THE FOUNDATION OF THE SOUL'S EVOLUTION AND ITS DRIVING FORCE: LOVE

All-powerful and invincible, love is the strongest force in the universe. Eros is everywhere, timeless and eternal, striking mortals and immortals with his mighty arrows; all yield to the will of the little winged god. The ancient Greek myth of Eros and Psyche concerns the overcoming of the obstacles between Psyche and Eros and their ultimate union in a sacred, eternal marriage.

THE MYTH

What is a myth? Certainly not something simplistic or baseless. Behind the apparently simple meanings of myths and fairy tales lie profound, universal human truths. This is precisely why the symbolism of myths is archetypal, turning each one into an initiation. This is wholly true of the story of Eros and Psyche: behind its events lies the adventure of the human soul itself. It therefore offers us a wonderful tool for self-knowledge, allowing us to examine more closely what we have sown in the field of our consciousness and to encourage the part of ourselves that deserves to blossom. The myth symbolically contains every stage of the soul's journey: its lofty destiny, ascent, error and fall, followed by its gradual awakening and the emergence of its inner abilities through trials that ultimately lead it to triumph and apotheosis.



Here we see a terracotta group of Eros and Psyche from the Archaeological Museum of Pella. The group symbolizes pure love and pure union. It dates to the early 1st century BCE. Part of Psyche's body and Eros's feet are missing. The

original colours that once covered the figurines have not survived. The maximum preserved height is 10 centimetres. Pella's ceramic production (vessels and figurines) was well known in the Hellenistic period. Excavations of the ancient city have uncovered numerous pottery workshops. The figurine was probably made in a workshop in the Agora area. The winged Eros, on the viewer's right, embraces and kisses Psyche, who stands on the viewer's left. The work is displayed in the Museum's permanent collection in the section "Public Life and the Agora."

The myth of Eros and Psyche is described as an ancient Alexandrian tradition of the Hellenistic period. It is not associated with specific places or historical events, but seeks to interpret significant phenomena or express a philosophical teaching, such as the celebrated immortality of the soul. The truth expressed by the myth is that supreme delight arises from the union of love and the soul. As an integral part of the religion of a remarkable civilization, the ancient Greek myth does not merely present a brief, static lesson; it also functions as an initiation into life's great truths. From antiquity to the present day, the myth of Eros and Psyche has inspired countless artists around the world, two of whom we will consider below.

"...I shall tell you a Greek story..." Thus, in the 2nd century CE, the Latin author Lucius Apuleius begins his novel The Metamorphoses. The myth of Eros and Psyche is a story within that narrative. An old woman tells it to a young girl, introducing her to the mythical depths of matriarchal mysteries—the feminine mystery of rebirth through love.

Apuleius belonged to that line of creative men throughout the ages guided by Psyche—the feminine principle present in both men and women. Psyche's lover, Eros, is not a mischievous cherub, but the primordial god Eros—the masculine principle present in both men and women. We are not speaking of male and female as biological sexes, but of the feminine and masculine principles inherent in every person, according to depth psychology. What manifests as aggression, victory, conquest and fulfilment of desire in the masculine principle appears in the feminine as destiny, transformation and life's highest mystery. We must set aside the cultural patterns that shape relationships between men and women and return to the primordial phenomenon of the sacred, eternal marriage: the archetypal experience of reconciling the feminine and masculine principles within the individual through the exploration of the depths of existence required by individuation. The myth of Eros and Psyche recounts this development, individually and collectively, centred on the mysterious phenomenon of love.

