

THE EAGLE AND THE SERPENT;

or — The Minding of Matter

RODERICK PETERS, *London*

A MAN IN HIS MID-THIRTIES, married and with children, had a keen intellect which he immersed in a very high-minded and committed study of Western and Eastern philosophy. His earning work made it necessary for him, from time to time, to make inspections of work sites. There he found himself among earthy labourers, in a sweaty and physical atmosphere in huts where the walls were covered with gloriously tempting photographs of beautiful women baring their bottoms or masturbating or voluptuously enjoying the caresses of another. So powerfully did he find his sexuality aroused that he either ejaculated involuntarily or was, more often than not, unable and unwilling to stop himself from masturbating. He felt an intensely jarring disharmony between his serenely cool philosophical states of mind and these overpowering and somehow shameful descents into a hot-blooded pounding sexuality. During this period of his life (about a year) he had some fifty dreams, all of which had a very similar theme. Usually he was on a raft trying to get across a river or lake. The raft was made of woven reeds and it had a little mast but no sail. As he tried to get it over the water, snakes, one or many, big and small, wriggled up through the woven reeds and he felt mortally afraid of them, often gripping them around the neck and trying desperately hard, but unsuccessfully, to strangle them. All the time he was aware of the presence of an eagle perched on top of the mast, which seemed loftily unconcerned with the goings-on below.

I have records of many other dreams in which this same threesome appears: an eagle, a serpent, and between them the dreamer him/herself. Involving all three there is a tension, or a conflict; something going on. But the same essential theme finds expression in other images, which are still recognisably dealing with an opposition between something higher and having one or more qualities in common with an eagle, and something lower which has qualities in common with the serpent.

Here are some actual dreams as instances of variations recognisable because of the same dynamic tension:

Early on in her analysis, a woman who had no confidence at all in her intellect dreamed of an eagle whose feet were stuck to rock so it could not fly. Talking about the dream, she said a peculiar thing: that the rock needed the eagle to be able to fly because otherwise the rock's dreams were earthbound. She spoke of her experience of an earthquake, using the metaphor of Mother Earth wrinkling her dinosaur skin. Here the dinosaur (great lizard) is the serpent-equivalent, characteristically feminine, be it noted, and the eagle is stuck to it in a way that is immobilising for both, while she herself plays no active part in the dream. As her analysis progressed she began to see that although she had had a bad relationship with her father, it did not have to mean that all fathers and all men were bound to be bad relationships for her. She was distinguishing between the masculine principle as such, and her own particular and unfortunate childhood experience of it in her personal father. This was coming about by way of a good and working relationship with me that enabled her to allow the realisation of the good masculine principle within herself. Around this time she dreamed she had to get to a pub called the 'Eagle' which was in the middle of devastated land and was a gathering place for gangsters. A year or so later her active participation in the process is evidenced by a dream in which she crossed over a stile in order to unearth a baby bird which had been buried in the ground years before. When she held its corpse in the palm of her hand it came to life. One might say that this rather touchingly represents the baby bird that could grow into the eagle becoming unstuck from the rock.

Another woman, whose philosophical and metaphysical thought was well developed but often used in a punitive, even sadistic way, and who was really terrified of being overwhelmed by her emotions and losing control, dreamed at the start of her analysis that, summoning all her courage, she entered a room despite a warning of the danger within: inside, she was embraced by a huge snake; she was pleasantly surprised to find she liked the contact with the serpent's skin and was only afraid that the military man with a hawkish face (the warlike and the bird of prey here in the form of a man), who was sitting opposite her, might frighten the snake and make it kill her.

A third person, a businesswoman who was efficient and excelled in organisation, enthusiastic in her work but depressed when not working, who described herself as totally at sea when it came to her emotions, dreamed that she was in a hot-air balloon; she was trying to control it with an eight-spoked wheel like the wheel of a ship, but this wheel was made of rope and despite her efforts the balloon lost height

and fell into the sea. Trying with all her might she swam towards what looked like the superstructure of a yellow submarine, on top of which a bird was chopping up, but seemed not to be eating, a worm.

In this dream the tension of opposites is repeated. Flying the hot-air balloon was an admirable image of the way her conscious personality felt high, ungrounded, and difficult to control when she was in the grip of an intellectual competitive excitement. The yellow submarine, which of course echoed the Beatles' phantasy film of an undersea journey to redeem a blue and joyless land, belonged to the deep and watery as the balloon belonged to the high and airy. Both are man-made objects; we shall be looking at ways of trying to understand the eagle and serpent symbols, but for the moment it is worth noting that whatever they mean, they are created by God or nature, not by man. I have found that when the paired opposition appears in images of man-made objects it tends to indicate a denial on the part of the dreamer that he or she is subject to inner forces of nature; there is a hubris which seeks to pretend such forces are created by man and within his control. Going back to this woman's dream then, the second opposition, which appears in quite a small way, is the image of the bird chopping up the worm: here the 'otherness' quality, that is, 'other' to the conscious personality in its humanness, finds diminutive recognition. The destructive relation of the bird to the worm corresponded well with the way this woman, at that time, was intellectually chopping up her emotional experience which so frightened her.

These people were all struggling, each in their various ways, with an experience of conflict between their intellectual, spiritual life, and their emotional, instinctual life. That conflict appears to be expressed in their dreams as an opposition between what I might summarise as the symbols of the eagle and serpent. Why should this be so? If just one or two persons dreamed like this, one might fairly think that the images were peculiar to them; or if someone's life-style involved contact with eagles and serpents then one might account for it in that way. But if the images come up in many people's dreams, and none of them has any particularly unusual acquaintance with such creatures, then why should it be? The fact is, although not one of the individuals whose dreams I have quoted was consciously aware of this, the opposition of the eagle and the serpent is not only an age-old story but also one which has appeared all over the world.

It is a story which appears out of the darkness of a 6,000 years ago pre-history in the Mesopotamian cylinder seals; it appears in pre-Homeric Greek legend, in the mythology of Borneo, in pre-Columbian America, in the Indian Vedic tradition, in Chinese art, in the sagas of the Norsemen. After going through even a tiny selection of all the

times and places that the story has surfaced, one cannot fail to appreciate that it must be a story which somehow satisfies, which gives expression to, some aspect of universal human experience.

