



The Double Flame: Love and Eroticism

Octavio Paz, Helen Lane (Translator)

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In this series of essays Octavio Paz explores the intimate connection between sex, eroticism, and love in literature throughout the ages. Rich in scope, The Double Flame examines everything from taboo to repression, Carnival to Lent, Sade to Freud, original sin to artificial intelligence. “Brimming with insight, thoughtfulness, and sincerity” (Kirkus Reviews). Translated by Helen Lane.

The Double Flame: Love and Eroticism Details

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Mona Hernandez says

El ensayo es en sí, un genero difícil; falta el clímax de una historia, la conexión con sus personajes, el ansia de saber cuál será el desenlace.

La pluma de Octavio Paz tiene mérito propio. En la Llama Doble se plasman las diferentes concepciones que la humanidad ha tenido del amor, y cómo el erotismo es único de los hombres. Abriendo paso a la imaginación logramos hacer del sexo una experiencia cósmica.

Como es de esperarse, el autor hace innumerables menciones de obras que quizás la mayoría de nosotros no hemos ni siquiera escuchado; es el precio que hay que pagar por meter las narices en la obra de un erudito.

El capitulo en donde planea las conexiones de la evolución del amor y el desarrollo de las especies y la tecnología me pareció innecesario y desconcertante, caprichos a los que un premio nobel tiene derecho.

Recomendaría la obra a aquellos que tengan sed de conocer el estilo del autor; Paz deja ver entre capitulo y capitulo reflexiones certeras y frases que llegan al alma, sin embargo, el conjunto no es una lectura que apasione.

Isabel says

Um ensaio muito interessante sobre o amor e o erotismo ao longo da história, apoiado igualmente na literatura e na filosofia.

Na impossibilidade de colocar todos os excertos que destaquei pela sua elevada quantidade, e pela indecisão de qual ilustraria melhor este livro, deixo aqui uma frase que faz parte da introdução (e que justificará o título deste ensaio):

"O fogo original e primordial, a sexualidade, levanta a chama vermelha do erotismo e esta, por sua vez, sustém e ergue outra chama azul e trémula: a do amor. Erotismo e amor: a chama dupla da vida".

julieta says

La verdad me interesé en este libro porque fui a una exposición sobre Octavio Paz hace poco, en Bellas Artes, y de ahí me entró curiosidad por acercarme más a sus libros. En esta exposición, me llamó mucho la atención la cantidad de temas que abarcó en su vida, y me di cuenta de que realmente conozco poco de él. Así descubrí este hermoso libro, en donde se acerca a este tema del erotismo, en contraste con la sexualidad. "La sexualidad es animal; el erotismo, es humano" Y así te lleva en todo un viaje de cómo ha ido transformándose la manera en como se vive el amor, en la poesía, en la literatura, en la filosofía. Contrasta el platonismo con las prácticas tántricas de los budistas, la presencia del alma contra la modernidad, la tecnología, que convierte a las almas, a las personas, a los individuos, en mercancías, y pregunta, en dónde queda el erotismo, ese encuentro de las almas, frente a lo que nos hemos convertido en el mundo moderno.

Habla de como el amor, o más bien, la interpretación del amor, en la literatura, la poesía, la filosofía, el arte, ha ido transformandose en las distintas épocas, y siempre refleja a su tiempo y a la sociedad de cada época. Abarca desde la presencia en la literatura, poesía, pero se va a la filosofía, política, hasta neurobiología, y hace una gran pregunta: ¿En qué lugar queda el amor, o el alma ante la modernidad? Los seres humanos nos hemos ido convirtiendo en mercancía, en donde el alma humana ocupa un lugar secundario, en donde el físico es una mercancía.

Se ha sacrificado el erotismo, ante el uso público, el salir del closet, como quien dice, de el mundo moderno.

Qué diría, pregunto yo, él que menciona la lucha entre la humanidad y la tecnología, la importancia del diálogo, qué diría ahora? que somos seres detrás de computadoras, que las redes sociales son nuestra mayor comunicación, y solo me lo cuestiono, no porque esté en desacuerdo de ellas, las uso sin parar, pero si me pregunto, qué somos ante tanta información, donde quedan puestos del lado el contacto, el mirarnos a los ojos y tener un diálogo, sobre lo que sea. Este mundo que nos inunda de información, en su gran mayoría trivial, nos hace perdernos de tanto, qué seríamos si nos tuviéramos los unos a los otros más cerca? Si pudiéramos hablarnos más directamente?

