

# Adam McLean's Study Course on reading alchemical texts

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## Lesson 9 : The dense structure of alchemical allegories.

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The use of allegory in alchemy has been an important part of alchemical literature from the earliest times. Zosimos, one of the earliest of recorded alchemical writers, used this device back in the 3rd/4th century AD. We have seen through this course, metaphor was used very often in alchemy, sometimes to hide the identity of a substance or process from the casual reader, but also occasionally as a literary device to enliven the text. The alchemical allegory, however, stands on a quite different level than the mere metaphorical enhancement of a text. An allegory in an alchemy text was usually a self contained narrative, with a complex structure. Alchemical allegories have a strong formal structure to them. The writer created through his allegory a kind of special world, a space within which an allegorical exploration of alchemical ideas could proceed. We can recognise some elements common to many allegories.

? Many allegories use a device in order to lead us, as readers, into the space of the allegory. Often this takes the form of the hero of the allegory, falling into a sleep and waking inside the allegorical space. Here just are a few examples of the opening of some alchemical allegories.

*In the third year of Ruchartz, the King of Adama had a dream and vision upon his bed which he set down in the following manner. I, Ben Adam, saw a vision at night, and beheld the four elements fought one against another in a way of battle, and behold two swallowed up the other two.*

*The Vision of Ben Adam, Amsterdam 1698.*

*I brought to mind that it had been a cruel thing that so many times I had been so ill paid by my fellow men, even by my friends. I felt broken down by the pain of these memories. My strength and energy left me and I put my head on my hands and a very torrent of tears poured forth, as at the same time I called the Eternal to my help. That day it was very hot, so that I fell asleep and then dreamed a dream that I shall never forget. I thought that I heard the tree, at whose feet I was sitting, split open. The sound made me turn my head. I saw a nymph, a very epitome of beauty emerging from this tree. Her clothes were so diaphanous that they seemed transparent.*

*Cyliani, 19th Century.*

*I was buried in a most profound sleep when I thought I saw a statue of about 15 ft high representing a venerable old man, beautiful and perfectly well proportioned in all the parts of his body. He had a great head of hair of silver, all waving; his eyes were fine turquoises, in the middle thereof were carbuncles, enchasing the lustre whereof was so resplendent, that I could not behold the light.*

Bernard Trevisan – *The Green Dream*. Possibly 16th century.

*It was about the dawning or daybreak when, tired with a tedious solitude and those pensive thoughts which attend it, after much loss and more labour, I suddenly fell asleep. Here then the day was no sooner born but strangled. I was reduced to a night of a more deep tincture than that which I had formerly spent. My fancy placed me in a region of inexpressible obscurity, and - as I thought - more than natural, but without any terrors.*

Thomas Vaughan - *Lumen de lumine*. Mid 17th century.

This use of the idea of entering or waking from a dream is an obvious literary device, which was used by many alchemists. Some depth psychologists, regrettably seem to take this literally, treating such allegories as if they were accounts of dreams or visions. In fact alchemical allegories are tightly structured out of the conscious mind of the alchemist, who often drew on, and quoted from, other such allegories. These were not some free ranging fantasies, but rigorously constructed narratives that incorporated an alchemical message.

? Most allegories have a central hero figure, who in passing through the events of the allegory is lead through a transformative process. The hero often meets with a guide who assists him in finding the right path to follow, or he may sometimes meet a deceiver who gives him misleading advice. Here are some examples.

*Sitting above this fountain, I contemplated its beauty and I saw the upper part was shut. A very venerable old man was coming there. As reverent as a priest, I honourably saluted him and I asked him wherefore that fountain was shut and fortified in that manner, above, below, and on every side. Having deigned to give me a friendly answer, he said, "What you would know, my friend, is a fountain very terrible and wonderful in virtue before every other fountain in the world. It belongs to the King alone of this country, whom the fount knows very well, and he himself the fountain."*

Bernard Trevisan - *Fountain allegory*. 16th century.

*After advancing thus for a good while, I came at last to a lovely meadow, encircled by beautiful fruit-laden trees, and called by the inhabitants, The Field of the Blessed. Here I met a group of old men with snow-white beards, and one among them was young and had a pointed black beard. A still younger man was present also, whose name I knew, but whose face I did not yet see. These men conversed about many things, particularly about a high and great secret in Nature which God kept hidden from the multitude, revealing it only to the few who loved Him. I listened to them for a long time, and their words pleased me much. But some among them appeared to mutter foolishly, indeed not about the objectives or the work, but about Parabolae, Similitudes and other Par-ergons.*

*Parabola* allegory of Henry Madathanus. 17th century.