One of the early seals from which the Mesopotamian myths have been deciphered tells the myth of Etana and the Eagle (HOOKE 4, pp. 59–60). The legendary dynasty of Kish was the first of the great kingdoms after the flood (we learn from the deciphered myth) and Etana was the thirteenth king of the Kish dynasty; he is the hero of this particular myth. Interwoven with the myth of Etana's ascent to heaven on an eagle's back, is the folk-tale of the eagle and the serpent, which was evidently a familiar one at the time. At the beginning of things, according to this story, the eagle and the serpent had sworn a solemn oath of friendship. The eagle had its nest and its young in the top of the World Tree, while the serpent and its young lived at the bottom. They undertook to protect and provide food for each other's young.

For a time all went well. But the eagle conceived evil in his heart, and broke his oath; while the serpent was away, the eagle devoured the serpent's young. With the aid of Shamash (the masculine sun-god), to whom the serpent appealed, the serpent broke the eagle's wings and imprisoned him. Here the myth re-enters with the hero Etana delivering the eagle who, in gratitude, takes him to Ishtar (the queen of heaven) from whom he obtains the plant of immortality.

In a version of the story from Borneo, which is still told today, and which I heard some years ago from a Dyak medicine-man, the serpent, who is associated with the feminine essence, lives at the roots of the world tree and battles continuously with the eagle, the masculine essence, at the crown.

In Norse mythology, an eagle with a hawk perched on his forehead sits on the topmost bough of Yggdrasil, the world tree, that same eagle whose flapping wings engender the wind that 'bloweth where it listeth' in the world of men. Entwined among the roots of the tree lies the great serpent, Nidrhogger (the dread-biter) accompanied by many scores of lesser snakes. The serpent is at war with the eagle, and a nimble squirrel runs up and down the tree, carrying insults from one to the other (ELLIS-DAVIDSON 2).

This pair of symbols was evidently known when Homer (or the poets known as Homer) composed the *Iliad*. When Agamemnon and his Greek army were camped before Troy an eagle appeared gripping a wounded serpent in its talons; Calchas the seer interpreted the event as foreshadowing a victory for the patriarchal Greeks over the matriarchal Asians.

The changing face of Greek myths after the time of Homer tells of the establishment and securing of dominance for the masculine gods in

the pantheon. The great goddesses, most of whom are represented holding serpents, who had been, as far as can be seen from archaeological remains, the supreme divinities for at least the previous 20,000 years, were conquered and subjugated by the masculine gods. This changing face of mythological images reflected the changes taking place among human communities where dominance and inheritance shifted from women to men.

Zeus ('bright sky') became the greatest god, ruling the realms from his throne in Olympus; the eagle was known specifically as his bird, the bird of Zeus. Under the supreme authority of Zeus, some of the goddesses such as Artemis (? 'high source of water'), Hecate ('one hundred') and Persephone ('bringer of destruction'), all of whom wielded serpent power, were diminished from their sovereignty but still held sway among the Olympians (GRAVES 3).

But Zeus, the eagle-sky-god, had defeated and driven into a sort of divine limbo many of the already ancient serpent divinities. Far down below Olympus in noisome subterranean or submarine caves and holes brooded these serpent-women and serpent-men monsters (e.g., the Phorcids, Ladon, Echidne and the Gorgons; also Tethys or Ceto, the sea monster corresponding to the Hebrew Rahab and the Babylonian Tiamat).

In the Judeo-Christian myth we find the eagle and serpent popping up all over the place; so familiar in fact that we hardly notice them any more. A few instances must suffice. In the chapel of the monastery of St Bernard, which is itself perched like an eyrie on the snow-covered heights of the Alps, there is a painting of St Bernard himself trampling a serpent underfoot with a look of single-minded determination. A monk told me that they understood it to mean the overcoming of all desires of the flesh; much the same theme, in fact, as St George and the dragon. Many lecterns are carved in such a way that the support for the Bible is an eagle (the Brompton Oratory in London has an eagle carved upon the pulpit, and above it the word, *verbum*: often, in such carvings, the eagle has its talons deeply buried in a serpent which appears to have just about given up the ghost. Like bright-sky Zeus, the eagle is the bird of 'Our Father which art in Heaven', and the wings of angels, conquering time in the carved stone of Gothic cathedrals, or burning in a blaze of stained-glass windows, are the wings of eagles. The perfected body of the risen Christ was often represented by just a bodyless face within a frame of eagle wings, or simply by an eagle bearing a chest-shield, signifying the invulnerability of the eternal victor in the divine struggle against the angel of evil, the serpent Satan. In general, the serpent symbols in the Judeo-Christian myth are linked with the 'fallen' state of this world, with the devil, with instinctual desires and with the feminine principle.

In the contemporary mythic phantasy of Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, Sauron, whose name sounds reptilian, had dark scaly skin and surrounded himself with maggoty holes in the ground, while Gandalf, after his descent and death in the depths of fire, was carried to rebirth by the King of the Eagles.

Not far below the surface of every religion which has been shaped into a distinct and separate body of ritual and faith, and hall-marked as the only one pure and true, there is always to be found, like an underground river which springs up in many places, a stream of living symbols which do not just belong here or there: they are universal. It is as if these symbols are the best possible way of expressing something of unchanging importance to man; they may be interpreted this way or that: the eagle and serpent, for instance, may be interpreted theologically as god and devil (under many names), conceptually as 'spirit and matter', as 'masculine and feminine', as 'intellect and instinct', or more concretely as 'Greeks and Asian', 'men and women' and so on. But the interpretations are always less complete than the symbols; the interpretations do not continue to appear in people's dreams for millenia, but the symbols do.

What other general ideas gather around the many million years of human experience of these two creatures?

The eagle, as seen by man, is a creature of the air; soaring in the blue heavens, seemingly free to go where it will, unhindered. It needs ground to rest upon, but its nest is high on the highest mountains. It looks down on everything below, all the earthbound creatures insignificant in their smallness as their destinies unfold. Its powers of vision are both enormous in extent and piercingly intent. It can swoop down, take what it wants and fly up to the safety of its inaccessible heights: dangerous and admirable, a lordly creature. From the Orient to the Occident, from the furthest past to the present time, the eagle is associated with the masculine gods of power and war. The ivory sceptre of the Roman kings was topped by an eagle by which, in addition to the reddened face and the oaken crown, the king-man was felt to be one and the same as the god Jupiter. The American eagle symbol, like the Roman, proclaims that nation's guiding value as being the eagle principle (the Russian Bear, incidentally, like the snake, is traditionally associated with feminine, earthy material, chthonic divinities (JUNG 5, pp. 262-3)). Throughout history, interpreters of symbols have understood the eagle in terms of fire and air elements, as spirit, and as masculine. The struggle with the serpent has more than anything else been seen as the struggle between the celestial, spiritual world and the lower material world.

