

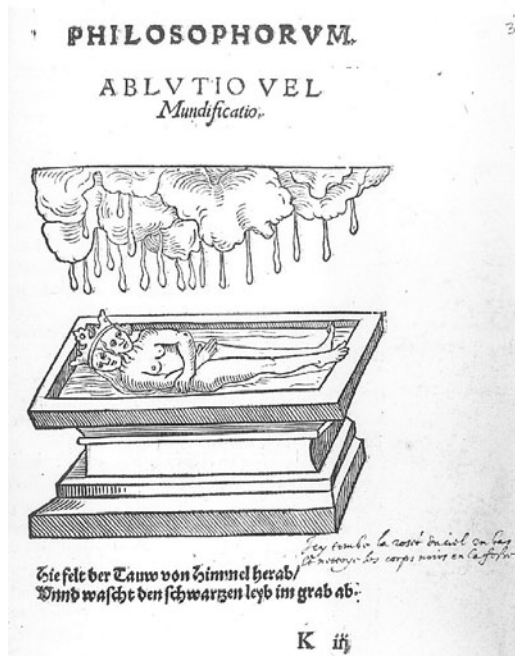
A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery

A

ablution the stage in the circulation of the matter of the *philosopher's stone in the *alembic when the blackness of the *nigredo is washed and purified into the whiteness of the *albedo. *Zoroaster's Cave* says of the Stone or metal: 'when [the body] begins to change from black they call it Ablution' (72), and 'by how much the Stone has more of Ablution, so much the more Intense is the whitenesse' (77). The same treatise related the four main processes of the opus, including ablution, to the *four elements: 'Solution turns the Stone into its Materia prima, that is into Water: Ablution into Ayre: Conjunction into Fire: Fixion into Earth Spiritual and Tingent' (73). The ablution or purification is also known as the mundification. Calid wrote: 'Thou art moreover to understand that Decoction, contrition, cribation [*sic*], mundification, and ablution, with sweet waters is very necessary to this secret mastery' (*Booke of the Secrets*, 38).

The alchemists believed that in order for a metal to be transmuted it first had to be 'killed' or dissolved into its *prima materia, the original stuff of creation, and cleansed of its impurities. When the old 'body' of the metal or matter of the Stone has been dissolved and lies putrefying at the bottom of the alembic, the 'soul' is released and the 'spirit' rises as a volatile vapour to the top of the vessel, where it condenses and descends as rain, *dew, or *tears from *heaven onto the dead body below. John Dryden refers to this alchemical rain in *Annus Mirabilis*: 'Yet judg'd like vapours that from Limbecks rise, / It would in richer showers descend again' (lines 49–52). This rain or dew signifies the *mercurial water or secret *fire which cleanses the putrefied body of its corruption and makes it ready to be reunited with the soul (or the already united soul/spirit entity). The soul then re-animates the new body and resurrects it. The eighth emblem of *The Rosary of the Philosophers* shows the mercurial water as rain or dew descending onto the dead bodies lying in a *coffin below and cleansing them of their impurities (fig. 1). The ablution is equivalent to the metaphysical purification of sins by baptism. Alchemical emblems of the ablution show women *laundering dirty linen in streams or tubs (the mercurial waters) and then putting them out to dry in the meadow (see fig. 37). This process is also symbolized by the figure of *Naaman the leper being washed in the waters of the Jordan (AF, embl. 13), by the washing of the stains from *Latona's face (AF, embl. 11), and by the *king washed by dew in his sweat bath (AF, embl. 28). The term occurs in an alchemical context in John Donne's *Sermons*. He wrote of David: 'Therefore he saw that he needed not only a liquefaction, a melting into tears, not only an ablution and a transmutation, those he had by his purging and this washing . . . but he needed fixionem and establishment' (in Mazzeo, *Renaissance . . . Studies*, 75). See **laundering**.