*This man approached me, and said: I am the Genius of the Sages; fear not to follow where I lead. Then, taking me by the hair with the hand which held the key, he raised me up, carried me away, and caused me to traverse the three regions of the air, the fire, and the heaven of all the planets. Beyond even these did he transport me; then, having enveloped me in a whirlwind, he disappeared, and I found myself on an island floating in a sea of blood.*

Allegory in Martin Ruland's *Lexicon*. Early 17th century.

? In some allegories the hero is shown some important alchemical item or process.

? Some allegories have a strong dramatic narrative, being almost like novels. Among the best examples of these are the *Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz* from the early 17th century, and the *Most Holy Trinosophia* of the late 18th century (supposedly by the Comte de Saint Germain, but the authorship is unknown).

? In some cases the hero witnesses an alchemical transmutation as an observer, but in a few of the allegories it is he himself who is transformed. Often there is a death process leading eventually through an alchemical process to a resurrection and transformation. In the first example below, the hero or central character of the allegory, witnesses a death and resurrection, and in the second he actually works the alchemical process and resurrects the dead king and queen.

*This they did mix with the powder of the dead King. Then they did make a paste of it with linseed oil, and put it into a chamber, made like a perforated crucible, and under the hole they put another clean crucible. There they left him for one hour, then they covered it with fire, blowing till all was melted into the other crucible, descending through the hole. Then the King, also brought from dead to life, cried out "Where are the enemies. Let them know that I will kill them, if they do not obey me immediately".*

Allegory of Merlin

*Meanwhile, I saw in the room a rainbow of the most beautiful colours, caused by the sunshine in the moist weather, which heartened me no little in the midst of my sorrows. And soon I became rather happy that I could see my two lovers lying before me... I was sorrowful because I saw the ones I was to have guarded lying lifeless before me. But since their room was made from such pure and solid material and was shut so tightly, I knew that their soul and their spirit could not escape, but were still enclosed in it, so I continued with my steady warmth day and night, carrying out my duty as prescribed, for I believed that the two would not return to their bodies so long as the moisture was present. This I indeed found to be true. For in many careful observations I observed that many vapours arose from the earth about evening, through the power of the sun, and ascended on high as if the sun itself were drawing up the water. But during the night they gathered into a lovely and fertile dew, descending very early in the morning, enriching the earth and washing the corpses of our dead, so that from day to day, the longer such bathing and washing continued, they became even whiter and more beautiful. But the more beautiful and whiter they became, the more they lost their moisture, until at last when the air became light and clear and all the foggy, damp weather had passed, the spirit and soul of the bride could no longer remain in the pure air, and returned into the transfigured, glorified body of the Queen, and as soon as the body felt their presence, it instantly became living once again.*

*Parabola* allegory of Henry Madathanus. 17th century.

In the third example the hero himself is actually transformed through the action of the allegory.

*The hall which I had just entered was precisely round, it resembled the inside of a globe, composed of a material hard and transparent as crystal, it received light by all its sides. The lower part was put on a vast basin filled with red sand, a soft and equal heat reigned in this circular surrounding wall. The sages name this room Zelûph. The basin of sand that sustains it carries the name of Asha hôlith. I considered with astonishment this globe of crystal when a new phenomenon excited my admiration. From the floor of the room rose a sweet, moist and saffron-coloured vapour. It enveloped me, raised me gently, and in the space of thirty-six days carried me up into the higher part of the globe.*

*At the end of this time, the vapour thinned, I was lowered down little by little. Finally, I found myself on the floor, my robe had changed colour. It had been green when I entered into the hall, it had now become a brilliant red colour. By a contrary way, the sand on which the globe rested, had lost its red colour and became progressively black. I remained three days in the hall after the end of my ascension.*

*Trinosophia, late 18th century*

We can see how alchemical allegories could have arisen out of elaborate metaphorical alchemical works. Take for example this piece supposedly by Stephanos. It is one of that type of coded or obscured texts practical alchemical texts, we looked at in lesson five.