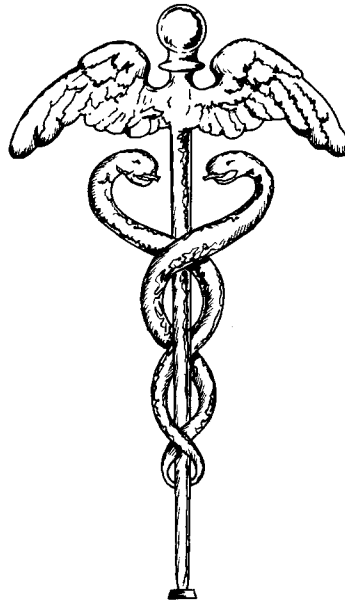
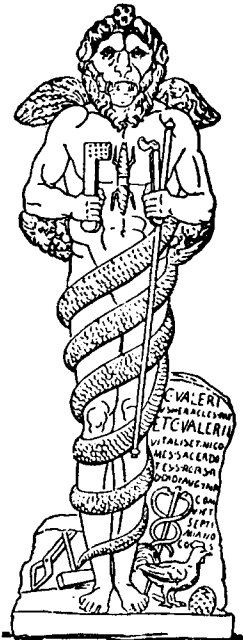
The serpent, again as seen by man, is a creature of the earth and waters; its belly lies on the earth and it lives in the dark earth. Unable

to raise itself high above the earth, it cannot see far ahead in the same sharply focused way as the eagle; its power, and its foreknowledge, is of a dark, deep, and inward kind, rather than light, high, and outward. It is fascinating, fearsome, deadly. Encounters with snakes powerfully affect our autonomic nervous system, can make us feel paralysed, make our legs turn to jelly, our bellies turn to water, make us break out in a cold sweat; and the movements of a snake echo the anfractuous and undulatory movements that we feel slithering about our insides from time to time. The snake is sensed to have power and a seductive, dangerous wisdom. The forked tongue seems always to have been an image for deceit and duplicity, an untrustable hidden two-ness of the mind. Possibly more than any other archetypal image, the image of the serpent is ubiquitous and ever-potent. As well as wisdom and foreknowledge it is also associated with a blind instinctive energy. It is the guardian of hidden treasure, pots of gold and springs of life-giving water.

In the Biblical paradise story and in Norse myth the serpent seems to represent the principle of evil inherent in the world, rather than personal sin. And yet these serpentine forces can be supremely beneficent if their overwhelming and destructive power be withstood. Examples of this are the legend of Gautama being wound about seven times by the serpent, which, unable to crush him, transformed into a youth who then served the Buddha; and Zervan Akarana ('boundless time'), the Mithraic equivalent of Greek Kronos, whose image is of a naked man with four wings, wearing the head of a lion and wound about by a serpent with six coils mounting the body, the seventh turn being the serpent's head on the crown of the man's head (see illustration). Then there is the Kundalini serpent (AVALON I): the Tantric texts are intriguing expositions of Kundali yoga, an oral tradition reaching from pre-history and written down for the most part by practitioners between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries in India. They are records of empirical explorations into self-experience, which attract a good deal of Western interest today. These pioneers who anticipated the West by so many centuries expressed the evolution of the experienced world entirely within the metaphor of the Śakti, the serpentine kinetic active aspect of the supreme divinity Śiva-Śakti ('there is no Śakti without Śiva, nor Śiva without Śakti'). They describe seven centres (all but the highest of which are called *cakras*), the lowest in the anal-genital area, the highest at the crown of the head, each of which may be activated when the Śakti serpent power uncoils herself from the lowest centre and rises through the fine channels alongside the spine into the other centres. As her power activates a centre so the individual experiences himself within the realm of that centre—a whole subjective world of self-experience

belonging to each. As with the Egyptian *uraeus* symbol, the *sahasrara* (seventh centre) is the serpent raised and transformed, now the most precious part of the royal diadem. And finally, because I will subsequently be connecting these mythic images with our flesh-and-blood bodies, let me mention one of the early Christian so-called heresies; the Naassene Gnostics (*naas* = snake), for whom the snake was an object of worship, believed there was an identity between the sacred snake and their own spinal cord and marrow. Arising from his interest in Kundalini and the Gnostics, Jung made a number of brief observations linking images of the serpent, reptile and worm with the human primitive sympathetic nervous system, and with a psyche experienced in compartments (e.g., JUNG 6, p. 208).

Coming back now to the dreams with which we started, it is clear enough that the symbols appearing in these people's dreams do indeed have a long history, and are in some way bound up with the human experience of a split which has been around at least as long as recorded history. In a single dream, or in just a few, one may see the serpent or the eagle appear alone, but keeping an eye on a longer series of dreams will usually find both. It is rather remarkable how frequently the images are, as it were 'classically', eagle and snake, despite the dreamer having no conscious associations to the age-old story; often, however, the images are not precisely eagle and serpent but still can be recognised as the same opposition of spirit and matter. Such variations



are just as common in historical material as in contemporary, e.g., in *Symbola Aurum Theorae*, the eagle is linked not with a serpent but with a toad, and it is upon the broad and earthy back of the toad that the golden house, the marble mansion, must be built. Naturally, knowledge of the person and of the context of the dream is absolutely essential if the interpretation is to be something more than an abstract statement about the relation of spirit and matter. It is the individual conscious personality that has a relation to the transpersonal, collective, realities that become visible in these images, and the variations of the images have a specificity arising out of the individual's unique experiences of the universal archetypes. The analyst must have a grasp of how their patient's conscious personality actually experiences those underlying realities which are imaged as eagle and serpent or blackbird and worm or hot-air balloon and submarine, in order to be able to assist in a process of knitting together the personal experience with the transpersonal realities, and from that to raise the question of what it might mean that the images have such and such a form. Variants of the serpent may be maggots, rats, worms of all sorts, scorpions, spiders, dragons, lizards, as well as man-made things such as tube (underground) trains, drains, sewers: variants on the eagle may be birds of all sorts, wind, flying machines and so on. To become aware of the theme as it appears and reappears in dreams over long periods of time is also to become aware of how one's conscious personality, the 'I' of the dream, is relating to each of the poles within this pair of opposites. Such a dawning awareness can be very helpful for a feeling of orientation within oneself as well as bringing the supremely valuable and healing sense of profundity and meaning that is born out of realising one's relationship with collective and autonomous realities of the psyche; when it is realised that the living water of religion is appearing from the darkness within it brings a sense of wonder, humility, awe, and belongingness to the world of time and eternity.

