

V A R I A

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On Chastity and Acces to Truth – Two Models –

Abstract: The cult of love is not in marriage, it is outside and in chastity. Faithfulness of this kind is unjustified; when one justifies it, one masks it. Love – passion is asceticism, pedagogy, spiritual exercise and in this exercise one can find what is called *fine amor*. This is an erotic of the possession of the desire that makes the difference between “close love” and “love from afar”, both being based on self-control and mastery of desire. Socrates, in the *Symposium*, is wise also in the fact that it is in his power not to respond to the provocative beauty of Alcibiades. Chastity is not foreign to access to truth and it is more than a model of abstinence. In the same way, the cult of truth is not outside it, but in itself. And, despite all appearances, although they seem to constrain definitively, and truth and love end up making us free, whether we want it or not. A Socratic model and a medieval one speak in this text precisely about these things to which we remain true, even if we do not always realize this fact.

Keywords: truth, love, chastity, faithfulness, eroticism

I begin in this text from the premise that, in the Platonic erotic experience, love and sexuality are not compatible, the same way as in courtly love it comes to the situation to claim that love and marriage are not compatible. If courtly love (or of chivalry against marriage), the central term is that of “faithfulness” and this one is against for both marriage and “fulfillment of love” (not “fulfilled love”, which is valid also in the Platonic erotica and in the chivalry one). Faithfulness is identical with the passion that the disciple shows the master unconditionally. Passion defeats lust, philosophy defeats rhetoric and the Platonic homoerotic is exactly like a perfect “marriage” but not consumed, for precisely here lies the perfection of such marriage. But not consuming marriage is an affront for the citadel and an obstacle to the

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couple! But for love, obstacles are its way of being, for the Greeks did not love in desert. They loved with passion and, deeper than that, they loved ascetically.

The Platonic erotica (and I am not referring here to the Plato character!) is an ascetic erotic, a chaste one. The same way the chivalry and romantic one. Maybe its hidden mechanism sees the elementary appetite increasing if pleasure is delayed. In Sparta, for example, Lycurgus recommends to young people the prolonged abstinence, hence the following fact: chastity becomes the natural obstacle against instinct. Except that, in this case, the purpose was a vital one: love to always remain new, the children to be vigorous. The erotica of Platonic type suspends the relation instinct – purpose (passing lust in the act); lust is transferred towards an aspiration that is no longer defined, it has no vital purpose, it even is the opposite of such a purpose. The Eros is unextinguished longing, divine delirium, enthusiasm (“fools for Christ”, in another register). Eros, if it is lust, it is so only in the form of absolute lust, form in which one cannot wish for the one or the other because thus you would obey the relative, the accident. However, in absolute, one is under the influence of fatality, so that the supreme lust is the negation of lust, not its privation. Negation is absence; privation is an incomplete form of presence. In the report that establishes between absence and presence it is reached to the fact that the absence of lust is not also absent. Denis De Rougemont says that this dialectics of Eros is “*the endless overcoming*, the raising of human to his God. And this path has *no return!*” (de Rougemont 1987, 56; Evola, 1994, 294-309; Marías, 2000, 74-84). Absolute lust feeds relative lusts in order to sacrifice them. And the erotic lust is lust only in and under the condition of the fellow, the neighbor, so that no one can love in absolute and remain at the same time as it was. Eros, as indefinite desire, cannot be fulfilled in this world and it even rejects the temptation to be performed here.