abortion



1 The abluition

abortion a name given to the the opus when it has failed to come to completion. The generation of the *philosopher's stone from the *chemical wedding of *Sol and *Luna (form and matter) was frequently compared to the birth of a child or chick. If the alchemist attempted to hasten the process of the opus alchymicum or made an error, the work could fail to come to fruition. The birth of the *philosophical child was thus aborted. In the epigram to emblem 1 of *Atalanta fugiens*, Michael Maier expressed the hope that the 'unborn child' of the alchemist may be born 'under a lucky star' and 'not as a useless abortion' (55). *The Sophic Hydrolith* warns, 'If thou strivest unduly to shorten the time thou wilt produce an abortion' (HM, 1:84). In 'Paradox. That Fruition destroys Love', Henry King plays on the idea of the 'still' birth of the Stone when speaking of post-coital disillusionment: 'After Fruition once, what is Desire / But ashes kept warm by a dying fire? / This is (if any) the Philosopher's Stone / Which still miscarries at Projection' (lines 73–6).

abyss the ancient chaos or formless primordial matter, or the alchemists' *prima materia which was a piece of the original *chaos. In his 'Index chemicus' (Keynes MS 30, f. 58), Isaac Newton listed 'abyss', along with 'hyle' and 'chaos', as one of the names of the prima materia (Westfall, 'Index', 180). The *Arcanum* states that through the dissolution of the old metal or body into the prima materia the alchemist brought back 'the whole into its ancient Chaos and dark abyss' (208). Guillaume Salmon's *Dictionnaire Hermetique* states that the chaos signifies the matter of the Stone when it has become black and putrefied at the *nigredo. *The Abyss* provides the title for Marguerite Yourcenar's novel about the life of an imaginary Renaissance philosopher-chemist, Zeno.

Adam the *prima materia, *Mercurius; the first adept and natural philosopher, according to alchemical tradition. The secret of the *philosopher's stone was said to have been divinely revealed to Adam and then taken from paradise into the world and handed down to the holy Patriarchs. Elias Ashmole wrote that Adam 'before his *Fall*, was so absolute a *Philosopher*, that he fully understood the true and pure knowledge of *Nature* (which is no other then what we call *Naturall Magick*) in the highest degree of Perfection' (TCB, 445). (See **doctrine of signatures**.) In Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* Sir Epicure Mammon claims to have an alchemical treatise written by Adam: 'I'll show you a booke, where MOSES, and his sister, / And SALOMON haue written, of the art; / I, and a treatise penn'd by ADAM' (2. 1. 81–3). Paracelsus attributes Adam's longevity to the fact that he was 'so learned and wise a Phisition, and knew all things that were in Nature her self' (*Arch.*, 114).

In the context of the opus alchymicum Adam is a synonym for the prima materia, the substance from which it was believed the universe and all the things in it were created. The name 'Adam' was thought to have been derived from the Hebrew *adom*, meaning 'red earth', and thus the prima materia is sometimes referred to as the *red earth. This materia is also referred to as the aqua permanens, the 'sperm' (sometimes *menstruum) of the world, and 'our Mercury' (philosophical mercury as opposed to common mercury). John Dee referred in his *Monas hieroglyphica* to 'that most famous Mercury of the philosophers, the microcosm and Adam' (165). 'Mercurius' is the name given to the secret transforming substance which transmutes itself from the prima materia into the ultimate goal of the opus, the philosopher's stone. Thus Adam is potentially the 'new' Adam, Christ or the philosophic man (see **furnace**). The Hermetic tradition held that Adam was hermaphroditic before the Fall. In alchemy Mercurius personifies the Adamic *hermaphrodite because, as prima materia, he contains both the male and female seeds of metals (*sulphur and *argent vive). The hermaphrodite also represents the entity which consists of the union of the male and female seeds, *Sol and *Luna, at the *chemical wedding. The necessity for the chemical wedding (or coniunctio) was based on the idea that after the Fall man lost his original, undivided Adamic state and had to strive to reconcile and unite the conflicting halves of his self to regain his integrated nature (symbolized by the union of male and female).

adrop (from the Arab *usrubb*, lead), the ore from which *philosophical mercury was said to be extracted; philosophical mercury. In *The Compound of Alchymie*, Sir George Ripley equates 'our *Magnesia*, our *Adrop*' with the sister and brother that are '*Agent and Pacient / Sulphure and Mercury*' in the alchemical coniunctio (TCB, 135) (see chemical wedding). *Zoroaster's Cave* cites Arnoldus and Saturninus: 'Our Stone is called Adrop, that is Saturn', and 'The Stone is called Adrop, that is Saturnus; because, as Saturn is the chiefest of the Planets; so our mercuriall Saturnine Stone, is the highest and most precious of Stones' (65, 64).

