

Unfurling the Rose of the Rosicrucian Cross

By Soror E.A.S.

For each individual, the Rosicrucian rose and cross can mean different things. For some it is the rose at the centre of a Universe unfurled. For others the rose's thorns tell of the pain that seems to be an innate part of life, and the cross of the sacrifice and suffering that often goes hand-in-hand with that pain. For others still, this symbol is about the masculine and the feminine and their divine union. All are correct, but personally, I think the rose of the rose-cross, is a symbol of the divine feminine. Together, the rose and cross are symbolic of an innate, Universal polar dance that is vital to modern Rosicrucian thinking

Have you ever sat and really looked at a rose? Its beauty and natural aesthetic symmetry starkly reveals the intelligence of Nature and the natural order that permeates a Universe that may at first seem chaotic. The rose's multi-petalled complexity is comparable only to the lotus flower whose image holds a similar spiritual power in many Eastern and Egyptian religions and mystery traditions. Unsurprisingly, both the rose and the lotus have yonic associations and have long been connected with the feminine. In the East, the Lotus has been identified with the Mother Goddess for over 3000 years. Whilst in ancient Egypt, it was a symbol for creation and the miracle of birth.



Carl Jung identified the Lotus as a fundamental archetypal symbol equating it with the womb and the cherishing feminine. Such symbols usually resonate with us on a near-instinctual level, often penetrating beyond mere cognitive thought into the minds deeper realms.

One thing that is agreed upon by scholars of religious iconography is that the Lotus and the Rose carry the same symbolic meaning.¹

By the eleventh century, the symbol of the rose was strongly equated with the Virgin Mary. At around this time, her 'rosary' was introduced with prayers being symbolised by roses. Medieval religious art

often depicted Mary with a rose or in a garden of roses. For examples of this see Stephan Lochner's 1440 painting 'Madonna of the Rose Bush' (above) and the 1470 painting by Alessandro Botticelli, 'Madonna of the Rosegarden.'

Medieval hymns and poems about the rose and Mary were also popular and it has been suggested that the connection between Mary's Mariolatry and the symbol of the rose could go back even further and be a Greek influence. Certainly, the Greeks equated Goddesses of love with the flower and it was connected with Isis, Aphrodite and Venus. This is probably why Paracelsus, in the fifteenth century, attributed the rose to the planet Venus.

This association is also seen in the paracelsian physicist and astrologer Robert Fludd's, *Summum Bonum*, published just years after the three Rosicrucian manifestos. Its cover (below) depicts one of the earliest records of a Rosicrucian Rose-Cross.² It is clear that this particular rose-cross, takes its form from the astrological symbol for Venus.



The rose was also an emblem for Sophia, the Goddess of Wisdom, and the Shekinah. Arthur Edward Waite on the symbolism of the rose and cross wrote; 'Thus the Rose is a symbol of Mary because of her motherhood, but in relation to her it belongs to divine things, even as she herself stands on the threshold of Deity, being Spouse of the Divine Spirit and bearer of the Divine word made flesh. So also is the Rose of Shekinah, a Divine Rose, as she whom it typifies is Divine Mother of souls.'³

This observation is in accordance with the character of the Virgin in the 17th century Rosicrucian manifesto *The Chemical Wedding*, who was often accompanied by small lights which could certainly be interpreted as souls. It is evident that the Virgin in *The Chemical Wedding* pertains to Mary and that by this time in history, the symbol of the rose is heavily identified with her.

Another important written work about the rose was penned in the first part of the thirteenth century by Guillaume de Lorris. This French poem, called the Roman de la Rose (Romance of

the Rose) is a tale of courtly love and chivalry. The 'Rose' in the title was the name of the woman in the poem. It was also the symbol of her love and in a more visual way, her genitals. Guillaume's poem was considered incomplete for it was later greatly expanded by Jean de Meun who, it is convincingly argued, made it darker and more misogynistic. So popular was this allegory that many illuminated manuscripts were made of it, thereby ensuring its survival.

The writer of the *Chemical Wedding* would have almost certainly been aware of this controversial poem. It is especially interesting to note that it is about a lover who dreams of a beautiful rose imprisoned in a castle. This is directly analogous to Venus' bedchamber, hidden away in the bottom of the Castle in *The Chemical Wedding*.

The rose then, is surely unequivocally female in nature. With its scented, folded petals that slowly unfurl, to reveal its full glory and its distinctive fragrance, it is no wonder that the rose has long been associated with love and the feminine. Writers such as Yeats and Shakespeare have used the imagery of the rose in their work. Indeed it could perhaps be argued that Yeats' classic series of poems 'The Rose' could never have been written if it were not for his unrequited love of Maud Gonne.