Later, troubadours and Cathars will glorify the virtues of chastity (for example, when the Cathars were receiving the baptism specific for their sect – the baptism of the spirit, for they reject the water baptism (Barthélemy, 2002, 649-652 – the paragraph entitled “The cold water test”) – promised, among many others, to refrain from any contact with their woman *if they were married*; if not, not!. Cathars even called marriage as “the lawful depravity” (*jurata fornicatio* – de Rougemont 1987, 80, 87-88). Five kinds of debauchery are distinguished by the Christian tradition: simple fornication, adultery, incest, dishonoring and rape. Saint Thomas will add, to these five which he also takes over, a sixth sin: *vitium contra naturam*. In *De Malo*, q. 15, art. 3 Thomas speaks of *tertio quaeritur luxuria, quae sunt fornicatio, adulterium, incestus, stuprum, raptus et vitium contra naturam* (where *stuprum* means “defilement”, “dishonoring” and *raptus* means “to take by force”, “to drag”. The sense

here is of “kidnapping of the virgin / virginity”, rape / defloration – *raptus virginis; illicita defloratio virginum* says Thomas).

The simple fornication is unlawful depravity and it ceases when the woman becomes a *good* (i.e. she is married), it ceases as a fornication but can continue as adultery. The simple fornication implies that the two persons are not connected either between them or with / by someone else. The sexuality of the bachelor is always depravity and Thomas, still in *De malo* (the same place – q. 15, art. 3) even makes the etymology of the term: “fornication” comes from *fornix* that can mean “vault”, “arch”, “covered passage”, “arch of triumph” (*arcu triumphali*), in the end “brothel”, the place where women gathered (or men, if applicable) to indulge in prostitution.

In the twelfth century, chastity was imposed by the laws of courtship; in the nineteenth century, it is imposed by the bourgeois tradition. It is a degradation, in fact, concretized in the shift from fatal Eros to vital Eros. On the other hand, poets of the twelfth century “adopt as theme pederasty, (and) it is often difficult to determine if we are dealing with imitating some literary models (*imitatio*), or with personal feelings” (Curtius, 1970, 138). Middle Ages appear to reclaim a place in Ovid. This place is retrievable in *Amores*, a paper of year 1 or 2 our era. The poet says somewhere: *Aut puer aut longas compta puella comas* (“Whether a boy or a girl with long hair”). Curtius comments: “this «either ... or» of Ovid meant in the Middle Ages often «both ... and»” (Curtius, 1970, 139). And an abbot (Baudri) explains why both virgins and boys sang: “my songs love a sex and also the other one”. A bishop of Rennes (Marbod) pities in senescence the errors of young age: “My mind was wandering, mad with the fire of desire [...] / I were not that [girlfriend] or that [boyfriend] dearer than light of eyes? [...] / And an embrace of the one sex and of the other make me sick now”. A certain Hilarius (itinerant school boy that heard Abelard, the archetype of the philosopher in love from the Middle Ages – de Libera, 2000, 152) epistles nuns and young boys. He writes to one: “yellow hair, proud face and white and clearly neck, / soft and delicate word – why do I enumerate them in vain? / for you are entirely beautiful, without shadow in your being, / and to bow chastity such face one could not”.

Curtius’ conclusion agrees terribly to the point of view that I have supported throughout this text. By Curtius I reiterate, in fact, what I meant to say, which applies also to the Socratic era and to that of the centuries, at least, XI-XII. “Here, says Curtius, also places the poem of an anonymous depicting the debate between Ganymede and Helen if it is preferable the love girls or of epebes” (Curtius, 1970, note 1, 140). I am interested in the argument in favor of the love of epebes. Here it is: “This game we play has been invented by the gods / And kept until today by the most important among men”. Then it is said: *Rustici, qui pecudes possunt appellari, / Hii cum mulieribus debent inquinari* (“Peasants, who can be counted as animals / Must