Aeson

Aeson Jason's old, sick father who was rejuvenated by Medea. He is synonymous with the aged, diseased *king (or metal) who is killed in order to be transmuted, rejuvenated and resurrected. Aeson signifies the death and *putrefaction of the matter in the alchemical vessel at the *nigredo. The dead matter may then be purified, revived and transformed into the white stone and the red stone. John Dastin wrote in his alchemical poem 'Dastin's Dreame': 'Old *Aeson* was made young by *Medea*, / With her drinks and with her potions, / Soe must your Brother [the King] of pure *Volunta* / Dye and be young through his operation' (TCB, 264). The alchemist Toutguerres in Bassett Jones's 'Lithochymicus' recounts the tale of an old Italian who 'did comaund me to revive *Medea's* art uppon Duke *Aeson's* age, / By practice uppon him' (AP, 262). In François Rabelais's *Pantagruel*, Pantagruel and his company arrive at the 'Kingdom of the Quintessence' where they are shown the rejuvenating action of the alchemical quintessence upon the aged and decrepit. 'This is the true Fountain of Youth' by which means the old suddenly become young, as happened 'to Aeson by Medea's art, and to Jason likewise' (651).

air one of the four elements, the mastery of which brings the brotherhood of all life. Volatile spirits in alchemy are often referred to as 'airy'. Michael Sendivogius described this element: 'The Aire is an entire Element, most worthy of the three in its quality, without, light and invisible, but within, heavy, visible, and fixed, it is hot and moist, and tempered with fire. . . . It is volatile but may be fixed, and when it is fixed it makes every body penetrable' (*New Light of Alchymie*, 95). See **elements**, **Mercurius**, **volatile**, **wind**.

alabaster a symbol of the *white stone of the philosophers attained at the *albedo. Edward Kelly wrote: 'As the Mercury becomes white, our white Sulphur becomes incombustible, containing the poison, whose whiteness is like the whiteness of alabaster' (*Two excellent Treatises*, 142). See **albedo**, **white stone**.

albedo the pure, white stage in the opus, also known as the albificatio. The albedo occurs after the blackened matter, the putrefied body of the metal or matter for the Stone, lying dead at the bottom of the alembic, has been washed to whiteness by the mercurial waters or fire (see *ablution). Artephius said of the mercurial water: 'This aqua vitae, or water of life, being rightly ordered and disposed with the body, it whitens it, and converts or changes it into its white colour' (SB, 14). Ripley wrote of the blackened matter: 'Sone after by blacknes thou shalt espy / That they draw fast to putrefying, / Whych thou shalt after many colers bryng, / To perfy Whytenes' (TCB, 149). During the circulation, the matter of the Stone passes from the black *nigredo (the death) through the rainbow colours of the cauda pavonis (*peacock's tail) through to the white albedo where the many colours are integrated into a perfect white. *The Sophic Hydrolith* stated that after the 'peacock's tail' the matter turns 'a dazzling white' (HM, 1: 83).

When the matter reaches the albedo it has become pure and spotless. This whitening of the Stone's body by the *mercurial waters is sometimes called the 'albification'. Chaucer's Canon's Yeoman tells of 'our fourneys eek of calcinacioun, / And of watres albificacioun' (*Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, lines 804–5). At this stage the body of the Stone (the *white foliated earth) smells fragrant and has attained to a spiritual state where it is no longer subject to sin or decay. The body has been whitened and spiritualized (i.e. the fixed is volatilized) and the soul has been prepared to receive illumination from the spirit. This is the stage at which the alchemist achieves the white stone and white elixir which has the power to transmute all imperfect metals to silver. The albedo is symbolized by all things pure, white or silver, some of which are: *Luna (the white *queen), the *moon (because the matter has attained the perfect state of receptivity, ready to be imprinted by form), *Diana, the *virgin, *dove, *snow, *swan, *white rose, *white lily, *alabaster, *marble, paradise (the *Elysian fields), *salt, *ash, silver and *white foliated earth. Edward Kelly wrote that the 'tincture or elixir' which 'melts, tinges and coagulates . . . imperfect metals into pure silver' is 'called the Virgin's milk, the everlasting water, and water of life, because it is as brilliant as white marble; it is also called the white Queen' (*Two excellent Treatises*, 142). And Philalethes wrote of the albedo: 'when by continuance of decoction the colour changeth to white, they call it their Swan, their Dove, their white stone of Paradise, their white Gold, their Alabaster, their Smoak, and in a word whatever is white they do call it by' (RR, 178). The clear moonlight of the albedo leads the adept out of the black night of the soul (the *nigredo) into the dawning of consciousness, heralding the advent of full consciousness symbolized by the midday *sun at the final red stage of the opus, the *rubedo. Thus Benjamin Lock wrote: 'Before thy matter be perfectly congelate / Into rosynes, gloriously albificate' ('His Picklock', f. 32v).

