



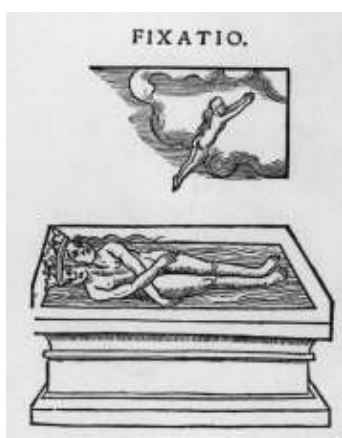
Adam McLean's Study Course on Inner alchemy and alchemical symbolism

Lesson Twenty one : Individual alchemical processes.

Over the past few lessons we have been looking at the general alchemical process. Apart from this sequence of stages we also find in alchemy special processes, for example, Calcination, Sublimation, Exaltation, Projection. Most of these are derived from practical work with substances, but the creators of emblems occasionally used some of these in an allegorical way. You can see a listing with summarised description of many of the practical processes found in alchemy on the web site at :

<http://www.levity.com/alchemy/alch-pro.html>

One of the best known example is the *Rosary of the Philosophers* which was published in 1550 with its important and influential series of woodcuts.



Individual processes like these were used in an allegorical sense even earlier than this. One of the more important early sources for this allegorical use is the writings of the late 15th century George Ripley, especially his *Twelve Gates* which was used as a basic structure by later alchemists. Ripley gives a sequence of twelve processes which became a template for later alchemical writers.

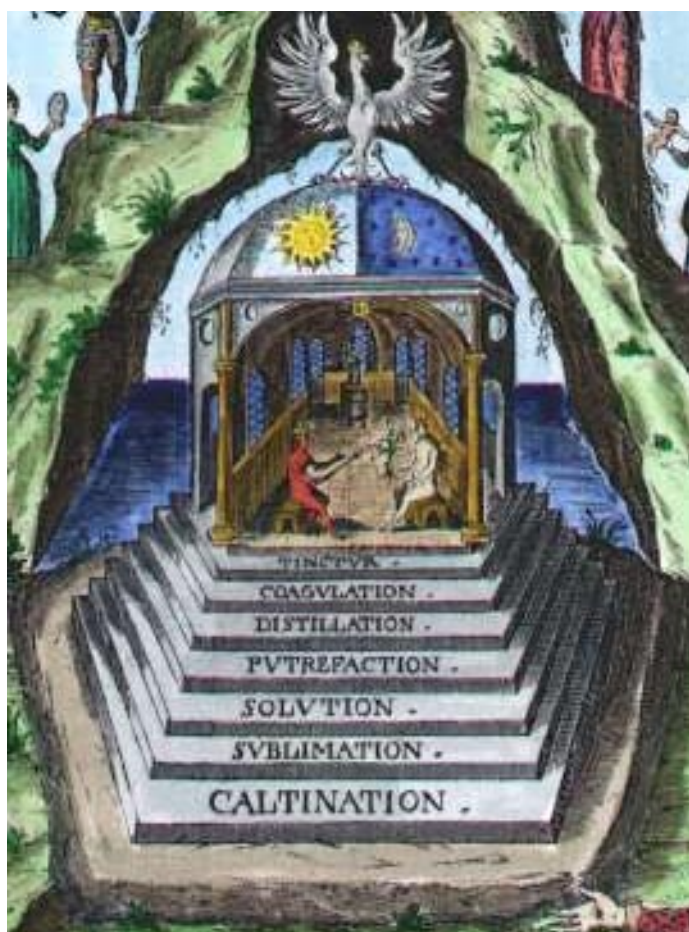
Calcination - Solution - Separation - Conjunction - Putrefaction - Congelation

