

The Romance of the Rose

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Some years ago at a witchy shop in Glastonbury, I found a little grimoire with a spell to enchant a wayward lover.¹ This entails tracing the name of the spirit of Venus in the lover's footprint which is then to be covered with rose petals. A simple ritual in itself, this operation yet echoes ideas and makes use of symbolism thousands of years old. The great virtue of an occult symbol is that it not only represents something, but also makes manifest the power behind the symbols for those who with faith make use of it. The doctrine of sympathies means that all things in the chain of correspondences may be used in ritual to affect all manner of ministreting (?) forces, and by use of the appropriate symbols even species of the divine power itself may be invoked, as Iamblicus attests.² The rose is a symbol par excellence. A sixteenth century lexicon says: *"This symbol (the rose) ... has many and most profound meanings ... in all branches of the Hermetic mystery, as well as in the symbolism of Universal Mythology"*.³ Such a symbol merits close attention by all students of occult philosophy.

When Nebuchadnezzar II created the Hanging Gardens of Babylon by the River Euphrates in about 575 bce, it may be guessed that he grew roses there for the benefit of the mountain princess who became his wife. Fossil evidence indicates that roses have flourished in Mesopotamia for millions of years, and they must surely have been known and used there in ancient times. Clay tablets from the royal library of the last great king Assurbanipal (668 - 627 bce) at Ninevah contain the cuneiform word 'amurdinnu', which most contemporary Assyriologists take to mean "wild rose". The Russian scholar Igor Diakonoff cites its use in the Epic of Gilgamesh⁴, and linguists have pointed to the etymological connection with the Arabic 'ward' (rose) as the letter 'm' often became 'w' in later Babylonian.⁵ The Hanging Gardens were located near the Gate of Ishtar, the Goddess identified with the planet Venus, and in this guise her title was Ninsianna, Lady of the Garden of Heaven. Her symbol was the rose-star disc. Ishtar had a youthful spouse, Duzi or Dumuzi, who was taken from her and for whom she searched in the infernal regions. This theme is echoed in later myths involving Adonis or Tammuz, wherein the rose figures allied to the Goddess shedding her blood. The great Sumero-Akkadian Goddess is variously named, and Ishtar is the Semitic Ashtoreth of the Bible, the Syrian Astarte and the Aphrodite of the Greeks.

Ancient authors highlight the ritual use of the rose in Greek life. The Iliad, about the siege of Troy, tells how the body of Hector, killed by Achilles to avenge the death of Patroclus, was anointed with rose oil by Aphrodite and then embalmed by the Goddess⁶. Greek myths accentuate the symbolic nature of the rose. The most famous surround Aphrodite (Venus) as Goddess of love. She sprang forth into life from the foam of the sea, and where the foam fell to the ground white roses grew. This and later myths about Aphrodite display the dual nature of love: purity and innocence represented by white roses; desire and sexual gratification by red ones. In one story she runs to help her wounded lover Adonis and catches her flesh on the thorns of the white rose bush. Her blood falling on the bush turns the roses red, symbolising the way innocence and purity change to fecundity and motherhood when

blood is shed through menstruation and parturition. Eros, son of Aphrodite and God of sexual desire, is frequently depicted wearing a wreath of roses. In the 5th century bce Anacreon composed an ode in praise of the rose, its beauty, perfume, power to heal and the esteem in which it was held by the Gods. The Greek philosopher Epicurus (c341 - 270 bce) had his own private rose garden in Athens, wherein he instructed his pupils regarding the highest pleasures. Theophrastus records that in some gardens, known as 'Gardens of Adonis', exceptionally pretty roses were cultivated in silver pots. They were grown for their perfume which devotees believed kept illness at bay, as well as for use in wreaths.