*A dragon springs from that. For twenty days exposed in horse-dung, he will devour his tail till nothing is left of it. This dragon's name is Ouroboros. He is white to see, his skin is spotted, and his form and shape are very strange. At birth he was produced out of the warm wet substance of mated things.*

*The close embrace of male and female kind, a union clasped and working in the sea, brought forth this dragon, as I said, a monster blasting all earth with flames. With all his might and armour shown, he swims until he reaches a site within the currents of the Nile. His glistening skin and his engirdling hands are bright as gold and shine with points of light.*

*Then seize and slay with skilful art this dragon there in the sea, and quickly wield your knife two-edged with hot and moist. And when you have cleft his carcass through, lift out the gall and take its blackened form that is heavy with earthly bile. From it ascend great clouds of steaming mist, which, when they have risen dense enough, can bear the dragon from the sea and lift him up to a warm station. The air's moisture upholds his lightened shape and form.*

*Be cautious then. Don't burn his substance. Rather change its nature with quenching draughts. Pour out the mercury into a gaping urn; and when its stream of sacred fluid ceases flowing, wash the blackened dross of earth away with care.*

*So, when you have brightened what the darkness hid, inside the dragon's entrails, you will bring an unspeakable mystery to light. For there, extremely bright and lucid, it will shine, and, tinged throughout with perfect white, will stand revealed with marvellous brilliancy - its blackness changed utterly to white. When cloud-sent water flows there, it cleanses each dark and earthly stain.*

*Thus he easily frees himself by drinking nectar, though he is quite dead; and all his wealth he*

*pours out for mortals.*

*Abundantly the earth-born are sustained in life when they have found at least the wonderful mystery, which, being fixed, will turn to silver, dazzling-bright in kind, a metal purified of earthly stain, so shining, clear, and marvellously white.*

*Then seize again the dragon changed to white (a change divinely achieved, as I have told, by means of whitening twice performed). Again kill him with a knife of fire, draw all his blood which gushes blazing-hot and red as flame glittering as it ignites. Then dip his skin into the blood that spurted from the wound deep in his belly (as you would dip in dye of murex-purple a whitened robe). You'll gain a shining glory lustrous as the sun, of noble form and gladdening the heart of mortals who behold its excellence.*

We can see that the author, had he wished, could have written this as an allegorical narrative. It is thus likely that allegories initially emerged from these kind of writings. Zosimos, writing only a short time before Stephanos, had already grasped and fully embraced the allegorical format.

*While saying these things, I fell asleep; and I saw a sacrificer who stood up before me, on top of an altar in the shape of cup. This altar had fifteen step to go up. The priest stood still there, and I heard a voice from on high that said to me:*

*"I accomplished the action to descend the fifteen steps, while walking toward the darkness, and the action of ascending the steps, while going toward the light. It is the sacrificer who renews me by rejecting the gross nature of the body. Thus being dedicated a priest by necessity, I become a spirit."*

*Having heard the voice of he who stood upright on the altar in the shape of cup, I asked him who he was. And he answered me in a thin voice in these terms:*

*"I am Ion, the priest of the sanctuaries, and I have undergone an intolerable violence. Someone came hastily in the morning, and he assaulted me, splitting me with a sword, and dismembering me, following the rules of the combination. He removed all the skin of my head, with the sword that he held; he mingled the bones with the flesh and he made them burn with the fire of the process. Thus I learned, by the transformation of the body, to become a spirit. Such is the intolerable violence (that I underwent)".*

*As even as he spoke, I forced him to speak further to me, his eyes became as blood, and he vomited all his flesh. And I saw him change into a homunculus, tearing himself with his own teeth and collapsing.*

*Full of fear, I awakened and I wondered:*

*"Is not this stage the composition of waters?"*

*I was persuaded that I had understood well; and I fell asleep again. I saw the same altar in the shape of a bowl, and, on the highest part, boiling water and many people themselves bearing it without slackening. And there was not anybody that I could question outside of the altar. I went up then toward the altar, to see this spectacle. And I saw a small man, his beard whitened by the years, who told me,:*

*"What do you look at?"*

*I answered him that I was surprised to see the agitation of the water and the burning and yet living men.*

*He answered me in these terms: "This spectacle that you see, is the beginning, and the end, and the transmutation."*

*I asked him again: "What transformation?"*

*And he answered me: "It is the place of the operation called maceration; because men who want to obtain virtue enter here and become spirits, after having escaped the body".*

