

HEINRICH KHUNRATH'S COSMIC DEW

Peter Bindon, M.A., FRC

From *The Secret Rosicrucian Tradition*
(San Jose: Supreme Grand Lodge of AMORC, 2004).

Frater Peter Bindon, who served as Grand Master for the English Grand Lodge for Australia, New Zealand, and Asia for many years, presents an example of German symbolic artwork from the late sixteenth century that was of such importance in the Rosicrucian Tradition that it is included in [Secret Symbols](#): the concept of “Cosmic Dew” as proposed by the German alchemist Heinrich Khunrath (see page 37). Khunrath is best known for his alchemical classic, *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* (Hamburg, 1595). Khunrath’s ideas, as expressed in *Amphitheatrum* and other works, represent tensions typical of the late sixteenth century—tensions between the importance of experience and direct observation, versus more traditional spiritual beliefs (“Wisdom coming down from the Divine”). The controversial ideas revolving around the conflict between spirituality and experiment, and the rich symbolism expressed in Khunrath’s text and engravings in *Amphitheatrum*, caused this work to be condemned by the Sorbonne in 1625. However, today the book attracts the attention of scholars as it has throughout the centuries.

the diagram is “to show (that) the mind of the Rosy Cross at the end of the eighteenth century was that of Khunrath two hundred years previously.” Waite does not say much more about this interesting German alchemist and natural philosopher at this point, although he does elaborate elsewhere in the book on Khunrath’s contribution to the Rosicrucian Tradition.



Heinrich Khunrath, *Alchemist's Laboratory* from *Amphitheatrum Sapientiae Aeternae* (Hamburg, 1595).



In Arthur Edward Waite’s book, *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross*, published in the early part of the last century, he reproduces a figure taken from the book, *Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Waite’s description of the illustration is primarily alchemical and is allegorical to say the least. He claims that his purpose in reproducing

Heinrich Khunrath, sometimes spelled Kunrath, was born in Leipzig, Germany, around 1560, and died at just forty-five years of age in Dresden (or Leipzig), on September 9, 1605. Khunrath was a medical doctor and an alchemist. During his short professional life, he wrote several books and treatises that attempted to unite Kabbalah, alchemy, and natural phenomena. He taught the value of personal observation and experience in life matters and encouraged

those who read his books to form their own conclusions regarding the meaning of his essays and symbols.

The Divine Hand

In our diagram, the Divine Hand suspends a magnet over the work, symbolic of bestowing cosmic energy on the procedures that take place beneath its influence, while simultaneously showering the alchemical dew on the symbols on the upper portion of a triangle. *Ros* in Latin means “dew” or “sweat.” This word was given special meaning by mystics and in symbolic alchemy that persuaded Rosicrucians to establish linguistic connections linking the mystical understanding of this heavenly dew and the rose in the center of the Rose Cross. Khunrath believed the cosmic dew was strongest in the spring, when it should be collected and retained for use as a “universal solvent,” which is said to be “water that is not water” or the “blood of the green lion.”

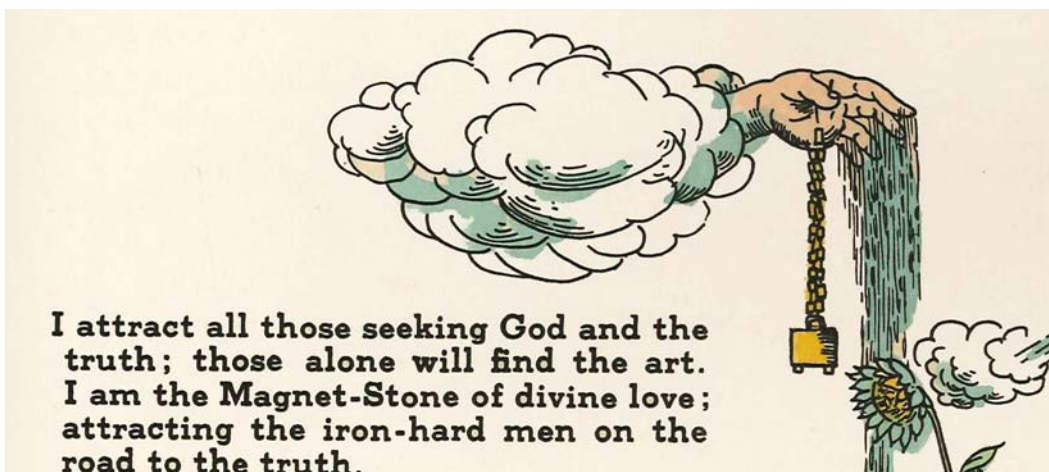
In the illustration, the dew falls on a sunflower that has its head turned from the Sun by a heavenly wind. This deflection from its normal attitude into the path of the universal solvent is a kind of baptism that, along with the magnetic effects, bestows an unusual power on the elements represented in this upper portion of the triangle. A Rosicrucian interpretation of what we have

examined could be that with cosmic guidance and the assistance of the “heavenly dew” (which we can reveal is actually a chemical compound secreted by glands within the brain as a consequence of meditation), we can bring about changes in ourselves that we never thought possible. This is symbolized by the sunflower turning away from the Sun, in opposition to its more usual action, which is to face the Sun.

