THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

Today, we all live in a world that I believe has three dominant characteristics that get in the way of a positive evaluation of this thing that we call *love*. The first characteristic has been with us for a couple of centuries now. It is associated with capitalism and the hegemony of the marketplace. Its economic term is *rational self interest;* it is not simply an economic category, however. Because market relations are so pervasive, rational self-interest can now be described as a dominant *thread* in culture. Moreover, it has a long and evolving history in the West from the Greeks who initially defined the *good or valuable* as something that we would all pursue if we really knew what was good for us. You might, in fact, think of most of western civilization as wrestling with what is good for us and eventually settling on the *self* as the primary unit for doing the appraising. The act of appraising or evaluating rationally what is good for us has also increasingly concentrated on what makes the self *happy*. Those things have value that make us happy and, in true utilitarian fashion, we constantly calculate whether the things we say that we love are making us happy or not. If not, we are encouraged by psychologists, therapists and even friends to get rid of them. Many people are ready and willing to help us formulate a *list* of pros and cons and will encourage us to *cut bait* in an unhappy relationship on the grounds that there are *many other fish in the ocean*.

I don't wish to deny any validity to this kind of thinking. But he problems with thinking about love this way should be obvious, even if a clear alternative is not readily available to modern consciousness. In the first place, love is not *rational* even if it need not be completely irrational. In the second place, the primary emphasis wherever love is present is neither the self nor society, but the *beloved* or the particular intimate society or what we sometimes call the *world* of the lovers. Third, if you think that love will make you happy, you are grossly simplifying a complex emotion, one that is linked to all kinds of pain including the pain of anger and, ironically, the pain of hatred. Love and hate run together more often than many people think, while a degree of anger must sometimes be expected when people deeply care about the other. You don't get angry with people that you don't care about.

The first characteristic that love has to contend with I would prefer to call *early modern* and to distinguish it from a more recognizably *late modern* kind of consciousness that began to enter the culture at the *fin de siecle* or towards the end of the nineteenth-century. Late eighteenth and early nineteenth century culture was buoyantly optimistic. The general consensus was that, if you gave people freedom and allowed them to develop and explore their own interests, or a more general self-interest, people would be happy or at least happier. As a side effect or bonus, you would also get not only a greatly improved standard of living but also greater toleration of others. Power and violence would be greatly mitigated and peace would be the recognized rational framework for the pursuit of happiness. If you like, late eighteenth and early nineteenth century western culture had a marked tendency towards *utopianism*. Even as dreams of utopia declined among more critical and sophisticated observers of modernity, they became more pervasive in the general consciousness, boosted as they were by scientific positivism. However, the

intelligent naysayers began to proliferate in late modernity, led in particular by a man named Nietzsche who directed an assault on western rationality. Even without Nietzsche, however, the intelligenzia would have moved inexorably into an attitude of cultural despair.

You can say lots of things about the causes of this attitude. For example, you could say that the intellectual and cultural elite were increasingly mopy and whiny because they were losing their status in a more bureaucratic society dominated by the growing and largely uncultured middle class. You could dismiss it as sour grapes by a group of people who refused to embrace the democractic thrust of modernity. The problem with such a dismissal, however, is that many of these writers, romantics or conservatives, were pointing to an issue with which many of us are all too familiar. They pointed to the *absence of shared meaning* in modern life, including the loss of a meaningful god or a meaningful religion and even a meaningful moral code. It is a fascinating realization that free, autonomous and optimistic human beings are more likely to become despondent and disenchanted to the extent that more general social meanings atrophy. The effort that it takes to create individual meanings for oneself is huge once the social props are dismantled. Utilitarian happiness gets reserved for the stupids, or the naïve members of the *herd*; the smarts pride themselves on appreciating the sadness that is late modernity.

How do I know that many of you share this malaise? I just ask you to honestly tell me if you are really happy, in what your happiness consists, and just how optimistic you are about your happiness in the future. It tends to be really easy for a good teacher to poke holes through the hollowness that is modernity; and, in order to be taken seriously, a modern writer simply cannot adopt a universally happy tone. We know all too well that people don't live happily ever after, even if they are so fortunate as to find real love. Intermittently from the eighteenth-century on, we hear the echoes of the belief that "all you need is love". The problem is that this persistent refrain is so difficult to maintain. Modern human beings feel increasingly alone in a universe that doesn't care about them. Love has a heavy burden to carry because it is the focal point of caring in this uncaring world. It is little wonder that love has become so fragile just at the point that it becomes more intense.

One of the issues that all declarations of love have to confront is bodily decline and death. In a world that still has faith and hope in either an afterlife or a life that is inherently meaningful, love itself has meaning. In fact, religion and love can support and enrich one another, as we shall demonstrate in this course. Even when religion loses much of its power – when for all intents and purposes "God is dead" – ethics or morality can provides a sort of secular substitute for religion that interacts with love. But take away all of those props and hopes and love stands on its own exposed to the cold winds of late modern consciousness. Arguably the most effective route out of the pessimistic gloom that besets most of us at one time or another is love. Love allows us to lose ourselves in the *being* that is the love relationship rather than having to constantly toil in the hopeless *becoming* that is one's life and one's relationships with others.

Unfortunately, this is a strategy without much hope for success, as Nietzsche among others pointed out. It reduces love to a single moment at the beginning of a relationship, when the distance between oneself and the other vanishes. This longed for moment of forgetfulness, and suspension outside of historical time, clearly is only one stage of love. If you divide love into three rather obvious stages, you will immediately see the dilemma. The first stage of love or *falling in love* is the only moment in which love feels itself entirely invincible and the question of personal happiness falls into the background. The second stage of *being in love* with another person already involves a certain distancing where a critical appraisal (more on this concept of *appraisal* further on) is already very much in evidence. Many so-called romantic relationships fall apart at this stage without ever reaching the much more challenging stage of *staying in love*.

It has often, but not always, been the case that writings, discussions and analyses of love in the West have focused on the first stage. Romantic literature in particular escapes the difficulties posed by the second and third stages with a cute little escape clause – the assumption that they all "lived happily ever after". But the romantics generally believed that love made the human and the natural world go around and we today are much more cynical. Freud, in particular, has shown us that marriage is a state of constant accommodation where happiness is elusive. Marriage, for Freud, is not an institution designed to make us happy, but to make sexuality stable and to support civilization. The world was not created for love, much less for our single or social happiness. The romantic impulse is basically a limited sexual (i.e. chemical) response. Since Freud, most of the scientific discussions of love are really about sexuality because scientists understand and appreciate love even less than Freud did!

You don't have to agree with Freud's reduction of romantic love to the sexual; in fact, I would contend that successful love relationships are able to invoke elements of *falling in love* albeit certainly not on a daily basis or as intensely as in the first stage. But the difficulty is that most of us think of love primarily in terms of *falling in love*, that we late moderns yearn for that falling out of society and letting go of our nagging and restricted selves, and that we haven't got much, other than therapy or congenitally theraputic friends, to help us bridge the stages to more lasting and stable love. The tensions and loneliness of late modernity makes many of us yearn for love more than ever, but our characteristic attitude towards love as something that will solve all our problems is ultimately self-defeating. Of course, many other people realize this, so you get a line in the sand between those who still believe in love and those who see love as a trap. Many alternate positions in this dance of love's pros and cons can emerge, depending on age and experience. What is interesting is that, whereas the younger generation could once be depended to be *believers* in love, many of generation X are skeptics. As for the older generation, some of them are less cynical about love, either because they had lower expectations to begin with or because they were raised in an environment that was more positive and less fearful about love.

Modern and late modern attitudes towards love tend to run together, sometimes in complex ways that are difficult to analyze. Thus, paradoxically, calculating self-interest can combine with a yearning for romance that leads a person to constantly seek out self-

affirming romantic liaisons where the essentially selfish and self-centred individual pursuing love really *feels* that they are romantic. Much depends on the dominant characteristic that is operating, and these are subject to change, particular in people who are what a relationship therapist would define as unstable. Ignoring the subtleties, it makes sense to think of the first group as perpetual romantic *travelers* of whom the extreme is the *Don Juan* type of lothario who moves quickly from lover to lover in order to remain within the state of loving. Needless to say, this is not an exclusively male group by any stretch of the imagination. Members of the second group fall into the category of perpetual romantic *searchers* looking for their destined *soulmate*, someone who will understand and appreciate them for who they are. What makes these recognizable failures at love so fascinating to think about is that their actions, if not their primary motivations, tend to be so similar. Both have a tendency to sleep around convulsively.

A relatively new characteristic attitude towards love is distinctly postmodern. We live in a global world characterized by fragmentation and difference where any consistent attitude towards life or love seems to make little sense. When nothing is stable or even predictable, our attitude towards the 'other' is complicated and compromised. In a positive sense, we are now encouraged to respect the essential *otherness* of the other, to welcome diversity into the social equation, and even to enjoy unpredictability. In fact, if you live in the GTA and come to a multicultural institution like York, you are highly sensitized to embrace these positive potentialities and to condemn their opposites. It is as yet unclear what this postmodern attitude brings to the table of love. A serious analysis of love in this new environment would need to take into account the fact that globalization is simultaneously an exciting and novel phenomena and a marketing concept manipulated by multinational corporations for their own purposes. Any uncritical celebration of globalization must take into account the undermining of traditional identities that mediate between the self and the larger community and that provide a more natural framework for affective relationships, of which love is one.

The problem of love's recent globalization, if I may put it that way, is twofold. First, it facilitates the erosion of traditional relationships, without taking into account the potential stresses that this particular kind of affective individualism could produce. Some of these tensions, the generational ones, are already in evidence in first generation families in the GTA and their impact down the road is unpredictable. Second, I suspect that, rather than resulting in greater experimentation and alternate models, globalization will privilege one discourse of love – Western discourse – that will become hegemonic. As we shall see throughout this course, the Western conception of love was never a neutral cultural variable. It arose in and reinforced a particular kind of society. It became interwoven with and reinforced a certain kind of individualism. And, just as the concept of the individual, is not something that we should accept uncritically, so too the freedom to make one's own choices in love contributed to the creation of an advanced technological and bureaucratic society that inhibits diversity in some important respects. Indeed, one author that we will be taking a look at later on in the course suggests that the evolutionary function of love was to transform supposedly free *subjects* into more sophisticated information processing cyborgs. For Niklas Luhmann, the overriding

purpose of the Western discourse of love has been to generate autonomous *systems*, which ironically no longer require the convoluted and self-defeating love code. Once diversified complex systems become established, love becomes irrelevant.

I think that Luhmann misunderstands and misappropriates the discourse of love when he views it in technical and functional terms, but that will be for you to decide once we get to him. For those who see diversity and difference in a more optimistic light, however, there are a couple of issues that need to be *on the table* if love is to be recast in our postmodern world. The first should be obvious. Love is all about finding a stable emotional home. The more unstable the world becomes, the greater the pressure that will be exerted on love to perform the role of individual and social glue. Admittedly, western love has been under this kind of pressure for a couple of hundred years and has survived. But there is no way of knowing whether love can continue to thrive in a world characterized by drastic change. Maybe it needs an injection of different concepts of love and loving from the international community.

The problem is not abstract; its dimensions are already becoming clear. Marriage no longer gets the kind of support that it used to from self-propelling individuals who are increasingly more reluctant to *commit*. One could argue that marriage and love were always tenuous companions at best, and we will examine this historical tension in the course. But it is not simply that marriage is a declining institution; if that were the only question we could substitute common law relationships for marriage and leave the reservations to the more fundamentalist defenders of tradition. The issue is that *love is being recognized as subject to change*. The stages from falling in love to staying in love are all under pressure from the overwhelming acceptance of dramatic change as the norm. High divorce rates are symptomatic of the reluctance to stay in and work on relationships in the face of inevitable changes that take place. Like everything in the global cosmopolitan world, nothing is safe. In an unsafe environment, the tendency for individuals who have been encouraged for over 200 years to be rational calculators, is to limit risk.

It seems to me to be an ideological fabrication on the part of the cheerleaders for globalization that we need to embrace change, to take risks, to live dangerously. That's a myth. Anyone who knows anything about dealing with high change environments should understand that the natural attitude is not to take chances but to *manage risk*. Postmodern men and women take *less* chances than in the past; they continually reassess the norm rather than striking out on their own. Indeed, corporations recognize the need for new information and novel ideas because these, more than anything else in an information society, have the capacity for generating profits. But their universal complaint about the products of universities and business schools is that graduates want to play it safe within *recognizable systems* and to flirt with rather than commit to new approaches. The creative inventiveness of the entrepreneurs of the nineteenth-century is a thing of the past; genuine entrepreneurship is restricted to specific areas like computer software and electronic communications. My experience with undergraduate students is that they are far less inclined to engage in risk than even fifty years ago. Whereas in the late sixties and early seventies, students wanted to criticize and challenge their professors, now they

want clear instructions from their teachers on what is acceptable. They respect neither their teachers nor their own minds. The result, predictably, is mass mediocrity. And don't get me started on the 'cut and paste' or cookie cutter approach that scholarly essay writing has become.

Such an aversion to risk taking is bound to have a profound effect on love. After all, love is the absolute most dangerous adventure that you would ever consider embarking on. You have to fall in love just to be able to take the risks. What happens when you regard love itself as a risk? You all know what happens. People are reluctant to get into relationships, long before they become wounded by love. When people enter into longer term relationships, they rarely commit. They are already preparing for that relationships end, as the prevalence of pre-nuptial agreements seems to suggest. What people look for in their relationships almost as much as signs of love, are signs of love's end. In our postmodern age, it seems you need to be ready to *move on*. Moving on is not a symptom of the willingness to take risks; quite the reverse: it is the supreme form of *risk management*. It is love's new investment strategy.

Continual mental preparedness for *moving on* seems to me to be characteristic of modern love. Its antithesis – a blind faith that love will conquer all – merely reinforces the rule. If people require an absolute blind faith in love, perhaps it is because that is the only way you can tune out the negative vibes that now encircle love. It's a pathetic state of affairs to say the least. If our ancestors were so fearful of the negative consequences of love, a great deal of western art, music and culture might never have been created. We may criticize past Europeans for their colonial and patriarchal attitudes, but we should also be aware that we are in many respects puny purveyors of political correctness in comparison with many of them. For fear of doing something wrong, we do nothing; we abdicate responsibility both for ourselves and our society. We are a whiny generation that could benefit from a better understanding of the history of love.

The constant focus on *moving on* implies a toxic fear of the death of a love affair that has parallels in our postmodern society's more general fear of death. If love is a metaphor for life, then the absence of love should be a metaphor for death. We don't talk much about death in postmodern society because everything for us is a contingent fragment and our lives are constant movement between those fragments that we find most promising – usually the ones that a consumer society creates for us rather than ones that we create for ourselves. We don't work so much at things than we jump from thing to thing, including love partners. Even if some relationships are recognizably better than others, they all tend to take on the same hue and texture – as relatively transferable experiences. The new emphasis on fitness and physical proportion has less to do with health and vitality and more to do with having the stamina to collect experiences, of which lovers are the most privileged. At least Don Juan or Cassanova were not entirely in bad faith in thinking that they loved their objects of seduction; many of us have our mental suitcases fully packed when we enter into relationships.

Thus far, I've suggested that there are modern, late modern and postmodern considerations that problematize any discourse of love. My aim in this course is to show

you historical models of love that you might not agree with, but that offer a richer imaginative palate upon which love might operate. I don't think for a minute that love has outrun its potential, but I do believe that we need to know how it has been imagined and reimagined to make life more meaningful for individuals. If we worry less about *finding meaning* in love than *creating meaning* in love, then there might be something worth salvaging. By seeing the variety of created meanings for love in the past, by those who may still have believed that they were discovering something real, we might begin to invigorate our own imaginations. It is my contention that love is worth fighting for, but you'll have to decide that for yourselves. If you don't fight for love, however, you need to find something that will appeal to both your imagination and your physical being to the same degree. Love has provided inspiration for Western society for centuries; what do you plan to replace it with?

If you've followed my rant thus far, you should be asking some obvious questions. What is love? We use the term loosely to describe anything that we have a strong attachment for. Some people use it so narrowly as to suggest a love of money or possessions; others widen its scope to include such abstractions as mankind; a particularly strong conception of love in the past was generated towards God. People can rightly be said to *love* their home. And, of course, there is the love of men and women for one another that has been the primary axiom for love, but not in all times or all places. In ancient Greece, for example, the axiomatic relationship was between two men, typically an older and a younger man that we might regard as the taboo of pederasty. In modern times, we have begun to accept relationships between two consenting adults regardless of gender. What makes the love for home closer to the love between two human beings is that it denotes a special *caring* that singles out that particular home or that particular *person* and not another. When you really care for your home or for another person, you do something interesting. You create a *new value* that wasn't there before. A person is a much more dynamic, exciting and dangerous prospect, however, than a house. In this course, we will be exploring love between persons.

The reason that *love of money* or any commodity appears to us to be a misuse of the concept of love is that it is not a fitting subject for the kind of care that we are talking about and that the only new value that we would create is a fetishism. Not that fetishisms can't be a part of love, or even that money has some of the same objective and instrumental values as love (or else how could we even use the term *love*), but that the value in question is mundane and adding value is difficult. It doesn't provide much scope for the creative imagination. In fact, the only way that we can legitimately add value to the concept of money is by thinking of the things it could buy (more leisure), the stability it could provide (a home), and the close relationships it could support (a family). The concept of love relates deeply to our "affective life" and, in particular, to "affective relationships". We attach or "bestow" special meanings to personal relationships that makes it meaningless to describe them in instrumental or utilitarian terms. Sure, you could describe your home as an investment, and your husband as a provider, and these might enter into your love of your home or your husband. But it would be a misuse of the term *love* to think that these characteristics encompassed the concept.

If you consider the love of God, for many centuries the archetype of meaningful love, the value added component is obvious. In instrumental and objective terms, you might certainly fear God, be grateful to God, surrender to God's will etc., but none of these would capture the concept of religious love. To the extent that relationships are dominated by fear, economic considerations, or obedience, there is thought to be a diminution of love. In fact, the concept of love clearly grows from the Old Testament to the New Testament because the fundamental relationship changes between God and man. The relationship becomes one of reciprocal *caring* that adds enormous value because Christ is a *person* and his relationship to his Church is highly personal. God the Father is loved because he is a Father, but fear and obedience reign supreme. Love has to be primarily a free gift. That kind of freedom is described in places in the Old Testament, but not towards God. In the *Song of Solomon*, we hear of the Shulamite seeking her true love:

> I will rise now, *I said*,
> And go about the city;
> In the streets and in the square,
> I will seek the one I love…
>
> When I found the one I love,
> I held him and would not let him go,
> Until I had brought him to the house of my mother.
> And into the chamber of her who conceived me.
>
> I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
> By the gazelles or by the does of the field,
> Do not stir up nor awaken love
> Until it pleases.

What this biblical quote shows us is that we should not think of the ingredients of love as entirely modern. This passage is recognizable to us today as an early awareness of the spontaneous growing of love; it implies the free **bestowal** of a special value on the beloved; it delights in the wonderful reciprocity of love; and it implies a **commitment** to a single person. It is not by accident that the Christian doctrine of love, with Christ as a bridegroom to his Church, emerged from Judaism. As pungent and prescient as this description of love may be, however, it was subsumed within and overridden by obedience to an occasionally terrifying God. For earthly love between a man and a woman to become a central motif of Western civilization, it had to first establish itself in the heavens before returning to earth, eventually becoming the pseudo-religion of romantic love. We know we are in the modern age when earthly love rivals, and sometimes eclipses, heavenly love.

Be that as it may, the concept of bestowing a special meaning on another person and committing oneself to that person – the **beloved** – would appear to be central to any definition of love. Reciprocity is always desired by the lover, but true love is characterized by its bestowal without any guarantee of return. To be sure, love is

unlikely to survive for very long without reciprocity, but the point is that it can survive and, therefore, it can never be reduced to an exchange. What obscures this special value added feature of love is that it cannot be separated from a characteristic that does lend itself to something like exchange – **appraisal**. Not that an individual or objective appraisal of the beloved should be reduced to anything like a crude exchange of services, only that the concept of appraisal can be enlisted in an explanation of love that emphasizes the element of self-interest that is involved. Love always involves an individual and objective appraisal of the other person – in terms of looks, character, attributes etc. – but the key is that the beloved he or she is **alive** and is a **person** who is loved for his or her own sake and not simply reciprocity. When reciprocity happens, both individuals are rightly said to be transformed into a unity.

Even in terms of appraisal rather than bestowal, love is much more complex than many so-called realist interpreters of love might suggest. Appraisal is an individual assessment; what appeals to us may not appeal to others; appraisal is often excessive, not only when one is in a state of sexual arousal towards the other but even in terms of what constitutes sexual arousal for the individual. Love, according to anatomists of human behaviour, likely begins with any number of appraisals that can include anything from what society deems to be desirable to what the individual deems to be an object of desire. Therapists can tell you that appraisal and desire can relate to all sorts of experiences that we had as children, especially our relation with our parents. At some time, these scientists may even be able to predict what kinds of people are attracted to one another. Philosophers like Plato have built this quality of appraisal into complex paradigms of meaning. So, I don't want you ever thinking that appraising another person is a simple or straightforward operation that even scientists can understand. Still, you could conceivably argue that genetic and environmental considerations work together to program us to love certain people rather than others.

But desire and appraisal do not encompass all there is to love. No amount of appraising, whether it is transparent or excessive, can account for love. That's precisely why Plato cannot explain love solely in terms of appraisal, even in terms of one's appraisal of the Good. Plato has to attach a mystical quality to love, as a step beyond, a merging of entities, as a creative idealization that he hopes is true. Even the language of appraisal is transformed when we fall in love. We say things like the beloved is unique, perfect, wonderful etc. We do not intend for these comments to be taken literally; we fully understand that the beloved is not perfect; we know that an objective assessment of the beloved (that our friends will constantly remind us of, in order to bring us back to our common sense) will not make her as special as she is to our lover's imagination. We are speaking in the language of love; we are speaking the language of metaphor; she is wonderful to us. What does it mean to say that someone is wonderful to us? It is not simply an exaggeration, although it must be to someone (like our friends) who is appraising rather than loving the other. The attribution must be understood in terms of the imaginative bestowal that we have engaged in that makes us totally sympatico with the other person and allows us to **merge** as much as possible with that person. As in *My Fair Lady*, identifying completely with the person – "her smiles, her frowns, her ups and downs".

Now, our friendly commentators will not be looking at our beloved "through the eyes of love" but primarily through the lens of appraisal. This means that they likely will be more objective than us. They can usefully point us to appraisals that might, if not immediately, in light of future experience prove to be more correct than our naturally excessive bestowal. But the point is that our bestowal is equally as natural as their instrumental or objective assessments and is key to our ability to love. The act of loving is a highly creative act; it privileges the imagination over reason at a critical point of appraisal. More important, it creates a new *society* between loving partners. Something like this goes on whenever and wherever love operates.

But, you might ask, what about the origin of love in sexual desire? Couldn't Freud be right in suggesting that what we call love is society sublimating and directing our sexual desires towards more civilized ends, almost certainly frustrating our desires in the process? There is a sense in which Freud was right, in terms of sexual energy being imaginatively recycled. Even if we grant Freud that insight, however, we still wouldn't have a clue why sexual sublimation takes the general form that it does, similar in its basic form in all societies. Freud seems obsessed with reducing love to sex, so much so that he is quite unable to explain married love, except in terms of its pathologies. To suggest that love is repressed sexuality is to speak to those who are frustrated, or accepting, rather than those who feel fulfilled in love. Another problem with Freud's emphasis on sexuality is that he is forced to reduce any kind of *caring* whatsoever to the sex drive. A broader and richer conception of the objects of desire provides much more analytical purchase. Freud may be right in pointing to the importance of sexual desire in most of the relationships that we would describe as *loving*. Sexual energy provides a vitality that allows us to jump from appraisal to bestowal. But it could never explain that act of bestowal or its universal nature. Finally, and most conclusively to my mind, we have to understand exactly what we mean by the sex drive. In human civilization, it is the amorous imagination that makes sex central to our identity, not the other way around.

Love can't be reduced to sexuality because it is directed at *someone* and is constantly *gratuitous*. Of course, it isn't usually divorced from sexuality because, as Plato rightly noted, sexual attraction leads to love. Love can never be separated from appraisals based on need, desire, individual predilections and more objective social standards. But love as bestowal is a different kind of valuation than love based on appraisal only. The fact that the two kinds of valuations take place simultaneously should not confuse us. Let's look at a typical scenario. Men are often attracted to women that they find beautiful. That attraction could increase if they think that the person is a good person – in conventional male terms morality defined as nice and kind. But those qualities do not equate to love. Beauty could as easily provoke sexual interest as love. Morality – being kind or nice – has an even less direct connection. We often love someone despite the fact that they do things that are not good. Love has overridden virtue at so many times in so many cultures that any connection is tenuous. In order to make virtue and wisdom the true goal of love, Plato had to separate it entirely from real living persons. He and others in history have wanted love and virtue to run in tandem. It is not possible. Rousseau was the last to

seriously try and you'll see for yourself whether he was successful. "Love", in the words of Irving Singer, "is not intrinsically moral".

Love "re-creates" another person. The eye of the beholder is a creative eye. It involves the human imagination re-envisioning the other. Its operation is similar to that of a spectator watching a play. The spectator knows that the scene being played out before her is not *real*. The play is not an *illusion* and much less a *delusion*, however, because the spectator is always at least partly aware that she is mixing the scene in her imagination. In love, one is always prone to a form of self-hypnosis that makes the creations of one's imagination more vibrantly real than what passes for objective reality. But one is creating *something* when one is in love; even if it is a mistake, even if it involves errors in judgment; that special something has its own reality. Just as a work of art is real, so are the creations of the amorous imagination. What is different in love than even in theatrical and artistic productions that deal with love is that this love is directed at a real person. Unless one is able to play this amorous game of the imagination, one cannot love or even fully enjoy another person.

Of course, this imaginative re-creation can be, and often is, excessive. Its reality is not empirical. Scientists throughout history have condemned or mocked love's claims. The realist critique of love takes many forms that we will explore in this course. Some of you may decide that, on balance, the realists make a lot more sense than those contributing to the tradition and ideals of love. But the very best writers, like Cervantes in Don Quixote, never entirely dismiss the reality of love, even when they demolish its idealistic pretensions. Love in the West clearly has given rise to inflated expectations and not a few personal tragedies. Does that mean that we should reject love as a concept? I don't think so. What I do think is that we need to dislodge *falling in love* from the romantic pantheon and temper its imaginative excesses by learning to appreciate the different modulations of love. Love is not always about losing oneself; bestowal need not put someone on a totally unrealistic pedestal. "Love is not always ecstatic; it can even be quite prosaic."

In the West, love took a novel direction; for several centuries now, it has "ricocheted" back and forth between lover and beloved generating a completely new versions of society. It made a unique contribution to individualism by allowing people the freedom to make up their own mind about marriage, and it tempered the excesses of that same individualism by illuminating its limitations when compared to the imaginative brilliance of love. In recent times, a battle between possessive individualism and love appears to be brewing, and love seems to be on the defensive. But I wouldn't count out love just yet. It may be that other ideas and ideals of love and caring from other cultures may be just the tonic for reviving love and making it more appropriate for our modern age. If anything, we desperately need love because it challenges such tendencies as selfishness and consumerism. Love is inherently subversive. Love is dangerous. Love is risky. Ultimately, its greatest appeal for those who refuse to bend their knee to our risk averse society.

Platonic Eros

Introduction: Western Idealization

Last time I described two kinds of activities that intertwine in substantiating love. The first in time, but not necessarily importance, is *appraisal*. We discover qualities in the beloved that we approve of, such as beauty, niceness, strength of character, and we build those individual appraisals into love. Love at first sight is neither common nor possible. At best, we can say that the beauty or bearing of another person strongly *predisposes* us to love. But the ideal, because it is an *ideal*, of love at first sight has an element of truth to the extent that love can also be a *bestowal*. We sometimes bestow love in advance of anything like a completion of a judicious appraisal process. The significant other literally gets put on a pedestal, and once someone is on a pedestal, they are damned difficult to kick off. It takes a lot of negative appraisals, often reluctantly undertaken, to end love relationships, especially where two people have bestowed love on each other. In fact, it is entirely possible for mismatched people to maintain a relationship indefinitely simply because they have bestowed love.

Appraisal and bestowal run together in love. The wisdom of looking at bestowal apart from appraisal is that it most clearly points to something interesting not only about love, but also about human culture at all levels. Human beings have a unique capacity and tendency to **idealize**. Idealization obviously takes place in bestowing love, as we intuitively appreciate when we see someone being put on love's pedestal. But idealization also takes place in appraisal. In fact, you might say that it is impossible not to make idealizations when you confer significance on almost anything. Even the money-making realist has a tendency to idealize money, and without a certain amount of idealizing money, the emergence of capitalism would have been inconceivable. Not all idealizations relate to *love*, however, and most of us would balk at equating the so-called love of money with the love of persons or the love of virtue. The fact that we can use the term *love* in both cases reflects not only the limitations of language but also the enormous significance of idealization for love. Love is an archetype of idealization.

All of this leads us to the single biggest obstacle in understanding the culture of Western Europe and the Atlantic seaboard. The dominant interpretation of the distinctiveness of the West is that its culture is distinctly empirical, materialistic and scientific when compared to other cultures. Indeed, the hegemony of the West is predicated on this very understanding. Another way of putting this highly misleading dichotomy is that Westerners became more practical, rational and **realistic** than other cultures. Now, there are a number of problems with such an interpretation. Leaving aside for a moment the obvious and rather trite fact that the West applied its knowledge in the form of technology more successfully than other cultures, any good philosopher would tell you that empiricism, materialism and Western science – especially its naïve belief in the inevitability of progress – are themselves complex idealizations that are chock full of lesser idealizations. Even reason itself is an idealization that we've inherited from the

ancient Greeks. As the theorists Castoriadis points out, we Westerners still dream the dreams of the Greeks without appreciating that they are just that – dreams.

What I'm suggesting here is that you should appreciate the idealistic property of all of human thought before you evaluate some of the idealizations of love that we are going to examine in this course. In any case, you will probably discover that any criticisms of love that you can ever conceive have been put forward by the so-called **realists** in Western culture. Their names include Lucretius, Cervantes, Marx and Freud, and we'll be looking at some of them. What I want you to appreciate is that none of these realists ever completely escape the human web of idealization and that their claims to science often mask significant unarticulated ideals. So, when we talk about the difference between the idealists and the realists when it comes to love, we need to understand that the differences are relative, and that both the so-called realists and idealists tend to share many of the same idealizations. In fact, you can't appreciate the power of a guy like Plato unless you appreciate that certain aspects of his thought are more realist – such as the dismantling of traditional legend – and others – such as the idealization of abstract forms – are more idealist.

Idealism and realism in Western thought form a spectrum. Science and technology and psychoanalysis tend to line up on the *realistic* end of the spectrum and the language and literature of love tends to line up on the *idealistic* end of the spectrum. In order to be able to make any absolute distinction between idealistic and realistic conclusions, you would need to be able to escape from human language altogether, which inevitably generates concepts, which may be functional but can never escape idealization. Some of the most imaginative and meaningful idealizations in Western civilization relate to our appraisals and bestowals of love. Some components of modernity clearly are steering culture towards a more realistic dimension, but not all. The individualism of modern society -- itself an idealization of personal freedom -- has illuminated the disfunctionality of some of the more extreme idealizations of love. Love many require new forms of idealization in order to compete effectively with individualism. But the ideal of individualism is running into problems of its own, as is demonstrated by the pervasive depression of modern men and women and the return to religion or their longing for love.

Religion is a kind of idealization that once had a very strong connection with love. The two fed off and reinforced one another in the Western world. But the incredible journey of love does not begin with religion, but with a Greek philosophy that boldly dismissed religion and replaced it with a hegemonic reason. If I may speak for a moment about natural religion before discussing how the Greek philosophical tradition displaced it, I'll be able to make a point about love that is worth making. We don't know a lot about the native religions in the West that were eclipsed by ancient and Christian culture, but what we do know is that many of them viewed sexuality as a central idealization. The gods and demons often took a phallic or mother goddess form. The emphasis in natural religion likely was on sexual penetration and reproduction rather than anything that we would associate with love. Small-scale religions tended to "idealize the natural functions of man". Greek thought, especially that of Plato, entered into an opposition with mythically understood natural functions. As in any effective dialectical relationship,

however, Greek thought needed to understand, incorporate and subsume these natural desires. They did not simply go away. When the Romans superimposed Greek though on their own more *primitive* tribal culture, physical desire was bound to make a comeback. But now physical desire would have to be more complex because the natural functions of the body had been transformed by the creative imagination of the Greeks. When the Greco-Roman world clashed and mingled with emergent Christianity, love and desire were sublimated in God. The Christian god offered new possibilities for love because one now had the choice to view him in Platonic terms as the ultimate form of the good or in the very personal terms of Jesus. The Christian emphasis on love as overriding all previous religious injunctions gave a new emphasis on the complex emotional character of this special kind of appraisal and bestowal. What it could not easily establish in that unique form was a foundation for what love would eventually grow into – an authentic relationship between persons that embraced their sexuality. A key development in Western culture, therefore, was the rise of courtly love in the Middle Ages, a complex 500-year development that brought love down to earth. When I say "down to earth", I do not want to imply that love somehow became 'earthy'. In fact, what was the most interesting legacy of the itinerant troubadours who began to sing this new kind of love is the transcendental significance they attached to love. Those forms of idealization would later be incorporated into the romantic tradition, with which you are all familiar (and if you are not you will be after taking this course!).

We don't know much about the troubadours in southern France during the 12th century, although some of their songs and poems have survived. One thing worth saying about the troubadours is that they emerged from a popular culture, which had never completely lost sight of the natural and sexual foundation of love. The transformation of the songs of the troubadours into courtly love is a fascinating example of what can unexpectedly happen when elite culture merges with popular cultures rather than fossilizing or folding in upon itself. Love's western journey was many centuries in the making and anything but inevitable. But you demonstrate its continuing potency when you dream your very Western dreams of love.

Platonic Philosophy

Plato's influence on Western philosophy and western culture is rarely disputed, even in an age that is suspicious of terms like *authors* and *influence*. Even if we consider Platonic philosophy as subject to misinterpretation and flexible adaptation, we return to this cluster of concepts that we join together under the banner of *Platonic*. One related and contemporary concept, i.e. Platonic love, we shall discover to be highly misleading. But at the very least it demonstrates the longevity and adaptability of Plato in Western culture. Actually, we will find that the concept of Platonic love has more affinities Aristotle's concept of *friendship* than Plato's doctrine of forms. But that's the story of the next lecture. Right now, I want to give you a crash course in Plato.

Plato's philosophy is, if you will pardon the pun, the archetypical or *ideal type* of Western idealization. Plato argued that the material world, the world of sensation and materiality, was at best a lesser and derivative *reality*. The real world was an ideal world

of forms that could never be understood through the senses, but that was accessible to reason. Ideal forms, especially the ideals of beauty, wisdom and virtue that separated humankind from the animal kingdom, were only reached by rational abstraction. An essential key to discovering abstract truths was logic. But, for Plato, logic was only a tool and one that was highly susceptible to misuse. Greek rhetoric teachers known as the *sophists* routinely enlisted logic as a tool to impress and convince others of any number of truths that were basically relative. Many contemporary thinkers have more in common with the sophists than Plato precisely because they believe that truths are multiple and that no one has privileged access to the *truth*. Plato thought otherwise and even went so far as to describe ultimate beauty and wisdom (we would say truth) as the *good* towards which all human inquiry should be reaching.

What makes Plato so compelling, even when we disagree with him, is his crystal clear characterization of the higher functions of human beings, as a journey towards two interrelated goals – the truth that simultaneously unites all its aspects into a single unity. That journey has captured the imagination, not only of Western civilization, but also Islamic civilization upon which Plato's writings had a profound impact. In fact, a lot of Plato's and other Greek writings first came to the West through Islamic translations that preserved Greco-Roman learning through the so-called *dark ages* following the overthrow of the Roman Empire by the Western tribes. But it is of the Western world that I now speak. What's fascinating about Plato's thought, and about his dialogues in particular, is its self-referential character. The dialogues read at best as plausible language games *unless* you assume that there is an abstract and unified truth towards which human thought is pointing. In other words, it is the *ideal* that dictates the enquiry. That is precisely why the ideals are a superior reality for Plato, because they alone provide meaning.

The classic analogy, of course, is Plato's Cave. Empirical reality is clearly flawed; sensory impressions are misleading; we must search for a higher truth. The truth or the good or whatever you want to call it, is the sun. But humans inhabit a cave that separates them from the sun. They produce functional knowledge; they generate fire in the caves that allows them to pursue their troglodyte existence. But they yearn for something more and something higher. What they typically generate are gods and devils that relate to their limited existence, shadows cast by the fire on the walls. One day, an enterprising individual chances on a path out – there must have been many abortive attempts – and wanders out into the sun for the first time. He or she is blinded by truth and Plato's essential contention is that people have to be *habituated* to the sun before they can see clearly. The eventually enlightened individual returns to the cave to share this truth with his fellows and is typically regarded as either a nut case or a charlatan. But eventually it is possible for human civilization gives rise to a few individuals – the wise – who have access to the truth and who deserve the power to shape human society in its divine image.

What is it that characterizes the wise and separates them from the troglodytes in the cave? Clearly it is a combination of reason and abstraction. Reason alone gets you nowhere and abstraction can take you absolutely anywhere -- not necessarily your goal. Plato prescribes a reason and intuits a controlling ideal abstraction – the good that we can never

completely reach but towards which we ought always to strive. The practical implications of Plato's philosophy are anything but abstract; they have clear political consequences that support a Philosopher King selecting, educating and leading those capable of this kind of wisdom. At an intermittent stage of enlightenment are those capable of limited abstraction, who are capable of *virtu* -- putting honour and duty above material needs. These constitute the military that defend the best political approximation of the good. The rest of the people are the labouring people who generally care only for sensory satisfaction and have little if no capacity for wisdom of any kind.

Such a political approximation of the eternal good may strike our democratic ears as offensive. But it does nullify one of the biggest problems of democracy, i.e. that so many people act stupidly. We may also be offended by the genetic implications of Plato's theory, i.e. that some people are more inherently rational than others. But at least Plato's ideal society is prepared to identify and educate those who demonstrate an aptitude for genius. I don't want to go into whether or not Plato's system has merit, or even to contextualize it within the elitist and hierarchical attitude that prevailed in his time. Certainly, the hierarchical implications of Plato's *Republic* made it relative easy to translate into the feudal society that slowly emerged from the ruins of the Roman Empire. What I really want to talk about is something that is often obscured, and that is the implicit mysticism of Platonism.

Even if you were to develop a rationally organized Republic led by a Philosopher King, you would only be scratching the surface of Plato's ideal world. The ultimate goal of wisdom is to discover the *good* not to construct a good society, although that may be a consequence. What does it mean to discover the *good*? For Plato, it is not enough to know the good as an abstraction. The whole point of the exercise is, as far as humanly possible, to merge with the good, to become one with the good. That is what we are ultimately searching for, union with the divine. What we want is to *merge* with goodness so that there is no distinction, no difference, between the human and the ideal. We may not be able to do that continuously, but we can have moments of *crystallization*. And that, says Plato, is what is meant by this mysterious word that we call love – yearning for absolute union with absolute goodness.

Desire and Appraisal

Our contemporary use of the term *Platonic love* makes absolutely no sense if you've read *The Symposium*. It's central protagonist and intellectual hero is Plato's former teacher Socrates. And Socrates is clearly a guy who finds it difficult, but by no means impossible, to control his dick. He's described as looking like a *satyr*, which is a highly sexual creature in Greek mythology. He clearly has a thing for Alcibiades and handsome young men in general. He is not at all the kind of asexual creature that we associate with Platonic relationships. Quite the reverse; one of his overriding characteristics and a major theme of *Symposium* is desire. And, if Plato knew anything at all about desire, he knew that desire had a sexual basis. Plato may not like sexuality; he may think it gross; but he couldn't think it away. He could only *transcend* it.

Suggesting that desire has a sexual basis, and that Socrates was highly sexual, is not the same as saying that love is primarily sexual. Desire clearly is an essential component of love, but desire need not be stuck in sexuality. It can lead to a love that eclipses and submerges mere sensuality. What makes Socrates so real for us in *Symposium* is that he accepts his own sexuality; what makes him a role model for others is that he recognizes the mandate of much higher love. One can easily imagine Socrates engaging in sexual acts with his young lovers, but *never* at the risk of obscuring a higher love. Physical contact is perfectly natural; it may even take forms in Plato's time to which we would object today; but sexual relationships must be recalibrated in terms of truths that are eternal. Desire, especially sexual desire, is a beginning and means rather than an end. True love is a relationship, not with people, but with goodness.

It might come as a surprise to you, given Plato and Greek society's clear preference for homosexual relations, that Socrates had a wife. In fact, he had two wives. One day both wives were mad at him and to avoid the hassle, he went outdoors and sat on the steps of his house. His wives didn't let him off the hook; they came outside and dumped a bucket of water on his head. He is reported as saying something like: "I knew that where there was thunder, rain would eventually follow." There are several points to telling you this story. First, the homoeroticism of Greek society didn't preclude marriage to women. Second, homoeroticism involved a system of evaluation that implied, for the elite, that men were more suitable objects of desire than women. Third, male relationships with women were not worth talking about, at least not as serious subject matter. In fact, marriage wasn't so much a relationship as a necessity, either for individuals or society.

It's hard for us to get into the heads and sexual motivations of the Greeks, but there are a couple of points that are worth making. The Greek discussion of sexuality and love was a discussion among the elite. You can only have a real love relationship between equals or relative equals. Because women were not the equals of men at any level in Greek society, it was natural that any desire that you might have for women was confined to the sexual level. Another consideration that entered into Greek thinking about love was that excessive desire for women was tainted by its very sexuality. It was entirely too close to the natural world, which, for the Greeks, was not the arena for human authenticity; rather, it was the world of beasts. The focus on male and female bonding was appropriate for animals and slaves, not for Greeks who sought to embody what they called *arête* or excellence.

Some of the characteristics of Greek love may surprise but they should not be allowed to confound our understanding of what was going on. At all levels of elite Greek society, love expressed an ideal that always already involved an appraisal of love beyond mere sensuality. However, Plato wanted to argue that there was a great deal of confusion and hypocrisy in the various appraisals of love among his contemporaries, and set up Socrates as the single wise man who had penetrated into its essential core. Socrates' imaginative appraisal of love – his idealistic idealization and his understanding that true love was something driving beyond the physical -- would have an enormous impact on western culture In fact, Plato is a vital source for virtually all succeeding discussions of love. In the words of Irving Singer, "Courtly love, Romantic love, and major emphases in

religious love all take root in him. They form a single tradition, albeit internally divided, that naturalistic and realistic writers have attacked in a variety of ways. But even among the latter, from Lucretius to Freud, Platonic elements often contribute to the governing mode of expression."

The Lover and the Beloved

For the Greeks of the late classical period, love may have included minor elements of bestowal but it was primarily about appraisal. The beloved object needed to be demonstrably worthy of identification, which is precisely why love could not take place between non equals, i.e. between a man and a woman or a citizen and a slave. To bestow love on someone unworthy was not entirely inconceivable for the Greeks; they undoubtedly knew that it happened; but they didn't think it qualified as love. To understand, not necessarily approve, this attitude, you only need to consider how much our modern conceptions of love have been enriched by the greater equality between men and women of all classes. Inequality may not make love impossible, but it obviously puts up barriers to the mutuality of love.

Plato, a la Socrates, is operating within this overriding paradigm of appraisal when he gets invited to the Banquet. We know that he is a serious guy; he arrives fashionably late because he is absorbed by his own thoughts. Plato deploys all the techniques of a novelist, techniques that he pretends to disavow, in order to predispose us to Socrates' intellectual superiority. The literary elements are structured in such a way that Socrates always gets the dramatic last word and his opponents cave in equally dramatically; you can't really take Plato's appeal to reason, argument and conviction entirely at its face value. Plato wants to disavow any reliance on literary techniques because he knows that these are the stock in trade of the Greek poets, especially the tragic dramatists that have such a powerful impact on people's emotions. But Platonic love, the real thing, is not primarily about emotion; it is about a judicious appraisal that Plato calls the truth.

The mistake that the young up-and-comer and, eventual military and political catastrophe, for Greek society, Alcibiades, makes is not understanding just how far beyond physical attraction true loving abides. To interpret love at the physical level, as Alcibiades does, is not just a misunderstanding, it is a sign of a fatal character flaw. Alcibiades will never be allowed a sexual relationship with a man like Socrates unless he is willing to move to a higher understanding. Socrates tacitly appraises Alcibiades as an unworthy candidate for love, at the same time as he provides an object lesson in true love that Alcibiades cannot appreciate. Plato implicitly describes his own as well as Socrates' love for young candidates in virtue and rescues his former teacher from the Greek republic's criticism of his having corrupted young Athenians. The relationship with Alcibiades is a crucial part of the story. Whereas the first part is a Socratic dialogue, the second part demonstrates the way in which Socrates practices and embodies what he preaches. Socrates is simultaneously the voice of reason/virtue/truth and a "concrete individual". Body and mind are in complete harmony, but only because the mind rules.

The student-teacher relationship is not Plato's ideal model of love, but it is the way that a superior conception of love can be transmitted to others. The merging of the sage with the absolute is the ideal and mysterious event that transcends earthly love and fulfills its promise. Clearly, there are elements of bestowal in the caring that a teacher feels for his student and the responsibility he feels for the full development of his protégé's character. These elements of bestowal, however, are always subservient to an appropriate appraisal of the particular level of development. It is precisely that focus on 'tough love' to which young Alcibiades objects. Socrates is a cool customer. You might compare him to a Zen master in his detachment, except that a Zen master would probably feel more compassion. You might even argue that Alcibiades would have turned out better if Socrates had loved, or at least understood, him more. But then you wouldn't have grasped Platonic eros, which constantly and continually appraises rather than bestows love gratuitously.

In order to appreciate why Plato doesn't want to get stuck in the quagmire of bestowal, you only need to follow his argument in the dialogues of *The Symposium*. There are five speeches on love that taken together contribute to, but never complete, love's ontology. There is, as Irving Singer suggests, a great deal that Socrates would have been willing to accept in the formulations that proceeded his, but most of the other formulations are too static in limiting desire in contemporary culture. Socrates not only wants to build on the realizations of Greek society but, what is so important for the discussion of love, he seeks an intellectual breakthrough from traditional and functional conceptions operating in his contemporary society (hence the very real threat to the status quo of a man like Socrates). Apart from the speech of Socrates himself, the most important of all the speeches on love for understanding Plato is probably that of the playwright Aristophanes. It is the most beautiful speech in *The Symposium* certainly, and the one most often cited. What is it, do you think, that Plato would embrace in this speech and what would he reject?

Different scholars make different arguments, so it is important to read for yourself. You don't need to agree or disagree with me. I think that Aristophanes has a fundamental intuition of the central axis of love. By framing his powerful conception in ancient myth and legend, he provides a powerful metaphor for the nature of desire. But by relating that metaphor to love as it exists in the contemporary Greek world, Aristophanes completely misses the capacity of desire – of eros --for transcendence. It is fascinating that the severed halves of the spherical forms that once threatened the gods (as if something that is eternal could ever be threatened by man) are divided basically into homosexual, lesbian and bisexual types. That alone reflects a typically Greek reluctance to view male-female relationships as paradigmatic. Sexual procreation for Aristophanes as for Socrates is an unfortunate necessity and unworthy of idealization. Aristophanes confirms Socrates' assumption that sex is a relatively minor component in love. By far he most important insight of Aristophanes for Socrates and Plato is his wondrous description of desire as a *yearning* for a former and lost unity. Plato was also concerned about reaching a former state that might have existed prior to our human birth, and yearning was key to his analysis.

The problem with legends and myths is that they take on a life of their own and too easily become cultural artifacts rather than insightful metaphors. When Socrates talks of the ancient gods giving birth to love, these are not real characters but conceptual abstractions. Socrates has little patience with the mythic survivals in Greek literature, even if he appreciated their poetic force. Just one more reason to expel poets from an ideal Republic! The ultimate problem with mythic explanations, however, is that they invariably flatter a corrupted humanity. It is not so much their fantastical element that bothers Socrates, ironically, it is their obfuscation of and deflection from the true goal of human desire. The lost unity that we seek is not with halves of each other. That limits love to the physical and historical plane, overlooking its eternal nature. The unity towards which love is directed is abstract goodness. What Socrates clearly recognizes is that myth, legends and traditions are very human *forms* of storytelling – shadows on the cave – that capture desire rather than setting it free. If my analysis is correct, then many of the criticisms of Plato and, by implication, Western Civilization for establishing a hegemony of reason over imagination are misplaced. For Plato, reason is only a means for putting us in touch with eternal truths that are beyond anything that the more limited mythic imagination could ever imagine. Of course, if the means becomes an end, the consequences are very different. In this sense, Plato does share some blame for what we have become.

Plato wants to liberate desire by connecting it to the eternal. This might well be a wrongheaded goal but it creates a broader horizon for human consciousness and especially for the discourse surrounding love. Desire is much more than merely sexual; it is not bound by time or circumstance; it is a timeless merging with a unity that is perpetual. When this discourse eventually returns to reclaim the sexual love generated between persons it creates so many more creative possibilities than any one particular conception of love or one particular historical formulation could ever hold. It encompasses radical transformative possibilities for culture. The sexual instinct itself is transformed, not necessary as Freud thinks in terms that repress, but in ways that stimulate imaginative exploration.

But I wander ahead of myself. As you can see, I resemble Plato, not in intelligence but to the extent that I want to privilege culture over biology and possibility over function. There is an interesting *functional* argument about love presented by the first speaker, the hypocondriac Phaedrus. Now, it is the essential character of a hypocondriac that he or she is obsessed with the physical body and such a preoccupation hinders any more spiritual understanding of love. So, in advance, we shouldn't expect too much from Mr. Phaedrus. The first mistake that Phaedrus makes is to essentialize love, as for example the oldest god, rather than to see that love is a process. Love is not a noun but a verb. Characterized by desire, love itself cannot be the goal for Socrates, but is something that propels us towards the goal. Yet even this static conception of love as a social phenenomenon that has always existed and will always exist has its merits. Love is not only a glue that binds individuals together in society, but it stimulates virtue. When you are in love with someone, you want to posses and demonstrate qualities that are *loveable*. In Phaedrus's rather static understanding of Greek society in the late republic, the concept of virtue is essential civic and military. Male lovers want to appear heroic in their

defense of the Athenian city state. Phaedrus condescendingly notes that even women are willing to "sacrifice their lives for another" in a well-ordered city state.

The relationship between love and goodness should be apparent here. It is part and parcel of the attitude of appraisal that Phaedrus and Socrates share and it automatically places love on a higher sphere than sexual. The problem that Socrates would discover in Phaedrus's account is the extremely partial and limited version of goodness here. The lovers in question have not come anywhere close to real virtue because they interpret goodness in terms of the approval of significant others. They show no signs of ever embracing, of loving, goodness for its own sake. Nonetheless, as Plato suggests elsewhere, this kind of love – a love of honour that stimulates courage – is a far cry from sexual love. This kind of love is ultimately inferior but it helps sustains society. Moreover, it is the greatest form of love that most people are capable of. This heroic love, which will in later generations be referred to as *aristocratic love*, is partial and fragile. In a well-run and tightly regulated society, it may thrive, as the case of Sparta demonstrates. Unfortunately, it is subject to corruption as the case of the ostensibly brave soldier-leader Alcibiades demonstrates. Only when bravery is controlled by wisdom – when those with silver souls are dominated by their golden counterparts – will there be stability.

Of particular interest to Socrates in Phaedrus's speech is his elevation of the *lover* over the *beloved*. All the world loves a lover is a common assumption and led to the worship of youth, even in Socrates' time. But for Socrates, it is not the lover who should count but the beloved object. In many academic accounts of *The Symposium*, scholars argue that, contrary to first appearance, the lover is not Socrates but Alcibiades. Socrates is appropriately the *beloved* because his approval is what Alcibiades should be seeking. What we have here is an understanding that love driven by passion is a form of madness and that the actions of the lover are predictably excessive. But the beloved's interest in the lover is more cool and calculated. The appraising process has a much higher degree of legitimacy. What can we deduce from this? Plato is underlining the superior position of the individual who is less engaged emotionally – constructing a fascinating distinction between spectator and agent – and, even more interesting, effectively denying the mutuality of love between persons. Why might he want to make this point? First, he wants to distinguish true love from passion. Second, he wants to suggest that mutuality is impossible in earthly love and that the unity we seek can only be achieved, to the degree that it can be achieved, with *goodness*. The love of *persons* is inherently problematic and ultimately unsatisfying.

Hopefully you are beginning to realize just how complex and fascinating *The Symposium* is as an indicator of Platonic Eros. It is worth quickly going through the other speakers in succession before turning to Plato's outline of the stages through which true love as appraisal ought to travel towards its mystical and mysterious conclusion. Pausanias, the homosexual lover of the party's host, Agathon, provides a hint of Socrates argument by condemning Phaedrus's static concept of love. He argues that human experience demonstrates the existence of at least two kinds of love, one of which is higher and more heavenly than the other. Most men are incapable of appreciating the higher love because

they are mired in sensuality. Among this category are men who love women; these are obviously motivated by the desire to couple and typically lack the capacity for more refined appraisal. Refinement, for Pausanias means confining one's relationship to males on the grounds that they are the stronger, more intelligent and worthier sex.

Again, Plato might appear to superficially agree with some of this, but there is a deeply disturbing tone to Pausanias's speech. I do not mean that he defends pederasty or the physical love for young boys. I doubt that Socrates or Plato would have a problem with that. What is much more disturbing is that we suspect that Pausanias is either deceiving his audience or practicing a form of self-deceit. His bottom line is that, as long as the motivation for sexual contact is pure, anything goes. This is the classic rationalization of a child molester that couches the love of the lesser Aphrodite within the love of divine Aphrodite. The reader suspects that it is really the lesser Aphrodite is in command here, especially since the speaker is so eager to defy all conventional "standards" and to place no limits on sexual desire. Whether consciously or not, Pausanias apes the language of virtue as a mask for sexual license.

How would Plato or Socrates respond to Pausanias? I think he would argue that there is certainly exists baser and higher love, but the distinction needs to be much sharper than the line that Pausanias draws. Love that is more spiritual demonstrates itself by an attachment to what the beloved (lover) needs rather than what the lover (beloved) needs. Moreover, and much more important, spiritual or refined love distinguishing itself from the physical plane by its commitment to truth. A clear commitment to the eternal nature of truth makes one incapable of self-deceit. There is nothing in Pausanias that suggests he has a real grasp of the higher love that he invokes. Plato does a superb job of showing us how easily people con themselves and others when they say they love. Even more telling, he makes the point that many religious advocates of a larger love invoke. Love confined to *persons* is massively subject to abuse. We cannot hope to successfully love other people unless we incorporate that love in something bigger than ourselves, whether it be God or an eternal form. You might disagree but it is a compelling argument.

There is only one speaker for whom Plato seems to have no respect. Pausanias is succeeded by the doctor whose name is a mouthful –Eryximachus. For convenience, let's call him Eric. Eric's a doctor in a society that held doctors in fairly high esteem. Plato does a hatchet job on Eric by showing that he doesn't have two brain cells to put together. In the process, Plato also helped to relegate medicine to something of a sideshow in European life for centuries. Eric has no real ideas of his own; he slavishly borrows his basic theory from Pausanias, articulating a commonplace argument centering on the humours or bodily fluids that need to be balanced in order to prevent disease. The lower kinds of love he describes, partly as the byproduct of the interaction of body chemicals with the environment and partly by the influence of astronomical phenomena. What probably irritated Plato most about the doctors of his time, apart from their tendency to reduce spiritual defects to physical or supernatural phenomena, was their pretension to understanding things that they could never understand. Eric's knowledge base is entirely random and hapzard. He puts *divination* or magic on a par with other

forms of knowledge and, for all his encyclopedic but superficial wisdom, he is not far removed from being a tribal witch doctor.

What happens when knowledge is a patchwork quilt of myth, magic and conventional wisdom? For one thing, the true and abstract nature of love gets misplaced. In particular, desire becomes the subject of medication, fasting or even blood-letting, rather than the path to a higher understanding. If you want to appreciate why Plato held Eryximachus in such low esteem, you only need to consider what Plato might think of the medical profession in our own society, that dulls excessive desire with narcotics while stimulating inadequate desire with viagra. A very similar approach to balancing the humours in the interest of normalcy is shared by the medical professionals of the past and present. Plato wasn't interested in achieving normalcy at the expense of transcendent wisdom.

All of which leads us to the tragic poet, Agathon, who was the Athenian's flavour of the day. Plato so cleverly and effortlessly positions Agathon's speech that it is easy to rush through it. Certainly, he hints that only Socrates is the wise one here and that Agathon, however brilliant he might be as understanding something more deeply, is going to be on the defensive. At the same time, Agathon is the only one worthy of debate with Socrates because he appreciates one essential point: an adequate treatment of eros must not focus on the derivative or particular characteristics of love, or even its contribution to human happiness. A true appraisal must focus on a concept – *love in its own nature*. By elevating the discussion to the *essence* of love, Agathon unveils a radically new ontology of love. In order to understand that ontology, we need first to view love as a *new* rather than an *old* God. Agathon describes love as a new or young god because its power is not yet established in human history. Although Agathon believes that love has existed longer than humanity – i.e. is antediluvian – he argues that it must be regarded as younger than the other gods because all of those Gods reflect the proddings of experience or Necessity. Love is more idealistic, attaching itself to the more "peaceful and friendly" aspects of civilization. Love is also more "sensitive", attaching itself to the human soul rather than the body and only finding a truly suitable abode in refined souls. You may not have noticed the *dualism* being invoked here, but a sharp dividing line is drawn by Agathon between love as an ideal form and the human history of love. Viewed in itself and for itself, love is pure and unadulterated goodness. Love is "sovereign" despite not being recognized as such by the vast majority of human beings. Despite youth, love is sovereign to all the other gods, particularly Aries, the God of War, who played such a large part in the Greek concept of civic duty and in the cultivation of excellence or aretē.

Socrates is the consummate teacher. He's waited just for this moment. Agathon is on the verge of demonstrating that physical love is merely a lesser actualizations of a more absolute form of goodness whose fundamental nature is love. "Love is supreme in beauty and goodness himself". When Socrates says that this is a "wonderful performance", he is not being one bit sarcastic. What then does he consider the problem with Agathon's speech? First, he says that it is a "panagyric" and by this he means that it falls to easily into poetic license rather than a "plain speaking" of the "truth". Second, in his rigorous questioning, he suggests that this form of idealization is bound to obscure the relationship between the human and the ideal because it describes love as a god, as desire

seeking to establish itself empirically – settling down in sensitive natures and sympathetic conditions. You can't turn a desire into an object, even an ideal object, because love is an action rather than an end. Love is "desire" and desire means that you lack something. Love is a *process*. Agathon confuses love with goodness itself, a confusion that is easy to make but that essentializes love. His insight into goodness as an ideal form needs to be logically separated from love and re-connected to Aristophanes' powerful concept of yearning.

Love is not the goal. Love is not goodness. Love is "lack" and goodness lacks nothing. What love desires is *union* with something higher, Agathon's *goodness*. The whole point of love, for Socrates, is to merge with the good. You don't do that by obsessing over, or trying to understand love itself; instead, you focus on the goal towards which love is pointing you. This distinction is absolutely crucial for Plato and it explains why true love can never stay at the realm of the physical and ought to move towards what we would call the spiritual. It is an operation of the soul's yearning rather than the body's needs; Agathon was correct in arguing that true love never remains within the realm of Necessity. Physical love is lesser; spiritual love is superior. The only really appropriate question now is: how do we move from the lower to the higher. Plato's answer is monumental for the future of Western consciousness – we focus on our *reason*. Reason shows us the way.

Let's pause for a moment to consider some of the assumptions that Plato is working with, assumptions that may confound rigorous philosophy, but that have become embedded at various levels and in subtle ways within our culture.

- The first is that there exists a perfect truth that we all yearn to know.

- The second is that *possession* of the truth is not only theoretically possible but also is the only worthwhile human endeavour.

- The third, implied in the second, that desire always seeks to possess; it is fundamenatlly *acquisitive*.

- The fourth is that the gulf between the physical and the spiritual is enormous and, consequently, the only justifiable significance of the physical is to serve the spiritual. A clear body-mind dualism is evident here.

- The fifth is that spiritually must equate with rationalism because the senses and emotions are the lowest forms of desire. Reason in Plato becomes hegemonic.

- The sixth, and in some ways the most fascinating, is that the search for knowledge, truth, the ideal is *egocentric*. The search is not conducted by a empirical community with its own values and traditions, but by the rational and wise subject.

- Seventh, the appropriate focus/target is no longer on the physical environment or on real *persons*. Desire is misdirected if focused on the community, the environment, or persons.
- Finally, you might want to state the obvious, it is rational *males* and not irrational *females* who are the subjects of desire.

The female principle, intimately associated with nature and sexuality in primitive tribal religions, does not disappear entirely. After all, the mythic and magical world world still retains its powerful pull and a residual role for Diotima, Socrates' instructor in the "art of love". Plato interestingly retains elements of a mystical connection to butress his cerebral journey towards goodness. He still feels faint stirrings of the siren song that tortured but could not defeat cunning Odysseus. Once Diotima has served her legitimizing and framing purpose, however, the feminine principle she embodies can be conveniently discarded, if not suppressed.

The Ontology of Desire: Mounting Love's Ladder

By the time Socrates arrived on the scene, the mythic world was already well on the way to becoming a nostalgic memory for those who counted in the Greek city state. The latter substituted a manly emphasis on heroic or clever communal service for feminized nature. This male definition of excellence, in Greek the concept of aretē, was transformed utterly by Plato's recasting of desire. Aretē now becomes a personal search for wisdom. Wisdom or union with goodness is the goal; the mechanism is eros or desire. Eros has an entirely new ontology. To the extent that a mythical or mystical merging in still possible, it must henceforth conform to the appropriate stages of desire. These are anything but mystically given. The ladder of desire is paved by emotional self-control, rationalistic abstraction and the subjugation of the senses.

Platonic love has a bright side. After all, it is a fundamentally optimistic search for true beauty with a big pay off for those who can control their emotions and keep their eye on the goal. Socrates even guarantees that the pay off will *transcend* all partial allurements of beauty. But there is also a dark side, the *dark horse* that Socrates describes and that Diotima underlines by suggesting that, compared with true beauty and knowledge, everything else is "ugly". Desire, however, can bridge the gap between sensual man and the divine truth. Love is described as a "demi-god" or a "spirit" that moves between the world of men and the world of eternal truth. Rationalized desire is the only thing that holds these dualistic forces together.

In an ingenious explication Diotima describes love as the child of Poverty and Contrivance. Poverty is easily identifiable as the lack, the longing or the yearning characteristic of all human desire. It is Contrivance that requires some explanation. Contrivance is something subtly different from Agathon's Necessity; it is cunning, inventive, and creative. It refuses to stay in the realm of Necessity and constantly seeks to escape to higher ground. Contrivance is not just reason; it is a peculiar and essentially western kind of reason, it is cunning, resourceful and intensely practical. All of this restless energy is engaged in appraisals, seeking a refuge from its poverty. What it

unknowingly desires is “perpetual possession” of the good for itself. But, how will it know that it is moving towards beauty or goodness? In keeping with the egocentric focus, it measures progress by individual happiness. Typical individualistic searches for happiness are doomed to failure, because they narrowly focus on earthly goods and relationships that have no objective value. Real wisdom recognizes that various love objects – such as sex or money – are not good appraisals because they do not result in any lasting “happiness”. They fail to silence the ‘pangs’ of desire.

The mistake made by all living things that cling to the natural world is their failure to abstract from experience and, thereby, to begin climbing the ladder of desire. The natural world is connected to the supernatural world of forms by principles. Principles are axioms constructed from concepts, and these have a greater reality than anything we might describe as experience. “Natural objects of love” may not generate happiness, but they can be abstracted into principles. The principle that all the procreative activities of nature demonstrates is a desire for “immortality” – “the perpetual replacement of an old member of the race by a new”. Human beings are superior to animals, not in their immortality, but in their deliberate seeking of immortality in their **progeny**. Bearing in mind the triadic relation between goodness, happiness and immortality, we arrive at the typical gradations of human desire.

Desire is a blunt instrument and not everyone is equally expert at shaping or *contriving* desire. Wisdom lies in the power to progressively abstract and Diotima provides Socrates with an object lesson in contrivance as abstraction. An ignorant human being remains closer to the brute and instinctive world of nature and likely associate progeny with physical procreation. Such a person will look for beauty in the body of a woman to slake his desire. The result will be children, nature’s solution to mortality. A higher type of humanity seeks beauty of soul in addition to beauty of body, and Plato’s assumption is that this ideal type of relationship can only exist between males who typically begin in a mentoring relationship and jointly mentor any male children. Leaving aside the sexism, the concept of progeny is redefined as not merely physical flesh, but spiritual beings. From such relationships, forming a virtuous community, one can deduce a more abstract concept of progeny in terms of service to the larger community that will live on in memory.

That these are all forms of loving that have a connection to the eternal, Plato does not dispute. What he does want to do is to rank or order them hierarchically in terms of the ability to abstract to more universal principles. Thus *progeny* becomes not merely physical creation but creative shaping and service. None of this would have seemed out of line with the attitudes of many Athenian upper class males. The conceptual leap that Diotima wants Socrates to make is to abstract beauty and goodness much further and to climb up the ladder of desire, not only from physical to moral beauty but to morality, science and wisdom as higher instances of the good. Plato’s language is worth paying attention to because he describes this ladder in anything but rationalistic terms. He describes an *initiation* in the *mysteries* of abstraction. Reason for us is a technique; but rationalization in the form of abstraction for Plato clearly is something *wonderful* and

awesome. We are listening in on a time when reason is not simply replacing magic but is inherently magical.

The ultimate goal, of course, is beauty and goodness complete and undivided, which can only be glimpsed by the magic of reason. The language describing this final goal is rhapsodic:

> The man who has been guided thus far in the mysteries of love, and who has directed his thoughts towards examples of beauty in due and orderly succession, will suddenly have revealed to him as he approaches the end of his initiation a beauty whose nature is marvelous indeed, the final goal, Socrates, of all his previous efforts. This beauty is first of all eternal; it neither comes into being nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes; next, it is not beautiful in part or ugly in part, not beautiful at one time and ugly at another, nor beautiful in this relation and ugly in that, not beautiful here and ugly there, as varying according to its beholders; nor again will this beauty appear to him like the beauty of a face or hands or anything else corporal, or like the beauty of a thought or a science, or like beauty which has its seat in something other than itself, be it a living thing or the earth or the sky or anything else whatever; he will see it as absolute, existing alone with itself, unique, eternal, and all other beautiful things as partaking of it, yet in such a manner that, while they come into being and pass away, it neither undergoes any increase or diminution nor suffers any change.

Physical beauty and human love will always have a component of ugliness for Plato. They are useful only as a stage on the ladder of the journey of desire towards the absolute. Ultimately, Socrates has little respect for "beauty tainted by human flesh and colour and a mass of perishable rubbish".

"No Human Being Has Ever Seen Socrates Drunk"

These are the words of Alcibiadies, who comes out looking very badly in his attempt to outwit Socrates. Plato's Socrates, for we will never know the real historical Socrates, is an impressive creation. What he articulates and extends is a spiritual theory of love that moves us past the biological, the physical and, obviously the *personal*. What I personally find fascinating about Plato is that love is the essential link between the human and the divine. What I personally like about Plato is the realization that love is a highly creative act, capable of considerable abstraction and enrichment. What I find disturbing about Plato is his ultimate rejection of human sexuality, his marginalization of women, and his overriding interpretation of love in terms of appraisal. There is nothing intrinsically wrong in appraising others – it would be impossible not to – but appraisals that focus on abstractions denies others the status of *persons*. There is something rather cold, calculating and even sinister in the Socratic evaluation of others. There is also a paradoxical focus on the acquisitive ego and individual happiness, even if desire is focused on a good that counts individual "goods" as spacious and necessarily includes the good of others. It not difficult to see how the rational ego would eventually come to associate happiness with 'goods' when absolute and universal forms became myths.

There is no understanding, and certainly no approval, of love in the lives of everyday people. If such people have a place, it is on the very lowest rung of the ladder of desire. Needless to say, there is no respect for the women who give birth to the children of the men who inhabit the higher rungs. Children are respected in terms of physical beauty, strength, and the potential for honour or wisdom. Everywhere in Plato's ideal society, abstractions rule and real people become shadows on the wall of the cave. It is not a Republic that I would ever want to belong to. I would go so far as to suggest that this imaginary republic contains some of the seeds for the inhuman technopoly that Western civilization appears to be aiming for. Plato can't be blamed for the abduction, misappropriation or betrayal of loving, but we can legitimately point to a latent tendency in Platonic thought to suspend eros altogether in an absorption with the absolute that resembles nothing so much as death.

The intellectual historian, Irving Singer, suggests that Plato isn't writing so much about love as the "purposeful life", with purpose overwhelmingly defined in terms rationality rather than emotion. I'd like to think of the historical Socrates as very different from his student Plato. If some of the depictions of him as a guy who has a normal libido are correct, he doesn't seem to be such a bad guy. But just as I'm skeptical about anyone who never gets drunk, I'm even more suspicious of someone who can drink without ever appearing to be drunk. Plato clearly wants to present his teacher as someone whose got his eye on the real intellectual prize, but I prefer my heroes to be more recognizably human. Human weakness and vulnerability is not something we should look for in Plato's Socrates.

My personal reservations aside, Plato's discussion of love and the good reverberated through Western culture and provided a huge stimulus for the erotic imagination. Many of us still believe along with Plato that love is life's greatest adventure and, in the words of John Lennon, "love is all you need". We still have difficultly dealing with human sexuality on its own terms. We remain obsessed with what is purest and most spiritual in love. We spin creative abstractions around love and make them our "reality". And love for many of us has truly become a yearning for union, if no longer with eternal forms, then with each other. If Plato conned us into believing that such a merging – such a happiness -- was possible, then maybe he bears some responsibility for our pervasive unhappiness.

Key words: assess, estimate, proportionaity, intentionality

3. Love and the Good Life

Introduction: Virtue and Rationality

There is a great deal of Plato in Aristotle, particularly in terms of viewing love overwhelmingly as *appraisal*. Love and friendship are evaluated overwhelmingly in terms of an egocentric search for goodness. The goal is to *possess* goodness for oneself. Of course, this kind of Greek egocentrism is very different from what we would call selfishness because it has absolutely no basis in crude utilitarianism or even personal pleasure seeking. Its goal is a much more complex, rich and sustained happiness. Goodness only targets the virtuous and only the virtuous *man* can hope to achieve happiness. The resulting equation DESIRE pursues GOODNESS culminating in VIRTUE = HAPPINESS is one that impacted western civilization mightily and continues to resonate today. What deserves to be noticed is that this view of happiness and goodness is a huge abstraction that consistently focuses attention away from everyday sources of happiness, always pointing to some higher virtue or goodness. This tendency towards abstraction is particularly marked in Plato where goodness become *the* ideal unifying form towards which all desire ought to be yearning.

The major analytical difference between Plato and his student Aristotle is that the latter rejects all ideal forms. The abstract concept of goodness *in itself* as the only true and originating reality cannot hold, argues Aristotle, if we look at the *facts* of human experience. Human happiness cannot be defined in terms of absolutes; our desires and our happiness must always relate to our *practical activities as human beings*. Virtue and goodness are not abstract ends but rather, **virtue is a practical activity**. Virtuous desire must always be focused on something concretely real and, for Aristotle, that reality is the **good life**. By bringing philosophy back down to earth, to a more recognizably empirical reality, so to speak, Aristotle shifted the focus away from goodness and happiness as ideal or mystical forms and placed it more firmly within the virtuous community. One learns virtue within a specific community that approximates in its unique context what it means to be a good man. One's success as a student of virtue and a candidate for happiness depends entirely on how well one functions and *performs* in this particular factual community.

Since the real community is Aristotle's focus for virtuous activity, we might want to ask what specific kind of community is he envisioning? There is at present a school of neo-Aristotelian scholars who subscribe to something called *virtue ethics* -- the belief that virtue is constructed relative to a given community and incapable of being critiqued from the outside. They rightly cite Aristotle's contention that virtue is an action orientation towards the mean between extremes that is constructed within a given community of

values. Having the appropriate habits and disposition for pursuing a judicious and prudential kind of happiness is inconceivable outside of a particular construction of laws, morals and norms that all support one another. Virtue ethicists clearly line up with Aristotle in suggesting that happiness is never something that can be pursued directly, it is, if you like, a *happy* consequence of living excellently, of *flourishing* in one's community. Virtue and happiness are dependent on the formation of *character*, first in the family and then in the community. Character formation is difficult if the community of values gets too large, too differentiated or too factionalized. Virtue ethicists tend to emphasize traditional values within small scale, or at least relatively uniform communities. Not surprisingly, they tend to be highly conservative and civic minded because, for them, it is the community of values that is the privileged reality.

When modern virtue ethicists invoke Aristotle, obviously they are not inventing something that isn't there. Aristotle does believe that the community is key and even grants the community the right to legislate and indoctrinate values. Virtue for Aristotle ostensibly is an activity that is all about finding and enacting the mean between opposing and overlapping values within one's community and, without a communal anchor, would be inconceivable for Aristotle who always thought that virtue and happiness must relate to social *facts* rather than intangible ideals. But where most virtue ethicists completely miss the point with respect to Aristotle is in ignoring first his particular focus in the Greek city state and, second, his analysis of the greater *fact* that is human nature. Aristotle's particular focus on the Greek city state, and his relative dismissal of other cultures as tribal and brutish, suggests that virtuous happiness can only be pursued in an environment that shares his conception of *enlightened egoism*, i.e. that privileges calculative human reason as Greek civilization did. Aristotle's theory of the human, in line with his biology and physics, similarly privileges the rational faculty as the one that distinguish humans from other levels of nature and that forms our *essential character*. Since it is reason that defines us as human beings, virtue cannot be relative but must be defined overwhelmingly as a rational activity.

None of this means that human beings are *only* defined in terms of rationality – we are also flesh and blood creatures – but it does mean that virtue and happiness *ought* to be defined rationally. And this is precisely what a modern relativist can't accept, whether it consist in the smug superiority of the Greek city state that turned its defeated enemies into slaves or the white man's burden of more recent times that transformed vast parts of the undeveloped world into European colonies. There is no way of getting around the fact that Aristotle viewed virtue overwhelmingly in terms of a peculiarly Western reason that contributed to the judgment of other societies as inferior. His political, biological and ethical theories fitted very neatly with the evolution of European society as it moved out of its feudal insularity and set out on the path of hegemony. By Shakespeare's time, Aristotelian theory completely dominated in the universities and provided the underpinnings for a rationally ordered and expanding society.

We can't go into all of that in a course on love, but it is useful to keep it in the back of our minds. For as down to earth and practical as Aristotle may sometimes sound, his writings had a clear ideological thrust. They justified an anti-democratic control that not

only elevated the most rational elements in the community into positions of power (Plato had tried to do something similar) but also pinpointed how rationally minded legislators could aim at "the excellent performance of typically human tasks" (Barnes xxxvii). This emphasis on increasing the technical functionality of what Foucault calls *bio power* adds a completely new and potentially sinister element to Greek rationality. If we add to this a powerful rationalization for the self-interested behaviour of those who define themselves as the wise, we get a recipe for social control. What in Plato is "suggestive, probing, imaginative" (Singer, 91) becomes a "systematic" agenda with practical consequences for Aristotle.

Happiness as *Eudemonia*

While Aristotle can't be blamed for all the uses to which his theory was put, we can legitimately point to the elitist and controlling nature of his theory, much more poised, pointed and practical than his teacher Plato. At the same time, it is important to be fair and to assess Aristotle's argument on his own terms. Aristotelian rationality did not aim primarily at social control or conquest, but at virtue and happiness. Aristotle's discussion of happiness ultimately and paradoxically leads to *contemplation* as the highest form of virtuous activity. Therefore, social control could never be its primary agenda. And the conquest aimed at was the conquest of all that was weak and servile in our own natures. Today, we probably tend to differentiate terms like contemplation and activity, so it's important to appreciate that Aristotle viewed contemplation as an activity, in fact the most *really human activity*. Another way to put this is to suggest that the ace contemplator is the expert rationalist and the person capable of the highest happiness.

Before we get to analyzing more precisely what Aristotle means by contemplation, we need to unpack his concept of happiness. Aristotle uses the term happiness or *eudemonia* somewhat differently and certainly more precisely that our term happiness. But he makes a point that many of us will understand intuitively or experientially. He wants to suggest that you can't really be happy unless you live a *good life*. What eudemonia implies is not simply being a good person in your heart, whatever that might mean, but being successful. Being successful means linking motivation and action towards the most appropriate goal – realizing your potential as a civilized human being. Being successful, expert or perfect at being human is something that takes a lifetime. Therefore, happiness can only be determined in the framework of an entire life's activities:

> One swallow does not make a summer; neither does one day. Similarly neither can one day, or a brief space of time, make a man blessed and happy.

What Aristotle is referring to is no intermittent joy, but the deeper satisfaction that comes from living the good life. He thinks all other satisfactions – what he calls the lesser pleasures -- pale in significance. In fact, Aristotle could not conceive of happiness apart from this desire to live a good life. Many of us can appreciate the force of this argument. Experience tells us that desire directed in other paths than the good life – i.e. personal advantage or sensual pleasure – are often more productive of pain than happiness.

We can easily appreciate Aristotle's emphasis on human flourishing. What we might find much more difficult to understand is Aristotle's tendency to essentialize what that flourishing consists of, i.e. his reduction of happiness to a rational calculation of goodness. There isn't much room for *feeling* in this equation. Aristotle's good man may seem sterile to us because he is always appraising his own best interest and highest happiness without a genuine concern for other people as individuals and *other*. The implication of Aristotle's definition of happiness certainly makes room for relationships with others, but only with others as approximations of oneself. Relationships between equally rational equals are clearly important to Aristotle and he spends considerable time describing these ideal relationships. He even is willing to define these relationships as *caring* and *loving* and *crucial to happiness*. But the focus of appraisal is always the self. To the extent that potentially lovable others depart from one's own definition and orbit of rationality, they fall off the table for happy relationship. The other is loved overwhelmingly as "a source of personal benefit" (Singer 92).

Now, you might say that I am being rather too hard on Aristotle here and turning him into a utilitarian calculator of personal advantage. It is important to underline that what one loves in another person is virtue. But this virtue *is* a personal advantage precisely because it encourages and reflects (mirrors) one's own virtue. Not that friendship and love should never *include* suitable reflections and encouragements, but that Aristotelian love either dismisses or trivializes all other considerations.

Once this point is understood – that friendship and love is defined in terms of personal goodness – a seeming contradiction in Aristotle's thought can be contextualized. The section you read ends with ideal goodness as contemplation. Now, contemplation may well be an *activity* but it is a very *solitary* activity. You don't need others for contemplation. Aristotelian contemplation is overwhelmingly an exercise of personal power, a flexing of the intellectual muscles. Once a rational person has achieved the state of contemplation, the supporting function of others recedes. Never entirely, to be sure, but in ways that make love and even friendship something of an afterthought. What Aristotle is trying to do is to ground goodness and happiness empirically, but the end point of rational cogitation is remarkably similar to Plato's.

There are important differences in Aristotle. In the first place, goodness is not suprahuman and happiness does not contemplate merging with some ideal good. The Aristotelian contemplator is still inside a flesh and blood body and remains a member of a community. He needs goods and leisure if he is to be able to contemplate at all. Contemplation remains tied to earthly understanding and appreciation; its ruling character is possession of an adequate body of knowledge rather than a never-ending desire for an elusive truth. That may be why Aristotelianism made tremendous headway in the late medieval and early modern university, where Professors were thought to *possess* and *profess* rather than to search for the truth. The contemplator brings to his mind accepted truths in "quasi-aesthetic appreciation" rather than challenges or critiques that truth. The mental mirage that is created is that of stable and reassuring body of knowledge, rather than something that is open to critique, hence the growing popularity of Aristotelianism in the late medieval Roman Catholic Church. Aristotelian contemplation ended up being

more reassuring and less dangerous than Platonic purveyors of a highly charged and imaginative *eros*. In Platonic contemplation, you still have remnants of erotic and spiritual *feeling*. Desire seems omnipresent even if sublimated. In Aristotle, desire diminishes. The kind of sexual desire that Plato put firmly on the ladder of ascension is almost completely gutted in Aristotle. Aristotle's enlightened egoist will not be troubled by sexuality because it doesn't provide any lasting happiness.

What Aristotle does so perfectly for Western civilization is to justify a self-centred and asexual search for happiness and, even more interesting, to provide individuals with the clear and recognizable *motive* for an earthly life well lived and self-satisfying. The entire tone of *The Nicomachean Ethics* is one of self-congratulation among the members of a rational elite. There certainly are wonderful bits of advice scattered among this agenda, but never forget that it is an agenda. It is the agenda of the statesman, the patriot, the legislator, and the professor, but it might not appeal to those outside of the authority and legitimizing structure. What I find most fascinating is the conclusion – the emphasis on contemplation. Love and friendship are very different, are they not, from contemplation? And, at the end of the day, it is neither the lover nor the friend, but a systems of knowledge, that is being contemplated. Happiness may require, even demand, others; but happiness ultimately is not about others but about oneself.

The Real Nature of Pleasure

Still, Aristotle differs from Plato in describing a patently human kind of love as a perfect friendship. Although this is obviously not the love of persons as complete individuals in their own right "at least it is a love of good character in other persons" (Singer, 94) and therefore a recognizable component in most close relationships. In Plato, relationships are mere stepping-stones towards goodness, but in Aristotle, long-term and relatively stable relationships seem possible. What is most telling about these relationships, however, is their complete lack of sexuality. At least in Plato's *The Symposium*, you can still recognize sexuality even as sublimated yearning. In Aristotle, sex has become something different. Sexuality takes two, and only two, possible forms. Sexuality can either be *natural* and inconsequential or unnatural and licentious. In the former, it is an unfortunately necessary mechanism of release and procreation. In the latter, it is a dreadful corruption of human reason.

In order to appreciate these different and limiting appraisals of sexuality, one needs to examine Aristotle's treatment of *pleasure*. Aristotle, consistent with his philosophy of happiness, calls pleasure the "supreme good". The appropriate pleasure for an animal, or a child, however, is very different from that for an adult human. For a fully recognized human being, the highest and most satisfying pleasure is the *good life* and the opportunity for contemplation that it affords. Aristotle thinks that would be ridiculous to consider this achievement of the rational faculties as capable of an extreme. Goodness never permits of excess. Other, and more common, descriptions of pleasure, however, do permit of excess. "The pleasures of the body" are precisely these kinds of pleasures and, among these, sexualty is pre-eminently the most powerful and the most dangerous.

What is it that makes most people, especially ignorant people, associate pleasure with sexuality, Aristotle asks? One reason is because sexual pleasure is particularly intense. It is also *remedial*, highly efficient at obliterating excessive pain particularly in young people who suffer from bodily “irritation” and “a state of vehement desire”. All such intense remedial solutions to pain, however, are like addictions and susceptible to excess. The link between sexuality and *licentiousness* is way too close for comfort. Consider, says Aristotle, the nature of sexual continence and incontinence. Sexual continence need not involve active virtue but could simply be an instance of endurance or abstinence, as in the case of someone who is afraid of the consequences of sexual penetration. Sexual incontinence can be one of two things. It can be either passive or active. It can be a case of better judgment being temporarily overwhelmed by desire or it can be a case of *choosing* desire as a goal. The former is a forgivable misjudgment that conceivably could be corrected by repentance and the adoption/inculcation of a better value system. The latter is licentiousness. The problem is that sexual pleasure cannot easily escape the turn towards licentiousness because the remedy effortlessly becomes the prescription. That’s precisely why people don’t make a clear distinction between sexual incontinence and sexual licentiousness. The intellectual line may be clear, but the experiential line will always be blurred. And what you want to avoid like the plague, if you hope to live a virtuous and happy life, is licentiousness.

If we were to cut incontinent weakness some slack, we would still be presented with a problem. The higher rational faculties of a human being are suspended when sexual desire dominates (“Who can think when sexual desire surfaces?”). That fact alone makes this type of bodily desire highly suspect. When sexual desire predominates as the addiction of choice, the rational faculties are not merely overwhelmed but entirely corrupted. Man becomes much worse than a brute for Aristotle, because animals have no choice when it comes to bodily desire and their sexual relations cannot be termed either good or vicious. People with mental diseases are also let off the hook because they lack the rational faculty to choose properly, but for Aristotle these people are sub-human because humanity is defined by its rationality. Barbarians, however, are not let off the hook because they *ought* to be more rational. This makes them the proper subjects for conquest, colonization and control. Are you beginning to see how well Aristotle supports a particular vision of Western civilization and its elevation of the rational principle?

Given this attitude towards sexuality and its potential for success, it should now come as no surprise that the normative mean for Aristotle is not love in the sexual sense but *philia* or friendship. Sexual love is at a dangerous extreme from this mean. If sexual love is to be acceptable, it must be subsumed within and controlled completely by friendship. The head must dominate the heart, reason must dictate to emotion. Just how much all of Aristotle’s discussions of love and friendship are dominated by this ultra rationalistic imperative can be seen in his treatment of different levels of emotion, where sexuality is at the very lowest level. He takes considerable time, for example, to argue that an aggressive temper is far less dangerous than bodily desire because anger still has an element of reason within it, while sexual desire eclipses rationality. Is there a fear of sexuality in Aristotle? You bet. At the very least, there is “scant regard for the society that sexual love effects” (Singer, 95).

Friendship as Philia

There is a sense in which we could pardon Aristotle on the grounds that sexuality is not the appropriate foundation for any society even the conjugal that it defines. A more mature and wiser perspective (Aristotle talks like an old man in comparison to Plato) could legitimately suggest that stable conjugal relationships may begin in sexuality but only survive in friendship. It would be a marked advancement on the male dominated consciousness of his age to view Aristotle as exploring the possibility that men and women, especially, could be *friends*. Love as a special kind of friendship has a fascinating history from the Puritans, through the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and has resurfaced again in the present. To his credit, Aristotle does mention this possibility as an empirical *fact* in the case of some husbands and wives, masters and servants, parents and children. His truncated and condescending treatment of these relationships demonstrates a number of salient points. First, none of these could be considered an ideal of friendship because they clearly are friendships between unequals. Friendships between unequals presuppose an enormous difficulty in sustaining the kind of mutual reflexivity that Aristotle views as central to love. Second, lumping in husband and wife with other relations of superordination and subordination illuminates what is clearly missing – sexuality and mutuality. Sexual affection and reciprocity bring no special *goods* to the table. Indeed, Aristotle's only serious treatment of unequal affection is that of the mother for her child, and this is a strange analysis to say the least. The child is loved not for itself but as the second self of the mother. Third, none of these relationships contain any valuation of the special or distinctive character of the other. Instead, the pressure for maintaining the relationship sits squarely on the shoulders of the subordinate party, who needs to constantly affirm the superiority of the husband, father or master. Finally, even within these "various degrees of relationship", it is the relationship between relatively equal and exclusively male brothers that registers Aristotle's greatest approval.

Given that Aristotelian friendship or what the Christian followers of Aristotle referred to as *philia* has already shuffled off sexually charged friendships as *eros* (redefining eros in the process) is it worth elaborating on his analysis of the various kinds of male friendship? I think that it is, if only because the concept of love as a special friendship is interesting, illuminates positive attributes, and is capable of interesting modulations. Also, by closely examining Aristotle's submersion of love in *philia* or friendship, we can decide what, if any, friendly features might have some significance for our modern and postmodern dilemmas and confusions surrounding love. What is particularly admirable, I think, about Aristotle's treatment of friendship is his complete and unequivocal rejection of crude utilitarian calculations in genuine caring for another.

Aristotle begins his discussion of friendship with a touching claim that friendship is a necessity, even I suppose for the contemplator. Friendship for him clearly is more important than other necessities, such as wealth, status, communal belonging etc. Friendship is even foundational for the community, presumably more foundational even than the family. A society of families need not be a real community. Only honest and

open friendship makes a community. Moreover, it is not just any kind of friendship that Aristotle is invoking; he affirms the importance of "well disposed" and genuine friends that wish each other nothing but good. Finally, friends love each other, not for any accidental qualities, but for who they really are. Given this beautiful description of "lovable" friends, perhaps we can forgive Aristotle for his sexism and elitism. After all, here we have a model society of affectionate mutually affirming equals.

Aristotle recognizes that the terminology of friendship can be misleading. For him, one always has to appreciate the core or essence of real friendship and a vocabulary that extends it by analogy. There are three kinds of *friendships* in common parlance, says Aristotle. There are friendships of *utility* or convenience. People associate with one another primarily on the basis of what they can get tangibly. This is the kind of relationship that exists between business partners who need one another in the most ethically impoverished sense – i.e. economically. Next there are friendships of *pleasure* where one simply enjoys the company of another, because they are funny, beautiful, flattering or any other kind of pleasant company. Both friendships of utility and pleasure are based on incidental characteristics and do not qualify as real, essential friendships. Finally, and much more important, there are friendships based on a mutual recognition of one another's excellence or virtue or goodness. These clearly are the only genuine and pure friendships for Aristotle; although they can contain the other two elements, they are not based upon them. Because they are more judicious, serious and significant, these relationships will be relatively few in number and will usually take time to develop. Since friendships based on goodness are the only genuine relationships, Aristotle wants to argue that all other friendships are not real and are based primarily on analogy, incidentals rather than fundamentals.

The latter kind of true friendships involves more than affectionate relationships, even if they do *resemble* feelings, because they are based on a mutual recognition of one another's moral worth. What is Aristotle getting at here? He's clearly said that friends like to be together and care about the good of one another, so why is he so hesitant to admit of feelings in the relationship? Why is he so determined call friendship a state or a faculty first rather than an emotion? It's because of something that I said earlier. It's because he wants to emphasize the element of ratio-moral calculation in genuine friendships. The joys of caring and "sharing" follow a clear trajectory of appraisal. There isn't much in the way of bestowal here, apart from a predisposition to make virtuous friendships if suitable partners become available. But that by no means implies a reduction in intimacy, which caring and sharing over time engender. Intimacy is superior to superficial emotion; it is a deep and lasting connection. One is inclined to ask Aristotle why friendship can't be simultaneously affectionate and deeply intimate, and why virtuous friendship has to exclude such passions, even if they are deemed inferior?

Aristotle's practical advice about friendships can occasionally be offensive, but it has a clear basis in empirical reality. The young are disposed to make friendships based on pleasure rather than worth and need lessons in value. They mistake affection for intimate knowledge of another. The old get spleenic and cranky; they can maintain relations but not easily form new ones. Friendships between unequals are highly precarious because

even virtue and goodness cannot easily compensate for significant differences in situation. Losses in wealth and status can be more easily supported than differences in virtue, but the former will make it difficult for people to continue interacting on the equal footing that true friendship implies. It is for precisely this reason, suggests Aristotle, that we cannot wish every possible blessing on our best friends; if our wish be granted, we might lose our equality and our friendship. All of this we can understand practically. The fundamental and unifying principle behind all of Aristotle's practical advice, however, may come as something of a shock: "it is for himself that everyone most of all wishes what is good". A good man, says Aristotle elsewhere, "is his own best friend". This affirmation has been given many labels including, appropriately, "the doctrine of self-love". On first blush, it seems inconsistent with a treatise on ethics.

It might come as a further surprise that Aristotle immediately follows this introduction of the *doctrine of self love* (that he will develop more fully later on) with the argument that, in an intimate relationship, it is better to love than to be loved. Aristotle admits that most people would rather be the beloved than the lover. Most people are weak, succeptable to flattery, and fail to appreciate enlightened egoism. The reason the lover is superior to the beloved is that the lover actively projects himself and his virtue in the act of appraising whereas the beloved is more passive and needy. The best outcome, of course, is mutual recognition and reciprocity but, since in most relations there will be a difference between the lover and the beloved, the more active and substantial activity consists in loving. This is a highly masculine view of love and, arguably, fails to account for the quality of surrender and transcendence through that surrender in a love that is giving. It is fascinating that Aristotle cites the female loving of a mother for her child as an example of giving love, without bothering to explore its characteristics. What Aristotle would have to say in order to be consistent is that mother love is self-love; a mother loves her child as a second self; and in fact he does say that elsewhere in the text.

Why is it that Aristotle is incapable of exploring alternate conceptions of love that allow for elements like bestowal and submission? Why does he want to minimize many of the emotional characteristics that we associate with love, or submerge them within a recognizably masculine independence and rationality? This is a question that we can ask not only of Aristotle but also Western thought in general, and in particular articulations of the language of love, that can't so easily exclude features like sexuality and feeling. But in Aristotle's case he himself provides us with an interesting answer. You will remember that I earlier suggested that virtuous friendship was Aristotle's foundation for the political community, and the friendship between brothers perhaps its original prototype. But in Book VIII section ix (215) Aristotle provides us with another surprising revelation when he says "friendship is based on community". The ideal type of community, not the ideal community, that Aristotle has in mind clearly is the Greek city state. The kind of male relationship that he affirms in friendship has a striking relation to the Greek polis that was threatened from within and without during Aristotle's lifetime. It was natural for him to view male relationships in the context of a small-scale male dominated society that was by our standards quite "miniscule". Despite the fact that Aristotle was the tutor to Macedonian Alexander the Great, who constructed an Empire out of these small and self-

contained units of individuals with a remarkably similar life history and perspective, his model was always the latter.

The mental universe that Aristotle inhabited was quite remarkable for its brilliance and invention, particularly in igniting reason off as the dynamic of Western civilization. But it was also in many respects a closed universe, and not open to the other, be it woman, working person, slave or foreigner. For many of us, love's most promising and revolutionary characteristic is its capacity to break through closed universes and to construct more open and inclusive vistas. All the same, Aristotle implicitly and tragically points to the potential disintegration of meaningfulness when differential variables overpower the resources of community.

Self and Society: Confirming or Affirming the Other

Aristotle's influence was huge, particularly on the neo-classicism of the seventeenth century, which viewed love as a rational choice rather than a natural attraction – an appraisal rather than a bestowal. There were always some, of course, who took issue with this rather narrow definition of love, especially poets and artists, including Shakespeare. In *Hamlet* the protagonist berates the arch-Aristotelian Polonius for reducing human relationships to rational assessments:

> Hamlet:…Good my lord, will you see the players (actors) well bestowed?
> Polonius: My lord, I will use them according to their desert.
> Hamlet: God's bodykins, man, much better! Use every man after his desert, and who shall 'scape whipping: Use them after your own honour and dignity: the less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty.

The point that Shakespeare, and other conscientious objectors to the rationalistic idea of love, wants to make is that there are many ways of valuing other people than simply their virtuous character. Moroever, evaluations based solely on worthiness of character severely impoverish not only the recipient but also the appraiser. They reduce love and friendship to considerations of justice, whereas love and friendship have a quite remarkable capacity to go beyond justice. Love is not typically proportionate to merit. When we love someone, we literally make them special rather than simply affirm their special qualities.

In ordinary language, we make an important distinction between *honouring* or *respecting* someone's character and achievements and *loving* a person. It is precisely, as Irving Singer says, that love is not the same thing as a just appraisal, that we have other avenues of recognition besides love. It is possible to imagine a utopian community, where love and merit form a tight equation, but it wouldn't be a human community as we currently understand it and for most of us it wouldn't be *desireable*. And this isn't just because humanity is incapable of making rational choices due to its ignorance, it is because some basic component of human individuality would be missing in such a world. Aristotle's perfect world resembles nothing more than a kind of human engineering with "human sentiment regulating itself in accordance with a code of social morality". The correlation

between love and merit would deprive many of us of the love that we need and even more of the love we are capable of giving. Not to mention that it would dissolve all the ineffable and magical qualities that we attach to love.

One of the greatest drawbacks of Aristotelian friendship in my opinion is its complete negation of the creative *imagination* in its elevation of rational judgment. Plato's world of love also elevates the rational faculties, but his is still a recognizably imaginative mental universe that makes Aristotle's seem awfully dry and dreary by comparison. It is one thing to say that we ought to love someone's character, and quite another to say that this is all we should love or that this is the correct definition of love. A character is not the same thing as a person. When we love a person we draw on the considerable powers of imaginative bestowal, often excessively, but incredibly creatively and meaningfully. That imagination requires correction from reason is fine, but to displace it entirely is to diminish love and our capacity for it.

Displacing imagination with reason, creative bestowal with rational calculation, also has the effect of putting the individual Ego front and center. It is certainly no accident that Aristotle affirms a "doctrine of self love". Love as bestowal affirms the other; friendship as appraisal ends up affirming the self. The good man first judges his own behaviour as satisfactory, as Aristotle says, and extends that *same* approbation to others. On the basis of this interpretation, Aristotle is absolutely justified in saying that "a friend *is* another self" and that the defining characteristic of friendship is "self-love". People who lack "lovable qualities" are incapacitated for virtuous friendship and must confine themselves to friendships based on utility or pleasure. They have, as Aristotle puts it, "no sympathetic consciousness of their own joys and sorrows" because their soul or psyche is in conflict. They are incapable of the higher pleasure of self-affirmation.

Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but there is something very smug and complacent, not to mention static and stifling, about this kind of other and self-appraisal. If it is truly the case that "all friendly feelings for others are extensions of a man's feeling for himself", then several consequences must follow. First, only the good man can love himself. Second, goodness is at least partly dependent on objective conditions of life and is therefore restricted to the virtuous few. Third, the goodness in question is overwhelmingly defined in terms of one's higher and rational self, thereby relegating all other aspects of one's personality to the status of a sideshow. Fourth, the virtuous self-lover typically will devote all of his considerable vitality to discerning and performing those "fine" public welfare tasks that are most rational. Alternatively, he can choose to assist his friends in performing those "fine deeds". Public life in this vision ends up being a selective and self-perpetuating male club.