Cibation - Sublimation - Fermentation - Exaltation - Multiplication - Projection

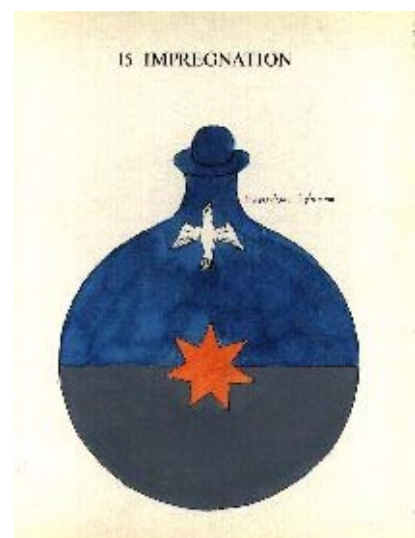
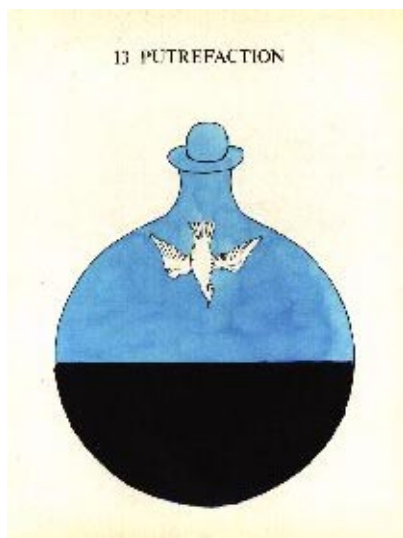
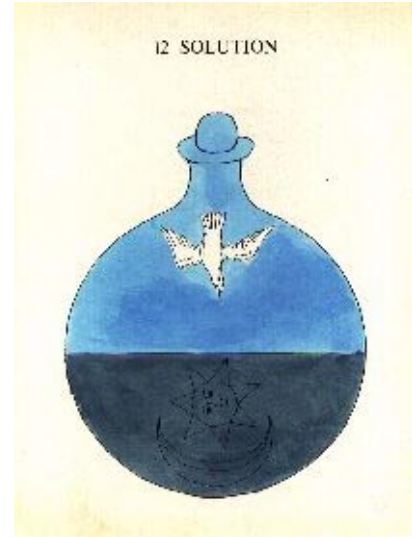
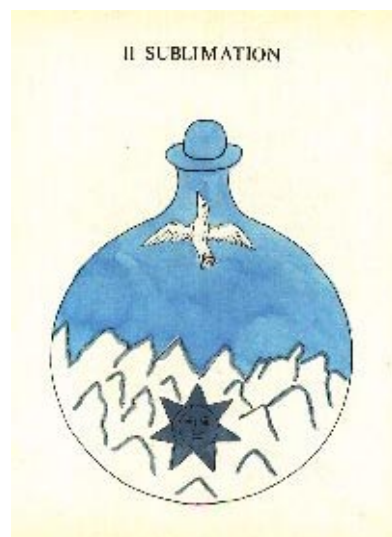
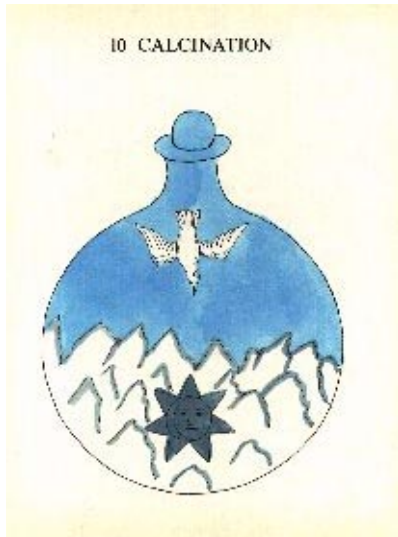
These were still used, for example, 150 years later by Mylius in his *Philosophia reformata* series :



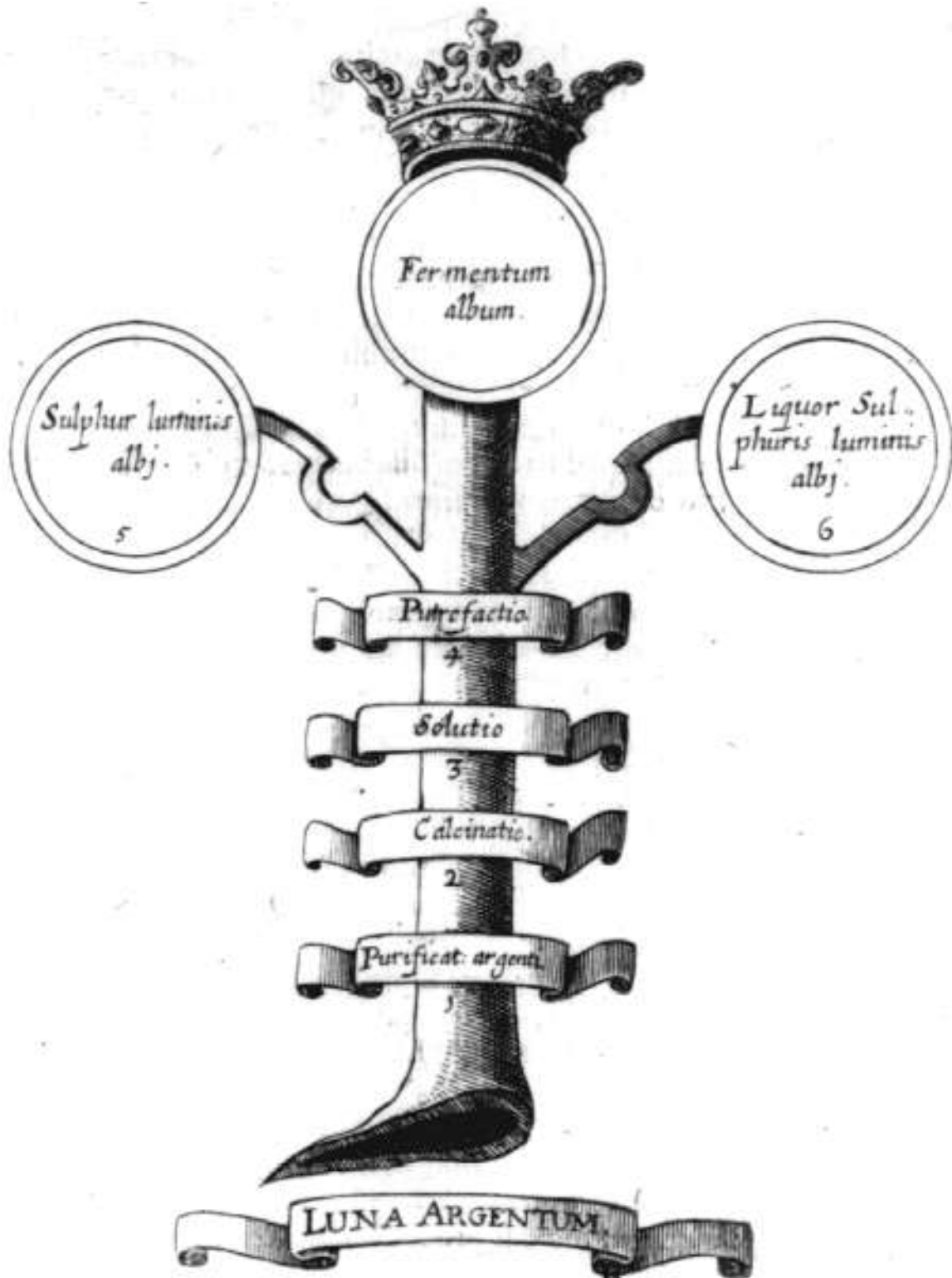
These were sometimes presented as a series of stages on a single emblem. Here, in a detail from the third engraving in Michelspacher's 'Mirror of Art and Nature', we see the processes depicted as a series of steps leading to the alchemical chamber.