One wonders, when did this warring opposition arise? Is it inherent in life itself? Does an amoeba already experience this split in some unimaginable way? Or is the split something to do with the evolutionary development of reflective self-consciousness in man? We can only guess at the answers to such questions. The Judeo-Christian myth relates it to the Fall; but there is no general agreement about how we are to understand the Fall. It does seem the split was always there (the split between God and Devil was there before Adam and Eve ate the fruit and 'knew' it), but it was unconscious before whatever event the Fall depicts. The consensus from East and West would seem to be that it is inherent in life itself. Both mystical intuition and scientific theorising from the hints and traces available, lead us to the notion that the way things are now was foreshadowed in the way things were. We

see, for instance, in the hydrogen atom the division into opposites (one positive proton, one negative electron) and the balance of tension between them: always there, but only recently known. But whatever the split may or may not be for the rest of creation, humans experience the opposites as pulled apart—the eagle lives at the crown and the serpent at the roots.

So there are no end of stories about the hostility and enmity between eagle and serpent: but what about friendship, or even love and marriage between them? Such images can be found, but they are far outnumbered by stories of conflict. Kundalini tells of a uniting of Śiva-Śakti; and there is the South American 'Plumed Serpent', for instance, and the symbol known as the caduceus, where two serpents spiral symmetrically about an axis surmounted by a pair of wings. But it is in alchemy that we find a tradition and secret doctrine which aimed specifically to unite the opposites in marriage. The alchemists kept bright the life-blood of the pre-Christian pagan nature worship; they held that all and everything comes out of nature, and is transformed by nature. And yet at the same time they called their endeavour an *opus contra naturam*—a work against nature. They recognised the conflict between the opposites in the prima materia, an unconscious conflict in which alienation of the natures was only increased by the exorcising attitude of the Church. The way of the alchemists was to draw the conflicting opposites into conscious distinction and separation, whereupon an attraction arose between them such that the sacred marriage could take place, which was fulfilled in the birth of a single creation combining within one nature what *was* both separate and opposite. As symbolic pairs of opposites the eagle and serpent were represented with a frequency less only than man and woman, and sun and moon.

We have seen that these symbols can be interpreted in a number of different ways. Indeed, it is of the very essence of a symbol that it is not exhausted by just one interpretation; perhaps a symbol continues to be alive within people until all the many shades of possible interpretations have been drawn from it and assimilated. All the people working in analysis with me, in whom these symbols appeared, were experiencing conflict which could well be seen as between man and woman, or to do with father and mother. But more exactly they felt the conflict as an inner one, between different parts of themselves. The arrangement of the world tree, with eagle at the crown and serpent at the roots, suggests an interpretation which does something to bring a scientific world view of self-experience together with the collective religious imagery, and this is the interpretation I pursue here. There is no intention to explain away the symbol, which is the closest we can get to the unknowable mystery; and all interpretations of a symbol are

bound to overlap, all merging into each other just as the spokes of a wheel all meet at the hub.

We know ourselves as having a reasonable, thoughtful, clear-sighted and controlled part of our minds, and also as having emotions and instinctual needs which are always powerful, often unreasonable, and sometimes uncontrollable. Although most of us are easily seen to be a mixture of these two parts, there are individuals who appear to be so much at one extreme or the other that one can almost say that they are living only half their potential. To our scientifically aware age, this immediate self-experience must have some foundation in our matter, in the anatomy and physiology of our bodies. Although it has not always been so, nowadays we consider our nervous systems as the body tissue which is closest to the insubstantial mind itself. In a human being standing upright the brain is at the top, at the crown as it were, of the spinal cord tree, whose roots are the nerves ramifying throughout the dark earth of the body. In this inner World Tree we shall find the eagle living at the crown and the serpent among the roots.

THE TWO NERVOUS SYSTEMS, ANS AND CNS

Nerves are tissues of our bodies which have the specialised function of conducting electrical impulses from one place to another. Where a lot of nerves are gathered together, in the brain for instance, they also perform complicated integrating functions. The conventional understanding is that we have two nervous systems, the Autonomic Nervous System (which I shall shorten to ANS), and the Central Nervous System (CNS). In evolutionary terms, the more ancient, more primitive, system is the ANS.

In point of fact, however, it seems highly probable that the CNS must have developed from the ANS. Therefore they are, in this sense, one and the same nervous system, although in medical study they are treated separately—a manifestation, perhaps, of the eagle and serpent opposites being pulled apart. Just as one may look backwards down evolutionary time and reflect that the potential to become modern man was within those ape-men whose bony relics are unearthed by archaeologists, so we can look back and see that within the ANS from the beginning, as it were, was the potential for increasingly complex integrations, and what we now study is only the present stage in an unforeseeable evolution of increasingly differentiating nervous tissue. The CNS is reckoned to have come into being with the first appearance of vertebrates. It comprises the brain (enclosed within the protective skull), the spinal cord (enclosed within the vertebrae), and the incoming and outgoing peripheral nerves which ramify throughout the whole body-matter of the individual. In the course of the next

few paragraphs you will find many judgmental statements about the CNS and ANS; unfortunately, it is simply impossible, within the confines of a paper, to substantiate these with appropriate anatomical and physiological material.

The very existence of the CNS, and such understanding as there is of its functioning, very strongly suggests the evolution of increasingly individual self-control.

Although it has links with ANS centres in lower parts of the brain, the forebrain itself—which is the part of the brain that has undergone an enormous development in man—has no definite ANS centres. A large part of its surface is taken up with the regulation of movement and sensation. Direct and easily traceable tracts of nervous tissue sweep from the forebrain to this or that part of the body. A clearly definable nerve connects to a clearly definable muscle or area of skin. This physical control arrangement is a relatively easy system to understand; in many ways it has been the basis for robotics, a system for detecting favourabilities or unfavourabilities in the environment and enabling movement. Many creatures less clever than man possess such a system; of far greater significance for man, and far more complex, this pre-eminently CNS forebrain is the main site of intellectual functioning, of word and number organisation, and the integrating centres of vision, hearing, speech and memory.

