

KIEFER DICTIONARY

AARON (Hebr. *Aharón*) The brother of Moses. Because of his eloquence it was Aaron who passed on the messages of God in accordance with Moses' instructions ("The Lord said to Moses And he shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God" (Exodus 4:16) and "...the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet" (Exodus 7:1)); God revealed himself to Moses, but Aaron had the talent for imagery that made people believe his words. Aaron was involved in drawing down the Ten Plagues on Egypt, and it was Aaron, while Moses was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments, who at the urging of the people created a god that they could worship in his place in the form of the Golden Calf. In so doing he broke the Lord's Second Commandment, and God threatened the people with torments because they had created and worshipped an idol. With his powers of rhetoric and imagery Aaron has often been compared to the artist-figure.

ALCHEMY (Arabic *al-kimia*) has its foundations in Aristotle's doctrine of the transformations of matter, which are made possible because at the basis of everything there is a universal "primal matter". The word "alchemy" is originally an Arabic term, *al-kimia* (7th cent. AD), for "the art of making gold", which at the time involved thorough training in mathematics, astronomy, chemistry and medicine. Alchemy is also known as "hermetic philosophy", which indicates the spiritual, psychological and cosmological dimensions of the discipline, and at the same time gives an idea of its obscure and mystical character. At the basis of alchemy lies the conviction that there is an analogy between the microcosm and the macrocosm; the chemical and physical work of ennobling the metals (where the lowest is lead and the highest is gold) is thus closely related to the metaphysical effort to approach closer to the

spiritual world, the Universal. At the end of a series of complex experiments lies the prospect of distilling the "quintessential" material – also known as the Philosopher's Stone – with which one can make gold and attain unlimited wisdom and eternal life. But the quest for the Philosopher's Stone can only be accomplished by a person with pure intentions and a combination of persistent meditation and experimentation. The physical and spiritual worlds are thus inextricably related in alchemy. In several works Anselm Kiefer refers to the English alchemist Robert Fludd (1574-1637) – a physician and natural philosopher, who drew on ancient philosophies, Bible studies, Kabbalism, hermetic philosophy, his own experiments, everyday experience and ordinary contemplation to demonstrate his overall vision: that "great creating nature" imitates and reflects God, and that mankind imitates both God and nature. One of his principal works is *Utriusque Macrocosmi et Microcosmi Historia* (1617).

ASH The residue from combustion by fire. Ash from the burning of organic consists mainly of minerals, which is why it is generally rich in energy. This is why periodic forest fires can benefit the soil with new nutrition. Analysis of ash can provide important information about the living conditions and growth of the burnt material. Ashes can be a symbol of death and destruction but also of possible resurrection – like the Phoenix, the fabled Persian bird which according to legend burnt itself up in its own nest only to rise from the ashes and be reborn – a cycle that was said to be repeated every 500-1000 years. In several cultures it is customary to keep the ashes from a cremation.

INGEBORG BACHMANN (1926-1973) Austrian writer. Bachmann's poems belong to the *hermetic tradition* in German poetry that arose after World War II. The hermetic poets were fundamentally distrustful of language after it had been abused

by the Third Reich – through poetry the language had to be reinvented in an entirely subjective idiom that often makes the poems difficult to fathom. Like so many other artists after the war, Bachmann felt a general disillusionment and a mistrust of ideologies, and her poems came to express a different, better, Utopian existence. Bachmann and *Paul Celan* were a couple for several years.

Among the Bachmann texts that Anselm Kiefer quotes in his works are the poems *Anrufung des Großen Bären* (Invocation of the Great Bear) (1956) and *Im Gewitter der Rosen* (In the Storm of Roses) (1953).

PAUL CELAN (orig. Paul Antschel, 1920-1970). Writer and translator born in Czernowitz in what was then Romania (but is today in the Ukraine) to a German-speaking Jewish family. During the war Paul Celan's parents were deported and both died. He himself spent several years in various labour camps. Celan has later become known as the poet who was able to refute the philosopher Theodor Adorno's claim that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" – precisely by writing poetry *about* the Holocaust, as in the famous *Todesfuge* (Death Fugue) where rhythm and sound are verbal resources that are just as important as the poetic images. Celan himself said that the only thing that remained intact for him after the war was language. The poem has thus become a negative Utopia: it expresses what cannot be expressed.

CEPHEUS A constellation in the northern hemisphere called after King Cepheus of Ethiopia from Greek mythology, who was married to Cassiopeia and was the father of Andromeda. This constellation of heavenly bodies includes no fewer than three visible 'red dwarfs' – dying stars.

