



Introduction

This story is quite profound. Years ago, I tried several times to read “The Chemical Wedding,” but always ended up putting it down, often in despair. I had the feeling that there are lessons in it I couldn’t understand but that are very important. I tried perhaps five different times to read it, but always reached a certain point where I would lose interest and just put it away.

Then, one summer, I decided I would actually try to “translate” it, even though I already had an English translation. That translation is in a Baroque style, and I hoped I could bring the highly symbolic story into the realm of contemporary consciousness. I spent a good part of a summer typing it out and teasing it, sentence by sentence. I kept asking myself: *What would be the practical lessons in this story for a contemporary person?* I sensed that there is something in it for today, even though the language can be difficult. I intuited that there is something profound in it—not just for today but also for the future. It points to something in the future that Rudolf Steiner characterized as the fundamental esoteric initiation challenge for contemporary souls—*uncertainty*. I was typing and typing and reached a certain point where I had a feeling of déjà vu: *I think this story has something to do with my own life at this time, but I also feel that it’s more than I can handle.*

I couldn’t finish the story and had agitated thoughts about it for two days. This was accompanied by strange dreams with deep feelings that I was a failure in life. I couldn’t finish the book, because I felt in myself what I imagined was going to happen to Christian Rosenkreutz. Eventually I just forced myself to finish the book. Once I finished reading, it was clear to me that I was a failure in my initiation

process. But the story reveals that these feelings were present for Christian Rosenkreutz throughout the whole story. That brought a kind of release for me. Rudolf Steiner says that Christian Rosenkreutz is the most highly initiated Western person. If Rosenkreutz could feel like a failure, I was in good company.

This realization was a turning point for me—a turning point for my life about how I could actually go into the world and try to represent Rudolf Steiner’s teachings in my own way, even if that impulse failed. I felt like Christian Rosenkreutz gave me the ability to fail and still get up in the morning and continue to work. My understanding of that now is about how uncertainty is the mark of the new initiation taking place globally. So, I would like to show you how I understand this by pointing to certain alchemical motifs in the alchemical wedding. Those motifs have to do with an approach to the meditative life that requires reflection on the idea of marriage. We could ask: What is the marriage part of the alchemical marriage? What is the wedding? It’s all about a wedding. What wedding? It mentions the bride and the bridegroom. Who is the bride? Who is the bridegroom?

Throughout the book are code words such as *Wedding*, *Bride*, *Bridegroom*, and *Virgin*—words that expand into many different meanings. In the process of working with these code words, I found similar code words in Rudolf Steiner’s teachings, as well. They are not actually written words but more like symbols of alchemical ideas and processes. Esoterically, “marriage” has to do with bringing together two polarities in the human soul. The motif of marriage is the central theme of the Western alchemical tradition, which also includes esoteric traditions of ancient cultures. Gradually, I have come to see that alchemical symbolic language is the true basis of traditional medicine wherever it is practiced today. The soul alchemy of symbols that Steiner wrote into his mystery dramas is what Carl Jung did in *The Red Book* and Goethe did in his fairytale, *The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily*. Alchemy is ecumenical in its reach.

Alchemical reasoning has to do with the marriage of the Bride, the soul, to Christ, the Bridegroom. The Bridegroom is Christ, and the Bride is the human soul. The plot is that they will eventually be married in the end times. Right now they might be engaged, but they will eventually become married; the universal issue is commitment. The Bridegroom is eager but the Bride needs time to feel things out and commit to the union. If the true “wedding” is to take place, the hopes and needs of both must first be balanced so that each is willing to commit to the other. A hesitant soul requires time to become willing to commit to anxiety-producing uncertainty, travail, and a whole lot of unknowing. Misunderstanding and the feeling of uncertainty that not knowing produces in the soul is exactly the challenge Christian Rosenkreutz faces again and again. This is the central motif in the book. Thus the subtitle of *The Alchemical Wedding*: “The Initiate of Misunderstanding.”

This is the contemporary soul, faced with mountains of misunderstanding—continents of misunderstanding, worlds of misunderstanding. Yet, in this story, the compassionate healing force of patience arises somehow from misunderstanding.