Paz resalta la importancia de el alma, el regreso a ella, como salvación de la humanidad.

Me doy cuenta de que subrayé mucho, y que volveré muchas veces a leerlo, y lo mantendré muy cerca de mi.

"Toca a la imaginación creadora de nuestros filósofos, artistas y científicos redescubrir no lo más lejano sino lo más íntimo y diario: el misterio que es cada uno de nosotros. Para reinventar el amor, como pedía el poeta, tenemos que inventar otra vez al hombre."

charta says

Octavio caro mi sei come poeta, grande fra i grandi. Questo tuo saggio è prosa elegiaca. Però. Tu parli di Amore e Psiche, la più antica storia del mondo, rendendo anima lei.

Ti è avulsa la filologia, io temo, che nella *psychè* omerica divisava la vita. E dunque ancora si continua l'errore: questo cunto de li cunti che non conosce limiti di spazio, e cangia i nomi mantenendo il senso, diviene il canto dell'alto - l'anima superna - sul basso, la fisica attrazione.. Non più l'incontro con lo sconosciuto e l'abbandono fiducioso ma ancora e sempre scissione di corpo e mente, dove il primo, se non vile, quantomeno è *pondus* da contrastare.

Imbibito di platoniche idee ci conegni questo libello, ferace di riflessioni sul motore del mondo. E noi, felici e gabbati, all'eccelso saggista plaudiamo.

Quiver says

Sex is the root, eroticism the stem, and love the flower. And the fruit? The fruits of love are intangible. This is one of love's mysteries.

Paz is poetic, philosophic, and knowledgable in this overview of literary and historical ideas on love and

eroticism. He peruses ideas spanning millenia, from Plato's Symposium to Marvin Minsky's Society of Mind.

Human love is the union of two beings subject to time and its accidents: change, sickness, death. Although it does not save us from time, it opens it a crack, so that in a flash love's contradictory nature is manifest: that vivacity which endlessly destroys itself and is reborn, which is always both now and never. Therefore all love, even the most blissful, is tragic.

I would recommend reading *The Double Flame* together with Anne Carson's *Eros the Bittersweet*, for its complementary analysis of love-eroticism as both binding and separating, and Albert Camus's *Myth of Sisyphus*, for its complementary analysis of the absurd, from which love often borrows its most tragic elements.

metaphor says

There is no remedy for time. Or, at least, we do not know what it is. But we must trust in the flow of time, we must live. [...] We are time and cannot escape its dominion. We can transfigure it but not deny it or destroy it. This is what the great artists, poets, philosophers, scientists, and certain men of action have done. Love, too, is an answer: because it is time and made of time, love is at once consciousness of death and an attempt to make of the instant an eternity. All loves are ill-starred, because all are made of time, all are the fragile bond between two temporal creatures who know they are going to die. In all loves, even the most tragic, there is an instant of happiness that it is no exaggeration to call superhuman: it is a victory over time, a glimpse of the other side, of the there that is a here, where nothing changes and everything that is, truly is.

Mariana Borrego says

Octavio Paz publicó este libro tres años después de haber recibido el Nobel de Literatura pero en realidad tardó muchísimos años en escribirlo.

Pensé que iba a leer de erotismo, cachonderías, amores clandestinos, posiciones de kamasutra y demás morbosidades. Nada de eso. Es una lectura muy elegante de la transformación del amor al pasar de los años, del amor cortes, de tradiciones, amor primitivo, amor moderno y amor platónico, siendo el hilo conductor el factor erótico-sexual.

Todo el libro, que es un extenso ensayo, está bien respaldado y fundamentado en reconocidos e importantísimos escritores que van desde Platon hasta Einstein pasando por Ovidio, Brenton, Dante, Sade y Shakespeare.

La Llama doble nos va transportando en un viaje de conceptos, historias, mitología, teorías y memorias del amor y el erotismo.

