



Ovid's Metamorphoses and the Sacred scripture

Two worlds, two loves

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The love between a man and a woman has certainly been one of the dominant motifs of universal literature, perhaps the most: from the lofts of Zeus or Aphrodite, the dazzling beauty of Helena that provokes the war of Troy, the fatal infatuation of Dido by Aeneas, passing by the couples of Dante and Beatrice, Don Quijote and his Dulcinea, Romeo and Juliet, until the boyfriends Lucia and Renzo of Alessandro Manzoni or the suicidal passions of Madame Bovary and Anna Karenina.

Here we'll explore briefly two works that have permeated the literary humus of the West: the Bible and Ovid's Metamorphoses. These are two works that in the field of literature can represent our cultural Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman roots. They underlie the two conceptions of human love that we are going to compare: agape and eros.

Let us begin with the Metamorphoses and its author, the Latin poet Publius Ovidio Nasón (43 BC-17 A.D.). A famous elegiac poet since his youth, he wrote in his twenties the Loves, books in fifty elegies dedicated to his affair with a girl named Corina. At the same time, he published the Heroides, a collection of twenty-one letters of "heroines" or female characters of mythology, addressed to their loved ones. More notorious will be after his Ars amatoria, three books with advice and recommendations on gallantry between men and women. These works and other minors (Remedy Amoris and Medicamina Faciei) consecrated their author as "erotic poet" already before writing the Metamorphoses.

The Metamorphoses constitute an epic poem of fifteen books with which Ovid intends to tell the story since the creation of the world («ab origine mundi ad mea perpetuum deducte Carmen») until the supposed deification of Emperor Julius Caesar. Thanks to this agile and plastic weaving of more than 250 narrations, posterity has been able to know many stories of Greco-Roman mythology. In its

characters – gods, human beings, flora and fauna, the mineral kingdom or the stars – the phenomenon of metamorphosis or transformation in another being happens again and again. It has been one of the most read classics, especially at the time of the Renaissance, and has influenced other arts: Titian's paintings (Venus and Adonis, the Rapture of Europe), those of Sandro Botticelli (The Spring, The Birth of Venus), those of Diego Velázquez (The Hilanderas, The Forge of Vulcan) or the sculptures of Gian Lorenzo Bernini (The abduction of Proserpine or Apollo and Dafne).

The characters in this poem are passionate, dominated by the impulse of a love at first sight that they want to meet immediately. Often the desired being resists and flees in the midst of a lush and fresh forest. In these muddles is where the metamorphosis happens, either as a disguise of the seducer, as an escape from the insidious or as punishment on the part of a jealous divinity.

The predominance of Eros is evident, for which the eyes are an automatic way: «Phebus amat Visaeque cupit conubia Daphnes»; the Eco nymph looks and lights ("vidit et incaluit") by Narcissus, which in turn is captivated by the sight of his beauty; Perseus, as he flies with his winged sandals, sees Andromeda chained on the rocks, inflames ("trahit inscius ignes et stupet") and almost falls into the sea. The language itself reveals the nature of this love (ignis, flamma, ardor, aestus), and who is imprisoned, Rebulls, burns, is consumed (aestuatur, arden, uritur). In this way, it generates an exuberant variety of situations where fiery prevails over reason. Important omissions are the terms cure and pain to refer to the "sorrows of love" (in other Latin poets, Propertius or Tibullus, are synonymous with love), which makes more evident the exclusively sensual and voluptuous nature of ovidian love. On the other hand, conjugal fidelity is rare and counted: Kephalos and Procris, Ceyx and Alcíone, Orfeo and Eurydice, Philemon and Baucis, Deucalion and Pyrrha.

In general, romantic passion shows dramatic and fatal consequences. The antithesis between the Fury/Cupid (Θυμς) and the ratio/men (βολευμα) is observed in some pathological characters and especially in the female figures. It draws attention to the case of Medea, daughter of Eetes, king of the Colchis: as soon as Jason arrived in search of the golden fleece, he fell in love and divided between his desired and the fidelity to his father; he will end by giving his sorcery to the young Argonauts, while still considering it as treason, and he has no choice but to flee. His lamentation anticipates that of Saint Paul (cf. ROM7, 19-21) almost literally: «aliudque cupido, mens aliud suadet: video meliora proboque impairs sequor».

This brief review of Ovid's Metamorphoses has meant to be an example of the excesses and insufficiency of Eros. The potency of erotic love in the pre-Christian Greco-roman world was revealed contradictory: on one hand, it promised fullness, happiness and even communion with the divine and on the other, it always escaped and was never satiated, a clear thing in the case of mortals subjected to the whim of Gods. And yet this promise of happiness persisted in the heart. Has there been a solution to the lament of Medea, to the rupture that she experienced?

This is an ever-present yearning. Let's look at the response of Christian humanism. The first encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI offers us some clues: "The drunken and undisciplined Eros is not elevation," ecstasy "towards the divine, but fall, degradation of man. It is thus evident that Eros needs discipline and purification to give man, not the pleasure of an instant, but a way of making him be pretended in a certain way the highest of his existence, that happiness to which our whole being tends. "It follows later: "This is not to reject the eros or to" poison it ", but to heal it so that it reaches its true greatness». With these reflections, Benedict XVI pointed out how the Christian faith never condemned the eros but wanted to preserve it from all deviation and integrate it with another kind of love, selfless and donation, the agape. These loves have often been countered, but the real Christian proposal is an integration of both: "In reality, eros and agape — ascending love and falling love — never fully separate. The more they find both, though, in varying measure, the righteous unity in the one reality of love, the better the true essence of love, in general, is realized. "

Moreover, the first part of this encyclical for a speculative approach to the reality of love and a straight understanding of the Christian position is of great interest. The previous references serve as a nexus between Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the Bible: the erotic character of the first is evident; on the other hand, in the sacred pages, love is mainly described as agape, without it being dismissed from recognizing the beauty of love between a man and a woman.

