

The Riddles in *The Rose Labyrinth*

Riddle text 3

The first true riddle text of the novel is the third in sequence, as it is arranged in the collection. (The first in order is that which is carried by Will, passed down from his mother; and the second would accompany the Prologue of the story, having no riddle save the Number square.) It can be read singly, or in tandem with Chapter One.

Beginning with the quotation from **John Donne** – *As virtuous men pass mildly away* – it introduces the themes of the novel. We will be dealing with the passing away of John Dee, and what came after him; and the legacy as a whole that creates the impetus for the quest. One main motif stands out in this primary riddle text – which, by the way, clearly has a Roman numeral (I) on its pictorial side. That motif has five different manifestations.

The legacy that inaugurates the Quest is a Key, left to Will by his mother.

In the **first section** of the riddle text, the ‘trust that may exist between a master and his servant’ is a reference to the virtue of FIDELITY and FAITHFULNESS. It is personified as female in both Literature and Art; and ‘her’ symbol is a KEY. This state of trust between servant and master is a lesser theme of the book, too: Amel and Alex, FitzAlan and Guy Temple, Dee and both his daughter Kate and his secretary, Patrick Saunders. And of course it impacts on the trust that was held by Christ for Peter, his ‘rock’ – referenced in the **third section** of this text.

Peter, as rock of the church, is given the keys to heaven by Christ: ‘On this rock I will build my church [and] I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 16, 18-19). The crossed keys are, again, emblematic of the authority of the Church; and the keys, sometimes one in silver and the other gold, are Peter’s device.

Between these sections come a reference to the ‘Lady of the East’ who wears a ‘crown’ and ‘rides i’ the grete chariot’. The description of her, dressed in the green and flowers that make her queen of the earth, and the single fact that she was personified by a stone (remember Peter is a ‘rock’) which was brought to Rome, identifies her as CYBELE, the great Phrygian earth goddess who ruled all of nature. Her name is very close to that of Sybil – and she is a mother and antecedent of goddesses. Claudia, a Roman vestal virgin, was able to prove her innocence from a charge of adultery when she alone was able to free a boat carrying a stone bearing Cybele’s image from a sandbank on the Tiber. The immense weight of the stone had caused the barge to stick, and Claudia – first calling on the power of the goddess to attest to her innocence – looped the barge rope around her girdle and simply pulled the boat free along the river. Claudia has become synonymous with Trust, and Cybele’s primary emblems are a sceptre and a key.

The **final section** of this riddle text concerns the sisters, Mary Magdalene (Mary of Bethany) and Martha whom, according to legend, came to France with their brother, Lazarus. Luke 10, 38-42 tells us that Martha was industrious and domestic, preparing

food when Christ came to their house, while Mary sat listening to him. Thus Martha is the practical house-maker and the doer, rather than the philosopher, and she is associated with housewives and given the emblem of a KEY or bunch of keys, to represent her in art. France – the legendary stopping place of their evangelising mission – will of course play a vital role in the story.

The KEY has a fifth manifestation – which is also important. A dragon bearing a KEY is often the symbol of the Apocalypse. Thus it is a play on the overlapping associations of the key which takes the strands of our labyrinth in many directions, all at once.

The **Hebrew letters** are used in Cabbala, and have a potent value in the Gematria (Hebrew Numerology of sacred words: see text 15) – the word here means ‘to reveal’ or ‘to open up’. It relates to the beginning of our story, the opening up of the mystery.

The **lines at the very bottom** of this, and every subsequent text, contain one special word, which will be added to others and form a clearly worded message. Can you decipher which word it is?

Riddle text 7

Again, the number can be seen by a careful search on the illustrated side.

The text here works in a number of ways. I don’t want to give away everything – but it acts like a marginal gloss on what is happening (and what will happen!) in the narrative, in and from chapter 7.

Dante and his guide in the Divine Comedy, Virgil, are ferried across the **Stygian marsh**. Dante is one of the key strands in the story, partly because he influenced so much literature and thought from the second decade of the fourteenth century – including Shakespeare’s. He, in turn, was drawing upon classicism; but his use of the symbolism of numbers is of interest to this story, as becomes clear towards the latter half of the novel. Also, Dante is describing the stages of Initiation towards human enlightenment, and oneness with the Divine, which have come down in veiled form from the mysteries of Isis and those of Eleusis.

This sense of **Initiation** – getting closer to the Divine, and becoming enlightened spiritually – is happening in parallel form to Will, at this moment; and it will come to be significant metaphorically also to Alex. ‘**El Iksandria**’ is the Arabic name for Alexandria; but it was also the centre in antiquity for the cult of the worship of Adonis, a lord of vegetation rites. The Semitic people of Syria worshipped Adonis, and it was taken up from them by the Greeks in (or before) the fifth century BC. Adonis is a Phoenician word – Adon – which means Lord. He was supposedly a beautiful young man, a beloved of Aphrodite, slain by a boar in his youth while on a hunt. This tale – and manifold connections to and from it – runs through much of the mystery and symbolism of the book.