What may not be obvious from Aristotle's description of self-love is how it is ultimately the public that benefits from the kind of service provided by virtuous activity. There is a kind of *hidden hand* that propels enlightened self-interest to provide the community with excellent leadership. Virtuous self-love approximates and supercedes the traditional Greek city state ideal of arête, clarifying the nature of virtue and providing it with a completely new motivation. One's self-interest is completely consonant with the

communal interest, and one needn't fell any anxiety about the complex role that one had to play in changing times. Aristotle's theory must have been reassuring to those in position of power and authority. A similar theory has provided the justification for power for countless authorities in the centuries following Aristotle. Clearly, the good life is not for everyone. It is not democratic; in fact, it is distinctly anti-democratic because the virtuous few compose an elite circle of friends. Bad people, of course, are not capable of virtuous self-love only a crude self-corrupting selfishness. But what about the vast majority of people who are neither good nor bad? What about the people who inhabit private life and who have no opportunity for "fine deeds" even behind the scenes?

Quid Pro Quo: The Economy of Love

Any comparison of Freud with Aristotle is bound to appear anachronistic. After all, the doctrinal components of their theories couldn't be more different (Singer, 191). Aristotle believes that virtuous action is a reality, a tangible *fact*. Freud believes that ethics is a con job that makes people feel guiltier than is necessary. Aristotle believes in self-control and the shaping of the excellent self, whereas Freud believes that civilization is process that simultaneously shapes, distorts and discomfits the self. Aristotle believes that rationality defines the self; Freud believes that sexuality defines the primordial self and that reason is an artificial construct of society. Aristotle is not interested in the sub-conscious mind other than as a logical problem; Freud invents it.

But exploring the similarities with Freud can tell us a lot about Aristotle. Both had pretensions as biologists and both were the sons of doctors. More important, both found it necessary to justify the enormous energy involved in this form of appraisal that we call love. Here are the four fundamental premises about love that they share in common (Singer 103-4):

> **First**, that "once cannot love another without loving oneself".
>
> **Second**, that "loving others is a way of loving oneself"
>
> **Third**, that "loving oneself best means living in a way that satisfies one's ideals of what one would like to be".
>
> **Fourth**, that ultimately a man "loves himself best in the sense that he always desires the greatest good for himself".

Irving Singer suggests that each of these statements is logically independent. You don't have to believe them all as a bundle unless you assume a closed environment of interchangeable *selves*. For example, if you think that you can't love someone properly without loving yourself first, that doesn't mean that loving others is *only* a way of loving oneself. Additionally, if you think that loving yourself best means living up to your ideals, that doesn't necessarily mean that you want the greatest good for yourself ("even moral goods").

Why is it that both Freud and Aristotle believe that you have to maintain all four of these propositions as a bundle? Singer thinks that it is because both of them are constructing their principles from the perspective of a "closed society" that does not allow many possibilities for the extension of oneself. In looking into the eyes of the other, Freud's protagonists see only reflections of themselves or what they would like themselves ideally to be. They appropriate other people as things, in Aristotle's case, virtuous characters rather than separate and unique persons. They are unable to escape their mental mirrors "propped up at points between concentric circles". They are incapable of stepping outside of the closed world of the self. They are incapable of loving those who are not like themselves. And, it might be said, they fear the other as a potential depletion of the self's limited resources. Any closed circle easily adopts a siege mentality.

This is the closed, and very male, world in which our children and friends are extensions of ourselves. Our wives and husbands are projections of our mothers and fathers. Our fundamental relations are confined to our families or to a small community that resembles a club or a band of brothers. In order to maintain that closed world, we reproduce those relationships relentlessly and obsessively and, of course, narcissistically. One wonders whether it is appropriate to define these relationships as self-love because they so limit our capacity for love. A bolder conception of love might seek to increase our opportunities for experiencing it.

I'm being critical here, but it is important to recognize what is valuable in Freud and Aristotle, as well as why people might be attracted to a line of thought that I am describing as impoverished. First, they focus on some important needs of the self to husband its limited capacity for love wisely, to make appropriate *choices* as it were. Second, they rightly point out that extending, and especially falling in, love, especially falling in love with love in the romantic fashion, is precarious because it multiplies the chances of choosing incorrectly. Third, there is considerable truth in suggesting that potential partners should be chosen in part in terms of their worthiness or objective lovability. It is difficult to lead a purposeful and flourishing life if you make partnership choices on the basis of desire as redefined *eros* or libido. If you want lasting happiness, as most psychologists will tell you, you need realistic ideals. At the very least, your marital and friendship choices have to conform to normative notions of "decency" and "self-respect".

Second, the concept of a **closed society** is not simply a product of patriarchy or zenophobia. Every community is in some respect a closed society because we cannot easily navigate multiple meanings and values, even if we can be more or less open to them. As the old saying goes, you *dance with the ones that bring you*. One of the psychological problems of modernity is that it fails to provide individuals with significant others, shared meanings and a sense of community. Multiculturalism attempts to get around this failure by balancing the needs of the ethnic community with the demands of a more extensive society. But this is more difficult than it appears and, arguably, the concept is more easily defined by its failures than its successes. And one of the obvious appeals of Aristotle and *virtue ethics* in general for our late modern world is that it asserts shared values of and links between the family, neighbourhood and wider community, that

are eroding without necessary emotional replacements. That these localized values can often be too narrow and incestuous, however, is born out by historical experience as well as Freud's tendency to view the Oedipus Complex as something that must be traversed in the transition from infancy to adulthood, often with considerable difficulty and lasting psychological trauma. What Freud and Aristotle fail to appreciate is that love and marriage is capable of breaking out of the closed society. Anthropologically, even politically, love has bridged tribal disputes, kinship differences, and even national boundaries. Just because there ought to be realistic expectations on love's capacity to form new alliances, and just because there are erotic complications involved in making the bridge, doesn't mean that new formations are not possible. If they were not, we would all still belong to small tribes.

Love is not the static *quid pro quo* that both Freud and Aristotle appear to believe it is. Why do they believe it to be such as simple gain-loss kind of transaction? Why is it that Aristotle wastes so much ink trying to balance out friendships and telling his readers when to fish in the rivers of love and when to cut bait? Irving Singer has a compelling explanation that we can extend into a problem inherent in Western Civilization in general. Singer suggests that Aristotle's, and by implication Freud's, model for love transactions is *economics*. Don't let Aristotle's aristocratic dislike for businessmen and crudely utilitarian calculation fool you. Aristotle views love in economic terms. One has to harbour one's resources carefully and invest love wisely in order to cash in on the returns. That love is profitable, that it leads us up the ladder of human nature, Aristotle tells us on numerous occasions. But love itself is never the goal, it is only the capital that we invest for a greater reward. What is that reward? What is the payoff? It is not more love, but *success*, now defined as winning in the stakes of life. And what does winning look like for Aristotle? It looks a lot like self-congratulation. A narrow and meager view of economics might suggest that the person who dies with the most toys wins. At least this shows that the measuring stick for success has to be something superior to cash or the currency of transaction. More sophisticated economic theorists like Schumpeter argue that success is measured in realizing something bigger than oneself, that can live on after one's death. Shumpeter further suggests that the fundamental appeal of creating something successful lies in contemplation of the relation of the parts and the arrangements to the structure of a business.

We shouldn't carry the economic model too far because the creation that Aristotle is focused on is different from that of a business. He wants to mould and shape virtuous personalities within virtuous communities. But a major strength of this economic comparison is that it helps to explain a deep felt and paradoxical anxiety that runs through Aristotle's writings. It makes sense that the satisfaction of having lived the *good life* should be a mature reflection in the decline of life. But isn't it puzzling that Aristotle is not just worried about what happens in this life; he's concerned about one's reputation after it is over. Death is not the termination of one's existence, not only because one's contributions live on in the community, but also because one's *reputation* continues on as a kind of capital in the form of the intimate memories of one's friends. That is why a person always needs to be concerned about one's status after death. One has not really died until all of your friends are dead.

Some fascinating insights about Greek life, death and culture generally can be squeezed out of these sorts of recognitions. I merely want to point out that Aristotle's formative life experience revolves not only around the Greek city state, but a specific Greek city state, namely Athens. Athens was not simply a military state, or a flourishing political, philosophical and artistic community, but it was a commercial empire that dominated the Aegean Sea. Aristotle was not simply a political or moral philosopher, but an economist. Just as he viewed the family as a *domestic economy*, he also had a tendency to view life in fundamentally economic terms. Freud may have lived in a more recognizably capitalist world of profit and loss that he translated into the libido, but their formative influences are not as different as we might first assume. It is also telling that Aristotle's thought was embraced by Europe just at the stage where it was making the first tentative steps towards a more market based economy.

If this analysis is correct, and I certainly wouldn't want you to embrace it without reservation, it illuminates a huge divide in the Western history of love, between those who view love primarily as an egoistic transaction, in which self-directed individuals are out to profit more than they lose and those who view love more idealistically, as a phenomena that gets us out of the narrow confines of egotism. With the emergence of capitalism, these divisions were bound to get even more pronounced, i.e. between those so-called realists who view the world in terms of the ego and those idealists who are disgusted at the prospect of an egoistic world. Love is one of the central battlegrounds in that Western divide. Of course, the battle lines were never precise; they shifted continually as individuals forged and changed allegiances in a mental world that oscillated between *self* and *other*. Moreover, the battle was complicated by an evolving remnant of the magical and mystical world that the rationalistic Greeks incorrectly believed they had put behind them but that has had remarkable staying power – religion.

Love and God

Mystical religion still finds a home in Plato. Like Aristotle, however, the *good* that resembles God is an end, rather than a starting point. Love is not God, cannot ever be god, because love is *desire* and the gods are self-contained and desire nothing. In Plato, however, there remains the possibility of *merging* with the Good or with God. In this possibility, medieval mysticism and Platonism discover considerably more meaning and hope than a strict rationalism could ever achieve. Aristotle is just that strict rationalist who denies that any possibility of merging with good or God. That doesn't mean that God departs the stage by any means. In fact, God or the absolute good can still be considered *necessary* as a concept because It alone explains why everything in Nature is striving towards its own perfection. Infinite and self-contained perfection is an important, albeit temporary, ruling principle. It provides a hierarchical *great chain of being* that allows us to classify nature and human nature from the lowest to the highest. On this chain is man, for Aristotle certainly the highest form combining material and spiritual substance.

I don't want to get into the intricate details of this classification of the material and the divine. And it is not just because any such discussion would involve thorny theological issues for which I have no qualifications. For the division between the mental and physical properties has a more extensive history in Western thought than could ever be contained within a theological perspective. It is just that love needs to be our main focus here and that we can't possibly explore *all* the possible connections of love to religion and philosophy. The point that I want to make that has the most relevance for our future discussions relates to Aristotle's recalibration of Platonic dualism. Aristotle seriously undermines Platonic dualism by showing "how all things are linked together by form and matter" and underlining the belief that human beings can *never* escape the conditions of material existence; and by never, I mean not ever – and certainly not through metaphysical or mystical insight. Aristotle, of course, is still a metaphysician and his materialism is qualified by a belief in forms and essences. But my point is that, for Aristotle, any concept of the higher good or God is so remote from human existence that our primary and most successful endeavours and investigations ought to relate to the so-called *facts* of living in the material world. Aristotle shifts the axis of investigation from God or the good to material life. God becomes an organizing principle, for a time *the* fundamental organizing principle, but it's the organization or system itself that commands our attention. Love may make the world go round, but love is chained to earthly existence.

This idea of a remote god, who is incapable of love, who we could never hope to be friends with, but who still provides the *raison d'être* for everything, has a long, complex, troubled and troubling history in the West. How can you ever connect with a remote God? You can give him the name of cosmic love; you can even love him; but you must gravely doubt that he will love you back. Here is where Christianity as a religion of love with a god made human enough to love us back, even when we don't love him as we should, enters the picture. But biblical Christianity is very sketchy and indefinite about the way that love functions on the material plain; and institutional Christianity ardently searched for rationales that could provide it with a more material purchase in this life. Plato and Aristotle were the primary authorities and chief recruits in the adaptation of a charismatic personal Christ to the institutional requirements of a growing civilization. And Aristotle was the more influential precisely because sexual and other kinds of feelings were a threat to the system. Aristotle kept feeling in its place.

There is a dualistic paradox that the entire Greek tradition of *eros* bumps up against; its inclusion in the Christian tradition ensured that this paradox would continue to plague all manner of thinkers in the West for centuries to come. It is the paradox of desire defined primarily as appraisal. In Plato, the paradox is resolved by a recognizably idealistic and mystical merging with the Good. In Aristotle, the paradox is sidestepped by the realistic recognition that people require friendship to be happy. In both Plato and Aristotle, however, God is different from man precisely in his self-containment, in the complete absence of any form of desire. What this implies is that any perfect definition of the good man should be complete and entire in himself. The good man is "sufficient unto himself" says Plato, and something similar remains in Aristotle's praise of the contemplative man. Contemplation looks very much like desire terminated, no matter how many times

Aristotle insists that one still needs friends. Why even on earth would the contemplative person require such self-affirming supports?

As Irving Singer asks, does love "belong to the good life" or is it but "a means of striving for the good life". You can't have it both ways unless you believe alongside some Christians that god is love or concur with the Romantics that one should fall in love with love. Difficult positions to sustain intellectually because they inevitably run into paradoxes and contradictions. Positions that would have been anathema for either Plato or Aristotle. You can't logically or consistently substitute an appraisal for a conclusion. Or can you?

4. Sex in the City

Introduction

Publius Ovidius Naso, (aka the *nose*) was born in 43 B.C. to an equestrian or noble family. He was a child when Julius Caesar was assassinated in the Roman Senate. His literary career not only coincided with, but also ran afoul of, the imperium of Augustus Caesar. One reason for the latter Caesar's displeasure was that Ovid published poems openly endorsing adultery just at the time when Augustus was attempting to make moral reforms and to strengthen his authority with Rome and Italy's leading families. Augustus was far too smart, however, to ever seek to *break this butterfly poet on the wheel*. He allowed this irritating poet to write and gain fame in the city he ruled until his fifties. In 8 A.D., Augustus banished Ovid to a Roman outpost on the Black Sea, ostensibly for his immorality, but much more likely because Ovid had failed to report valuable information that he had about the potentially treasonable discussions floating around a circle of would-be conspirators attached to Augustus's daughter Julia. Ovid was a party boy and an aging adolescent who got himself involved with the wrong crowd. He paid for it, continually writing suck up letters from Tomis on the Black Sea attempting to re-ingratiate himself with either Augustus or his potential successors. It didn't work and he died unhappily in exile far from the city that he loved and around which he constructed an entirely new and modern personality.

That new and modern personality is supremely evident in the erotic poems, and I'm going to talk about it at some length. But first a word on the poems themselves. The *Amores* poems were written in Ovid's late teens to mid twenties and made him an instant hit in Roman high society, not just for his shock value in talking openly about sexual escapades in the city – that had long been available in elegiac poetry – but for elevating the formerly rough and vulgar verse into an elegant form. Additionally, Ovid exploded all the formal distinctions between high and low poetry by 1. making sex in the city the central focus of very serious poetry; 2. elevating the status and personality of the poet as a lover; 3. using the new found autonomy of the lover-poet to shatter the status quo and its preconceptions; 4. infusing formerly comic or trivial subject matter with psychological insight; and 5. cleverly undermining hypocritical and pompous pretensions with a complex combination of candour and cleverness, and more than just a hint of slyness. The *Amores* or love poems were just the first installment in what must be viewed as a literary battering ram. In his late twenties, Ovid published the even more popular *Ars Amatoria* or *Art of Love* that must have struck Augustus and his inner circle as a much more socially dangerous work; Ovid's poetry could no longer be dismissed as the irreverent bragging of a love struck young man, but was a more boldly conceived and didactic tract in the art of seduction. In fact, as far as I know, this was the first in what would be a long line of serious seduction literature in Western Europe. After Ovid, it was impossible to ignore sex and seduction in the city as serious subject matter. As the acknowledged masterwork in this genre, Ovid's erotic poetry and mockingly subversive tone was enormously influential right through the eighteenth-century enlightenment, where it was finally eclipsed by the romantic idealization of love. Interestingly enough, it

seems to be making a huge comeback today and the writers of Sex and the City could take more than a few plot tips from Ovid. They might also find his imaginative stylization of sex and love inspirational.

Love's Reality

What Sex and the City offers viewers is insight into love relations in a big city – in a *metropolis*. Rome was the first Western metropolis. What Rome was around the time of Christ – when all roads led to Rome – Paris become in the nineteenth-century and New York became in the twenty-first century. An important characteristic of the discussion of love in these 3 cities is **realism**. It is a certain kind of realism that makes room for idealistic and highly stylized elements, but it remains fundamentally *realistic* in so far as it deals with love empirically, i.e. in terms of the real patterns of lovemaking exhibited by those who counted in urban society. The kind of love that it illuminated, therefore, was actual erotic or sexual practice that could be, and usually was, very different from the social or normative ideal, whether these ideals come from Plato and Aristotle or from a more pragmatic prime legislator like Augustus. Real life participants can observe themselves and their urban society through an erotic lens that not merely accepts but to some extent *celebrates and champions* sex in the city. Urbanity and civilization are redefined, maybe not exclusively, but at least partly in terms of a sexually based code of conduct. Outside of the city, these norms will not apply as much except when the values of the city percolate and bubble over to the countryside or the regions. Ironically, Ovid was born in the countryside. Although he came from a noble equestrian family, his early home was in Paeligni territory or the area now called Abruzzi, a rural area of meadows and valleys. Like many who come from the regions to the metropolis, Ovid became a devoté of the urbanity that infused his poetry and that he helped to crystallize. When exiled by Augustus to Tomis, this self-defined urban personality could no longer function; he was willing to do anything in his power to get back. Augustus knew full well that this kind of exile away from the stimuli of the metropolis was a living death for Ovid and would break the back of the *persona* that his poetry created for him.

So, we discover a kind of urban and urbane realism in the erotic poems whose central axis is sexuality. The sexual antics of the poet or his *persona* (should we care which is doing the talking?) are recognizable in any large and tolerant urban setting today. The ethical taboos that typically hem in sexuality in small and closed societies are superseded by an artfully conceived and conducted sexual agenda. Art typically usurps ethics in the behaviour of the fashionable elite and those poets who are brave and egotistical enough to celebrate the refined art of sex. Ovid is one of the most self-conscious poets in the lineage of love and his poems are interlaced with the enormous possibilities of what grappling with this new realistic subject matter could mean. Despite occasionally feeling (or pretending to admit) that this subject matter was beneath his poetic art, Ovid knew only too well that love provided the poet with an independent and subversive voice and a much more prominent popular role. The poet is no longer the bard of the rich and the powerful; he is not even the literary representative of a particular nation and its history; he is potentially immortal as long as his love poems are able to strike a cord in cultivated readers. Ovid constantly tells his readers as much as in his closing lines to *Amores*:

> Of my fellow-Paelignians – a race who fought for freedom,
> Freedom with honour, in the Italian wars
> That scared Rome witless. I can see some visitor to Sulmona
> Taking in its tiny scale, the streams and walls,
> And saying: 'Any township, however small, that could breed so
> Splendid a poet, I call great. Boy-god…
> So farewell, congenial Muse, unheroic elegiacs –
> Work born to live on when its maker's dead!

No false modesty here, but a clear-headed appreciation of the modern role of the lover poet that could relegate even the "great world of Rome" to "simply the scene of operations", at the most, "material" for much more interesting and salacious subject matter.

It is this understanding of the lover-poet sub-genre, that took over the genre so effortlessly that we today associate poetry with the language of love, that allows us to deal with a thorny problem in Ovid scholarship. The burning question for many Ovidians is the extent to which this poetry is autobiographical and how much to accept Ovid's voice as the sexually experienced lover. If we examine the poems carefully, and look at the development from the *Amores* to the *Art of Love*, matching them against the events of his life, there are good reasons to think that some of the escapades he describes were indeed autobiographical. For example, the earlier love poems describe a young and naïve lover who gives his heart more or less completely to his beloved Corinna. He's frisky, conceited about his lovemaking ability, and capable of having sex with mutual partners, including ladies and their servants. But the love for one special person keeps burning inwards and bursting out of *Amores*, so much so that the question of who exactly was this Corinna ricocheted through Roman high society. And the poetic protagonist clearly is devastated by his Corinna's unfaithfulness. By the time we get to the *Art of Love*, the poet-lover has learned his lesson and has now become an artful *technician of love*, the classic seducer. He's been burned by love, and although he still feels the embers, he keeps the beloved at a distance and doesn't invest his entire personality in the seductive process. All of this resonates with real life experience.

Some scholars, including the editor of the book we read, thinks that there is suggestive but inconclusive evidence that Corinna was actually based on Ovid's first wife, who he married at the tender age of 18 and divorced shortly thereafter. Ovid obviously had easy access to his beloved. Corinna appears sometimes to be actually living with the poet and *sharing his bed*, for example, and details like her pregnancy and abortion suggest the solicitude and expectations of a husband who can dish out punishment rather than simply an anxious gallant. There is no problem believing this to be the case, or looking for any other autobiographical connections, just as long as one appreciates that Ovid's overriding agenda is to establish the poet-lover as a new, superior and independent literary type. Of course, he will look to his own sexuality and love experiences in order to infuse the necessary realism and to demand attention as an expert or veteran in love's campaign. But those personal experiences can never be definitive because Ovid is so obviously

playing with the distinction between *fiction* and reality as he freely admits when he suggests towards the end of Book 3 of *Amores* that his literary construction of Corinna undermined his relationship with a real person that became the object of male readers' sexual attention:

> …..oh, creative poetic license
> Is boundless and unconstrained
> By historical fact. You ought to have taken my praise of Corinna
> As fiction. Now *your* credulity's done *me* harm.

Clearly, Ovid is having literary fun with a reader's tendency to believe in a realistic function, which still doesn't mean that there wasn't a real person somewhere as a touchstone. In fact, all through the *Amores* I think you can see the poet as a real person attempting to disentangle himself from a one-sided and vulnerable relationship:

> ….So go find
> Some other more willing victim. My vessel lies safe in harbour,
> Garlanded, indifferent to the swelling storm outside.
> Leave off your blandishments. The old line's lost its magic.
> Hold on my senses. I'm not the fool I was.

It's not that easy to replace love by hate and we view the poet struggling right up to the end of the *Amores.* By the time we get to the *Art of Love*, however, the poet has internalized a strategy for keeping himself safe from women, a strategy that he is willing to share with men, and ironically, with women.

Love-poetry is artistic *fiction* based on an urbane capacity for maximizing a very real sexual attraction. Sexual love is real, universal and pervasive. But sexually charged love has a tendency to create its own reality in the lover's fevered imagination. The psychology of love is a *reality* worthy of poetic exploration and exhortation because it impacts *everyone* at one time or another. In the urban environment, love provides the spice of life and a major incentive to refined behaviour. But it is as hazardous as any military campaign or voyage, which is why there need to be rules and stratagems to protect the lover from his own potential addiction. Love too easily transforms the beloved into a divine object that often defeats the purpose of love's enchantment – namely possession. A realistic campaigner in love's wars appreciates the distinction between physical and cultural attraction, minimizing the latter in the interest of the former. The seducer turns seduction to his own advantage. That strategy may be playful, artistic and creative, but advantage is ultimately measured in the "contact between two epidermises" (Singer, 148)

The intellectual historian Irving Singer says as much, defining Ovid as "a cynic and a clever dandy". Personally, I don't think that Ovid all that shallow; he wouldn't have survived this long if he were *just* a clever dandy. It seems to me that the protagonist of the *Amores* is way too eager to bestow an earthly divinity on his Corinna. Even though he consciously knows that she is using him and cheating on him, it takes a kind of

superhuman effort of his part to arrive at the cynical attitude. Moreover, if Ovid is just a clever cynic, then the structure of the *Art of Love* makes no sense. It ultimately consists, as Singer himself suggests in a "suicidal" strategy because it teaches women the secret of male psychology – our desperate desire to believe that we are loved. There are lots of ways we might try to square the paradox – i.e. in terms of Ovid's popularity among a female readerships – but I think we would be missing the point. Ovid wants the battle of love to be a fair fight between men and women and, despite all his fear and closet hatred of women, it is a more genuine and stable union that he seeks. Irving's analysis reeks of a romantic's disgust for any kind of love that views the other as something to be *used* exclusively for one's own pleasure. His ideal of love must always be something authentically excessive. He completely fails, I think, to appreciate love as a game. To be sure, it is a game in which people can get badly burned, but that's why *everyone* needs to learn the rules of the game. By completely dismissing Ovid as a "moral weakling" and a "libertine", Irving completely misses out on the fascinating psychology of love that unfolds in his writing. Even the most moral and romantic conception of love involves elements of seduction. Moreover, love's fire is kept burning by the arts and artifices of seduction. Much more on this later.

All of which leads me to an interpretation of the kind of *reality* that Ovid offers to his readers. He flatly rejects the kind of idealism that Plato and Aristotle espoused – the definition of love as a search for ideal goodness or as embodied in the good life. Not only are these false illusions, but also the ethics they define are merely religious opiates or normative substitutes. They are the tricks that power brokers like Augustus use to deprive people of a personal power that is fundamentally and monumentally erotic. Ovid does not simply flaunt public morality like some adolescent rule breaker – even if there is clearly some of that in the exuberance of his poetry – he wants to put people in touch with what *really* matters. In the *Amores*, he writes:

> …..When
> Good men die untimely I'm tempted – forgive my bluntness –
> To deny that gods exist. A holy life
> Is still closed by death. The most pious of worshippers
> Will yet be dragged from his temple to the grave.
> Is creative magic your touchstone? Look, there lies Tibullus,
> Great talent rendered down
> To ashes (156)

Being "lucky in love" or successful as a lover is the only clear evidence that "spells life" over death, and that is precisely love should be celebrated by the poets. Not merely celebrated, of course, but understood in all its conflicting and creative potential as a "benign harmony between the warring sexes" that discovers its "inner equilibrium" in successful "love making" where the participants *both* come and come together.

Obviously, the kind of reality that the lover-poet explores is different from a scientific treatment of sexuality. There is lots of subject matter for the amorous imagination in Ovid, and very little in scientific materialism. The scientist type, of which the poet

Lucretius was one, tends to view love exclusively in terms of congenital sexuality, and to interpret sexuality as the "mechanical transferal of seed" (Singer, 147). The scientist, and some psychologists are scientists, reduce Venus or love to biology. If they discover any ideals or added value in sexual reproduction, it is as a cosmic evolutionary force, within which any distinctly human lovemaking rituals may be analytically interesting but ultimately irrelevant. Sexual desire has only a biological function and material meaning. Human love can be summed up as the appropriate and healthy functioning of the human genitalia. In Ovid, on the other hand, cultural games are grafted onto sexual desire and even appear to eclipse it. The realm of matter is transcended by human culture. Some may consider Ovid's game of love as patently unsatisfying fare in comparison to the Christian or Romantic ideas of love that we will be exploring hereafter. But love in Ovid is still an aesthetic adventure that renders scientific and psychological explanations entirely unsatisfactory. Its most skillful practitioners display a creative imagination that has no parallel in nature.

To call someone a superficial dandy of the city is to fail to appreciate that aesthetic dandyism is a very serious business indeed, demanding the stance of a hero or warrior. When Ovid appropriates military language to describe the skirmishes and night battles of lovemaking, he is not merely speaking metaphorically. Finding love in the real world is a difficult business and it requires considerable stamina in addition to expertise. It is not just a technique but a willingness to stay the course.

The Psychology of Love

Ovid is in some ways a strikingly modern writer in his insistence that we begin with the real world of human relations rather than positing some abstract ideals for human behaviour and working backwards to practice. His starting point is the *middle* so to speak and the middle is representative human behaviour. Unlike Freud or most clinical psychologists, Ovid doesn't want to reduce human behaviour to a set number of goals and functions; instead, he wants to *describe* it. To be sure, like Freud, his focus is sexuality, but that's just the obvious jumping off and end point and couldn't possibly capture the dynamic of love. A rather obvious critique of Ovid's psychology of love is that it privileges the *getting* rather than the *giving* of love. Everyone in Ovid's world *seems* just a little too self-centered rather than focused on others. But this is more apparent than real because the artful lover is willing to go to extreme lengths and to accomplish arduous tasks to win over his beloved. If Ovid was just about taking what you can get, he wouldn't have had the significant influence on chivalric literature that he did. There's a hell of a lot of giving involved in the *getting* and even more in the *keeping*. All that he seems to want to suggest is that the giving and the getting should ideally be in equilibrium.

There is certainly evidence for the argument that Ovid treats women indiscriminately as sex objects in the *Amores*. For counter argument's sake, lets say that his desire to seduce *all* the "desirable beauties in Rome" and his division of his "erotic psyche" between "rival claimants" was more a case of youthful lust (he was 18 years old after all) than a more mature appraisal. It is interesting that the desire to fuck all and sundry comes in the

earlier rather than later *Amores* poems and that the efforts and techniques in the *Art of Love* are all clearly aimed at one person. Someone unconvinced may point to the fact that the techniques of love are pointed at married women and, therefore, are adulterous. Adulterous relationships are by definition self-centered and selfish to the extent that they guarantee a right to sexual access without any corresponding responsibilities. The problem with that interpretation is twofold. First, adulterous relationships were common in Imperial Rome, despite the decrees of Augustus, because among the equestrian classes marriage was first and foremost a relationship of property and inheritance. Love and marriage rarely ran together, which is why Ovid might have suppressed the fact that his Corinna was based in part on his first wife. Second, one's perceived and expected *duties* towards one's mistress could be substantial. You only have to look at how this relatively poorer poet complains about the financial burden that gift giving towards one's mistress involved and the ways that women and their maids colluded to increase personal wealth in the form of goods.

But even if we were to admit that the motivation for love was primarily a self-centered form of indulgence where the appropriating senses, rather than a giving heart, played the dominant function, we would by no means have exhausted Ovid's brilliant psychology of love. Love is not destined to happen. You first have to put yourself in a position to find it. There are certain events and venues where people come together to inspect and be inspected. If you don't, to use today's language, put yourself out there, you aren't likely to find love. In order to succeed at love, however you want to define it, your approaches have to take the form of courtship in which there are usually or potentially multiple suitors. You have to strike up a conversation in which a certain amount of deceit is difficult to avoid; you might want to call this *putting on your best face* or simply not sending out the wrong signals, but whatever you label it, it is unlikely to be absolutely authentic. Ovid suggests that self-confidence is imperative; you have to convince yourself that the object of your affection is attainable and work accordingly. Timing is crucial and Ovid thinks that many love affairs come to ruin because suitors don't chose a propitious time to make their advance. One ideal time, of course, is when a person is in a happy receptive and generous mood. You have to be patient, wait for and take advantage of such a time. Another very different ideal time is when someone is on the rebound.

If you get rebuffed in potential love relationship, says Ovid, you can use reverse psychology. You can pretend that you don't care or you might pay attention to someone else, particularly a friend of the person. That makes them aware that they don't have proprietorial rights over you and pushes them to declare interest. Now, many of us at some level have engaged in these kinds of games, but there is one that is just priceless. Ovid suggests that you make friends with a woman's maid. Today, we might say that you ingratiate yourself to the woman's friend. You don't need to be deceitful about this maneuver; all you really need to do is make yourself popular with the friend. In that way, ideally, the friend will go to bat for you. Ovid is clear that potential lovers value the input of people that are close to them and that you have a chance if you are in their good books. Another strategy is to make sure you find as many opportunities to bump into the other person as you can, and judiciously flatter her when you can. Does that sound calculating?

Then consider this. The other person in any preamble to love is also engaged in a certain amount of calculation. Women, says Ovid, often expect to be courted with dinner and presents. Some of them he describes as *gold diggers*. You can compensate for gifts with compliments, especially in the form of poetry argues a cash strapped Ovid. But however you balance up the courtship ritual, exchanges of goods or services are usually involved. If you go to dinner, in those days a banquet, you'd be pretty stupid if you didn't recognize that people let their guard down when they drink alcohol. Now, let's say you don't want to get the other person drunk to seduce them, at least you might see the drinking as an opportunity to get them more relaxed. Relaxation could lead to intimacy, could it not? But drinking too much oneself is potentially disastrous. That is why many Italians in Ovid's time and today water their wine to avoid acting like barbarians. When I first took out my present girlfriend, I was very careful to limit my drinking so as not to make a bad first impression. In any case, here is the clincher. When you think the other person is receptive, you let her know (there are lots of ways) that you consider her to be beautiful. Ovid believes that every woman wants to believe that she's beautiful and the object of passion, at least with respect the person conveying the complement. He also suggests that exaggeration in the complements department is customary because everyone knows that "today's false declaration" can be tomorrow's "true love". How do you avoid an element of deceit in these flirtations, even if you are not trying to seduce and control the other person? And, isn't it natural to use inflated language and to make unrealistic promises in these situations.

I don't want to deny that Ovid, whose clearly been burned by Corinna or someone like her, is highly suspicious of women and thinks that they are inclined to "cheat" in love games, so it's o.k. to cheat them first. He also thinks that women are likely to be sexual predators, and more sexually aggressive than men, which is clearly a form of essentializing the gender. He goes so far as to claim that women want to be approached roughly and, in a sense, refuses to accept our modern dictum that "no means no". But let's be clear about the limits here. Ovid is not advocating the rape of these often powerful Roman matrons, and there is a big difference between what he calls "rough seduction" and "near rape" than actual forced submission. The female psychology that Ovid is unveiling here is fascinating. Many women want men to be rough and tough and not to act like the hero Achilles in a dress. Today, there is thought to be a premium on the sensitive male, but Ovid thinks that is a myth. What do you think is right? Whatever you think, isn't it interesting that Ovid discovers female sexuality as something very real, proactive and that demands satisfaction on *its own terms*.

When love comes to town, in the words of U2 a different psychology goes into effect. Playing the game of love means recognizing certain things that might not be pleasant, such as the fact that the other person may be playing a game with you. But it's not just you or your loved object that you have to take into account. You've heard the expression "all's fair in love or war". Ovid warns you not to trust even your friends when it comes to sex. Friends will betray friends to get at their partner. In fact, there is a perverse psychological pressure that comes from winning love at another person's expense. Now, you might say that such a friendship couldn't be a real friendship and that *you* would

never engage in such behaviour. But you don't know. My girlfriend's best friend for many, many years made a play for me, and I'm sure you all know of similar situations. My girlfriend valued the friendship enough to forgive her, but all her other uninvolved friends warned her about the dangers inherent in that strategy, especially where the friend continues to have access. Love breaks up friendships.

All of Ovid's treatment of the psychology of love, I find absolutely fascinating and more accurate than most of the stuff that passes for love advice today. It is also intriguing because it goes to the heart of love's peculiar chemistry. It shows why love can't easily be grafted onto Plato's goodness or Aristotle's good life. Sexually based love is its own creature. If it is to survive and keep that sexually piquancy – if it is to endure – you really need to appreciate the tendency of Venus to get bored when it settles down; love is "winged and flighty" by nature. Physical good looks, if you don't get bored with them, "wither" over time. How do you keep mature love alive? Ovid's advice is for a mistress rather than a wife, but it not necessarily bad advice. What's involved in keeping love alive? You substitute civilized conversation for looks; fun for passion; polite attention and service for adulation; you remember important dates with gifts, and, since you are a man, you get accustomed to yielding to the woman. The relationship that once had its overriding foundation in sexuality becomes a more cultivated relationship. Mature love loses a great deal of its sexual energy, but what it loses it makes up for in experience, wisdom and, last but not least, habit. "Absence makes the heart grow fonder," so Ovid suggests that you occasionally alternate the comfortable habit of being together and having civilized conversations with periods apart.

If you want to give Ovid a chance to show you that he knows something about love, at the very least you need to appreciate that we live in a very different kind of society today, in which we usually marry or something like it the person that we love. By and large, the Roman relationships with a mistress were closer equivalents to today's marriages. Clearly, Ovid makes allowances and suggestions for further sexual dalliances than with a single mistress and, while you may not like that, don't miss the larger point. Just as you allow yourself the odd dalliance, so too you should expect it of the other person. Part of the game of sustaining love for Ovid, is deliberately not noticing the indiscretions of the other that are attributable to human nature. Ovid interrupts this analysis by telling us that he finds such a strategy easier to recommend than to practice. He "falls short of perfections" because he's jealous when someone is "making passes" at *his girl*.

Another intriguing recommendation for settled lovers is becoming more expert at sex. Closeness combined with expertise can make sex even more enjoyable, says Ovid, in mature years. Sex, as you might expect for Ovid, remains fundamental to the love relationship, but it is transformed from lusty to more sophisticated sex and an understanding of sexual positions. The surprising key, for Ovid who is often condemned as treating women like sex objects, is the *mutual joy* of sex. He says that he takes no "charm" in intercourse unless "sighs betray their rapture" (211). The most important thing is to climax together – "both should pass the winning-post neck and neck – that's the height of pleasure". Ovid has a healthy view of mutual sex that should be an ideal throughout life. All of this is fascinating, of course, and certainly not irrelevant for

today's society, but it does highlight certain limitations in Ovid's view of love. Despite all the artful contrivances and cultural embellishments, love remains fundamentally and irrevocably erotic, i.e. sexual. The one advantage of Platonic love and Aristotle's virtue ethics is that desire was not anchored so powerfully at the sexual level. That the late modern or postmodern mentality is closer to Ovid than either Plato or Aristotle should be obvious. We seem just as determined as Ovid to maintain our sexual potency, supported by Viagra, Cialis and other drugs, as long as possible. Many modern males, especially, seem to equate sexual incapacity with death.

The War of the Sexes

Until we get to Book 3 of the *Art of Love*, we are in a fundamentally male world where women are dangerous game to be hunted down and mastered. The all too male protagonist is a *Don Juan* who employs a military-like strategy for securing his prey. What makes Ovid much more interesting than merely a cunning seducer, however, is his sense of vulnerability. His is the heart that has been badly bruised but that still longs for love's fulfillment – mutuality in love -- on the best terms available in a world where love is a kind of warfare between the sexes.

In the background of Ovid's mind resides a military culture. The lover poet who managed to avoid official military conscription on the way to a likely Senatorial career, still breathes an overwhelmingly military atmosphere. Love is a game, but for Ovid, all games are *agonistic*. Urban life, in particular, is a dangerous competition where you never know who your friends and lovers really are. The pervasiveness of this *agonistic* principle makes it difficult for a died in the wool Roman like Ovid to think like a Greek or a Christian. And, he is certainly no romantic, because his ability to bestow meaning on the beloved or to allow love to reign in his heart is truncated. But that doesn't mean that Ovid has nothing to tell us. Even as a cautionary warning against the *wiles of the world*, he has something to offer even the most passionate of love's legions. If you look more closely, there is much added value for modern readers because the urban and cosmopolitan world that Ovid inhabited resembles our own. Everything is *on the move* in Ovid's world and, if love doesn't last, at least it sometimes *floats*, enriching our lives in the process. Ovid sensitizes us to love's moments and at least encourages us to enjoy different degrees of sunshine at different times and at different periods of our lives.

Moreover, there are intermittent truces in the battle of the sexes and these truces become more frequent as one gets older and wiser. Ovid likely was in his early forties when he finished up *The Art of Love*. From the *storm und drang* of the *Amores*, to the take no prisoners Don Juanism of the first book of the *Art of Love*, to book three that surprisingly gives tips on love to women that uncover and exploit the weakness in male amatory armour, we see the lover poet growing in maturity. To some, Ovid's voyage towards maturity is a shallow journey. For our more jaded postmodern humanity, it could be legitimately regarded, in the words of one recent movie, as *as good as it gets*. This thesis of personal growth and worldly wisdom helps to explain what would otherwise be a contradiction. In the *Amores*, Ovid tells us unequivocally that all women are *cheats*. In Book 3 of the *Art of Love*, says "men are often deceivers, girls hardly ever: inquiries will

prove the feminine cheat a rare bird indeed". By his forties, Ovid has a more mature view of women and the challenges that they face in love's game. He's still suspicious; he remains vigilant.. But he seems ready for the more comfortable and stable relationship that he appears to have had with his third wife. He's mellowing and his analysis, while still agonistic, is much more balanced. Not without some fears and reservations, because he alternately says that his *heart* is more "buoyant and carefree" (215) and that he is forfeiting his "advantage" and "exposing his heart" in the dangerous game of love. Love is a dangerous game at any age.

Predictably, most of Ovid's advice is to more mature women and prefaced by the warning that youth's beauty soon fades. Whereas young women have a huge advantage over testosterone driven men, older women need to arm themselves more strategically. The primary goal of all their stratagems is to hold the lover and to maintain a stable relationship. Maintaining, like obtaining love, is a matter of *technique* and the fundamental technique around which love revolves is sexual intercourse. Looks may wither, says Ovid, but sexual proficiency need not. Mature women know what they are doing in bed, and they can compensate for any decline in beauty by more freely granting sexual favours. Ovid interestingly says that he's not "encouraging promiscuous conduct" only "warning you not to be scared of shadows".

What follows is a fascinating instruction in female "self-cultivation". Forget for a moment its male shallowness and run with it as fashion advice. Ovid advises women not to "neglect your looks" or "go to pot" if they want to hang on to their lover. He's quite specific about what this means and his advice fits neatly with what we see in *Sex and the City*. Fashion is about much more than ostentation; it's about appreciating the refined culture of a global environment. First, you've got to match your hair to the shape of your face. Second, you've got to choose dress colours wisely and according to the season. Ovid doesn't think he has to mention shaving one's armpits and one's legs, because Roman girls are not *hillbillies*, but he does mention it. Then he goes into cosmetics, referring his female readers to his separate book *On Facial Treatments*. The art of makeup obviously fascinates him. He's pretty clearly not gay, as you discover when he criticizes those narcissistic *dandies* who sandals are too tight and their togas too textured and their rings all too glittery. These are men who would prefer to wear women's dresses. Unless he's in self-denial, his interest in fashion and cosmetics is an interest in the cultural aesthetics of sexuality and love. He's also not just concerned with *covering up* the aging process, although that's part of it, because he's so obviously intrigued by style. Style over substance, you may complain, but Ovid is celebrating Roman beauty as an urban art form. It involves the stylization of the entire female person.

The stylized female package isn't confined to promenading in public, although that's the physical space where one trolls for lovers. I find it amazing that Ovid cheekily but seemingly effortlessly transforms public buildings, military shrines, and ostentatious monuments to political power, into places where fashionable Roman women can see and be seen. But they aren't just *pick up* venues, even if the implication must have pissed off Augustus and his inner circle. They are *an*, if not *the*, intrinsic defining feature of Roman cosmopolitanism and, more generally, the artful dance of civilized life. The stylized

civilization that Ovid celebrates depends on enhancing female sexuality and transforming it into an art form. Its functioning depends to a great extent on men worshipping women not only sexual but aesthetic objects, and upon women exercising their power to display their *charm*, which is precisely why homosexuality, or the gay culture that obviously must have existed in imperial Rome, is depicted negatively by Ovid.

Sexual aesthetics relates to the *differences* between the sexes, and metamorphoses (a favourite word of Ovid's) the agonistic battle of the sexes into the foundation for a complex civilization. Just because a civilization's culture is based on sexual differentiation, and even a certain amount of essentializing of the female sex, doesn't mean that it has to be narrow. If women are sex objects, then they are complex and self-propelling sex objects that can use cultural symbols to their advantage. Ovid clearly gives women the weapons for manipulating the odds in their favour and maximizing the opportunities for self-expression. In fact, we will not appreciate Ovid's popularity throughout Western history fully, unless we appreciate the extent to which women need to be autonomous in order to play the game of civilization. Ovid's women not only learn to play the game, but to play it to their advantage. This involves subtle intelligence, even if that intelligence is displayed within restricted bounds. The thoroughly modern woman may shudder at Ovid's prescriptions to perpetual softness and cheerfulness, but maintaining this kind of female persona clearly requires skill, confidence and an in-depth understanding of male psychology. The female strategies to "capture stable maturity" -- that work equally well on "green youth" -- revolve around an understanding of all men as wanting to *believe* that they are loved and that they inspire love. "Just make us believe that we are loved" (234). We men are consummate suckers for love's flattery.

At the same time, we are also inherently lazy and have a tendency to take love for granted. Too much "sweetness cloys the palate". Love, therefore, is an emotional balancing act. Male surrender is always something of a truce because of our genetic inability to "sustain any long-term passion". So, Ovid advises women to keep males actively off-balance by *mixing in the odd rebuff* with a more general "cheerful fun". Although only the lover "alone has rights in your bed", it's a good tactic to stimulate a bit of jealousy. Insinuate that there are real or potential "rivals" for your love in order to ensure that congenitally lazy males never become too complacent. This is all part and parcel of the game of love skillfully played. Now, you might be a bit confused by Ovid's advice on how to deceive crafty husbands that get in the way of adulterous affairs, but remember that neither Ovid, nor Roman elite society, restricted love to marriage. In fact, love was far too important to their cultural aesthetic to confine love in what was, after all, a mundane property relationship. That said, this advice to women, as the earlier advice to men, is usually aimed at stable love relationships between two people. Today, most of us view love and marriage or common law relationships as normative. Therefore, to translate Ovid to modern times, you may consider this to be advice for maintaining a good marriage.

Although I've never watched *Sex in the City*, I'd bet my life savings that a lot of what Ovid talks about is similar to what the female friends in that dramatic sit-come discuss. All of them are searching for love, but they have to navigate a sophisticated urban world

where love is a complicated game and stable relationships are difficult to secure. One piece of Ovidian advice that fans of *Sex in the City* might want to consider, however, is that you shouldn't trust your friends. Always remember that they too, and everyone else for that matter, is on the hunt for love. If you are "over-trustful" says Ovid, "other women will reap your pleasures: the hare you started, they'll hunt". Even when he suggests that stable love is a real possibility, Ovid never lets us forget that love is a battlefield.

Desire as Disease

What makes Ovid so very modern, even distinctly postmodern, is his acute awareness of the problem of human desire. All of us *desire* love, want to be loved, some of us more desperately than others. And love itself so often is temporary, a brief respite. Love as desire is never satisfied; that is why it is always a risk. Sometimes and in certain situations, love may appear, to quote another movie title, a very *risky business*. When the political and socio-economic environment is characterized by change, nothing can be taken for granted, and this is especially true of love. Although different historical cultures are just that – *different* – there can be quite remarkable similarities between cultures at their apogee. All the way through this lecture, I've been comparing Ovid's prescriptions for love in ancient Rome with its counterpart in contemporary New York. An even more fascinating comparison can be made between imperial Rome and nineteenth-century Paris. Their respective poets of sexuality and love, Ovid and Baudelaire bear an uncanny resemblance. Both were self-proclaimed but very serious *dandies*; both were poets of sex in the city; both viewed their urban environments essentially as aesthetic labyrinths for the expression of human passion; both were obsessed with cosmetics; both relied on their city for artistic stimulation; both depicted the excitement and felt the sadness of change. Ovid floated above the sadness far better than Baudelaire, but the sadness is obviously there.

The sadness stems in part from a desire for love or connection that is constantly thwarted. Ovid and Baudelaire always appear to be preparing us for love's disappointment. The lover poets are always getting ready to *move on* to the next adventure that doubtless will not live up to expectations; but they are all we have. The implication in the poems of these very secular realists is that love and relationships are bound to disappoint, at least on this earthly plane. Western writers on love will explore love's dangerous terrain in different ways depending on their orientation but one of the most compelling metaphors for the dangers of sexually based desire is as a sickness or as a disease. We met this conception first in Plato's pompous doctor who believed that this lower love could be treated by a moderate diet, fresh air and exercise. Obviously, Plato thought that the only cure for desire was its redirection to its pure object and source – ideal goodness. Christian thinkers, enormously influenced by *Saint* Plato, sought a similar redirection of desire towards God. Only when love was purified by religion could desire's lack be slaked.

In the meantime, back here on earth, many writers have sought less spiritual solutions for the defects of love. Recently, Leonard Cohen penned a popular song called *Ain't No*

Cure for Love – “no pill no drug; it’s all been cut with stuff’. The only solution is to embrace love and pray that one is not destroyed in the process. Love becomes its own religion. But Cohen inherits a romantic legacy that is in love with love. No romantic, Ovid has some very earthy solutions, some of them practical and some of them more intriguing. Before exploring these so-called *cures*, we should remind ourselves that Ovid’s airy style masks a genuine respect for the damage that love can do and that is on a par with the *carnage* and *red gore* of warfare. The best cure, of course, is prevention. It involves understanding and embracing, not love itself, but the techniques and technology of “the love game”. Ovid describes his role as a “public deliverer” and there is no reason not to take him seriously. If one practices the love-game as a set of techniques, one has a chance to avoid the diseases of desire altogether.

Ovid is fully aware that this is not the way that most people learn. Most people learn from experience. Unfortunately, experience in love is dangerous because typically the “disease” has spread before you realize that it is there. The slip of a tree in the topsoil (Ovid loved to use horticultural imagery) grows into a rooted tree before you know it. What generally happens, once you recognize the problem, is delaying taking appropriate medicine. “Love’s a con, feeds on delaying tactics,” says Ovid. The net result is a “captive heart” and, consequently, a much tougher problem. Fighting an established disease now requires systematic and desperate treatment. The new regime towards Ovidian health is strenuous. All leisure must be eliminated – “cupid hones in on sloth”. The diseased victim needs to throw himself into “some really absorbing work”. If one lacks the options of military service or politico-legal forms of involvement, one can *divert the mind* with “country matters, good farming” – i.e. agricultural improvement and horticultural knowledge. It goes without saying that Ovid considers love to be a disease of the elite and leisured class, the people who have agricultural estates or are engaged in public service. The aristocratic (equestrian) audience is also implied in the parallel solution of hunting “boar” instead of a “girl”. If all else fails, one can go on a Grand Tour of Greece, making sure to take one’s time and ignore one’s mail. “Don’t keep looking over your shoulder to Rome” says Ovid. And, if you come back too fast, and see the object of desire too soon, you may well be in a worse position than when your started off.

The entire object of someone with a diseased heart should be self-preservation. That much is obvious. But Ovid realizes that love is a psychological state and his most fascinating remedies involve fighting fire with fire. You work on your imagination to construct a contrary image of the beloved as an object of hate rather than love; you catalogue the faults of the “greedy bitch”; you rely on all your imaginative rhetorical talents to construct a new and negative image. In particular, you hone in on any physical defects of that person in order to regain self-control. If the person in question is your mistress, or it’s not that easy to get away to Greece or the safety of your imagination, then you look for and manipulate situations that put the object of desire at a disadvantage. For example, if her teeth stick out, tell her jokes that make her laugh. If she croaks like a frog, flatter her into singing; if she’s got elongated breasts, ask her not to wear a bra. A covert strategy is guerrilla warfare; surprise her when she’s not wearing any makeup, so that you can commit her facial flaws to memory. The most effective strategy of all is to

strike at the root of vaginal infatuation. Make love with other women *before* you come to your lover ("come into her lusty fresh"), the point being sexual *revulsion* rather than distraction. Exposing private parts and bodily fluids are sometimes effective. Ovid apologizes if his readers find such advice "scandalous" but he maintains that all's fair in love and war, and "unlearning passion" requires drastic action. When recalibrating one's sexual imagination, every "little safeguard" contributes to the systematic overhaul of one's psyche. One plays a game of pretend that becomes a new mental reality. "Feigning indifference" and "disgust" can become real indifference and disgust when imagined conceptions become mental habits. Deliberately amplifying and "worrying" about your own problems makes the other person less of a problem.

The main difficulty with psychological or imaginative solutions is that desire invariably hones in on its prime object when you least suspect it. Therefore, Ovid advises breaking out of this "secret forest". *Being alone* is the worst thing one can do. What about *being with friends*, the media favoured solution of the twenty-first century? Bearing in mind that baring one's heart to one's friends is as dangerous as any other abdication of self-control for Ovid, he advises love-diseased victims to seek out *company* and *crowds*. Conventional, rather than close, friendships are a huge advantage at such times. The point is not to share one's emotions, and obtain sympathy, but to escape them. One must create an alternate universe. A common expression today is that "it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all". Ovid thinks that this is absolute nonsense:

> What's the use of nostalgia? Who wants cold love reheated?
> Live – if you can – in another world….
> Your affair broke off – please, quit complaining: the best revenge is
> Silence. Just let her dribble away
> From your desires…

All temptations must be resisted:

> …What's more, though I hate to say this,
> Love poems are *out*: the ban extends to my own
> Collected works…

Concluding Remarks

Ovid is miles away from either Plato or Aristotle, but he should be viewed in the *erotic* tradition that they established. His eroticism is focused on sexuality, which largely (but not absolutely) limits love's appraisal to what can be obtained and enjoyed bodily. His emphasis on bodily satisfaction may well be regarded as healthier than the abstract aestheticism of Plato and Aristotle. When we love somebody, we usually love them as a body and enjoy their body. There is something liberating in the joy that Ovid takes in coupling, even if he is obsessed with sexual coupling. There's something sad about these kinds of relationships because they have a tendency to equate sexuality with life and joy. The logical binary to sexuality as life and joy is sexual decline as a kind of living death or, at least, the absence of joy. To make sexual coupling the central axis of human

existence is to leave oneself open to a certain amount of dissatisfaction with life in general. Our present day obsession with, and anxiety, about sexuality and sexual dysfunction, speaks volumes about the problem.

For some of you, it may not be Ovid's obsession with sexuality that is worrying – in fact you may be equally obsessed for all I know! In fact, although Ovid's analysis of love centers on sexuality, it privileges the aesthetic qualities and contributions of sexuality. You might find his assessment of refined love more satisfying than its shockingly sexual foundation. What might trouble you more is Ovid's tendency to limit love to the *desire to be admired and loved* and his **appraisal** of human relationships overwhelmingly in terms of that desire. In no complex thinker, and Ovid was complex, will be find a description of love *solely* in terms of appraisal. Obviously, Ovid loves people who have a certain uniqueness as people and he often reminds us that everyone and all love affairs are different. But the dominant train of Ovid's analysis of love is to treat women (and it must be said *men* as well) as *objects of desire* to be appreciated and consumed in the correct quantities. What is fascinating, even wonderful, about Ovid's objectification of desire is the way he reveals its rich aesthetic character and the joy that he finds in refined human sexuality. Those who affirm that it is better to have loved and lost than ever to have loved at all, however, have a radically different conception of love. Love for them is a more complex desire – it is the desire *to love* at least as much as the desire *to be loved*. That is something that Ovid would never have understood.

In a martial society that gave superiority to those who fought over those who gave birth to future soldiers, it is hardly surprising that Ovid thought of love in terms of warfare. That he was willing to place far greater human value on the battle of the sexes than conquest of enemies was an unusual cultural move. His dramatic shift of the poetic domain from military hagiography set in motion a literary development of enormous consequence in the West. From here on in, the soldier would not be the only icon; he had to either make room for the *lover* or, better still, to become a soldier-lover. We have taken a huge step on the road to chivalric love.

Note that Ovid believes love is based on sexual attraction, but that is not what is interesting. What is interesting is the aestheticization of sex.

The Religion of Love

Introduction

In the first four centuries of the new era, a revolutionary religion called Christianity consolidated itself in Western and parts of Eastern Europe. What makes Christianity so crucial to the evolution of the idea of love is that Christianity was the first religion to define itself as having its entire basis in love. By this, I do not want to imply that the concept of love is the exclusive domain of Christianity, far from it. But Christianity was distinguished by making love "the dominant principle in all areas of dogma" (Singer, 164). Other religions have talked endlessly about love, and certainly it was a significant thematic of the Hebrew religion, out of which Christianity emerged. Christianity, however, elevated to concept of love to prominence in Western culture and implicated all discussions of love that followed. We cannot fully understand the characteristics of romantic love, for example, unless we appreciate the longing for a mystical union with the person of Christ – so often referred to as the *bridegroom* – in Christian literature.

The starting point is the New Testament where Christ is said to have reduced or replaced the Ten Commandments and Jewish law with two pronouncements. First, Christians were admonished to love God with their whole heart, their whole mind, and their whole soul. Second, Christians were exhorted to love their neighbours as themselves. Of course, these were the sayings of a charismatic preacher named Christ; they were sufficiently vague and insufficiently precise as to require centuries of theological elaboration in order to provide the intellectual and institutional support without which no religion, no matter how divine, can flourish. Not surprisingly in a Greco-Roman world, a considerable amount of the intellectual and institutional support came from Plato and Aristotle. At the same time, there were dynamic elements in Christianity that constructed a new platform for love.

The Four Elements of Love

There were four main elements to Christian love that interacted in complex ways with one another. These were, to use the Greek terms, *eros* or desire, *philia* or friendship, *nomos* or submission, and *agapē* or the bestowal of God's love through the universe and, especially, through his followers. Nomos and agapē can be traced to Hebrew theology, but in Christianity, they were expanded in ways that not only made the concept of love pervasive but reciprocal. While nomos remained tied to the relationship with a stern but loving abstraction and his chosen people, it could not explore all the erotic and cathartic connotations of submission. While agapē was restricted to a *people*, it could not be conceived as *personal*.

How Christianity worked out the problems of connecting divine love with an earthly community and an institutional church would take many lectures and involve many more thorny issues of interpretation, including the major split between Catholicism and Protestantism. You shouldn't expect that here. What you should expect from me is some

insight into the ways that Christianity not only introduced and developed conceptions of love but also made love itself such a complex and fascinating cluster of concepts. For example, the Christian erotic tradition underlined love as an ascending journey towards union with God either in this life or the next. The Christian emphasis on friendship encouraged members of the Church to view themselves as brothers and sisters in Christ. The Christian translation of submission transformed obedience as a potentially painful duty into a free act of faith and trust inspired by love. The Christian concept of agapē was highly revolutionary in articulating God's love as a kind of divine bestowal or grace that went way beyond what anyone could ever deserve. And yet this gratuitous, supernatural, spontaneous and unbounded love would become love's central definition. This was so very different from anything that the Greeks had on offer because Greek ideas of love were pervasively selfish. Agapē is infinitely more creative, providing new resources for the creative imagination, than the classical erotic tradition.

You could easily make the mistake of highlighting agapē at the expense of other elements like eros and nomos but, of course, you'd be limiting the complexities and paradoxes of the *concept cluster* that is modern love. Agapē emerges from and combines with the other elements and different discussions of love emphasize different combinations. The highly influential discussion of love in Augustine, for example, might appear to focus more obviously on Eros, philia and nomos than agapē. But there is a good reason in this course to single out agapē for special attention because it allowed love freedom to move outside the limitations of realism and rationalism in order to become an independent force. Even with respect to the early Christians, who still shared a recognizably Greco-Roman worldview, the significance of agapē was enormous and explains why converts gladly went to their deaths in such huge numbers that the Christian religion was difficult to suppress. A large part of their motivation was overwhelming gratitude for God's gift of grace and promise of heavenly union. Agapē or the original Christian conception of bestowal underlines the difference between the earthly and the spiritual spheres, the City of God and the very imperfect City of Man. Augustine's entire approach to religion is theo-centric in ways that underline God's free bestowal of love on a *person* – namely himself – that is entirely unworthy of salvation. Only agapē can deliver salvation. And earthly love is of no value unless it infused with, and a acted as a conduit for, God's agapē. There is a sense, therefore, in which it is correct to emphasize the revolutionary significance of agapē just as long as one keeps in mind that it cannot make full sense of the complex phenomena of love on its own.

Agapē is a religious term. If you want to secularize it as an analytical tool, you might consider it as a projection of the human imagination that simultaneously humanizes God and finds new possibilities for the creative display of love. As a predominantly religious concept, however, agapē has a limiting impact on love. Love is so overwhelmingly spiritual that it is the obverse, the opposite, of secular and sensual love. What many of you must have noticed when reading Augustine is the enormous divide between the divine source of agapē and its potential recipients. If Augustine's God is love, we human beings are unworthy sinners. Augustine's babies are naturally wicked and would do infinite harm if it were in their power; children are willful beings that deserve

punishment; adult human society is a catalogue of the different kinds of sin exhibited by those who are far from God. And absolutely no one is innocent.

Augustine's intriguing venture into child psychology has a clear purpose. He wants to make it absolutely clear that there is no such thing as childhood innocence and that we are all sinners who are incapable of genuine love unless our souls are enlarged by God. Genuine love must first and foremost be *love of God* or it will be totally misplaced. Only when it is purified by God's love does earthly love have any merit *at all*. Such a perspective must have struck many of you as extremely harsh, inhumane, and anything but modern. In fact, some of you might have discovered a more up to date paradigm of love in Ovid, a person who Augustine would have condemned not merely as a pornographer but as sensualist doomed to perdition. And yet, there are some very novel and modern characteristics in Augustine's *Confessions* that are almost entirely missing from Ovid's more healthy approach to human sexuality.

Love's Pilgrimage

Before discussing these *modern* characteristics, let's ask ourselves why Augustine has such disgust for normal human relations. Clearly, he doesn't start out that way. His *Confessions* is the diary of a spiritual journey that begins in a search for earthly love that leads to a religious catharsis that ends in an almost exclusively religious love, where everything earthly is subsumed within and transformed by God. As a young man, Augustine demonstrates a remarkable ability for making friends; as an adult, he continues to draw friends to him. A decisive event in early adulthood, just when he began teaching rhetoric, was the death of an unnamed friend, a so-called *companion in error*. He describes how agonizing it was to lose this friend who was his *second self*, the person that he had "poured his soul out to" like water upon sand. This tragic event meant that Augustine began looking for something deeper to love than someone that he could lose so easily. It doesn't prevent him from making more, and probably even closer friendships, especially with Alypius. But it ensures that Aristotelian friendship or *philia* will no longer satisfy a person like Augustine. Hereafter, friendships, even with people as close as Alypius, will be interpreted in terms of the spiritual journey.

With Augustine we have a new and fascinating image in Western literature. We are all *pilgrims* searching for a higher meaning. Alongside the image of pilgrimage in search of a higher love – quest literature – we find two new ideas: suffering and dislocation. There is a dark night of the soul where the self-propelled protagonist goes through various challenges. There is also the imperative of a fundamental personal transformation – a purification – either during or by the end of the quest. The concept of a spiritual journey may be implied in Plato if not in Aristotle, but it is not elaborated in the same detail as a voyage of the self. It is a concept that will spill over into all kinds of restless Western adventures and explorations, many of them far from this spiritual destination, but not surprisingly having the attributes of a secular religion. What is crucial about the spiritual journey that Augustine describes is that it is an intensely individual journey of the self. It is a personal search for happiness that is much more self-centred and infinitely more dangerous than the one described by Aristotle. At least with Aristotle, the search for

happiness was conducted within a recognizable community and resulted in a special community of virtuous friends. With Augustine, there is no stable community and, ultimately, friendship depends entirely on joint membership in heaven's army. Any other community contains wicked deserters who prey upon the *traveler*.

Change, impermanence, and danger seem to surround Augustine in ways that they did not Plato or Aristotle. This may have had something to do with the imminent demise of Roman civilization and the more general challenge to core Greco-Roman values. What is pretty clear is that Aristotelian male friendships didn't provide Augustine with the kind of stable love that he was looking for and that the Platonic search for ideal goodness could never satisfy someone whose longed for a more personal love relationship. What about sexually based love – the love of a woman and the relationship of marriage? The *Confessions* only illuminate the inability of this kind of love to sustain a classically formed character like Augustine. We know that he had the sexual itch, lived and had a child with a woman, and even planned to get married. But his friend Alypius rightly talked him out of such a relationship on the basis that it would interfere with his more spiritual quest. Love for a woman obviously represented an inferior form of love to virtuous friendship. Once a more spiritual love entered Augustine's soul, even the sexual itch disappeared. Food became a more serious threat to love's proper devotion than sexuality.

Freud might suggest that Augustine's religious love was actually libidinous love displaced or sublimated. But Freud believed that all love was sexual and perhaps Augustine's spiritual happiness, and the happiness of all true believers, suggests that love is not so sexually restricted. Maybe love is a more complex phenomenon than sexuality and maybe Augustine's spiritual journey can tell us more about love than Ovid and Freud's realistic and sensual technology.

Saint Plato

Although he describes himself as a wretched sinner, Augustine seems to have been an unusually warm hearted and generous person. His friends, and he had many, clearly loved him. On her deathbed, his mother claimed that he had never once done anything deliberately to hurt her. Unlike many pilgrims of the heart in search of the holy grail of love, however, Augustine was an intellectual. As a trained intellectual of his time, Augustine felt the imperative to interpret his life rationally. The task of finding an emotional home that also made rational sense was something that made his quest more difficult but that ensured that his solution would be more universal. On his journey to unite the love that he felt in his heart with the ultimate meaning that his sharp intelligence required, Augustine sampled various belief systems including the Manicheans, a religion that survived right up to the middle ages because it addressed some fundamental questions that more doctrinal and dogmatic religions like Christianity did not address, at least not straightforwardly.

The Manichean *heresy* that Augustine attacked in the *Confessions* and other works may sound like hocus pocus to us. But it explained the mixture of good and evil in the world

as two embattled forces that had interpenetrated the entire world of matter. The leader of the heresy, Manes, didn't deny all of Christianity but united it with what seemed common with other religious points of view to construct what you and I might consider to be a new age perspective in which vegetarianism played a crucial role. Augustine always had problems with some of these beliefs, and he actually preferred more scientific views of the world, but the Manichean heresy was a useful stopgap religion because it didn't require a belief in anything mysterious apart from good and evil forces. Unlike Christianity, it certainly didn't require a belief in heaven or unseen spiritual substances. More important, it flattered human weakness. What Christians called sin was really an insurmountable mixture of good and evil in the universe that might be purified but could never be avoided. Christianity made people feel guilty for a situation that they did not create.

Enter Plato. Aristotle was much more readily available to the teachers of logic and rhetoric than Plato. But in the fourth century, a group of neo-Platonist scholars made Plato's more idealistic theories trendy. Augustine is a classic example of the way that Christian scholars embraced Plato and gave greater intellectual credibility to Christian doctrines. You will remember that Plato articulated an erotic or desire based search for the good, describing an ascent from material objects of desire and culminating in a virtually mystical embrace of the Good. What Augustine and many Christians recognized is that there were real advantages to grafting Plato's discussion of the immaterial and ideal form of the good onto the Christian discussion of God. The really serious drawback of Christianity – its otherworldliness – was obliterated once one accepted Plato's argument that spiritual ideals were actually more real, more meaningful, than all the data of material existence. Moreover, Plato's rationalistic ascent towards the good fitted fairly neatly with the spiritual ascent to divine goodness explaining why one had to have faith in the process and determination to rise out of the cave's shadows towards the sunlight of truth.

Augustine was already sensitized to incorporating Plato into his mental world because he had written about beauty and proportion as ideal abstractions rather than empirical observations. He was already moving towards an idealistic appreciation that would allow him to rationalize Christianity in his own mind and explain away some of its more peculiar doctrines as metaphorical or allegorical constructs. At a higher level, God became the word, the light, transcendental goodness and the absolute perfection who (because he was a person) created all material phenomena. The problem of evil could now be dealt with on two levels. On the divine level, no evil whatsoever existed because the divinity was perfect. On the worldly level, everything was of a lower order precisely because it was not God or the only reality:

> All other things are of a lower order than yourself, and I saw that they have not absolute being in themselves, nor are they entirely without being. They are real in so far as they have their being from you, but unreal in the sense that they are not what you are. For it is only that which remains in being without change that truly is.

Through Plato, Augustine learned about God's *invisible nature*. His intellectual needs were met. But what about his other equally important needs? What about his need for love? Augustine informs his readers that what he missed was the kind of love that Christianity offered. He wrote: "how could I expect that the Platonist books would ever teach me charity?" So he now read the New Testament and, especially, Saint Paul with an eye to embracing Christian charity or love.

Christian Caritas

As I said earlier, Christian love or caritas is a combination of elements. Augustine continually lists these elements in some wonderful passages that are full of his authentic love of his Christian god:

> None of this (i.e. *grace*) is contained in the Platonists' books. Their pages have not the mien of the true love of God. They make no mention of the tears of confession or of *the sacrifice that you will never disdain, a broken spirit, a heart humbled and contrite*, nor do they speak of the salvation of your people, *the city adorned like a bride*, the *foretaste of your Spirit*, or the chalice of our redemption. In them no one sings *no rest has my soul but in God's hands: to him I look for deliverance. I have no other deliverer but him; safe in his protection, I fear no deadly fall*. In them no one listens to the voice which says *come to me all you that labour*. They disdain his teaching because *he is gentle and humble of heart*. *For you have hidden all this from the wise and revealed it to little children*.

It goes without saying that Augustine might never have found this salvation if he had not been exposed to these *wise writings* or, as you might expect, that Augustine felt guilty for the rest of his life for his sin of pride in abstract intellectual inquiry. True love meant embracing Christian teaching with one's heart and soul rather than one's mind.

Confessions is a long autobiographical love poem and it's easy, in these pronouncements of heartfelt love to lose sight of what is absolutely and decisively modern in these passages. The crucial event that makes the New Testament unique is that Christ was crucified for our sins. You have to appreciate just how much this transforms the concept of ideality in a rationalistic philosopher like Plato. Jesus Christ is God. Like God the Father, the God of the Old Testament, he has existed since the beginning of all creation precisely because he is God and God is eternal perfection. But Jesus is also a person who united the human and heavenly form. For the Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, a god could not love because a god was self-sufficient, lacking desire. You can and should love god or goodness, but you shouldn't hope that it would love you back. However, a god who is also a human being can love you back. Love now can be reciprocal. God and his universe may now legitimately be defined as imbued with love. However, one needs to appreciate one's proper place in the love relationships. God is still god, and so far above us that we cannot achieve anything like equality. But as far as friendship is possible between unequals, we can consider God our friend.

Of course, God is our saviour first and we are not God's Aristotelian buddies. If we adopt that smug attitude, we completely fail to appreciate the enormous bestowal of love that this infinitely superior being has bestowed on us. The crucifixion is a symbol of God's willingness to bridge the gap between divine and earthly existence, to rebirth us in his divinity and offer us heavenly salvation. But, and this is critical, it is *only* because of God's love that the human soul is valuable. And this love is pure and unadulterated agapē. It is spontaneous, unmotivated and perfect; it is "not generated by any *desire* for an object or any *assessment* of the worth of a person. This is precisely why it applies to the sinner as well as the holy. The passion of Christ symbolizes this perfect love.

The Christian God incorporates the two objects of Augustinian desire. **He is *both* perfect and personal.** In Greek legends, the gods are personal in the sense of being anthropomorphic but they are imperfect. In Greek rational philosophy, the gods are perfect in terms of their characteristic of absolute goodness and their lack of desire, but they are impersonal. Thus, the philosophical erotic tradition moves away from other persons. But Christianity gives us a person to love who is worthy of our love. It also provides us with a new ideal model of love. Christ's love for us, which we can mirror to the extent that God is in us, is *altruistic* and not muddied by egoism. Moreover, Christ's love is *intimate* in ways that transcend typically human expressions of love.

God bestowing love on us and our loving god as a *person*, whether or not you believe in it as a religious proposition, creates an entirely new dimension for loving. Or, it might be more accurate to say that it allows for the elaboration and exploitation of a dimension that has been relatively unmined in human cultures 1) that privilege group life over individual desires, or 2) that place the emphasis on the maximization of self-interest. These two kinds of human relationships, of course, exhibit the tension between traditional and modern cultures. The discourse of love, however, reveals a third and much more creative possibility in which love generates meaningful bestowals. That possibility was first articulated in the religious dimension.

Agapē *contra* Philia

As we've seen, the strikingly new and most dynamic element in Christian *caritas* is agapē. You don't need to be a Christian to recognize its importance. You don't even need to be religious. If you wish, you can view agapē as an imaginative conceptual leap in the language of love that is initially projected onto a God because people are not yet ready to believe that this remarkable creative faculty is a human invention. Indeed, such a rich and all encompassing view of love originally must have seemed to contain something of the divine because it seemed to rise above the mundane realities of social life and the selfish passions.

Even if this was a projection, however, it is important to understand that those early Christians who embraced agapē did so as a fundamentally religious truth. God was its source. Earthly love was at best a pale imitation of God's love and, especially in Augustine; it had no significance apart from the love relationship with God. All of which begs the question – what should earthly love look like if it can't match love with the

divine bridegroom? Not surprisingly it looks a lot like Aristotle's *philia* except that it is no longer applicable to the *virtuous few* who were males but to one's fellow Christians and potential converts. Philia obviously is not agapē. Augustine already had a form of philia with close male friends but it wasn't enough. Philia functioned in Aristotle as the highest form of human relations. Philia functions in Augustine as a second-tier relationship subsumed under agapē. It would have seemed sacrilegious to Augustine to describe human relationships in those terms. Normal human relationships were less meaningful, less real, than the ideal loving relationship with God.

Augustine is only one Christian writer among many, but his understanding of the limitations of earthly relationships characterizes a dominant train of thought in that religion. Augustine presents us with a highly dualistic perspective: the divine and the secular. The Christian Church inhabits both of these domains but its legitimacy derives from the divine. Christian love is different from any secular love. When Christian love operates on the secular plane it needs to affirm those differences. It takes the form of Christian philia, which translates all human relationships into friendships. All human relationships can ever be are friendships. Other potentially *close* relationships, such as those between parents and children or husband and wife, must ultimately be redefined in terms of friendship. No longer are these friendships exclusively male. You will remember that Aristotle described relationships between brothers as a model of friendship. Christians described one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Parents and children were brothers and sisters playing a different role. Husbands and wives were notdifferent. The only real marriage was with Christ, who is often quite fittingly described as the *bridegroom* (and husband or lover).

This adaptation of Greek philia by the early Christian church, and its application to the City of Man limits the potential of agapē and more sharply divides the spiritual from the earthly plane. It informs Augustine's, and later Protestant, theology into two separate cities – the City of God being the source of creative inspiration. Agapē comes from God and not man. Man unaided by grace is a despicable character. Even when supported by grace, men and women are incapable of God's agapē. They are still selfish creatures of desire, incapable of perfect love. Their imperfect desire, their lack of love, propels them forward in the Platonic sense to seek God. But their propulsive engine is fundamentally a self-centered search for personal happiness. Only God can be selfless because only God needs nothing. It doesn't take a rocket scientist or theologian's brain to appreciate a new justification for individualism in the Christian appropriation of the Greek concept of philia. Now, absolutely nothing in the earthly domain should get in the way of the pilgrims search for a happiness that can only be found in closer union with the divine.

Aristotle's virtuous man is selfish. He loves himself properly by living the good life and linking himself with the good that informs all of creation when it flourishes as it should. Augustine's Christian is also motivated by self-love. He loves himself properly, first when he returns God's love, and, second, when he loves his fellow spiritual pilgrims as brothers and sisters in Christ. Now, I don't want to under appreciate this kind of spiritual bonding. It can be a fierce kind of glue that binds the members of a Church closely together and allows them to act in unison. It helped the early Christians to unite together

in the face of persecution from Roman authorities. These were, and are, serious friendships that generate vibrant communities. I do want to suggest, however, that they do not exploit the full potential of the concept of agapē and, in some ways, they severely restrict it. Augustine is a case in point.

What we know about Augustine and the early Church is that while Christian philia generates strong internal bonds, it also bred intolerance towards outsiders. The greatest phobia of the Roman Catholic Church as it extended its secular power was something called *heresy*. The Church demanded uniformity of belief in the interest of philia because it wanted every Christian to be like every other so that their common beliefs would be mirrored to one another. This attitude severely limits the potential of recognizing other people as individuals and runs into predictable problems because Christianity simultaneously liberates the self as agapē and rigidly moulds it as philia. Those problems, of course, led to the creation of Protestant sects that were just as intolerant as the Roman Catholic Church. Augustine and Luther were equally insistent on doctrinal uniformity and equally intolerant of heresy. The main difference was that Luther was forced to accept religious diversity in a Europe divided into nations while Augustine was writing in a more fluid, but still imperial, context.

I find Augustine's horror of heresy fascinating given his embracing of Christian *caritas*. It helps to explain some of the paradoxical history of the Catholic Church and Christianity in general – i.e. that a religion of love can be so unloving at times. But my primary interest in early Christian philia is as an obstacle to more secular versions of love. In this course, we will soon be looking at the sexually based love – primarily between men and women – that Augustine would dismiss either as a temptation to the fully spiritual life or as duty based on human weakness. I won't pre-empt that discussion here but merely suggest that secular and sensual relationships were very low on the ladder of Christian love and its refined exploration in writers like Ovid a symptom of a corrupt and unsatisfying love that Christianity wanted to address. Instead, I want to talk about another kind of love that may either get lost in future lectures or get reduced to sexually based love by Mr. Freud. This is the love that Augustine and his mother have for each other. This relationship is likely the one that many of us find most touching in *Confessions*. It's hard to hold back the tears when Augustine finally cries over the death of Saint Monica.

We've got to remember that Augustine is still *confessing* when he describes his response mother's death. What he's confessing to is a very human weakness for this person who devoted her entire life to him. The question I want to ask you is this: how would you feel if Augustine hadn't finally broken down and cried for his mother? The appropriate Christian response might be to *understand and forgive* the tears, but not to *approve* of them. In strict and logical terms of Christ's love, Monica is first and foremost a *sinner* who must attribute all of her kind acts to his *grace*. In terms of Christ's Church, Monica is only Augustine's biological mother; she is more fundamentally his sister. It is paradoxical that the mother who gave her son so much love, and the father who disciplined and domineered Augustine rather than loved him, are lumped together so

indiscriminately towards the end of the book. But remember that Augustine's father converted to Christianity on his deathbed and joined the ranks of a brother in Christ.

That many of you *feel* that this is unfair suggests that you have a different idea of love than Augustine. Nonetheless, Augustine and Christianity opened up new possibilities for Western love, of which you probably are the product.

Love as a Mystical Union

Augustine and the early Church combined agapē and philia into a powerful combination that would run in tandem throughout the history of Christianity and into today. I've already suggested that, behind this synthesis, and informing the autobiography of the Christian pilgrim described in *Confessions* is the tradition of eros, not it's sensual articulation in Ovid, but the desire and ascent for love. But I haven't yet mined all of the religious possibilities for eros/desire or of *nomos* or submission to God. *Nomos* runs through Augustine's spiritual autobiography because he is prideful and will not submit to God's grace. The catharsis of the spiritual journey comes only when he submits after a long struggle. Pride still remains, however, as a temptation that besets him. He takes too much pride in his intelligence and struggles to *understand* what he should properly just *believe*. We see that anxiety to understand reflected in the last few books of *Confessions* that have less to do with his spiritual journey and more to do with a demonstration of his analytical prowess. It's easier to take the Christian out of the scholar than it is to take the scholar out of the Christian.

Eros and *Nomos* can suggest a very different combination than the accommodation of agapē and philia. Augustine's appropriation of Plato can be taken one step further, resulting in a more complete union of the believer with the Godhead. It's not a step that Augustine could ever take because of his acute consciousness of the gulf between man and god. The closely he gets to a taste of the divine union is while talking to his mother before she dies, but it is clear that everything in that conversation points to a heaven hereafter rather than a taste of heaven on earth. But a bolder and less analytical approach could push past those differences in search of a mystical union with God. What such a mystical union required was absolute trust, a more spontaneous love, and the desire to surrender not only one's intelligence but also one's will to God. This is the mystical union with God that privileges intuition and feeling over intellect. It is the attempt to *erase* the dualism between heaven and earth, the secular and the divine. It is an even more individualistic, and far more dangerous, path than the one endorsed by Augustine because it pays less attention to dogmatic distinctions and articles of common faith than to a more fundamental union. The term that we usually give to this kind of union is *merging*. Its characteristic catharsis may appear superficially to resemble submission to God's grace – and certainly submission is an element in the process – but it takes the shape of a *heavenly vision*.

Typically, often after a long struggle, the supplicant merges with the godhead in one blinding paradigmatic leap. The leap is not exclusively Christian, but occurs in many religions with a mystical component, which is what makes it potentially dangerous to the

concept of religious orthodoxy. And certainly the Christian Church fathers such as Augustine were highly suspicious of such mystical unions and sought to brand them as heretical. The ideal of mystical union, however, is not so easy to suppress because, ultimately, it is the goal of all Christians. Such a union is typically reserved for the life hereafter, but who can categorically deny that the same God who offers the miracle of grace can give some select individuals a glimpse of the godhead in this lifetime? Is God's agapē not sufficient for such a task, especially if supplicant for love loves without reservation? This mystical element was marginalized in mainstream Christianity, but it could never be completely suppressed without committing a logical fallacy. And mystical union had an even better pedigree. Saint Plato, arguably the most influential of the Greek philosophers in the history of Christianity, longed for a complete and unearthly union with absolute goodness.

In the history of Christianity a significant number of mystical visionaries, such as St. Bernard, St. Teresa, and St. John of the Cross, achieved official recognition as well as notoriety. It was the only route whereby the inequality between men and women could be completely erased. The medieval German abbot Hildegaard Von Bingen, for example, was consulted by Popes who believed that she had been granted visionary powers by God. These exceptional individuals, both men and women, provide a sub-text in the history of Christianity, sometimes worshipped as saints, more often executed as heretics. The important thing is that they never went away.

Why bother with these and sacred and supreme individualists of Christian history? There is a very good reason. These holy relics pushed the concept of love towards a mystical or spiritual union that was utterly transformative. This kind of love was by definition superior to any earthly considerations; it was entirely self-contained; and it could *only be judged from within*. This new love union was *sui generis*; it was not subject to rules; it wrote its own rules. This union was simultaneously individualistic, in the sense that it demanded freedom for the soul to ascend to heaven, and completely obliterated the atomistic self, in the sense that mystical union turned two into one. The human merged with the divine.

Romantic love will show up many centuries later, but it would have been inconceivable without this idea of the *merging* of two entities into one. Some of path towards this new conception of male and female merging was prepared in the Old Testament, of course, in the sense that God was supposed to have ordained that women and men become united in marriage as *one flesh*. An important difference here, however, is that the union is not simply divinely ordained but divine. Earthly love will become a mystical religion and will borrow heavily from the taxonomy of the mystics who pursued a union that put all secular considerations in the shade.

Conclusion: Some Observations on Religious Love

Religious love can be intensely creative as spiritual art, music and architecture evidence. The most obvious restriction on the creative potential of religious love is that its focus is otherworldly. Indeed, *caritas* can be an insurmountable barrier to certain kinds of love between persons, because the latter may be viewed as *cupidas* or attachment to objects in the world of sense. Religious love demands self-control and discipline with respect to all worldly objects and sensations, which is why much of our contemporary Christianity appears to lack a genuine spiritual impulse. Just how strict that self-control can be we can see in Augustine's detailed examination of all his motivations in order to ensure that he always puts God first. Augustine disciplines all his senses in order to plateau spiritually, including self-critiquing indulgences in sight, smell, touch, and especially taste that make sexual abstinence appear almost secondary. Think that you are genuinely spiritual like an Augustine? Then just imagine constantly monitoring your feelings, wondering whether you are wasting your spiritual energy by enjoying a sunny day, the smell of flowers, or a good meal. Love of god means keeping your eye always on the spiritual ball and understanding that the world is full of temptations. For many of us, this variation of religious love might appear unhealthy and extreme. It leads to certain kinds of obsessions and melancholia if one feels that one is failing in love.

Religious love solves some huge problems of living a meaningful life, but generates entirely new ones. How, for example, can a Christian be so sure that God has bestowed love on himself or herself? Deciding whether or not God has bestowed love on you is not just a rationalistic exercise; loving God is a Christian commandment but the kind of love that the Christian deeply desires is a reciprocal love. Ultimately, reciprocity is a strong *feeling* that God loves you. Unfortunately for the would-be believer, that reciprocal feeling is often the culmination of an agonizing personal pilgrimage, as was clearly the case with Augustine. In some moments, Augustine feels that god hasn't revealed himself fully. At other moments, during the so-called dark night of the soul experienced by Augustine and many other Christians, the pilgrim feels as though God is playing a *game* of hide and seek. Finally, when one's faith in God's love has reached the point of mental catharsis and metamorphosis into a more secure love, the pilgrim has a tendency to cling to the more palpable desires of the world. Temptation to backslide into worldly desires is a permanent given – the devil never sleeps -- so that true confidence only comes on one's deathbed. Now, some of these problems, including the fear of death, adhere to every serious religion. But they are exacerbated in a religion predicated on love. Love can never be taken for granted; love is always being tested for its authenticity; love likes to deceive the lover.

But then love is always a risk, and religious love certainly is no exception to the rule. Indeed, Christian love prepared Westerners to take that risk on the grounds that the reward was well worth the struggle. Do we still think so? Perhaps the more appropriate question is: do we still wish to think so? We are what we dream. Are we really prepared to live in a world without love? For the devout Christian, the answer was "no" – love of God was the only thing that made life meaningful and the true servant of God wears his discipline as lightly as a cloak.

6. Courtly Love

Towards a Definition

The term courtly love or *amour courtois* is a nineteenth-century invention used to describe the quite astonishingly new set of attitudes about secular love that developed in medieval society, and in particular in Northern France. Medieval society was Christian society and medieval religion was based primarily on a dogmatic adherence to faith in ways that could make even Augustine appear too much of a rationalist. The City of God that Augustine made pivotal to spiritual belief, however, was visible in full dogmatic institutional force. Love or *caritas* was to be fundamentally and fully directed towards God. Earthly love was, at best, derivative of agapē and, at worst, a total misdirection of desire. Sexual love, although necessary, ought to be regarded as brutish and debased – a sign of mankind's fall from grace – and a *duty* rather than a joy. Men and women, even married men and women, were brothers and sisters in Christ rather than a reciprocal and closed union.

That a very different view of love should not only emerge during the eleventh and twelfth century but also survive as a potent cultural force is surprising. The term *courtly love* is apposite because this perspective coalesced around the *courts* of Northern Europe. We know that the first symbolizations contributing to courtly love emerged further south, in the courts of Moorish Spain, where Arab poets like Ibn Hazm put together elements of Ovid and Plato in a novel way to describe the *union of souls* of a man and a woman that helps to ennoble them to strive to do and be better in the eyes of the beloved. This new literature of love was recycled in the poetry and songs of traveling troubadours who eventually made their way north. Along the way, they effectively recalibrated the Arabian treatment of love, which emphasized the Platonic element and made earthly love a stepping-stone to a higher spirituality, in ways that were closer to Ovid's celebration of the mutual joys – the *solace* – of the sexual affair. The Platonic emphasis was transformed in ways that idealized the love bond itself and that constructed something very much like a *closed circle* between the lover and the beloved.

There are inherent problems in defining an unstructured development that took place over two centuries and in a religious environment that was radically different from our own. But certain characteristics of this thing called courtly love bear a family resemblance. First and key is the Ovidian belief that sexually based love between a man and a woman is a natural and joyful thing that is capable of being idealized *in its own right*. Second, is the Arabic realization that love ennobles both the beloved and the lover. Third, true love is never exclusively or even predominantly sexual. Fourth, true love is a passionate relationship that is a moral, even sacred, union *apart from religious considerations*. Fifth, refined earthly love demands polite manners, courtesy, eloquence and an acceptance of the rules of courtship. Sixth, and most interesting, love and marriage do not necessarily go together and usually diverge from one another. These characteristics can combine in different combinations with different emphases, but together they erode many of the Classical and Christian interpretations of love. Platonic idealization now

takes place within, not away from, sexual love. Aristotelian friendship is undermined by a love that is clearly so much more than philia. The Augustinian love of God – caritas – now has serious competition from earthly love. Small wonder, therefore, that the Catholic Church had problems with this new paradigm of love.

Sexually based love between men and women was hardly a secure foundation for new kinds of idealization during the middle ages. Even those who advocated or delineated this new and *naturalistic* interpretation of earthly love must have felt a certain schizophrenia about embracing it. Hence the otherwise puzzling number of medieval romances that seem to endorse courtly love only to end up by denying its validity for true believers in Christ. Even if we are inclined to dismiss the Third Book of Andreas Capellanus' *The Art of Courtly Love* as a tongue in cheek pandering to orthodox Christian beliefs – as I think we can – we should not therefore conclude that all of Capellanus' readers were in on the joke. Many of them might have been persuaded that Books I and II were really an expose of the devil's religion and a manual only for those who were on the path to hell.

I don't think that Capellanus was confused. In Books I and II, he describes the City of Man in too much detail and with too much affection to believe he was only showing young Walter how courtly love functioned. Books I and II are much more than an instruction manual in the rules of courtly love and demonstrate an idealist's embracing of its *art*. Moreover, more than once Andreas brags about his prowess in the aforementioned art, describing himself as *Andreas the lover, chaplain of the royal court*, and pleading his own case as an unrequited devote of a "woman of such lofty station". The extreme chastity he recommends in Book III flies completely in the face of, and breathes none of, his fascinatingly *human* personality. Book III reads like it was written in the form of sermon to placate public consumption as opposed to Books I and II that lovingly explore the rich ambiguities of the love of real *persons*. But, for me, the most conclusive evidence that Book III should not be taken seriously is its disparagement of women. If you are going to end up arguing that women are slanderous, fickle, liars, sluts, disobedient, cantankerous, greedy slaves to their bellies and ultimately incapable of mutual love, how could you compose Book I, where educated women exhibit a voice that is completely new in literature. And, even if you object that these women were not really liberated, you have to admire their very real and uncontested power.

The Courts of Love

Women ruled the courts of love. These were not literary heroines but real women who wanted to redefine sexual and social roles. To be specific, they were the wives of kings (princes in those days) and higher nobles. We know some of them quite well. Probably the most important were Eleanor of Aquitane who divorced Prince Louis of France and who would eventually become Queen of England and her daughter Countess Marie of Champagne, both of whom play key roles in *The Art of Courtly Love*. We don't know how many noble women subscribed to and propagandized the courtly code, but we do know at least three things about them. First, they held sway in cultural courts of considerable power that paralleled, and in many ways, subverted the more overtly

military and political based courts of their husbands. Second, they advocated a role for women that made them the *instructors* and arbiters of behaviour of powerful males. Third, it was these women who codified the new cultural roles and rules. Capellanus was writing largely at these women's dictation. If Book III of *The Art of Courtly Love* is really the serious about face that some scholars think it is, then perhaps he was getting even with his female masters.

Personally I doubt it. But regardless, it seems pretty clear to me that the *naturalistic* love between men and women is a set of ideals *created* by women. Not only created, however, but fine-tuned over time. Capellanus shows us quite specifically how Queen Eleanor, the Countess of Champagne, the Countess of Flanders, Lady Ermengarde of Narbonne, and the Gascony Court of Ladies, adjudicated dubious cases and refined the code of love. That this was not some sideshow should be clear by some of the details. In one case, for example, Marie Countess of Champagne summoned no less than 60 ladies to witness her decision. The lover's code of secrecy could easily be exploded in the judgments of these particular cases, so the courts ensured that all cases were presented anonymously. While decisions in these courts of love generally upheld a chivalric code that reinforced the feudal aristocratic values of military valour (courage), generosity and honour, what must have galled some royal husbands is that the primary allegiance was not to any male superior, but to a woman. Women not only wrote the code, but they instructed males in appropriate behaviour.

We should avoid anachronism when looking at the debates between potential lovers in the most fascinating of Capellanus' three books – Book I. It is natural for us to focus on the element of the male seduction of the female. In fact, Book I was aimed at a man, Walter, and could legitimately be interpreted as a manual in the art of seduction along the lines originally set out by Ovid. The Ovidian emphasis is clearly there. But what is much more interesting than any presumed dominance of the male viewpoint is that that the masculine pursuit *must* be conducted on the terms dictated by the noble female. You might suggest that it is only the middle class and noble ladies that count for anything here, since peasant girls cannot have an idealized understanding of love and can be taken by force. That's true. But is not insignificant for a feudal military society that noble ladies must only be won by courtesy combined with character. Moreover, refined manners combined with morals, are imperative, not only for those of the highest noble birth, but anyone capable of appreciating love in the lesser nobility and middle classes.

By legitimizing secular love, these women were not merely redefining sexual politics but advocating a kind of secular religion that would help contribute to the humanism of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries – the period that we know of as the Renaissance. They were also setting in motion forces that would eventually erode feudalism. Medieval feudal society had its basis in a strict hierarchy of stations, with loyalty and obedience. The new view of love challenges those hierarchical relations by allowing unions that are not based exclusively on class. Class distinctions can be challenged by love. A middle class man, not without a great deal of difficulty to be sure, can impress a noble lady by the combination of love and noble *character*. A noble male suitor can find a suitable lover in a middle class. The lover and the beloved need to address the issue of rank, but

rank itself is not insurmountable. In one of the dialogues, the middle class lover of a noble lady rejects the "yoke of a class". Love is the great leveler. It has the power to flatten social stations; it modifies and leavens the established hierarchy. Most important, however, it creates an entirely new closed circle between the lover and the beloved with its own unique roles and rules. Courtly love countenances "a kind of autonomy or self-sufficiency of human love" that is quite remarkable; it constructs "a closed trajectory within itself". In courtly love for the first time, the love between a man and a woman is not a stepping-stone to something higher. It discovers the *higher*, the ideal, within itself.

Love Most Definitely Is Not Marriage

In his magnum opus *The Nature of Love*, Irving Singer suggests that there is not always a conflict between marriage and love in the courtly romantic literature. In *The Art of Courtly Love*, the only codification of its rules and behaviour, however, there is just this kind of conflict. It is *why* Capellanus suggests that such a conflict is bound to be inevitable that should interest us because it will tip us off to some essential characteristics of this thing called courtly love. We can focus either on the historical or essential characteristics of the love of people. If we focus on the historical characteristics, we might want to suggest that medieval marriages were essentially political and property relationships rather than love matches. Therefore, a person was *unlikely* to discover love within marriage, and inclined to look for love outside of marriage. But that is not Capellanus' argument; quite the reverse. He suggests that it is *impossible* to sustain love in marriage *even if* one begins by loving one's potential spouse. This, clearly, is not the modern view and that's what makes it so revealing about courtly love.

You will recall that, in one of the dialogues between a man and a woman designed to tease out whether or not love is genuine that the woman says that she *loves* her husband and cannot encourage the suitor in his quest for love. Now, not only does the male suitor question the veracity of this claim, but also the female Countess of Champagne decides that the woman is deceiving herself. It is the male who provides the logical argument against love in marriage by focusing on the difference between a passion capable of imaginative idealization and the kind of relationship that exists between a married couple. But the Countess of Champagne would agree with him. See if you agree. He says several things that you may or may not agree with. First, he says that all aspects of loving boil down to freedom of choice on the part of the woman. In marriage there is a presumption of sexual duty that is an insurmountable obstacle to that kind of freedom. Today, there is not the same presumption and forcing one's wife is the legal equivalent of rape. So, let's say you don't buy that argument, even if there may be something in it.

The second thing that he says is that there is a huge difference between the kind of *affection* that gets generated between a married couple and the *passion* of love. Crucial to this difference is the lack of tension. Married relationships are comfortable rather than amorous. The lover is not dedicated to the beloved to anywhere near the same extent because the lover has the rights and privileges of possession. Amorous love, however, never feels possession as a right and is continually anxious to provide adequate *service* to the beloved. Because the lover does not have the rights of possession, he constantly fears

the loss of love. That fear is exhibited primarily in one single emotion – jealousy. While in marriage, jealousy is a bad thing that can destroy a marriage, in love it is the very spice that keeps amour alive. If there isn't sufficient tension in the form of jealousy, Capellanus suggests that you need to inject a bit of it into the relationship. Whereas the arguments that stem from jealousy can destroy the security of a marriage, those are exactly the kind of spats that keep love alive. If you like, make up sex is the very best kind of sex.

You might not agree, or want to agree, but some interesting things are being said about the psychology of sexuality here. Let's say you completely disagree, why would Marie, the Countess of Champagne and final judge in the court of love suggest that love and marriage ought not to go together. The answer provides the secret to the new kind of civilization that these noble ladies were creating. The potential influence of women over men would be completely undermined if love were not separated from marriage. Women have enormous sexual power over men as long as men are *lovers*. Women can transform that sexual energy into courage and honour while men idealize women; they loose that power when they marry men. More important than courage and honour, the characteristics of an aristocratic military society, are courtesy, politeness, eloquence and, more generally *character*. Here is an insight worth considering. Women have the ability to civilize men and get them to perform to the very best of their ability. But that power goes out the window once love's tensions, fears, and anxieties are smoothed over by marriage. Married men are not necessarily bad; they are just boring.

The Countess of Champagne argues that love's power is stymied in marriage. "Love cannot exert its powers" because "loving one's wife's embraces has no effect on character or women's power of instruction." What is it that these women want? They want the power to instruct men in courtesy and to mould them into refined beings. That is what Capellanus means when he tells men to "seek love as the root and principle cause of everything good". It is not that there is something wrong with the institution of marriage. In fact, one of the rules of love is never to choose someone for love that "shame forbids you to marry". It is just that the religion of love wants infinitely more dedication than marriage could ever sustain. Freud would call this dedicated tension *sublimation* and make it the essential catalyst of *civilization*. Queen Eleanor and her daughter wouldn't have reduced love to sexuality, but for sure they understood the idea of sublimation and the potential power that it gave to women to transform a feudal into a civilized society.

Love is naturally excessive; love is a kind of madness; love often fails to realize its object. Ovid and others would like to cure us of that kind of madness by focusing on sexual satisfaction and seeking cures for fatal infatuation. Eleanor and Marie want to harness all of those imaginative disorders that adhere to the love of persons in the creation of a civilization where women are put on a pedestal. But in order for women to perform their role as *instructors in civility* and for women and men to conduct themselves appropriately, the *nature of love* needs to be understood.

Natural Love

Given the complex role played in the stimulation of love, it might appear perverse to talk about *natural love*. In the Roman scientist-poet, Lucretius, natural love is sexual love and sexuality is procreation. When love is depicted as *natural* in courtly literature, something different is meant. What the courtly tradition has in common with Romans like Ovid and Lucretius is a clear understanding that love is based on sexual differentiation. That is why they dismiss the Greek preference for homosexuality as unnatural. But just because love is ultimately sexual, that does not mean that sex can be reduced to sexuality. Ovid, of course, was the first to talk about an *art* of love that was refined and aesthetic as well as sexual. But the courtly tradition clearly recognized the Platonic insight that love's appraisal generated idealizations that went way beyond the sexual and extended into bestowal. Moreover, they were willing to bestow those idealizations on the exclusive love relationship between men and women. Finally, they were willing to do something very unplatonic. They were willing to attribute the most important meaning to love itself. That is why I suggested that they created a new religion of love in which, of course, women presided as the high priestesses.