Definitivamente es un libro que quiero leer en otra etapa de mi vida cuando este perdidamente enamorada

Thomas says

The ambition it takes, or the confidence perhaps, to attempt a history of love and what it has meant to mankind throughout history could only occur to a writer of supreme knowledge and competence. To write such on such a monumentally complex topic and then work in a history of erotism and sexuality, to look at those topics and their complicated relationships religion, society, politics and modernity is an even more impressive undertaking. Octavio Paz attempts and completes, in a relatively compact and even to follow discourse, all that and throws in some slightly off putting tangents on the origins of the universe.

That doesn't mean everything he says is agreeable or particularly contemporary. One section, initially intriguingly complex, on the distinctions between "amor amistoso" and "amistad amoroso" unravells into the misguided statement (of fact in Paz's voice of authority and confidence) that women are, by nature and because of social and historical restraints, incapable of true friendship. Such statements perhaps have their source in Paz's references - this is a history of love and erotism in a strictly literary sense, no matter how much he refers to the courtly society of 12th century France or the implications of Marxism on our representations of love. Not one to degrade the relevance or important of literature of human reality, I couldn't help feel the focus on love's representations in the written word restricts its completeness somewhat. Particularly, reflections on our modern interpretations of love seem unsatisfactory without much mention of film and music.

That's nitpicking, it would be impossible to realise a comprehensive document on the nature of mankind's amorous relations that satisfied and mentioned everything. As Paz repeats frequently, it is part of our self-definition, the modes of behaviour that separate us from animals (sex from eroticism). It is our method of understanding and reconciling our existence with the universe, creation and, most importantly, death. Paz traces the history of love from the egocentric idolisation of human beauty in the time of Platon in Ancient Greece to the advent of Christianity and the changing nature of the battle between love and death. He looks at love and eroticism's relationship and break away from the constraints (and sometimes liberations) of religion. He analyses our need to be remembered, to seek immortality in the love of others, or in loving another. He sees love as a violent act, a battle with self and other, between loved and beloved, as an ultimate tragedy. One of his most interesting comments is that love as portrayed in literature is for the young and the tragic, not the old and the content, quoting from one of very few examples of ideal love between the aged in literature. Another look at that discrepancy through the lens of modern literature and film would be very interesting.

Encapsulating such an ambitious argument would require a much longer attempt than this - Paz's work is intricate, nuanced with infinite examples and observations. The arguments loop back and repeat themselves, confirming but rarely sounding repetative, and the writing is academic and intelligent without being inaccessible. It doesn't have to be agreed with and it's not all conclusive, but we are talking about love here, and it's hard to argue with Paz's enthusiasm for it's importance the make-up of our identity and the way we see ourselves, each other and the world around us. 6

Fabiola says

It guide me through the history of "our share of paradise", as Paz liked to call love. Sex, eroticism, and love

all together: sex the original fire, raises the red flame of eroticism giving place and feeding the tremulous and blue flame of love...

Michael says

Ando egoista yo con quien es el mundialmente reconocido Octavio Paz, al que no le agarro el gusto. Vamos a descomponer mi opinion. Primero, la alegria de entender el concepto (aunque en realidad el titulo deberia haber sido la llama triple: amor, erotismo y sexo), concepto que en realidad Paz habria podido explicar en dos paginas (el libro tiene bastantes mas). De a pocos, entender, ya sin duda, que el humor es un concepto absolutamente ajeno a Paz. Y con esto, una idea relacionada, que tal vez explica la falta de humor: una pedanteria envuelta en un grado de erudicion que ya se hace absurdo. El ensayo envuelve algo de filosofia, de historia, de poesia (me hizo reir Paz, aunque claramente no fue esa su intencion cuando da a entender, sobre un soneto de Quevedo, que nadie -excepto el -Paz-, claro esta- lo ha entendido en su total dimension). Exacto: en cientos de anios, solo un hombre, Paz, ha sido capaz de darle al soneto su justa dimension. Anadiendo algo de injuria, usa Paz citas en frances (detesto esa costumbre, que no es, claro esta, unica a Paz, de citas en otro idioma -detesto la costumbre en particular cuando la cita es en un idioma que yo no hablo, circunstancia para la cual hay una posibilidad grande-). Y finalmente, extiende Paz el alcance de este ensano a temas como la inteligencia artificial (con una lucidez que asombra, eso si, teniendo en cuenta que este ensayo fue escrito hace unas decadas). En resumen, deteste, por sobre todo, la pomposidad de Paz.