One of the most elaborate depictions of the alchemical process as a sequence of 67 individual processes (for the most part taking place in flasks) is the renowned and most influential 'Crowning of Nature' manuscript.



Another way of working with these is seen in Samuel Norton's books, published together in 1630. Here he shows the processes as branches or fruits on a series of trees.



It is not easy to quickly summarise the meanings of these individual alchemical processes in an allegorical context. We must begin by trying to understand the nature of a physical process such as, say, solution or calcination. Then we can extend or generalise this to an allegorical significance. Calcination, we may note, involves the burning away of impurities, while Solution involves the breaking down or incorporation of a solid earthy material into a liquid. There is a great deal that can be learnt about the alchemical view of transformation by exploring these processes in an inner or allegorical way. There is insufficient space within this study course for us to work with these concepts in detail and I may address this more deeply in a later, more specialised course. However we should be aware that these processes appear quite often in alchemical emblems and may carry an allegorical as well as a physical significance.

To show one example, let us attempt to read the 14th engraving from Mylius' *Philosophia reformata*.



Here we see a stage of Fermentation. This is pictured through the man sowing seed. As we noted in the previous lesson, alchemists saw the seed as dying, decaying, and losing its form in order that the new shoot could arise. The seeds of the alchemical work are thus presented here as going through a fermentation. From these two figures form - a solar and a lunar one. These are being called to rise into activity by the angel sounding the trumpet. We note the use of polarities. The male sowing the seed downwards, the

female angel giving the call to quicken, rise up and come to life. The solar-headed male figure and the lunar-headed female figure point in opposite directions - the male with his feet towards the man sowing seed, the female with her feet pointing to the angel. Of course this particular emblem must be seen within the structure of the emblem sequence devised for Mylius' book, which follows the pattern laid down in Ripley's *Twelve Gates*, but here the Fermentation of the seed created in the earlier parts of this sequence gives rise to a new growth and the subsequent stages of Exaltation or a elevation of the newly formed forces into the King and Queen, their Multiplication through a nourishment and the final Projection.



Exercise:

As an exercise I would like you to analyse the complex emblems I mentioned in the last lesson. It has many symbols and quite complex geometrical relationships between the symbols. I would also ask you to attempt a reading of the emblem in the way I have tried to present over the last few lessons. Please try not to project ideas from outside alchemy into your reading of the emblem. Use the analytical methods I have outlined throughout this course rather than improvising an interpretation. Try to see the various symbolic dramas that compose this complex emblem as they can be a pointer to a reading. I know this emblem is quite a challenge and you may have problems in finding a way through this to a reading, but if you find it too puzzling then perhaps you could work on small sub-components of the emblem. I will give a general reading of this in the next lesson. There are a few short Latin phrases on this emblem:

Sapiens dominabitur astris - A wise person is ruled by the stars.

Inferius est sicut est superius - That which is below is as that which is above.

Ego sum niger albus citrinus et rubeus - I am the black the white the yellow and the red.

Longitudo dierum et sanitas gloria et divitiae infinitae - May your days be long and healthy and may you have fame and infinite riches.

Ab uno omnia, in uno omnia, per unum omnia - All things are from the One, all things are in the One, all things are through the One.