When Capellanus speaks of what is *natural*, therefore, he is always already including a wealth of idealizations. The courtly love of which he speaks is *natural*, however, insofar as it accepts the sexual foundation of love without wishing to reduce love to sexuality. In the courtly formula that he establishes, we don't have the classic formula of a *higher* and a *lesser* love; we have a higher and a mixed love. The natural in this love equation, of course, is sexual desire. The human form that this takes is very different from what occurs in the animal kingdom. For we not only see the beloved object, but we *meditate* upon what we see. The mental picture that we construct is more important to us than the sensory impression that we have. The imagination is engaged right from the get go. But the imagination does not operate in isolation; far from it. The essential catalyst to appraising and bestowing meaning on the beloved is *conversation*. Conversation informed by imagination takes the form of eloquence. Eloquence aimed at mutuality or reciprocity takes the form of courtesy. And courtesy in a refined civilization presided over by women results in refined character. What those women wanted to see in men so many centuries ago, is not so very different from what they say they want today.

What Capellanus calls natural love is natural in so far as it focuses on the *human* world as distinct from the spiritual world that is Augustine's superior reality. The one clear statement that we get on the heavenly kingdom is the argument that it is better "to enjoy love thoroughly than to lie to God under the cloak of some pretense" and the quite revealing claim that "God cannot be seriously offended by love, for what is done under the compulsion of nature can be made clean by an easy expiation." Apart from that self-serving use of the Catholic confessional, until we get to Book III, there are only sporadic and largely inconsequential references to religion because we are firmly anchored in the profane City of Man. And we know it is profane because sexuality is so firmly imbedded in this new consciousness. Capellanus defines love or *amour* as the hooking and capturing of a person of the opposite sex. He further defines it as restless desire – a type of *suffering* – to possess the love of other person. He fully appreciates that possession is

sexual. What does that mean, i.e. sexual possession? You may be interested in knowing that Capellanus denies that that love *has* to involve sexual penetration. However, all of his dialogues between lovers indicate that love has a difficult time sustaining itself on idealization alone, i.e. in the absence of sexual contact. Love typically occurs in four stages: hope, the first kiss, the first embrace, and, finally, sexual yielding.

There is a fair amount of ambiguity in Capellanus' discussion of love. He wants to emphasize love's idealizations – higher love – but he can't ignore sexuality. He unconvincingly includes in "pure love" not only kissing but also "naked embraces" and more than once warns against sexual relations as "fragile" and "dangerous". It's fun to watch him attempting to reconcile Platonic purity with emergent sexuality. But ultimately he comes out in favour of a *mixed love* that blends the sensual with the ideal. Capellanus can't possibly maintain the illusion of naked embraces. He even uses the allegory of the procession of the army dead into the King of Love's domain to suggest that women are *obligated* to provide their lovers with sex. If, as seems logical, this criticism of chastity was endorsed by the leading women of the court, then it is a remarkable acceptance on their part that taking on a lover by free choice almost inevitably implies accepting adulterous sexual relations as a social norm. We need to understand exactly what that means. It does not involve endorsing lust; it does not negate the free choice of the beloved; it means relatively monogamous relations (with the lover; the husband is irrelevant); but it also means eventually "rewarding the services of the lover" with sex and not "capriciously putting things off". Finally, it means that the stages of courtship need to be followed carefully and the signals of love's progress need to be carefully and clearly given.

The Art of Courtly Love is as much a treatise on what love should be, what are its signs, and how it should unfold than actual dialogues between lovers. It is more authoritative and argumentative than descriptive and suggestive for real life exchanges between lovers. There is an obvious concern to distinguish between an appropriate timeline for moving love forward and ensuring that love is genuine. Equally, there is an attempt to delineate the heart and the head, sexual desire and love's idealizations. Most important, there is a defense of adultery as perfectly natural:

> I admit that I have a wife who is beautiful enough, and I do indeed feel such affection for her as a husband can…I am naturally compelled to seek for love outside the bonds of wedlock.

As defensible as adultery is, however, the relationship needs to be based on love. True love for both sexes ought to be based on the beloved's character rather than his or her physique. But the sexes are physiologically different. What is natural to men is different from what is natural for women, and this difference needs to be understood in the courtship process.

Capellanus adheres to a physiological/gender distinction that was common in his society, but that differed greatly from Ovid's exploration of female sexuality. For Capellanus and the Courtly ladies, the nature of women was sexual passivity. Men were more sexually

aggressive. That is the reason, says Capellanus, using the old double standard that Ovid refreshingly rejected, why women cheating on lovers was more “disgraceful” than men. Women were supposed to be more modest by nature. There may have been more important cultural than physiological reasons for the gender difference invoked by Capellanus, however. If the civilized function of *ladies* was to instruct men in courtesy and mould politeness into a more extensive moral character, they could hardly be the sexual aggressors. Love had its most powerful impact on the male character when it was only obtained with “great effort”.

Relative female passivity meant that women were capable of engaging in love affairs at a much earlier age than males. Male adolescence, Capellanus argues, is highly sexually aggressive. Therefore, men needed to be prevented from having affairs until they learned to manage these impulses, i.e. around the age of eighteen. Women, on the other hand, could enter into love as early as the age of menstruation, i.e. around the age of twelve. These, not coincidentally, were also the permissible ages for marriage in medieval society. We moderns may be somewhat shocked by the inequity of relationships that allowed older males to control younger women. We may find the biology, and certainly the psychology, of sexual maturity bogus. However wrong and patriarchal as such analyses may be, what is revealing about the emphasis in courtly love on the *age* when sexually based love is possible is the way it illuminates and confirms the *naturalistic* basis of love. Consequently, sexually based love has a termination date. Capellanus and his courtly contemporaries believed that it was improper, for example, for old men to engage in love affairs with younger women.

Courtly love was a systematic character building program based on natural sexuality. In order for this supposedly *natural* love to be effective, it needed some blatantly *artificial* devices. Chief among these was secrecy. You can see just how much powerful noble ladies were behind these adulterous relations because of the premium placed on protecting their reputation in society and the stability of their relations with their husbands. In order to so much as pursue a love affair with these socialites, men had to pledge themselves to secrecy. Everything depended on the discretion with which these clandestine affairs were conducted. Eleanor of Aquitaine’s first husband Prince Louis of France (as well as his advisers), for example, was not the slightest bit sympathetic to her ideas of love. For elite women who were considered baby machines producing princely and aristocratic heirs, love was a dangerous game. The danger, however, was acknowledged as part and parcel of the erotic appeal. Men, says Capellanus, not only love best when obstacles are placed in their way, but when an element of danger is involved in the proceedings.

As courtly love spread its tentacles through Europe, there must have occurred a tacit acceptance of affairs in the same way as formerly occurred in Ovid’s Rome and later in Renaissance Florence. Adulterous affairs were part of the natural order of courts and cities. The culture of courtly love pervaded life and literature to such an extent that the Courts of fourteenth century Spain, not only accepted adultery as a way of life but actually established “the rule that no gentleman could pay court to a lady without first obtaining the permission of the husband”. Thus, in one country at least, the institution of

marriage triumphed over courtly love but, paradoxically, only by first embracing it. The eventual and preferred solution would be to make romantic love the basis of marriage. That would generate a completely new set of problems. For, as weird as courtly love's embrace of adultery might seem, there were advantages to keeping love and marriage separate. At least you didn't place so much pressure on marriage to sustain a passion that is so very tumultuous.

Seduction and Sincerity

Love, says Capellanus, is a "wonderful thing" that "teaches everyone" so "many good traits of character!" The rhetoric of love's instruction is so thick at times that one is bound to suspect a degree of deceit. Did elite married women play the courtly game primarily because of higher love, for example, or because they were stifled in unhappy marriages? Was "freedom of choice" a principle in love's religion or an assertion of personal power in the only arena where women could have any significant power? How much female sexuality really was involved, if women were passive, circumspect and addressed as your "Your Prudence"? That Capellanus is so concerned to condemn women who give over their sexuality too easily as "wanton" and "prostitutes" points to a complex and possibly conflicting female agenda. But the subtlety and sophistication of this agenda suggests equally that it cannot be dismissed as a mask for releasing female sexual preferences within the realm of the possible. And the admittedly male writer on courtly love, Irving Singer, is not mistaken in describing the tradition of courtly love as *authentic* and *magnificent*. Singer singles out courtly love as "Western man's (he should say women's) first great effort to demonstrate that the noble aspirations of idealism need not be incompatible with a joyful acceptance of sexual reality." (Singer 35)

Having said all that, what interests me more in the development of courtly love is less its proto-humanism than its emphasis on *technique*. There are three main ingredients involved in courtly loving: physical attraction, an assessment of character, and *skillful speech*. You *hook* your beloved, and *chain* them to you by fine speech. That is why courtly love and the flourishing of literature go hand in hand because they are both about artfully crafted words. Despite the claim of one of the female debaters that true love can be *mute*, no one who really embraces the courtly tradition can dispense with words. From the eighteenth-century on, there is an understanding that true love cannot easily find the words to express its profoundly private reality. Too many fine words make us suspect that love is not present. But love's muteness or silence is most definitely **not** an article of faith in the religion of courtly love. It's all about using words to *convince* the beloved of one's authentic passion. The dilemma that *The Art of Courtly Love* confronts is the virtual impossibility of separating true passion from artful seduction. That dilemma is further compounded if one realizes that there is a fine line between love and seduction. Love becomes a psychological problem because everyone engaged in the courtship ritual has to ask two questions simultaneously: is the other person *really* in love with you and are you *really* in love with the other person? The dilemma in courtly love goes beyond that of separating infatuation from a more lasting passion because of the *power of words* to generate an emotional response.

A related issue that we will be discussing later on in the course is the way that the language of love illuminates a more complex and psychological understanding of the *self* by multiplying the number of possible emotional responses to stimuli. The main issue that I want to pursue here is a more simple and straightforward one – the possibility of deceit and self-deception. In the *Art of Courtly Love*, the primary male role is that of an artful seducer. In fact, Capellanus is instructing Walter *how* to practice this art in different and sometimes difficult situations. Being able to seduce the female *with words* despite differences of rank illustrates the *skill* Capellanus has. Being able to seduce very prudent and careful female judges of character further illuminates the technical ability of the consummate lover. Without *technique* the would-be lover would never be able to get past the bastion of female circumspection. But with *technique* the would-be lover cannot only achieve success with a beloved but with almost any woman.

Courtly love's program was to make a connection between sexual attraction and higher values but it put into play techniques and arguments for seduction. The woman can only withhold love for a reasonable period; she has to *decide* whether or not the male is *worthy*. To be sure, the male is also engaged in assessing the worthiness of the female, but the primary onus in the judging a lover's sincerity of character – "good faith and lawfulness" -- is placed squarely on the female. That is why the female must always have the "right of refusal". But, this right of refusal comes with a lot of catches because the male lover has his rights as well. One of these rights, of course, is to be heard out. Another is to be granted hope. Yet another is the expectation to proceed around love's bases – from hope, to kiss, to embrace, and finally to sexual or *mixed love* that that is truly the male's genuine desire. More crucial than any of these presupposed male rights, however, is the one right of refusal that available females in the court of love are not allowed to invoke – to reject the potential lover "on the excuse that some only pretend to love" (87). The courtly empire of love cannot function smoothly if women have the right to preemptively deny a suit. Or, it would be more accurate to say that women only have the right of refusal on two conditions: 1) they have to hear out the man's passion and 2) they have to combat the man's arguments.

There are more rational arguments than statements of passion in *The Art of Courtly Love* because love is agonistic. It is not only a rivalry between males for love but also an exchange of wit and wisdom between the beloved and the suitor. In this game, the suitor can move between authentic or fake passion and rational argument, but the entire point of the game is to *convince* the female that he has the right to her love. If the female refuses the male offhandedly, she is not playing by the rules because everyone knows that love can grow even when it is not recognized as such. If she *forestalls* the male unduly, she is not playing by the rules. Persistence is a given when a male truly loves a female. She is treating something as serious as love as a frivolous game, whereas it is a very *serious game*. This being the case, the woman has to simultaneously respect the prerogatives of love while *investigating* the sincerity of a lover who expects to eventually "profit" from his labours. The challenge is articulated by one of the female respondents in Capellanus, when she says: "Any man will try by every argument to induce an unwilling person to assent to that which he himself wishes and desires with all his heart to have…" (119). The woman not only needs to assess the lover's character, therefore, but also his motives

in a complex situation where we can never expect anything like absolute sincerity because successful seduction relies on the "ornaments of language" and is an exaggeration of reality. No amount of searching, no amount of investigation, can guarantee the commitment of the other person.

The ultimate paradox and the supreme irony of *The Art of Love* is that, while Capellanus dismisses deceitful and sensually oriented lovers as "impetuous assess" (149) or even worse "sinners against love" (162), he provides them with a textbook in seduction that can be used for selfish as well as noble purposes. Walter is not being instructed in how to find his true love; he is being taught how to seduce anyone. We might want to ask what, if any, are the checks and balances in this exposition of courtly love, particularly given the made double standard that at least partly excuses the male desire for conquest. One such check and balance, of course, was the courts of love presided over by Eleanor, Marie and a number of ladies in Northern Europe. These courts not only decided ambiguous cases but they dealt out punishment to "wicked men" who abused the rights of love. The Countess of Flanders, for example, exiled one poor fellow from the court of love altogether because he vacillated between two lovers. The decision read as follows:

> The man who plotted so fraudulently ought to be deprived of the love of both women and should never in the future enjoy the love of any honorable lady, since we think he is swayed by strong voluptuousness and this is a direct enemy of love as you are shown more fully in the teaching of the Chaplain (i.e. Capellanus). But the woman should not consider it any reflection on her reputation, since any women who wants to have the praise of the world must indulge in love, and it is not easy for anybody to examine a man's innermost faith and the secrets of his heart, and so we often find wisdom deceived under the cloak of many words (172).

These courts clearly provided women with a certain amount of solidarity and protection, but only if they played the game of love on its own terms. Women who chose not to play the game obviously forfeit the "praise of the world".

The world of the lovers that was closing upon itself was not entirely closed. Love was not simply its own sole judge as all these meticulous rules and courtly decisions suggest. The all important criteria of status and reputation, not to mention access to desirable lovers, applied to these admittedly adulterous liaisons. What no longer appear to have applied were the theological and political sanctions against sexuality outside of marriage. Unless one takes Book III of *The Art of Courtly Love* seriously, love was now subject to quite different rules. And, even if one takes Book III at its face value, we are witness to a schizophrenic assessment between the City of Man and the City of God with no possible synthesis except opting for the one or the other. If you follow the *natural* and *human* impulses of love, you suffer eternal damnation. If you subscribe to the love of God, you forfeit not only "the praise of the world" but are dismissed as uncultivated and emotionally bankrupt by the King and Queen of Love. No wonder the medieval mind jumped back and forth leading both to Renaissance and Reformation.

Personally, I don't think the Courts of Love took religious sanctions very seriously. The feudal elite generally had a more secular outlook, at least until old age and death loomed on the horizon. In which case, Catholic lords and ladies might hope to rescue salvation from the infernal fires by confessing their sins, doing penance, and donating part of their riches to the Church. The monasteries made rich picking from the accumulated guilt of people who were now too old to feel the pricks of love. Part of the difficulty in establishing love's reign is that sexually based love has an expiry date. Some might say that all love has an expiry date, but that would deny the potent force that results when sexual love is linked to the idealization of one unique person. Nevertheless, the shelf life of courtly love was limited by the fact that it was qualitatively *different* from the kind of habitual affection common in marriage. Older men and women are not generally thought to *suffer* from restless passion or to be jealous rivals in love's game.

Courtly love was a young person's game, even though it is clear that older women still had the function of mentoring younger men and women in its meaning, its function, and its rules. Older men presumably moved on to other games of power – typically wealth and political influence – that were less vulnerable to cultural imperatives. In the eighteenth-century, Adam Smith disabused the pretension of love by declaring that "avarice often succeeds love, but love seldom succeeds avarice". While Adam Smith's comments are clever, he may have seriously underestimated the cultural power of love, however. For the courtly lords and ladies who subscribed to love never pretended that sexuality was a constant. What they argued was that, while it was a constant, love had the power to mould men's sexual natures towards courtesy and moral character. Adam Smith's comments on avarice may appear telling, but it was courtly love more than abstract ethics that taught potentially powerful men the lessons of generosity. It was courtly love that identified greed as the enemy and that the sole rationale and function of money was to "serve everybody" (59). Capellanus suggests, and you might consider this carefully, that it is only through love and its rewards that any "man can be of use in this life or be considered worthy of any praise" (108). The ultimate goal of love's religion, apart from its solaces, is "profitability to others".

Courtly love cleverly cultivated and mined all the jealousy and rivalship between powerful males and pointed them towards generosity. Only the generous man was lovable and so it behooved everyone who wanted love to be generous. This antithetical attitude towards capitalism long sustained its aristocratic critique. But some of these attitudes of courtly love are still with us and make even the most modern lovers uncomfortable with acquisitive individualism. By definition, the beloved does not want a greedy or acquisitive lover. According to the courtly definition of love, any woman who is attracted to a man for his wealth fails to understand the real meaning of love and, indeed, *sins against love*. Of course, both love and capitalism free up individualism, but in very different and typically antithetical ways. The single largest source of mental and moral confusion in the modern age may be the commercialization of love. Courtly love was replete with confusions and contradictions, many of which we have inherited, but it was not confused about one thing. True love made you want to do things for another, not for yourself.

*Might want to discuss the use of **tu** and **vous** in the art of seduction somewhere in this section.*

Love as Passion

How does courtly love fit into our analysis of *appraisal* and *bestowal*? That is a difficult question to answer. Appraisal is obviously there in courtly love in spades, especially as witnessed by as witnessed by the interigation of the lover by the putative beloved. Indeed, the woman not only appraises the male but also teaches the male to make correct appraisals about what counts as *loving*. These appraisals are not just of the motives of the lover, but assess the lover's character Individuals in courtly love don't go it alone; they have the love courts to support and reinforce proper assessments. But it seems to me that elements of bestowal of value on persons and relationships are emerging. The *relationship* between belover and beloved is beginning to generate its own meanings.

I suppose you could say that, in courtly love, appraisal and bestowal are being combined in an entirely new and influential formula. Both the lover and the beloved engaged in appraisal, with the primary task of assessing and appraising character falling to the woman. Once lovability and mutuality was approved, the male was expected to devote all his energies to the service of the woman. The woman's job was to encourage bestowal of love upon her *as a person* and to reward that bestowal only if it fit the strict criteria of courtly love. The man's primary *service* was to bestow the most intense meanings possible on his beloved. By bestowing love, the man submerged (sublimated if you will) rational and sensual appraisal within an idealization of the female. That bestowal took the form of putting the woman on a pedestal, treating her not only as the personification of perfection but the impulse for his own perfection. This symbiosis eventually privileged imaginative bestowal over appraisal.

Prior to courtly love, such an extreme form of bestowal. Love as passion encourages individuals to construct their own special meanings about one another and their relationship could only take the form of God's love or the reflection back of gratitude for God's love. Now a primary relationship of meaning was not between god and man but between man and woman, where the woman acted as an earthly replacement and potential substitute for the divine. This new relationship was so infused with passionate energy that it stimulated and sustained a new cultural paradigm and an intense and erotically charged literature. Perhaps the best way to understand the remarkable innovation of courtly love is not in terms of appraisal and bestowal but in terms of *sensuality* versus *passion*. Passion seems to be something new on the scene. Passion is based on sensuality but goes way beyond it, generating all kinds of creative possibilities for love. Ovid gave us sex rather than passion. Ovidian sensuality is redeemed only (if one can say *only* about something so significant) by aesthetics. But passion moves so far beyond sensuality, while still depending upon it, so as to provide resources for the erotic imagination that transcend and sublimate the sexual. Sensuality draws upon aesthetic ideas of beauty; passion generates its own aesthetics of love. As so often was the case with developments surrounding love in the Western world, things would never be the same.

7. Medieval Romance

Introduction

The original literary installments in the long history of romantic love were composed in the twelfth and early thirteen centuries. Today we are going to zero on Gottfried von Strassburgh's romance of *Tristan*, one of the greatest tales of tragic love, written in 1210. The reason that I picked *Tristan* over other romances is that it is to my way of thinking the most modern of the bunch. I consider it modern for several reasons:

First, it seriously undermines feudal values by placing love above honour and loyalty. To be truly worthy of the epitaph *honourable* means being loyal to one's lover.

Second, it goes further than simply modifying feudalism by contrasting the ideal of love with the evil of society. This is why the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century romantics embraced the medieval romance.

Third, while it oscillates between romantic optimism and pessimism, *Tristan* inexorably moves towards the tragic side of love's equation. As its title suggests, the book makes love's *sadness* and, more interesting, the *joy of sadness* its central theme. Here we have a profound analysis, not of love *per se*, but of readers' sympathetic indulgence in love's trials and tribulations.

Fourth, it makes the sexual and psychological relationship between the lovers the fundamental dynamic of the tale in ways that prefigure the modern novel. Indeed, you may be interested to know that the term *novel* was taken from romance because *roman* in Latin means a story or novel.

Fifth, contrary to what you might suspect, *Tristan* incorporates modern elements that go well beyond romantic idealism. It is *realistic* in some very interesting ways, as I hope to demonstrate. To exaggerate the unreal and idealistic quality of romance means missing out on some of the most interesting things that are going on in *Tristan*.

Sixth, and finally, *Tristan* has an unmistakably *secular* tone that surprises us for an overwhelmingly Catholic society. Whereas so many medieval romances end up contradicting themselves at the end by putting spirituality back on top, in *Tristan* the religious perspective is fading into the background.

Abelard and Heloise

However, to suggest that the spiritual viewpoint recedes as love moves into the foreground is to simplify a much more interesting incorporation of religious sentiment. *Tristan* and romance retains a distinctly spiritual quality that <u>ultimately</u> disqualifies it as modern *realism*. The love between persons now becomes *sacred* and holy in ways that demonstrate a profoundly religious influence. Just what that influence was can be

clarified by showing what it was *not*. The tale of Tristan and Isolde is very different from the story of Abelard and Heloise. The latter were *real* medieval lovers who provide us with a written record of their love and their later reflections on that love. Still, their tragic love story resembles nothing so much as an Augustinian commentary on Christian love. It starts off differently, as paths to Christ so often do. Abelard was a 40 year old Church canon on his way to becoming a priest who got a job as tutor to a precocious seventeen year old girl. Having no experience, he falls head over heels in love with her and even composes troubadour songs for her that hit the equivalent of the medieval hit parade – they get sung from village to village and town to town. Did I also mention that Abelard is an intellectual – in those days a theologian – who writes dangerous books that get him into trouble with the ecclesiastical hierarchy? He's the classic bad boy who gets the girl into bed in an age when you just didn't do that. In an age without much in the way of birth control, he gets the young girl pregnant and secretly marries her. The powerful uncle finds out and hires men to castrate Abelard. In classic medieval fashion, Heloise gets sent to convent, in those days a *nunnery*. But the castrated intellectual and the nun continue to write letters to one another that demonstrate a caring for each other that goes beyond the sexual.

You can imagine how this real life story became a legend and one that could be exploited by both religious and secular perspectives on love. Scholars today still argue about the nature of their love – the extent to which it was conformed to traditional values or struck a blow for love's independence from dogma. The controversy is fueled by ambiguities in Abelard's ultimate Augustinian confession of faith in spiritual love and Heloise's joyful reminiscences on the obviously sexual closeness they once had. All that you need to take from all of this is the very obvious ambiguity and conflict in the medieval mind when it came to appreciating earthly love and the tendency to make its secular understanding subservient to its religious, i.e. Catholic, understanding. There was no easy exit from this divided mind and no ultimate solution apart from the Augustinian one – to appreciate that God is the true source and definition of love.

The Mysticism of Human Love

That is, there is no easy exit from the conventional religious viewpoint. But the conventional religious viewpoint was by no means the only one. Medieval religion offered a less orthodox alternative to Augustine's division of the City of Man and the City of God. That is the essentially mystical solution first suggested by Plato and embraced by Christian mystics like St. Bernard of Clairvaux who believed that it was possible for the soul to be united to God in this world as well as the next. This union with God was a life transforming experience with an uncanny resemblance to falling in love. Indeed, Bernard describes the merging with Christ in the vibrant language of love and marriage:

> This is the marriage-contract of a truly spiritual and holy union: no, contract is too weak a description; it is an embrace…Nor need we fear that the inequality of the two partners will make the concurrence of their wills halting or lame, for love is no respecter of persons, and it is from loving, not from paying honour, that love

> takes its name. Indeed, one who is horror-stricken, one who is filled with amazement, or with fear, or with wonder, may well pay honour; but to a lover all these have lost their meaning. Love provides its own sufficiency; where love has come to be, it subdues all other affections and makes them part of itself; and that is why the soul that loves, loves and knows naught else at all. He who is a worthy object of honour, of amazement, of admiration, he loves rather in order to be loved. They are the Bridegroom and the Bride (Happold, 238-9)

This discourse of the bride and the bridegroom is, of course, metaphorical. It depicts a spiritual reality between the Creator and creation. But it is far too imaginative and explosive a conception to remain an exclusively spiritual metaphor. Thanks to courtly love and the songs of the troubadours, sexual love was already emerging from its repressed hiding place. The next step was to make sexually based love divine. In *Tristan* we witness the full flourishing of a love that seeks to *provide its own sufficiency*.

The mystical path of religious love was not for everyone. Not everyone makes it to what Richard of St. Victor calls *excessus* or *extasis* – what we today call ecstasy. In order to get to complete oneness with God, you have to "leave Egypt behind, first we must cross the Red Sea"(Happold, 243). The religious mystics all concur that the path of love is a path of suffering. The suffering is worth it because it leads to a union that not only restores everything that is missing but so much more. As Richard of St. Victor puts it, when you fall in love with God, your soul "returns to itself" but as your love grows, you are sequentially "transcended", "transfigured" and "resurrected". When these kinds of transcendent values are applied to earthly love, as they clearly are in *Tristan* you move from a Christian religion of love to love as a secular religion. Those who are religious may want to argue that the secular religion of love is *sacrilegious* and sinful, as both Augustine and Abelard did upon mature reflection. Those like Gottfried von Strassburg, who emerged from and transformed the courtly tradition, would happily replace religious values with a completely new path for the ascension of "noble minds".

Some scholars, notably Irving Singer, have serious objections to a secular interpretation of Gottfried's *Tristan* such as I want to develop. So before examining the specific ways that he transforms the courtly tradition, we'd better deal with the allusions to religion in the text. The first thing that we have to say is that there isn't much religion in the text, and what's there is highly ambiguous. We find Tristan making the sign of the cross before going into battle with the dragon, for example, but such conventions hardly constitute evidence of the religious perspective. We find them routinely coupled with legends, sources that Gottfried respected, but that cannot seriously reflect a belief in things like Dragons, Giants and little dogs with bells that dispelled love's care. These are simply literary and social conventions. More significant are examples of God's intervention, as in the scene where the young Tristan has been kidnapped by merchants who want to use him as a translator. By "His will and command" (i.e. God's) a tempest arises to make sure that Tristan lands in the court of Mark in Cornwall, Great Britain (73). The problem with making too much of these and similar statements, is that they are obviously straightforward substitution of God for the "fate" that Gottfried was familiar with from Greek and Roman epic stories. They won't bear the discursive weight of a

more fundamentally religious outlook. Perhaps the most direct allusion to the vitality of religious faith and dogma is the *ordeal of the red-hot iron* that Isolde is put through by Mark and the nobles of the court. Now this ordeal was a very real possibility in a medieval society that believed that God could directly judge the truth by protecting the innocent from injury. Moreover, we see Isolde craftily getting a squeeze from Tristan, dressed as a beggar, so that she will not have to lie about cuddling with someone other than Mark. There may be a superficial respect for religion here in so far as Isolde escapes the ordeal without a burn. But you have to ask yourself: what kind of religion is it that is allowed to placate God with semantic distinctions that obscure something as serious as adultery? Finally, as if there were any doubt that Gottfried treats religious dogmatism on a par with other fantasies, he tells us that Jesus or God can mean whatever you want him to mean:

> Thus it was made manifest and confirmed to all the world that Christ in His great virtue is pliant as a windblown sleeve. He falls into place and clings, which way you try Him, closely and smoothly, as He is bound to do. He is at the beck of every heart for honest deeds or fraud. Be it deadly earnest or a game, He is just as you would have Him (248).

Isolde wasn't saved by her faith but by her "guile". In this life, earthly cunning is more powerful than religious conviction.

I'm not requiring you to be absolutely convinced that Gottfried doesn't believe in God or the Catholic religion, only suggesting that it's not first and foremost in his mind. If there is an important division and potential ambiguity in the book, and I think there is, it is not between heaven and earth – it's between human love and human society. Even Singer would admit that, if Gottfried had been able to finish the tale before he died, it would have had a secular rather than a spiritual conclusion.

The Poverty of Courtly Love

Gottfried clearly was immersed in the language and the literature of courtly love. That was a secular vision of love that opened up the possibility of genuine joy in a sexually based relationship between men and women. The writing on the courtly tradition that we read viewed love as operating outside of marriage, but in other writings, courtly love could operate inside as well as outside formal marriage. In *Tristan*, of course, we see true love operating and sustaining itself fairly well outside of marriage. It is the jealousy of Mark, fomented by Marjodoc and Meloc, which eventually discovers the *secret* between the two lovers and ruins their chances of happiness. Superficially, the story of Tristan conforms to the basic structure of courtly love. And there is a ton of *stuff* about fashion, calf size, jousting and everything else that would strike the advocate of courtly love as very familiar. However, a fundamental tension is evident in *Tristan*. Not only is the love described by Gottfried more of a mystical union than anything depicted in courtly literature – a merging of two souls – but also love is no longer supportive of the social structure. Even when love challenged the social hierarchy in courtly love by suggesting that love could temper some of the distinctions of rank, it generally and powerfully

supported the chivalric values of an aristocratic society. In *Tristan*, much of love's sadness derives from the fact that its values have little if anything to do with social values. Love is so much its own world that it challenges the social world.

The tension in *Tristan* revolves around this potential opposition. The little circumscribed world of the lovers is necessarily a challenge to any social order. You might think that everything would be fine if Mark relinquished his chivalric claim to Isolde; if Tristan inherited either the kingdom of Cornwall or took up his dead father's domain in France; and if Tristan and Isolde eventually married and lived happily ever after. But if those things happened, you wouldn't have a romance about a love that is measured and tested by suffering, and you'd be missing the fundamental tragedy of true romance. What is the fundamental tragedy? What do you think is the fundamental tragedy of love? Your answer to that question could lead you to some profound insights into the romantic love that persists today. You could and should spend a lot of time exploring the question if you *believe* in romantic love. I can't answer it completely for you; no one ever could. But here are a couple of things to consider. First, only a few really sensitive souls are ever capable of this kind of mystical union and, to the extent that there is a soul mate somewhere for these people, there is no guarantee that they will ever find each other. Second, the world is not sensitive and even if innocent rather than evil, will constantly throw up obstacles to love. Third, true love, even if found for a moment or a lifetime, is an ideal that requires constant devotion and will be severely tested. That is why love is tragic and why so many people settle for something less.

But enough of these supposed profundities. Let's look at how Gottfried contrasts courtly love with the new kind of love that he is imagining, on the understanding that he and his readers still have one foot in the courtly domain. In the prologue to *Tristan*, we already see Gottfried making the transition from a courtly love that teaches "loyalty, constancy, honour and many good things besides" towards a "sweet love" for whose sake lovers will gladly "suffer pure longing in their hearts". Important distinctions between the first and the second discourses of love are explored through the differences between Tristan's parents Rivalin and Blancheflor and Tristan's much more sacred bond with Isolde. We have a clear sense that Rivalin and Blancheflor really love one another and some of the language describing their love sounds like a mystical union:

> Thus he was she, and she was he. He was hers and she was his. There Blancheflor, there Rivalin! There Rivalin, there Blanchesflor! There both, and there true love!…Their life was intimately shared. They were happy with each other and heartened one another with much kindness shared in common.

Clearly, it's a pretty intense relationship as you might expect from the noble parents in love of Tristan. But it's a relationship that is totally imbedded in the feudal structure. Rivalin is a feudal warrior whose loyalty is to Mark first and his Blanchesflor second. It's true that Rivalin steals Mark's sister away after he gets her pregnant. It's true, therefore, that love presents some potential complications for the feudal order. But these are relatively easily put aside. Rivalin's chief vassal or feudal henchman, Rual views the romance with Blanchesflor as imminently suitable and a relationship that reinforces his

honour and *esteem* in every way. The horse pulling the feudal cart is just this honour and esteem of Rivalin and the "loyalty" of Rual. Rivalin, like so many other feudal warriors dies in battle. Deprived of her lover and her kingdom, Blanchesflor conveniently dies as well. The death of Rivalin and Blanchesflor is *sad* but it is not *tragic*. Rual raises the baby that she gives birth to before dying, hiding it away from Morgan who would view the child's heredity as a threat. He puts the baby first and raises Tristan as his own; it is an act of *love defined in terms of service*.

When Rivalin and Blanchesflor die, they don't simply die as individuals but as people who are defined in terms of their elite status in a hierarchical society. The love between them may be real but it is always conditioned by feudal values. The tenacity of those values can be seen most powerfully in the story of Rual who wanders all across Northern Europe in search for the kidnapped Tristan. The message here is one of loyalty and honour to one's rightful lord by birth. Consider that Rual favours Tristan over his own biological sons and that he leaves them and the wife that he also *loves* in the proper feudal fashion, because his first loyalty is to a particular version of *society*. Courtly love was never meant to undermine that loyalty. That sense of honour and loyalty is what Tristan and Isolde have been schooled in since birth. That is why Isolde makes the marriage match with Mark that cements an alliance between Ireland and Cornwall. That is why Tristan gets the bodelicious babe for his lord rather than himself. Any other practice would be considered villainous – a word that plays on the disservice of a bad vassal to his rightful lord.

To put oneself and one's private relationships before honour and loyalty was unthinkable. To be sure, if you are really cunning and you can dovetail what you want with what you can try to prove that you are entitled to, so much the better. No one expects people to be saints. That is why patching up feuds and the reconciliation of foes is such a staple of feudal and early modern society. What is unthinkable, or at least highly novel, is setting up a love relationship in *opposition* to social expectations. No wonder then that one of the primary literary works establishing love as its own justification requires a subterfuge. Instead of having Tristan and Isolde simply fall in love and flaunt so many social conventions, as a writer might do today, Gottfried has to find an external and entirely magical mechanism for a love like this – the love potion. The potion is a particularly fascinating literary device because, in an age when love was not able to change social rules, it *changes everything*. Clearly, the potion is simultaneously a justification – Tristan and Isolde are not responsible for flaunting conventions – and a symbol – falling in love with one's soul mate is a mystical union far superior to any conventions. Isolde is even willing to sacrifice her best friend Brangane if it will protect her love relationship; Tristan is willing to cuckold his best ally and father figure Mark.

Today, we are used to excusing love and its power. It was not so in the early thirteenth-century. It took a hell of a lot of literary finessing. Gottfried's brilliant use of the love potion, his skillful elaborations on the beauty and nobility of mind of his two protagonists, as well as his overt and subtler hints that Tristan and Isolde deserved better – all of these techniques are needed to predispose us in favour of the hero and heroine. There's absolutely no doubt about Gottfried's program, however; he's trying to fashion a

new gospel of love that he firmly believes in himself. He tells us that this kind of love is what he is looking for; that he's tasted just a little of love's couch; and that this is the kind of love that should rule society and not visa versa. This for him is the new "lodestar" or magnet of happiness within sadness that alone makes life worth living. Arguably, a century earlier, such a perspective would have been religious sacrilege and secular treason.

We are on the road to modern romantic love, but we have not yet escaped the world of feudal society. Much of the tragedy of our two lovers, and the tension of the narrative, stems from the fact that *love itself clearly is not sufficient*. It is sufficient for a time. It feeds itself on the symbolic transparently crystal bed in the cave in the garden but the pull of social relations and social esteem is tenacious. Love would like to be self-sustaining and, in its dreams and ideals, it is self-sustaining. But the real world intrudes, not merely because Mark and his hunting party discover the lovers, but because Tristan and Isolde constantly connive, with their retainer Curvenal and their friends at court, to have the best of both worlds. The irony of our typically medieval lovers, to cite Irving Singer, is that they want to enjoy both each other *and* a society that operates according to a very different system. In order for love to lose some of its tragic quality – it can never lose it all because love is tested by real or potential *suffering* – it would be necessary to free up the individual from social rules. Gottfried and other medieval writers likely could never have envisioned that happening. The medieval hierarchy may not have been established by God; it may not have been a *great chain of being* stretching to the heavens; but it must have appeared inevitable.

There were elements in this new religion of love, however, that would help erode medieval hierarchy. Religion does not provide a strong impetus for social reform because it makes a sharp distinction between the City of God and the City of Man. At best, it seeks a temporary armistice in secular institutions and hierarchies that parallel and reinforce their heavenly counterparts. But the new religion of love pictures society as inimical to love, if not positively evil in comparison, and that criticism can shine a light on those social structures that prevent love from flourishing. Medieval romances did not do that. Medieval writers on love likely did not want to change their world. In fact, they may have found it the best of all possible worlds to suffer in to the extent that, if true love failed, at least courtly love remained. Noble souls might survive in the latter realm, although they could no longer thrive there. The ideal of true love as a mystical union guaranteed restless and perpetual desire. And that, my friends, is ultimately what is meant by *suffering*.

The Bed in the Garden

If true love is self-sufficient, we are entitled to ask two questions. First, what kind of an intimate world does it generate? Second, what are the implications for the way we look at the rest of the world? I've answered the second question in part by describing the feudal, or if you like *political* world, as evil. That is a world that demands the kind of cunning and opportunism that seems opposed to true love. In romantic literature generally, the socio-economic and political world always bears the stain of impurity

when compared to what is essential in love. But focusing on romance only as a critique of the external environment would be to miss something that is so essential to its future – a novel appreciation of the *natural* world as re-imagined through the eyes of love.

Let's begin with the intimate world. Its symbol is the bed and the cave. Gottfried is at his literary best and most engaged in describing the setting. Elsewhere, he can be cynical, ironic, and even sarcastic. But here all of his considerable intellectual and literary power is focused entirely on conveying the sacredness of the intimate union. The bed is crystal, symbolizing the complete transparency of lovers towards one another when they are engaged in sexuality. Transparency means the complete absence of treachery, deceit or force. The intimate sexuality that provides the basis for union is a joining of souls as well as bodies. It does not favour the mental over the physical, invoking the exploration of different techniques (symbolized by the malleability of tin) for giving one another mutual pleasure. But the combination of the physical with the mental is the ideal that all true lovers should strive for. Lest we fail to appreciate the idealization of love that is aimed at here, Gottfried himself italicizes the word *should*. Like nowhere else in *Tristan* or medieval literature for that matter, the author personally comes out from behind the *persona* of the narrator to tell us what he personally believes:

> I know this well, for I have been there [i.e. love's refuge]. I, too, have tracked and followed after wildfowl and game, after hart and hind [i.e. hunting for love] in the wilderness over many a woodland stream and yet passed my time and not seen the end of the chase. My toils were not crowned with success. I have found the lever and seen the latch in that cave and have, on occasion, even pressed on to the bed of crystal – I have danced there and back some few times. But never have I had my repose on it. However hard the floor of marble beside it, I have so battered the floor with my steps that, had it not been saved by its greenness, in which lies its chiefest virtue, and from which it constantly renews itself, you would have traced Love's authentic tracks on it. I have also fed my eyes on the gleaming wall abundantly and have fixed my gaze on the medallion, on the vault and on the keystone, and worn out my eyes looking up at its ornament, so bespangled with Excellence! The sun-giving windows have often sent their rays into my heart. I have known that cave since I was eleven, yet I never set foot in Cornwall!

WOW! What a tour de force of writing to describe the temporary habitation of "Tristan and his mistress" in all of its symbolic splendour. The bed of love that can never be assailed by force and the circular and domed interior of the cave that resembles a pre-Gothic church. Just at the time the Catholic Church was building its spires up to heaven, Gottfried opts for the intimate domed enclosure that permits of no hierarchy and that reflects a perfectly secular, but sacred, unity.

In many medieval romances, such caves and beds would have all kinds of allegorical meanings, sacred as well as secular. What makes this beautiful description so different is that, like the transparent bed, there are no hidden meanings, that is apart from the obviously sexual (exception might be the white hind). This is a description of intimate

lovemaking and its characteristics that requires no translation for careful and committed readers. The same is true of the garden in which the cave and the bed are located. The only potential ulterior reference point for love's garden might conceivably be the Garden of Eden, but the nature that is described, while ideal, is neither unnatural nor supernatural. Gottfried successfully conveys the romantic identification with the beauty in the natural world, which corresponds to the physical beauty of the lovers. There are green grass and lime trees giving off their beautiful scent. There are the artistic contrasts between sunshine and shade. There are the birds of the forest, the nightingales, the thrushes and the blackbirds making music. And men and women in love can feel that they are part of this natural world. Gottfried asks what else could anyone possibly want: "Man was there with Woman, Woman was there with Man. What else should they be needing? They had what they were meant to have, they had reached to goal of their desire." (263)

There is, of course, a pastoral element to the scenes where the lovers go out into the Garden and "frolic". After all, they take their harp and sing their love songs. They hunt, rather than tend sheep, as was the fashion in feudal society. The author's descriptions are not what we would consider to be *naturalistic*. They are idealizations of nature. They suggest a view of love that permeates all living things. What makes them interesting idealizations in the medieval context is that they present human beings as part of nature. That is something very different from the biblical interpretation of mankind dominating nature with God's blessing. Whatever the merits of Gottfried's idealizations of love and nature, and the equation that he seems to make between them, this does not appear to be a spiritual interpretation of the natural environment. It involves at least a certain amount of enjoyment of nature *on its own terms* and *for its own sake*. There is a close connection between romantic literature and a new appreciation for nature that begins at this time.

Romance and Realism

Gottfried's attention to nature and other aspects of the lived-world of real human beings leads us to an issue of much significance for love. Love is two things simultaneously. It is a complex set of idealizations as well as a lived reality. Distinctly modern literature tends to place a premium on realism, which translates into various kinds of literary criticism that disparages romance. It is interesting, isn't it, that courses on love and romantic literature attract so many women and so few rationalistic and realistic males? But love is so much part and parcel of our real lives that it seems not only a personal shame but also an intellectual travesty to ignore the romantic literature that celebrates it.

As a scholar, I'm as interested in the representation of reality as the representation of love and, particularly, on their conjunction in romantic literature. Bear with me for a moment while I suggest that you can't really appreciate the lived realities of medieval society unless you understand romantic literature. Gottfried's *Tristan* is not just a love story or a heroic adventure; like all great literature, it reflects the socio-economic and political conditions of its time. It is not, as the famous Eric Auerbach suggests of medieval, simply the romantic idealizations of an aristocratic class. Indeed, the issue of class is highly problematic the closer one penetrates *Tristan*. For sure, we see the appropriate

values for a warrior class in hunting and fighting and marrying someone whose property can be united with yours. But in *Tristan,* there is an ongoing reassessment of those warrior values by someone who is clearly not an aristocrat himself. Gottfried probably was a member of the German city of Strassburgh's patriciate. He's learned in several languages; internal evidence suggests that he possessed diplomatic skills; his analysis of warfare places the emphasis on strategy over blind courage; and, finally, *Tristan* embeds a fascinating discussion of class that even the most dedicated Marxist might find interesting.

When Tristan is kidnapped, it is by merchants, who seem to be playing an increasingly important role in providing consumption goods to the aristocracy, who cannot seem to do without them. When Tristan goes *incognito*, he invariably presents himself as a merchant. The members of the feudal class and their retainers who come into contact with our disguised hero sometimes doubt his mercantile origins, but they are not entirely shocked by his abilities and don't disparage him on the basis of his birth. Now, there are different ways of interpreting this middle class presence. For example, Gottfried could be suggesting that someone from middle class origins, such as himself, can have nobility of spirit. But by making noble Tristan a merchant, at some level Gottfried was challenging class roles. Equally, by suggesting that the nobility needed to learn to read, write and think differently – i.e. that skillfully carving up the roe was not incompatible with book learning and chess playing – Gottfried's romance cannot be dismissed as groveling to some static medieval status quo. At the very least, in *Tristan* we see a much more interesting and adapting medieval society than terms like 'Dark Ages' might suggest.

Obviously, the tales about giants, dragons and other chivalric fare reflect the continuing popularity of the Arthurian romances in literate high society. There is lots of that kind of thing in *Tristan*. But, for anyone with intelligence, Gottfried constantly undercuts the world of legends and fables with wry comments that speak to an appreciation for the way that the world really works. For example:

> One reads in the old Tale of Tristan that a swallow flew from Cornwall to Ireland and there took a lady's hair with which to build its nest – I have no idea how the bird knew that the hair was there – and brought it back over the sea. Did ever a swallow nest at such inconvenience that, despite the abundance in its own country, it went ranging overseas into strange lands in search of nesting materials? I swear the tale grows fantastic, the story is talking nonsense here!

Gottfried here subjects a great deal of his own tale to implicit criticism. One can hardly imagine that he forgot what he was doing in other parts of *Tristan*. In fact, Gottfried follows this passage with a skillful description of what a good aristocrat – a Baron – should look like. He should not only have courage, but should also be *versatile*, *subtle* and *resourceful* like Tristan before he falls in love.

Of course, the book is all about love. Not that there aren't large chunks of text that put love into the background, but all of Gottfried's fulfilling his readers' expectations is

pointed towards his new religion of love. Therefore, it is most legitimate to ask the question: is there anything realistic in his idealization of love. I think that the attentive reader will discover lots of realistic detail, particularly in the way love doubts, feeds on doubts, reveals itself in looks and sighs. The sexual touching, cuddling and chatting is usually not artificial. The description of the four temptations of Tristan by the other Isolde of the White Hand may appear somewhat contrived, but one could argue that Gottfried wants to show you that he knows that even the truest love can be tested. And Isolde of the White Hand is a very good seductress who seduces herself into thinking that Tristan loves her.

I don't know but that if you went carefully through the text to explore the scenes of love and the various *feastings of the eyes* that you wouldn't find lots of realistic detail that you could relate to your own experiences in love. But there is one description in *Tristan* that is absolutely and undeniably stunning in its realism and that would grace any modern love novel. It is the scene shortly following the drinking of the love potion where Isolde overcomes her doubts and modesty in order to make the *first move* on a more than willing Tristan. The build up to the scene is almost as interesting. The two lovers "beat around the bush" about their feelings. They take the "roundabout way", abstractly praising one another. In the process, they blush a couple of times. Gottfried describes the physiological effect superbly as "Love painted their cheeks for them". Finally, after all this build up comes the poetical punch: "She leant against him with her elbow". Now this a realistic touch that breaks through all the artificial conventions of romance literature and allows us to identify with the characters. Its genius cannot be improved upon, but Gottfried attempts to do so in the following lines:

> The bright mirrors of her eyes filled with hidden tears. Her heart began to swell within her, her sweet lips to distend; her head drooped on his breast.

Even in translation, this is pretty powerful stuff. The distended lip is a great touch as is the drooping head. The love between Tristan and Isolde may be scorned ultimately as a completely unreal idealization, but it contains some very real attention to detail.

Ain't No Cure For Love

As realistic as some of these details might be, what we get more than anything else in *Tristan* is a powerful idealization of love. What makes this idealization even more potent is that it effectively obliterates most of the possible controls over love's reign. If you embrace this new religion of love, you actually *cherish* all the pain and suffering associated with love, because pain intensifies love. True love's imagination feeds on itself to the extent that it seems ridiculous to anyone outside its power. Thus, Tristan is so in love with Isolde's name that he confuses his love for Fair Isolde with love for Isolde of the White Hands. Speaking of the latter, Gottfried writes:

> When Tristan saw how lovely she was, it renewed his suffering – his old sorrow was as fresh as ever. She reminded him strongly of the other Isolde, the resplendent one of Ireland. And because her name was Isolde, whenever he let

> his eyes go out to her he grew so sad and joyless at the same time that you could read his heart's pain in his face. Yet he cherished this pain and held it in tender regard – it seemed sweet and good to him…Isolde was his joy and sorrow. (291)

Gottfried is playing a bit of game with his readers of confused identity relating to two beautiful women with the same name, but we should understand that love plays very serious games with a person's imagination. It results in all sorts of blind spots and irrationalities.

There is no alternative to this kind of madness that Gottfried can suggest apart from being true to the source of one's love. There is no cure for love, because the cure could destroy all that is valued in love. Those of you who were reading carefully will have noticed that there is a cure to love's melancholy in the form of a little magical dog by the name of Petitcreui. But both Tristan and Isolde end up refusing this solution because of the love that they cherish for each other. Each wants the absence of pain for the other person; neither wants it for themselves. Poor little Petitcreui gets his bell removed, symbolically removing all possible cures for lovesickness.

Now, the real world of love is not identical to its idealizations, but you would be in serious error if you failed to appreciate the very real power that idealizations can have. Obviously, love has pluses and minuses in the real world. If the minuses multiply, love can be oppressive for a person. It can also be, and ended up being, highly oppressive for an entire gender. How this works, we can see by examining parts of *Tristan* a bit more closely. It's easy to get a bit too caught up with the equality and mutuality of attachment on the bed in love's cave. Elements of equality and mutuality are obviously there and it is not entirely wrong to say that love erases gender distinctions. But it is misleading because there is always a real world outside of the ideal world that has to be filtered into the analysis. The particular combination of the real and the ideal in love has disadvantaged women in one very important respect. Since medieval romance, it has idealized women almost exclusively in terms of their ability to love. Love is always a risk; but what the idealization of women as *loving* means is that they face a double jeopardy.

In the chapter entitled "The Parting", Gottfried offers some revealing comments on women in general. Whereas Isolde is perfection personified and is totally committed in love, the vast majority women are the "daughters of Eve". This means that they have an "inherited weakness" or genetic tendency to be fickle, inconsistent and disobedient. In other words, women as women are temptresses. Women can only overcome this defect by completely and irrevocably loving one man. The way that Gottfried puts it is that only when a woman is totally dedicated to her man does she achieve true personhood. She is now a woman only "in name" but "in spirit she is a man!" The implication is that a man still remains a complete person if he is unfaithful; but a woman relinquishes her personhood when she does the same. She – the words are fascinating – "acts against herself and so directs her thoughts that she becomes her own enemy – who, in face of this, is going to love her?!"

The price of female equality and perfection, therefore, is a pretty steep one. I think it would be difficult to read this gendered interpretation into *Tristan* if it wasn't so obviously there. Moreover, it is written with such emphasis (i.e. !) that you have to assume that this gender distinction may be informing Gottfried's entire discussion of love. It certainly links up to the double standard for loving that has long applied to women. Courtly and romantic love writers put women on a pedestal. They idolized them but they also feared them and wanted to control them. Here is Gottfried's discussion of female perfection:

> What can ever be so perfect in a woman as when, in alliance with honour at her side, she does battle with her body for the rights of both body and honour? She must so direct the combat that she does justice to them both and so attends to each that the other is not neglected. She is no worthy woman who forsakes her honour for her body, or her body for her honour, when circumstance so favours her that she may vindicate them both…She who thinks to love many, by many is unloved! Let the woman who desires to be loved by all first lover herself and then show us all her love-tracks. If they are Love's true traces, all will love in sympathy. (278)

Language is important. Perfect women modeled on Isolde are called upon by Gottfried to "bestow their love and person" on a fortunate male. This begins to sound more like male wish fulfillment than true love.

All of this might seem to make *courtly love* postiively modern and feminist, were it not for the fact that romantic love elevates love between persons *for its own sake* and much more deeply explores the psychology of love as a kind of *liming* that renders a rational person or a rational society irrelevant.

Concluding Remarks: Love, Death and the Hereafter

I don't want to whip Gottfried any more than necessary, only to suggest that there are good reasons why some women today want to be cured of love as males conceive it. The influence of medieval romance was not all negative. In a world where patriarchal males were used to obedience and submission, love could equalize the playing field. Women weren't the only ones meant to devote themselves. The love struck male is meant to be loyal as well. If males ever hope for love, then can never force themselves on a woman or even practice surveillance. Either love must be given freely or not at all. For both noble male and female spirits, life without love is a *living death*. And even a moment of love in a lifetime of suffering gives life its meaning. All of these robust romantic themes can be found in *Tristan*. Precisely because they have been such robust idealizations, they have tended to drown out more exclusively sensual interpretations of love, such as the celebration of sex in the city in Ovid.

What is strangely missing from a writer living in a society so literally obsessed with the life hereafter, is the obvious correlation between *love* and *death* and the ideal of an eternal union of lovers beyond death that absorbed romantic writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Perhaps it was the earthiness of the courtly tradition, or perhaps the

desire to replace heavenly with earthly bliss, which prevented the conceptual conjunction of love with the eternal. In either or some other case it is interesting that this should be so. What it convinces me of is that *Tristan* is all about secular love that terminates in the death of both lovers. As long as one lover lives, the other will live in that heart. But when both are dead, that fragile mystical union ends. Perhaps that makes it all the more precious.

What might conceivably be going on consciously or unconsciously in the writer's mind, is the psychological impact of a tragic love story that ends with the death of the lovers. Arguably, the emotional impact of romance is greater when love ends in death with no hope of resurrection. The dead lovers "endure" and are revitalized in the minds of readers and nowhere else. Most certainly, the emotional response to those who have suffered and died is deeper and sadder, or as Gottfried says – *bittersweet*. And Gottfried wanted to discover and inculcate as much sadness in love as possible, not only for his readers, but also it would seem for himself.

Of course, there are other ideas of love that also rise above the sensual into the passionate and romantic but that don't make quite the same demands on the psyche. The intriguing thing is that none of these other ideas of love has ever had the same hold on the erotic imagination as this one of romantic love. The appropriate question is *why*? If you can answer that question convincingly, you may become famous at the expense of exploding one of love's greatest cultural mysteries.

8. The Lady in Red

Beatrice: Re-Imagining a Person

Dante's Beatrice arguably is the most famous woman in western literature. No one has ever divinized his earthly love to the extent that Dante did Beatrice. She is not merely the perfect woman; she is an angel. In life, she is the embodiment of divine love; upon her death, she will become Dante's heavenly angel. While it would not be quite accurate to say that Beatrice is more meaningful to Dante than God, she is the fountain through which all divine love flows to and through Dante.

There are two justifiable, but I think overly simplistic, ways to approach this most iconic figure in the language and literature of love. One could view her as a symbol, as a metaphor for spiritual love. That might get around the problem that no one so perfect as Beatrice could possibly exist. The problem with this interpretation is that, for all her perfections, Beatrice comes across to us as a real person. She walks, talks, loves her dad, gets married and dies mourned by actual friends and relatives. She's obviously something more than just a metaphor! Dante wants us to view her as *real*.

Another possible angle for analysis might be to interpret the earthly Beatrice through the lens of renaissance *neo-Platonism*. Neo-Platonists like Ficino generally agreed and optimistically argued that earthly beauty and divine goodness were not only related but virtually inseparable. Therefore, loving someone like Beatrice was a kind of loving God. This is an interpretation with greater merit, because Dante's love for Beatrice is best appreciated as religious love. But ultimately this interpretation also fails because Beatrice isn't just a bodily reflection of divine love; she's the perfect embodiment of a love that is divine. Thus, Beatrice is neither a *metaphor* nor a *type* of spiritual beauty or perfection; she's is a *uniquely* perfect person, not simply a type of beauty or perfection. In Dante's terminology, a perfect nine. Even if you don't consider her a *realistic* person, you have to accept that Dante wants us to take her seriously as a *actual* flesh and blood person. Even among the Christian neo-Platonists, this divination of a real person must have looked a lot like heresy.

Dante prefigures renaissance humanism, not because he is a prototype neo-Platonist, but because he is supremely and creatively individualistic. He doesn't just *interpret* his feelings for Beatrice; he *creates* meanings and values around that relationship. He does this psychologically, in his imagination. Essentially, he re-imagines a real person and *bestows* new meanings upon that person. In the process of creating a person anew, he also re-imagines and re-creates himself. His life is changed utterly by love; he is now in the service of love.

Creation can never be done in a vacuum, so it is not so surprising that Dante *interprets* his love for Beatrice in a terminology that is fundamentally spiritual. But Dante bestows a value on Beatrice that go well beyond anything that conventional religion could justify. Although Dante continually and very aggressively defends this bestowal of value as a just

appraisal that everyone -- even visiting Pilgrims-- must accept, it should be obvious that Dante's idealization of Beatrice is one of the most creative bestowals in literature. It is a bestowal worthy of God, and Dante is playing God in investing Beatrice with supreme value. That is why there is nothing like this previously in western literature.

Bestowing Value: A Perfect Nine

Amore Bestiale refers to instinctual or sexual love while Amore Divino refers to the love of God. In Neo-Platonic thought, there is a mid-point that connects both kinds of desire called Amore Umano, or the love of persons. The renaissance humanist discovers the divine in the human. The divine element is created by God. In Dante, we discover something superficially similar but conceptually quite distinct. **We discover a person who doesn't simply have angelic qualities; she is an angel. And it is not God, but Dante who is defining her as an angel.**

The bestowal of value on Beatrice begins so early in *La Vita Nuova*, that one can easily miss some essential features in its creative evolution. On the ninth hour of the ninth day towards the end of the thirteenth century, Dante first bumps into the nine-year old lady in red. The meeting is significantly a case of juvenile love at first sight or a spectacular *aesthetic arrest* that will fundamentally change the *meaning* of Dante's life. However, it is crucial to watch what Dante is doing here. He is investing meaning and projecting value back into that early meeting that he knows he cannot easily justify. His early love can be construed as puppy love. It is more instinctual than sexually or spiritually mature. It is only at the age of eighteen – 9 years later -- that a more mature Dante bumps into Beatrice again. This meeting results in his first erotic dream about Beatrice. In that famous dream, a personified Love holds a naked Beatrice, covered only by a blood red mantle, in his arms. Love forces a reluctant Beatrice to eat a burning heart, presumably Dante's, prior to weeping over her and carrying her off into heaven. The dream predestines Beatrice as the sole consumer of Dante's heart as well as her early death. The dream clearly has sexual significance for Dante in the nakedness of Beatrice, the blood red cloak, and the visceral act of eating his heart.

It seems fairly clear to me that Dante's initial attempts to discover the meaning of his dream do not preclude the possibility and the hope of a sexual connection with Beatrice. But very quickly in the process of loving, Dante becomes *ashamed* by any intimations of a sexual character and disowns any intention of physical possession. The classic event that crystallizes his idea and ideal of love for Beatrice is a discussion with group of "certain ladies" who obviously knew that Dante was in love with someone, wanted to figure out exactly who she was, and who embraced Dante and his poems with their "sighs". What they clearly knew about Dante was that he was so in love that he couldn't handle even talking to the secret object of his dreams. They, therefore, interrogated him in the way that sympathetic women will grill a lover, in order to discover just how in love he is and whether he is capable of successfully wooing his beloved. "To what end lovest thou this lady" one asks "seeing that thou canst not support her presence?" (70). Dante replies that he just wants to praise Beatrice. The female interrogator counters by saying that the "words" of the poet were not written simply in praise of a lady but in order to

describe the poet's suffering "condition". They were, in other words, "written with another intent" than simply describing Beatrice's "beatitude". They were statements of erotic desire rather than beatific bestowal.

The impact of this discussion on Dante was profound and absolutely characteristic of his pattern of idealization. He was "put to shame" by any suggestion of impure poetic idealizations that were tainted by personal desire. Henceforth, he claimed to adopt a quite different approach and to discourse **only** "of her high grace". He sought to speak of Beatrice in ways that underlined the *sweetness of love* that flowed through her to him. He would now discourse about her as a model of perfection, a source of inspiration and, most of all, as the embodiment of love. Today, we might consider this to be an extreme form of idealization bordering on fixation. We might reflect that the woman in question has become an obsessive idol in the poet's mind and conclude that his behaviour borders on the pathological, especially since is going to continue for so very long after the death of the subject. The pathological nature of Dante's malady is all the more striking because of the considerable imaginative resources that the poet brings to bear to *prove* to himself and others that Beatrice *deserves* this level of appraisal – this idolization. The dreams, the visions, the variations on number 9, and every conceivable piece of collateral evidence are brought to bear on one single point – the praise of Beatrice's perfection. Every *thing* every event is reinvested with significance – re-imagined – in terms of this perfection.

Dante's love for Beatrice is certainly not *amore bestiale* nor is it *amore umano* – it is *amore divino*. The fact that this kind of love is directed to a real person makes it a novel form of bestowal; the fact that it is so extreme makes it the ideal type of the bestowal of love for a particular person. It is so abstract, almost allegorical, that it is hard for some to believe that a person can be its subject matter. But, unreality and extremism aside, isn't something like this kind of bestowal of value present in any articulation of the romantic love that we have inhereted? When we say we love someone and we talk of them as perfect, part of us may recognize that this kind of bestowal is hyperbolic. But at least part of us *believes* that the object of our love is perfect or we could not conceive it. At the very least, she is perfect to *us*. What Dante does in bestowing praise on Beatrice would not seem so different from what many of us do when we claim to love. What is pathological may be that Dante he believes it so deeply that it not only becomes his sole reality but that he is so determined to communicate that reality to everyone. But romantic lovers today often do the same thing. The key to understanding Dante's importance is that **he was the first to imagine and idealize a real woman in this way.**

Beatrice is the one unique supernatural female. More recognizably human or *umano* relationships pale in significance; they don't rate very highly on the scale for love for Dante. Not surprisingly, we hear nothing specific in *La Vita Nuova* about the woman that Dante married a year following the death of Beatrice – Gemma Donati. Whether or not Donati was the *very beautiful* "woman in the window" who seemed to commiserate from a distance with Dante's sorrow, we are led to understand that any other connection with any other woman is going to be projected as "base" in comparison with the divine love that he has for Beatrice. One feels sorry for the poor lady in the window having to live

up or down to the standard that Dante has bestowed on Beatrice and the way in which his imaginary perfection trumps any hopes for a real relationship.

Courtly, Religious and Imagined Love

This kind of bestowal of value, based on very little and sometimes nothing at all, would have been inconceivable to the Greeks and Romans. It is the product of the marriage of religious and courtly ideas of love that allowed men to place women on a pedestal and that would eventually allow men and women to create new worlds of meaning based entirely on their *beliefs* about their relationship. In Dante's *La Vita Nuova*, a recognizably courtly love is elevated into a kind of divine love associated with an idealized person rather than a God.

Without a symbiosis of courtly and religious love the kind of romantic love that persists today would not have been conceivable. In religion, idealism obviously predominates over and subsumes realism. Another way of putting this is that religion is all about strongly held *beliefs*. In courtly love, realism has much more room to maneuver, since a great deal of courtly literature refers to very real women who you could embrace. The courtly love that we have been analyzing in this course even defends adultery as a way of ensuring sexual satisfaction in a real world where marriage was primarily a political and an economic alliance. But courtly love could also lead towards the sublimation of sexuality in the form of *service* of a woman who is, for all intents and purposes, unattainable. In some forms of courtly literature, the loved object is never going to be a person that you are going to make love to, much less set up housekeeping with. There is, therefore, a tendency in certain courtly literature, towards the kind of abstract idealization that Dante indulges in. Dante pushes that idealization to its extreme limits, in the process *devaluating* more realistic forms of male-female relationships.

To be more precise, Dante doesn't simply devalue male-female relationships rooted in mutuality, he *rebukes* and *curses* himself for even considering them in the same light as his commitment to Beatrice. In comparison, these would always be *foul* combinations that signify a lack of devotion. Dante's language is revealing:

> What hope is this that would console me after so base a fashion, and which hath taken the place of all other **imagining**? (144-5)

The internal "battle of doubt" that Dante goes through with respect to the woman in the window – whether she is the one he married or not – is a spiritual test of a truer and more perfect "Love". His conclusion is as stark and irrevocable as any religious testimony:

> Except by death, we must not in any way
> Forget our lady who is gone from us.

Like Augustine's love of God, Dante's love of Beatrice overthrows all desire that has a basis in "appetite". Indeed, this love of the soul not only drives out appetite, but the one is "contrary to the other". "Evil desire" has no place in Dante's love for Beatrice. The

"tender love" that Dante wants to extol has been completely purified of any sensuality. Its bodily location, when Beatrice was alive, is restricted to the eyes and the ears (mouth that speaks and ears that listen) – that reveal the character of the soul within – rather than to other bodily parts and the touching of those parts that Dante describes as "base". Now that she is dead, any attraction to others is only the "trifling of my eyes" for which Dante is "ashamed".

What if the Lady in the Window is not a person?

In the penguin edition of this text, the editor Barbara Reynolds suggests that the Lady in the Window is offering compassion or consolation. Thus, she could be an allegorical figure representing *philosophy* rather than an actual female and human competition to Beatrice. This is an interesting possibility and one that should not be summarily rejected.

However, if the Lady in the Window is Dante turning to philosophy, then the analysis of love and Beatrice in *Vita Nuova* becomes even more romantic because Dante ultimately rejects consolation and philosophy and reaffirms his primary allegiance is to the love as bestowal that Beatrice inspired. Philosophy is ultimately impoverished because it is based on rational appraisal rather than idealistic bestowal.

Reason throughout *Vita Nuova* is idealization moving away from appetite, based upon psychological conviction or *belief*, but directed at one unique person. It is reason filtered through the imagination. That's precisely what's *new* in Dante and what's new in the *new sweet style* that he creates. Moreover, it could not be more different from reason as rationalistic appraisal, which is why it had such an appeal for the romantics.

I've already suggested that there is a pathological quality to both Dante's extreme constancy and guilt over any wavering of affection away from Beatrice. But pathology is another term for a variation from what may in other contexts be considered normal. Dante offers his readers an extreme take on a new normal and, indeed, a new reality for

love. What is going on in this new kind of love is a fascinating inward dialogue about love. What this modern love completely revolves around is a constant examination of one's loving and a constant interrogation of whether or not one *continues* to be in love. The internal dialogue in Dante is relentless because love is not a tangible relationship based on sex, companionship, friendship or any of these *things*. Love is a conviction constructed in the imagination and a continuing faith in that conviction. Once that *belief* in love is gone, nothing else remains especially since the new kind of love is based on *nothing*. But if belief continues, love can mean *everything* to the lover.

The new life of love is overwhelmingly a psychological state whose authenticity is determined mentally, Dante would say *rationally*. As a mental state, love has many of the characteristics of a **secret**. Dante is so obsessed with keeping his love a secret that you have to wonder why. At first, Dante's secrecy is consistent with lovemaking in a courtly society. He obviously wants to protect his own and his lady's reputation. He doesn't want people gossiping about him, and he's particularly concerned that others will consider him a bit of a wuss. He even goes so far as to use another woman as a "screen" for his real ambitions. None of this, however, accounts for his later commitment to secrecy. One reason why he becomes so obsessed with secrecy is the protection of his Love, or rather the convictions of his own mind, from any external interference. To submit his Beatrice, his inner Love, to the scrutiny of an ordinary and impoverished social reality would be to defile it. The "tongue of love" is not the ordinary tongue. That's why its expression typically requires the language of poetry. Dante's love develops poetically.

The utmost secrecy needs to be maintained while the heart/mind explores and confirms its love, lest external forces drown out the voice of love. Yet love is an aching of the heart that has an innate need to create meaning and share feeling. Poetry is the ideal form for such expression because its language is inherently idealistic and its meaning obscure. Dante takes full advantage of this medium and its opacity. Nonetheless, *La Vita Nuova* embraces those poems and encloses them in the prose form recommended by fellow poet Guido Cavalcanti. Why the shift from poetry to prose? What had happened to Dante by the time he composed this great work that he was not only no longer afraid to say exactly what he wanted but also to painstakingly explain any potentially hidden meanings in the poems themselves? By the time Dante was ready to compose *La Vita Nuova*, his internal reality was firmly consolidated. He could now share it with the world as his statement of his new reality, his new life, and his new personhood, defined in terms of his belief in Beatrice. His conversion had been tested and now he could confidently use realistic prose language to describe his new reality. Dante's imaginings had become his reality – his new life.

The Concept of 'Aesthetic Arrest'

Aesthetic arrest is a concept that describes what happens when a person *falls in love*. To be more precise, aesthetic arrest describes what a romantic conceives when he or she falls in love. We think we know what we mean when we talk about falling in love, but the fact that we so routinely confuse and confound sexual attraction, infatuation, and mystical

union with love would seem to indicate that falling in love is anything but a straightforward phenomena. In fact, the way we conceive of falling in love is largely predictive of the way we will actually experience the phenomena. For the romantics, aesthetic arrest was an ideal that captured the total annihilation of everyday reality – complete arrest – in contemplating the beauty of that unique person that one was destined to love. Beauty can be both inner and outer beauty – beauty of the body and the mind. Both are inseparable for any truly romantic lover, who is deeply interested in a union of bodies and soul.

Romantic love, therefore, implies the creation of a new reality that is the world of the lovers – a psychological paradigm shift that one likes to perceive as instantaneous even if one is projecting love at first sight backwards. There should be no doubt that Dante's *La Vita Nova* made an enormously creative contribution to this idea of romantic love, not merely in the designation of the destined lover (number 9, number 9…) but also in the description of what actually happens when love comes to one's town. At the age of nine, Beatrice hits Dante between the eyes and his "spirit of life" began to "tremble so violently that the least pulses of my body shook therewith" (24). Love begins its career of governing Dante's soul. We needn't take Dante too seriously. Without this destined love at first sight, his love might appear as an "accident of substance" rather than a spiritual event. But Dante himself admits that his memory of love's history was more "distinct" at the age of eighteen, when Beatrice passed him in a customary promenade. The event was emotionally powerful – he "parted thence as one intoxicated" (27) and proceeded to experience a highly symbolic dream about said lady. The third influential event took place in a Church where Dante got a good look at Beatrice by doing what we have all done at one time or another – examined the person who infatuates us by pretending that we are looking at someone else. When Beatrice cuts him for his pretended unfaithfulness, young Dante obsesses about her and his love begins to crystallize. His dreams turn into visions, particularly about Beatrice dying.

This may not exactly be modern romantic *aesthetic arrest* – love crystallizes over a period of time – but it is described as *almost instantaneous* and its effect in a short time is life changing. Hence the title of the book *La Vita Nuova*, which does not refer to Dante's early years but his life changing experience with love. The characteristic that makes the concept of aesthetic arrest most applicable, however, is the connection with death. In Romantic literature, love and death form a team. The moment you discover love, you confront death in several forms. First, there is a sense in which you are dead to your old life, "when all my pulses beat at once and stop" says Dante (68). Second, you see your own death in the possible death of your beloved, who you can no longer truly *live* without. Third, without the love of the other, your soul is already dead. Consequently, fourth, you discover a powerful psychological need to project your union into eternity – in other words beyond death. These four conceptual formulations imply a union of such spiritual and life changing significance that death becomes a special problem. We can put the problem in the form of a question? If there is a hell, and if Beatrice went to hell rather than heaven, where would Dante choose to go? It's an unfair question because Dante's imagination couldn't put Beatrice anywhere except right next to Jesus and the

Virgin Mary. It's also a legitimate question because Dante couldn't conceive of heaven apart from Beatrice.

Next to loving and praising her, Beatrice's death is central to the meaning of *La Vita Nuova*. It is foreshadowed in Dante's dreams and visions. It is the personified Love's *dark subject matter*. It is the sadness that makes some think of "Love as Evil" because love brings loss. It is "that point of life, beyond which he must not pass who would return" (60). Love kills, and in more ways than one. Here is Dante's famous sonnet that describes the living death that is disconnection from the beloved (65):

> The thoughts are broken in my memory,
> Thou lovely Joy, whene'er I see thy face:
> When thou art near me, Love fills up the space,
> Often repeating, "If death irk thee, fly."
> My face shows my heart's colour, verily,
> Which, fainting, seeks for any leaning-place;
> Till, in the drunken terror of disgrace,
> The very stones seem to be shrieking, "Die!"
> It were a grievous sin, if one should not
> Strive then to comfort my bewildered mind
> (Though merely with simply pitying)
> For the great anguish which thy scorn has wrought
> In the dead sight o' the eyes grown nearly blind,
> Which look for death as a blessed thing.

Life without love is not worth living, says Dante. But as his love is purified and he becomes able to live simply though his love for Beatrice, the fear is not for himself but for her. Reflecting on his own illness, Dante says (90)

> And then perceiving how frail a thing life is, even though health keep with it, the matter seemed to me so pitiful that I could not choose but weep: and weeping I said within myself: "Certainly it must some time come to pass that the very gentle Beatrice will die."

In Dante's imagined the world without Beatrice, not only the social structure but all of nature is overthrown. The sun's light goes out; the stars weaken; the birds fall from the trees; and the ground is swallowed up in earthquakes.

In a mental world ruled by love, death is no longer an unfortunate impersonal event. It is not even a religious event. It is deeply intrusive and destructive of the internal meaning that the lover has created. One psychological tactic is to personalize death by embracing it as the place where lovers will be reunited with one another. This psychological attitude helps to explain the element of tombstone worship that so often accompanies romanticism. As with so many other romantic traits, this too is prefigured in Dante's *La Vita Nuova* where more than once he composes prayers to "Death":

> …Death, I hold thee passing good
> Henceforth, and a most gentle sweet relief,
> Since my dear love has chosen to dwell with thee:
> Pity, not hate, is thine, well understood.
> Lo!   I do so desire to see they face
> That I am like as one who nears the tomb:
> My soul entreats thee, Come (99)

"Little by little", the bereft Dante's mental state "leads to death" (126) where he can be with Beatrice again. His internal speech "clamours upon death continually" (134). There is so much here that the romantics of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century could utilize. Of course, there are important differences as well. The romantics breathed sexuality whereas Dante regarded it as bestial. Whereas Beatrice is Dante's heaven on earth, she ends up in a recognizably Christian heaven. Any potential reunion is bound to be one-sided rather than reciprocal. To the extent that Beatrice embodies divine Love, she is Dante's master rather than mistress. The ultimate *la vita nuova* or "New Birth's begun" is a spiritual one in Heaven. But back here on earth, Dante confesses that he still hasn't found the language to describe eternal bliss apart from his beloved Beatrice.

As befits someone whose access to the spiritual world is a *person*, Dante's Beatrice is a potential blasphemy. She radiates and elicits love *as if* she is a divinity herself and, consequently, her place in the heavenly hierarchy is ambiguous. Given the clarity of medieval consciousness as a hierarchy and a *great chain of being*, Dante never budges from bestowing special and unique meaning upon Beatrice as a *person*. She is not, however, a very realistic person. Courtly love was capable of viewing women as real people that one could embrace even if it might be difficult to set up housekeeping with them. Courtly love also had the capacity for making love reciprocal and interpersonal. There are significant elements of courtly love in Dante's *La Vita Nuova* but nothing that approaches the ability of courtly love to imagine not only *unique persons* but also realistic people with realistic emotions. Because Dante stands betwixt and between courtly and religious love, incorporating elements of both according to his needs, he's not successful in bridging to two discussions of love. He doesn't advance a more modern intellectual or social structure within which love might flourish. But, and this is a big *but*, Dante's treatment of love as a psychological and imaginary state of conviction that flaunts any external reality and his pairing of love and death are *modern*.

Crystallizing Love: Love's Poetry and Love's Prose

Dante was not the only thirteenth-century Italian writer to compose poems about love. Petrarch was one and Guido Cavalcanti was another. Cavalcanti was Dante's best friend and an interesting relationship emerges in *La Vita Nuova*. For example, we see Dante delicately chastising his friend for inconstancy in transferring his "homage" from a certain Joan to the more famous "woman from Toulouse" -- Mandetta (104). Cavalcanti was looking for a very different kind of love from Dante; he was looking for mutual reciprocated love with a real woman. One of his main reasons for writing poems in the

vernacular is that most of the Italian women that he was celebrating and pursuing did not speak Latin. *La Vita Nuova* is in some ways a dialectic with Cavalcanti in its affirmation of a purer kind of love that is impervious to the kind of imperfections Cavalcanti experienced. For Cavalcanti's poetry constantly confronts a "bitter truth", i.e. that every one wants true love, but that true love can't be found. Dante tries to convince himself and anyone who wants to listen that true love does exist. In the process, he makes Beatrice a perfect "9".

Just how much Cavalcanti influenced Dante is uncertain; what is known is that Cavalcanti encouraged Dante to write poetry *and* to frame the poems in *La Vita Nuova* with prose. Prose greatly supported Dante's interpretation of love as a *rational* rather than *emotional* activity fueled by erotic desire. Contemporary readers may mistake Dante's use of terms like *reason* and his separation of reason from *appetite* unless we understand that Dante's reason is nothing like modern rationalism. Dante's reason is the ennobling faculty that leads us to a higher truth. The higher truth incorporates beauty and virtue, but its proper name is Love. While love is inherently poetic, because poetry is the instinctive and first language of love, most love poetry is emotionally chaotic because it confuses the sexual appetite with that higher love that is alone ennobling. Dante refers to those who *rhyme foolishly* about love (112). Despite his exoneration of Cavalcanti from foolish rhyming, he must have believed that his friend Cavalcanti was guilty of this misuse of poetry, not merely because Cavalcanti's idea of a relationship was fundamentally sexual but also because his poetry reflected the inconsistency of his mind – his attitudes towards the love that he found so tragic were a *bundle of psychological states* rather than what Dante might have regarded as rational.

There is a lot of psychology –inner dialogue – in Dante, but it is always accompanied by the imperative of order and control. So eager is Dante to dispel any criticism of misguided emotion or excessive metaphor that *La Vita Nuova's* literary treatment of Beatrice and Love is constantly undermined by commentary – what Dante would call the "faithful counsel of reason, whensoever such counsel was useful to be heard" (26). Given the prose explanations and elaborations, one might think that Dante's meticulous breakdown of all the poems into first, second and third divisions would be superfluous. But Dante is desperate to show his readers that there is a rational order, a logical succession, to all of his love poems. Unlike some other poets, he wants to tell you that his poems are anything but irrational "exultation of love". He never loses sight of the suitability of the subject "matter" for "poesy" (89). Moreover, he is always prepared to give you the "reasons" behind his decision to proceed in the way that he does (40-1). Finally, unlike his friend Cavalcanti, his poems are anything but "bundles of psychological states"; he is always aware of himself as the "I" that is making suitable choices rather than being swept along by love.

These facts allow us to understand the "reasoning" behind all those irritating dissections that either follow or precede the poems. *La Vita Nuova* may be a juvenile book but it is meticulously structured. One wonders just how much. How much is the persona of Beatrice structured so as to make her a worthy and rational object of love? Many of the attempts to make her a perfect 9 – the numerical symbol for the most perfect truth in

Christianity – The Holy Trinity or 3 in 3 – seem artificial and contrived. How successful was Dante in submerging his attraction for other women, including the "woman in the window"? There is some reason to believe that Dante married her. If the entire purpose of the book was to demonstrate how love could be guided by reason towards a higher nobility, *La Vita Nuova* becomes even more suspect. One need not doubt that Dante's starting point was a real person, or even that he dearly loved Beatrice in a fundamentally spiritual way, but one can legitimately question the authenticity of some of the descriptions and, especially, the dreams, visions and astrological conclusions.

Talking With Love/Talking At Women

I've already suggested that *La Vita Nuova* is modern in the sense that it describes love psychologically, i.e. as a belief or conviction that is maintained through constant questioning and affirmation. The *other* is re-imagined through love. This is what so many of us do in our heads today that it is difficult for us to appreciate what a modern invention and what a novel kind of thinking is modeled in Dante's little work. Dante's technique for mental exploration is that of talking with love, i.e. personifying "Love" and engaging in "inward speech" (153). Although this is a psychological technique, Dante wants us to appreciate that it is anything but a haphazard process. It has a goal in terms of discovering what noble love really is.

Dante occasionally admits that love is difficult to define – "I know not what to say", he says more than once (53). But, so different from the eighteenth-century, Dante is always reluctant to allow love to be silent. He wants to put words in his mouth. "I have recorded and written those words which Love had dictated to me" (55), he writes. What love says is simultaneously "sweet" and rational. It can only be both sweet and rational if it is pure in itself and directed at a pure source. Love rises upwards by cleansing every "vicious thought".

But love is an abstraction. Love personified is a metaphor. There is no such thing as Love that we could ever identify much less have a conversation with. If anyone could ever appreciate this, it was Dante. He absolutely needed a real person or event as the starting point for any of his idealizations says his biographer Dante Gabriel Rossetti. His allegorical explorations were always based on actuals. That is why he invests Beatrice with such significance. That is why he has Love say that Beatrice is "so like to me" that she resembles John the Baptist paving the way for Jesus (103). One learns about love by loving real people. The point is that they must be worthy of our love. Dante is not just appraising Beatrice as a worthy object of love, however; he is *imagining her* as worthy and bestowing exceptional value upon her. He even has Love describe her as a "creature of God till now unknown" (75). But, since Love is a metaphor for an internal debate and search, we are led to understand that Dante is the voice of Love here and the one doing all the bestowing of value. And who and what exactly is Dante bestowing value upon here?

Is there an important sense in which love is a symbol and a metaphor for creative re-imagining? What else can be meant by the long section in *La Vita Nuova* where Dante runs through the ways that former Latin poets have personified "Love" (110f) and his claim that this is permissible as a kind of "rhetorical similitude" in which a "man is made to speak to his own intelligence as to another person". The important point, argues Dante, is not the use of such metaphors *per se* but that there has to be a "right understanding" about their use. Both the internal discussion and the poetry of love should lead to a higher understanding of the purpose of loving – to lead us towards higher and nobler realizations. Following this apology for treating love as a person, Dante does something very interesting and very revealing. He jumps from a dismissal of the "common sort" of critic who "should be moved to jeering" at his metaphorical treatment of Love to the "matter of my discourse", i.e. Beatrice. Is he thereby admitting that this "excellent lady" also is largely a symbol and a metaphor for earthly perfection? Why is Love imagined as a man and Beatrice so clearly a woman? For that matter, why are women the only ones with "hearts" capable of soothing the spiritually "widowed" Dante? Why aren't his first friend Calvalcanti, or the second friend who asks him to compose a poem for his cousin Beatrice, suitable sounding boards and consolers when it comes to love's sorrows? Is love being differentiated from male friendship here?

One of the keys to answering some of these difficult questions lies firmly in the tradition of courtly love, namely in its conception of *service*. Male to male relationships are based on characteristics like equality, fraternity, justice, loyalty, duty and obedience. Wonderful values to be sure, but ones where the value is defined in advance. The inspired service that the courtly love of a woman demanded was inherently gratuitous, typically excessive, and, most of all, freely given *out of love*. The emotional quality of behaviours might superficially appear to be the same. But Dante recognized that the special love of a man for that one unique woman was qualitatively different, as he described in the poem written at the best of Beatrice's kinsman. The cousin laments the death of Beatrice as an anguish of the soul that makes one long for death. The lover also longs for death but celebrates the "light of Love" that diffused his life with spiritual meaning. Dante wants to suggest that only the love of a woman can inspire a man into this kind of spiritual rebirth. Only women have the secret of love in their hearts. For all his religiosity Dante remains firmly in the tradition of courtly love.

Talking with women in real life, and talking about women in your mind, are the most important instruments of spiritual growth for males. But what about the spiritual growth of females? Are they somehow born with hearts suited for love? How did Beatrice get to be so perfect, even if her character was merely foundational for Dante to be able to bestow perfection upon her? What kind of female role is Dante advocating in *La Vita Nuova*? Dante's women seem to love poetry about love and to sigh an awful lot. Did they have any ideas independent of their primary function of stimulating the love and service of men? Dante doesn't appear to give them much room for maneuver, at least not if they wanted to be angels like Beatrice. On one obvious reading, *La Vita Nuova* is a devotional book of love towards a unique woman and a classic model of what love should be. It is equally plausible to suggest that *La Vita Nuova* is a book written by a man telling women what they needed to be like if they wanted to be adored. This might

be described, not as talking to or with women, but talking *at* women. The first reading is one that we might find a bit obsessive, even pathological, but we can all sympathize with it. The second reading is far more sinister and controlling of women, don't you think?

The temptation to be idolized seems as dangerous for the woman as it is irresistible!

A Renaissance Way Out: Locating the Divine within the Human

La Vita Nuova has many modern traits, especially its emphasis on love as a psychological state of *belief*. One characteristic that makes it very unmodern, however, is its complete indifference to ordinary life, ordinary joys and sorrows. Everything operates on a grand scale in the book because the stakes are very high. In this life, Dante believes that we are all pilgrims searching for Love. However we search, whatever our tools, our quest is essentially a spiritual one.

Dante adheres to a very strict and austere course on this pilgrimage. He combines Platonic and Christian elements in a synthetic argument that we will never find Love unless we rise above the sensual plane – our sexual "appetites" – towards the reason of the soul. To his credit, he thinks that we can ascend the scale of values by loving real people constantly, including keeping them firmly in our hearts after their death. It is in some ways a beautiful and highly romantic vision of what true love can achieve, even if we consider it potentially pathological in its obsessive character and its flat out denial of many of the more problematic characteristics of reality. Dante is so intent on subordinating sensual love to spiritual love that he leaves no room for any middle ground. A strict and unwavering hierarchy is maintained throughout, with Beatrice, Love and God as the end point. There is love for a divine *person* in Dante, but not much love for humanity.

Many of us late and post moderns are highly suspicious of all these would be pilgrims that offer us such idealized versions of love. We tend to be relativists either by default or by principle. The values we accept and the values we endorse are usually the lesser values of mutual toleration or the somewhat higher values of hospitality. As a result, unfortunately, our ideas and ideals of love are typically confused and contradictory, allowing less room for the play of significations than the appreciation of limitations and preparedness for the risks involved in loving. Those are contemporary problems. They may not be such big problems for the majority of people as for people like you studying the Humanities. Why? Humanities is all about discovering, creating and applying *values* to our lives. This valuing can, and hopefully is, respectful of difference and ambiguity, but at the end of the day, we want you to be able to do it as carefully and as consistently as possible. You especially want to *create* value in your lives, or you shouldn't be in Humanities. That is why the humanistic approach offers you examples and models of valuing.

The term *humanities* originates with the humanist movement of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Italy approximately a century after Dante. What makes the humanists relevant to this lecture's discussion of love is that, while they shared Dante's

interest in love and in correctly valuing love, they did not distain the human or put it so completely service of the spiritual. Arguably, their perspective towards secular love was much more accepting, joyful and optimistic than Dante's. This new synthesis, however, came at the expense of some of Dante's powerful psychological insights and romantic idealizations. The most influentially modern train of thought in renaissance humanism was neo-Platonism. Ficino and other neo-Platonists removed the sharp distinction between God and man, spirit and matter, base and higher love, by pointing out that everything that had been created by God was infused with His love. In theory, this meant that everyone and everything was potentially lovable. In practice, of course, some things and some people were more lovable than others.

The distinction between higher and lower forms of beauty and virtue and rationality obviously was not demolished, because no self respecting neo-Platonism could ever completely "escape the conflict between loving God and loving nature that weighed upon the mentality of the middle ages" (Singer, 169). But humanism encouraged its adherents to love beauty in nature and human nature as a way of loving God. Even more important, many humanists went so far as to suggest that one could never achieve spirituality *unless* one was capable of loving the manifestations of God's beauty in matter. This was not classic Platonism, which ultimately dismissed the world of matter as nothing other than as a stepping-stone to more ideal and abstractly real forms. It was not classical Christianity (Augustinian or Thomist) either, because it obscured most Augustinian distinctions between the City of God and the City of Man. The humanist natural or material world does much more than point to a higher spirituality, as God's creation, it *embodies* that reality. Humanism, consequently, elevated the *human being* as not only a divine *creation* but also as partaking of the nature of the divine in terms of freedom of will and creativity. Human beings were free to create what they willed. The terms *humanism* and *humanities* reflect this celebration of the human, but always in the context of the divine. Humanism did not get rid of the conflicts, tensions and ambiguities in the human and divine, but it did make these tensions less burdensome because human beings resembled God and lived in the world that God created. As God wandered father from the center of humanism and the humanities, the divine got replaced by human ideals of beauty, goodness, rationality and, of course *love*, which we are prepared to discuss, debate, disagree but never ever dismiss.

The humanist conception of love has been briefly discussed already in this lecture. But it is worth rehashing in order to highlight some important differences with Dante as well as its limitations. Three kinds of love are described in neo-Platonism, *amore bestiale*, *amore divino* and *amore umano*. Humanists like Ficino tended to disparage amore bestiale or sexual appetite as something that shouldn't even be considered a real kind of love. It was instinctual, animalistic and imprisoned us at the lowest form of animal existence. To be sure, the newfound respect for God's creation set the renaissance mind free to explore the human body and sexual apparatus. Renaissance artists like Michelangelo obviously began to paint biblical figures like Adam, Eve, David, Mary and Jesus not only with anatomically correct features but also as sensually appealing bodies. We have to be careful about viewing such works of art as sexually liberated and sensually suggestive, however, because the naked body in the renaissance was usually meant to

symbolize the divine. The actual world of sense still carried the burden and the stigma of sin. That such works of art could be conceived and produced, however they might have been rationalized, does reflect the refocusing of attention to the material and sensual world that was taking place in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. And one has the impression in a great deal of renaissance literature and art of tantalizing tactile possibilities just waiting around the corner.

However, it must be said that the serious humanist treatment of love generally disparaged amore bestiale. In terms of man's higher calling, all forms of sexual or erotic love could be labeled as a form of disease or insanity. That left two kinds of serious love. Amore divino is the highest form of love possible because it completely frees human beings from the conflicts and temptations associated with the body. Few people are capable of amore divino, however; the kind of love available to most people is amore umano. Moreover, one cannot sidestep amore umano if one hopes to reach amore divino. Let's call amore umano *human love* on the understanding that the term human love refers man's higher calling in the great chain of being. How can human love be defined so as to avoid becoming mired down in the sensual realm? Human love is the love of two people for one another that combines both the physical and the spiritual elements of a person. Obviously, its primary focus cannot be the genitalia or the smelling, tasting and tactile senses that we share with animals. For the neo-Platonists, human love came through the eyes, the ears and the mind. The eyes were crucial organs because love originates in the eyes and attaches itself to a particular person. But what the lover sees in the beloved is more than just a person, but a aesthetic prodding and a reminder of a more universal beauty that is divine. He sees the beautifully divine construction in the other. Hearing and speech (not taste or kissing) come next in importance because only by talking and listening to the other person can we discover the beauty of their minds. Finally, love in confirmed by the union and reciprocity of two minds that indicate the possibility of merging with something that is beyond either of them. In genuine love, "each lover does in himself and is reborn in the other". Thus, humans come to love one another "as an expression of their yearning for an ideal" (Singer, 174).

What Ficino and renaissance philosophers suggest about the love of persons is that it is not really their body that we love but the "shadow of God" in their body. More important, it is not really the mind and the soul of a person that we want to possess but the "image of God" in the beloved's mind and soul. Finally, Ficino makes a brilliant point that you don't have to be religious to appreciate. He argues that it is only when we make the connection between our love of persons and our love of a higher value that we can call God that we become fully human. What happens then is that we "love ourselves". In order to love ourselves, in other words, we have to love other people first. But if we depend on people to love us, we won't ever realize our own beauty and our own divine potential.

There are neo-platonic elements in earlier writers such as Dante, especially his condemnation of love as sexual appetite and his emphasis on the eyes and speech as the primary organs of perfect love. What makes neo-Platonism very different is its refusal to make any single person *divine* combined with its capacity for finding the divine within all

life. Dante loved his Beatrice religiously, transforming her into the equivalent of divine love. Neo-Platonism is simultaneously more orthodox and more radical. No person is divine – the divine and the human cannot merge. But there are elements of the divine to discover in everything and everyone. That special human relationship that is *amore umano* provides us with a foretaste of spiritual life. We should approach it as a helpmate to our spiritual growth, but never as a substitute for it. That spiritual growth should not reinforce our feelings of separateness, sinfulness and inadequacy; loving God properly means loving ourselves as well as others.

Love as Adoration versus Love as Friendship

The Neo-Platonic God still remains vastly superior to us, but we have elements of his divinity within us that *we* can nurture. Renaissance humanism differs profoundly from Protestantism in its capacity for affirming the potential of human beings for internal and spiritual growth. In Protestantism, the gulf between God and the sinner is only mediated by divine grace; in renaissance humanism we can become what we will just as long as we always appreciate the danger of being dragged down by our animal appetites. No wonder the renaissance let loose a creative potential that arguably eclipsed anything before and since.

We've discussed the technical characteristics of Neo-Platonic love in its emphasis on the eyes, ears and mind, but we still haven't described exactly what kind of love it privileges. We haven't appreciated either why the term Platonic love comes down to us from this period as emphasizing *friendship*. Humanism overwhelmingly defines love as *reciprocity* between persons and between people and God. Genuine and heartfelt friendships can involve significant personality changes and in the case of love, a kind of personal death and rebirth. What's missing is the kind of union that the mystics and romantics described as *merging*. The ideal type of love is a *meeting* rather than a *merging* of minds. For how could any human mind ever hope to completely merge with God's mind and, given that human lovers' mental connection was with the divine in each other, how could they completely merge with each other? Platonic love as it comes to us from the Renaissance emphasizes the quality of friendship. In the infamous words of the Spice Girls, "if ya wanna be my lover, you got to be my friend".

We've seen friendship before, as a meeting of mutually affirming male minds in Aristotle. So we should not be entirely surprised to find many renaissance writers and artists, such as Michelangelo, espousing male as the highest form of friendship. What makes male friendship pulsate in Michelangelo, and what makes the idea of love as friendship so full of vitality in the Renaissance is that it cannot so easily be separated from the body and its sexuality. Sexuality is ubiquitous in renaissance art and literature because neo-Platonism affirms nature and human nature as God's creation. The official program of neo-Platonism is always to take us higher and towards the divine, but the sub-text is an embracing of life that incorporates the love of earthly pleasures. By taking love's gaze downward as a prelude to its more meaningful upward movement, neo-Platonism opened the floodgates of the senses. It is more difficult to maintain a balance between the mind and the body than the neo-Platonists imagined. It is especially hard to

keep bodily love at a spiritual level, *even if* you agree that true love is more of a meeting of the minds than a meeting of bodies.

The modern phrase that might incorporate renaissance humanist elements, were it not so cynical and relativistic is *friendship with benefits*. The reason it doesn't appeal to romantic-minded moderns is that is lacks the psychological intensity of love as adoration and merging that is part of the romantic outlook. Merging doesn't really apply to Dante, since Beatrice is so far above and beyond him. Adoration clearly does apply. The desire not only to be adored but to adore appealed to, and released, the power of *imagination*. Whether this leads to ends that are valuable or not is for you to decide. But once the power of individual creative imagining of another person is released – once bestowal is out of the bag – it's difficult to put it back in!

Bestowal always tends towards excess and thus is bound to come into conflict with reality. At best, it might seem confined to the stage in love that we call *falling in love*. A more extensive cultural embrace of bestowal in love – other than as a beautiful image – would seem to require a socio-economic context that favours the individual and independent construction of meanings. This and other developments were about to happen in the west. Once again, love would never be the same.

Love as Passion is Disease and Madness

Introduction

Thus far in the course, we've been looking at continental ideas of love, mostly in Greece, Italy and France. Today I want to change the scene to the British Isles, specifically England, the country that was going to become the scene for a completely new attitude towards love and marriage that has been described by one historian as *affective individualism*. For most of the medieval period, love literature in England mirrored the courtly love tradition of the continent, which should not surprise us because England was very much the kind of feudal society where chivalric ideals would thrive. England was relatively poorer by continental standards, but that did not stop the aristocracy from wanting to be just like the aristocracy in richer European countries and even more so. The Arthurian romances, centered on a supposed court at Camelot, symbolized these aspirations.

But something happened in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth-century that would change all of that. England was by no means the richest European country in these centuries – that would occur in the eighteenth-century – but it was the most dynamic. It was in the process of changing from a feudal society to a recognizably capitalist and aristocratic society. Now some of you will be assuming that a capitalist society is a middle class or bourgeois society rather than an aristocratic society. But there was no such a thing as a middle class capitalist society until well into the nineteenth-century. If you wanted to introduce capitalist values at an earlier period, you needed the aristocracy to champion those values. Aristocrats don't typically become capitalists because they believe in markets, but they did so in England because they were relatively poor and it was in their interest to exploit new sources of revenue. After the centralization of the English monarchy under Henry VII and his Tudor progeny, English aristocrats discovered that they could leverage their estates by renting out land to tenant farmers, some of which eventually became members of the lesser nobility – the so called gentry -- during these two pivotal centuries. Aristocrats needed a new source of funds because the centralized English crown swallowed up a great deal of the feudal fees and privileges that they formerly required to maintain their aristocratic lifestyle. By renting out to enterprising tenant farmers, they could get more money than maintaining feudal traditions. And in order to pay that rent and make a profit, tenant farmers revolutionized English agriculture along Dutch lines, practicing mixed farming and increasing production enormously. The net result was thriving agriculture; progressive agriculture meant that more mouths could be fed than could be easily employed on the land; some of the surplus labour went to the cities to find jobs; English cities and countryside now entered into a symbiosis that increased the wealth of the nation as a whole, eventually making puny wet little England the richest country in Europe.

On the continent, feudal society remained entrenched in place until at least the French Revolution of 1790, despite the growing recognition that it was an economically backward system. But in England by the early 1600s when Robert Burton wrote *The*

Anatomy of Melancholy feudal society in England was dead. There was no peasantry. Many aristocrats looked upon their estates as capital investments first, and sources of privilege and prestige second. Status began to follow wealth rather than wealth following status. If aristocrats didn't operate their lands rationally with an eye to profit, the gentry bought up pieces of their land, for England was, by European standards, a much more mobile society in which one could rise and sink (usually over generations) by one's own industry or lack of industry. The growing towns meant that there were a larger proportion of craftsmen, merchants and urban labourers than elsewhere. Merchants, in particular, thrived because the increased wealth of the landowners meant that there was a stable and growing market for luxury goods. All of these sections of society, both rural and urban, were more tuned into individualistic values than in other countries, and this was reflected in the respect for liberty and freedom. Individualism means making your own *choices* and one of those choices is of a marriage partner. I don't want to suggest that people no longer married the people that their parents chose for them, or that politics and property were no longer significant rationales for marrying someone, but in England by the seventeenth-century, you had a much better chance of marrying the person you loved than anywhere else. Marrying for love for the first time in history became a serious option.