When I find myself in times of trouble,
 Mother Mary comes to me,
 speaking words of Wisdom,
 let it be.
 And in my hour of darkness,
 she is standing right in front of me,
 speaking words of wisdom,
 let it be. (Lennon–McCartney)

Patience is acknowledgment that any agenda, attitude, or perspective that I project onto others is essentially a misunderstanding of their true being (“I,” or True Self). As a result, any judgment I make of another person’s being is a misjudgment, a misunderstanding.

It is very useful to understand my role as a human being engaged in misunderstanding. I overcome misunderstanding by simply

having patience to continue working toward understanding. This is true even when I am the one who feels misunderstood. Again and again, the motif of understanding based on uncertainty is what Christian Rosenkreutz faces. We could even say that this theme highlights the difference between *having knowledge* of something and *truly understanding* something. In the story, the Virgin mocks him many times for his alleged beliefs, and he cries because he has what is called the gift of tears. He cries, because her mockery makes him believe that she does not really see into him or understand his heart. He has no way of explaining to her the reality that underlies his inner life. He is at a loss to explain the intent of his will to her. He is caught in the dilemma of feeling that he is being misunderstood by the spiritual cosmos.

This is the posture of the contemporary soul and the problem of the future in the war of each against all. War is promoted through lies that create uncertainty. The war of each against all is healed when the individual human makes efforts to develop a patient understanding of one's own failings. This kind of difficult patience toward oneself eventually becomes patience for the failings of others. The key point is that, by recognizing my own misunderstandings, I see the danger of casting judgments about others. Casting judgments is a certain path to misunderstanding

A great danger to contemporary initiate wisdom is *inflation*, a kind of untruth. Inflation means that I think of myself as greater or more correct than I really am.* Self-monitoring this is a potent challenge for all esoteric students. Awareness of one's own misunderstanding diminishes inflation. In moments when we manage to diminish inflation, that experience is Pentecost. Although we say something from our own position, it is mysteriously capable of being heard by other

* This error is described in psychology as "The Dunning-Kruger Effect," a common cognitive bias and lack of self-awareness in which people believe they are smarter and more capable than they actually are. "Ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge" (Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*).

souls without causing turbulence. Without knowledge of our own misunderstandings, we can become immersed in the second Tower of Babel, represented by contemporary social media culture. This is one motif—*the great initiate of misunderstanding*.

The second motif in the story is linked to the first in a rather severe practice of patience. Everywhere in this work, Christian Rosenkreutz is being asked to wait—wait at the door, wait at the gate, wait to enter, wait to be recognized, wait, wait, wait. The way he deals with this is that his will is not idle while he waits; his will is turned inward in an effort to understand what his spirit is gaining by learning to wait patiently. External circumstances often prevent him from carrying through with his plans, but instead of reacting he waits and then cultivates an active inner spiritual kind of digestion. He frequently does this by going to sleep. Often, when he's faced with the dilemma he cannot solve, a kind of agitation arises—for instance, when the Virgin mocks him or when he gets pushed back or is stopped at a threshold. At such times, he is thrown back on himself, and instead of reacting or pushing he becomes inwardly active, asking himself if he understands. Frequently there will be a being, a wise person or guide who miraculously appears and acts as an agent of change.

As I understand it, this represents the wise person in us who understands patience and the laws of the higher will. Such a being is called *the witness* by Carl Jung and *the guardian* by Rudolf Steiner. The motif of the patient guardian is this: If you are spiritually active while you are waiting, a guardian will come and change roles, from initially being an adversary to becoming a confidant. Until the guardian becomes a confidant, we experience the guardian's admonitions as hindrances to our will. This is the role of the Virgin in this story. The only one who determines the difference in feelings about the guardian is the individual human. This is done by adopting a progressive posture toward what one learns by having to be patient. The Virgin is purifying Christian Rosenkreutz by poking him into reactions. She does this so that he will gain the capacity to perform the alchemical

wedding without danger. This is the second great motif—*waiting, but being spiritually active while waiting*. This posture builds soul potential, so that the guardian will honor us with an insight or a visit, which then leads to the third motif—*deliverance and service*.

When the guardian comes to speak to Christian Rosenkreutz, it is always at a time when a serious judgment is about to occur. In these situations, Christian Rosenkreutz goes into deep uncertainty, which produces variations of either misunderstanding or being misunderstood. After his initial reaction, he becomes silent and patient inside. This opens the opportunity to interact with another being, after which he often goes to sleep. Because of the work he's done spiritually while learning patience, it frequently happens that he awakes in a higher state of consciousness. It is always an act of grace that somehow comes from another dimension (chance or fate). The pattern is this: Christian Rosenkreutz enters a sleep state so he will be open to receiving grace in response to the will he created by being spiritually active while waiting.