This enormous development of the forebrain, which seems to be the outstanding anatomical foundation of man's reflective self-consciousness, makes possible a considerable freedom from, and some control over, the more primitive stages of the brain and of the autonomic nervous system, out of which it has actually grown. The inhibitory control which the forebrain exercises over emotional behaviour, has undoubtedly been a powerful contributory factor in the development of civilisation (as well as a major source of psychic suffering). The operation of pre-frontal leucotomy, which was performed for a few decades but is rarely used nowadays, severed the connections to and from an area of the frontal lobe of the forebrain which was known to have some influence on emotional behaviour. It was most often performed as an attempted remedy for crippling anxiety or uncontrollable violence. Unhappily it resulted in occasional and unpredictable disinhibitions of instinctual behaviour such as masturbation in public with no more shame than a monkey.

Most of the forebrain, and especially those parts which are most understood, is comprehensible in the sense that we can build machines on the same lines of organisation—computers of cold immaculate reason, robots of unemotional action and sleepless sensing. Its closeness to the quality of contemporary intellectual consciousness is evidenced by the relative ease with which we can understand it. It belongs, as it

were, to the daylight world of ordered logical arrangement and it is easy to feel at home (or perhaps I should say, at work) in it. Incoming sensations of heat or cold or touch, for example, readily become conscious, and the outgoing, active, response is voluntary, it exists within the will. We can choose, or at any rate have the feeling of being able to choose, whether we wish to move, and in what way. Such consciousness of effects of the environment on the individual together with the conscious choice and ability to do this or that to the environment, go far to inculcate the sense of being discrete and separate from the environment, and of having power over it. At a price, of course! Prometheus stole fire from the gods; the development of the forebrain made available to mankind, alone of creation, conscious possession of extended forethought. As the eagle, in the archetypal image, can see far ahead, this very power, previously possessed only by the gods, gnaws us with doubts and anxieties about what is to come.

In contrast to the distinctly bounded body sense, the clarity of intellect, the resources of consciously available memory and focused penetration that is our self-experience associated with CNS functioning, the self-experience of autonomic nervous system arousal, of the ANS (which means the 'self-regulating system', and is also sometimes called the 'vegetative' nervous system), is darker, bewilderingly diffuse, eerie, powerful and fathomless. And this contrast is reflected in the anatomical organisation as well as the inner subjective experience. Instead of a distinct nerve running a distinct course to a particular place, there are networks of filaments so fine that like fungal myceliae they weave a tracery along and around every blood vessel in the body, throughout the spleen and liver, the heart and lungs and gonads and guts. Whereas the outgoing nerves of the CNS move lumpish blocks of the body, an arm or a leg or a finger, here and there, the autonomic nerves steal into and out of the insides of everything.

The ANS itself comprises two systems, the sympathetic and parasympathetic, of which the evolutionarily more ancient is the sympathetic. These systems are immensely old. It is important to grasp the fact that organisations of nervous tissue do not exactly govern or control the other tissues through which they ramify. Although it tends to seem like that to us (a very 'eagle' viewpoint: anatomical texts always speak of such and such an area 'being supplied' by such-and-such a nerve, as if the brain were the central supplier and nerves came out from it to the body), in fact it is just as much the other way round. The theological view that spirit, as reflectively self-conscious mind enabling man to participate in the spiritual creation, was infused by God into already organised matter, has surely given way popularly to a more evolutionary view today, a more immanent view in which

mind is inherent in matter as such. The specialisation, differentiation and increasing organisation of nervous tissue may be seen, in this immanent view of mind, as an entelechy of blood-*proto-mind*, of lymph-*proto-mind*, of testicle and ovary-*proto-mind* etc towards *integrations* of mind and, ultimately, towards reflective consciousness of self. Using a mythological image, nerves are the pale threads of *nous* emerging from *physis*. The brain, far from being their origin, is the latest and greatest of their gathering points. The beginnings, then, of the ANS are in the first specialisation of some cells towards a conducting function; and as with all conducting tissue there is a telos of integrating. In creatures such as the worm which have no brain, only a sympathetic nervous system, the segmental quality of this system is apparent. Each segment of the worm can grow into a new organism: in a sense each segment is a complete unit of integrated matter. This ancestry of segmental centres of integration, like lakes in the course of a great river where the water-energy gathered until it could flow onward, still exists in our ANS and, hence, in our mind. The major integrative centres which are anatomically recognisable, are called ganglia, and are linked like a chain throughout the belly, the chest, and the neck, whence they pass inside the skull into the lower brain. Before they enter the skull the chains run on both sides just in front of, and a bit to the side of, the spine.

This arrangement of the ANS centres bears a striking similarity, surely more than chance, to descriptions in Tantric texts of the Cakras and Suśumna channels through which the serpent energy may move (AVALON I), and also to the Gnostic image of their sacred serpent lying along the spine. Like the Cakras, each ganglion is not only an organising and integrating centre in its own right but is also part of a more embracing integration, involving more and more ganglia and eventually the ANS centres in the lower brain. If the ganglia do have more than a chance association with the Cakras then the descriptions of the realms of experience arising from each of the Cakras would illuminate the subjective self-awareness of the ganglionic centres: this is to say, particular sets of sensations and emotions unique to each region of ganglia, arousal of which can constitute a whole ontological experience, a containing or suffusing realm of experiential quality 'belonging' to each centre. The difference, for example, between being subject to the realm of sexual desire in arousal of the sacral ganglia, and being subject to the realm of love in arousal of the heart-region ganglia.

Our scientific understanding of how our 'mind' is specifically related to our 'matter' is still very limited indeed. I think it is true to say that the way our sensations and voluntary movements, our intellectual functioning and our memories, are linked with matter is

better understood than is the way our emotions and instinctual drives are linked with the nervous system matter. The former are associated with the CNS, and the latter certainly have their main basis in the ANS. If you shake hands with a stranger of no interest to you, the sensations of touch conducted by the CNS incoming nerves are no different from those which would be conducted if you were shaking hands with your dearly beloved: the inner difference in self-experience is certainly something to do with the ANS, but it is very far from being thoroughly understood scientifically. So we see, inexactly and rather dimly, that the split which we often experience in the mind does find a correspondence in the nervous system of the body (which Western medicine has split in two as a subject for study). It does appear that symbols of the eagle and serpent may be symbolic images cast in the mind by the *self*-experience of CNS and ANS functioning.