Individualism can be a curse as well as a blessing. On the one hand, you have much greater freedom to pursue the things that *you* desire rather than being tied down to your kinship group, a hierarchical structure, or peer group pressure. You can pursue your own happiness in life and love. On the other hand, *you* have to make choices that are difficult and take responsibility for those choices and outcomes. Especially if the society you live in is dynamically changing, it is sometimes difficult to know what the best route is. In a society where there are fewer options surrounding life and love – especially where love and marriage are separated – there might, ironically, be more contentment and less tension. For example, you wouldn't spend your life trying to find that perfect person to share the rest of your natural life with. One of the positive characteristics of a dynamically changing society is a sense of freedom and excitement and a desire to pursue your own journey to happiness. One of the corollaries of increased options, however, is depression. What is depression? If we were to define depression as a combination of "fear" or "anxiety" and "sadness" without a determinate cause, we would be describing the seventeenth-century English equivalent of depression – *melancholy*.

The sixteenth and seventeenth-century English were known for having a melancholic temperament and no greater evidence can be supplied than the huge popularity of Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Burton was by no means the only writer concerned with this peculiarly British disease. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, to cite but one example, was all about melancholy and its debilitating effect upon a nobility that was supposed to be able to act in such a way as to provide political and social leadership. But the theme of love is muted in *Hamlet* and poor Ophelia's death is relegated to a sideshow. In *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, thanks to acknowledged pressure from his reading public, Robert Burton devoted hundreds of pages documenting the disease of *love-melancholy* and recommending its cure. Love clearly was becoming a problem in the upper reaches of this individualistic society. If we can trust Burton, it was already beginning to

generate extreme anxiety among his upper class readers because their desires and ideals had no basis in a lived reality.

The Anatomy of Melancholy is obviously a rich and rewarding work, once you get past the overall style and the irritating digressions, but it is a transitional work. There is a tantalizing discussion of the emerging ideal of love as *affectionate individualism* and some fascinating comments on its religious connection, but the book is more revealing in its treatment of *love-melancholy* or *heroical love*. What Burton wants to critique in *love-melancholy* is the entire tradition of desire that we associate with courtly love and to clearly separate it from a love based on morality and constancy or, if you like, moral restraint. Highly passionate and erotic desire was incompatible with self-discipline and a stable society. Burton, like many Englishmen of his time, wanted to undo the extreme idealizations of courtly and romantic semantics by showing that it could never lead to genuine relationships or a political society that could balance order and liberty. *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is intriguing precisely because the author is simultaneously repelled and fascinated by the concept of love with greatest influence among the British nobility. He constantly condemns heroic love as a *plague*, a potion, and a personal *agony* that is like being bitten by a mad dog. He warns his readers that *love-melancholy* typically leads to the excesses of lust or the release of a dangerous and *brutish passion*. At the same time, no one is more aware of the enormous power that *heroic love* had over the erotic imagination. His description of the way that heroic love operated in his own society provides a rare glimpse into the love life of his age and more than a few hints on the ways that it was about to change. The intensities of *heroic love* were about to be tamed and subordinated to the modern needs of a more individualistic society.

Burton's agenda is unmistakable. He wants to show you that idealizations of love based on extreme passion lead to *melancholy* and that's not good for you or anybody else. It doesn't give rise to stable love relationships; it masks self-interest; it encourages deceit and hypocrisy; and, although this is not a key theme in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, it can't provide a realistic foundation for family life and child rearing in what was a much more complex society than in the past. Still, Burton understands that the tradition of courtly amour whose "vanities" and "fopperies" he now wants to expose as a "snarling" lustful *fit*, *frenzy* and *perpetual flux*, instilled "some good and graceful qualities in lovers" (172). Among the upper classes, it encouraged generosity, courage, courtesy and a desire to do well. It taught nobles "subtlety, wit and many pretty devices". It helped create a civil and civilized society, contributing substantially to art and literature. "What would life be, what joy would there be without golden Aphrodite? (181) Burton clearly was no simple reactionary. But heroic or *Herculean love* was also a dangerous potion; it constantly breaks out of an orderly course and endangers the very civilization that it is supposed to have supported; it most definitely was not the kind of love that English society in the seventeenth-century needed.

The Great Chain of Being

Englishmen might have believed in liberty but they believed even more in order. For them, every aspect of life was structured and this overall orderliness provided psychic

compensation for a British society experiencing change. During the late 1500s and early 1600s, British thought was governed by a conceptual idealization known as *the great chain of being*. This idealization functioned to make sense of the universe and a person's place within it. The world of spirit and the world of matter were connected by a hierarchically graduated chain. At the lowest rung was inanimate matter, followed successively by plant life, followed by animals, followed by human beings. This earthly domain, however, in turn was connected to a spiritual realm consisting of angels, other heavenly saints and spirits, and God in the form of the Trinity. Because this teleological perspective pictured all existence as minutely graduated in a successive pattern, it not only reinforced social hierarchy, it also encouraged the conceptualization of intermediate beings or spirits that operated in the material world. Burton, like many educated people of his time, thought that evil spirits or demons were real entities. He based this belief on the testimony of witnesses and judicial cases, especially ones that accused women of practicing witchcraft. He believed in incubi, demons who had intercourse with sleeping women and succubi who made love to men in their sleep. He believed that the spirit world could be consulted by divination and manipulated by magic.

Burton obviously inhabited a different mental world from our own, but he was neither naïve nor unintelligent. His belief was based on a complex understanding of interrelations of spirit and matter and upon what he regarded as incontrovertible evidence. He recognized that many other authorities were skeptical about things like witchcraft and demonology; he provided both sides and allowed readers to draw their own conclusions; he compromised with a new kind of protestant rationalism by telling his readers that while commerce with evil spirits might work, it was "unlawful". What Burton reflects is a worldview governed by positive and negative synergies that were intensely interconnected and hierarchically laddered. Within this worldview, it made no sense to artificially separate things like physical and spiritual health. Just as physical health required perfectly balancing the different humours of the body, so spiritual health meant avoiding any extremes that tempted a person off the narrow path of righteous behaviour. Physical idleness, for example, destroyed both the physical body and the spiritually connected mind. The social organization, the state, was quite simply the human body writ large and its economic strength depended as much on spirit or morality as it did on economics. Prior to the English Civil War of the 1650s, which gave rise to the birth of political economy in Hobbes and Locke, the concept of a *great chain of being* in which England was doing quite well provided sustenance.

The great chain of being, in both Shakespeare and Burton, meant that God, human beings, the nation and nature were all simpatico, which is why both writers believed that nature responded to human acts of good and evil. When Macbeth and his wife kill old king Banquo, nature works up a storm. The message was not simply a metaphor. You did bad, you upset the entire chain. You don't have to believe this formula to recognize that it made everything potentially meaningful as well provided clues to hidden meanings in nature and human nature. For Burton, absolutely everything was connected by and organized through God's love. That divine love, or if you like, that force in the universe, was completely positive, pure and unifying. Human love, on the other hand, was much lower and more imperfect on the great chain of being. It was easily perverted by self-

centered human beings, or corrupted by evil demons, towards base, bestial and evil directions. Like many of the religious Puritans of his time, Burton thought that human beings could only practice pure love in relations that were immersed in spirituality. Only if one's earthly loves exemplified the flow of divine agape could they avoid the pitfalls of a depraved nature. But most of us mere mortals are not human vessels of agape and that's precisely why you need self-discipline and constancy. Courtly love was an eminently dangerous form of infection because it elevated passion over self-control.

Paradoxically, such a fundamentally spiritual and hierarchical perspective is not incompatible with a degree of realism. In different ways, both Shakespeare and Burton helped to undermine the medieval worldview by exposing the hypocrisy and deceit that masqueraded as aristocratic ideals. Shakespeare did it by delineating individual character and unpacking the individual motivation behind the clever rhetoric and deceitful courtship of someone like Richard III. Burton exposed the sensuality behind love's courtly idealizations and, by so doing, injected a much-needed reality check into the elite embrace of love. You might consider these new and realistic explosions of aristocratic pretensions to be part and parcel of a middle class critique of the aristocracy. Lots of historians and literary analysts think this, so you wouldn't be alone. It's a simple formula for explaining the major transformation to a capitalist society that took place first in England. You might want to remember, however, that Shakespeare's and Burton's approaches remain hierarchical and that significant cultural changes were taking place *within* an increasingly capitalistic British landed society. The readership for Burton's very popular book was not some hypothetical urban middle class but the classically educated members of landed society who alone had the time and leisure to read something like *The Anatomy of Melancholy.*

Charity Versus Possessive Individualism

The reading audience was the aristocracy and gentry who sent their sons to public (i.e. private) schools where they typically read the Greek and Latin classics that Burton quotes so freely. I've already suggested that the attitude of these folks was far more capitalist than their continental counterparts, but this meant rational investment in their land through tenant farming and agricultural improvement rather than embracing all aspects of market capitalism where land, labour and commodities are nothing but economic variables. Capitalist investment in land doesn't imply a competitive free for all. In fact, it is compatible with a critique of many of the values that we consider indispensable to modern capitalism. One of the most revealing elaborations in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, therefore, is the breakdown of love into three categories: the profitable, the pleasant and the virtuous or honest. You may guess by this reverse order that Burton is going to condemn the love of profit. He goes so far as to suggest that "no loadstone (i.e. magnetic force) so attractive as that of profit, none so fair an object as this of gold; nothing wins a man sooner than a good turn; bounty and liberality command body and soul". (19) He's certainly not embracing anything like a marketplace in desire. When he suggests that the "hope of gain" is what drives individuals as far as the "antipodes", he's

criticizing it as the completely wrong attitude towards what is important or really *profitable* in human life

Modern English affections are so fixed "upon this object of commodity", Burton argues, that accumulation has become a fetish. Instead of having real relationships with other people, British society has become litigious. Old relationships are daily destroyed as people fight over title to land. As society becomes increasingly commodified, Burton complains, the people that get the most respect and even the most genuine sympathy are the people with the most commodities – for whom we sacrifice our "friends, neighbours, kinsmen, allies, with whom we have conversed and lived as so many Geryons, for some years past." (21) Love of commodities and the consequent accumulation of wealth is just as negative a social force as the negligence and waste that destroys a fortune. What happens when we love goods too much is that "covetousness" and "ambition tyrannizeth over our souls" and "crucifies" everything that is good and generous in us. Invariably, the result of greed is melancholy.

Burton views the love of commodities as a disease of the mind. He regards it as a complete misunderstanding of what is *profitable* for us as a healthy person. The aristocratic as well as Christian virtue that he wants to oppose to this selfish rapaciousness is "charity" or the "Christian laws of love". Love means caring for other people as much as we do for ourselves. Burton wants to stress a Christian love for one's neighbour over aristocratic charity or benevolence, not only because he is infused with Christianity himself, but also because he is highly suspicious of what masquerades as charity in his society. Burton argues that "the charity of our times" is not to do good for its own sake, but "that all the world might take notice of it." (37) This kind of "cold" and "hypocritical" love has expelled "justice" and "virtue" for a superficial "immortality". This is the prime cause of "good works" in our "iron age".

Obviously, some of this strikes a cord with us today, when rich donors are able to manipulate charities into idolizing them. But what are we to make of this critique of emerging capitalist society in the seventeenth-century British context? Given the popularity of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, I think we can assume that many *aristocratic and middle class* readers must have been receptive to the message. I think we can also agree that many people were feeling more than a little anxious about the destruction of traditional values resulting from market commodification. The tensions would have been most acute in elite aristocratic society where traditional ideas of *noblesse oblige* were under siege. By exposing the desire for commodities as a corruption of love, Burton offered his elite readers a moralist's perspective on the corrupt times and an alternate conception of charity and human relations. Just like today, people like to be reminded that charity can be genuine, even if they find it more difficult to practice it.

Burton's comments on Britain's capitalist direction allow us to see that he was anything but a bourgeois apologist and that, in fact, he was a much more traditional kind of moralist. All of this is useful to know, but it doesn't get us much closer to appreciating what is novel in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. It is not the love of wealth, or the love of pleasure in general, that is his focus. His primary concern was to explore a topic that was

emerging as a central battleground for new directions in culture – the love of a man and a woman for each other. "More eminent above the rest", says Burton, suggesting that when people thought of love, it was no longer God or wealth that they typically pictured in their minds but the "comeliness and beauty which proceeds from women". (40) Love was on everyone's agenda. Burton remarks that love was becoming *the* central topic of concern for everyone; he jokes that love was turning everyone into a poet; even those villagers who didn't have the skills to compose poetry were busy writing love ballads that became the hits of the day. What disturbed Burton was that it was *love as passion* rather than *love as commitment* that was being celebrated.

Love's Tyranny

Burton is a man talking about women. As an Oxford bachelor, he's obviously a guy who doesn't have a great deal of experience with women. Consequently, a combination of fear and fascination saturate his analysis of female sexuality. There's no reason to think that this particular combination was uncommon in an age where many hoped to control and submerge burgeoning female sexuality within the patriarchal or, as Burton calls it, "aristocratic" family where everything was sweetness and light because women were instructed to be sweet and light. Burton is a contributor to a new view of the *companionable marriage* that not only wants to control and harness this female sexuality within a male dominated family but also placed the burden of that control overwhelmingly upon the female sex. We are at the very beginning of a remarkable change from the view of women as lustful creatures and temptresses in the tradition of Eve towards the sexless females of the nineteenth-century.

In Burton, the gender lines are just being drawn and the Victorian patriarchal family is off in the distance. What is central in Burton is the belief that, for the sake of a stable, moral and religious society, both men and women have to practice sexual restraint. Instilling sexual self-discipline begins as a demolition job on *love as passion*. Courtly love needs to be hived off from religious love and all of its pretensions need to be exploded. The strategy is effective to the extent that it cuts through some of the major ambiguities of *heroic love* by demonstrating that it is tyrannical "immoderate, inordinate, and not to be comprehended in any bounds". (54) The strategy turns out to be problematic in the long run because: 1) it wanted to confine sexuality within the family, a strategy that many courtly writers described as foolish; 2) it failed to anticipate the degree of psychic repression that would result from self and social controls of sexuality; and, finally, 3) it ran headlong into conflict with the increasing emphasis on individualization and the utilitarian privileging of individual, including sexual, happiness. That doesn't mean, of course, that the critique of courtly or romantic love was entirely wrong. It just means that when it comes to love and sexuality, the answers were not going to get any easier as people entered the modern era.

Burton couldn't foresee the future history of love; he was just interested in exposing the corrupt underbelly of courtly or *heroic* love. We need to define what Burton means by *heroic love*. Why is it called heroic? It is heroic because it is the courtly love espoused by the *nobility* or self-proclaimed heroes and warriors of society. Burton also calls it

love-melancholy because he wants to show you where *heroic love* leads; it inevitably leads to the twin characteristics of melancholy – fear and sadness without a determinate cause. Or, you might say, the causes are largely imaginary. They are the result of the imaginative (imaginary?) idealization typically of a woman that leads to the very things that the Courts of Love suggested: pale skin, hollow cheeks, constant tension, anxiety and jealousy. This melancholic love disease predominates in those of a "higher strain" argues Burton because they are "idle". What Burton really means is that the upper classes have the time and the leisure to contemplate or indulge in thoughts about love. In Great Britain, a liberal society, they also have far greater access to members of the opposite sex than in some more traditional aristocratic societies.

Burton's patriarchal attitudes are real but his misogyny can easily be exaggerated. "Of women's unnatural, insatiable lust, what country, what village doth not complain" he writes. (55) But when we look more closely, he complains pretty equally about the *insatiable lust* of both men and women; and more than once he says that the men are just as bad, if not worse, than the women. Burton often talks off the top of his head and repeats contemporary clichés without considering whether or not they consistently support his claims. What is much more interesting than quoting him out of context to support a feminist agenda is the fact that Burton thinks that women have a high sex drive and want much the same things out of a love relationship as men. But what both sexes want when they let sexual desire loose, they can never get, because *sexual passion is not the same as love*. The highly eroticized imagination that privileges love as passion is an entirely "corrupted" and "destructive passion" that "rageth" before marriage as lust and after marriage as jealousy. What the courtly tradition calls love is always a form of *heroic melancholy*. Burton's condemnation is absolute:

> The beginning, middle, end of love is nought else but sorrow, vexation, agony, torment, irksomeness, wearisomness; so that to be squalid, ugly, miserable, solitary, discontented, dejected, to wish for death, to complain, rave, and to be peevish, are the certain signs and ordinary actions of a lovesick person. (151)

Heroic love will always contain a combination of fear and sadness. Sexually based love -- the passion of love -- is not only a dangerous set of symbols; it is a disease of the nobility. Once it has settled in the mind of a "young and lusty" but idle person, it is virtually impossible to eradicate. And these are the people on whom the future of English society depends.

Burton the moralist wants always to condemn this "heroical passion or rather burning lust" and to contrast the same with a more "natural and chaste love" (87). What makes it difficult to take Burton's moralizing seriously is the way that he deliberately blurs the line between courtly and more moderately based forms of sexual love. There is absolutely no doubt that he fears this heroical love like the plague, and wants to eradicate it, but he fails to do justice to love as a form of idealization except very begrudgingly. And he doesn't really tell us how *sex* is supposed to function in a healthy relationship. At least if he argued that sexuality played no role in marriage other than the biological

function of procreation, he would be consistent. But he recognizes sexual attraction and sexuality in marriage in ways that are entirely modern even touching:

> There's something in a woman beyond all human delight; a magnetic virtue, a charming quality, an occult and powerful motive. The husband rules here as head, but she again commands his heart, he is her servant, she his only joy and content; no happiness is like unto it, no love so great as this of man and wife, no such comfort as *placens uxor*, a sweet wife. (53)

Clearly, what is being described is sexual chemistry. Moreover, Burton's moral condemnation conflicts with his description of the way love becomes established, by blurring the line between chaste and impure love. The appropriate question is why such inconsistencies and internal contradictions? Why does the moralist in Burton usurp the scholar, especially the loving scholar of a European literature that often discusses love with much more sophistication?

I think we need to incorporate Burton's earlier warnings regarding commercial Britain. He was very concerned that moral values are being usurped by the captivation of the ruling classes to commodities and their increasing rejection of those virtues that were more socially stabilizing. In such a society, any potentially civilizing properties of courtly love could get lost in the general contagion and love could easily become a rationale for the selfish pursuit of passion that Burton continually calls *lust*. Such an interpretation is supported by the fact that Burton clearly considers modern England to be the counterpart of metropolitan Rome before its fall. "No laws," he says, "will serve to repress the pride and insolency of our days". (98) Finally, Burton believes that commercial society condones a communication of the sexes that will go too far if love becomes the heroic religion of the upper classes. "We assume more liberty in such cases; we allow them, as Bohemus saith, to kiss coming and going…to talk merrily, sport, play, since, and dance, so that it be modestly done, go to the ale house and tavern together." (105) In a relatively free and open society, Burton argues, it is difficult for "the most averse and sanctified souls to resist such [i.e. sexual] allurements." (117)

Another possible interpretation might be that Burton is simply using all this moralizing about the tyranny of love as a mask to justify a sexually explicit book that could conceivably be read as a guide to, or at least a titillating description of, the modern art of seduction. That would explain some of the contradictions in the text, especially his puzzling admission at the end of Partition 3, Section 3 that he himself is a "novice" and has a "tincture" of *heroic love*. But it doesn't seem to me that Burton is the kind of guy who would be afraid of censure, even from his Oxford University peers. Furthermore, his formulaic equation between heroic love and *insatiable lust* is repeated so many times and with such violence that it appears to be a genuine concern of his. And it was a concern of many of his contemporaries. Finally, the argument that heroic love necessarily results in melancholy is of such a piece with the overall argument of the book as a whole that it would make the work virtually unreadable if we were to assume that he is just being clever or coy in this instance. All the same, it is when Burton *describes* the way heroic love works in his society, rather than when he moralizes about it, that the

book really springs to life. He finally seems to be enjoying himself. Most of the religious cum moralizing language is either discarded or appears strained. With this in mind, let's take a close look at his actual description of workings of eros in early seventeenth-century England.

Beauty's Gaze

When Burton describes the way heroic love works, he immediately becomes more modern and relevant for us. Against those Platonists and Divines who might argue that we should "see with the eyes of our understanding", Burton simply says that we see with our eyes and that we love beauty. The great chain of being suggests that all things are attracted to beauty, but human beauty is a matter of sight first and foremost. We don't look for a higher virtue when we love, we desire only to gaze on beauty. Beauty captivates our senses. Beauty doesn't need to bring anything else to the table says Burton, "beauty is a dower of itself, a sufficient patrimony, an ample commendation, an accurate epistle" (68). Let's be clear about something; Burton is not simply describing here; he's approving. He says of Alexander the Great choosing Roxane as his wife: "'Twas well done of Alexander, and heroically done: I admire him for it." (75)

In the first instance, it is the face of the woman that is loved by the man. Burton describes the way the face *bewitches* by *invading* the eyes to the heart. The qualities of a beautiful face include things like a high forehead, coral lips and a dimple in the chin. Next come things like sweet breath and flaxen hair. Soon after the face, come the breasts that Burton loving describes as "two chalky hills" composed of "fine soft round pap" (79), hardly what one might expect from the moralist of insatiable lust. Equally surprising is the reference to female secret *loadstone* that draws the male spectator further and further in. These *sights* for the eyes are so crucial to love, argues Burton, that someone who has been blind since birth cannot love because he cannot conceive them properly. Any blind person would consider this assessment to be superficial; what it shows is that Burton's has an idea and ideal of sexual attraction that is perfectly consistent with neo-Platonic and, especially, courtly love.

Burton could be following the neo-Platonists, who he had read, by defining human love in terms of proportionate beauty accessed primarily through the eyes. One might interpolate, therefore, that he is describing a love that is not primarily or exclusively sensual. But he sounds more like Ovid than Ficino when he begins to describe the "artificial allurements" that women use to attract men. Surprisingly, he argues not only that the "artificial is of more force" but also that it is "much to be preferred". Again, he would appear to be *approving* as well as describing. He says that beauty is "more beholding to art than nature". (88) To be sure, Burton follows this up with a condemnation of women who use their physical charms and makeup (i.e. cosmetics) to incite men to lust after them and, more reprehensible, to snare a wealthy marriage partner. But the principle of physical beauty being enhanced by makeup (cosmetics) and artifice need not be prostituted for evil purposes.

For a monkish professor, Burton understands the tactical strategies of a decidedly sensual courtship. He's actually a bit more than a novice in love. For example, he shows you how to move strategically from first to third base -- from holding hands to drinking on the same side of the glass to "mutual compressions", "ringing of hands", "treading on feet", and, eventually, to "feeling of breasts". Seduction often takes place in subdued lighting that flatters the female's face; it requires "pretty speech"; but its major deadly weapon is "kissing". Burton views kissing as a kind of female "battery" or "continual assault" because kissing opens up sexual possibilities without closing them; "kissing is never finished and is always fresh". (109) Needless to say, such kissing differs from the more legitimate *ceremonial kisses* that take place in company. Sexually based kisses "cling like ivy, close as an oyster, bill as doves, meretricious kissing, biting of lips…" (112) Lip biting is a big thing with Burton and he describes how one bites and pulls the lip at the same time. This is pretty sexy stuff. I'll admit that Burton warns young men and women against this kind of kissing and he even suggests that anyone who would kiss their wife like that commits a form of adultery. But the explicit description is there for anyone to read. And, if kissing is a temptation, surely reading explicitly about that kind of kissing is a temptation as well.

Burton obviously thinks that most of his readers will be male because he wants to show them a range of female entrapments, including playing coy and picking fights (for the "renewing of love"). Once they've got you hooked, they practice all kinds of deceit – "fair promises, vows, oaths and protestations"; they lie about their age; they lie about everything because "when lovers swear, Venus laughs". (122) Women often keep multiple lovers at the same time. Men do the same, says Burton, but women are much "better at counterfeiting emotion" and their supremely effective tool is crying. The main battleground for this modern war of the sexes is the dance floor. Dancing, says Burton, is the "companion of all filthy delights and enticements". He is concerned to contrast modern dancing as a meat market, and mixed dancing as a *moderate* and *sober* and "lawful recreation":

> There is a mean in all things; this is my censure in brief: dancing is a pleasant recreation of body and mind, if sober and modest (such as our Christian dances are), if tempestively used; a furious motive to burning lust, if, as by pagans, heretofore, unchastely abused (121).

Modern dances are a "necessary appendix to love matters" (178); however, they are just one part of the military strategy of females seemingly bent on enticing and manipulating male lust. A host of mercenary soldiers are recruited in this battle, including bawds, pimps, and panderers of love charms that Burton seems to believe have genuine power. The extensive use of professional *bawds*, seemingly unthreatening older ladies who have the access to act as go betweens and who are paid to talk up the person's good qualities, is a fascinating part of upper class love life at the time.

Whatever the sexual strategy, the net result is the same. When a person falls in love, she falls in love with a false promise of joy. The overwhelming outcome is melancholy. Love melancholy is clearly identified in the pale features, hollowed eyes (because the

liver no longer functions properly), constant anxiety, jealousy, and general unhappiness. Lovers are easy to spot because they *have no self-control*, and constantly devour the beloved with their eyes. Their sense of themselves is lost in the other person, and they even lose their sense of time. Time in the company of the beloved is an instant; time away from them is an eternity. Men become "lackeys" of women. Burton depicts these male *inamoratos* of his day as totally emasculated by love. "If he might be strangled in her garters; he would willingly die tomorrow". (166)

"Fear and sorrow" – melancholia – is what attends both men and women in all love affairs where love is an extreme passion rather than a temperate and controlled sentiment. It gives rise to extreme oscillations of feeling that are dangerous to the equanimity of both sexes. Burton is much more concerned, however, about the female power over men. Heroic love has the power to transform even the most stoic male into a female puppet, and the puppetry is not confined to the *young and lusty* but even into male old age. "Ancient men will dote in this kind sometimes as well as the rest…though they be sixty years of age above the girdle, to be scarce thirty beneath". (179)

Affectionate Relationships and The Ethic of Constancy

A horror of female control so saturates Burton's prose that we need to correct any misconceptions. Courtly love was consciously constructed by women to give them some cultural power in an age when men had absolutely all the political and economic power. By attacking courtly love, and even by describing it overwhelmingly as female seduction of helpless males, Burton is not negating the power of the male-female love bond or even denying that it has a sexual basis. Burton is part of a movement in the early seventeenth-century to redefine love within marriage as a special kind of friendship. He and other writers strenuously disavowed *love as passion* both within and without marriage precisely because it demands emotional extremes that are inherently unstable. He and others sought to substitute a new *ethic of constancy* that diffused and subdued extreme emotions. Male-female friendship that doesn't deny or rely on sexual attraction is not only personally and socially stable, but it is potentially radical.

In the pages you read, and certainly in the pages you will be reading next week. Burton occasionally refers to a different kind of love than *heroic passion* and, while he is not exactly clear and consistent how these affectionate relationships work, there are three characteristics worth singling out. The first is that that married love should be happy. Unlike *heroic love*, it is not subject to melancholy. The second is that legitimate love should be based on genuine affection and real compatibility. It is more realistic than *heroic love*, because it is not based on ridiculous idealizations that have little to do with real people. The third and more subtle point is that the companionable marriage is based on a much higher degree of equality than any previous male-female institutions. If courtly love provided a powerful female antidote to male power, the companionable marriage offered a complete alternative. Burton describes love in the family as an aristocratic government, but the important characteristic of this government is that it is based on *consent*. In many seventeenth-century English writings on the family, including John Locke, an important distinction is made between the relationship between husbands

and wife and parents and children. The hierarchical relationship between parents and children should not be the model for the husband and wife relationship, John Locke suggests, because adult women and men are autonomous equals. He suggests that marriage is a voluntary contract that can be broken *when either party is dissatisfied*. (Leities, 49) Locke even goes so far as to say that the terms of the marriage contract in principle could be open to negotiation.

With Burton, we don't get anything anywhere as radical, but we certainly do get a feeling that no one is to be subdued or dominated against their will by love. And we also get the fascinating notion and the new norm of love as a *sweet and agreeable* ethic of constancy that is "natural, spontaneous, and constant" because it involves the "integration of conscience and impulse", or to put it more simply, because it replaces an unruly passion with a more gentle and lasting affection. Love is a personal experience but it has social purposes and consequences, as Burton points out. Intense love, or *love as passion* is dangerous to society as well as to the psychic health of the individual. A consistent and affectionate love connects the world of private feeling more effortlessly to the world of social relationships. In an important sense, affectionate love and the companionable marriage mirrors the "words and gestures of social life" by withdrawing "intense or untoward emotions" (57) The same *self-control and constancy* that made a good marriage work also reinforced sociability towards others.

Burton, and many of his Puritan contemporaries, derived the appropriate morals and manners for both private and social relationships from religious injunction and theology. He invokes the commandment to love thy neighbours and the concept of god's agape as increasing our capacity to love like a good Christian should. The principle of sweet moderation and constant and controlled emotion can stand without religious support as it did in the enlightened love of the eighteenth-century. The only problem is that, whenever you allow people any emotional freedom based on sexual attraction, you are potentially opening a Pandora's box of individual emotion. If the social controls on that emotion start to slip, for whatever reason, the floodgates of emotion will open as they did in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and drown the fragile ethic of constancy.

No idea ever dies completely. Many today will still use the concept of friendship and the language of constancy to describe love. Arguably, however, many do not appreciate the kind of restraint and self-discipline needed to be a good friend and a true lover. Many seek *love as passion* in addition to friendship and constancy without appreciating just how different these sets of idealizations are. Burton certainly thought that it was impossible to sustain lasting affection and a truly companionable marriage in an environment ruled by sexual passion. Perhaps the strongest indication that he may have been more right than wrong is the number of broken marriages and the melancholy search for love that characterizes most modern love.

Love and Sexuality within Marriage

Introduction

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a radically new view of marriage was developed and promoted in Great Britain, originating with those Protestants that we today refer to as the Puritans and later by more secular writers such as Samuel Richardson. Earlier attitudes towards marriage were overwhelmingly functional for all classes. Working people, for example, got married because society and its institutions, reinforced by religion, told them that the purpose of marriage was to raise a family. Moreover, the family was more an economic than an emotional unit if people wanted to survive. It allowed marginal economies – and most pre-industrial economies are marginal -- to place the responsibility for survival on the labouring poor. Children were quickly introduced to helping sustain the family economy and were responsible for caring for their parents in old age. That is why the consensus was the more children the better, to ensure that at least someone survived to support the aged. Those people who didn't work by definition – the leisure class or aristocracy – largely got married to consolidate property, form interfamilial alliances, and produce legitimate heirs to carry on the family name. Love or affection within marriage might occur, but they were secondary considerations for at least three reasons: 1) first, most marriage partners were arranged by parents (in the case of the wealthy) or scrutinized by peers and guardians; 2) the marriage partnership had to take a back seat to more important political, social, economic or occupational roles and relationships (public life trumped private life); and 3) even if the marriage partners were sexually attracted to one another, common sense and experience dictated that this would wear off in time. When the medieval ladies who ran the *courts of love* sought to intensify and celebrate a kind of love based on sexual passion, they quite logically placed it *outside* of marriage.

It was a new and radical idea in the seventeenth-century, therefore, to place love *within* marriage; it was even more astonishing to suggest that married love was *erotic* to some degree; it was downright shocking in the seventeenth-century to argue that men and women had the right to *choose* their marriage partners based on sexual attraction. None of these propositions sound strange to us. In fact, when we look at the analyses of writers like Robert Burton, we might well find them far too conservative or traditional in their ideas about love within marriage. But, we would not only be anachronistic but we would completely misconstrue one of the most important cultural developments of modernity. We would fail to appreciate the complex ways that *love within marriage* contributed to the tensions and anxieties of the modern age. For overwhelmingly restricting emotional fulfillment to the marriage relationship put an enormous burden on a single type of social relationship that it has obviously proven difficult to bear. And yet, there is no longer any other kind of social relationship that has been able to replace it because the discourse around love and marriage elevated the very private relationship between a man and a woman in all of our consciousnesses. Writers like Burton helped create our modern world of love.

Marriage is the place where we today usually locate love. But it is a challenge to sustain love in marriage. That's only one aspect of the dilemma that that the drama of love within marriage has wrought for us moderns. Cultivating and sustaining love is difficult enough, but the new view of love within marriage emphasized the normative ideal of self-control. Love in marriage might include sexual delight, friendship and comfort, but it also "called for sobriety, steadiness, and constancy, even where sexual pleasure was concerned. (Leites, 15) Married love is all about compromise and concession. Love in marriage works best when steadiness of feeling predominates over intensity of feeling. In order to establish the very possibility that *love within marriage* could survive, therefore, men and women had first to learn how to *repress* extreme emotions, especially *love as passion*. Erotic love need not disappear in marriage – in fact the new view was that sexual attraction was crucial -- but if it is going to survive, it needs to be toned down.

The extreme emotions of eroticism, the swings of mood, the tensions and jealousies are dangerous to marriage. They need to be *toned down* into the more gentle, friendly and polite kind of affection that two people can sustain over time. There is no doubt that this kind of mutual accommodation can and does take place between some people, but there is justifiable doubt that most people are capable of the kind of *self control* that is involved or even that both people in a relationship will be on the same wavelength over an extended period of time. It's asking a lot of two different people to develop the kind of moderated feeling needed to sustain an affectionate, companionable marriage. It's asking a lot more of people if you consider this new kind of marriage a happy possibility, i.e. if you presume to make that relationship the central focus for personal and social development. But that's precisely what British writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century wanted to do, partly for religious reasons – because love is sinful outside of marriage – but all also for social-cultural reasons because they believed that individuals and society would both be *better* for the cultivation of this kind of controlled and constant *feeling*. Consequently, love ceased to be a *passion* and became a *sentiment*; sentiment and *sensibility* to the sentiments of others became the glue for modern society.

There is a great deal that is admirable about this new idea of love within marriage. As opposed to the medieval worldview that people basically are *wicked*, there is an assumption that people can be a lot better. Once the idea of love within marriage emerged from its puritan religious cocoon, there was even the possibility of thinking that people can be *good*. But goodness requires discipline and it has to be learned. The best place to learn it is an environment where discipline develops through love. One learns how to respect the feelings of other people, by first respecting the feelings of one's marriage partner. Marriage is a *little society* based on the kind of sympathetic harmony that writers like Robert Burton describe as the best of all relationships, when both people are committed and constant. "Can the world afford a better sight, sweeter content, a fairer object, a more gracious aspect?", he asks his readers. The answer may be no. But the difficulty of establishing this little empire of constancy and content with another person should not be underestimated. Neither should the distinct possibility for repression and guilt in the emotionally controlled marriage that Sigmund Freud would later single out as a chief cause of neurosis. As the mention of Mr. Freud suggests, today we live with the good and bad effects of the sixteenth-century program to locate and

sustain *love within marriage*. We don't all get married and lived happily ever after, do we? The fascinating thing is that some of us expect to and that most of us hope to. That's the nature of idealistic notions of love when they become internalized. They sometimes have more force than the bluntest statistics on rates of adultery and divorce.

Married Hell versus Married Heaven

Robert Burton wrote on the cusp and contributed to the new view of *love within marriage*. What's strikingly obvious in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, however, is Burton's clear realization that contemporary marriage was more likely to be "an hell" than a heaven of love. In order for *love within marriage* to be a reflection of heavenly joy or a social ideal, people's expectations and attitudes first had to change dramatically. Marriage for Burton was "a rock on which many are saved, many impinge and are cast away". (218) As Burton analyzes the pros and cons of marriage, he constantly wavers between an uncommon ideal and more common reality. The most common marriage reality is a relationship chock full of "cares, miseries and discontents". (216) The primary cause of this is that both men and women haven't learned how to be unselfish; they continually use one another to satisfy their lust; and, when they marry, they don't change. Marriage doesn't make them more virtuous. Men cheat on their wives, and women cheat on their husbands. Burton can be quite vicious when he describes female cheaters and deceivers, When many women get married, he suggests, they use their husbands as a "cloak to hide their villainy; once married she may fly out at her pleasure". (220) We may be surprised at Burton's sexual stereotype of women, but the medieval consensus on women was that they were at least as lustful as men and infinitely more dangerous as experts in the art of seduction. One of the more remarkable features of Burton's gender analysis, therefore, is his willingness to apologize to women for his rants as well as his admission that men are every bit as bad. When these equally "depraved men and women" enter into a marriage, they enter into a "hazard", a "lottery" where the chances of success are slim to none.

Burton is so personally put off by the prospect of marriage that he begins his analysis of marriage by warning people not to marry and even extolling the pleasures of bachelorhood. The only initial reason that he can discover to marry rather than avoiding marriage is as a cure and antidote for the even greater *melancholy* associated with *heroic love*. As his analysis develops, however, we see new rationale for marriage emerge. Love and marriage are risks worth taking if the relationship is based on genuine attraction and the marriage partners possess the inclination and good will to make a marriage work. "No sweetness, pleasure, happiness can be compared in the world," he claims, "if they live quietly and lovingly together". (263) I don't want to deny some genuine ambiguity and distrust about marriage in Burton – he says that both bachelorhood and marriage are "hazards". But he ends up overwhelmingly on the side of marriage because it is the only place where sexually based attraction has any chance of avoiding personal and social devastation. He idealizes a good marriage as *the* most important foundation of personal happiness and social progress. Whatever reservations he might have as a bachelor himself, he is one of the very first to detail the necessary criteria for love within marriage

to have any chance of success. The devil they say is in the details, and Burton's details constitute a social revolution.

Dismantling Obstacles to love.

Burton's fundamental critique of contemporary marriages is that there were far too many "impediments" to marrying for love. Burton is insightful in suggesting that some of these impediments are in the minds of the lover's themselves, who may be genuinely in love, but who put status, economic or other considerations first. Women, in particular, are expected to adhere to a code of pride and consensus, and will not *confess love* unless friends and supporters advance their cause, and these are often unwilling to do so because they don't evaluate potential partners through the eyes of love. Some young people are their own worst enemy. Many young men and women are "so nice", for example, that they look for prince and princess charming. They scorn any suitors that are not considered good enough and their standards are unrealistic. Women take a special delight "to prank up themselves, to make young men enamoured…and to run mad for their sakes". Even when they embrace love, however, securing a partner is often difficult because "cupid has two darts". Just because you love someone, doesn't mean that they will love you back – "love danceth in a ring". (231)

But Burton's chief critique and legitimate concern about the future of married love was the control that parents had over their children's love life. His new direction for love was aimed at the British upper classes, by far the most socially mobile people in Europe, with merchants and gentry mingling and intermarrying with the aristocracy. In a mobile society, it doesn't matter as much what your parent does or what your parent wants, because there are alternate opportunities than following in mommy and daddy's footsteps. It is not totally surprising, therefore, that the first attack on parental controls over children's love life would come in England and from among writers infused with values of self-reliance and independence. But the extent of the attack upon parental power in Burton and other writers is still surprising because Great Britain was a highly stratified society and marriages among the upper classes especially were tightly controlled. The nobility viewed marriage contracts in terms, not of love, but of the power and prestige of the family. The gentry and merchant classes viewed suitable marriages in much the same way, except that for them marrying well was an essential instrument for upward mobility. Any dismantling of parental controls, therefore, could be viewed as socially, economically, politically and culturally revolutionary.

Burton's cultural revolution targeted one group in particular -- "covetous fathers". He condemned contemporary society because "every one is so mad for money" that they destroy the possibility and potential of love:

> 'tis a general fault among most parents in bestowing of their children; the father wholly respects wealth; when through his folly, riot, indiscretion, he hath embezzled his estate, to recover himself he confines and prostitutes his eldest son's love and affection to some fool, or ancient or deformed piece, for

> money…His daughter is in the same predicament forsooth; as an empty boat she must carry what, where, when, and whom her father will. (235)

He counters this mercenary attitude towards marriage with a sentiment that we are all familiar with, but that wasn't generally accepted in 1600 in an aristocratic society – that marriages are "made in heaven" and based on attraction. Furthermore, he maintains the principle of liberty in love, i.e. that "affections are free and not to be commanded". (237)

Such an attitude was not likely to be popular with many parents, so Burton needs to buttress it by as many collateral arguments as he can muster. First, marriages based on love help counter the general covetousness or greed in society. Second, marriage to someone outside the genetic peer group helps counter "hereditary diseases in a family". Third, appealing to a principle that was becoming more common in British society, Burton suggests that "families have their bounds and periods" and we should expect some to rise and some to fall every "six or seven hundred years". But the overwhelming principle is that "love is a free passion, and may not be forced". Against those parents who excuse their interference in their child's lives by saying that they will learn to love their partner in time, Burton objects that this is a dangerous infringement on liberty because, while love can be cultivated, it "may not be learned". Even "Ovid himself cannot teach us how to love", says Burton.

These are dangerous words in 1610. We should not think that someone like Burton takes them lightly because, as the rest of his book shows, this is a guy who believes in order and authority. He generally agrees with convention that obedience to parents is a duty, *except in this one particular case*. "Mistake me not in the meantime, or think that I do apologize here for any headstrong, unruly, wanton flirts," he says. (238) All the same, parents who bully their children into marriages with someone that they don't love are always "at fault". "Tis a grievous thing to love and not enjoy" says Burton. Those who do not find love in marriage will find it elsewhere, at the expense of their happiness and at the risk of disorder and dissention in society. Burton's decisive comment, and his ultimate justification for promoting love in marriage, is that good marriages are not only the foundation of "content and quietness" in relationships but in "a commonwealth". Here, for the first time (or one of the first times) we find the affectionate marriage as the bedrock of society. **Civil man is usurping civic man, and civility starts in the family**.

Some of those who have appreciated the Puritan contribution to genesis of the *affectionate family* and *companionable marriage* have focused on these concepts primarily as religious values that protect individuals from sin and support lives of self-discipline. Burton occasionally makes religious claims like that, which place him in the moderate Puritan camp. What is interesting, however, is the evidence that this idealization of a loving relationship within marriage is not simply or exclusively religious. Writers like Burton repeatedly suggested that the constancy, patience, and self-control that developed in a loving relationship provided a more stable foundation for British society than courtly or heroic love. If people cared less for their personal or family's wealth and honour, or combinations of wealth and honour, then society as a

whole would be more responsible and responsive. Marriage in other words was a "public good".

Love in marriage provides the foundation for a completely different social order than a society dedicated in theory to honour but in practice to wealth. Love is the antithesis of covetousness; you think about the other as much as yourself. To be sure, courtly love also helps curb greed by promoting generosity. The problem with courtly love is this -- when you obsess about another person, you are either being totally self-centred or you completely lose yourself. You invariably oscillate between emotional extremes that are personally and socially disruptive. Affectionate love is an emotional balancing act that helps cultivate and complete the development of more mature human beings. It is a difficult balancing act that requires the two qualities that heroic love shuns, namely prudence and patience. To that, you can add discipline and precision. Burton, like many of you, believes that love evolves and matures and contributes to a person's growth and maturity. To work its patient magic, however, it requires a fundamental, irrevocable and continuing commitment. Burton approves of marriage on one condition. The lovers must say in their hearts – "thee alone I love". (249) Constancy is key, otherwise the participants could never contribute the enormous effort required to sustain the relationship that makes them who they are. Here again is the essential criterion. No one can be expected to commit to a marriage that they have been forced into. That is precisely why the obstacles to marrying freely must be removed.

From the Public to the Private Domain

I've suggested that Burton's book is revolutionary. One of the most revolutionary characteristics of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* may not be immediately apparent. In the seventeenth-century, all over Europe, discussions of morals and manners tended to focus on male roles in public life. Courtly love was an exception to the rule, but an *exception* that implies and appreciates the fact that the primary norms or rules of behaviour were public. In fact, courtly love could only legitimize itself to the extent that it generated male behaviour patterns that could be exhibited in public life, namely honour, courage and generosity. In a more commercial society, these values were obviously becoming outmoded. But that did not mean that public virtues would necessarily be replaced by more private ones. What fascinates me about *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is the intense focus on morals and manners in private life and the highly original claim that private virtues are a public good. Previous literature rarely paid attention to the details of domestic life and domestic relations, because these were not important. In Burton, they appear to be all important. If you don't get your private life right, you will be in hell. And social relations will be hellish.

Burton's claim that "avoiding marriage is avoiding the world" needs to be taken literally. (251) Good, constant and peaceful marriages are *what* make for a good, constant and peaceful society. This worldview means that "rebels against marriage" are not only religious "apostates" but also anti-social beings. In *The Anatomy of Melancholy* we witness an attack on formerly innocent bachelors as well as guilty libertines orchestrated, ironically, by a self-confessed bachelor. It is not just marriage as an institution that is

being idealized here, but a new view of marriage where the primary *society* is between a committed husband and wife and where such marriages are being stressed as normative for *everyone*. If something is a norm, then anything that doesn't conform will be *abnormal*. People who didn't marry, consequently, were a problem. Everyone needs not only to marry, but also to work at his or her marriage.

Such an emphasis on married life may seem somewhat surprising in a British world where political and economic activity was taking off and political science and political economy were being born. Just at the time when contract theory and possessive individualism were becoming triumphant, we witness an ethical shift from public to private life with marriage, rather than the aristocratic values of loyalty and kinship, providing the social glue. Burton attacks the outdated values of honour, pugnacious heroism and *herculean love* and seeks to replace them with a private morality. The family and the home increasingly become the ethical focus, as men and women are cautioned to avoid the temptations and distractions to marriage in "plays, masks, feasts and banquets" (278) and all forms of public events. Rarely in previous history do you find ethical discussions of intimate relationships between couples at home because the emphasis is always on civic and public virtue. Now, for the first time in history, intimate relationships are viewed as central and potentially more significant than life in the public sphere. Public life at court comes under particular attack because its aristocratic values conflict with the morally superior values of home and hearth.

This is only the beginning of an amazing cultural shift that doesn't replace politics and economics but recontextualizes them within a family framework. In the decades to come, personal and domestic relationships will become the focus of literature and an entirely new literary form – the novel – will be created precisely for exploring that reality. Not only would a happy marriage become the norm, but countless treatises, sermons, manuals would tell people exactly how a happy marriage functioned. In the eighteenth-century, the *home* – as in 'home sweet home' – would become the center for everyone's emotional life and the nuclear family would become the place where a person's emotional being was moulded. In addition to developing norms for a contented marriage, writers began to explore the relationships of parents to children and the ways that the primary love relationship could be extended to the next generation. *The Anatomy of Melancholy* doesn't develop all of these socio-cultural directions, but it is the starting point.

Terms of Endearment

Burton writes at the very beginning of the shift from the public to the private domain, so he does not develop the notion of home and the family very far, but these concepts would be central issues for writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries, when novels and moral instruction manuals develop and explore the idea of the nuclear family as the primary source and defense of an emotionally balanced life. The ideal of *home sweet home*, for example, emerges in the eighteenth-century in the hugely popular British periodical Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's *Spectator*. But although Burton barely

scratches at the surface of this emerging discourse on private life, he has some very important things to say about good relationships between husbands and wives.

The crucial variable for a committed marriage, not surprisingly, is the right choice of a spouse. Since love is based on sexual attraction, however, how can one be sure of choosing the right person for life? As Burton suggests, every marriage is a gamble. Genuine attraction and sexual compatibility are the best beginning because any match that doesn't contain these characteristics is likely doomed from the start. If people don't find sexual fulfillment and compatibility in marriage, they will *always* look for it elsewhere, which is why Burton takes direct aim at marriages that pair old men with young women or old women with young men. (267) Impotency automatically nullifies marriage. A corollary of this principle is that married couples must give each other the sex that they need. Ironically, given today's preoccupation with the imperative of male sexuality, Burton is more insistent that it is men who need to give their wives what they need sexually as well as emotionally. Husbands who are never home and *do not play the man as they should* must expect their wives to seek sex outside the marriage.

Burton was not liberated by today's standard. He believed that an orderly married life required men to establish a form of patriarchal control and to oversee their wives to a certain extent. More than once, he objects to relationships where women "wear the breeches" and tyrannize over men, suggesting that this typically happened when noble women married rich but socially inferior men. Burton's patriarchal attitudes were nothing new. What is more revealing and modern is Burton's constant demand that male power over women to be gentle and affectionate. Men should never *tyrannize* over their wives; because the love bond cannot be generated in cases of extreme inequality. Within the context of an aristocratic and patriarchal culture, therefore, Burton called for far greater equality and liberty for women within marriage. He argued that the typical double standard, where men keep mistresses or frequent whores, while expecting their wives to be faithful was simply not on. Commitment is a two way street; it can only survive if two people treat one another with consideration.

The appropriate question is – how considerate? If the devil is in the details, what are the specific terms of endearment? Burton suggests that husbands should regard a "good wife" as a "second self". (304) But surely a good wife and a good marriage is a work in progress. How do you progress towards having a good marriage? Burton focuses on the male, arguing that *a good husband makes a good wife*. In the eighteenth-century the focus would shift increasingly towards a good wife making a good husband. Women's sexuality would be downplayed in order to concentrate on their affectionate, companionable and parenting function. But at this stage, writers like Burton are primarily interested in turning men into good husbands. But what exactly is involved in being a good husband? Not wandering too often from home and giving your wife the sex that she needs certainly are components of a good marriage, but far from constituting the whole story. Exactly what does it mean when Burton says that men who want good wives have to "mend thyself first"? What's involved in the mending? He says that the best remedy for keeping a wife happy and committed to the relationship is "fair means" and "patience". Today, we might add communicating and working things out. So we

have a sense of what Burton means, but he is short on the specifics. He finds it easier to tell men to make the right choice, to be patient with their wives and to balance authority with affection, but we want more details. Perhaps Burton shouldn't be expected to supply the details because he is a bachelor; perhaps a better reason is that this kind of marriage is so new that it is a work in progress. No one could see precisely where this socio-cultural revolution was heading.

But there is one component of love within marriage that Burton does explore, and that specific detail can tell you a heck of a lot. *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is a major assault on one particular emotion. Jealousy was *the* essential element in courtly love and that type of love's primary rationale for denying any connection between love and marriage. Jealousy was a positive contributor in courtly love precisely because it triggered the kind of extreme emotion that allowed for embracing a different set of ideals. But the new conception of love *within* marriage was predicated on eliminating jealousy; jealousy could not be tolerated because it undermined the kind of constancy and self-control that engendered personal and social stability. Indeed, so much is jealousy the target for this new conception of love that Burton describes love *within* marriage as the *antidote* for jealousy.

Anatomy of Jealousy

Jealousy is the essential defining feature of heroic or courtly love. For Burton, jealousy is evident in the animal kingdom, where males generally resent reproductive competitors for females. In human society, Burton argues, this "furious passion" was "most eminent" in males and was "as well amongst bachelors as married men". Jealousy simultaneously was the child of "insensate love" and the parent of "hell tormenting fear". (266). The furious and aggressive character of jealousy was greatly accentuated, argues Burton, in courtly or "heroic love". It single handedly accounted for the fact that men and women could not "live quietly and lovingly together". (263) Not only was it the primary source of the disagreements, fear and sorrow associated with melancholy, but also the rationale for the harsh treatment of women. In courtly love, abstract women were put on a pedestal, while real wives and daughters were virtually imprisoned.

Any society with a culture based on jealousy was a culture in which no one can be trusted. Jealousy may serve a purpose in a warrior aristocratic society, but it negates good married and neighbourly relations in a civil society. Since jealousy "begets unquiteness in mind, night and day" it is the quintessentially anti-social emotion. It potentially alienates everyone from everyone else, "not strangers only, but brothers and sisters, father and mother, nearest and dearest friends". (280) Most of the problems in society as well as in marriages, Burton claims, are attributable to this extreme emotion. Therefore, the essential key to cultivating love *within* marriage was eliminating this one particular emotion. The essential negative commandment of the new perspective on love within marriage, therefore, was "Be not jealous over the wife of thy bosom". (289) Just how far was this injunction to avoid jealousy to extend? Quite far it would seem.

Burton can quote his bible as well as anyone; some of his religious attitudes reflect the kind of moderate puritan protestant values that were influential in England, particularly in the universities. But the main reason that we can say that Burton's perspective on love *within* marriage was at least as much a secular as a religious paradigm is the fact that advises husbands to overlook *adultery* in their wives. This is a paradigm that we witnessed earlier in Ovid, yet another author that Burton has read and knows how to quote to his purposes. Love in Ovid's society was predicated on adultery, so it is not surprising that Ovid tells his readers to tolerate it in mistresses. But Burton's discourse of love is all about love inside marriage and his overwhelming prescription for a happy marriage is commitment and constancy. How on earth is it that Burton can say things like the cuckolding of husbands is such a "common malady" that it sometimes "can't be helped", so "'tis not so grievously to be taken". (289) A dyed in the wool puritan would not be likely to say about adultery that "to wink at it as many so is not amiss at some times". (292) After all, adultery is a sin, is it not?

It shows how seriously Burton is committed to a regime of self-control and the avoidance of "future strife for quietness sake" that he tells husbands to sometimes turn a blind eye to their wives' sexual dalliances. Jealousy is such an enemy of quietness and constancy that Burton believes that you have to avoid it at all costs. It is best to assume that your partner is faithful. If you find yourself cuckolded by a wife that you sincerely love, then your only recourse is to exhibit enough patience and good will to *reform* your wayward wife. What can this surprising argument tell us, apart from the imperative to do whatever you can to make a marriage work? It highlights the fact that, in order to maintain a loving relationship, one of the partners may be required to make a considerable sacrifice. It also suggests that your development as an ethical person depends largely on your ability to demonstrate this kind of constancy, *even when your partner may not do the same*. Finally, it inculcates an enormous amount of self-analysis and potential guilt in individuals who have started to ask different kinds of questions. In heroic or courtly live, the most important question is: does the other person love me, are they continuing to love me, and what are the *signs* that they still love or no longer love me? In love *within* marriage, the most important question is: am I doing enough to make the relationship work. And to the extent that you can never do enough, and some marriages won't work no matter what you do, the potential for feeling inadequate or guilty is simply enormous.

You might have noticed the ways that this new view of love *within* marriage encourages you to question your own motivation – your personal commitment. When compared to courtly love, love *within* marriage may appear much more *selfless*. But this same selflessness involves a lot of internal work. In the world of courtly love, people were focused on objects outside of themselves, even if they mentally idealized those female objects. In the world of love *within* marriage, people are focused on their own conscience. A much richer inner world of the *self* is being constructed. Sigmund Freud, who we'll be looking at later on in the course, believes that everyone in every society has a psychological inner life that can be more or less neurotic. I don't agree with psychiatry that all societies at all times have an inner life. I believe that the inner life as a spectator of your own actions and ideas needs to be constructed and I believe that the new ideal of love *within* marriage makes an enormous contribution to psychology. Once people

started to distinguish between a good and a bad sexuality in the specific form of a *good conscience* and a *diseased conscience* then a sexually relevant psychology was possible. Before that time, sexuality might very well be good or bad, it might result in pleasure or shame, but it was not the subject of psychological interrogation or the complex domain of the constant conscience.

Gender Relations

Burton's treatment of jealousy requires some contextualizing in terms of typical seventeenth-century gender relations. His analysis of the difference between England and continental Europe provides insights into Burton's agenda. Where *heroic love* and concomitant jealousy still predominated, namely on the continent, both married and unmarried women were subject to strict social controls. English practice, on the other hand, already provided Burton and his contemporaries with an alternate model of gender relations. Jealousy could be viewed as less of a powerful independent variable because communication between men and women flowed more freely and in England it was possible to regard women not just as potential lovers but even as friends and, relatively speaking, equals. We "permit our wives and daughters to go to the tavern with a friend", writes Burton, patriotically concluding that England "is a paradise for women, and hell for horses: Italy a paradise for horses, hell for women, as the diverb goes."

I've already suggested that there were contemporary limitations to female equality in seventeenth-century Britain, and that it would be simplistic, not to mention anachronistic, to condemn someone like Burton for not advocating female equality as a *right*. That said, we can and should deconstruct Burton's assumptions about gender and describe the potentially sinister role and function that he was establishing for the female sex. As previously mentioned, Burton is afraid of women because he stereotypes them in a fairly conventional way as *artful seducers of unsuspecting males*. The problem with women is that they are superb operators when it comes to making men fall in love with them, which is precisely why marriage is such a gamble and why you have to look as hard as you can to find a good woman. Women would appear to be fickle and irresolute when it comes to goodness, which is precisely why husbands have to win them over to constancy with patient and loving kindness. The view of women that emerges despite Burton's protestations and apologies about women and men being equally vicious is a hybrid. On the one hand, women resemble prostitutes, not only in their sex drive but also in the mercenary way that use their sexuality to get what they want. On the other hand, women are like children who can be won over by kindness and patience to decency and constancy of behaviour. There are numerous statements in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* to the effect that if women, who have little innate self-control, can be won over to constancy in marriage, they will represent ideal sweetness.

Thus, Burton's seventeenth-century gender paradigm establishes two polarities that would come to dominate male conceptions of women well into the eighteenth, nineteenth and some would argue twentieth and twenty-first centuries – the prostitute and a sweet domestic deity. The strategy for cultivating sweet domestic deities was to create a loving relationship within the safe confines of the family home. These highly gendered

stereotypes did not prevent Burton and some of his contemporaries from appreciating that women were people or that women required freedom to develop maturely. What it did imply, however, was that women were regarded as children *of a larger growth* and that patronizing males were discussing the best ways to cultivate them in order to separate the saint from the prostitute.

When compared to the idealizations of courtly live, the liberty given to women in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* seems much more realistic. But there are obvious elements of male wish fulfillment about women whenever the descriptions of these comparatively liberated women provide specifics. The ideal agenda of these male moralists was to cultivate sweet wives who would provide constant support to their husband without undermining his authority. The net result seems more like the female robots in movies like *The Stepford Wives* than real people in real relationships. Burton describes his bottom line towards the end of the treatment of love-melancholy, providing us with a fitting conclusion for this lecture. Here's how the ideal woman shapes up:

> I know not what philosopher he was, that would have women come but thrice abroad [i.e. outside the home] all their time, "to be baptized, married, and buried", but he was too strait-laced. Let them have their liberty in good sort, and go in good sort…, as a good fellow said, so that they look not twenty years younger abroad, than they do at home, they be not spruce, neat, angels abroad, beasts, dowdies, sluts at home; but seek by all means to please and give content to their husbands: to be quiet above all things, obedient, silent, patient; if they be incensed, angry, chide a little, their wives must not cample again, but take it in good part. An honest woman, I cannot now tell where she dwelt, but by report an honest woman she was, hearing one of her gossips by chance complain of her husband's impatience, told her an excellent remedy for it, and gave her withal a glass of water, which when he brawled she should hold still in her mouth, and that *toties quoties*, as often as he chid; she did so two or three times with good success, and at length seeing her neighbour, gave her great thanks for it, and would needs know the ingredients, she told her in brief what it was, "fair water", and no more; for it was not the water, but her silence which performed the cure. Let every forward woman imitate this example, and be quiet within doors, and (as M. Aurelius prescribes) a necessary caution it is to be observed of all good matrons that love their credits, to come little abroad, but follow their work at home, look to their household affairs and private business, *oeconomiae incumbents*, be sober, thrifty, wary, circumspect, modest, and compose themselves to live to their husband's means, <u>as a good housewife should do</u>,
>
>> Who delights in the labour of the distaff, beguiling her work with song, her maids working in a ring around her; as she turns the wheel and the spindle.
>
> Howsoever, 'tis good to keep them in private, not in prison:

> Who guards a wife with bolts and bars may think himself clever, but is really a fool.

Burton's conclusion shows how the discourse of love *within* marriage can easily be turned into a subtle form of social control over women. In the ideal male fantasy, it is not the male who is exhibiting patience and understanding, it is the woman. And the ideal woman's voice in the private domain is not a voice at all; it is *silence*. Seventeenth-century writers like Shakespeare and Burton were obsessed with the virtue of female silence. Whether the female shrew was tamed with kindness or force, or some combination of the two, the point was to get her tamed.

The new gender roles and functions associated with love *within* marriage provided women with blessings as well as curses. If women increasingly were meant to be sweet and nurturing towards men and their children, they were meant to be respected and treated with kindness. There is a novel possibility for friendship between men and women that many women probably endorsed, even if it was a unequal and culturally conditioned kind of friendship. We all know how these gendered distinctions and ideals evolved into a division of labour where men were the rationalistic breadwinners and women were the emotional heart of the family in the home. We also know how sexuality bifurcated with cultivated women rejecting lust and learning how to pacify their more lustful husbands. Finally, we know how these distinctions and ideals ultimately concluded, namely in the rejection of these emotionally limited roles. Ideas and ideals never really die, however, and many aspects of the ideal of love *within* marriage remain to thrill as well as torture us.

Conclusion: The Internalization of Ideals

Love is about the appraisal and bestowal of value. In other words it is about ideals. In Dante's writings, we witnessed the first major writer in the western tradition to internalize ideals in such a way as to create the perfect woman, Beatrice, in his mind. Dante begins to make the distinction between inner and outer, but he cannot manage his ideal internally, constantly relating his love for Beatrice to external religious ideals and constantly attempting to convince all and sundry that his love is justified by all external and spiritual standards and that everyone should recognize Beatrice's superiority.

It is with love *within* marriage that norms like commitment and constancy are well and truly internalized and that people make moral demands upon themselves and judge themselves *from the inside*. This is not to say that many of these ideals come from the outside or that moral judgment doesn't reflect or impact social relations. Obviously, love *within* marriage has an enormously powerful impact on social practice. What this new internalization of normative ideals does encourage is the development of mental "techniques and methods for learning how to control oneself" (Leites, 146). The moral demands are now experienced more strongly as coming from *within* oneself. The responsibility for success or failure is equally internalized.

Medieval and other societies also established ideals that were internalized, sometimes to an exceptional degree. It is not so much the degree of internalization that makes the discourse of love *within* marriage so modern, but the new psychological techniques that a person deploys that increasingly define who you are. These new ideas of love may be socially constructed norms, but a complex modern society no longer provides rules or supports for relationships that are between individuals. In a medieval world with a clear "cycle of sin, guilt and repentance", the entire social and cultural structure provide you with support precisely because you cannot be expected to *control yourself*. The new ideal of love *within* marriage allows you the freedom to organize your intentions and hands over the responsibility for controlling yourself. This handing over of the controls for your own moral purity is a positive development to the extent that it assumes that individuals have the power and the ability to develop as decent human beings. It can be a negative development if too many people find it difficult to shoulder this burden of responsibility.

When the ethic of love *within* marriage began, both men and women were challenged to accept responsibility for constancy in marriage. Both men and women were encouraged to act like decent adults who cared about the other person in the marriage and other people in general. As we saw in Burton, the emphasis could easily tilt away from male and female individuals towards a perspective that placed the major responsibility for emotional and moral development on the female. Female, rather than male purity, became the *sine qua non* of a more individualistic society and women took upon themselves the burden of being the conscience for their husbands and their children. When I say they "took the burden upon themselves", I am not denying what I said in the last section – that male writers stereotyped and sought to mould women in the direction of nurturing or that they privileged a female silence that reinforced male power. But to view women exclusively as pawns in a male program is to obscure the role that women played in embracing the responsibility for their own and their family's emotional development. Many of the readers of Burton's book must have been women, or why would he take the time to address them and apologize to them for his harsher criticisms. Burton wrote in the seventeenth-century. In the eighteenth-century, we absolutely *know* that the majority of readers for writings related to love *within* marriage were women. Women may have embraced this kind of literature for many reasons but two in particular come to mind. First, the discourse of love *within* marriage and its internalization of the norms of constancy presumed the moral autonomy or ultimate freedom of everyone, including women, as independent people capable of taking responsibility for their actions. Second, as the separation of gendered spheres of activity developed, making women responsible for the moral development of their families, women could legitimately regard themselves as the moral superiors of their husbands. This belief could be liberating and "used to enhance women's status and widen their opportunities" in a male dominated world. (Leites, 152, quotes taken from Nancy Cott)

Ultimately, therefore, love within marriage increased women's status. As long as the emphasis was on *public life*, a woman's role was marginal. With the new emphasis on *private life*, women had much more central roles to play. As with so much in the history of love, nothing would ever be the same again.

Sentimental Love

Introduction

The eighteenth-century – the so-called century of Enlightenment – has rightly been labeled *The Age of Reason*. Reason, however, can mean different things to different people. Therefore, we need to be more precise, about what eighteenth-century thinkers or *philosophes* meant by reason. The first thing that they meant was that individuals should be able to *think for themselves*. This implied that reason was a personal human trait that had been too long obscured by social prejudices, such as tradition, superstition, religious dogmatism, and political oppression. Many eighteenth-century writers rather optimistically believed that once individual reason was liberated, the mists of confused thinking would be dispelled, and society could be reformed. The relationship between the individual and society would be transformed and, instead of oppressing the free thinking individual, a rationally constructed society would allow individuals to flourish.

Reason, for the eighteenth-century thinkers who regarded themselves as *enlightened*, was eminently practical. Its focus was *improvement* or, as we would say today, *social progress*. Therefore, enlightened writers didn't worry too much about the big metaphysical questions such as: is there a God? What is the meaning of life? What is the relationship between mind and matter?, and other questions that had preoccupied earlier cultures and thinkers. They freely adopted both deductive and inductive or empirical modes of thinking –focusing mainly on the latter because it dealt with *facts* rather than abstractions -- in order to discover solutions to social problems. But these empirical facts were built into hypotheses and, hopefully, laws all designed with one end in mind – to improve the lives of people here on earth rather than to prepare them for life in the hereafter. This approach did not necessarily mean that the Enlightenment or the Age of Reason was anti-religious. But it did mean that the Enlightenment was always prepared to attack religion that was dogmatic or opposed to natural and social progress.

The kind of religion that the Enlightenment became particularly associated with was *deism*. Deism suggested that God created an orderly universe governed by laws discoverable to reason. We humans cannot understand or appreciate God very well if we appeal to organized religion, dogmatic doctrinal *beliefs*, or mysteries that resemble magical mumbo jumbo. We know God by studying his creation. While you didn't need to be a deist to consider yourself enlightened and progressive in the eighteenth-century, what deism reflects is the liberating *tendency* to look to the material conditions of life to discover meaning and to discount any supernatural truths that come into conflict with the study of material life. The point is to study the nature that God created rather than to try to fit nature into some preconceived idea of God and religion.

The appropriate question for eighteenth-century thinkers, therefore, was *what constitutes material life*? They used a term in tandem with and inseparable from *reason* – nature. In order to improve life, to make progress, you first had to understand *nature* and its laws. Your starting point wasn't the Bible, the Koran, or even some metaphysical assumption

about the nature of material life, such as Plato's ideal forms or Aristotle's essences. Your starting point was nature itself. You might not be able to fully understand nature or natural *phenomena* says someone like Immanuel Kant, but, with a lot of hard work, you can figure out *how it works*. Once you know how it works, you can work with nature to improve upon it. In the external material world, in particular, you can use science, especially mathematically based science, to discover certain regularities and build them into natural laws or useful hypotheses. Enlightenment marked the beginning of using science in a dramatically practical way to control and harness the forces of nature. Science and applied science – technology – joined forces to change the world. And it worked!

But the Enlightenment wasn't just interested in finding out about and manipulating physical nature. It was also concerned to find out whatever it could about *human nature*. A few *philosophes* believed that, given time, they could discover the laws that made human beings tick; in fact a guy named Condorcet suggested that humans were no more than extremely sophisticated machines. Even those who regarded human beings as more complicated entities, as possessing immortal souls, believed that you could discover enough about the ways that human beings behaved to improve the human condition. By using reason, you could construct a more *rational society*. Some carried the idea of creating a rational society so far that they conceived of *utopian* societies in which everyone was perfectly rational, perfectly free and perfectly happy. To some extent, utopian thinking substituted a heaven on earth for a heavenly hereafter. While utopianism was just an extreme element in enlightened rationalistic thinking, the Enlightenment as a whole was an *optimistic movement*, especially in contrast with later modern thinking that became increasingly pessimistic about technology and progress.

I'm not going to talk too much about science and technology in this course, because we have a very different focus here. What particularly interests me about enlightened rational thinking is the way that it focused a new light on the human *passions* and *sentiments*. Sometimes when people think about the Enlightenment, they focus way too exclusively on its rationalistic, scientific and technological side, but the Enlightenment period witnessed a completely new fascination with human emotions. One of these emotions, obviously, was self-interest. Writers like Adam Smith and Cesare Becarria believed that economic and social progress would occur only if you harnessed the enormous power of self-interest – rational and calculating self-interest – in the cause of progress. Out of such writings came completely new theories of economics and politics that still dominate our thinking today. But self-interest was by no means the only, or even the most interesting, focus of our enlightened writers. Rousseau, Hume, Smith and others were fascinated by the emotions that connect us to others. They sought to affirm, maintain and maximize our natural connection to others, in the form of pity, affection and brotherhood. The analysis and cultivation of human emotion was a very important part of what passed as *enlightened thinking* in the eighteenth-century. In the second part of the eighteenth-century, writers, especially British writers, focused their attention on one particularly natural emotion – namely sexual attraction, and the human and cultural variable that could be built upon sexual difference – namely love.

Love was big news in the eighteenth-century. It was the subject matter of philosophy, poetry, essays, sermons and even of an entirely new form of writing that was emerging, namely the novel. It wasn't as though the enlightened writers of the eighteenth-century were totally original in focusing in on love as a significant form of idealization. They weren't even the first to realize that sexual attraction could be moulded into a powerful cultural force. Where they were much more original was in thinking that love could be *cultivated* and become a powerful cultural force within in a rational modern society. What they attempted to accomplish much more systematically than their Puritan precursors was to transform sexual attraction into a powerful kind of friendship that could hold a modern individualistic society together, ensure the education of the next generation of rational thinking people, and, most of all, ensure that the selfish and competitive propensities of individualism would be mitigated by love. Rational love – love transformed into a special kind of friendship -- was to be the dynamic unifying force of modern life. Contemporaries called it lots of different things. I'm going to call it *sentimental love*.

The eighteenth-century Enlightenment cannot really be appreciated apart from its fascination with the power of love. The emphasis on rational thinking, science and technology was only one side of the Enlightenment. The other side was a bold attempt to make the love between a man and a woman the key to social stability and transformation. Love was not merely the foundation of a new society – to some extent the seventeenth-century Puritans anticipated this – but an antidote to the kind of selfishness that might tear modern society apart. It is noteworthy that love fully hit eighteenth-century consciousness in the 1760s, as the agenda of a new generation of enlightened writers. Not coincidentally, this was exactly the time when the early optimism of the enlightenment *philosophes* began to hit social snags, i.e. when thinkers began to worry that all of this individual freedom and rational self-interest might actually damage society. The new emphasis on the love relationship dominated Scottish secular thought because the Scots, in particular, were disturbed by what they saw as an increasingly competitive, factionalized and greed ridden society to the south. The Scots not only lived closer to the flame of economic, social and political progress, but also they were anxious about the assimilation of their own nation within English manners and morals. Love, they suggested, might save Scottish society in particular and British society generally from moral corruption. In any case, a modern community needed to explore alternate kinds of relationships to those of kinship, lineage, and hierarchical loyalty. Love between men and women was ripe for exploration.

John Millar on the Natural History of Love

In the chapters on love in my book *The Age of the Passions*, I attempted to show how Scottish writers sought to understand the role that love had played in the past, and might continue to play, in a distinctly modern society. The first chapter that I had you read was on a guy named John Millar, a favourite student of the economist-philosopher Adam Smith, and the guy who, more than anyone else, invented the 4 stage theory of human economic progress that influenced none other than Karl Marx. The 4 stage theory assumes that human societies move from a hunter gatherer to a pastoral or herding

society to an agricultural society and, finally, to a commercial society. The key to the 4 stage theory is that each stage accelerates economic improvement by leveraging a more sophisticated division of labour that, in turn, revolutionizes productivity. Millar likely got the 4 stage theory from Adam Smith, but he developed it more clearly into a theory of technological progress. Millar, incidentally, was more comfortable with economic progress than his mentor, who was frightened that prudential and rational improvement might turn into a greedy free-for-all, especially if the corporate values of commerce became more general.

Millar also taught Marx that the cultural values of any given society were partly a reflection of its economic base. Thus the sentiment known as love *evolved* with the progress of society. In a hunter-gatherer or *savage* society, the modern sentiment of love didn't have a chance. Cultural values, to the extent that they existed, supported the hunter and the warrior and the *softer* values that we associate with love were positively frowned upon. The relationship between a man and a woman was entirely subservient to tribal values which were consolidated in tight kinship networks that were supported by marriage. Marriage wasn't about love; it was about strengthening the kinship connection. Women raised the offspring because kin was traced through the mother's side; husbands had little or no say in child rearing; and the family unit as we know it was non-existent. Affection was insignificant, except in terms of the tribal connection. As we shall see later on, James Macpherson presented an idealized model of *savage* Scottish society that uncannily sustained a modern conception of love, thereby linking modern love with traditional values. But, at least in Millar's account, the idea of savage love was something of an oxymoron.

The next economic stage, pastoral society, allowed a few individuals to acquire wealth in the form of cattle and, consequently, power over others. The relatively comfortable and easy life of the rich individuals at the top of this society allowed them to explore and refine the natural passion of sexual attraction. A tender idea of the opposite sex, visible in the love poetry of advanced pastoral societies among the Arabs, for example, began to emerge. But this idea could not have any considerable social purchase because pastoral societies were still intermittently warrior societies and they also patriarchal or *male dominated* societies. The first agricultural societies in Europe – feudal societies – offered the possibility of more settled and somewhat richer societies. But they were still based primarily on male warrior values that made love subservient to military service, which is why the penetration of the values of love into primitive subsistence agricultural communities was actually imported to feudal courts from places like Persia. In order to make love a genuine possibility for a significant part of the population, agriculture needed to be transformed and supplemented by commerce. Only then would military force, with its warrior values, lessen sufficiently in power to allow men and women to fraternize more equally in a relatively peaceful society. A commercial society provides a much greater opening for love relations because men's military muscles are no longer crucial; loyalty to a superior is no longer the only route to safety and success; women are no longer pawns in marriage relations; wealth and opportunity allow personal preference to dictate sexual liaisons; friendships between the sexes are possible.

But, while this evolutionary process allows us to understand why men and women would be freer and probably happier in their choice of marital partners, what it doesn't explain is how significant cultural values associated with love would become in European civilization. Cultural history isn't simply a matter of stages, no matter what Marx thought. According to Millar, what the culture of the later medieval period – the period that the enlightened writers labeled *Gothic* -- demonstrated was the enormously rich possibilities of love for enhancing life and happiness. The Courts of Love, of course, were somewhat ridiculous to enlightened writers in the entirely artificial way that they idealized love, and even more unnatural in separating love from friendship and denying it to married couples. But the fact that the spirit of these values persisted into the commercial stage of society, and helped endear men and women to one another, demonstrated that culture was not simply a superstructure on top of an economic foundation, but that culture was to a certain extent an independent variable. Not entirely independent, of course, which is why the ideas of love in feudal society were unnatural, ridiculous and tangential, i.e. unable to exert a broad-based influence on social values that remained aggressive, patriarchal and military for the most part. But such cultural ideals, duly modified by reason and experience, could continue to exert considerable influence in commercial society. They might even be *cultivated* by moralists in order to offset the potentially negative features of commercial society.

One of the really fascinating things that a close reading of many enlightened writers demonstrates is that they were not all utopians or even sanguine about the future. For sure, they wanted to get rid of obstacles that stood in the way of creating a rational society where people might act more freely and more rationally. But lots of enlightened writers like Millar still held to a neo-classical perspective that suggested that luxury and excessive individualism might eventually end up corrupting the social bond and turning individual against individual. Millar's brilliant insight was that the valuable features of *gothic love* might be harnessed to a commercial society that allowed greater communication and relative equality between men and women. Love, modified but not eclipsed by a more rational friendship, might not only serve as the new foundation for society but greatly enrich the lives of individuals.

You can witness in Millar's conception of love two dominant themes. The first is the fear that social progress might be threatened by too much individualism. The second is a remarkable confidence that cultural values and traditions, unique to Europe, could compensate for the pitfalls of progress and ensure the future stability of society. Culture could protect a commercial society from itself. If love and women were respected as they should be, if love and friendship went hand in hand in marriage, if the children of the significant classes were raised in an atmosphere of love and friendship, then commercial society need not fear unduly about the future. The appropriate question is not so much *how* this culture of love was to be sustained, but how could it be *cultivated*? Progress should never be assumed; writers and moralists had to take on responsibility for instilling the right set of values in the present and future generations. They had a duty to teach people what true love is and how to exercise it. Enlightened Scottish writers took this responsibility very seriously and became the teachers on love, marriage and the family to

all of England, already the most dynamic economy in Europe and soon to become a powerful conduit for a new set of cultural values.

The Cultivation of Love

To a higher degree than ever before in history, enlightened writers believed that love could be cultivated. The Scots, in particular, took seriously the task of cultivating young men and women into sentimental love. Even before John Millar put pen to paper, Scottish writers were already beginning to explore the new world of love. They even helped to promote a new literary form – the novel – precisely and quite explicitly because it allowed them to explore and cultivate a new set of idealizations rooted in sexual attraction. It has to be said that these writers had a distinct moral purpose in writing about love – they wanted to make the love bond between men and women the social glue for a Scottish society coming to grips with modernity. But they also provided the British reading public with a new set of social values that allowed them, if not to entirely embrace modernity and its dangers, but at least to navigate these dangers with a higher degree of confidence.

In my chapter on the *culture of love*, I suggest that the new Scottish model for love is best described as *sentimental*. Why use the term *sentimental*? Why did Scottish writers always want to affirm sentiment over another word that was generally associated with love, i.e., *passion*. Enlightened love was sentimental rather than passionate. It acknowledged the power of sexual attraction, and like chivalric love, it sought to harness that power in the interest of a more polite and refined society. But it was closer to, and built upon, more recent Puritan values in continually emphasizing a less explosive and more *rational love* that resembled friendship. But this eighteenth-century conception of *love as friendship* had a much more distinctly romantic and sexual character, in keeping with Millar's fascination with chivalric literature, than anything that puritan literature or works like *The Anatomy of Melancholy* had on offer. In fact, even when moderated into friendship, the sexual character of sentimental love remains present. As the freer sexuality of the eighteenth-century gave way to a much more repressed Victorian moral code, therefore, it was inevitable that this *repression* would be intensely sexual. Nineteenth-century culture was steeped in sexuality, even as repressed sexuality, because the *sentimental friendship* that the Enlightenment espoused was itself saturated in sexual difference.

Eighteenth-century writers distinguished between extreme passion and the softer and more malleable *sentiments*. Sentiment can access reason whereas passion negates reason. It may be difficult for us today to conceive of something like *sentiment* as a kind of rational passion. That's because we contrast reason with passion in ways that the romantics have inclined us to do. But in the eighteenth-century, it was still possible for Scottish writers to think that they could moderate passion into sentiments consistent with rationality and to believe that they could instill a more general sentimental ethic into their readers. Not surprisingly, the agenda of Scottish writers *cum* moralists changed as the eighteenth-century unfolded. At first, the emphasis was on presenting an alternate conception of love that differed from more traditional Scottish communal values, in the

Highlands and villages, the values of kinship, in the Lowlands and large cities, feudal and aristocratic values. In Allan Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd*, the primary concern was to offer a new model of community bested on an affectionate individualism consistent with a more general sociability. Later writers, particularly contributors to the *Scots Magazine*, critiqued bachelorhood and the ubiquitous male clubs, idealizing the married state and the nuclear family. Some contributors to the *Scots Magazine* were quite detailed in demonstrating how sexual attraction could be transformed into a more lasting friendship and how mutual love could flow to one's children. A close look at the writings of hugely popular moralists like James Fordyce indicate how the sexual and partnership focus of earlier writings was transformed into a systematic division of labour that place women within a separate sphere and made them the conscience and moral heart of their families. In other words, eighteenth-century Scottish moralizing about love and the family moved from elevating the sexually-based and affectionate nuclear family to making love a sophisticated, and some would say, repressive instrument for moral cultivation.

Allan Ramsay's *The Gentle Shepherd*

The Scottish fascination with love did not begin with John Millar, by any stretch. Although writers like David Hume and Adam Smith were more interested in male values like self-control and in specifically male friendship, Scottish culture increasingly became saturated with the theme of love and marriage from at least 1725 when Allan Ramsay composed one of the most beloved of all Scottish works *The Gentle Shepherd*. This was the work that stimulated and helped sustained the Scottish literary revival of the entire century. It remained popular in Scotland until well into the nineteenth-century, partly because it contained some wonderful songs, but primarily I think because it gave people a new perspective on love and marriage. This dramatic representation had staying power in Scotland because it told modern people how to think about love.

Patie and Peggy are the central characters of the play and their relationship constitutes its dynamic. What they represent is a new view of the Scottish community as grounded in the love, marriage and family life of an elite, no longer defined exclusively by wealth or lineage (although they both turn out to be noble *born*) but by natural reason combined with something that the eighteenth-century Scots took very seriously – sociability. Patie and Peggy are the people that everyone both likes and looks up to in their community. They are everyone's ideal role models. The traditional laird, Sir William Worthy, is neither a central character nor the real hero of the play. To be absolutely precise, neither are Peggy and Patie. It is Peggy and Patie as a *team* that is the hero. It is their relationship and marriage that ensures leadership and continuity in this village that is meant to be a changing Scottish society in miniature.

There are lots of things that this play reveals about the anxiety concerning change in eighteenth-century Scottish society, but for our purposes what is fascinating is a new and intricately described perspective on love and marriage. Because Patie and Peggy don't know they are nobles, and because the play is set in pastoral mode, nothing whatsoever interferes with their budding attraction to one another. Property relations do not intrude; bossy parents do not intrude; real life economic considerations do not intrude. There are

important realistic touches in the play, but they have nothing to do with the socio-economic considerations of eighteenth-century village life. Instead, the realistic touches all have to do with the affectionate bond between Patie and Peggy.

Ramsay's message is pretty clear and distinctly eighteenth-century in tone and texture. Individuals should marry for love; marriage is the most important of all social institutions; the loving relationship between a man and a woman should extend to their children; if marriages are loving and if families are stable, then socio-economic change can be dealt with in confidence. But, first and foremost, love needs to be defined clearly as a sexually based and affectionate *friendship* rather than as a romantic *passion*. While love is a sexually charged and highly emotional relationship, it needs to conform to reason, or in the village context, *common sense* rather than romantic or heroic ideas of love. Patie tell his friend Roger that love needs to be reasonable and that, if someone doesn't love you, you should simply move on rather than considering jumping off *lover's loup*. The kind of love that Ramsay is recommending would come to be described as *sentimental* as distinct from romantic. Enlightened eighteenth-century love was categorized as sentimental because the sentiments were cooler, gentler and distinctly sociable rather than the more extreme passions that rendered people jealous and competitive with one another.

One of the most delightful elements in *The Gentle Shepherd* is the characterization of Peggy. If you are seriously going to place value on sexually based friendships between men and women, you need to do justice to both genders. As opposed to previous literature, early sentimental literature presents women as fully formed, rational, and interesting people in their own right. This does not mean that there is anything like full equality between the sexes, as Peggy's description of a good working marriage shows. But it does make women real people. In this case, Peggy is arguably the most real, the most interesting, and certainly the most insightful character in the play precisely because she 1) not only understands the nature of true love, 2) knows how to choose a mate, and 3) knows how to make the marriage work. She will ensure marital success by pleasing her husband, even to the extent of practicing a modicum of sexual manipulation designed with love, i.e. to make Patie feel honoured and completely satisfied in his relationship with her.

The debate about whether to marry or not to marry between Peggy and Jenny is a treasure trove of information about the new perspective being indoctrinated. To our way of thinking, Jenny may appear the more realistic debater, because she believes that sexual attraction declines and that many husbands treat their spouses badly once the initial infatuation wears off. Also, having children is a difficult job as well as aging a person prematurely. But Ramsay has Peggy winning the debate by pushing the new view of marriage as a sentimental and affectionate friendship that 1) not only can be maintained if both partners are reasonable in their expectations, 2) but also is the model for all happy relationships where the partners are committed to and willing to accommodate one another. Patie and Peggy will be able to achieve this *happy ever after* because their attraction has grown slowly over time and because they bring distinctly *unromantic* elements to the relationship – ease, sociability, good humour and common sense.

The image that Ramsay used to describe this new kind of marriage is relevant. It is the musical song combining Patie's flute and Peggy's voice as *harmony*. The image that he uses to describe the impact of love and marriage in the community as a whole is equally interesting – the *dance*. What's significant about these social melodies and symphonies? It is the way that recognizably individual characters soften their feelings in order to blend in with the feelings of significant others and, more generally, how the propensity to accommodate affirms the bonds of sociability. Ramsay's relationships allow a lot of room for individual feeling – the love that Patie and Peggy feel is real, dynamic and unique to themselves – but it is sociable love. It is love softened into a friendship that supports rather than challenges community. It is a love that is decidedly optimistic about the ability of individuals to form links with one another and the wider community.

Sociable or sentimental or affectionate or companionable love (whatever you want to call it) may sometimes look like romantic love because it contains elements of individualism and romance, but the distinction between romantic and sentimental love is significant. Sentimental love is part and parcel of an enlightened world that believes that reason, reasonableness or common sense (whatever you want to call it) is compatible with emotion. Sentimental love is a delicate balancing act that allows individual feeling a certain freedom but never the license that romantic love appears to justify. To lose one's self-control in love is something that you can't imagine Patie or Peggy ever doing. There is no conflict between the individual and community in a society where people like Patie and Peggy are defining love.

But eighteenth-century writers like Ramsay were not stupid. They realized and they greatly feared the potential for individualism, both economic and emotional, to crack the boundaries of communal sociability. That's why enlightened writers interested in love wanted to develop cultural ideals that balanced reason with feeling, and to stress the mental over physical attractions. That's also why enlightened writers put a lot of pressure on women to make the marriage work by subordinating their interests to those of men. The detailed marital advice that Peggy gives to Jenny puts the blame squarely on women for a failed marriage. Making the man happy and constant is the responsibility of the woman. Obviously, there were limits to the equality that obtained in this new view of friendship between men and women. Women were on their way to becoming the moral heart and conscience of their families. They would later be elevated to moral superiority over their male counterparts. Many women embraced this new role, and not because they had to, but because they wanted to. But their overriding function in marriage was to make men happy. If they were no longer to be silent and submissive, they were locked into being subordinate. But Peggy doesn't sound the slightest bit subordinate and the more sinister implications of female submission are not yet present. They will be by the time we get to a guy named James Fordyce, however.

The Scots Magazine

Historians have long argued that a new view of love and marriage as a sexually based friendship originated in Britain. What they have overlooked is how much this new

paradigm was developed by eighteenth-century Scotsman who were anxious and concerned about how to protect community from competitive individualism. It was Scotsmen and women, who worried about Scotland being swallowed up by English politicians and capitalists, who gave the most serious thought to the ways that new kinds of relationships could preserve sociability and social morality. It was largely Scottish writers who spread this new message about love and the family to English and American readers. You only have to look at the enormous emphasis on the sentimental family in America to realize how profound the Scottish influence was.

I'm not saying that there were no English and American writers who thought about these issues. What I'm suggesting is that the enlightened Scots were the ones who examined the relationships between man and society most completely and that the Scottish influence was probably decisive. There is no other eighteenth-century analysis of the love and the family, for example, to compares with that of John Millar. And Scottish eighteenth-century culture produced some of the most important writings dealing explicitly with love and marriage. *The Gentle Shepherd* was more popular in Scotland than England, but the novels of Henry Mackenzie, the sermons and addresses of James Fordyce, and James Macpherson's *Ossian* were bestsellers in England and on the continent.

There was a popular journal in Scotland appropriately titled the *Scots Magazine* that is very useful to examine because it shows the evolution of Scottish thinking on love and marriage in the eighteenth-century on a yearly and monthly basis. There is a lot worth talking about, but one of the things I want to highlight is the increasing attention to the role and function of the wife in this new kind of sentimental marriage. No longer is it the beautiful woman that is put on a pedestal, as was the case in courtly love, it is the ideal *wife*. As the concept of the wife is sanctified in many of the poems and essays in the *Scots Magazine*, the wifely function gets much more precisely defined. What we view, month in and month out, is a functional division of labour between men and women. Whereas early writings like *The Gentle Shepherd* present both men and women as having sentimental potential – the ability to balance reason and feeling – women increasingly become the professional practitioners of sentiment. Men in general are defined as rational, and women are defined as emotional. Ideal men combine reason with affection, but remain essentially rational in character. Ideal women, however, have to shape themselves into *sentimental* experts, not only with their husbands but also with their children. In particular, the wife is increasingly expected to perform a delicate emotional balancing act on her husband, comforting him, alleviating his psychological distress, and affirming his moral core. Women, in fact, become responsible for the moral character of their husbands and children.

Throughout the eighteenth-century, Scottish writers increasingly stressed the sympathetic capacity and expertise of women. Their sexual attractiveness gets moderated or redefined, as in the poet's discussion of *snowy founts* that become the sources of infant nourishment. Breasts that once were sexual attractors become something more important. The mother's duty with respect to task their children is refined as they become almost entirely responsible for moulding the home into an environment for child

rearing. They are repeatedly told that it is their job, rather than their husbands, to transform their children into rational and virtuous beings. Male (and occasionally female) correspondents in poems and essays quite explicitly describe the way that women are supposed to watch their children, assess their natures, and guide their interests and affections towards appropriate ends. This female nurturing role is so second nature to many of us that, even if we object to it, we don't find it at all surprising. But in the eighteenth-century, this kind of approach to child rearing was all rather new and writers were very aware that they were exploding the paradigm in which upper class children were largely raised by nurses and servants and tutors and ideas of cultivating children were very primitive. Previously, responsibility for the moral cultivation of the child was largely reserved to, or at least shared with, the community, the profession and even the university. This intense focus on the family, and especially the role of the wife as combined ethicist and nurturer, represents an entirely new cultural direction.

There is much that is touching, but also something just a little sinister about this new emphasis on family and the private female sphere. Increasingly, moralistic Scottish writers moved from encouraging women to play the role of emotional nurturers for troubled husbands and impressionable children to being stridently critical of *hard hearted* and *monstrous* women who refuse to take part in this sympathetic symphony. There is an increasing shrillness in the injunction to women to perform the nurturing function or relinquish their title to being women. The spheres of responsibility between men and women become more defined, more separate. The sexual power of women becomes more and more subordinate to their sentimental function. The sentimentality that formerly made a heck of a lot of room for sexuality becomes increasingly mental and asexual. Sexuality more and more becomes defined in terms of the male contribution and it is ever present but repressed in the interest of a stable marriage, Love and sex are separated to the extent that sex is no longer talked about openly. Women become asexual.

'Honourable Love' in the Sermons and Essays of James Fordyce

This is not a cultural shift that happens overnight, but it is remarkable that the emphasis on healthy sexuality in the early enlightenment becomes rarer towards the end of the eighteenth-century and almost invisible in the nineteenth-century. One Scottish writer whose sermons and essays addressed to young men and young women remained popular throughout Britain and North America well into the nineteenth-century was a guy named James Fordyce. He was a Scottish minister who moved to London, England to take charge of a congregation and became incredibly successful as a preacher and author. He was also clearly a product of enlightened Scottish thinking about love and the family who made it his project to define what *honourable love* should be. What makes Reverend Fordyce particularly useful is that he tells us exactly why he thinks a new paradigm for love, and a new role for women, is absolutely necessary.

Beginning with an analysis of gothic romance, Fordyce points out to his young readers and, especially, the parents that he knows are listening to his sermons and reading his books, that the real significance of *gothic* love -- love as passion -- was its cultivation of

generous and refined manners. While romantic love is dangerous precisely because it tends towards extreme, in an amended and sentimental form, the cultivation of love might be imperative in modern society. “Honourable love”, argued Fordyce, was the most effective *antidote* to the immoral characteristics of life in a modern commercial (i.e. capitalist) society. Fordyce described those negative characteristics as: 1) avarice or greed, 2) sexual promiscuity, 3) anti-social feeling and 4) artificial cunning and disguise designed to get what one wanted. Much earlier, Jean-Jacques Rousseau had outlined exactly these same sources of corruption. But Rousseau did not have a practical alternative apart from turning back the clock of economic progress and establishing an egalitarian face-to-face society where individuals might be transparent to one another. For the Scots, sitting next to England and always in danger of being swallowed up, turning back the clock was never an alternative. But creating loving private families that could counter public depravity was.

The key to creating stable and morally centered families, or mini-societies, for Fordyce, was love. He gave different names to the love bond in the family, including ‘honourable love’, ‘virtuous love’, ‘sincere love’, ‘reciprocal love’ and even ‘holy love’. The two key ingredients, however, were always the same – “friendship and sympathy” between husband and wife:

> Friendship and sympathy, when thoroughly awake, are constantly employed in numerous pleasing services, and amiable attentions, to which language cannot appropriate names, but which the heart of the person obliged feels.

This kind of reciprocal love and friendship is what many people still want today. The problem that we have inherited from the late eighteenth-century and writers like Fordyce is that what eventually transpired was not so *reciprocal*. In his sermons about love and marriage to young men, Fordyce did not demand much. Most of his advice was constructed in terms of generalities like: understanding that mental attraction or friendship was more important than sexual attraction; being kind and patient with your wife; and not expecting perfection. As in all descriptions of sentimental love, the emphasis was on controlling oneself and accommodating the other person. That much we could expect from someone who was no bible thumping minister but an heir to the protestant-puritan treatment of love and marriage.

What is more surprising than his sermons to young men are his addresses to young women, where there is considerable detail about the role of wives and mothers subsumed under the principle of gender differentiation. The female sex, Fordyce argues, is by nature designed to be sentimental, sympathetic and nurturing. Women were genetic specialists in “tenderness” and “love”. They were much more capable than men of acquiring the “politeness” and “refinement” that comes from an affectionate temperament rather than artificial accommodation. According to Fordyce, women were by nature more sociable than men, who were naturally solitary; moreover, they were more attuned to subtle and sophisticated conversation than argumentative males; finally, and decisively, they were more *complacent* or adept in the art of pleasing. Throughout the eighteenth-century, Scottish writers increasingly emphasized and explored the

sympathetic and sentimental capacities of women, but Fordyce was far and away the most determined in suggesting that there were gender differences that pointed to a division of labour between rational male and emotional female expertise. There is a "sex in minds", Fordyce declared, fossilizing gender distinctions in a more dogmatic way than ever before.

The appropriate female function for Fordyce was to be sympathetic and nurturing. Fordyce was more than willing to give the female sex the moral high ground; they were more ethical than men. But there was a steep price for that abstract and ideal superiority. Rule number one, if women were going to exercise their expertise, was *submission to male authority*. What began in eighteenth-century enlightened discussion of love as relative equality between men and women, was slowly and steadily transformed into the idealization of the Victorian patriarchal family, where women's place would be inside the home and any desire to escape that role akin to the abomination of one's female nature. Fordyce continually cautioned young girls that they were to be "meek" and to "yield" to male authority. Fordyce continually cautioned future wives that the *only way* for them to exert power over their husband's hearts was to practice the *art of pleasing*. Moreover, total responsibility for the success of a marriage now rested on the woman's shoulders. Their job was to create the environment of *domestic bliss* that could modify their husband's "shortcomings". They were instructed to blame themselves and no one else for an unhappy marriage.

Now, many of these ideas had been around for some time. We've seen a taste of them in Allan Ramsay. No cultural idea is absolutely new. What you need to consider when you interrogate the nature of the significant cultural change that is going on here several things: 1) whether or not there were other competing cultural values and ideals; 2) whether these concepts, values and ideals constitute a new and dominant cultural paradigm; 3) how much wiggle room there is within a paradigm like 'courtly love' or Fordyce's 'honourable love'; and 4) finally, how effectively this new paradigm gets disseminated. My suggestion is that the ideas of Fordyce and others were crystallized and propagandized very effectively towards the end of the nineteenth-century. They resulted in a clear separation of spheres for males and females that were designed to effect a rigid division of labour in marriage. Women were relegated to the private sphere and to the home; love and sentiment became private concerns; public life – politics and economics – was left to men. If the men screwed up in their political and economic life – if society was corrupted or dissolved – it was largely the fault of women.

A strange thing happened on the road from Allan Ramsay to James Fordyce. You might object to some of Peggy's statements to Jenny that seemed to make women responsible for pleasing their husbands and keeping the marriage together. But Peggy is a realistic and independent gal, with an obvious personality not to mention a healthy sex drive. With Fordyce, we are on the cusp of the silent, sexless, submissive female cultural ideal that resulted in patriarchal Victorian families. You have to ask yourself why the more open enlightened sentimentalists gradually led to the more repressed and guilt ridden Victorians? I think the answer may be that that moralistic male writers became increasingly frightened about the tendency of modern society to transform people into

competitive, deceitful, self-centered and sensually aggressive beings. Capitalist society destroyed traditional values and institutions much faster than anyone could have expected. Even the capitalists themselves must have felt insecure as symbols of community and continuity were eroded. As the tensions between competitive individualism and communal cohesion increased, it was women, the home, and the family that became the bastion of moral value. This represented a huge and unprecedented responsibility for love, not merely to counter all the defects of a market driven society, but also to replace the desire for social connection. Ironically, as love became more difficult and repressive, especially for women, the need for love became more imperative. The only place remaining for emotional connection, unless one embraced the chaos and uncertainty of sensual love like Casanova, was marriage. And even Casanova didn't like change!

What am I suggesting? It's up to you to think about modernity and what it means because we can't do everything in this course. But what you might want to consider is that a competitive individualistic society breaks down not only the power but also the emotional ties of community. It simultaneously frees us from possibly unwanted controls and deprives us of emotional connection. In a modern socio-economic environment, the love between a man and a woman is likely to increase in emotional significance because it substitutes for most other forms of *connection*. Apart from Rousseau, enlightened writers confronting modernity were generally optimistic about the emotional trade-offs involved in modernity, and even enthusiastic about the liberation of love. As time went on, and as the negative effects of progress became apparent, I think love become more of a defense strategy and a compensation for the increasing alienation of the individual. The function of women became more defined; love itself became regimented and repressive; sexuality eventually was bound to break these controls. The irony of sexual liberation, unfortunately, is that it doesn't necessarily provide any lasting satisfaction, and as a strategy not much temporary relief.

The Poems of Ossian

Just how important a new love paradigm was to Scottish culture can be gleaned from the series of poetic fragments, supposedly composed by an ancient Scottish bard called Ossian, published in the 1760s. The poems were largely fabrications by an ambitious Gaelic speaking minister, James Macpherson, and, once the issue of their forgery came to light, they began to disappear from public view, except in Scotland where many people still regard them as largely authentic and, in their totality, forming an epic or national poem to compete with Homer or Virgil. The supreme irony is that if James Macpherson had just claimed to make them up, if the issue of forgery had not tainted their acceptance, *The Poems of Ossian* still would be regarded as one of the most important works in the eighteenth-century. As it stands, they are still an important source for understanding the eighteenth-century debate on love and community.