As in Greek mythology, the rose plays a recurring and symbolic role in Roman legends. Although the names differ, there is a basic similarity in many of the stories. One myth parallels that of Aphrodite rescuing Adonis and symbolises the connection between blood, sexual fulfilment and red roses. Venus loved Adonis but was also pursued by Mars, the God of war, who would have killed Adonis had not Venus warned her lover of the dangers he faced. In her haste to save him, she slipped in a rose bed and scratched her legs. Red rose bushes grew from the blood that flowed from her wounds onto the ground. Rose wreaths were awarded by the Romans as a mark of honour for a major military success, and indeed in later ages for every minor victory. Rose petals were scattered in the path of the victors at the Games. The association of the rose with wine and revelry was prevalent at the height of the Empire. Both Dionysus and Bacchus were crowned with roses. The Emperor Nero (37 - 68 ce) started the fashion for raining rose petals on guests at feasts. Two centuries later the teenage Emperor Heliogabalus (202 - 224 ce) showered his guests three times with roses which were so overpowering that a number of guests were suffocated. The Romans used roses in abundance at funerals, and garlanded their tombs with rose wreaths. Rose buds were offered to the departed during the festival called Rosalia. The rose was a symbol of life because of its beauty, a symbol of death because of the inevitable withering of its blooms and a symbol of eternal life because of its association with the Gods. In this context it is interesting to note that the Goddess Hecate is sometimes portrayed wearing a crown of roses. The predilection of the Romans for roses is attested by the excavation of the remains of private gardens in the ruins of Pompeii, and the depiction of roses in surviving frescoes found there.

The Romans imported masses of roses from Egypt, the source of the earliest pictures of gardens, dating back to 2,600 bce. Some experts believe that the Coptic word 'ouert' or 'werd' relates to the Arabic 'ward' for rose and dates back to the 14th century bce; others believe the rose was introduced into Egypt by the Greeks in the 4th century bce. There is no concrete evidence that the rose existed there until Roman times. Stories of Cleopatra VII (69 - 30 bce) carpeting the floor of the banquet hall or throne room with roses to a depth of two feet when Mark Anthony visited her verify that roses grew in abundance at that period. It may have been accounts of this occasion that gave rise to the Roman fashion for using cascades of roses at their feasts and festivals. Evidence from Egyptian tombs of the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE affirms that roses were used in funeral wreaths. Actual wreaths survive, excavated by Sir Flinders Petrie at Hawara in the Fayyum, dating from 170 CE, of which there is a sample in the collections at Kew. In the British Museum there is a 2nd century terracotta from this area depicting Harpocrates, along with Isis and Anubis. Harpocrates is the Graeco-Egyptian name for Horus, son of Isis, who puts his finger to his lips in a gesture that overtly signifies his infancy, but covertly enjoins silence on those who understand him. As the son of Osiris, Harpocrates is a symbol of the soul, reborn in its purified state. His gesture enjoins

silence on initiates of the mysteries. In classical legend, Cupid bribes Harpocrates with a rose not to betray the amours of Venus. In the tale of his metamorphosis, Lucius Apuleius relates how he restored himself from an ass to human form by devouring a crown of roses proffered to him by a priest of Isis.

Graeco-Roman Egypt affords examples of how practical occultism made use of roses in the land of the Nile. A magical papyrus gives an account of divination by means of a lamp, in which ointment of roses is used to bring a woman to a man⁷. Later Coptic texts of ritual power involve the use of roses. A text in the National Library of Turin, against the power of evil, has a series of protective spells to be used by a person who wishes to adjure the powers of the divine realm against malevolent forces. "*Draw four angels ... while you are wearing a wreath of roses*" directs one such. Another text recommends a person inflicted by a demon to have a prayer uttered over a flask of rose water, which is then to be poured over the unfortunate victim.⁸

It is believed that the roses cultivated in the West since Greek and Roman times originated in Persia. The last pagan Roman Emperor, Julian, called the Apostate by his Christian opponents, died on an expedition there in 363 CE. Little is actually known of the region before the 7th century CE, when the Arab religion of Islam swept through the country and most of the ancient texts which recounted the earlier history of the Persian people were destroyed. Since then, the rose has been associated with all aspects of the spiritual life, and mystical poets have used the symbolism of the rose to express the complexities of existence. The poet Sa'adi of Shiraz wrote of the rose garden as a garden of contemplation. "I shall pluck roses from the garden, but I am drunk with the scent of the rose bush." Another author, Shabistari, wrote *The Secret Rose Garden*. These poets used the rose as a symbol to express the yearnings of the mystical life because they were Sufis and followed beliefs which were disapproved of by the orthodox authorities. They expressed their beliefs through the judicious use of symbols. For them the rose symbolised the achievement of perfect understanding and union with God. It was also a symbol for life itself. Orthodox religion accepted the symbolism of the rose, which was reputed to have arisen from the tears of the Prophet. The Arabian magicians prescribe rose incense against all evil, enchantment and enemies.

