



Solomon and the Royal Art of Love

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There are many links, visible and invisible, between Chivalry and Masonry, and especially between the Templars and the Masons: both observed the Royal Art, both were initiatory organizations, both were beyond the common “vassalage,” free and directly obeying God, both constituted “brotherhoods” without women.¹ In a world where the Holy Grail stories worshiped the *dame* and where the troubadours sang *l'amour courtois*, the Knights of the Temple living without this love for any *dame*, the Masons working without fondness for any lady would seem strange, if we did not know that, for them, *l'amour* was the supreme love and the *dame* was the supreme *Dame, Notre-Dame*, Our Lady. However, to really understand this “love” we must go beyond the religious or exoteric, not to say sentimental, significance, and try to redescovers the “initiatory” mentality of these particular “lovers.”²

¹ There are today studies giving examples of women that worked beside the medieval masons, which is something different; also, we are not saying that women did not have suitable métiers as supports for an initiation. Regarding the womenless brotherhoods, Saint Bernard admonished: “What likeness do you bear to them? Perhaps the fact that you take women not as traveling companions but as mistresses? Companionship does not lay itself open to suspicion in the same way as living together. Who would entertain dark suspicions about those who raised the dead to life? Go and do likewise, and I will suppose that a man and a woman together are merely resting. Otherwise, you are insolently abrogating to yourself the privilege of those whose sanctity you do not possess. To be always in a woman’s company without having carnal knowledge of her – is this not a greater miracle than raising the dead? You cannot perform the lesser feat; do you expect me to believe that you can do the greater? Every day your side touches the girl’s side at table, your bed touches hers in your room, your eyes meet hers in conversation, your hands meet hers at work – do you expect to be thought chaste? It may be that you are, but I have my suspicions. To me you are an object of scandal. Take away the cause of scandal, and prove the truth of your boast that you are a follower of the Gospel... Let us return to the question of associating and cohabiting with women, for all of them have some experience of this. ‘Now, my good man, who is this woman, and where does she come from? Is she your wife?’, ‘No,’ he says, ‘that is forbidden by my vows.’ ‘Your daughter then?’ ‘No.’ ‘What then? Not a sister or niece, or at least related to you by birth or marriage?’ ‘No, not at all,’ ‘And how will you preserve your chastity with her here? You can’t behave like this. Perhaps you don’t know that the Church forbids cohabitation of men and women if they are vowed to celibacy. If you do not wish to cause scandal in the Church, send the woman away. Otherwise that one circumstance will give rise to other suspicions, which may not be proved but will no doubt be thought probable’” (*Sermon 65*).

² As Saint Bernard was saying, “The bride’s form must be understood in a spiritual sense, her beauty as something that is grasped by the intellect; it is eternal because it is an image of eternity. Her gracefulness consists of love, and you have read that ‘love never ends.’ It consists of justice, for ‘her justice endures

Solomon and the Royal Art of Love

René Guénon, who, prompted by Luigi Valli's work about Dante and the *Fedeli d'Amore*, wrote a series of articles related to *Amor*,³ stated *très nettement*, from the start, that “the main shortcoming of Mr. Valli … is not to have the ‘initiatory’ mentality, which is appropriate for treating in depth such a subject”⁴; indeed, when Francesco da Barberino⁵ mentioned a mysterious widow, symbolizing *Sapienza*, the Wisdom, we are in the realm of the initiatory love.⁶ Barberino said: “Io dico a te e chiaramente che vi fu *e vi* è una *certa vedova* che non *era vedova*. Era toccata eppure intatta. Era vergine e la sua verginità era ignota. Mancò di marito. Aveva marito. Per la sua prudenza eccelleva sulle donne e per la sua eloquenza su tutte le creature terrene.”⁷