DONAUQUELLE The so-called 'source of the Danube', in the palace well of the city of Donau-

eschingen. However, two mountain streams, the Brege and the Brigach, flow into the Donauquelle before the Danube can be said to arise.

FIRE Fire is one of the classic 'four elements' earth, water, fire and air, and in several cultures is considered to have purifying or healing powers (for example Christianity's Purgatory, where the sinners are purified; the use by Indian cultures of smoke as a healing remedy). But fire may also be associated with fever and disease – as in the word "inflammation". Fire is often associated with the divine or with the sun. In the Bible fire thus often functions as a substitute for or an omen from God or the Holy Spirit – as when God appears to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus Ch. 3). Religious fire typically "burns without consuming". The dual nature of fire as both a discharge of energy and a destructive force is often compared to artistic creativity and the artistic temperament.

JEAN GENET (1910-1986) French writer and dramatist. Genet stood out as one of the greatest provocateurs of his time in French society. Jean Genet was a homosexual and cultivated his so-called 'doubly rejected existence' – as a criminal, artist and homosexual – in his works, where he wrote openly of life as a thief, prostitute and prisoner in the harsh prison milieu – and about his sexual fantasies and experiences. In particular the novel *The Thief's Journal* (1948) caused a sensation in its time. In literary circles Genet enjoyed high esteem as the autodidactic martyr and provocateur who had devoted his life to challenging the French bourgeoisie, and Jean Cocteau and Jean-Paul Sartre among others recognized his literary talent at an early stage.

GERMAN ROMANTICISM A broad term for a school of artistic thought that flourished from about the 1790s until the 1830s. Important German authors and philosophers who, for periods

in their careers, could be called Romantics include Goethe, Schlegel, Heine, Hoffmann, von Arnim, Brentano, Kleist, Novalis, Chamisso, Schleiermacher and Hölderlin, while Caspar David Friedrich was one of the definitive leading figures in Romantic painting. The German Romantics had a tendency to withdraw from society and everyday life in their art. They cultivated nature, history and myth; they cultivated the dream and the irrational; and they cultivated the *self*, which could lead either to rebellious individualism or to alienation and *Weltschmerz*. Particularly popular too was *idealism*; the view that behind the surface or appearance of this world were certain universal ideas that belonged to a higher, purer reality. Nature was animated by a divine energy that could be perceived in glimpses – especially through art and religion. Romanticism was in other words permeated by an idea of *dualism*, the sense of a dichotomy between body and soul, subject and object, spirit and nature.

GREAT BEAR (Lat. *Ursa Major*) – a constellation in the northern hemisphere, also known as the Plough. The name refers to a Greek myth about the infatuation of Zeus, the king of the gods, with the beautiful nymph Callisto, who was turned into a bear by Hera, the wife of Zeus.

HELIOGABALUS – See **SOL INVICTUS**

HOLOCAUST (from Lat. *Holocaustum* “burnt-offering”). Now mainly a term for genocide. Today *holocaust* refers almost exclusively to the Nazis’ systematic attempt to exterminate the Jews during World War II – sometimes by shooting and sometimes in concentration camps, where more than 4 million Jews were gassed and then cremated in the ‘ovens’. Around two thirds of the Jews of Europe perished in the Holocaust. Besides Jews, ‘social deviants’ such as homosexuals, the disabled and non-Jewish groups, first and foremost Gypsies, were affected by the Holocaust.

ICONOCLASM (Gr. “destruction of images”) Refers to the controversy in the Early Church about religious images that was played out in the Byzantine Empire, mainly in Constantinople (the modern Istanbul) from ca. 730-843. At the centre of the controversy was the Second Commandment of the Mosaic law: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me... Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth ... Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them ...”. In the Byzantine Empire the dispute was between *iconodules* (venerators of images) and *iconoclasts* (destroyers of images). The iconodules thought that an image could contain some of the substance of the subject depicted, and therefore venerated their religious icons. The iconoclasts, on the other hand, thought that the very production of religious images was a kind of idolatry, and they destroyed innumerable icons in Constantinople. The dispute flared up again during the Reformation (in the 1530s), when the overwhelming richness of Catholic imagery contrasted starkly with the white church interior of Protestantism, which had been meticulously ‘purged’ by the iconoclasts of the Reformation. Speaking more metaphorically, history (and the history of art) is full of examples of iconoclasm without religious undertones. The widespread book-burnings of the Nazis during World War II seems for example to exhibit similarities to the ravages of the iconoclasts and their burning of pictures.