In this interpretation we see the ANS as the anatomical basis of the ancient 'serpent mind'; the mind of the realm of blood and viscera. This mind is lodged deep in collectivities. Blood-mind belongs, as it were, to universal blood; if I see someone gashed and bleeding, my blood-mind is affected almost as if it were 'my' blood. It is as if there is no boundary between me and that wounded person. When we watch creatures whose nervous systems are predominantly sympathetic, such as the reptiles, one of the things that affects us strangely is the way that they slither over each other's bodies as if they had no sense of boundary. And, indeed, this is one of the characteristics of the sympathetic system. When someone laughs and you laugh too, or your friend has a bellyache, and you begin to feel it too, we say this is a sympathetic response—a feeling with. It is an activity of the ancient mind, the autonomic sympathetic system in which the belongingness, the absence of boundaries, the oneness, is one of the realms of experience.

The experiences of one's bodily self which come when 'I' consciousness allows itself to descend into a participating awareness of autonomic system arousal are very hard to put into words. But they leave one in no doubt that they are our real connection to the past; we can go down and down through the unending evolutionary layers within our body nature, and feel a sense of linking up with the dimmest and deepest roots of life. Through it we can know renewal, as if we have retouched vitality itself. The descent feels full of dangers because we have gone into the power of the old serpent, the worm, the dragon, the deep well, the chthonic gods. The 'I' that consciously experiences the activity of autonomic matter is all but submerged in feelings of oneness, oceanic feelings, feelings of isolation, abandonment, eternity, infinity, fear, love, hatred, rage; all the passions in fact. It is a descent accompanied by writhing, arching, shuddering move-

ments, expanding and contracting waves of burning heat and trembling cold, surges of juiciness, an icy hand clutching at the heart, the chest bursting with hugeness, pounding blood, cold sweats, the belly turning to water, the legs turning to jelly. This is the knowing sharing of Dionysian life, the knowing-being of the Green Man.

EAGLE MIND AND SERPENT MIND

I have been using the word 'mind' to connote the inner realm within which the conscious personality (which is what I call the 'I') knows subjective experience. This subjective experience may be linked with CNS and ANS functioning. I am suggesting that there are inner experiences which are symbolised by the eagle and the serpent, such that, in a manner of speaking, the conscious personality can know 'eagle mind' or 'serpent mind', and preferably both. Mind is the inner world; it is that which is, as it were, beneath the opposition of conscious and unconscious, perhaps bearing the relationship to that opposition which 'space' bears to the opposition of light/dark, or the relationship that the one (unity) bears to the two (duality) in Plato's *Timaeus*. Clearly this is very similar to Jung's use of *Seele*, although I am using 'mind' to include his 'psychoid' as well, because I see all specialising of tissue toward integration as being part of the minding of matter.

The conscious personality is, at any given time, the realisable potentiality of self-consciousness: not what happens to be conscious at a particular moment, because contents of consciousness are moving in and out all the time. The important thing is the receptivity of the conscious personality to mind, which could be experienced as self. This statement brings in 'self' as well as 'mind' and 'conscious personality'; an illustration helps with these conceptual entities:

A young man came into analysis because he could approach complete satisfaction and at-one-ness only when he was dressed as a woman and imagining being penetrated by a man. It had come about, largely owing to circumstances in his childhood, that he had experienced in the image of woman all that was desirable, and in the image of man an extremely destructive lack of emotional control combined with an admirable intellect. Striving very hard to identify with his own manhood, he developed a remarkably penetrating intellect but got into a panic whenever circumstances required an emotional or personal component in relating. His ANS mind was only received as self by his conscious personality—and that secretly, hidden away, with later shame—when he dressed as a woman. In one of his early dreams he was standing in the garden of his house and saw, outlined very sharply against the clear blue sky, an eagle perched on top of his

roof; then he was seeing from above as if he were the eagle. Later in the dream he heard something moving below and looked through some iron bars in the floor; there was a dark shaft with water some way down and a serpent with a beautiful woman's face was reaching up toward him.

This young man's 'I', his conscious personality, did know his 'serpent mind' as well as his 'eagle mind', but he could not, for a long time, accept his serpent mind as 'self'. He used to insist to me that this really was not him, that it was something alien that got into him. His 'eagle mind', however, he completely accepted as 'self'.

Whether mind itself is seamless is an unanswerable question, but what is beyond doubt is that consciousness of mind does have divisions. I am not referring to the seeds of future possibilities for which the time is not yet ripe, but that which is in mind and could be known but is not. The barriers to receptivity, the defences, either exclude certain experiences of mind altogether, or admit them at the cost of dividing the consciousness of self into compartments.

In analytic work, as opposed to arenas such as therapeutic communities, we tend to see people in whom the ANS mind has been compartmentalised within, or excluded from, the conscious personality. Affect is over-inhibited rather than uncontrolled. This is because disinhibited affective behaviour is virtually untreatable by analysis. Developments in civilisation have accompanied the development of the forebrain and it can hardly be doubted that inhibitory control over discharge of affect has played a key role in this.

When a baby is born the CNS, like the lungs, is not fully developed or differentiated; it continues to differentiate over a number of years. These developments have some correspondence, no doubt, with the well-known stages of developmental (mainly inhibitory) control over autonomic processes and behaviours which take place in the first years of life. By contrast, the autonomic nervous system is, as far as I can discover, fully developed at birth.