One thing for certain is that the *Poems of Ossian* were hugely successful and enormously influential. Goethe ends *The Sorrows of Young Werther* with Ossianic Poems. Mendelssohn composed his famous Scottish Symphonies as a direct result of reading

Fingal and *Temora*. I don't want to go too much into the content of the poems here. They deal with the decline of a heroic warrior society and are steeped in a new combination of nostalgia and melancholy for an ancient highland society that still remained as a fragment, but that modernization was rendering a misty memory. They fit generally into a late eighteenth-century politics of nostalgia for a disappearing world. A lot of today's imagery of the brave highlander is encapsulated in those poems that also placed its heroes and heroines in the sublime and wild landscape that soon became the stock and trade of emerging romanticism. Romance and valiant highlanders have turned out to be a combination with enormous staying power, but they were really inventions of James Macpherson.

I mentioned heroes and heroines of highland society for a specific reason. What I want to focus on is the love relationship that Macpherson describes between highland men and women, to speculate on what it means, and perhaps to indicate why it had such a powerful impact on people's imaginations throughout Europe. The sublime elements of the poems – the rugged landscape and wild nature -- fueled romanticism, but the relationships between heroes and heroines was decidedly sentimental. Macpherson drew upon medieval romance, the gothic legacy whose importance Millar and Fordyce so clearly recognized, but also -- totally in keeping with an enlightened Scottish agenda – transformed male-female love relationships into sentimental attachments. It is not wild romantic passion that attaches Cathullin, the chief of Erin, to his wife, but tender friendship. Brave Cathmore looks upon his beloved Sul-malla while she sleeps. In true sentimental fashion he sighs and sheds a couple of tears. These relationships are intimate friendships rather than the passionate encounters of courtly romance and, as such, are distinctly eighteenth-century in character.

The language of love in *The Poems of Ossian* is soft and sentimental and sociable, highlighting significant differences from romanticism. Love is even described, not as a passionate flame, but as a soft *beam of light*. What is remarkable even in a supposed forgery of an old highland culture, is that the primary relationships in this ancient Gaelic society have absolutely nothing to do with clan or kin. It is as though clan society never existed. Instead, the primary relationships in the poems are between men and women who love one another in the sentimental way. By "sentimental way" I do not only mean a softer, affectionate, and controlled emotion, although even this should seem strange a warrior society. I do not even just mean love as a deeply meaningful friendship, although this characterization is obviously central. I also want to suggest that love is a highly refined *mental* than a physical connection. In *The Poems of Ossian*, it survives death; either the real ghosts or the imagined memories of loved ones continue to haunt the living.

Ancient societies, of course, were no strangers to death, ghosts and superstition. What makes *The Poems of Ossian* so modern is that the influence of the dead on the living is a relationship of intimacy that is so tender, so beyond the physical, that it continues to influence the living partner. It has absolutely nothing to do with the fear of death, the problem of an afterlife, or tribal totems and taboos. It is the strength of an intimate connection that is sufficiently constant to survive the death of one's life partner. There

are other intimate relationships described in Macpherson's poems, including surprisingly tender male friendships, but it is only the male-female bond that survives death. Some commentators mistakenly consider these relationships to be romantic, and today we would probably use the term *romantic* to incorporate most such relationships. But contemporary readers and critics were much more subtle and sophisticated. They fully appreciated that it was a sentimental rather than passionate relationship that was being depicted.

The attitude towards women – as friends – in the Ossianic poems surprised contemporary academic readers like Hugh Blair and John Millar. They found such attitudes remarkable and completely out of keeping with the four stage theory of society that depicted a hunter warrior society as incapable of appreciating love. Millar rationalized that ancient highland society must have had some pastoral elements, i.e. herding, to stimulate and sustain this kind of love. Blair attributed the remarkable capacity for male-female friendships to the Bards, whose cultural influence permitted the introduction of new and imaginative valuations. What is so astonishing is that for neither of these writers did the penny drop. They, like Samuel Johnson, should have suspected that these poems were forgeries and that the attitudes depicted belonged to enlightened sentimentality rather than ancient epic poetry. The appropriate question is: why were these very intelligent people so easily duped? The answer goes to the heart of our discussion of enlightened love.

People are inclined to believe what they desperately desire to believe. In Scotland, in particular, there was a desire to link the nation's past, present and future as a moral community in the strongest terms possible. If male-female love was going to be the social glue that ensured the continuance of the moral community in the future, it greatly assuaged anxiety and reinforced continuity if male and female friendships could be discovered to be an integral part of Scotland's past. Hugh Blair, John Millar and many others were not so much suspicious as delighted in finding ancient evidence that the Scottish heroes of the past held such enlightened ideas about love. As a result, they were totally blindsided and abashed when it became increasingly clear that Macpherson could provide neither the documentary evidence nor oral testimony that verified their authenticity. Macpherson legitimately argued that, if he really had invented the poems, then he deserved to be regarded as an imaginative genius rather than a forger. But when you want to believe something really badly, you can never forgive the person who deceived you.

Conclusion

The national pride, transformed into national embarrassment, over *The Poems of Ossian* interests me mainly because it reflects the intellectual tensions and cultural concerns of a provincial Scottish community confronting modernization. The Scottish exploration of the relationship of *man and society*, which marked the beginning of modern sociology as much as economics, was a direct result of these tensions. Perhaps the most original and influential aspect of their analysis of modernity was the way that Scottish writers focused on *sentimental love* as a way of bridging the gap to a more individualistic society and

countering the negative effects of greed, competition, artificiality and alienation. Only the tendency to lump Scottish and English writers together as British can obscure the fact that it was the Scots who taught the most dynamic nation of the time to consider love and the family as the key cultural issues of modernity.

In this lecture, I've tried to distinguish *sentimental* from *romantic* love and to demonstrate its connection to enlightened thinking. Sentimental love or love as friendship combined reason and emotion in ways that reinforced sociability generally and avoided any undue conflict between self and society. This remarkable cultural agenda began by affirming the relative equality of women as well as the mutual reciprocity of friendship. Towards the end of the eighteenth-century, however, it was making constancy in love and the maintenance of the contented family in the happy home the responsibility of women. Women got stereotyped according to gender and regimented within what historians have labeled *separate spheres of influence*.

As in all kinds of valuations of love, we might want to affirm the possibility and potential of any idealization as well as to critique its limitations and problems. Modern love within the family has resulted in repression for many men and even more women. But at least men had other public roles from which they could derive satisfaction. As the professionals of love, women were confined to a private sphere which could not sufficiently challenge them mentally and regimented them emotionally. That doesn't mean that we need to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Sentimental love, especially in its early conceptualization, is an interesting kind of idealization, especially in its emphasis on the kind of friendship –mental as well as physical – that couples can achieve. Love as friendship may be a difficult balancing act, but at long as it doesn't fossilize into pre-determined roles, it offers an alternative to the mental bifurcation of modernity that worships one of two icons – either an abstract and potentially bureaucratic society or a unique but potentially isolated and alienated self.

What I principally object to in sentimental love is the idea that friendship and the family should bear all the burden of emotional connection (and by implication should be the solution or the antidote to all of the ills that derive from our present lack of connection). I think that society has been allowed to become more impersonal and that individuals have been encouraged to become more selfish precisely *because* attachments have been located and intensified elsewhere. But love and the family are not sufficient bulwarks against impersonalization and isolation because they are part of that society and share its characteristics. Civilizations can instill complex values; but they cannot easily sustain incompatible ones. As ideals of community and relationship are weakened generally, the sentimental love bond must also eventually erode. Sentimental relationships still exist and are enormously powerful. They are, however, on the defensive. What's going to replace them? Romantic love? Sensual love? We'll be looking at those formulations in the weeks to come.

Sensual Love

Introduction

This introduction is about one of the most fascinating *introductions* in the history of literature. At the beginning of *The Story of My Life*, Giacomo Casanova introduces us to *himself*. Make no mistake about it; this is an entirely new kind of *self*. In part, this new kind of self is a product of the Enlightenment because it is anti-dogmatic; it follows Kant's advice in *thinking for itself*. What it thinks, however, is not what a rationalistic cum moralistic philosopher like Kant might wants it to think. Kant does not want the thinking self to be a *rebel* but, rather, an orderly member of an ideal cosmopolitan society. Casanova takes freedom of thought in a completely different and entirely modern direction. He views himself overwhelmingly as a bundle of sensory experiences in search of a predominantly personal happiness. Casanova is both a real and a symbolic *wanderer* in the search for and cultivation of sensory experiences that give his life *meaning* as well as *happiness*. Whereas earlier writers on love distinguished between experiential happiness and higher meanings or idealizations, Casanova's ruling principle is "cultivating the pleasures of the senses" (6). One of these pleasures, as you no doubt noticed, is food. Casanova loves his food to the point of suffering severely at times from indigestion. But his chief pursuits are the amorous adventures that he graces with the title of *love affairs*. When he can combine love and food with a woman who equals him in both appetites, he is at his very happiest.

Casanova's approach may appear shallow to those who cling to idealizations of love as friendship, romance or the sentimentalism that combines elements of both, but it should not be dismissed as superficial. In the first place, it has a serious foundation in a materialist understanding of life that critiques most idealizations of love as ridiculous. Even if we don't agree entirely with Casanova, we can appreciate the ways that his experiential perspective punctures love's idealistic balloons. The emphasis on sensual experience, as Casanova presents it, is liberating if not fully satisfying. Second, the sensual love that Casanova embraces, and even devotes his most of his life to, is obviously richer and deeper than mere animal sexuality. Love, for Casanova, is different from lust in at least two respects that he identifies. One, love is first discovered by the eyes, so it is an attraction to a beauty that has its original blueprint in the human soul rather than simply our sexual equipment. Two, love is never satisfying unless it is reciprocal. This, of course, is not to suggest that Casanova's sexual escapades are always prompted by love and not lust. It is, however, to point out that Casanova generally seeks love that is shared in sentiment as well as sexual coupling. Casanova reckons that "the sight of pleasure I gave always made up four-fifths of my own" (102) Finally, Casanova's idea of love is cultivated and refined in so far as it depends on the art of conversation, fashion, technique and experimentation.

You may not like the way that Casanova collects sensual experiences, but you might pay attention to the fact that he continues to *like* most of the women he has loved and that, for the most part, these women obviously *enjoyed* their experiences with Casanova and

remained *loyal* to him long after the affairs ended. What is also interesting is the sense of responsibility that Casanova feels towards his conquests (can we really call them conquests when they appear so willing to be conquered?). He is not only generous in giving them money to help them continue their life's journey, but he actively finds them suitable husbands. You might argue that he is just finding a way to get rid of them, but today's *Lotharios* don't even do that. Casanova has a sense of duty towards women, not merely as sexual objects, but as *persons*. He seemed to recognize and affirm women as *persons* in an age when men did not need to do that, and this may explain his enormous appeal to women.

Of course, Casanova has a sense of responsibility and duty in general, quite apart from women. You might not think so, given the fact that he is something of a gambler and a swindler, and has a tendency to flaunt any laws that he finds contrary to good sense, polite breeding, and the firm belief that anything standing in the way of sensual pleasure was absolutely unnatural and ridiculous. Certainly he is not Immanuel Kant's idea of a good political subject. But Casanova is entirely modern in so far as he has constructed his own (and obviously self-serving) code of morality. He firmly believes that the people he dupes, such as the cabalistic Madame D'Urfé or the three members of the Council of Ten either want or deserve to be swindled. With respect to some of these unsavory escapades, the least you can say about Casanova is that is he forthright when he writes about them and describes himself as a *libertine* and *good-for-nothing*. In other respects, however, he is a composite model of old and new values. In terms of tradition, he adheres to a code of honour that makes him generous and courageous. He never backs down from a duel and fears ignominy worse than death. He shares his wealth when he has it and expects his peers to share with him. The people he detests the most are those that are *stingy*. In terms of more modern aristocratic roles, he's always seeking diplomatic positions in royal courts that will allow him to exercise his linguistic and strategic abilities. In the introduction as well as in several places in the text, he warns his readers not to stereotype him on the basis of his sensuality:

> Those who call me sensual are wrong, for the power of my senses has never torn me away from my duties, when I have had any. (see also 203)

To affirm this statement, one need only scan the notes at the end of *The Story of My Life* when Casanova *assiduously* negotiated better relations between Austria and the beloved Venice that exiled him for so long. Ironically, Casanova himself is largely to blame for his Don Juan reputation because his own history of himself is most fascinating when delineating the progress of his love affairs.

Casanova's God

Thus far, I've interpreted Casanova as an entirely modern kind of man, influenced by the materialist and anti-dogmatic philosophy of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Of course, the concept of *modern* is highly ambiguous. Like many other people of his age, Casanova has a foot in both the traditional and the modern world. What I want to aggressively suggest, however, is that the modern elements greatly outweigh the

traditional ones and that Casanova needs to be understood as a brave new person in his outlook on life and, especially, in his fascination with his own *story*. Before moving on to highlight the modern attitudes towards the self and its experiences, it may be advisable to comment on Casanova's perspective on religion, since this may appear to be at variance with the conventional interpretations of historians and philosophers of the Enlightenment.

According to the latter, the most representative religious position of enlightened men and women was something called *deism*. This was the belief that God should be understood first cause or the creator of a marvelous and orderly universe. Rather than adopt a revealed, and necessarily dogmatic, view of the *creator*, the rational approach was to focus on his *creation*. The deist god of the Enlightenment could only be understood and appreciated by observing and understanding a material life, in which god did not intervene. The idea of god is incomprehensible except as the first cause of this materialist universe that we understand by applying reason to sensory perception. Supernatural ideas are largely meaningless; religious ideas that are mysterious or miraculous are even dangerous because they prevent us from appreciating what is natural; God can only be discovered in and through nature. Deism shifts the entire focus of religion from the ideal to the so-called *real* world. God becomes an intellectual superstructure. The way has been paved for studying nature's laws apart from god's laws and, of course, making nature work for man.

Deist beliefs privilege a secular and naturalistic approach to this world, and implicitly, refocus any idealizations on the real world, in the process transforming heavenly idealizations into ideals of progress on earth. The heavenly city becomes the earthly city, most dramatically in the idea of secular *utopias*. This is a common formula for the modern secular viewpoint that dramatically separated Church from State during the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries. Modernity comes to mean just this. The fact that Casanova does not embrace this paradigm may make him appear more traditional than he was. Casanova is highly ambiguous about progress. He approves of modern and rational politicians like Catherine the Great, who he chats with in her garden. But he does not believe in utopia because he shares the view of the Marquis de Sade that most people, and certainly not the lower classes, are incapable of rational behaviour. He thinks that enlightened champions of reason like Voltaire dangerously underestimate the extent to which people are motivated by anger, appetite and superstition. He sees these tendencies alive in himself and by implication most other people.

Casanova agrees that most religious views are no more than superstition. But against Voltaire, he argues that "superstition is necessary, since without it, the people would never obey the monarch" (307). The Enlightenment made a serious error not only in assuming that in a perfect world everyone would act rationally but even more in assuming that rational men and women be perfectly *happy*. The last thing rationally calculating individuals would ever want is to obey authority. Without authority everyone would be unhappy. Casanova's argument against Voltaire is brilliant. Humanity is not lovable on the whole and, if given the freedom to think for themselves, most people would be "more wicked and unhappy". As it was, even for the brave few who are

capable of carrying the burden of freedom, like Casanova himself, happiness is as complex as it is elusive.

Casanova scorns dogmatic religion like a true *philosophe*, and he carries materialist philosophy to its dramatic extreme in his search for sensory pleasure, but he appreciates the support that religious feeling, even superstition, can play for personal happiness and social order. This is because he understands that happiness depends more on *feeling* than *reason*. Voltaire's big mistake, according to Casanova, confirms this judgment. For Voltaire's worldview is also based on a kind of feeling – his love for humanity. "Love humanity if you will; but you can only love it such as it is. It is not amenable to the benefits you wish to lavish upon it; and by sharing these with it you will only render it more wicked and unhappy." Casanova is not only a realistic and a rationalist, but also an anatomist of feeling. He incorporates these insights into his own life.

Religious belief, Casanova argues, is a feeling that makes us happy. A wise and free man is such because he acts upon reason, and reason should always have preference over feeling. But a "wise being" that relies solely upon reason is a "rare" commodity. Reason is only a part, a "fragment" of our nature. God exists, not because reason could ever discover him, but because human life would be much bleaker without a belief in him. Especially when misfortune strikes, it is a natural feeling for us to reach out to a divine being to discover its meaning and to hope for relief, as Casanova does many times during his life. The idea of God should be maintained because it makes our lives less unhappy:

> GOD only ceases to be GOD for those who conceive his non-existence as possible. They could not suffer any greater punishment than this.

Even for the most sanguine (like Casanova), life can often be difficult and productive of melancholy feelings. God smoothes over those hard times.

Casanova's idea of God is more interesting than that of a salve or prophylactic against misfortune. When commenting on the deist view that God can be found in nature, Casanova makes a fascinating argument and draws an astonishingly radical conclusion. He argues that, if we discover God in nature, we must see God in ourselves. While we might find the idea of a God mysterious and inconceivable, we can love him in ourselves. "Finding himself in his maker, he could no longer have denied Him: *in eo movemur, et sumus*". Casanova does not simply discover God in nature and human nature. He becomes something of a God unto himself. As a god, he can better justify his feelings and hold himself above traditional or idealistic interpretations of good and evil. The most evil thing that Casanova can contemplate is not folly, is not vice, it is the termination of his own existence:

> As for me, I have always known myself to be the principal cause of all the misfortunes that have befallen me. Thus I took pleasure in finding myself able to be my own pupil and compelled to love my teacher.

The Story of My Life, therefore, is a love story. It is a story about loving oneself with all one's warts. It is also a story about laughing at oneself, but you can only laugh heartily at yourself if first you love yourself. The modern love affair with the self has begun.

Loving the Self

What does it mean to love oneself? The first thing it means is to make one's story the central agenda. Casanova's life is *interesting* in a modern sense, not as a memoir of a guy who hobnobbed with many of the most famous politicians and writers of his era, but because Casanova is a complex individual. To be sure, Casanova is writing at the beginning of the modern era and we should not expect from him the kind of psychological insights into the subconscious provided by later writers. What we get instead is a self-conscious expose of a libertine's loves and motivations. There is only a single point of view provided here – that of the personal. A great deal of this might be boring, were it not for the fact that Casanova may be the champion Don Juan of all time. What remains fascinating is the fact that anyone could engage in this kind of autobiographical writing at all. If you compare Casanova's story with that of St. Augustine, you will discover a quite remarkable difference. Augustine is only marginally concerned with what we would consider autobiographical detail because he is describing a spiritual journey. Casanova's story has no ideal purpose whatsoever. He explicitly denies having any message other than writing for himself and for people like him "who having lived too long in the fire, have become Salamanders" (10).

While Casanova knows that others will find his life interesting because of his notoriety, he is writing primarily for himself. The only approval that he wants from others is praise for his erudition, wit and good taste. The only real message that his massive autobiography delivers is a supposedly truthful account of his life coupled with a declared unwillingness either to justify or repent for his actions to his audience. The message is one of complete self-acceptance bordering on self-obsession. If you were going to discover a meaning in Casanova's life, what would you focus on, apart from the fact that this guy loves to talk about himself? At a stretch, you could say that his is an illusive search for love, and then you could judge him favourably or unfavourably by deciding whether or not he found it. But then you'd be missing the point completely, because the love that keeps him relatively happy, even in misfortune, is his love for himself. Again and again, we are thrown back on this surprisingly new attitude of self-love. He only cares what his readers will think to the extent that he needs "to hear myself praised in good company" (11). That praise, however, is clearly secondary to his ability to praise himself.

So, again, what does it mean to love oneself? It is easier to respond in the negative than the positive. First and foremost, loving oneself means *not judging* oneself. Casanova judges himself only by his own standards. He feels precious little guilt for his actions, but he is anything but a sociopath. He loves society, and he can feel guilty when he has treated someone unfairly. But fair and unfair are relative terms. You can't expect anyone to go against his or her human nature, and you have to understand that human nature is weak. This understanding of himself and others is what makes the largely self-

taught ethicist Casanova so generous in his judgments of others. He's always willing to admit his own shortcomings with others, as when he smears the reputation of Count Manucci. The groups he most strongly dislikes are religious dogmatists and social moralists like the inquisitioners; the individuals he most strongly dislikes are hypocrites and betrayers. These are the *fanatics* who interfere with his and other's happiness. These good-natured qualities, coupled with his learning, charm and looks, help to explain why Casanova is so popular wherever he goes and why it takes so long for his indiscretions and flaunting of authority to catch up with him. By his own standards, Casanova is non-judgmental and his relative happiness obviously relates to the fact that he seldom beats himself up over anything but his own stupidity. He has a remarkable capacity for self-respect. What is more, as his story reveals, he had a knack for attracting and appreciating intelligent women of all ages who respected themselves. The Italian-Parisian actress, Silvia, receives something of a "funeral oration" from Casanova for her "purity of heart" at age fifty (161).

The second attribute that contributes to Casanova's self-love is a remarkable ability to laugh at himself. In his remarkable introduction, an introduction that says much more than most introductions, he imagines readers will turn up their noses at his addiction to female perspiration. What's his characteristic response? He says "this reproach tickles me to laughter" (7). He thinks that his proclivities and habits are *harmless* and could only be condemned by "the fanatics that seek out such suffering". Most people would consider venereal disease no laughing matter, but one of the highlights of *The Story of My Life* for me is Casanova's conversation with a doctor in Osara who claims to have made a good living treating the "little souvenir" that Casanova left with so many his conquests and their husbands. "After I had a good laugh at this tale, I saw his face grow long when I told him that I was in good health" (111) Casanova has a quite remarkable ability to laugh at his own follies and those of others. Most of the women that he loves also share his ability to laugh as well as his appetite. The abundant laughter in *The Story of My Life* gives a comic flavour to the work; it is rarely mocking or sarcastic; most often it is shared laughter at the human condition. My favourite episode is the one where Casanova is tricked into the arms of the aging but pimply arms of the Duchess of Ruffec and only escapes her clutches by feigning syphilis (181).

Respecting oneself while maintaining the ability to laugh at oneself are repeating themes in Casanova's story. But we still haven't come to the heart of the matter that makes this work so modern. What is this thing called the self anyway? *The Story of My Life* delineates a quite remarkable assumption about this thing called the self. The self is neither a static reason nor any particular hierarchy of feelings. The self is the sum of our experiences and our reflections upon those experiences. Casanova is one of the world's first existential tourists, a wanderer in search of new experiences. To be sure, he often has to flee geographical jurisdictions, but it should be clear that he wanders largely by choice. He sucks up experiences like a sponge – the more the better. But for Casanova, the most fundamental and pungent experiences contributing to his identity and happiness were sensual experiences with the opposite sex. A perceptive reader will also notice that there is a certain amount of ambiguity in Casanova's sexual preferences as the episode with the boy-girl Bellino and his fascination with her fake penis demonstrates. It doesn't

really matter if you consider Casanova bi-sexual or even in the closet; what matters is that Casanova feels most alive in intense sexual encounters that he calls love. The minute the effects of a love affair begin to wear off, he needs to seek out new lovers. He *wants* to experience new environments, he clearly *enjoys* praise from other cultivated people, he finds it difficult to "renounce the fair hope of becoming famous among civilized nations" (133) but he really *needs* intense sexual contact to affirm his sense of self. When he loses a job opportunity, he just takes it in stride and moves on. But when he can't find someone to love, that's when he gets desperate. More on this in the next section.

If the modern self is the sum of individual sensory experiences and reflection upon those experiences, in other words if the *self* is built up and defined internally rather than externally, what happens when one's ability to experience or to *feel* declines with age? That's a problem that many of us face alongside Casanova because, like him, we define ourselves by our experiences and, especially, our receptivity to new experiences. The emphasis on sensual love creates genuine problems for individuals because this form of love fades as you get older. Consequently, if life, as Casanova regarded it, is a mixture of pleasure and pain, you have a serious problem when the pain you feel begin to outweigh the pleasures you "no longer feel". Casanova's hedonistic lifestyle aged him prematurely; while he remained a charmer, he couldn't give pleasure to women as easily as he did when he was younger; in his story we see that he begins to redefine life as a more stable attachments but with limited success given the wandering habits acquired over a lifetime.

He solves the problem of the vanishing self in a characteristically creative fashion. Since the self is not only the ability to experience but also the culmination of those experiences, what Casanova has left to comfort and amuse himself are *memories* of those experiences. *The Story of My Life* revives and reaffirms Casanova the sensual lover:

> In recalling the pleasures I enjoyed, I relive them, while I laugh at the pains I endured and no longer feel. A member of the universe, I speak to the air, and fancy myself giving an account of my conduct of affairs the way a major-domo does to his master before retiring.

We must remember that these introductory words are those of a still defiant, but physically declining old man who wanted more than anything else to return home to his beloved Venice. There is an important sense in which he could never go home because his freedom as a modern individual means that you can never find a home. You are neither defined by the places you come from nor the places you go to. You are your experiences and your memories until you can no longer feel experiences, at which time you become your memories. Feeling and memory are what define us as human beings, which makes our death a dramatic philosophical problem in a world that defines religion in terms of feeling.

Loving Others

An axiom of modern life and modern relationships is that, first and foremost, you have to love yourself. To really love yourself, you have to be able to free yourself of dependence upon other attachments, and not only those that are obviously toxic. Giacomo Casanova provides a recognizably modern version of what it means to love oneself. But he also offers us sensual love as a realistic critique and alternative to the guilt feelings engendered by "the courtly and Christian traditions" (xvi). This kind of critique is sometimes referred to as the *realistic* discussion of love that focuses primarily on sexual attraction and satisfaction. Clearly, it explodes many of the idealizations that were constructed by the courtly and Christian traditions, as well as the sentimental perspective on love that tried to connect self and society, friendship and sexuality, feeling and reason. The new emphasis is predominantly on maximizing the sensual pleasures of the self. Whether this embrace of personal pleasure is viewed as liberating or shallow depends largely on one's perspective. One thing seems certain, however, the emphasis in modernity shifts the cultural pendulum from shared idealizations to personal sensual satisfaction.

A typical criticism on the part of opponents to the so-called *realistic* approach to love is that it is shallow, unimaginative and, ultimately, unsatisfying. Another way of putting this is that the personal search for sensual pleasure and excitement leads only to a hollow loneliness. As he ages, Casanova clearly feels increasingly isolated and desires a more lasting union, which, as an inveterate pleasure seeker, he can no longer hope to achieve. Those who find him shallow and even immoral can point to this decline and despondency as evidence of the emotional poverty that is sensual pleasure seeking. However, there is another point of view that *The Story of My Life* represents. Casanova never repents his life as a pleasure seeker; quite the contrary, he reflects back fondly on all the pleasures that he has found. And, in true utilitarian fashion, he believes that his realistic attitude towards sexuality has provided him with more pleasures than pains. Even his memories give him pleasure.

A related criticism of sensual pleasure seeking is that it is culturally impoverished. It contributes no significant valuations to civilization. Courtly love and Christian love contributed mightily to European culture in ways that have had significant staying power. Sensual love, on the other hand, provides nothing in *added value*. Against this viewpoint, Casanova might counter that such unrealistic idealizations come at a huge cost to individual happiness. In addition, they make people feel guilty or inadequate when they can't come up to unnatural social expectations. Finally, although this is more Sigmund Freud than Casanova, these unnatural idealizations mask the real engine of refined manners and civilization – the erotic impulse itself. Where Casanova has it all over Freud, however, lies in his recognition of the inherent and limitless creativity of that erotic impulse. He shows us just how much sexual pleasure seeking depends upon the creative imagination. The sex act alone is relatively boring; skillful sex takes technique; foreplay and fetishism play roles that are infinitely more significant than the mere act of coupling. One of the most famous and often cited episodes in Casanova's life is his relationship with the nun known only as M.M. where all the arts of sensual love are displayed. Every male that has ever fetishized about what is hidden by the nun's habit can appreciate Casanova.

The ultimate critique of sensual pleasure seeking is that it provides insufficient meaning because it begins and ends with one's life. There is much truth in this criticism because death is the obvious and threatening horizon for the pleasure seeker, while more idealistic kinds of love connect to eternal values or, at least, relationships that go beyond oneself and one's lifespan. But even this criticism needs to be tempered by Casanova's quite sophisticated approach to sensual pleasure. Simple sensual pleasures, such as traveling and eating, are anything but solitary pursuits. They involve sharing experiences with others. The most significant pleasure –sexual – is only really satisfying for Casanova when the pleasure is shared. And we should take him very seriously when he says that giving pleasure to his sexual partner is much more important to him than receiving pleasure. Casanova might be deluding himself, but his argument is that his happiness is intrinsically social -- he adds to the happiness of others. Of course, we don't get to see any of his more unhappy conquests, but to dismiss his Don Juan attitude as anti-social or even selfish is to ignore some of its most interesting features. Casanova believes that sensory love is a shared rather than a solitary enterprise.

Casanova is *relatively* secure in the validity of his approach. Like Mozart's Don Giovanni, for whom Casanova was interviewed as the model, he does not repent. But Casanova is no great philosopher and he often finds himself falling into traditional idealizations of love. In order to fully understand him, his general attitude, and his wavering, we need to appreciate that he invents himself over time and that *The Story of My Life* is a reflection backwards upon a person who had become the personification of the sensual lover. Exploring Casanova's life story from the outside rather than the inside allows us to avoid either praise or blame and to see why sensory love appealed to many upper class denizens in the eighteenth-century. Casanova's authoritarian father died when he was young, so he had no positive male role model. The two most powerful women in his life were his mother and his grandmother. Casanova's mother was a largely absent actress who seems to have abandoned him to a boarding house in Padua on the pretext that the air there was better for an obviously sickly child. His doting grandmother rescued him from this unfortunate situation and "loved me unfailingly until her death", but she too remained largely absent. Casanova's acute helplessness and dependency on two very different kinds of women may have set the tone for all his relationships with the opposite sex – a natural gravitation towards women, an intense desire and need for love, coupled with a fear of emotional commitment that might result in abandonment. The remarkable fact that Casanova excuses selfish, manipulative and downright ornery behaviour on the part the women he encounters demonstrates a perverse idealization of the female sex.

That Casanova longed for more permanent sentimental attachments, but could not sustain them, is demonstrated by his early life as well as his intermittent desire to marry. The desire for more permanent forms of love even evidenced itself in relatively short-lived religious conversions. We should not think of Casanova as someone totally immune to alternate idealizations of love but as someone whose life experiences and intellectual convictions combined to make him wary of being trapped. His most formative experience came as a teenager in Padua when he fell head over heels for the 13 year old sister of the tutor with whom he boarded, Bettina. At this time, young Giacomo was

seriously tempted towards what he called "perfect love" but modified those emotions in light of his experience. What is most interesting about the episode, in which Bettina succeeded in manipulating the emotions of two young competitors and confounded a Capuchin exorcist, is the way that Casanova intellectualized the experience. He learned to distinguish between what he viewed as the sensual realities of love and its idealizations. He learned early on that women can "dupe" men with entrapments and tears. This did not lead, as it might have done, to hatred or fear of women. In fact, Casanova demonstrated early on a remarkable capacity for understanding not only how but also *why* women did what they did. The Bettina episode did not lessen Casanova's need for intimacy with women, but it did determine the form that his love would take. As long as he avoided *falling into all the traps*, he could lavish as much love on women as he wished.

As a good-natured person with a capacity for love, I would suggest Casanova was both attracted to and extremely fearful of idealizations that might trap him. His primary principle throughout his life was *freedom* from entrapment, which explains both his wanderlust and his embrace of the eighteenth-century idea of intellectual liberty. Every time he finds himself lured into a commitment, be it religious or sexual, he eventually *rebels*. That rebellion gets increasingly confirmed in Casanova's character by a combination of ideas and experience. At first, he only wants relationships with *innocent girls* whose love he is not willing to share. He's as jealous of competitors as any courtly lover. He wants nothing to do with married women. Eventually, however, he realizes that this is "stupidity" and that married women provide the perfect targets for a lover who cannot tolerate commitment. His growing embrace of sensual love is perfectly encapsulated in Casanova's description of the wooing of Lucia at the Contessa of Montereale's place at Pasanio:

> Not willing to be sentiment's fool, nor to act against it, I wanted things to be clear. I nonchalantly extended a wayward hand and touched her…

While Casanova is not successful because he still clings to an idealized version of courtly love, and regards the women he likes as angels, in his cranium, his trajectory as a lover is defined by this balancing act between rejecting love and being trapped by love. He was *not willing to be sentiment's fool, nor to act against it*. The solution was to move swiftly but expertly to sexual connection before any dangerous idealizations had a chance to take hold.

It soon made little difference to Casanova whether his conquests were virgins, married women, or courtesans (high priced prostitutes). What counted was whether the attraction and pleasure was reciprocal. As this strategy became confirmed and his conquests began to multiply, Casanova began to see more clearly through the tactics that women used to entrap men and "these comedies amused me immediately" (80). All the idealizations of love became to him "nothing more than an invention of boys" and contrary to human nature and lived experience (93). The loss of these illusions did not represent any decrease in happiness for Casanova, who interrupts his pursuit of the boy-girl Bellino with this revealing intervention:

> Those who say that life is a series of misfortunes actually mean that life itself is a misfortune. And if this is true, then death is a boon. Those who have written such things did not possess good health, a purse full of gold, or contentment in their souls from having just held a Cecilia or a Marina in their arms, nor the certainty of holding still others in the future. There is a breed of pessimists (excuse my beloved French) that can only have existed among beggarly philosophers and bilious or roguish theologians. If pleasure exists, and it can only be enjoyed when one is alive, then life is a boon. Misfortunes certainly do exist; I ought to know. But the very existence of such misfortunes proves that the sum total of goodness is much greater, I feel infinite pleasure when I find myself in a dark room and see the light shining through a window open onto the vast horizon.

Casanova follows up this remarkable comment with a reference to his *sinful nature*, but it should be clear by this time that he is shedding himself of Christian guilt, just as he has shed himself of the illusions of courtly and sentimental love.

After the Bellino episode, Casanova's life and loves falls into a groove. Although his value system is stirred from time to time, it is not shaken. He finds more reasons to celebrate his freedom and experiences than to regret them. Even imprisonment in the *Leads* prison below the Venetian doge's palace cannot dispel his positive attitude and his conviction that he is doing nothing wrong by pursuing his own pleasure. Ironically, the only person who seriously challenges Casanova's lifestyle as a libertine and voluptuary in a Muslim by the name of Yusuf Ali, who pitches the Neo-Platonic argument that the passions of the soul provide more lasting pleasure than the passions of the senses. Casanova is almost persuaded by the reasoning of the man he calls "the Turk" and especially by his argument that the attractions of sensual love wither with age. But, at the end of the day, Casanova sticks by the pleasures of the senses.

I've taken some time to elaborate upon Casanova's development as a devote of sensuality because I think its important to show that ideas do not develop in a vacuum; they have to make sense of your experience and give your life meanings that you can be relatively comfortable with. The appropriate question now is: what can Casanova's life history tell us about the more general embrace of sensual love in the eighteenth-century? For despite all the criticisms of philosophers and theologians, and even enlightened writers on sentiment, sensual love clearly did emerge as a serious cultural perspective during this period. Casanova was not even its most extreme propagandist; the Marquis de Sade can take credit for that. Sensuality burst forth with such force in the eighteenth-century that it took all the powers of Victorian moralists to construct a fence around it; and even then it went underground in the collective or individual subconscious from which Freud tried to release it. Casanova's life story provides lots of tantalizing clues. Clearly the tensions built up by the mental demands of courtly and Christian love were a factor. These conflicted so much with lived experience in the growing urban centres that such idealizations were increasingly difficult to sustain. The personal experiences of the upper class families, where fathers were abstract authority figures and mothers had more complex and differentiated functions than love providers, must have been a factor. The

attractions of sensuality may have been more acute among the middle and educated classes, to which people like Casanova belonged, because they had to struggle harder to secure legitimate roles to play. This was a much more mobile age than any previously in history and, arguably, people like Casanova would have become more settled and satisfied if provided with suitable positions. Sensuality is much more attractive to those who find no other outlet for their creative energies. In addition, we cannot forget the ideas of *freedom* that were in the air in the eighteenth-century and that made everyone responsible for determining their own unique *happiness*. In an important sense, freedom and happiness in terms of the *self* became the contemporary ideals. Casanova breathed in this eighteenth-century air.

But might there be something else in *The Story of My Life* that is perhaps more significant than abstract ideas like materialism, empiricism, sensory information, anti-dogmatism, and personal development. Once you open even a crack in the door to sensory experience, you can no longer expect individuals to prefer safety to adventure. It is not just sensory pleasure that individuals like Casanova sought, it was adventure of new experiences, even their danger. For Casanova, the greatest possible fear was not female entrapment, but *boredom*. Boredom for the truly modern man is a form of death, because when you are bored, you do not experience anything. Even in a city like Constantinople, we see Casanova getting bored unless he has something on the go, something to stimulate him. And what is the most dangerous and powerful stimulant of all? – Casanova thinks it is love.

Sex and Death

In an imaginary conversation with the deceased Catherine the Great of Russia, who he had met and liked, Casanova has her define "eternal damnation" in a revealing way. She says that it is "boredom" (399) I've suggested that, for the kind of modern men and women who crave experience and define themselves in terms of their experiences like Casanova, boredom is synonym for death. We can only know that we are really alive while when our senses are being stimulated. This definition of life largely in terms of sensory experience makes death a modern problem. To be sure, death has always been a problem that had to be dealt with by philosophy and religion. But old age and death become 'in your face' problems if you define your life in terms of sensory experience. The eighteenth-century made experience life's measure and meaning like never before, to the extent that even those who embraced philosophy or religion were confronted by their own mortality. Eros and Tanos are now intertwined more closely than ever before.

Old age is the stage terminating in death. It no longer has strong sensations to fortify it and must rely increasingly on memories of earlier sensations. To the extent that the modern age is about experiencing feelings, therefore, it has a difficulty coming to terms with old age. To the extent that modern men and women choose to emphasize sensual love as the highpoint of living, youth and experience usurp age and wisdom as the most meaningful periods of life. Despite the fact that he was an old man when he wrote *The Story of My Life*, Casanova finds almost no consolations in this stage of life. Being able to give sexual pleasure defined his life, and losing his sexual powers diminishes him.

"Nature", he says, "must abhor old age, which can easily procure pleasure, but never give it. Youth shuns it as its most fearsome enemy, but in the end age, sad and feeble, gnarled and frightful, will seize hold of youth, and always too soon". (103) This elevation of youth over age, and the overriding definition of youth in terms of sexual energy, is an entirely modern attitude. It helps to explain why we try to do everything in our power to maintain sexual vigor, including making viagra the designer drug of choice. We want to delay the signs of old age, and ignore the fact of death, as efficiently as possible. Casanova would sympathize.

Casanova invokes a thoroughly modern mood when lamenting that he has reached "that *certain age*" when "women take little interest". (442) When he can't get stimulated by women he loses his sense of self; he says, "I did not recognize myself" (445). He also refers to himself as "lost" and "discouraged". Increasingly, his remaining *theatre of action* and hold upon the self that he has created are his *memories*. That doesn't stop him from traveling to Spain and entering into an affair with Doña Ignacia. Reading between the lines, however, this last tango in Madrid sounds pretty pathetic, with Casanova passing for Doña Ignacia's father and only fueling his relationship with his dwindling financial resources. One cannot help but feel sorry for this old lothario who still images that he's got what it takes with the ladies.

You can really recognize the *modern* man in Casanova when he talks about death right there in the introduction to his book. In a sense, he's been running away from death throughout his life, but his introduction offers a mature perspective on the one thing that he dreads the most. In a twist on Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*, Casanova writes:

> I know I have existed and, being certain of this precisely because I have felt, I also know that I shall no longer exist when I have ceased to feel. If I do happen still to feel after my death, I shall no longer doubt anything, but I will give the lie to all those who come and tell me I am dead. (4)

On the consolations of religion, Casanova is perfectly clear that it makes more sense to believe than not to believe because believing makes you happier than not believing. But that is a very uncertain rationale for belief as Casanova admits. On the existence of the soul beyond the body, Casanova writes:

> That's all very beautiful but, religion aside, it is hardly certain. As I therefore could never be absolutely sure of my immortality before ceasing to exist, you will forgive me if I was in no hurry to discover this truth. (5)

Death, finally, is the ultimate "monster" for Casanova.

Modern Life as a Tragic-Comedy

You've got to hand it to Casanova. He's consistent even in his inconsistencies. He defines himself by his experiences and he measures his life by the pleasure that it brings. He occasionally flirts with marriage and commitment, he's tempted by the solaces of

religion, but he always comes back to *himself* and his *feelings*. On balance, he's an optimist who feels that life's pleasures outnumber its pains, but only if you approach life realistically and with a certain amount of irony. You have to be able to laugh at yourself and at life, he says, and suggests "I am writing my life to laugh at myself, and I am succeeding". What makes Casanova resemble someone like Ovid more than our contemporary sensualists or economic utilitarians is that he posses the art of taking himself seriously without taking himself too seriously. Ultimately, you have to be able to laugh to truly enjoy life, and that means laughing at yourself as well as others.

The tragic and comedic elements in life need to be balanced. *The Story of My Life* contains both, and you don't read it sympathetically if it doesn't make you laugh at Casanova and yourself. Arguably we late and postmoderns have lost the eighteenth-century power to laugh at ourselves; we take ourselves altogether too seriously. Even if we reject his lifestyle, we can learn from Casanova's ability to laugh whenever and wherever the opportunity arises. Perhaps that is one of the reasons that he was so popular with men as well as women.

Casanova has come down in history as the ideal type (as opposed to ideal) of the sensualist of love. His character was stereotyped and immortalized in Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* where the libretto presents him as a totally immoral rogue. Mozart's librettist, Lorenzo Da Ponte, actually interviewed Casanova before providing the words for the famous opera. It is hardly surprising that the Don Juan character in the opera is presented as a satanic figure who is justly condemned to hell by social convention. It could hardly have been otherwise given the site of its premier, Vienna, where, as Casanova himself tells you in *The Story of My Life*, a moral dictatorship condemned all forms of sexual dalliance and especially adultery. But there is at least one sense in which the character is drawn true to life. He adamantly refuses to repent for his actions.

If the character fails to resemble the historical Casanova, the opera itself may do more justice to the revolution in sexual mores that he represents. Modern experts cannot agree whether *Don Giovanni* is "a comic opera or a tragic one". (Libretto, iv) Is the plot, as Beethoven suggested, an "immoral gibe, unworthy of Mozart's music, or is it a classic "morality play". I have little doubt that Beethoven was closer to the truth because Mozart and most of the aristocrats who attended the opera's premier were more attracted to the plays wit and absurdity than they were to its increasingly dated supernatural horror. I believe that Casanova would have enjoyed the play and shared a wink with Mozart when a fossilized statue of outdated ideals confronted a living and breathing image of sensual love. Beethoven was a colossal prude but plenty smart enough to recognize the sly game that Mozart and Da Ponte were playing. On the official stage, the Commendatore had to win, but in real life, sensual love was already winning. Courtly and Christian values were waning. If an idealization of love was going to have any purchase in this modern age, it would need to embrace both the self and its sensuality. The stage was set for something very special, something that we call romantic love.

For most of his life, at least, Casanova was able to embrace his sensual nature joyously. It would not have been the outdated morals of the Commendatore that would have scared

him. As for dogmatic assumptions about eternal punishment, I doubt that he would have cared a whit. Religion was for him an undogmatic belief and a consolation when everything else failed. Religion was a special kind of feeling. The real enemy and the tragedy for a sensually inclined human being, who knew he was alive because he felt, was death. Eros and Tano intertwined – that was the new human tragedy. And there is only so much laughing you can do when faced with death.

13. Romantic Love

Introduction

The eighteenth-century discourse on love led in two directions. Sentimental love was a delicate balancing act that transformed sexual attraction into friendship in the expectation of harmonizing reason and feeling into an affection based morality. Although the project didn't exactly fail because sentimentalism has not only survived but also become a part of modern consciousness, it obviously was a complex synthesis requiring a high degree of individual and social cultivation. Not everyone was capable of this degree of sentimental sophistication. It was to be expected, therefore, that some eighteenth-century writers, and protagonists such as Casanova, would cut through many of these subtleties in order to define love in terms of sensuality. Although sensual discourse embraced many new complexities, it liberated the individual to pursue passion, absolved him or her of unnecessary guilt, naturalized human desire, and demolished seemingly unnatural ideals. Indeed, the late eighteenth-century embrace of desire can be viewed as an outcome of the rationality that we associate with the Enlightenment. The radical Enlightenment invited individuals like Casanova to reduce human nature to its basic elements, and love to sensuality.

I've argued that sensual love is not synonymous with sexual love because it still belonged to the eighteenth-century neo-classical world that elevated the qualities of the human over the animal kingdom. While affirming sexuality, it supplemented and enriched sex with all the arts of polite refinement in conversation, fashion, and especially imagination. To equate sensual love with the sex act is to ignore what made it so fascinating to men like Casanova. As attractive as sensual love might have been for those with the time, resources and leisure to embrace it, however, there were obvious drawbacks to sensual love. Because it was rooted in sexual attraction and performance, sensual love was difficult to sustain over time and problematic with the decreasing functionality of age. Its idealizations – and it did manufacture idealizations – tended to be impermanent because they relied on the senses. Sensual love, as the life and writings of the Marquis de Sade demonstrate, did not provide individuals with larger meanings for their lives. The fragility and impermanence of sensual love inevitably brought meaninglessness and death to the forefront of consciousness. But perhaps the characteristic that has besieged sensual love most powerfully is the limit that it puts on the human imagination.

The western discourse on love had generated some impressive idealizations that transformed humanity, if not exactly into gods, into beings who imitated the gods and who could make themselves worthy of God's love. Religious love, in particular agape, freed up individuals to *bestow* meanings to all forms of love that were essentially *supernatural*. In other words, as religious love became secularized, love's ideals were metamorphosed and liberated from the chains of nature. To be sure, many of these idealizations were eventually critiqued as *unnatural* and *unrealistic*. But a return to something more basic and *natural* was bound to meet with resistance from many of those who had been enchanted in various ways by religious or secular love. The various forms

of enlightened and sensual love would receive their most impressive and influential attack from the people that we call the *romantics*.

There are lots of courses on this thing called *romanticism* in university literature and humanities departments, which shows you how important this movement was in western culture. The problem is that romanticism is notoriously difficult to define because it was anything but a coherent movement and provided no unified cultural position. Some romantics, such as Lord Byron, could even be highly realistic advocates of sensual love. What did unify most of the romantics was their irritation with the highly rationalistic, instrumental and bureaucratic features of modernity. The romantics, such as Shelly, Wordsworth, and Schiller wanted to oppose Enlightened rationalism with *passion*, im*agination* and an appeal to the uniqueness of the individual, who was being stifled, manipulated and conditioned by the emerging nation state and bourgeois society. The highly *reactive* character of romanticism, as well as its appeal to feeling rather than reason, meant that it was replete with contradictions, ambiguities and shifting approaches and positions that we simply can't get into here. What interests us, however, is the new perspective that some romantic writers gave to this thing we call *love*. When we talk about modern love, we often use the term *romantic love* to describe it, don't we? We might even appreciate that the ideals of *romantic love* are something that makes us Westerners very different from other cultures.

In the most powerful romantic writings on love, such as Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde*, we witness something quite unusual in culture. The preparations for western romantic love were a long development from the Greeks and, particularly the re-appropriation of Plato by Christians, who taught Europeans to think of God as love and eventually to mimic god's love in their relationships with one another. Earthly love becomes increasingly idealistic as a result. However, the romantics made a paradigmatic leap by idealizing love *for its own sake*. We can sum up the mental transformation in this way: whereas in Christian writers like Augustine, God is love, in the romantics *love is God*. (Singer, 294) Nowhere is the new *religion of love* more clearly and forcefully expressed than Friedrich Schlegel's *Lucinde*.

The Attack on the Enlightenment

The romantics were never as anti-Enlightenment as simplistic definitions of romanticism might lead you to expect. Many of them like Schlegel began their careers as neo-classical scholars, and one could never fully understand or appreciate their attitude towards *nature* apart from the influence of the Enlightenment. But they all shared a deep distrust of the instrumental and conformist tendencies of rationalist thinking. And, although romanticism emerged from sentimentalism, they all felt that the only effective counter to a bourgeois civilization that stifled and constricted the human imagination was *passion*.

In some ways anticipating Nietzsche, Schlegel condemns as boring the modern world that the Enlightenment has helped to create. His symbol for enlightenment is the Greek god Prometheus, who brought fire to humanity, thereby liberating them from the control of

the gods. This obviously is the rationalistic enlightened agenda of controlling nature, in a sense turning men into gods. But Schlegel asks the question: how can these industrious little human machines consider themselves gods to something as expansive as Nature when they worship their narrow egotistical conforming selves as putative divinities. (67). Prometheus, that "inventor of education and enlightenment", has led to a highly distorted *self* that is constantly working at analyzing everything and everyone, including itself. Prometheus has "seduced mankind into working, now has to work himself, whether he wants to or not. He'll have plenty of opportunity to be bored, and will never be free of his chains" (68).

In contrast, Schlegel praises Hercules, who knows how to affirm himself and life. This Dionysian character "was sensual rather than intellectual". He "could keep fifty girls busy during a night for the good of humanity, and heroic girls to boot." This romantic hero is not chained down by reason, but knows how to love himself and, by implication, others. Schlegel is only partly engaging in hero worship here, although that is always a distinct temptation for a bored romantic. And he certainly is not condoning sensuality for its own sake. What he wants to defend is *not defining our world and ourselves* by utilitarian instrumentality. What he counters the limited Promethean mentality with is a very different and less contorted notion of the self. The "most perfect mode of life", he suggests, is "*pure vegetating*" (66). What on earth could he mean by this? It isn't obvious at first glance. Only if you look more closely will you see what the romantics were getting at. Pure vegetating obviously means being more "in touch" with nature and one's nature by rejecting the negative attributes of personality construction and wealth and property creation. Schlegel implies that past societies, non-capitalist bourgeois societies, understood the importance of *leisure*. The "intrinsic spirit of aristocracy" is that one can only really enjoy oneself and one's life if one balances activity with "passivity". The romantic defense of passivity and leisure will never be appreciated, however, unless you understand what is involved in these forms of inactivity. This is not the laziness that a capitalist society would condemn us with. It is an "intentional, arbitrary, and one-sided passivity" whose essence is "thinking and imagining".

The romantic critique of emerging modernity is that it is not only unidimentional but also *secondary* in terms of what counts for intellectual and creative life. It doesn't encourage people to appreciate themselves or their lives, and it doesn't foster what makes us truly human – our creative imagination. Modernity is boring, mechanical and destructive of everything human. It destroys the unique potential of every self, while pretending to affirm the self. In opposition to this mechanical world, the sensual embrace of life by Hercules is a positive alternative. Sensuality is supremely important to most romantics because it puts us in touch with our nature and allows us to become passive and open to experience. But, given their emphasis on the creative imagination, you would expect a romantic like Schlegel to qualify his appreciation for Hercules' sensuality and to differentiate this from romantic life. Schlegel begins his analysis of the love between men and women with a defense of the "holy fire of divine voluptuousness". (58) He goes so far as to cite Diderot in suggesting that those who lack "the sensitivity of the flesh" are incapable of love's inspiration. But this affirmation of sensuality is qualified by Schlegel's harsh attack on libertines like Casanova. These "may know how to undress a

girl with a kind of good taste" but the "higher art of voluptuousness" or romantic love is something infinitely superior and even mystical.

Like many romantics, and we'll see this again in Stendhal, Schlegel divides love into grades or levels that move successively from the senses to mental idealizations. The "first grade" is the innate sensitivity to love that someone like Casanova demonstrates. The "second level" transforms sensual love into something "mystical"; the lover is not satisfied with fulfilling his own or his partner's sensual needs, but wants to "fulfill and satisfy the inner longing of his beloved". In an interesting choice of words, Schlegel suggests that "something mystical" is going on at this second level that "might easily appear to be irrational like every ideal". At this second stage, imagination comes clearly into play. A body is not connecting with another body but "imagination can also communicate imagination" (59). What no Casanova could ever appreciate is the way this connection is *mental* rather than physical as the lovers' way "leads inward, their goal is intensive infinity, inseparability without number and measure; and actually they need never want because their magic can replace everything". The final or third *stage* of love Schlegel describes as a mystical union with obvious supernatural qualities to it. It is the "harmonious warmth" that is not merely desirable, but is life's perfection because now both of the lovers are complete in their union. For Schlegel, who believed more in gender differences than some romantics, the gender that benefited most from this union was the male because he "no longer loves only like a man, but at the same time like a woman too". In the completed male, the active male and passive female qualities are reconciled.

Sensual love is only a starting point on the path to this wonderful discovery. A Casanova type who stays at this stage of "naked sensuality" mistakenly "denies spirit for the sake of flesh" and thereby denies himself or herself of most of the higher joys of life. But at least sensual love provides an opportunity for an individual to embrace the perfect joy of mystical union. Love encourages the development of non-rational modes of thought and provides the inspiration for imagination to work on. Casanova may have potential, but as a rationally confirmed libertine, he constantly denies entry to the higher workings of the erotic imagination.

The Religion of Love

Schlegel ignores the conventional God and the conventions of religion, but there is a clear sense in which *Lucinde* is a religious text. Romanticism contains many of the qualities of religion, and *Lucinde* abounds in explicitly religious symbols. Thus, Julius is a "priest" and Lucinde is a "priestess of the night". Their love for one another is described as "holy' and "sacred". And, although Schlegel does not use the word, their marriage is a *sacrament* in the fullest sense of the term. What is most fascinating about Schlegel's religion of love is the extent to which it charts a new path by combining sexual and intellectual love. This combination, however, should not be understood as a 'mixture' or a balancing act between different requirements of the self. It is, at least when it reaches the third stage, a mystical union with magical properties.

We've met with mystical unions before and so had Schlegel's readers. The Christian mystics had already described many of the essential characteristics of *merging* between man and God that Schlegel now envisions as a possibility between men and women. This mystical union makes the relationship between men and women the fundamental mission and meaning of one's life. It is the "loveliest situation in the most beautiful world". (59) It renders the dictates of reason, and even morality, subservient to the all-important relationship. It is the antithesis of "order"; it is a beautiful "chaos". Time and space become irrelevant to a relationship that not only embraces "eternity" but in which two individuals become "the universe to each other" (111). Death is an enemy to earthly unions but the "beloved one" lives on in the imagination of the sincere lover (117). Romantic love is "eternal" or as we say "forever".

One of the reasons that romantics like Schlegel worshiped at the altar of love was that this "interrupted", "removed" and "destroyed" rational *order*. (45) A love relationship has rules unique to itself that make absolutely no sense apart from that relationship. As such, this mystical union allows for the "re-creation and integration of the most beautiful chaos of sublime harmonies and fascinating pleasures" in our lives. Love restores to us our natural "childlike consciousness" that an artificial society suppresses (99). By making love our religion, we have an opportunity to graft our "happiness" on "a living branch compared to an artificial one". These qualities, however, also made love dangerous. Whereas love now defined as *passion* infused life with meaningfulness, unrequited love could lead to self-destruction (99). Romantic writers can be divided on the basis of those who were optimistic or pessimistic about the probability of finding true love and keeping it alive. Sometimes romantic writers swung to one side or the other at different stages in their life. The author of *Lucinde* was an optimist at this stage in his life. But a fundamental issue for those who think romantically, then as now, is that the love between a man and a woman is the supremely important thing that makes life worth living. Once the romantic imagination takes a hold of culture, there is no longer any cure for love. If love is true, how could it possibly admit of a cure? Love is a terrifying and "terrible omnipotence". (115)

Love between a man and a woman now becomes the single most important issue – the "rose" as Schlegel calls it of life. This is a supremely important cultural agenda that lets no one who accepts its truth off the existential hook. If you are a romantic, your life is only fully meaningful through love. The meaning is so mystical, and love is such a spiritual harmony, that a romantic like Schlegel will suggest that it must be felt to be understood and can only be described allegorically. What is crystal clear to Schlegel is that, not only is there no cure for love, but also no substitute. While he would change his mind later on in life, at the time of writing *Lucinde*, Schlegel is absolutely categorical that love eclipses even god. The moments of shared love are heaven:

> This moment, the kiss of Cupid and Psyche, is the rose of life. Inspired Diometa revealed to Socrates only the moiety of love. Love is not merely the quiet longing for eternity: It is also the holy enjoyment of a lovely presence. It is not merely a mixture, a transition from mortal to immortal: rather it is the total union of both. There exists a pure love, an indivisible and simple feeling without the slightest

> taint of restless striving. Each person gives exactly what he takes, each like the other; everything is equal and whole and complete in itself, like the eternal kiss of divine children. (106)

The merging changes everything because there is no separation, only unity, in perfect love. But it cannot be found in heaven or among eternal forms, only in earthly relationships. Human eclipses the divine, but only if every "I" is answered by a "you" in "boundless unity". The moments of union are *heaven* in the religion of love.

On 'You' and 'I'

The influence of this merging of *I and you* on western civilization has been monumental. Love is no longer a stage, or an element, in life but it constitutes life's meaning. Such has been the power of this imagining that even the most cynical and realistic critic will typically find himself or herself entangled at one time or another in the web of romantic love. And it isn't just an age thing. Romantic love knows no age and, to quote love's cynics, *there's no fool like an old fool*. However, citing its cultural influence does not exhaust the more complex meaning of romantic love and certainly not its relationship to modernity. There is a critical sense in which romantic love contributes to modern individualism.

Historians and sociologists often suggest that romantic love is the necessary counterpart of a modern capitalist society. As the affective bonds and networks of traditional societies break down, there needs to be a new foundation for belonging that attaches itself to love. This breakdown and need for an emotional home helps to explain why romantic love so often gets paired with marriage, because marriage provides permanency for this need. Some sociologists will also point out that marriage and the nuclear family are the social relationships that allow the greatest individual freedom and so, indirectly, support the spread of capitalist individualism. These arguments help to explain part of the attraction of romantic love but certainly not all. What they fail to account for is the fact that the religion of romantic love is *opposed* to many of the characteristics of bourgeois capitalism and that the individualism it encourages runs counter to the rational individualism that propels a great deal of modernity. There is nothing in the sociological explanation, for example, that would prevent romantic love from eventually being eclipsed by more self-centred forms of individualism or relationships based on mutual interest or professional ties.

If romantic love is besieged, however, it is far from having run its course because it contributes to the modern individual self in ways that have little to do with market capitalism or its ethic of enlightened self-interest. Love makes a crucial contribution to an understanding of the *self* that is entirely modern but that had little to do with *modernity* as the romantics viewed it. In modern society, romantics like Schlegel argued, the individual moved only on the "surface" of life. Love *draws us back* from the surface and encourages the exploration of our "inner self". Love doesn't lead to our superficial and artificial modern self; it allows us to get to know our deeper self. True love, in other words, is necessary for the discovery of our "true self".

What happens to someone for whom "the worship of his sublime friend" becomes the "spiritual foundation and fixed center of a new world" is that they can come to appreciate their *higher calling* and *sacred duty*. (93) You forget your own times and its distractions in order to look closely at yourself and, hopefully, follow your own "inspiration". Love, even if unrequited, forces you back upon your own true character or what Schlegel calls the "inner sea". But requited love entirely refashions, remolds, re-forges oneself and one's relationships with objects and people outside of oneself. Instead of being objects to appropriate, the "surrounding world" is magically transformed into "friendly possessions and instruments of social life" (95). Admittedly, this is the optimistic view of romantic love, the one that transforms the external world into a friendly place, not for control and appropriation, but for creative and constructive engagement, particularly for those with an artistic temperament. There is also a pessimistic view of romantic love that pits lovers against a hostile world. The romantics were not uniform in their assessments of the relationship between lovers and the world, but they usually agreed that the only really meaningful world was the world generated by love.

Why is love more real and meaningful than anything else? In love, Schlegel suggests, people "open up" their innermost selves and provide a *mirror* to one another. Only in love do the scattered fragments of one's life become a coherent and "connected whole" (98). The real magic of the mystical union of love is that this intensely spiritual relationship allows each partner to finally appreciate himself and herself as whole and complete. Schlegel describes the paradoxical relationship between union and identity in the following way:

> They were completely devoted and joined to each other, and yet each was wholly himself, <u>more than he had ever been before</u>, and every expression was full of the deepest feeling and the most unique individuality. (99)

Love is more than a relationship; romantic love is more than a mixture of the sensual and the ideal; love is a process of discovering your true self. It is a metamorphosis as profound as any spiritual rebirthing. Schlegel alternately describes the effect as *spiritual and magical*, language that suggests that love itself is the essence of what is spiritual and magical.

The "original state" of human nature, Schlegel says, is a "divinity" that is complete in and of itself. But you can only re-discover your complete, divine and unique nature through love. What is crucial to true love is that the lovers become "the universe to each other". Just as long as "*one* woman understands me completely", says Schlegel, I can be myself and realize *my* unique dreams, no matter what the world thinks. (113) Every individual has a unique inner voice – an inner echo – but the tragedy is that one's inner echo fades away "fruitlessly without the complementary creation of shared love" (105). We should appreciate what Schlegel is suggesting here. He is suggesting that you can't be complete, you can't be truly yourself, without love. He's also affirming an entirely new condition for love; lovers by definition *affirm* not only their love but also their lover's true and unique identity.

Don't you think that it is a tall order for those who are in love to be so responsible for the healthy development of each another? It's one thing to suggest that only when you love do "you live completely" (74). It's quite another to suggest that you are not really living unless you love your partner completely. It's another altogether to suggest that one person alone can satisfy the heart's *yearning*. Let's look at some of the qualification for true love that Schlegel innumerates in *Lucinde*. The first requirement is an *intense* passion that is notoriously difficult to maintain. The second requirement is the complete harmonization of emotions in a *mutual warmth* that is not merely sympathetic, or even empathetic. It requires constant psychic interpenetration and affirmation of the relationship. Because we are modern, and have been influenced by romantic ideals, we can understand how this can be achieved in practice. And the jealous quarrels of Julius and Lucinde provide a recognizable model of how lovers converse with one another to smooth over difficulties. But it doesn't take a psychologist or even a marriage counselor to see that Schlegel's idea of a warm and supposedly ideal marriage depends a heck of a lot on the wife's adoring deferral to her husband's superior intellect. Finally, and decisively, if love depends on intense and absolute commitment, how can we ever know that love is true or if it will last? Presumably, Lucille's jealousy is based on a recognition that Julius is a bit of a ladies' man.

The problems that beset romantic union become even more apparent when you consider that a defining characteristic of true love is that it flows spontaneously. Leaving aside for a moment the fact that love might flow from one side only, what is to protect love when it runs into difficulty? Julius tells Lucinde that:

> Love comes in one moment wholly and forever, or not at all. Everything divine and everything beautiful is sudden and easy. Or do you think you can accumulate happiness like money or other material possessions just by being consistent? Great happiness surprises us like a melody out of the air; it appears and then vanishes."

It's the *vanishing* possibility of intense love that is interesting here. There's absolutely no serious accommodation. Either love is there or its gone. And when it's gone, it's gone forever according to the romantic definition of love. One significant advantage of love defined as friendship is that it doesn't make such significant demands on the individual psyche.

Schlegel's analysis of friendship in *Lucinde* is informative. He affirms Aristotle by defining pure friendship as an essentially male relationship that females are entirely incapable of. But he completely inverts Aristotle by arguing that romantic-love both eclipses and includes any value in friendship. Finally, in his argument with Antonio about his *friendship* with Edward, it is clear that Julius has completely redefined friendship with males in terms closer to his love of women. As his understanding of love develops in the novel, to some extent reflecting Schlegel's own life experience, it is the intensity and complementarity of the relationship that counts. That recalibration of all human relationships in terms of a love that begins and ends with Lucinde makes it

difficult to discover whether Julius is having a homosexual relationship with Edward or an affair with the mysterious *her* that Lucinde refers to. My hunch is that Schlegel is suggesting that both Julius and Lucinde (and by implication he and Dorothea Veit) had affairs that did not undermine their more fundamental commitment to each other. What it does draw into serious question, however, is the power of romantic love by itself to silence the intense *yearning* that individuals have. All we really have at the strange conclusion of the novel, is the word of Julius and Lucinde that they are each other's beginning and end. It sounds very 60s and 70s to me.

In any case, the obvious difficulty involved in sustaining romantic love made one thing imperative. Above all else, you had to find that one *right* person for you. Making a mistake in one's choice for Mr. or Mrs. Right could be fatal to the reign of love. That's why a large part of *Lucinde* is devoted to Julius' apprenticeship in love. The romantics generally were sexually liberated because they understood that you had to find the right person for you. The romantics don't deserve their reputation for sensuality because they believed that you had to experiment with partners to discover the right chemical combination of sexual and mental attraction that was true love. Romanticism doesn't deserve its association with *love at first sight* for the same reason. In an alienated and emotionally frustrated modern world, finding the right person for you has to be a search. Various partners may communicate with the fragments of our soul, but you will only know that you have found the right person when this "mass of unrelated fragments" finally came together and one was *moved* at the "very depth of his heart for the first time". (78, 91)

There is a certain contradiction between the long, necessary and painful search for love and its sudden apotheosis in that one person who inspires idealization. The contradiction is clearly there, but becomes more understandable when one considers the religious character of romantic love. In religion, and in the religiously inspired variations on courtly love, the supplicant typically has to go through suffering to deserve love. Eventually, however, love comes as either a conversion experience or as a sudden merging with the godhead or the beloved that has miraculous or magical qualities to it. Just because romanticism is a secular religion didn't mean that it dropped all of these conventions. You can often spot romantic types by the largely self-imposed suffering that identifies them as love's pilgrims.

Love and the Imagination

The rather obvious drawbacks and difficulties associated with romantic love might be a temptation towards less idealistic bestowals and more realistic appraisals. Romantic love, as Irving Singer suggests, is "the highest level to which man's thinking about the love of persons had [has] thus far reached. In some respects, it is a level that has not yet been exceeded". (302) As a self-proclaimed romantic, it is not surprising that Singer would view this kind love as something of a cultural high point. The question I want to ask is how such an idealistic and seemingly impractical version of love gained ascendancy in the West. Surely there was something in romantic love that compensated for all the personal and social problems it has engendered. Since I've already suggested

that this definition of love encouraged a new focus on the self, here I want to confine myself to the relationship between love and the creative imagination.

The Romantics did not discover the creative imagination but they empowered it. The Scottish enlightened thinker David Hume pointed out that knowledge, even the cause and effect relationship, owed more to imagination than to a deified reason. Reason on its own was inadequate, even dangerous, because it dismissed the creative imaginings of past communities. Human knowledge was based more on custom and belief based in common imaginings than the dangerous systems of would be reformers, said Hume. Hume's major insight about the imagination ultimately had less to do with knowledge in general than with the shared moral beliefs that kept communities together. These norms, said Hume, were based on sympathy or the ability to *imagine* and connect with others. Hume and his buddy Adam Smith were typically enlightened guys in so far as they argued that the ability to connect with others, while fundamental to human relations, was limited by self-interest. But the sentimental writers who followed them believed that the sympathetic imagination and, therefore, the ability to connect with others could be cultivated. Sentimental writers were frightened, however, by the passionate imagination whereas the romantics wanted to *unleash* it. The romantics built on the insight of sentimental writers that love was the crucible of the imagination but what they sought was not love tamed into friendship and sociability but love that burned.

The romantics focused much of their writing on love – hence the tendency for love and romance to become synonymous in culture -- because they believed that love unleashed the creative imagination. But their imaginary agenda involved a lot more than love. In their battle against the utilitarian rationality that they associated with the Enlightenment, the romantics affirmed the creative *imagination* in general; they sought to apply it to the natural and the social world, as well as to intimate relationships. Against the manipulation of an abstracted and calculable Nature, for example, they pitted an imagination that endowed "all of nature…with life and soul". (51) This emphasis on a non-instrumental approach to nature explains why the Romantics were so attached to fairy tales, legends, occult mysteries and every variety of "divine Fantasy". (53) The romantics sought to re-enchant nature and re-invigorate a stifled imagination:

> Only after the power of my concentrated reason broke…did I give myself over to the stream of my thoughts and listen eagerly to all those colourful fairy tales with which desire and invention, irresistible sirens in my own breast, bewitched my senses. (64)

Modernity had made it increasing difficult to hear "the delicate music of the imagination". Modernity was by definition mundane because it had lost the power of idealization. Modernity was simultaneously "boring", not only because it was mechanical and fragmentary, but also because it was stuck inside the bustle of the "ordinary world" rather than Lucinde's world that "conceives and creates for itself". (98) When you are chained to creation, you lose the ability to create and, without imagination, life is impoverished.

The romantics loved the *symbols* and *allegories* of the past precisely because they reflected the *will to create* from inside one's own imagination. But the most wonderful acts of imagination, the greatest of all idealizations, the most serious *fantasy* if you like, involved bestowing love on another person. Love is simultaneously life's supreme fantasy and its most significant reality. Love opened the doors of imaginary perception because it directly and conclusively demonstrated a higher truth than the modern emphasis on empiricism, utility and all instrumental approaches to nature and human nature. Even the convoluted ideas and ideals of love in chivalric and courtly *novels* contained a valuable human truth that modernity lacked. In the section of *Lucinde* entitled "Allegory of Impudence" – a section that is admittedly difficult to understand – we see Schlegel defining the basic difference between romantic love and all past types. The "genuine *Novels*" of the past obscured and distorted the full power of love because they were connected to other values that obscured love, such as *ceremony*, *delicacy*, *religion* and even *morality*. What Schlegel and many other romantics wanted to argue was that love was a *soul-to-soul* connection that defined its own universe, its own reality and its own morality. To fully release its creative power, you had to get rid of all *prejudices* and realize that love itself was the ultimate truth. Love teaches you how to "re-create the songs of the spirit" (58).

We've seen this emphasis on all-powerful love before in the form of a very different relationship between humans and god. But now it infuses the very human relationship between a man and a woman. Schlegel quite specifically defines this *soul to soul* connection as a clearly extravagant, excessive and imaginary *bestowal*. Rather than being unrealistic or impossible, however, it is the natural human tendency of *imagination communicating imagination* (59). For the romantics, the ability of souls to communicate with each other is the "holiest miracle of nature" and the "pure flame of the noblest life force". (113) It's also a frighteningly powerful force – a "terrible omnipotence" (115) -- as the lover's imagination goes wild when Julius *imagines* the untimely death of Lucinde. But love could not be the source of life's creative energy if it didn't contain within itself all possible emotions, from the warm and peaceful to the "eternal discord". (117) Imagining his relationship to his deceased *beloved*, Julius is able to describe the range and power of love's idealizations without unnecessary real life interference:

> I looked at your picture and saw it transfigured more and more into a serene purity and universality. Serious but charming, completely you and yet no longer you, your godlike form transfused with a wonderful glow. One moment it was like the terrifying light of visible omnipotence, the next a friendly gleam of golden childhood. My spirit drank with long, silent draughts from this source of cool, pure fire, secretly intoxicating itself with it, and in this blissful drunkenness I felt a peculiar kind of spiritual worth because in fact all worldly thoughts were completely foreign to me and I never lost the feeling that I was consecrated to death.

Of course, there are obvious ironies here. The reader understands that Lucinde is not dead, but somehow that does not make the lover's imagining of her death any less significant. Lucinde is a real person and, as Julius says a bit later, "not simply a product

of my imagination" (127). But we would be wrong to make too much of the difference between the real and the ideal world. In the world of romantic love, the protagonists are simultaneously real and ideal. To make distinctions is to miss the point.

The romantics always had trouble defining their approach because the moment you try to put romantic love into rational terms you completely forfeit the power to "see reflected in me – in me who am forever yours – the marvelous flower of your imagination". (126) They gravitated to art and literature because there they could affirm love's "holy" power using "symbols" rather than arguments. In the symbolic realm governed by the imagination, the *beloved one* could provide the necessary *mediation* that all romantics sought between the self and the universe not only by temporarily destroying distinctions (as in love's embrace) but establishing a permanent paradigm of union (as a more fundamental merging). Julius describes the crucial role of the *only beloved one* in this way:

> They [years and deeds] were holy symbols for me, all of them referring to the only beloved one, who was the mediator between my dismembered self and indivisible eternal humanity. My whole existence was an uninterrupted divine service of solitary love.

If the beloved is going to be able to provide this mediating role, of course, there can only ever be one great love in your life. Romantic love's greatest bestowal of imagined meaning on the beloved, as well as its greatest problem, is to make one person the fountain of life's meaningfulness. As Irving Singer says, that's a bestowal of meaning on another person that is difficult to top. When it's mutual, it might just be the most intensely life affirming symbolization that will ever be possible. That is, at least, while it lasts.

Romantic Marriage and the Family

Since romantic love is a life-affirming *ideal*, the appropriate question to ask is whether it needs to conform to lived reality at all. A died in the wool romantic could live virtually, in the world of imagined symbols and idealizations. This helps to explain why there were so many self-proclaimed romantics who were very pessimistic about the possibility of love surviving in our nasty little world. Emily Bronte, in that wonderfully romantic book *Wuthering Heights*, only puts Cathy and Heathcliff together, wandering the moors after their death. This pessimism also helps to explain the fascination of many romantics with death and even a death wish. What interests me is how, for so many romantics, love after death is an extension of earthly yearning rather than the achievement of love's peace. At the end of Schlegel's *Lucinde*, the protagonists seem to still be searching for the peace that they can't hold on to in modern life. Schlegel even expresses nostalgia for the ancient Greeks who seemed to be able to accept life and find, if not necessarily happiness, at least a modicum of content.

Schlegel is not a pessimist, even if we see how a romantic like him could become one. At this stage in his life, he presents us with a model of romantic contentment in marriage

and family life. Indeed, early on in the book we are introduced to one of the fruits of Julius and Lucinde's love – "Little Wihelmine". Little Wihelmine is a relatively new character on the literary scene – the innocent, playful, and of course intensely imaginative child who Julius and Lucinde are, presumably, going to raise in an environment of love. What is amazing about this precocious two-year old is how well she fits in with the emerging ideal of the nuclear family living in their *home sweet home*, ideally situated in the natural countryside but always providing a refuge from the corrupted world.

Schlegel, presumably writing from his own experience of fatherhood, communicates the fondness that the parents feel for their little offspring of love. This emotionally knitted nuclear family is not only a refuge from a world preoccupied with accomplishing rather than feeling *things*. Julius aka Schlegel tells us that he is now able to act with purpose, even heroism, in the world precisely *because* his emotional center is secure. We might want to ask this defender of imagination, however: what are the specific conditions for his male protagonist's renewed confidence in life? Despite the book's title, the male character Julius's character is clearer to us than his wife. Julius has become a confident person because of his love for Lucinde, but Lucinde has become a supportive role player in the world of the romantic male. Schlegel partly justifies this separation of roles, in which the male actively creates the world he lives in, while the female is more passive, by idealizing the passivity of female sex. But we cannot help but note the elements of patriarchy and possible oppression in this supposedly loving family.

Not all romantics stereotyped the female sex as givers and receivers of love in the family. In fact, romantics like Shelley affirmed the equality and personhood of women, a compliment that could be double-edged, since liberated guys like Shelley were not necessarily any easier to live with than more conservative romantics like Schlegel. But you are not responsible for analyzing the different attitudes towards women and their consequences among the romantics. Scholars, even feminist scholars, disagree about these things. What I'd like to leave you with is a better understanding of the impact of romanticism upon love in general. One reason that I chose such the unusual and in many ways difficult *Lucinde* as the book that best typifies romantic love is because it provides the general model of love that dominated most of the nineteenth and twentieth century. Its generally optimistic message is that, if we can find our soul mate and start a family together, we will be happy.

One of the most *modern* aspects of this particular version of romantic love is that it settles for harmonious warmth between husband and wife rather than extremes of emotion. It is particularly charming, in my opinion, in taking into account marital squabbles and recommending wit and playfulness in the exchanges between husband and wife. The romantic potential for extreme and excessive emotions gets toned down into something closer to the sentimental version of love. Of course, no romantic would ever want to admit that love could or should be diluted into friendly affection, but Schlegel always retained the notion that friendship was a component of love. And, that too is modern. What a modern person seeks is love first and friendship second. For it is love rather than friendship that now provides people lives with their essential meaning.

Love in a Fragmented World

Lucinde is an unusual novel, not so much because of its description of romantic love, but because of its irregular structure. The work has no recognizable plot, sections seem to follow in no logical order, and the author intrudes into his text in a number of irritating ways. That makes it necessary for the reader to discover for himself or herself the work's internal structure. Many contemporary readers, the ones who didn't find the work pornographic, considered it terrible on stylistic and artistic terms. The composition of the work seems even weirder when one considers that Schlegel, like so many of his contemporaries, was educated in a neo-classical tradition that had definite rules about structuring a work.

So, now you know why I couldn't get you copies of the book for this course – because so many people think that it is just plain **bad**. That may be the case but, if so, a great deal of what people call bad is quite deliberate. If you look the time to examine at the rest of the book in which *Lucinde* appears, you will see that Schlegel's *Fragments* are attached. He wrote these with his brother, but the most important book of fragments (the *Athenaeum Fragments*) is mainly Schlegel's creation and, ironically, his major claim to fame. To fully appreciate *Lucinde*, you have to recognize that Schlegel was attempting to incorporate some of his ideas about the fragmentary nature of modern life within this novel about romantic love. Once you do that, *Lucinde* appears not only modern but even postmodern in its approach.

What does it mean to view the modern world as a series of **fragments** and what are the implications for love? That's by no means an easy question to answer, but let's take a stab at it. For Schlegel, modern experience and the modern person were fragmented. You might not like that; you might have nostalgia for an earlier period; you might cling to classical models. But for Schlegel the implications for literature were enormous. You could no longer imply a unified experience or understanding; you could not resurrect and cling to dated paradigms; you had to accept that the modern world was different from anything that went before. And, if you were a writer, you had to find meaning in and through fragments. The most hideous characteristic of this fragmentation of experience for Schlegel is that it completely lost sight of the *beautiful* in its preoccupation with the momentary and the *interesting*. The positive feature of a world in fragments is that it opened up opportunities for original and individualistic syntheses of human experience. If the modern artist embraced the world in fragments he or she could give "free play to his imagination" and stimulate the imagination of others. (Peter Firchow's introduction, 12).

The danger, of course, was getting lost in the fragments or what we might today call being passive processors of information. That is precisely where romantic love comes in. When we love, we see the world as a beautiful whole, and we are *inspired* to embrace it in our own unique way. Fragmentation without love desiccates life. It produces an insipid form of reality. Romantic love restores unity while allowing one's unique interpretation, one's "individualistic mannerism" to shine through. A fundamental difference between the modern and the classical world was that the Greeks had a clear

sense of the beauty of life. Instinctively the Greeks embraced a unified and balanced vision of life whereas modern reason divided life up into little pieces and spit them out as interesting factoids. Schlegel argued that, while modern men and women could never hope to recover life's instinctual meaning – we were too jaded and artificial for that – we could embrace *imagination without limits*. Instead of discovering the meaning in life, we could create it.

The first and crucial step was to step outside the limited world of the *interesting* and to bestow a personal value upon life. Easier said than done, as Nietzsche suggested that only a few souls were capable of rising above all the cynicism and irony to create their own meanings. Nietzsche appropriately labeled these creative artistic types *supermen*. But in 1799, romantic love seemed to offer people like Schlegel a new "religion of man and artist" that could make the broken fragments of modernity more widely comprehensible. The important communicative agenda for the modern artist was first to experience love and second to channel that love to others through his or her art. When Schlegel refers to his approach as "sublime imprudence" what he means is challenging his audience, not to understand him and fit him into interpretive boxes, but to *intuit* or *feel* something for themselves.

Romantic love, of course, provides the model for this new artistic paradigm, because it is simultaneously a divine chaos – "a fusion and confusion" – of fragments that is also a *merging*, not on rational grounds but in terms of intention and belief. When two individuals say that they love, they are not simply reflecting emotion; they are actually *creating* love. And when they reach out to one another in that way, they are not just creating love, they are creating themselves *as persons who love*. It goes without saying that this union, despite its appropriation of the religious language of perfect merging and absolute and eternal happiness, is never a pure state of being but a continuous act of becoming. Love is never complete, just as the communication of love in one's art is never finished. It means finding 'peace' within 'constant yearning' by focusing one's imagination on that one special person. (127)

Conclusion

Loving romantically means embracing the chaos, uncertainty, ambiguity and yearning in life. You can't control love or life, you have to be receptive to them happening and allow them to evolve organically. Past societies did this instinctively and they were creative as communities. Modern societies are artificial and individualistic and rationalistic; they need to relearn how to be passive and to tap into dreams. To be creative in modern society is to appear at least a little mad. The most available form of divine madness is love, and it is the most fertile soil for creative imagination. When one loves, one steps out of the rational world. Romantic love was a deliberate cultural agenda based on a natural phenomena. The sensitive and self-conscious lover could use love as a springboard into an alternate universe, governed only by two unique individuals who continually affirm their love for one another.

A legitimate question is just how much was romantic love a deliberate literary technique for emancipating the captive imagination and a legitimate cultural paradigm in its own right. Many of those who promoted the new religion of romantic love seem to have believed it. But what is interesting is just how quickly romantic love petered out as an intellectual and artistic movement. Could it be that the real function of romantic love was to underline the importance of the imagination for *perceiving, unifying and creating* (Firchow, 38) and that it become less vital as an artistic agenda once the creative imagination was firmly established? That seems a possibility if one compares Schlegel's *Lucinde* with his much more complex agenda in the *Athenaeum Fragments*. The romantic artist incorporates so much more than the romantic lover, that love can be viewed as the doorway to aesthetics.

But romantic love's short-lived literary career obscures its enormous significance for modern culture. Long after the intellectuals abandoned (often regretfully) romantic love, it provided cultural meaning for many of us in the West, arguably *the* major meaning in our lives. Many of us seek the kind of romantic love that Schlegel described. Some of us still think life is impoverished without it. Multiple failures in love seem not to prevent us from continuing to look for it. We are still willing to commit ourselves absolutely and eternally in the face of high divorce rates. We still believe in loving families despite the fact that most divorces take place after the children come and many modern people prefer being at work to being at home. All of this and more demonstrate the quite remarkable power of an ideal of love that encourages us to idealize others and discover more meaningful selves than the modern world has to offer.

Undergrad assignments:

Try to read it all but make sure you start with and complete pages 63-113, then answer the following question:

"In a letter to Lucinde, Julius refers to love as a 'divine miracle'. Why is it a divine miracle for him? In what sense does love fundamentally change him? Do you believe that truly romantic love can change a person?

Alternate Questions:

Schlegel says that "industry and utility are the angels of death" that prevent man's "return to Paradise". (65) What does he mean? How does true love overcome death, for example.

We've been looking at the concept of jealousy (in love) throughout the course. In courtly love, jealousy is a good thing. In sentimental love, jealousy is a bad thing. How does Schlegel regard jealousy?

Useful Definition:

WIT – wit for Schlegel is the kind of inspired serendipity that allows a person to discover similarities and construct original ideas; it is very different from superficial cleverness or rule bound thinking.

<u>Love's Crystallization</u>

Introduction

Throughout the readings in this course, we've seen the way that *ideas* of love can be built on *idealizations*. What we have only just begun to explore, however, is the *psychology of idealization*. Ideas of love can be highly creative and imaginative, as we've seen, for example, in courtly and romantic love. But that doesn't show us how a person who is culturally predisposed to love's idealizations actually processes the signs and signals in their minds. It also doesn't show us why a few individuals, but still a significant group, create a *world of love* in their minds that usurps a more realistic appraisal of relationships. The classic case of an individual whose sense of reality is destroyed by love is someone that we haven't looked at in the course – the protagonist of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Still, most of us are familiar with people like Werther, for whom love is, at least for a time, the superior reality. Most of us understand that there are people who die for love, or pine away in various forms of despair if they are deprived of love. And, we recognize that love can be so strong that the death of a loved one is the emotional equivalent of the death of oneself. The extreme idealizations of love in some people's minds suggest a fascinating relationship between *love and pain*. It might be interesting to try to explore this process of extreme idealization in the mind, not as a pathology, but as an observable "mental process" with positive characteristics. Then we might be able to understand better, not only how this most intense *crystallization* of love's ideals can take place, but also why it can be so appealing.

The appeal of extreme romantic love is undeniable. Not for everyone of course, but certainly for more than the few extremists that succumb entirely to it. Those who find romantic love appealing are often drawn to the peculiar mixture of pleasure and pain that combines to make it so *intense*. It was for precisely this reason that none other than the infamous Marquis de Sade attacked love with incredible ferocity. He argued that romantic love inhibited natural sensual pleasure by subjecting it to the chains of illusions just as fallacious as religious fantasies. The role of the imagination, he contested, was to affirm not usurp our sexual nature. Imagination's appropriate role was to construct fetishisms that enhanced our animalistic biological nature, not fantasies that rendered biology, not irrelevant, but unimportant. The Marquis de Sade was interested in the relation between pleasure and pain, but only in pain that intensified sexual pleasure. That's what *sadism* means.

The reason that I've brought up de Sade in my introduction to this lecture is because de Sade was in Henri Beyle or Stendhal's mind in writing *Love*. Stendhal wanted to demonstrate that romantic love, with its unique combination of pleasure and pain, was valuable, even and especially when it *wildly overrated* the beloved. Moreover, mental love, and not *physical love* was the most exquisite pleasure available to humans, not only *in spite of* but also *because of* the huge component of pain involved in extreme loving. In a contest between a suicidal Werther and a sensual Don Juan, there was no doubt in Stendhal's mind whose reality was superior. The suicidal romantic experienced pleasures

that a Don Juan or Cassanova could never begin to contemplate. That's precisely why living without love is unthinkable for someone who has experienced romantic love.

Early on in *Love*, Stendhal makes an intriguing observation on the Cassanova's of society. He suggests that they are *afraid* of loving. And, as for those sadists who like to have power and practice cruelty towards women, he says that they are *afraid* of women. In order to experience love at all, you have to affirm the beloved as a *person* and, in order to appreciate love fully, you have to attribute *perfection* to that person. This emphasis on a process of idealization that takes place in the imagination obviously makes sensual or sexual love secondary. Stendhal goes so far as to claim that, for many romantic women, the sexual element is relatively insignificant. That is not the same as saying that sexual attraction or physical love is completely irrelevant. What it does mean is that sexual attraction is only an initial step on the ladder to romantic love. The ubiquity of sexual attraction is a given. What is infinitely more important is the process of symbolization that it is possible to build on that initial attraction, if pain and pleasure enter sufficiently into the idealization.

Stendhal views love's idealization overwhelmingly as a *psychological process*. Since psychology hasn't really been invented yet, we can perhaps forgive him for his rather clumsy and unconvincing attempts to describe a process of *valuing the beloved* in pseudo-scientific terms. One of the obvious problems in attempting to describe loving as a scientific process is not only that it confuses mental with biological operations but also that it seriously underestimates the element of culture. Romantic love may be a phenomenon that every modern individual can experience, but only the quite particular cultural developments of Western society made these so-called individuals receptive to the signs and symbols of love. What is more, romantic love was never just an individual pilgrimage towards personal happiness; it was an implicit critique of a mechanical, positivistic, meaningless, and imaginatively *boring* modernity. Nevertheless, no one before or since Stendhal has so painstakingly explored the "spontaneous and unwilled occurrence in the creative imagination which leads one person to see in another a cluster of perfections <u>that are not there</u>." (Singer, 361) There are many things that one can find fault with in Stendhal's account of love's crystallization, but his fundamental claim that love not a mental aberration but an evolutionary form of emotional development that leads to the greatest happiness a human being has ever been capable is "not indefensible".

The Crystallization Process

Here is what happens when one claims to fall in love, according to Stendhal. Remember, he wants us to confirm some of these stages from our own experience, while some of these stages will necessarily elude those who have not progressed up the ladder of love. That is why the full crystallization process will only be understood by a few readers. First, you are attracted to someone, usually to his or her face or some other physical attribute. Second, you think to yourself, wouldn't it be nice to have some form of physical contact with them, such as a touch of the fingers or a kiss. Third, the will begins to take over as you *hope* to possess the other person physically. Fourth, *love* typically happens when you not only enjoy the other person but you become aware or suspect that

they have similar feelings towards you. We might quibble about the exact order or details of these stages, but we'd likely be missing the point. Stendhal actually contradicts himself hundreds of times in the text, such as when he defends love at first sight. But the hurried almost breathless prose suggests that he doesn't care too much about these stages, the point is that a powerful physical attraction takes place. He even suggests that the most exquisite sex takes place within these preliminary stages but that doesn't interest him much. This is what interests a Cassanova, but it doesn't interest Stendhal. It's what happens in the mind after the physical rush that he finds fascinating.

If you seriously love someone, rather than simply dallying with them, if you allow yourself to seriously love someone in other words, you begin to *idealize them in your imagination*. You find them *perfect* in all kinds of ways, *for which you have no real justification other than that you love them*. This process can begin immediately when love happens but it requires the willingness and opportunity for *contemplation*, which is why those who are unwilling or want to prevent this idea from developing will focus in on the physical relationship or seek a distraction. But those who want to embrace this love in contemplation will begin to transform the beloved in their minds, so that soon she or he will be literally unrecognizable except through the eyes of love. Stendhal describes this process of creative loving as a *crystallization*, and he uses the image of a branch being thrown into a tunnel in the Salzburg salt mines. The image is appropriate because the relatively mundane beloved is transformed by love into something absolutely wonderful.

Stendhal appeals to the experience of his readers for the truth of this description. He's well aware, however, that although this crystallization is perfectly *natural*, it is not inevitable. It only occurs in civilizations where people have the time and leisure for love to crystallize. Therefore, Stendhal believes that it is not an option for what he refers to as *savage* societies that live on the brink of subsistence. Moreover, the crystallization process can be partial among those who are, by temperament or education, not particularly sensitive or passionate. Finally, the crystallization process can be entirely subverted by two kinds of negative passions that occasionally run together, vanity or fear. When vanity rules your soul, like Cassanova, you idealize yourself. When fear rules your soul, as in the case of de Sade, you treat potential lovers as sexual objects of power.

But the sensual person's fear of love is the best evidence that love's crystallization does occur. Once this first crystallization has occurred, the appropriate question might seem: *is the crystallized beloved real or an illusion*. The point Stendhal wants to make is that the *process of crystallization is a demonstrably real and natural human response*. Already with the first and most common form of crystallization, it no longer makes sense to think in terms of real and ideal because, in love, human beings are no longer biological animals but idealizing animals. That is an interesting insight, is it not? But it gets much more interesting than that, even if the relationship between individual psychology and cultural development gets a tad messy. As it so often turns out, in a modern, refined and complex civilization, love and lovers run into obstacles. Without these obstacles, love's first crystallization would possess its object far too easily. The infatuation associated with love would be too superficial, the crystallization too brittle, and love would settle

back into the real world as a pleasant dream. If lovers did manage to form a relationship, it would likely become more settled and conventional – it would become *mannered* love in the sense of conforming to the general pattern of relationships in society. That doesn't mean it wouldn't have some positive attributes, such as mutual companionship and even genuine affection. But for Stendhal, it wouldn't begin to exploit love's evolutionary potential. Its commonplace reality would be mundane and even insipid in comparison with what romantic love could offer.

The wonderful accident of a refined and modern civilization for Stendhal is the obstacles put in the way of true love. Normally, we might associate those obstacles with the traditional ones explored in eighteenth and nineteenth-century novels, namely parental opposition to the love match or the interference of friends or the even bigger problems of unequal fortunes or class distinctions. Always, Stendhal is much more interesting when you follow him closely. Modern civilizations accentuate the differences between the sexes because women have to protect not only their virginity but also their reputation. The conventional double standard, as well as the emotional immaturity of men, means that men have much greater freedom to reveal their real love towards women or their lust disguised as love. Women have to be more prudent and guarded, and to put their suitor's love to the test. This is an arrangement that a true romantic like Stendhal – someone who desperately believes in heart to heart unions between equal persons – might want to condemn, and sometimes he does. What he finds almost miraculous about this gendered tension, however, is that it turns the lover's imagination back upon itself.

We come to stage 6 in the potential for love's crystallization. The lover begins to doubt that he (or she?) is loved. Then you get desperate. You look for signs and signals of love everywhere. Where you might have been "anticipating", now you "subject your grounds for hope to critical examination" (47). What you feel is enormous pain, verging on dread, that love will not be requited. You become your own torturer and subject yourself to "haggard doubt". Now it is that you enter into stage 7, which is in effect the second and most critical crystallization. The risk of losing what you love "transfixes" you more securely on the beloved and a much richer and deeper process of crystallization now occurs. Hereafter, it will be much more difficult to erase the crystallization process and to settle for *mannered* love because love's true potential has been imagined. Everything else will pale in comparison with this new universe of love.

Let's say you eventually obtain your love, will you then be happy? That's a fairy tale, not because it is unrealistic, but because your reality has been extensively overhauled. If you love this deeply, you will always have doubts and dread, because you will always have fear of losing your beloved. Your capacity for love is entirely proportionate to this fear, and romantic love cannot live without it. You will always be looking for signs of love from the beloved, and you can never possibly get enough signs to feel comfortable. And comfort, such as the kind that exists in mannered love, is so much *not* what you want to feel that you may *deliberately* create doubts for yourself. You now have something so precious, so different from conventional reality that the thought of losing it fills you with dread. But, and here's the pertinent thing, you wouldn't change that situation for

anything else in the world. The world of extreme lovers is a world of heaven and hell; ironically it provides the greatest happiness in the world.

In this world, everything is meaningful and everything is intense. The reality outside the relationship is insipid, and entirely secondary. Within the relationship, sex can be good or not, but that's also entirely secondary, because the sensual factor is not longer necessary. You can easily kick out the first rung of the ladder, as Stendhal says that many refined women do, because you are so much further up the ladder of love that the mental factor predominates. Among the happiness that you now discover in a love whose tensions keep all your mental processes alive, not the least is selflessness. Human beings whose lives are predicated on the pursuit of animal desires and sensuality have no idea how wonderful it is to care more about another person than oneself. The tensions, the pains, of loving someone else are real. That's why the Cassanova's and de Sade's of this world fear love – in the words of Bjork "they want but can't handle love". Love's exquisite pleasures can only be described by the initiated.

Love and Subjectivity

It should be clear by now that Stendhal privileges mental over sensual love. It's not exactly that he denies the 'reality' of sexual pleasure. He even implies that he's really enjoyed his physical contacts with peasant girls and ladies of the night, and there's no reason to think that he's fantasizing. But these relationships only affirm one level of his existence. The disguised beloved in the book is Mathilde Dembowski, with whom he obviously found no sexual culmination. In fact, Madame Dembowski showered Stendhal with a great deal of indifference once he began to make a pest of himself. But his doubts and hopes clearly provided Henry Beyle with evidence of the enormous power of the second crystallization. Madame Dembowski was idealized so fully in Stendhal's mind that he would never be the same person again.

Stendhal was no Werther; he did not shoot himself. But he was a changed person, and his experience with love dramatically affected his novel writing. What Stendhal took from this experience was an enormously significant modern insight. What the intense exploration of love in the nineteenth-century contributed to modernity was much more than an affirmation of the creative imagination over realism, although that was clearly a significant part of it. Without the exploration of love, it is difficult to know whether Western culture would have traveled so far down the *road interior*. *Love* is a book that affirms our internal or subjective reality. The mining of meanings and meaningfulness with respect to love led to the discovery that human beings are symbolic and imagining creatures just as much as biological entities. In an age when Darwin would soon describe human beings as accidents of natural selection, Stendhal had already discovered our non-biological significance. "In love," he wrote, "everything is a symbol". (181)

Subjectivity has its own rules. In rationalistic and realistic discourse, the individual *discovers* meanings. In love, the imagination creates meaning. And when you create meanings in love, you create **value** where it did not previously exist. That's precisely why Stendhal is able to legitimately escape from the dilemma that de Sade and his

realistic followers, such as Baudelaire, have found themselves in – deploring a meaningless universe in which humanity has no intrinsic value. Stendhal wanted to argue that we create value when we love. That's also why Stendhal asserts that his, and by implication, anyone's journey of love is essentially a **moral journey**. If only by loving can humans generate added value over reality, then loving is the very essence of the ethical.

Of course, it was to be expected that this and other affirmations of love's imagining would lead in unexpected directions. Subjectivity or the road interior need not be confined to matters of the heart. It is entirely possible to combine subjective introspection with a realistic orientation and even, like Sigmund Freud, to show how love's fantasies and frustrations are potentially dangerous illusions grounded in an entirely physical, i.e. sexual, repression. But then Freud's tripartite account of human imagining is highly positivistic and based entirely on minimizing unnecessary pain. Stendhal's account of human introspection embraces "imaginary unhappiness" on the understanding that subjective pain is the path to pleasure. An essential difference between a romantic like Stendhal and a scientist like Freud is that values are not generated as antidotes to or sublimations of pain, but that pain and pleasure jointly construct the creative imagination. The more intense the pain, the more exquisite the pleasure. Another related and significant difference between Stendhal and Freud is Stendhal's conviction that creative introspection on pleasure and pain is an essentially *ethical* and character forming process. Freud, of course, considers a great deal of ethics productive of nothing more than unnecessary guilt.

One of the things that you might have noticed, and that might very well have annoyed you, in Stendhal is that he differentiates between male and female subjectivities. He believes that men and women conceive of love differently in their very different imaginations. In part, these differences can be attributed to the different upbringing of men and women that deprives women of the opportunity to develop their intelligence, and by implication, their creative imaginations. At the same time, the restricted environment for women focuses their attention more directly on matters of the heart than the head, and so they have a great deal to offer men. Stendhal can get very confused and confusing about whether the differences between men and women owe more to nature or to nurture. For example, after telling us that women's situations deprive them of anything to *imagine* apart from love, marriage, and the little affairs of life, he informs us that men and women have an entirely different biology and that male blood flows to the brain and female blood to the heart. Some of this is unintelligible to modern readers. I find it interesting that a feminist like Simone de Bouvoir would praise Stendhal because he wants women to be freer, happier and better educated. I myself am struck by the double standard that makes it acceptable for men to have affairs but never women. And, I'm even more disturbed by off-the-cuff statements like this one on female bravery:

> Only they must have a man to be in love with, for they feel only through him (95)

The fundamental difference between male and female subjectivity when it comes to love is that men are propelled either by vanity or devotion while women are motivated either

by modesty or pride. Pride is the female equivalent of male vanity, although we today might be inclined to change the order around. In any case, these are negative characteristics when it comes to loving. Stendhal rather obviously felt snubbed by Mathilde Dembowski, who he thought proud but certainly not vain, and so he attributed this characteristic to women in general. Female modesty, on the other hand, was the handmaiden to creative love for both men and women. Because it placed anxieties and doubts and a constant state of melancholia in the male mind, it triggered new crystallization of devotion. Because it made women more prudent and circumspect in testing the truth of love, it cultivated their emotional capacities as well.