JASON is a hero from Greek mythology, whose best known adventure is the hunt for the Golden Fleece. Jason had to undergo a long, perilous journey before he reached Colchis, where the Fleece was kept, and there King Aietes set him a task that he had to perform before the Fleece was his: first he had to plough a field, then he had to sow it and finally harvest it. However, the apparently

manageable task had hidden complications; the oxen he had use to plough the field were fire-breathing giant oxen, the seed to be sown was dragons' teeth from which heavily armed warriors sprang up, and the Fleece was guarded by a mighty dragon. But with advice from the King's daughter Medea, Jason managed the tasks: dressed in a fireproof costume he ploughed the field, and when the warriors sprang up where the dragons' teeth had been sown he threw a stone in among them and, blind to the thrower of the stone, they began to fight one another furiously. The dragon was put to sleep with a magic potion, and Medea and Jason fled together from Colchis with the Fleece.

KABBALAH is a branch of Jewish mysticism. *Kabbalah* is to be understood both as a philosophy and as a theology whose purpose is to understand and explain the relationship of God with mankind and the world. Through the ages philosophers, artists and scholars – Jewish and Gentile – have been inspired by fundamental ideas and metaphors from the Kabbalah, which is closely related to Platonism and Gnosticism. Important figures in this tradition include the Renaissance mystic Jakob Boehme, the Enlightenment philosopher Hegel and the fathers of modern psychology, Freud and particularly Jung. Anselm Kiefer draws mainly on the branch known as *Theosophical Kabbalah* as expounded by the Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-1572), who stresses the original unity of everything and the quest for the re-establishment of a similar harmony.

KHLEBNIKOV Viktor Vladimirovich Khlebnikov (1885-1922), Russian writer, co-founder of Russian Futurism, who in 1912 issued the famous manifesto *A Slap in the Face of Public taste*. Khlebnikov was fascinated by the sound effects of language and invented a wealth of new words and phrases detached from meaning in the conventional sense. For example he created “the lan-

guage of the gods” and “the language of the birds” and was a co-inventor of the language *Zaum* – an attempt to create a universal and “transrational” language (later called “The Alphabet of the Stars” by Anselm Kiefer). Unlike several of the speed- and machinery-loving Futurists, Khlebnikov was greatly preoccupied with mythology, magic and Slavic folk art – and the roots of the Russian language. In his older days he was interested in Pythagorean numerology and drew up long “Diagrams of Fate” which used complicated mathematical formulae to map crucial historical battles. Among other things, his calculations showed that important sea battles would be fought every 317 years.

LEAD (Lat. *plumbum*) An element with the symbol Pb (main-group metal, atomic number 82). Lead is a frequently occurring metal, but is rarely found in pure form. Lead is toxic for living organisms – it accumulates easily in tissue and bone and among other effects can destroy the nervous system and lead to brain damage. In earlier times lead pigments were used in lead paint in the colours white, yellow, orange and red, and lead carbonate (white) is the pigment that was traditionally used as a primer for oil paintings. Today lead is primarily used in batteries, weights, bullet cartridges and as protection against radiation. Lead was associated by the medieval alchemists with the planet Saturn and the melancholy temperament. In 1981 Anselm Kiefer bought the lead roof of the Cathedral in Cologne, and since then lead has been a recurring element in his works – in both liquid and solid form.

MARGARETHE & SULAMITH (Marguerite and the Shulamite) are the principal female figures in Paul Celan's poem *Todesfuge* (“Death Fugue”, 1948) – a poem that describes life in the concentration camps during World War II. The phrases “*Dein goldenes Haar Margarethe*” (Your golden hair, Marguerite) and “*Dein aschenes Haar*

Sulamith” (Your ashen hair, Shulamite) are repeated throughout the poem. Margarethe is often interpreted as the Aryan woman with blond hair, the Nazi ideal, while Sulamith with her scorched locks is identified with the cremated Jewish bodies in the concentration camps. The Margarethe figure, as the epitome of purity and self-sacrifice, can be found all the way back to German medieval literature and legend, and later for example (as Gretchen) in Goethe’s *Faust* (1808), where Faust, in his thirst for knowledge, sells his soul to the Devil in return for the possession of all the knowledge in the world. With this knowledge, and with the aid of the demon Mephistopheles, Faust leads the beautiful young Gretchen into temptation. She becomes pregnant and is later imprisoned for the murder of her child. However, her innocence of the crime is established in the end, when God promises her a place in Heaven. The virtuous, beautiful – and blonde – Margarethe was elevated by the Nazis during World War II to the status of an ‘Aryan’ female ideal. Sulamith – or ‘the Shulamite’ – was originally a figure from the Old Testament Song of Solomon, where she is celebrated as a divinely beautiful, extremely desirable Jewish woman.