*Then I said to him: "And are you a spirit?"*

*And he answered me: "Yes a spirit and a guardian of spirits."*

*During our conversation, the boiling was still growing, and the people were uttering miserable screams, I saw a man of copper, holding in his hand a lead tablet. He said the following words to me, while looking at the tablet: "I prescribe to all those who are submitted to the punishment to calm themselves, each to take a tablet of lead, to write in their own hand, and to hold their eyes raised to the sky and their mouths open, until their vintage is developed."*

*The act followed the speech and the master of the house said to me: "You contemplated, you stretched your neck upwards and you saw what was done itself."*

*I answered to him that I saw, and he said to me: "The one that you see is the man of copper; he is the chief of the sacrificers and the sacrificed, the one that vomits his own flesh. Authority was gave to him over this water and over the people who are punished."*

*After having had this apparition, I awoke again. I said to him: "What is the reason for this vision? Is this boiling white and yellow water not therefore, the divine water?"*

*And I found that I had understood well.*

*I said that it is beautiful to speak and beautiful to listen, beautiful to give and beautiful to receive, beautiful to be poor and beautiful to be rich.*

*"However, how does Nature teach giving and receiving?"*

*"The man of copper gives and the liquefied stone receives; the mineral gives and the plant receives; the stars give and the flowers receive; the sky gives and the earth receives; the thunderbolts give the fire which springs forth."*

*In the altar in the shape of a cup, all things interweave, and all split up; all things unite; all combine themselves; all things mingle, and all separate; all things are wet, and all are dried; all things bloom and all deflower fade themselves. In fact, for each this is by method, by measure, and by the exact weighing of the four elements, that makes the interlacing and the dissociation of all things; no connection occurs without method. There is a natural method, to exhale and to inhale, to preserve the divisions stationary, to increase and to diminish.*

*To summarise, when all things agree by their separation and their uniting, without the method being neglected in any way, nature is transformed; because nature, having turned in on herself, is changed: Such is the nature and the bond of virtue in the whole universe.*

For the exercise we should look at one of the shorter but complex allegories. The important thing to realise is that allegories have a well thought out structure, and are not merely whimsy or fantasy, but encode alchemical messages in the form of a narrative journey, following a central figure or alchemical hero, as he proceeds from ignorance to knowledge.

In future I hope to be able to create a study course devoted entirely to these amazing alchemical allegories. The study of allegories leads us close into the symbolic world in which many alchemists articulated their ideas. Allegories can reflect and incorporate actual pictorial emblems and some even appear within manuscripts with drawings or coloured paintings. Most, however, can stand entirely on their own, as they are so graphic.

## EXERCISE 1

[For this exercise we should try and discover some of the structural elements, the foundation, on which this allegory is based. Firstly, read through this *Parabola* allegory of Henricus Madathanus from the early 17th century, and make a map of the places the alchemical hero visits on his journey.]

*As I once was walking in a beautiful, green, young forest, meditating and deploring the difficulties of this life, considering how, through the grievous Fall of our first Parents we came into such wretchedness and grief, I left the accustomed road and came, I know not how, upon a narrow footpath, very rough, untrodden, difficult and overgrown with so many bushes and brambles that it was easy to see it was very seldom used. At this I became frightened and wished to retrace my steps. But this was not possible, especially since a strong wind blew so mightily behind me that I had to take ten steps forward for every one I could take backward. Therefore I had to press on, despite the roughness of the way.*

*After advancing thus for a good while, I came at last to a lovely meadow, encircled by beautiful fruit-laden trees, and called by the inhabitants, The Field of the Blessed. Here I met a group of old men with snow-white beards, and one among them was young and had a pointed black beard. A still younger man was present also, whose name I knew, but whose face I did not yet see. These men conversed about many things, particularly about a high and great secret in Nature which God kept hidden from the multitude, revealing it only to the few who loved Him. I listened to them for a long time, and their words pleased me much. But some among them appeared to mutter foolishly, indeed not about the objectives or the work, but about Parabolas, Similitudes and other Par-ergons. In this they followed the Figmenta of Aristotle, of Pliny and of others, each of whom had copied from the other. At this I could no longer remain silent, but put in a word of my own, answering many futile things on the basis of experience, so that many listened to me, examining me in their speciality, putting me to some very hard tests. But my foundation was so good that I came through with all honours, whereat they all were amazed. However they unanimously accepted me into their Brotherhood, at which I rejoiced heartily.*

*But they said that I could not be a full colleague so long as I did not know their Lion and was not fully aware what he could do internally and externally. I was therefore to set about diligently to make him submissive to myself. Confidently I promised them I would do my best, for I enjoyed their company so much that I would not have parted from them for anything in the world.*