But, you know, as much as Stendhal talks about women, and seems genuinely to appreciate interesting women of spirit, his perspective is entirely, and often conventionally, male. He severely contrasts *modest women* with *coquettes*; and while he constantly complains that women set up fortresses against love and fail to communicate their love honestly, you can see how his stereotypes make honest communication more difficult. In addition, he wants women to be more free and better educated *not for themselves* but to make them more interesting targets for male devotion. The more simple a woman is, the more the vastly intellectually superior male will be inclined to manipulate and use her. Finally, and perhaps most obviously, Stendhal's women absolutely need a real man to love and to express their love through. Their imaginations are not capable of loving without a real object. Men on the other hand, have a much greater subjective capacity for romantic love. They can grow in love despite the fact that it is, as in the case of Mathilde Dembowski, unrequited. The main point is that they have experienced love, not that they have a partner to love.

Granted the fact that this is a male perspective, what do you think is the ultimate significance of this subjective experience called loving? Is it simply about loving for its own sake? There is very little exploration of the realistic experience of loving and, in particular, that love can have an expiration date for one or both of the partners. Stendhal does make a few suggestions about the difficulties involved in curing someone of love, including the fascinating and entirely consistent argument that imaginary idealization, i.e. second stage crystallizations, can never be cured by *realities* (which are insipid by comparison). Thus, "it is only imagination that can resist imagination". So much for hoping for any realistic reality check when romantic love has really set in.

In some ways, of course, Stendhal is willing to admit that romantic love is terribly risky, and he does not even shun from calling it a *disease*. What's the payoff for this subjective journey? For the individual, it is a kind of happiness that is difficult to describe, but that Stendhal considers to be the most exquisite possible. Many people today share this sentiment, even though they would be hard pressed to defend themselves against a staunch realist who would not appreciate the joy that they get out of their sadness. But Stendhal briefly suggests another benefit that connects the little universe of lovers to a wider world and that underlines the ethical character involved in loving someone seriously. In the "Extract from Salviati's Diary" (probably Stendhal's own), Salviati is warned by Schiassetti against taking the risk and being "drawn into the gamble of a grand passion" like love. (103) Salviati's defense is not his solitary happiness but the

significance of this peculiar subjective experience. It is the only time he says this so I'm going to quote the passage in full:

> In the sphere of the affections, love is all-important. After the chance experiences of early youth, one's heart closes up against sympathy. Death or distance estranges you from childhood companions, and you are thrown upon the company of associates quite indifferent to you, and who, foot-rule in hand, are for ever calculating in terms of self-interest or vanity. Gradually, all that is sensitive and generous withers from lack of nurture, and before you reach thirty you have become impervious to sweet or tender sensations. In the midst of this arid desert, love makes a spring burst forth, brimming with feelings sweeter and more abundant than those of early youth. Then there was hope, vague, crazy, and easily distracted; there was no devotion to anything, no deep constant desires; you, always fickle, craved for novelty, adoring one day what it neglected the next. But nothing is more contemplative, more mysterious, more eternally single in its aim than love's crystallization. Once it was only pleasant things which had the right to please, and the pleasure they gave was no more than momentary; but now all that has any bearing on the woman one loves, even the most irrelevant object, moves one deeply. Once when I arrived in a large town a hundred miles from Léonore's home, I discovered that I was trembling with shyness, quaking at every street corner, lest I should meet Alviza, her intimate friend whom I did not even know by sight.

Without affection, there is no possibility of ethics or community. Romantic love is the best defense of emotional connection in an indifferent world.

Love Versus Beauty

The terminology of love makes appreciating Stendhal's concept of crystallized love difficult. In some ways, Stendhal fits in the romantic tradition because he wants to affirm the importance of the imagination in a "lethally chilly" world. The problem with romanticism for Stendhal was that it often confused love with beauty. Keats suggested that "beauty is truth, and truth is beauty; that is all you can know and all you ever need to know". The romantic beauty equation demonstrated just how much thinking about love in the late eighteenth-century remained linked to and overwhelmed by an empirical Nature (with a capital N) and failed to get past the first crystallization. Romantic love didn't release the full power of the imagination because it is stuck in an appraisal of beauty; it remains locked in the process of *falling in love* and can't adequately account for *being in love* and *staying committed to love*.

Stendhal fully understood that beauty plays a part in stimulating love, sometimes a *necessary* part. It is, however, only an *advertisement* for love. Even if one considers the idea of beauty to be subjective, beauty as an assessment of the attractiveness of the other is not indispensable. Stendhal refers to beauty, at best, as the *promise of one unit of happiness* compared to thousands of units of happiness in crystallized love. To focus on beauty is to miss the point of love. The person we love need not even be beautiful to us

on first acquaintance. A degree of esteem is all that a receptive and sensitive person needs to fan the flames of love. When love crystallizes, we find everything about the beloved to be beautiful. All of our lover's imperfections become beautiful to us. Stendhal says that we will even find our lover's pockmarks attractive, because they are part of her. If we refer back to Keats's quote about *beauty and truth*, we can see just how radical Stendhal's idea of love is. Love is not about nature; it is not about truth; it is not even about the notion that truth is subjective. Love creates truth. It might have its origin in nature; it clearly had something to do with biological attraction; but it goes beyond anything that you could discover in nature.

If beauty is not something out there, then what exactly is it? Stendhal says that "beauty is a potentiality for pleasure". (59) It is all about *desire*. The Greeks, and to a certain extent the romantics, understood that there was a connection between beauty and desire. What they failed to understand is that people are not simply desiring beings searching for beauty and love. Rather, every individual creates desires that he or she affixes to the beloved. Stendhal's language is revealing:

> The crystallization about your mistress, that is to say her *beauty*, is nothing but the sum of the fulfillment of all the desires you have been able to formulate about her.

To put it another way, our beloved is what we want her to be; she represents the fulfillment of our desires.

What about beauty as a beautiful soul or character? Plato and Aristotle, as you may remember, sought to redefine desire and beauty in terms of virtue or character rather than superficial qualities. Greek love adhered to *character* rather than appearance, which is why women only qualified as breeders instead of beloveds. Stendhal argues that love's imaginative reality has relatively little to do with beauty of character because *desire* is a passion. To attempt to link love and moral character is an attempt to subdue passion within reason, and that circumvents the imaginative process and bleeds love of all its exquisite happiness. This kind of *beauty* has nothing to do with love's crystallization:

> Let us remember that *beauty* is the visible expression of character, of the moral make-up of a person; it has nothing to do with passion. Now *passion* is what we must have, and beauty can only suggest *possibilities* about a woman and about her self-possession. But the eyes of your pockmarked mistress are a wonderful reality which makes nonsense of all possible probabilities.

Serious passionate love is never about the "examination" of another person, whether in terms of appearance or character. It is about a different kind of "looking" at the other person, looking through the eyes of love.

Stendhal is not naïve. He knows that, in addition to classical and modern ideals of beauty, there are also fashions in beauty. What one society considers beautiful, another will not. He's even aware that, if you don't understand or break those conventions, you might fail to *advertise* yourself as a potential lover. These failures can sometimes be

decisive. As an experiment, for example, he 'turns off' one fashionable aristocratic lady from a potential lover by suggesting that the poor guy flips over his cravat when it gets soiled. So, it's not as though Stendhal doesn't understand everything someone like Ovid suggests about sexual attraction and fashionable accessories. What Stendhal wants to suggest is that, when it comes to talking about true love, beauty and fashion are at the shallow end of the spectrum. Those who think that "fine clothes make a difference" are mistaken about love. Even appearance and character are only catalysts. Simply put, serious love is not about beauty, unless it is the beauty that you create in your mind.

A serious objection to this not merely idealistic but idealizing definition of beauty and love is that it does not conform to reality. But that's precisely what makes love so special for Stendhal. All of men and women's other desires have to conform to reality, or what Stendhal refers to as "cold reality". Love doesn't have to do that, and really deep love creates its own reality. Love is the only place where we "rearrange" the world to fit our ideals. With respect to any other desire, such a radical rearranging would amount to madness or disease, and there is a sense in which love is a kind of madness, and certainly a situation that often gives rise to extreme and violent behaviour. That is why societies at all times and all places find it necessary to subdue love into something more socially acceptable. The enlightenment of the eighteenth-century that began to explore passionate love, for example, was eager to transform and tame love into something more rational, i.e. *friendship*. But Rousseau, who also sought to tame passionate love, taught his eighteenth-century readers that friendship was incompatible with the life changing and divine happiness that was love. Stendhal, citing Rousseau, claimed that friendship was insipid compared to deep love. Male-female friendship typically implied the kind of *mannered love* that Stendhal found a weak substitute for crystallization.

Communicating Love

Stendhal's work is entirely modern because it is replete with paradoxes and ambiguities. Perhaps the most important of these paradoxes is the simultaneous necessity of communicating one's love towards the beloved and the absolute impossibility of doing so. Towards the end of the eighteenth-century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, this question of communicating love is front and center. The earlier eighteenth-century does not wander far from the renaissance or the earlier period of courtly love in its belief that *love can and should be communicated*. In fact, courtly love literature actively instructed individuals in courteous love talk, and renaissance literature is replete with protestations of love, and model arguments to affirm that one's love is sincere. There's no inherent tension between polite forms and authentic communication, apart from a ritual testing of sincerity that almost any practitioner of polite love would be able to pass. One reason perhaps why earlier lovers were never tongue tied, unless they were inexpert and by definition unqualified, is because love was not the complex subjective imagining that it came to be by Stendhal's time. Another possible reason is because earlier societies were more tolerant when it came to excusing the necessary exaggerations

and falsehoods in love talk. You talk and feel love, and almost by definition, you exaggerate reality.

With Stendhal, love has its own reality. An absolute prerequisite for experiencing that reality is authentic feeling and absolute devotion. Love may be the great illusion, the great exaggeration, but you have to be committed heart and soul to that exaggerated reality. How on earth can you communicate these unprecedented feelings that you have for your beloved? The difficulty is palpable throughout *Love*, especially when Stendhal describes his desperate attempt to communicate with Mathilde Dembowski. The point is not simply that Stendhal was an inept lover, in which case we could just feel sorry for him. The larger realization is that there are absolutely no precedents for conveying such intense crystallizations. Exchanges between potential lovers take place in what Stendhal calls an "unknown country" (77). His description of the problem of communication is fascinating. If love is the superior and most authentic reality, then love, with all its dangers and difficulties, becomes the ideal type of human relationship. Within this sphere, ordinary communication is by definition inauthentic. Words are just "what seems to us to be true" and books are "as so many lottery tickets; they are really not worth much more". But these conventional words, and what we have learned from books, are all that we have to communicate our feelings.

What makes communication particularly challenging is that every single contact with our beloved is an opportunity for crystallization. We are crystallizing *while* we are attempting to communicate, which makes it virtually impossible for our reason and our will to control our words. To the extent that we can will ourselves to say the right things that love's communication demands, we are stepping out of crystallization and not conveying what we really feel. That would be difficult enough, but it gets worse. We live in societies where our contacts with possible lovers are restricted. To be sure, some of these restrictions are obstacles that assist the deeper crystallization of love, but they make the *moment* of contact absolutely and sometimes dreadfully *intense*. The pitfalls are simply *immense*. You are all familiar with the anecdotes about the ugly guy getting the beautiful girl simply because he *dares* to ask her out and gives himself the opportunity of being loved. But it is far easier for someone to take the dare who is less committed, who does not have the mixture of hope and dread that crystallizing love generates. The superficial irony that Stendhal laments is that a Cassanova or a Don Juan might be able to break the ice better than a genuine lover. The ultimate irony is that a Cassanova or a Don Juan might even find true love in its crystallized form. Stendhal is aware that true love has the power to transform sensuality, and that he who begins with a desire to possess can become possessed by love.

Speaking love's true language in an unknown country makes communication breakdown the perennial problem. Love can survive without a successful connection, but the lover must dare in an exchange that looks a lot like an emotional lottery. Now, I don't have to tell you that there is a lot of complexity and confusion in this little book of Stendhal's, but some of them can be understood better in terms of this huge communication problem. Stendhal's gendered analysis is a case in point. Stendhal has enormous hostility towards female pride, because it is an impenetrable fortress to the kind of communication he

desires. A moustached officer can break through this reserve relatively easily whereas a serious love might not. Stendhal's preferred gender characteristic is modesty, which sets up emotional guardrails but does not forbid entry, and even provides openings for the man who can convince a woman that his love is selfless. But that's all very well and good; it does not clear up the communication problem. In fact, the rules of modesty make it damned difficult to know if one's attentions are welcome. Even if an outsider can see through this female modesty, the lover will not find it so easy, because his hopes are matched by his *dread*. That's why Stendhal spends so much ink talking out loud to these *modest* women that he so admires but finds their behaviour so *incalculable*. What he wants them to do is to balance their *desire for love* more evenly with their *fear of shame* (the "happy mean") so as to look for authentic *signs of love*. These will not be found exclusively or primarily in words or ritualized gestures. They will be so difficult to discover that one has to be vigilant in looking for them and returning them. Stendhal clearly thinks that women are much better at discovering and communicating signs of love than men and so he assigns them the task of being love's professionals.

Of course, that doesn't prevent him from telling women how to be love professionals, or criticizing them if and when they get it wrong. But he's not a bastard, and he's clearly fonder and more interested in women than many of his male contemporaries. That being the case, we can give him a bit more room to *instruct* women than others of his time. Since there is no longer any room for any artificiality if you want to communicate heart to heart, Stendhal wants women to spot love's phonies. The approach these phonies use is the one that has served them well for a few centuries. Stendhal detests the *gallantry* of courtly and rhetorical love precisely because it affirms style over substance. He makes what he thinks is a crucial distinction between the lover who is genuinely *sensitive* and the one who is merely *prosaic*. (78) He wants women to understand that real crystallizers will have none of the *sangfroid* of a gallant, and are much more likely to "loose their wits" and appear "shamefaced" or "frozen" in the presence of their beloved. Gallants, on the other hand, will be far bolder, because they typically *calculate* their advantage, and do not dread rejection.

What I find so fascinating about Stendhal's description of tongue-tied lovers is that this book is clearly a manual of instruction for women to discover whether they are truly loved in the sense of bestowal. It is a motivational manual because it advises women to hold out for the kind of love that will bring them the greatest happiness conceivable. It is also an invitation for women to be idolized by men.

Loving on Credit

How do you know when you are in love? How do you know when someone is truly in love with you? These are not easy questions to answer, which is why the signs of love now become so very interesting for women especially to decipher. Stendhal claims that he has written his little book on love for a few sensitive souls, especially women, who can understand him. But obviously that's more than a little disingenuous because he's taking a lot of trouble to tell people what true love is, and what is could be. Moreover,

he's obviously aware that the crystallization that he describes is not nearly as uncommon as he says it is.

Although he thinks he's explained how crystallization works better than anyone – how love is built up in the imagination – he understands that there are lots of people, especially young women, who actively seek this kind of happiness. Individuals, for example, who have been influenced by Rousseau's famous novel, *Julie or the New Eloise* (a book that I was tempted to assign for this course). For people who are searching for this kind of love, Stendhal has a warning that we are all familiar with. The crystallization process can't be forced, he says. To rush into affairs of the heart is to *live on credit* that you don't have. Love's crystallization happens spontaneously, often without your fully realizing what is happening. For sure, it can begin as love at first sight or what he calls the *thunderbolt*, but its time of coming can't be predicted. It happens naturally in the soul. It can even happen in the soul of Cassanova, but it is most likely to happen in a receptive or sensitive soul. There is absolutely no guarantee that it will ever happen. And, even if it happens, there is no guarantee that your love will be reciprocated or fulfilled, but that doesn't really matter. Stendhal is literature's most emphatic believer that it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.

All of this makes love an even more complicated phenomena that even its admixture of pain and its problem for communication. How does a receptive, sensitive person ever really know whether they are merely *anticipating* love on credit rather than really experiencing love? If the reality is in the imagination, isn't there an obvious danger that love is a figment of that imagination? Stendhal believes that love is a natural, if rare, form of crystallization, but it might not be so easy for us cynical late and postmoderns to accept this. To some extent, you have to be willing to commit in advance to a complex cluster of idealizations. And the inflatable balloon that is love seems to some of us to be so very easy to puncture:

> Love is like a fever which comes and goes quite independently of the will.

If this is the case, then it should not be so surprising that some people want to limit the serious damage that this form of divine madness can do.

If you agree in general with Stendhal, however – and there are still a lot of modern people who do – then you have to be able to distinguish between false and true love. The primary sign of false love is rushing in too fast; ideally love should take you by surprise. But even this sign is no guarantee because individuals sometimes do *fall* in love at first sight, and move progressively towards *being* and *staying* in love. The second sign that love is false is that the crystallization process fails to continue. You too easily move from *infatuation* to *weariness*. But it is notoriously difficult to predict this descent into boredom in advance. Moreover, love can be as true as you could ever wish, and it can still leave. Crystallization strives for eternity, but the human imagination is not eternal. All of this makes love a very difficult business.

I think that it's the right time to balance Stendhal's account of the greatest happiness that is humanly possible with an account of love's demise when one of the partners ceases to love. It may be sobering to consider the serious thing that you are doing to another person when you commit to loving them. So, for next time, Benjamin Constant's *Adolphe*, in some ways an even deeper look at how messed up human subjectivity can be.

ADOLPHE: Fatal Attraction

The Modern World

Benjamin Constant had an ironic last name because he was anything but. Perhaps the fact that his mother died shortly after childbirth and his father found intimacy difficult contributed to a lifelong desire for intimacy coupled with a desperate fear of commitment. This made him the perfect pawn for the tyrannical Madame de Stael, whose obsession with controlling the male protégés in her life is partly described in Ellenore's desperate attempts to keep Adolphe close. In a novel like *Adolphe*, it is so very tempting to take the autobiographical approach precisely because Constant and Adolphe were so very alike and because Constant drew upon his own very inconstant character to construct his protagonist.

I think that it is always a mistake to read too much of the author into a work, and especially in this case. Why? Well, because Constant is drawing upon his own experience as a much more general tendency and type of *modernity* – the person who can't find a meaning in his life and is doomed to vacillate between emotional responses. It's a modern person who is acutely aware of himself and his fickleness, but who simply can't find an emotional home. And it's not just that he can't find an emotional home because of his particular life story. That feeling of abandonment certainly makes him *feel* his situation all the more poignantly and contributes mightily to his inability to act. But Adolphe is representative of a larger and expressly modern problem –- in the nineteenth century, many sensitive types find it increasingly difficult to discover meaning in their lives.

It is 1816, and already the romantic sun that you saw in *Lucinde* was beginning to set. Romanticism was always a confused and convoluted strategy at the best of times, but by 1816 it was clear that romanticism did not provide an effective alternate reality to the rationalism of the eighteenth-century or the realism that was beginning to dominate life in the nineteenth-century. Romanticism, especially romanticism as a pseudo religion of love, was quite simply too out of touch with lived reality and social relations to develop a unified program and code of behaviour. It is not as though the idealizations of romanticism were going to disappear – they were way too potent for that! – But romantic discourse could not square up with the facts of life and was acknowledged by many as a form of wishful or nostalgic thinking for something that could never be actualized in this world. One of the most fascinating characteristics of those who clung tenaciously to their romantic visions was their increasing pessimism about whether love could survive in this world. Understandably, this new brand of *pessimistic* romantics were fascinated with death as the necessary and inevitable prelude to the eternal union of a man and a woman fated to love one another.

You have to understand this sense of the hopelessness of love and regret about the setting of the romantic sun to appreciate a very important point that Constant makes in his introduction to *Adolphe*. (29) He tells his readers that Adolphe *suffered* "by" Ellenore

because he loved too *feebly*. But, and this is the crucial point, if Adolphe had more feeling or "sentiment" towards Ellenore, he would not have suffered any the less. He would have suffered "for" her. While suffering for the one you love is certainly a more noble gesture than suffering because you are a bit of wimp, it remains "suffering" and for Constant, that kind of suffering is never worth it. What Constant wants to say – and this is a main message of the novel – it is not better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. For Constant, it is better never to have loved in the way of passionate love.

Now, if you have faith in romantic passionate love, you might criticize Adolphe, and by implication Constant, for lacking that faith and commitment. So it's important to look closely at what Constant says in his introduction if you are going to appreciate his *argument*. His argument is that would-be modern romantic lovers like Adolphe and Ellenore are doomed to be "tormented" because they are "without resources". It is crucial to understand what Constant means by "without resources". He means that romantic love cannot survive because it lacks sufficient social and cultural support. The little world of romantic lovers is supposed to insulate itself against outside influences; it is supposed to be a universe of meaning unto itself; its values as Ellenore suggests, should always trump the values of the outside world. But no matter how intense the relationship might be, the outside world will intrude.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the novel *Adolphe* is that, while it focuses a searchlight on the relationship between the lovers and only touches upon the external world, there is no way of getting away from social life and its values. While Adolphe reluctantly dotes upon Ellenore and does his duty as a lover, he is constantly probed and prodded by parents, mentors and role models about the conventional roles that he ought to be playing. The relationship between Ellenore and Adolphe is constantly subjected to assessment and critique in terms of conventional values. Of course, those values are not at all consistent. Sometimes, for example, Adolphe's relationship with Ellenore is celebrated as a kind of Don Juanism by other young men; more often it is condemned as a dereliction of duty by established superiors. Ellenore is alternately condemned as a slut by some and pitied as a victim of a heartless seducer by others. Even those who draw on their past experiences in love, and who want to be understanding, just don't get it. There's no understanding or support for a romantic relationship like this apart from what the lovers themselves provide. That's what Constant means when he says that the lovers are "without resources". They can't even trust their own feelings because their feelings, especially Adolphe's, are inconsistent, and they have nothing substantial to measure them up against. Ellenore's feelings obviously run much deeper than Adolphe's. She is "constant" unto death. But even Ellenore is caught up in a psychological need to bestow love that is highly unstable. And, despite her significant level of commitment, she's not impervious to outside influences, including trying to make her lover jealous by carrying on with other men. Without "resources" the empire of romantic love is fragile.

Now, I've suggested that the outside world is not the focus of the novel, but it is ever present in the minds of the protagonists. It makes sense to describe that world if we are to understand the pervasive "sadness" with which Constant ends his novel. Let me make my point a bit clearer, Constant's moral in the novel is that nothing about modern life,

even love, can provide sufficient meaning for the individual. Modern life is a moral "wilderness" ending abruptly in "death" where everyone is condemned to a certain extent to be a *lonely* stranger. We shouldn't condemn Adolphe because he can't love enough. We should pity him for clinging to the branch of romantic love that cannot support him and, perhaps, for inadvertently entrapping another person in the process. If we are going to condemn him, or any modern individual, we should condemn him for lacking strength of character to stomach the world as it really is and for engaging in the kind of "self-abasement" that modern individuals indulge when they choose to avoid social reality.

The "society" that Constant describes is a recognizably modern society. What is most interesting is not what's modern society is, but what it's missing. Religion is noticeably absent from Constant's description of what makes this society tick. The absence of religion deprives individuals of a major source of meaning. What makes modern society tick is a combination of rational self-interest and realism. Sometimes the realistic and self-interested factor is disguised or obscured as classical rationalism in the form of the duty of each individual to pursue a career, to raise a family and contribute to his society. But this imperative towards duty or excellence is easy to see through in a world where basically everyone is in it for himself or herself. The dominant modern mentality is patently a cynical one, against which anyone with a sensitive emotional nature like Adolphe is likely to rebel. Adolphe clearly has some of the essential characteristics of a romantic rebel against this emotionless modern society. He clearly feels alienated; he seeks out trivial opportunities for emotional protest but is not willing to revolt; he deeply wants but fears more authentically emotional relationships. The realist and cynic in Adolphe dominate the more romantic element. This is true of modern society in general, which is defined by rational self-interest and the cynical attitude but permits a certain amount of dialectical opposition in the form of sexual passion between men and women. Love is tolerated, even encouraged, to the degree that it does not seriously challenge the rational and realistic consensus. The individual Adolphe brilliantly mirrors that consensus, at least until he runs into Ellenore.

The young shy and sensitive, but already cynical, Adolphe instinctively resents the damage that modernity is doing to his emotions. Characteristically and consciously, but not conscientiously, he opts for a love affair in which he can simulate authentic feeling without serious commitment. Like his society, he seeks to experience something like love without being burned. Even though he never falls very deeply in love, certainly never reaching anything like Stendhal's second degree of crystallization, he will become, like so many, a victim of love. An encounter with love exposes not only his inner hollowness, but also the hollowness of modern civilization.

Love and Death

Modernity, as Constant describes it, is an "attitude". It is an adolescent desire for freedom or independence combined with a "terror" of forming real meaningful commitments. (38) Adolphe is fascinating because he so self-consciously wants his freedom but is unable to act decisively. In the eyes of the outer world, he may appear pathetic, but the social world in which he might act more or less decisively, is far less

honest. People act from a combination of habit and self-interest; they are unreflective herd-like creatures spouting conventional wisdom. Adolphe, at least, is highly self-reflective, and his apathy is tragic in a similar way to Hamlet's indecisiveness. The reader of the novel runs a very serious risk in condemning the protagonist without fully appreciating his and modernity's dilemma.

That dilemma revolves around the relationship between love and death. Death is the most meaningful event that we will never experience (except in the form of dying). Religion gives death a meaning; traditional societies illuminate death; but modern men and women "lightly cast it out of their minds". (39) Adolphe informs us that his "apathy" towards society was "deepened" by this realization that death ends everything. At the age of 17, he witnesses the death of an older woman who was something of a mother figure and was deeply impressed by "death as the inevitable end of all". A sensitive modern person, even one lacking religious sentiment, is bound to see how uncertain life is. Here is a brilliant, authentic woman who has so much to offer, being *struck down* before young Adolphe's eyes. It is largely this recognition and pensiveness about death that enables Adolphe to see through the shallowness of society and to look for something more meaningful. His judgments of society are harsh, unkind and entirely self-centred in an adolescent way. He himself could be categorized by the "self-interest, affectation, vanity, and fear" that he condemns in society. (43) Alternately, at least he's looking for something more meaningful than upward social mobility on the path to death. And what attracts him is love.

It has to be said that Adolphe's love project is hardly romantic; in fact, it is narrowly and negatively *modern*. Not only is it full of the same vanity, fear, and selfishness he condemns in others, as I suggested above, but his idea of love is that it will provide him with a prophylactic against a very modern unhappiness. He "decides" that he wants to be loved and goes about getting a lover in a very calculating sort of way. He finds someone equally unhappy and emotionally unstable as himself, albeit for very different reasons. She seems perfect for him because of her strong anxiety and desire to "give happiness". Ellenore only feels self-esteem when she is doing everything in her power to give pleasure to those who are close to her. This need to please works out perfectly for shy indecisive young Adolphe. In the first place, her tumultuous instability breaks through Adolphe's defenses. Secondly, she tips her hand so early in the relationship, that it's not hard for him to develop a strategy. Despite his customary vacillations, it's not hard to figure out that this very married older lady is going to come his way. They need each other.

In terms of falling in love, Ellenore is so needy to give that she moves to Stendhal's second crystallization almost immediately. Adolphe is never given an opportunity to move past the first crystallization, and that's exactly what Constant wants to describe as happening, because he wants to show you what love can do to someone sensitive, *even* to someone who is too afraid or too cynical to fall all the way. At any rate, Adolphe's experience with love is "almost magical" and it "enlivens his existence in a quite unaccustomed way'. (48) You might say *mission accomplished* and Adolphe's life made relatively happy and meaningful if you didn't have an inkling of what was coming next.

If everything happened *relatively* happy ever after, you would have, not romantic love perhaps, but the kind of happiness that would allow young Adolphe to put his fear of death behind him. Of course, Adolphe and Ellenore are not on the same page. There are obstacles to them getting married, because love and marriage don't move in the same social circles. These and other social obstacles have a very different impact on the two lovers. They further crystallize Ellenore's romantic visions while making Adolphe wish that he could find an exit strategy that wouldn't pummel his self-esteem.

The ever-indecisive Adolphe has almost consolidated that exit strategy (why did it take him so long you ask?) when a telltale letter confirming his emotional unfaithfulness is strategically delivered to Ellenore. Perhaps if Adolphe had gotten out of the relationship more skillfully, or Ellenore had recovered from a relationship that could never have worked on any number of levels (unlike many nineteenth-century literary victims of love, she had the money and the status to live an independent life), they both would have gone on to live acceptable lives. The professor who owned my copy of *Adolphe* before me was surprised at the ending. According to him, this was a very strange ending. What he expected was that the woman would die, and that the man would recover from the affair, perhaps a little wiser about fooling around with another person's emotions and more like a good marriage prospect in a less volatile relationship. Not only does Ellenore die (relatively conventionally) but also Adolphe is doomed to a living death.

Obviously, this is not autobiographical. Constant didn't have a mistress die (unless you count Madame de Stael) and he went on to get married. So we can't look to biographical details for an explanation. Constant wanted to make a point, so what was it? The point comes forcefully, I think, in the closing pages of the book. Adolphe isn't allowed to escape from the meaningless of modern life, and his fear of death. What Ellenore's love ends up doing is force him to confront the death of someone he cares about (even if he doesn't love her) and the meaninglessness of modern life. Romantic love isn't an answer, may not even be possible, but its failure illuminates the hollowness of modern life. If romantic love isn't even strong enough to stand up to the "force of society" and modern society's brand of rationality, why on earth would you expect it to stand up to death? But the death of love, whether or not it involves the death of a loved one, shows us the emptiness of modern life.

Passionate love, for Constant, is not the life force opposing death – not Eros versus Tantalus, as modern society would have us believe. That kind of love is a very limited, precarious, self-centered and entirely unreliable way of dealing with our inevitable death. Adolphe only puts all human things, including his love affair with Ellenore, in perspective when he contemplates death. His love for Ellenore, as it is, is a substitute for coming to terms with a life that ends in death. It is a dangerous substitution because Adolphe destroys Ellenore in the process.

The Harm that Men Do

One of the most brilliant insights of Constant is not the facile and obvious one that society destroys love. It does, and to the extent that it does, modern society is vicious and

inhuman. That's not the root of the problem. The root of the problem is the lack of consistent character. Constant's deeper insight is that romantic love is an entirely inadequate rebellion against what is wrong in society. When we fall into love, we mentally bring our society's values and ideas into that relationship. It is not a question of the outside putting up obstacles to the inside, the *outside is already inside* however much our sense of self-esteem and self-importance would have it be otherwise. "The trouble is not in its surroundings but in itself". (125) The external circumstances are not what is most important, what is important is "character". What Constant means by character is a combination of classical and Christian values, namely "steadfastness, fidelity, and kindness". These are "gifts" that we cannot discover by analyzing and indulging ourselves, either inside or outside of love. They are qualities that we acquire with great difficulty and that we should "pray for". Although there is not much religion in *Adolphe*, there is a distinctly religious attitude in Constant's ideal that we humans should pay less attention to explaining why we do the things we do and more time "repenting" the harm that we do because of our "vanity". The obvious question for all the Adolphes in the world is why do they inflict so much harm on others and themselves in their relentless search for love?

The advantage that the reader of the novel, as spectator of rather than protagonist in this love affair, has is a more impartial view of what is going one. Such a view is rarely available to lovers because, the minute that you let another person come between you as a couple, you destroy the sacred space and trust that a reflective romantic union offers:

> It is a major step, and an irreparable one, when we suddenly reveal to a third party the secret places of an intimate relationship; daylight, as it penetrates this sanctuary, shows up and completes the ravages that night had enveloped in its shadows.

Lovers belong to the night; but readers belong to the daylight. The reader can see that this is a doomed relationship; the protagonists can't do it so easily. That there is a problem of internally assessing your relationship when both people are equally committed is obvious, it's less clear why more unstable relationships with unequal levels of commitment last so long and so often end with disastrous results for one or both parties. We can understand why Ellenore stays in a bad relationship, but why on earth does Adolphe – the guy who is not interested in committing. Assuming that he's pretty selfish and self-centred, what's he getting out of this relationship?

In order to understand Adolphe's constant vacillation, you have to appreciate – not necessarily approve -- him as a new kind of modern man living in the big city. He craves intense stimuli and, when he can't get it, he's bored. An intelligent, self-absorbed but bored person will often seek out intense emotional experiences in order to pre-occupy his mind. What is far less important than whether this intense experience is negative or positive – typically it is a combination of the two upon which a person can exercise different facets of their mind – is that it be *interesting*. Certainly, a love affair can become monotonous, but for someone with a flexible imagination, it is bound to be exciting. In comparison with the largely predictable rationalistic/realistic world outside

the love affair – a world that you cannot fully escape – a love affair is mentally challenging to say the least. To the extent that you bring the maxims and fears of the outside world into the love affair, it makes love even more a source of interest.

Constant reminds us through the narrator (124) that Adolphe is "selfish". He also describes Adolphe as mingling that selfishness with "emotionalism". In effect, what Adolphe is doing, and what so many people do who stay in bad relationships, is entertaining himself by playing with his emotions. He doesn't look like he's entertaining himself because we typically associate entertainment with happiness; but in drama and in the drama of life, constant happiness is *boring*. Emotionalism means maximizing the drama of one's emotional responses to complex stimuli. Adolphe complains how "complicated" his relationship with Ellenore has become, but he wouldn't have it any other way. That's why he's simultaneously capable of complaining to others using a more conventionally realistic language, while being unwilling to call it quits. If and when he calls it quits, he will return to a more *boring* life situation.

Another possible reason for Adolphe's unwillingness to *cut bait* is that his sense of self and, consequently, his *self-esteem* depends on his dominant character as an emotionalist. He doesn't have a strong moral core, so he depends entirely on the moral flavour of his emotions. He wants to view himself as exhibiting the most self-congratulatory emotions and this is especially the case when outsiders intervene. Of course, he's not consistent because 1) he does care to some extent what outsiders think and, more importantly 2) he wants maximum flexibility, including an exit strategy from the relationship. What he lacks, obviously, is a sense of genuine *responsibility* and he compensates for this by highlighting genuinely felt emotional *responses*. Ironically, these emotional responses can sometimes trump his self-esteem. For example, when he occasionally blames rather than excuses himself, it does not seem to be genuine remorse that he feels. Even his self-critique is just another form of emotionalism:

> I really am not trying to make excuses, and I blame myself more bitterly than another might do in my place, but I can at least solemnly claim that I have never acted out of calculation, but have always been guided by genuine and natural feelings. How comes it that with such feelings I have so long brought about nothing but my own misfortune and that that of others?

The answer, of course, is that romanticism and other forms of emotionalism are often the signs of a self-absorbed and ultimately selfish person.

Not always, of course. Romantic feelings, as you know, have a remarkable ability to lead oneself out of selfishness in order to bestow value upon another person as a *person*. In Ellenore's case, her initial desire to break through conventional judgments by *expressing* love is transformed into a genuinely selfless bestowal. Constant recognizes that this sometimes happens and is even willing to suggest that there is something *divine* – he uses the word "sacred" to describe this kind of surrender and sacrifice. Presumably, he thinks this form of crystallization sometimes happens in relationships. This is a literary work rather than an ethical or religious tract on love, so we have to try to gauge his assessment

of the individual and cultural potential for this kind of bestowal. First, we know that he says that the social and cultural "resources" for this kind of love are totally inadequate to support it. Second, the saga of Adolphe and Ellenore suggests that one cannot expect two people to be committed to the same extent, even if both of the participants in a love affair *feel* they are committed or *desire* to commit. Third, despite the imagery of romantic love, the participants will find it difficult to avoid bringing the *outside inside*. The outside may put up obstacles to love, but as we see with Adolphe, those obstacles can strengthen, sometimes falsely, the love affair. It gives love a challenge to surmount. What is much more sinister, however, is the *outside* that is in the minds of the lovers and that they bring *inside*. These serious obstacles to love make it the quintessential risky business.

Adolphe clearly finds the risk intriguing but he doesn't really appreciate what he is getting himself into. And, the biggest risk of all is not finding someone who loves you. The biggest risk is finding someone who genuinely loves you and not being able to love them back completely and unreservedly. Some people might be capable of crystallizing love, but as Stendhal suggests, they are going to be few. If you encounter them and persuade/convince/coerce them to they bestow love on you, it could be disastrous for you. It could highlight what a pathetic, self-absorbed, worm you and most people really are. Many people desire love but most people are incapable of loving someone else more than themselves. What happens to these people when they are loved, but fail to love adequately in return, is that they are forced to recognize not only their personal deficiencies as lovers but also their incapacity for love. In addition, and more important, they do something unpardonable in hurting the one that loves them. That recognition is a shocker for Adolphe.

Even before Ellenore dies, M. de T (the Baron) tells Adolphe that he is not only "doing yourself harm by your weakness" but also "giving no happiness to this woman who is making you so unhappy." (109) Not only is Adolphe giving no happiness to Ellenore, however, he is treating someone who is offering him the greatest gift that one person can give to another with consummate "cruelty". He can hide from this cruelty until the affair comes to an end with Ellenore's death; he can kid himself that his feelings are genuine, even honourable; but the end of love, however it comes, shows him up for who he really is. To the extent that there is a little of Adolphe in most of us, we share his guilt. Constant wants us to think twice before we convince someone to love us. He wants us to appreciate what an awesome responsibility saying you love someone really is.

Adolphe feels remorse when it is to late to do anything about it. In any case, Adolphe might be incapable of feeling genuine remorse because he remains self-absorbed until the end. Maybe we shouldn't feel very sorry for him, but we can at least pay attention to how severe his punishment is. Adolphe has received a kind of love that few of us ever experience. He quite deliberately drew it out of Ellenore and he himself killed the love that he conjured up. The person who bestows love doesn't have to die, but when we kill their love we not only commit an act of blasphemy against that love, we actively contribute to a loveless universe. There is no greater tragedy than a person who, in searching for love, finally freezes love's potentiality in themselves. Constant has this

wonderful image of Adolphe escorting a declining Ellenore over the "frozen grass" that "crunched beneath our feet." (116)

For those who allow themselves to become entranced by romantic love with another, the price for self-imposed failure is simply immense. Love is hard enough to obtain, but when you kill it, something dies in you as well. The result is "desolation". As the painful truth begins to hit him, Adolphe says:

> It was not the mere heartache of love, but a deeper and more desolate emotion, for love so identifies itself with the beloved that even in its despair there is a certain charm. Love struggles against reality, the keenness of its desire makes it overrate its strength and uplifts it in the midst of woe. But my grief was dismal and solitary. I did not hope to die with Ellenore, but was going to live on without her in the wilderness of this world, in which I had so often wanted to be an independent traveler. I had crushed the one who loved me, broken this heart which like a twin soul had been unfailingly devoted to mine in tireless affection, and I was already overcome by loneliness. Ellenore was still alive but already past sharing my confidences; I was already alone in the world and no longer living in that atmosphere of love with which she had surrounded me, and the very air I breathed seemed harsher, the faces of the men I met seemed more unconcerned. All nature seemed to be telling me that soon I should cease to be loved, and for ever.

Adolphe finally is confronted by the prospect of death and the "dense night that surrounds us" knowing that he has both conjured up and destroyed the love that lit up his life.

Constant is not unsympathetic to those who seek love, but he recognizes more than any other writer before him that human desire rarely finds a home and that the human heart is a lonely traveler. Love is an awesome responsibility and affairs of the heart should give rise to at least as much sorrow and regret as self-congratulation. Beware those who enter at the door of romantic emotionalism – you will undoubtedly get more than you bargained for.

The Making of the Modern Self

Constant, and other writers, who warned against the excesses of romantic love were unable to halt its progress. Romanticism as a movement was short-lived, but the desire for passionate love that it endorsed was self-propelling and became a major motif of modernity up to and including the present. So much so, in fact, that when we use the world love, it is typically passionate love to which we refer. In practice, of course, something as intense as passionate love could never be *the* only major theme of modernity and writers on love tend to fudge the distinctions between different kinds of loving so as to dampen down its more impossible features. But, and this is the important point, however irrational, unrealistic and irresponsible, when we talk about love between *persons* it is this passionate love that many of us consider the ideal. So much is it the

modern ideal type of loving – this intense interpersonal interpenetration -- in fact, that those who endorse other kinds of loving between persons find it necessary to define their own ideals *against* this kind of passionate loving.

An interesting question, to which we may return later on in the course, is why this cultural ideal – that could not even sustain a literary movement for very long – has ricocheted through our modern consciousness? Could it be that this ideal romantic love is a substitute for the loss of other significant meanings in modern life? Is the idea of passionate love a counter to a cold and calculating modern economy and bureaucracy? Is passionate love the natural outcome of a modern world that, at least theoretically, liberates and endorses individual feelings? There are reasons to think that all of these possibilities are relevant. But there is one aspect of passionate loving that sometimes gets obscured and that is the contribution that something like romantic or passionate love makes to a distinctly modern *self*. The relationship between modern loving and the modern self is a tad difficult to explore because of our tendency to view love, especially in the form of bestowal, as eclipsing the hard and insular shell of the self. Many modern writers, for example, view passionate love as a reaction and an antidote against a utilitarian world of self-interested actors. And, in fact, the novel *Adolphe* uses precisely this dichotomy to illuminate the pain of those who enter love irresponsibly. The world is profane and lonely; love is sacred and heartwarming.

But a little reflection suggests that passionate love and the modern self are not in dialectical opposition. Historians tell us, for example, that romantic style love between two people helps to break down the force of communal and kinship values. Romantic love is the social bond most conducive to the development of distinctive selves. The love between two *individuals* affirms their unique personalities – their individuality. As long as love persists, it gives people the security and confidence to develop their unique personality. After all, romantic love at its best is the *bestowal* of love on a *person* and in order to maximize the power of bestowal, you've got to think of a person as an individual don't you? You *accept* them as their own person, rather than a representative type or an approximation of an ideal. In effect, you sanctify the *uniqueness* of the other.

There is yet another sense in which romantic love strengthens and supports a recognizably modern self. If the modern self is anything, it is a complex psychological mechanism that is aware of itself and its autonomy. It is capable of processing stimuli according, not just to social rules, roles and conventions, but also to the maximizing of its own well-being. Now, Benjamin Constant is not particularly sympathetic towards this modern freedom maximizing, self-propelling, desire seeking individual. He goes so far as to condemn Adolphe's devotion to personal freedom and choice as a selfish addiction to emotionalism. And, although Constant doesn't develop an alternative, it is pretty clear that his ideal model for human behavior combines elements of Christian charity with classical virtue, kindness combined with character. Constant, however, is a much more interesting novelist than a moralist, and his delineation of a recognizably modern love affair illuminates the way that a recognizably modern self is emerging.

To the extent that our modern identity is all about probing, discovering, explaining and analyzing oneself, Constant shows us in minute detail the extent to which self-analysis happens in a love affair, and by implication he illuminates how important the language of romantic love is for the genesis of the modern self in all its rich complexity. What Constant wants to do, however, is to show us what a dangerous and counter productive game this self-analysis can be and how we can hurt ourselves and other people in the process. What's fascinating about the protagonist Adolphe is that he's not even very committed to this love thing. He's constantly protecting himself, excusing himself, explaining himself and, a very modern attitude, getting ready to *move on*. There are many more modern people like Adolphe than you might expect, and there is some Adolphe in most of us to the extent that we are products of a self-absorbed modern society.

When Adolphe enters into a relationship with Ellenore, it's clear that there is a great deal of selfishness (Constant would call it "vanity") in his desire to find someone to love. Early on in the relationship, it becomes clear that Ellenore loves Adolphe way more deeply than he loves her. But romantic love is an extremely intense relationship that demands that a man and woman not only approximate one another's love but that also generate a special and reflexive relationship based on a very high degree of love. In an ideal sense, these lovers provide a *world of meaning* for one another. That's what Ellenore thinks that she's getting when Adolphe says he loves her. Now, precisely because of the intensity, uniqueness and special character of this relationship, romantic lovers are highly attuned to any changes in emotional intensity that might suggest a decline in love. One of problems with romantic love is that it must maintain, within the limits of reason, this high degree of intensity. Outside events might deflect or detract from this intensity, but romantic lovers always need to reconnect and reaffirm the psychological primacy of their special relationship. That's not easy to do, especially when one of the primary tools for affirming love are words that can mask emotion, not only from the person being spoken to, but also from the speaker. We can, as Adolphe often does, practice a form of self-deceit, convincing others and ourselves that we really feel love. If the other person has crystallized her love for us past Stendhal's second stage, she will be more inclined to believe in the authenticity of the words or other symbols of affection. In fact, these signs will have more reality than any evidence suggesting that the relationship is in trouble. What is complicated about love, and what Constant describes so perfectly, is a situation in which people constantly misread the signs as either positive or negative.

What I want to suggest here is not merely that the world of love provides an entirely new and rich world of *meaning* for individuals to draw on, but more precisely that it provides multiple worlds of *meaning*. As love develops, everything about love becomes more complicated – there are no set rules or roles in really passionate love. As opposed to the outside society, where relatively uniform conventions and expectations apply, nothing is as it seems inside the world of love. There is only one absolutely major commandment in romantic love – the one law without which passion cannot continue – and that commandment is *authenticity*. The lovers must be authentic with one another; anything less is a form of deceit. In the world outside of love, deep authenticity is impossible.

You can only be *yourself* to a degree. In the world inside passionate love, you must allow yourself to be emotionally naked. Of course this ideal of honest and authentic communication is virtually unworkable; it can only function as an ideal. But the important point is that you measure genuine loving by how close you approximate the ideal. That is precisely why passionate or romantic love is so intense while other kinds of social relationships aren't.

This ideal of authentic communication – heart to heart – is what Ellenore is committed to and Adolphe not so much. Romantic commitment is measured, not by anything so mundane as sexual fidelity or loyal companionship, but absolute transparency. That's why passionate romantic love is in trouble the moment that someone holds back, keeps something in reserve. The problem with the relationship between Adolphe and Ellenore is precisely that Adolphe either counterfeits or dramatizes rather than genuinely harmonizes his emotions towards Ellenore. Adolphe is only able to practice self-deceit because of the problem with words. As any believer in romantic love will be happy to tell you, this kind of love cannot be *communicated*. Words won't convey what the heart feels. Words are socially accepted conventions. Unfortunately, as the Bee Gees tell us, "words are all I have". The amazing thing about using romantically infused words, is that the speaker and the listener have to *interpret* those words as *signs of love*. Whereas in courtly love, one has to be a smooth talker and elegant words not only communicate but encapsulate love (the crucial issue of authenticity is never breached), in romantic love, words are subjected to critique, not only by the listener, but especially by the speaker.

This may sound a bit complex, but to make it simpler, words in particular and communication in general is not a given but something that is routinely referred back to the *self* for authentification. "Words of love" constantly refer the speaker and the listener back to the self. It is not the words that count, but the self behind the words. This suggests that there is no such thing as a routine exchange between lovers, because everything is grist for imagination of lovers. Literally, everything is subject to interpretation in terms of reinforcing love. Words will act like "intoxicants" for those like Ellenore who have already committed themselves fully to love, but for anyone else (the vast majority of people), they have become part of the problem. "What miserable ambiguities, what tortuous language!" laments Adolphe, when you had to consider not only the "meaning of words" but also the *mood* they reflected and the *effect* they might have on the hearer. This kind of energy and intensity would be unsupportable except for two things. The first I've discussed already. Love makes everything to do with the two lovers incredibly *interesting*. When a love affair is boring, that's when its over. The second is that, when mutual love is affirmed, each individual is affirmed by the other. This kind of affirmation may sound spacious, but it is what everyone feels in a love affair. When two people affirm their love for one another, they recognize and celebrate themselves in the other. Against all odds, therefore, individuals in love always desire success in communicating their feelings. They also experience considerable tension, and even anger and resentment, when unsuccessful. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, when you are in love, you constantly communicate with *yourself*; you get deeply in touch with personal meanings.

That is why it is so difficult to end a love affair. Feeling alone certainly is part of, but not the whole, problem. The problem is that the lonely self has only its own relatively meager resources for self-affirmation. Even when love is in decline and the two selves are drifting apart, it is difficult not to persist in:

> Living, so to speak, on a sort of memory of the heart, strong enough to make the thought of separation painful, but too weak for us to find satisfaction in being together.

Adolphe suggests that "love is a forgetting of all one's interests and duties" a kind of divine "madness" and a veritable "ecstasy of the senses". (85) It is an abdication of the "laws of society". But this same forgetting is exactly what allows lovers to focus in on *themselves*. Discussions of romantic love often focus on the *union*; what they often forget and what Constant describes so well is that this unity is never a being but always a becoming. Love is a verb that actualizes not only a relationship, but also persons. It bears repeating: in love, you don't just obsess about the *other* but about the *self*.

Constant describes this constant maneuvering between self and other so brilliantly that he is a quintessentially modern writer, despite not having much sympathy with the dilemma of modern people. He is so struck by the misfortunes that occur in romantic love, so intent on dismissing self-analysis as a lack of character, so critical of Adolphe (and perhaps himself) as a pathetically weak man, that he fails to see the emergence of recognizably modern men and women. Whether or not we approve of Adolphe, we have to recognize him as a thoroughly modern creation in his *self-reflexivity*.

When the Spell is Broken

In condemning Adolphe, it is probable that Constant was condemning himself. Constant was also a modern man who shared many of his protagonist's faults. That he used his experience as a battering ram against the modern romantic outlook makes him look somewhat reactionary. But the sense of responsibility and guilt that he feels for his past actions also seems modern. I think only a modern self-reflexive self would feel that kind of responsibility, that kind of guilt. What is more, the *sadness* that Constant seems to feel about the weaknesses of the human heart also seems modern to me. While his unconvincing solution to the problem of love is classical and Christian, the mood of regret is profoundly modern. Constant is much more interesting when describing the problem than prescribing its solution.

In closing, I'd like to briefly mention a *constant* (pardon the pun) theme in *Adolphe* that adds considerably to novel's overall theme of sadness. Whether or not one believes that passionate love is feasible, whether or not one holds lovers to Constant's high standard, the stark reality is that passionate love usually has a beginning and typically comes to an end. The ending may not involve death and despair as in *Adolphe*; the relationship between lovers may be transmuted into something else. *Adolphe* is a novel about falling in love, but there are important differences between falling, being and staying in love that

need to be projected into sexually based passionate love if it is to survive. That said, the passion in the romantic ideal of love is difficult to sustain. When it eventually ends, many formerly intense relationships become "strained". While some pleasure, and certainly some pleasant memories remain, "all the charm had gone" for one or more participants. (68) This is the sad fact of life and love. "The long trail of bliss in our souls, fun and laughter…detachment from all mundane care and superiority over everything around us" – that kind of magic cannot last.

Let's agree that this is a fact. If you want, you can argue that the *magic* can be maintained by force of will or whatever. But what emerges is not the kind of magic that Adolphe describes:

> Love is only a single speck of light, yet is seems to illuminate the whole of time. A few days ago it did not exist, and soon it will have ceased to be, but so long as it does exist it sheds its radiance upon the time which has preceded it as upon that which is to come.

These are words that Constant puts into Adolphe's mouth. We know that Adolphe goofed up, and that Constant wants us to dislike him. But by putting words like these into Adolphe's mouth, Constant at least offers a different possibility for passionate love, one that introduces us to a different and more *sacred* world. Instead of putting the fear of whatever into us about this kind of love, and overwhelming us with our responsibilities to our beloved, Constant occasionally lets us choose a different perspective. It's one in which we can look back fondly on the *memory* of that kind of love, rather than obsessively fearing, craving or regretting it. That's the option summarized in the slogan that *it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all*. Maybe you can have greater *kindness* and *character* by having loved or been loved than without it. Maybe you don't need to be bitter or depressed when the spell is broken. Maybe your world wasn't such a lonely place, at least for a while, and *memories* of human affection really do warm people's entire lives. But I'll close here lest I get too maudlin for some people's tastes!

16. Aesthetic Love

Either/Or

"The Seducer's Diary" is a self-contained segment of Søren Kierkegaard's most famous work *Either/Or*. In a way, I've cheated you by only allowing you to read a segment that sums up the *either* part of the choice about *how to live* and, more specifically, about *how to love*. Published in 1843, *Either/Or* sets up a "radical choice" between embracing romantic love outside of marriage and ethical love within marriage. I'll talk a lot more about Søren Kierkegaard's analysis of romantic love in a little bit; but first I want to set up the conflict. You might want to ask: why on earth would we have to make such a choice in the first place. Instead of *either/or* you might want to suggest a *neither/nor* that doesn't involve such extreme or *radical* choices. And, to a certain extent, Søren Kierkegaard might be inclined to agree with you. The entire point of presenting an inescapable *either/or* is to get you to reflect upon what is **crucial** in life and love; to understand that you can't always have your cake and eat it too; almost inevitably there will be times when you have to **choose** your beliefs and face the consequences. You have to **commit**. One characteristic of romantic or aesthetic or sensual loving is that it thrives on immediacy – it lives for the moment – and it doesn't like to commit. Søren Kierkegaard wants to show his readers exactly what a serious commitment to romantic love involves – how capricious, fragmented and unsatisfying it would be as a foundation for living and loving. Only by presenting you with a clear choice can he hope to convince you that the pursuit of pleasure is too narrow to be meaningful. But in order to accomplish that convincingly, he has to relate the richest possible meaning in romanticism – the aesthetic appreciation of sensual beauty in the opposite sex. And that's what you got to read.

There are two other reasons, however, why Søren Kierkegaard opts for this *either/or* without any middle ground. The first has rightly been called *existential*. By existential – and Kierkegaard is regarded by many as one of the pioneers of existentialism – is meant that how we live and how we love is a personal choice and all choices are by nature *radical* choices. What this existential approach implies is that our life has no intrinsic meaning apart from the choices that we make. There is no "higher" or "stronger" expression in the universe apart from ourselves. If you look for a higher meaning outside of yourself, you will find nothing:

> I lie stretched out, inert; all I see is emptiness, all I live on is emptiness, all I move in is emptiness. I do not even suffer pain. (53)

Admittedly, this graphic description of existential crisis comes in the *either* rather than the *other* part of *Either/Or*. It begins to dissolve once one makes a *commitment* to the ethical life and, for Kierkegaard, it dissolves a hell of a lot more if one makes the leap of faith to the spiritual life. But the supremely important existential point here is that life has no meaning prior to making that *choice*. Ethical and religious systems have no intrinsic validity in themselves apart from this choosing, which is precisely why

Kierkegaard was so critical of those who embraced these beliefs from the outside rather than the inside.

The second reason for presenting life and love as an *either/or* relates to this same existentialism. There are a number of scholars who view Kierkegaard as espousing either Aristotelian or Kantian ethics. Such approaches don't really take into account the fact that Kierkegaard is modern in a way that even Kant is not. Everything in Kierkegaard's approach centers on the development of the individual's subjectivity. If the individual incorporates ethical or religious systems from without, rather than developing them from within, that suggests that the individual is not *free*. Both of the radical choices presented in *Either/Or* depend on the cultivation of subjectivity or *inwardness* in ways that cannot *predict* an outcome, and that can only *prefer* an outcome by close comparison. In other words, there is no Aristotelian mean or Kantian truth that one can hope to discover. The modern individual's situation is so dreadful that it demands making a choice to get past existential dread. To the extent that people don't make choices, they cannot call themselves free individuals. To the extent that they make choices, individuals are totally responsible for the choices that they make.

In "The Seducer's Diary", Kierkegaard tries to be as neutral as possible in writing from the *aesthetic lover's* point of view, but he cannot easily avoid conveying the impression that the writer 'Johannes' is simultaneously wounded, evil, and utterly responsible for his pain and the pain he causes others. The title is a dead giveaway because the term *seducer* has negative characteristics. The fact that Johannes chooses not to accept responsibility as a seducer, and defines seduction as the opposite of what he is doing is shown to be a kind of *bad faith* by the title. And, certainly, the smug superiority, the boastfulness, and the special pleading of Johannes highlights more than Adolphe's lack of character – it suggests the presence of the demonic. But Kierkegaard would not be a great writer if he didn't explore the almost selfless dedication to aesthetic beauty that 'A' clearly possesses and that even tempts the spiritual 'B'. If 'B' claims to have a better grasp of what is true and good for the individual, he would not be complete without taking seriously the *beauty* that A is pursuing. So, for the rest of the lecture, let's join together with Johannes in aggressively pursuing that beauty without deciding in advance that he's *either* right or wrong.

Love, Marriage and Seduction

Kierkegaard wrote in the 1840s, long after the peak of romanticism. The scaled down version of romantic love that he was most familiar with was the one that still dominates much of contemporary western consciousness today. It is the essentially bourgeois formula that romantic love leads to marriage. One of the reasons why romanticism couldn't survive as a movement was because of the obvious tension between love based in subjective feeling and marriage as a social institution. By the time that Kierkegaard began writing about love, the equation between love and marriage had pretty much been exploded in cultural terms. In fact, this dichotomy between love and marriage was likely a deal breaker for Kierkegaard himself. Events in "The Seducer's Diary" seem to parallel Kierkegaard's engagement to his ex-fiancée Regine Olsen and provide a kind of

explanation for his own mental turmoil about choosing marriage over sensual pleasure in his youth. Kierkegaard, like many males before and since, feared marriage as the death of sexually based love.

For many devotees of love in the nineteenth-century, sensual love usurped conventional romantic love. The obvious attraction of sensual love was its *immediacy*. The problem with married love was that it generated a *history* that invariably destroyed the impact of this immediacy. Any really emotionally engaged lover inhabited a *lightening moment* – a marvelously beautiful and ultimately "indescribably now" (261). Marriage as an institution buried this consciousness changing experience in the past and present of a social relationship. If the experience of love was intensely *interesting*, the institution of marriage was *boring* in the way that most bourgeois life is boring. That is why so many married couples are unhappy and desire love outside. In this search for love, women like Cordelia tend to be disadvantaged by their social confinement in their parents', guardians' or husband's home. Men have a freer rein to pursue pleasure, especially as unmarried *seducers* of women.

It is important to understand both 'A's' and Johannes' analysis of seduction to appreciate Kierkegaard's homage to what is beautiful in romantic love. In a section that you didn't get to read 'A' argues that Christianity is responsible for separating the life of sensuality from the life of spirit and thereby illuminating sensuality by contrast. Sensuality according to 'A' is closer to nature and all of us, especially in our youth, long for this sexual connection. But most men, especially, fail to really appreciate the power of sensuality because they either 1) don't find the love they long for, or 2) jump too quickly from love to marriage without really appreciating the enormous potency of sensual love. 'A' admires Mozart's *Don Giovanni* because he represents that unrefined and natural vibrancy. Contrary to conventional criticism, Don Giovanni or the ideal type of Don Juan doesn't need to seduce anyone. He's a force of nature. He doesn't seduce; people are seduced who come into the sphere of pure sensuality. Its beauty is overwhelming; it absorbs everything in its power; and it is the very quintessence of the aesthetic. That is why it can be so perfectly expressed in the most sensual of all the arts – music – specifically Mozart's music.

What 'A' has described is not only the intrinsic beauty of the sensual but also the sharp divide between the beautiful and the ethical. You can't call Don Giovanni unethical because he's beyond ethical categories. You can only call him *evil* in terms of a moralistic consciousness that he doesn't share. He's not aware of being evil; he is who he is. Of course, Mozart's Don Giovanni is an abstraction and human beings in the real world do live in a world where *good and evil* exist. Nature is neither good nor evil; Don Giovanni as a force of Nature is neither good nor evil; if you consider him evil, then you are forced into a situation where beauty and evil are co-terminus. You are forced into a situation where all the beauty is sucked out of life. The categories of good and evil only apply to *persons* and Don Giovanni is incapable of *seeing* his conquests as individuals. It is a completely different matter, however, when the seducer is an individual whose choices have an impact on other individuals' choices. Only then is it possible to talk

about people being good or evil; only then is the seducer diabolical because he manipulates others' attraction to the beautiful.

Johannes, of course, is not Don Giovanni. He is a person and a person needs to take responsibility for his choices. What makes Johannes a truly fascinating character is that he takes full responsibility for who he is. One of the first things that he tells you is that he is *not a seducer*. A seducer is a person who coerces someone against his or her will; a seducer is an enslaver of another person's emotions; a seducer is a sexual predator. Whether or not you see Johannes in these definitions, it is important to understand that he does not *see* himself in that light. He is anything but a sexual predator. Sex for him is entirely secondary and only *interesting* to the extent that it reflects the optimum release of love. Johannes argues that he doesn't want to enslave anyone's emotions but, instead, wants him or her to fully feel his or her buried emotions. Finally, the last thing Johannes says that he wants is to trick someone into loving him. He wants them to truly love him in a way that is absolute. And, he says that he wants to love them absolutely as well.

Now, none of Johannes' behaviour would seem so reprehensible if he actually married Cordelia (or Regine) and was faithful to her and her alone. Oh sure, he's the patronizing male in terms of his development of Cordelia's emotional equipment, but in his defense, he's not seeking to manipulate Cordelia but only to fully bring out what is there. That doesn't necessarily make him bad husband material, at least not in terms of the 1840s and the age of the patriarchal male. What makes him appear demonic is that he eventually leaves the girl in the lurch after seducing her. But what does leaving the girl in the lurch really mean? It just means that he isn't going to marry Cordelia or continue the relationship. If it's marriage that's the issue, Johannes thinks that marriage is a trap, not just for him, but presumably for Cordelia as well. If it's about continuing the relationship, Johannes well might argue that this relationship has reached its apogee. It can't possibly go anywhere but downhill from here *for both of them*.

If you are going to label Johannes a seducer, as the title "Diary of a Seducer" does, obviously you can't call him a seducer in the typical sense. I suppose you could call him irresponsible, as Kierkegaard presumably would, but then you'd have to take into account the fact that he accepts full responsibility for his actions. He's not conceited about his conquests –he refuses to brag about them to anyone – but he is conceited about his ability to manipulate his environment to maximize its aesthetic appeal. He takes full responsibility, therefore, for being an aesthete. You might want to call him selfish, but you'd have to admit that there is a high degree of selflessness in his actions. He doesn't even get much sensual pleasure, since sensuality is simply his route to moulding the beautiful. It's the *spiritual undressing* that interests him. Some of you would undoubtedly claim that he has done serious harm to another person. But what harm has he really done if he has encouraged another person to develop their emotions and to love as fully as possible? In order to claim 'harm done' wouldn't you have to ask Cordelia whether she regretted falling in love with Johannes? Would marriage to a person like Johannes bring happiness? Unlikely. At the end of the day, you might still want to condemn Johannes for, what else? – his smugness in thinking that his approach to life is the only correct one. Kierkegaard would like you to get that impression, I'm certain of

that. But really, is his smugness any worse that a person who wants to marry and mould another person. Doesn't his smugness relate to the fact that he knows that he is emotionally enabling another person?

If this is a seducer, it is the most dangerous and diabolical seducer imaginable, because he is at least as much interested in the rich development of his partner as in his own personal happiness. Arguably, he gives more than he gets and he makes the world a more beautiful place in the process. Think that this emphasis on *giving* is exaggerated? Then recognize that Johannes cannot resist helping others along the path to love. He even takes time out to advise people who will eventually marry how to build their love. When he's not focused on himself or the beloved, he is actually the best advisor on the game of love imaginable. Even the unfortunate Edward is sensible enough to retain his services after he's been summarily dismissed by Cordelia and her aunt. That outcome was never in doubt anyway. And who could doubt that Johannes will help Edward find someone more suitable?

The Aesthetic Adventure

Ultimately, Johannes is self-focused. He is interested in others only to the extent that he can make them and his life more *interesting*. To the extent that he can render the lives of others richer and more beautiful, it is largely because this makes his own life more *beautiful*. After *immediacy*, the key words in "The Seducer's Diary" are *interesting and beautiful*. This focus on constantly unearthing, framing and intensifying the interesting and the beautiful is that makes Johannes' and modern life in general an aesthetic adventure. If life or reality has no intrinsic meaning, then the human task is to find or create that meaning. And if what is most meaningful, most truthful, most decisive for we humans is what is beautiful, then creating beauty is precisely what we should be doing.

The false Enlightenment and Romantic equations were first, that the truth is beautiful and second, that the beautiful is true. Along with truth and beauty we can string terms like ethical, eternal and spiritual. The crisis of existentialism that happened at different times in different western countries brought all of those linkages into question. The existential consciousness replaced eternal truth and eternal beauty with the highly contingent now. What remained of romanticism after the cultural smoke cleared was the affirmation of sensuality, especially sensual beauty and love, but now caught within a vacuum. In the existential consciousness, reflection on nature and love no longer led upwards but could only move outwards. This existential consciousness signaled the creation of a new kind of individual, as a collector of interesting and beautiful experiences – a traveler rather than a pilgrim. The poet Baudelaire, who resembles Johannes, termed this kind of attitude *serious strolling* through life in search of the beautiful.

You may not like Johannes, but all modern people share some of his characteristics, which is precisely why Kierkegaard wants to make us choose, rather than mix and match in ways that deny our freedom. Johannes at least is consistent in his approach. What a modern person like Johannes cannot do is look for answers on some higher plane. He must look for themselves in one of two places – the external or the internal world. The

aesthetic approach privileges the senses, especially sensuality, which means actively, not passively, being receptive to outside stimuli. It is only internal to the extent that it arranges those external stimuli for maximum impact and, of course, beauty, which has the maximum impact on a human being. The aesthetic penetration and arrangement of reality provides meaning. The only problem is that reality is contingent, consisting of moments of crystallization. Nothing is static. For the existential consciousness, the static always loses the element of surprise or excitement. It is always the immediate moment that matters. Or, and this is more subtle – memories of moments.

It should go without saying that the existential consciousness is a distinctly urban kind of consciousness. The stroller is an urban creature; the pilgrim is a rural creature. Existential modernity, however, turns everyone into a stroller. Having relatively few stable internal resources, the modern person is highly dependent upon his or her external environment for stimulation. Since sex (or if you wish *love*) is the most powerful stimulant, it is what many modern people look for in order to spice up their boring lives. Not surprisingly, the modern existential aesthetic adventurer continually seeks out some spice to beautify his or her life. Johannes sees a girl that he thinks he can love. What does he mean by love? He means that Cordelia can be his aesthetic adventure. What is interestingly modern about his game of *hide and seek* with Cordelia is just how dependant Johannes is on the element of *chance*. His mental world has literally "come to a standstill from boredom" (269). He damns chance to provide his life with "possibility". But because he's a real aesthete, it can't just be any possibility of a tryst. In order to engage his imagination fully, chance has to provide him with something really subtle, complex and ambiguous – "a possibility that looks like an impossibility":

> Show me her in the shadows of the underworld, I shall fetch her up. Let her hate me, despise me, be indifferent to me, love another. I'm not afraid; but stir up the waters, break your silence. It's cheap of you to starve me in this way, you who after all fancy yourself stronger than I.

The combination of spring, and his beloved, of course, is all that he needs to get the ball rolling. But it is fascinating to see how close this recognizably modern person is to boredom, and from boredom to despair, unless he can find a new adventure to mould into a beautiful *memory*.

Beauty comes in different shapes and sizes. But for the truly aesthetic adventurer, there is never one size that fits all. The reason that Johannes feels so superior to his other Copenhagen acquaintances is that every interesting external stimulus is uniquely crafted within his fertile imagination. Young girls clearly provide the best material for his craftsmanship, but he doesn't necessarily want to make love to them. One, for example, he considers absolutely delightful in terms of the way she greets him. He doesn't recognize her as a person but as a piece in an aesthetic montage. Cordelia on the other hand is special; she's a person upon whom he can totally devote all the subtleties of his imagination. It doesn't so much matter that he really understands who Cordelia is as a person. In fact, the idea of Cordelia is so intertwined with his ideal of femininity that one suspects that Cordelia herself is missing. What is not missing is the very interesting,

hence beautiful composite of Cordelia that he constructs in his mind and that is absolutely *real* for him. Because this mental picture is so perfect; because Johannes puts all of his creative energy into moulding it; it is absolutely complete once it crystallizes.

It is certainly possible to suggest that Johannes is missing out on another real Cordelia, the one that is growing and changing as a person. You could even argue that Johannes is missing out by not getting to see and interact with that emerging person. Many people deploy just this kind of reasoning to say that while married love changes, individuals can stay *interesting* to one another. That's quite possible, even plausible, and spokesman 'B' in *Either/Or* is going to suggest something very much like this. What you would be failing to understand is that the modern aesthetic adventurer is always concerned about maximizing the power of the *interesting* and is always positioning himself (or today *herself*) to *move on*. The utterly modern experience of death is boredom, and that is what the aesthetic adventurer wants to avoid most of all. The ideal position of the true aesthetic adventurer in love is to move on at the precise moment when the relationship reaches its peak because it is not likely to get any better than that.

Magic Moments in Memory

A truly majestic love affair only comes around once or twice in a lifetime. Johannes considers himself lucky because it happens to him twice. He can use the experience learned the first time around, when he was really young, to ensure that that he maximizes the aesthetic pleasure the second time around. Both Johannes and Kierkegaard would be dismissive of those who go from love affair to love affair (i.e. Casanova) believing that they can reproduce experiences. By definition, within the terms of reference of the aesthetic adventurer, magical moments lose their magic when you multiply them. The most important thing is to *capture* exquisite new moments. The only safe and sure way to find abiding love is in one's memory. The trick now is to render the external internal.

For Johannes, and any modern collector of aesthetic experiences, memory is both a resource and a problem. It is a resource because the magic moment can only be preserved pure and pristine in memory. In fact, love can be aesthetically enhanced in memory whereas it always runs the risk of diminution in real life. The idealistic poetization of love typically beats earthly love hands down; which is why it is so dangerous to let love linger past its expiry date. The problem with memory is that it one tends to forget everything, including lovers, over time. When one's entire life's meaning depends on being able to recall magic moments from memory, you can have some idea of the magnitude of the problem.

This is the age of the portrait; the age of the photograph is rapidly approaching. Portraits used to be evidence of lineage; increasingly they become love's aids to memory. Johannes is too clever not to have *fixed* his memories of his first love and his second love, Cordelia, in his mind. He imagines the first in a rural country setting that seems to reflect the openness and expansiveness of the relations. He imagines the second at that little table, almost a waiting room, with the lamp reaching down and its shade moving with every breeze and breath – it is the intensity of the relationship with Cordelia that he

particularly wants to remember. Fixing this 'real' image in his mind is critically important because, as a sensualist, he desperately needs the real to "awaken the ideal", in other words to trigger his aesthetic imagination. Without this attention to reality, the imagination of the individual is unfocused, dreamlike and totally incapable of capturing the moment. The ideal situation is to awaken the ideal from the real.

For those like Johannes who seek to crystallize reality aesthetically into magic moments, activating distance is crucial. One needs to adopt the position of the spectator – the photographer who fixes time, not in a holiday snapshot but an aesthetic frame. The aesthete must pay attention to every detail, note any distinctions and differences, and at all costs avoid becoming absorbed or merging with the subject. To the extent that any merging occurs, therefore, it involves *method*. Otherwise, one loses oneself and the moment is blurred in the imagination, only capable of being recaptured as a vague feeling. The most powerful feeling, and potentially richest, stimuli imaginable for Johannes is love and, in his search for stronger and stronger realities to inspire him, he feels tremendously fortunate to discover love's potential for a second time.

One of the criticisms of Kierkegaard is that he objectifies women and essentializes what he terms "feminine nature". In part, of course, he is reflecting a commonplace and very questionable nineteenth-century notion of gender differences and the "separate spheres" within which women and men were supposed to operate. This criticism is absolutely valid. What it obscures, however, is that aestheticizing reality means actively seeking out differences that can be lovingly teased out and beautifully rendered. You cannot do this very easily in terms of anything like friendships between equal men and women, which is precisely why even the most liberated men and women are inclined to ascribe to gender roles if they want to have any *piquancy* in their relationship. Johannes mentions this piquancy several times and always negatively, not because he doesn't believe that it is there and a necessary condition for loving, but because these gendered differences and attractions are meaningless to him unless they have received the aesthetic treatment. Not only are most sexual relations crude and unrefined, but also because they provide no crystallized moments worth remembering.

It is easy to view this aesthetic rendering of moments with varying degrees of intensity as superficial. You could view Johannes as a conceited dandy. But there are at least two elements that make this particular kind of *dandyism* a very serious philosophy of life. First, if all we humans are is *moments in memory* then it is important to make these moments as significant as possible. Second, if humans want to act as free individuals, they cannot go through life in a dreamlike state – as virtual automata. They need to notice, differentiate, select or *choose* the moments that are significant for them as individuals. It is the act of shaping moments that makes us free individuals. Shaping beautiful moments involves a huge amount of self-denial, which ironically leads to greater reflexivity and self-awareness. Johannes' powerful critique of the people around him is that they lack any real understanding or appreciation of themselves. They are anything but self-reflective. In addition, Johannes thinks that most modern people float lazily through life without noticing beauty or creating beautiful moments for themselves. For him, this is the *modern* unexamined life of the bourgeois man and woman.

I want you to appreciate the power of this critique. If there is no ideal beauty, no meaning in life, if we create our own meaning and measure it in moments, then Johannes' has at least made a choice. It's an aesthetic choice because neither ethics nor religion has any intrinsic meaning for him. You might not like his character, but you need to appreciate that it takes a lot of balls. It also takes a hell of a lot of work. You can't just stroll through life; you have to be engaged in spotting and moulding the aesthetic elements that you can find there. And people like Johannes are anything but worthless; they constitute many of the poets and artists that allow us to *see* life afresh. Johannes thinks that he gives people a gift, and he might be right. All the same time, he doesn't respect them as *persons* only as *potentials*. Moreover, he appraises them in terms of potential; he never bestows significance on them in advance or alongside those appraisals. To be fair, he doesn't do that with himself either.

Johannes's choice is anything but easy. He is prepared to suffer for his art. Just consider that he desperately needs constant stimulation. He's always on the edge of boredom bordering on dread:

> Or has the turbulence in the world's structure come to a standstill? Is your riddle solved, so that you (i.e. fate or chance) too have plunged into the ocean of eternity? Terrible thought, for then the world has come to a standstill from boredom! (269)

It was this existential assessment of life as **dreadful** that propelled him on the aesthetic adventure in the first place, combined with his disgust at the way most people slouch unreflectively between the cradle and the grave. Johannes lives with constant ambiguity. There is no exit or rather there is only one exit. Despair and suicide is always a possibility with people like Johannes, because it is the only escape from the chore of making meaningful moments for himself.

Immediacy versus History

The moment is everything. Everything else in life is movement. Capturing a moment arrests time; it is what we experience as an aesthetic arrest where time stands still *for us*. The term "arrest" is important because the mind *rests* momentarily in "that one picture that is not seen". The aesthetic adventurer is obviously self-centred and even selfish in discovering the beauty that makes his or her life beautiful but, arguably, this ability to poeticize life and love plays an important role in making modern life more *interesting*. The word "interesting" can be confusing because, in a modern specialized society, different people find different things interesting. But what the aesthetic adventurer means by the term interesting is not something pre-packaged that you can fit into, but something that wakes you up from the mundane and allows you to *see* more vividly. The romantics rightly struck upon love as the one single emotion that changes everything. Romanticism also put beauty – of nature and the beloved – clearly at the center of meaningfulness. Finally, romanticism challenged the status quo of fixed and predictable and controlling social relations. The mistake that the romantics made, for existentialists

like Kierkegaard, was selling us damaged goods by linking love to the mundane or the eternal rather than to the immediate, the contingent and the momentary. The net result was the unlawful wedding (pardon the pun) of love to marriage and marriage to eternity. Instead of being life affirming, love was transformed into a living death sentence.

In order to bring out the life affirming love in Cordelia – what he calls "raising her to a higher level" (278) -- Johannes needs to cut her out from the social herd, specifically her aunt. Because he is highly observant and self-reflective, whereas most people are not, he is able to entrance the aunt by appealing to her interest in agricultural/horticultural topics. In this way, he slowly maneuvers the situation, at the expense of Edward, towards an engagement to marry. It's complicated following the ins and outs of all the internal debates that go on in Johannes' mind, partly I think because Kierkegaard is recounting and reliving his own engagement to the very young and pretty Regine Olsen. Thus, Johannes continually ridicules engagements and convinces Cordelia that they are obstacles to love, while betraying a distinct fear of the commitment involved in marriage. If we separate the character from the author, however, a clear argument emerges for immediacy over history.

Johannes feels that he needs to get engaged to Cordelia in order to get close enough to push the love affair forward. But an engagement is a social institution with a history; it connects individuals to a society with a history and to families with their own histories. A sociologist might describe engagements and marriage as social institutions but Kierkegaard wants to retain this idea of interlocking histories to clarify his major point, namely you aesthetically affirm your life through the immediate rather than through an outside history. To the extent that you are conditioned by relationship histories outside of you, you cannot authentically respond to the immediate. To the extent that those histories take up your mental space, *you are not you*. The real you, the free you, the self-aware you are the memories that you create for yourself. Since love is the most powerful and life-affirming moment you will ever have, you have to take precautions not to allow history to get in the way. The only history that counts is the history that you create for yourself.

The romantics were tuned into the special mood that love generates. They beautifully described love as an *empire* created solely by the lovers, as a closed circle of intense emotion in which lovers constituted a world to themselves. But Kierkegaard noted that romanticism failed to be compelling precisely because it couldn't bridge the gap between the lovers and external social relationships, particularly the married state. In the second part of *Either/Or* he argues that love needs to be subsumed first within ethics and second within spirituality. But ethics and spirituality, and the web of social relationships that they support, can no longer be taken for granted as eternal truths; they have to be choices. Johannes, on the other hand, is more or less firm in his conviction that ethics and spirituality are histories that interfere with the individual's ability to process reality in its immediacy. The only pseudo-spirituality that Johannes is willing to accept is an aesthetic shaping of reality. And the only reality that he is willing to affirm is *immediate* reality unmediated by history. This for Johannes is first and foremost an issue of freedom.

Throughout "The Seducer's Diary", Johannes affirms the freedom to process one's own immediate reality without historical interference. He's extreme, of course, but many modern people are inclined to trust their own feelings and their reflections on those feelings, aren't they? And the reason why a course on love is so difficult to teach is because free individuals tend to resist ideas of love that they don't share. Johannes goes a huge step beyond that by saying that love is not real, substantial or fully aesthetic unless it is given freely and completely, and that means relegating all other histories apart from the history of the love affair to the background. Of course, you can't get rid of external histories and institutions altogether. Johannes needs to get engaged, for example, to develop the affair. But you shouldn't feel any responsibility to stay engaged, much less to commit to marriage, or anything else that gets in the way of maximizing love's supremely aesthetic moment.

Again, you have to remember that this is an extreme position that Kierkegaard develops to demonstrate the different kinds of choices involved in the aesthetic and the ethical *cum* spiritual approaches to life and love. Few people are forced to make such dramatic choices in real life. But you should at least know where your priorities lie. If it came to showdown, what is it that you are committed to? Are you committed to <u>being in</u> love or to the <u>responsibility</u> of a serious relationship? You want to have it both ways, but what if you can't? What would you choose? Now up the ante considerably and consider the existentialist dilemma. If all you are is the intense experiences that you cherish and store in your memory, why would you ever want to commit yourself to a serious relationship that, at the very least, is going to dilute those experiences within pre-ordained histories with their attendant distractions and duties. Marriage is a joint history connected to other histories. Can love survive marriage? The romantics hoped so; the early existentialists didn't think so; in any case, marriage could not be allowed to interfere with the aesthetic adventure of capturing intense moments. Many of us want to have it both ways. Like the romantics, we want *both* the intense experience and the stable relationship. We don't appreciate that immediacy and history are unlikely to be compatible.

Life is not easy for the existential aesthetic adventurer. Given Johannes commitment to immediate reality, and his own individual freedom, he is prepared to relinquish most external history. The only history that has validity/reality/immediacy for him is his personal history. This is a recognizably *modern individual*. The people of the past located their personal history within a more general social history; this general history provided a grid upon which to locate their personal experiences. Social and personal memory reinforced each other and gave rise to a doubly coherent personality or character. The existential question *who am I* did not arise nor, however, did the recognizably modern kind of individualistic freedom to find or construct oneself. The difficulty, of course, lies in the lack of social support for one's individuality. Johannes may appear to be irresponsibly selfish by social standards, but he has the awesome responsibility for creating himself. And all he has to do this are *his* memories.

Going Beyond Reality

There is a sentimental song by Keith Urban (actually it was by Rodney Crowell) called *Memories of Us*. What the song implies is that love creates a "we", however impermanent that *we* may be that goes beyond the existential "I". In an important sense, that "we" is a possible leap of faith worth considering without the necessity of Kierkegaard's spiritual solution. Kierkegaard's philosophy is built upon appraisal and it is quintessentially religious in so far as it is only God who has the power to bestow greater meaning than reality provides. I'm not adept in Kierkegaardian studies, so I may be stretching somewhat here by suggesting that love's "we" creates its own self-contained eternity, not simply for as long as love lasts, and not simply as a fond memory, but as a bestowal of a wished-for meaning. Wishes might not come true, they might well run up against reality and social institutions, but the act of wishing for love to be eternal is life changing. The crucial point is that this is no so much a radical choice or a leap of faith in fear and trembling, as it is an *act of loving*.

As Kierkegaard says in Part II of *Either/Or*, when people fall in love, particularly when they experience first love before their guard is up, they wish it to be eternal. But then, says Kierkegaard, they are confronted by the responsibilities of married life and social duties and that love is severely challenged unless it is transformed into and fortified by something bigger, i.e. the eternal itself. This is recognizably individualistic love as appraisal approaching a bigger spiritual ideal that can embrace it and merge with it. Love's bestowal typically also has spiritual resonance, but that spirit need not be apart from our wishing it to be so when we love. What I find particularly fascinating about "The Seducer's Diary" and what the very masculine Kierkegaard may not himself have fully understood is that it describes an alternative that is neither some hoped for middle way nor a case of muddled and lazy minded thinking. It is the feminine embodiment of love.

The feminine embodiment of love that Kierkegaard describes need not preclude the capacity for rational thought; it need not be formlessly emotive and intuitive; it need not even be characteristically female. It is more properly an approach to love where the person goes beyond the limits of the self and usurps reality with its own power of bestowing love. Cordelia's love is patently aesthetic, but it is not hedged around with aesthetic and existential imperatives. Consider the two short but revealing letters that she writes to Johannes (256). Her love is "continuing" whereas Johannes has been artificially curtailed at some supposed apogee. Her love contains elements of unlimited generosity and self-sacrifice, whereas Johannes doles out emotion without ever surrendering himself. Her love is a wonderful kind of overflowing bestowal to Johannes that his essentially capitalist doctrine of investing in immediate moments cannot begin to fathom. It is this squandering of love's infinite bestowal that I find most repelling in Johannes.

It doesn't matter if social or other realities might eventually intrude into and weaken Cordelia's love. What is wonderful and liberating and immensely fulfilling about her loving is that she is willing to take the risk. All Johannes sees is the risk. Her love is motivated by positive bestowals; his is stunted by negative appraisals, not of the lover, so much as of love itself. Kierkegaard might feel safe and secure in his rationalistic masculine choice making; certainly we shouldn't allow that to interfere with the insights

he provides into the very different character of someone like Cordelia. In fact, she makes Johannes, and by implication Kierkegaard, look very shallow when she is “awakened” to love. And whose to say it takes a clever aesthete to awaken that kind of love?; as if it were only available to artists. Cordelia is the complete package whereas Johannes is not. Johannes fails even as an assessor because he has to play the Platonic game of seeing Cordelia as representative of a “female totality” (272), as a representative of an ideal rather than a real loving person. The power in her loving is simply tremendous. We can read passages like the following in a totally different way from that perhaps intended by Johannes (and probably Kierkegaard):

> Now I go for pre-market purchasing. But perhaps she has exhausted one aspect of the interesting: her secluded life seems to indicate that. Now it is a matter of finding another aspect which seems to her at first sight not at all interesting, but which, just because of this resistance, will become so. For this purpose I select not the poetic but the prosaic. That then is the start. First, her femininity is neutralized by prosaic common sense and ridicule, not directly but indirectly, together with what is absolutely neutral: spirit. She comes close to losing the sense of her femininity, but in this condition she cannot stand alone: she throws herself into my arms, not as if I were a lover, no, still quite neutrally. Then her femininity awakens, one coaxes it to its greatest resilience, one lets her come up against something effectively real, she goes beyond it, her femininity attains almost supernatural heights, she belongs to me with a worldly passion.

The language here is as revealing as it is fascinating. Cordelia is capable – he wouldn’t have chosen her if he didn’t think she was capable – of a special kind of loving. It is a loving that is simultaneously a “worldly passion” but “goes beyond” reality. Her femininity attains “almost supernatural heights”. You have to ask yourself, who is the real gainer here – the person who temporarily possesses this kind of love and who stores it in his memory box or the person who “bestows” it. Probably, Johannes would take credit for this bestowal; after all he thinks he has systematically teased it out of Cordelia. But that’s not the real issue. The issue is who has the capacity for bestowing love if the conditions are right. It’s certainly not Johannes and probably not Kierkegaard.

Love, Culture and Repression

The Riddle of History

In order to really appreciate Freud's discussion of love, you first have to get past the simplistic equation love = sex. You have to really grasp the astonishing attempt that Freud makes to reconstruct human history and, particularly, its proudest achievement – human culture. The nineteenth-century European world view that to a large extent persists today is that what makes us human – what makes us different from animals – is our reason. The European emphasis on rationality has a long history, but it obviously coalesced in the eighteenth-century enlightenment that placed nature at the service of reason and legitimized its continuing domination in the interest of rational progress. In tandem with the rational exploitation of nature was generated a pervasive view of human beings, no longer as selfish and sinful, but as rationally self-interested beings whose freely calculated decisions would usher in, if not utopia, at least the best of all possible economic worlds. This rationally instrumental and utilitarian perspective came into considerable criticism from the romantics who increasingly sought refuge in the imagination. But the influence of the romantics was limited precisely because they established and barricaded their ideal of culture outside the dominant paradigm of rationalism.

As I've suggested, reason and rationalism have a long European legacy and in this class we witnessed its emergence with Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. What differentiated eighteenth and especially nineteenth-century rationalism was its marriage to realism. In Plato, rationalism certainly is triumphant, but it leads to ideal forms like goodness. Nineteenth-century science and intellectual life generally was focused on what is demonstrably evident, in other words the *reality principle*. The scientific perspective was to extrapolate what is *possible* from what is. As hypothesis and investigation, it is uncomfortable with and dismissive of idealizations that do not conform to reality. Of course, rationalistic scientists and economists are notoriously blind to their own idealizations be they assumptions or axioms. Their power and success derive far less from the absolute truth of their observations and more from their insights into the way things work and their identification and elimination of potential obstacles to the smooth functioning of presumed reality. Thus, while economics is hardly solid as a way of understanding human behaviour, it is highly successful at mobilizing people and resources in the creation of wealth.

Sigmund Freud worshipped at the shrine of the reality-principle. Anything but an idealist, his clinical approach was totally focused on helping individuals to cope with everyday reality in the nineteenth-century. What makes Freud so interesting is not his acceptance of nineteenth-century reality or even his therapeutic practice, which aimed at getting individuals to adjust to what was considered *normal*. Rather, it is his unflinching investigation into what exactly a human being is. His reality-based exploration of what makes human beings tick brings into question the assumption that governs most of European history. A realistic study of the human being conclusively demonstrates that

we are not naturally rationalistic. We are naturally erotic. Our governing principles are desires that are anything but rational. We are not so much *sexual* as *sensual* organisms. We are different from animals, not so much because of our reason, but because of our extended infancy. Our much-celebrated rationality does not define our *real* and complete nature, but actually involves manipulating and contorting our nature. The riddle of history is that human civilization *represses* us as desiring animals, pleasure seeing biological entities in order to achieve the goals of common and progressive society. All that we call normal or *civilized* behaviour demands that we *repress* or *sublimate* our instinctual selves.

Before looking a bit more closely at Freud's interpretation of our sensual instincts, which I promise you in advance that you don't have to swallow wholesale, it's important to appreciate what a revolution against conventional attitudes Mr. Freud is engaged in. It's also interesting to consider just how paradoxical his position is. The reality-principle privileges what *is* or what normally exists in human behaviour. This means that Freud expects his patients largely to adjust their behaviour to conventional norms. But since civilization and culture *repress* everyone's basic instincts rather than reflects their fundamental rationality, what society considers normal is biologically abnormal. Society is characterized, therefore, by *neurosis* and, in order to function normally in society, you have to be *neurotic*. If this were the extent of the problem, it might not appear so overwhelming. Society forces you to behave yourself, so what? The more fundamental issue than social regulations, telling you what you can and cannot do, is that civilization is synonymous with *culture* than you internalize. It is not just a case of someone else telling you what to do; it is a case of you telling yourself what to do. "In the new Freudian perspective, the essence of society is repression of the individual, and the essence of the individual is repression of himself" (Norman O. Brown, 16). Society is inherently neurotic; the more complex and advanced society is, the more neurotic it is; unless you want to get rid of culture and civilization, the only legitimate question is *how neurotic do we want to be?*

When Freud interrogates the dreams and subconscious of his patients, what he discovers is profound. Those diagnosed as neurotics are essentially no different from the rest of us; they are just less successful in adapting to reality. It is useless to stigmatize neurotics as irrational because we are all instinctively irrational, we've just learned how to subjugate and sublimate our irrationalities more successfully. The neurotic patient and the so-called normal person are different only in degree. What both seek is happiness. The normal person adjusts to reality; the neurotic hides from reality in delusion. Neither in reality nor in delusion is happiness to be found. In fact, according to Freud, the desire for happiness itself is the problem. The best we can ever hope for is an approximation of happiness. The paradise we really want – and have to some extent really experienced in infancy – is an impossibility. All culture and civilization are premised on that impossibility. The riddle of history is answered by this frustrated desire

Infant Sensuality

We are still a long way from love and marriage but, if you appreciate what's been said thus far, you will have some inkling of Freud's ultimate destination. Love and marriage are cultural mechanisms for managing and transcending our sensual instincts. Because love and marriage are the socially accepted and normalizing channels of a more ubiquitous desire, two serious problems relating to love should already be apparent. First, the institution of marriage is not likely to fulfill the full spectrum of desire that tends to seek total fulfillment without any repression. Repression is a component of any social relationship. Second, the best approximation of marital satisfaction, that judicious blend of sexuality and affection (or friendship), will be rare. Why? Because the blending of instinctual and social love, while not impossible to achieve (there are good marriages) is a notoriously difficult balancing act. We should not expect marriage to escape the general unhappiness or neurosis of society.

Assuming that Freud has put his finger on the difficulty faced by love and the relative incompatibility of desire and marriage – because this is clearly even more of an issue for us than for the nineteenth-century when marriages tended to last – we need to discover along with Freud the tension between love as desire and love as social institution. In effect, we need to go back to the basics of the formation of the human being. Unlike animals, human beings have an extended infancy and a more gradual introduction into reality. This gradual process effectively determines the information available for individual, and by implication more general *cultural*, development. Freud argues that 3 stages in infant or child development correspond to 3 cultural stages. These are 1) the free exercise of the sexual instinct; 2) the restriction of the sexual instinct to the purposes of procreation; and 3) the legitimization of procreation as defined by moral codes, i.e. marriage. The fundamental point that Freud wants to make is that the passage through these stages is fraught with challenges, that many people do not fully complete the process, and that even those who make a successful passage will bear the marks of the difficulties involved in aspects of conscious or subconscious behavior. In any event, most of us will unconsciously desire, if not the full range of sensual experience of early infancy, then at least that "intensity".

In early infancy, the baby at the breast and in the crib, the developing individual is exposed to the full range of bodily, i.e. *sensual*, satisfaction. These are oral, anal and genital pleasures and are the most inclusive possible package of desires requiring and, unless there is a problem, receiving satisfaction. This panoply of consummate pleasure of the body, which would later come to be replaced and symbolized by a more culturally respectable and culturally controlling Garden of Eden or Paradise, is in Freud's language a truly *polymorphous sexuality*. What does that mean? It means that our original sexual impulses are very broad; so broad in fact that impulses that would later be consigned to homosexuality are perfectly normal at this stage. Of course, this polymorphous sexuality that celebrates the entire body is not sexually functional in the conjugal sense that is needed to reproduce the species. What needs to happen for normal sexual relations to occur is for sexuality to be concentrated in the genitals. But this is precisely what does not happen very quickly in the case of human development, since the child is so long at the mother's breast. Both for the female and the male child, the original object of polymorphous sexual expression and attraction are the self. There will be some affection

for the mother as nurturer, but originally the distinction between mother and self is blurred. The mother's breasts, for example, are extensions of the self and are fiercely demanded when not available on demand. This for Freud is a kind of bodily paradise. What fascinates him are three things: 1) how polymorphous sexuality is transformed into genital sexuality and 2) how this genital sexuality is made useful to society and civilization, and 3) what is gained and what is lost in the process.

Freud's model of sexual development was excessively male and generally portrayed women as less complete or passive versions of men. In other words, women were castrated males and naturally tended to be envious of the penis up to the point when they elevated their vagina over their clitoris and accepted their twin destiny as receptacles for the penis and producers of babies. Since masculine eroticism is Freud's primary model, we can see more clearly how progress is made through the three stages in the case of men than in the case of women. Initially, the male discrimination between the self and the other (the mother) is blurred but, eventually, the object choice of the self separates itself from a general identification and preference for the mother. There is never initially identification with the father, who competes for the mother's attention. In normal genital development towards puberty, the focus of the male becomes now and for the rest of his life – his penis. Through the pre-puberty and puberty period, the attention to the penis is *narcissistic*, in other words, the male sees no reason for any other attitude than masturbation or what Freud calls auto-eroticism. Typically, the parents disapprove of this anti-social use of the penis and threaten something like castration. The frightened young male, typically frightened by the hated father, is forced to find some other object for his sexuality than himself and, naturally, focuses on the mother. The Oedipus complex now sets in, with the young male desiring to get rid of his father and mate with his mother. But the fear of the father elevates the latter as an authority figure, who is internalized as a kind of conscience for socially unacceptable behaviour. In order to exhibit a normal attitude towards one's penis, one needs to point it (if I may say so) at acceptable mother substitutes (other women). In order to demonstrate a civilized attitude towards one's penis, one needs to point it at unmarried women who one marries. As the Oedipus complex is more rigorously superseded, the male becomes a father figure. In psychological language, the father has been installed in the male's own psyche.

Whether or not you buy into this entire package, which reads to me like a fascinating narrative of sexual development rather than a scientific analysis, what should be clear is that *normal human sexual development is complex*. It is even more complex in some ways for women than men because they move from identification with their mother to fixation on their father as early as the oral stage. When the young girl discovers the anatomical difference with her father, she feels mutilated or castrated. She compensates for this shock by seeking to intensify the love that she feels from her father, consequently entering into hostility and rivalry with her mother. In the course of normal development, the girl would likely discover representative father figures (other than the father) as legitimate objects of sexual attraction. But Freud thinks that normal female development is more problematic for a number of reasons, some of which clearly stem from his own nineteenth century patriarchal prejudices, but we'll mention them just the same. First, the shock of finding that one doesn't have this marvelous thing called a penis could be so

resented that the female continues to imagine herself as a male. This can have two different consequences depending on circumstances, either frigidity or lesbianism. Second, unlike the male, the girl identifies both with the mother and with the father, meaning that her sexual preferences are less likely to be as fixed as the so-called normal male. Third, the girl can so resent the father's betrayal with her mother, that she remains angry with men in general. Freud thinks this accounts for the unusual fact that many women nag their first husbands but are perfectly compatible with their second husbands (because the primary substitute for the father is no longer in the picture). Finally, and most fascinating of all, Freud believes that women generally have an undeveloped super-ego, conscience or ethical sense because the fear of castration does not weight so heavily with them. That women might have a different approach to ethical issues than males did not occur to Freud, although it does to modern feminist scholars.

Whether or not you agree with all of this essentializing of sexual development, and lest you are inclined to throw out the baby with the bathwater, Freud's basic point is that our "anatomy is destiny". Both males and females begin life as polymorphous sensual bodies engaged in free play without any sense of guilt. What society and civilization have to accomplish is the direction of that free play of sensuality into acceptable directions. It has to make certain kinds of behaviours *taboo* in order to redirect behaviour into areas deemed socially profitable. The painful process of tabooing formerly enjoyable kinds of playfulness is bound to generate resistances. When these resistances impede what is considered normal and responsible behaviours, people act out their neurosis or have breakdown. But even in normal cases, these resistances are bound to have left residual traces in the psyche. The adult psyche bears witness to all the stages of development from innocent polymorphous sexuality. Some taboo desires get buried in the unconscious Id, that the Super-Ego is absolutely determined to repress. The successful Ego mediates between the Id and the Super-Ego to maintain psychic health.

The Id deals in desire; the super-ego in suppression of desire. The ego tries to walk a balance by continually referring to the reality-principle, now defined not as the battle between angelic and demonic forces, not as some universal truth, but as what society deems normal or acceptable. What Freud wants the fragile modern ego to appreciate is that repression means that you are damned if you do and damned if you don't. It's not your fault; it is just the way life is. Learn to accept what you can't change and don't beat yourself up too badly. Above all else, understand that being "free and happy" in love is a relative term that means *coming to terms* with your compromised sexual nature.

Culture and Sublimation

Whether you like his analysis of sensuality or not, you have to admit that, for a scientist who adheres to the *reality principle* quite strictly, Freud is very humanistic sort of guy. The subtext of virtually all of his writings is sympathy for the *disease that is humanity* and the desire, within the strict limits of reality, to emancipate individuals from unnecessary pain. The pain that he identifies especially reveals itself in love and marriage. What Freud deplores is the *excessive idealism* that the language of love and marriage reinforces and that sets people up for tragic disappointment. Disappointment

because love and marriage cannot ever live up to those expectations. Tragic because we do have imbedded in our human consciousness the ideal of a time when loving ourselves as physical bodies was complete, prior to the fall from paradise when our physical desires were made subservient to the needs of civilization. The only possible equivalent for such a state of perfect being outside of infancy would be a disastrous choice – death. Freud increasingly came to believe that a paradoxical remedy for infantile sensuality thwarted was embodied in something called the *death wish*. By ridding mankind of excessive idealization, Freud hoped to reaffirm *life over death*.