MELANCHOLIA I is the name of famous print by the German artist Albrecht Dürer from 1514. The print shows a winged, brooding figure in a picture-space that is both inside and outside, surrounded by a variety of symbols and instruments, many of which can be related to mathematics and geometry – for example the above-mentioned polyhedron. The work can be interpreted as a depiction of the artist in his studio. In medicine, Galen’s doctrine of the bodily ‘humours’ (i.e. fluids) was generally accepted in Dürer’s time: it was thought that every individual was dominated by one of the four temperaments (each dominated by a ‘humour’): melancholy (black bile), sanguine (blood), choleric (yellow bile) and phlegmatic (phlegm), which should ideally be in balance in

the body. At the time melancholy was often associated with mental illness (depression) and was the least desirable of the four temperaments. But it was also associated with creativity, so artists often had the reputation of having melancholy natures.

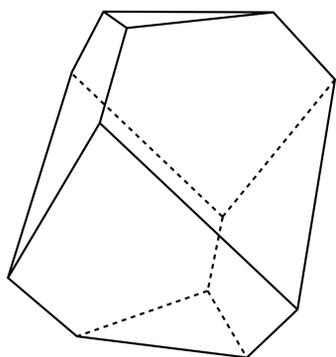
MÄRKISCHER SAND (German – “the sands of the Margraviate of Brandenburg”) refers to a landscape feature in the state Brandenburg in the eastern part of Germany. Brandenburg surrounds Berlin (which has been an independent city-state since 1881) and its landscape is characterized by a variety of dry, sandy soils and heath areas, marches and dense pine forests (German *Kiefern-wälder*). In 1939, under the National Socialist regime, the old name of the state, Mark Brandenburg, was reintroduced – the name went back to the time when this area was on the borders (the ‘marches’) of the Roman Empire. *Märkische Heide, Märkischer Sand* (also called *Die Brandenburghymne*) is also the title of Brandenburg’s unofficial state anthem, written by Gustav Büchsen-schütz in 1923. With the approval of the composer, the anthem was incorporated in the official ‘song heritage’ of the Third Reich, and since then the German Jewish Council, among others, has demanded the suppression of the song, which is still sung.

NIBELUNGENLIED. The *Nibelungenlied* or ‘Lay of the Nibelungs’ is a national epic in medieval German, originally deriving from orally transmitted material and written down at the end of the twelfth century in Passau. The epic consists of about 3700 four-line strophes and ends with the massacre of the Burgundians by the Hunnish King Etzel (Attila) in Hungary. The event that precipitates the action is the slaying of the Netherlandish prince Siegfried, the son of King Siegmund. He is said to have killed a dragon and taken a hoard of gold from people called the Nibelungs. In the battle with the dragon, Siegfried had been

covered in its blood, and had thus become invulnerable – only on a small spot on his shoulder where a linden leaf had stuck was he untouched by the blood. In order to win the Burgundian princess Kriemhild, Siegfried has to use deception to win the Icelandic princess Brynhild for King Gunther of the Burgundians. When Brynhild later finds out about the deception, she brings about the murder of Siegfried by the Burgundians, and Kriemhild (now Siegfried’s wife) swears revenge. This becomes the driving force in the rest of the epic; Kriemhild marries Etzel (Attila), King of the Huns, and has him invite the Burgundians to his court, where they are massacred. The human urges of the characters drive them from love to hate and from reconciliation to betrayal, murder and revenge. The epic shares characters and plot elements with the Norse *Volsunga Saga* and the *Elder Edda*, which were written down in the same period, but take place in more northerly regions.

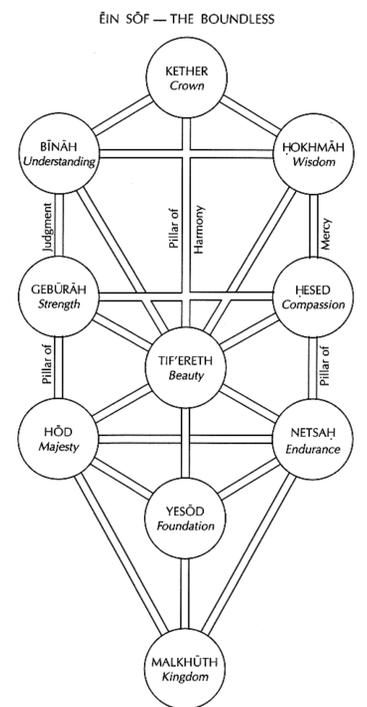
NOTUNG is Siegfried’s sword in the *Ring of the Nibelung*. Notung was given to Siegmund, the father of Siegfried, by the god Wotan (corresponding to the king of the gods in Norse mythology, Odin); the god planted the sword to the hilt in a tree during a wedding feast; of all those who tried, only Siegmund was strong enough to draw it. Siegmund calls the sword *Notung* and it brings him great glory and honour until the day Wotan demands it back and breaks it during a battle with his spear, whereupon Siegmund dies. The sword is later re-forged by the fearless Siegfried.

