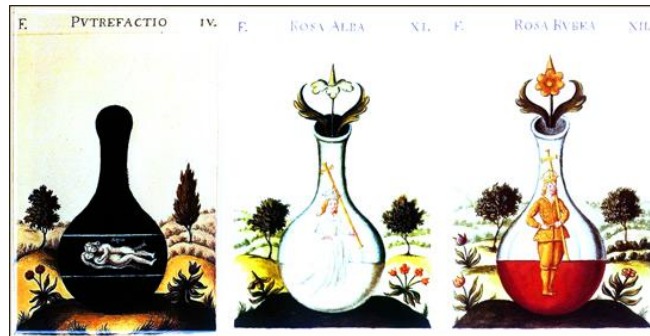


## SNOW WHITE & ALCHEMY



Black, [*Putrefactio*] White [*Rosa Alba*] Red, [*Rosa Rubea*] in Alchemy

Christina Luce:

“ . . . fairy tales are not only artful platforms for speaking about often unspeakable realities; they are also potent tools for visualizing and cultivating change.”<sup>1</sup>

Robert Bly:

“We recall that the Queen in "Snow White" was sewing one day near an ebony window frame as the snow fell outside; and when she pricked her finger, three drops of blood fell on the snow. She said, "I want a child as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as this window frame." The fairy-tale hero or heroine, whether in Russian, German, or Finnish tales, who chances to see a drop of red blood fall from a black raven into the

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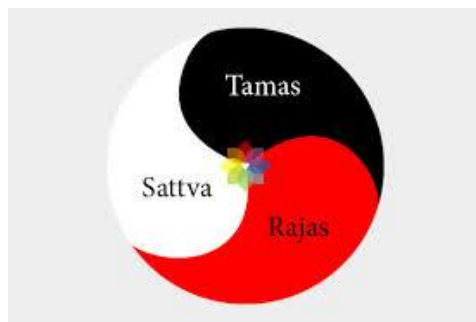
<sup>1</sup> Christina Luce, *Once Upon a Sibyl's Tongue: Conjuring Fairy Tale [Hi]stories for Power and Pleasure*, M.A thesis, Univ. of California, Santa Cruz, June 2013

white snow, sinks immediately into a yogic trance. That suggests the vast power red, black, and white have or have had over human consciousness up through the Middle Ages.”<sup>2</sup>

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N. J. Girardot:

“In the opening lines of the story we are presented with the whole story in miniature. Snow White's real mother is sewing, practicing one of the traditional female arts that indicates her maturity and creative powers. She pricks her finger and three drops of blood fall in the snow. This is the first reference to the significance of menstrual blood; symbolic here of the birth of Snow White and, later, of Snow White's own sexual and social maturation involving a threefold unification of the white, black, and red parts of her nature. Indeed, these colors might be taken as an indication of the tripartite constituents of the human person seen in many traditions: body, spirit, and soul. In the Indian Upanishads, for example, this same color symbolism is related to the three *gunas* (*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*) or "strands" of existence: "*sattva* is the quality of purity and tranquillity (and may be equated with white); *rajas* is the active principle which initiates karma (and may be equated with red), while *tamas* is 'constrictive, obstructive, and conducive to lethargic apathy (and may be equated with black).”<sup>3</sup>



Left: The Three Gunas: Centre and Right: White, Red and Black Dragons in the *Splendor Solis*.

Ajit Mookerje:

"According to yogic concepts, the three tendencies of being each have their own colour equivalents. *Sattva*, which is the ascending or centripetal tendency, expressed in the force of cohesion and aspiration towards Unity or Realization, is represented by white. *Tamas*, the descending or centrifugal tendency, the force which is behind decomposition and annihilation, is represented by black or midnight -blue. *Rajas*, the tendency to circular movement, expresses itself in all creative force as the colour red.”<sup>4</sup>

Duchesne-Guillemin, Jacques:

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Bly, *Iron John*, Shaftesbury: Element Books, 1991, pp. 199-200.

<sup>3</sup> N. J. Girardot, Initiation and Meaning in the Tale of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 90, No. 357 (Jul. - Sep., 1977), p.285

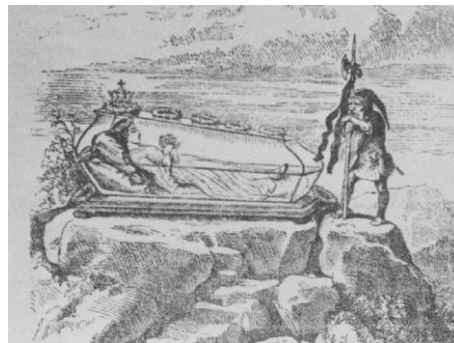
<sup>4</sup> Ajit Mookerje & Phillip Rawlson, *Yoga Art*, Ravi Kumar Publisher.

“Between Christmas and Epiphany, in certain regions of Christendom, three boys carrying a paper star fixed at the end of a decorated stick go singing from farm to farm and beg for a few pennies. They are often in fancy dress but sometimes content themselves with wearing their coats inside out. They smear their faces and hands – one black, with soot; another white, with flour; the third red, with pig’s blood. This usage is a remainder of medieval mysteries which originated in France and spread through most of Europe and in which the three wise men at Bethlehem were impersonated as an old man, an adult, and a beardless youth. This differentiation is first attested, in the literary sources, in the Venerable Bede (eighth century), and in art, two centuries earlier.”<sup>5</sup>

Giradot:

“The seven dwarfs return from mining gold and discover Snow White. Being deep in the forest at the house of the dwarfs, Snow White has symbolically returned to the mythic beginnings of time, the liminal period of chaos when the mysterious gods and ancestral creatures of creation were active. In many tales the dwarfs, as chthonic creatures, are malevolent and destructive beings; but, as in this case, they can also be the creative agents of growth and rebirth. Indeed, in this story the dwarfs (or, in some versions, robbers, others who are outside the normal social realm) can be taken as the divine ancestors, teachers, refiners, guardians, or helpers necessary for a successful initiation. They help to mine gold from the black earth of Snow White’s soul as the smith and alchemist assist in the divine work of accelerating the processes of nature, or the shaman heals through the agency of various spirit-animals.”