albification see **albedo**.

alembic, limbeck a vessel with a beaked cup or head, the upper part of a still used for distilling. The beak of the alembic carries vaporous substances to a receiver, in which they are then condensed. The alembic was invented by Kleopatra, its name coming from the Arabic *al-anbiq*, which in turn is from the Greek *ambix*, meaning cup, beaker, and still-head. Ramon Lull's *Testamentum* states that the matter for the Stone should be placed 'in the *Balneo* for the space of six days, in a Glasse very well sealed; after that open the vessell, and setting the Alembicke on again, with a most gentle fire distill the humidity' (FC, 18). Calid wrote of the equipment needed by the alchemist: 'As for the instruments, they are two in number. One is a *Cucurbit*, with his *Alembick*' (*Booke of the Secrets*, 34). In *Macbeth* Shakespeare uses 'limbeck' in its sense as the upper part of the still conveying vapours to the receiver. Lady Macbeth plans to get Duncan's guards so drunk that 'memory, the warder of the brain, / Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason / A limbeck only' (1.7.66–8). John Dryden likewise wrote of the alembic in its distilling role in an 'Apostrophe to the Royal Society': 'O truly royall! who behold the law /

aludel

And rule of beings in your maker's mind, / And thence, like limbecs, rich ideas draw / To fit the levelled use of human kind' (*Annus Mirabilis*, lines 661–4). Other names for the alembic are *head, *helm, and helmet. The 'imperfect creatures' of alchemy's 'Art', who appear as a second anti-masque group in Ben Jonson's *Mercurie Vindicated*, wear 'helmes of lymbecks on their heads' (lines 183–4).

In alchemy, the term is also applied to the generic circular vessel, the *vas rotundum*, in which the alchemist carries out all the operations of the opus. Roger Bacon wrote: 'which vessel must be round, with a small necke, made of glasse or some earth representing the nature or close knitting together of glasse: the mouth whereof must be signed or sealed with a covering of the same matter, or with lute' (*Mirror*, 12) (see lute). The treatises stress that although the vessel is known by many names there is but one vessel in which the work of transmutation is accomplished. Roger Bacon wrote: 'in one vessel the whole mastery is performed' (*Mirror*, 10). Some of the names of the vessel are: pot, vessel, body, *prison, *grave or coffin, chest, box, barrel, *ark, *ship, chariot, trough, *well, *bath, pocket, sack, oven, kettle, *womb, *egg, *oval, sphere, globe, *bed, *pelican, *stork, cormorant, goose, pumpkin, *nest, *den, *house, glass-house, glass, citadel, *fort, *castle, treasure-house, *garden, *temple and *city. The name of the vessel changes according to the particular chemical operation in process. During the blackness of the *putrefactio when the chemically united *lovers (*sulphur and *argent vive) are killed and buried in order to generate the philosopher's stone, the vessel was represented as a grave, coffin or prison. John Donne employed this idea in 'A Nocturnal upon S. Lucy's Day': 'I, by love's limbeck, am the grave / Of all that's nothing' (lines 21–2). At the *chemical wedding the vessel is represented as the conjugal bed in which the lovers unite (fig. 3), and at the stage where the alchemist has attained the red and white elixirs or stone, the vessel is spoken of as the garden in which bloom *roses red and white, or the *philosophical tree with its *flowers of sun and moon (see fig. 17).