POLYHEDRON (Gr. “many-sided”) a solid, three-dimensional geometrical structure with many plane faces. A truncated rhombohedron (also called the Dürer polyhedron or Dürer’s solid), which is what Anselm Kiefer shows in several



works, is a particular kind of eight-faced polyhedron. It is constructed from the figure in a print by the German artist Albrecht Dürer: *Melancholia I* from 1514. See **MELANCHOLIA I**.

SEPHIROTH are the basic elements of Rabbi Isaac Luria’s (1534-1572) interpretation of the Kabbalah (see **KABBALAH**). There are ten *Sephiroth* (pl.), hierarchically arranged, and each *Sephirah* (sing.) – represents a quality or state which mankind should seek to understand in order to approach the Infinite. At the top stands



Kether (Will) by itself as a divine quality, and is therefore not counted among the ten. Then the ten Sephiroth are divided into four spheres. The sphere of the intellect is highest and includes *Chokhmah* (Wisdom), *Binah* (Understanding) and *Da’ath* (Reason). This is followed by the moral sphere, which consists of *Chesed* (Kindness/ Mercy), *Gevurah* (Strength/Justice) and *Tiphereth* (Beauty). The third sphere belongs to the material world: *Netzach* (Victory), *Hod* (Splendour), *Yesod* (Foundation). And finally comes the bottom sphere: *Malkuth* (Kingdom – also called the Mother), which is the very foundation of the physical world as we know it.

The Sephiroth thus form a structure for the material and spiritual world and at the same time a codex of moral behaviour – corresponding to Plato’s four cardinal virtues: wisdom, self-control, justice and courage, to which Christianity later added Faith, Hope and Love. The Sephiroth have been compared to Jacob’s Ladder because of their hierarchical arrangement of qualities and the spiritual improvement one undergoes by following the steps.

The Sephiroth are depicted in several

models: as ten circles organized as a ladder in an oblong vertical structure, as branches of a 'Tree of Life', and as a number of concentrically arranged circles.

SOL INVICTUS ("The Unconquered Sun") is the Latin name for an early Persian divinity who was brought to the Roman Empire via Syria around 220 AD. The sun god was called *El-Gabal* in Syria, in Latin *Heliogabalus* or *Elagabalus*, which was also the by-name given to the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antonius (218-222) as the High Priest of the cult.

THE WORLD ASH comes from Norse mythology and is better known as *Yggdrasil* or the *Tree of Life*. The world ash contains the world of men, Midgarth; the world of the gods, Asgarth – with the mighty palace of the gods, Valhalla; the world of the giants, Utgarth; and the underworld, Hel. The tree takes its nourishment from the Well of Urd, and the three Norns, Urd, Verdandi and Skuld (i.e. Past, Present and Future), water the roots of the tree. The three Norns are also goddesses of fate and at the roots of Yggdrasil they spin and break the strands of fate for all living beings; they both tie and untie knots in the threads and in the end cut them when a life is over.

RICHARD WAGNER (1813-1883) The German composer based his famous masterpiece, *the Ring of the Nibelung* (1869-1876), on a mixture of the *Nibelungenlied*, the *Volsunga Saga* and the *Elder Edda*. *The Ring of the Nibelung* is divided into four operas: *The Rhinegold*, *The Valkyrie*, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung* (*The Twilight of the Gods*), and lasts a total of about 15 hours. In Wagner's version the treasure of the Nibelungs includes a gold ring stolen by the gods from the dwarf Alberich, who lives in the Rhine. However, there is a curse on the ring which will corrupt its possessor and bring him misfortune until the day the ring is returned to the Rhine. Siegfried, born

in the Nibelung Forest, gains the ring by killing the dragon Fafner with the divine sword *Notung*. Wagner's monumental music was epoch-making in its time, and has left strong marks throughout history as a recurring source of fascination and debate for philosophers, authors and artists. In the 1930s Wagner was acclaimed by the Nazi movement as having revived the ancient heroic epic, the *Nibelungenlied*, whose ideals were 'restored' and considered the core virtues of the 'superior Aryan race'.