Psyche was an exceptionally beautiful princess, so beautiful that no one considered himself worthy of asking for her hand in marriage. Mortals honoured

her as though she were Aphrodite herself, and the goddess grew jealous. To humble Psyche, Aphrodite asked her son Eros to make her fall in love with the ugliest man in the world. But Eros himself fell victim to his own arrows and fell in love with Psyche. As soon as he saw her, he desired her and delivered an oracle to her father, instructing him to prepare her for marriage and lead her to the summit of a high mountain. According to the oracle, a terrible monster was supposedly to devour her there. Grief-stricken but obliged to obey, the king prepared his daughter and left her on the mountaintop. Instead of a monster, however, Zephyr carried her away to the gardens of Eros's magnificent palace, where invisible servants fulfilled her every wish. On her first night, Psyche sensed the presence of an invisible lover. For the first time she felt Eros take possession of her body, though she could not see him. She sank into blind ecstasy, sensing and hearing her lover but never seeing him. She called him "sweet as honey" and surrendered to heavenly bliss. She submitted to his possession and power, far from the higher feminine consciousness. She lived happily like this for some time, until she longed for her family and asked to see them. Eros, still invisible, granted permission on two conditions: she must not reveal the secret of her life in his palace, and she must never try to see him.

Yet every paradise has its serpent. When Psyche's sisters saw how happy she was, they grew jealous and persistently pressured her to reveal her secret. Eventually she gave in and told them the story. They convinced her that her invisible lover was a monster fattening her up so that he could eat her at the right moment. "You must lie in wait and kill him before he kills you," they insisted.

On returning to the palace, Psyche faced a terrible dilemma: should she break her promise to her invisible lover, or disregard her sisters' advice? She chose the former, driven by curiosity and a desire for knowledge. She hid in Eros's room to discover the identity of the monster who concealed himself and might one day devour her. When she emerged from hiding, however, she saw not a hideous beast but a beautiful young man asleep. With a knife and a lamp, she approached her "unknown" lover as he slept. "In the light of the love that overwhelms her, Psyche encounters Eros as a god, who is both the higher and the lower within the One, connecting the Two." She pricks her finger on one of his arrows and bends down to kiss him.



So startled by his beauty was she that a drop of oil from the lamp she held fell onto Eros's body and woke him. He immediately flew away because Psyche had disobeyed him. Thus both are released from the devouring embrace of darkness and must bear the pain of separation and individuation. The source of their pain is not the knife but the oil that feeds the lamp—the principle of light and knowledge. Angry that Psyche had disobeyed his wish, Eros left the palace. She remained behind, weeping over her disobedience and the loss of her ideal lover.

By placing her desire for knowledge first, Psyche leaves behind the childish, unconscious side of her reality. She is no longer a victim, but a woman actively in love, captivated by Eros as an inner force rather than an external conqueror. It is no longer enough for her to charm and be charmed. The loss of her lover at precisely the moment when, in the light of knowledge of love, Psyche begins truly to love is one of the myth's deepest truths.

By deciding to see Eros, Psyche brings the mythical age—when relationships depended exclusively on the supreme power of the gods and were at their mercy—to an end. The age of human love now begins, in which the human soul consciously makes both the fateful decision and accepts responsibility for it. This

brings us back to the myth's underlying theme: the conflict between the mortal Psyche and the goddess Aphrodite, as we shall see.

Pan heard Psyche's weeping and advised her to search for Eros across mountains and plains. She first went to her father's home and tricked her sisters into throwing themselves from a high mountain as punishment for the harm they had done her. She then began wandering in search of Eros, who was suffering in his mother's house. Desperate, Psyche searched everywhere for her beloved. Begging gods and mortals for help, she came to a temple of Aphrodite and implored the goddess to help her find him. Aphrodite again grew jealous of the young couple's love and pursued Psyche until she surrendered. Psyche then served Aphrodite by completing four strange tasks that required not struggle but reconciliation of the feminine and masculine principles. This reconciliation makes it possible to contain the living current of life and give it form, to fertilize, conceive and give birth. Aphrodite set Psyche tasks such as sorting mixed seeds of every kind, gathering the golden fleece of wild sheep, and bringing water from the lake of Styx. With the help of animals and the forces of nature, Psyche succeeded, until Aphrodite ordered her to descend into Hades and ask Persephone, goddess of the underworld, for a box containing a beauty potion. At Persephone's palace, Psyche asked for the box so she could give it to Aphrodite. Persephone handed it over on condition that only Aphrodite herself open it. Psyche set off on her return journey, but curiosity again tempted her to try some of the gods' beauty potion, hoping to ensure that she could enchant her lost lover Eros when she found him. As soon as she opened the box, however, she fell into a deep sleep resembling death. This fourth task—the descent into Hades to obtain from Persephone, for Aphrodite, the secret of eternal beauty—can be interpreted only in the light of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Once again, Psyche disobeys a divine command, this time Persephone's, just a breath away from completing her final task successfully. She chooses to learn the secret she carries for Aphrodite, hoping to secure Eros's love. Like a female Prometheus, she takes what ordinarily belongs to the archetypes—to the goddesses—and her punishment is to sink into sleep. Her self-sacrificing decision and need for salvation through love inspire Eros, still captive to the bonds of his great mother goddess, and set him on the path to his own development.