Alfonso Ricolfi,⁸ in his *Studi sui «Fedeli d'Amore»*, said also: “the gemstone or gem symbolizes the human intelligence at its highest level; at this level, there are two widows and in opposition: one has Constanza for maid, and the one, being inconstant, has *Facometipiacere* (Do-as-you-please) as servant.” This partition is just one of the multiple facets of the Maiden's symbolism; Meister Eckhart said: “The Virgin Mary, before becoming Mother of God in her humanity, was Mother of God in her divinity, and the birth in heaven is illustrated by the birth of God as human being,”⁹ and he said about Christ, “that his birth of Mary ghostly was more pleasing to him than that his birth of Mary in the flesh.”¹⁰ In the Judaic tradition, the Pharaoh's daughter presents the same dichotomy and so does Solomon himself, as St. Bernard gracefully¹¹ explained.

forever” (*Sermon 27*). We may note that the Bride (which for Saint Bernard is officially the Church) is not only *Madonna Intelligenza* (the Love) but also *Astraea* (the Justice).

³ Latin *amor* became Italian *amore*, French *amour*, but remained *amor* in Old Provençal, Portuguese, Spanish and Venetian.

⁴ Guénon, *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁵ Francesco da Barberino was contemporary with Dante.

⁶ This Dame-Wisdom, sometimes Barberino calls her the Rose: “D'ogni cosa donna è rosa [the Dame is the Rose] (ponendo vertute lei per quella) e luce bella ed è d'ognun salute [and the beautiful light, and she is the salvation of mankind].” And, at the question “who is this Dame?”, he describes Constanza *armato al cuor che ben sai che vuol dire/ porta di donna vedova sua veste* (“armed to the heart that you know what it means/ and she wears widow's garment”) (Valli 242).

⁷ “I say to you clearly that there was and *there is* a certain *widow* who *was not a widow*. She was touched and yet untouched (intact). She was a virgin yet her virginity was unknown. She lost her husband. She had a husband. She, for her wisdom, was the best of all women, and for her eloquence, the best of all earthly creatures.” Valli commente on these lines: “Do you understand? But when we say that these people spoke in jargon, that *amore* was not *amore*, that they belonged to a sect, that they *mystically* celebrated these *mystical* ladies, that their lady was the lady of the *Song of Songs* (do not you hear the clear echo of the *Wisdom of Solomon*?), those ‘positive’ critics strongly say that these are fantasies, and they are capable to waist their time trying to identify from the *historical point of view* the name and origin (*la paternità*) of this widow Francesco da Barberino loved.”

⁸ He followed, completed and sometimes amended Valli's work in his *Studi sui “Fedeli d'Amore”* (year 1933) (see Pierre Ponsoye, **Intelletto d'Amore**, Ét. Traditionnelles, no. 371, 1962).

⁹ Quoted in Jean Hani, **La Vierge Noire et le mystère marital**, Guy Trédaniel, 1995, p. 112.

¹⁰ Quoted in Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, **Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government**, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978, p. 36.

¹¹ That is, “full of grace.”

Solomon and the Royal Art of Love

It is well known how Solomon was criticized for falling from grace at the end of his life,¹² but we must have in view, first and foremost, the symbolic and sacred significance of Solomon's tale, similar with the meaning of Samson's famous story, and, of course, with that of Adam himself: from a cosmologic viewpoint, the King will decay, eroded, and at the end of the cycle will become the Dragon¹³; consequently, there is a celestial and androgynous Solomon (*moglier e marito* of the *Fedeli d'Amore*) and an earthly, divided and multiplied one.¹⁴ His alleged wife, the Pharaoh's daughter,¹⁵ is very similar

¹² "And Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David, until he had made an end of building his own house, and the house of the Lord, and the wall of Jerusalem round about" (**1 Kings** 3:1); "But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; Of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father" (**1 Kings** 11:1-6).

¹³ See in detail our **The Everlasting Sacred Kernel**, Rose-Cross Books, 2001. "Samson, as an archetypal solar hero, an avatāra, has to play all the scenarios. He has to be the divine king who reigns over a cycle of existence and changes gradually into a dragon. He has to be the dragon at the end of time. He also has to be the hero embarked on the initiatory path" (p. 29).