After the fall of the Roman Empire its pagan symbolism gradually changed and was incorporated into the Christian symbolism of the Middle Ages. Although the many gods of the pagans were countered by the three-fold godhead of the Christian Trinity - of which a very old and secret tradition reckoned the Holy Ghost as feminine - the Christians yet lacked a female deity to whom they could channel the devotion which had hitherto been shown to the Goddesses of the Ancient World. They lacked a symbol representing the different aspects of femininity - innocence, purity, sexuality, fecundity and motherhood, as represented by Aphrodite and other great Goddesses. This dilemma gave rise to the Cult of Mary, the Mother of God. Marianism adopted the rose as her symbol, and Mary was addressed as the Mystic Rose in her litanies, as the perfect symbol of love and beauty. The rose was incorporated in many works of art and literature, and by association with the myth of Christ and the acts of the saints was associated with pain, death and martyrdom. It became the chalice of redemption or cup of blessings. The Mary Cult revered the Virgin as the symbol of purity and motherhood simultaneously. The paradox of the virgin birth was accepted as a mystery. As Mary herself declared in the apocryphal Gospel of Bartholomew:

"Son of the Father, thou whom the seven heavens hardly contained, but who was well-pleased to be contained without pain in me ...".⁹

With the decline of Rome's influence throughout Europe, it fell to the Christian monks to be the official guardians of knowledge. The ascetic attitude of the Church frowned upon the cultivation of roses for secular purposes, but they were yet grown in monastery gardens along with medicinal herbs. It was held that persons possessed by demons could not endure the smell of roses, an ancient belief. It was left to the Muslim Arabs to cultivate them for pleasure in the palaces and gardens in Sicily and Spain, as those of the Alhambra in Granada. Roses, along with eastern ideas, were brought back from the Crusades, and they were cultivated in what became known as the *Hortus Conclusus*, the secret or enclosed garden. The evolution of this sacred enclosure, sanctified by the presence of the rose, is complex. It combines elements of the biblical Garden of Eden and the Persian Paradise Garden, as idealised by writers and poets, and has its origin in the Song of Songs attributed to King Solomon, which likens the lover's beloved to a garden: "*a garden enclosed; a sealed fountain*". The only person allowed access to this private, enclosed space, to "taste its rarest fruits" is the lover. There was an allegorical analogy between "*Mary's inviolate womb and the sealed garden of the Song of Solomon, penetrated only by God. A closed gate, through which only Christ could enter ...*".¹⁰ The rose was the symbol of both the lover's devotion and the mother's glory.

The oldest meaning of the word "rosary" was a rose-garden (rosarium), the enclosed rose-garden of Marianism. Later it came to refer to the strings of beads, made of dried rose hips or carved from rose-wood, that monks used for counting their prayers, originally paternosters but Hail Marys by the 12th century. Gradually the enclosed rose-garden dedicated to Mary and used for spiritual contemplation became a garden associated more with the courtly ideas of chivalric love and, later still, a garden where earthly lovers could meet. The religious symbolism of the rose became increasingly secularised. It became a symbol of human love and also of kingly power. In England the white rose was associated with the House of York and the red rose with the House of Lancaster. When the Wars of the Roses ended in 1485 the heraldic badge of the Tudor rose, which Henry VII incorporated to symbolise the merging of the two dynastic families, was a small white rose upon a red one. It is still the badge of the royal house of England.

Some time before 1167 Henry II began his affair with Rosamund Clifford, the young and beautiful daughter of a knight from the Welsh border. "Fair Rosamund" is connected in legend with the royal palace at Woodstock, Oxfordshire.¹¹ In the 16th century, Michael Drayton writes of her labyrinth and tower there. This may have been the bower and garden at Everswell, which had originally been built for Henry's queen Eleanor. One legend recounts how Eleanor penetrated the maze set to protect Rosamund and offered her a choice of poison or the dagger. Another version is that the queen arranged for her to be bled to death in a bath. It is however almost certain that Eleanor never met Rosamund, and this prospect of blood-letting is an overlay echoing ancient beliefs attached to the rose and the love escapades of ancient Goddesses. The labyrinth may have been a maze of rose-bushes, and Rosamund's bower was assuredly decked with rambling roses, tokens of the king's affection. It is curious to note that further legends refer to the shrine wherein Henry's Rose of the World was buried. Upon the exhumation the venerated grave exhuded a sublime perfume and exhibited no corruption, as later was to be

experienced by those who discovered the tomb of Christian Rosenkreuz, the mythical founder of the Rosicrucian movement. The rose is symbolic of that which is undying.