Eros could no longer bear to see Psyche suffer through his mother's trials. Having received proof of her love, he awakened her and, joining forces with Zeus, asked permission to marry her. Zeus, acting as a deus ex machina, welcomed Psyche to Olympus and gave her ambrosia so that she would become immortal and unite with Eros forever. Despite her mortality, Psyche earns this place by passing through symbolic death into rebirth through love. Later, at an assembly of the gods, Eros—with Zeus's help—calms his mother's anger and marries Psyche.

Psyche becomes Eros's wife and is granted immortality. Soon afterwards, she gives birth to the fruit of their love, Pleasure (Hedone), the mystical joy that cultures everywhere describe as the fruit of the highest mystical union.

The myth symbolically contains every stage of Psyche's journey: her lofty destiny, ascent and error, as well as divine love, which leads her through initiatory trials to awakening, triumph and deification. Psyche's triumph and ascent to Olympus direct our attention to human development: the ego relinquishing its leadership and being guided by the wholeness of the couple; the reconciliation of ending and beginning, heaven and earth. Along with Psyche, an undeniable archetype was deified: the archetype of two lovers who overcome adversity and ultimately remain together. It appears everywhere—in art, literature and even beloved fairy tales, whose heroes struggle and fall in love just as Eros and Psyche did. It also exists within us, in our own souls, striving above all else to love and live.

ANTONIO CANOVA'S SCULPTURE



The myth of Eros and Psyche found its ideal, transcendent expression in Antonio Canova's (1757–1822) Neoclassical masterpiece shown above, part of the artist's series of mythological allegories and now housed in the Louvre Museum. The sculpture was created between 1787 and 1793 and is based on Praxiteles' principles for representing the human body. Since it was carved in the eighteenth century, it has been copied thousands of times. The marble sculpture depicts a

moment from the myth of Eros and Psyche: Eros awakening and reviving Psyche so that the two can finally unite for eternity.

CÉSAR FRANCK: "PSYCHE AND EROS" — SYMPHONIC POEM

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Belgian by birth, César Franck (1822–1890) spent most of his life living and teaching in France. He was one of the period's most important music teachers and a celebrated organist. Psyché is a large four-part symphonic poem that Franck composed in 1886–87, at the same time as his famous Sonata for Violin and Piano. It is one of five symphonic poems he wrote under the influence of Franz Liszt. This story of human—and sensual—love might seem ill-suited to a man devoted to religion, sometimes described as a "Christian mystic and ascetic" and called a "seraphic angel" by his students. As Franck presented it, was the story about salvation? Redemption through divine intervention? What of all its eroticism? Vincent d'Indy, Franck's student and the dedicatee of the work, insisted that "there was nothing of the pagan spirit in it … but it was imbued with Christian grace and feeling." Even if the myth's themes seem unusual for a "blessed" composer such as Franck, they are fully expressed through his late-Romantic colouring, emotion and imagination. Some claimed that the composer had "de-eroticized" the subject, but the music speaks for itself: complete, evocative, richly coloured and deeply moving.

