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Minerva, Venus, and Fortune Between Paganism and Christianity in Two Medieval Texts: The Temple of Glas and The Kingis Quair.

Relatore
Prof. Alessandra Petrina

Laureando
Lisa Ceccarelli
n° matr.1125789 / LMLLA

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Foreword

I have always found the world of pagan deities particularly interesting and rich, and maybe that is also due to my classical background. Studying more in depth the Middle Ages, I have come to understand more than ever that classical antiquity never died, but that it merely transformed into something new, absorbing new aspects while leaving others behind. I find this extremely fascinating and so I decided to study the evolution of three pagan deities (Venus, Minerva, and Fortuna) from Paganism to Christianity, by focusing on two medieval English texts: Lydgate's *Temple of Glas* and *The Kingis Quair* of James I.

I began by studying the background, the common sources, and the themes that link the two poems and, generally, their similarities and differences. This helped me build the foundations for my research. Then, in the following chapters I studied more in depth the three goddesses and the changes they underwent in the passage between Paganism and Christianity making reference to classical works, and to the medieval perception of ancient deities and classical culture. I traced each goddess's changes through literature and art, and then used all the knowledge accumulated to describe their roles in *The Temple of Glas* and *The Kingis Quair*.

Roman deities had not been forgotten after the fall of Rome, that is a fact. Works written by Roman authors may have been misinterpreted in the frenzy to read them in a Christian key and part of them may have been lost, but they never stopped circulating. Still in the Fifteenth century, Latin was the language of the learned, the language used to communicate throughout Europe and all writers could at the very least understand it. However, Latin was also the language of the pagan gods and the Church was trying to make it into its own language, but it was not an easy task; Latin words and texts bore the

heavy burden of the memory of glorious past times and no effort seemed to be enough to overwrite it. We must keep in mind that it is rare, if not impossible, to completely erase a religion; some vestiges tend to remain either in written works or in folklore. In the case of Roman deities that probably also has to do with that fact that Rome and its glory were still very much present in everyone's mind as a model to imitate. During the Middle Ages, pagan texts were considered to contain universal truths; classical authors represented the *auctoritates* and were recognized by everyone (Dante, for example, will have Virgil guiding him).

Things became easier when a new notion began to circulate: it was to be believed that no one could ever have written any truth outside God's permission and so these pagans were to be seen as blessed people who had a glimpse of God's words before His time. They were not proper Christians, but Christian-like figures that had a prefiguration of the times to come. This vision of things made it easier to reconcile the pagan and the Christian visions so that, with due caution, even priests could approach pagan works without fear of blame or sin. This process of Christianization completely invested the pagan gods; with great care, a Christian meaning was imposed on each goddess, putting them under God's influence.

Another thing to take into consideration is art. Until the Christian art of the Middle Ages, all of it was pagan. All the beautiful temples of the past, the very same temples that everyone still loved and visited, were dedicated to those pagan gods that the Church wanted to erase. The Roman and Greek cultures were everywhere in sight, and no matter how many things were destroyed or declared sinful, they still were to be found in the various cities, houses, and in the memories of the people. They were buried just beneath the surface ready to come out at any time. Christianity could do nothing against them; the

only tool to fight such a strong presence was trying to overwrite every single tradition and story. Festivities were replaced, and all that could be useful for the new religion (like the polished Latin prose and poetry of ancient poets) was declared to be nothing more than a preparation for Christianity, and thus rightfully Christian in itself too.

We were taught that the gods of Olympus died, but in the medieval struggle between the love for classical antiquity and the Christian faith, the pagan gods survived and, with them, their mythological heritage.

I have dedicated one chapter to each goddess, always following the same scheme. The first part of each chapter is dedicated to literature, following the goddesses' literary evolution from Greece, to Rome, to the medieval times. The second part is dedicated to art, and I used numerous images to show how their representation developed, responding to the cultural changes and creating the iconography that we know today. In the last part of each chapter, finally, I described how each goddess is represented in *The Temple of Glas* and *The Kingis Quair* to show how Lydgate and James I made use of the classical heritage and how they interpreted Minerva, Venus, and Fortune.

Chapter One

The *Temple of Glas* and *The Kingis Quair*

1.1 About the Two Texts

For my thesis, I have decided to concentrate in particular on two texts that will give me the possibility to further develop the main focus of my work: the evolution of pagan gods in the Middle Ages. The texts I have chosen are *The Kingis Quair*, attributed to James I of Scotland, and John Lydgate's *The Temple of Glas*. Even though they are not found in the same manuscript, they have a lot in common, including the fact that the three main divinities to appear in them are the same: Minerva, Venus, and Fortuna. I will, in later chapters, concentrate on these three goddesses.

As I have already mentioned, these two works are not in the same manuscript, but some of Lydgate's works can be found in the manuscript containing the only copy we have left of *The Kingis Quair*:

> MS. Seld. Arch. B. 24 in the Bodleian Library is a collection of poems that contains Chaucer's *Troilus*, *The Parliament of Fowls* (from a defective copy so that ll. 607-79 have been supplied), *The Legend of Good Women*, which is followed immediately by the *Quair*, also a number of minor English and Scots poems by writers such as John Walton (an excerpt from his "Boethius"), Lydgate, Hoccleve, probably Dunbar, the unknown author of the *Quare of Jelusy*.[1]

Reference to James's poetic activity in contemporary or later chronicles are extremely scanty, and specific reference to *The Kingis Quair* in the centuries following James's death are practically non-existent.[2] There is almost total obscurity until the late eighteenth century, when the manuscript, at that point in the Bodleian Library, was rediscovered by William Tytler, who had a young Oxford student read and transcribe *The Kingis Quair* for him.[3]

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[1] McDiarmid, Matthew, ed., *The Kingis Quair of James Steward*, London: Heinemann, 1973, p. 3.
[2] Petrina, Alessandra, *The Kingis Quair of James I of Scotland*, Padova: Unipress, 1997, p. 26.
[3] Petrina, p. 26.

On the contrary, the popularity of *The Temple of Glas* is attested by the fact that the poem survives complete in seven manuscripts (among which are Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Fairfax 16 and SL: London, British Library, MS Sloane 1212) and several early printed versions.[4] One copy of *The Temple of Glas* is preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Tanner 346; this anthology of love poetry, containing *The Legend of Good Women* among other Chaucerian pieces, is datable to the second quarter of the fifteenth century.[5] Lydgate's poetic reputation was at its height in the fifteenth century: he is praised again and again, and his name (unlike that of Hoccleve) is regularly linked with those of Chaucer and Gower as one of the 'masters' of English poetry.[6]

It is difficult to date with certainty these two poems but it is believed that *The Temple of Glas* may be one of Lydgate's earlier poems, thus belonging to the first quarter of the fifteenth century, and *The Kingis Quair* is datable between James's marriage of February 1424, or more probably the return to Scotland in April of the same year, and his death at Perth in February 1437.[7] *The Kingis Quair* can be considered an autobiographical poem, maybe even written as a valentine for James's wife. It is known that the king's marriage to Joan Beaufort was a happy one and thus it is possible that he may have written his poem in her honour. James and Joan Beaufort probably met in May 1423, in Windsor castle – a date that, incidentally, would prove the reference to May in *The Kingis Quair* (stanzas 34 and 49) substantially correct.[8]

There are not many studies about the language of the poem and the reason is pretty simple but also extremely evident: as there is only one manuscript in which we can find

[4] Mitchell, J. Allan, ed., "The Temple of Glas", http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/mitchell-lydgate-the-temple-of-glas, *Robbins Library Digital Projects,* last accessed September 2017.
[5] Mitchell, last accessed September 2017.
[6] Gray, Douglas, *Later Medieval English Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 316.
[7] McDiarmid, p. 28.
[8] Petrina, p. 11.

the poem, it is not possible to know how much of its language has been changed by the scribe who has copied it down, especially when it has been noticed that the Chaucerian poems of the manuscript have been heavily Scotticized.[9] Also, we cannot forget the matter of James's own language because while it is true that he was born and raised in Scotland, he spent a long part of his life imprisoned in England, and it is there that he received most of his education.

What we do know for certain is that it is written in rhyme royal (iambic pentameters rhyming *ababcc*) as the author himself states by saying, towards the end of the poem, "I recommend my buk in lynis seven".[10] This type of stanza is derived from the French *chant royal* and used, among others, by Froissart and Charles d'Orléans in its original form, while in the English version it was used by Geoffrey Chaucer in *Troilus and Criseyde.*[11] On the contrary in *The Temple of Glas* we are presented with a great amount of variation for what concerns the metre: it is designed on the pattern of iambic pentameter, but in practice there is considerable variation in stress and syllable count.[12]

> The poem alternates between two styles of verse: rhyming couplets that are reserved for narrative description and are also used in the male lover's soliloquy and seven-line stanzas called rhyme royal (or Chaucerian stanzas) that are used for speeches and lyric set pieces. Near the end of the poem is a ballade consisting of rhyme royal stanzas with a refrain. The combination of verse forms owes perhaps more to French than to English, Chaucerian influence.[13]

But to fully appreciate these poems we also have to look at their theme and at the way it is treated. This will help us see how similar they are and in what they differ, justifying also my decision to concentrate on them.

[9] Petrina, p. 54.
[10] McDiarmid, p. 117.
[11] Petrina, p. 54.
[12] Mitchell, last accessed September 2017.
[13] Mitchell, last accessed September 2017.

1.2 A Brief Overview

Both *The Kingis Quair* and *The Temple of Glas* are courtly poems that rely heavily on allegory and on dream-vision, devices widely used in the Middle Ages. However, contrary to many other poems of the time, in James's case we are not faced with a completely allegorical and simply conventional story: we can consider *The Kingis Quair* a poem, at least partly, autobiographical. In the poem key events of James's own life are described, like his capture by the English while he was travelling to France, his captivity and his marriage. It still contains an allegorical dream but, for example, it is not in the dream that the narrator falls in love (as is the case in *The Temple of Glas*); love blooms in his chest by looking upon the lady in the garden from his high tower before sleep may claim him.[14] The dream is an addition in which the narrator learns how to approach love thanks to a divine intervention.

In *The Kingis Quair* we can see a complete identification of author and narrator, it is as if James were trying to show us the exact moment when he fell in love. We are like voyeurs, looking at James as he falls in love and journeying with him through his dream in hope that his experience may teach us something too. In many poems of the same kind, like Lydgate's *Temple of Glas*, the role of voyeur is that of the author that finds himself witness of love (maybe desiring to have a part in it, but not ever the active lover) and so we are less personally involved[15].

Lydgate works more heavily than James on literary tradition; like many medieval poets, he does not feel the need to add anything new because everything has already been said before him. He was an ordained priest and during his career as a writer he tried many

[14] Petrina, p. 31.
[15] Marshall, Celine Simone, *The Female Voice in The Assembly of Ladies: Text and Context in Fifteenth-Century England*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008, p. 65.

different genres, but still one would probably not expect to read a secular court verse which has so little to do with religion and which relies so heavily on pagan and classical themes. This probably has also to do with the fact that monasteries were centres of culture: when the Roman empire collapsed, the task of collecting and preserving the existing literary tradition fell to the only institution that could withstand the barbaric invasion, the Church. However, in this way, the pagan and Christian cultures collapsed and blended to the point that sometimes it is impossible to distinguish them; they are but a continuum that cannot be broken, only bent and looked upon from different angles. Classical antiquity is part of the Middle Ages and that is clearly reflected in Lydgate's work. For example, in *The Temple of Glas*, the Christian notion of marriage is only hinted at and not in a positive way.

The direction taken by C. S. Lewis in commenting the relevance of marriage in *The Temple of Glas* is surely interesting. Marriage is, according to the established courtly love tradition, the negation of love but, at the same time, it has to be preserved and respected, as the Christian religion commands.

> The heroine of the poem is certainly married, and not married to her lover; and so far the tradition is preserved. But then her marriage is the heroine's chief grievance (it had not troubled Guinevere) and seems to be regarded as an insurmountable obstacle to her desires.[16]

Unexpectedly (or maybe not, given his position as the future King of Scotland), *The Kingis Quair* seems to be more christianized that *The Temple of Glas*: marriage is celebrated as the perfect completion of love and, in loving the lady, the lover seems to get closer to God. James also had to be more cautions than Lydgate because, while in *The Temple of Glas* the narrator claims to have no experience in love and to be merely an onlooker (much like Chaucer in *The House of Fame*), James adds an autobiographical

[16] Lewis, C. S., *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, p.241.

touch to his work: he is both the narrator and the real protagonist of the events, events that really took place outside the poem.

This is also reflected in the fact that, as already mentioned, the experience of falling in love in *The Kingis Quair* happens before the narrator starts dreaming. The dream is a device used by the author in order to show that he is leaving behind all foolish behaviour and, with the help of heavenly emissaries, he is learning how to be more responsible and how to love according to the law of God and not be pushed merely by lust and bodily desire. We are not seeing lovers set in a distant past or suspended in time, everything that is placed before our eyes has to be seen as real. The lady James falls in love with, while locked in his tower, is none other than his future wife, Joan, that will really be, in a not so distant future, his "sovirane". And that too is not to be read simply as an allegorical expression of the power the lady has on his lover, she will really be the Queen to his King.[17] By loving her, he will become the wise sovereign that Scotland needs and, at the same time, he is showing his audience (probably the court) that he has matured and is fit to guide them. Foolish kings are bound to mark the fall of kingdoms[18] (like the legendary Arthur and Shakespeare's King Lear) and James is taking pains to demonstrate his valour.

On the contrary, Lydgate is not the one experiencing love but he takes up the role of the voyeur. Much like Chaucer, he claims to have no experience in love affairs as a device to talk about love without fear of being blamed or judged: he will not take part in the rituals of love, he is a mere witness. However, at the end of the poem, he will express the desire to obtain the Lady he has seen in the Temple. For her part, Lydgate's lady does

[17] Mapstone, Sally, "Kingship and the Kingis Quair", in Sally Mapstone and Helen Cooper, eds, *The Long Fifteenth Century: essays for Douglas Grey*, Oxford, Clarendon press,1997, p. 56 (pp. 51-69).
[18] Mapstone, p. 57.

not seem to be the "donna angelicata" that will help the lover discover God's true love. Even if she does not exist outside the narrator's dream she seems more real than James's beloved. That is also due to the fact that the lady in *The Kingis Quair* is not described using bodily adjectives because what interests the poet more is the effect her vision has on him and her role in his path towards wisdom.

Lydgate is bolder in his description and his lady actually takes action. She speaks, showing up in Venus' temple as a supplicant (much as James does) nearly taking over what could be considered a man's role in the ritual of wooing. She reminds us more of the Greek and Roman heroines, like Medea, Circe, and Dido, who act in spite of men's desires and even manage to be the characters that make the plot move. She is not simply an icon, a beautiful and angelical Lady that serves no other purpose but that of trying to guide the man who loves her towards the one true fountain of love (God), but a real woman with a voice, however limited by the reality that is marriage and literary tradition.

1.3 Literary Sources

In the Middle Ages, the notion of "poet" and "author" was not the one we are used to today. Poets were bound to canons and conventions and could not stray too much from them otherwise they risked not being recognized for their work. So, a good part of a writer's work was that of reading the classics and reworking them, taking what he needed to create a new literary piece that could give something new to the reader but that, at the same time, could be recognizable enough to be reconnected to the canon.

This obviously goes also for James and Lydgate. Theirs are not completely original works, Lydgate's even less so than James's. *The Kingis Quair* and *The Temple of Glass*, two works written in the same period and concerning the same love theme, have

many sources in common, even if they take after them in different measure. For example, we can say that James is torn between two desires; that of showing his knowledge, making use of the traditional conventions and following the example of the great authors who came before him, and that of showing his innovative autobiographical side.[19]

One of the works that has influenced all writers during the Middle Ages is surely Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, and, incidentally, that is also the first book we stumble upon while reading *The Kingis Quair*. It is winter and the narrator, unable to sleep, picks up this book in the hope that it will help him. Reading it, however, he does not find rest but, on the contrary, he starts to wonder about his own life and the mutability of Fortune and spends the night awake, thinking and interrogating himself. He stays in bed until the matin bell rings and he takes that as a sign and an encouragement to start narrating his own story. Boethius's work is perfect for James: not only do the two writers share similar experiences (they are both prisoners), they are also interested in the same theme, that is the mutability of Fortune[20].

Boethius offers a pattern that goes from the recognition of one's situation, through denial, to the acceptance of Fortune's whims[21]. Obviously, James's inspection is not as deep and philosophical as Boethius's[22] but neither does it try to be.

> Consolatio then becomes a philosophical tool by which the older James is able to fit the miseries and misfortunes of his youth into a pattern, and to give them an explanation. Above all, it constitutes for him an invitation to consider the capricious working of Fortune, and the ways in which she might have affected his life.[23]

[19] Petrina, p. 117.
[20] Fuog, Karin E. C., "Placing Earth at the Centre of the Cosmos: The Kingis Quair as Boethian Revision", *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 32, (2001), p. 142, (pp. 140-149).
[21] Preston, John. "Fortunys Exiltree: A Study of *The Kingis Quair*", *The Review of English Studies*, 7, (1956), p. 341, (pp. 339–347).
[22] Carretta, Vincent, "*The Kingis Quair* and The Consolation of Philosophy", *Studies in Scottish Literature,* 6, (1981), p. 16, (pp. 14-28).
[23] Petrina, p. 91.

Lydgate perhaps takes less after Boethius but even he is not immune to his influence as is to be expected seeing that his major influence is Chaucer, one of the English translators of *De Consolatione Philosophiae*. It is only natural that Lydgate would pick up some of it. Also, we cannot forget that also *The Temple of Glas* starts in December, much like Chaucer's *The House of Fame* and Lydgate owes much to this work.

We can say that the greatest part of the material used in *The Kingis Quair* comes from Chaucer, Gower, and their disciple, Lydgate. It is to be believed that James knew of Lydgate and had probably read some of his works. It is almost certain that James may have read the translation of *The Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine* (the allegorical story of a man's progression from sin to salvation) undertaken by Lydgate in the late 1420s.[24] This means that there is a chance that James may have read *The Temple of Gals* itself, given that the theme of the narration is the same.

Another, already cited, important source for both Lydgate and James, is Chaucer. All the English writers that came after Chaucer could not help but confront themselves with him and his legacy. He was either a model to imitate or someone to surpass, but there was no way that new writers could create their work without having to come face to face with Chaucer's production. For James, it is obvious that the main source of his story is *The Knight's Tale*[25] with the imprisoned lover who falls in love with the lady in the garden and the help of the Gods to reach and obtain her. On the other side, Lydgate's main source seems to be *The House of Fame*[26], with the description of the lovers in Venus's temple

[24] Petrina, p. 99.
[25] Scheps, Walter, "Chaucerian Synthesis: The Art of *The Kingis Quair*", *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 8, (1971), p. 161, (pp. 143-65)
[26] Scanlon, Larry, "Lydgate's Poetics: Laureation and Domesticity in the Temple of Glass", in Larry Scanlon and James Simpson, eds., *John Lydgate: Poetry, Culture, and Lancastrian England*, Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2006, p. 71, (pp. 61-97).

and the description of the temple itself (after all, Fame's temple is "ymad of glas"[27]). The second part of *The Temple of Glass,* however, opens with the dreamer leaving the commotion of the temple to be alone, whereupon he sees a solitary man complaining (lines 567–693), thus recalling Chaucer's encounter with the grief-stricken knight in the *Book of the Duchess*.[28]

Obviously, we cannot forget that courtly love tradition was extremely important for writers in the Middle Ages. Love usually is born outside marriage, and it is normal if we think that in the Middle Ages most marriages were combined ones and it was not unusual for the husband to be older than the wife. This, of course, only holds true if we are talking about the upper classes, the minority of the population that is the object of the works of the poets. Also, courtly love takes after feudal relationships so the reality of the lover being at the lady's command (that is, the wife of the feudal lord), is not so far-fetched. As C. S. Lewis writes, "only the courteous can love, but it is love that makes them courteous".[29]

This leads us to love allegory and, consequently, to *The Roman de la Rose*. This text was even partly translated by Chaucer and that is probably the version that James and Lydgate read. In it the lover, in a typical May setting, falls in love and, through an allegorical journey that will help him mature, he will learn how to truly love and thus be worthy of the "rose". The dream, the landscape, and the allegorical narration of love became stock devices used throughout the Middle Ages.

We cannot omit to mention the dream theory that pervades a good part of the Medieval written production. Even in this case we come across a great example of

[27] Chaucer, Geoffrey, "The House of Fame", in Larry D. Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 349, l. 120 (pp.347-373).
[28] Mitchell, last accessed September 2017.
[29] Lewis, p. 2.

syncretism: dreams are present in the *Bible* (Joseph and Daniel, for example, could interpret dreams) and also in classical antiquity. During the Middle Ages *The Dream of Scipio*, commented by Macrobius, was extremely famous, as we can see by the fact that it is the same book that the narrator of Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls* was reading right before falling asleep and dreaming. However, the *Dream* was nothing more than a part of Cicero's *De Repubblica* and thus, once again, connected to classical antiquity. It is an encyclopedic investigation of dreams, accompanied by a theoretical explanation and it had become a useful device for authors to express themselves freely and to establish a connection with the pagan gods, just as James I did in *The Kingis Quair*, and Lydgate in *The Temple of Glas*. Moreover, there was no better way for both of them to show their gratitude and thanks to the one dear predecessor who, before them, had excelled in this genre: Geoffrey Chaucer.

Chapter Two

Minerva

2.1 From Pagan origins to Christian reading

One of the first authors ever to write about the birth of the various Olympians was Hesiod in his *Theogony*. In this work it is said that Athena was born from a piece of Zeus's brain and she is described as the blue-eyed goddess of war and wisdom.[30] But although the dwellers of Olympus were born in Greece, they found their home in the great empire of Rome: Minerva is the embodiment of the Greek goddess Athena. Around the 45 AD Cicero wrote *De Natura Deorum*, a work in the form of a Platonic dialogue in which he discussed the nature of the gods. Various currents of thought are described, and we even come across some unexpected beliefs like that of the existence of only one god.[31] In general, Roman and Greek gods have always been considered supernatural beings, unreachable, part of a different and superior breed. But men of learning and philosophers have always been curious about their real nature: some simply believed in polytheism, some believed that there was only one god and that it corresponded to nature or the natural order, and some believed they were plants or celestial beings.

In *De Natura Deorum* Cicero stops for a moment to examine the shape of the gods, which they share with men. He says that every population has thought of the gods as having human shape because that is the one form we all have in mind as the superior and most beautiful one. It is obvious that the gods' bodies are free from the imperfections that mar our human bodies but the shape we share is the same, as it is the most perfect

[30]Hesiod, "Theogony", http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0130%3Acard%3D901, *Perseus Digital Library*, ll. 924-27, last accessed October 2017.
[31]Cicerone, M. Tullio, "De Natura Deorum", in Domenico Lassandro and Giuseppe Micunco, eds, *Opere Politiche e Filosofiche*, vol. III, Torino: UTET, 2007, Book I, XIII, 32 (pp. 88-427).

one that nature has at its disposal, the only form apt to contain reason.[32] The similarity with the Christian doctrine which says that God has created man in His own image is striking and it is another proof that pagan culture is not so different from the Christian one.

Cicero even doubts the existence of the gods, affirming that Protagoras of Abdera said that: "de divis neque ut sint neque ut non sint abeo dicere".[33] The connection with Christian apologetics and Doctors of the Church trying to prove the existence of God is immediate. For example, Thomas Aquinas spent most of his life on this question and he only came to the same conclusion that God's existence cannot be demonstrated[34] and that we can do nothing more than choose whether to believe in him or not.

But let us return to Minerva. According to the legend, to the goddess belong many arts, like playing the flute, weaving, and embroidering (women's skills that were most appreciated for a long time).[35] A story about one of these skills is narrated in Book VI of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[36] Ovid was a Roman writer born in the first century BC who became widely famous in the Middle Ages and his *Metamorphoses* is a long poem in 15 books written in hexameter verse. In it there are stories, narrated in chronological order from the creation of the universe to the deification of Julius Caesar, of mythical characters that are either punished or rewarded by the Gods for their actions with a transformation into some animal, vegetable, or astronomical form.[37] Gods and goddess usually received

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[32] Cicero, Book I, XVIII, 46-47-48.
[33] Cicero, Book I, XXIII, 63. "About the gods we can't say they exist nor that they do not exist." (My translation)
[34] Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, translated by Daniel J. Sullivan, London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952, First Part, Q.2 Art. 2.
[35] Berens, E. M., *The Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece and Rome*, London: Bleckie & Son, 1880, p. 47.
[36] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* translated by Frank Justus Miller, London: Heinemmann, 1956, Book VI, ll. 1-145.
[37]Kennedy, Edward Johns, "Ovid", https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ovid-Roman-poet, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, last accessed November 2017.

prayers and offers, even sacrifices, from those who excelled in the art they protected and had invented, and the more believers they had, the more prestigious they were considered.

It happened that a young girl named Arachne, who excelled in the art of weaving, boasted about her superiority in that same art, invented by the goddess Minerva herself.[38] In ancient times the Greek concept of ὕβρις, the sin of being too boastful, was strongly felt by the people as was the belief that that the deities may decide to punish you in a more or less severe manner, depending on the gravity of your offence.[39] This concept too passed from Greek to Roman culture: there were many apotropaic rituals that had the sole scope of reminding men of their mortal condition. It also happened with victorious generals coming back from war and parading around the city: by their side there always was a subordinate that would whisper in their ear "memento mori", which means "remember that you will die".[40] The Arachne in Ovid's story evidently was too young and foolish to keep this in mind and so, she boasted she was better that an immortal. Minerva, feeling herself threatened and disrespected, decided to go to her under the guise of an old lady, to warn her against excessive pride: she would be forgiven as long as she admitted that she was no better than Minerva. She should have been content with being the best among mortals, but her pride pushed her beyond her limits and she challenged the goddess. Minerva fashioned a beautiful robe with different scenes, and all of them had a common theme: the punishment of men and women full of pride by the hands of the gods. On the other hand, Arachne painted beautiful sceneries that showed all the wrongs done by the gods towards humans, seemingly unmindful that she, too, was

[38] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book VI, ll. 35-37.
[39] Gowan, Donald E., *When Man Becomes God: Humanism and Hubris in the Old Testament*, Eugene: Pickwick Publication, 1975, p. 4.
[40] Sfetcu, Nicolae, "Death: Cultural, Philosophical and Religious Aspects", https://books.google.it/books?id=7XEfDAAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false, *Google Books,* last accessed, November 2017.

nothing more than one of those humans and thus sealing her fate. Her skills would not save her: whether they are wrong or right, deities will always have the upper hand. Her work was destroyed by Minerva and she hanged herself. However, the goddess took pity on her, and gave her back her life transforming her into a spider.[41]

We can see how the Greek and Roman gods were more similar to mortals than the Christian God. They surpassed men in beauty and strength, but they still had very human feelings and habits, had to eat and drink every day, and would reproduce. The same cannot be said of the Christian God, the angels, or of Christ himself who, even if made of flesh and living as a mortal, never stepped so "low" as to have sex with another human being and never showed "human" feelings. When on the cross, he used his last strength to pray God to forgive those who had done that to him, while the pagan divinities of the Greek and Roman pantheon would have never forgiven such an act: the classical pantheon is full of petty and vengeful gods that would have condemned and punished anyone that would have dared to do anything of the sort to them, much like Minerva with Arachne.

Not only that; it was not unusual for the gods to fall in love with mortals, care for them and physically protect them from harm. Athena does that, for example, in Homer's *Iliad*. The "flashing-eyed" goddess sided with the Achaeans during the war of Troy and more than once she is seen standing beside Odysseus or Achilles. The gods take part in everyday human life: they fight side by side with the warriors they love and want to protect, and they show emotions that are wholly human. For example, Thetis, Achilles's mother, kneels and cries and tries to make Zeus have pity on her and on her son because the pain of his death would be unbearable.[42] The Christian God always manages, on the

[41] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book VI, ll. 137-45.
[42] Homer, *Iliad*, translated by A. T. Murray, London: Heinemann, 1927, Book I, ll. 488-513.

contrary, to seem more standoffish, more powerful and unapproachable. All that in spite of the fact that he is often, especially in the Old Testament, a victim of petty emotions, especially anger.

Also, the gods are litigious, as shown by the argument Hera, Zeus and Minerva have concerning the war:[43] they are not perfect like God, they are just better than mortals. They fight as men do, and they can be wounded by men (for example, Diomedes wounds Aphrodites's hand).[44] When Venus laments the fact that humans are now fighting even against the gods, her mother Dione tells her that she has to bear it because the Olympians are bound to suffer much at the hands of mortals,[45] a concept not so far from the Christian belief that sin is something that may physically hurt Christ.

Augustine says that "Hoc enim ait fingere poetas, quod ex istorum daemonm numero deos faciunt et eis deorum nomuna inponunt et quibus voluertint hominibus ex his amicos inimcosque distribuunt […] Haec est ergo fiction poetarum deos dicere, qui dii non sunt, eosque sub deorum nominibus inter se decertare propter homines, quos pro sudio partium diligunt vel oderunt."[46]

> Denique hinc esse dicit Homericam illam Minervam, "quae mediis coetibus Gaium cohibendo Achilli intervenit." Quod erfo Minerva illa fuerit, poeticum vult esse figmentum, eo quod Minerva illa fuerit, poeticam vult esse figmentum, eo quod Minervam deam putat eamque inter deo, quos omnes bonos beatosque credit, in alta aetheria sede conlocat, procul a conversatione mortalim, quod autem aliquis daemon fuerit Graecis favend Troianisque contrarius, sicul alius adversus Graecos Troianorum opitulator, quem Veneris seo Martis nomine idem poeta commemorate, quos deos iste talia non agentes in habitationibus celestibus point, at hi daemones pro eis, quos amabat, contra eos, quos oderant, inter se decertaverint: hoc non procul a veritate poeta dixisse confessus est. De his quippe ista dixerunt, quos hominibus simili motu cordis et salo mentis per omens

[43] Homer, Book IV, ll. 1- 50.
[44] Homer, Book V, ll. 369-96.
[45] Homer, Book V, ll. 369-96.
[46] Augustinus, *De Civitate Dei*, B. Dombart, ed., Lipsiae: B.G. Teubneri, 1921, p. 377. "The fiction of the poets consists in their making gods of demons, and giving them the names of gods, and assigning them as allies or enemies to individual men […] This, I say, is the poet fiction, to say that these are gods who are not gods, and that, under the names of gods, they fight among themselves about the men whom they love or hate with keen partisan feeling" (Cited according to Marcus Dodds, ed., *The Works of Aurelius Augustus Bishop of Hippo*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871)

> cogitationum aestus fluctuare testatur, ut possint amores et odia non pro iustitia, sed sicut populus similis eorum in venatoribus alios exercere.[47]

But why did a man of the Church know so much about pagan deities? Is it not an oxymoron? Or is it simply proof of the deep connection between the two religions? With the spread of Christianity many started to believe that the ancient gods were nothing more than exceptional men and women that other people made object of idolatry, drawing a clear line between them and the Christian God.

Contrary to many other pagan gods, Minerva is one of the few chaste and virgin ones. The goddess was very protective of her sexuality and virginity to the point that, when Tiresias by chance saw her naked body, while she was bathing outside in a spring, she blinded him and, to compensate for her maybe excessive reaction, she then gave him the gift of prophecy thanks to which he is remembered today.[48] The Greco-Roman world of antiquity demanded virginity of all unmarried women, and so did many of its deities and the priestesses who served chaste goddesses such as Athena or Vesta were virgins.[49]

Also, Minerva's qualities are more man-like than those of the other goddesses of the pantheon. The fact that Minerva was born clad in armour signified that her virtue and purity were unassailable, and her broad shoulders and small hips give her a slightly masculine appearance.[50] In the *Iliad* she even takes the form of a male warrior, Laodocus,

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[47] Augustinus, p. 377-78. "To this category, he says, belongs the Minerva of Homer, "who interposes in the ranks of the Greeks to restrain Achilles." For that this was Minerva he supposes to be a poetical fiction; for he thinks Minerva is a goddess, and he places her among the gods whom he believes to be all good and blessed in the sublime ethereal region, remote from intercourse with men. But that there was a demon favourable to the Greeks and adverse to the Trojans, as another whom the same poet mentions under the name of Venus or Mars (gods exalted above earthly affairs in their heavenly habitations), was the Trojans' ally and the foe of the Greeks, and that these demons fought for those they loved against those they hated, -in all this he owned that the poet states something very like the truth. For they made these statements about beings to whom he ascribed the same violent and tempestuous passions as disturb men, and who are therefore capable of loves and hatreds not justly formed, but formed in a party spirit, as the spectators in races and hunts take fancies and prejudices."

[48] Abbott, Elisabeth, *A History of Celibacy*, Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2001, p. 25.

[49] Abbott, p. 43.