In the 13th century the mystical writer Jean de Meung completed the epic *Roman de la Rose* (Romance of the Rose). He sought that knowledge which brings great joy, symbolised by the troubadours as the Fountain of Youth. He detailed the means of spiritual rebirth and was called a Cathar for his gnostic ideals. The Romance is a veritable treatise of occult theory which teaches us how to drink from the fountain of the true alchemy. De Meung wrote that to drink from this fountain was to honour Nature. The alchemist himself is the subject of the work. He is a man in love and it is through this love that he discovers Nature. He discovered his true relationship with himself, with his loving partner and with the universe. A 14th century manuscript of the Romance which is kept in the National Library, Paris, tells of an enclosed garden, which contains the rose, that had sculpted on its outer walls symbolic figures of all the vices and miseries of mortality. Inside the garden the lover finds the God of Love. Whilst he contemplates the loveliness of the Rose he is pierced with the shafts of the deity, but he does not in spite of his sufferings abandon his project, which is to possess the Rose, and after imprisonment and various adventures he achieves his desire.¹² De Meung may have known of the Paradise in the Divine Comedy, wherein Dante is led to the vision of a vast celestial rose surrounded by ministering spirits.

The rose is only twice directly mentioned in the Bible. One reference will be found in the Song of Solomon: "I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys"; while the second is in Isaiah, where we read that when the kingdom of righteousness shall be established on earth, the desert shall rejoice and blossom as a rose. The Talmud has other references of significant import. A discourse on Genesis says that, upon arrival in paradise, a righteous person is taken to a place where are brooks of water, surrounded by eight hundred varieties of roses and myrtles. Astrologically, the rose is Venus as the morning star; the myrtle represents Venus in the evening. The Zohar, that has been called a *"vast and hidden source of universal philosophy"*¹³, tells us that *"the Lord God took this man (Adam) and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and keep it"*. It is said in another passage that Adam was set to grow roses. Before the instigation of blood sacrifice the gifts that Adam placed on the altar in Eden were offerings of aspiration. He preferred roses as symbols of his desires. He longed for a companion. This relates to the mystery of womanhood, the real sense of that Garden which he was given to cultivate. The roses were the very offspring of Shekinah, the Rose of the World, that immanent, demiurgic power of the divine who is herself represented by the Garden. The Shekinah (Hebrew "shachan", meaning "to reside") is the female manifestation of God in humanity, the indwelling spark of the divine. In the New Testament the Shekinah is the glory emanating from God, his effulgence. She is equated with certain Sephira, particularly Malkuth, the Kingdom, and is mentioned as a messenger from on high, when she appeared to Moses. Maimonides regarded Shekinah as an intermediary between God and the World.¹⁴ This blinding light of Shekinah was the flame of the burning bush, a bush with thorns, a rose-bush no less, guarded by the angel Zagzagel, which name means "divine splendour", the angel of the Presence. This bush is the ever-flaming, ever-revealing blossoming of divine power that is truly Rosa Mundi, the Rose or Soul of the World, that had dwelt in Eden since the Creation, and which sustains the world. The Talmud tells us that when God drove Adam out of the earthly paradise, the Shekinah remained behind *"enthroned above a cherub under the Tree of Life, her splendour being 65,000 times brighter than the sun"*, and that this radiance *"made all upon whom it fell exempt from disease"*, and, further, that then *"neither spirits*

nor demons could come nigh unto such to do them harm". Here is the origin of that sheltering star invoked in the ritual of the cabalistic cross.

Since the 16th century there have been a number of organisations known as Rosicrucian, tracing their origins to certain mysterious sources, and using the rose and the cross as their symbol. The rose, joined to the cross, is the quintessence that gives life to the four elements. The petals form a pentagram which is emblematic of the supreme self-denial of the initiate devoted to the completion of the Great Work. This correlates with the Grail as the Heavenly Rose of redemption, and is cognate with the chivalric ideals. The rose as the Sacred Heart of Jesus was reputedly carved at the centre of Arthur's Round Table. There is also a relation with the flaming star of the Freemasons. In 1785 Cagliostro declared that the Rose-Cross was the ancient and true symbol of the Mysteries. Genesis says that a river watered Eden and from thence it was parted and became four heads, or four sources of rivers. Thus the rose-cross symbolises the Garden of Eden, itself a pantacle of the Universe, and where dwelt the Shekinah. Eliphas Levi observes: *"The mystic pantacle of Eden shows therefore an enclosure constituted by a ring or circle of water, and island like Avalon, which is another Garden, and the waters flow out therefrom towards the four points of heaven; they form therefore a cross, and in the centre of that cross is the Paradise."***15**