*So they led me to the Lion and very carefully described him to me. But what I was to do with him at first, no one would tell me. Indeed some of them did give me certain hints, but so confusedly that not one in a thousand could understand them. However, when I had tied him and made certain that his sharp claws and pointed teeth could not harm me, they no longer kept anything back. The Lion was very old, fierce and huge; his yellow mane hung over his neck, and he really appeared unconquerable. I was nearly terror-stricken, and had it not been for my agreement and for the old men who stood around me to see how I would begin, I would have run away. Confidently I approached the lion in his cave and began to cajole him, but he looked at me so sharply with his glittering eyes that I nearly let my water for fear. At*

*the same time I remembered that as we went to the Lion's cave one of the old men had told me that many people had attempted to conquer the Lion, but very few had succeeded. Since I did not wish to fail, I recalled many grips I had learned through careful application to athletics, and in addition I was well trained in natural magic, so I forgot about the pleasantries and attacked the Lion so artfully and subtly that before he was aware of it, I had pressed the blood out of his body, indeed out of his heart itself. The blood was beautifully red, but very choleric. But I examined his anatomy further and found many things which greatly surprised me; his bones were white as snow, and they were of greater quantity than his blood.*

*When my old men, standing round the cave and watching me, realized what I had done, they began to dispute with each other violently so that I could see their gestures. But what they said I could not understand because I was so far inside the cave. And when they began to shout at each other, I heard one who cried, "He must also bring the Lion to life again; otherwise he cannot be our colleague."*

*I did not wish to make trouble. Therefore I walked out of the cave and crossed a broad space. Then I came, I do not know how, to a very high wall which rose over a hundred ells into the clouds. But above there it did not have the width of a shoe. From the beginning where I started, to the end there ran an iron railing along the top of the wall, well fastened with many supports. I walked along the top of this wall and thought I saw someone going along a little ahead of me on the right side of the railing.*

*After I followed him a while, I saw someone following behind me on the other side of the railing (to this day I don't know whether it was a man or a woman) who called to me and said that it was better to walk on his side than where I was going. I easily believed this, for the railing which stood in the middle of the wall made the passageway very narrow so that it was difficult to walk along it at such a height. Then behind me I saw some people who wanted to go that same way. So I swung myself under the railing, holding it fast with both hands, and continued along the other side until I came to a place on the wall where it was especially dangerous to descend. Now I regretted that I had not remained on the other side; for I could not pass under the railing again; also it was impossible to turn back and take the other way again. Therefore I summoned my courage, trusted in my sure-footedness, held on tightly, and descended without harm. When I went on for a while, I had indeed forgotten about all dangers and also did not know where the wall and railing had vanished.*

*After I had descended I saw standing a lovely rosebush on which beautiful red and white roses were growing; but there were more of the red than of the white. I broke off some of them and put them on my hat.*

*I soon saw a wall encircling a great garden, in which were young fellows. Their maidens also would have liked to be in the garden, but they did not wish to make the great effort of walking the long distance around the wall to the gate. I was sorry for them and returned the whole distance I had come, then followed a smoother path, and I went so fast that I soon came to several houses, where I hoped to find the cottage of the gardener. There I found many people; each had his own room; often two were working together slowly and diligently; but each had his own work. And it appeared to me that all this they were doing, I had done before them, and that I knew it all very well. Then I thought, "Look, if so many other people do such dirty and slovenly work only for appearance's sake, and each according to his own*

*ideas, but not established in Nature, then you yourself are forgiven.” Therefore I would not stay there any longer for I knew that such art would disappear in smoke, so I continued on my destined way.*

*As I now went toward the garden gate some looked at me sourly, and I feared that they would hinder me in the fulfilment of my intentions. Others, however, said, “See, he wishes to go into the garden; but we who worked for so long in its service have never entered it. We shall laugh at him if he blunders.”*

*But I paid no attention to them, for I knew the plan of the garden better than they, although I had never been in it, and I went straight up to the gate. This was locked fast, and one could not discover even a key-hole from the outside. But in the gate I saw a tiny round hole which one could not distinguish with ordinary eyes, and I thought it was necessary to open the gate there. I took out my skeleton-key, especially prepared for this purpose, unlocked the gate and walked in.*