[50] Berens, p. 44.

to walk through the ranks of the Trojans[51] and she battles alongside Mars.[52] On the contrary, when Venus asks to fight, Zeus kindly tells her: "οὔ τοι τέκνον ἐμὸν δέδοται πολεμήϊα ἔργα, ἀλλὰ σύ γ᾽ ἱμερόεντα μετέρχεο ἔργα γάμοιο, ταῦτα δ᾽ Ἄρηϊ θοῷ καὶ Ἀθήνῃ πάντα μελήσει."[53] The Greek and the Romans seem to have taken pains to remove any femininity from Minerva and even when describing her they do not use the sweet words used for Venus, or Hera:

> αὐτὰρ Ἀθηναίη κούρη Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο
> πέπλον μὲν κατέχευεν ἑανὸν πατρὸς ἐπ᾽ οὔδει
> ποικίλον, ὅν ῥ᾽ αὐτὴ ποιήσατο καὶ κάμε χερσίν:
> ἣ δὲ χιτῶν᾽ ἐνδῦσα Διὸς νεφεληγερέταο
> τεύχεσιν ἐς πόλεμον θωρήσσετο δακρυόεντα.
> ἀμφὶ δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ὤμοισιν βάλετ᾽ αἰγίδα θυσσανόεσσαν
> δεινήν, ἣν περὶ μὲν πάντῃ Φόβος ἐστεφάνωται,
> ἐν δ᾽ Ἔρις, ἐν δ᾽ Ἀλκή, ἐν δὲ κρυόεσσα Ἰωκή,
> ἐν δέ τε Γοργείη κεφαλὴ δεινοῖο πελώρου
> δεινή τε σμερδνή τε, Διὸς τέρας αἰγιόχοιο.
> κρατὶ δ᾽ ἐπ᾽ ἀμφίφαλον κυνέην θέτο τετραφάληρον
> χρυσείην, ἑκατὸν πολίων πρυλέεσσ᾽ ἀραρυῖαν:
> ἐς δ᾽ ὄχεα φλόγεα ποσὶ βήσετο, λάζετο δ᾽ ἔγχος
> βριθὺ μέγα στιβαρόν, τῷ δάμνησι στίχας ἀνδρῶν
> ἡρώων, οἷσίν τε κοτέσσεται ὀβριμοπάτρη.[54] (ll. 733-47)

This is the description of a men's dressing for war, even wearing her father's garments; a privilege usually reserved to the first-born son. And during the fight the goddess even manages to wound Ares,[55] the god of war himself. Robert Graves confirms the presence

[51] Homer, Book IV, ll. 73-100.
[52] Homer, Book IV, ll. 420-45.
[53] Homer, Book V, ll. 428-30. "Not unto thee, my child, are given works of war; nay, follow thou after the lovely works of marriage, and all these things shall be the business of swift Ares and Athene"
[54] Homer, Book V. "But Athene, daughter of Zeus that bareth the eagis, let fall upon her father's floor her soft robe, richly broidered, that her had wrought and her hands had fashioned, and put on her the tunic of Zeus, the cloud-gatherer, and arrayed her in armour for tearful war. About the shoulders she flung the tasseled aegis, fraught with terror, all about which Rout is set as a crown, and therein is Strife, therein Valour, and therein Onset, that maketh the blood run cold, and therein is the head of the dread monste, the Gorgon, dread and awful, a portent of Zeus that bareth the aegis. And upon her head she set the helmet with two horns and with bosses four, wrought of gold, and fitted with the men-at-arms of a hundred cities. Then she stepped upon the flaming car and grasped her spear, heavy and huge and strong, wherewith she vanquished the ranks of men – of warriors with whom she is wroth, she, the daughter of the mighty sire."
[55] Homer, Book V, ll. 839-66.

of a male side in Athena when he writes: "Pallas is one of Athena's tides […] What puzzles me is that Pallas is a man's name, not a woman's."[56] He also gives examples:

> There was, as you say, Pallas the Titan, who was brother to Astreus ("the Starlike"), and Perses ("the Destroyer") and who married – whatever that means – the River Styx in Arcadia. […] Next comes Homer's Pallas, whom he calls the father of the Moon. And next another Titan, the Pallas who was flayed by Athene; it was thus Pallas from whom she is said to have taken her name.[57]

Not only is her epithet more apt to describe a man, but usually no mention is made of her mother and, even in the cases in which it happens, the mother is eaten and absorbed by Zeus so that no traces of her remain, seemingly in a desperate attempt to erase all female influence also from the upbringing of Minerva. Moreover, her attributes are not those typical of a woman of ancient times but, once again, of a man: she is wise, a good warrior and strategist, and the goddess of justice (and it is known that women could not take part in the assemblies nor judge anyone). In Aeschylus's *Eumenides*, Athena says "μήτηρ γὰρ οὔτις ἐστὶν ἥ μ᾽ ἐγείνατο, / τὸ δ᾽ ἄρσεν αἰνῶ πάντα, πλὴν γάμου τυχεῖν, / ἅπαντι θυμῷ, κάρτα δ᾽ εἰμὶ τοῦ πατρός. / οὕτω γυναικὸς οὐ προτιμήσω μόρον / ἄνδρα κτανούσης δωμάτων ἐπίσκοπον."[58]

> Europe, in short, recovers her gods very much as she received Aristotle – "mutilated, botched, crippled, turned from Greek into Arabic and from Arabic to Latin." Their long absence and their vagabond paths – leading sometimes so far from their native shores – have made them into foreigners.
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> But now that they have at last returned to their homeland, we shall see them gradually undergoing formal reintegration – regaining, at least in the large part, their natural bearing and their familiar look.[59]

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[56] Graves, Robert, *The White Goddess: a historical grammar of poetic myth*, London: Faber & Faber, 1961, p.351.
[57] Graves, pp. 351-2.
[58] Aeschylus, "Eumenides", http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0006%3Acard%3D711, *Perseus Digital Library,* ll. 736-40, last accessed October 2017. "For / there was no mother who gave me birth; / and in all things, except from marriage, / whole heartedly I am for the male and, / entirely on the father's side" (Cited according to Herbert Weir Smith, ed., "Aeschylus. Eumenides", http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Aesch.%20Eum, *Perseus Digital Library,* last accessed October 2017)
[59] Seznec, Jean, *The Survival of Pagan Gods*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972, p. 183.

The pagan gods went through the Middle Ages in disguise, without making a noise, accepting everything that was done to them in exchange for the possibility to keep living. Their iconography changed, adapting more and more to the uses and customs of the times and they acquired new features and functions. For example, we have seen before how one of the main qualities of Minerva, besides her never-fading wisdom, was her virginity and her complete exclusion from matters of love and marriage. In the *Kingis Quair*, however, her function is exactly the one of advising the lover on how to love and how to get his beloved. What is important to notice is that we, as readers, are not surprised by this turn of events because we ourselves expect the goddess of wisdom to give advice and guide men. What we all seem to forget is that this was never one of the goddess's prerogatives: she advises people in war and judicial matters, not love.

So, Minerva survived through the Middle Ages, but to a price: the loss of her original identity. Much like all the other deities, no doubt. For example, Mars can be seen driving through a rural landscape in a heavy peasant's wagon, much after the fashion of Lancelot, the knight and his cart; elsewhere he resembles a Roman legionary mounted on a veritable battle chariot.[60] Courtly romance and tradition starts to absorb the ancient gods: Mars is the Lancelot to Venus's Guinevere.

But what place could Minerva ever take in this setting? What could be the role of the one female deity that renounced wholly her female role? To survive, like all the other gods, Minerva needs a role and a place to make her own in Christian culture and the best possible solution, as her sexualization would make her too similar to Venus to survive, would be that of completely renouncing any claim on the body and develop a new role, similar to that of Boethius's Lady Philosophy. The allegorical aspect is pushed so far that

[60] Seznec, p. 194.

the boundaries between the two characters tend to disappear so that when we are talking about wisdom we are simultaneously talking about Minerva and Philosophy (or Sapientia).

According to a famous passage in Dante's *Il Convivio*, the first or "literal" sense of a piece of writing is that sense which does not go beyond the strict sense or "the letter", whereas the second or allegorical sense is "disguised under the cloak" of the literal story and is "a truth hidden under a beautiful fiction".[61] It is perfectly proper to enlist pagan material in the service of Christian doctrine since "All that is written is written for our doctrine".[62] There can be no perfection without divine grace, yet in many pagans there was perfection after a manner, which "consisted of the detestation of vice, so far as this was possible without the grace of the faith which illuminates and purges".[63]

Isidore of Seville, a deeply admired archbishop of the sixth century, had claimed that *pagani* were so named from the country regions (*pagi*) around Athens, in which places the gentiles set up light and idols. The gentiles, according to Isidore, are those who are without the law (i.e. the law of Christ), because they did not yet believe. They are called *gentiles* because they are just as they were generated or born (*geniti*), "that is, just as they descended into the flesh in sin, namely serving idols and not yet regenerated" in Christ.[64] The most generally accepted explanation of the origin of the pagan gods, and hence of idol-worship, was the euhemeristic theory that these deities originally were mortal men who, through misplaced reverence or fear, had become falsely worshipped as gods.[65] Isidore of Seville says so himself in his *Etymologies*, and about Minerva he says:

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[61] Minnis, Alastair J., *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity*, Cambridge: Brewer, 1982, p. 13.
[62] Minnis, p. 18.
[63] Minnis, p. 31.
[64] Minnis, p. 32.
[65] Barney, Stephen A., Lewis, W. J., Beach, J. A., Berghof, Oliver, eds., *The Ethymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 183.

> Minerva apud Graecos Ἀθήνη dicitur, id est, femina. Apud Latinos autem Minervam vocatam quasi deam et munus artium variarum. Hanc enim inventricem multorum ingeniorum perhibent, et inde eam arte et tationem interpretantus, quia sine ratione nihil potest contineri. Quae ratiom quia ex solo animo nascitur, animumque putant esse in capite et cerebro, ideo eam dicunt de capite Iovis esse natam, quia sensus sapientis, qui invenit omnia, in capite est. In cuius pectore ideo caput Gorgonis fingitur, quod illic est omnis prudential, quae confundit alios, et inperitos ac saxeos conprobat: quod et in antiquis Imperatorum statuis cernimus in medio pectore loricae, propter insinuandam sapientiam et virtutem. […] Unde et tanto proclivius dea credita, quanto minus origo eius innotuit. Pallas autem dicta vel ab insula Pallene in Thracia, in qua nutrita est; vel ἀπὸ τοῦ πάλλειν τό δόρυ, id est ab hastae concussione; vel quod Pallantem gigantem occiderit.[66]

He was happy to draw on pagan authors as well as Church Fathers[67] and, when writing the *Etymologies*, his aims were not novelty but authority, not originality but accessibility, not augmenting but preserving and transmitting knowledge.[68]

Unlike other divinities, Minerva does not have a planet sacred to her, but Saint Augustine in *De Civitate Dei* says that "Minerva enim, quia eam humanis artibus praeposuerunt nec invenerunt vel stellam, ubi eam ponerent, eandem vel simmim aethera vel etiam lunam esse dixerunt."[69] And it is exactly from the ether that Minerva descends in Martianus Cappella *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii et de Septem Artibus Liberalibus*.[70]

It is important not to forget about the spread of Christianity and the importance, for writers and other artists, to show that they believed in the Christian Church. By giving

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[66] Isidori Hispalensis Episcopo, *Etymologiarum Sive Originum*, W. M. Linsaday, ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911, Book VII; XI, 71-76. "Among the Greeks Minerva is called Ἀθήνη, that is woman. Among the Romans she is called Minerva, as the goddess and gift (*munus*, gen. *muneris*) of various crafts. They claim she was the inventor of many skills, and thus they explain her as art and reason, because nothing can be comprehended without reason. Because this reason is born from the mind alone, and because they think the mind is in the head and brain, therefore they say she was born from the head of Jove, because the sense of a wise person, who discovers all things, is in his head. On her chest the head of the Gorgon is pictured, because all prudence is in that spot – prudence that dazzles other people, and confirms them as ignorant and stone- like. We also see this in the ancient statues of the emperors, in the middle of their breastplates, in order to imply wisdom and strength. […] Thus the less her origin is known, the more readily she is believed to be a goddess. She is called Pallas either from the island Pallene in Thrace, on which she was raised, or after the Greek term πάλλειν τό δόρυ ("brandishing the spear"), that is, from striking with a spear, or because she slew the giant Pallas." (Cited according to Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof, eds., *The Ethymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2006).

[67] Barney, p. 7.

[68] Barney, p. 11.

[69] Augustinus, Book VII; XVI, 18-20. "Minerva, also, because they set her over human arts, and did not find a star in which to place her, has been said by them to be either the highest ether, or even the moon".

[70] Capella, Marziano, *Le nozze di Filologia e Mercurio,* Ilaria Ramella, ed., Milano: Bompiani, 2001, p. 33.

an allegorical and deeper meaning to the gods and their stories and actions, the writers felt safe. They had the freedom to explore whatever theme and story they wanted but every piece of writing had to undergo a moralizing process. Scholars in the Middle Ages used to look for Christian morals under the surface of pagan fables, as they did not want to risk being considered guilty of impiety.

This also happens in the case of Boccaccio's *De Genealogie Deorum Gentilium*. In this work Boccaccio shows how, even though he is ready to change certain aspects of literature, he is still very deeply rooted in the Middle Ages. He acts like a great compiler, putting together all the information he finds about the gods, no matter how absurd or how discordant among them. The fact that some stories may not match seem not to bother him in the least, after all he claims no responsibility for what he is writing, right from the very moment he decides to present himself simply as a compiler.[71] But, anyways, he tells these stories in search for those allegorical and moralizing aspect that would lead everything, every being, story and event, to the one and only God of Christianity.

> Voluerunt igitur Minervam, id est sapientiam, ex cerebro Jovis, id est dei natam; volunt enim physici omnem intellectivam virtutem in cerebro tanquam in arce corporis consistere. Hinc Minervam, id est sapientiam, ex cerebro natam fingunt, id est ex cerebro dei, ut intelligamus, quoniam ex profundo divine sapientie arcano omnem intellectum, omnem sapientiam infusam esse, quam Juno, id est terra, quantum ad hoc sterilis dare non poterat neque potest; nam, teste sacra pagina, omnis sapientia a domino Deo est. […] Virginitas inde illi attribuitur perpetua et inde sterilitas, ut per hoc noscatur quia sapientia nunquam labefactatur aliqua contagione mortalium, quin imo semper pura, semper lucida, semper integra et perfecta est. […] Triplici autem veste ideo tegitur, ut intelligatur verba sapientum et potissime fingentium multiplicem habere sensum.[72]

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[71] Boccaccio, Giovanni, "Genealogie Deorum Gentilium", Vittorio Zaccaria, ed., *Tutte le Opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1998, p.59 (pp. 1-1813).

[72] Boccaccio, Giovanni, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, translated by Jon Solomon, London: Harvard University Press, 2011, Book II:3. "They want Minerva, that is, wisdom, to be born from the head of Jupiter, that is, god; for physical scientists want every theoretical virtue to exist in the head as if in the citadel of the body. For tis reason they say that Minerva, that is, wisdom, was born from the head, that is, from the head of god, so that we would understand that all intellect, all wisdom, pours forth from the deep recess of divine wisdom, which Juno, that is, earth, insofar as she is barren in this, was not able and is not able to provide. According to Holy Scripture, all wisdom is from the Lord God. […] they attribute perpetual virginity and then barrenness to her to make it known that wisdom is never tarnished by any contact with a mortal but in fact is always pure, always clear, always whole and complete. […] She is covered in triple

Here too, Minerva becomes Wisdom and she is reconnected to the Christian doctrine because for medieval men there can be no wisdom outside God. The classical authors simply did not know about God, and so they did their best to explain the nature of those entities they called gods, but the only true explanation can be given now, after the coming of Christ. The *Genealogy* is still rooted in the medieval past but, in spite of that, it became, and remained for two centuries, the central storehouse from which educated men drew their knowledge of the gods.[73]

In every work and manual, the pagan gods tended to be considered and explained following three main criteria: historical, physical and moral. What needs never be forgotten is the existence of a deeper meaning that is to be acquired looking beyond the mere image and presentation of the gods. According to many thinkers and writers of the Middle Ages, mythology was a disguise under which to find truths and teachings that you would need in your life and so there was no need to disregard it.

In his *Precetti della pittura*, Giovanni Battista Armenini enumerates the authors who, in his opinion, should be in every artist's library. After mentioning the standard authorities on sacred history, he recommends for the fables Boccaccio's *Genealogy of the Gods*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the work of "Alberico, cioè del Cataro".[74]

> Ma parlerò de' libri a tale studio più necessari, e dirò prima delle sacre storie; l'esorterò a tenere la Bibbia, il Testamento nuovo, la vita di Cristo, quella della Madonna e delle sante vergini e martiri, il leggendario de' santi, le vite de' santi padri, con l'Apocalisse di San Giovanni, poiché di tutte queste materie io ne ho veduti disegni e pitture infinite, per mano di buoni maestri. E circa le materie profane buonissimi sono i libri i quali trattano delle storie romane, come di storie che sono vere e piene di esempi ottimi e profittevoli, e massimi quelli che sono descritti da Plutarco, e dietro a questi vi è Tito Livio, Appiano Alessandrino, Valerio Massimo, gli Uomini illustri del Petrarca, le Donne illustri del Boccaccio, e per le favole della Genealogia degli Dei del medemo; di Alberico, cioè del Cataro, le Trasformazioni di Ovidio, o come è d'Antonio Apulei, e l'Amadigi

garments so it would be known that the words of the wise and especially of those inventing these tales have multiple meanings."

[73] Seznec, p. 224.

[74] Seznec, pp. 257-58.

> di Gaula, insieme con alcune altre opere che sono de' più moderni, pure di materie onorate e piacevoli. [75]

This piece of writing is emblematic of the attitude towards the pagan gods during the Middle Ages. They had found their place side by side the characters of the Bible and seemed to have no intention whatsoever to move and the people could not help but be drawn to their beauty and to what they represented: a past long gone of power and strength that could never be recovered.

> 'The pagans are wrong and the Christians are right!', exclaims the hero of the late eleventh century *Chanson de Roland*. By contrast, in the *Roman de la Rose* (c. 1277) Jean de Meun assures his audience that 'It is good to believe the pagans, for we may gain great benefit from their sayings'. By Jean's time the pagans had attained considerable degree of respect, even of popularity. Sometimes they were wrong, sometimes they were right, and often they were half-right, or right in a limited way
>
> Christians of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were fascinated by classical or pagan lore of every kind. Pagan philosophers were recognized as experts in such subject-areas as natural science, ethics and politics; pagan poets were supposed to have written fables which, when interpreted allegorically, were found to contain profound truths. It was generally accepted that contemporary Christians, the *moderni*, had much to learn from the sages of antiquity, the *antiqui*. […] Some of them, moreover, had been prophets or forerunners of the faith to come. Virgil has foretold the coming of Christ in his first eclogue.[76]

Pagans are limited and, while they are not always wrong, they can never be completely right. That is why we have to interpret everything that comes from that past upon which God had not yet set his eyes. Often in many medieval works, the noble pagans of ancient Troy, Greece and Rome are depicted 'in a natural environment, observing laws and customs that they felt were true, performing duties and obligations in which they believed, doing the best that they knew, and occasionally exceeding the virtue and moral excellence of Christians'.[77] But never once is put in discussion the fact that everything good that came before the Revelation of God's world, was for God and by Him inspired.

At the same time, since the gods cannot be excluded from art, poetry, or education, a compromise is more than ever necessary to satisfy the demands and convention of

[75] Armenini, Giovanni Battista, *Precetti della Pittura*, Ravenna: Francesco Tebaldini, 1587, pp. 318-19,
[76] Minnis, p. 1.
[77] Minnis, p. 2.

morality, and the traditional compromise consists in presenting each of the gods as an edifying symbol.[78] Thus flourished the allegorical method so dear to the Middle Ages; all mythology is nothing more – or pretends to be nothing more – than a system of ideas in disguise, a "secret philosophy".[79] The Middle Ages felt, stronger than ever before, a sentiment of nostalgia for the beauty, strength, and power of the ancient times of imperial Rome, with its gods, and its long gone dominion over the whole of Europe.

2.2 Minerva's Images

Especially during the Middle Ages, the literacy level of the population wasn't too high and so churches were full of paintings, in an effort to help people understand the word of God. The Church was one of the few institutions that managed to remain safe and rich after the fall of Rome, and throughout the Middle Ages it only grew richer and richer. As always in the history of mankind, during times of suffering, there was a strong need for something people could turn to and, in many cases, that role has been filled by religion. And the Christian religion was slowly but surely becoming more and more widespread: the idea that all the hardships people were going through on earth would be rewarded was the only way to make the pain of living bearable.

The aesthetic side of any religion is incredibly important, and we cannot forget that the way we think of the divinities and of the otherworld has been shaped by literature, art, and religion. The ancient gods did not disappear, but they changed also because the Greco-Roman art could not be forgotten. So, what the new religion had to do was to take those same statues, those temples that had acted before as a refuge for those in need and

[78] Seznec, p. 312.
[79] Seznec, p. 321.

give them a new meaning, in the hope to show that not everything had changed and that there still was someone watching over the population. But, even more important, the recovery of those same buildings and symbols was a clever way to show that God had always been there, even when the people did not recognize him. The same process of Christianization that invested classical literature, spread to art.

As I will argue later, the shape that Venus will take is that of Mary (both Magdalene and the mother of Jesus)[80], while probably the one closer to Minerva is that of Jesus himself, however strange that might seem, and despite the fact that they do not share the same sexuality. We have already seen that as Minerva is part of Zeus, so Jesus is part of God and they both are the ones who approach humanity to bring words of wisdom. Also, the major and unforgettable characteristic of Minerva are her eyes, two beautiful blue eyes that have accompanied her representation throughout time. In the sacred scriptures there is no indication about the color of the eyes of Jesus; actually, there is no physical description. And so it seems that many artists, enamored with the Greco-Roman art, and thinking that being the son of God he could be nothing but close to perfect, started to represent him using the characteristic of Roman and Greek divinities. A beautiful body like that of Apollo, the god of sun and art, the beard as a sign of wisdom, much like that of Jove, and blue eyes like those of Minerva, eyes that even God is suspected of having.

In an apocryphal letter written supposedly by the roman proconsul Lentulus, it can be read that Jesus was tall and well-proportioned, with a terrible gaze (like that of Minerva), light brown hair and beard, and blue eyes (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). Also, they both can be recognized for their wisdom, their ability with words and their chastity.

[80] See Chapter 4.

Ora per venire al Salvator nostro Giesu Christo, & vedere qual forma egli havesse in carne humana, à pieno fi raccoglie da quella epistola scritta da Lentulo officiale d'Erode in Giudea , la quale fu trovata in certi annali di Romani, dove egli descrive la sua forma o effigie in questo modo & parimenti ancora da Gioseffo Ebreo vien trattato. Apparve in questi tempi un'huomo chiamato Giesù, huomo di gran virtù. Il quale dalla gente è chiamato Profeta di Verità; & dai suoi discepoli figliuolo di Dio, il quale risuscita i morti, & sana gl'infermi; uomo di statura mediocre, & spettabile, di volto venerabile si che chi lo guarda conviene che lo ami; hà i capelli color della noce auellana matura, piani quasi fin'all'orecchie, & dall'orecchio fin alle spalle cerulei e crespi, ho lo screminale in mezzo al capo, fecondo il costume Nazareno, la fronte serenissima, la faccia bella, nel naso & nella bocca non si può cosa veruna desiderare, di colore è simile à capelli, & di barba non troppo longa ma biforcuta in mezzo, hà aspetto semplice & maturo, gl'occhi glauci, varij, & chiari; nel riprendere è terribile, nell'ammonire piacevole, amabile, & lieto, ma sempre con gravità.; né è stato veduto ridere mai ma si ben piangere; di statura di corpo è bellissimo & dritto, le mani & le braccia con tutto il corpo sono dilettevoli a vedere; nel parlar è grave tardo moderato & spetioso frà tutti i figlioli de gl'huomini. Et fi questo divino simulacro fù felicissimamente esptesso in marmo dal signor Buonarroti nel Tempio della Minerva di Roma ignudo co bellissime attitudini in piedi con la croce nelle mani.[81]

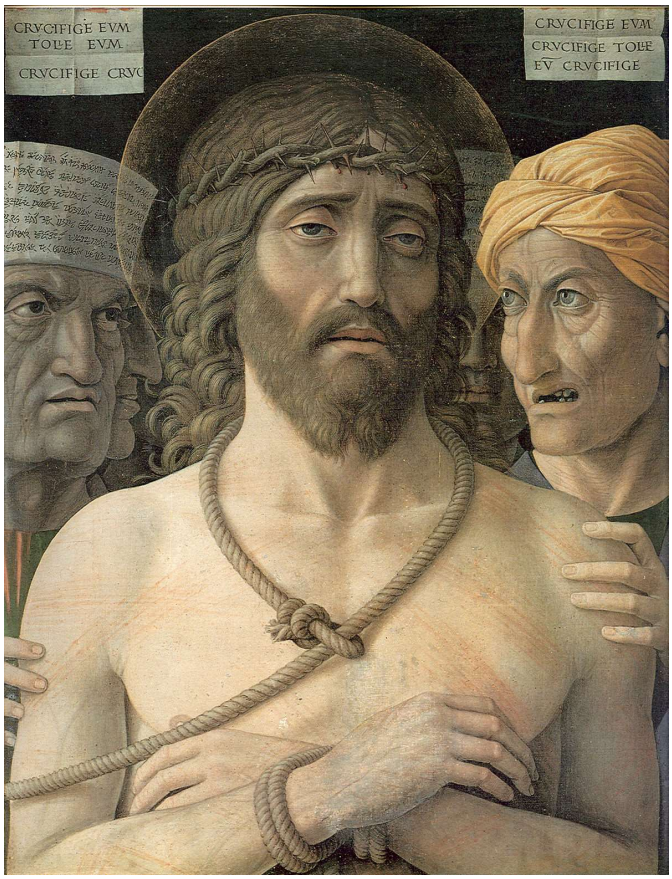

Figure 14. Andrea Mantegna, *Ecce Homo*, Jaquemart-Andrè Museum, Paris, ca. 1500.

[81] Lomazzo, Giovanni Paolo, *Trattato dell'arte della pittura, scoltura, et architettura di Gio. Paolo Lomazzo milanese pittore: diviso in sette libri, ne' quali si discorre de la proportione, de' moti, de' colori, de' lumi, de la prospettiva, de la prattica de la pittura, et finalmente de le istorie d'essa pittura: con una tavola de' nomi de tutti li pittori, scoltori, architetti, & matematici antichi & moderni*, Milano:Paolo Gottardo Pontio stampatore Regio, 1584, pp. 530- 31.

Figure 15. Jacopo da Valenza, *Cristo Salvator Mundi*, Accademia di Carrara, Bergamo, 1480 (?).

One method to erase the characteristics of the pagan gods was that of attaching to them a new meaning and let them be seen in a new way that could completely overshadow the previous one to the point that they could become unrecognizable. That is what has been done to Venus, completely erasing her sexual character by superimposing on her the figure of the eternal virgin, Mary, and the same has been done to the warrior Minerva by superimposing on her the figure of a wise and obedient man, bringer of peace.

In this way the more war-like and violent aspect of the goddess are destroyed and completely erased. In many classical paintings and sculptures, she is represented wearing her war gear and ready for battle. Most famous is a statue done by Phidias. Phidias was a Greek sculptor of great renown who is said to have made the statue of Athena that was kept inside the Parthenon in Athens, datable around the V Century B.C and later removed

by the Romans.[82] The original has been lost but many reproductions have been made following the description of it made by Pausanias. One of them was created by Alan LeQuire, in Nashville, where it is still kept (Fig. 3).

Figure 16. Alan LeQuire, *Athena Parthenos*, Nashville Museum, Nashville, 1990.

> The goddess was represented standing, a figure of Victory on her extended right hand, her left hand resting upon her shield, and also holding her spear; within the hollow of her shield was coiled the sacred serpent. She was clothed in a simple Doric chiton, of which the upper fold fell below her waist and was confined by a girdle, meeting in front in a snaky clasp; her weight rested mainly on her right leg, in front of which the dress fell in heavy and rigid folds; her left leg was bent, and so, as the knee projected forward, was modelled through the drapery – a common device in the sculpture of the period. Every available part of the statue and its accessories was covered with the richest decoration. The description of Pausanias would in itself suffice to show this. "On the middle of her helmet," he says, "is set a Sphinx, and gryphons on either side of it; on her breast is wrought a head of Medusa … And on the basis of the statue is represented the birth of Pandora." We may supplement this from Pliny: "On the convex surface of her shield was embossed the battle of the Amazons, on its concave side was the fight of Gods and the Giants; on her sandals were the Laphitae and Centaurus."[83]

Complete copies have been recognized in three statuettes; one, known as the Lenormant statuette, is an unfinished sketch, but useful for its indication of figures on the basis and

[82] Gardner, Ernest Arthur, *Six Greek Sculptors*, London: Duckworth, 1910, p. 90.
[83] Gardner, p. 91.

on the outside of the shield; another, known as the Varvakeion statuette (from the place where it was found in modern Athens) is complete and in good preservation, but shows no feeling for the grandeur of its original.[84] Obviously, this kind of iconography is not the same one we come across in the Middle Ages: the belligerent Minerva of the Pagans, the goddess Bellona, has been erased and, after having lost all violent connotations, she has become Peace, as in Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Allegory of Good Government* (Fig. 4).

Figure 17. Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Allegory of Good Government*, Sala dei Nove, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, 1338.

Figure 18. Ambrogio Lorenzettim *Allegory of Good Government*, detail with Peace (on the left).

[84] Gardner, p. 93.

Lost is her war gear, lost is the attitude ready for war and the standing position. All that is left is a woman, representing Peace (Fig. 5), dressed in a simple garment and with a branch of olive tree in her hand, a tree that does not represent the city of Athens anymore, but the peace brought on Earth by God. Minerva could also be seen as the "Just War" done to preserve the internal order and peace, as she in intended by Tintoretto (Fig. 6).

Figure 19. Tintoretto, *Minerva Sending Away Mars from Peace and Prosperity*, Palazzo Vecchio, Firenze, 1577.

Here Minerva, whose spear touches both the earth and the sky as a symbol of divine justice, pushes Mars back in order to protect Peace, completely at ease in her new role.

We have already touched upon the importance of art and of the visual aspect but let us go a little more in depth. Even in literature the visual aspect tends to be relevant. People in the Middle Ages either owned a manuscript and they could either read it on their own, or listen to someone else reading it. There is still, in medieval times, a strong oral component, possibly due to the low level of literacy. If you owned a manuscript, you could come across images painted on the pages that would guide you during the reading and help you imagine the characters and the events. You would be led towards

understanding but with surely less mediation than if you were listening to the text being read by someone else. If you are a member of an audience, there is a further mediation, that of the reader that gives you his/her own interpretation.[85] Moreover, it is impossible to keep up your concentration on the same level throughout a reading and thus you are bound to have some gaps and holes at the end that you can only fill by using your imagination.[86] The works that are usually read, however, show the author's deep comprehension of the status of things and so he tends to use devices that could help capture and keep the attention of the reader. For example, the use of "I saugh", "saugh I", "I glimpsed", "I beholde", and the following descriptions, keep the reader occupied with trying to imagine what the reader is seeing: "When one hears a tale read, one perceives the wondrous deeds as if one were to see them taking place".[87] This creative aspect of the imagination was often called phantasia, from Plato onwards. Medieval attitudes towards it are sometimes ambiguous: it was understood to be a higher power, but it could also mislead, presenting the unreal as though it were real.[88] As anything that has to do with human sense and perception, it has the potential of being untrue and false, but sight has always been considered the most important sense. After all, the greatest reward of all, for Christians, has to do with sight: the sight of God.[89] Dream vision does nothing more than take part of this tradition of seeing as a way of knowing.[90]

The composition of a literary work could be compared thus to that of a painting or a sculpture and, in fact, these arts strengthened one another by supplying the

[85] Kolve, V. A., *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales*, London: Arnold, 1984, p. 16.
[86] Kolve, p. 17.
[87] Kolve, p. 10.
[88] Kolve, p. 22.
[89] Kolve, p. 27.
[90] Kolve, p. 30.

characteristics they did not have, and thus help readers reach a deeper level of understanding. As I have already said it was also an incredibly clever move on the part of the authors who wanted their work to be accessible to, and thus known by, everyone. One does not need to say that different audiences, with different level of instruction, could grasp the meaning of the text on different levels, but the fact that the visual and oral side was so important made them more accessible.

This brings us back to the most important and noticeable feature of Minerva, her eyes. As we have seen, it was not unusual for the images of the gods that circulated in art and literature during the Middle Ages to be different from the original ones. We have seen how, for example, the reproduction of the sculpture of Athena may seem more like a caricature of the original, based as it is on the description made of it in a book by writers like Pausanias. Wisdom has become a person, at least on the literary and pictorial level.

The only cases in which we can still see Minerva ready for battle is when she is used on an allegorical level to express the Christian fight of virtue fighting against sin, as Mantegna does in his *Triumph of Virtue* (Fig. 7).

Figure 20. Andrea Mantegna, *Triumph of Virtue*, Louvre, Paris, 1502.

Minerva is fully dressed in three different colours, as the medieval canon wants, and ready for battle. Her body is surely less feminine than that of the naked Venus, and her role is similar to that of the angels expelling Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. We can see two parallel and opposite phenomena taking place: in literature the pagan gods are taking contemporary costumes, they are adapting to the new Christian environment taking on contemporary clothes and even ecclesiastical attributes and gestures, while in art saints and virgins stand before us, draped in their noble and tranquil majesty as togas and peplums are now used to clothe new ideas.[91]

> As pagan ideas gradually became severed from expression in art, Christian ideas came forward to inhabit the forms thus abandoned, just as the Christian cult took over the empty temples or the imperial baths. And the heroes of Fable, for their part, at length sought shelter within the priest's robe or the knight's armor. […] But no god is now represented in his traditional form as a divinity. The mythological heritage, like the classical patrimony as a whole, has so disintegrated that in order to take stock of its remains, we find it necessary to distinguish between a pictorial and a literary tradition which had become completely separate. Neither tradition, by itself, was able to keep intact the memory of the gods.[92]

It's like looking back at a golden age that we know belonged to us but that we have let slip through our finger. For Christians, however, even that past belongs wholly to the plan and time of God so there is a continuity that can justify the keeping of those "old" images.

The break from the past is chiefly moral: we now know of God and we are aware of his law. That is why paganism can be looked upon with a condescending attitude: those men who came before the Revelation could not help but be, in certain way, lacking, as they did not have the necessary knowledge of God's existence. However, even from their less than advantageous position, they still managed to write beautiful works and create beautiful pieces of art. And why not use all of that to glorify God, given that if something has happened throughout history, it has happened because of God's will? Everything comes from God and everything will come to rest in Him, so it seems only logical and

[91] Seznec, p. 212.
[92] Seznec, pp. 212-13.

right to bring back that beautiful art to the rightful place and role it should have always had: the praise of God and His glorification.

Regarding art and the representation of the gods we can also turn to Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo's *Treatise on Painting*. When he talks about Minerva's shield he gives us reasons to think of her as associated with Sapientia or Philosophia:

> Lo scudo sotto la tutela di Minerva, significava riparo, & con la testa di Medusa in mezzo sapienza; percioche si come quella faceva diventar gli'huomini che la guardavano sassi, cosi la sapienza ammutisce quelli che non fanno. […] Lo scudo di Minerva di cristallo significa la sapienza, & mente divina, nella qual non fi può risguardare.[93]

In this work we really do not see the author treating with any difference the pagan gods and Christian God, even when there are lists and descriptions, they come one after the other without any logical break. We can see an example of this when Lomazzo describes the angels, that seem to take much from the form and attitude of the pagan Minerva.