¹⁴ On a historical level, Solomon's legacy was "division," considering that, after him, the kingdom was disastrously divided in two (Rehoboam – Jeroboam (he was a "widow's son"), see our **Free-Masonry: A Traditional Organization**, p. 167). Maximus the Confessor (who was in his youth an assistant to the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius), and Eriugena after him, commented on St. Paul's words, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (**Galatians** 3:28), stating that the primordial man was androgynous, "neither male nor female," and the Fall produced the division of the sexes (Érigène, **De la division de la Nature, Periphyseon**, Livre I et Livre II, PUF, 1995, pp. 294, 300-1, 452; see also Henry Bett, **Johannes Scotus Eriugena**, Hyperion Press, 1986, pp. 56, 67, 78).

¹⁵ "And his house where he dwelt had another court within the porch, which was of the like work. Solomon made also a house for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he had taken to wife, like unto this porch. All these were of costly stones, according to the measures of hewed stones, sawed with saws, within and without, even from the foundation unto the coping, and so on the outside toward the great court. And the foundation was of costly stones, even great stones, stones of ten cubits, and stones of eight cubits. And above were costly stones, after the measures of hewed stones, and cedars. And the great court round about was with three rows of hewed stones, and a row of cedar beams, both for the inner court of the house of the Lord, and for the porch of the house. And King Solomon sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre. He was a widow's son of the tribe of Naphtali" (**1 Kings** 7:8-14); even though he built a house for Pharaoh's daughter, "Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David unto the house that he had built for her: for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy, whereunto the ark of the Lord hath come" (**2 Chronicles** 8:11). There is, we see, a connection between the Temple and the house of Pharaoh's daughter. We should not be so much concerned with the objection of the Egyptologists, who assure us that Egyptian royal women were never married to a stranger king; like in all the other cases regarding sacred writings, we should remember that the obvious meaning is the most uninteresting and superficial one (even if it has its own reality).

Solomon and the Royal Art of Love

in this respect: on the one hand, she is the divine virgin-mother¹⁶; on the other hand, she is, like Eve or Noah's wife or Delilah, the “strange woman,” whose “strangeness” has more than one symbolic aspect, related to the *prakritian* and *asurian* heritage.¹⁷

From an initiatory perspective, the dual aspect was represented by Solomon's *Amor* for Wisdom, a woman identical to *Madonna Intelligenza*,¹⁸ and his *Mors* for the “strange woman.”¹⁹ The Wisdom, she is the Gate of Liberation, the *Ianua Coeli*, and she is ready

¹⁶ “And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive. And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink. And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him. And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it” (**Exodus** 1:22, 2:1-5). In the Judaic tradition, Moses has three mothers: a corporeal one, an intermediary one who nurses him, and, eventually, the divine virgin, the Pharaoh's daughter. We have here a sacred scenario: for example, in the Greek mythology, Acrisius was afraid that his new-born grandson, Perseus, would kill and replace him; similarly, Laios was scared that his son, Oedipus, would kill him and take his reign. For the same reason, the Pharaoh ordered, when Moses was born, that all the new-born children to be killed [implying that Pharaoh's daughter is the virgin]; the same scenario could be found in the Gospel (the “massacre of the innocents”).

¹⁷ In the Romanian traditional vestiges, Satan gives Noah's wife a jar of boiled wine and she, becoming drunk, betrays Noah's secret and confesses that he was building a boat in the woods. In **Qur'ân** (66:10), Noah's wife is an example of an unbeliever (her name was Wâila). The Gnostics also developed the theme of Noah's wife; she appears under the name of Norea, the daughter of Adam and Eve. Norea set fire to the Ark, because God (Ialdabaoth for the Sethians, an inferior and arrogant God) did not want to let her survive the flood and because Noah's God is considered the evil God. In other Gnostic texts, this God, who sent the flood, is opposed by Sophia, the Wisdom that saved Noah in the Ark (See our **The Wrath of Gods**, p. 181).