*After I was inside the gate I found more locked gates, but I unlocked them without more difficulty. But I found that this was a hallway as if it were in a well-built house, about six shoes wide and twenty long, covered with a ceiling. And although the other gates were still locked, I could see through them sufficiently into the garden as soon as the first gate was opened.*

*And so in God's Name I wandered further into the garden. There in the midst of it I found a little flower-bed, square, each of its four sides six measuring-rods long, and covered with rosebushes, on which the roses were blossoming beautifully. Since it had rained a little and the sun was shining, a very lovely rainbow appeared. After I left the flower-bed and had come to the place where I was to help the maidens, behold! instead of the walls there stood a low wattle fence. And the most beautiful maiden, dressed all in white satin, with the most handsome youth, clad in scarlet, went past the rose-garden, one leading the other by the arm and carrying many fragrant roses in their hands. I spoke to them, asking how they had come over the fence.*

*“My dearest bridegroom here helped me over,” she said, “and now we are leaving this lovely garden to go to our room to be together.”*

*“I am happy,” I replied, “that without further effort of mine you can satisfy your wish. Nevertheless you can see how I ran so long a way in so short a time, only to serve you.”*

*After this I came into a great mill, built within stone walls; inside were no flour-bins nor any other things necessary for milling; moreover, through the wall one saw no waterwheels turning in the stream. I asked myself how this state of affairs came about, and one old miller answered me that the milling-machinery was locked up on the other side. Then I saw the miller's helper go into it by a covered passage-way, and I followed close after him. But as I was going along the passage, with the waterwheels on my left, I paused, amazed at what I saw there. For now the waterwheels were above the level of the passage, the water was coal-black, although the drops from it were white, and the covered passage-way itself was not more than three fingers wide. Nevertheless I risked turning back, holding fast to the beams over the passage-way; thus I crossed over the water safely. Then I asked the old miller how many waterwheels he had. He answered, Ten. This adventure I long remembered and dearly wished I could know what it meant. But when I saw that the miller would not reveal anything,*

*I went on my way.*

*In front of the mill there arose a high, paved hill; on its summit some of the old men I have mentioned were walking in the warm sunshine. They had a letter from the Brotherhood and were discussing it among themselves. I soon guessed its contents, and that it might concern me, so I went to them and asked, "Sirs, does what you read there concern me?"*

*"Yes," they replied, "Your wife whom you recently married, you must keep in wedlock or we shall have to report it to the Prince."*

*I said, "That will be no trouble, for I was born together with her, as it were, was raised with her as a child, and because I have married her I shall keep her always, and death itself shall not part us. For I love her with all my heart."*

*"What have we to complain of, then?" they asked, "The bride is also happy, and we know her wish is that you must be joined together."*

*"I am very happy," I replied.*

*"Well then," said one of them, "the Lion will come back to life, mightier and more powerful than before."*

*Then I recalled my previous struggle and effort, and for some curious reason I felt this did not concern me but another whom I knew well. At that moment I saw our bridegroom walking with his bride, dressed as before, ready and prepared for the wedding, whereat I was very happy; for I had greatly feared that these things might concern me.*

*When, as has been said, our scarlet-clad bridegroom came to the old men with his dear bride, her white garments gleaming brightly, they were soon united and I greatly wondered that the maiden who might be the bridegroom's mother was nevertheless so young that she seemed newly born, as it were.*

*Now I do not know how the two had sinned; perhaps as brother and sister, united in love in such a way that they could not be separated, they had been accused of incest. Instead of a bridal bed and brilliant wedding they were condemned to a strong and everlasting prison. However, because of their noble birth and station, in order that they could do nothing together in secret, and so all their doings would always be visible to their guard, their prison was transparent-clear like crystal and round like a heavenly dome. But before they were placed inside, all the clothing and jewels they wore were taken from them so they had to live together stripped naked in their prison. No one was assigned to serve them, but all their necessities of food and drink -- the latter drawn from the stream mentioned above -- were placed inside before the door of the room was securely closed, locked, sealed with the seal of the Brotherhood, and I was placed on guard outside. And since winter was near I was to heat the room properly so they would neither freeze nor burn, but under no conditions could they come out of the room and escape. But if any harm resulted from my neglect of these instructions, I would undoubtedly receive great and severe punishment.*