> Questi in Ebreo sono detti anco Aralim, cioè Angeli, grandi forti & robusti; & però debbono essere figurati non in tutto piacevoli, ne anco terribili; ma pien di maestà, & come giusti in atto rappresentante la vera giustizia, la quale appresso i Platonici, che forse in ciò seguirono la dottrina degli Egizii, non si determina essere più femmina, che maschio, ne più maschio che femmina; per dimostrare che la giustizia si deve amministrare senza passione alcuna, sì che questi angeli dei quali parliamo si come seggio del divino giudizio, vogliono così havere del virile e del effeminato, in quella guisa che si rappresentava Minerva presso i Greci, & ancora la giustizia, con alcuni ornamenti d'arme che benissimo accompagnino la virilità, si come dirincontro convien accompagnare anco il resto de gl'habiti che tendano al molle, alla clemenza & pietà, senza le quali virtù giustizia non sarebbe perfetta .[94]

Figure 21. Giorgio Ghisi, Francesco Primaticcio, *Plutone Nettuno Minerva e Apollo*, Civiche Raccolte Grafiche e Fotografiche, Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Milano, ca. 1560.

[93] Lomazzo, pp. 170-71.
[94] Lomazzo, p. 534.

The male aspects of Minerva are never fully forgotten, and her judicial powers are given to the Angels. There is a perfect equilibrium in her figure and that is why she in the only goddess that has the privilege of being painted among the male gods (Fig. 8).

It is important that the artist never forgets to make the gods recognizable, giving them the attributes they are known for so that anyone, in front of the work of art, may be able to understand who it is. That is why in manuals on painting, the authors never forget to include a brief description of the gods, so that the artists may know their shape and form before they begin to represent them in their art.

> Da Pausania è descritta Minerva nell'Attica sopra un carro in forma di triangolo da tutti tre i lati uguali, tirato da due civette, e armata all'antica, con una veste sotto l'armatura longa fino à i piedi, nel pero hà scolpita la testa di Medusa, in capo porta una celata, che per cimiero ha una sfinge, & da ciascun de' lati un griffo, in mano tiene un'hasta, che nell'ultima parte vi è avvolto un drago, & à i piedi di detta figura è uno scudo di cristallo sopra del quale hà appoggiata la sinistra mano. Il carro in forma triangolare significa (secondo gli'antichi) che à Minerva s'attribuisce l'inventione dell'armi, dell'arte di tessere, ricamare, & l'Architettura. Dipingesi armata perché l'animo del sapiente sta ben preparato contro i colpi di fortuna. La lancia significa l'acutezza dell' ingegno. Lo scudo il mondo, il quale con la sapienza si regge. Il drago avvolto alla lancia, denota la vigilanza, che nelle discipline adoprar bisogna, ò pure che le vergini li deuono ben guardare, come riferisce sopra di ciò l'Alciato ne i suoi Emblemi. La Gorgona dipinta nella corazza, dimostra lo spavento, che l'uomo sapiente rende ai malvagi. I griffi, & la sfinge sopra l'elmo dinotano, che la sapienza ogni ambiguità risolue. Le ciuette, che tirano il carro, non solo vi si mettono come uccelli consacrati a Minerua,mà perché gl'occhi di questa Dea sono d'un medesimo colore di quelli della civetta, la quale vede benissimo la notte, intendendosi che l'uomo saggio vede, & conosce le cose, qualunque sieano difficili, & occulte.[95]

Many pagan decorations were made for men of the Church, and rich people paid artists to create works in an attempt to buy their place in heaven and make God look upon them with benign eyes. It was not unusual for the pagan divinities to find a place in them. The situation may seem paradoxical, but we have to remember that pagan culture was part of the very culture of men of the Church. Nurtured upon ancient letters, the most scrupulous among them cannot rid themselves of their classical memories and ways of thinking; as humanists, they continue to love what they condemn, or should condemn, as theologians.[96]

[95] Ripa, Cesare, *Iconologia*, Venice: published by Cristoforo Tomasini, 1645, pp. 78-9.
[96] Seznec, pp. 265-66.

After all the allegorical reading of the pagan figures can be considered a moral antidote to mythology[97] and this view can help put an end to the controversy between artists, forever wanting to imitate their noble predecessors and enchanted by pagan mythology, and churchmen, fearful that those ancient gods, so alluring, may overshadow their God.

> In fact this pseudo science, which teaches us to hide, or to discover, the most serious precepts beneath the most frivolous outward appearance, offered a providential means of reconciling the pagan and Christian worlds, the profane and the sacred, at the very moment when a rupture between them seemed imminent, Fables, for example, could be "sanctified" merely by the attribution of a spiritual meaning. This play of concealed meanings authorizes all sorts of combinations and transpositions. "Christian" emblems utilize elements of pagan iconography to illustrate the teachings of the faith.[98]

The gods will lose everything they are, and they will slowly but surely become ideas and means to signify something else, completely losing all independence, as in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*. We can read in the proem:

> Nel primo modo furono trattate da molti antichi, fingendo l'imagini delle Deità, le quali non sono altro, che veli, ò vestimenti da tenere ricoperta quella parte della Filosofia, che riguarda la generatione, &la corruttione delle cose naturali, ò la dispositione de' Cieli, ò l'influenze delle stelle, ò la fermezza della Terra, ò altre simili cose, le queli con un lungo studio ritrovarono per avanzare in questa congnizione la plebe & accioche non egualmente i dotti, & gl'ignoranti potessero intendere, & penetrare le cagioni delle cose, se le andavano copertamente communicando fra loro, & coperte ancora per mezzo di queste imagini, le lasciavano a' posteri, che dovevano à gli altri essere superiori di dignità & di sapienza. Di qui è nata la moltitudine delle favole de gli antichi Scrittori, le quali hanno l'utile della scienza per li dotti, & il dolce delle curiose narrationi per gl'ignoranti.[99]

The Roman goddess of wisdom was annihilated and transformed into a symbol of Sapienza:

> È commune opinione, che gl'Antichi nell'imagine di Minerua con l'oliuo appresso volessero rappresentare la Sapienza, secondo il modo, che era conosciuta da essi, & però finsero, che fosse nata dalla testa di Gioue, come conoscita per molto più perfetta, non sapendo errare in cosa alcuna […]. Lo scudo con la testa di Medusa, mostra che il Sapiente deve troncare tutti gli habiti cattivi da sé stesso, & dimostrarli, insegnando, à gl'ignoranti, aciocche li fuggano, & che se emendino. L'oliuo dimostra che dalla sapienza nasce la pace interiore, & esteriore, & però ancora interpretano molti, ce il ramo finto necessario da Virgilio all'andata di Enea à i campi Elisij, non fia altro, che la sapienza, la quale conduce, & riduce l'huomo à felice termine in tutte le difficoltà.[100]

[97] Seznec, p. 269.
[98] Seznec, p. 273.
[99] Ripa, Proemio.
[100] Ripa, pp. 546-47.

Just a few lines after this, Ripa introduces the figure of Sapienza Divina but she seems to be nothing more than Minerva clothed in Christian ideas. How could that not be? Ripa is doing what every writer and artist has done up until that very moment, hiding behind allegories and using the pagan gods to explain Christian principles. He could not act as if he did not know of their existence and their function, but he could surely use them: Greeks and Romans did not know of Christ so even if their knowledge could be good, it never could have reached the perfection that Christian knowledge brings.

And so Minerva, clothed in Christianity, becomes *Sapienza Divina* (Fig. 9): "una donna di bellissimo, & santissimo aspetto, sopra un quadrato", "armata nel petto", with an "elmetto" on her head and in her right hand "uno scudo rotondo con lo Spirito Santo in mezzo".[101] The similarities with Minerva are striking and it is easy to see how such a transposition from pagan to Christian could work: the beauty and greatness of ancient images could be kept and the Christian meaning could be best conveyed.

Figure 22. Illustration of *Sapienza Divina* in Cesare Ripa's Iconologia, ca. 1600.

[101] Ripa, p. 547.

2.3 Minerva in *The Kingis Quair* and *The Temple of Glas*

In *The Kingis Quair*, the narrator is led to Minerva's bright palace by Good Hope, having been sent there by Venus. According to the belief that Minerva resides in the ether, Venus sends the dreamer upwards, where she resides, guarded by Patience. The virtue of Patience is a supremely Christian one: it is the strength to withstand pain and adversity, never once doubting God's love. We can read: "Therefore ye, as the chosen of God, holy and loved, clothe you with the entrails of mercy, benignity, and meekness, temperance, patience."[102] And as Christians have to patiently live their life waiting to see God, so the people of James's reign have to wait for his return. Patience is the one virtue that the narrator will need also in love: he will have to bear the suffering his lady will make him go him through in order to be worthy of her. Like Beatrice for Dante, here the lady becomes a means to understand the teachings of God.

I think it is important to note that the wise goddess Minerva is not only physically above Venus, but also morally. Venus knows that, and she also knows that the narrator could not gain control of his future without the counsel and guidance of the other goddess. It is much a journey towards wisdom and knowledge, and we have seen how Minerva is used by Christians to represent the wisdom of God. Some things never change, and in medieval times, much like in ancient Greece or Rome, Minerva is seen as superior to Venus. And it makes sense that in the process of personal growth the prisoner is going through, Minerva would come after Venus, once the goddess of love had prepared him for the new teachings. This is fundamental as Minerva's teachings are set in love as a

[102]Wycliffe Bible (WYC), Colossians 3:12, https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+3.12&version=WYC, *Bible Gateway*, last accessed November 2017.

starting point: to learn how to love his lady, the narrator must be first sure and steady in his love for God and then, only from there, he will learn how to love someone else.

> Tak him before in all thy gouernance,
> That in his hand the stere has of ȝou all;
> And pray vnto his hyë purueyance
> Thy lufe to gye, and on him traist and call,
> That corner-stone and ground is of the wall,
> That failis nought; and trust, withoutin drede
> Vnto thy purpose sone he sall the lede. (ll. 9094-10)[103]

The language is clearly ecclesiastical and the expression "corner-stone" (l. 908) reminds us of the episode in which Jesus tells Peter "And I say to thee, that thou art Peter, and on this stone I shall build my church, and the gates of hell shall not have power against it."(WYC, Matthew 16:18). This makes us think that Minerva's aim is that of teaching the young man how to create a love that will not bend to sin; an incredibly clever move on the part of the future king that, in doing so, assures his people of the purity of his intentions.

Minerva's language is heavily religious and this, I think, strongly helps James build an impression of truth around his dream. Dream visions are an extremely common topic in the Middle Ages but also extremely dubious as they could be either good, bad, or simply false. What made the difference was their cause: false dreams were caused by body humors and alimentation, bad dreams were sent by the devil, and good dreams were sent by God.[104] The use of so much ecclesiastical and Christian language surely impresses the reader and makes him believe that this dream may, in fact, be true, and that the positive effects it has had on the lover are real. It is also interesting that one of the occasions in

[103] Cited according to Matthew McDiarmid, ed., *The Kingis Quair of James Steward*, London: Heinemann, 1973.
[104] Kruger, Steven F., *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. 92-3.

which the word "cornerstone" is used in the Scripture is when, after having performed some miracles, Peter tells the people:

> be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from death, in this this man standeth whole before you [whom God raised from dead *men*, in him this man standeth whole before you]. This is the stone, which was reproved of you building, which is made into the head of the corner; and health is not in any other. For neither other name under heaven is given to men, in which it behooveth us to be made safe." (WYC, Acts 4:10-12)

I think it is not too farfetched to think that James may be indirectly talking about himself: much like Jesus, he has been abandoned by his people, and he is coming back as the one who will save them all.

Minerva's first words are proof of the fact that the Christian culture has influenced her character: she refers to the dreamer as "My sone" (l. 897), and never before in classical works had the virgin goddess referred to someone like that. Also, it is very strange for Minerva to be the one who counsels a man in matters of love as it should be of no interest to her. As already said in the previous chapters, she often took up the role of judge but almost never in love matters and, even then, she never took the woman's side. Even more unusual then is her role in the wooing of a woman, advising the man:

> Be trewe and meke and stedfast in thy thought,
> And diligent hir merci to procure;
> Nought onely in thy word, for word is nough,
> But give thy werk and all thy besy cure
> Accord thereto, and vtrid be mesure
> The palace, the houre, the maner and the wise,
> Gif mercy sall admitten thy servise. (ll. 918-24)

Minerva is identified with the Christian teaching of love,[105] and the Christian teaching of love, in turn, is embodied in the figure of Jesus Christ. It is another sign that these two figures may have influenced each other during the passage of the gods from paganism to Christianity. Also, Minerva has lost all physical attributes and worries only about setting

[105] McDiarmid, p. 57.

the lover's feelings "In Cristin wise" (l. 989)[106]. The wealth of biblical echoes, and the very strictness of the goddess's injunctions, show clearly that the mock-religious courtly world has collapsed and left its place to a new spiritual context, more rigorous in its demands, and more austere in its rewards.[107]

The goddess also launches into a discussion about Fortune and the free will of men, once again assessing her role as a theologian. I will talk more in depth about this passage in the chapter dedicated to the goddess Fortuna, but I think it is important to note that the one who utters such an important speech is Minerva, the only goddess that could help the narrator gain some control over Fortune. This Minerva is not the pagan goddess of wisdom and war that we can see, for example, in Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*, but a completely new character, born from Christianity: the bringer of the word of love and wisdom, like Jesus.

As already said, in *The Kingis Quair* Minerva loses all physical attributes, the exact opposite of what happens in *The Temple of Glas*. In Lydgate's poem Minerva appears only in one line and she is purely a physical object with no voice. The dreamer walks into the temple and sees a statue of Pallas with a crystal shield, opposite the statue of Venus. If read in a Christian key, the shield could actually represent the same thing as the guardian of Minerva's door in the *Kingis Quair*; patience. The pose of the statue with the shield could make us think of the pagan iconography of Phidias but it is not clear what the meaning of the statue is. Maybe it symbolizes a battle between wisdom and beauty and, considering the fact that Minerva has no voice in the poem, it could mean that beauty has won over wisdom and knowledge. But that does not explain then why Venus's

[106] Hodapp, William F. "The Real and Surreal in Medieval Dream Vision: The Case of James I's *Kingis Quair*", *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 42, (2009), p. 67, (pp. 55–76).
[107] Petrina, p. 126.

language, that will be studied more in depth in the next chapter, becomes increasingly more Christianized until the point of sounding like a priest finalizing marriage:

> Your honour save and eke your womanhed
> Him to cherissen it sittith you right wele,
> Sith he is bound under hope and drede
> Amyd my cheyne that maked is of stele.
> Ye must of merci shape that he fele
> In you som grace for his long servise,
> And that in hast, like as I shal devyse.
>
> This is to sein, that ye taken hede
> Hou he to you most faithful is and trwe
> Of al your servauntis, and nothing for his mede
> Of you ne askith but that ye on him rwe;
> For he hathe woid to chaunge for no nwe,
> For life nor deth, for joye ne for peyne:
> Ay to ben yours, so as ye list ordeyne. (ll. 1117-30)[108]

Venus uses expressions that are fit for a true ceremony of marriage like "him to cherissen" (l. 1118), "bound under hope and drede" (l. 1119), "he hathe woid to change for no nwe / For life nor deth, for joye ne for peyne" (ll. 1128-29). These words seem to belong more to the Minerva of The *Kingis Quair*, but it is also interesting how Venus can overcome the notion of desire, veiling it all under the semblance of duty. Maybe there is no real wisdom in these words and it is nothing more than a farce, a trick used to keep up the appearances while, at the same time, leaving the lovers free to fall into the sin of lust.

That would explain why Minerva is left to watch, protected by her shield and feeling like an outsider in matters that have nothing to do with her and to which she wants no part. This ambivalence of the role of Minerva in love matters is reflected also in art, where we may find both a Minerva reprimanding Cupid, fighting against earthly love, and another one, maybe more idealistic, that teaches Cupid how to shoot with his harrow and thus, as in *The Kingis Quair*, teaching men how to love justly and giving earthly love a new dignity.

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[108] Cited according to Mitchell Mitchell, J. Allan, ed., "The Temple of Glas", http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/mitchell-lydgate-the-temple-of-glas, Robbins Library Digital Projects , (accessed October 2018 – February 2018).

Figure 23. Giulio Romano, *Minerva che rimprovera Cupido*, Palazzo Barberini, Roma, 16th century.

Figure 24. Richard Cosway, *Minerva and Cupid*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1788.

Chapter Three

Venus

3.1 From Pagan Origins to Christian Reading

Venus's story, like Minerva's, began in Greece under the name of Aphrodite. Her fascinating history was first narrated by Hesiod in his *Theogony*, in which he wrote that she was born from Uranus' genitals, fallen into the sea after Chronos had castrated him:

> μήδεα δ᾽ ὡς τὸ πρῶτον ἀποτμήξας ἀδάμαντι
> κάββαλ᾽ ἀπ᾽ ἠπείροιο πολυκλύστῳ ἐνὶ πόντῳ,
> ὣς φέρετ᾽ ἄμ πέλαγος πουλὺν χρόνον, ἀμφὶ δὲ λευκὸς
> ἀφρὸς ἀπ᾽ ἀθανάτου χροὸς ὥρνυτο: τῷ δ᾽ ἔνι κούρη
> ἐθρέφθη: πρῶτον δὲ Κυθήροισιν ζαθέοισιν
> ἔπλητ᾽, ἔνθεν ἔπειτα περίρρυτον ἵκετο Κύπρον.
> ἐκ δ᾽ ἔβη αἰδοίη καλὴ θεός, ἀμφὶ δὲ ποίη
> ποσσὶν ὕπο ῥαδινοῖσιν ἀέξετο: τὴν δ᾽ Ἀφροδίτην
> ἀφρογενέα τε θεὰν καὶ ἐυστέφανον Κυθέρειαν
> κικλήσκουσι θεοί τε καὶ ἀνέρες, οὕνεκ᾽ ἐν ἀφρῷ
> θρέφθη: ἀτὰρ Κυθέρειαν, ὅτι προσέκυρσε Κυθήροις:
> Κυπρογενέα δ᾽, ὅτι γέντο πολυκλύστῳ ἐνὶ Κύπρῳ:
> ἠδὲ φιλομμηδέα, ὅτι μηδέων ἐξεφαάνθη.
> τῇ δ᾽ Ἔρος ὡμάρτησε καὶ Ἵμερος ἕσπετο καλὸς
> γεινομένῃ τὰ πρῶτα θεῶν τ᾽ ἐς φῦλον ἰούσῃ.
> ταύτην δ᾽ ἐξ ἀρχῆς τιμὴν ἔχει ἠδὲ λέλογχε
> μοῖραν ἐν ἀνθρώποισι καὶ ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι,
> παρθενίους τ᾽ ὀάρους μειδήματά τ᾽ ἐξαπάτας τε
> τέρψιν τε γλυκερὴν φιλότητά τε μειλιχίην τε.[109] (ll. 188-206)

From the very moment of her birth we can see the manifestation of her double nature: she is described as being, at the same time, "awful" and "lovely". Also, from her very first steps, she is followed by Eros and Desire, two forces that can be both creative and destructive. It is surely interesting to note that the castration of her father resulted in a

[109] Hesiod, last accessed November 2017. "And so soon as he had cut off the members with flint and cast them from the land into the surging sea, they were swept away over the main a long time: and a white foam spread around them from the immortal flesh, and in it there grew a maiden. First she drew near holy Cythera, and from there, afterwards, she came to sea-girt Cyprus, and came forth an awful and lovely goddess, and grass grew up about her beneath her shapely feet. Her gods and men call Aphrodite, and the foam-born goddess and rich-crowned Cytherea, because she grew amid the foam, and Cytherea because she reached Cythera, and Cyprogenes because she was born in billowy Cyprus, and Philommedes because she sprang from the members. And with her went Eros, and comely Desire followed her at her birth at the first and as she went into the assembly of the gods. This honor she has from the beginning, and this is the portion allotted to her amongst men and undying gods, the whisperings of maidens and smiles and deceits with sweet delight and love and graciousness" (Cited according to Hugh G. Evelyn-White, ed., *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, London: Heinemann, 1914.)

generative force so strong that her feet made grass grow around them as soon as they touched the ground.

> In questa formulazione – come in una melodia che dice l'indicibile – punto di partenza e di arrivo coincidono, procreatore e creatura sono identici. Il phallos è la creatura, e la creatura – Afrodite – è un eterno stimolo alla continuazione della Procreazione. L'immagine della fanciulla nata esprime qui la genesi stessa, l'origine atemporale, in modo così sintetico e così completo, come soltanto nel linguaggio della mitologia è possibile fare.[110]

Love is the creative force par excellence, the power that ensures the continuation of mankind, and so it is fitting for fertility to be one of the goddess's attributes. However, we cannot forget that Venus was born not only from the castration but also from the death of her father, and the idea of love born from death is also not to be underestimated. Thus, I think it is no coincidence that in the *Theogony* the birth of Aphrodite immediately precedes the catalogue of Night's children, whose three firstborns are given three names for death: Μοῖραι, Κήρ, and Θάνατος.[111] However, it is possible that the connection with death concerns also beauty. In Greece many a young man aspired to what was called the "beautiful death" (Καλός Θάνατος), the heroic death that assured undying fame: the ultimate proof of a man's virtue, in the prime of his life.[112] For example, Hesiod uses the adjective "limb-melter" for Eros, but is also applied to sleep and death.[113] There would be no death without life and no life without death; and if love is the force that allows life on this earth, then it is impossible for that force to have no connection to death.

> More significantly still, among Night's progeny, among the scourges engendered by the ancient goddess, there appears Philotes and Apate, Loving Tenderness and Deceit – the two being who belong to Aphrodite as her privilege (*time*) and her portion (*moira*). But this is not all. Associated with the sinister squadron of Clashes, Battles, Manslaughters, and Murderers – all forms of violent death – Deceitful Lies (*Pseudees Logoi*) also find their place. These recall the love-talk of young girls, with their deceitful ruses (*exapatai*) – all the more so since other passages from Hesiod are

[110] Jung, C. G., and Kerényi, K., *Prolegomeni allo studio scientifico della mitologia*, translated by Angelo Brelich, Torino: Einaudi, 1948, p. 89.
[111] Vernant, Jean-Pierre, *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays*, translated by Froma I. Zeitlin, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 97.
[112] Vernant, Jean-Pierre, *L'individuo, la morte, l'amore*, traslated by Giulio Guidorizzi, Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 2000, p. 36.
[113][113] Most, Gwen W., "Eros in Hesiod", in Chiara Thumiger Sanders, Chris Carey, and Nick J. Lowe, eds., *Erôs in Ancient Greec*e, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 172, (pp.163 – 174).

> explicit on the point: Hermes places *pseudea th'aimulious te logous,* "lies and deceitful words," in the breast of the first woman, Pandora, from whom issued "the race of feminine women". Hesiod also warns his male reader not to let a woman dupe his senses with deceitful blabbing. Furthermore, it seems hardly necessary to point out that when women did not exist – before Pandora was created – death did not exist for men either. Mingling with the gods, living like them in the Golden Age, men even remained young like the gods throughout their existence, and a kind of gentle sleep took the place of death for them. Death and woman arose in concert together.[114]

The connection gets deeper; death is not only connected with love and beauty, but "death and woman arose in concert together". The connection with love, beauty and women is thus easily made: women are the receptacles of love and beauty and, as such, the ones who ultimately bring men to death. This not only works for paganism, but also for Christianity. The ideas of the decay of the body, of sin and death, are always connected to a female figure; be it the rebellious Lilith, the curious Eve, the foolish Pandora or the beautiful Aphrodite, women seem to be the host of a force so strong and uncontrollable that the only possible outcome is the fall into sin and the destruction of the existing order. Only a woman that has not explored her sexuality yet is able to bring order and salvation; Mary, the virgin mother. Eros (love), embodied by Venus, is an all-consuming force that may lead to madness and to the exclusion of the individual from society, and its extreme consequence is the annihilation, both physical and psychological, of one person into another, resulting inevitably in death, in the negative, or sex, in the positive.

> Erôs has a strong quality of exclusivity and individuality; it is a strictly one-to-one emotion. Likewise, madness is an experience of the subject in isolation. Tragedy gives prominence to the risk of acting out one's individual desires and responsibilities without contemplating the wider context. It is not emotions in themselves, arguably, which bring danger to the individual (the exclusion of emotions appears to be equally destructive), but the dominance of a particular emotion that excludes reflection or compromise, and sets the individual irreparably apart from the rest of the community.[115]

A perfect example would be that of Dido, the queen of Cartage who, blinded by her love for Aeneas, forgot all her duties and began to live for him only. From the very beginning

[114] Vernant, Jean-Pierre, *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays*, p. 98.
[115] Thumiger, Chiara, "Mad Erôs and Eroticized Madness in Tragedy", in Chiara Thumiger Sanders, Chris Carey, and Nick J. Lowe, eds., *Erôs in Ancient Greec*e, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 40, (pp. 27-40).

Dido's love is seen as something negative and uncontrollable, so much so that, in Virgil, Juno says to Venus that: "Dido is burning with passion, love's madness has seeped into her marrow".[116] This is why the queen's death does not come as a surprise: Aeneas, by going away, is taking with him also a part of Dido ("her marrow"), and without it she could not keep on living.[117] It is interesting to note that Gorgias puts love together with the other forces that man cannot control because they are under divine command: fate, necessity and divine will.[118]

> ὅς εἰ μὲν θεός, θεῶF θείαν δύναμιν πῶς ἂν ὁ ἧσσων εἴη τούτων ἀπώσασθαι καὶ ἀμύνασθαι δυνατός; εἰ δ'ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπινον νόσημα καὶ ψυχῆς ἀγνοήμα, οὐχ ὡς ἁμάρτημα μεμπτέον ἀλλ' ὡς ἀτύχημα νομιστέον· ἦλθε, ψυχῆς ἀγρεύμασιν, οὐ γνώμης βουλεύμασι, καὶ ἔπωτος ἀνάγκαισ, οὐ τέχνης παρασκευαῖς.[119]

Everything about Venus is unusual, from her birth to the power she exercises over both mortals and immortals. She is Jove's aunt (being part of Uranus's offspring like Jove's father, Cronos) and thus she could be seen as Minerva's grand-aunt, but it is difficult to say because these two goddesses have had a very peculiar birth and, moreover, neither of them seems to have had a mother. As we can clearly see, their situation is similar but they develop in completely opposite ways: Venus gives herself wholly to love and the pleasures of the flesh, while Minerva stays as far as possible from them, freely choosing to remain forever a virgin goddess. It is also interesting to note that, more often than not, Venus is not blamed for her irresponsible behaviour and that may be because love, however hurtful and destructive, can never be blamed; but also, I think that there is an element of fear that we have to take in consideration. Venus's love can influence even the

[116] Virgil, *Aeneid,* translated by Frederick Ahl, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, Book IV, l. 101.
[117] Virgil, Book IV, l. 664.
[118] Gorgia, *Encomio di Elena*, translated by Guido Paduano, Napoli: Liguori Editore, 2004, p.77.
[119] Gorgia, pp. 82-84. "Se amore è un dio, come potrebbe essere capace di respingere la divina potenza degli dei e di difendersene un essere loro inferiore? Se invece è una malattia umana, un errore dell'anima, non deve essere biasimato come colpa, ma considerato una disgrazia, se è vero come è vero che piombò su di lei in forza di un a trappola dell'anima, e non di un disegno del pensiero, grazie alla necessità dell'amore e non agli espedienti dell'arte"

gods, and so it is possible that the other divinities of the pantheon may be wary of her and the frightening force she embodies:

> Hesiod's account of the birth of Aphrodite (Theog. 183-206) brilliantly enhances this frightfulness while at the same time mitigating or even domesticating it. For she arises from a terrible crime, Cronus's castration of his father Sky at the instigation of his mother Earth – there is a profound paradox in the fact that the goddess of sexual desire arises out of the brutal cancellation of the very possibility of oversexed Sky's continual sexual activity – and yet what she comes about as is something delicate and lovely, a beautiful maiden with slender feet.[120]

The fact that even Zeus fell in love with her is proof of her strength. This struggle between the sexes is best represented in Zeus himself, the highest divinity in the Greek pantheon: his proverbial excessive desire offers a challenge to his authority but at the same time it is proof of his great virility.[121] Zeus's efforts to tame the power of Aphrodite and to bring her under his control resulted in a genealogy that made her the daughter of Zeus and Dione (whose name is simply an adjective derived from Zeus's name [Dios]]).[122]

The Greek philosopher Plato will try to solve this contrast. In his *Symposium* it is written that there are two different Aphrodites:[123] Aphrodite as "Urania" is the goddess of heavenly love, but the "Pandemos" gives love to all, and when inclined becomes a willing "Symmachia" – an ally in love.[124] Loving only the body and the pleasures that derive from it is considered vulgar and useless because it is a love directed to something extremely changeable and ephemeral, and thus this love will be of the same kind.[125] To ennoble this emotion we need to insert in this feminine vision of love, a more masculine side that will balance it, creating a perfect equilibrium, a perfect balance of body and

[120] Most, p. 172.
[121] Zeitlin, Froma I., "Reflections on Erotic Desire in Archaic and Classical Greece", in James I. Porter, ed., *Constructions of the Classical Body*, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press,2002, p. 65, (pp. 50 -76).
[122] Zeitlin, p. 71.
[123] Platone, *Simposio*, translated by Francesco di Benedetto and Franco Ferrari, Milano: Rizzoli, 2000, p. 115.
[124] Clark, Nora, *Aphrodite and Venus in Myth and Mimesis*, Newcastle-on-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015, p. 1.
[125] Platone, p. 123.

mind: it is the perfect love, the reconstruction of the whole that Plato exemplifies with the figure of Hermaphrodites.[126]

> L'universo conosce una melodia – così potremmo indicare quel carattere alquanto complesso – dell'eterna connessione di amore, furto e commercio: questa melodia, in tonalità maschile, è Hermes. In tonalità femminile la stessa melodia (che è pur sempre differente come sono differenti uomo e donna) si chiama Afrodite. L'affinità essenziale di Eros e Hermes si manifesta il più chiaramente nei rispettivi rapporti con la dea dell'amore. Afrodite e Eros appartengono l'uno all'altra come forze e principi essenzialmente connessi. Eros, il fanciullo divino, è il compagno naturale di Afrodite. Quando però si vuole esprimere in una sola figura l'aspetto virile e femminile del comune carattere di Afrodite e Eros, questa figura è Afrodite e Hermes tutt'insieme: Hermaphroditos.[127]

This figure is seen as the unification of contraries and the solution of conflicts. It is like a bridge between the conscious and the unconscious, the rational and the irrational, beastly desire and heavenly love. However, this equilibrium in love was rarely felt by author and a good example would be that of Alan de Lille. We do not know much about him other than the fact that he studied in France, possibly at Chartres, and taught in Paris, and that he died between 14 April 1202, and 5 April 1203.[128] His *Plaint of Nature* belongs to the type of literature called Menippean, from Menippus of Garda, originator of the serio-comic style in which humorous expression was given to philosophical view.[129]

> In lacrymas risus, in fletum gaudia verto:
> In planctum plausus, in lacrymosa jocos,
> Cum sua naturam video secreta silere,
> Cum Veneris monstro naufraga turba perit.
> Cum Venus in Venerem pugnans, illos facit illas.
> Cumque suos magica devirat arte viros.[130]

The confusion and the division that love causes is clearly shown here but once love has reached this more noble form we may distinguish between a love that is "human" and

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[126] Platone, p. 141.
[127] Jung, p. 86.
[128] Alan de Lille, *Plaint of Nature*, translated by James J. Sheridan, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1980, p. 8.
[129] Alan de Lille, p. 35.
[130] Alanus de Insulis, "De Planctu Naturae", http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/alanus/alanus1.html, *The Latin Library*, last accessed November 2017. "I turn from laughter to tears, from joy to grief, from merriment to lament, from jest to wailing, when I see that the essential decrees of Nature are denied hearing, while large numbers are shipwrecked and lost because of a Venus turned monster, when Venus wars with Venus and changes "hes" into "shes" and with her witchcraft unmans man." (Cited according to James J. Sheridan, ed.)

one, to which all humans should aspire, that is "celestial". This is certainly a good starting point for Christianity to build on and by the end of this process love will be completely assigned to the male and the woman will be left with nothing but lust. Love comes from God and only in him does true love live. During the Middle Ages many authors will have to leave the earthly domain to be able to write about love, but we will return to this a bit later in this chapter.

But, whatever kind of love is taken into consideration, the only one deemed able to supervise such matters is Venus. For example, Ovid in the proem of his *Ars Amatoria* invokes Venus instead of the Muses:

> Quo me fixit Amor, quo me violentius ussit,
> Hoc melior facti vulneris ultor ero:
> Non ego, Phoebe, datas a te mihi mentiar artes,
> Nec nos aëriae voce monemur avis,
> Nec mihi sunt visae Clio Cliusque sorores
> Servanti pecudes vallibus, Ascra, tuis:
> Usus opus movet hoc: vati parete perito;
> Vera canam: coeptis, mater Amoris, ades!
> Este procul, vittae tenues, insigne pudoris,
> Quaeque tegis meidos instita longa pedes.[131] (ll. 23-32)

Even here, from the very beginning we see an element of violence; it seems impossible for the goddess to leave behind that side of her nature that inevitably resurfaces every time she is concerned and not even the passage from Greece to Rome could erase it.

> Time would fail me, if I should attempt to repeat the named of those, whom she has armed to their mutual destruction, driven to wicked intrigues, and hanged into monstrous beasts; but I am deterred by modesty from proceeding further.[132]

Her intervention seems to bring inevitably to disaster and in courtly love it will be the same. The knight will suffer for the love that pierces him, no matter the outcome of such

[131] Ovid, *The Art of love*, translated by J. H. Mozley, London: Heinemann, 1939, Book I. "The more violently Love has pierced and branded me, the better shall I avenge the wound that he has made: I will not falsely claim that my art is thy gift, O Phebus, nor am I prompted by the voice of a bird of the air, neither did Clio and Clio's sisters appear to me in thy vale, O Ascra: experience inspires this work: give ear to an experienced bard; true will be my song: favour my enterprise, O mother of Love. Keep far away, ye slender fillets, emblems of modesty and the long skirt that hides the feet in its folds."
[132] Sheldon, Williams, *History of the Heathen Gods and Heroes of Antiquity*, Boston: Isaiah Thomas, 1816, pp. 47-8.

love. Another hint at Venus's connection with violence is her relationship with Mars, the god of war and strife. Some of their children were bringers of life and peace (Harmonia and Priapus) because they were generated when the opposite forces of the two gods were balanced, while others brought death and pain (Phobus and Deimus) probably because there was an unbalance in the gods' union. As already said in the previous chapter, the image of Venus and Mars as adulterous lovers whose feelings are impeded by Venus's marriage to the ugly Vulcan, will become a theme of great success. Venus, the beautiful lady who is loved by a toiling knight in shining armour (Mars), will be represented by many an author, among whom there is certainly Chaucer in *The Knight's Tale*.