As for the Holy Scripture, word of God, there is the question of whether you have something to tell us about human love, about your relationship of erotic nature. Love is a recurring theme in all Scripture, which is displayed as an alliance or fellowship between God and man, between God and his chosen people, or between Christ and his Church in the summit of revelation. This image of love is not alien to that privileged archetype of human love. It is not a spiritualized, uprooted love of the life experience of human beings. Pope Benedict XVI himself recalled that the love of God for his people is described with "daring erotic images" in the prophets Ezekiel and Hosea. Certainly the noun Eros appears twice in the Greek Bible and in a rather negative context (cf. Prov7, 18; 30, 16), which denotes the novelty of faith in the one true God; however, it can be said that God's love is also Eros: «These Biblical texts [OS3, 1-3; Ez16, 1-22] They indicate that Eros is part of the heart of God: the Almighty expects the "yes" of His creatures as a young husband of his wife. " The agapeno destroys the Eros, but assumes and purifies it: «One could even say that the revelation of God's Eros towards man is, in reality, the supreme expression of his agape. In truth, only the love in which the gift of one is united and the passionate desire for reciprocity instills such intense joy that it turns into mild even the hardest sacrifices».

In addition to such images of the love of God, let's meet to three passages where the love relationship between man and woman is recognized, elevated and sanctified. The first two chapters of the Genesisson the first step obligated. It should be pointed out that God created everything with wisdom and kindness,

especially in his favorite creature: «And God created man in his image, in the image of God created him, male and female created them» (GÉN1, 27). God himself wanted the woman for the male and the male for the woman: it is not good that man is alone; I'm going to make him someone like him to help him » (GÉN2, 18). Here you can see the existential loneliness of Adam even in the midst of all the animals. So God makes him sleep and steals a rib from him to form the woman. God makes Adam dream and after waking him he introduces the woman. These verses are of a special primer, for Adam responds stupefied to see Eve: "This is indeed bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh! Its name will be "woman" [in the original Hebrew, *isha*] because it has come out of the male [*ish*]" (GÉN2, 23). This first encounter of man and woman, characterized by astonishment and fascination, it is propitiated by God himself, who created them both for a deep communion: "That is why the male will leave his father and his mother, he will join his wife and they will be the two a single flesh" (GÉN2, 24).

Another singular passage of love is the case of Tobias and Sara. Tobias, animated and protected by the Archangel Raphael, does not hesitate to ask the hand of the beautiful Sara, although they have already been seven men that this young woman had married and who had died because of the demon as they tried to approach her. With the protection of the Archangel and God, marriage will be consummated. The description of the first night of delivery of these chaste husbands is beautiful:

Tobias got up from the bed and said to Sara, "Arise, woman, let us pray to our Lord that he may have mercy on us, and shall be protected." She got up and they began to supplicate for the Lord's protection. Tobias prayed like this: "Blessed be God, God of our fathers, and bless your name forever. May the heavens and all your creatures praise you forever. You created Adam and you gave Eve, his wife, as help and support. Of them was born the human race. You said, "It is not good that man is alone; let a similar aid to him." By marrying this woman now, I do not do it for impure desire, but with the best intention. Have mercy on us and make us come together to old age. "They both said: Amen, Amen. And they slept all night.

And the third passage is rather an entire book, the Song of Songs, whose central theme is bridal love. Its poetic expressions are very alive and intimate: «Kiss me with the kisses of your mouth! Your love is sweeter than wine! How exquisite the smell of your perfumes; odor that expands is your name; that's why the maidens love you! "(Cant1, 2-3)."In my bed, at night, I sought the love of my soul; I looked for it and did not find it [...]. I hugged him and did not let go, until I put him in my maternal house, in the bedroom of which he conceived me» (Cant3, 1-4). "My beloved calls:" Open me, my sister, my beloved, and my dove without blemish; that my head is covered with dew, my curls of the relenter night "[... My beloved introduced his hand through the wicket, and my bowels trembled for him "(CANT5, 2-4). But is it a mere allegory of God's love? Suffice it to note that the allegory can be applied, but without falling into a disembodied angelism. It is enlightening the thought of Pope Saint John Paul II:

However, at the same time, it has begun to read the book in its most obvious

meaning, as an exalting poem of the natural human love (cf. Rowley, Young, Laurin). [...] D. Lys notes that the content of the Song of Songs is, at the same time, sexual and sacral. When it is dispensed with the second characteristic, one arrives to treat when singing like a purely secular erotic composition, and when one ignores the first one, it falls in the alegorism. Just by putting these two things together, you can fairly read the book.

With these allusions of the Old Testament emerges with clarity the sacredness of the human love that belongs to the genuine Christian humanism. The exclusionary ends of Erosy the agapeno satisfy and would not be humanizing. This is how the eros is not relegated as something harmful or unfit of man and is ennobled with the transcendent sense of life. Far are the sadness and some despair that was glimpsed in some Ovidian characters, as is the case of the young myrrh after a love incestuous: «O siqua patetis numina confessis, merui nec sad resource supplicium. Sed ne violem vivosque subperses mortuaque extinctos, ambobus pellite regnis, mutataeque mihi vitamque necemque negate! ». Beyond the prodigal joy, the Virgilian sigh is also noticeable in the pagan sensual loves: "Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt".

The key to understanding and full experience of human love will be found in the heart of Christianity: "Dear brothers and sisters, let us look at Christ pierced on the cross. He is the most impressive revelation of the love of God, a love in which eros and agape, far from being counterposed, illuminate each other. On the cross God himself begs the love of his creature: he thirsts for the love of each one of us."