sleep with women”). It is clear, according to Curtius, that such a polemic of erotic type corresponds to the distinction of social status. The poem continues and says in strophe 40: “We know that this is permitted by the important ones, / For those who hold power and primacy in the world / And who call themselves judges of morals and crimes / Do not despise the tender leg of a child”. And Curtius quotes, for reinforcement, Henri-Irénée Marrou with a text from 1947 (*evue de Moyen Âge Latin*, p. 88 and the following): “The study of ancient pederasty has exposed to us such remarkable findings regarding the Greek soul, that we must admit as a certain thing that a similar survey, covering the medieval era, would not be less useful” (Curtius, 1970, 139-141; 685-686). As a “symmetry” of Sapphic type we have a Latin poem entitled “The Council of love in Remiremont” (80 strophes) and “which is a cynical description of the erotic orgies from a monastery of nuns from Lotharingia: it is the libertinism of passion”. Against this excessive “emancipation of the body” rise the “three Bernards”: Bernard Silvestris, Bernard of Clairvaux and Bernard of Morlas – (Curtius, 1970, paragraph “Eros and Morals”, 146-149). Later, in the thirteenth century, in “diametric contrast with the chivalrous love [...] it is given the alarm against love. Eros gave away the spot to sex” and the literature of genre of the period is profoundly and perfectly misogynistic. In the *Novel of the Rose*, an old procuress proclaims: “all women for all men and all men for all women” (Curtius, 1970, 146-150). The idea is related to “the proverbial ecclesiastical suspicion against love: being in love is a dangerous thing” (Delumeau 1998, vol. II, 141). That means that many of the clergymen “have included excessive love for the other one by means of blamable behaviors” (Delumeau, 1998, vol. II, 144, 127-145; vol. I, 252-260).

But in the end, the cult of love is not in marriage, it is outside it and in chastity. Faithfulness of this kind is unjustified; when one justifies it, one masks it, kills it. Marie de Champagne, daughter of the erudite Alienor of Aquitaine (together were a sort of Sappho for men in the twelfth century and among the first ones who felt that they could train men), “has stated unequivocally the difference between the conjugal union and the union of the lovers: «lovers understand each other perfectly and without the thought of reward. Spouses should, *out of duty*, to obey one another and do not refuse anything to one another» (Eliade 1991, 102). Love-passion is asceticism, pedagogy, spiritual exercise (with mentioning that in courtly love the terms of the relation are opposites, not similar, are male and female), and in this exercise one can find what Gaston Paris called in 1883 *fine amor*. This is an “erotic of the dominion of desire”, “even when the lover is lying naked next to his lady”, which differentiates between “close love” and “love from afar”, both are based on “self-control and mastery of desire” (Régnier-Bohler, 2002, 28, 29, 30).

Socrates, in the *Symposium* (217a-219e), is wise even by that it is in his power not to respond to the provocative beauty of Alcibiades. Chastity is not foreign to access to truth and it is more than a model of abstinence. Maybe that is why “Platonic love is claimed falsely from this philosopher” (Weischedel, 2012, 45), from Plato. And Andreas Capellanus concludes on how love is an innate passion (*amor est passio quaedam innata procedens*) and if nature refuses something, love is ashamed to embrace what nature refused (*nam quidquid natura negat, amor erubescit amplecti* – Capellanus, 2012, 10-11; 14-15).

In *Poetics*, 1454 a 20, Aristotle says that even a woman can be good, a slave can also be good. However, the woman is rather an inferior being, the slave is a being completely worthless. Aristotle’s expression is not contradictory for a Greek. A relatively late myth, that’s true, tells us what and how about the origin of masculine democracy and the origin of Athenian marriage: “at the time of the conflict between Athena and Poseidon for the protection over the stronghold of Kekrops, the king would have received, says Varro, an oracle that demanded him to ask, regarding the choice of the polyadic divinity, all Athenians, including women; since women were more with one than men, Athena was chosen. Men took revenge, deciding that «from now on, the Athenian women will no longer vote, the children will not be known anymore after the mother’s name and no one will call Athenian the women»” (Vidal-Naquet, 1985, 328). And things happened exactly like that: in Athens we no longer speak of Athenian women, but of wives and daughters of Athenians, and this is valid even in comedy (Aristophanes himself does not speak of “the gathering of Athenian women”, but of “the gathering of women”!).

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