But Venus' popularity during the Middle Ages had also much to do with her connection with Rome and the Romans.

> Si qua tamen pars te de fastis tangere debet,
> Caesar, in Aprili, quo tenearis, habes.
> Hic ad te magna descendit origine mensis
> Et fit adoptiva nobilitate tuus.
> Hoc pater Iliades, cum longum scriberet annum,
> Vidit et auctores rettulit ipse tuos:
> Utque fero Marti primam dedit ordine sortem,
> Quod sibi nascenti proxima causa fuit,
> sic Venerem gradibus multis in gente receptam
> alterius voluit mensishabere locum.[133] (ll. 19-28)

Then follows a long list of names, describing the genealogical tree of the Romulus' race, starting from Dardanus, in order to show without a doubt that Venus is Romulus' ancestor. However, there is the problem of the name of the month dedicated to the goddess. If March comes from Mars, then how does April come from Venus? *Aprilis*, it

[133] Ovid, *Fasti*, translated by James George Frazer, London: Heinemann, 1989, Book IV. "Yet if any past of the calendar should interest thee, Caesar, thou hast in April matter of concern. This month thou hast inherited by a great pedigree, and it has been made thine by virtue of thine adoption into a noble house. When the Ilian sire was putting the long year on record, he saw the relationship and commemorated the authors of thy race: and as he gave the first lot in the order of the months to fierce Mars, because he was the immediate cause of his own birth, so he willed that the place of the second month should belong to Venus, because he traced his descent from her through many generations"

turns out, is linguistically related to Aphrodite, the Greek name for Venus. Aphrodite was named after the foam of the sea (ἀφρός), from which she was born, and *Aprilis* is derived from the same word[134] and it makes sense if we think not only that Aeneas comes from Troy, but also that Ovid himself refers to Italy as the "Greater Greece".[135] The same etymology will be shared also by Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologies*.[136] Venus, like all the other gods, is moving from Greece to Rome. After lying with the human Anchises, she gave birth to the founder of Rome, Aeneas and during the war of Troy she tirelessly fought for his survival[137] and it is no wonder that she was then taken up as one of the major gods of Rome.

> Venus was originally an Italian goddess, probably presiding over the fertility of vegetable gardens, fruit, and flowers. The oldest known temple of Venus dates back to 293 B.C., and within a century many other temples were dedicated to Venus. By the second century B.C., under Greek influence, Venus became identified with the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite, and the Greek goddess's myths and attributes became associated with Venus. […] The cult of Venus became particularly important to the Romans because Aphrodite was said to have been the mother of Aeneas, the founder of Rome. Later influential Romans took Venus as their patron, thus also enhancing her importance. For example, the dictator Sulla claimed her as his protectress, as did Pompey. The most important family to claim descent directly from the goddess, however, was that of Julius Caesar and his nephew Caesar Augustus (Octavian). By linking themselves to the family of Venus through Aeneas, these men helped consolidate their power to rule what had become a huge empire. The goddess that brought love had become one that bestowed power.[138]

Lucretius, a great Roman writer of the first century AD, also began his *De Rerum Natura* with an invocation to Venus. Like a good Roman he invokes first the goddess that presided the birth of his race:

> Aeneadum genetrix, hominum divomque voluptas,
> alma Venus, caeli subter labentia signa
> quae mare navigerum, quae terras frugiferentis
> concelebras, per te quoniam genus omne animantum
> concipitur visitque exortum lumina solis:
> te, dea, te fugiunt venti, te nubila caeli
> adventumque tuum, tibi suavis daedala tellus
> summittit flores, tibi rident aequora ponti

[134] Parker, Hugh C., *Greek Gods in Italy in Ovid's Fasti*, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997, p. 3.
[135] Ovid, *Fasti*, Book IV, l. 64.
[136] Isidore, p. 128
[137] Homer, Book V, ll. 288-313.
[138] Salisbury, Joyce E., "Encyclopedia of Women in The Ancient World", http://1.droppdf.com/files/0VpyU/encyclopedia-of-women-in-the-ancient-world.pdf, pp. 358-59, last accessed November 2017.

placatumque nitet diffuso lumine caelum.
[…]
effice ut interea fera moenera militiai
per maria ac terras omnis sopita quiescant;
nam tu sola potes tranquilla pace iuvare
mortalis, quoniam belli fera moenera Mavors
armipotens regit, in gremium qui saepe tuum se
reiicit aeterno devictus vulnere amoris,
atque ita suspiciens tereti cervice reposta
pascit amore avidos inhians in te, dea, visus
eque tuo pendet resupini spiritus ore.
hunc tu, diva, tuo recubantem corpore sancto
circum fusa super, suavis ex ore loquellas
funde petens placidam Romanis, incluta, pacem.[139]

The power of Venus is strongly represented: nature itself is put into motion by the mere invocation of her name and Mars is easily won. In this excerpt it is easy to see how much of an influence the previous Italian goddess Venus, who presided over fertility and gardens (the future gardens of medieval courtly tradition where the protagonist falls in love with the lady), has had on the figure of the Greek Aphrodite. For the Romans Venus is not only lust and beauty, but primarily a natural force of creation, and a mother. She is thus the best one to preside not only on matters of love but also on the natural world in general and in this proem her presence could also be read as an allegory for the arrival of spring. In the figure of Venus, then, Lucretius has created a great mythological symbol for all that is positive, creative and attractive in the natural world and in men.[140] We can see this same figure in Apuleius: from the sea came a beautiful woman with unbound long

[139] Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, translated by W. H. D. Rous, London: Heinemann, 1959, Book I, ll. 1-40. "Mother of Aeneas and his race, darling of men and gods, nurturing Venus, who beneath the smooth-moving heavenly signs fillest with thyself the sea full-laden with ships, the earth with her kindly fruits, since through thee every generation of living things is conceived and rising up looks at light of the sun: from thee, O goddess, from thee, the winds flee away, the clouds of heaven from thee and thy coming; for the wonder-working earth puts forth sweet flowers, for thee the wide stretches of the ocean laugh, and heaven grown peaceful glows with outpoured light. […] Cause meanwhile the savage works of war to sleep and be still over every sea and land. For thou alone canst delight mortals with quiet peace, since Mars mighty in battle rules the savage works of war; who often casts himself upon thy lap wholly vanquished by the ever-living wound of love, and thus looking upward with shapely neck thrown back feeds his eager eyes with love, gaping upon thee, goddess, and as he lies back his breath hangs upon thy lips. There as he reclines, goddess, upon thy sacred body, do thou, bending around him from above, pour from thy lips sweet coaxing, and for thy Romans, illustrious one, crave quiet peace"
[140] Gale, Monica R., *Myth and Poetry in Lucretius*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 223.

hair, and a crown made of corn and she presented herself as Nature but admitted that some called her also *Paphian Venus*.

> "En adsum tuis commota, Luci, precibus, rerum naturae parens, elementorum omnium domina, saeculorum progenies initialis, summa numinum, regina manium, prima caelitum, deorum dearumque facies uniformis, quae caeli luminosa culmina, maria salubria flamina, inferum deplorata silentia nutibus meis dispenso; cuius numen unicum multiformi specie, ritu vario, nomine multiiugo totus veneratur orbis. […] illinc fluctuantes Cyprii Paphiam Venerem […] et qui nascentis dei Solis incohantibus illustrantur radiis Aethiopes utrique priscaque doctrina pollentes Aegyptii, caerimoniis me propriis percolentes, appellant vero nomine reginam Isidem".[141]

So, Venus may also be seen as Nature herself. Probably here she is called *Paphian* because of her famous temple at Paphos were she was celebrated as the goddess of marriage and of the wedded state.[142] In this role she is seen as a bringer of order: she is everywhere, and she is the force that makes the world move. This kind of relationship will change a bit during the Middle Ages but the connection between Nature and Venus will never be broken. Nature became closer to God while Venus became her vicar as in *The Plaint of Nature* where Nature herself says:

> Ita tamen sub divinae potestatis imperio ministerium hujus operationis exercui, ut meae attentionis manum dextera supernae majestatis dirigeret, quia meae scripturae calamus exorbitatione subita deviaret, nisi supremi dispositoris digito regeretur. Sed quia sine subministratorii artificis artificio suffragante, tot rerum species expolire non poteram, mihique in aethereae regionis amoenante palatio placuit commorari, ubi ventorum rixa serenitatis pacem non perimit, ubi accidentalis nox nubium aetheris indefessum non sepelit, ubi nulla tempestatis saevit injuria, ubi nulla debacchantis tonitru minatur insania, Venerem ineffabili scientia peritam, meaeque operationis subvicariam in mundiali suburbio collocavi, ut meae praeceptionis sub arbitrio, hymenaei conjugis, filiique Cupidinis industria suffragante, in terrestrium animalium varia effigiatione desudans, fabriles

[141] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, translated by J. Arthur Hanson, London: Harvard University Press, 1989, Book XI, 5-6. "Behold, Lucius, moved by your prayers I have come, I the mother of the universe, mistress of all the elements, and first offspring of the ages; mightiest of deities, queen of the dead, and foremost of heavenly beings; my one person manifests the aspect of all gods and goddesses. With my nod I rule the starry heights of heaven, the health-giving breezes of the sea, and the plaintive silences of the underworld. My divinity is one, worshipped by all the world under different forms, with various rites, and by manifold names. […] in another (place) the sea-washed Cyprians call me Paphian Venus […]; the people of Ethiopoas, who are lighted by the first rays of the Sun-God as he rises every day, and the Egyptians, who are strong in ancient lore, worship me with the rites that are truly mine and call me by my real name, which is Queen Isis."

[142] Raliegh, Katherine A., *The Gods of Olympos or Mythology of the Greeks and Romans*, New York: Cassell Publishing Company, 1890, p. 96.

> malleos suis regulariter adaptans incudibus, humani generis seriem indefessa continuatione contexeret, Parcarumque manibus intercisorum injurias repararet.[143]

And as such we might be reminded of her form as a planet, a physical existence able to inspire love and sexual impulses in mankind.

> Venus is again mentioned in connection with astrology as governing the destinies of men, who in turn attribute their wrongdoing to the influence of Venus. The same thought is expressed in the Enarratio in Psalmum 61, in which Augustine mentions an astrologer who used to say that one did not commit sin through one's own will, but Venus was the cause of the sin. The hold which astrology had on people is evident from the numerous references made to the belief in the guiding powers of the stars as responsible for man's conduct. In keeping with the Neoplatonic idea of worshipping the object represented rather than the image, the pagans said that they worshipped Venus as the morning star.[144]

We are used to the scientific view that the Greeks often adopted but it would have been impossible even for them to see the stars and planets as existences that had nothing to do with the gods and the supernatural, and so the learned Greeks of the fourth and third centuries received Babylonian astronomy and astrology together, and developed both - indeed, they used the same word, *astrologia*, for both.[145] Isidore of Seville is one of the first writers to explore the difference between astronomy and astrology even if there was still much confusion about the two terms and for a long time they kept being used interchangeably.

> Nam Astronomia caeli conversionem, ortus, obitus motusque siderum continet, vel qua ex causa ita vocentur. Astrologia vero partim natralis, partim superstitiosa est. Naturalis, dum exequitur solis et lunae cursus, vel stellarum certas temporum stations. Superstitiosa vero est illa quam mathematici sequuntur, qui in stellis auguriantur, quique etiam duodecim caeli signa per singula

[143] Alanus de Insulis, last accessed November 2017. "However, under the mysterious powers of God, I carried out the administration of this office in such a way that the right hand of the supreme authority should direct my hand in its work, for my writing-reed would instantly go off course if I were not guided by the finger of the superintendent on high. But because without the supporting skill of a sub-delegated artisan, I could not put the finishing touches on so many species of things and because I decided to spend my time in the delightful palace of the ethereal region, where the contending winds do not destroy the peace of unadulterated clam, where no nightfall with its clouds buries ether's never-tiring light of day, where no destructive storm rages, where there is no threat from the thunder's mad rage, I stationed Venus, earned in the artisan's skill, on the outskirts of the Universe to be subdelegate in charge of my work that she, under my will and command, with the active aid of Hymenaeus, her spouse, and Desire, her son, might exert herself in the reproduction of the varies animal-life of earth and, fitting the artisan's hammer to its anvil according to rule, might tirelessly maintain an unbroken linkage in the chain of the human race lest it be severed by the hands of the Fates and suffer damage by being broken apart."

[144] Madden, Sister Mary Daniel, *The Pagan Divinities and their Worship as Depicted in the Works of Saint Augustin Exclusive of the City of God*, Washington: Catholic University of America, 1930, p. 72.

[145] Tester, S. J., *A History of Western Astrology*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1987, p. 19.

> animae vel corporis membra disponunt, siderumque cursu nativitates hominum et mores praedicare conantur.[146]

Medieval people felt very strongly the need to prove that the planets did not determine the lives of men because that would go against the principle of free will, one of God's gifts to mankind. Also, as said before, men tended to use this supposed influence over them to shed any responsibility from their action and, above all, as an excuse to sin without remorse. Sometimes pagan divinities were seen as demons that would try to sway you from your faith and the fact that there was a physical body in the sky, watching over you and influencing you, could only strengthen this belief. The heavenly bodies never truly stopped being considered divinities, but the men of the Church took pains to erase this belief:

> Planetae stellae sunt quae non sunt fixae in caelo, un reliquiae, sed in aere feruntur. Dictae autem planetae ἀπὸ τῆς πλάνης, id est, ab errore. Nam interdum in austrum, interdum in septentrionem, plerumque contra mundum, nonnumquam cum mundo feruntur. Quarum nomina Graeca sunt Phaethon, Phaenon, Pyrion, Hesperus, Stilbon. Has Romani nominibus deorum suorum, id est Iovis, Saturni, MArtis, Veneris, atque Mercurii sacraverunt. Decepti enim et decipere volentes in eorum adulationem, qui sibi aliquid secundum amorem praestitissent, sidera ostendebat in caelo, dicentes quod Iovis esset illud sidus et illud Mercurii: et concept est opinion vanitatis. Hanc opinionem erroris diabolus confirmavit, Christus evertit.[147]

The identification of the gods with astral bodies had already been fully accomplished by the end of the pagan era[148] and Venus was one of the first planets to be named:

> Originally the Greeks singled out only one [planet], Venus, Ἑωσφόρος or Ἕσπερος in Homer. They learned from the Babylonians to distinguish the five wandering stars form the fixed stars

[146] Isidori, Book III: 27. "Astronomy concerns itself with the turning of the heavens, the rising, setting, and motion of the stars, and where the constellations get their names. But astrology is partly natural, and partly superstitious. It is natural as long as it investigates the courses of the sun and the moon, or the specific positions of the stars according to the seasons; but it is a superstitious belief that the astrologers (*mathematicus*) follow when they associate the twelve signs of the zodiac with specific parts of the soul or body, or when they attempt to predict the nativities and characters of people by the motions of the stars."
[147] Isidori, Book III: 20-1. "Planets are stars that are not fixed in the sky as the rest are, but are carried through the air. They are called 'planets' (*planeta*) from the word πλάνη, that is, 'wandering', for sometimes they are carried to the south and sometimes to the north, and they are often carries against the cosmos, and sometimes with it. Their Greek names are Phaethon, Phaenon, Pyrion, Hesperus, and Stilbon. The Romans have consecrated them with the names of their gods, that is Jupiter, Saturn, Mars, Venus, and Mercury. Themselves deceived, and wishing to deceive others into the worship of those who had granted them something in accordance with their desire, they would point out the stars in the sky, and say that this one was Jupiter's and that one was Mercury's, and this vain belief was born. The devil strengthened this erroneous belief, and Christ overturned it"
[148] Seznec, p. 37.

> forming the constellations, and – still following the same example, consecrated each of the five to a different deity. For every Babylonian god a Greek god who bore some resemblance to him in character was substituted as a master of the same planet.[149]

This view of the gods as planets thus passed from the Babylonians to the Greeks until it reached the Romans. Pliny, for example, described Venus's magnitude, brightness and course attributing the discovery of some of its characteristics to Pythagoras of Samos. Furthermore, he stressed the creative and generative force of Venus, in line with Lucretius and Apuleius.

> Quam naturam eius pythagoras samius primus deprehendit olympiade circiter xlii, qui fuit urbis romae annus cxlii. iam magnitudine extra cuncta alia sidera est, claritatis quidem tantae, ut unius huius stellae radiis umbrae reddantur. itaque et in magno nominum ambitu est. alii enim iunonis, alii isidis, alii matris deum appellavere. huius natura cuncta generantur in terris. namque in alterutro exortu genitali rore conspergens non terrae modo conceptus inplet, verum animantium quoque omnium stimulat. [150]

The gods and their power are assimilated by the planets that in this way gain an identity, a gender, and also the powers typical of the god they now embody. Benevolent or deadly, they determine the fate of peoples and individuals by the mere accident of their movements, their conjunctions and oppositions.[151]

Astrology seems to be another way in which the pagan gods survived through the Middle Ages; after all the names of the planets could not be changed on a whim and thus every scholar was bound to know of them also in this vestige. There were scientific proofs of the influence of planets on man, and so the impact of Venus on the people was more than simply a literary convention: it was a reality men and women had to live with. But

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[149] Seznec, p. 39.

[150] Pliny, "Naturalis Historia", http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0138:book=2:chapter=6&highlight=fortuna, *Perseus Digital Library,* Book II:10, last accessed November 2017. "This property of Venus was first discovered by Pythagoras of Samos about the 42nd Olympiad, 142 years after the foundation of Rome. Further it surpasses all the other stars in magnitude, and is so brilliant that alone among stars it casts a shadow by its rays. Consequently, there is a great competition to give it a name, some having called it Juno, others Isis, others the Mother of the Gods. Its influence is the cause of the birth of all things upon earth; at both of its risings it scatters a genital dew with which it not only fills the conceptive organs of the earth but also stimulates those of all animals" (Cited according to John Bostock, ed., "Pliny the Elder; The Natural History",http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0137:book=2:chapter=5&highlight=fortune, *Perseus Digital Library,* last accessed January 2018.)

[151] Seznec, p. 41.

God created everything and so even those planes who bore pagan names were bound to have a meaning even if mankind, with his limited knowledge and understanding of God, could misinterpret it. The planets, identified with the pagan gods, were believed to influence a wide range not only of forms of life, from the characteristics of stones and plants to the humours of men, but also of events, from changes in the climate to the rise and fall of nations.[152] However, Augustine was quick to draw a line that would reduce the influence of the planets and put them under God's law:

> Now, some men hold 'the power of the stars' to be independent of God, while others believe it to be dependent upon his will. The first opinion is to be rejected as really a form of atheism, whether it is held by pagans or professed Christians. In the second case either the stars act of their own volition, the power being given to them by God, or they merely carry out, by necessity, the will of God himself. If the first, how is it that these heavenly bodies, in all their beauty and grandeur – *clarissimus senatus et splendidissima curia*, says Augustine – can cause evil? It is unthinkable. Then surely it is even less thinkable that God causes evil through them? But if it is said, as it has been by men of great learning, that the stars *signify* events but do not cause them.[153]

This is a possible solution to the problem of free will. The planets are closer to God and thus reflect a knowledge that is greater than ours, so it is not that the planets and the stars govern our actions but, as they are a reflection of God's knowledge, we can learn more about ourselves by learning how to read them.

Venus as a planetary influence is invoked also by Dante in the *Paradiso*:

> Solea creder lo mondo in suo periclo
> Che la bella Ciprigna il folle amore
> raggiasse, volta nel terzo epiciclo;
>
> per che non pur a lei facieno onore
> di sacrificio e di votivo grido
> le genti antiche ne l'antico errore;
>
> ma Dïone onoravano e Cupido,
> quella per madre sua, questo per figlio,
> e dicean ch'el sedette in grembo a Dido;
>
> e da costei ond'io principio piglio
> pigliavano il vocabol de la stella
> che'l sol vagheggia or da coppa or da ciglio.

[152] Rivers, Isabel, *Classics and Christian Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry: A Student's Guide*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 71.
[153] Tester, p. 110.

Io no m'accorsi del salire in ella;
ma d'esservi entro mi fe' assai fede
la donna mia, ch'i' vidi far più bella.

E come in fiamma favilla si vede,
e come in voce voce si discerne,
quand'una è ferma e altra va e riede,

vid'io in essa luce altre lucerne
muoversi in giro più e men correnti,
al modo, credo, di lor viste interne.

Di fredda nube non disceser venti,
o visibili o no, tanto festini,
che non paressero impediti e lenti,

a chi avesse quei lumi divini
veduti a noi venir, lasciando il giro
pria cominciato in li alti Serafini.

E dentro a quei che più innanzi appariro
sonava "Osanna" sì, che unque poi
di rïudir non fui sanza disirio.[154] (ll. 1-30)

Here Beatrice and Dante are in the third heaven that belongs to Venus. The mood is set from the very beginning with the use of the word "Solea": the use of the past lets Dante explore the existence of the pagan gods as planetary forces while, at the same time, showing us that this is not what he believes, but what other people once used to believe. Once he has made this premise, he is free to follow the classical conventions as we can see from the fact that he noticed his entrance in the circle of Venus when he sees "la donna mia, ch'i' vidi far più bella" (l. 15). Here too, as in Canto IV of *Inferno*, wind blows. But this is not the furious wind that transported Paolo and Francesca, mirroring how in life they were blown away by their love; it is a gentler wind that can better represent the ennobled and perfect love commanded by God.

[154] Dante, *Divina Commedia*, in Luigi Blasucci, ed., *Dante: Tutte le Opere*, Firenze: Sansoni Editore, 1981, Paradiso, Canto VII.

In the *Purgatorio* Venus is mentioned again not as a deity but as a planet that inspires love in men.[155] In his *Convivio*, Dante had already talked about Venus and the role of her heaven as the one inspiring love in humans:

> 13. Per che ragionevole è credere che li movitori del cielo e de la Luna siano de l'ordine de li Angeli, e quelli di Mercurio siano li Arcangeli, e quelli di Venere siano li Troni; li quali, naturati de l'amore del Santo Spirito, fanno la loro operazione, connaturale ad essi, cioè lo movimento di quello cielo, pieno d'amore, dal quale prende la forma del detto cielo uno ardore virtuoso, per lo quale le anime di qua giuso s'accendono d'amore secondo la loro disposizione. 14. E perché li antichi s'accorsero che quello cielo era qua giù cagione d'amore, dissero Amore essere figlio di Venere, sì come testimonia Vergilio nel primo de lo Eneida, ove dice Venere ad Amore: "Figlio, vertù mia, figlio del sommo padre, che li dardi di Tifeo non curi"; e Ovidio, nel quinto di Metamorphoses, quando dice che Venere disse ad Amore: "Figlio, armi mie, potenzia mia". [156]

Dante had already explored how Venus influenced humans and, quite obviously, he explained everything in a Christian key. The Thrones are the "movers" and it is no wonder that they belong to the heaven of Venus, the one goddess that superintends the matters of love, the creative and moving force par excellence. Moreover, Saint Aquinas says, when talking about the angels who had supposedly followed Satan in his rebellion:

> In sacra Scriptura tamen nomina quorundam ordinum, ut Seraphim et thronorum, Daemonibus non attribuuntur; quia haec nomina sumuntur ab ardore caritatis et ab inhabitatione Dei, quae non possunt esse cum peccato mortali. Attribuuntur autem eis nomina Cherubim, potestatum et principatuum, quia haec nomina sumuntur a scientia et potentia, quae bonis malisque possunt esse communia.[157]

The Thrones have a deep connection with God's love, they are its emanations and none of them had turned his back on Him during Satan's rebellion; no heaven suits them better than that of Venus. Love loses any sexual and impure connotation: the love that Venus reflects and hosts is the love of God. Beatrice, for example, becomes more beautiful but

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[155] Dante, Purgatorio, Canto I, ll. 19-20.
[156] Dante, *Il Convivio*, in C. Vasoli and D. De Robertis, eds., *Opere minori*, Milano: Ricciardi, 1988, Capitolo V: 13-14, (pp. 3-887).
[157]Aquinas, Thomas, "Summa Theologiae", http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/sth1050.html, *Corpus Thomisticum*, Liber I, Q. 63, Art. 8, last accessed November 2017. "In the Sacred Scriptures, however, the names of some orders, as of Seraphim and Thrones, are not attributed to demons, since they are derived from the ardour of love and from God's indwelling, which are not consistent with moral sin. Yet the names of Cherubim, Powers, and Principalities are attributed to them, because these names are derived from knowledge and from power, which can be common to both good and bad." (Cited according to in Daniel J. Sullivan, ed., *The Summa Theologica of Saint Thomas Aquinas,* London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952.)

her beauty is not seen as something threatening but entering in the heaven of love, she too becomes a mirror of that same love that comes from God. The woman is only a starting point, the first motor that helps men catch a glimpse of God's love and pushes them towards Him. Dante found a possible solution to the temptation of the flash in the death of Beatrice: once her body is gone the threat disappears and the only possible love is a spiritual love. Having also removed any possible sinful aspect also from the narration (Virgil is back in Hell), Dante is free to write about her beauty and his feelings for Beatrice when he finally sees her in the Earthly Paradise.

However, this is not the only possible outcome. While it is certainly true that Christians tried to control the destructive force of love and sometimes succeeded (as Dante did), other times it was difficult to reign over Venus. This drive, this force, that Aphrodite commands is none other than Eros. In the beginning Eros was a distinct deity, even if always under Venus's command, but it gradually disappeared and by the Middle Ages, Eros was nothing more than the love-force that the goddess inspired in men and gods. This is confirmed by the fact that there is no mention of Eros even in Isidore's *Etymologies*: it is not considered a god and thus it finds no place in the midst of the other deities that are listed.

Chaucer seemed unable (or unwilling) to suppress the more sinful and sexual aspects of his Venus in *The Knight's Tale* and he solved this problem by setting his story in a distant past that had nothing to do with the present. However, unlike Dante, he did not offer an alternative view on the present Venus but simply explored her existence in that setting. Also, in the *Parliament of Fowls* he completely broke the connection between Nature and Venus; they have a similar function, but Venus is sinful while Nature seems

more like a vicar of God's creative power[158]. The concept is similar to that of Alan de Lille's *Plaint of Nature*, but while this author considered Venus a subordinate of Nature, Chaucer made her seem more like a threatening force; Venus is sin, trying to subvert the natural order given by God.

This confusion regarding Venus and her nature becomes evident when we turn to Boccaccio's *Genealogy* where we find three different Venuses. The first one is the daughter of Zeus and Dite and she is the most similar to Nature:

> De patre autem dissentiunt, cum dicant alii ex Jove genitum, alii ex Libero patre. Sic et Gratias quas huius etiam dicunt filias. Dicunt insuper huic cingulum esse quod ceston next hit nominant, quo cinctam eam asserunt legitimis intervenire nuptiis. Aliis vero coniunctionibus maris et femine dicunt absque cingulo interesse. Eam insuper dicunt summe Solis progeniem habere hodio propter adulterium eius cum Marte, ab eo Vulcano patefactum. […] . Nec hanc mixtim atque confuse corporibus iniunctam debemus arbitrari potentiam, quin imo unicuique proprium constituisse officium, et circa que eius versaretur autoritas distinxisse, voluisseque omnia se invicem secundum plus et minus coniunctionum atque reliquarum virium pro varietate locorum ad opus in finem deducendum intentum mutuis vicissitudinibus iuvare. Et inter alia concessa pluribus ut testantur effectus, Veneri planete asserebat idem Andalo fuisse concessum quicquid ad amorem, amicitiam, dilectionem, coniunctionem, societatem et unionem inter animalia spectare videretur, et potissime ad procreationem prolis spectantia, ut esset qui segnem forte naturam in sui continuationem atque ampliationem urgeret, et idcirco causari ab ista hominum voluptates concedi potest.[159]

Her belt, called "ceston", gives her a more sacred meaning and her planetary existence puts her under God's law. The second Venus is the one who corresponds to the more classical and widespread view of Venus as the libidinous daughter of Uranus:

> Venerem secundam plures Celi volunt fuisse filiam, non tamen ritu genitam quo gignimus omnes, ex qua recitatur: Saturnum scilicet in Celum sevisse patrem, et, falce sumpta, ei abscidisse virilia et in mare abiecisse, quorsum autem ceciderint non habetur. Falcem vero haud longe a promontorio

[158] MacQueen, John, "Tradition and the Interpretation of *The Kingis Quair*", *The Review of English Studies*, 12, (1961), pp. 122-3, (pp. 117–131).

[159] Boccaccio, Book III: 22. "They say in addition that she had a girdle which they call cestos, and they assert that she wore it when occupied with legitimate marriages; they say that she participated in other unions of man and woman without the girdle. In addition they say that she held the progeny of the Sun in intense hatred on account of her adultery with Mars, which sun had revealed to Vulcan. […] We must not think this power is mixed or joined indistinctly in bodies but that each one hos its own function and that each has its own discrete and specific authority, and that is wants to help with their mutual vicissitudes all things in turn to complete their work and continue towards their intended end, varying according to greater or lesser conjunctions and the power they maintain in their various locations. And among the other things granted to many planets, as their effects bear witness, the same Andalò used to assert that the planet Venus should be conceded anything that seems to look toward love, friendship, delight, association, society, and union among living things, and especially things having to do with the procreation of offspring, so that it is Venus which impels a somewhat inactive nature into its continuation and expansion, and therefore it can be conceded that the delights of men are caused by her."

> Lilibei Siculi deiectam aiunt nomenque dedisse loco Drepanum, eo quod sic grece falx dicta sit. Testiculi vero deiecti quacunque in parte maris deciderint, sanguinem emisere, ex quo et maris spuma hanc procreatam Venerem voluere ac etiam a maris spuma denominatam, que grece aphrodos dicitur, quoniam sic et hec dicta est. […] Huic preterea dicunt rosas esse dicatas, et quod marinam gestet manibus concam. Sic et ex ea et Mercurio Hermofroditum natum volunt. Et ex ea sola Cupidinem. Multe quidem fictiones sunt, sed ex eis talis potest exprimi sensus. Nam pro Venere hac ego voluptuosam vitam intelligo, et in omnibus ad voluptatem et libidinem pertinentibus cum superiori unam et eandem esse, et sic etiam videtur velle Fulgentius.[160]

The third, and last, Venus is Aeneas's mother but also, curiously, the one who invented prostitution. Not a very flattering attribute for the mother of the Romans, but Boccaccio seems to solve this by saying that, actually, these Venuses are not the same one, not at all worried about this plurality of Venuses.

> Venus, Omero teste, Iovis fuit filia et Dyonis, et est hec, quam Tullius, ubi De naturis deorum, terciam vocat. Et coniugem dicit fuisse Vulcani. Hanc aiunt Martem amasse, de quorum adulterio et captivitate supra ubi de Marte dictum est. Sic et Enee matrem dicunt, de qua etiam ubi de Enea scriptum est. […] Nec desunt qui credant de hac dici, quod legitur in Hystoria sacra Venerem scilicet instituisse meretricium questum. […] Quoniam supra ubi de Veneribus multa circa fictiones de Venere dicta sunt, esset hic replicare superfluum. Superest quod ambigitur ponere. Hanc enim Venerem quidam putant eandem esse cum Cypria. Ego duas fuisse arbitror, et hanc vere Iovis filiam fuisse et Vulcani coniugem. Aliam Syri et Cyprie seu Dyonis filiam et Adonis coniugem.[161]

Love is not one and its manifestation are varied, so why should there be only one goddess? Venus often appears in medieval literature as a prominent figure but she transforms time

[160] Boccaccio, Book III: 22. "Many want the second Venus to be the daughter of Sky, but she was not born in the custom in which we all are born, and there is a story about this: namely, that Saturn was angry at his father Sky, and, taking a scythe, cut off his manhood and threw it into the sea, although it was not known whither they fell. They say that the scythe was thrown not far from the promontory of Sicilian Lilybaeum and gave the place the name Drepanum which means "sickle" in Greek. They say that the discarded testicles, wherever they landed in the sea, emitted blood, and this, mixed with sea foam created this Venus; she is also named after the "sea foam," which in Greek is aphrodos. […] In addition, they say roses were offered to her and that she carried a seashell in her hands. Also, they want Hermaphroditus to be born to her and Mercury, but from her alone Cupid. There are many fictions, but this is the meaning that can be rendered from them: I understand in this Venus the life of pleasure, and in everything relating to pleasure and lust she is one and the same as the preceding Venus. Fulgentius also seems to think this."

[161] Boccaccio, Book XI:4. "As Homer says, Venus was the daughter of Jove and Dione, and she is the one that Tullius, in his *De Natura Deorum*, calls the third Venus. And he says that Vulcan was her husband. They also say that she loved Mars, and their adultery and capture has already been narrated in the chapter on Mars. They say she is Aeneas mother, and things have been written about her in the chapter on Aeneas. […] And some believe what is said about her in the Sacred history, that she established the trade of harlot. […] As in the previous chapters on the numerous Venuses many things have already been told about Venus, it is useless to repeat them here. Only one thing remains that poses a question. Indeed, some think her to be the same Venus as the one from Cyprus. But I think they are different and that this one is the really the daughter of Jove and the wife of Vulcan. The other one was the daughter of Sirius and Cypria, or Dione, and Adonis' wife." (My translation)

and time again: in one place a source of life or of death, in others, instructress in the art of love, emblem of changing seasons, genitrix of poetry, guardian of procreation, natural force of physical warmth, corrupter of good warriors, hermaphrodite, and bourgeoise paramount.[162] The figure of the pagan gods underwent many changes during the Middle Ages so it is normal that Venus, a goddess in herself very changeable, evolved in many different directions, even in contradiction with each other. The only stable element was obviously their main characteristic, in Venus's case her connection with love and beauty. Venus became the mirror through which the various authors could explore their meaning of love, beauty and sexuality and thus she may be richly dressed and wholly covered or nude, modest or provocative, cruel or sweet, depending on the needs of the writer. Taken from her pagan background, she is used as a medium to show what love could be: courtly and earthly love, a path to god, sexuality, heaven or hell.