Fernando Suarezserna says

Uno de los libros más importantes que he leído. Esta fue mi segunda lectura. Paz lo escribió en el ocaso de su vida, y nos lleva a entender el origen del amor como lo conocemos.

James says

The Double Flame by Octavio Paz is an extended discussion and analysis describing an extensive journey through the history of love in the West. On this journey Paz visits ancient Greece, Alexandria, and Rome, emphasizes the importance of Arabic culture during the so-called Dark Ages, and chronicles the rise and fall of Provençal culture and poetry in the Middle Ages. He finishes his analysis in the modern era, with special praise for Surrealism's emphasis on exclusive love. He examines the literary and philosophical traditions of each era, sometimes analyzing specific poems in the context of love and eroticism. His survey makes clear the centrality of women's position in society; as Paz writes, "the history of love is inseparable from the history of the freedom of women." If a culture prohibited women from being active agents in love, then genuine love could not flourish.

Paz is not merely a cultural historian; he is also a literary and a cultural critic. His impression of contemporary culture is fairly bleak. Because he believes there can be no love without a reverence for both the body and the soul, he finds the current situation pitiful: Capitalism has desacralized the body and transformed it into a marketing tool, while the soul (or psyche) has been suppressed or ignored. Without a soulful regard for the body, and an acceptance of the reality of the soul—what gives each person his or her individuality—there can be no love. Paz concludes with a call for a dialogue among scientists, philosophers, and artists that will lead to a renewed sense of love's importance to human culture. This view of Eros and its

history is both an entertaining and educational journey for the reader.

Burak Uzun says

Octavio Paz, mitolojik ö?elerden, Pan'dan ba?layarak dinler ve tarihsel süreç aras?nda dola??p a?k?, cinselli?i ve erotizmi, arada Ulysses'dan, Sappho'dan ve bir çok edebi metinden al?nt?larla süsleyerek nefis anlatm??.

Ayr?ca, Tomris Uyar çevirisinden al?nan keyif diye bir ?ey de var, eline ald??n kitab? k?sa sürede sona erdiren.

Jenna says

Reading this book reminded me of why I rarely read prose essays for pleasure: I was rather annoyed by the repetitiveness and meandering wordiness of the writing style. In this book, Nobel-winning poet Paz discusses three concepts that commonly get mixed-up in the public consciousness: sex, eroticism, and love. According to Paz, many species of animals practice sex, but human beings are the only species that practices eroticism because we are the only species endowed with imagination. Paz defines eroticism as sex that, through the intervention of imagination, has been diverted away from the mundane goal of procreation, just as poetry is language that, through the intervention of imagination, has been diverted away from the mundane goal of communication. Love differs from garden-variety eroticism in that love is specially concerned with the uniqueness and irreplaceability of the beloved: rather than viewing the "Other" as a mere object that can be possessed, love views the "Other" as a fellow subject with whom a dialogue is possible. Paz argues that we are living in a twilight age because the concept of the human person as a unique and irreplaceable entity is becoming obsolete. He blames such modern horrors as totalitarian governments, genocides, widespread sexual trafficking, and the magnitude of the AIDS epidemic on the obsolescence of this concept, and argues that, in an era as secular as ours, a revival of the concept of romantic love may be the only possible remedy. I'm not sure I buy his arguments, but they are unarguably rooted in rigorous, level-headed, cosmopolitan thinking that draws on everything from the theories of modern physics to the literature of ancient Japan. Moreover, the ideas presented in this book are excitingly original in that they comprise a comprehensive worldview that puts the idea of romantic love at the very center.

Carolina says

Pocas veces alguien tiene la oportunidad de leer una prosa tan hermosa. En el libro Paz no sólo nos dice su interesante opinión de lo que es el amor, pero también nos da interesantes datos históricos y precisas descripciones. Los autores y citas que menciona sirven para jugar con el ritmo del libro y darnos a conocer más puntos de vista sobre el tema del amor y erotismo que, como él nos lo dice, es tan poco estudiado en nuestros días. 100% recomendable.