The alchemists sometimes identify the secret transforming water (*Mercurius) as their secret vessel. Philalethes enigmatically wrote: 'When we speak of our vessel and our fire, we mean by both expressions, our water; nor is our furnace anything diverse or distinct from our water. There is then, one vessel, one furnace, one fire, and all these make up one water' (*HM*, 2:263). The mercurial water is paradoxically referred to as the contents of the container and the container itself. In the metaphysically oriented treatises it is made clear that man is the vessel in which the transformation takes place and from which the transformative substance issues. The vessel is viewed as a little universe in which the adept attempts to duplicate God's creation in miniature. Morienus wrote of the Stone: 'Truly this matter is that created by God which is firmly captive within yourself, inseparable from you wherever you be' (*Testament*, 27).

aludel a pear-shaped bottle used as a condensing receiver during the sublimation process. The name comes from the Arabic *al-uthal*. It is also one of

the names of the philosophical vessel or *egg in which the entire opus alchymicum is accomplished. Calid wrote of the utensils needed by the alchemist: 'As for the instruments, they are two in number. One is a *Cucurbit*, with his *Alembick*: the other is *Aludel*, that is well made' (*Booke of the Secrets*, 34). Subtle in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* addresses Face: 'Looke well to the register, / And let your heat, still, lessen by degrees, / To the *Aludels*' (2.3.33–5).

amalgam, amalgamation originally, a soft mass formed especially by the combination (of gold etc.) with mercury (*OED*). In an appendix to 'Lithochymicus' Bassett Jones defined amalgamation as 'a particular operation for the calcination of mineralls. It is perform'd by vertue of quick silver incorporating itself with the minerall, soe reducinge the composition into a soft and pliable consistencie' (*AP*, 353). In *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, Chaucer writes of the 'amalgaming and calcening / Of quik-silver, y-clept Mercurie crude' (lines 771–2). Jean de la Fontaine stated that 'If a body and Soule be impure / Thou shalt not make Amalgame sure' (*AP*, 94).

amber a synonym for gold. Amber was known among the ancients and the philosophers as a very precious substance and there was a close association between gold (Sol) and amber in alchemical thought. It was known principally as three things: as a golden exudation of certain trees (poplar, alder, pine and fir); as an alloy of gold and silver; and as a synonym for gold. Ruland wrote that its composition as an alloy was one part silver to five parts gold (*Lexicon*, 122). To some alchemists the amber alloy was known as *Laton or Latona, the mother of *Apollo (sun-gold) and *Diana (moon-silver) (see *AF* embl. 11). As the exuded, hardened gum of trees, amber is associated with alchemical Sol or gold. The *philosopher's stone is frequently depicted as a tree (see **philosophical tree**). Mylius wrote of the 'philosophical stone, from which branches multiply into infinity' (in *AS*, 319). The congealed sap of the philosophical tree is seen as part of the tree's 'fruit', and this *fruit is silver and gold. Flamel wrote: 'the *living* fruit (the real silver and gold), we must seek on the tree' (*HM*, 1: 144). The alchemists saw amber, the golden, coagulated sap, as a potent image for the gold which issued from their growing metallic tree. The idea of amber gold or vegetable gold occurs in Crashaw's 'The Weeper': 'Not the soft Gold which / Steales from the Amber-weeping Tree' (80), and in Milton's description of the tree of life in *Paradise Lost*: 'And all amid them stood the tree of life, / High eminent, blooming ambrosial fruit / Of vegetable gold' (4.218–20).

amorous birds of prey see **bird**.

androgynic see **hermaphrodite**

angels the volatile or spiritualized matter of the *Stone during *sublimation. The alchemical texts always depict volatile substances as winged (see **volatile**). Nicholas Flamel wrote in *His Exposition*: 'The natures then are here transmuted into *Angels*, that is to say, are made *spiritual* and most

antimony

subtle, so are they now the true *tinctures*' (123). (See also **castle, bird**.) 'Angel' is also the name of an English gold coin of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, so named because of its device depicting the archangel Michael slaying the dragon (*OED*). In John Lyly's *Gallathea*, Peter says of the alchemist: 'He can make of thy cap gold, and by multiplication of one grote, three old Angels' (2.3.38–9).