Don't get Freud wrong. He admires the achievements of European civilization. He certainly doesn't think that there is a time or place after early infancy where a human could be full and complete in himself. Repression is a function of society. And the pay off for the intensified repression of civilization is a wonderful outpouring of art and science. What the humanist in Freud wants is two things: 1) he wants people to understand what they can legitimately desire and what happiness they can aspire towards, and 2) he wants to alert individuals and those responsible for culture to the kinds of *unnecessary repression* that proliferate in modernity and that do not merely *repress* but *oppress*. One of Freud's chief targets can be expected from a scientific type. He believes that religion is far too oppressive in scaring the living daylights out of people if they have impure or socially taboo *thoughts*. Freud thinks he understands the function of religion in shaping socially acceptable behaviours and directing sexuality towards marriage and procreations. But he argues that religion has been *excessive* in its prohibitions towards sexuality and contributed to a modern neurosis that is toxic. Religion, however, is far from being Freud's sole target. Religion's secular replacement, ethics, comes in for scathing criticism as incapacitating modern men and women from successfully navigating the complexities of modern life. And, although he was in many ways the quintessential patriarchal bourgeois male, Freud's writings were an explicit condemnation of the prudery and hypocrisy of conventional morality. So excessive and unrealistic were these sexual attitudes that they left too many women – and men too – frigid or with erectile problems. They effected a vicious double standard, which tacitly accepted the fact that men would cheat on their wives, while wives were stigmatized for cheating on their husbands.

What were the functions of society and civilization that resulted in so much psychic devastation, Freud asked? They were legitimate in so far as society had a right to legislate what was *normal* and in ways that reinforced social stability and its continuation. Thus, the deflection of sexuality into marriage and childrearing was perfectly legitimate. In addition, an advanced civilization required intellectual and artistic specialization, which meant *sublimating* and tapping into sexual energy for other purposes. Left to their own devices, human beings might have been stuck at the level of two appetites: hunger and sex. Civilization, at the level of culture, legitimately praises and rewards the higher forms of endeavor. Sublimation is an acceptable trade off at the individual as well as the social level. Not only does it provide a more complex and sophisticated pleasure for a more instinctual one, but also, for those who are gifted, it offers something pretty special for a kind of "complete satisfaction" that is no longer available to us. Freud himself obviously derived enormous satisfaction from thinking

and writing at a high level, despite the human pain that he catalogued. What he consistently objected to was extreme and unnecessary forms of social control.

The problem with culture in general, and sublimation in particular, is that they often establish themselves dogmatically rather than realistically. In other words, cultural values appear to the mind as imperatives and not what they really are, functional requirements that may or may not be necessary. All human ideals are illusions, but when they take over one's psyche they become potentially dangerous delusions. Nowhere is this more evident than the stereotypes that one typically entertains when one is seeking out love. Freud's description of infant sensuality shows how the male sexual desire originally directed at one's mother (or sister) gets deflected and sublimated into an idealistic "deference for women in general". In order for that idealistic sublimation to occur, however, the prohibition against incest is impressed upon the developing mind, crystallizing the idea that not only is sex dirty but particularly heinous when conceived with respect to those nearest and dearest. At the same time, that original powerful desire does not go away; it is merely repressed or, as is likely, is made available in connection to people that one is not close to. What results is the classic case of the man who has no trouble engaging in sexual activity with a prostitute, but whose sexuality is seriously compromised with his wife. Given that both married men and women bring these residual repressions with them to the marriage bed, Freud believes that the really *legitimate* course of action is to come to terms with these repressions. If we want to be "free and happy in love" a man "must have overcome his deference for women and come to terms with the idea of incest with mother or sister" (55). Or to put it another way, people need to understand, accept, and work with their deep set sexual issues.

The danger with culture in general, and sublimation in particular, is that they can erode the sexual instinct and place a dark cloud over our most intimate relationships. Freud wants his readers to understand that he is not pitting culture against sexuality by pointing out such problems and dangers. In fact, what he says is so much more interesting and worth considering. The only time the sexual instinct is relatively complete is in infancy. Thereafter, what must occur is dialectic between culture and sexuality. Simply freeing up genitally based sexuality will never result in greater happiness; indeed, it *becomes empty*. Unrestrained sexual liberty would be entirely boring and mechanical. The erotic absolutely requires cultural shaping and even cultural resistance to develop:

> It is easy to show that the value the mind sets on erotic needs instantly sinks as soon as satisfaction becomes readily obtainable. Some obstacle is necessary to swell the tide of the libido to its height, and at all periods of history, wherever natural barriers in the way of satisfaction have not sufficed, mankind has erected conventional ones in order to be able to enjoy love. This is true of individuals and nations. In times during which no obstacles to sexual satisfaction existed, such as, may be, during the decline of the civilizations of antiquity, love became worthless, life became empty, and strong reaction-formations were necessary before the indispensable emotional value of love could be recovered.

Clearly, for Freud, love does not equal sex. Love is a cultural ideal that requires *obstacles* to sexual access and the sublimation of the sex drive. However, the kind of love in particular that Freud wants to explore – love in marriage -- has an obvious sexual origin. Whereas all cultural sublimations involve a degree of repression, therefore, ideals of love between men and women – if they are to provide incentives to normal development – have to confront the traumatic sexual development of the human infant. Freud repeatedly warns that personal tragedies will proliferate – i.e. one's love life will be unnecessarily painful and marriages will fail to provide men and women with happiness – if one's idealizations are excessive.

There is no simple solution apart from clearly recognizing and facing up to the difficulty. In love and marriage, in particular, one needs to carefully balance the ideal of love with its sexually based reality. Relinquishing love's ideal would mean jettisoning not only its tenderness but also its eroticism. Ignoring the underlying sex drive is a recipe for psychic disaster. In nineteenth-century Victorian society, Freud obviously thought that cultural idealizations had repressed anything like healthy sexuality to such an extent that any serious discussion of the topic was taboo. The extremely negative reaction to his scientific attempt to put sexuality back on the mental map demonstrated the extent of the problem.

Of course, it didn't make Freud's task of convincing nineteenth-century European society that it's attitude towards sexuality was neurotic that he located the primary sexual instinct together with their repression and possible inversion in early infancy. In effect, he made sexuality a fundamental human drive even prior to the age of puberty, consequently defining the human being in terms of sexuality. Freud's clinical investigations may have been distorted by his obsession not merely in chasing down but amplifying the significance of sex. Thus, for Freud, all of ***culture*** is nothing more or less than the sublimation of this single drive. Clearly, even if you don't share the sentiment of some of Freud's nineteenth-century critics that this focus on infant sex and incestuous ideas is disgusting, you are perfectly entitled to think that it is highly reductionist. The extent of this reduction of humanity to its sexual anatomy is clearly demonstrated in Freud's concept of the libido.

The Libidinal Economy

We shouldn't make the typical error of Freud's critics by being unnecessarily reductionist ourselves. When Freud utilized the concept of the libido or sex drive, he usually had infant sexuality in mind. The libido could not be defined only as genital sex. It related to the entire range of infant sensuality and was characterized as broadly as the "pleasure principle". What Freud clearly did want to argue, however, was that that the libido or pleasure principle or desire or Eros or whatever you want to call it, originated in the *body*. If for nothing else, we can thank Freud for reminding European civilization of the importance of the body, and especially of the very vulnerable human body. For a culture obsessive focused on mental symbols, Freud's warning that the oppressed body would come back to haunt their dreams was, in my opinion, entirely salutary. I'm not as convinced, however, by Freud's own obsession with infant sensuality.

Freud maintained that the sex drive or libido was the source of civilization. Society and its culture were essentially libido damned up and channeled into socially approved ideals and behaviours, a process that he identified as starting in infancy and leaving remedial marks of repression on the unconscious that could lead to serious neurosis. The normal or healthy process of individual development channeled the libido in ways that did the least damage and that substituted more complex and refined pleasures for more instinctual ones. The point that needs to be underlined is that Freud firmly believed that the infant libido was the source of everything significant in civilization, which is why he deplored the tendency in modern culture, not merely to repress, but to deny the powerhouse that is the libido.

All of Freud's writings were concerned to affirm the libido as the original source and to condemn any excessive demands on the libido that might impact its effectiveness. Thus, just as he warns married men against exaggerated idealizations, he warns social legislators against unnecessary repression that might interfere with a normal, life affirming *vita sexualis*. All of his clinical studies pointed to the fact that that any perceived "conflict between the libido and sexual repression" was absolutely bound to lead to serious neurosis. In the individual, that neurosis was evidenced as sexual inversion or obsession, and was seriously incapacitating. In the larger society, any kind of excessive damming up of the libido, without a clear benefit to society, was as dangerous as it was inhumane. Freud deplored all the characteristic of modernity that "keep the nervous system on the rack" (12) and exhausted the valuable resources of the libido. Unnecessary repression bred pathological individuals and a pathological society. Freud put it bluntly saying that:

> The injurious influence of culture reduces itself in all essentials to the undue suppression of the sexual life in civilized peoples (or classes) as a result of the "civilized" sexual morality which prevails among them.

Two aspects of this argument need to be highlighted. The first should be obvious; Freud obviously thinks that everything in culture reduces to sexuality. Second, the only form of cultural oppression worth discussing is the *suppression of sexuality*. The problem with Freud's reductionism is that it ignores or trivializes any form of oppression other than sexual oppression. The quote cited above equates *peoples* and *classes* without ever once considering the possibility that some people or some classes in society might oppress others for reasons that have nothing to do with sexuality. Of course, Freud might respond that all political and social arrangements depend on the repression and sublimation of sexuality. But that is not the same thing as saying that they are *essentially and only forms of sexual repression*. The mention of class is appropriate here because class is fundamentally an economic concept rather than a cultural concept. Deriving economic arrangements from the sexual instinct is at best a dicey proposition. The economy is not obviously concerned with sexuality, or at best only indirectly; it is concerned with the production and distribution of resources that sustain life. If you were going to base economics on an instinct, wouldn't hunger or self-preservation be more appropriate than sexuality?

Of course, I'm not convinced by Freud's reductionism here, although I might be prepared to agree that neither Freud nor Marx present a full picture of humanity and its oppressions by focusing on sexuality or economics. These two greatest nineteenth-century thinkers make more sense in supplementing or complementing each other. But that's a separate issue, what I want to illuminate is the fact that Freud's theory of the libido probably owes more to nineteenth-century capitalist economics than he might be prepared to admit. Consider how closely the concept of libido resembles capital. Libido resembles *fixed* rather than *circulating* capital because for Freud it is a massive and static investment in civilization. If you allowed libido to circulate too freely, you would loose out on your investment. Normal and healthy repression of the libido seems to me like a form of delayed gratification, the payoff being culture. Freud's injunctions against excessive repression seem to me to resemble squandering limited emotional capital in wasteful projects.

Freud's concept of the libido resembles a limited resource that one needs to invest wisely. Freud sometimes describes this as a biological and sometimes as a chemical resource. What makes the economic analogy even more pertinent, however, is that Freud increasingly came to describe the libido as a *quantitative* resource whose energy can all too easily be expended. I think this arithmetical tendency in Freud's thinking is a problem because, even if it is possible to examine a biological resource quantitatively, the culture that is built upon this resource is best described *qualitatively*. Once the biological instinct is transcended and transformed into a symbolic resource, thinking in terms of inputs and outputs no longer makes sense. As Freud himself pointed out in his discussion of civilization, the sexual instinct by itself is an impoverished, a "worthless" and "empty" (see quote above) entity when compared even to the sexually based erotic resources of culture. Like so many nineteenth-century realists, Freud gets involved in unavoidable contradictions when he tries to reduce the qualitative to the quantitative.

What Freud didn't understand, but John Stuart Mill clearly did, is that the "pleasure principle" is a quality not a quantity. Happiness is qualitative. Even as far as the body is concerned, Freud's idea seems untenable. Infant sexuality may be biologically based but it cannot be defined quantitatively; what emerges from its very definition is an idea of polymorphous play that can't be quantified. If we were to wander into the developing mind of a person, I'm not sure what we would find, but I doubt very much that it would be quantifiable. Why on earth did Freud lean so heavily towards a quantifiable libido? The reason advanced already is that his thinking bears obvious econometric tendencies. But there may be something else that Freud doesn't see. For someone who spends so much time insisting that the infant is sexually polymorphous, Freud's own understanding of sexuality still appears to be dominated by the almighty penis and its particular kind of pleasure. The male pleasure principle is obviously limited as far as the genitals are concerned and, in the nineteenth-century, most male medical writers were frightened by the prospect of losing or squandering male virility. Perhaps subconsciously Freud had a fear of temporary castration unless sexual reserves were maintained and channeled appropriately.

Freud the Appraiser

Of course I'm speculating here, but I'm only speculating because I want to reinforce through contextualization the point that Freud's argument about repression is compromised unless you are prepared to reduce cultural resources to biological units of measurement. Despite his devastating attack on the heart of western rationalism, Freud's idea of love remains severely limited by his scientific positivism. Despite the fact that Freud recognizes that complex idealizations transcend the limits of libido, he has a desperate need to set strict limits on those idealizations in terms of what he considers to be the finite resources of the libido. My alternate argument to his is that *anatomy is not destiny* and, once the process of imaginative idealization takes hold, the mental plays a much more significant role than the biological. That, of course, is not the same as suggesting that the biological is indispensable, but simply that we are no longer dealing with quantifiable scientific principles.

Ultimately, Freud is a *realist* when it comes to his practical prescriptions about love. That's fine; being a realist is an entirely acceptable position, and certainly preferable to unhealthy and self-defeating idealizations. Moreover, despite his emphasis on the quantifiable, Freud isn't narrowly scientific. His emphasis on the infant *body* is an extremely imaginative attempt at holistic thinking inspired by biblical and literary sources. The various sexual complexes and inversions that he describes remain useful as poetic attempts to explain the conundrum of human desire and to capture traumatic events in the life of the soul. But as far as practical advice on love and marriage is concerned, Freud is not very exciting. Like Plato, with whom oddly enough he identifies, Freud thinks only in terms of the correct appraisal of the object of one's love. Unlike Plato, he's suspicious of any kind of appraisal that might be an excessive idealization. He's much more economical about his willingness to give love, which should be doled out like a precious and limited resource. And, he goes so far as to equate love with a rather mundane combination of personal and sexual compatibility. For someone who at one level understands the historical enrichment of love, in practice he offers a rather limited and impoverished version. What I find strange for someone who wrote so much about love is his incapacity for it. He seems afraid of love of women in particular and *love of persons* in general. Maybe that wouldn't be so very strange, were it not for the fact that his comments on the rewards of intellectual sublimation are so very *loving*.

Needless to say, there is little room for imaginative *bestowals* in Freud's practical prescriptions on love. More to the point, such bestowals would be exaggerated idealizations and by definition *unhealthy*. The point of all therapeutic interventions is to rid the would-be lover, or married idealistic, of ideas verging so closely on the edge of neurosis. There is a real sense in which anything like a romantic ideal of love is a *form of insanity* for the clinician in Freud. One's emotional destiny always needs to refer to reality. Now a realistic fear of love is one thing, and even a warning against love's dangers is understandable, but we need to appreciate exactly where Freud is taking us. It's one thing to be a healthy realist, and quite another to be a pessimist about romance. For one thing, the mood is completely different. A healthy or normal realist has no expectations to interfere with his pleasure; he or she is open to pleasant surprises in

loving relationships. But the chastened romantic has to accept something less than anticipated happiness, and bewares any idealizations that likely will be wolves in sheep's clothing. Moreover, the thoroughly sober and Freudian realist should never embrace imaginary relief or wishful thinking about love. Such attitudes are infantile, and infancy unfortunately is paradise lost. Our desire for union with objects in the world is bound to be disappointed and that is why we are, and must necessarily be, discontent. For Freud, we have to put away childish wishes and come to terms with the world as it is.

Freud's warnings against romantic extremes are healthy, but his dismissal of love's idealizations is not. His imagination is constructed by his attachment to the libidinal economy and its narcissistic reservoir. Arguably, he underestimates the therapeutic value of extending one's love outside of an extremely closed circle of lovers and friends that resemble nothing so much as oneself. Anytime you extend your love, you let go of your safety net. But the act of bestowing love, quite apart from successful union, might have its own value. Freud's definition of the pleasure principle focuses so much on the "narcissistic, self-enjoying character of human desire" that it tends to leave out the *other as a person in his or her own right*. To be sure, a healthy Freudian agenda might be to expand "the self until it enjoys the world as it enjoys itself" without any body-mind dualism. Certainly that is what the neo-Freudian Norman Brown suggests (Brown, 52). The difficulty of this enterprise, that Brown does not acknowledge, lies in the nature of the libido itself. Its resources for expansion are notoriously limited. Principles like *erotic exuberance* can only be stretched so far. Perhaps a few can escape the chains of an essentially narcissistic Eros, but the rest of us have to curtail our demands on reality. And since we cannot absorb reality within ourselves, we content ourselves with navigating that reality more or less efficiently. There is nothing in efficiency, however, that can measure up to our Erotic desire. And that's the tragic situation for most people.

Plato, Augustine and Freud

I've taken Freud to task because he doesn't appreciate the imaginative possibilities of a kind of loving that leans more towards bestowal than appraisal. I'd like to focus on what I view as admirable in Freud in this closing section. In order to fully appreciate the Freudian revolution in its most positive and life affirming sense, it is useful to contrast his with some of the other views of love that we've examined this year.

Although Freud views himself in the tradition of Plato, presumably because they share a rationalistic starting point, both focus on appraisal or a suitable 'object choice', and Freudian sublimation explains Platonic idealism. But the differences are more important than the similarities. Platonic Eros starts from a lack or a need whereas in Freudian Eros infant sexuality is full and complete. Plato wants to us to move from the "insufficient self" in order to find completion in an ideal of goodness. Platonic Eros typifies western thought generally in that it is "aggressive" about discovering the truth. Freudian Eros emphasizes the narcissistic basis of love, stressing the fundamental commandment to love oneself. One of the most positive and life affirming characteristics of Freudianism is that of shedding guilt and accepting oneself completely.

Christian Agape, as developed in Augustine, shares with Platonic Eros the fundamental insufficiency of *self*. Instead of aggressively pursuing goodness, however, agape calls upon this grossly inadequate self to submit or sacrifice itself to God. The human self is "extinguished" and is replaced with a reborn divine self that can now channel God's love. Needless to say, Augustine stigmatizes the body as inherently sinful until it becomes a temple of God. In Freudian terms, this is body-mind dualism at its most vicious and masochistic. While Freud sees some positive elements in Christian idealism, he detests a kind of sublimation based on inducing guilt. What is more, Freud attacks all religious perspectives that deny the body.

Freud transcends the age-old debate between Eros and Agape, and according to Norman Brown, poses "the proper question, at least for our time, which is:

> To develop a love based neither on self-hatred nor the need to appropriate, but on self-acceptance, self-activity, self-enjoyment. And the Freudian (and Spinozistic) recognition of the bodily nature of all self-enjoyment indicates the obstacle that prevents both Platonic and Christian from accepting the self – the human body (Wilson, 53).

Since we've demonstrated the crucial importance of Freud in putting us in touch with our body's need for love, we can now ask if anything is missing in Freud that is contained within Platonic Eros or Christian Agape. While Augustine and Plato's foundational beliefs may be faulty, their high points seem to reach imaginative possibilities that go missing from a sober and realistic reading of Mr. Freud. Platonic Eros overflows with unimaginable creativity and beauty, and does so with increasingly intensity on the path towards goodness. That's why it doesn't matter whether a final mystical union with goodness is achieved, because every step on the upward path reveals new and superior beauties that could not be realized in the cave of mundane reality. Similarly, Luther's Agape is "love overflowing into creativity" (Wilson, 53). We do not find anything like this kind of creative explosion and celebration of life in the supposedly life-affirming psychology of Freud. The ends if not the means of Platonic Eros and Christian Agape admit of a kind of poetic mysticism than scientific positivistic discourse shuns. While these might be delusions, without any shadow of a doubt they are equally life-affirming illusions.

It might have been possible for Freud to accept something in the extreme idealizations of Plato and the creative bestowals of Augustine and Luther if he had understood the implications of his own assessment of infant sexuality. At the most perfect state of innocent pleasure, the child does not distinguish between *subject-object*. Once the reality principle begins to amend the original pleasure principle, a gulf occurs between self and object that the individual will always want to close. The separation of self and object sets in motion an entire host of dualisms that duel dialectically with one another in the western consciousness. Platonic Eros and Christian Agape may be dated concepts but at least they provide a strategy for reconciling the dualisms that beset civilized mankind. Freudianism might provide a *modern* strategy by focusing on wonderful world of the infant, where there is no dualism, no negation, no normal. It might suggest that the

conscious imagination incorporate more of the non-rational and unifying strategy of a subconscious imagination that is still in touch with its body. Exploring the subconscious might also suggest that fights between different cultural, political and scientific positions are really one big "unconscious harmony" (Brown, 281). Freud was far too much of a reductionist and a realist to really appreciate the mysticism that is the infant unconscious. But unless Freudians articulate a strategy for reconciling the dualisms that plague western thought, Plato, Augustine and Luther will have the advantage.

Swann in Love

The Critics of Romanticism

Proust stands alongside Freud as a major late eighteenth-early nineteenth century critic of romanticism. Both of them want to explore and account for the *disenchantment* with love that was pervasive in European culture at the *fin de siecle*. But whereas Freud criticizes romantic love from *without* as excessive and unrealistic, Proust wants to document and account for love's reality from *within*. No one has ever explored what happens when one falls in love more exhaustively than Proust. The closest was Stendhal's description of crystallization. But compared to Proust, Stendhal's account, despite all its various stages, is blunt and unconvincing when compared to Proustian analysis. What Proust demonstrates in a most compelling fashion is not only that passionate love need not occur quickly but also that a "considerable period of time" and a number of rather complex conditions need to occur for it to achieve ultimate intensity. What Proust wants to show us is just how morbid and masochistic this lengthy stage of falling in love typically is. Finally, Proust wants to insist that the *real* meaning of love is not some metaphysical union with another person – which is impossible – but an aesthetic understanding that puts us in touch with a higher reality. Whereas there is nothing beyond love in Stendhal, Proust discovers the inspiration for art that is the ultimate reality, the ultimate crystallization, and the only redeeming element in love.

Both Freud and Proust agreed that romantic love is impossible. Romantic love is the *merging* of two people to create a new and special entity that destroys any distance between the lovers and suggests a new metaphysical reality. That is a spiritual or metaphysical reality is suggested by the fact that lovers are fated or destined to be together. Freud's understanding of the libidinal economy suggests that no such extension of the self's resources is possible, but he does think that a certain tenderness for the other person is a realistic and healthy option. Proust likely would not argue that there are different kinds of love and that tenderness, like the feelings that he has for his grandmother, does happen. But, unlike Freud, Proust doesn't find these kinds of attachments very *interesting* precisely because they don't give rise to anything like intense *idealizations*. Proust wants to explore and develop the implications of idealistic love with the explicit strategy of discovering their ultimate purpose.

Proust, therefore, unlike Freud, remains the idealist searching for a higher meaning in love that may not reside in love itself. In fact, he wants to hit you between the eyes with the fact that, not only is love impossible, but that its essence is *suffering* rather than happiness. His method for showing you this is realism. He develops the implications of passionate love as a realist. In detail, he shows you how these ideals arise, he shows you how diseased they can be, and then he devastatingly destroys them for you. The question, of course, is why? In the case of Freud, the answer is straightforward; Freud wants to spare us poor human beings of suffering. In the case of Proust, the answer is much more complex, because Proust doesn't find this suffering completely negative, even as he explodes any chance of finding happiness in love. In fact, Charles Swann is a

boring person leading a boring life before he falls in love. Falling in love transforms Swann and his life into something richer and full of potential. But passionate love is obviously just a stage, and to get trapped in it as Swann does, is a serious mistake. We witness the deterioration of Swann into something quite pathetic as his love for Odette de Crécy unfolds. He gets stuck into a world of his own imagining. What's important and *really* interesting for Proust is not love itself – which ends up being a horrible mistake and not even worthy of the label of tragic – but the creative imagination. Romantic love is only legitimate as an impulse to art.

That's Proust's argument, but such a summary cannot possibly do it justice. You are perfectly entitled to think that Proust has a very narrow and neurotic understanding of love. It's narrow because the only kind of passionate love that Proust can conceive is the capture and possession of another person so utterly that it either contradicts reality or ends up defeating itself when possession turns out not to produce the anticipated benefits of intense feeling. Swann is like the character in a 60s film entitled *The Collector* who is obsessed with possessing a person but who moves on to another when she dies in his captivity. What that film, and Proust's character, wants to demonstrate is that there is not one person out there for us and that no metaphysical merging is ever possible. You might want to argue that Proust misunderstands the deeper meaning of love's imagination that at one level appreciates that there is no such thing as an inevitable or perfect union, but that chooses to act *as if* this were the case. By imagining your love as a perfect match, you reconstruct it in your imagination. You understand that you are idealizing love; you don't need to do it *blindly* in the way that Swann does. Proust seems to think that there is a sharp divide between love's idealisms and its realistic appraisal, which strikes me a typical misunderstanding of the classic realist. He's so hung up on states of mind, and stages of love, that he sometimes fails to appreciate love's subtleties.

Proust is also a neurotic when it comes to loving. Unlike Freud, he's afraid of love, partly because he believes that passionate love can never be *reciprocal*. The person who desires to possess the other, and imagines him or her as indispensable to their metaphysical happiness, is at the mercy of the other person, who doesn't need to be very intelligent at all to recognize the state and practice sadistic forms of control. Odette's attitude towards Swann obviously changes when she knows he is in her power. But Odette's power is insignificant in comparison to Swann's malignant imagination. The real torturer that intensifies the screws is the diseased lover's imagination that has constructed a mental world around an inevitably false image of Odette. Swann's passionate lover is a masochist. Proust's preoccupation with the devastating disaster that is love – what Baudelaire calls "an oasis of horror in a desert of boredom" (Singer, 191) – screams out neurosis. There is no understanding here that, even if love is unrealistic, it might still be possible. Moreover, love can be reciprocal between persons. Swann talks about people as *things* to be possessed, which obviously limits the amount of happiness that is possible. If capitalism taught artistic types like Proust anything it was that the possession of things was empty. Identity depends on memory, and things can only be processed by memory as real, essential and meaningful if they connect with feelings rather than utility. By viewing romantic merging in terms of exclusive possession, Proust not only makes love impossible but also deprives it of any inherent meaning. And that's

precisely what Proust wants to do, to show you that passionate love has no meaning worthy of consideration on its own terms.

The romantics zeroed in on the potential inherent in love as merging as an antidote to an increasingly utilitarian world. But that wasn't the sole focus of romanticism. The romantics also focused on Nature with a capital N and often idealized love in relation to human nature within a larger nature. Thus, romantic love's metaphysical merging morphs into unification with Nature and a return to innocent being. Proust exposes this desire (not in the section you read unfortunately) and denies its possibility. Proust's human being are so constrained within their own subjectivity that their ability to *connect* with any reality outside of themselves is truncated. They typically reconstruct the world around them analytically and analysis quickly becomes habit. Authentic connection with the world outside oneself – a realization of its essence – can only be achieved in terms of feelings that all too quickly become associated into habitual architectures. This subjective cage is even more devastating than romantic love because it means that not only can't we connect with another person, but also that we have great difficulty connecting with anything authentically, including ourselves. In this context, however, passionate love can be viewed as having some positive meaning, not as legitimate in itself, but as temporarily releasing the death grip of habit.

The last vestige of romantic idealism that remains available to Proust (and by implication his hero Baudelaire) is art. Only when a person celebrates or creates beauty is he or she acting authentically. Only the artist is a true individual. The ultimate purpose of human life is not loving other people, or even oneself, but producing art. Art is the only thing that is meaningful. All other *things* have significance only insofar as they serve this last remaining ideal – creative art. Passionate or romantic love is near the top of the hierarchy of human feeling, and far more important than friendship or tenderness towards near and dear ones, because it releases the creative imagination. If the creative imagination merely stagnates in Stendhal's self-indulgent crystallization it serves no deeper purpose and ends up as a mental disease. If the creative imagination recognizes something deeper than another replaceable person or so-called typical objective reality, if it opens up to the essence of things, then love serves a purpose much bigger than itself.

Now it makes sense to speak sensibly of Proust's significance. If you view him simply as a theorist of love, he appears narrow and neurotic. There is no reason why you have to buy into all elements of his critique. But, if you examine him from another perspective, what he shows is that looking for a deep metaphysical meaning in love of another person, you are not going to get very far. The more you bury yourself in your love for that other person, the more you close the door that first opened up through love. The entire point of intense feeling is to go deeper than love of a person or persons. In the medieval period, you might have found that deeper meaning in God. In the modern age, you discover it primarily through art. By art, of course, we mean cultural production. By cultural production we mean the original insights of the novelist, painter, poet, etc. rather than the highly derivative pabulum designed by capitalists for mass consumption. The modern artist can only project essences that he or she has personally discovered, often through pain and suffering, but the timeless element of essential beauty will speak like a voice in

the utilitarian wilderness to those who, while they may not be artists, are open to its affect.

Living Superficially

The romantic ideal is to live authentically rather than superficially, but its agenda was seriously compromised by its abdication from reality and its excessive idealization of love. As a result, a crass and vulgar utilitarianism dominated most aspects of European culture by the end of the nineteenth-century. The mentality that *fin de siecle* utilitarianism reinforced was simultaneously realistic and disenchanted. It was realistic because it saw no escape from reality, but it was disenchanted because it provided few resources for the imagination. We can call this kind of society philistine or bourgeois, but the point is that everyone of intelligence feels apathetic in this perceived cultural wasteland. Charles Swann is a bourgeois man. His grandfather was a Jew who converted to Christianity in order to more effectively pursue his economic interests. His father was a kind of banker to the rich and powerful, and Charles himself is adept at wheeling and dealing with Barons, Countesses and even one Princess. Today, many would see him as the ultimate success story. He has more money than you can count, an apartment in Paris and a huge estate in Combray that he rarely visits in the volume you read.

Swann isn't much impressed by his success because he recognizes how superficial it is. He simply goes through the social motions. When he has to get involved on issues of the day he supplies his audience with "facts and details" rather than engaging them. This excuses him from "showing his real capacities" (297). Why doesn't he show these real capacities; it's because they serve no useful purpose in his life, because he's a panderer to the rich and powerful and a procurer for himself. Swann evidences a particular *fin de siecle* mood that is still around today because the society that created him is still very much in evidence. He's bored. He operates like an automaton – by habit. Occasionally, he thinks there must be something better, such as when he famously hears the Vinteuil sonata, and he's stirred into activity to discover the name of the composer. But his general character trait is a kind of mental laziness, and he soon forgets the siren call of music. He soon forgets this musical interlude in his consciousness because his memory is governed almost entirely by "voluntary memory" which reduces itself to a comfortable habit. He's comfortable but unhappy.

Like many people today, Swann attempts to liven up his boring existence by having affairs. It is possible for him to be a *man of the world* because 1) he has the financial resources to support mistresses, and 2) because he doesn't have very deep feelings towards anyone. It's easier to make conquests if you are not fully engaged. What's interesting about Swann's womanizing – that again fits in with *fin de siecle* consciousness generally – is that he's not attracted to women of his own class. He craves, to the extent that he is capable of craving, different kinds of experiences – "fresh pleasures" (271). But he's a tourist, a traveler, a stroller through life and these conquests don't last long with his *mistress of the moment*. This essentially disengaged, dissipated individual is a cad with women, not out of cruelty or even misogyny, but out of a more

general disinterest. Swann goes through the motions and through any number of women. None of them engage his interest. He might be looking for love, but he's not looking very hard, and he's certainly not finding it.

It is here that Proust wants to cut in with a fundamental insight into love. The reason that Swann is incapable of getting involved with a woman is because it is too easy and involves no special "effort on his part". His meeting with Odette de Crécy, is quite different. It is nothing like love at first sight, which Proust doesn't believe in anyway, but requires considerable effort. Initially, Odette arouses "no desire" and her kind of beauty "left him indifferent". Indeed, he even felt a "sort of physical repulsion". In order to even begin the first stage of loving her, Swann needs to re-imagine Odette. How he does this is crucial. He relates the person Odette to a painting that he admires by Botticelli. Thus, from the get go, his interest in Odette is aesthetic rather than involving sexual attraction.

You may notice a huge analytical gulf between Freud and Proust here. Freud believed that everything in loving and culture is grounded in sex. But Swann doesn't even have sexual feelings towards Odette. For Proust, sex may be unavoidable and even indispensable to loving, but as far as passionate love is concerned sexuality is very much a background requirement. As far as intense passion is concerned, sexual attraction is low on the list of requirements. What Proust wants to show us through Swann's love for Odette is that "love may come into being…without any foundation in desire." In other words, we *create* love in the imagination. Love begins life, not as sexual attraction, but in this case, as a waking dream. What our memory typically does as we proceed further into the love affair is to re-write this desire as the need for the possession of a specific person. But it is really a desire that has no specific person in mind and is triggered by accidence and coincidence and suggestion rather than a fated merging.

The first Proustian insight is that love's desire is triggered by an effort that kicks the imagination into gear. The second is that sexual attraction, like everything else in a utilitarian society, is *superficial*. The idea that sexual merging with another person could ever result in a lasting happiness, therefore, is ludicrous. Sex can happen with any number of partners without stimulating anything like love. The third insight is that love doesn't strike us from the outside, in the form of another person, so much as from the inside in our *imagination*. If the right combination of triggers occurs – and even these do not need to happen in any preordained order – we will find ourselves in love. And what we are always in love with, is not another person, but with the creative possibilities released by our imagination. The only thing that isn't superficial or accidental or circumstantial about loving is that it unleashes the power of our imagination. In other words, the essence of loving is an aesthetic creation that has nothing to do with superficial everyday reality.

Subjective Feeling Versus Objective Reality

What all of this cogitating amounts to is the denial of any metaphysical or even inherent validity in love. Proust's descriptions of love affairs are all calculated to demonstrate that

love has no *unitary being*. It is a trick of suggestion and a deception of memory. Putting faith in such a subjective association of feelings or psychic states is bound to result in failure. The outcome is usually the same for friendship as for love, because we can never really connect with the other person through feelings that have no unity apart from the shifting label of *friend* or *lover*. The result of these desires is "failure". The only modern difference between the categories of friendship and love, as far as Proust is concerned, is that romantic loving is a more intense investment and, therefore, a more devastating failure. Just how devastating? Well, Proust views it as "the source of exhaustion, ruin and despair". Sooo, pretty damn devastating.

Romantic feelings are simply shifting feelings that we ourselves unify in order to possess the object of our desire according to Proust. Where Proust is absolutely brilliant is in demonstrating the ways in which romantic love destroys the essential ground for happiness by setting into effect a series of disasters. Even if you don't agree with Proust that *this must happen* when we love, you'll have to give him credit for showing how romantic love either totally misses its mark or has to evolve to a second stage of love where we don't expect happiness so much as contain the degree of unhappiness. Unless you think that Swann's experience with Odette is unusual for lovers, you should appreciate his detailed account of love's *blindness* to anything remotely resembling reality. And, unless you think that romantic love is totally worth the risk, his account of how most people are deceived should act as a cautionary tale. If you love, you lose, says Proust, except of course in art. All forms of human *affection* tend to be delusional, if not for the mediating and redemptive features of art.

Let's give Proust the benefit of the doubt and tentatively go along with his argument that the romantic daydream of merging with another person is a potential recipe for disaster and take a look at the case study of Swann and Odette. There are lots of other case studies in the various volumes of the six-volume work *In Search of Lost Time*, but Swann is intriguing because he doesn't begin as a romantic but as someone who uses sex as a diversion from the monotony of modern life. In a sense, he's a hard case who's liberated himself from love and friendship quite explicitly out of fear of being disappointed. That people like Swann, and you yourself know them, are still susceptible to romantic ideology is because in their heart of hearts they want something deeper and more meaningful than the life they lead. Because he's something a hard case, however, it takes a number of events and circumstances to trigger desire into love. There is nothing whatsoever inevitable about it, except for the fact that Swann desires something *more* than what he can find in his commonplace reality. Even after he's done a Botticelli number on Odette in order to make her sexually and socially acceptable, he's still driving his sexual blueprint – the seamstress – around in his coach before meeting up with Odette at the Verdurins. He has no immediate desire to shack up with Odette. In fact, he keeps such a distance that she has make all the significant first moves, which don't impress him much.

Proust underlines the aesthetic character of loving by making the piano sonata of Vinteuil rather than Odette herself the fundamental emotional breakthrough that ties him to Odette and the Verdurin circle that he initially charms rather than engages. Close on the heels of

this experience, which is really the repeat and consolidation of an earlier experience in which Odette had no involvement, his customary relationship with Odette (i.e. driving her home) is broken. We don’t know this yet, but it's because she wants to meet up with another lover by the name of Forcheville. This bothers Swann, not because he’s suspicious of her at this stage, but because she turns out to be more difficult than he supposed. As he fears her loss, his desire to possess her, and possess her exclusively, increases quite dramatically. All of this would seem entirely unrealistic, even for a novel, were it not for the fact that Swann’s imagination is already moving towards loving a person, for which Odette is anything but the obvious choice. “Love,” writes Proust, has such a need to find some justification for itself” (353). Lest you miss Proust’s argument that the deeper meaning behind love is aesthetics, he points out that Proust had been unable to feel romantic love because his sexual “desires had always run counter to his aesthetic tastes” but now Odette had Vinteuil and Botticelli lining up on her side. This alignment, of course, was not in the stars but entirely circumstantial.

Love gets fanned into life rather dramatically as a “feverish agitation”, but it is still more of an infatuation than a romantic engagement on Swann’s part. But his imagination goes to work with the cattleyas or orchids in the coach and he begins to create an empire of love with Odette at its center. She isn’t even indispensable at this stage except as the thing around which Swann’s imaginary world will be created. Proust wants us to understand that Odette has no real power; she’s even quite dull, except the power that Swann has “invested” in her. Proust goes so far as to suggest that we never really connect with other people who mean “little to us” except when we “have invested one of them with the power to cause us so much suffering or happiness”. Thereafter, however:

> That person seems at once to belong to a different universe, is surrounded with poetry, makes of one’s life a sort of striving arena in which he or she will be more or less close to one. (334)

Proust wants us to appreciate that, at least initially, this imaginative embrace of an imaginary Odette is not entirely negative for Swann’s mental life. He once had the ambition to be an artist rather than a glorified accountant. When he falls in love, the frustrated artist “became gradually himself again” but at the cost of “thralldom to another”.

It is useless telling Proust that the eventual outcome might have been more propitious with someone less like Odette and with greater capacity for reciprocating love’s idealizations, because **you’ll never convince Proust that romantic love is anything other than a trap that deflects the artist from his or her appointed task**. Anyway, that would spoil the awesome description of the horrors of love that begins in poetry and moves to an obsession with possession. Success depends on bringing the loved object securely into one’s imaginative universe, which is realistically impossible. The lover is satisfied with nothing less that “absolute mastery” of the person he wants to possess. The more that the reality of the other conflicts with the “universe of Swan’s heart”, the more he rewrites that external reality to fit in with his desires, the more pathetic he becomes. Against all the evidence that Odette is a slut, he imagines that her love “for him was

based on a foundation more lasting than the charms or qualities she might see in him." (379) In other words, he reinterprets reality in terms of a romantic *merging of souls* that is not merely the opposite of anything that Odette could ever feel, but also an association of feelings that he has only recently fabricated for himself. He even manages to redefine Odette's role as "kept woman" in ways that support rather than challenge their love.

By Proust's definition, by this stage Swann is seriously deluded, seriously diseased. His jealousy of Forcheville only enlarges his needs and the importance of Odette in his eyes. As his jealousy intensifies, he loses more and more of himself to the extent that he becomes obsessed with "the smallest details of a woman's daily life". (387) His life is totally absorbed into her life, not even her real life, but her imagined life in relation to his own diseased imagination. Now his individuality is confined entirely to his loving, and his loving is defined by its suffering. Proust describes this state as a *morbid, unhealthy torture chamber* that no longer bears any relation to the Swann who first described Odette as "not my type!" Odette's obvious deceit of Swann is recalibrated in terms of that "other Odette" in his imagination who cannot be anything other than sweet and kind. The only lies he is at all capable of detecting are the ones that his jealous imagination anticipates.

What Proust thinks he has conclusively demonstrated is that the search for a metaphysical absolute in love is bound to be disappointed. His characters begin by searching for love as a solution to their boredom and alienation but end up by no longer believing that this subjective experience has any objective reality. To the extent that they cling to this false belief in romantic love, their imaginations are diseased and their energies wastefully dissipated.

Diagnosing the Disease

Proust's exposition of the *blindness of love* is arguably the most devastating critique of the pitfalls of romanticism ever written, eclipsing Freud's much more sympathetic warnings against its excessiveness. The oscillation he describes between extreme jealousy and tenderness (*ce rythme binaire*), even between love and hate, is something that we've all witnessed, if not in ourselves, then at least with others that we know. This unlooked for enrichment of our inner lives, ironically, leads only to more suffering when we embrace it as our destiny.

The fundamental diagnosis of romantic love that Dr. Proust wants to make, the goal of all his realistic descriptions of its hopeless idealism, is that the merging of two persons is impossible. If anyone accepts that mystical or metaphysical union as a possibility, it will be difficult for them to settle for anything less. Against the notion of a perfect and pure "whiteness of love", Proust wants to affirm "a spectrum of varying and conflicting hues" (Singer, 198) that go into its imaginary construction. Just as knowing that love is sexuality repressed helps Freud's patients to come back to themselves, so understanding how love is constructed in the mind enables Proust to discover an alternate meaning in love from its inoperable meaning in the mind. Proust goes much further than Freud when

he deplores romantic love as a serious and *consumptive* disease like "cholera or the plague" (488).

The disease that is romantic love – the tendency for pleasure to be eclipsed by suffering – suggests unhealthy even psychotic mental states. One of these states obviously is the sadism that includes the desire to possess the other absolutely and demonstrates itself dualistically as both love and hate. But even where the impetus is not absolute possession, as in the case of Odette, there is marked cruelty in colluding with the lover's self-delusion. The only way to avoid this element of sadism in the relationship would be for both lovers to be deluding themselves equally, a kind of reciprocity that Proust is skeptical of. The most characteristic symptom of the diseased imagination, however, is not sadism but masochism. Swann is a man who is not only willing to suffer for love but who ends up justifying his love by this suffering. Eventually even death might be preferable to recovery for the incurable romantic.

There is an element of false consciousness on the addled romantic's part, however. Just as the entry into romantic love was a gradual escape from the tedium of a superficial life, so too obsessive love itself can become a monotonous "struggle". What may keep Swann love *inoperable* more than its intensity, is its perverse masochistic comfortableness. In his previous life, Swann had already shown himself to be a creature of habit, and now he has settled into the habit of suffering. It is revealing that, when Odette deserts him on a year long cruise, he swings back towards this old comfort zone in high society with the likes of the Princesse des Laumes. When we leave Swann in this volume (he will appear again in later volumes), he appears to be over Odette. Whether he will ever get back together with Odette is uncertain at this stage. One thing, however, is certain. With or without love, Swann will always be unhappy. He will be unhappy whether his torture chamber is the undramatic drudgery of an unquestioned bourgeois life in a society that provides him with no meaning or an intensely meaningful but patently wasteful life as a victim of love. Swann seems to waver between various versions of happier and unhappier without ever accepting that he is himself responsible for creating his own happiness, that happiness comes from within not without, and, finally, that artistic creativity provides the greatest satisfaction possible for modern men and women.

Romantic love is not tragic. That Swann wastes his intelligence and creative abilities on a phantom of Odette is what is tragic. His love begins in a salutary fashion by rekindling Swann's love of art. His feelings reawaken the artist in him and he returns to his essay on the Dutch painter Vermeer. But he soon drops that in order to passively indulge his aching heart rather than actively building on the glimpse of another and more aesthetic reality that his entry into love provides. Proust suggests that the bourgeois functionary and the romantic believer are not so different as one might initially suppose. The two attitudes reinforce each other in ways that one might suspect. The "new state" soon comes to resemble in its pathetic character. That someone of Swann's obvious intelligence and ability would pander to the banalities of the Verdurins, and compete with a militaristic blusterer like Forcheville, not to mention reinterpret the vacuity of someone like Odette, demonstrates an underlying "mental lethargy" that alone is what renders the patient incurable.

Out of suffering that is human life and love, the composer Vinteuil crafted a piece of music that was not only "authentic" but also *luminous* (498-9). Swann is no Vinteuil but his considerably energies would have been better spent working on Vermeer or doing something like *ramshakling*:

> the extant documents of fifteenth-century Florence in order to penetrate further into the soul of the Primavera, the fair Vanna or the Venus of Botticelli. (442)

After all it is Botticelli who allows Swann to appreciate the all too human qualities in Odette. Botticelli allows Swann to see. Vinteuil teaches Swann how to listen. Art, not love, teaches us who or what we are. Art, not love, suggests the magic presence, supernatural, delicious frail". (501) It is also by listening to Vinteuil in Odette's absence that Swann finally comes to grips – *understands* -- that love's merging is impossible and that Odette's "feelings for him will never be revived, that his hopes of happiness would not be realized now". (502) But understanding the human lessons of great art is not the same as incorporating them into one's life. We always sense that Swann's congenital laziness, his mental lethargy, will bring him back to Odette.

Proust was not unusual in believing that the *fin de siecle* society in which he lived and wrote was passive, lethargic and bored. In spite of all its analytical discoveries it was creatively impoverished. Romantic love, once championed as the antidote to modernity obsessed with facts and figures, had turned into a self-destructive and defeatist soporific. Like Baudelaire who he admired, Proust looked for a way out that retained the ideal but, not in the romantic escape route, but in the real. For Proust, romantic love was as monotonous and formulaic as the utilitarian calculations that govern modern society. For the masses, it was no more than a comfortable drug. But for the truly artistic and sensitive individual, however, it was an incapacitating and incurable disease. Proust seems to have feared love, and we could feel sorry for him in this regard. But he's a bigger thinker than just someone who sees the damage that love can do an individual. He's someone who wanted to liberate the artistic imagination from the chains of romantic idealism. Love has a time and a place – an 'authentic moment' in the cultivation of artistic imagination. As an end in itself, however, it was an enormous waste of precious *affect*. In the end, only art matters.

Treating/Transcending the Disease

In Swann's particular case, romantic love proved to be the fruit that poisoned his life and his potential. Of course, he recovers some of his sanity and he returns to a kind of emotional equilibrium where the love episode in his life becomes somewhat "monotonous" in his consciousness. Now he recognizes that Odette's life and his were not intertwined, that she had and has a separate existence from him, and that all of our affective experiences are really comprised of specific incidents that we combine in our imaginations. To the extent that he chooses to commit his love affair to his memories, it is negatively. They are for him "corpses in a river. And they poisoned it" (527). He

seems glad to put all of that past him. At least in his waking life, Swann reaffirms his former *caddish* nature.

Now Swann's conclusion about the sadness and senseless waste of precious time that was his love affair with Odette might appear to approximate Proust's own evaluation of the misery that is romantic love. But this is anything but the Proustian view. Swann is a failure in love, but not for the obvious reasons. Love provides people like Swann with an opportunity to grow emotionally. Affective feelings can even have metaphysical significance but not in our ability ever to "respond adequately to nature or other people" (Singer, 171). What love demonstrates is never really the desire to possess another person or their love but to creatively perceive a different reality from the one that dominates our everyday (what Proust calls *voluntary* memory). Love opens the doors of an artistic perception that is immensely creative – after all it could imagine a world in which shallow people like Odette and the Vedurins were highly significant. But if this creative imagination remains only at the level of love for persons, Proust thinks that it will truly be poisoned fruit.

Love's fruit was poisonous for Swann, because he didn't allow his feelings to develop properly. Love began its career in Swann by rekindling his inner artist but ended by burying its very possibility in an even more sorry and sordid cynicism and caddishness than before. While love between persons might be a waste of emotional expenditure, the experience of loving could have put Swann, as presumably it did Vinteuil, in touch with something more essential in love or other human experience than some supposed metaphysical unity of two persons that is unrealistic. Relationships are the product of circumstance, accident and suggested associations – they cannot withstand metaphysical scrutiny let alone realistic appraisal. Swann's father was thought by his friends to be the perfectly loving husband, but after her death, he found it difficult to keep his mind on her or even to remember her. People change from moment to moment and what we call love can change to something closer to hate in a flash. But the artist can capture a 'moment' in love for all eternity, even if he or she fails as lover of persons.

Ultimately love fails as "communing with persons" in the first stage of romantic love, but succeeds in the second stage as a "medium for arousing sexual and poetic sensations that are cultivated for their own sake, not for the sake of any metaphysical goal external to themselves." (Singer, 185) Love of persons is never defensible on its own grounds, only as a stimulus to imagination. For Proust, art not love is what makes life meaningful. Swann's life is meaningless, not because he cannot find love but because he's lost the artist inside himself.

Time and Memory

Love is not real but our enhanced feelings when we love are real. Love would not even be special were it not for the fact that it is an intense experience that puts us in touch with our emotions. Proust wants more than anything else to capture the superior reality of *feeling* in an impoverished modern consciousness dominated by the details and analysis. Although Proust is a realist, he remains squarely within the romantic tradition to the

extent that he believes that it is our feelings that make us human. The task of the artist is to capture and crystallize intense human feelings. The profound and very *real* experience that the artist seeks to convey has a timeless quality about it because it captures what is *essential* rather than transitory in experience. The intense subjective feelings released in love, for example, are condemned by time to be fleeting and even contradictory, but a great composer like Vinteuil can capture it and share it with people who, at least for a moment, rise above their everyday reality. When Vinteuil's sonata is played for the gossipy and inauthentic high society group at the Marquise de Saint-Euverte's, the time of everyday life stops. It is worth quoting what happens at length because it goes to the heart of what Proust wants to say. Speaking of the little phrase that affects him so much, Swan learns something deep about humanity:

> For the little phrase, unlike them [indifferent strangers], whatever opinion it might hold on the transience of these states of the soul, saw in them something not, as all these people did, less serious than the events of everyday life, but, on the contrary, so far superior to it as to be alone worth while expressing. It was the charms of an intimate sadness that it sought to imitate, to re-create, and their very essence, for all that it consists in being incommunicable and in appearing trivial to everyone except him who experiences them, had been captured and made visible by the little phrase. So much so that it caused their value to be acknowledged, their divine sweetness savoured, <u>by all these same onlookers, if they were at all musical</u> – who would then fail to recognize them in real life, in every individual love that came into being beneath their eyes. Doubtless the form in which it had codified those charms could not be resolved into rational discourse. But ever since, more than a year before, discovering to him many of the riches of his own soul, the love of music had, for a time at least, been born in him…the field open to the musician is not a miserable stave of seven notes, but an immeasurable keyboard (still almost entirely unknown) on which, here and there only, separated by the thick darkness of its unexplored tracts, some few among the millions of keys of tenderness, of passion, of courage, of serenity, which compose it, each one differing from all the rest as one universe differs from another, have been discovered by a few great artists who do us the service, when they awaken in us the emotion corresponding to the theme they have discovered, of showing us what richness, what variety lies hidden, unknown to us, in that vast, unfathomed and forbidding night of our soul which we take to be an impenetrable void. Vinteuil had been one of those musicians (495-7).

The problem for Proust with modernity was that its everyday reality choked off the most of the possibilities for feeling at the source. Its rational, calculating, analytical approach to the present and the future, denied the "reality of the human soul", made emotion seem less real than its "transparent and cold" present and future (505). The impact on one's inner life, expressed in feelings of apathy and boredom, was to interpret one's future unemotionally and pseudo-realistically as "that colourless, free flowing stream". People are so anesthetized that they do not even realize how miserable this analytical reality that buries a potentially rich inner life in a mundane outer life is making them. They don't

suspect the richness that could be their inner reality until they are *convulsed* by something like love or re-introduced to the richness of human experience by the artist.

One of the characteristics of late twentieth-century art is its narcissism -- its self-referential quality. This notion that art is all that matters seems unnecessarily reductionist, indeed arrogant. You have to appreciate that artistic types like Proust believed that they were involved in a pitched battle for the future of the human soul that justified the halo that they placed over their heads. Freud taught us that the nature of the infant is narcissistic and suggested that this primordial narcissistic entity needed to move beyond itself into external objects. That was how culture and civilization was generated. A great deal of *fin de sciecle* art and art theory sought to reverse that mental process in order to tap into more vital human emotions. That there was a huge element of narcissistic self-obsession in these movements around concepts like *art for arts sake* is obvious. Why should we place the artist's reality above other realities? In particular, why should be elevate a mode of perceiving that is so patently egotistic over more relationship and communally based kinds of thinking? Why is the artist's imagination the only kind of imagination that matters?

These are extremely valid questions, but they can distract us from seeing what is interesting and valuable in Proust's method. What Proust wants to argue is that the modern world is the world of the individual. The self should be free to explore its autonomy and to chart its own future. We are essentially subjective entities and we are unique. At the end of the day, all we are is our experiences or, more precisely, our memories of our experiences. What curtails our freedom is the real or objective world in which our subjectivity must operate. The problem with the everyday or objective world that constitutes modernity is that it imposes its reality upon our inner world so much that we lose touch with our emotions. In new age language, we become out of touch with ourselves. We are so out of touch that the way we consciously view ourselves – our *voluntary memory* – has little to do with any deeper feelings. Voluntary memory strangles those deep emotional and rich and real experiences -- we *forget* them, and to the extent that we forget them, they cannot inform our present and our future. Emotional experiences may always be difficult to process and retain, given human laziness, but modernity is particularly vicious because its dominant mentality dismisses particular emotions. Emotions can't be analyzed and, therefore, our emotional lives in modern life are relegated to a sideshow. What the bourgeoisie can't process, they dismiss. And its analytical quality usurps any emotional mental life.

Proust is in the romantic tradition because he wants to reinvigorate our emotional life. In order to do that, the modern artist has first to rediscover his or her own emotional essence. For Proust, this means going back into memory to discover not only profound emotional experiences but also their essential experiential meaning. Because our voluntary memories don't typically allow us to do that, these experiences get buried within a boring and colourless and utilitarian approach to life. Instead of enlarging our lives and expanding our understanding of ourselves, they get forgotten. If we really want to know who we are, we need to rediscover them, not like album snapshots of our life that a tourist might take. We need to engage and process and incorporate them, which

takes immense mental effort because all the forces of a so-called real and objective world militate against taking them seriously. Swann stores up experiences like a bored tourist, but all he retains from the emotional experience that once convulsed him are dead corpses in the stream of his life. If he were an artist, on the other hand, he might, like Vinteuil, have respected the significance of his deep emotional experience and, thereby, respected *himself*.

We can appreciate Proust's point better if we overlook the narcissism of the artist and reflect upon the artist in ourselves. Life is an art, isn't it? It's difficult to be an artist of our own lives if we fail to take our deepest emotional experiences seriously. We need to appreciate these moments of *involuntary memory* if we are to become, in new age language, a whole person. In the past, arguably our emotional experiences or involuntary memories were better integrated into our voluntary memories. Individual and communal lives were connected at a number of levels; we had opportunities to connect our emotions to the objective world. Both our inner and the outer lives were richer as a result. The disease that is modernity is vicious because it simultaneously releases and replaces our inner lives, leaving us bored and unhappy in the most fundamental sense. The romantics believed that the love between two people might provide an alternative to that cold, colourless modern reality. According to Proust, they were wrong, not in their critique of modernity, or their belief that emotions are real and important, but because a complete metaphysical merging is unrealistic. The critique is sound; the strategy in practice is horrific.

You need not agree. You could look for an accommodation between love and art by pointing out how the romantic and the artistic imaginations can reinforce and compliment one another. You could suggest that Proust has too negative a view of romantic love because he focuses on falling in love, rather than a being or staying in love that processes and incorporates some of the emotions of falling in love in the same way that great art captures and shapes emotional moments. But I think you have to accept Proust's claim that the engines of the modern world are so good at chewing up and spitting out emotions that we need to be vigilant in cherishing them.

<u>The Futility of Love</u>

Love in Existential World

Any attempt to describe existentialism must take into account the problem of definition. Existentialism is not a systematic philosophic theory and occasionally fails the test of logical coherence. It is, however, a valuable approach that is characterized by four distinctive attitudes and obsessions. First and foremost, existentialism is concerned to provide a meaningful framework for modern men and women who live in a world bereft of meaning. Second, it emphasizes doing because in a meaningless world, the issue is *what do we do now*? Third it offers individuals an ethical perspective, albeit one that demands extreme authenticity and full responsibility for all one's actions rather than ethical systems. Fourth, the character of existentialism can be seen clearly in its harsh critique of another abstract system -- reason. "Reason is a whore," wrote Kierkegaard. Since the rise of the Greek city-states, western philosophers have attempted to understand – to give meaning – to nature and human nature. The western tradition of rationality is inextricably linked to the belief that human life has significance that can be understood by reason. But existentialists believed that all rationalistic systems, including ratio-religious systems, are fundamentally flawed. The starting point of the existentialist is that life does not have any intrinsic meaning that can be discovered by reason. Human life is meaningless. The issue is how to *act* in a meaningless world.

This statement must be internalized if we are to understand its stark consequences for existentialist thought. What does it mean to say that human life lacks significance? If we cannot approach human life through the abstract categories of reason, how can we hope to comprehend it? If life has no intrinsic meaning, how is ethics possible? Equally problematic, how are we supposed to act if there are no ultimate goals to which humans can aspire? Before even beginning to tackle these issues, we need to make a critical distinction. Many of the key existential writings were not written by people who would have ever called themselves existentialists. These writings are touchstones, however, because they describe the pain and anguish that became central to later existential writers like Sartre and Camus. But this did not make their authors existentialists. Dostoyevsky, in particular, brilliantly depicted the existential condition of the underground man in his classic *Notes from the Underground*, but he remained a devout Christian all his life. Nietzsche was much closer than Dostoyevsky to the existential frame of mind. But all of his writings were an attempt to transcend the existential condition, rather than cohabit with the pain and dread that characterizes a true existential *philosopher*. Nietzsche's attack on the western philosophical and religious canon, his introspective approach and his failure to solve the existential dilemma, however, mark him a kindred spirit of Sartre, Camus and modern existentialists. Dostoyevsky, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, therefore, were existentialists to the extent that they regarded reason as illusory and a dangerous approach to the big questions of life. It was illusory because it presumed to provide meanings where none existed. It was dangerous because its inevitable failure led to crises of identity and conscience. Moreover, the historical project of western rationalism

systematically eliminated many of the refuges of religion, art and enchantment that made life meaningful in the past. To paraphrase Nietzsche, while western rationalism and science may have value as life preserving and as critical or creative tools, they cannot supply that life with *meaning*. They do not make life meaningful. Eventually rationalism on its own leaves man standing defenseless in a world that was neither designed for or against him.

Not only does modern underground man lack a purpose but also, upon his death, his universe will be obliterated. Nietzsche forced his readers to confront this predicament in all its horror:

> Whiter is God" he [the madman] cried. We have killed him – you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how have we done this?…Whiter are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space?…Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? Gods too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murders, comfort ourselves?

This is the essential problem for the intelligent underground man – the man who is not stupid, who is aware, and who has an acute consciousness of the human predicament. Simply being able to recognize the problem differentiates those who, like Dostoyevsky's underground man or Nietzsche's Zarathustra, are intelligent and aware, from those who lead a mere bovine existence

What does it mean to say that there are no meanings apart from the *we* who have killed god? And who exactly is this *we* anyway? For an existential *philosopher* like Sartre, it goes without saying that all of the metaphysical definitions of humanity are meaningless, because humanity has no *a priori* meaning. Scientific, i.e. biological, sociological and even psychological, definitions are equally misleading and far more dangerous because they have to rely on instrumental and utilitarian assumptions in order to function. Those instrumental and utilitarian assumptions might allow us to illuminate patterns of behaviour, but they don't tell us anything important about what a human being is and the absurd dilemma that he or she faces. Human beings are not just objects or *its*. Human beings are also and more fundamentally free subjectivities that create themselves.

The appropriate question is how and under what conditions do we create ourselves? Obviously, there is a so-called natural world that we have to navigate; there is also external world of Others and institutions created by others. For an existentialist like Sartre, the natural and social worlds may be crucial in setting the conditions within which we create ourselves, but they are neither fundamental nor decisive. Even if the natural and social world could provide optimal conditions for self-development -- so that we were no longer conscious of any obstacles to self-discovery – there would still remain our consciousness. There would still remain our very individual consciousness **confronting itself alone and in anguish**. There is no utopia that could ever restore this consciousness

to some primordial unity. Human consciousness is always and already conflicted; for Sartre, the fundamental unit of analysis – the human psyche -- is divided against itself from the start. It is this divided self that is doomed to enter into “concrete relations” with others. When conflicted psyches attempt to construct relationships, we should not expect happiness; we should anticipate conflict. For Sartre, all human relationships bear the stigma or sin of this original conflict, and love is no exception. In fact, love and sexual relations can be viewed as prototypes of conflict between the self and the other because 1) it is the most intimate and intense human relationship; 2) love is the relationship that speaks most directly to our psychic (not biological) *needs*; and 3) even if those needs can never be satisfied, there is no possible exit from *desire* apart from death. Death is a life sentence. We can put the problem more superficially in order to grease the path for a more complete and complex analysis. To the extent that we believe that love makes the world go round, that love makes life worth living, we now have to face up to the fact that love is complicit in, and cannot escape from, all the pain and anguish of existence.

The *In Itself* and the *For Itself*

Before discussing love and more general relationships with others, it is important to appreciate how Sartre’s solitary individual is locked up within the closed circle of subjectivity. Kantian subjectivity and rational subjectivity don’t pose a problem because they assume that everyone shares the same human nature or *essence* that points more or less optimistically to a God. Ethics, activity and the specifics of *existence* in general follow from that metaphysical *essence*. In a Sartrean or existential world, essence flows from existence and is transcendent because our subjectivity is totally free. It is always free, even if it is only to say *no* argues Sartre. There is nothing, no human nature that limits the will. This implies that the self is not fixed in any way. Men and women are continually engaged in the process of self- transcendence. This self-transcendence is not confined to the subjective mind: it has objective significance in terms of the choices that an individual makes and the actions that an individual takes. The individual continually defines himself or herself by choices and actions.

We need to understand what *objectivity* does and doesn’t mean in this context of subjectivity. What it clearly doesn’t mean is that there is an objective reality that *we* all share as human beings. You can never get into someone else’s subjectivity or understand their fundamental reality, no matter how close you think you are to them. The only thing that you can do from the *outside* is to assess a person’s behaviour in terms of choices and actions. Both the actor-participant and the observer *appraise* the actions they perform or witness, and sometimes the observer’s appraisal of what is going on is more objective than the actor-participant in terms of identifying motivations. But let’s be clear that what is actually being assessed or appraised here are particular actions and specific motivations. The observer can never know the actor-participant in his or her subjectivity, a subjectivity by the way that never stands perfectly still.

The difficulty lies at the heart of the human psyche, which is two things simultaneously and dialectically. On the one hand, consciousness is and needs to be defined as an object or a thing *in itself*. That is what we typically mean by referring to our consciousness. On

the other hand, our consciousness is not a thing that could ever be objectified or essentialized because it freely creates itself. Consciousness is an impossible but necessary construct – it is simultaneously object and subject. It is object projecting itself as a subject and a subject referring back to itself as an object. The concepts of object and subject operate dialectically, continually describing a consciousness that never stands still, that is forever transcending itself. The being-in-itself man is facticity or contingency. It is "nature or reality impinging upon human freedom, causing it to be as it is, dependent on material forces that enable us to exist." (Singer, 283-4). It is the primary way that others view us, i.e. as an object, but it is not the primary way that we view ourselves. Since we alone can experience our own consciousness directly, we only identify our consciousness as an object trivially, i.e. as a limiting principle. The for-itself man or woman is "a complex of possibles which he [or she] projects in accordance with whatever system of values he has chosen." (Singer, 283) In other words, we typically view our consciousness as free; there is "nothing that can objectively tell him [or us] how to live."

This is what existentialists like Sartre mean by the term "being". It refers to the *irreducible subjectivity* in each of us that makes it impossible to reduce any human being scientifically or metaphysically because all of us are conscious of living in freedom. We only need to consult our own minds to appreciate that this is the case. The reason that existential freedom is replete with anxiety, anguish and even dread is that the "for-itself man as a conscious entity":

> Freely creates values out of *nothing*: in the external world there is nothing that can objectively tell him how to live.

Thus, conscious and essentially free *being* must shape itself out of nothing at all. One the one hand, this may sound tremendously liberating, but one needs to appreciate two fundamental implications. Generating meanings with nothing to hold on to, as Nietzsche well knew, is terrifying. Nothing is nothing. But to use an apt analogy, nothing is like an abyss or a vacuum that leaves you with a sense of vertigo. Second, even if the only meanings that the for-itself subject can create are subjective meanings without objective truth, the individual nevertheless bears *responsibility* for those meanings. That is why there is an entirely new dread in existential decision making. There are no longer any guidelines, but there is a hell of a lot of potential guilt.

Most modern individuals want to have the freedom without the responsibility. They assume that everything is relative and that their choices, therefore, are equal to anyone else's. That would be bad enough, but many people also kid themselves that they are acting freely and responsibly when they clearly are not. Sartre illuminates the enormous self-deceit that individuals practice when they invoke either the *in itself* or the *for itself* as justifications of choices or actions. For example, the prostitute or gigalo who interprets and excuses his or her actions as going through the mechanical motions of lovemaking hides from his or her subjective personhood. Similarly, a husband who rationalizes former infidelities or cruelties towards his wife on the grounds that he is now a *changed* person, typically invokes the transcendent nature of consciousness to explain and excuse

past behaviours for which he is responsible. We are able, not only to deceive others but also ourselves by exploiting the dualistic and dialectical nature of human consciousness. We fail to take responsibility for our choices; to paraphrase Rousseau (with whom Sartre has much in common) we are not acting freely or authentically.

Being-for-others

Thus far we have focused on the psyche and its essential subjectivity in terms of its relationship with itself. This hopelessly torn and divided self causes considerable anguish even without the involvement of other people because it constantly wants a unity that is impossible. It is difficult to be comfortable with yourself if you can't really pin down what yourself is. Obviously, this analysis of the psyche is analytically artificial, if only because consciousness would never come into existence in the first place without the intervention – Sartre revealingly refers to it as the *eruption* -- of the other. The reason that Sartre and other existentialists deploy a methodology that focuses on consciousness is because they assume that the individual is primary and that community is secondary. Right or wrong, existentialism is entirely modern in so far as it is an individualistic mode of analysis. Sartre spends a lot of time towards the end of his discussion of *being-for-others* arguing against any privileging of *we* over *I*. To that end, he dismisses Heidigger's *mitsein* and is only willing to accept an *us* that is constructed by individuals *looking at* each other.

Individuals do not act in isolation. Part of the "hell" that is human life is "other people". Damned if you can't get away from them; there is "no exit". You are always being "looked at". Sartre wants to unpack that *look* of the other in all its implications to show why our lives are so unhappy that humans have always sought metaphysical solutions like God to explain or escape the judgmentalism of that exterior gaze. Individuals experience their own consciousness in terms of a freedom that is subjective. Others, however, interpret individuals as objects. Self-regarding individuals constantly seek to transcend their *facticity* but others want to pin you down as an object. Who you are is not only what you define yourself as being, but how others in the objective world define you. Prima facie others will objectify you, which is simultaneously a source of guilt and shame because they view you naked and bereft of much of your free flowing subjectivity and, of course, they *judge* you. What the individual consciousness constantly aims at may be an impossible unity but the look of the other appears to deny that very possibility. The individual wants maximum assurance and security about himself and herself, but the other constantly threatens that security. In place of a desired integration of personality, only disintegration appears on the horizon provided by the other. That is why Sartre believes that desire is thwarted and that "Man is a useless passion".

The **hopelessness of individual desire** will have significant implications for Sartre's analysis of the futility of love. The significance of the look is that our desired transcendence is trumped or transcended by the subjectivity of the other. We will always be in terror of, and essential conflict with, the other unless we can dismiss him or her as an irrelevant object in our own right. Leaving aside for the time being the legitimate reservation whether all *looks* can be reduced to this kind of subject-object tension (there

may be different kinds of looks), it should be noticed that this kind of tension between persons is pervasive even if we don't necessarily agree with Sartre that "conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others." The pervasiveness of individual insecurity, even with regard only to oneself, suggests that the most characteristic interpersonal strategy always will be to *dominate* the other. That is why human relationships are aggressive, conflictual and violent. Typically, we seek possession of others and that is why we so often appropriate them instrumentally, as objects of manipulation. An entirely plausible assumption is that others will manipulate you as an object if you don't succeed in manipulating them first.

Whether or not this kind of conflict is as pervasive as Sartre suggests, it does help to explain the element of *possession* in all human relationships including love. Instrumental or utilitarian control over others, however, is far from being very satisfying. It leaves you in constant fear of others, partly because power over others is never complete but, more importantly, because instrumental domination is not the same as freedom. Even the master-servant relationship makes the master in some ways dependent upon the servant. The most satisfactory way to strive for perfect and perpetual security is to "assimilate the Other's freedom" and to "absorb the Other". The individual yearns for *possession*; what he or she really wants is not to control another person as an object but to absorb another person's "freedom as freedom". That is the only way to be completely safe and secure. It is, of course, a futile enterprise; but it is a very human enterprise. Another name for this kind of possession is romantic love. It involves complete interpersonal interpenetration or, in layman's language, merging

The Futility of Merging

An initial and insurmountable problem with love as a romantic *merging* is that it must be futile given the fundamental conflict between the self and the other. What the romantics call merging must fundamentally be "a project of absorbing the Other." (475) The only way that union as merging could conceivably be accomplished is if the lover's could adopt each other's subjective perspective on themselves and Sartre has argued that this is *prima facie* impossible. Moreover, this kind of merging is never really what we desire. If romantic love were to be a realistic possibility, its fundamental preconditions would be that both lovers were giving more than they were receiving and doing so equally. Sartre suggests not only that perfect reciprocity is inconceivable but also that the fundamental position of the lover is to absorb the love of the other as completely as possible. Finally, try as we might, we can never escape the subject-object dichotomy that undermines the merging of two subjectivities.

What we seek in this *project* (which is really an "ensemble of projects") that we call love is never to love but *to be loved* by the Other in all the other's free subjectivity. In this fundamental agenda, what we really, really want is to reinforce and enhance our own "possibilities" for freedom, not negatively by canceling out any possibility of objectification but positively by assimilating all of the Other's subjective potentiality in the affirmation of myself. That is why infatuated lovers may initially feel like they have discovered their true autonomous selves in the love of the other. For that is precisely

what they want. That is why Cathy in *Wuthering Heights* can affirm something like "I am Heathcliff", which would seem ridiculous in normal interpersonal relationships. The desire for personal transcendence is what "propels" the love affair. What "haunts" this project of assimilation from its very inception, however, is the fact that the other's subjectivity can never be fully captured precisely because it is inalienable:

Sartre's language is convoluted but his meaning is not ambiguous. The lover's primary aim is to capture or possess the other person. However, this is nothing like the possession of an object because what is sought is the complete person in all his or her subjectivity. In order for a person to *surrender* that freedom, they would have to imagine something unthinkable outside of a love affair. They would have to *freely relinquish their freedom* as love, that is to allow their "freedom to be captured *by itself*, to turn back upon itself, as in madness, as in a dream, so as to will its own activity" (479). There is no doubt that the language of love does attempt this kind of free abdication and even attempts to reinforce it with the language of fidelity. But here's the problem. The language of fidelity is not at all recognizable as the language of love, which demands that love be present at each instant. Fidelity cannot guarantee love, because when love dies, it is irrelevant. The real issue is whether or not this intense version of love is sustainable at all. Consider what is implied. As Proust discovered, romantic love flies in the face of the contingent nature interpersonal relationships because it demands that the lover "be the unique and privileged occasion" of this magnanimous surrender of subjective freedom. As Sartre further underlines, this stance is almost inconceivable because it requires that the various kinds of objectification naturally adopted by the other be surrendered as well, and continuously as well. Additionally, it supposes that the lover maintains full and complete confidence in the ability of the Other to maintain this rather complex mental juggling act, which constantly threatens to self-distruct. The only way this artificial empire of freely given love can hope to survive is if the lovers can manage to avoid the facticity and contingency of the outside world, i.e. the looks of others. As if all of this was not enough, Sartre informs us that both lovers in a romantic relationship seek to assimilate each other's freedom without thereby limiting it.

Given the problems, indeed the pathology of romantic love, the appropriate question is why anyone would ever make the attempt? Here Sartre is most impressive. Every individual is haunted by the Other – the *stranger at the turn of life's path* – that will render him as a despicable object. But if an idealized Other is simultaneously a lover who surrenders all power of judgment within an overwhelming affirmation, I need never fear the world of Others again. I become something of a God to myself because I am freely worshipped. I am "placed beyond the whole system of values posited by the Other". I myself finally am the foundation of value. Sartre puts it perfectly:

> If the Other loves me then I become the *unsurpassable*, which means that I must be the absolute end. In this sense I am saved from *instrumentality*. My existence in the midst of the world becomes the exact correlate of my transcendence-for-myself since my independence is absolutely safeguarded…the world must be revealed in terms of me.

The religious reader/listener may consider that this theory of the self as an egotistic lover transforms and subsumes the love of God in ways that are presumptuous if not blasphemous. What Sartre implies is paradoxically less humanly arrogant and much more theologically devastating. He is suggesting that human beings are far too helpless and vulnerable to ever be gods; at the same time he is arguing that all our metaphysical beliefs, including that of God, derive from our futile desire for psychic unity. It is not arrogance that propels us towards love for god and other persons; it is our anguish. We seek to be *chosen* by God or the lover so as not to be so alienated in the world.

The lover is not so much engaged in love, therefore, as in a *project* to make himself the center of another's universe. That this project is never as simple and straightforward as mutuality of affection is demonstrated by the enormous pains that the lover takes to ensnare and capture the beloved. Remember that it is never just the body of the beloved that the lover is after – there is no such thing as strictly sexual attraction in relationships between individuals. You might successfully imprison a person's body, but you would not be getting what you really desire. In order to get what you want (what you "really, really want") in the form of surrender, you need to *seduce* the Other. Seduction is an inherently dangerous *enterprise* because you have to coax the emotions of the other towards yourself as the center of the possible. Sartre's language is difficult but intriguing:

> Thus I try to guide the transcendence which transcends me and to refer it to the infinity of my dead-possibilities precisely in order to be the unsurpassable and to the exact extent to which the only unsurpassable is the infinite.

The job the lover has to do as part of this enterprise of besieging the beloved is complicated. He has to present himself as the axis and entrance to greatest possible world of possibilities – a recipe for future disappointment if there ever was one. Such an ambitious enterprise could never be an intelligible in terms of a genuine and inevitable merging. Clearly, seduction is nothing less than the *besieging* of the Other.

Seduction first involves making oneself *fascinating* so that the beloved will fall in love with the lover. Fascination is only an initial step in the siege of the beloved's affective capacity. Lots of things are fascinating – Circe de soleil is fascinating – without producing love. The goal is always to stimulate the beloved into becoming the lover. This goal can only be realized when the beloved projects *being loved*. Why does Sartre waste so much ink on this litmus test of love? The point that he wants to make is that, in spite of all the efforts on the part of the lover, in spite of all the symbolic effort he generates to fascinate the beloved, what the lover absolutely requires at the end of the day in not a docile and obliging body, but love as subjective freedom. Ironically, the lover has done everything to effect this outcome, but it would be negligible and totally unsatisfying if love were not given freely. Quite contrary to the assumption that freedom negates possession however, Sartre suggests that what is at stake here is both conflict and extreme possession of the other's subjectivity. This is, for Sartre, a clear act of violence towards the other's freedom conducted under a most deceitful cloak.

At the end of the day, of course, the project is futile because freedom can't be captured in this way and the contingency of human relationships always puts victory just out of reach or in actual jeopardy. What the project or enterprise conclusively demonstrates, however, is that the "amorous intuition is, as a fundamental-intuition" does not resemble what actually occurs in a love affair and as an ideal of love is perpetually "out of reach." (491) The actual relationship that occurs, to the extent that it maintains some semblance of a love affair, begins as violent project and, as Proust originally suggests towards one or other extreme of sadism and masochism.

Sexual Desire

As we have shown, our attempt to merge the *in-itself* and the *for-itself* is futile for all concrete human relations, and therefore for the subsidiary ideal of love. Love is a complex and unrealizable project rather than the undifferentiated intuition that is supposed to characterize merging. It can never achieve the complete success that alone would be satisfying and it is necessarily characterized by anxiety, partly because the illusion of love is difficult to sustain and partly because one or the other (both are *Others* to each other) will awaken from what is essentially a *seduction*. Whoever awakens, for whatever reason, will begin treating the other as an *object* and not only will the goal of love be destroyed, but also the alienation and isolation of the lover will increase to the extent that he or she recategorizes the illusion as a delusion. One possible strategy, of course, is to re-energize the illusion by attaching it to another person, but after a few experiences, this turns into desperation. Another is to eliminate some of risks of failure by asserting control over the self or the other in the forms of masochism or sadism. These strategies are obviously self-defeating, even in a common sense way, because they destroy the very possibility of any meaningful merging.

Since love as a merging of subjectivities is futile, Sartre turns his attention to the possibilities of sexual desire. Sexuality resembles love in so far as it is a search for mutuality and merging that overcomes the fundamental conflict between persons. It also resembles love because what we desire is not simply a body as a set of organs but as a *person*. Sexual desire between people is not fundamentally biological; rather it uses bodies to "express an extra-biological intention". (Singer, 302) The human sciences, especially the sciences of biology and psychology, misrepresent human sexuality and underline the all-pervasive tendency of the appraising other to transform human subjects into objects of instrumental analysis, because they fail to appreciate what is *really* going on when people engage in sex with other people. Even when the focus is on bodily contact, the free subjectivity of the individual is operating to maximize the possibilities of merging with a person. Sexual desire is always "directed toward persons rather than organs or parts of the body." (305)

Sartre, I think rightly, deplores the contemporary emphasis on a so-called healthy libido as the institutionalization of *bad faith*. If we *chose* to ignore all the difficulties and tension connected to concrete relationships with person, it allows us to jettison personal responsibility. To be specific, if we interpret sex fundamentally as a connection between physical bodies, we can conveniently sidestep the inevitability of timidity, guilt and

embarrassment that is always associated in responsible relations with others. We "conveniently" become the opposite of these qualities and "confident" in ourselves and our power. In bad faith, because we ourselves select this self-serving approach, we chose to be selectively *blind* to what is really going on in sexual relations. We thereby evade the "look" of the other. "Save for brief and terrifying flashes of illumination," we can even live and die without "ever having suspected what the *Other* is." (405) This ignorance, far from being innocent however, shows a complete lack of responsibility. It is the willed ignorance of someone like the character Charlie in *Two and a Half Men* who treats sex as a recreational release.

Sartre goes rather farther than he needs to go in order to undermine the biological and psychological (i.e. Freudian) emphasis on the body. Just as Freud reduces subjectivity to the sexual libido, Sartre reduces sexuality to subjectivity. He maintains that we can only understand sexuality in terms of the ontology of what it means to be *human* and human desire in general. It is only explicable in terms of a much more fundamental analysis of what he calls *being-in-itself-for others*. It could never be explained in terms of a "particular act" because it is subsumed under "affective intentionality" in general. All forms of human desire refer us back to consciousness. We need not buy into his argument totally, however, to appreciate that what Sartre says does go a long way towards explaining what often happens when we engage in healthy sexual relations. Sartre suggests that what we are really aiming for with the other person sexually is maximum closeness. In order to achieve this closeness we do something quite fascinating; we *incarnate* our subjectivity or complete personhood in our bodies, allowing our bodies to stand in for us. What we really desire, therefore, is a *double mutual incarnation* rather than the union of bodily parts that is typically associated with human sexuality. Sartre buttresses this intriguing interpretation by pointing to two serious deficiencies in the standard scientific accounts of human sexuality in terms of the instinct for biological reproduction. The first is the fact that humans seek to link their bodies as a whole with other bodies and don't focus exclusively on the reproductive organs. The second is the significance of foreplay, especially in the form of the *caress*

We incarnate desire, or intentionally make ourselves into a body, in order to achieve this merging with the other that culminates in sexual relationships. The most informative physical element in a sexual coupling, for Sartre, is the caress because that is sexuality of the wider body than simply the sex organs. As such, the caress might appear to romantically inclined lovers as the most innocent and touching and (for many women) significant episode in sexual coupling. While Sartre agrees that sexuality is much more than a union of the sexual organs, he wants to show you what is implied in the caress. The caress, he says, anything but simple contact; it has a "unique meaning". (507) The caress is an "ensemble of rituals" designed to incarnate the other to the lover. It is like a magical conjuring act that reconstitutes the personhood of the other as a body. It would be simplistic to think that lovers can simply enter into contact as pre-fabricated bodily incarnations. They need to do a number on each other. "The caress causes the other to be born as flesh for me and for herself," says Sartre. The caress is much more involved than the touching of epidermal layers of flesh, it is a symbolic act designed to "uncover the web of inertia behind the action" or the "pure being-there" of the other person.

Of course, you might argue that the caress could be both of these things simultaneously and that there is no compelling rationale for eliminating the intrinsic biological pleasure of touching. Even so, I think you have to give Sartre credit for revealing the *human* meaning behind the caress. But that is still only a superficial meaning as far as Sartre is concerned and he is determined to relate this incarnation to his larger ontology of the individual in relation to the Other. The more fundamental meaning of this seemingly innocent touching is still to merge with, which in turn still means, *appropriating* the incarnated subjectivity of the other. Again, this is anything but an instrumental or utilitarian appropriating of the other. It is the push of human desire for completeness in general, focused on a specific Other. What we really desire, and what desire really means, is **to caress ourself.** Both love and sexuality are similar in their goals and strategies; they are desire or emotion "expressing itself by means of a radical alteration of the world". (509) But the gulf and the tension between the self and the other remains the *real* and insurmountable world. Intersubjectivity and human consciousness are forever destined to remain open wounds.

The connection between sexuality and death can now be understood. Human consciousness defined in terms of subjectivity always wants to see itself as free and eternal – hence the perfectly understandable but totally unrealistic need to posit a *soul*. Sexuality as a strategy for "being-in" and "being-for" itself in the world has to work with the body. Regardless of how you attempt to incorporate consciousness within the body, you are still confronted with flesh that decays. This confrontation with, and usurpation of, the flesh is brought fiercely home to one's consciousness in the denouement of the sex act. Even within the sex act, it is difficult to keep together magically inscribed personhood of the other and to completely avoid objectifying the other person. That's why we sometimes feel exposed and guilty even in relatively satisfying and healthy sex. These feelings can be masked by imaginatively enhanced pleasure. But guilt and depression all too often come home to roost in the aftermath of the sex act, which typically restores the Other, at least to some degree, to the negative status of object and which reminds you that depletion or death is the culmination of all your desire. Desire aims at *enchantment* but you cannot catch, capture or appropriate the Other for long. At the end of sex, it is not uncommon or illogical to feel alone in the universe.

Love is a subsidiary of relations with Others as is sexuality broadly conceived. Love and sexuality are complex ensembles of strategies for negating the threatening *look* of the Other. Sartre's Other has a capital O because the other and not God is the being that we can never understand and that we fear. Because these strategies do not, indeed cannot, achieve their goals, they often take perverted sadistic or masochistic forms that appear to offer greater chances of success by reducing the inherent freedom of the self or the other. The characteristic perversion of love is masochism where we turn ourselves into an object for the control of the other. The characteristic perversion of sexuality is sadism where we attempt to transform to body of the other into an object at the command of our will. Needless to say, these perverse strategies have just as little chance of success as more conventional approaches to love and sexuality. While Sartre believes that all

relations with others are *violent*, masochism and sadism are at the extreme edges of violence because they negate any kind of meaningful relationship with the Other.

Meaningful Relations with Others?

There is a good reason why there is a question mark at the end of this section's title. Given this stark and pessimistic Sartrean perspective, are meaningful relationships between people possible at all. You might be interested to know that Sartre himself came to believe that his analysis in "Concrete Relations with Others" was overly pessimistic and was written at a time in his life when he felt particularly alone and rejected by others. In a later essay entitled *Existentialism as a Humanism*, he argued that relationships with others need not be so negative for one reason. Because the way we define ourselves as individuals is primarily in terms of subjective freedom, we must respect the subjective freedom of others. Recognizing, even affirming, the subjective freedom of others gives us shared *human* goal and makes us a bit more of an intersubjective *we* than an objectified *us* versus *them* that only reiterates the essential conflict between persons in another form. Existentialists who want to find reason for hope cling to this essay like a liferaft. Personally, I don't think it provides much hope from a Sartrean world of selves and others from which there is "no exit". It certainly doesn't provide us with much ethical support for choosing a life direction.

If we reconsider the "look" of the Other, we may have better grounds for developing a realistic strategy for relationships within the existential framework. We can even accept Sartre's definition of the look in terms of essential conflict and, although we cannot find an "exit", perhaps we can still make life with others more meaningful. Consider first that it is the look that propels us to seek a merging that obliterates all the negative consequences of looking. What if we refuse to flee from the horror of this external gaze into any of these misguided attempts at merging? What if we accept the inevitability of a divided self and fractured relationships? Freud's clinical insight was that knowledge and acceptance are the first steps of recovery and that recovery aims not at some unrealistic ideal of happiness but something like contentment. Achieving contentment is difficult and impossible to find solely in romance or sexuality. It need not involve an artistic retreat into an elite and disembodied culture, such as Proust seems to advocate, but rather an attention to something like *the art of living*. An attention to the art of living, not in Stoic terms, but in a fuller recognition and appreciation of the signal importance of relations with others, would have ethical implications. It would allow us to recast and draw upon the insights of western and non-western ethics.

Sartre's approach is distinctly and decidedly western in its emphasis on the individual and, therefore, his analysis should be acknowledged as a privileged domain for culling more effective life strategies than the unrealistic merging that has characterized western ideas of love and sex. In his work and, interestingly, in the work of his *partner* Simone de Beauvoir, there emerges another ethical nugget that might provide a center or axis for a modern *art of living*. To be sure, this ethical nugget is a personal characteristic of intense difficulty without any permanent resting place for consciousness, but arguably that makes it all the more valuable as a goal to aspire to in human relationships. Sartre

clearly appreciates the importance of being honest with ourselves and avoiding self-deceit. I'm not so sure that he recognized equally the importance of authenticity with others, although this jumps out at me when I look at his later writings and those of the partner with whom he presumably had a very real and meaningful relationship. This focus on authenticity, rather than validating some rather vague concept intersubjective freedom, has the enormous benefit of providing maximum consistency between Sartre's early and later writings. It retains the very valuable and sobering truth that, whatever one thinks about the possibilities of love, relationships will always retain an underlying element of conflict and violence. Who knows how meaningful, even satisfying, authentic relationships can be when both partners appreciate and work with this inherent conflict.

Sartre's work is important because it takes the rosy gloss off intimate relationships while affirming the human significance of those relationships. Do they need to be as doomed and futile as Sartre suggests? Only, I think if we define them prima facie as doomed and futile. I do not think that even Sartre would deny that there exist 'moments' of pleasure and happiness in relationships. Of course, there are other possible perspectives, even within the existential framework. We can, for example, like Martin Buber, distinguish between *looking* at the other in fear and trembling – the "I-It" relationship – and approach them as an "I-Thou". This other kind of look takes a little bit of cultivation but Buber thinks it is just as essentially human as an instrumental looking. What you do is connect with the more foundational *personhood* in the Other than their facticity or contingency. The neat thing about this way of seeing is that it is a way of *making contact* that overcomes distance and the even neater thing is you don't need to restrict it to humans. All life and even matter itself becomes more meaningful when you adopt this point of view. The problem with perspectives like Buber's is that they are hard to maintain, but then so is authenticity. Just as long as you don't wear rose coloured glasses that make the very real conflicts in human relationships disappear, I see no reason to dismiss them as strategies in the art of living. One always needs to remind oneself, however, that these strategies need to operate in the real world. There are too many Buberites among us that are incapable of authentic relationships with others and, ironically, more capable of appreciating trees and rocks than people. Sartre's brand of existentialism keeps our eye on the difficulty.

In this course, we've also emphasized the unique ability of human beings to bestow meanings or value on others gratuitously. When you bestow meaning, arguably to take a person out of the instrumental sphere of objects and make them special. What Sartrean methodology alerts us to is that this capacity for bestowal is more likely to be an exit strategy, i.e. an unrealistic strategy for avoiding or escaping the inherent difficulty in relationships. Sartre likely would also point out that bestowal is part and parcel of the ensemble of strategies whose goal is the appropriation of Other. Bestowing may very well be a symbolic weapon in the artillery of self-defeat and the arsenal we use to besiege the Others. Can bestowal and authenticity run together? They might be difficult to combine, and even more difficult to sustain, but wouldn't they be a powerful duo for constructing modern and meaningful close relationships?

<u>The ‘Modern’ Problem of Love</u>

A Social Systems Approach

In Humanities courses we explore and argue on behalf of *values* like morality, friendship and love. We are more than willing to explore these values historically, to discuss exactly what they are, when and how they arose. For a social theorist like Luhmann, the best that these two kinds of theorizing can produce are specific contexts and contents. Humanities and cultural history constantly assume what they should demonstrating and explaining, in particular the *evolution* of the individual subject and his or her relationship to society. The social theorist not only wants to know what and how but to explain *why*. As far as the value system of love is concerned, Luhmann wants to show you why love developed in the way it did, why something as unreal as romantic love prevailed, and why we moderns are in something of a bind as far as love is concerned – we can’t easily live with it or without it.

The kind of love that has dominated since at least the late eighteenth-century is *improbable* to say the least. It involves a kind of communication with others that is incredibly intense, extreme, complex, and paradoxical. There are the aspects of this *media of communication*, in particular, that logically should have made it impossible. The first is a demand for an astonishingly high degree of “interpersonal interpenetration” between two people that allows each of them: 1) to *attribute* all kinds of meanings to even a glance from the other; 2) to *anticipate* in advance the attitudes, responses, needs and fears of the other; and to 3) respond in ways that support and reinforce the unique individuality of the other. The second is the need to treat a relationship simultaneously as if it were historically contingent -- with a possible beginning, middle and end – and as an absolute universal and immortal world of love. It really doesn’t matter whether a person regards these universal characteristics as exaggerations or not; the way of conceiving love is paradoxical, i.e. to regard something so fragile as permanent. Finally, or third, is the understanding that we all have that love is ultimately *incommunicable*, so much so in fact that Sartre’s demand for honesty or authenticity is doomed from the start. It is not simply that words cannot convey the complexity of emotion or that the lovers can attribute all kinds of hidden meanings in words, although that is clearly important. It is also because it is impossible to avoid deceit, because authenticity implies a clear understanding of what is real as opposed to illusion in a relationship. Lovers who are already operating in the world of illusions and ideals rarely have the kind of grip on reality that Sartre considers necessary.

Leaving aside those who manipulate love for selfish -- i.e. sexual – ends, those who are committed to intense relationships in the modern age are stranded in a world where the traditional dichotomies: good/bad, selfish/altruistic, ego/other, and even the fundamental distinction of love/hate are rendered irrelevant by what Luhmann calls generally the *codification of intimacy* and specifically the *semantics of passion*. Even the longest standing distinction in love’s lexicon – true love versus sexual appetite – is confused and conflated by the modern ideal of romantic and married love, whose central axis is

sexuality. What we appear to have in modern love, is a reflexive domain that operates according to its own axioms, and these axioms have increasingly little relevance to what goes on outside love's domain. Indeed, the media of communication that operates in love today is more and more likely to come into conflict with other self-reflective codes. Luhmann wants to tell us why this happened the way it did and why we find ourselves in the mess that we are in when it comes to love within marriage in the modern age.

Functional Differentiation

It is a truism that modern society is a much more complex phenomenon than the world of the past. Its functional principle is different. Societies in the past were stratified, organized hierarchically in terms of specific roles. Aristocratic medieval society, for example, was structured in terms of those who fought (the nobles) and those who worked (the peasants) with a special role given to those who prayed (the clergy). Religion had a special status in medieval society as the communicative glue that held everything together, which is probably why there was such an insistence on universality of belief. We know that religious beliefs began to splinter in the fifteenth-century as society began to move towards modernity. For Luhmann, modernity means *functional differentiation* as distinct from hierarchical differentiation. What we Europeans and North Americans have been doing ever since the fifteenth-century is hiving off functions. The appropriate question is not whether this kind of differentiation is inevitable (clearly it is not, since it didn't occur to the same extent elsewhere). That question is: how is it possible. Luhmann suggests that two interrelated forces needed to operate simultaneously. First, the individual needed to be freed up from social controls in order to function in a more differentiated world. But this outcome was far from simple, since this thing that we call the individual was firmly imbedded in a complex of human relations stretching from the elite caste to the communal village and religious community. Second, because functional institutions do not simply appear upon demand, adaptations have to take place within the available means of communication that define our personal orientation and individualistic possibilities. Religion was obviously one of the places where the communicative code was sufficiently rich and flexible so as to provide opportunities for refocusing away from a stratified society towards a more individualistic outlook. Another was love, which had already emerged as a distinctive code as early as the twelfth century and, as we have seen, could just as easily support a more radically individual interpretation as the status quo.

Today we live in a modern functionally differentiated society, but our *evolution* to that society was always difficult and effected through available communicative media or, if you like, ways of thinking and talking about relationships. There are 4 obvious functional discursive domains that dominate modern life, each with a single propeller. There is the economy, whose engine is need. There is science or truth, whose informing principle is perception. There is politics, whose dynamic is force. And there is modern love, whose axis is sex. It should be obvious, says Luhmann, that these 4 dominant and dominating areas of modern life are not simply abstract *things* but specialized ways of communicating knowledge. Unlike religion, each of these four areas has gone through progressive and radical transformations by exploring and developing their

communicative potential as *systems*. The difference between a system and its environment is that a system severely limits those aspects of the environment that deems significant and focuses on its own internal development. The inherent tendency of a system, and this especially applies to the codified system of intimacy that is love, is to make the external environment conform to its own development. Thus, what goes on outside the world of the two lovers is only relevant to the extent that it impedes or supports love. In a functionally differentiated world characterized by self-referential systems, what is outside the system is typically regarded as *noise*. Love was one of the earliest and most important modern systems.

Obviously, we could get entangled in the pros and cons of Luhmann's theory-building in particular and the relevance of the Social Sciences in general. I'm much more interested in the functions that Luhmann thinks the modern language of love served. Its primary functions, you should know, were not to make people happy or fulfilled and only very indirectly and marginally to provide a foundation for society in the loving family. There are lots of definitions of the family that could provide social stability and some of them most certainly preceded the codification of love. For a social scientist like Luhmann, you don't necessarily require institutions like marriage or the family for a modern society to function. Functionality means something quite different, therefore. Love evolves to do two things that modernity does need. First, it enables the individual to flourish as an individual. It provides the individual with liberty from the bonds of social stratification within a relationship between people who are to some extent equalized by love. Moreover, it reinforces the unique individuality of the modern person by allowing it to be discovered and affirmed within the close relationship. The extreme version of that affirmation, of course, is *interpersonal interpenetration*, which is a better term for what actually goes on than a complete merging that is impossible.

The second function that love plays relates to differentiation in general. The modern world does not merely divvy up economic, political and scientific *tasks*. It divvies up the person, the subject, the individual or whatever you want to call this biological-psychic entity. The more modern the individual is, the more he or she will be expected to function in increasingly *impersonal* functional domains. Formerly, stratified domains glued together by religious belief, provided emotional security including a sense of belonging for the individual. The *affective* needs of a person were spread across a range of institutions and relationships. As these supports were dismantled, the individual was left alone in a world that could only seem as unfeeling as it was impersonal. Love provided a highly valuable counter world where affective feelings could be deepened and intensified to balance the emotional losses elsewhere. In this functional context, Luhmann suggests, Romantic love was not the antithesis of a cold and calculating modern society. Whatever the Romantics thought about themselves and their agenda, romanticism was the necessary functional evolution of love to perform an imminently modern need.

Where Luhmann's approach is particularly useful is in suggesting that the realistic critique of romantic merging is entirely misplaced. Romanticism was a necessary exaggeration that capped off a process that had been taking place for hundreds of years.

Love as a codified system of intimacy gradually withdrew itself from connections with increasingly irrelevant discursive domains, such as reason (philosophy), morality (ethics), and, increasingly, art (aesthetics) and even reality in order to become a self-regulating system of intense affectivity. Love departs from philosophy by affirming irrationality; it transcends morality by making love its own rule. As we saw in Proust, it discards aesthetic considerations in the interest of universal applicability; not everyone can appreciate art, but anyone can appreciate love (perhaps that is why Proust was disturbed about the possible corruption of art by love). As for reality, until recently, the entire weight of the code of intimacy was placed on asserting that love was its own reality.

Luhmann obviously isn't interested in whether love is true or false in general or in particular relations. He thinks that these kinds of questions are only interesting to the extent that they illuminate the evolution of love's code. The whole point of love was to enable the modern individual to develop, and to provide that psychic system with emotional support. Thereafter, love as a system takes on a life of its own whose truth or falseness is measured only by its success. Success, in turn, is measured by relevance. Relevance, finally, is measured by ongoing commitment. Obviously, codes like economics, politics, science and love run up against an external environment. You can call that reality, if you wish, but Luhmann would be inclined to ask: what you mean by reality? Since the environment is just noise until either processes it stratified and hierarchical or differentiated codes, it makes no sense talking about a reality outside of them. The most *real* environment for modern codes is the existence of other codes. The language of economics, for example, has become dominant among codes and threatens to subvert the integrity of politics. Its potential impact upon love is at present uncertain. At one point, Luhmann appears to suggest that modern love might be able to overcome some of its challenges by incorporating something called *exchange theory* that views emotional relations as parallel to economic transactions in which you want to get back as much as you put in. But it is lucky for him that he doesn't pursue this line of reasoning because, by his own account, modern love is defined by loving and is nothing like exchange. Intense *affect* can't easily be replaced by a transaction.

