

the
Chemical
Wedding
by Christian
Rosencrantz

A ROMANCE
IN EIGHT DAYS

by

JOHANN
VALENTIN ANDREAE

in a new version by

JOHN CROWLEY

illustrated by THEO FADEL

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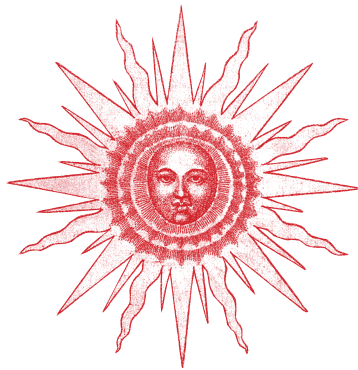
Introduction

I

The Chemical Wedding by Christian Rosencreutz is the way I've decided to present the title of this book. Most versions in English are called *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz*, which suggests (and most people who've heard of it suppose) that the wedding is Christian's. It's not; Christian Rosencreutz is the purported *author* of a book called *The Chemical Wedding*. The actual author is Johann Valentin Andreae, whose name didn't appear on the book originally, thus ensuring the confusion. I'll call it herein (as everyone mostly does) simply *The Chemical Wedding*.

Though its original readers would have had a certain amount of context for the truly bizarre and surprising events it tells of, it's possible that *The Chemical Wedding* is now more enjoyable without knowing that context, and experiencing the book unmediated. You might therefore wish to start right in on the first page of text that follows and only then return to this introduction.

Consider a similar case: a little book published in 1934 by the Surrealist artist Max Ernst called *Une Semaine de Bonté*. It was made entirely of collaged illustrations cut out of old books



The First Day

It was just before Easter Sunday,¹ and I was sitting at my table. I'd said my prayers, talking a long time as usual with my Maker and thinking about some of the great mysteries the Father of Lights had revealed to me. Now I was ready to make and to bake – only in my heart, actually – a small, perfect unleavened wafer to eat with my beloved Paschal Lamb. All of a sudden a terrible wind blew up, so strong that I thought the hill my little house was built on would be blown apart – but I'd seen the Devil do things as bad as this before (the Devil had often tried to harm me), so I took heart and went on meditating.

Till I felt somebody touch me on the back.

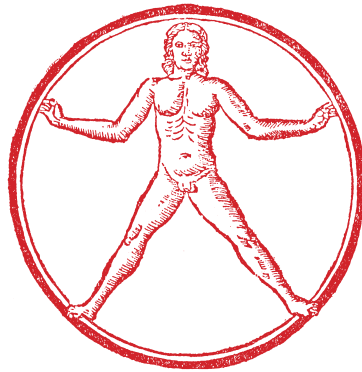
This frightened me so that I didn't dare turn. I tried to stay as brave and calm as a human being could under the circumstances. I felt my coat tugged at, and tugged again, and at last I looked around. A woman stood there, so bright and beautiful, in a sky-colored robe – a heavens covered with

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¹ Christian's story begins just before Easter, like Dante's *Divine Comedy*. It can be seen as an allegory of Christ's death and resurrection, though this idea produces some puzzles.

*The birds sang so beautifully, the young deer skipped so happily,
that it gladdened my old heart, and I couldn't help singing too...*





THE FOURTH DAY

I was awake and lying in bed next morning, looking idly at the wonderful images and inscriptions all around my room, when suddenly I heard the sound of trumpets, as if a procession were already underway. My page jumped out of bed as if crazed, looking more dead than alive, and you can imagine how I felt when he cried, “They’re already being presented to the king!”

I could only groan in frustration and curse my lazy bones. I got dressed, but my page was quicker than I was and ran out of the chamber to see what was what. He soon came back and gave me the good news that I actually hadn’t overslept; all I’d done was miss breakfast: they hadn’t wanted to wake an old man who needed his rest. But now I had to get ready to go with him to the lion fountain, where most of the others were gathered.

Such a relief! My spirits recovered, and as soon as I had got into my habit, I followed him to the garden I have already told about. I found that the lion, in place of his sword, now held a rather large plaque. Examining this, I could tell that it had been taken from those ancient monuments I’d seen and put here for some special reason. The inscription on it was fading away, so I should set it down here as it was then, and ask my readers to ponder it:

PRINCE HERMES:¹
 NOW AFTER HUMANKIND
 HAS SUFFERED SO MUCH HARM
 HERE I FLOW
 HAVING BY GOD'S COUNSEL
 AND WITH THE HELP OF ART
 BECOME A HEALING BALM.

*Drink from me if you can; wash, if you like; trouble my waters if
 you dare.*

Drink, Brethren! Drink and live!



(This inscription² is simple to read and understand, and I put it down here because it's easier than the ones to come.)

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 1 Hermes is the presiding deity of alchemy: he is the god of shape-shifting, and of money (the alchemists may have personally scorned the search for mere material gold in the Work, but it was a common preoccupation); he is also identified with mercury the element, the basic stuff of much alchemical practice. (He is also famed for tricks, counterfeits, and lying, the god of thieves.)