*I did not feel well about this, my fear and worry made me faint-hearted, and I thought to myself, It is no small task which has been assigned to me. I also knew that the Brotherhood did not lie, always did what it said, and certainly performed its work with diligence. However, I could change nothing, and besides, the locked room was situated in the midst of a strong tower, encircled by strong bulwarks and high walls, and since one could warm the*

room by a moderate but constant fire, I took up my task in God's Name, beginning to heat the room in order to protect the imprisoned married couple from the cold. But what happened? As soon as they felt the faintest breath of warmth, they embraced each other so lovingly that the like of it will not be seen again. And they remained together in such ardor that the heart of the young bridegroom disappeared in burning love, and his entire body melted and sank down in the arms of his beloved. When the latter, who had loved him no less than he had loved her, saw this, she began to lament, weeping bitterly over him and, so to say, buried him in such a flood of tears that one could no longer see what had happened to him. But her lamenting and weeping lasted only for a short time, for because of her great heart-sorrow she did not wish to live longer, and died of her own free will. Ah, woe is me! In what anxiety, grief and distress was I when I saw those two I was to have helped, dissolved entirely to water and lying before me dead. Certain failure was there before my eyes, and moreover, what to me was the bitterest, and what I feared most were the coming taunts and sneers, as well as the punishment I would have to undergo.

I passed a few days in careful thought, considering what I could do, when I recalled how Medea had restored the corpse of Jason to life, and so I asked myself, "If Medea could do it, why cannot you do it also?" Whereat I began to think how to proceed with it, but I did not find any better method than to maintain a steady warmth until the water would recede and I could see the dead bodies of the lovers once again. Then I hoped that I would escape all danger to my great gain and praise. Therefore for forty days I continued with the warmth I had begun, and I saw that the longer I did this, the more the water disappeared, and the dead bodies, black as coal, came to view. And indeed this would have happened sooner had not the room been locked and sealed so tightly. But under no conditions dared I open it. Then I noticed quite clearly that the water rose high toward the clouds, collected on the ceiling of the room, and descended again like rain; nothing could escape, so our bridegroom lay with his beloved bride before my eyes dead and rotten, stinking beyond all measure.

Meanwhile, I saw in the room a rainbow of the most beautiful colours, caused by the sunshine in the moist weather, which heartened me no little in the midst of my sorrows. And soon I became rather happy that I could see my two lovers lying before me. However, no joy is so great that sorrow is not mixed with it; therefore in my joy I was sorrowful because I saw the ones I was to have guarded lying lifeless before me. But since their room was made from such pure and solid material and was shut so tightly, I knew that their soul and their spirit could not escape, but were still enclosed in it, so I continued with my steady warmth day and night, carrying out my duty as prescribed, for I believed that the two would not return to their bodies so long as the moisture was present. This I indeed found to be true. For in many careful observations I observed that many vapours arose from the earth about evening, through the power of the sun, and ascended on high as if the sun itself were drawing up the water. But during the night they gathered into a lovely and fertile dew, descending very early in the morning, enriching the earth and washing the corpses of our dead, so that from day to day, the longer such bathing and washing continued, they became even whiter and more beautiful. But the more beautiful and whiter they became, the more they lost their moisture, until at last when the air became light and clear and all the foggy, damp weather had passed, the spirit and soul of the bride could no longer remain in the pure air, and returned into the transfigured, glorified body of the Queen, and as soon as the body felt their presence, it instantly became living once again. This brought me no little joy, as one can easily imagine, especially as I saw her arise, dressed in a very rich garment, the like of which very few on

*this earth have seen, wearing a costly crown, adorned with perfect diamonds, and heard her say; "Harken, you children of men, and learn, all of you who are of women born, that the All-Highest has power to enthrone kings and to dethrone them. He makes rich and poor, according to his will. He kills and makes to live again. And all this behold in me as a living example! I was great and I became small. But now after I became humble, I have been made queen over many realms. I was killed and am resurrected again. To me, the poor one, have the great treasures of the wise and mighty been entrusted and given. Therefore have I been given power to make the poor rich, to extend mercy to the humble, and to bring health to the sick. But not yet am I like my dearest brother, the great, mighty king, who will also be awakened from the dead. When he comes he will prove that my words are true."*