3.2 Venus's Images

Venus is by far the most represented goddess both in visual arts and in literature. Not only is she the epitome of beauty and grace, she also has the advantage of being closely linked to the glorious Roman past as she is the mother of Aeneas, the founder of Rome. Even the English had tried to reconnect with this ancient and prestigious heritage by means of the figure of the Trojan Brutus, escaped from the burning city of Troy to find refuge in

[162] Tinkle, Theresa, *Medieval Venuses and Cupids. Sexuality, Hermeneutics & English Poetry*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, p. 1.

England.[163] As the goddess of love, her influence was never forgotten, and it is also easy to see how many an artist could have found pleasure in painting beautiful lines like those of Venus's body, how much they would have been challenged to paint beauty itself. In recognizing the power of Venus and of her beauty, the ancients were, at the same time, recognizing the power of love with its good and bad sides. Love, moreover, is also a very important concept for Christianity but it is a problematic theme, especially when reconnected with beauty: love in itself is pure, but the fact that the first symptoms of such a feeling come from the exterior appearance of a woman is a sign of its impureness.

Figure 12. Praxiteles, *Aphrodite of Knidos*, Roman copy of the 360 BC., Vatican Museum, Rome.

For example, Pliny tells the story of a man that fell in love with Praxiteles's statue of Aphrodite (Fig. 12) to the point that he tried to make love with it: "ferunt amore captum

[163] Monmouth, Geoffrey, *History of the Kings of Britain*, translated by J. A. Giles, London: printed by William Stevens, 1842, p. 24.

quendam, cum delituisset noctu, simulacro cohaesisse, eiusque cupiditatis esse indicem maculam."[164] With his statue, purchased by the city of Knidos in about 350 BC, Praxiteles introduced the naked Aphrodite as a subject into classical Greek art and, as such, it inspired many other versions of the goddess even in Rome (Fig. 12).[165] From this moment on, nakedness became one of the main attributes of the goddess, marking a change in her iconography. As it often happens, the original Greek statue has been lost and we have to rely on the Roman copies and on its description made by classical authors.

In a corpus of Greek works written around 100 BC, many poets expressed their envy of the sculptor because, like Ares and other lovers of Aphrodite, he had the opportunity not only to see the goddess completely naked, but also to touch her body.[166] It is thanks to Praxiteles that this part of the iconography of Venus became so stable that, later, Clement of Alexandria, one of the Fathers of the Church who lived in the second century BC, wrote that one of the aspects that made Venus recognizable was this very nudity.[167] He too mentioned the statue of Aphrodite of Knidos and said that it had become an object leading to the destruction of amorous men and he warns them not to mistake a piece of art for something real.[168] Venus has always been connected with love and lust but, as we can see from Clement's words, with the spread of Christianity, she became the very symbol of the sin of lust. Later iconography will take up this sinful aspect of Venus and transform it into something more Christian by attaching to it a new meaning; the

[164] Pliny, Book XXXVI:6. "They say that a man taken by love, hiding in the night, made love to the statue, and as a sign of his passion remained some stains"
[165] Havelock, Christine Mitchell, *The Aphrodite of Knidos and Her Successors: A Historical Review of the Female Nude in Greek Art,* Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1995, p. 1.
[166] Havelock, p. 3.
[167] Clement of Alexandria, "Exhortation to the Greeks", http://www.theoi.com/Text/ClementExhortation1.html, *Theoi Texts Library*, last accessed December 2017.
[168] Clement, last accessed December 2017.

naked Truth, as a sign of simplicity and pureness, will present herself in front of worthy men, so that the shame of Venus will be completely erased.[169]

> The desire of this Beauty is Love; arising onely from one knowing faculty, the Sight; and that gave Plotinus (Ennead. 3, lib. 5, 3) occasion to derive ἔρως, Love, from ὅρασις, Sight. Here the Platonist may object: If Love be onely of visible things, how can it be applied to Ideas, invisible natures? We answer, Sight is twofold, corporeal, and spiritual; the first is that of Sense, the other Intellectual faculty, by which we agree with Angles; this Platonists call Sight, the corporeal being onely an image of this.[170]

But Venus's nakedness also reminds us of her numerous liaisons. The beautiful goddess, together with Jove, is one of the more lascivious deities of the classical Pantheon: married to Vulcan, she had numerous affairs, and the most famous one is surely that with Mars, a story that had enjoyed great popularity during the Middle Ages (Fig. 13).

Figure 13. Detail of a miniature of Vulcan finding his wife in bed with Mars in a manuscript of Jean de Meun's and Guillaume de Lorris's *Roman de la Rose*, Harley 4425, f. 122v, Paris, 1500 ca.

This miniature represents a medieval interpretation of the god's illicit union, transferring it into a more bourgeois setting where we are missing the Sun (Apollo) that represents the sight of God that sees everything so that sin can never be hidden, but the

[169] Ripa, p. 665.
[170] Pico della Mirandola, *A Platonik Discourse Upon Love*, translated by Edmund G. Gardner, Boston: Merrymount Press, 1914, p. 27.

same effect is achieved by opening up to the spectator the private space of the bedroom. This representation could be taken as a warning against infidelity and, by contrast, an incentive to cherish marital fidelity. Curiously Mary, in some mystery plays, found herself in a situation similar to that of Venus: that of the wife cheating on her husband. But the great difference is that it was all in Joseph's head: Mary is really carrying the child of God and living a spotless life while Joseph, perfectly fitting in the role of the jealous old husband (like Vulcan), is convinced that she is cheating on him and casts her away from his house, just as her predecessor, Eve, had been cast away from the garden of Eden.[171]

Figure 14. Sandro Botticelli, *Venus and Mars,* National Gallery, London, 1482-83.

A less know tradition exists in which Venus was first married to Mars and it would make sense if we think of the bond that the two gods share, a bond that is transferred even in astrology.[172] As I have already argued in the previous chapter, this kind of extramarital union is the perfect example of how Courtly Love works and many painters were

[171] Woolf, Rosemary, *The English Mystery Plays*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980, pp. 172-73.
[172] Panofsky, Erwin, *Studi di Iconologia: I temi umanistici nell'arte del Rinascimento*, Torino: Einaudi, 2009, pp. 226-27.

interested in this episode, probably also because painting such a scene would let them explore two different kinds of beauties: the voluptuousness of Venus and the masculinity of Mars. One of these painters is Botticelli, showing in his *Venus and Mars* (Fig. 14) the goddess's influence over him.

The god of war is quietly resting while small satyrs play with his armour: his weapons are nothing but toys now, fit for a child's play. And Venus not only is in a position of power over him, but she does not seem tired at all: quenching Mars was not a challenge for her, she can easily subdue him to create that condition of peace that Lucretius asked of her at the beginning of his *De Rerum Natura*. Moreover, as we have already seen in the previous chapter, Harmonia is their daughter, and so it is fitting that Mars would show a more peaceable side when in the company of the goddess. Venus's power over his divine lover, however, is made even clearer in Cossa's fresco, *The Triumph of Venus* (Fig. 15). Once again, we face a courtly setting and we can see how Mars is not only kneeling in front of Venus, but he is actually chained to her throne, possibly to show that the goddess' power will subjugate him in spite of his will.[173] The chain that Vulcan had imposed over them as a sign of shame, now becomes a visible sign of their love: in the religion of love, the lover is a slave to his lady, a slave who freely choses the chains that bind him to his love. Moreover, this kind of binding ceremony could also remind us of the first Venus described by Boccaccio who wears the "ceston" during legitimate unions[174] and so this once again could be a sign that Venus's rightful husband should have been Mars and not Vulcan.

[173] Wind, Edgar, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renassaince*, London: Faber and Faber, 1968, p. 89.
[174] Boccaccio, Book III:12.

Figure 15. Francesco Cossa, *Mars Enchained by Venus*, Palazzo Schifanoia, Ferrara, 1470.

On the banks brightly dressed young lovers flirt, chat and kiss, and on the right the three graces, Venus's attendants, preside over the scene. There are even instances in which Venus herself wears an armour and holds weapons, most probably the very same ones that Mars has dropped. This Venus has her roots in Sparta where she was associated with love and, in particular, with marriage.[175] She is surely more similar to the Venus represented by Virgil, always fighting to help her son, than to the Venus described by Homer, warned by Zeus to stay away from matters of war reserved to men. But love can hurt and be used as a weapon to hurt other people, and the classical authors knew that very well: it is a side of love that has been well explored by authors such as Catullus and Sappho. The violent *amor militia* described by Ovid, is transformed in the courtly tradition giving space to a new way to see love, a way that is more suitable for Christian women and that, taken to the extreme, could be used to describe the Virgin Mary: the

[175] Wind, p. 93.

courtly "love as siege" with the woman's heart imagined a tower or a castle to be conquered but that the ladies have to protect in order to keep their worth and purity.

Figure 16. *The Castle of Love*, KBR Ms. 9961-62 Peterborough Psalter, Folio 091v, Royal Library of Belgium, Bruxelles, 1300-25 ca.

In this miniature taken from an English manuscript of the fourteenth century (Fig. 16), the women inside the castle fight against the knights, but they do not use real weapons: they throw flowers at them and one of those women is even using a crossbow to shoot flowers. This scene is also described in a famous morality play, *The Castle of Perseverance* (1425 ca.), in which seven virtues (female) fight against seven vices (male) for the soul of mankind.[176] Wrath, defeated, said:

> I, Wrethe, may syngyn "Weleawo."
> Pacyens me gaf a sory dynt.
> I am al betyn blak and blo

[176] Klausner, David N., ed., "The Castle of Perseverance", http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/klausner-the-castle-of-perseverance, *Robbins Digital Library*, last accessed December 2017.

> Wyth a rose that on Rode was rent.
> My speche is almost spent.
> Hyr rosys fel on me so scharpe
> That myn hed hangyth as an harpe.[177] (ll. 2217-23)

The theme of women and roses is also central to another important medieval work that is *The Romance of the Rose* where the woman herself is the rose that the lover has to conquer. The story of the roses is connected to Venus and to her love for Adonis: it is said that once roses were white and that they became red when some of the goddess's blood fell on them when she was scratched by thorns while she was running towards the dying Adonis[178]. It then became a stable attribute of the goddess, denoting her lustfulness.

> Venere si dipinge giovane, ignuda, & bella, con una ghirlanda di rose e di mortella, & in una mano tiene una conca marina. Fu Venere rappresentata nuda per l'appetito de gli lascivi abbracciamenti, ovvero, perché chi va dietro sempre alli lascivi piaceri rimane spesso spogliato, & privo d'ogni bene, perchiochè le ricchezze sono dalle lascivie donne divorate, & si debilita il corpo & macchia l'anima di tal bruttura che niente resta più di bello. Il mirto, & le rose sono consacrate a questa Dea, per la conformità, che hanno gl'odori con Venere, & per l'incitamento, & vigore, che porge il mirto alla lussuria.[179]

Having said this, it would make no sense for women to fight throwing flowers, and especially roses. As the flower of Aphrodite, Romans associated it to the cult of Venus, particularly with the bower of Venus, the archetype of the paradisiacal garden: the garden protected by a rosehedge constituted the ideal "locus amoenus" for romantic encounters from ancient times down to *The Romance of the Rose*.[180] In the *Codex Sphaera*, unanimously regarded as the mot beautiful astrological book of the Renaissance, there is an illustration of Venus holding roses in her hands and wearing a crown of red and white roses and, under her, lovers enjoy themselves while listening to music (Fig. 17).[181]

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[177] Klausner, last accessed December 2017.
[178] Cyrino, Monica Silveira, *Aphrodite*, New York: Routledge, 2010, p. 96.
[179] Lomazzo, p. 76.
[180] Winston-Allen, Anne, *Stories of the Rose: The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997, p. 82.
[181] "De Sphaera", http://www.codicesillustres.com/catalogue/de_sphaera/, *Codices Illustres*, last accessed December 2017.

Moreover, here the lovers exchange flowers as a sign of love so how does it become possible to use them as weapons against sin? With the spread of Christianity, the symbology of the rose has been completely rewritten: no longer is the rose a symbol of Venus's love, it has now become the visible sign of Christ's passion.

Figure 17. The planet Venus and the Garden of Love, miniature from *De Sphaera* by Leonardo Dati, Latin Manuscript, Folio 9, Estense Library, Modena, Italy, 15th Century.

> For as the rose, shut up in the cold of the night, when the burning sun arises it opens out altogether, and stretching out its leaves in redness displays its delightful glowing [colour]: so the delicious Flower of heaven, our most good Jesus Christ, who, for a long time, by the sin of the first man, was shut up from sinners as it were in the cold of night, and did not impart his fulness; then at last, when the fulness of time had come, He was opened out in every part of His Body by the rays of burning charity, and the glowing of the rose of His charity was resplendent in the redness of his Blood that was shed.
> See, then, how our most good Vine, the ruddy Jesus, Blossomed with this flower of the rose.[182]

The symbolism of the rose has a long history in Christian tradition also in relation to the Virgin Mary: Saint Ambrose in his *De Virginibus* referred to her as the "rosa pudoris",

[182] Brownlor, Rev. W. R. Bernard, ed., *"Vitis Mystica" or the True Vine. A Treatise of the Passion of Our Lord (Attributed to S. Bernard),* London: Washbourne, 1873, p. 276.

and the fifteenth century Christian poet Sedulius called her "a rose among thorns" in his *Paschale carmen.*[183] Also, a famous thirteenth-century legend narrated the story of a man visited by the Virgin Mary while he was reciting his rosary prayers: she miraculously pulled a rose from his mouth as he said each "Hail Mary" fashioning a crown for herself and, once he had finished praying, she placed it on her head and returned to heaven.[184] Because of the popularity of this tale many started to believe that reciting the Rosary meant fashioning a real and tangible crown to give as a gift to Mary, strengthening the connection between her and the rose flower, and these crowns were also seen as the blessing that the Virgin could bestow upon others.

Figure 18. Albrecht Dürer, *Feast of the Rose Garlands*, National Gallery, Prague, 1506.

However, we can see in this painting that Mary is not the only one distributing rose garlands; Christ, even though he is still an infant, helps her and he crowns the pope

[183] Winston-Allen, p. 89.
[184] Mellon, Joelle, *The Virgin Mary in the Perceptions of Women: Mother, Protector and Queen Since the Middle Ages*, Jefferson: McFarland, 2008, p. 53.

while she crowns the emperor (Fig. 18). So, as I have already said before, in Christian tradition the rose stands not only for Mary, but also for Christ. But in Christ's case the connection contains nuances of violence that remind us of Venus: the redness of the rose comes from His blood, blood that partly fell because of the crown of thorns that was put on his head just as if it was a thorn that made Venus bleed. The theme of being wounded by the dart is also translated in Christian terms by Origen in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*:

> Indeed, the soul is led by a heavenly love and desire when once the beauty and glory of the Word of God has been perceived, he falls in love with His splendor and by this receives from Him some dart and wound of love. […] Therefore, if anyone has been able to hold in the breadth of his mind and to consider the glory and splendor of all those things created in Him, he will be struck by their very beauty and transfixed by the magnificence of their brilliance or, as the prophet says, "by the chosen arrow" (Is. 49:2). And he will receive from Him the saving wound and will burn with the blessed fire of His love.[185]

The wounds of love, once exclusive dominion of Venus, are now part of the Christian tradition, used as a meditation on Christ's passion and later transformed into the veneration of the wounds of the Savior, wounds that he willingly accepted for our love.[186] However, as usual, Paganism too left its mark in Christianity: in some mystical writings, especially of the "bridal mysticism" of allegorical devotional gardens, Christ's suffering was portrayed as willingly suffering for love.[187] So allegorically, if Christ is a rose, then the Virgin is also a rose garden, the garden that bore Christ as it is also true that her importance mostly comes from the very fact of being the mother of Jesus. In fact, Dante lauds her in *Paradiso* as the "rosa in che 'l verbo divino carne si fece".[188]

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[185] Origen, *Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs*, in Rowan A. Greer, ed., *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer First Principles: Book IV. Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs, Homily XXVII on Numbers*, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1979, p. 223, (pp.217-44).
[186] Winston-Allen, p. 98.
[187] Winston-Allen, p. 98.
[188] Dante, Paradiso, Canto 23, ll. 73-4.

Figure 19. Stefan Lochner, *Madonna of the Rose Garden,* Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne, 1440 ca.

In Stefan Lochner's *Madonna of the Roose Garend* Mary is sitting on a cushion while holding her Son (Fig. 19) and, behind her roses and lilies are in full bloom. She is described as the "Mystical Rose"[189] possibly to symbolize the paradox she embodies: the fact that she is at the same time a virgin (the lilies) and the mother of Christ (the roses).[190] This image also recalls the "hortus conclusus" that symbolizes virginity and chastity, the two virtues opposed to Venus. This association was also reinforced by the fact that Mary was thought to be the Second Eve, bringing redemption in the heavenly garden of Paradise.[191] Eve's connection to the Garden is more similar to Venus' connection to the sinful garden of love (even carnal), leading man to sin and to the Fall through an apple. The apple is another symbol of Venus, the emblem of her victory in the mythological beauty contest in which Paris acted as a judge. The apple thus was an object that carried discord with itself as women did, and so it became a fruit to be avoided and demonized.

[189] "The Loreto Litanies", http://www.vatican.va/special/rosary/documents/litanie-lauretane_en.html, *Vatican.va*, last accessed December 2017.
[190] Taiz, Lincoln, and Taiz, Lee, *Flora Unveiled: The Discovery and Denial of Sex in Plants*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 302.
[191] Mellon, p. 64.

So, for love to gain some semblance of purity, the woman has to resist temptation, with a fortitude that comes from believing in God and in His love. And the armed Venus that we have seen before wearing Mar's armour becomes then a symbol for women's constancy (Fig 20).

Figure 20. Illustration of Constantia in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, 1600 ca.

> Donna che tiene la destra mano alta, & con la sinistra un'asta, & si posa co' i piedi sopra una base quadra. Costanza è una disposizione ferma di non cedere à dolori corporali, né lasciarli vincere à tristezza, o fatica, né à travaglio alcuno per la via della virtù, in tutte l'azioni.[192]

But why is it that women have to defend themselves? Why do they have to hide in towers and cover themselves? Why are women the ones deemed responsible if someone falls in love with them? We can easily find the answer looking at Venus's description:

> La forma di Venere signora della terza sfera si trova molto diversa ma in generale è quella ch'habbiamo descritta da Apuleio dove dice ch'ella eran di bellissimo aspetto, di color soave e giocondo, & quasi tutta nuda mostrava la sua perfetta bellezza: poiché non havea altro d'intorno, che un velo sottilissimo, che non copriva, ma solamente adombrava le parti sue, le quali stanno nascoste quasi sempre, & il vento soave leggiermente soffiando, tal'ora l'alzava un poco gonfiandolo, perché si vedesse il fiore della giovinezza, tal'hora lo stringeva, & accostava alle belle membra in modo che quasi più non appareva. Il corpo tutto era di bianco, cleeste; & il sottil velo di color ceruleo, per essere tale il color del mare d'onde ella nacque.[193]

Venus's sinfulness comes mostly from her beauty, as does women's sinfulness. It is possible to associate this Venus, naked and lustful, to Eve who, much like her, was a

[192] Ripa, p. 125.
[193] Lomazzo, p. 563-64.

product of divine creation and came to life as a complete and perfect woman. Also, created by God himself, there is no reason to think that Eve would not have been incredibly beautiful, so beautiful that the fear of losing her might have pushed Adam to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. Eve does not only take the first step in the damnation of humankind, but also seems to acquire the very essence of the fruit she eats: "Therefore the woman saw that the tree was good, and sweet to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightable in beholding; and she took of the fruit thereof, and ate, and gave to her husband, and he ate." (WYC, Genesis, 3:6). She is the first woman, wife, and sinner; she was also the very first mother who mourned for the death of her son (much as Mary will do for Jesus). Eve and Mary stand in two opposite positions: the former was born without sin and brought it into the world, letting mankind know death, while the latter was born with the stain of the original sin but became the instrument through which God brought salvation and forgiveness.

Venus finds her position exactly at the centre of this opposition, and at the crux of a very real problem regarding Christianity: the impossibility for women to identify themselves either with Eve or Mary. They are not replicable models because women are not born pure like Eve nor are they perfect like Mary, the mother of God. Women were condemned to be seen either as saints or as sinners and in this earthly domain there was no real alternative for them. This need was answered by Venus. Venus's beauty is the typical female beauty, while that is not the case with Eve and Mary: as we have said before Eve is perfect because she was directly created by God:

> Et cominciando da Adamo & Eva non ho dubbio che la forma d'ambedue non fosse bellissima, & sopra tutte l'altre leggiadra per essere stati fattura della propria mano d' Iddio, il quale si sa che creò tutte le cose nel più bello, & più perfetto modo che potesse essere.[194]

[194] Lomazzo, p. 621.

and Mary has a spiritual strength so great that it transpires and is perceived by men as beauty:

> E per venire a i santi, Maria Vergine fu di singolar bellezza, tale che non cedeva alla bellezza dell'animo, ma l'una all'altra benissimo corrispondeva. Per il che non si trovò mai nessuno che di lei si innamorasse lascivamente, tanta luce e splendore d'onestà, di maestà, d'umiltà e di carità risplendeva nella sua bellezza corporale; leggesi però che fu alquanto bruna, di grandezza di corpo fu mediocre conforme alla statura di Cristo figliuolo.[195]

So pagan beauty was not forgotten but it did change form and ownership, becoming Christian. Is seems like a return to the Greek connection of beauty and virtue, a connection that was lost with the Romans that perceived beauty as something completely separated from moral greatness. Earthly beauty is a result of contraries meeting and uniting in harmony because it is a reflection of God's real beauty and since God contains everything in Himself, this means that he is the harmonious receptacle of all contraries. It is once again the proof that human love is not evil or sinful in itself, but that the responsibility lies entirely on the individual. This beauty is what causes man to love, but then each man may decide whether to dedicate himself to sensual pleasure, or to use it to recognize in Venus the mirror of God's love and lean towards a more celestial understanding. It is the same division between Aphrodite Pandemos and Aphrodite Urania that the Greeks made.

In the attempt to assimilate this Venus, to give sense to her beauty and, more importantly, to give Christian women hope of redemption, Mary Magdalen was born. Pagan beauty becomes Christian beauty in an attempt to show that beauty is not irremediably linked with sin nor is it unredeemable, but that it has a connection with God as it is one of His gifts.

> Madonnas and Magdalens consequently resembled Venuses and vice versa: sixteenth-century art and literature were replete with images of beautiful women, naked and draped, celestial and terrestrial Venuses, depicted and described as in conformity with the ideals of feminine beauty propounded by male writers of the period. It was thus that Mary Magdalen became the "goddess of Love" or "Venus of Divine Love" […] Preeminently regarded as Luke's sinner in this period, forgiven for she had loved greatly, she ascends from the excess of sensual love to the heights of

[195] Lomazzo, p. 623.

> spiritual love: she is the "amante Donna" (loving woman), "l'innamorata" (the enamoured one), who is inflamed by her love.[196]

From an early period, Christian tradition conflated into the figure of Mary Magdalene three women whom the Gospels record as having either followed or met Christ: the woman who anointer Jesus's feet with perfume and dried them with her hair, the sister of Lazarus, and Mary of the town of Magdala from whom Jesus expelled seven devils.[197] It is interesting though to note that her redemption is a result of her love. She was a prostitute (of whom later she will become patron) and a sinner (all that was condemned in Venus and in women in general), and she can be recognized by her physical beauty and her long hair which she wears loose.[198]

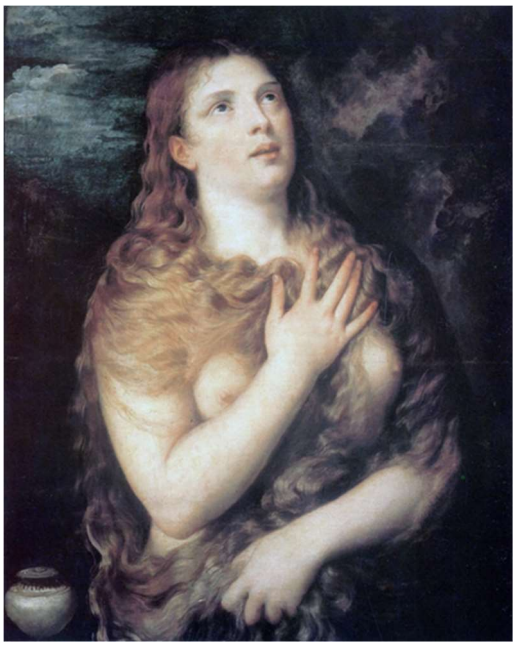

Figure21. Titian, *Penitent Magdalene*, Palazzo Pitti, Florence, 1531 ca.

If we think about the description of Venus made by Lomazzo which I quoted before, it is easy to notice the similarities between Venus and Mary Magdalene: the

[196] Haskins, Susan, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor*, London: Harper Collins, 1993, pp. 238-39.
[197] Douchet-Suchaux, Gaston, and Pastoureau, Michel, *The Bible and the Saints*, Paris: Flammarion, 1994, p. 237.
[198] Douchet-Suchaux, p. 238.

unbound hair covering her whole body while at the same time tracing and revealing its every line, her beauty and the position of her arms that resemble that of the Venus Pudica, trying to cover herself (Fig. 21). Looking at this painting it is almost impossible not to be remined of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (Fig 22).

Figura 22. Sandro Botticelli, *Birth of Venus*, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, 1480.

The fact that the very moment of the goddess' birth is represented could have been used by Botticelli as an excuse to show some nudity in the painting but that does not happen. On the contrary, the very spring wind seems to blow in such a way that Venus's hair covers her genitals and even Flora, already dressed, is covered by the drape that she is holding. It is interesting to note that the source of life here is hidden in the wind and not in the water, seemingly in an attempt to erase the memory of Saturn's castration.[199] However, it could also be something of a riddle for the learned: Saturn is also known under the name of Sky and so the idea that it is the wind that inspires life into the goddess is not so difficult to reconnect to the myth narrated by Hesiod, even if the more violent moment of the castration is eliminated in any case. The goddess's posture in itself seems

[199] Bull, Malcom, *Lo specchio degli dèi. La mitologia classica nell'arte rinascimentale*, Torino: Einaudi, 2015, p.233.

that of the classical *Venus Pudica*, used to express the double nature of love, both sensuous and chaste,[200] and this is also reflected in her attendants. Zephyr is inspiring in her the creative wind of spring while, on the other side, Flora is waiting for her, ready to cover the newborn goddess as her hair do not cover her as much as Mary Magdalene's hair cover her. Nudity is still difficult to accept most of the time unless the subject is "Veritas" that is always represented as a naked woman to show that she has nothing to hide.[201]

Figure 253. Beato Angelico, *Annunciation*, Museo del Prado, Madrid, 1435.

But the very same position of the arms that distinguishes Mary Magdalene and Venus is characteristic also of Mary, especially in representations of the *Annunciation* (Fig. 23). We find Mary once in more in an enclosed space, protected, while an angel in the background sends Adam and Eve away from the garden of Eden. The book on her knees shows us that she was reading before an angel forcibly entered, making her reflexively assume a defensive stance, with her arms crossed over her breasts. However,

[200] Wind, p. 131.
[201] Ripa, p. 665.

unlike Eve's, Mary Magdalene's, and Venus's, Mary's blond hair is not let loose but tied, as a sign of humility and virginity. Mary is different from other women: her own birth is never mentioned, and neither is her death, she is the Virgin Mother of God, a perfect symbol to erase all that was filth and danger in women. But Venus is all that Mary is and, at the same time all its opposite. Venus is the embodiment of love and beauty and she could be seen as that pervasive divine power that is present in every woman and that has forever made men weary of them, but also as God's perfect love and beauty. It is impossible to consider and discuss all aspects of this goddess, all the changes that her presence brought in art and mythology and the great influence that she has had in the Christian conception of love. She is everywhere and everything: she is the lust and the dangerous will of Lilith, the sin of Eve and her shame, the great mother Mary, and the prostitute Mary Magdalene. She is truth and lies, beauty and filth, wife and lover, pain and pleasure, mother and virgin, life and death. Writers and artist will forever continue to explore her mystery (Fig. 24).

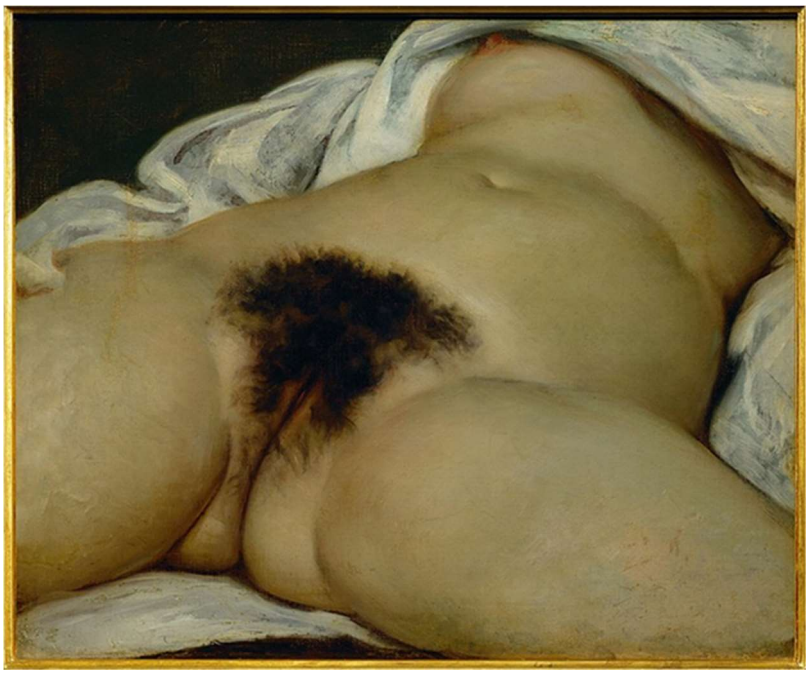

Figure 24. Gustave Courbet, *The Origin of the World*, Musèe d'Orsay, Paris, 1866.

3.3 Venus in *The Kingis Quair* and *The Temple of Glas*

Venus appears in *The Kingis Quair* right from the very first lines:

> Heigh in the hevyniss figure circulere
> The rody sterres twynklyt as the fyre;
> And in Aquary Cinthia clere
> Rynsid hir tressis like the goldin wire,
> That late tofore in faire and fresche atyre
> Through Capricorn heved hir hornis bright.
> North northward approchit the myd-nyght. (ll. 1- 7)

From the very beginning, James seems to make reference to the stars and planets, seemingly to introduce the theme of planetary influences and Fortune, but he swiftly shifts his focus on Cynthia and he does not even treat her wholly as a planet, but as a goddess. Lydgate does the exact same thing[202], and this is one of the reasons why it is thought that James might have read *The Temple of Glas.*[203]

> For thought, constreint, and grevous hevines,
> For pensifhede and for heigh distres,
> To bed I went nou this othir nyght, now;
> Whan that Lucina with hir pale light
> Was joyned last with Phebus in Aquarie,
> Amyd Decembre, when of Januarie
> Ther be kalendes of the nwe yere,
> And derk Diane, ihorned, nothing clere,
> Had hir bemys undir a mysty cloude. (ll. 1-9)

Astrology is the starting point for both poets, but Lydgate seems to concentrate on this aspect while James tends to personify the planet. Taking advantage of the fact that Aquarius is also called the "Water-bearer", James describes how Cynthia (Lucina in Lydgate) rinses her hair, but some scholars believe that there may be a mistake in the manuscript[204] because this scene and the goddess' golden hair remind the reader of the toilet of Venus rather than of the moon. Another thing that strengthens this hypothesis is

[202] Schick, J., *Lydagte's Temple of Glas*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1981, p. 133.
[203] MacColl, Alan, "Beginning and Ending *The Kingis Quair*", J. Derrick MacClure and Michael R. G. Spiller, eds., *Bryght Lanternis,* Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1989, p. 119, (pp. 118-28).
[204] McDiarmid, p. 118.

the fact that a similar scene is described in Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls* and the goddess invoked is indeed Venus, making use of her epithet "Cytherea".

> Cytherea, thy blissful lady swete,
> That with thy fyrbrond dauntes whom the lest
> And mades me this sweven for to mete,
> Be thow myn helpe in this, for thow mays best"
> As wisly as I sey the north-north-west,
> Whan I began my sweven fot to write,
> So yif me might to ryme, and endyte! (ll. 113-19)

In *The Kingis Quair* then, following the Courtly Love convention, the author, prisoner in his tower, sees a beautiful lady in an enclosed garden. As we have seen in the previous chapters it is not unusual to associate Venus with Nature, given her driving force of reproduction and birth, and especially with rose gardens. Venus's presence at this point becomes pervasive: she is spring, the force that makes flowers bloom and animals mate.

> Worschippe, ȝe that loueris bene, this May,
> For of ȝour blisse the kalendis ar begonne,
> And sing with vs, away, winter, away!
> Cum, somer, cum, the suete sesoune and sonne!
> Awake, for schame, that haue ȝour hevynnis wonne,
> And amorously lift vp your hedis all.
> Thank lufe that list ȝou to his merci call. (ll. 232- 38)

The prisoner feels the pull of nature but does not know what to make of this feeling, that he identifies as love, because he himself has never loved before. And, as always, Venus is ready to respond to any kind of challenge: three stanzas after his inquiry on the nature of love[205], he casts his eyes down from his tower and sees "the fairest or the freschest ȝong floure/ That ever I sawe, me thought, before that houre" (ll. 277-8). This same episode can be found in Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*, where Palamon, like the narrator imprisoned in a tower overlooking a garden, falls in love with Emelie and likens her to Venus: "I not wher she be womman or goddesse, / But Venus is it smoothly, as I gesse".[206]

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[205] Kratzmann, Gregory, *Anglo-Scottish Literary Relations 1430-1550*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 49.
[206] Chaucer, "The Knight's Tale", in Larry D. Benson, ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, ll. 1101-02, (pp. 37-65).