Various near-eastern mystical orders earlier conveyed similar ideas. An Arabic school of illuminati followed Abdelkadir Gilani. His device was a rose, and he was known as the Light of the Rose. The path of practical mysticism which this Sufi established in the 12th century was called Sebil-el-Ward (The Path of the Rose). This Order may have influenced Western mysticism as practically the totality of the alchemy of the Middle Ages was passed to Europe by the Arabs. Among another secret mystical cult in Syria, the word "wird" (which means secret conjurations, repetitions of words of power, devotional exercises, and is a technical term of Islamic mysticism) is represented by a symbol (the rose) which is "ward" (the very word noted in the Babylonian tablets), used as a mnemonic. When Stanislaus Guaita decided in 1888 to restore the Order of the Rosy Cross, he made a new Rosicrucian emblem for his cabalistic society. Marking the cross with the four letters of the tetragram, in the centre he drew a pentagram whose points in turn are marked with the name of the Divine Adam. Between the angles of the cross are four roses with rays beaming from them. This restored the mystical heritage recalled by Cagliostro, and interated the relationship of the rose with the four-square garden that is a pantacle of Creation.

Roses were the favourite flowers of the alchemists. Several treatises are entitled The Rosary of the Philosophers. White roses were linked to the white stone, the objective of the first stage of the Word, while the red rose was associated with the red stone, the objective of the second stage. Red is cognate with gold. An old myth tells how Bacchus favoured Midas, whose touch turned things to gold, and that the king resided where there was a garden with roses having sixty petals and unsurpassed fragrance. The Popes used to bless a Golden Rose on the fourth Sunday in Lent, as a symbol of their spiritual and didactic power, of resurrection and immortality. Ironically the Golden Rose was twice conveyed to Henry VIII who broke with Rome. His dissolution of the monasteries significantly occasioned the transfer into private hands of the cloistered rose-gardens hitherto maintained by the religious houses. The Red King and the White Queen figure frequently in alchemystical allegory. Their successful union is acknowledged by use of the rose symbol. One alchemical figure shows a vessel that is penetrated by a rigid object and from which rose blooms show

forth. The alchemical treatises obviously contain great mysteries for those who have the acumen to rend the many veils that are drawn by the alchemical philosophers over what are the axiomatic truths of generation and rebirth.

That grandiose book of occult lore, the Tarot, has the symbol of the rose pressed within its pages. Perhaps the most significant image in the deck is that portraying Death. This card retains its image and its number throughout the history of the Tarot. Its likely origin is in the Black Death which swept Europe in 1348 and which became a popular image for artists and writers in the centuries that followed. In the renowned pack published by Waite, Death in black armour is riding a white horse. He carries in his left hand a flag on which is a white rose on a black field. In the field through which he rides are a dead king, a curious child, a despairing woman and a praying bishop. The sun is rising. The mysterious horseman moves slowly, and the square black banner is emblazoned with the Mystic Rose which signifies life. The interpretation of the card signifies renewal and rebirth. Waite rightly called his study of the Tarot "*fragments of a secret tradition under the veil of divination*". The square banner equates to the number four, a feminine number, and relates to the elements and the Earth, and recalls all those sets of four things so often met with in esoteric literature. In this context, the rose on the banner is Rosa Mundi, emblematic of the eternal renewal of manifestation through Anima Mundi, the Soul of the World.

"*Rosa Mundi*", wrote Crowley, "*red glory of the secret heart of love*". Perdurabo defined ritual as the uniting of the microcosm with the macrocosm. The androgynous figure of the magus must conjure with the elements if he is to pluck the rose at the heart of nature. The Gnostic Gospel of Thomas declares: "*When you make the two one, and when you make the inner as the outer and the outer as the inner and the above as the below, and when you make the male and female a single one, then shall you enter the kingdom*". Herein lies that consummation devoutly to be wished, the accomplishment of the Great Work which is possession of the Mystic Rose. Pico Mirandola, in his essay on human dignity, said that every man was higher than the angels. Dante may have been led by St Bernard but "*every man and every woman is a star*" said the Beast, and each has his or her own guardian angel as guide to Paradise wherein the Rose of Shekinah blooms. In lesser quests, roses are made use of in works of attraction and devotion, for healing and purification. The ancients burned roses for luck. Rose of Crucifixion oil is variously used by modern spirit cults. A crown of roses is worn by the practitioner in all operations of Venus. The rose is also related to Hulda, Hathor and Demeter, and to Aurora, Goddess of the dawn. In the Almadel of Solomon the angel guardians of the Eastern altitude are crowned with roses. The Roman Sybil who foretold the birth of Jesus also has the rose as her emblem, a seal for the new covenant given her by grateful monks.