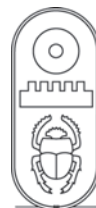
The dragons, usually depicted as being killed by the action of the Sun and the Moon, have risen above the plane where this could have been accomplished and thus reinforce the idea that the so-called “usual events and activities in our lives” can be transcended. For the alchemists, the dragon being killed by the Sun and the Moon was symbolic of the liquid metal mercury (dragon) being combined with gold and silver (the Sun and Moon), and while losing any capacity for further transformation, in the process it becomes something else.

The Rose and the Lily

Below this scene, the Sun and Moon project rays of light and energy towards each other and downwards onto the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of Jehoshaphat. In this section of the illustration, we are presented with an idea of opposites and further symbolic alchemical interactions. The word

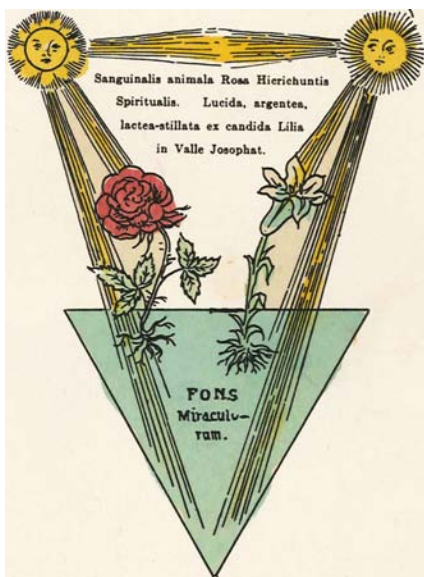


Detail from “The Hermetic Philosophy” in *Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians*. The Divine Hand suspends a magnet over the work.

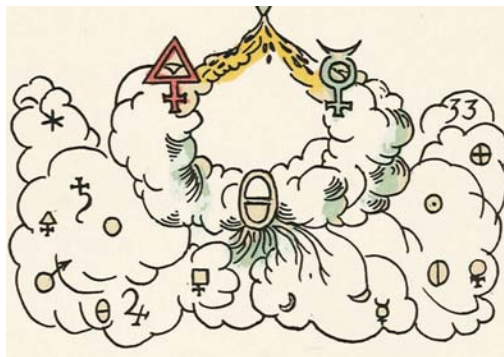


“rose” itself was an alchemical code name for “tartar,” a product formed from tartaric acid. The previous chemical reactions resulted in the production of an amalgam of gold and silver, a silvery white compound (the lily). Now it is to be subjected to the cleansing and purifying chemical action of tartaric acid (the rose). In alchemical symbolism, a wedding between the male and female opposites symbolized this process, but our artist has chosen to use a different pair of symbols to illustrate this stage of the transformative process. Both the rose and the lily have ambiguous symbolism.

Rosicrucian interpretations parallel biblical usage and Khunrath certainly understood this imagery. The rose symbolizes both the soul and the mystery of resurrection and rebirth, which in the New Testament came to be symbolic of the Master Jesus. Although the lily has been seen as symbolic of purity, chastity, and intense love, from the perspective of the Rosicrucian, it symbolizes the mystical surrender of oneself into the Divine Hands and the Cosmic. Both lily and



Detail from “The Hermetic Philosophy” in *Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians*. The Sun and Moon project rays of light and energy towards each other and downwards onto the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of Jehoshaphat.



Detail from “The Hermetic Philosophy” in *Secret Symbols of the Rosicrucians*. From the lower point of the triangle a vapor emanates that condenses to form Earth.

rose arise out of the Spring of Miracles (*Fons Miraculum*), that is the Fountain of Youth, which is also fed by the drops of heavenly dew that percolate down through the diagram. The Rosicrucian symbolism here is that by aligning ourselves with cosmic energies, and performing the correct acts of transmutation, we can achieve a blissful state like that sought by the philosophers of ancient times. As Khunrath might have believed, this could be either now or in a future existence (when it would be called “heaven”).

The Elements of the World

From the lower point of the triangle a vapor emanates that condenses to form Earth, the central symbol in the double cloud, surrounded by numerous other sigils (signs) representing the elements that go to make up the world. The symbol of the double cloud is to remind us that there is a world, or as we might say today, a “state,” that lies above our mundane world, but which is accessible to those who know the techniques. This state of peace and harmony is available to all those seekers who are prepared to listen to the voice of the inner guide, or in a Rosicrucian sense, the Cosmic. Despite the time difference between Khunrath and ourselves, it is almost certain that he too was aware of the inner world that forms a precious part of human experience.