*And as she said this, the sun shone brightly, the days became warmer, and the dog-days were near at hand. But long before the sumptuous and great wedding of our new queen many costly robes were prepared from black velvet, ash-grey coloured damask, grey silk, silver-coloured taffeta, snow-white satin; indeed, a silver piece of extraordinary beauty, embroidered with costly pearls and worked with marvellous, clear-sparkling diamonds was also made ready. And robes for the young king were also made ready, namely of pink, with yellow aureolin colours, costly fabrics, and finally a red velvet garment adorned with costly rubies and carbuncles in very great numbers. But the tailors who made these garments were invisible, and I marvelled when I saw one coat after another, and one garment after another being finished, for I knew that no one except the bridegroom and his bride had entered into the chamber. But what astonished me the most was that as soon as a new coat or garment was finished, the former ones disappeared from before my eyes, and I did not know where they had gone or who had locked them away.*

*And after this costly coat was made ready, the great and mighty king appeared in all his power and glory, and there was nothing like him. And when he discovered he was locked in, he asked me in a friendly manner and with gracious words to open the door for him so he would be able to come out; he said it would result in great blessing for me. Although I was strictly forbidden to open the room, I was so overwhelmed by the great appearance and the gentle persuasive powers of the king that I opened the door willingly. And as he walked out, he was so friendly, gracious, even humble, that one could indeed see that nothing graces noble persons so much as do these virtues.*

*And since he had passed the dog-days in the great heat, he was very thirsty, weak and tired; and he asked me to bring him some of the fast-flowing water from beneath the waterwheels of the mill, which I did, and he drank it with great eagerness. Then he returned to his chamber and told me to lock the door fast behind him, lest someone should disturb him or waken him from his sleep.*

*There he rested for a few days, and then he called me to open the door. But I saw that he had become much more handsome, full-blooded and splendid, and he also noticed it; and he thought that the water was marvellous and healthy. Therefore he asked for more, and drank a larger quantity than he had the first time, and I resolved to enlarge the chamber. After the king had drunk his fill of this wonderful beverage which the ignorant do not value at all, he became so handsome and glorious that in all my life*

*I never saw a more splendid appearance, or anyone more noble in manner and character. Then he led me into his kingdom and showed me all the treasures and riches of the*

*world, so that I must say that not only did the queen speak the truth, but he also gave the greatest part of it to those who know the treasure and can describe it. There were gold and precious carbuncle stones without end, and the rejuvenation and restoration of the natural powers, as well as the recovery of health and the removal of all illnesses were daily occurrences there. But most delightful of all in this kingdom was that the people knew, revered and praised their Creator, receiving from Him wisdom and knowledge, and at last, after this happiness in the world of time, they attained an eternal blessedness. To this may God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit help all of us.*

When we carefully read this allegory examining at its structure can see our alchemical hero moving from the forest, with its difficult paths strung with briars and obstacles, through a series of events and ultimately ending up in the splendid rich kingdom of the King whom he had alchemically revived.

He moved through seven places on his journey from the outer forest to the glory of the kingdom.

Forest	Field of the Blessed	Cave of the Lion	High wall	Outside the Garden	Inside the Garden	The Mill	Prison Tower	Kingdom
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In each of these places he performs a particular action or achieves a special thing.

Accepted into the alchemical Brotherhood	Presses the blood from the heart of the lion	Crosses the wall	Recognises the work of the outer labourers is pointless	Meets Bride and Bridegroom	Finds mill has ten wheels	Works to restore the bride and groom to new life
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We can similarly list the various people he meets along his journey.

Also the various things that change as he goes on his journey.

The work in the tower can be analysed in more detail as a separate task in itself.

List the obstacles he meets on his journey.

Once we have built up a detailed picture for ourselves of the structure that underlies the allegory, we will find that it begins to make more and more sense to us. We often find that something that happens at one point in the allegory is somehow reflected in the events at another. We should read the structure out of the allegory and not try and impose one onto the work. Thus we should not go fishing for seven planets, or the twelve signs of the zodiac, the three principles, or the four elements, or the cycle of alchemical stages. Instead, we should trust the allegory and let it show its own particular structure and try not to presuppose or impose one onto the allegory.

There is much structure layered into this seemingly short piece, only about six pages in length. Alchemical allegories can have an exceedingly dense structure, and you will probably need to revisit this a few times to entirely tease out all the strands that are woven into it. Allegories like this are not, as some people would want us to believe, mere works of imaginative fancy, or eruptions of unconscious feelings. They are, on the contrary, well-crafted, beautifully conceived and structured explorations of alchemical ideas. They are rich in thought, not being some whimsical fantasy, and if you spend any time at all exploring the structure of an allegory like this, you will come to appreciate the deep well of structured symbolism that lies hidden beneath their seemingly simple exterior.