¹⁸ The Wisdom, like *Shekinah*, like Astraea, is herself a “strange woman,” because the decadence of the world makes her a stranger: “Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorner delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you. Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil” (**Prov.** 1:20-33).

¹⁹ The “strange woman” appears nine times in the *Proverbs*. “To deliver thee from the strange woman, even from the stranger which flattereth with her words; Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God. For her house inclineth unto death, and her paths unto the dead” (**Prov.** 2:16-18); “My son, attend unto my wisdom [*Amor*], and bow thine ear to my understanding: That thou mayest regard discretion, and that thy lips may keep knowledge. For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a twoedged sword. Her feet go down to death [*Mors*]; her steps take hold on hell” (**Prov.** 5:1-5).

Solomon and the Royal Art of Love

to give the *Eucharist*²⁰; the “strange woman,” she is the Jaws of Death, the Dragon’s jaws and the *Ianua Inferni*.²¹ Solomon sacrificed himself to illustrate the two Gates, to prove that, as a projection of the Universal Man, he is complete only with the both women, even though the *Bible* says that, because of this, he is *not full(y)*,²² while Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, the Templars’ mentor, illustrated from his vantage point, in almost one hundred sermons about the *Song of Songs*,²³ how Solomon, Love, and Bride should be comprehended at the highest spiritual level, an illustration that we could call it “initiatory,” in concert with what René Guénon wrote to Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: “for me, this person [Saint Bernarnd] is indeed an initiate and not only a simple mystic.”²⁴

²⁰ “Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city, Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, *eat of my bread, and drink of the wine* [our *Italics*] which I have mingled” (**Prov.** 9:1-5) (“But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind,” see **Luke** 14:12-24).

²¹ “The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein” (**Prov.** 22:14); “For a whore is a deep ditch; and a strange woman is a narrow pit” (**Prov.** 23:27). Saint Bernard alluded to these two “women” in his 85th *Sermon*: “For where there is love, there is no toil, but a taste. Perhaps ‘sapientia,’ that is wisdom, is derived from ‘sapor,’ that is taste, because, when it is added to virtue, like some seasoning, it adds taste to something which by itself is tasteless and bitter. I think it would be permissible to define wisdom as a taste for goodness. We lost this taste almost from the creation of our human race. When the old serpent’s poison infected the palate of our heart, because the fleshly sense prevailed, the soul began to lose its taste for goodness, and a depraved taste crept in. ‘A man’s imagination and thoughts are evil from his youth,’ that is, as a result of the folly of the first woman. So it was folly which drove the taste for good from the woman, because the serpent’s malice outwitted the woman’s folly. But the reason which caused the malice to appear for a time victorious is the same reason why it suffers eternal defeat. For see! It is again the heart and body of a woman which wisdom fills and makes fruitful so that, as by a woman we were deformed into folly, so by a woman we may be reformed to wisdom.”

²² “And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went *not fully* after the Lord, as did David his father. Then did Solomon build a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his *strange wives*, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods” (**1 Kings** 11:5-7) [our *Italics*].

²³ He died in 1153, without finishing his commentary on the Solomon’s *Song*.

²⁴ Letter of November 1936. In his opuscule, *Saint Bernard*, René Guénon presents, because of the special circumstances surrounding the writing of such an essay, a view slightly adapted to the exoteric readers: “Saint Bernard’s doctrine is essentially mystical; by this we mean that he envisages divine things especially from the point of view of love, something which, nonetheless, would be wrong to interpret in a merely affective sense, as the modern psychologists do. Like many great mystics, he was particularly drawn to the *Song of Songs*, on which he commented in many sermons, sermons which were part of a long series that continued throughout almost all of his career; this commentary, which was never completed, describes all the degrees of the divine love [*Amor*], up to the supreme peace which the soul reaches in ecstasy. The ecstatic state, as he understood it, and certainly experienced it, is a sort of death [*Mors*] of the things of this world; along with sensitive images [*les images sensibles*], all natural feeling disappears; everything is pure and spiritual within the soul itself, as in its love. Naturally, this mysticism reflected itself in the dogmatic treatises which Saint Bernard wrote; the title of one of the principal ones, *De diligendo Deo* (“On Loving God”), clearly indicates the place that love held in his thought, but it would be wrong to believe that this was to the detriment of true intellectuality. If the Abbot of Clairvaux