Of the roses used by the ancients, some may yet survive. The wreaths excavated at Hawara are identified as Rosa Sancta (*rosa richardii*), and reputedly are still to be found in Ethiopia. Old garden roses, large and opening wide and flat, crammed with petals and often quartered, with petals folded into tightly packed sections, no doubt are reflections of the four-square Garden of Eden. The doctrine of signatures has forever sealed them as pantacles of paradise. Rosa Mundi (*Rosa gallica versicolor*) is an ancient variety known since at least 1581, stemming from the Apothecary's rose. This was known in Northern Europe since before 1400 and it thought to be the rose that Thibault IV brought back from the Seventh Crusade in 1250, to grow at his château in Provins. There is a double border of the Apothecary's rose at Kiftsgate House, Gloucestershire, with a famous Rosa Mundi border at Hidcote Manor in the

same county. Damask roses take their name from Damascus in ancient Syria, where they were known from classical times. There is a half-forgotten belief that St Catherine's Monastery, built in Sinai on the very site of the Burning Bush beheld by Moses, may yet secrete ancient roses within the four-square walls of its compound garden.

The use of the rose as a symbol of sovereignty and power has been given special use even in modern times. In 1960, after 750 years, the golden rose of Eleanor of Provence appeared again as an armorial design of Elizabeth II. The Queen adopted a flag for her own personal use outside the United Kingdom. The flag bears the Royal Crown within a chaplet of golden roses. It is significant that the roses are laid on a square blue ground with gold edges, the enclosed space of the celestial Eden, a design of graceful elegance, worth of the ancient symbols from the realm of beautiful women charmed by troubadours' songs in rose gardens. A more recent use of the rose was revealed in videotape recordings of the Solar Lodge rituals, suggesting the Rosicrucian leanings of that fateful body.

The rose, by virtue of its beauty, shape and scent, has become the most commonly used floral symbol in the West. Angelus Silesius took the rose for an image of the soul. Once the insignia of ancient Goddesses, it was revealed to be of cosmic import, a semblance of divine power in its feminine splendour. It is in effect the symbol of the Divine Mother, and thus symbolises the chalice of life and love that is the soul. To gaze at the heart of a rose is to contemplate the truest living mandala. To look on this mystic centre is to be in the presence of holiness. "*The rose each ravished sense beguiles*", wrote Sappho, who called the rose the Queen of Flowers. A symbol cherished by our ancestors that has been handed down over millennia yet has power to move our spirits.

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Many English-speaking readers of the *Roman de la rose*, the famous dream allegory of the thirteenth century, have come to rely on Charles Dahlberg's elegant and precise translation of the Old French text. His line-by-line rendering in contemporary English is available again, this time in a third edition with an updated critical apparatus. Readers at all levels can continue to deepen their understanding of this rich tale about the Lover and his quest--against the admonishments of Reason and the obstacles set by Jealousy and Resistance--to pluck the fair Rose in the Enchanted Garden. *Winning the Rose*, a Commentary by A. S. Kline. Composed in the 13th century, *The Romance of the Rose* created by Guillaume de Lorris and continued, and completed, by Jean de Meung, is the finest poetic achievement of the French High Medieval period. This Commentary explains the structure of the work, and the intentions behind it, and considers the detailed content, chapter by chapter, identifying references, and elucidating the speeches and actions of the personifications brought to life by the allegory. Translated by A. S. Kline © Copyright 2019 All Rights Reserved. Despite all this, *The Romance of the Rose* has its merits. Once I stopped expecting the many allegories to form a cohesive story and treated them instead as a puzzle of metaphors, I found it much more satisfying. Who can't relate to the idea of Jealousy building a massive castle to obstruct the potential lover? There are two authors of *Romance of the Rose*. Guillaume de Lorris started it, telling the story of a man who found the Garden of Pleasure, went inside, and discovered a party of allegories: Pleasure, Idleness, Courtesy, Pleasant Looks, Fair Welcome and the God of Love himself. He also found a beautiful rosebud which he immediately falls in love with.