Christian Rosenkreutz is engaged in a beautiful kind of push-pull of emotional energy that moves delicately across the threshold and back. He learns to use the state of sleep and dream as a doorway into higher states of consciousness. As I understand it, this is what Rudolf Steiner encourages—that, as students of initiation science, we do the best work in our sleep. We have to structure our sleep so that we permeate it with the willingness to be open to the admonitions of the guardian. This means I have to put my own agenda in abeyance when I become fearful or agitated about having to be patient. The guardian's help allows us to begin to perceive and appreciate what is coming from the spiritual world clothed in the circumstances of the manifest world.

This is a direct picture of how our practice of patience leads to a kind of crisis that eventually creates a deliverance. Out of the grace of the deliverance comes the requirement of service based on what the grace has taught: *patience, deliverance, service*. Christian

Rosenkreutz is thwarted; he is thrown back on his own devices. What he wants to bring is not accepted; thus, he experiences uncertainty but works inwardly to not react. He then has a dialogue with another before going to sleep. When he wakes up, he suddenly sees in a higher state of consciousness. This happens again and again. Nevertheless, his learning task is not finished. Whereas he is able to see in a higher state of consciousness, this creates a kind of separation from the consciousness needed just to do the work. When faced with this polarity, he humbly perseveres and remains focused on the task at hand.

Accompanying Christian Rosenkreutz's humility is a sense of feeling inadequate to meet the demands of the service being requested by the gift of grace. He transforms this feeling by faithfully showing up to do the work, even when he knows that his effort is inadequate. In this, he is a model for dealing with the widespread social uncertainty of contemporary life. There is no guarantee that anything we do will bear fruit. This challenge is the basis of the idea that Christian Rosenkreutz can be called an initiate of misunderstanding. The poet Keats had a term he coined: *negative capability*. Keats felt that staying enthusiastically engaged in a problem that has no hope of a solution is a creative, magical tool for humans that can be cultivated. This capability allows patience to become a path toward deliverance.

Another motif is that of the Virgin. There are *virgins* and *Virgins*. Some are more powerful, some less; some are a little cranky, some lovey-dovey. They all have colors and various regalia, scepters, and costumes. The code word for the purified soul at the end of time is, according to Rudolf Steiner, the *Virgin Sophia*. At the end of time, human beings will have worked upon themselves to such a degree that their souls—their *collective* souls—will have been purified. All the souls of all the humans, taken together, will be known as Sophia, *Anthropos-Sophia*—the Sophia of human effort, the Virgin of humanity, our benefactor, our go-between, an advocate with the spiritual world for our ultimate stupidity and human failures. The Virgin in the story represents the future collective human soul.

THE ALCHEMICAL WEDDING

Her great teaching is *do not judge*. If we really wish to entertain Sophia, our greatest error is judging others and ourselves, because we are too small to understand the world fully. To fortify this teaching to Christian Rosenkreutz, the Virgin of the chosen ten continuously tests Christian Rosenkreutz with harsh judgments. She wants to purge any judgment of others from his soul, because she knows that, so long as he has that weakness in his soul, he will be unable to complete the wedding. He passes her tests, because his humility helps him understand how deeply he misunderstands the great laws she represents. When he is judged by her, he feels that it would be best to own the error, keep silent, and go to sleep. In times of uncertainty, people today are training as initiates of misunderstanding when being misunderstood by then casting judgments out of the anger at being misunderstood. The Virgin of the ten is the aggressive agent of this fierce soul battle that is the process of initiation.

So, the different kinds of virgins are merely showing different aspects of the Sophianic quest. We could say that the journey toward Sophia—and the attributes of patience, deliverance, and service—occur repeatedly as motifs in the seven days of this book. I've broken them down here to illustrate why I think these motifs are useful. When read symbolically, this story becomes a key esoteric teaching that leads toward a deeper understanding of useful soul postures for healing the social issues that permeate uncertain times.

*Dennis Klocek,
Fair Oaks, California, March 2021*