I would postulate that the earliest experiences of an infant are predominantly the ineffable realms of autonomic system arousal. Some evidence for this exists in the very marked and rapidly changing skin vasculature. Such visible changes in the blood vessels and skin, as with blushing, cold sweats, hot sweats, or sudden pallor, are characteristic of powerful autonomic arousal. The mother's CNS is, of course, fully developed and the baby is absolutely dependent on the developed CNS of another for survival. Whereas the ANS mind is characterised, in part, by boundaryless states of experience, the CNS mind is characterised by discrete, sharp-boundaried individual experience. Countertransference is the fundamentally useful tool that it is, only to the extent that the analyst's conscious personality is open to his own

serpent mind: the more he can let in, contain, and know what is going on in his own ANS, the more he will know his sympathetic and parasympathetic responses to his patient, and be able to help his patient to know his (the patient's) serpent mind. Similarly the relation between the CNS and ANS minds in the consciousness of the mother is crucial in her relationship with her baby. If her ANS mind is excluded by inhibition from her conscious personality then she will be oblivious to the realm of ANS communication which is the main thing available to her infant with his fully developed ANS but immature CNS. This is familiar ground, of course. The ANS sensations are not met, recognised, reflected, so they are not experienced as contained, so the affect, which is coenaesthetic sensation, and the accompanying image are inadequately knitted together. The sensation/affect is experienced as threatening disintegration to the developing conscious personality which resists, knowingly, with all the powers at its disposal, and this seems to lead to somatically based inhibitions of autonomic arousal and hence a loss for the conscious personality of the ANS mind, or serpent, self-experience.

AN ILLUSTRATION

A woman complained that she lacked spontaneity and said she had 'no enigma'. She felt like a robot; she could think clearly, was good at organisation, could tell her body to go here, go there, and obediently it went. Her muscles were so tense all the time that she needed daily massages to relieve the pain and to soften herself; nevertheless, she could fulfil all her tasks with a normal-seeming co-ordination, but it felt mechanical to her, especially when she tried something like dancing. She was obsessively clean and felt devoid of all feelings or emotions except that of emptiness and despair. She would not marry because she thought she would be unable to mother a child.

This pattern of psychic distress has been extensively described in analytic communications, and the psychological genesis and therapeutic requirements are well established. All that I wish to bring out from this example is the identification of the conscious personality with the CNS mind and the exclusion of the ANS mind. This combination is often referred to as a head/body split. But in fact, in addition to the normal functioning of the intellect, all those aspects of bodily functioning within the realm of the CNS, mainly musculo-skeletal control and inhibition of ANS expression, are fully linked to the conscious personality. The split is more revealingly thought of as a CNS/ANS split. In the tree that unites the eagle and the serpent, the conscious personality is living up at the crown with the eagle, often actually identified with it, and no end of barriers are thrown up to shut

out the serpent below.

Whatever the reasons may be, it is a fact of experience that consciousness of mind tends to split along a division which I have described in terms of CNS and ANS minds, and that for many of our patients, conscious personality is identified with the separate individual experience, the functional and controlled sensory and locomotor experience, the above-it-all intellectual experience, which is characteristic of CNS mind. The eagle is dominant, the serpent is locked away, or being chopped up. ANS mind is associated with loss of control, with infantile states, with disintegrated segmentalised involuntary actions (e.g., unwilling vomiting, fainting, orgasm, tics, convulsions, lashing, slashing and bashing, wanking and spanking); *but* it is also associated with experiences of at-one-ness, of fulfilment and satisfaction. Because of this it is not only dreaded, but, at the same time, longed for above all else.

DISCUSSION

There are innumerable facets to the archetypes of spirit and matter, and the eagle and the serpent syzygy is just one symbolic image belonging to one facet. My observations about the CNS and ANS, and about the one mind that tends to appear to the conscious personality as dual, is no more than one amplification of the image, though it seems a good fit to me. I will conclude with some general remarks on how alertness to these archetypal images and the somatic amplification has seemed useful to me in practice.

These archetypes (spirit and matter) flow, one might say, in systolic and diastolic movements: these in-and-out movements, circling through time, may be conceived as a spiral of progressive sublimations tending towards increasing self-awareness. When they flow out then someone or something else is invested with them and effectively carries a part of one's self. When they flow back in, all their charge of intensity, and the characteristic conflict between them, reinvests CNS and ANS mind, so much so that the needful transformation of the conscious personality may be experienced as a threat of disintegration.

In the primal relationship they flow into the dual-unit of mother and baby. The capacity of the mother's conscious personality to be separate from, yet open to, her own eagle and serpent mind is crucial for her baby's developing conscious personality to integrate experience of his own eagle and serpent mind. Usually, when the father begins to play a significant part in the infant's experience, the spirit component of the archetypal pair flows back from the mother into the child, a time associated with an intensification of CNS mind ex-

perience, then flows out into the father. If there is no suitable paternal figure then the result is often a 'paternal child', good at organising, looking after things, but deformed by the strain of trying to look after wife/mother while still too young, and by the repression of their own ANS mind which, as a consequence, has remained immature. If, however, father and mother are good enough then this situation (serpent-mind-self within and in mother, eagle-mind-self within and in father) holds steady and develops until around the time of home-leaving. At this point the next major spiral of this archetypal sublimation begins. It begins with the diastolic movement, a flowing back of the archetypes into the young person, a time of intensely charged self-experience, of intense conflict between eagle mind and serpent mind, a time of searching for new, and apt, objects (e.g., religion, philosophy, intellect or power for eagle; rock concerts, sex, parties, drugs, nature for serpent) to receive this archetypal war. Sooner or later, aptly or ineptly, they are found. This situation then holds and develops, usually until around middle age, when it all happens again; and often again in old age. With each turn there is a tendency to contain more of the archetypal opposition within the self-experience.

This thumbnail sketch provides a backdrop. Some patients are at one loop of the spiral, some at others. At all transitional stages of archetypal development there tends to be a regression of the conscious personality while the intensities within are difficult to bear and there is no knowing what is to come. The need of the patient, which sounds its truest note in transference and countertransference, is the only guide to the level of work. Sometimes the parental situation was in fact so poor that the archetypal images could only be projected in the most unbalanced way. In such cases the need really is for work from the beginning up. But for many the regressive spiralling back occurs only for a number of brief periods, recollections that are apparently necessary before the systolic initiation of an age-appropriate turn of the spiral can take place.

Whichever turn of the spiral it may be (and an analyst can be only of limited help if he himself has not experienced the development in conscious personality which is gathering in the patient's wings), what is usually true is that the archetypal intensity has flowed back into the person, and the warring love of the opposites is going on there. As I have said, a mother uses her experience of serpent mind to know what her infant is experiencing; with her eagle mind she executes helpful actions and names it, connects it with reason (remember the original promise of eagle and serpent to look after each other's young!). She helps to knit together the material coenaesthetic affective experience with the accompanying spiritual image. By doing this she fosters the

infant's developing conscious personality, hopefully as an 'I' centre of 'self' experience, which possessively identifies with neither eagle nor serpent, but knows them as self, not only at war but also united in love, and can allow them their eternal status. In this respect the analyst's task is similar, though what use (i.e., via transference) the archetypal projections make of him depends largely upon which loop of the spiral is about to develop.