2 The string of symbols has been interpreted by Richard Kienast (1926) as a *chronogram*, an encoded date, which he works out as 1378, which is Christian Rosencreutz's birth year as given in the Rosicrucian document called *Confessio* for short.

We all washed there at the fountain, and each of us drank the water from a golden cup. Then we followed our mistress back into the hall, and there we put on new robes, all cloth of gold beautifully embroidered with flowers. Everyone also received a new Order of the Golden Fleece, set with gems, each one the work of a different skilled craftsman. On each order hung a heavy gold medallion, on which was shown the sun and the moon; on the back was engraved *The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, but the sun will be seven times brighter than now.*³ We put our previous orders in a case that one of the waiters took away.

Our young mistress led us out in order to the door, where the musicians waited, all dressed in red velvet belted in white.⁴ A door I hadn't noticed before was unlocked, revealing the royal winding stairs, and our mistress, with music playing, led us up *three hundred and sixty-five steps*, with all around us nothing but highly finished workmanship and astonishing artifice – the farther up we went the richer it got, until at the top we came

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 3 The quote is from Isaiah: "Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound." (KJV) Wounds and their healing, for the alchemists as for Isaiah, always have physical, spiritual, and temporal aspects. The sun stands for gold in alchemy, the moon for silver.

4 Christian's initial dress was white belted with red.

movements of the planets, very neatly turning all on their own; a small chiming watch; and a sort of little glass fountain that bubbled continuously with blood-red fluid. Lastly there was a skull or death's head, and inside it a white snake. The snake was so long that it could slide out an eyehole and wind itself around the objects on the table, yet the tip of its tail still remained inside, even after its head went back in through the other eyehole, so that it never entirely left its skull; but when Cupid gave it a playful tap, it vanished in a moment completely inside. We were amazed.

Up and down the whole room too were statues or figures that moved by themselves just as if they were alive, worked by hidden mechanisms I couldn't possibly explain.⁹ And as we were passing out of the hall, there came a wonderful sort of singing, and I couldn't tell for sure if it was the maidens who stayed behind who sang, or the figures themselves. By now we had seen and experienced so much that for the time being we could take in no more, and our maidens led us down the stairs the musicians had

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9 Like the tall clock in the artisans' workshop, and the sphere showing the movements of the planets and the chiming watch in the previous paragraph, these moving statues are high-tech stuff of the period. They could be clockwork too, or could be made to move by wind or water moving through them. Some sang, like these, or at least made sound. (If these statues' movements included walking, they were beyond any in existence, though.) Nothing more is made of them or said about them – just another scientific marvel.

gone down, and the door was locked carefully behind us.

When we were in our own hall again, one of the girls teased our lady president: "I'm amazed, sister, that you dare walk around so freely among so many men."¹⁰

"Well, sister," said our president, "the only one I need to be careful of is this one," and she pointed at me.

This hurt. It was obvious to me she was making fun of my age, and in fact I was the oldest man there. She saw that I was abashed, and she whispered to me that, if I behaved myself properly with her, she knew how to deal with that problem of age...

But, well, meantime a light supper was again brought in, and everyone sat with his appointed young girl¹¹ beside him. Those girls were all very skilled in passing the time with interesting conversation, but what their talk and jokes were about – well, I won't tell tales out of school! Honestly, most of the talk was about the higher arts, and it was clear that, old or young, they knew what they were talking about. For myself, I couldn't stop

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10 It seems that Cupid's presence and his projection of sexuality is affecting the company. Certainly Christian throughout is pestered with thoughts of sex and of his own aging, which the young woman is suggesting she has ways of overcoming.

11 The male pages and waiters are replaced now with smart and sexy young women. Alchemy was constantly concerned with the sexual urges and couplings of its substances, translating chemical reactions into the biological and the animate, and seeing incest, copulation, and generation in their processes.



THE FIFTH DAY

The night was passed, and the dear longed-for day had just broken, when I leapt out of bed, more eager to find out what was going to happen next than I was to go on sleeping. I put on my clothes, and as before I slipped down the stairs, but it was still too early and the hall was empty. I returned then, and asked my page if he would please take me around the castle for a bit and show me something special. He was agreeable (as he always was), and he led me down a certain staircase that led down under the earth. We came to a great iron door, and set into the door were tall letters, made of copper.¹ They said:

Իշր 8շցց ծրցսժօրօ
ժշր Խհօօ յս^{VENVS}ա^{VENVS} Բօօժօժիբօ
Հօրօօ Իօ
Սօծցց՝Կ.փհ.Բրցրօնօծ ւօթխցց
ցրօսժից հչցց.²

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¹ In alchemy, copper is the metal of Venus as lead is of Saturn and iron of Mars. Venus is a key but ambiguous figure in the alchemical process – she can symbolize both the unclean and chaotic matter with which the alchemist begins his work – she is referred to as the Whore – but she can also be the cold, chaste, moist substance related to the Moon and to silver.

² The letters are a simple substitution code, with odd symbols