The **death of Adonis** was the centre of a rite, enacted by the lamentations and tears of women; and images of him were thrown into the sea. Usually the next day his rebirth was celebrated – and this owes much to the myth of Osiris and Isis. At Alexandria he was worshipped alongside Aphrodite, where twin beds were laid out for both of them. Fruits, cakes and flowers were set around them, their marriage celebrated, and the following day his effigy was taken and committed to the sea. This ceremony – of death and rebirth – seems to have taken place in late summer – overlap of late-flowering and first harvest.

These points can be traced through the riddles in the text, and their connection with the narrative explored.

The **Hebrew word** at bottom, in this text, means ‘the heart’; but it also can mean ‘to cover up’, and is again used in Cabbala.

Riddle Text 25

This is one of my favourites – partly because Lucy latches onto it so personally, but we never look more deeply into the other elements that are going on with it.

‘Lucy Locket lost her pocket’ ... is an eighteenth century rhyme: it tells of the heart/and pocket/that were ‘stolen’ by the beautiful Kitty Fisher from the lovelorn Lucy.

Kitty Fisher is a fascinating character: she was a famous courtesan who once was offered fifty pounds to sleep with the Duke of Cumberland. Her fee was double that, so she simply ate his fifty pound note between two slices of bread and butter! This stunt was so similar to the story of Cleopatra dining with Marc Antony. To consume a feast of greater worth and luxury than his, she took an opulent pearl, given her by an Oriental king, from her earlobe and dissolved it in a glass of vinegar-wine, then drank it. The companion pearl was sliced in half after Cleopatra’s demise, and placed in the earlobes of the statue of Venus in the Pantheon in Rome.

There is an eighteenth-century painting by Joshua Reynolds, which conflates these two events. One of the characters in the book has a fondness for that painting – as we see from the wallpaper of his laptop. What might this suggest about how he thinks of his own ‘Venus’, and who she reminds him of?

And who is the man who is referred to with the ‘cloak’ and ‘tears of pearl’?

In short, this riddle text concerns two Wills, and two women.

There are various connotations and connections to tease out, here – and individual readers will come up with some more, quite probably, than I have!

The Hebrew word at the bottom translates as 'stife' and is used in Cabbalistic magic. Of course, the value of the letters is germane.

Riddle Text 26

This is the one covered with music notes, and the number is visible in the top left corner if you look carefully.

The text opens, 'Enter the walled city, famous for salt'. There are many contenders for this, but the one I have in mind here is the Austrian city of Salzburg – literally, Salt City by name. As the next line suggests, there is an interesting value which can be obtained by working out the numerology of the word SALZBURG.

Salzburg has a famous son, a composer. Various clues in the second paragraph of the text suggest who that is, and also describe a piece of work that he composed as the last of its kind that he wrote in Salzburg. It is numbered chronologically as the next in sequence after another piece, known as the 'Paris'. The words that follow this describe the work itself. Obviously, this particular piece has been selected as it has something in common with the other answers: can you guess what it is? This is the main focus of the puzzle.

But the final section of the text also refers to a mystery. The composer at the centre of this riddle had a very unusual relationship with a 'King's daughter' – actually, she was a princess but her father was less powerful than her Austrian mother. When the princess and the composer were both children, aged seven, he proposed to her. Later, as a Freemason, he may have become involved in a highly secretive plot to free her from danger from the country over which she had become queen. Perhaps the idea of 'dropping a stitch' and 'letting it go to her head' also touches off some clues as to who this is?

The cabbalistic Hebrew word at bottom here means 'oscillating', but also, something thin or weak.

Riddle Text 34

Text 33 is dealt with in fairly close detail in the narrative itself, but the following one is poignant, having been added by Diana Stafford.

It begins, 'Sir Christopher Hatton gave his queen ...' and is in hand-written script.

Many people will be familiar with Hatton Garden in London, and its centrality as the jewellery district. Its fifteenth- and sixteenth-century past, though, concerns both a myth about the Bishop of Ely having sent out for some strawberries for the white rose king, Richard III, during a council meeting in the Tower of London, just before he executed Lord William Hastings: the event is dramatised in Shakespeare's play. This garden was

the Bishop's, belonging to the Palace of Ely before the dissolution. After this, though, it passed to the crown, and Elizabeth bestowed the beautiful garden on her young favourite, Sir Christopher Hatton. His annual rent was £10 per year, 10 loads of hay, and a red rose plucked (for the Queen) at midsummer.

The narrative explains the significance of the coloured roses – red for male and white for female. In alchemy – a ‘chemical wedding’ – the red rose and the white are used together to create the basis for transmuting ordinary metals into gold. But this chemical wedding should be read in two ways, as should mention of ‘Lucy’.

Simon will take up the importance of this second ‘Lucy’, and indeed ‘Eve’, just as we will learn about the Rainbow's Pot of Gold in the novel itself.

There are three Hebrew words here: the first means ‘the dew’ or little pools of dew; the second means ‘strength’; and the last is again the ‘heart’. These words have a magical connection with some of the answers to a mystery. But, do they also allude to what is the real magic, and the real gold? There will be many different thoughts on this subject!

This is the ultimate text, so the final significant word in the ‘The Song’ will reveal the final piece of a puzzle. One word, surely, stands out?