Dreams of the eagle and serpent, or variants, reflect the relation of the conscious personality to CNS and ANS functioning, especially so when the archetypal images of spirit and matter are not projected outward. At such times, and people often come into analysis at such times, either the ANS functioning or CNS functioning, or both, become charged with positive or negative numinosity. Finding out all this stuff about the eagle and the serpent, and bringing it together with central and autonomic nervous system self-experience, has helped me to be more aware of my eagle and serpent minds, and hence more sensitive to them in my patients.

A final note on the alchemical *filius philosophorum* (*lapis, rebis, aqua philosophorum, aurum nobilis*, etc) symbol, in which eagle and serpent are conjoined. This goal of the opus, supremely valued by the alchemists, was interpreted by Jung as a realised image of the self which, at the same time, is the *imago Dei* imprint or archetype. Whereas Christian orthodoxy believed in the redemption of man by Christ, son of God, the alchemists understood their devout labour to be redeeming the divinity imprisoned in matter, including or even especially the human body. And yet, as Jung has amply demonstrated, the parallels between the *filius* and Christ are abundant. Overall, Jung understood the phenomenon of alchemy as being a compensatory response to the incompleteness of the conscious collective dominant *imago Dei*. The *filius*, as the son of the mother, complements Christ the Son of the Father. The resultant image combines elements from the serpent mother of the *filius* with the eagle father of Christ. (See most of the illustrations in JUNG 5.)

The situation does not seem to have changed a great deal. Although individuals vary in the strength of their religious instinct, every patient with whom I have worked has consciously or unconsciously struggled with the Christ-image. With very few exceptions they experience it as an image from outside, not within, remote not central. Since the demise of alchemy, the eagle-like ascent of a scientific world-view has de-animated matter so thoroughly that for most people the human body itself has become the last refuge of the divine in matter. No longer can most of us experience the divinities at work in the metals, as the alchemists did. Not, at least, until we have redeemed the numinous from the prison of our matter. Both dreaded

and longed for, as Jung said, we are now most likely to experience the manifesting of the gods as pathologies: the most potent compulsions, the terrors which evoke real spontaneous prayer, the autonomous, the overwhelming, the mysterious—in our body-selves we experience the power of the unknown god. Although the substantive locus of manifestation is now mind, *mind in spirit* as ideas, intuitions, images, dreams, phantasies, visual impressions, and hallucinations, which are bridged by feelings with *mind in body* as emotions, instinctual impulses, sensations, and somatic manifestations (e.g., skin rashes, asthma, convulsions), and the containing vessel for transformations is now (sometimes) the analytic consulting room, the drive of alchemical endeavour may be seen to be continuing unchanged today. The eagle and the serpent symbols of the *prima materia* are no less present now than 300 or 3000 years ago.

The writings of the alchemists convey an impression of once-and-for-allness in the achievement of the *filius* which hardly tallies with experience of life over time. Without doubt numinous symbolic images of the opposites united do occur, and are often accompanied by profound and all-embracing experiences of wholeness and religiousness. But life does not stand still: however once and for all it feels, there is always more to come.

For the child who experiences in the family a fairly balanced archetypal image of spirit in his father, and of matter in his mother, the image of their uniting in love is just such an image of the opposites united. It is the appropriate one for the stage of development. Naturally, such massive projection of self also betokens enormous dependence on the parents.

Each succeeding turn of the spiral demands that more of the opposites be experienced within the conscious personality, as self-awareness. The alchemists, and Jung also, were concerned with an *imago Dei*, developing within and inwardly experienced, appropriate for a maturity of middle-age and beyond. In no way does it diminish its value to recognise the forerunners of this *imago Dei* in infancy and youth, nor that it too will undergo change, separation, recombination. Equally, for an analyst working in the professional *Zeitgeist* wherein the baby and the primal relationship have become sacred symbols, the value of the infant's experiences of united opposites is in no way diminished by the recognition that for subsequent human development images and experiences of the opposites are more differentiated and less projected. The baby's experience is important as a foundation, but not as a goal. Just as the matter of the adult is a development of the matter of the infant, so the minding of that matter is a development of the minding of the infant. No one stage of the *imago Dei*, of the self

experienced and imaged as a *complexio oppositorum*, is supraordinate to another stage.

SUMMARY

I have given instances of the age-old and ubiquitous symbol of the eagle at the crown of the world-tree warring with the serpent at the roots, both from antiquity and as they appear in contemporary dreams. Historical interpretations have gathered around such concepts as spirit and matter. I have linked this syzygy with our soma by way of some observations upon the central and autonomic nervous systems, and our mental experience of their functioning; this constitutes a general form of interpretation which takes account both of traditional religious values and of a contemporary scientific viewpoint. I have suggested that nervous tissue is an early sublimation in matter's inherent tendency to evolve mind, and that the 'I', the conscious personality, tends to split its self-experience of (Mercurius duplex) *prima materia* mind along a line between the 'eagle-mind' associated with CNS functioning, and the 'serpent-mind' associated with ANS functioning. The development of the individual conscious personality in relation to this duplex mind is conveyed by conceiving the systolic and diastolic movements through time to form the image of a spiral, each loop of which is a typical stage of development. I have suggested that awareness of spontaneously occurring images of the serpent and the eagle, or their variants, is a great help in orienting the conscious personality in its relation to the inner and outer experience of spirit and matter. More than this: apprehending one's participative relationship with the autonomous and impersonal mysteries which these archetypal images represent is scary and awing, but it is also accompanied by the sense of belonging, profundity, and meaning.

REFERENCES

1. AVALON, A. (1974). *The Serpent Power*. Madras. Ganesh & Co.
2. ELLIS-DAVIDSON, H. R. (1964). *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*. London, Penguin.
3. GRAVES, R. (1955). *The Greek Myths*. London. Pelican.
4. HOOKE, S. H. (1963). *Middle Eastern Mythology*. London. Penguin.
5. JUNG, C. G. (1944). *Psychology and alchemy*. *Coll. Wks*, 12.
6. — (1984). *Dream Analysis* (Notes of the seminars given in 1928–30, Ed. W. McGuire). London. Routledge & Kegan Paul.