Solomon and the Royal Art of Love

For example, in the *Sermon 27*, Saint Bernard said: “What does she mean then by saying: ‘I am beautiful like the curtains of Solomon?’²⁵ I feel that here we have a great and wonderful *mystery* [our *Italics*], provided that we apply the words, not to the Solomon of this Song, but to him who said of himself: ‘What is here is greater than Solomon.’ This Solomon to whom I refer is so great a Solomon that he is called not only Peaceful – which is the meaning of the word Solomon – but Peace itself; for Paul proclaims that ‘He is our Peace.’ I am certain that in this Solomon we can discover something that we may unhesitatingly compare with the beauty of the bride.” Equally, Saint Bernard interpreted the phrase “the king hath brought me into his chambers”²⁶ as referring to the House of Wisdom, where the chambers compose an initiatory (amorous) hierarchy, aiming at the same time to the Most High and to the Center: “Let the garden, then, represent the plain, unadorned, historical sense of Scripture, the storeroom its moral sense, and the bedroom the mystery of divine contemplation. You remember that I said the bedroom of the King is to be sought in the mystery of divine contemplation”²⁷; and then, in the same *Sermon*: “I feel that the King has not one bedroom only, but several. For he has more than one queen; his concubines are many, his maids beyond counting. And each has her own secret rendezvous with the Bridegroom and says: ‘My secret to myself, my secret to myself.’ All do not experience the delight of the Bridegroom’s private visit in the same room; the Father has different arrangements for each,” which shows how far away (and how elevating) is Saint Bernard’s exposition, in comparison to the profane one. With regard to Solomon’s many concubines and his Peace, Dante also declared: “Moreover, the Empyrean Heaven by its peace resembles the Divine Science, which is full of all peace and suffers no diversity of opinion or sophistical reasoning because of the supreme certainty of its subject, which is God. Christ says of this science to his disciples: ‘My peace I give to you, my peace I leave with you,’ giving and leaving to them his teaching, which is this science of which I speak. Solomon, speaking of this science, says: ‘The queens number sixty, and the concubines eighty; and of the young handmaids there is no number: one is my dove and my perfect one.’ He calls all sciences queens and friends and handmaids, but this one he calls perfect because it makes us see truth perfectly, in which our souls find rest.”²⁸

always sought to remain apart from the vain subtleties of the academics, it was because he had no need of the laborious artifices of dialectic; he resolved at a single blow the most arduous questions because his thinking did not proceed by means of a long series of discursive operations; what philosophers strove to reach by a twisty route and by fumbling, he arrived at immediately, through intellectual intuition, without which no real metaphysics is possible and someone can only grasp a shadow of the truth.” We may add that, in this traditional spirit, Coomaraswamy wrote: “But there is every reason to believe that Leonardo, like so many other Renaissance scholars, was versed in the Neo-Platonic esoteric tradition, and that he may have been an initiate, familiar with the ‘mysteries’ of the crafts (Cf. René Guénon, *L’Esotérisme de Dante*, Paris, 1925; J. H. Probst-Biraben, “Léonardo de Vinci, Initié,” *Le Voile d’Isis*, 38, 1933, pp.260-266)” (Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, **The Iconography of Dürer’s “Knots” and Leonardo’s “Concatenation,”** The Art Quarterly, Detroit, VII. 2, Spring 1944, pp.109-28).

²⁵ *Song of Solomon*, 1:5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:4.

²⁷ *Sermon 23*.

²⁸ Dante, *The Convivio*, II, 14.