Consider also Dante's *rosa mystica* which appears in his vision of paradise as recounted in his early fourteenth century book, *The Divine Comedy*. His mystical rose is a catalyst for his creativity which draws him towards true divinity. Similarly, it is the attainment of a mystical rose that is the goal of Lucius in Apuleius's 2nd century curiosity, *The Golden Ass*. Throughout this book, the rose is clearly equated with Venus, Isis, love and the divine feminine. At the end of this tale, Lucius entreats the Goddess to appear. This she does with the following words;

*'I command thee not to prophane or despise the sacrifice in any wise, for the great Priest shall carry this day following in procession by my exhortation, a Garland of Roses, next the timbrell of his right hand: follow thou my procession amongst the people, and when thou comest to the Priest make as though thou wouldest kisse his hand, but snatch at the Roses, whereby I will put away the skin and shape of an Asse, which kind of beast I have long time abhorred and despised...'*⁴

In order for Lucius to finally shed his Asses skin, to free himself from the nepheshistic aspect of his animal instincts and the primal aspects of his soul, he must reach for the rose and through it, discover his true human form, his humanity.

We, as people, manifest in male and female form, whilst the physical differences are rather obvious, we are innately different in so many ways. For example, how men and women think, feel, view and interact with life is generally quite different; a viewpoint that the writers of *Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus* capitalised on. The fact that this book became a best seller certainly suggests that it was saying something that was resonating with readers.

Recently, the Human Genome Project found that genetically, the differences between the races is minuscule (one-hundredth of 1 percent) compared with the difference between the sexes (a much larger 1 to 2 percent)⁵. There do seem to be intrinsic differences between men and women that transcend artificial, human constructs such as cultural boundaries, and social roles and expectations. Furthermore, as seen in Rosicrucian and alchemical literature such as *The Chemical Wedding*, I think that the way to understand divine nature is by exploring that polar dance of man and woman, Sun and Moon, the lion and the unicorn.

We are all a product, a manifestation of the emanations from Ain Soph Aur, the limitless light, which runs into the supernal triad of Kether, Chokmah and Binah, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Binah is also known as the Universal Mother and crowns the feminine black pillar of severity. Similarly, Chokmah crowns the masculine, white pillar of mercy. It is the interplay of the forces of the black and white pillars that defines the path of balance - the Middle Pillar.

In another example, think about solar Tiphareth and lunar Yesod; two middle-pillar sephiroth linked by the Hebrew letter Samekh - the prop. This path, equated with the tarot card Temperance, suggests a two way support system based on harmony and equilibrium. Additionally, the first path on the Middle pillar, the 32nd path leading from Malkuth to Yesod, is attributed to the Hebrew letter Tau, the cross. It is also associated with the World tarot card, which usually depicts a woman, or a hermaphrodite, in a state of balance, surrounded by four figures which represent the elements, or as some would say, the four gospel writers; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The importance of equilibrium is also seen in alchemy, which seeks a balance of the Sulphur (male) and Mercury (female) principles. A glance at alchemical texts, such as *The Book of Lambspring*, or the *Rosarium Philosophorum*, readily reveals the importance of alchemical polarity and so often it is love and attraction that is the fulcrum of that link.

Many of us have experienced the creativity that can come through love of another, it stirs something within, deep down, opening channels, inspiring us, and before you know it, those gifted with an artistic eye are thinking up poetic phrases, or glimpsing a half-formed painting. These thoughts may then be brought down into manifestation through an act of Universal expression.

The need to express such feelings can be overwhelmingly strong even when their true nature seems elusive and words fail us. These emotions seem to come from some other level 'up there' beyond Malkuth. The key to the whole event is that it is experienced as a direct result of an interaction with another person. We do not exist in isolation even if life sometimes makes us feel that we do. It is only through our interactions with others that we ever really get to know anything at all about ourselves.

All things are connected, for we all spring from the same source, whether you see that source as Ain, or cosmic dust created through the death of stars, the result is the same. Surely, it makes sense to look at the divine not through solitary eyes but through the wider eyes and open heart of a shared love. For the changing Moon only reveals her glory through her reflection of the Sun's radiant light, and so too does the Rose's true beauty only come to fruition through the 'rays' of the Cross which nurtures her. Add to this the third harmonizing principle of their alchemical union and the key to a spiritual portal is in your hand. It is then up to you, to use it.

¹ Seward, Barbara. *The Symbolic Rose*. p10 New York: Columbia Press, 1960.

Cirlot, J. E. *A Dictionary of Symbols*. p141 New York: Philosophical Library, 1983.

² http://www.levity.com/alchemy/fludd_rose.html

³ A.E. Waite, *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross* p92.

⁴ Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* Chapter 47.

⁵ http://dir.salon.com/story/opinion/feature/2005/03/02/gender_differences/index.html