antimony a silvery metalloid chemical element of which stibnite is the main ore. John Read glosses it as 'strictly, metallic antimony; but alchemically, stibnite (native antimony sulphide)' (*TAC*, 194). Basil Valentine's *Triumphphant Chariot of Antimony* (1660) was the text responsible for the antimony craze in the seventeenth century. According to Newton's 'Clavis', Dobbs writes, when the ore of antimony was reduced using iron, it could be purified to such an extent that it would crystallize in a star-like pattern and was thus known as the 'star of antimony' (*Foundations*, 199). Sir George Ripley used antimony or sericon to prepare the alchemical substance known as the green lion (*BB*, 101), an experiment repeated by Edward Kelly on 8 February 1588 at Trebon (*Dee, Diary*, 26). In alchemy, antimony or the *black earth is one of the names given to the arcane substance at the black stage of the work (the *nigredo) and is depicted in alchemical emblems as the grey wolf and sometimes the griffon. *The Golden Tract* indicates that the name antimony is used metaphorically 'on account of the brilliant blackness which it assumes after solution' (*HM*, 1: 23). In *Poly-Olbion* Michael Drayton depicted a mountain in the Derbyshire Peak District as an alchemist producing antimony: 'For shee a *Chimist* was, and Nature's secrets knew / And from amongst the *Lead*, she *Antimony* drew' (*Works*, 4:531. lines 386–7).

Apollo the son of *Latona and Jupiter, twin brother of *Diana. Apollo is a symbol for the red tincture, *Sol, *gold, the *sun and the *red 'sun' stage of the opus which succeeds the white lunar stage. In 'Lithochymicus' Bassett Jones writes that the lunar stage must 'be advanced to th' state divine / Of great *Apollo*' (*AP*, 296). Isaac Newton wrote in his commentary on the *Emerald Table* of Hermes Trismegistus: 'and the earth is the nurse, Latona washed and cleansed, whom the Egyptians assuredly had for the nurse of Diana and Apollo, that is, the white and red tinctures' (Dobbs, *Janus*, 276). Apollo represents the hot, dry, active, masculine principle of the opus which the alchemist must unite with his sister, Diana, the cold, moist, receptive female principle. This process is depicted as an incestuous *chemical wedding or union from which the *philosopher's stone is conceived and born. See **incest**.

apples see **Atalanta, Hesperides, fruit**.

aqua ardens (Latin, burning water) *Mercurius, the universal solvent of the wise, the 'mother' of the *Stone, the first mercury in the opus alchymicum which mortifies bodies, breaking them down and dissolving them into their

*prima materia. In *Ripley Reviv'd* Philalethes wrote: 'This water they call sometimes, *Aqua ardens*, sometimes *Acetum Acerrimum*, but most commonly they call it their *Mercury*' (3). This use of the term probably came from treatises by Ramon Lull where *aqua ardens*, the spirit of wine, was treated as an impure form of the universal quintessence (Moran, *The Alchemical World of the German Court*, 78).

aqua divina see *Mercurius*.

aqua fortis (Latin, strong water) nitric acid, originally referring to any powerful solvent. In alchemy it is another name for **Mercurius* as the universal solvent which can dissolve any metal into its *prima materia (see **aqua ardens**).

aqua nostra see *Mercurius*.

aqua permanens see *Mercurius*.

aqua regia, regis (Latin, royal water) a concentrated mixture of nitric acid (*aqua fortis*) and hydrochloric acid, able to dissolve gold. In *De natura acidorum*, Isaac Newton wrote of the reduction of gold or other bodies into the *prima materia for transmutation: 'Mercury can pass, and so can Aqua Regia, through the pores that lie between particles of last order, but not others' (in Dobbs, *Foundations*, 218). In Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* Subtle quizzes Face on his knowledge of repeated distillation: 'What's *Cohobation*?' and Face answers 'Tis the powring on / Your *Aqua Regis*, and then drawing him off' (2.5.26–7).