If we take for granted that this poem was written by James I, then it is clear that he could not have used this same exclamation, because Venus's name still carried sinful nuances and he was not in a position that would permit him to indulge in such a slip of the tongue. So, he does not liken the lady he sees to the goddess of love, but to the goddess Nature (l. 297). However, we have seen that there is a strong connection between Nature and Venus, and the goddess herself is often depicted and invoked as Spring.

Here begins the prisoner's journey: he has had his first contact with Venus even if he does not know it yet and he is already starting to change:

> So ferre I fallyingf was in lufis dance
> That sodeynly my wit, my contenance,
> My hert, my will, my nature and my mynd,
> Was changit clene ryght in ane othir kynd. (ll. 312-15)

After the conventional love lament, the author falls asleep and he tells us what he has dreamed but it seems like he is doing something more than simply dreaming because he says that he was raised up into the hair by his arms (ll. 253-4), likening his experience more to an Ascension that to a simple dream (it is not a coincidence that a few lines after this we find the term "Ascending" in line 526). The first goddess he meets is Venus in her circle, where her crystal palace is set. Led inside, he finds a crowd of lovers, but they are not always the courtly lovers we might expect; among them, for example, there are martyrs, whose presence in the temple is the first hint at the fact that Venus does not only supersede to profane love, but also to a more sublimated kind of love directed towards God. The list of lovers and their description reminds us of the similar catalogue in *The Temple of Glas* but, for what concerns our topic, it is sufficient to say that this device is used to show the variety of loves that Venus governs, in line with my theory that she can be used as a means to explore any kind of love, from the most sinful to the holiest.

Then the lover sees Venus, preceded by Fair Calling and Secrecy. She is wearing only a mantle, but on her head she has a crown of roses, the very same crown that we have seen upon the head of the Virgin Mary and that she distributes as blessing. This ambivalence continues in the following stanza where the narrator, kneeling, prays Venus to help him in a form that closely resembles the prayers to the Virgin but at the same time, he inserts terms that clearly make reference to the pagan Venus.

> "Hye quene of lufe, sterr of beneuolence,
> Pitouse princes and planet merciable,
> Appesare of malice and violence
> By vertew sure of ȝour aspectis hable,
> Unto ȝour grace lat now ben acceptable
> My pure request, that can no forthir gone
> To seken help bot vnto ȝow allone.
>
> As ȝe that bene the socour and suete well
> Off remedye, of carefull hertes cure,
> And in the huge weltering wawis fell
> Of lufis rage blisfull havin and sure,
> O anker and keye of oure gude aventure,
> ȝe haue ȝour man with his gude will conquest.
> Merci, therfore, and bring his hert to rest! (ll. 687-700)

Even though the narrator uses terms like "quene" and "piteuse princes" that remind us of Mary and her Rosary, he never lets us forget that it is Venus we are talking about by referring to her also as a star ("sterre of beneuolence" l. 687) and as a planet ("planet merciable" l. 688). James seems unwilling to choose either aspect of the goddess, and so he uses expressions that could be applied to Venus both as a planet and as a deity, especially when he says: "appesare of malice and violence / by vertew sure of ȝour aspectis hable". It is clear that he is talking of Venus's planetary influence on the planet Mars and, at the same time, of the goddess's story with Mars (as we have seen in the previous chapter).

Venus's answer has slightly Christian echoes as she seems to be all knowing ("the cause of all thyne inward sorowe / Is nought vnknawing to my deite" ll. 729-30), like God but, at the same time, it is possible that her knowledge is circumscribed only to matters

of love, her classical field of expertise. Her son Cupid is next to her, but he does not talk, and the goddess makes it clear that, while he is the one shooting with the arrow, "to me langis the cure / Quhen I se tyme" (ll. 738-9). However, it is not only Cupid's powers that are limited, but also Venus's;[207] she explains to the dreamer that there are other powers that influence his life and that, even though she is already showing him her benevolence, it is not sufficient for him to gain his freedom. Here we clearly see her both as a goddess under God's will, and as a planet whose influence depends on the course and position of the other planets.

But Venus, for all her benevolence, does not think that the dreamer is ready to love; he is but a weed, not worthy to enter the garden of love where his beloved daisy dwells (l. 763). His unworthiness does not come from his unwillingness to serve Venus or from a defect in his nature ("And sen I was unto ȝour lawis strange / By ignorance and nought by felonye" ll. 708-9) and so Venus does not send him away but, before she can do something for him, she has to send him to others that may be able to teach him how to love, and Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, is the one deemed able to set his spirit straight, by teaching him God's love.[208] At this point, however, James inserts a change in the tradition of Courtly Love; it is the goddess, and not the lover, who starts to complain. Her suffering, like God's suffering, come from mankind; men have forgotten what it really means to love, making Venus cry. At this point we witness the goddess's original powers of generation, that are now in God's service: the flowers that before sprang when her feet touched the ground, now bloom on earth from her tears that rain down from her heaven. But if once those flowers were used by lovers to show their passion, now they serve to

[207] Spearing, A. C., *Medieval Dream Poetry*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 185.
[208] Gray, p. 479.

remind mankind of God's love. Venus embodies this love, as if she were a reflection of that single (but fundamental) aspect of God. She resembles the Christian God of the Old Testament even in her attitude towards mankind: she can be sweet and caring, weeping for her lost children, but at the same time she can be terrible and violent, punishing them until they recognize that she is nothing but Him.

> This is to say, contynew in my seruise,
> Worschip my law, and my name magnifye
> That am ȝour hevin and ȝour paradise,
> And I ȝour confort here sall multiplye,
> And for ȝour meryt here, perpetualye
> Ressaue I sall your saulis, of my grace,
> To lyue with me as goddis in this place. (ll. 855-61)

This godly Venus then leaves the narrator with a mission: she will teach him what love is by guiding his journey, but when he goes back to Earth he is to preach her (God's) word of love. If *The Kingis Quair* is an autobiographical poem written by James I, then this is an incredibly astute stratagem: imprisoned from a young age, inexpert still, he presents himself as a King chosen by the gods (presented as vicars of the one and only God) to bring His word. He chose to design his poem partly as a political manifesto, showing that it is not only right that he return to his homeland as King, but that it is also part of God's design.

The narrator of *The Temple of Glas* is completely different, first of all because he is not a lover himself, and it seems like he has never been one. While the prince of *The Kingis Quair* is not a lover because of ignorance and not for lack of attitude, the contrary could be said for the dreamer of Lydgate's poem: he has observed lovers and knows love's rules, but his nature seems to impede him. However, later in the poem, when he describes love's illness and the lover's symptoms, in narrating them, the author shares and feels them, to the point that he is not be able to write anymore because his hands tremble too

much (ll. 935-47). For Lydgate moreover we are not talking about an ascension but simply a dream whose truthfulness he himself doubts once he wakes up.

As soon as he reaches her temple, he sees Venus and we immediately recognize her as the pagan goddess; she is floating over the sea (possibly over a shell) in her classical representation as the Marine Venus or Venus Anadyomene (ll. 53-5). Lost is the Christian atmosphere that we find in *The Kingis Quair*. The walls of this temple are covered with paintings of famous classical lovers and even the gods are included: Phoebus with Danae, Jove with Europe, and of course Venus with Mars.

In *The Temple of Glas* the many and different aspects of the goddess seem to collapse one unto the other, with no particular care or order.[209] It matters not if they are controversial or if they seemingly clash one against the other, the author seems to act like a compiler (much like Boccaccio in his *Genealogia*), simply putting together every possible informations: Venus is a statue (l. 249), a star (l. 253), the month of May and Spring (l. 255), a rose (l. 256), a goddess (l. 332), the classical beautiful winner of the apple (l. 464). Also, in this poem we have two prayers to Venus, the first of which is, curiously, from a woman.

> "O ladi Venus, modir of Cupide,
> That al this world hast in governaunce,
> And hertes high that hauteyn ben of pride
> Enclynyst mekeli to thin obeissaunce,
> Causer of joie, releser of penaunce,
> And with thi stremes canst everithing discerne
> Thurugh hevenli fire of love that is eterne;
>
> "O blisful sterre, persant and ful of light,
> Of bemys gladsome, devoider of derknes,
> Cheif recounford after the blak nyght,
> To voide woful oute of her hevynes,
> Take nou goode hede, ladi and goddesse,
> So that my bil your grace may atteyne,
> Redresse to finde of that I me compleyne. (ll. 321-34)

[209] Mitchell, last accessed January 2018.

The lady here is clearly invoking the pagan goddess of love, the mother of Cupid, the one who governs all the world with her control over love; there is almost no Christian meaning except for the hint at the "hevenli fire of love that is eterne". She is also invoked as a star and as a goddess, but the interesting fact is that she is also simply invoked as a "ladi", maybe in an attempt to liken her experience as a married woman who did not love her husband, to the same one that the lady who is complaining is going through. This may thus be an attempt on the part of the supplicant to get close to the goddess and try to inspire her with compassion, looking in her for some sort of companionship.

And the goddess seems to respond favourably. Lydgate's Venus seems to have no problem imposing her will on the other gods and does not seem to be bound by the same rules that James's Venus has to follow: she can promise that Saturn will not influence the lady's life anymore (ll. 384-90) because she can freely decide to tame him with none of the restrictions that come from following God's will. So, Venus accepts her request and makes the man fall in love with her. It is possible that a touch of misogyny may be colouring this scene: the lady now seems to assume the role of a witch, forcing the man she loves (and maybe even the author) to reciprocate her feeling by resorting to the help of a pagan divinity. In this instance we are also reminded of the statue of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, that was at the entrance of the temple as a silent warning against the working of Venus.

The insistence, throughout the poem, on both parties' consent raises thus a great problem: what do we make of the lover's consent if he was forced into this love? Throughout the poem the lover insists on the fact that this love that he feels was not of his choosing, but it was forced upon him and yielding to it is his only choice (ll. 565-570, ll.719-21, ll.1068-71). Glad of his favourable disposition, Venus casts her eyes on him

with benevolence and, as it happens in *The Kingis Quair*, gives him as a companion Good Hope, the one that will keep him from despairing during the time of courting.

We have another problem, this time with the lady. The impediment to her love does not seem to be only the fact that, before her prayer to Venus, the man did not love her, but it is also possible that she was already married[210]. But did she consent to that union or was it forced upon her? Is it really a sin to cheat on your husband if you had never given your consent before? Unfaithfulness becomes thus easier to accept, because marriage is seen as a mere impediment to a true and wanted union (much like Venus's marriage to Vulcan impeded her true union with Mars and thus paradoxically legitimated her cheating)[211]. This love is not the reflection of God's one, it is simply a force, a desire to be one with the person you love; this is the pagan Venus's love.

However, it all seems to turn out for the best and Venus forces the other planetary gods to act as witnesses to the union she has decided to celebrate (ll. 1232-33). But first she proceeds to instruct the man in the art of love, a task carried out by Minerva in *The Kingis Quair*. The difference between the speeches of the two goddesses is clearly noticeable: we have seen how Minerva's instructions reflect the Christian teaching of love, but Venus's teachings seem to be taken directly from a manual of Courtly Love like Andreas Cappellanus's *De Arte Oneste Amandi*. She tells him to be honest, to contain his lust, to speak gently, to follow his beloved's orders, and to be humble. It is a completely secular explanation and we are not to be misled by the use of terms typical of religion because it was a common practice at the time and we cannot mistake this appropriation of language for a sublimation of Courtly Love into Christian love.

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[210] Mitchell, J. Allan, "Queen Katherine and the Secret of Lydgate's *Temple of Glas*", *Medium Ævum* , 77, (2008), p. 65, (pp. 54-76).
[211] Smith, Norton J., "Lydgate's Changes in *The Temple of Glas*", *Medium Aevum*, Oxford, 27, (1958), p. 169, (pp. 166-72).

> The language of religion was an accepted part of the *stilo de loda*, which was the usually intended to shock and flatter. It was not customary for European court poets to elevate their mistresses into symbols of Philosophy or analogues of the Supreme Beloved, as Dante had done. The practice of writing parodies would appear to indicate that poets regarded this cult of woman as a form of idolatry and a truancy from true religion. Courtly Love was, in short, a make-believe religion. This is not to deny that it was the source of some genuine virtues: humility, constancy, patience and fortitude. The lady was extolled as the sole repository of morality: she was responsible for whatever merit the lover acquired, and she alone was capable of assessing his worth.[212]

This religion of love can become the adversary of the Christian religion, and it is even clearer when Venus binds the two lovers together, unmindful of the impediment that is posed by the possibility that the lady might have been already married to someone else. The ceremony performed by Venus begins at line 1106 with the appearance of a golden chain (possibly the one used before by Vulcan to tie together Mars and Venus, ironically underlining once again the fact that Mars should have been the one united with Venus and not him) and ends at line 1284 with the lovers kissing. The language used is religious but while James's Venus was a vicar of God, using religious language in relation to Him, Lydgate's Venus erases God's influence and takes up powers that should have not been hers or, rather, that were hers before the advent of Christianity.

It is difficult to say but I would argue that this secular reading of *The Temple of Glas* is also supported by its structure: both this poem and *The Kingis Quair* open with a description of Venus but by the end of these two journeys, we have two very different outcomes. The dreamer of *The Temple of Glas* wakes up in a state of distress possibly worse than the one he was in when he fell asleep at the beginning of the poem and, instead of turning his thoughts to God, he thinks about the lady he has seen in his dream, as bewitched by Venus's working as the lover in the dream. There is no real growth in the narrator; the whole poem is like a desperate call for a love that cannot belong to him, and

[212] Boase, Roger, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977, p. 109.

thus the author goes back to the beginning, concluding his poem by going back to Venus, just as he had begun.[213]

The journey of the narrator of *The Kingis Quair* is different; as the love for the lady he saw was a means to know true love, so the passage through the pagan goddesses had to be completed in order to be finally able to turn to the real all-knowing God that "heist in hevin sitt".[214] Also, the last line is a repetition of the opening one "Heigh in the hevynnis figure circulere" and that not only confers a perfect circularity to the poem and describes the circularity of the various spheres, but also shows how James has matured and that he knows that it all begins in God and in Him ends, breaking the chains of Venus.

[213] Rossiter, William T., "The Light so in my Face / Bigan to Smyte: Illuminating Lydgate's *Temple of Glas*", in K. P. Clarke and Sarah Baccianti, eds., *On Light*, Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 2014, p. 83.
[214] MacColl, p. 126.

Chapter Four

Fortune

4.1 From Pagan Origins to Christian Reading

To study the development of the concept of Fortune we have to go back to Greece once more just as we have done for the other two goddesses, Minerva and Venus. Reading Hesiod, we immediately notice that Tyche (the Greek name for Fortune) is a minor deity; she does not have a whole section dedicated to her as Athena and Aphrodite do, but her name is merely mentioned in the long list of Ocean's and Thetis's daughters.[215] In Homer's *Iliad* Tyche does not even appear, she has no weight on the outcome of the war of Troy. At this point she is a character of minor importance and she will go through many a change during her story, but I think it is normal that Tyche would have needed a little more time to develop in comparison with the other gods and goddesses of the Pantheon because her figure requires a greater degree of abstraction.

Pindar, one of the great Greek poets of the fifth century BC, is among the first authors who gave importance to Tyche and his *Olympian 12* is dedicated to her. In this short work Pindar concentrated on Tyche's influence on human affairs, and he elevated her from her original status making her the daughter of Zeus the Deliverer.[216] Pausanias also wrote that Pindar regarded Tyche as one of the Moirai (the Fates), and in fact even the strongest one among them (ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν Πινδάρου τά τε ἄλλα πείθομαι τῇ ὠδῇ καὶ Μοιρῶν τε εἶναι μίαν τὴν Τύχην καὶ ὑπὲρ τὰς ἀδελφάς τι ἰσχύειν).[217] Pindar described

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[215] Hesiod, l. 360, last accessed January 2018.

[216] Pindar, "Olympian Ode 12", http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0161%3Abook%3DO.%3Apoem%3D12, *Perseus Digital Library,* ll. 1-2, last accessed January 2018.

[217] Pausanias, "Description of Greece", http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0159%3Abook%3D7%3Achapter%3D26%3Asection%3D8, *Perseus Digital Library* , Book VII, 26:8, last accessed January 2018."Now I am in general agreement with Pindar's ode, and especially with his making Fortune one of the

her dominion over land and sea, insisting on the fact that everything depends on her whims and that, because of her, man's expectations are tossed up and down. But what is most important is that "σύμβολον δ' οὔ πώ τις ἐπιχθονίων / πιστὸν ἀμφὶ πράξιος ἐσσομένας εὗρεν θεόθεν: / τῶν δὲ μελλόντων τετύφλωνται φραδαί".[218] And that is why men/women live in uncertainty; their action seems to lead in one direction, but Tyche's intervention may always bring an unexpected change, turning joy into despair and vice versa with no reasonable explanation. This is the image of Fortune we are familiar with, the capricious deity that governs the world and brings chaos. Tyche, the Roman Fortuna, is the goddess of chance. Her gifts are to be enjoyed humbly and prudently: when men/women are so uplifted by good fortune that they forget their weakness, and in their arrogance become worshippers of Hybris (goddess of insolent pride), Zeus sends a terrible punishment.[219]

Polybius, a Greek historian of the second century BC, talked about Fortune in his *Histories*, trying to give it some kind of meaning and sense. He insisted on the importance of history as the only means mankind has to learn how to deal with Tyche: by looking at the fortunes and misfortunes (both concepts are comprehended under Greek term "Tyche") of other men that came before, the ones living now may be able to understand how Fortune works, and thus be better prepared to withstand her workings.

> ἐπεὶ δ' οὐ τινὲς οὐδ' ἐπὶ ποσόν, ἀλλὰ πάντες ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν ἀρχῇ καὶ τέλει κέχρηνται τούτῳ, φάσκοντες ἀληθινωτάτην μὲν εἶναι παιδείαν καὶ γυμνασίαν πρὸς τὰς πολιτικὰς πράξεις τὴν ἐκ τῆς ἱστορίας μάθησιν, ἐναργεστάτην δὲ καὶ μόνην διδάσκαλον τοῦ δύνασθαι τὰς τῆς τύχης μεταβολὰς

Fates, and more powerful than her sisters."(Cited according to W.H.S. Jones, Litt. D., and H.A. Ormerod, eds., "Pausanias. Pausanias Description of Greece with an English Translation", http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0160:book=7:chapter=26&highlight=pindar, *Perseus Digital Library*, last accessed January 2018)

[218] Pindar, ll. 7-9. "Never yet has any man on earth found a reliable token of what will happen from the gods. Our understanding of the future is blind." (Cited according to Diane Arnson Svarlien, ed., "Pindar. Odes.",http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0162%3Abook%3DO.%3Apoem%3D12, *Perseus Digital Library*, last accessed January 2018).

[219] Harrison, Jane E., *The Gods of Olympos or Mythology of the Greeks and Romans*, New York: Cassel Publishing Company, 1892, p. 39.

> γενναίως ὑποφέρειν τὴν τῶν ἀλλοτρίων περιπετειῶν ὑπόμνησιν, δῆλον ὡς οὐδενὶ μὲν ἂν δόξαι καθήκειν περὶ τῶν καλῶς καὶ πολλοῖς εἰρημένων ταυτολογεῖν, ἥκιστα δ᾽ ἡμῖν.[220]

Polybius also added a new element to Fortune, her jealousy of mankind[221] and that is why, when she sees a man in too happy a state, she bring him down in order to satisfy her envious nature. Like a kid (or like a woman) Fortune seems to give and take without a clear design in mind, simply for the pleasure of seeing people bend to her will. And among those that have to withstand Fortune and her caprices, there are also, apparently, the gods themselves. For example, Euripides, a famous tragedian of classical Athens, in his tragedies written in the fifth century BC, had postulated the possibility that Fortune may have been more powerful than the other gods[222] and he even came to the point of questioning the gods' existence: "ψευδῆ, δοκοῦντας δαιμόνων εἶναι γένος / τύχην δὲ πάντα τὰν βροτοῖς ἐπισκοπεῖν".[223]

Like all the Greek divinities, Tyche passed then to the Romans. At first the notion of Fortune was fragmented, creating a multitude of Fortunae: Fortuna could be *mala* (bad), *bona* (good), *meretix* (prostitute/courtesan), *conservatrix* (protectress), *inimica*

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[220]Polybius, "Hystories", http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0233%3Abook%3D1%3Achapter%3D1%3Asection%3D2, *Perseus Digital Library,* Book I, 1:4, last accessed January 2018."They have all begun and ended, so to speak, by enlarging on this theme: asserting again and again that the study of History is in the truest sense an education, and a training for political life; and that the most instructive, or rather the only, method of learning to bear with dignity the vicissitudes of fortune is to recall the catastrophes of others. It is evident, therefore, that no one need think it his duty to repeat what has been said by many, and said well." (Cited according to Evelyn S. Shuckburgh, ed., "Histories. Polybius.", http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0234:book=1:chapter=1&highlight=fortune, *Perseus Digital Library*, last accessed January 2018.)

[221] Polybius, Book XXIX: 19, last accessed January 2018.

[222]Euripides, "Cyclops", http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0093%3Acard%3D566, *Perseus Digital Library,* ll. 606-07, last accessed January 2018.

[223]Euripides, "Hecuba", http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0097%3Acard%3D484, *Perseus Digital Library*, ll. 900-01, last accessed January 2018."or that we hold this opinion all to no purpose, [falsely thinking there is any race of gods,] when it is chance that rules the mortal sphere?"(Cited according to E. P. Coleridge, ed., "Euripides. Hecuba.", http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0098%3Acard%3D484, *Perseus Digital Library*, last accessed January 2018.)

(hostile), *laeta* (happy), etc. But with the disappearance of the Republic the fate of the state now rested upon only one man/woman's shoulders and the good of the state depended on his/her fortune.[224] The consequence of this development was that a single goddess Fortuna ousted the goddesses Fortunae: a single abstract force similar to the omnipotent Tyche of the Hellenistic world replaced the various particular cults of Fortuna the existed in Rome.[225] We have already seen that sometimes the notions of Tyche and Moira (Fate) can be confused but, unlike the Fates, Fortune follows no rationality; there never seems to be a reason in her workings, only her whim guides her. However, many authors (like the already cited Polybius) have tried to understand her workings, in an attempt to subjugate her to human control, or at least to make her less frightful by showing that she is not as mindless and arbitrary (and thus unknowable) as one may think. Seneca is among those who have reflected upon this casualty of Fortune.

> Inter multa magnifica Demetri nostri et haec vox est, a qua recens sum; sonat adhuc et vibrat in auribus meis: "Nihil," inquit, "mihi videtur infelicius eo, cui nihil umquam evenit adversi."Non licuit enim illi se experiri. Ut ex voto illi fluxerint omnia, ut ante votum, male tamen de illo dii iudicaverunt. Indignus visus est a quo vinceretur aliquando fortuna, quae ignavissimum quemque refugit, quasi dicat: "Quid ego istum mihi adversarium adsumam? Statim arma submittet; non opus est in illum tota potentia mea, levi comminatione pelletur, non potest sustinere vultum meum. Alius circumspiciatur cum quo conferre possimus manum; pudet congredi cum homine vinci parato. "Ignominiam iudicat gladiator cum inferiore componi et scit eum sine gloria vinci, qui sine periculo vincitur. Idem facit fortuna: fortissimos sibi pares quaerit, quosdam fastidio transit. Contumacissimum quemque et rectissimum aggreditur, adversus quem vim suam intendat: ignem experitur in Mucio, paupertatem in Fabricio, exilium in Rutilio, tormenta in Regulo, venenum in Socrate, mortem in Catone. Magnum exemplum nisi mala fortuna non invenit.[226]

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[224] Frakes, Jerold C., *The Fate of Fortune in the Early Middle Ages: the Boethian Tradition*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988, p.13.
[225] Frakes, p. 13.
[226]Seneca, "De Providentia", http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:2007.01.0012:book=1:chapter=3&highlight=fortuna, *Perseus Digital Library*, Book 1:3, last accessed January 2018. "Among the many fine sayings of our friend Demetrius there is this one, which I have just heard; it still rings in my ears. "No man," said he, "seems to me more unhappy than one who has never met with adversity." For such a man has never had an opportunity to test himself. Though all things have flowed to him according to his prayer, though even before his prayer, nevertheless the gods have passed an adverse judgement upon him. He was deemed unworthy ever to gain the victory over Fortune, who draws back from all cowards, as if she said, "Why should I choose that fellow as my adversary? He will straightway drop his weapons; against him I have no need of all my power—he will be routed by a paltry threat; he cannot bear even the sight of my face. Let me look around for another with whom to join in combat. I am ashamed to meet a man who is ready to be beaten." A gladiator counts it a disgrace to be matched with an inferior, and knows that to fight without danger is to win without glory. The same is true of Fortune. She seeks out the bravest men to match with

According to Seneca, Fortune has some kind of moral imperative, a certain ability to discern people and their attitude, to the point that she even seems to give quite benevolently the possibility to show their worth to those who deserve it. She finds no glory in fighting against those who are evidently too weak to possibly overcome her trials. Fortune does not seem the mindless mistress that overthrows destinies following caprice, but a kind of obstacle for worthy men and women to assert themselves and thus be remembered ("Magnus vir es; sed unde scio, si tibi fortuna non dat facultatem exhibendae virtutis?"[227]). Seneca believes that it is impossible for anyone never to have some difficult times in life, never to go through any hardship: following the Stoic doctrine, men have to be brave and to withstand Fortune, engaging in battle with her every time and, in this way, strengthening themselves and becoming better men.[228] As gold is forged by fire, so brave men are forged by Fortune ("Ignis aurum probat, miseria fortes viros"[229]). This concept is similar to the Christian belief that the difficulties and hardships of this life are God's way to tests us and to assess our worth so that He may know how to (or no to) reward us. In a world ruled and already predetermined by the stars and planets, Tyche (or Fortune) became the irresistible mistress of mortals and immortals alike. Our will never plays more than a very limited part in our happiness and success, but, in the chaos of our lives, blind chance seemed to play with the life of everyone according to her fancy.[230]

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her; some she passes by in disdain. Those that are most stubborn and unbending she assails, men against whom she may exert all her strength. Mucins she tries by fire, Fabricius by poverty, Rutihus by exile, Regulus by torture, Socrates by poison, Cato by death. It is only evil fortune that discovers a great exemplar." (Cited according to John W. Basore, ed., *Seneca: Moral Essays*, London: Heinemann, 1928, p. 17.)

[227] Seneca, Book 1:4, last accessed January 2018. "You are a great man; but how do I know it if Fortune gives you no opportunity of showing your worth?"

[228] Seneca, Book 1:4, last accessed January 2018.

[229] Seneca, Book 1:5, last accessed January 2018.

[230] Cumont, Franz, *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*, London: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1911, p. 179.

In Latin Europe, in spite of the Church, the belief remained confusedly alive through the Middle Ages that on this earth everything happens in connection with Fortune. If our destiny is already written down, and if our fate has already been predetermined, not only is there no meaning in rewards and punishments, but also supplications and prayers become useless because our situation cannot be changed. The folk, however, as usual, never completely lost the old faith, continuing to believe in one or more powers that were outside of God, be it destiny, Fortune or Astrology.[231] So, like Venus and Minerva, Fortune was not forgotten during the Middle Ages; like the other two goddesses, Fortune underwent a process of readjustment and adaptation to the Christian faith.

For Christians (at least for the learned ones who studied theology) it was difficult to accept the concept of Fortune because of the belief that God already knows everything and has already planned something for us: the idea that something could happen to ruin God's plans was unacceptable. That is why many fathers of the Church, like Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, fought to eradicate this belief in chance. Fortuna became one of the symbols of disorder and chaos, an evil force that tries to oppose God's working. This way of thinking, as we can see, is not so far from the pagan belief.

> Puta itaque deum dicere: "Quid habetis quod de me queri possitis, vos, quibus recta placuerunt? Aliis bona falsa circumdedi et animos inanes velut longo fallacique somnio lusi. Auro illos et argento et ebore adornavi, intus boni nihil est. Isti quos pro felicibus aspicis, si non qua occurrunt sed qua latent videris, miseri sunt, sordidi, turpes, ad similitudinem parietum suorum extrinsecus culti; non est ista solida et sincera felicitas; crusta est et quidem tenuis. Itaque dum illis licet stare et ad arbitrium suum ostendi, nitent et imponunt; cum aliquid incidit quod disturbet ac detegat, tunc apparet quantum altae ac verae foeditatis alienus splendor absconderit. Vobis dedi bona certa, mansura, quanto magis versaverit aliquis et undique inspexerit, meliora maioraque: permisi vobis metuenda contemnere, cupiditates fastidire; non fulgetis extrinsecus, bona vestra introrsus obversa sunt. Sic mundus exteriora contempsit spectaculo sui laetus. Intus omne posui bonum; non egere felicitate felicitas vestra est.[232]

[231] Cumont, p. 15.

[232] Seneca Book 1:6, last accessed January 2018. "Think, then, of God as saying: "what I possible reason have you to complain of me, you who have chosen righteousness? Others I have surrounded with unreal goods, and have mocked their empty minds, as it were, with a long, deceptive dream. I have bedecked them with gold, and silver, and ivory, but within there is nothing good. The creatures whom you regard as

Seneca, who is trying to explain why, if there is a god, bad things happen also to good men, is the perfect link between the pagan and Christian visions. He believes that the trials of Fortune are god's way to assert our worth: god, like a father, wants us to be strong, and to achieve this he can't afford to let us idly enjoy good fortune, otherwise we would be like many others, maybe beautiful on the outside, but worth nothing. Not feeling any pain ever is like not fully living your life, deciding to give up something that has been given to you; it is like saying that there can be no true joy if someone has never known pain. And thus Seneca's god concludes by saying: "Contemnite fortunam; nullum illi telum quo feriret animum dedi."[233] We cannot mistake what Seneca is writing for something Christian; as we have seen in the first chapter on Minerva, the idea that there could have been only one pervasive god, is nothing new in the Roman world but that does not mean that the classical authors had in mind the Christian God. So, we have to be more careful than ever, not to mistake classical works for Christian works, as has been done for such a long time. The Church Fathers, seeing the impossibility of abandoning this great classical heritage, worked hard with the aim of showing that those illustrious pagans they so admired were, in reality, already writing according to God's plan. This illusion lasted for a long time, but we have to distinguish between the pagan works and what the Christians made of them. Lucan, for example, one of the great poets of Imperial Rome,

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fortunate, if you could see them, not as they appear to the eye, bit as they are in their hearts, are wretched, filthy, base – their own house-halls, adorned only on the outside. Sound and genuine such good fortune is not; it is a veneer, and that thin one. So long, therefore, as they can stand firm and make the show that they desire, they glitter and deceive; when, however, something occurs to overthrow and uncover them, then you see what deep-set and genuine ugliness their borrowed splendor hid. But to you I have given the true and enduring goods, which are greater and better the more anyone turns them over and views them from every side. I have permitted you to scorn all that dismays and to disdain desires. Outwardly you do not shine; your goods are directed inward. Even so the cosmos, rejoicing in the spectacle of itself, scorns everything outside. Within I have bestowed upon you every good; your good fortune is not to need good fortune"

[233] Seneca, Book 1:6, last accessed January 2018. "Scorn Fortune; I have given her no weapon with which she may strike your soul."

seemed to share Seneca's vision when he wrote: "Sed parvo Fortuna viri contenta pavore, / Plena redit, solitoque magis favere secondi /Et veniam meruere dei",[234] and "Non tam caeco trahis omnia cursu, / Teque nihil, Fortuna, pudet."[235] But this does not make him a Christian.

Greeks and Romans alike have tried to explain the uncertainty that ails our life, personified in Fortune, because they soon noticed that the number of events that happen by chance, without an explanation, greatly outnumbered those that can definitively be ascribed to the visible working of some force.[236] The first Greek meaning of Tyche is really close to that of Fate and we have seen how, for example, Pindar and Pausanias associate them. The development in "chance" comes later and one of the authors to speak of Fortune clearly in these terms, was Pliny in his *Naturalis Historia*.

> Invenit tamen inter has utrasque sententias medium sibi ipsa mortalitas numen, quo minus etiam plana de deo coniectatio esset. toto quippe mundo et omnibus locis omnibusque horis omnium vocibus fortuna sola invocatur ac nominatur, una accusatur, rea una agitur, una cogitatur, sola laudatur, sola arguitur et cum conviciis colitur, volubilis ... que, a plerisque vero et caeca existimata, vaga, inconstans, incerta, varia indignorumque fautrix. huic omnia expensa, huic feruntur accepta, et in tota ratione mortalium sola utramque paginam facit, adeoque obnoxiae sumus sortis, ut prorsus ipsa pro deo sit qua deus probatur incertus.[237]

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[234]Lucan, "Pharsalia", http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0133%3Abook%3D4%3Acard%3D121, *Perseus Digital Library*, Book IV, ll. 121-23, last accessed January 2018. "Thus for a little moment Fortune tried / Her darling son; then smiling to his part / Returned; and gained her pardon for the past /By greater gifts to come." (Cited according to Sir Edward Ridley, ed., http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0134:book=4:card=121&highlight=fortune, Perseus Digital Library, last accessed January 2018.)

[235] Lucan, Book II, ll. 566-67, last accessed January 2018. "Not with such blindness, not so lost to shame / Does Fortune rule."

[236] Patch, Howard R., *The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature*, London: Cass, 1967, p. 5.

[237]Pliny, Book II:6, last accessed January 2018. "Among these discordant opinions mankind have discovered for themselves a kind of intermediate deity, by which our skepticism concerning God is still increased. For all over the world, in all places, and at all times, Fortune is the only god whom everyone invokes; she alone is spoken of, she alone is accused and is supposed to be guilty; she alone is in our thoughts, is praised and blamed, and is loaded with reproaches; wavering as she is, conceived by the generality of mankind to be blind, wandering, inconstant, uncertain, variable, and often favouring the unworthy. To her are referred all our losses and all our gains, and in casting up the accounts of mortals she alone balances the two pages of our sheet. We are so much in the power of chance, that change itself is considered as a God, and the existence of God becomes doubtful."