"Psyche and Eros — Psyché et Eros" is the fourth and final section of the work. It depicts the lovers' first encounter—the slow, hesitant moments suggesting initial shyness—and perhaps the consummation of their love, all before Psyche's disastrous act of disobedience to Eros. Eros and Psyche have their own musical themes: Eros's is first heard in the cello and brass, while Psyche's is heard in the violins. The music is emotionally charged and erotic; at first, the themes flow together like a conversation between the lovers. Franck later develops them and intertwines them contrapuntally.

The composer divides "Psyche and Eros — Psyché et Eros" into three shorter sections:

- Introduction: Psyche is asleep (Lento); Zephyr awakens her and carries her to the mountains (Allegro vivo).

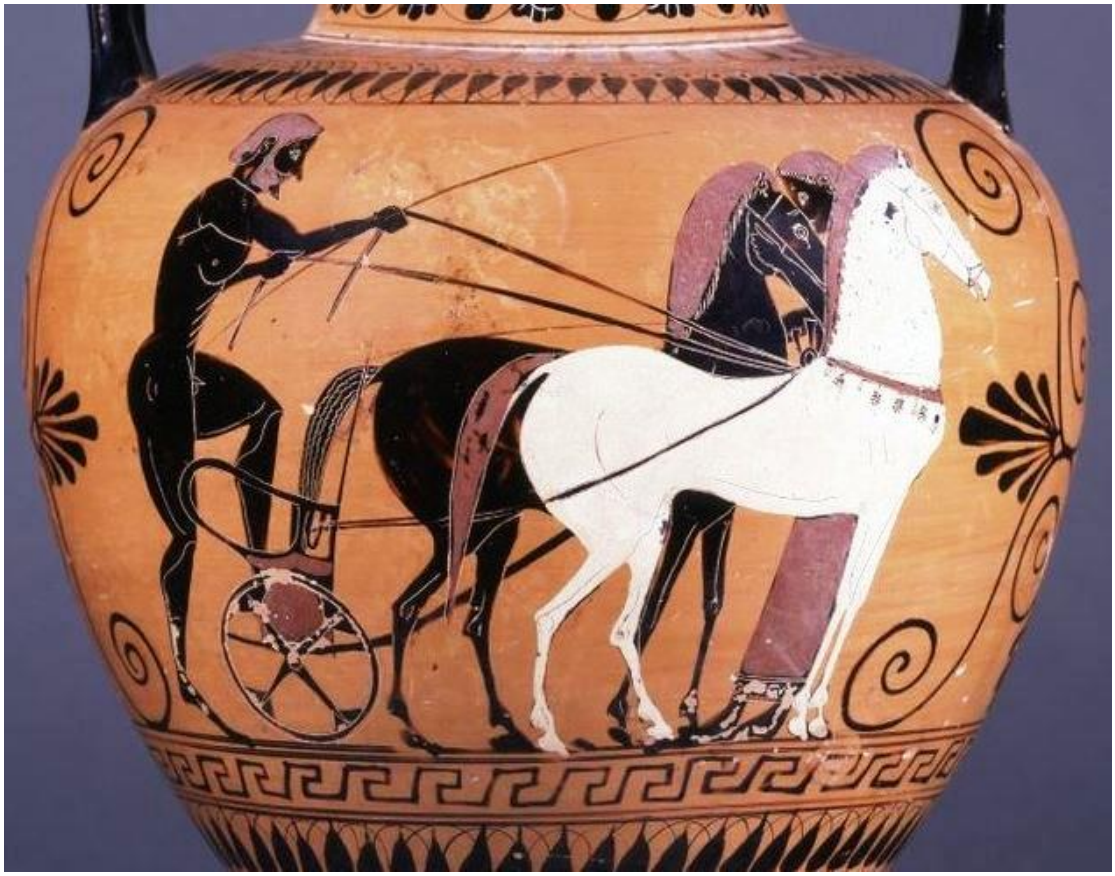
- The lovers' union: In Eros's gardens (Poco animato); a slow section (Lento); Psyche and Eros together (Allegretto moderato).
- A slow section foreshadows Psyche's punishment and redemption. The ending is extremely gentle, orchestrated only for two clarinets, horns, violins and violas.