The Seven Dwarfs are of course, the Seven Metals – which correspond to the Seven Planets. This is a very ancient system, which can be traced all the way back to Babylonian roots, where the metals and planets are represented. Dwarfs are naturally associated with mining and we have some illustrations of their activity in the alchemical texts, for example, the *Splendor Solis*. And according to the Disney version, they mine for jewels. Yet their domestic arrangements are very humble. Where do the jewels go? Who do they work for?



**THEME: RED IN CULTURE.**

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<sup>5</sup> Duchesne-Guillemin, Jacques, A Vanishing Problem, in: Kitagawa, Joseph M. and Long, Charles H. (eds.) *Myths and Symbols, Studies in Honor of Mircea Eliade*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967, p. 275



**ALBERTO BURRI:** Rosso plastica (Red Plastic), 1961. Plastic (PVC), acrylic, and combustion on plastic (PE) and black fabric. [\[ONLINE HERE\]](#)

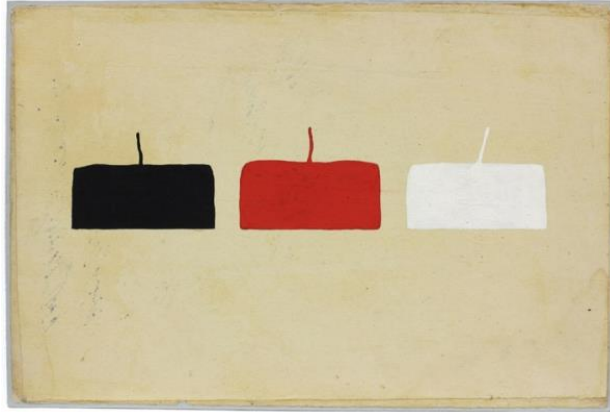
Jason W. Earle:

“In Egypt, red was a powerful color. The word for red (*dšr*) is closely related to that for “wrath” or “fury,” and the color was associated with demons, the god (of chaos) Seth, and the enemies of Egypt. Red ink was used to write the names of enemies in curses from the Old Kingdom onward; drawings of Seth were made in red ink; and models of Seth and Apophis – the enemy of the sun-god Re – were made in red wax. Red could also be used for protective purposes, as in depictions of the sun-disk, the wadjet eye, the garments of the goddesses Sekhmet and Hathor, and the snakes on New Kingdom beds.” “In Mesopotamia, *melammu* (i.e., divine luminosity) was bestowed on kings by the gods and materialized in the form of red garments. Red garments were also worn by *ašipus* (magical experts) when conducting rituals aimed at ridding or avoiding evil. Red cloth, hides and string were key elements in many other rituals.”

“While the significance of red in historical Greece remains elusive, in ancient Rome the face of the statue of Jupiter Capitolinus was painted red on holidays (a practice imitated by victorious generals awarded triumphal processions), and according to Horace, the color red was also associated with fertility rites. In summary, red had a variety of values in the ancient world: it protected against evil, fostered fertility, symbolized the cosmic order, and was generally associated with the divine.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jason W. Earle, *Cosmetics and Cult Practices in the Bronze Age Aegean? A Case Study of Women with Red Ears PP. 771 – 777. Aegaeum 33, Annales liégeoises et PASPiennes d’archéologie égéenne*, 2012



Above: Anonymous Tantric Painting, Jodphur, Rajasthan, 1995. The Three Gunas: Matter, Energy, Essence

### HILLMAN ON BLACK, RED, AND WHITE

“Among sub-Saharan African peoples, the three primary colours - black-white-red (and I am translating more metaphorically concrete expressions into our abstract colour terms) - form the very ruling principles of the cosmos. They are not merely colour words, names of hues.”

We find a similar idea in the three *gunas* in Indian cosmology: black *tamas*, red *rajas*, and white *sattva* enter into the composition of all things. The deservedly authoritative anthropologist Victor Turner states that these three colours "provide a primordial classification of reality." <sup>7</sup> They are not merely perceptual qualities, but as "experiences common to all mankind" they are like archetypal "forces," "biologically, psychologically and logically prior to social classifications, moieties, clans, sex totems, and all the rest." For culture, black and white, and red, precede and determine the way human life is lived." <sup>8</sup>

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“The colours red, white, and black occur together in folktales, ritual contexts, and traditional art forms around the world. This article draws together research from folklore, linguistics, art history, vision science, perceptual philosophy, and primate biology to propose an evolutionary source underlying the symbolic resonance of these colours.”

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<sup>7</sup> 3 Victor Turner. *The Forest of Symbols*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1967.

<sup>8</sup> James Hillman, The Seduction of Black. Spring 61 - A Journal of Archetype and Culture.

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SLAG - more orientated towards mining - dross is in chemical operations . . .  
7 Dwarfs = 7 metals = image in Islam and Alchemy . . . Von Franz link -