Pliny clearly depicted fortune as a powerful and pervasive existence that led men to doubt the need for the other gods. If she alone has the power to give and take everything from mankind, then the existence of other gods who have power over only one aspect of life does not seem necessary. This disappearance of the other gods in favour of Fortune, however, throws the world into chaos: we cannot talk anymore about an orderly *Fatum* because we are now preys of ruling Fortune, and inevitably the boundaries between these two concepts become blurred. In Martianus Cappella's *De Nuptiis Philologii et Mercurii* we can easily see this confusion of terminology but also the power she holds: when she arrives to the council held to decide about Philology and Mercury's wedding she brings chaos with her and the other gods can do nothing, they merely take note of what she has done.

> Tunc etiam omnium garrula puellarum, et contrario semper fluibunda luxu, levitate pernix delusoria gestiebat. Quam alii Sortem asserunt, Nemesismque nonnulli, Tychenque quam plures, aut Nortiam. Haec autem quoniam gremio largiore tutius orbis ornamenta portabat, et aliis impertiens repentinis motibus conferebat, rapiens his comas puellariter, caput illis virga comminuens, eisdemque quibus fuerat eblandita ictibus crebris verticem complicatisque in condyles sigitis vulnerabat. Haec mox Fata conspexit omnia quae gerebantur Iovis consistorio subnotare, ad eorum libros et pugillarem paginam currit, et licentiore quadam fiducia quae conspexerat inopinata discerptione corripuit, ut quaedam repente prorumpentia velut rerum seriem perturbarent, alia vero, quae causarum ratio prospecta vulgaverat, quoniam facere improvisa non poterat, suis tamen operibus arrogabat.[238]

Fortune seems not to hold any kind of respect for the other gods. She teases them, safe in

[238] Capella, Martiano, Book I:88-9. "And then the most talkative of the girls came flaunting and jumping about with nimble lightness, constantly unstable, extravagant now one way, now the other; some call her Sors, some Nemesis, many Tyche, and others Nortia. She carried in her ample bosom the many honors and decorations of the whole world, and conferred them on some people, distributing them unexpectedly; while like a girl she plucked the hairs of others, beating others on the head with a rod; while the same people she had formerly flattered se wounded with frequent blows of her knuckles on their heads. She soon saw the Fates observing everything that was going on in the council chamber of Jove; she ran to their books and notes, and with reckless boldness helter-skelter snatched what she saw: so that some things, suddenly starting from their place, upset, as it were, the due order of things; but others, which were common knowledge through a providential system of cause and effect, she could not render unforeseen, and therefore she claimed them as due to her own efforts"(Cited according to William Harris Stahl, Richard Johnson, and E. L. Burge, eds., *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

the knowledge that everything depends on her; she is a goddess, surely, but she also becomes an important rhetorical device in allegorical literature.[239]

The Fathers of the Church obviously had a violent reaction to this goddess: in an orderly world ruled by an omniscient God, there was no place for the chaotic intervention of Fortune. This reaction is fairly normal: it is not unusual for people who have just converted to violently deny everything that had come before. However, by the time of Saint Augustine the role of Fortune was starting to lose its importance; her workings were once again questioned, and she was put under Jove's command:

> Est causa, inquiunt, quia felicitas illa est, quam boni habent praecedentibs meritis; fortuna vero, quae dicitur bona, sine ullo examine meritorum fortitudo accidit hominibus et bonis et malis, unde etiam Fortuna nominatur. Quo modo ergo bona est, quae sine ullo iudicio venit et ad bonos et ad malos? Ut quid autem colitur, quae ita caeca est passim in quoslibet incurrens, ut suos cultores plerumque praetereat et suis contumptoribus haereat? Aut si aliquid proficient cultores eius, ut ab illa videanture et amenture, iam merita sequitur, non fortitudo venit. Ubi est definitio illa Fortunae? Ubi est quod a fortuitis etiam nomen accepit? Nihil enim prodest eam colere, si fortuna est. Si autem suos cultores discernit, ut prosit, fortuna non est. An et ipsam quo voluerint, Iuppiter mittit? Colatur ergo ipse solus; non voluerint, Iuppiter mittit? Colatur ergo ipse solus; non enim potest ei ibendi et eam quo voluerint mittenti Fortuna resistere. Aut certe istam mali colant, qui nolunt habere merita, quibus dea possit Felicitas invitari.[240]

And then Augustine continues by showing that it is impossible for Fortune to have any sense, impossible for her to be a divinity because, in time, she has turned against herself, casting her own memory into oblivion.

> Saltem certe, ut dixi, ipsa Fortuna, quae, sicut putant qui ei plurimum tribuunt, in omni re dominatur et res cunctas ex libidine magis quam ex vero celebrat obscuratque, si tantum et in deos valuit, ut temerario iudicio suo quos vellet celebraret obscuraretque quos vellet, praecipuum locum haberet in selectis, quae in iposos quoque deos tam praecipuaes est potestatis. An ut illic esse non

[239] Frakes, p. 20.

[240] Augustinus, Book IV:18. "There is a reason, they say, because Felicity is she whom the good have by previous merit; but fortune which is termed good without any trial of merit, befalls both good and bad men fortuitously, whence also she is named Fortune. How, therefore, is she good, who without any discernment comes both to the good and to the bad? Why is she worshipped, who is thus blind, running at random on any one whatever, so that for the most part she passes by her worshippers and cleaves those who despise her? Or if her worshippers profit somewhat, so that they are seen by her and loved, then se follows merit, and does not come fortuitously. What, then, becomes of that definition of fortune? What becomes of the opinion that she has received her very name from fortuitous events? For it profits one nothing to worship her is she is truly fortune. But if she distinguishes her worshippers, so that she may benefit them, she is not fortune. Or does Jupiter send her too, whiter he pleases? Then let him alone be worshipped; because Fortune is not able to resist him when he commands her, and sends her where he pleases. Or, at least, let the bad worship her, who do not choose to have merit by which the goddess Felicity might be invited."

> posset, nihil aliud etiam ipsa Fortuna nisi adversam putanda est habuisse fortunam? Sibi ergo adversata est, quae alios nobiles faciens nobilitata non est.[241]

What little effect she has is merely due to her etymological derivation from words such as "forte", "fortasse", and "fortuitus": the concept of fortune is simply reduced to a lexical normality.[242]

> Fortunam a fortuitus nomen habere dicunt, quasi deam quandam res humans variis casibus et fortuitis inludentem; unde et caecam appellant, eo quod passim in quoslibet incurrens sine ullo examine meritorum, et ad bonos et ad malos venit. Fatum autem a fortuna separant: et fortuna quasi sit in his quae fortuito veniunt, nulla palam causa; fatum vero adpositum singulis et statutum aiunt. [243]

Not only Fortune has been reduced to a simple lexical meaning, she has also been definitively separated from Fate, the force with which she was often confused before. So, Fortune was won by Christianity, but it can be argued that it had already been at least partly won by the Roman-Stoic tradition with its belief in the strength of human virtue as the natural weapon against Fortune.[244]

This is the tradition upon which Boethius relied. Boethius was a mediator and possibly one of the authors that helped Fortune to survive during the Middle Ages: his Fortune is a synthesis of the classical goddess, and it serves as a mediation between the ancient and the medieval conception of Fortune.[245] The Christian world was at war with the Roman Fortune, but Boethius managed to create a new system of meaning, integrating

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[241] Augustinus, Book VII:3. "At all events, as I have already said, Fortune herself – who, according to those who attribute most influence to her, renders all things famous or obscure according to caprice rather than according to the truth – since she has been able to exercise so much power even over the gods, as, according to her capricious judgement, to render those of them famous whom she would, and those obscure whom she would; Fortune herself ought to occupy the place of pre-eminence among the selected gods, since we suppose that the reason why she is not among the select is simply this, that even Fortune herself has had an adverse fortune? She was adverse, then, to herself, since, whilst ennobling others, she remained obscure."
[242] Frakes, p. 24.
[243] Isidori, Book VIII:9. "People say that Fortune (Fortuna) has its name from 'chance things' (fortuitus), as if it were a certain goddess sporting with human affairs through various accidents and chances. Thus they also call her blind, because she bears down upon people at random, without any consideration of merits, and comes to both good people and bad. They distinguish Fate from Fortune: Fortune, as it were, exists in what comes by chance with no obvious cause; but they say Fate is fixed and assigned for each person individually."
[244] Frakes, pp. 28-9.
[245] Frakes, p. 30.

the goddess and her attributes in this Christian view. His characterization of Fortune may depend on the tradition, but a new light is cast on her: the goddess, feared by the pagans and hated by the Christian, is placed on the side of the good as God's instrument.[246]

Boethius' work, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, had an enormous popularity although mostly secular in theme. Like many others before him, the prisoner (the protagonist of the book) blames Fortune for his condition but soon Philosophy comes to his side to remind him that Fortune's working are relegated to "vile things" ("Nunquam tua faciet esse fortuna quae a te natura rerum fecit aliena"[247]), going back to the same concept that Seneca had of the virtuous man able to withstand Fortune. The depiction of Fortune by the prisoner serves as a provocation, in response to which Philosophy can expand on the traditional concept and show the proper relationship between man and Fortune.[248] In Book II, Philosophy describes a Fortune that is really similar to the classical one and thus also very similar to the one described by the prisoner in Book I.

> Haec cum superba verterit viced dextra
> Et aestuantis more fertur Euripi,
> Dum tremendos saeva proterit reges
> Humilemque victi sublevat fallax vultum.
> Non illa miseros audit aut curat fletus
> Ultroque gemitus dura quos fecit ridet.
> Sic illa ludit, sic suas probat vires
> Magnumque suis demonstrate ostentum, si quis
> Visatur una stratus ac felix ora.[249]

Fortune acts without a plan, making no difference between class and status, but simply playing with mankind as she likes. And Boethius does not deny Fortune's existence at all,

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[246] Frakes, pp. 30-1.
[247] Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, translated by H. F. Stewart, London: Heinemann, 1953, Book II:V:39-40. "Fortune will never make those things thine which by the appointment of Nature belong not to thee."
[248] Frakes, p. 33.
[249] Boethius, Book II:I:1-9."The pride of fickle fortune spareth none / And, like the floods of swift Euripus borne, / Oft casteth mighty princes from their throne, / And oft the abject captive doth adorn. / She cares not for the wretch's tears and moan, / And the sad groans, which she hath caused doth scorn. /Thus doth she play, to make her power more known, / Showing her slaves a marvel, when man's state / Is in one hour both downcast and fortunate."

presenting her as the controller of earthly goods, opposed to Philosophy who controls the spiritual ones.

> "Quid tu homo ream me cotidianis agis querelis? Quam tibi fecimus iniuriam? Quae tua tibi detraximus bona? Quovis iudice de opum dignitatumque mecum possessione contende. Et si cuiusquam mortalium proprium quid horum esse monstraveris, ego iam tua fuisse quae repetis, sponte concedam.
> Cum the matris utero natura produxit, nudum rebus omnibus inopemque suscepi, meis opibus fovi et quod te nunc inpatientem nostri facit, favore prona indulgentius educavi, omnium quae mei iuris sunt affluentia et splendore circumdedi."[250]

Fortune, through the figure of prosopopoeia, speaks and reminds the prisoner that he has no reason to complain because nothing of what he had belonged to him: he never once thanked her when she had given him things, so there is no reason why he should complain now that she has taken back what was hers. She likens her powers to natural forces: she is like time and the sea, that do not bend to men's will and can bring both good and bad things. For example, sometimes the sea is calm, and men safely travel, but sometimes storms shake it and sailors die. Her nature is of the same kind, inconstant and uncontrollable ("Nos ad costantiam nostris moribus alienam inexpleta hominum cupiditas alligabit?"[251]). By impersonating Fortune, Philosophy forces the prisoner to rethink the relationship between men and Fortune. Fortune is the prisoner's "domina" (Book II:II:6), but with time he will recognize that he should have considered Philosophy his mistress because "Quid igitur o mortales extra petitis intra vos positam felicitatem?".[252]

[250] Boethius, Book II:II:3-13. "For what cause, O man, chargest thou me with daily complaints? What injury have I done thee? What goods of thine have I taken from thee? Contend with me before any judge about the possession of riches and dignities; and if thou canst show that the propriety of any of these things belong to any mortal wight, I will forthwith willingly grant that those things which thou demandest are thine. When Nature produced thee out of thy mother's womb, I received thee naked and poor in all respects, cherished the with my wealth, and (which maketh thee now fall out with me) being forward to favour thee, I had most tender care for thy education, and adorned thee with the abundance and splendour of all things which are in my power."

[251] Boethius, Book II:II: 27-8."And shall the insatiable desire of men tie me to constancy, so contrary to my custom?"

[252] Boethius, Book II:IV:72-3."Wherefore, O mortal men, why seek you for your felicity abroad, which is placed within yourselves?"

The discussion about Fortune almost completely disappears in Book III where the focus of the work shifts drastically from earthly and transitory things to a higher level (the *summum bonum*) where Fortune finds no place, as she is nothing but a subordinate of Providence.[253] Fortune is nothing more than one of God's instruments: when she reveals her true nature to men by withdrawing her favour, she forces them into self-examination and thus towards a rediscovery of self and God, which is the first step towards the *summum bonum.*[254] This attitude reminds the reader of the Stoic withdrawal from the world and earthly goods and this similarity is reinforced when Philosophy presents Fortune as one of the obstacles a man has to overcome to find glory:

> "Quare," inquit, "ita vir sapiens moleste ferre non debet, quotiens in fortunae certamen adducitur, ut virum fortem non decet indignari, quotiens increpuit bellicus tumultus; utrique enim, huic quidem gloriae propaganda illi vero conformandae sapientiae, difficultas ipsa materia est. Ex quo etiam virtus vocatur quod suis viribus nitens non superetur adversis."[255]

Fortune is good, an instrument through which God may value mankind and distribute rewards and punishments: she is now included in the Christian system, but she still seems to have her autonomy in the distribution of earthly good. This transformation will be completed later by Dante who, in his *Divine Comedy*, made Fortune one of God's agents, in charge of distributing earthly goods according to His will and plan, eliminating completely the element of chance: the fact that we do not understand Fortune's workings does not mean that they are casual, as everything is done under God's orders (orders that, as humans, we cannot understand). From an agent of chaos, now Fortune becomes one of the instruments that maintain the cosmos in order.

> "Maestro", diss'io a lui, "or mi dì anche:
> questa Fortuna di che tu me tocche,
> che è, che i beni del mondo ha sì tra le brache?"

[253] Frakes, p. 40.
[254] Frakes, p. 35.
[255] Boethius, Book IV:VII: 38-45. "Wherefore," quoth she, "a wise man must be no more troubled when he is assaulted with adversity, than a valiant captain dismayed at the sound of an alarum. For difficulties are the matter by which the one must extend his glory, and the other increase his wisdom. For which cause virtue is so called, because it hath sufficient strength to overcome adversity."

Ed elli a me: “Oh creature sciocche,
quanta ignoranza è quella che v’offende!
Or vo’ che tu la mia sentenza ne ‘mbocche.

Colui lo cui saver tutto trascende,
fece li cieli e diè lor chi conduce
sì, ch’ogni parte ad ogni parte splende,

distribuendo igualmente la luce:
similmente alli splendori mondani
ordinò general ministra e duce

che permutasse a tempo li ben vani
di gente in gente e d’uno in altro sangue,
oltre la difension di senni umani;

per ch’una gente impera ed altra langue,
seguendo lo giudicio di costei,
che è occulto come in erba l’angue.

Vostro saver non ha constato a lei:
questa provvede, giudica, e persegue
suo regno come il loro li altri dei.

Le sue permutazion non hanno triegue
Necessità la fa esser veloce;
sì spesso vien chi vicenda consegue.

Quest’è colei che tanto posta in croce
Pur da coloro che le dovrìen dar lode,
dandole biasimo a torto e male voce;

Ma ella s’è beata e ciò non ode:
con l’altre prime creature lieta
volve sua spera e beata si gode.

Or discendiamo omai a maggior pièta;
già ogni stella cade che saliva
quand’io mi mossi, e ‘l troppo star si vieta”[256] (ll. 67-99)

As always, the pagan and Christian tradition are skillfully united in Dante[257], with the pagan divinities subordinated to the Christian God. The Fortune of Boethius does not possess its own distinct sphere of action within the Universe: it is merely the personification of the qualities that have been attributed to this power, but it is not a divinely appointed administrator.[258] In Dante Fortune’s status as a divinity is firmly

[256] Dante, Inferno, Canto VII, ll. 67-99.
[257] Patch, p. 19.
[258]Cioffari, Vincenzo, “The Function of Fortune in Dante, Boccaccio and Machiavelli”, *Italica*, 24, (1947), p. 1, (pp. 1-13).

established: Fortune is the personification of the element of indeterminateness in the Universe, the Intelligence that God has put in charge of the distribution of external goods.[259] Virgil seems to be trying to explain to Dante exactly this: Fortune is not without reason and she acts according to God's plan but since mankind cannot understand His will, it is normal for Fortune to seem unreasonable. Fortune has been subjugated by Christianity and has become simply one of the emanations of God, a reflection of His order.

4.2 Fortune's Images

Not many representations of the Greek Tyche have reached us and that has probably something to do with the already discussed degree of abstraction that this figure requires. In the modern world, we are used to the presence of classically draped figures (mostly female) named after virtues or natural forces, but for the Greeks it was something of greater significance: giving human form to something abstract meant also giving it a spirit.[260] Few personifications appear before the fourth century BC[261] and the chronology perfectly coincides with the growing importance of Fortune from Pindar onwards. As a rule, the gender of each personification corresponds to the linguistic gender of the world personified[262] and, in this case, τὺχη is feminine and thus she became a goddess.

[259] Cioffari, p. 1, last accessed January 2018.
[260] Smith, Amy C., "Personification: Not just a Symbolic Mode", in Tyler Jo Smith and Dimitris Plantzos, eds., *A Companion to Greek Art*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2012, p. 440, (pp. 440-55).
[261] Gagarin, Micheal, and Fantham, Elaine, eds., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 228.
[262] Gagarin, p. 225.

Figure 25. Anon: *Tyche of Antioch*, Roman copy of an original Greek bronze of the third century BC by Eutychides, Galleria dei Candelabri, Vatican Museums, Rome.

One of the most famous Greek sculptures of Fortune, the *Tyche of Antioch* (Fig. 25), has unfortunately reached us only through a Roman copy, as often happens. Lysippos's student and son, Eutychides, was commissioned this statue in 296 BC, to celebrate the founding of the city of Antioch[263] (also mentioned in Pausanias 6.2.7). Her crown is a reproduction of the walls that surround the city (Tyche was often used to symbolize the fortune of rulers and cities) and in her hand, she holds sheaves of grain, as a sign of the fertility of the land[264] (later the Cornucopia will have a similar function). She sits on a mountain that rises above Antioch, and at her feet is represented the nearby river Orontes as a swimming young boy.[265] This statue has none of the august formality of older deities:[266] she sits casually with her legs crossed but with one hand placed upon the

[263] Smith, p. 451.
[264] Smith, p. 451.
[265] Neer, T. Richard, *Art & Archeology of the Greek World: A New History, c. 2500 – c. 150 BCE*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2012, p. 364.
[266] Neer, p. 364.

mountain on which she is sitting, as if ready to get up at any given time. This gives an impression of dynamism to the statue and, at the same time, is a great means to suggest the mutability and unpredictability of the goddess.

But despite the fact that not many Greek representations of Tyche have reached us, we come across many descriptions of the goddess and her temples in classical sources, like Pausanias's *Description of Greece*. In the city of Megarians there was a sanctuary of Fortune next to the temple of Aphrodite (Pausanias 1.43.6), one in Titane (Pausania 2.11.8), and another one at Pharae (Pausanias 4.30.3). The Eleans also had a temple of Fortune with her colossal image made of gilded wood except the face, hands and feet, which were of white marble (Pausanias 6.25.4), and in Thebes there was a statue of Fortune carrying Plutus, the god of wealth, in her arms (Pausanias 9.16.2). Pausanias also offers us a few more detailed descriptions of Tyche, showing her classical attributes. For example:

> Βούπαλος δέ, ναούς τε οἰκοδομήσασθαι καὶ ζῷα ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς πλάσαι, Σμυρναίοις ἄγαλμα ἐργαζόμενος Τύχης πρῶτος ἐποίησεν ὧν ἴσμεν πόλον τε ἔχουσαν ἐπὶ τῇ κεφαλῇ καὶ τῇ ἑτέρᾳ χειρὶ τὸ καλούμενον Ἀμαλθείας κέρας ὑπὸ Ἑλλήνων. οὗτος μὲν ἐπὶ τοσοῦτο ἐδήλωσε τῆς θεοῦ τὰ ἔργα: ἦσε δὲ καὶ ὕστερον Πίνδαρος ἄλλα τε ἐς τὴν Τύχην καὶ δὴ καὶ Φερέπολιν ἀνεκάλεσεν αὐτήν.[267]

The globe upon Fortune's head (and on which later she will stand) represents both her instability and her power over the whole world. This globe, however, originally belonged to another deity, the Greek Καιρός (Opportune moment, Occasion). Following the rule exposed before, according to which a personification takes the gender of the word used to define it, Kairos should be male and in fact in Greece it was represented as a man by sculptors such as Lysippus. However, in the passage from Greek to Latin culture, Kairos

[267] Pausanias, 4.30.6, last accessed January 2018. "Bupalos a skillful temple-architect and carver of images, who made the statue of Fortune at Smyrna, was the first whom we know to have represented her with the heavenly sphere upon her head and carrying in one hand the horn of Amaltheia, as the Greeks call it, representing her functions to this extent. The poems of Pindar later contained references to Fortune, and it is he who called her Supporter of the City."

took the feminine name of Occasio, becoming thus a woman and increasing the confusion between her and Fortuna.

> Donna ignuda, con un velo attraverso, che le copra le parti vergognose, e con i capelli sparsi per la fronte, in modo che la nuca resta tutta scoperta, e calva, con i piedi alati, portandosi sopra una ruota; e nella mano destra un rasoio. I capelli tutti rivolti verso la fronte ci fanno conoscere, che l'occasione si deve prevenire, aspettandola al passo, e non seguirla, quando ha voltate le spalle, perché passa velocemente.[268]

Figure 266.Giovanni Battista Bonacina: *Fortune's Games*, Scanned from Andrea Vitali, *Il Tarocchino di Bologna*, between 1631 and 1659.

Lomazzo wrote the same thing about Occasion, making reference to Cartari's work.[269] Cartari talks about Occasion in the chapter he dedicates to Fortune, explaining that many believe them to be one and the same because if you do not grasp in time what is casually given to you, it all will pass, and you will be left disappointed and envious of

[268] Ripa, p. 261.
[269] Lomazzo, p. 575.

those who have grasped their occasion.[270] From this confusion comes also the representation of bald Fortune, with her hair growing only on the front (Fig. 26) making it difficult for people to grasp her as she quickly runs around on winged feet. In Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval* (ca. 1190), for example, it is Fortune who is seized by the hair and whose nape is bare.[271] But at the same time, with her faced so covered, she is also blinded by her hair and blindness is another important attribute of the goddess, used to explain why her workings do not follow a clear path, as she casually gives and takes from worthy and unworthy men alike, playing with them. Time and Fortune (Chance) are the two forces that govern the world after the Fall.[272]

The other object that Pausanias describes as being in Fortune's hand is the horn of Amalthea, what later will be known as the Cornucopia, the horn of plenty (Fig. 3). Amalthea, symbol of fertility and abundance, is the she-goat that nursed and fed Zeus while he was hidden in a cave so that his father Cronus could not eat him.[273] This myth was later taken up by the Romans, and in particular by Ovid that in his *Fasti* makes Amalthea a Naiad who owned the goat that fed Jove; one of its horns broke and the naiad picked it up and filled it with fruit.[274] Ovid offers us also another version, this time completely transforming the Greek myth: the river god Achelous lost one of his horns in

[270] Cartari, *Le Imagini de i Dei Antichi*, Ginetta Auzzas, Federica Martignago, Manlio Pastore Stocchi, and Paola Rigo, eds., Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1996, p.421.
[271] Grafton, Anthony, Most, Glenn W., and Settis, Salvatore, eds., *The Classical Tradition*, Harvard: Harvard University Press,2010, p. 366.
[272] Kunts, Paul Grimley, and Braver, Lee, "The Wheel" in Helene E. Roberts, ed., *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes Depicted in Works of Art*, London: Fitzroy Deaborn Publishers, 1998, p. 342 (pp. 342-44).
[273] Hornblower, Simon, and Spawforth, Anthony, eds., *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 67.
[274] Ovid, *Fasti*, Book V: ll. 121-28

a fight with Hercules and the Naiads took it, filled it with flowers and fruit and gave it to the goddess of abundance, Bona Copia.[275]

Figure 27. Anon: *Statue of Fortune*, Vatican Museum, Rome, Roman period.

But Fortune also has another important attribute (as can be seen in Fig. 27): the rudder.

> Mostrava questa statoa qual fosse l'ufficio della Fortuna, che è dare e torre le ricchezze rappresentate per lo Corno di Dovizia, le quali cose si aggirano del continuo, come si aggira il cielo intorno a i due poli. Et hanno mostrato il medesimo poi sempre tutti quelli li quali hanno dipinto la Fortuna e ne hanno fatte statoe in qual si voglia modo, volendoci dare ad intendere ch'ella abbia il governo delle cose di qua giù, e che le possa dispensare come vuole.
>
> Il che si legge appresso di Lattanzio ancora, il quale descrive che gli antichi finsero la Fortuna con il Corno della Copia e le posero a canto un temone da nave, come che a lei stesse di dare le ricchezze e fosse in sua mano il governo delle umane cose e de i beni temporali, perché in questi non si trova fermezza alcuna né paiono ragionevolmente partiti, conciosiachè i buoni per lo più ne patiscono disagi grandi et i rei uomini ne abondino compiosamente.[276]

With her rudder Fortune directs people's path, scattering around her goods. Horace saw Fortune as the mistress of the sea (a comparison that appears also in Boethius) because both the sea and Fortune are unpredictable and can bring men both good and bad things.[277] As a capricious force, the sea is Fortune's natural place and this identification became so

[275] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* Book IX, ll. 88-89.
[276] Cartari, p. 405.
[277] Horace, *Odes*, translated by Nial Rudd, London: Heinemann, 2004, Ode I: 35.

strong that during the Middle Ages a sea-storm could be described using the term "fortuna".[278] Thus, she may have a rudder or a billowing sail (a reminder of the wind's inconstancy) or ride a shell or a dolphin (like Venus), or even hold a model ship (Fig. 28).[279]

Figure 28. Pinturicchio, *The Story of Fortuna or the Hill of Virtue*, Cathedral of Siena, Siena, 1505 ca.

These attributes – the horn, the rudder, the ship, and the globe – will be for the most part forgotten during the Middle Ages (they will be taken up again during the Renaissance) in favor of another attribute: the wheel. The wheel is considered the main attribute of Fortune; however, it appears earlier in the iconography of Nemesis,[280] the goddess of divine retribution, appointed with the task of punishing human hubris.[281] The wheel served to show that everything that you did in the course of your life, was bound

[278]See DuCange, Charles, *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis conditum a Carolo du Fresne domino Du Cange, auctum a monachis ordinis S. Benedicti cum supplementis integris D. P. Carpenterii, Adelungii, aliorum suisque digessit G. A. L. Henschel sequuntur Glossarium gallicum, tabulae, indices auctorum et rerum, dissertations*, Niort: L. Favre, 1884, p. 575. One of the possible translation given for the term "Fortuna" is "Maris tempestas".
[279] Cheney, Liana De Girolami, "Fortune: The Goddess", in Helene E. Roberts, ed., *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes Depicted in Works of Art*, London: Fitzroy Deaborn Publishers, 1998, p. 339 (p. 339-42).
[280] Hornum, Micheal B., *Nemesis, the Roman State and the Games*, Leiden: Brill, 1993, p.25.
[281] Hornum, p. 9.

to come back to you. Nonnius, the Greek poet who in the fifth century AD wrote the *Dyonisiaca*, still used the wheel as part of Nemesis's attributes:

> αὶ τροχὸς αὐτοκύλιστος ἔην παρὰ ποσσὶν ἀνάσσης
> σημαίνων, ὅτι πάντας ἀγήνορας εἰς πέδον ἕλκει
> ὑψόθεν εἰλυφόωσα δίκης ποινήτορι κύκλῳ,
> δαίμων πανδαμάτειρα, βίου στρωφῶσα πορείην:
> ἀμφὶ δέ οἱ πεπότητο παρὰ θρόνον ὄρνις ἀλάοτωρ,
> γρὺψ πτερόεις, πισύρων δὲ ποδῶν κουφίζετο παλμῷ
> δαίμονος ἱπταμένης αὐτάγγελος, ὅττι καὶ αὐτὴ
> τέτραχα μοιρηθέντα διέρχεται ἕδρανα κόσμου:
> ἀνέρας ὑψιλόφους ἀλύτῳ σφίγγουσα χαλινῷ,
> ἀντίτυπον μίμημα, καὶ ὡς κακότητος ἰμάσθλῃ,
> ὡς τροχὸν αὐτοκύλιστον, ἀγήνορα φῶτα κυλίνδει.[282] (ll. 377-88)

It is easy to see the similarities between Nemesis and Fortune: had Nonnius not specified that he was describing Nemesis, many would have mistaken her for Fortune. The only great difference is that Nemesis is not a chaotic force, but an agent of equilibrium, punishing those who deserve it and thus maintaining the Universe in balance. However, the Latin poet Claudian in his *De Bello Gothico*, describes a different Nemesis, more similar to the capricious and envious Fortune:

> Sed dea quae nimiis obstat Rhamnusia votis
> Ingemuit flexitque rotam: domat aspera victos
> Pauperis, unque die Romana rependit
> Quidquid ter denis acies amisimus annis.[283]

Although the wheel was not a stable attribute of Fortune in Greek and Roman art, it certainly is a perfect symbol for the constant shifting and turning of human affairs: the idea of the tossing and turning of human fortunes embodied by the wheel is expressed earlier with the circle (the globe) or the sea (the rudder).[284] The image of the wheel,

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[282] Nonnius, *Dionysiaca*, translated by H. J. Rose and L. R. Lind, London: Heinemann, 955, Book XLVIII. "A wheel turned itself round before the queen's feet signifying that she rolls all the proud from on high to the ground with the avenging wheel of justice, she the allvanquishing deity who turns the path of life. Round her throne flew a bird of vengeance, a griffin flying with wings, or balancing himself on four feet, to go unbidden before the flying goddess and show that she herself traverses the four separate quarters of the world: highcrested men she bridles with her bit which none can shake off, such is the meaning if the image, and she rolls an haughty fellow about as it were with the whip of misery, like a self-rolling wheel."

[283] Claudian, *The Gothic War*, translated by Maurice Platnauer, London: Heinemann, 1963, p. 172. "But Nemesis, the goddess worshipped at Rhamnus, she whose pleasure it is to check unbridled desire, was wroth and turned her wheel; harsh poverty overwhelms the vanquished, and in one day Rome's arm requites all that we have lost in thirty years."

[284] Hornum, p. 26.

however, starts to diverge from her original goddess Nemesis when Fortune, from the fifth century BC (when, as we have seen in the previous chapter, Pindar wrote the *Olympian 12*), becomes the embodiment of instability and fickleness itself. The Rota Fortunae was a familiar concept in Cicero's time, but literary references grow steadily in the time of the elegiac poets (Boethius included) and they become extremely frequent in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.[285] The turning of the wheel becomes then the perfect means to symbolize the unpredictable turn of events in human lives, and the blind chance that ignores any merit in bringing success and failure.[286] This symbolism is probably not much older than the third century BC and it may have been suggested by the earlier Ball of Fortune[287] and so, Fortune passed from standing on a globe, to a wheel (Fig. 29).

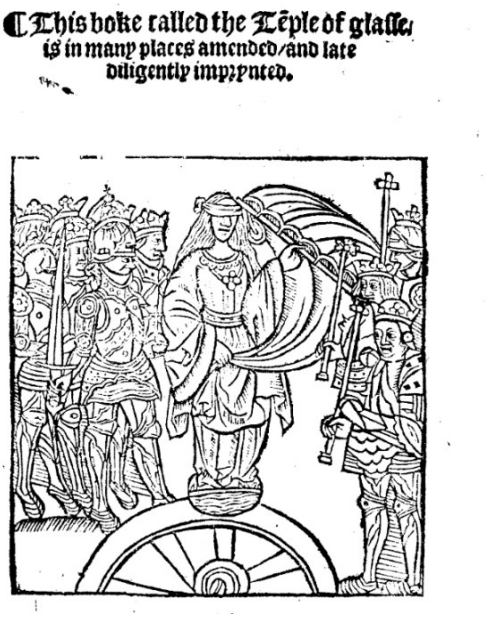

Figure 29. Illustration of Fortune in *Lydgate's Temple of Glas*, STC/ 1351:08, Bodleian Library, Oxford, ca 1529.

[285]Smith, Kirby Flower, ed., *The Elegies of Tibullus. The Corpus Tibullianum Edited with Introduction and Notes on Books I, II, and IV, 2-14*, New York: American Book Company, 1913, p. 306.
[286] Hornum, p. 27.
[287]Smith, p. 306.

But Fortune who totters about on a wheel is more a type than a goddess: the figure that reigned during the Middle Ages became such only when the meaning of the wheel as variation was firmly established, creating an incredibly effective allegory for the divine figure,[288] to the point that the image of the wheel came to stand for the goddess herself, evoking her presence even when she was not physically present (Fig. 6).

Figure 30. Anon: *Fortune's Wheel*, Cathedral of Siena, Siena, 1372.