aqua vitae (Latin, water of life) alcoholic spirits, especially of the first distillation; ardent spirits; distilled wine. It is also a name for the catalyst or agent of the opus, philosophical mercury known as **Mercurius*, and the *quintessence. Colson's *Philosophia maturata* states: 'first calcine, then putrefie, and dissolve, and fix often with our *Aqua vitae*; wash and dry, and make a Marriage between the Body and Spirit' (34). Artephius likewise identifies *aqua vitae* with the beneficent *'dew of grace' which washes and whitens the blackened body of the Stone after *putrefaction, leading to the *albedo: 'This *aqua vitae*, or water of life, being rightly ordered and disposed with the body, it whitens it, and converts or changes it into its white colour' (SB, 14) (see *Mercurius*). Synonyms for *aqua vitae* are *bath, balneum (or balmy), moist fire, *dunghill, *horse-belly, blood of the *green lion, philosophic mercury. The *Philosophia maturata* says of philosophic mercury: 'This is our Fire always equally burning in one measure within the Glass, and not without: This is our Dung-hill, our *Aqua vitae*, our Balmy, our horse-belly, working and producing many wonders in the most secret Work of Nature' (32). Calid equated *aqua vitae* with the alchemical quintessence: 'This is the true *Aqua Vitae* of the Philosophers; the true Spirit so many have fought for, and which has been desired of all Wise Men, which is called the *Essence*, *Quintessence*, *Spirit*' (*Booke of the Secrets*, 125).

arbor inversa

arbor inversa see **philosophical tree**.

arbor philosophica see **philosophical tree**.

argent vive or quicksilver, also known as mercury, the cold, moist, receptive, female *seed of metals which must be united with the hot, dry, active masculine seed known as *sulphur in order to create the philosopher's stone. Sulphur has the power to fix and coagulate the volatile spirit while argent vive or mercury has the power to dissolve fixed matter. Nicolas Flamel explained that 'all metals have been formed out of sulphur and quicksilver, which are the seeds of all metals, the one representing the male, and the other the female principle. These two varieties of seed are, of course, composed of elementary substances; the sulphur, or male seed, being nothing but fire and air . . . while the quicksilver, or female seed is nothing but earth and water' (*HM*, 1: 42). Calid equated sulphur with the 'form' and argent vive with the 'matter' of metals: 'all Metals are compounded of Mercury and Sulphur, Matter and Form; Mercury is the Matter, and Sulphur is the Form' (*Booke of the Secrets*, 126). Argent vive is symbolized by the serpent or dragon, as Mammon points out in Jonson's *The Alchemist*: 'our *argent vive*, the Dragon' (2.1.95). See **gold and silver**.

Argus, Argus-eyes a symbol for the rainbow-coloured stage in the opus known as the *peacock's tail (see Bassett Jones in *AP*, 294). In Greek myth, the hundred eyes of Argus were transferred to the tail of the peacock by Hera. Mammon in Jonson's *The Alchemist* lists 'Argus eyes' as one of the 'abstract riddles of our *stone*' (2.1.102–4). The multi-coloured stage of the peacock's tail occurs after the black *nigredo, where the dead bodies of the 'lovers' (male *sulphur and female *argent vive) are putrefied, preparing the way for the white stage or *albedo, where the blackened bodies have been cleansed and purified. See **jackdaw, Mercurius**.

ark the name of the alchemists' secret vessel while the matter of the Stone is undergoing the dissolution and *putrefaction at the *nigredo, leading to the generation of the philosophical chick or stone. In both biblical and alchemical symbolism the waters of the *flood were paradoxically destructive and regenerative. The old outmoded race was drowned while the new race was generated from the ark on the waters. Since the ark contained the new race of beings which were to repopulate the world, it was seen by the alchemists as a matrix of generation. In Jonson's masque *Mercurie Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court*, Mercury refers to the alchemists' 'great act of generation, nay almost creation', equating their vessel with the ark of Deucalion: 'For in yonder vessels which you see in their laboratorie they have enclosed *Materials*, to produce men, beyond the deedes of *Deucalion*, or *Prometheus* (of which, one, they say, had the *Philosophers* stone, and threw it over his shoulder, the other the fire, and lost it)' (lines, 133–9). Arthur Dee named a later version of his *Fasciculus chemicus* (1631) the 'Arca arcanorum' (the ark or vessel of secrets), playing on the words 'ark' and 'arcane' and implying