

Orpheus' Hymn to Love



From women's eyes this doctrine I derive:
They sparkle still the right Promethean fire;
They are the books, the arts, the academes,
That show, contain, and nourish all the world.
— WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE¹

If eyes were made for seeing,
Then Beauty is its own excuse for being.
— RALPH WALDO EMERSON²

To Love

The Fumigation from Aromatics

I call, great Love, the source of sweet delight,
Holy and pure, and charming to the sight;
Darting, and wing'd, impetuous fierce desire,
With Gods and mortals playing, wand'ring fire:
Agile and twofold, keeper of the keys
Of heav'n and earth, the air, and spreading seas;
Of all that Ceres' fertile realms contains,
By which th'all parent Goddess life sustains,
Or dismal Tartarus is doom'd to keep,
Widely extended, or the sounding deep;
For thee all Nature's various realms obey,
Who rul'st alone, with universal sway.
Come, blessed pow'r, *regard these mystic fires*,
And far avert unlawful mad desires.



¹ Shakespeare: *Love's Labour's Lost*, act IV, scene 3

² Emerson: *The Rhodora*

Orpheus' Hymn LVIII "To Love." There now follows Thomas Taylor's note and excerpt from his translation of the Commentary of Proclus on Plato's First Alcibiades.¹

THE FOLLOWING DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATURE of the Divinity [of] Love is extracted from the admirable Commentary of Proclus on the *First Alcibiades* of Plato, as illustrative of the Orphic dogmas respecting this God.

Love is neither to be placed in the first nor among the last of beings. Not in the first, because the object of Love is superior to Love; nor yet among the last, because the lover participates of Love. It is requisite, therefore, that Love should be established between the object of love and the lover, and that it should be posterior to the beautiful, but prior to every nature endued with love. Where then does it first subsist? How does it extend itself through the universe, and with what monads does it leap forth?

There are three hypostases among the intelligible and occult Gods; and the first, indeed, is characterized by *The Good*, understanding *The Good Itself*, and residing in that place where, according to the [Chaldean] Oracle, the paternal monad abides; but the second is characterized by *wisdom*, where the first intelligence flourishes; and the third by *the beautiful*, where, as Timæus says, the most beautiful of intelligibles abides. But there are three monads according to these intelligible causes, subsisting uniformly according to cause in intelligibles, but first unfolding themselves into light in the ineffable order of the Gods, [*i.e.*, in the summit of that order which is called intelligible, and at the same time intellectual,] I mean *faith, truth, and love*. And *faith*, indeed, establishes all things in good; but *truth* unfolds all the knowledge in beings; and lastly, *love* converts all things, and congregates them into the nature of the beautiful. This triad thence proceeds through all the orders of the Gods, and imparts to all things by its light a union with the intelligible itself. It also unfolds itself differently in different orders, everywhere combining its powers with the peculiarities of the Gods. And among some it subsists ineffably, incomprehensibly, and with transcendent union; but among others, as the cause of connecting and binding; and among others, as endued with a perfective and forming power. Here again, it subsists intellectually and paternally; there, in a manner entirely motive, vivific, and effective: here, as governing and assimilating; there, in a liberated and undefiled manner; and elsewhere, according to a multiplied and divided mode. Love, therefore, supernally descends from intelligibles to mundane concerns, calling all things upwards to divine beauty. Truth, also, proceeds through all things, illuminating all things with knowledge. And lastly, faith proceeds through the universe, establishing all things with transcendent union in good. Hence the [Chaldean] Oracles assert, "that all things are governed by and abide in these." And, on this account, they order Theurgists to conjoin themselves to divinity through this triad. Intelligibles themselves, indeed, do not require the amatory medium, on account of their ineffable union. But where there is a union and separation of beings, there also Love abides. For it is the binder and

¹ Frontispiece by MaDonna

conciliator of natures posterior and prior to itself; but the converter of subsequent to prior, and the elevating and perfecting cause of imperfect natures.

The [Chaldean] Oracles, therefore, speak of Love as binding, and residing in all things; and hence, if it connects all things, it also copulates us with the governments of daemons. But Diotima calls Love *a great dæmon*, because it everywhere fills up the medium between desiring and desirable natures. And, indeed, that which is the object of Love vindicates to itself the first order; but that which loves is in the third order from the beloved object. Lastly, Love usurps a middle situation between each, congregating and collecting together that which desires and that which is desired, and filling subordinate from superior natures. But among the intelligible and occult Gods, it unites intelligible intellect to the first and secret beauty, by a certain life better than intelligence. Hence [Orpheus] the theologist of the Greeks calls this Love *blind*; for he says of intelligible intellect,

Πομαινων πραπεδεσσω ανομματου ωκυν ερωτα.

i.e., In his breast feeding *eyeless* rapid Love.

But in natures posterior to intelligibles, it imparts by illumination an indissoluble bond to all things perfected by itself: for a bond is a certain union, but accompanied by much separation. On this account the [Chaldean] Oracles are accustomed to call the fire of this Love *a copulator*: for proceeding from intelligible intellect, it binds all following natures with each other, and with itself. Hence it conjoins all the Gods with intelligible beauty, and daemons with Gods; but it conjoins us with both Gods and daemons. In the Gods, indeed, it has a primary subsistence; in daemons a secondary one; and in partial souls a subsistence through a certain third procession from principles. Again, in the Gods it subsists above essence: for every genus of Gods is superessential. But in daemons it subsists according to essence: and in souls according to illumination. And this triple order appears similar to the triple power of intellect. For one intellect subsists as imparticipable, being exempt from all partial genera; but another as participated, of which also the souls of the Gods participate as of a better nature; and another is from this ingenerated in souls, and which is, indeed, their perfection.”

See more concerning this Divinity in the notes on the speech of Diotima in the *Banquet* of Plato.^{1, 2}

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¹ [The Works of Plato IV, TTS vol. XII]

² Taylor T. (tr. & Annot.). *Hymns and Initiations*. (Vol. V of “The Thomas Taylor Series”) Frome: The Prometheus Trust, 2003 (2nd ed.). “The Mystical Hymns of Orpheus or Initiations,” LVIII, *To Love*, with Taylor’s note and excerpt from his translation of the Commentary of Proclus on Plato’s *First Alcibiades*, pp. 120-22