Unfortunately, we have no smooth succession of references to the wheel from the time of Boethius to that of Dante: we must directly go to the twelfth century to talk about an established tradition.[289] The allusions might seem to settle the tradition from the classics, for at a first glance the train of development seems to be as follows: classical literature connects the wheel intimately with the turns of human affairs; Boethius puts man himself on the wheel and seems to suggest that Fortune herself turns it, probably by

[288] Patch, p. 149.
[289] Patch, p. 151.

hand; writers in the twelfth century use this concept as if it were quite established and thoroughly familiar.[290] There also seems to be another tradition in which Fortune herself is unstable and turned by the wheel:[291] Fortune becomes her own victim, just as we have seen her described by Saint Augustine when he wrote that she seemed to have turned against herself, casting her own memory into oblivion.[292]

However, the main tradition from classical literature is the figure of Fortune turning her wheel, on which mankind and the estate of man depend, and this idea has its beginnings in early Roman time; but whatever meaning was originally attached to the wheel, or whichever of the gods was chiefly associated with it in ancient Rome, by the time of the Middle Ages it primarily belonged to Fortune.[293] Men and women are attached to this wheel and, when it turns, they turn with it (Fig. 30). One may struggle to keep his/her place at the top of the wheel while another may feel that nobody else has ever reached so low a point. The typical representation is that of the wheel with four human figures on the rim and it seems likely that the idea originated in art.[294]

> On the top of the wheel is a crowned youth sitting on a throne and holding a scepter; at the right is a figure falling, his crown dropping from his head; at the bottom is a figure prostrate; on the left is a man climbing, extending his hands towards the youth at the top. The figures are inscribed respectively, Regno, Regnavi, Sum sine Regno, and Regnabo. This picture is exceedingly familiar in medieval art. In one of Boccaccio's descriptions of Fortune we read: "I saw men climbing the wheel by their wits, and arrived at the top they said, "I reign." Others, failing, seemed to say, "I am without reign"."[295]

The wheel of Fortune is a favourite theme with poets and artists alike.[296] Contrary to what has happened to Venus or Minerva, Fortune was not accosted to other figures of Christianity but merely Christianized in meaning: this is greatly due to Boethius, who,

[290] Patch, p. 152.
[291] Patch, p. 153.
[292] Augustinus, Book VII:3.
[293] Patch, p. 154.
[294] Patch, p. 164.
[295] Patch, pp. 164-5.
[296] Patch, p. 59.

although very much a Christian, incorporated many classical ideas in his representation of Fortune.[297] This goddess, like the others, was invested by the great allegorical trend of the Middle Ages that used her as a didactic figure, a Christian instrument for the edification of the soul.[298] Recognizing the impossibility of erasing her from people's minds and memories, the Church Fathers decided to use her in favour of their own religion, teaching men about the instability and fickleness of temporal goods: Fortune was used to mediate the idea that human attachment to material good is bound to bring only pain and disappointment.

Figure 31. Representation of Fortune's wheel, detail, *Codex Buranus* (*Carmina Burana*) Clm 4660; fol. 1r, Bavarian State Library, Munich, 1230 ca.

Cesare Ripa in his *Iconologia* describes nine different Fortunae, fracturing the various representations of the goddess: for example, the first is blind,[299] and the second

[297] Kunts, p. 342.
[298] Seznec, p. 103.
[299] Ripa, p. 113.

is sitting on a globe.[300] But between the third and the fourth there is the strongest connection, describing the passage from the globe to the wheel. Ripa says that the third Fortune uses her globe to exalt and lower men but then he adds: "Può anche significare il globo, che la Fortuna vien vinta, e superata dalla disposizione celeste, la quale è cagionata, e retta dal Signore della Fortuna e della Natura, secondo quello che ha ordinato ab eterno".[301] This Fortune is already under God's orders and the globe serves the same function as the wheel. And then, the passage from globe to wheel is completed in the fourth Fortune: "Donna a sedere, che si appoggia col braccio destro sopra una ruota, in cambio del globo celeste, e con la sinistra mano tiene una cornucopia".[302] The fifth Fortune is the Christianized version of Horace's marine Fortune: a woman sitting on ship but with no rudder[303] as it is not her will that governs our life (the ship) but God's. The other interesting one is the sixth, the *Fortuna Amoris* with Cupid playing with her vest.[304]

While it is true that Fortune with her wheel had been absorbed by Christianity,[305] she also maintained a more secular side, connected to her role in courtly poems: winged and blind, like Cupid, she has nothing to do with the inspiration of emotions (Venus's field of expertise), but she controls the possibilities that the lover has to gain his lady's love. One must be rich and courteous to love, and all the material objects needed are dispensed by Fortune and so she becomes also a convenient figure to blame in love's adversities,[306] together with Venus.

[300] Ripa, p. 114.
[301] Ripa, p. 114.
[302] Ripa, p. 114.
[303] Ripa, p. 115.
[304] Ripa, p. 115.
[305] There are illustrations of Fortune even in manuscripts of the Bible. See, for example, The Holkham Bible Picture Book, British Library, London, England, f. 1v, 1327-35 ca.
[306] Patch, p. 22.

This goddess controls all temporal goods, and so it is natural for her to feel completely at home at the court, a small world made of appearances and games[307]. Like a courtly lady, Fortune is always richly dressed and she bestows kingship[308], crowns, gold, and (a reminiscence of Kairos) opportune moments for lovers to meet. Moreover, what better figure other than Fortune (a woman herself), could have been used to indicate women's inconstancy and their tendency to make their lovers suffer? Through the image of Fortune, the vacillations of temporal affairs can be represented as forms of female sexual infidelity, promiscuity, or prostitution in an association that identifies excessive attachment to the goods of Fortune with sexual indulgence or carnal sin.[309]

> Dirò bene di quella che fu in Egira, città dell'Acaia, benchè ne dicessi pur anche già nella imagine di Amore, la quale era fatta in cotale guisa. Dall'un lato avea il Corno della Copia e lo teneva con mano, dall'altro il dio Cupido. E significava questo, come lo interpreta Pausania, che poco vale agl' innamorati essere belli, vaghi e gentili, quando non abbiano la Fortuna con loro, che pare voler dire che bisogna in amore non meno che nell'altre cose avere ventura e buona sorte; e pur troppo lo vuole dire. Ma questo vi si ha da aggiungere ancora, che bisogna che la Fortuna seco porti il Corno di Dovizia, perché senza sarà di poco giovamento ad amore, mercé dello avaro animo femminile che né a beltà riguarda né a virtù né a gentilezza, ma solo si piega a preziosi doni. Onde si può dire sicuramente che sarà bene aventuroso e felice sempre in amore qualunque abbia oro, argento e preziose gemme, doni tutti di Fortuna e mostrati per lo Corno della Copia.[310]

In this courtly and more secular setting, Fortune still is the sovereign, controlling the lovers like chess pieces, uncaring of their feelings. Presumably the top of the wheel is the condition in which the two lovers are together (a condition, it seems, bound to end), while the bottom would be the condition of unrequited or impossible love. The only way to stop the fall and to make this love eternal is to control Fortune's instability (a sphere) with wisdom's strength (a cube), as Veronese did in a painting from the series *The Allegory of Love*. In *The Happy Union* (Fig. 8) Fortune, wearing Venus's belt (the same belt that the goddess of love used to wear to consecrate legitimate unions), crowns the two lovers who

[307] Patch, pp. 58-9.
[308] Patch, p. 59.
[309] Echard, Sian, and Rouse, Robert, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature in Britain*, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2017, Volume 2, p. 808.
[310] Cartari, pp. 424-5.

are accompanied by a dog, the symbol of fidelity. Fortune is sitting on a sphere with the Cornucopia, but she has been given stability by the cubic support on which she is set. In love, as in life, virtue seems to be the only means possible to withstand Fortune's changes and to somehow control them.

Figure 32. Paolo Veronese: *Allegory of Love IV*, *The Happy Union*, National Gallery, London, 1575 ca.

I can conclude that although Fortune went through the same process of christianization that concerned Minerva and Venus, she more or less remained the same and simply adapted to the new religion by acting as a vicar of God. Possibly, too many people still believed in Fortune and still saw her as the only acceptable explanation for events seemingly incomprehensible and so, instead of hiding, Fortune flourished in the Middle Ages, adapting to every theme: a genuinely Christian figure was created, retaining the title and the apparatus of her original pagan cult.[311]

[311] Patch, p. 34.

4.3 Fortune in *The Kingis Quair* and *The Temple of Glas*

Fortune is the last goddess to appear in *The Kingis Quair*, but before her appearance she is mentioned many a time. At the beginning of the poem the narrator, unable to fall asleep, takes up a book written by another prisoner like him, Boethius's "counsele of philosophye" (l. 17).[312] At this point, following the convention of dream poems, the reader should fall asleep, but instead he finds inspiration to think about his own life and fortune. The complaint to Fortune, part of a long classical and medieval tradition[313], is mediated by the figure of Boethius: describing the fall and the condition of the philosopher, the prisoner complains about his own very similar situation.[314] Fortune is presented as a mindless force that overthrows men in spite of their estate and condition; on her wheel princes, nobles, and servants are the same, as exemplified by the fact that the protagonist, a prince, likens his situation to that of a virtuous man, but not necessarily of royal blood.

> For sothe it is, that on hir tolter quhele,
> Every wight cleuerith in his stage,
> And failyng foting oft quhen hir lest rele,
> Sum vp, sum doune; is none estate nor age
> Ensured more, the pryncë than the page,
> So vncouthly hir werdes sche devidith,
> Namly in ȝouth, that seildin ought prouidith.
>
> Among thir thoughtis rolling to and fro,
> Fell me to mynd of my fortune and vre:
> In tender ȝouth how sche was first my fo,
> And eft my frende, and how I gat recure
> Of my distresse; and all myn auenture
> I gan ourehayle, that langer slepe ne rest
> Ne myght I nat, so were my wittis wres. (ll. 57-70)

The initial complaint on Boethius's behalf then becomes an excuse to complain about his own Fortune. It is interesting to note that Fortune is considered particularly harsh in

[312] Elliot, Elizabeth, *Remembering Boethius: Writing Aristocratic Identity in Late Medieval French and English Literatures*, London: Routledge, 2016, p. 125.
[313] Hoddapp, William F., "Reading the Narrator Reading Boethius: The Implied Audience of *The Kingis Quair*", *Enarratio*, 14, (2007), p. 24, (pp. 23-35).
[314] Mapstone, p. 54.

respect to youth, but it makes perfect sense if we think that youth, by definition, is foolish.[315] We have seen in the previous chapters how the only weapon mankind has to conquer Fortune is wisdom; young men and women have not had enough experience yet, they have not learned enough to be able to withstand the strength of the goddess's blows. This does not mean, as the prisoner seems to think, that Fortune treats young people with more cruelty, but only that they are less prepared, and thus suffer more, than others when she hits them. Reading *De Consolatione Philosophiae* the prisoner sees his own situation reflected in those pages and understands that his condition in not unique but that it is a universal experience[316]: being born in Fortune's reign of variance, mankind has to play her games, but happiness can be found even in such a desperate situation.

While Boethius had Philosophy as his guide, the narrator of *The Kingis Quair* is led in his journey by three goddesses, the last of which is Fortune herself (that Boethius never actually meets but only glimpses through Philosophy's mediation). Fortune's influence is evident as soon as we enter Venus's temple, where numerous lovers are complaining "Vpon Fortune and hir grete variance" (l. 646). In the previews chapters I have talked about this aspect of Fortune, the *Fortuna Amoris*; she is the one who hinders or helps lovers, following her caprice. The poet's answer to this problem is the same that Veronese gave in his painting: virtue has to be the foundation of love otherwise it is bound to fail. To obtain this virtue that is needed to subdue Fortune and to be thus able to love, Venus sends the narrator to Minerva, the goddess of wisdom that, as we have seen in the chapter dedicated to her role in *The Kingis Quair*, will instruct the prisoner in God's law and prepare him for his meeting with Fortune.

[315] Ebin, Lois A., "Boethius, Chaucer, and The Kingis Quair", *Philological Quarterly*, 53, (1974), p. 327, (pp. 321-41).
[316] Petrina, p. 43.

First of all, the goddess confirms Venus's teaching about the importance of virtue in love matters: "Gif the ne list thy lufe on vertew set, / Vertu sal be the casue of thy forfet" (ll. 902-03) because "oft gud fortune flourith with gude wit. / Quhafore, gif thou will be wele fortunyt, / Lat wisedome ay to thy will be junyt" (ll. 929-31). Then she starts a long monologue about Fortune and man's free will, strongly resembling Philosophy's speech in Boethius's *Consolation*.[317] But while Boethius took part in the discussion, here the narrator seems to disappear completely in the background while Minerva explains everything to him. Minerva is the voice of God, His wisdom, and there is no place for external intervention: the only thing that the lover can do is listen and learn the doctrine that is being revealed to him.

> And how so be that sum clerkis trete,
> That all your chancë causit is tofore
> Heigh in the hevin, by quhois effectis grete
> Ȝe movit are to wrething, lesse or more,
> Quhare in the warld, thus calling that therfore
> 'Fortune,' and so that the diversitee
> Of thair wirking suld cause necessitee;
>
> Bot othir clerkis halden that the man
> Has in himself the chose and libertee
> To cause his awin fortune, how or quhan
> That him best lest, and no necessitee
> Was in the hevin at his natiuitee,
> Bot ȝit the thingis happin in commune
> Efter purpose, so cleping thame 'Fortune.' (ll. 1016-29)

Minerva explains that there are two ways of thinking about Fortune: some believe that everything has already been set in heaven by God in a sort of predestination and that the events that happen in our life, and that we attribute to Fortune, are in reality all commanded by Necessity. But others believe that man has in himself the power to forge his destiny, without any necessity binding his power of action; events happen commonly by human purpose and result of such purposed events is what some call Fortune.[318] This

[317] Gray, p. 479.
[318] McDiarmid, p. 133.

last belief is particularly important because if someone has it in himself to "cause his owin fortune", then mankind does have an active role in life: acts of will may change the future.[319] But, in this confusion, there is one thing that is surely true: Fortune has no power over those that have foreknowledge and are prepared to withstand her workings.

> And quhare a persone has tofore-knawing
> Of it that is to fall purposely,
> Lo, Fortune is bot wayke in suich a thing,
> Thou may wele wit, and here ensample quhy:
> To God, it is the First Cause onely
> Of everything, there may no fortune fall;
> And quhy? For He foreknawing is of all.
>
> And therfore thus I say to this sentence:
> Fortune is most and strangest evermore
> Quhare leste foreknawing or intelligence
> Is in the man; and, sone, of wit or lore
> Sen thou art wayke and feble, lo, therfore,
> The more thou art in dangere and commune
> With hir that clerkis clepen so 'Fortune.' (ll. 1030-43)

Minerva brings God as an example: he knows everything and thus His foreknowledge makes Him totally immune to Fortune. However, God is the only perfect being, the only one outside Fortune's influence; mankind, afflicted by human imperfection and bound to the material world after the Fall, depends on her and suffers her whims. Minerva seems particularly worried for the lover, that she describes as "wayke and feble" (l. 1041) and thus completely under Fortune's power.[320] But "for the sake and at the reverence / Of Venus clere" (ll. 1044-5) she will give him the strength and wisdom needed to face Fortune and to conquer her. To complete this step, the lover first needs to go back to Earth from Minerva's high place: Fortune there has no power because her workings are limited to earthly goods and human affairs.

Arriving in "a lusty plane", the lover sees flowers, trees, fruit, and animals. This long list should probably remind the reader of the Cornucopia; Fortune is the owner of all

[319] Petrina, p. 98.
[320] Carretta, p. 15.

earthly goods and that is why she can distribute them as she sees fit. Venturing in this garden, the narrator finally finds Fortune herself "hufing on the ground, / and right before hir fete, of compace round, / A quhele, on quhich there cleuering I sye / A multitude of folk before myn eye" (ll. 1110-13). Before they start to speak, the author stops a moment to describe Fortune: the description of this goddess is the longest in *The Kingis Quair*, covering 7 stanzas, from the stanza 159 to stanza 165. She is richly dressed, with a multicolored vest and a long white mantle with black spots so that her own clothes reflect the instability that she embodies. The four following stanzas then are wholly dedicated to the description of her main attribute: the wheel.

> And vnderneth the quhele eke sawe I there
> Ane vgly pit als depe as ony helle,
> That to behald thereon I quoke for fere;
> Bot o thing herd I, that quho therein fell
> Com no more vp agane, tidingis to telle;
> Of quhich, astonait of that ferefull syght,
> I ne wist quhat to done, so was I fricht.
>
> Bot for to se the sudayn weltering
> Of that ilk quhele that sloppare was to hold,
> It semyt vnto my wit a strong thing,
> So mony I saw that than clymben wold,
> And failit foting, and to ground were rold;
> And othir eke that sat aboue on hye
> Were overthrawe in twinklyng of ane eye.
>
> And on the quhele was lytill void space;
> Wele nere oure-straught fro lawe to hye.
> And they were ware that long sat in place,
> So tolter quhilum did sche it to-wrye;
> There was bot clymbe. and ryght dounward hye!
> And sum were eke that fallyng had so sore;
> There for to clymbe thaire corage was no more.
>
> I sawe also, that quhere sum were yslungin
> Be quhirlyng of the quhele vnto the ground,
> Full sudaynly sche hath thame vp ythrungin,
> And set thame on agane full sauf and sound;
> And euer I sawe a newë swarme abound,
> That sought to clymbe vpward vpon the quhele
> In stede of thame that myght no langer rele. (ll. 1128-55)

The image of the wheel described by the narrator is terrifying: there are men struggling to keep themselves on top but overthrown "in twinkling of ane eye" (l. 1141); others

struggle to climb on it, but fall on the ground; some others are cast down and do not have the courage to climb again on that crowded wheel with "lytill void space" (l. 1143) while an entire crowd greedily waits to take their place; and some are unexpectedly and suddenly cast up again. In this chaos, an ugly and black pit opens under the wheel, "depe as ony helle" (l. 1129), from which no man has ever come back. This pit seems to be a novelty in the description of Fortune[321] and it is possibly used to explore Fortune's connection with death ("Herd I, that quho therein fell / Come no more vp agane tidings to telle" ll. 1131-2). The tradition of Fortune causing death is widespread and continuous, and it takes an important place not only in all medieval elegiac poetry, but also in art: turning her wheel Fortune herself may send men into the grave.[322] It all is but a great game for Fortune who, from above, watches men greedily trying to climb up her wheel; the goddess likes to play with mankind and the only way to fight her is to oppose the pagan Stoic remedy of fortitude to her workings.[323]

The goddess speaks "in game" (l. 1160), and the lover answers in kind, resorting to a chess metaphor to explain his situation: "Help of ȝoure grace me wofull wretchit wight / Sen me to cure ȝe power haue and myght" (ll.1168-69). Fortune does not seem much inclined to help the narrator, even scorning him for his weakness that makes him unable to climb on her wheel; but then, inconstant as ever, Fortune changes her mind and helps.

> And therwithall vnto the quhele in hye
> Sche hath me led, and bad me lere to clymbe,
> Vpon the quhich I steppit sudaynly.
> "Now hald thy grippis", quod sche, "for thy tyme,
> An hour and more it rynnis over prime,
> To count the hole, the half is nere away:
> Spend wele therefore the remanant of the day.

[321] McDiarmid, p. 135.
[322] Patch, pp. 119-20.
[323] Patch, p. 83.

"Ensample", quod sche, "tak of this tofore,
That fro my quhele be rollit as a ball;
For the nature of it is euermore,
After ane hicht to vale and geue a fall:
Thus, quhen me likith, up or doun to call.
Fare wele," quod sche, and by the ere me toke
So ernestly that therwithall I woke. (ll 1191-1204)

Benignly now, after her reprimand, Fortune reminds the young man to hold on tight and tells him not to waste his life. This warning serves to prepare him for the goddess's unpredictable nature ("quhen me likith, up or doun to call" l. 1202) that is reflected in her wheel ("For the nature of it is euermore, /After ane hicht to vale and geue a fall" ll. 1200-01): it is an example of the typical medieval identification of the goddess with her instrument.

The narrator's journey ends when Fortune pulls his ear and he wakes up. A dove (l. 1235) is sent to him as a sign that his good fortune has been sealed by God's will,[324] proof that Fortune too has to follow God's orders. His journey has followed exactly the opposite path of Boethius's:[325] while Boethius had always had Fortune by his side until he was imprisoned, the young man protagonist of *The Kingis Quair* had fortune as his foe until the moment of his imprisonment. What they have in common is the fact that they both understand (James more superficially than the philosopher) that happiness does not come from external factors but is to be found inside oneself: there is no need for their imprisonment to end for them to find happiness.[326]

The two circular movements in this poem, the "lufis dance" (l. 312) and the circular motion of the wheel that "be rollit as a ball" (l. 1199), are finally reunited, through Minerva's mediation, "in the hevynnis figure circulere".[327] God's influence expands over

[324] Gray, p. 480.
[325] Brown, Ian, "The Mental Traveller – A Study of *The Kingis Quair*", *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 5, (1968), p. 248, (pp. 246-52).
[326] Petrina, p. 43.
[327] MacColl, p. 126.

that of the three goddesses and this final realization is what brings the prisoner to conclude his journey and to reach a new degree of understanding so that finally "endith the fatall influence / Causit from hevyn, quhare powar is commytt / Of guoirnance" (ll. 1366-8).[328]

Fortune's presence in *The Temple of Glas* is harder to notice, but nonetheless it is there. In this poem Venus's role is supreme: Minerva and Fortune do not exactly disappear, but they are embodied in Venus who takes up their powers and roles. The all-powerful Venus of *The Temple of Glas* seems to be able to control and dispense fortune as she likes, being a planet "fortunate" (l.1097), even against "old Saturne, my fadur, unfortuned" (l. 389). At the end of the dream Venus concludes the marriage ceremony between the two lovers "thurugh hir myght and juste providence / The love of hem, bi grace and eke fortune, / Withoute chaunge shal ever in oon contune" (ll. 1331-3). With this formula Venus admits that Fortune is fundamental in love, but the capricious goddess does not seem free to act as she likes, being under Venus's influence.

But this may only be an impression. The lovers lack Minerva's assistance; we have seen how this goddess stands, opposed to Venus, protecting herself from her workings with her shield. This may imply that the newly formed couple does not have the virtue necessary to love following God's law, and thus that this love is bound to end.

The other element that may pose a problem is the temple itself, made of glass. Cartari believed that Fortuna was made of glass "perchè come questo subito si spezza ad ogni lieve intoppo così tosto vanno a terrai favori della Fortuna",[329] a belief shared also by Lomazzo.[330] Given the way Cartari's sentence formulated, it is highly probable that, more or less directly, he (and through him maybe also Lomazzo) knew Publilius Syrus's

[328] Hendy, Andrew von, "The Free Thrall: a Studi of *The Kingis Quair*", *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 2, (1965), p. 151, (pp. 141-51).
[329] Cartari, p. 422.
[330] Lomazzo, p. 663.

sententiae. Quite a few of them are dedicated to Fortune, but the one that interest us the most is about the connection of Fortune to glass: "Fortuna vitrea est: tum cum splendet frangitur".[331] In Lydgate's work the temple of glas may belong to Venus, but *Fortuna Amoris* hovers on her workings.

[331] Syrus, Publius, *Sententiae*, in R. A. H. Bickford-Smith, ed., London: Clay and Sons, 1895, Sententia n. 24, p. 13. "Fortune is made of glass: while it is true that it shines, it could also break" (my translation)

Riassunto

Il mio interesse per il mondo classico nasce, probabilmente, dai miei precedenti studi, ma solo studiando più a fondo la letteratura medievale sono riuscita a capire quanto l'eredità classica abbia lasciato il segno nella storia. Nel tempo, gli antichi dei si sono nascosti nelle pieghe dell'arte e della letteratura per sopravvivere all'ondata di cristianizzazione che ha investito il Vecchio e il Nuovo Mondo, ma non ci hanno mai davvero abbandonato.

Per studiare l'evoluzione di Minerva, Venere e Fortuna nel Medioevo ho deciso di concentrarmi su due testi inglesi medievali, *The Kingis Quair* di Giacomo I e *The Temple of Glas* di Lydgate. Questi due poemi si trovano in due diversi manoscritti ma hanno molto in comune. *The Temple of Glas* ha goduto di una maggiore popolarità, soprattutto nel XV secolo, come può essere dedotto anche dal fatto che questo poema sopravvive in numerosi manoscritti contro l'esistenza di una sola copia del poema del Re di Scozia. La cronologia dei due poemi è molto simile: *The Temple of Glas* è databile intorno alla prima metà del XV secolo e *The Kingis Quair* dovrebbe essere stato scritto tra il 1424 ed il 1437.

Il poema di Giacomo I può essere considerato parzialmente autobiografico, dato che vi sono descritti eventi chiave della sua vita come la sua cattura da parte degli Inglesi, la prigionia ed il matrimonio. Contiene comunque una visione onirica ma, mentre in *The Temple of Glas* il narratore si innamora all'interno del sogno, in *The Kingis Quair* il sogno non è che una parte successiva all'innamoramento in cui il narratore, attraverso l'aiuto delle tre dee, impara ad amare. Nel *Kingis Quair* inoltre c'è una quasi totale identificazione di autore e narratore, come se Giacomo I stesse davvero cercando di aprire

una finestra di dialogo con il lettore, mostrandogli eventi della propria vita. Il lettore diventa così una specie di *voyeur*, ruolo che solitamente, in poemi d'amor cortese come questi, viene svolto dall'autore, come nel caso del narratore del *Temple of Glas.* Nel poema di Lydgate è il narratore stesso, infatti, che si trova a ricoprire il ruolo del *voyeur* e che ci narra tutto ciò che accade sotto al suo sguardo indagatore, coinvolgendo così in grado minore il lettore.

Entrambi gli autori fanno riferimento ad una ben consolidata tradizione letteraria ma Lydgate in maniera forse più pedissequa. Ciò ha dato al suo poema una sfumatura più laica, - cosa assolutamente inaspettata, dato che Lydgate era un sacerdote, - ma è forse una possibile conseguenza del fatto che i monasteri fossero grandi centri di cultura, incaricati della raccolta e preservazione della tradizione letteraria classica. Sarebbe stato impossibile per uno studioso come Lydagte non sentirne il richiamo. In maggiore o minore misura, comunque, entrambi gli scrittori fanno riferimento alle antiche divinità ed ai testi classici, spesso anche attraverso la mediazione del loro illustre predecessore, Geoffrey Chaucer.

Minerva, Venere e Fortuna appaiono in questi due testi in maniera differente, risentendo più o meno fortemente del grande processo di cristianizzazione che le aveva investite. Per esempio, la Minerva di Giacomo I sembra aver perso moltissimo del suo iniziale aspetto. Minerva, l'Atena del mondo Greco, è nata, secondo la tradizione più antica, dalla testa di Zeus: da questo parto senza madre è nata una dea vergine e guerriera, protettrice della pace e della sapienza. Come un uomo, Minerva combatte indossando le armi del padre e prende parte ai giudizi in tribunale, non le pertengono le arti amorose ed il suo posto è tra gli uomini, non tra le donne.

Una donna guerriera non trova facilmente posto nella religione cristiana: una dea che osa opporsi al padre Zeus e ferire il dio della guerra Ares sembra apparentemente non poter essere assimilata. Ma, inaspettatamente, questo avviene, anche se, come già accennato, il prezzo da pagare è alto: Minerva deve abbandonare un'intera parte della sua identità, cambiando così anche sfera di competenza. Da stratega militare, diventa, come nel caso del *Kingis Quair*, Sapienza Divina, riflesso della conoscenza infinita di Dio. Il suo ruolo dunque è quello di guidare e indottrinare gli uomini, in modo che possano avvicinarsi il più possibile alla vera conoscenza, che è conoscenza di Dio. È proprio per questa ragione che nel *Kingis Quai*r viene affidato a lei il compito di insegnare al narratore come combattere contro Fortuna e come amare.

Al contrario, nel *Temple of Glas*, Minerva ha un ruolo molto più marginale che ha probabilmente a che fare con la situazione che si presenta e, come detto precedentemente, con la possibile maggiore vicinanza di Lydgate alla tradizione classica. Rimanendo più fedele all'antica Minerva romana, Lydgate non lascia che la dea prenda parte ai problemi dei due innamorati protagonisti. La figura predominante infatti, è Venere, la dea dell'amore.

Anche la storia di Venere, come quella di Minerva, inizia nell'antica Grecia, dove era venerata con il nome di Afrodite. Il suo culto è sempre stato molto popolare ma, per quanto amata, è sempre stata anche molto temuta. Nata dalla morte e dalla castrazione del padre, la dea dell'amore è colei che dona felicità e piacere agli uomini, ma anche dolore e follia. L'amore è una forza incontrollabile che colpisce anche gli dei, Zeus compreso: se da una parte le numerose storie amorose di Zeus ne testimoniano la potenza virile (e dunque anche il diritto di essere capo), il fatto che il suo desiderio irrefrenabile sia causato dai lavorii di Venere mette in discussione la sua capacità di opporsi alla dea.

Da qui nasce il desiderio degli uomini di poter imbrigliare questa spaventosa forza femminile, mitigandone gli effetti tramite l'avvicinamento di un lato più maschile e la creazione così del perfetto equilibrio che, secondo Platone, viene espresso nella maniera più perfetta nella figura dell'Ermafrodito. Le figure femminili, generalmente parlando, sono viste come portatrici di distruzione e caos, incapaci di controllare se stesse e, al contempo, in grado di far perdere il controllo anche agli uomini più puri (è questo, per esempio, il caso di Adamo ed Eva).

Questo immenso potere viene simboleggiato, in maniera molto fisica, anche dalla presenza di un pianeta che porta il nome della dea dell'amore: il pianeta Venere. Tra i più luminosi e riconoscibili, questo pianeta (inizialmente considerato una stella) è uno dei primi ad essere nominato dai greci. Durante il Medioevo molti dèi pagani sono sopravvissuti anche grazie all'astronomia e all'astrologia (spesso ancora confuse tra loro) poiché era comune la credenza che i corpi celesti potessero influenzare la vita e le azioni delle persone e, per esempio, gli atti carnali potevano essere giustificati dall'influenza di Venere.

Questo potere femminile viene prontamente imbrigliato dalla religione cattolica che, per eliminare Venere, tenta di creare un nuovo modello femminile: Maria. Ma questa figura, seppur molto venerata, non si presentava alle donne come un modello emulabile: le figlie di Eva non hanno la possibilità di vivere la vita pura e vergine di Maria. L'unico modello alternativo è dunque quello di Maria Maddalena: una donna perduta, una peccatrice, che ottiene il suo riscatto grazie all'amore. Ma comunque anche in questo caso alla donna non è riconosciuto un potere salvifico personale: solo attraverso l'amore per un uomo (Gesù) sembra infatti possibile riuscire a trovare la salvezza.

La cristianità tenta di allontanare Venere ma si deve presto arrendere al suo potere ed alla sua presenza. L'amore dunque deve essere purificato e questo può avvenire solo tramite un avvicinamento a Dio: come Minerva è diventata il riflesso della sapienza di Dio, così Venere diventa il riflesso del Suo amore. Questo è anche il ruolo che la dea ha nel *Kingis Quair* dove Venere lamenta il fatto che gli uomini abbiano dimenticato cosa sia il vero amore ed arriva persino a dire al narratore che lo aiuterà nelle sue vicende amorose solo dopo che lui abbia incontrato Minerva, la dea che dovrà impartirgli le leggi dell'amore di Dio. Solo a quel punto Venere potrà intervenire per aiutarlo, in quanto vicario dell'amore divino.

Questa Venere così cristianizzata è molto diversa da quella che troviamo nel *Temple of Glas* dove sembra inghiottire l'intera scena, svolgendo i ruoli che nell'altro poema sono suddivisi tra lei, Minerva e Fortuna. Ed in effetti è tutto molto più confuso: la giovane innamorata chiede ed ottiene che il giovane per cui prova interesse ricambi i suoi sentimenti e Venere forza l'amore sul giovane per soddisfare questa richiesta. L'eco cristiana delle parole che usa poi per celebrare la loro unione sembra dunque più che mai sconveniente: questa è la Venere pagana, capace di imporre il desiderio e l'amore a uomini e dei, senza restrizioni di alcun tipo, nemmeno quelle di Fortuna.

Fortuna è una divinità più giovane di Venere e Minerva ma, paradossalmente, nel medioevo diviene una delle più potenti e temute. Da Esiodo viene semplicemente menzionata come una delle tante figlie di Oceano e Teti, senza nessun attributo o ruolo particolare. Le cose cominciano a cambiare quando Pindaro, in una delle sue Olimpiche, attribuisce la sua paternità a Zeus. Pian piano, da questo momento in poi, la dea Fortuna comincia a crescere così tanto che lentamente il suo potere e la sua iconografia si sovrappongono a quelle di altre divinità come le Parche e Nemesi. Pausania infatti dice

di essere d'accordo con Pindaro nell'affermare che Fortuna non solo è una delle Parche, ma la più potente tra loro. Questo ha creato molta confusione, soprattutto per quanto riguarda il labile confine tra Fato (rappresentato dalle Parche) e Fortuna.

Questa immensa influenza sul mondo umano era assolutamente insopportabile per i Padri della Chiesa: in un mondo in cui tutto era già stato ordinato da Dio, la forza caotica del caso non poteva esistere. Inizialmente dunque, Fortuna ha subito forti attacchi, ma grazie all'intervento di Boezio la situazione si è completamente ribaltata tanto che potremmo dire che Fortuna diventa la divinità pagana più popolare del medioevo. In *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Boezio riesce ad integrare Fortuna nel sistema di valori cristiano attribuendole un nuovo ruolo: la dea diviene uno strumento di Dio per valutare gli uomini, una forza subordinata alla Provvidenza. I giri della sua ruota ora sono incomprensibili all'uomo solo perché i piani stessi di Dio non sono conoscibili, ma ogni movimento della dea ne riflette la volontà. Ma Fortuna ha anche un lato più laico che ha a che fare con il suo ruolo nelle questioni d'amore: Fortuna è colei che, con il suo intervento, aiuta oppure ostacola gli innamorati. In effetti in Grecia, secondo la testimonianza di Pausania, alcuni templi di Fortuna sorgevano a fianco di quelli dedicati alla dea Venere, probabilmente ad indicare un comune campo di influenza.

Se nel *Temple of Glas* Venere sembra avere la meglio (Fortuna viene solo nominata ed appare come una subordinata di Venere, disposta a concedere favori secondo la sua volontà), nel *Kingis Quair*, invece, Fortuna ha un ruolo di ben maggiore importanza. Il narratore infatti non ha l'amore come scopo ultimo, ma la crescita personale. L'amore, e dunque la mediazione di Venere, non è altro che il passaggio iniziale che gli permette di capire, attraverso gli insegnamenti di Minerva, come combattere Fortuna. La virtù è l'unica arma che l'uomo ha per non soccombere ai suoi

mutamenti ed anche l’unico mezzo per poter creare un amore stabile e duraturo, secondo le norme date da Dio.

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