The performance we heard is by the Berlin Philharmonic, conducted by Carlo Maria Giulini.

EROS AND PSYCHE IN PLATO'S PHAEDRUS

In the Phaedrus, Plato explores in depth themes that preoccupied him and finds their fullest expression here. Never before had he delved so deeply into love and the soul. The soul is portrayed as enduring every hardship, overcoming every obstacle, and being guided by its daimon towards the highest good through patience and perseverance. Its inexhaustible desire to behold immortal beauty enables it to withstand temptations and disappointments and struggle towards its destination. Its ultimate goal is to encounter love, the fulfilment of beauty. The soul would not know the daemonic force that sets it in motion if it did not encounter love. Love is the driving force of the soul, and this is revealed most vividly in the Phaedrus. The soul's movement proceeds from reason/mind, which, in the form of a charioteer, governs and harmonizes the soul's opposing forces (see illustration below). Love is then directed towards the contemplation of natural beauty, and through education young people are guided by their teachers, with care and concern for their development, away from the immoral pleasure associated with base love. The Phaedrus teaches that we can attain the greatest goods through erotic madness, which partakes of the divine. In the Symposium, through the ascending ladder he describes, Plato concludes that love's ultimate goal is to contemplate the Form of Beauty and pursue the ideal without cease.

Plato's chariot allegory in the Phaedrus is a significant part of Western and world intellectual and philosophical tradition. It offers a rich metaphor for the soul and its journey. Anyone who has a soul should read the Phaedrus!



As in the amphora shown above, the soul is depicted as a union of three components: a charioteer (reason) and two winged horses—one white (spirituality, the spirited element, courage) and one black (the appetitive element, lust, desire). The aim is to ascend to the divine heights, but the black horse causes problems…

The chariot image undoubtedly offers a tripartite model of the human soul, different from Freud's divisions into the ego, id and superego. For Plato, however, the chariot itself is only the beginning: the story of its journey is a revealing allegory of spiritual or philosophical life. Whereas Freud's model is materialistic and detached from intrinsic meaning, Plato's model implicitly recognizes the human soul's innate religious aspirations.

In Plato's dialogue Phaedrus, the aim is to understand the meaning of love and follow the soul's ascent towards the Form. The soul's movement towards love is dramatized here. First, the divine nature of the soul is revealed, making clear that the soul is directly connected with the Form and knows the truth. Next, the divine madness that possesses the lover is demonstrated, and the soul's erotic madness—which leads to the attainment of inner beauty—is vividly portrayed. In its search for beauty, the soul encounters it in people who reflect the memory of the Form of Beauty and is seized by erotic madness. The soul alone has experienced truth; therefore, it defines true love as divine madness. True love is

the love between teacher and student: the teacher's love for the student and the student's love for the teacher. The teacher's role is to initiate the uninitiated into contemplation of the Form through love. The love of education is purified and guides the student's soul towards attaining the Form. Education guides the soul to remember the Form of Love it encountered in the world of Forms, since the soul's destiny is to recover the Forms from forgetfulness. Recalling eternal and uncreated concepts fills the soul with bliss. Contemplating the Form of Beauty allows erotic madness to develop and ultimately yields erotic knowledge. Those who participate in love follow the path of philosophy, restraining forces that tend towards undisciplined erotic frenzy. The meaning of love is grasped under the guidance of education. Philosophical love is the highest form of education because it strengthens the lover with wisdom, enabling the forces of the soul to be balanced. The soul would not know the daemonic force that sets it in motion if it did not encounter love. As noted above, love is the driving force of the soul, and this is revealed most vividly in the Phaedrus.