Luhmann's world is one in which the only *differences that make a difference* are either the distinctions within and between systems. Unless a system is in crisis (which may actually be occurring with respect to the codification of intimacy), it will typically be the distinctions within the code that are meaningful to participants. Modern men and women, and modern society in general, tend to be schizophrenic because we hop into codes without ever attempting to integrate them. Formerly, a more or less common religion served that purpose. Arguably, today it is the mass media that needs to dumb everything down to the extent that the world appears connected, whereas in fact it is not. Environmentalism may be the closest thing right now as the modern replacement to religion. Love occasionally claims a unifying role, but it is difficult to see how something that is confined to two people could ever serve that function. In order for the claim to be plausible at all, one has to invoke antiquated ideals of love that fly in the face of the modern monad.

Before leaving all this abstruse theorizing, I want to highlight the difference between a social scientist like Luhmann and anyone who pretends to be a humanist. The starting point for a traditional humanist is an individual or a subject. That need not be the foundational principle for a modern or postmodern humanist. But, I think you should be teaching in some other discipline unless you believe that there is something you can loosely call *people* who have "a spontaneous need for personal relationships and intimate communication" (57) Everyone we have looked at in this course, even Sartre, believes that except Luhmann. Luhmann doesn't believe there is anything that is spontaneous in what we call a person. A person is nothing more than a psychic system on a communicative grid or grids. People seek affection and respond to love in the ways the code tells them to. Modern people, for Luhmann, resemble sci-fi cyborgs is as much as they can process complex information with a high degree of flexibility. But their emotions are none-the-less programmed for all that.

Love and Friendship

Whether or not you agree with Luhmann about our possible independence from increasingly differentiated communicative systems, he reveals some features of modern love that historians and humanists overlook. Even today, you have a lot of people who think they know what love is or what love ought to be who don't understand the way the code has evolved and its implications for choices. For example, a lot of people, including the Spice Girls, think not only that love and friendship should go together but also that friendship should have primacy. Now, Luhmann would point out that the codification of intimacy will always contain residues of former manifestations. Aristotle reduced love to friendship between self-affirming males. In seventeenth-century Puritanism, there was an attempt to elevate married friendships within a reinterpretation of *agape*. Again, in eighteenth-century England, there was powerful movement to build married friendship on the foundation of sexual compatibility. Thus, there is a rich and varied literature/tradition that links love and friendship that we can draw upon.

Luhmann thinks that anyone who believes that love and friendship can make a comeback is deluding herself. It was something like romantic love as interpersonal interpenetration that propelled the code forward and not friendship. You might conceivably settle for friendship, especially at the stage of your life when sexual intimacy is less pressing, but the point is that you would be *settling* for something less than love, and certainly something less interesting than love. Romantic love won the serious contest for reasons that difficult to pinpoint, but the real point is that romantic love did win the race and now energizes the code. Love is no longer friendship and cannot be friendship. Friendship can survive in love, but only if it is subservient to love and pays homage to love. Moreover, friendship is a concept in serious jeopardy in any love relationship, not only because friendship hardly ever survives the death of love, but also because even if one were successful in maintaining friendship, it would involve the *cooling out* of the intensity that we now define as love. Love is now defined as emotionally intense, even irrational, whereas friendship is categorized at best as affectionate. There is a reason why a Greek rationalist fan of moderation like Aristotle championed friendship. Luhmann

thinks this idea of friendship is different from love in ways that ultimately make it irrelevant.

The very interesting emotional on-off switches that occur in a love relationship are arguably missing in friendship, unless the friend is categorized as a potential lover in which case a great deal of what constitutes friendship will disappear. That's why Harry says to Sally that they can be friends or lovers but not both; the ending of the movie is typically Hollywood schlock. Consider the paradigmatic difference between friends and lovers. Friendship involves conversation; lovers can talk without saying anything. Even when they talk, the dynamic is utterly different. The utterance of a friend is relatively straightforward. The utterance of a lover triggers a world of interesting, albeit not always positive, possibilities. In the first place, the utterance of a lover is linked to an incredibly complex attribution process. From a simple utterance, the beloved can draw conclusions about how:

> The other thinks of himself as someone who loves or no longer loves, is someone hoping for love, expecting or demanding it; how he overcomes his doubts in the chances for a lasting relationship; how he assumes the partner to have such doubts or attributes them to her in order to exonerate himself; how he exploits the fact that the partner knows, but cannot say, that she is no longer loved; and how he manipulates situations in which both know that both know that non-communication has more advantages for one than the other.

You can imagine many such possible on-off switches that complicate and problematize communication. The point is the multiplicity of possible reactions and counter-reactions push communication "up against the barriers of the possible" and bring the tremendously interesting incommunicability of love into play. Friendship makes no such demands on the psyche and, arguably, is far less interesting and exciting as a result.

How do you know that love is successful? Because it continues. Friendships may be contingent, but they are not contingent in the same way. Friendship is a much more simple relationship than love. In a contest between the more sophisticated communicative media and the more primitive, the more primitive will either be destroyed or absorbed by the more complex. At least, this will be the case when the code of love reaches a certain level of differentiation in its own right. Evolution is not destiny. There was no inevitability that love would begin to usurp friendship in the late eighteenth-century. For a long time the outcome was uncertain. Love was even at something of a disadvantage because it undermined contemporary patterns of stratification; it certainly was much more of an anomaly in contemporary patterns of *affectivity*; it wouldn't have had a chance against the classical and historically tested ideal of friendship were it not for the fact that love had already gone through a series of differentiations on the continent and had penetrated elite culture at a number of levels; without the printing press and its embrace within the novel, it might never have usurped friendship.

What love had going for it that friendship did not, was that it was impossible "to delimit friendship, i.e. to differentiate within it" (81) In the eighteenth-century, many writers

were obsessed with linking love and morality, but the irrationality of love and its connection to the supposedly diseased but still desired imagination, made it possible to decouple love and to start exploring it with an eye towards intensity. It is impossible to say what might have been done along these lines in terms of a recognizably modern friendship, but it does seem that it would have been much more difficult. Friendship and virtue were linked at the hip; it was impossible to think of one without the other. Ever since Aristotle, friendship had always been conceived in terms of a "generally recognized set of morals." The preoccupation with virtuous friendships made it unsuitable as a modern medium, where ethics was either becoming irrelevant as anything other than a specialized study.

I haven't said too much about the historical evolution of love here, other than to suggest that something like romantic love was eventually victorious. You can get a lot more out of Luhmann's discussion of the historical evolution of love, and especially insightful is his account of the significance of the language of gallantry that operated in French elite circles in the seventeenth-century. Luhmann argues that many of the signs, signals, and strategies – on/off switches – in the codification of intimacy were developed to suite refined extra-marital alliances. His account of the ways that these were supplemented by the recognition of love's sexual basis and ultimate incommunicability is interesting. His definition of modern love as less this exaggerated and transitional mode and more as *interpersonal interpenetration* is worth considering. If we look at romantic love as a unified set of ideas, rather than a propeller for love's autonomy, we miss its real function. The one area that needs much more explanation in Luhmann, however, is the way that love attached itself to marriage. Of course, it makes sense to suggest that love could only become a universal langue d'amour if it toned down its message and imbedded itself institutionally. But, surely, the reader would like to know how this was effected in practice, since the relationship between codes and institutions is key. Moreover, love's intensity and perhaps even its basic interpretations, must have been drastically modified to make this marriage (pardon the pun) between a code and an institution possible. One wonders, for example, why the codification of intimacy couldn't have challenged the institution of marriage. In other words, why did marriage have to become the test of whether one loved or not, since it's not a very good litmus test? Finally, these questions become all the more important if one considers that a great deal of the modern problem of love has to do with its forced cohabitation (pardon the pun again) with marriage.

Why Are We So Unhappy in Love?

Sartre tells us that we are unhappy because we want to merge with the other and that this is impossible. Freud tells us that love is really sexuality sublimated in ways that are unrealistic and self-defeating. Luhmann, I think, is much more interesting, at least for our postmodern age. Romantic merging just isn't the problem for him that it is for those realists reacting to romantic idealism. He's happy to substitute interpersonal interpenetration, which is bloody difficult but not nearly so demanding as merging and much more fascinating in giving the creative imagination a workout. With respect to Freud, he avoids the twin problems of repression and frustration by making sexuality the functional pivot for the code of intimacy rather than its meaning. All Luhmann's

meanings refer to the code and as long as we subscribe to love's code, our super-cyborg lives are meaningful. There is no disjuncture within the code itself to make our lives miserable.

Love still remains something of a modern problem, however, for Luhmann as for most of us. So, how does he describe the problem? The humanist would describe the problem as a need for intimacy that in one way or another is not being met by modern relationships or institutions. The humanist could offer counter valuations – such as friendship or religion or autonomy or authenticity or simply more loving – to correct the situation. The psychologist as therapist might advice us to limit our expectations. The Stoic philosopher might tell us to live inside ourselves. The new age pseudo-philosopher might offer us naturopathy and holism and like all late modern therapies – loving yourself first. For Luhmann, however, we are all prisoners of the codes that give our lives meaning. Well, not so much *prisoners* as *products* of a code. We sophisticated cyborgs don't have any subjective freedom that isn't programmed into us. Typically, we malfunction for one of two reasons. Either our internal programming no longer matches up with our environment or one of our programmed components comes into conflict with another. Even cyborgs become undone when two programs collide with one another.

It must be said that Luhmann is at his least satisfactory when it comes to discussing the problems of modern love. Having almost joyfully told us that the most intimate meanings in modern life, including our individuality, have been manufactured for us by a code, he gets positively maudlin when it comes to describing the code's impact upon our future smooth functioning. He points to three specific problems (that you might not think so very different from the arguments of humanist writers). First, he argues that the language of intense interpersonal relationships became too abstract to support real life relationships. The psychic expectation of a satisfactory, let alone ideal, relationship between a man and a woman is difficult to maintain (one is tempted to say without blowing out the psyche's circuitry). In other words, interpersonal interpenetration proved problematic for the normal everyday functioning of people in relationships, although this was now the very definition of love and the expectation of intimacy in the love relationship. In other words, the code of love is far too complex and abstract to allow ease of implementation. In cyborg language, there isn't an easy fit between the circuitry and the code.

A second and perhaps more fundamental problem with interpersonal interpenetration is that it requires two psychic systems – if you like *individuals* – reading and responding to the signs and signals of each other. Given that the dynamic is between two entities that view themselves as unique and autonomous, the potential for conflicting messages and interpretations is huge. Why would anyone assume that interpersonal affirmation or even homeostasis could ever result from such a combination? The "capacity for stability" argues Luhmann depends on two unlikely things simultaneously: 1) one's unique personal resources and 2) one's intimate involvement with the other person (156). A solution to this problem of conflict, because it can't always be solved by anticipation and attribution, is rendered more unlikely because the normal mode of communicating information in human affairs is verbal conversation. But it is a given in the relationship

between lovers that communication of this kind is inadequate and, even, a signal that one does not love properly. 'If you loved me properly, I wouldn't have to explain this to you' is a typical response. It often takes a professional to get two disgruntled lovers communicating, and when this happens, love's magical spell is already broken.

Third, if the communicative medium is too complex to effect understanding, its real world pivot is too specific and limited. Unlike the concept of need in economics or force in politics, the flexibility of sexuality in love is more limited. If you will, the human cyborg's sexual potency is limited and needs to be regenerated. Even if we accept that good sex remains crucial for love's survival, the everyday love life of two individuals is more mundane, intermittent and contingent than the concept of "passionate" love might suggest. Sexual potency even declines with age. It soon becomes clear to disillusioned lovers that sexuality can't easily match up to all the intensity that the symbolic medium places upon it. Since normal sexual functioning puts curbs on even the most active imagination, the excessive, indulgent, high-spirited language of love is often an uneasy fit with its primary operation. People in everyday relationships have to *cool out the semantics* of love in order to function within any kind of mutually acceptable comfort zone. So much is this the case in fact, that many of us are hesitant – and rightly so -- to enter into serious relationships with individuals who are too demanding, or as Luhmann quaintly puts it *too high spirited*, in their attitudes towards sexuality.

An important reason why the semantics of love – its code of intimacy – never fit perfectly with the physical functioning of individuals was that it development took place in relative isolation from the average psyche or normal sexual operations. It originated largely in imaginative literature, specifically in the novel. It was glorified as *the* ideal by romantic writers, high end cyborgs, who were much better equipped to modify its idealistic extremes, for example with a sense of ironic detachment. Unlike politics and economics, therefore, love was always much more of a literary construction. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature was primarily written by composed for a sophisticated and elite audience who could be expected to see through love's exaggerations while deriving energy and meaning from the richness of the code. Love became attached to marriage, and became the universal personal ideal for most people in European society, as a complete package, as a self-regulating system of values, without any significant modifications in terms of existing institutions and attitudes. A direct consequence of attaching this hybrid form to the everyday world was to shine a searchlight on the chasm between love's ideals and lived reality. One image that sticks in the mind is that of the modern housewife who completely compartmentalizes the love life of her imagination (i.e. in a Harlequin romance) from her relationship with her husband.

All codes have problems. Economics and politics have huge lacunae, and one needs only think of the gap between individual desire and the market to realize that market economics is a code that likely will not last forever. But the code of intimacy or semantics of love probably contains larger problems that other recognizably modern codes. In many ways, the semantics of love and the semantics of economics shared a parallel development. Both pushed the concept of the individual forward; both became self-sustaining systems; both were recognizably modern differentiated-differentiating

systems. But there are important differences between them. The concept of a market based on human need has heretofore been more successful than, and occasionally even threatens to annihilate or assimilate, the semantics of love, not because it is any more real but because its evolution took place within the institutional framework of society and drew strength from economic dysfunctionalities. Since the conception of *homo economicus* was not formulated in an elite or rarefied environment, the language of economics was forced to compromise by seeking the widest possible circulation and institutional support. Love, on the other hand, began its life as a quality that only the most noble or sensitive souls could aspire to. When it made the leap into everyday life, it provided the majority of people with only the vaguest notion of a *soul mate* that they were destined to be with, in other words a fairy tale. The only significant institutional support provided to love as a system was marriage, which might have appeared sufficient were it not for the fact that marriage is an institution under enormous pressure these days. Arguably, the institution of marriage came under pressure as soon as its basis was romantic love or, in Luhmann's words, interpersonal interpenetration. What is fascinating is that both the semantics of love and the institution of marriage were sufficiently robust to survive this threat and, even to thrive, a fact that shows that love was perfectly capable of shaping its own reality. Love as interpersonal penetration may have been inherently unstable, but that doesn't mean that it was impossible if people *cooled out the semantics*.

When love became tied to marriage their destinies intertwined. The question is why are both of them under threat? Obviously, the problems mentioned thus far have contributed to love's demise, particularly the difficulties involved in interpersonal interpenetration. I would argue that these are not decisive. Luhmann himself suggests that a version of romantic love may survive if lovers 'work through' the problems they will face together rather than throwing in the towel because they couldn't live in a fairy tail. Indeed, Luhmann has no choice but to suggest that we all work through the problems because there is no alternative to love when it comes to the human need for intimacy. If we emphasize working through the problems, however, Luhmann thinks we might have to let go of love's main institutional support – marriage. The link between love and marriage allowed the love code to become universal throughout society, but this marriage of convenience has served its purpose. Henceforth, many of us will seek love, but it won't necessarily be in marriage. Luhmann describes the institution of marriage as an "ideology of reproduction" that no longer matches up with the requirements of love. It main impulse is towards permanence, whereas love seeks interpersonal intensity. Pair relationships will continue to function, of course, because love can be defined in no other way. It would be difficult to free yourself from love, since that is how human intimacy is now defined and we've been historically programmed to need that intimacy. But the modern landscape is unstable. People will still seek love and form loving relationships with a sexual foundation (whatever their sexual preference). But it is likely that many of those relationships will break down and that many individuals will spend large parts of their lives living alone. And, when they are together, many people will be consulting love's code, not to reassure themselves that love continues, but for signs that love is failing and that it is time to *move on*.

The Threat to Love

If even the link between love and marriage could dissolve without threatening the integrity of the code, we have yet to identify the more decisive threat to love that I alluded to. Luhmann's analysis is all about functional differentiation. A major function of turning people into individuals is to facilitate their ability to fit into specialized roles. Paradoxically, as modernity unfolds, individualism reaches the limits of functionality and becomes a problem. What functional systems need are smart cyborgs who can process complex information independency, not renegade robots that might challenge the system. In aging modernity, arguably there is an increasing tendency for people to derive their primary meaning and sense of identity, not from their unique individuality, but from their role in the system. To put this in layman's language, people define horizontally by their career opportunities and choices and vertically by their status in the organization.

You could argue that love served an overall functional purpose that it shared with other self-regulating codes as long as individuality was a social requirement. Love allowed people to escape from stratified communities to explore their own preferences; lovers intensified individuality by affirming it in each other. Nowadays, despite the persistence of egoistic language, it appears that most people are less interested in finding themselves than in getting a job or pursuing a career. That is certainly my experience as a teacher of people who will soon be entering the workforce. The semantics of love is bound to suffer much more than economics or politics in this late modern climate because in the significance of the individual in economics or politics has become purely functional and largely irrelevant. Needs are manufactured and manipulated and politics has become the pluralistic management of interests that are defined in terms of groups rather than individuals. The individual is a statistic. Love is not really all that relevant in such an environment. We easily substitute terms like sexual preference and gender orientation for love. Living together means "being there" for the other person. The emphasis in *being there* is sexual; living arrangements are assessed in terms of convenience; and anything additional is a bonus not to be expected and most certainly not to be assumed. The code of love once made ethics irrelevant; modern life may be making love irrelevant.

Love provides intimacy. In the move to modernity, personal intimacy was necessary because people were acutely aware that a functionally differentiated society is *impersonal*. The intensification of personal life compensated for the universally recognized deterioration of traditional bonds. A valid question may be whether or not late modern individuals (or Luhmann's cyborgs) feel the same sense of loss or the same need for compensation if they define meaning in terms like *careers*. Even if you agree with the (debatable) humanistic assumption that everybody needs love, contemporary society is a place where love and careers are often in conflict, and love is losing many of those conflicts. Today, we seem more willing to embrace loneliness than to give up a job opportunity.

This isn't purely a case of the economic code absorbing the love code, although it would be stupid not to think that this often happens. When we choose a job in terms of a *career* as our priority, we are not simply choosing money. We are choosing to belong in terms

of playing a functional role in an organization. We are defining our lives in terms of tasks done more or less expertly. Our lives have a relatively unambiguous meaning in terms of a job well done. We may work long hours, but we are comfortable to the extent that we know what we are supposed to do and how we are supposed to do it. Our function is clear and function is meaning. Luhmann doesn't explore this development, but it makes sense of both his general theory and his insight that contemporary love is making demands on the individual that are getting harder and harder for the individual to endure. A recent sociological study (I forget what and where) discovered something very telling about modern white-collar workers. The assumption of the researchers going into the study was that American professionals should be experiencing a high degree of alienation because they were working longer hours away from home. What they found was almost the opposite. Many white-collar workers actually preferred staying longer in their jobs than going home. Their jobs provided them with a comfort zone. Maintaining a loving relationship with one's wife or husband, on the other hand, is increasingly being viewed not only as much more difficult but ultimately as less rewarding.

Luhmann says that when love fails, as it often does, in the modern world it leaves a residue of "isolation, incompleteness and failure" that affects men more than women. Many of the white-collar workers described above still cling to love at some level. Presumably, they want to maintain *both* their careers and their relationships, even if they want to avoid working on those relationships. In the recent past, men have not had to choose between love and careers because women generally supported and deferred to their husbands. There is a very good reason why men haven't had to confront an *either/or* situation and why it now pains them if they have to do so. The situation for women is quite different. In the past, they did have to choose between careers and husbands; even if this was a *de facto* choice, it placed restrictions on what women were allowed to be. Many modern women are understandably unwilling to sacrifice their careers on the altar of love. They no longer define themselves in terms of love, and men who are unwilling to adapt to this new environment will find themselves at a disadvantage when it comes to finding and maintaining an intense interpersonal relationship..

Everything points to the fact that the codification of intimacy will be subject to severe pressures in the world of the future. We don't have to subscribe to Luhmann's caricature of human beings as products of semantic codes, to appreciate that anything like romantic love is or its many derivatives is on the defensive. We can try to be more authentic and realistic, or we can maintain our idealism and continue to bestow values on significant others, but we should appreciate what we are up against. Those who *will* to believe in love will have at least one advantage over those who capitulate in the face of pressure; we are what we think and most of us still think in terms of love. If you took this course, you may be seeking to shore up and strengthen that faith in love. Hopefully, you will find the rich, complex and different discussions of love in the past a rich resource for finding your way. For those who refuse to cling to this particular illusion, I only have two things to offer. First, since all life is an illusion, I hope you choose the illusion that is most meaningful for you. Second, since we are all in this life together, if you can't approve of love at least you will have a better understanding of lovers.

Love, Death and European Civilization

Introduction

Throughout this course, I have tried to show you just how much European culture owed to what Luhmann calls the *semantics of love* or the codification of intimacy. What Luhmann makes so very clear is that love was an engine – perhaps the most important dynamo -- for the development of European civilization. Love also enabled us to become modern individuals because it encouraged us, even demanded of us, the pursuit of our own unique desires that ultimately were centered on that other unique individual who was our destiny, our soul-mate. The language of love took many different channels and even detours before rushing tempestuously into romantic merging. Even at its height, however, this idea of merging, which can be traced as far back as religious mysticism, was plagued by its inability to resonate in the so-called real world outside of the empire created by lovers. Thus, the more pessimistic of the romantics already related love to death in the sense that they were distressed by the ability of love to survive the contingencies of life and, therefore, imaginatively projected eternal bliss beyond the grave. By the eighteen-thirties, modern writers were already retreating from romanticism without, however, being able to do away with it completely. Why was this the case? It was the case because the impulse of passion, especially the passion of love, had become foundational for culture in general and art in particular.

We products of European civilization have found it difficult to dispense with love because it is the only code that speaks directly to our emotional selves and personal lives in an increasingly impersonal world. We find the greatest writers in the western tradition returning to love, often reluctantly, occasionally with fear and trepidation as in the case of Thomas Mann. "Death in Venice", for example, shows us how over passionate love leads to "degradation and confusion" and, if the protagonist hadn't died, most likely humiliation as well. Love might be increasingly irrelevant as a meaningful code, but the code is embedded within us and remains intensely meaningful *for us*. Thomas Mann highlights this peculiar phenomenon sympathetically in "Death in Venice". What he shows us is that love as passion has become such a part of our consciousness that we can run but not hide from its impact.

By the time Thomas Mann wrote "Death in Venice", love had two faces in European culture. One face was a set of idealizations relating to the beauty of the beloved and the desire to possess the beautiful. These idealizations contributed much to European culture and its heroic individualism, despite the fact that they had become increasingly problematic for individuals who needed to act in an increasingly utilitarian, bureaucratic and abstract society. The second face was the repressed sexuality uncovered by Freud that could only sustain so many idealizations before transforming a neurotic society into a society of neurotics. Much earlier than Freud, the poet-philosopher Nietzsche pointed to the dangerously increasing disconnect between the Apollonian or idealizing nature and the Dionysian or passionately sensual aspects of European thought. "Death in Venice"

inhabits this terrain as well as directly confronting the malaise in western culture that Nietzsche had predicted.

Fin de Siecle European Culture

Fin de siecle culture refers to the pessimistic crisis that beset European culture towards the end of the nineteenth-century, but it has earlier roots and it continues into the present. Serious culture and criticism began to move, not without regret and nostalgia, away from a romantic interpretation of the world. A new interpretation of the heroic artist and cultural interpreter emerged that prided itself on self-command and "self-abnegation" in a loveless world. Gustav Aschenbach (perhaps based on Gustav Mahler) is one of these self-proclaimed *supermen* who refuse to indulge hopeless passion and, instead, chart a new course in praise of the steely-eyed hero who can assess modern life aesthetically but without sentiment. The new type of heroic type is Baudelaire's traveler or stroller who discovers or manufactures beauty out of detachment. He or she is a self-contained and self-affirmed *will to create* who has moved far beyond romantic irony into a cynicism that is beyond good or evil. In other words, the new man creates out of determination and effort rather than romantic passion. Love is at best a distraction, at worst a hopeless attempt to escape, from the challenges posed by real life that require every ounce of our effort to rise above the meaninglessness of our existence.

Gustav Aschenbach is representative of the new kind of *artist*, in the widest sense of someone who contributes to aesthetic culture. He is an extreme type because he has no sympathy for those who continue to indulge romantic fantasies about life and love. He wrestles with and forces the world to recognize "his own worth" and "pay it homage" (13). He is the consummate Apollonian character. But ultimately Gustav can't avoid the *bitterness* and *loneliness* of this proud attempt to rise above a dead or dying European tradition. This dilemma isn't clear at first. Gustav considers himself above emotion and is inclined to criticize those who indulge in infantile idealizations. Like so many of his contemporaries, Gustav doesn't recognize his inner emptiness. Still, he seeks relief from two interconnected European stresses: the stress of overwork and the stress of a life lacking passionate inspiration. He does what modern men and women do in order to bandaid their neurosis and spice up their compartmentalized lives. He goes on *vacation*, not of course before he's cleaned up his desk like a good accountant in the field of culture. First, he heads for a Greek island, but feels that something is missing. He changes his travel plans and heads for Venice. Venice, of course, is not only a cool town in the story. It represents the efflorescence of sensual beauty and the shift from divine to earthly sources of inspiration. Revealingly, it is also a museum and a mausoleum for a dying European civilization. Lest the reader miss the point, Thomas Mann describes Venice in the grip of cholera; the city is the carcass of European civilization at its most buoyant and rapidly filling up with rotting corpses.

For Mann, Venice in decay represents European civilization at the turn of the century. When the winds of corruption are not blowing, it still has the power to charm the senses. It is a place like no place else, and it is a place whose charms are perfectly designed to fill the hole in Aschenbach's heart – a hole that he doesn't notice while he's working away

achieving fame as a thoroughly modern intellectual and critic. Gustav, of course, doesn't recognize the hole. He's dissatisfied, but thinks that a vacation is all that he needs and then he can go back to work. On the way to Venice, our protagonist observes the dandified clerk, who is representative of those who cling to a youth that will never return. The main irony of the story is that Gustav Aschenbach, despite all his superman tendencies and disgust with foolish clerk, is going to end up being what he derides. At the end of the story, we see Gustav with dyed hair, cosmetically enhanced cheeks and lips, and clothes designed for someone decades younger, slumped dead in his beach chair. Another victim of the foolishness ideals of western culture.

What Thomas Mann is so very expert at is showing you how difficult it is to rise above your culture and how pathetically you will fall unless you appreciate its siren call. Gustav is like so many individuals who claim that romantic love is ridiculous and meaningless, but who *fall* like so many ninepins when exposed to its magic. Aschenbach has fought against romantic notions all his life, but this means absolutely nothing when love for a fourteen-year old Polish boy in a sailor's suit erupts into his life. The boy, of course, also has a symbolic significance as the epitome of all that was beautiful and optimistic in western civilization. That he walks, runs, plays and even fights within the remnants of a decaying civilization shows just how pathetic European culture has become. Venice, of course, is not merely a museum or a mausoleum; it is also a tourist town. It is a glossy shell that obscures the ugly kind of commercial spirit that now predominates in western society that relegates the parade of old ideas and ideals to either a sideshow or mask concealing commercial hypocrisy. Underneath the fading beauty is an ugliness that we cannot escape.

Love of Beauty

Romantic love focused on the relationship between a man and a woman. "Death in Venice" is one of the first modern works of literature to treat of same sex love. Of course, at the birth of western culture, Plato had already made same-sex love the focus of philosophy. Mann's little story is particularly intriguing because it simultaneously affirms and challenges the Platonic interpretation of beauty and desire. Following Nietzsche, Mann offers a definition of love that must embrace our sexual and divinely creative natures in equal measure. Plato only accepted sexuality or the sensual love of beauty as a stepping-stone to a more Apollonian love of the good. In Nietzschean terms, he suppressed Dionysus.

What makes Mann such a great writer is that he describes this fascination with ideas and ideals that coalesced in romanticism, but could go no farther, with sympathy. Even though Mann desperately wants to warn intelligent contemporaries about the dangers looming on the European horizon if intelligent people fail to recognize how hopelessly naïve many of these romantic ideas area, he fully recognizes their enormous aesthetic appeal. Gustav, as an intellectual, is more susceptible to these impulses than he might have suspected because he is the product of a classical education. You would be mistaken if you simplistically considered Aschenbach to be attracted to young boys. At the very least, you have to take seriously Gustav's belief that it is the ideal form of the beautiful

that he aspires to. He is first attracted to Tadzio by the boy's uncanny resemblance to Greek sculptures that defined human beauty. He is cued up for the affair's further development by Plato's description of the power of beauty to "awaken every artistic nature" (26). The boy triggers yearnings in Aschenbach's soul are immediately related to love of beauty rather than sexual attraction, although there is no denying the "wanton and treacherous" instinct that generally goes along with this. Gustav gets hooked on Tadzio because he is prompted to ponder:

> The mysterious harmony that must come to subsist between the individual human being and the universal law, in order that human beauty may result…

Of course, Aschenbach at first finds these "fresh and happy thoughts" to have more in common with the "flattering inventions of a dream" (27) and by serious reckoning "worthless". But at least for a while this beautiful and imaginative dream does substitute for serious reality in Gustav Aschenbach because he himself is a product of the western culture that generated these ideal abstractions of love.

The problem with these western idealizations of beauty is that they flatter our humanity and repress our more basic sexual instincts. Gustav has so completely suppressed his sexual being, that when it strikes with full force, when Gustav eventually capitulates or "surrenders" to Tadzio, he is completely unprepared for the event. He increasingly *acts out* irresponsibly or "foolishly". Thomas Mann sympathized with the temptation; he felt it himself towards an 11-year-old Polish boy and probably interpreted it as a debasing or corrupting personal tendency. Clearly, Mann wants to warn Apollonian people like Aschenbach and himself – contemporary intellectuals – that they are mistaken and commit the sin of pride in believing that they are immune from the vengeance of Dionysus. Mann wants to shows us that such would-be impartial spectators are defenseless in the face of real intense emotion. What happens to modern individuals lacking cultural support is that, when they do fall into the clutches of passion, they lose all sense of their critical faculties and they become "foolish", dangerous to themselves and others.

The modern urban intellectual, and the modern individual in general, suffers from emotional deprivation. When Gustav Aschenbach finally allows beauty to touch his soul, he rapidly loses his ability to channel it in socially responsible ways. He becomes wildly romantic in his attitudes, to the extent of actually preferring chaos and corruption to reign because these fit in better with his moods. Gustav is even obsessed with the corruption that he thinks is taking place in Venice; he embraces chaos; he comes to hate the boring, the mundane and the conventional. He wants to uncover and expose the bourgeois corruption behind Venetian society, but not out of concern for others, but for his own delight in destruction. His own death becomes irrelevant to him, and he indulges a death wish for himself and his beloved Tadzio. His "infatuation" for Tadzio discovers its larger meaning, not in an aesthetic life and civilization, but in a "dark satisfaction" with the "unclean", the "secret", "corruption" and decay. (53) Mann puts it brilliantly:

> Yet it would be untrue to say he suffered. Mind and heart were drunk with passion, his footsteps guided by the daemonic power whose pastime is to trample on human reason and dignity. (54)

For the artist whose domain is and should rightly be sensual feeling, a particular temptation when one's culture becomes enervated is to find refuge in stronger, more primitive emotions. Under the sway of his love for Tadzio, Aschenbach relinquishes his hold on his own cultural reality so quickly that one can only suppose it was tenuous to begin with. He has a "fearful dream" that leaves the "whole cultural structure of a lifetime trampled on, ravaged, and destroyed". (65) In that dream, he comes face to face with the wild and savage part of his nature and he is simultaneously "overwhelmed" and "bewitched" and "beguiled". All dignity and self-control are thrown out the window as he experiences the blood in his mouth – his own bestial nature. Dionysus has taken revenge on the Apollo.

Mann's writings and especially "Death in Venice" can be read as a warning against a new and dangerous tendency in western culture, where rationality and even love had become so abstract, so bottled up, that an emotional explosion would result. Everything that western culture had painstakingly constructed, including ideals of love and beauty, would be reduced to ruins. Desire that in Plato had been a longing to embrace the beautiful and the good could end up destroying all the hard earned benefits of civilization. And if this happened, Mann suggested that the modern artist would be complicit. The hourglass of an increasingly lonely and alienating western civilization was rapidly running out. (61) Gustav knows the secret of Venice's (i.e. civilization's) guilt. Instead of warning about the "desolate and calamitous city", however, Aschenbach is "intoxicated" by its possibilities. His remaining moral sense, in an amoral modernity, is completely neutered by "fugitive, mad, unreasoning hopes and visions of a monstrous sweetness". (65) In any case, the *boons of chaos* for releasing pent up desire, outweighed any moral considerations. What Gustav seeks is the "utmost surrender" to his unleashed emotions.

Gustav's fall from grace, of course, began much earlier. It began when he composed works like *The Abject* that attempted to reconcile art and knowledge, i.e. when the artist set himself up in his pride as a *teacher* to mankind. The role of art is not to instruct and the artist is the last person who should set himself up as a teacher. Gustav's inability to apply his theories to lived experience is telling proof of that. What Mann wants to stress is that the artist is neither a philosopher nor a teacher; the artist's *way* is through beauty. Beauty is the only insight that connects the sensual and the divine; the path to the "spirit" is through the "senses". (70) Thomas Mann recovers and modernizes the Plato of *Phaedrus* as a warning to modern "poets" or artists who pretend to have superior understanding. The "poet" who wanders in the realm of feeling is by definition a "transgressor" who is "headed direct for the pit". (71) The notion of the artist or sensitive soul as 'hero' is particularly dangerous, because although there may be heroic or warrior elements in boldly treading the path of feeling, it is sensitivity rather than heroism that characterizes the artist's approach.

Love and Death

Thomas Mann chronicles the decay and death of the idealistic era of western civilization with sympathy; after all he is a product of that culture. Where he departs from many of his contemporaries, who wanted to flee the ugliness modernity or hide behind nostalgia for the past, Mann sees creative opportunities in corruption. What makes Aschenbach, and by implication, most modern men and women, pathetic is that they cling fiercely to the ideals of youth and health. Just as the Venetian authorities try to cover up the sources of civilization's decay, so too Gustav Aschenbach foolishly attempts to recover his lost youth. His lost youth is only partly a function of age; it is also the result of the fact that he expertly eliminated passion in his life.

As a young man, Thomas Mann was a typical German type of conservative who deplored and despaired of the present. As an older and more mature writer, he became convinced that change and corruption of outdated forms was absolutely crucial to new creative life and that the artist needed to appreciate that new life sprung from death. Love and art were balancing acts between appreciating both the beauties of your culture and the stagnating effects of tradition. Unlike most of his contemporaries, who gravitated to National Socialism (Nazis), in a mistaken attempt to recapture some lost racial purity, Mann affirmed the role of the artist to look cultural corruption, decay and death squarely in the face. The synthesis of Apollo and Dionysus meant embracing both creation and destruction simultaneously rather than clinging to ideals that no longer had purchase. Creativity means building up, destroying, reinventing. Clinging to ideals of beauty that no longer have relevance is like Aschenbach's attempt to recapture his youth and his youthful passion.

"Death in Venice" is not only about the decline of western civilization; it is also about the very personal fact of death. Love alerts us to death. Once we love, we confront the death of the beloved and the death of ourselves. Death, in turn, should alert us to the fact that our bodies will decline and that we will no longer exist. What should our attitude to our death be? Thomas Mann clearly does not endorse the death wish that he sees oscillating with the obsession with youthful vitality in modern western culture and individuals like Gustav Aschenbach. Instead, he wants death and decay to remind us what it means to live, love and create. Certain cultural strides and personal conquests of the soul would be inconceivable without hardship. Even what we most fear -- disease and death – are valuable learning experiences. What western civilization and many individuals like Gustav Aschenbach want to do is to hide from these valuable experiences by retreating either into ideal abstractions or extremes of passion.

Mann has a particularly relevant message for those of us today who refuse to be artists of our lives and who mindlessly accept the status quo. Like Aschenbach, many of us are merely tourists in life, traveling from experience to experience, distracting ourselves from really appreciating the important lesson offered by death. Like Aschenbach, we escape from reality by acting as though we will live forever, and mimicking the experiences of our youth. Late modern society (i.e. today) is characterized by a refusal to contemplate decay and death and a retreat into a youth culture that is aided and abetted by consumerism. We even take drugs like viagra in order to hide from our bodily corruption. We make use of plastic surgery to keep our youthful looks. We place death

out of the picture or under the carpet. Like Aschenbach, today's baby boomers have become perpetual adolescents who desire love without death. But, unfortunately for the baby boomers, they come as a package.

Conclusion

Aschenbach is *foolishly* chasing his totally unrealistic love when death catches up with him. Here is a guy who is recognized as a genius by his peers and whose death is lamented by the literate public. But what has he learned about life and himself? Before his death, he merely embraces one part of life over another – the Dionysian over the Apollonian that ruled the majority of his life. When the three representatives of Dionysus begin Aschenbach's initiation in passion – those threatening and hostile red headed men in the cemetery, the gondolier, the baritone singer who resemble Dionysus' chief follower Silenius – they offer him a richer perspective on love and life and death. But, like many of us, and like western civilization in general, Aschenbach cannot come to personal terms with his life and simply jumps from one extreme to the other. The irony, of course, is that Aschenbach has set himself up as the cool, detached, cynical and totally superficial/artificial superman. The true superman – the Nietzschean *ubermensch* is neither the adolescent academic nor the foolish sensualist – but someone who rises above the sadness and suffering of human life to create *joy from sorrow*.

You don't have to be a Nietzschean existentialist, or even an artist, to appreciate the Thomas Mann's message. Both love and death are part of life, and we need to accord them due respect. We have to appreciate that our cultural ideals of love may not work, may be corrupt or corrupting, but that doesn't mean that we cease to create new ways of loving that are not merely attempts to recapture or retain youthful joys. The role of the artist, and of imaginative literature, is not to teach us how we should love – we need to work out that for ourselves -- but to explore emotional possibilities, even the most "frightful and excessive" that the artist himself would be the "first to condemn". (71) We ourselves are responsible for translating ideals of beauty and love into our lives. Without those creative and perhaps risky or dangerous ideals, would a life closed ultimately by death have much in the way of meaning?

In "Tristan", another short story in the volume containing "Death in Venice", Thomas Mann takes the halo off the brow of the artist Spinell, exposing him as a selfish and self-righteous weakling. But, despite all his shortcomings, Spinell offers Frau Klöterjahn an insight into the divine that her 'man of action' bourgeois husband can never begin to understand – the way creative love can transform the mundane into the beautiful. In an imaginative act of love, he envisions a crown on her head in her father's garden, surrounded by her sisters. The crown was never there as the outraged husband protests and Frau Klöterjahn was probably talking nonsense rather than acting out a romantic dreamscape. But Spinell's aesthetic way of seeing "roused in her a quite novel interest in her own personality" and an "elevation of spirit" (330, 335) that made her no longer the same housefrau who worshipped at the shrine of her boorish husband and boisterous baby. Ideals of love are neither true nor false, but if they are authentic expressions of creative feeling, they have enormous power to transport us to another and higher place.

They make our lives not only interesting but, if even for a moment, meaningful. Socrates said that the unexamined life is not worth living, but unaesthetic perceiving and living may just be worthless. As Spinell, aka Thomas Mann, suggests:

> I cannot bear all this dull, uncomprehending, unperceiving living and behaving, this world of maddening naïveté about me! It tortures me until I am driven irresistibly to set it all in relief, in the round, to explain, express, and make self-conscious everything in the world – so far as my powers will reach – quite unhampered by the result, whether it be for good or evil, whether it brings consolation and healing or piles grief on grief.

<u>Love and Intentionality</u>

Love in an Apathetic World

The fundamental and vitality-draining characteristic of the late modernity we inhabit is *apathy*. Apathy is the embracing of a passive and deterministic approach to life – simultaneously 1) the feeling that nothing that we do counts for or changes anything, and 2) a realm of relative safety from excessive stimuli or dangerous contact. Apathy is an attempt to neutralize risk or emotional overload and is a perfectly natural situational response. We are apathetic to things we don't want to pester us, like toxic or uninteresting people. Apathy becomes *unnatural*, however, when it takes the shape of a *general* approach to life. Then apathy weaves its way into a pessimistic tapestry of life and deters us from perceiving and acting with confidence. The normally functioning emotional equipment of human beings is designed to affirm, not to inhibit, life and action. Although we will feel more pessimistic at some times than others, the natural tendency of human beings is to gravitate towards hope and optimism. Indeed, one of the primary functions of negative emotions, and emotional blockages, is to force us out of our ruts in order to make our lives more *meaningful* to ourselves.

When Rollo May published *Love and Will* in 1969, he singled out a disturbing cultural trend. Citizens of the most developed countries were displaying abnormal or neurotic characteristics, not just as disturbed individuals, but also as a group. These people, who were ostensibly more affluent and freer to pursue their desires than any other people in history, were showing catatonic behaviour symptoms. In other words, they were more passive, less capable of action, than perhaps at any other period in history (although May sees similarities between these late modern symptoms of neurosis and attitudes that prevailed in the ancient world in the Third Century). People in general were becoming more *anxious* and this anxiety was leading them towards unhealthy forms of apathy towards love and life. May noted three major reasons for this *anxiety leading to apathy*. The first is the loss of shared meaning between people in the late modern world. It is harder to act confidently when all *meaningfulness* is brought into question. Almost by definition, attitudes and ideas are more meaningful for people if they are shared. When religious or ethical beliefs are brought into question, or made relative to individual subjectivity, the effort involved in finding meaning is so overwhelming that people retreat into a safety shell rather than make the attempt. The second reason for the loss of meaningfulness in modern and developed cultures is a ratio-scientific approach that views life as *determined* by forces that are beyond our personal control. Thus, individuals are either a product of their biological drives or sociological environment, so it is unfashionable and even superstitious to talk in terms like *freedom* or *autonomy*. Our wills are conditioned and contingent. The third reason for the loss of meaningfulness in our lives is perhaps the clincher because it relates directly to *personal meaningfulness or intentionality*. The discourse of progress, autonomy and freedom largely has been co-opted by the paradigm of technology. Thus, we achieve greatest freedom by being a cog in the wheel of technological progress and passively embracing the benefits that it provides us with. Ironically, some individuals obtain whatever confidence and autonomy

they have by worshiping at the shine of technology. Many others, however, feel helpless in the grip of these impersonal forces.

Love's present and love's future needs to be understood in light of these developments argues May. Whether these developments are good or bad, they have made love a *problem*. It seems obvious to May that traditional ideas of love, whether they relate to ethical or romantic love, are no longer relevant in our late modern environment, at least not in their idealistic and now pretty much exploded forms. One might argue that they remain relevant, or more consistently that they still *ought to be* relevant, but the contemporary situation clearly belies this possibility. Never have we been freer to pursue sexually based love; yet perhaps never have we been more disappointed by love. Sexual attraction is no longer a taboo; we have complete control over who we love; we can experiment with love and try people on for size; sexual experimentation no longer faces severe consequences in the form of forced marriages or unwanted pregnancy; we are much freer to escape loveless relationships; we are supported by a host of professionals who are happy to give us advice on healthy sexual hygiene and loving relationships. But the waiting rooms of psychiatrists are filled with people who are impotent, unsatisfied, disappointed, and pessimistic about love. If you think about it seriously, it could hardly be otherwise; an anxious and apathetic and meaningless society is bound to breed discontented lovers even if they are technically *supposed* to be entirely free to form meaningful relationships. Ironically, the freedom adds immeasurably to the discontent because now there are no obvious obstacles and we only have ourselves to blame if we fail with respect to *relationships*.

The problem of love is not a simple reflection of a more general apathy. As Luhmann told us (although May's argument is going to be quite different from Luhmann's), an increasingly impersonal modern society is counterbalanced by more intense *personal* relationships. In our late modern age, we feel or in Luhmann's terms we are programmed to feel that we *need* love. The love relationship is supposed to affirm us in our unique and desirable individuality. Even if you don't buy into Luhmann's interpretation, love is what makes life in an impersonal world *personally meaningful*. The desire to find and secure love in this situation will either be desperate and, if given up as hopeless, will add both quantitatively and qualitatively to feelings of personal isolation and apathy. Either individuals will demand much less of love than they desire, or they will choose to eliminate the foundation of desire. In either case, what they will be doing May argues is *manipulating* their will to extirpate certain undesirable characteristics of desire. As the phrase *undesirable characteristics of desire* suggests, this kind of moulding of the will is inherently unhealthy, even dangerous. It assumes that desire is a *thing* that can be bent and shaped according to logical necessity rather than the very essence of what it means to be human. Desire is much more than a need or a push that can be channelled in deterministic ways; desire is the pull of the human towards the world and towards others. You mess around with that at the risk of damaging human nature!

May's central argument is that love and will are so interconnected in what it means to be a healthy human being that we need to understand exactly what it is that we are doing when we seek to make love subservient to will. Love and will are certainly not identical,

but they relate to each other in a profound way. Love may not be reduced to sex, Eros, philia or agapé (although a healthy love would likely incorporate aspects of all of these), but at the very least it is the pull that orients us away from ourselves towards the larger world. It is a major contributor to our *willingness* to engage the world and to render it meaningful. Willingness, or as May describes it, *intentionality* is essential to having any will at all. Without some form of love, however you want to define it, there will be very little willingness to engage the world and enormous apathy that any healthy culture other than our robotic modernity would define as unhappy as well as meaningless.

Sexuality and Eros

Although Rollo May pays lip service to philia and agape, his discussion focuses on the relationship between sexuality and Eros. As a clinical psychiatrist, he practices in the tradition of Freud; as a classically trained scholar he is influenced by writers like Plato, Aristotle, Aeschylus, and Lucretius. His major concern is to amplify and transform the Freudian emphasis on love as sex in order to illuminate a confusion about love in our late modern age. Whether or not most people would agree with Freudian theory, in practice most of us confuse love with sex, and we've become obsessed with sexual performance and satisfaction at the expense of happiness in love. Freud himself, argues May, was not entirely consistent in his discussion of human sexuality and, towards the end of his life, began to emphasize Eros as the life affirming approach that kept the death wish (Thanatos) at bay. Of course, Freud's modern scientific methodology pushed him towards a determinism that made the sexual drive or push or libido or need the source of everything. Therefore, love in the civilized form of Eros remained dependent on an economy of libidinal scarcity. But, just the fact that Freud viewed his approach as not entirely inconsistent with that of Plato, as well as his own attraction to classical myth, suggests that we shouldn't interpret him as meaning *sex is everything*.

What Plato recognized but greatly exaggerated was that sexual desire is only the beginning. Desire is not just a push of the libido that can be conserved or channelled into something else, such as civilized Eros, but it is a pull towards something else, something 'other'. Plato made desire a lack that didn't just push us as an animal need but that pulled us towards the ultimate good. Plato's insight, as Freud clearly recognized, was that desire is much more complex than a need but is also the source of creativity and inspiration. May suggests that the hydraulic-libido analysis of Freud rightly affirms the importance of sexuality as a foundation, but wrongly limits the possibilities of desire once released. What neither Plato nor Freud emphasized was the importance of sexually based love for *interesting* us in the world outside ourselves, for making that world *intentionally* relevant for us, for stimulating us into creative *engagement* with that external world. Without that simultaneous push and pull the human world would be meaningless. And to the extent that we deny the push and pull that is love, we run the risk of making our world meaningless. Ironically, in the process of denying love to limit personal risk, we end up with a meaningless world.

In other words, desire is what makes the world meaningful to us. Our "feelings are intentional." (91) The foundation of that desire may very well be our biological sexuality;

but biology is not destiny; our desire is not simply sexual in the sense of fulfilling our biological needs; our sexuality is what makes it necessary to have any kind of relationship outside of ourselves. Those relationships are *progressive*; they point to the future. We can legitimately ask *why* we have those emotions, and trace them back to our infant sexuality with Freud, but we would be artificially limiting our treatment of desire unless we also ask the question *for what purpose*. Desire is what encourages us to make the world intelligible to ourselves, to give us purpose and meaning in the world. That is precisely why dominating desire by force of will is so dangerous. You run the risk of killing all desire, all purposefulness and meaningfulness in life. Or course, desire needs a goal, always needs to be shaped, and this is where Eros in the form of purposefulness enters the picture. Desire is creative. But for purposefulness and creativity to have room for development, desire first needs to view the world as pregnant with purposeful opportunities.

That's why love and will must always support each other. That is the inherent nature of Eros, to support life. But since it is analytically possible to distinguish between sexuality and Eros, and because the pull of Eros is largely undetermined, it is equally possible to separate will from love. Freud was writing against one such artificial form of separation when he condemned the repressed Victorian society in which he lived for opposing will to sexuality. The successful master of industry and his dutiful wife, the role models for bourgeois society generally, were supposed to exert their will to make sex subservient to industrial and domestic production, including the biological production of children. Freud warned against the dangerous levels of repression, and the inevitable neurotic backlash, endemic in a society that not merely attempted to harness sexuality (as all significant civilizations must do) but to instil huge and unnecessary amounts of guilt into Victorian consciences. Rollo May suggests that Freud was dealing with a contemporary injustice of will over love.

In our own times, the problem has altered. Sexuality is no longer the enemy; its force and freedom are acknowledged and allowed. What the general atmosphere of apathy is repressing is the life affirming qualities of Eros. We believe that we are being rational in limiting risk, for example, but we are conflating rationalism with reasons for living. This is a problem that Freud could not have anticipated in the Victorian era, which was, let us not forget, also the heroic age of the individualistic, dominant and domineering bourgeois individual. The desire to shape the world of the future was a given. Today's psychiatrist's couch is occupied by individuals who can't find sufficient reasons for caring about anyone or anything. As May puts it:

> For it is true, both in therapy and in life, when we get to the stage where our essential needs are mostly met and we are not need-driven, that "there aren't any reasons" in the sense that reasons lose their relevancy. The conflict becomes stalemate and boredom on the one hand, or on the other, the opening of one's self to new possibilities, the deepening of consciousness, the choosing and committing of one's self to new ways of life. (92)

The modern problem is not with finding *reasons* about and for *things*, including human beings as determined things. The problem is finding reasons, if not for living, then for *trying*. It is a special and dedicated problem when it comes to finding good reasons for trying to attempt or to sustain meaningful relationships.

The difficulty in making modern life meaningful is exacerbated by so-called rational and realistic forms of thinking that deny or tame what has been called *emotional thinking*. We artificially divorce thinking from feeling as though thought is possible without a feeling that life and love are personally meaningful in the first place. That sense of meaningfulness requires Eros. Eros means desire as a pull as well as a push, not just a sexual need. Love literature shows an appreciation for this unique character of Eros by distinguishing between crude sexuality and true *passion*. Eros rather than sex is foundational not only for personal meaning but also for society and civilization. In order to appreciate the extent of our modern malaise, we only need to witness how mundane, and irrelevant Eros has become. We no longer distinguish between sex and passion in the classical sense, but between sex and eroticism. Although the term *erotic* has Eros as its stem, eroticism is basically a form of sexual play that in our culture is now "insipid, childish, banal". (95) Passion may not be completely dead, after all we still read about crimes of passion, but it has lost a great deal of its creative potentiality.

As far as possibility in modern society is concerned, Eros as passion has been tamed. In most historical discourses on love, it was understood that passion was aggressive and could never be tamed. Those who approved of passionate love understood that it had negative as well as positive attributes that could not be *cured* or artificially separated. Love was as destructive as it was creative; indeed the extent of love's creativity often depended on its dangerous and destructive potential. It was, in Plato and Aristotle's term, a daemon with demonic qualities. Consequently, it affirmed personal life, close relationships, and entire civilizations in ways that trumped the ethical values of good and evil. The problem was always to recruit Eros for the benefit of civilization rather than its destruction, understanding that, as dangerous as passion might be, <u>its absence is disastrous</u>. Without passion, civilizations entered into decay from their own sterility. We are not talking about biological sterility here; civilizations decline, not from a reduction in births, but a decline in passionate commitment.

Civilization, according to Rollo May, walks a tightrope between harnessing and extinguishing passion. Modern western technological society seems bent on extinguishing genuine and unruly passion in the interest of passivity. What is fascinating and new about our technological society is its absolute hostility to anything like real passion; even the anti-sexual puritan societies of the past left ample room for a passion that contained Satan as well as God. What constitutes real Eros in our society is safely hived off in art, while a fake and unthreatening and commodified Eros permeates the advertising that substitutes for consciousness and supports consumption (i.e. Marcuse's *repressive desublimation*. What is revealing about the direction of modern society is the fact that no such warfare takes place between sex and technology:

> There is no war between *sex* and technology: our technical inventions help sex to be safe, available, and efficient as demonstrated from birth control pills all the way to how-to-do-it books. Sex and technology join together to achieve "adjustment"; with the full release of tension over the weekend, you can work better in the button down world of Monday…But it is not at all clear that technology and *Eros* are compatible, or can even live without perpetual warfare. The lover, like the poet, is a menace on the assembly line. Eros breaks existing forms and creates new ones and that, naturally, is a threat to technology. (96)

Any sign of warfare between Eros and technology is a good thing, because the very real danger in late modern society is technology triumphant. That would likely mean the extirpation of feeling and the tragic vision without which the individual human identity would be null and void.

The appropriate ontological question is not what a human being is, which could be answered in deterministic language based on biological needs and functions, but how does an individual human being come into being. Why does a human being act like an individual with freedom to choose and create? How does a biological product become a specific individual? Even in a strictly scientific sense, an adequate answer to this question cannot arise from sex or biology. It must involve some understanding of the biological organism **reaching out to his or her environment**. In other words, it must involve an appreciation for Eros, not simply as genetics, but as passion or desire to connect. This is the initial move or *turn* that both necessitates and requires human language. This is what determines the nature of *human* consciousness. Human consciousness is not a given; it is certainly not the *cogito*; it is *intentionality* and, for Rollo May, it is a feeling that relates the self to the other and constitutes each in the other. At its core is a *commitment* to discover meaning in this relationship, and "meaning has no meaning apart from intention". (230)

Love and Will as Tragic

In the ontology of personhood, it should now be clear that the very idea of selfhood or individuality is only conceivable in terms of *tending*, reaching out, making some sort of connection and commitment to the other. We discover ourselves by seeking a *response* from the other. This means that, fundamentally, love and will reinforce each other and their basic alignment forges intentionality. The problem is that the will, that is unintelligible apart from love, can all too easily be decoupled as they are in modern society. In our contemporary situation of anxiety tending towards apathy, the will is paradoxically used to manipulate a person into *not feeling* towards another person. This self-manipulation is possible for the very understandable reason that human love, as the early Greeks understood, is tragic. There is no guarantee that someone that we love will love us back. Moreover, love opens us up, not only to the life of another person, but also to the possibility of their death and, by implication, our own death. All of this is part and parcel of being a human being, which is a wonderful thing but also a tragic thing. Understandably, we have *reasons* to utilize our wills to block off particular opportunities

for loving when we think that the consequences will be negative. What is problematic about distinctly modern attitudes towards love is the marked tendency to block off, not particular instances or opportunities for love, but the possibilities for love in general. Since love in whatever form is the paradigmatic affirmation not only of oneself but one's life in general, such a blockage is tantamount to denying one's humanity.

The blockage of love by will is only one strategy, but one that obviously relates to modern anxiety and ends up reinforcing apathy. Many people who watch shows like *Two and a Half Men* may be amused, but are instinctively revolted by this kind of apathy, especially when they become parents. However opposite their strategies, however, in the end they tend to contribute to a similar result, according to Rollo May. Too many modern parents are simultaneously protective and permissive with their children because they want to spare them from the tragic elements in life. Children therefore grow up in an environment so saturated by love – *all you need is love* – that they enter life completely unprepared for the very real challenges of love. Consequently, their expectations from others are too high and their love lacks the fidelity and staying power that is needed in a world where love is not typically spontaneous and always effervescent but sometimes tragic. May is particularly critical of hippie ideas of love as "fugitive and ephemeral" but these naïve expectations can just as easily apply to many people today.

What May wants to argue is that modern love especially requires the balance between love and will that reinforces both. It has to be able to affirm with full consciousness of the difficulties involved. The synthesis of love is always difficult and contains tragic elements, but it is a particular *problem* in our contemporary world. Why? Because individuals cannot rely on old or outmoded ideals of love that are no longer relevant to the present situation or the modern consciousness. Modern relationships are characterized by entirely new demands in terms of personal responsibility because the former cultural supports and, ironically, supporting obstacles are no longer in place. In the past, for example, the decision to marry or not was often social pressure. The decision whether or not to stay together was socially proscribed. Men and women conformed to set roles which, it should be understood, helped provide lives with meaning, even if these meanings were problematic. The decision to have children, in the absence of effective birth control, was prescribed by biology as well as cultural values. Ideas and ideals of love gave relationships depth as well as meaning.

There were numerous ways in which the union of love and will were given to us ready-made in the past. Nowadays, finding meaning through love is a **task**. Rollo May believes that the alternative -- i.e. closing oneself off to others – will ultimately be self-defeating because love is intimately related to feeling connected in a meaningful world. It is one thing never to find love, and quite another to closing the door to love. As long as one is open to feeling love, the world is still a meaningful place. But closing the door is a recipe for apathy. And apathy is meaninglessness and unhappiness under another name. May argues that it is not necessary to actively *intend* to love, which might throw love and will out of balance, as in the case of a person who is obsessed with finding love. The project, rather, is to keep the doors of *intentionality* open, in other words to be open to deep relations in life. The appropriate question now is *how* to keep the doors of

intentionality open in an environment that is more conducive to anxiety than to love. Here May has, I think, some interesting insights to offer all of us, whether we are lucky enough to find (or create!) love or not.

Being Open to Love

The first suggestion Rollo May makes is to make sure that your imagination or fantasy life is as rich as possible. The language of technology is the language of mastery and domination. The language of sexuality similarly revolves around performance and technique. The language of Eros, on the other hand, is replete with symbolic meaning. This is a "deeper but more subtle language" than the language of the body, although, of course, it involves the body as well. (280) May's entire book is erotic in the fullest sense of the word, since he is in touch with the deeper meanings behind mythical and magical language. Moreover, he points us to imaginative literature and art as sources for our erotic development. Although he appreciates the importance of culture in the past as a resource for imaginative development, he is adamant that we need to explore modern art and literature as well, because the artist especially is a person who is attempting to create new and more relevant modes of imaginative experience. These artists, like Cézanne, can make sense of our fragmented experiences while finding beauty and meaning within them.

The second valuable piece of advice that May offers would-be lovers, if they want to make their lives more deeply meaningful, is to take the *time* to allow both imagination and love to develop. What modern society tends to do is to turn us into obsessive workers (multi-taskers) and superficial consumers of products. May suggests that simply allowing experiences to develop rather than having performance anxiety can make all the difference in a love affair. This attitude, of course, involves patiently paying attention to the other person, rather than trying to predict behaviour and responses. It works just as well in the sex act as relationship building, and May provides us with quite graphic (!) evidence in the form of a guy named Preston who finally achieved erection when he took the time, relaxed, and allowed it to develop. Other forms of intimacy follow the same pattern but are made awfully difficult by the enforced speed of our society. I think this is why some people in relationships have found weekly date nights very effective. Then real time is set aside for the relationship. The pay-off for deploying time and imagination in relationships are those moments when time stands still. Rollo May describes these moments in sexual terms, but anyone who has been in a close relationship will appreciate that there are 'moments' of closeness that occur if time is given that are not directly sexual, although they contain all of the intimacy of sexual coupling.

May's third piece of advice involves *understanding* that moments of union must result in various degrees of separation. In part, the separation can be as straightforward as the end of the sex act, but there is always an element separation in any close relationship because of the insight that Sartre pointed to. There is a sense in which the other is an object, and something to be appropriated by us for our pleasure. Unlike Sartre, who is deeply troubled by this essential separation that he defines in terms of conflict, Rollo May has a much more gentle and therapeutic approach in telling us to accept the daemonic

characteristics of ourselves – the appreciation of the close connection between love and hate – and those with whom we are building a relationship. The level of commitment to that relationship is crucial here, of course, but it should not be understood as an eternal given, but something that is worked at. The commitment is to working things out, rather than to some ideal standard.

Willing versus Wishing

Rollo May thinks that romantic ideals and ethical standards are not particularly helpful for practising intentionality in life and love. Romantic ideals are bound to implode in the contemporary situation and ethical standards carry a heavy baggage of guilt that fails to address and incorporate the daemonic element that embraces life and love and that allows for the creation of new and more relevant values. But May recognizes that would-be lovers need something more than a *task* and a few *strategies* to orient themselves towards intentionality. At least ethics and ideals like romantic love provided a point of orientation, even if they were not entirely successful as strategies. That's why many people still cling to them in order to deal with the crisis of meaning in modern life. May, therefore, offers us a new orientation consistent with his idea of intentionality to act as a signpost for the relationships of the future. It is *care*.

The presence or lack of care is demonstrated by the way we *look* at others. We've already discussed the importance of the *look* for the existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. But notice the difference between his approach to looking, which is characterized either by the desire to appropriate the other as *object* or the fear that you yourself will be appropriated. This is exactly why *hell is other people* for Sartre. While Rollo May doesn't deny the element of domination in relationships with others, he privileges a very different way of looking – a look characterized by interest, concern and care. May plays a little loose and fast with this notion of *care*, which can range from simply the idea that the other has meaning for you apart – that the other *matters* to you in some way – to the more active notion of sympathy. Another way of describing this is the move from intentionality, meaningfulness and the potential for engagement towards a more active engagement with others that demonstrates a *concern* for their welfare. The quality of *concern* is, of course, much more intense with respect to someone that you love. That's why love is so important; it is *engagement* in, with, and through not only your own future but also the future of the person that you love.

Caring in this sense embodies the energy of Eros; in other words, it is passionate; it is a passion that transcends the kind of anxiety and fear that characterizes Sartre's philosophy, at least his early philosophy, Where Sartre's philosophy could be very helpful to May's psychology is in their common understanding that concrete and significant relationships, i.e. love, with others involves not only the touching of the epidermis layer, penetration, and the exchange of bodily fluids, i.e. sex, but is a "function of the whole person" (290). To the extent that we care at all, we have to incorporate the subjectivity as well as the objectivity of the other. To the extent that we care positively and confidently – admittedly much more difficult in late modern society – we relate to the full humanity of others. Since we necessarily relate to others, we can only experience

the fullness of our own deeper humanity to the extent that we care deeply about others. In other words, we can only love ourselves properly if we allow our passion to flow towards others. If we are not prepared to embrace at least some significant others in their full subjectivity, i.e. *passionately*, we can hardly bring that ability back to ourselves. That is why people experience their full unique and special individuality when they love others. And that this experience is not a utilitarian exchange – it cannot be explained by *exchange theory* – should be evident, because it can happen to you even if the beloved does not reciprocate your love.

It is not human beings as biological objects that is most relevant here, although we are clearly biological objects, it is the particular and peculiar *ontology* of *becoming* a human being. Developmental psychology has a lot more to offer us here than critics like Sartre tend to think, because it illuminates *normal* human development in terms of *looking* at others. The infant does not separate objectivity and subjectivity because it is a universe to itself. The first stirrings of self-consciousness probably occur with respect to the breast and get extended to a privileged relationship with mother. Only gradually, and with some Freudian difficulty, does the child move from degrees of narcissism towards an orientation towards the outside, and all relationships with the outside world will appear *broken* with respect to some infantile ideal of a paradise where one was complete to oneself. But Freud's focus on the element of repression involved in both socialization and, more generally, civilization underestimates the extent to which normal human development (human ontology) is an active embrace of the world and the others whose foundation is intentionality. The child moves actively to communicate, and not merely to communicate and fulfill infantile *wishes*. The crucial distinction and developmental strategy is the replacement of *wishing* by *willing*.

Willing is not merely a compensation for the fact that infantile wishes are impossible, it is a positive step that populates the external world with *meaning*. Intentionality with respect to the world and persons outside oneself is as magically mythical as any kind of irrational wishing and its power increases exponentially to the extent that we care. As a human being, you will always feel the loss of a complete but infantile being, but you are given an entire world to embrace. You can never completely let go of wishing, but it is willing rather than wishing that allows you to experience the aliveness of your humanity. Not without reason have some philosophers suggested that absolute and complete *being* implies individual death. Willing is proactive, creative and relationship building. Wishing is a much more solitary indulgence. Rollo May offers a revealing example of the crucial distinction between wishing and willing as it relates to caring (although I think that he could have developed it better). Caring as an act of will and intentionality is characterized by a sympathy that leads us towards active relationships with others. Sentimentality, by contrast, shuts us up in our own thoughts or feelings.

Happiness and Caring

Although we can argue *ad infinitum* about what is meant by human *happiness*, perhaps we can agree with Aristotle that the normal development of a human being is what gets us closest to this illusive *quality* that can never be a *quantity*. Modern society is not only

apathetic but also profoundly unhappy to the extent that it throws up obstacles to normal development by rendering us anxious and fearful about love. Modern rationalization is a juggernaut that eradicates *myth* in the service of efficiency. But myths have a deeper human meaning than technological rationality and, whatever else efficiency may be, it is profoundly *non-human*. A technological society doesn't require the happiness or even the normal development of human beings. What *matters* to a technological society has no relevance to what *matters* to you and me. Isn't that why the impulse of a technological society is to de-emphasize caring at all and to encourage us to continually calculate the *risk* of any kind of involvement at all? The pay-off for this lack of concern and commitment to life is increased attention to our self-interest, in terms of satisfying our wishes for personal satisfaction and safety. We repress *Eros*, just like they repressed sexuality in the nineteenth-century, at great risk to the normal happiness of the developed human being. Passion may be dangerous; passion may be risky; but without it our lives are not worth living.

Our modern world has a very impoverished understanding of will that is *turning away from* rather than towards love. We should understand this development for what it really is. <u>It's a suppression and a repression of what makes us human that is far more devastating than the sexual repression of Freud's time</u>. The supposed strengths and advantages of developed society – that other societies are grasping for – is coming at a high "price of suppression of all emotions, negative and positive alike". (295) In place of like affirming myths, the *myth of technological man* offers us the death of anxiety and fear through the anaesthetizing of feeling. But it is feeling that makes life meaningful.

In this course on love, we have followed an alternative route through western culture that privileged feeling through the exploration of the most intense set of emotions available to human beings – sexually based love. We have seen just how meaningful life could become for those who embraced this kind of love. But we have also seen how impractical and self-defeating some of these ideals of love could become. Romantic love received an enormous boost when it was located in the marriage of a man and a woman. Love and will could now run together as a powerful combination that transformed human relationships and infused culture with new and creative possibilities. Love was not perceived as a problem, at least not a problem without solutions, until recently. But arguably romantic love always carried the seed of its own future destruction because it was characterized by a high degree of infantile wishing for complete union and the expectation that blissful romantic states could be maintained. Romanticism was only able to survive in the real world to the extent that people were prepared to *chill out the semantics* and to limit expectations. That's not as big a problem as it might first appear, since there is always going to be a distinction between the ideal and what we perceive at any given time as the real or, as the poet rightly says, *what's a heaven for*.

There are lots of possible reasons for the present disjunction between the real and the ideal, and we've covered many of them in this course. To the list, we might add the fact that technological society has so infantilised our expectations that we can no longer distinguish judiciously between subjective ideals and objective reality. Whatever the reason, however, it does seem that romantic love has run its course. Rather than hopping

from one paradigm or ‘frying pan’ into another like philia, agape, sentimental love, love as friendship or any of the possible varieties of loving experience, Rollo May suggests that we “humbly go back to the simple fact of care” in order to begin working on fixing the breakdown in *human* communication that characterizes modern society. May says that we have to avoid the modern attitude towards problem solving, the anxiety that leads us to want to reduce and *solve* the problem with a clichéd solution. Instead, he suggests that we focus on *resolving* obstacles that get in the way of working towards solutions. This means appreciating just how deep and profound the issue is, since it is intimately related to human intentionality and imagination. It also means not shrinking from the realization that feelings, especially love as passion, can be personally and socially destructive (as we saw in *Death in Venice*) as well as creative.

May’s preferred approach to the modern problem of love, now defined primarily as *Eros* or passionate love that pulls us *towards* new combinations, is many-sided. Specialized discussions will not aid in resolving the situation unless they are combined within interdisciplinary questions. Even more important, the qualitative *human* dimension of the problem always needs to be fore grounded because feeling is a human *pull* towards closer engagement rather than a *push* whose effects are predictable. May concludes by reaffirming his belief that love will always be a distinctly human *struggle* between *vitality* and *form* involving intentionality and imagination. As such, artists in the broadest sense will likely have as much, if not more, to tell us than specialized scholars because they inhabit the frontiers of consciousness and teach us to *see ourselves* afresh. Perhaps more than anyone else, it is the artist’s creative task to *will* the world and to show us how to *love* the world we have brought into being, not with indiscriminate wishes, but with engaged wills. What the artist’s destructive and constructive creativity also should teach us is that a healthy world combining love and will always needs to be recreated anew. It is committed to the future.

Wuthering Heights (I)

The Context

Wuthering Heights was written by Emily Bronte in 1846 and published in 1847. It was edited by her sister Charlotte Bronte and republished in 1850 with the Charlotte Bronte preface that is typically attached to most future editions. The 'massaging' by the author of *Jane Eyre* is significant both directly and indirectly. Charlotte wanted to 'polish' the language, and by implication I think, the *wildness* of the original version. She was far too faithful to her sister's legacy to do much more than change the formal idiom of Emily's novel. But in the preface, she simultaneously defends her sister's forceful prose and brilliance while apologizing for *Wuthering Heights'* lack of sophistication and refinement. In other words, the book was far too rude for Charlotte Bronte and most of her Victorian contemporaries. It would be accurate to suggest that the book 'scared' them, not merely because of its titillating suggestion that the ghosts of the dead can still walk among us, but mainly because of its moral ambiguity. Do we dare, for example, identify with Heathcliff and Catherine, at the risk of relinquishing not merely civilization and courtesy, but also such good Victorian values as *pity* and *duty*.

The Heathcliff and Catherine of *Wuthering Heights* are not the tamed versions of those characters in the movie of the same name. Do not watch the movie! Emily Bronte's Heathcliff is demonic rather than sympathetic. He's dark from the very beginning of the novel. He doesn't care for anybody except Catherine and at least for a time Ellen or Nelly who nursed him through illness. He doesn't even show love to old Earnshaw who saved him from the Liverpool slums and who might conceivably be the boy's father. He's dark, hard, uncaring and vengeful – right from the beginning. In addition to forgetting the sanitized version the Laurence Olivier represented, you would also have a hard time doing the modern excuse that Heathcliff is a victim of his harsh environment. That he is a victim is an undoubted fact, but Emily Bronte never suggests that the harsh treatment of the boy and man is the only reason why he is the way he is. He's given lots of chances to redeem himself as his fortunes increase. He turns out to be mean spirited and cruel. His perceived *betrayal* by Catherine acts to reinforce his vengeful nature but is not the ultimate cause of it. And he only gives over his vengeance and cruelty when it becomes personally worthless to him. Heathcliff is not loveable. To love him would be a very serious mistake, as the infatuated Isabella discovers to her ruin. The only one who can love him with *relative* safety is Catherine. And she goes nuts!

Why create such an unlovable character and make him the focus of what clearly is a love story? The reasons may be partly biographical but they are not easy to discover. Emily Bronte, together with her two sisters Anne and Charlotte, and their much loved brother Branwell, were the well educated children of a Yorkshire parson. Although highly precocious, the family was provincial and the children tended to live in their shared imaginations. Branwell was the centre and focus of this imaginative realm but, like a character in *Wuthering Heights* , Linton, proved sickly and incapable of doing the great things as a writer that were anticipated of him. His three sisters, however, proved to be much more capable as novelists, and all were obsessed with recapturing the astonishing power of that origian brother/sister relationship.

The author of *Jane Eyre* was the most intimate with Branwell, but Emily nursed him towards the end of his life and died herself of tuberculosis (the disease that takes Linton) shortly thereafter. The intensity of this brother sister relationship reverberates throughout *Wuthering Heights* and explains several of its major dynamics. The first of these is the closed universe of relationships in the novel. Most hose who fall in love or marry are all either closely related by birth or by membership in the family. Thus, for example, Heathcliff is the foster brother, and perhaps even the real brother of Catherine. The Lintons at Thrushcross Grange will add new genetic material to the Earnshaws at Wuthering Heights, but that injection will eventually result in cousins marrying. Indeed, this closed world of relationships is highly incestuous. Even Nelly (Ellen Dean) could conceivably be the daughter of the old patriarch Earnshaw, since she's raised as one of the children. Into this relatively closed circle comes an outsider called Lockwood who could conceivably open up the universe of relationships to a wider world. Nelly views him as a potential savior of Cathy the daughter of Catherine who is under Heathcliff's thumb. But what is interesting is that Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights close in upon themselves and Cathy will eventually marry her cousin Hereton.

Incest may seem a strong term, but characters resemble one another and relationships parallel each other in this closed world that Lockwood initially finds attractive but eventually has no ability to belong to. Emily Bronte was well educated, possibly the *cleverest* of the Bronte sisters; she taught in Brussels; but she retreated to the closed world of home. The relationship with her brothers and sisters and to *home* in the Yorkshire moors was far more important to her, even than success as an author. Another way of putting this is that, for Emily especially, childhood, siblings and home were the closest thing to paradise for the Brontes. The distance between Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights were physical symbols of the narrow comfort zone that Emily Bronte wanted to tread. What makes Emily Bronte a great author is her appreciation of the depth and complexity of this confined emotional universe. Lockwood, a very untrustworthy narrator, wants to picture the Yorkshire moors and the inhabitants as pastoral or romantic recluses. But Emily Bronte discovers a pitched emotional battleground as scarily wild as the wuthering winds and as culturally pretentious as the civilized grange. The tensions between the grange and the heights arguably constitute the modern emotional universe.

The Web of Childhood

Wuthering Heights and *Jane Eyre* affirm "exactly contrary entities" according to the literary critic U.C. Knoepflmacher (98). What he means is that, while Charlotte Bronte wanted to affirm the civilized, social power of her protagonist Jane Eyre, Emily Bronte is much more interested in "primitive or asocial power". The strength of *Wuthering Heights*, and what distressed Charlotte Bronte about her sister's novel, is that it refuses to condemn and even celebrates love that is wild, ungovernable to the point of being grotesque. Charlotte Bronte's protagonist eventually obtains social power and control over her maimed male counterpart, something that gives *Jane Eyre* a distinctly feminist quality. Power operates very differently in *Wuthering Heights*. While both Heathcliff and Catherine exhibit oodles of will power, and real control over spouses and others, the most meaningful relationship that dominates their consciousness is one that is free, spontaneous and distinctly marked by a "abdication of power," especially on Heathcliff's part. How Catherine and Heathcliff arrived at this ideal type of relationship is unclear. When Heathcliff first arrives, and Catherine doesn't get her promised whip from 'papa', she

can't stand the gypsy urchin. Yet just a few weeks later, Nelly tells us that the two children are inseparable. In most novels, this unexplained change of affection might appear to be a weakness. But how does one explain the magic of a soul to soul connection like that between Catherine and Heathcliff without 'socializing' it? And that is precisely what Emily Bronte does not want to do.

On the face of it, their situation would seem to be far from ideal. Their union is disapproved of by Hindley, the sanctimonious Joseph, and by Nelly. Heathcliff is protected by old Earnshaw but only for as long as he lives, which is not going to be for very long. Some of the situations are contrived to increase our sympathy with Catherine and Heathcliff, not as individuals but as a team, but the underlying message is that forces are always at work to mould the primitive, natural and powerful emotions of the child into the value system of society and civilization. To view these 'forces' solely in terms of the raw power of socialization is misleading. As brutish as Hindley is, as hell-fearing as Joseph is, and as relentlessly common-sensical as Nelly is, they are no match for Catherine and Heathcliff's mutual joy in scampering about the moors. It may seem terrible when Joseph tears down the pinafores that Catherine and Heathcliff pin together to create a fortress of play, but such attacks can be laughed off. What civilized society, as represented by the Grange, effects is much more insidious. It achieves by 'art' what could never be achieved by mere 'force' (51) Catherine is transformed from a child into a 'lady' by a combination of praise and rewards. In *Wuthering Heights*, the innocent affections of childhood are also thwarted by an patently unfair class system that divides childhood friends into separate spheres. Catherine, who like many women, is socialized earlier than her male friend and forced to choose between spheres, finds herself confronted by social norms. What makes Catherine so very interesting as a protagonist is that she refuses the *either/or* choice of dutiful wife and passionate person. She attempts to juggle both worlds, socialized Grange and primitive Heights, by the sheer force of her indominable will. Needless to say, it will drive her to madness.

Catherine is the central protagonist in Volume I of *Wuthering Heights* just as her daughter Cathy will be in Volume II. She is not always entirely believable as a person in a novel so concerned with the "web of childhood", but Emily Bronte spends a lot of time unpacking her character, especially her strong will and affirmation of herself as a person rather than simply a social role player. Heathcliff is much more of a symbol and metaphor for primitive power; neither the other characters in the novel nor the reader is ever going to know him as a *person*. What is fascinating about him is his virtually complete rejection of all social norms except the intense bond of friendship that he exhibits for Catherine. Even this *friendship*, however, needs to be qualified because Heathciff is anything but what we think of as a good friend in normal social terms. Nelly, who acts as the Greek common sense chorus in this tragedy, constantly accuses Heathcliff of making things worse for Catherine and everyone else connected to her. "Who and *what* is Heathcliff?" is a question asked by Nelly and Isabella, and by the reader. The clearest answer that can be given is that Heathcliff is the personification of "animated desire" – the desire for union and, when separated from that union, for *revenge* on everyone that gets in the way. He is clearly a romantic figure, not in terms of the typical romantic cliché, but in terms of the romantic types prefigured by Milton's *Satan* or the suffering monster in *Frankienstein*.

Heathcliff is so one-dimensional that he is only *interesting* to the reader because of the intensity of his love for Catherine. He is true to that childhood love in making Catherine the absolute centre of him

emotional universe, but he typically mistakes or misreads the value of that love. He first misreads Catherine's choice of Edgar Linton as a sign or signal that she loves him less (instead of differently); when he becomes aware of that mistake, he continues to confuse cause and effect by seeking to punish all those who he thinks have deprived, usurped, sullied or transgressed his personal proprietorship of Catherine. As for Catherine, she simply cannot understand why Heathcliff can't simply accept the social status quo because he alone has access to her innermost soul. Heathcliff is not completely characterless to the extent he grows in understanding towards the end of the novel. This growth is still metaphorical, however, because what Heathcliff is really doing is shaking off the "rigid identities" that have been constructed by the adult and socialized world, and returning to/reaffirming the *essential* relationship that he had with Catherine in his childhood. That's why he's going to die with a smile on his face – a demonic smile.

Heathcliff's death wish is a return to childhood. Latter in the course, we'll see Freud will make much of the importance of childhood and infancy, highlighting to complex and difficult transition to adulthood that causes many to lament the loss of union with the mother or the brother or sister. A Freudian interpretation of *Wuthering Heights* certainly is possible, but a simpler and more straightforward explanation of Emily Bronte's novel is that civilization tends to destroy something very valuable in essential unity of the child, quite apart from kinship/friendship connections that gets undermined by role players in society.

Romantic Love

The answer and antidote to superficial stereotypical living according to the Romantics was *passion*. Passionate love between two complementary human beings revitalizes the self and brings it back to a something approaching a state of unity. But romantic writers tended to be divided on the possibility and potential for love in modern society. Moreover, romantic writers tended to vacillate between optimism about love's promise and pessimism about whether or not that promise was likely to be realized. Especially as the nineteenth-century wore on, and conflict and competition became the dominant norms, romantic writers projected love backwards, forwards and sideways – anywhere but in present. The increasing fascination with ghostly lovers only partly reflected the romantic desire to give readers a *thrill* and force them to feel something, if only fear. It also established an *uncanny* space where love might escape increasingly rigid social norms. The end of *Wuthering Heights* pits that scary place against a more conventional loving relationship and forces readers to choose between the restless dead and the complacent living.

Ghostly lovers certainly have a central place in *Wuthering Heights*. What most interests me about these ghostly apparitions is just how sexless they are. Arguably, sex is everywhere in the novel, as suggested by the pervading them of incest. But if this is the case, then sexuality is assumed rather than articulated, and the novels diffusions of brotherly-sisterly love speak to the androgynous and polymorphous love of the infant rather than the adolescent or adult. In any case, while there is a great deal of passion in the novel, sexual culmination is strangely missing. Now, you suggest that this was a novel written just as puritanical Victorianism was taking over British culture. So, we should not expect anything like the explicit sexuality of Schlegel's *Lucinde*. Maybe, but what clearly is in the novel is a lot of violence, such

equally unrefined. Indeed, *Wuthering Heights* was savaged by critics for its crudity and primitiveness, so what would it have hurt to include a little sex? The reason that there is no sex in this novel about passionate love must be because sexuality is a secondary consideration. The primary consideration is the union of two kindred spirits in an unsocialized Edenic childhood.

Eroticism need not be dominated by sensuality. Suppress desire is usually reflected in dreams, so it may be informative to explore the two dreams that Lockwood has near the beginning of the novel and that frame everything that follows. Both dreams deeply disturb Lockwood, so we have to take both of them equally seriously, even if one of them contains humorous content. The first dream centres on a sermon by James Branderham that was one of the books Catherine wrote in as a child. The dream has this fulminating pulpit orator denouncing 77 possible sins and the sinners who commit them. Lockwood forges an alliance with Catherine as a child by poking fun at the sermon and the sermonizer for being boring. This causes a commotion in the church with old Joseph taking the side of the pastor and attacking Lockwood as the chief among sinners. At first this seems dangerous, since everyone is out to get Lockwood, but it soon deteriorates into a farce because everyone is hitting everyone else. It's a silly farce, so why is Lockwood so relieved when the dream is over?

The second dream was far more 'disturbing', which is not to suggest that the first dream wasn't troubling. Here, however, we can see more reasons for being disturbed. Catherine's waif like ghost is trying to get in out of the cold. Lockwood's response is one of absolute terror – of a child seeking help! – and he resorts to extreme behavior by rubbing the child's arm against the glass, which results in pools of blood on the dreamscape bedsheets. Since that doesn't work, he lies to the helpless ghost, telling her to let go and then he'll let her in. Of course, he doesn't let the child in. He closes the window as quickly as he can and seeks to return to normal life, which turns out to be doing his morning wash up and annoying Heathcliff with his inane conversation. What can all of this mean? It must mean something more than setting up Heathcliff's "gush of grief" (29) Lockwood has been given the opportunity to get in touch with his inner child in both dreams. In the first dream, he's a potential ally with Catherine in her natural antipathy to being bored to death by Joseph and his books. In the second, he's invited to bring his own personal Catherine in from the cold. In both cases, he refuses. What Lockwood appears to be is an adolescent who wants love and connection, but is afraid of it. Because he's afraid of loving, all of his romantic posturing is artificial. He constantly claims to want to avoid society and find resources within himself but he obviously lacks any depth of soul. He's bewitched by Catherine's daughter and Heathcliff's daughter in law, but he has no character to match hers.

A particular view of modern love is emerging here. The idea is of a soul-to-soul acceptance that is more common in childhood, with all its demonic uncontrolled behaviours, than in a repressed adulthood. Many romantics projected their fascination with childhood into adult relationships. This childlike relationship between two lovers did not appear suddenly on the scene, but in writers like Emily Bronte **true love now becomes a union of souls that should not be submerged by adult roles and responsibilities.** Indeed, as the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff underlines, adult roles and responsibilities are more often inimical than complementary to the fundamental bond. The point is to retain the child and to be childlike in one's attitude towards the other. That is an extremely difficult load for love to bear, so it should not be surprising that many romantics were pessimistic about the

possibility of finding and keeping a soul mate. Adult life must always involve a *fall* from Edenic childhood. Even in good relationships, adult responsibilities are forever separating would-be soul mates. We are always projecting love backwards into its childlike beginnings rather than forward into mature relationships. We count on and live off the intensity of the more innocent and spontaneous connection. But as Catherine and Heathcliff's experience seems to indicate, it is impossible to sustain anything like that kind of union in the normal world. The Josephs will always be pulling down the protective pinafores.

The pessimistic romantics sought, but deplored of finding a soul-to-soul connection that went beyond the sexual. Just how far beyond the sexual did it go? Consider how impoverished Hindley's love for his tuberculosis ridden Frances appears beside that of Heathcliff and Catherine. The fact that he drinks himself to death after Frances succumbs does not make us sympathetic to Hindley, although he appears much worthier of our sympathy than the "unreclaimed creature" that is Heathcliff. Emily Bronte makes us loathe Hindley, while we cannot loathe Heathcliff. In the movie version of *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff exudes sensuality. But the Heathcliff of the novel seems completely asexual, his love more an obsession than a physical promise. Thus, when he presses Catherine to himself when he discovers her dying, his reaction has nothing to do with sensual longing and everything to do with a violent obsession. Catherine even tells Nelly that her love for Heathcliff contains "little visible delight" (82). All the sexual attractions belong to Edgar Linton, and they mean next to nothing to Catherine. Obviously, there is no inherent contradiction between passionate souls and their sexuality. The two have often been combined; the crucial thing is that **passion submerges sexuality**. It should not be confused with that sexuality.

Wuthering Heights contains a fascinating discussion of love between Nelly and Catherine. Nelly is the narrator and she condemns Catherine's view of love as primitive soul connection as complete "folly". Her view is not authoritative and we know that Nelly has an axe to grind in making effective relations fit the social norms that she interprets as 'common sense'. Nelly interrogates Catherine and forces her to articulate what love is when Catherine suggests that she is considering marrying Edgar Linton. She asks why Catherine might marry him, discounting her superficial rationales that he is "handsome" and "pleasant to be with "(78). She also makes short work of Catherine's claims that Edgar loves her and will someday be rich, making her "the greatest woman in the neighbourhood". Catherine is pushed into admitting that she is infatuated with Edgar's looks and invokes her right, like everyone else, to seek out "pleasure in the present". Only now will Nelly give partial approval, and her moral justification is the ethic of utility. Catherine will be making a good match that will clearly bring her the maximum amount of pleasure that she can calculate in the present.

Catherine now changes tack in order to discuss her own misgivings about the relationship, She prefaces her comments with an account of a dream that had a profound impact on her. She went to heaven but "heaven did not seem to be my home" (81). In her mind and her heart, she saw her emotional home as Wuthering Heights with Heathcliff. Marriage to Linton might appear to be a heaven on earth, but Catherine does not feel the soul connection to Linton. She does feel it to Heathcliff. Marriage to Heathcliff was not socially acceptable. Hindley had brought him "so low" that he was no longer marriage material if he had ever been. By marrying Edgar Linton, Catherine rationalizes that she can

help "Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother's power"(82). Leaving aside the issue of status and class, which might falsely reduce the romantic problem to one of economic inequality, what is particularly striking about Catherine's discussion is a completely new language of emotional connection and what sociologists of individuality call "interpersonal interpenetration". Catherine says "Heathcliff is more myself than I am" and goes so far as to say "I am Heathcliff" (82). This fact has nothing to do with power or pleasure. It is "necessary" and "eternal". Needless to say, this is strange language to describe a human relationship. It completely denies temporality. It obliterates sensual pleasure as the axis of what is now a hugely significant relationship. It completely flies in the face of Nelly's common sense. But what strikes Nelly, who is anything but a stupid person as her many manipulations evidence, this kind of talk strikes her as being "wicked" and "unprincipled".

Before exploring wickedness or the demonic in romantic love, a thematic that Emily Bronte certainly contributed to, I want to discuss the meaning of the soul to soul connection that Catherine invokes when you says "I am Heathcliff". On the one hand, Catherine obviously isn't Heathcliff. It is significant that she is much more comfortable with and adept in meeting social expectations than is Heathcliff. She's also much more in tune with words and books, the high end devices that society uses to civilize elites. Even before we meet Catherine, we meet her books and see, of course, that she is a very independent and aware 'miss'. Her writing shows that she's a mentor to Heathcliff and he takes his cues from this rather domineering little 'mistress'. Does that seem like an egalitarian soul-to-soul relationship to you? If we are going to make sense of statements like "Heathcliff is more myself than I am", we are going to need to interpret the soul connection at a deeper level. Heathcliff must represent something that is *essential* in Catherine's identity rather than all the qualities she possesses or could come to possess, something that she will go nuts before she gives up. It's also obviously something that Edgar doesn't possess and that Nelly Dean distrusts. Here is what Nelly has to say about the *difference* between her Master and Mistress (107):

> My heart invariably cleaved to the master's, in preference to Catherine's side; with reason, I imagined, for he was kind and trustful, and honourable: and she – she could not be called the *opposite*, yet, she seemed to allow herself such wide latitude, that I had little faith in her principles, and still less sympathy for her feelings. I wanted something to happen which might have the effect of freeing both Wuthering Heights and the Grange of Mr Heathcliff, quietly leaving us as we had been prior to his advent.

Nelly desperately wants Catherine to be a responsible adult and a dutiful wife. But Catherine is loyal to her childhood and unwilling to give up either it or Heathcliff.

What is it specifically about her childhood and her childhood friend that is so essential to Catherine's identity? That's a very difficult question to answer absolutely, but it must have something to do with *play* and *playfulness*. Cathy and Heathcliff are in their own paradise when they play together. Playing and playfulness imply *creating* your own universe to suit *yourself*. The only rules are the ones that you create for yourself. In the world of play, you don't have to concern yourself with external rules. What is more, you love and enjoy yourself. Heathcliff is the perfect 'other' for Catherine because he worships her and goes along with her domineering games. Now, when the child enters adult society, he or she

may put away the games of childhood. But they don't necessarily have to surrender all of the joy, creativity, exhuberence and confidence that they gain from play. Catherine brings the optimism, and some of the wildness of childhood, into her adult behavior. It makes her who she is. She is not completely socialized. She loves herself for herself and she assumes that everyone else does or should love her. When she discovers that Nelly Dean does not 'love' her and that her otherwise doting and indulgent husband wants Heathcliff out of the way, her situation is unbearable. Heathcliff knows intuitively that life at the Grange has become a living "hell".

Love and the Demonic

Victorian contemporaries found *Wuthering Heights* hard to take because its central message is that loving ourselves and others is always going to involve the demonic. On the one side, you've got Nelly the self-confessed "agent of patriarchal law" (81). On the other side, you've got the Catherine-Heathcliff connection. Some critics see Nelly as a villain. Charlotte Bronte tried to represent her as the paragon of "true benevolence and homely fidelity". She is neither saint nor sinner, just as Catherine is neither completely vicious nor innocent. Both Nelly and Catherine have the power to heal and to hurt. Nelly leans towards adaptability and balance while Catherine is perched more precariously on the edge of childhood anarchy – a captivating but dangerous woman-child. There is no doubt that Victorian readers would lean towards Nelly's perspective, just as Catherine's spunky rejection of straight-laced rationality tends to appeal to today's reader. But Catherine is hardly an ideal heroine because, in her dementia, she slips back into childhood rather than being able to integrate the child with the adult.

Although we may admire her, Catherine is not the heroine. She lacks the psychic integration that would make her such. For many modern readers, the Catherine-Heathcliff union has become something of a romantic idealization. But that ideal type is only feasible if one partially identifies with Heathcliff, something that Emily Bronte makes it difficult for her attentive readers to do. Even Mary Shelly's monster in *Frankenstein* has more redeeming qualities than Heathcliff. We are not even allowed to sympathize with him in his death, where the joy on his face freezes into a demonic stare. Heathcliff is described by everyone, including Catherine in her conversations with Isabella, as a nasty guy. And to many order loving Victorians, he must have appeared as Satan in their tidy Garden of Eden. We can't identify with Heathcliff because he has none of the weaknesses of a real person. He's largely a metaphor for "anarchic and libidinal power" He's the kind of male demon that young Victorian girls like Isabella were rightly warned against.

Wuthering Heights holds two realities in suspension – the wild and uncontrollable world of the Heights that borders on the demonic and the straight-laced and honourable world of the Grange that lacks vitality. As much as we might admire Edgar Linton, he seems bloodless in comparison to Heathcliff, and Heathcliff, remember, is largely a symbol or a metaphor. What results from Emily Bronte's ambiguous suspension of these two realities, however, is a rather stark realization. Without the psychic integration of demonic elements in our lives, our life itself will be less meaningful and our love will lack passion. Another way of putting this is that love is not rational. The passionate imagination combines tenderness and cruelty, life and death, anarchy and order in ways that have nothing to do with conventional social

rules and responsibilities. We are simultaneously fascinated by what repulses us. That is precisely the attraction of Heathcliff.

It is interesting that Isabella, and many other lovers of 'bad boys' ever since, generates an imaginary image of Heathcliff that she loves and that will lover her back in equal measure. Catherine bluntly informs Isabella that Heathcliff is "not a rough diamond" but a "fierce, pitiless, wolfish man"(103). Nelly echoes this judgment, adding details about Heathcliff's *knavish* behavior at Wuthering Heights. Isabella not only refuses to listen to counsel, but becomes a vicious "tigress" towards a well-meaning Catherine in defense of her love. Even your average Victorian reader could hardly find this whirlwind love affair with a brutish and unresponsive Heathcliff compelling, were it not for the fact that the dangerous and demonic is always captivating. And it is doubly captivating and entirely exotic for those who have led protected and comfortable lives.

Erotic passion, which I remind you need not focus on sex, is a potent drug. A considerable component of love's charm, like that of all drugs, lies in breaking many of the injunctions and taboos that surround it. Throughout the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth-century (and in some circles ever since), writers were optimistic that love, happiness, character, duty and goodness could all be balanced together in one wonderful life affirming equation. Schlegel's *Lucinda* represents the literary pinnacle of this enthusiasm – the religion or utopia of love. The later romantics, however, tended to view love and ethics as completely different and even opposed dimensions. Catherine's love for Heathcliff has a lot to do with making her life worth living but nothing whatsoever to do with social ethics. Heathcliff makes the issue very clear when describing the living hell that Edgar and Nelly are putting Catherine through by making her choose between love and wifely duty:

> You say she is often restless and anxious looking – is that a proof of tranquility? You talk of her mind being unsettled – How the devil could it be otherwise, in her frightful isolation. And that insipid, paltry creature attending her from *duty* and *humanity*! From *pity* and *charity*! He might as well plant an oak in a flower-pot, and expect it to thrive, as imagine he can restore her to vigour in the soul of his shallow cares!

Love may not be the exact opposite of ethics, but it often finds itself opposed to social norms.

The acceptance of the demonic element transposes the emphasis in love in a direction that, while not exactly new, tends to be stifled by social ethics – the happiness of the individual. "Happiness" may not be the very best word to use here because it implies a variety of social considerations such as comfort, security and belonging. In Catherine's case, a better term might be living a life that is "personally meaningful". By the mid-nineteenth century, individualism had developed to the degree that social acceptance and personal freedom were on a collision course. Love was looking for freedom from social considerations, as much to avoid personal unhappiness as to find happiness. Life and love now needed to be meaningful *on personal terms*. And that meant embracing the demonic.

Wuthering Heights is one of the first works of literature to explore the demonic as something more meaningful that forcing the reader to *feel*. Hereafter, the relation of the demonic to the passionate life, and especially to love, would be explored more fully. The alternative vision of patriarchal authority and

domestic fidelity, represented by Nelly Dean, would retreat into the cultural background. Society and culture would bifurcate. Ideas of love, at least the more interesting ideas of love, would take on a distinctly personal and anti-social hue.

The Feminism of *Wuthering Heights*

Wuthering Heights is above all else a love story. Actually, as you will see, it is two parallel and interweaving love tales – that of Catherine Linton and Heathcliff and that of Catherine's daughter with Hareton Earnshaw – that offer two possible models of love. It should be obvious that the relationship between Edgar Linton and Catherine does not qualify as a *modern* love story precisely because it lacks the piquancy of a soul-to-soul relationship that admits the possibility of danger and the demonic. Emily Bronte is defining the love bond on entirely new terms that all of you will be familiar with. Edgar is disqualified, not because he's a bad guy, but because he's Catherine's soul mate. You can only have one soul mate!

These days a novel about finding your soul mate would hardly count as feminist literature and the mantle for feminism among the Bronte sisters typically goes to Charlotte's *Jane Eyre*. However, there are good reasons to consider *Wuthering Heights* as a feminist novel, and even to give preference in some respects to Emily over Charlotte. One of the most striking elements in the novel is the attention given to the character of Catherine. Whether you approve or disapprove of her, she is an interesting and fully developed character. She is vivacious, willful, charming and stubborn, not necessarily in that order. She alone (at least in Volume I) has the ability to straddle the worlds of the Grange and the Heights and, until she's blocked by Edgar and Nelly, she thrives in both worlds. She stands up to patriarchal authority in the form of her father and Joseph, defying the former and caricaturing the latter. In a world that typically socialized women into dutiful or hysterical wives, she has a sense of her own independence. Moreover, she manages to like herself in the face of people like Nelly who won't give her approval. This remarkable ability to 'love' herself may make her selfish in some ways, but it also makes her very forgiving. In a world where women were meant to be meek and servile, Catherine is a fascinating creation.

There was probably more Nelly in Emily Bronte than Catherine which makes this literary character all the more surprising Perhaps Emily drew upon her own strong will and independence as a writer to create a strong woman in a highly circumscribed and provincial environment. What is important here is Catherine's individualism. Warts and all, she is definitely her own person. Even when she goes mad, she's not the hysterical Victorian lady of leisure. Her madness, like Heathcliff's self-starvation is a conscious choice and she's quite articulate about what is going on in her mind. She simply will not accept a world that will not accept her soul-mate. While all of this provides an argument for a certain kind of feminism – one that affirms individual rather than social power – it does not exhaust the novel's feminism. The most amazing feature of the novel is its exploration of androgyny. Prior to getting caught out at the Grange, there is not much to distinguish Catherine from Heathcliff. They even dress the same and use their pinafores to create a fortress from Joseph. They ramble on the moors; Catherine gets just as filthy as Heathcliff; and, most telling, there is nothing the least bit feminine about Catherine.

Catherine is soon fashioned into a beauty, which she embraces for the comfort and power that this brings. She does not, however, loose the distinctly male toughness that she developed playing on the moors. While she appreciates her handsome husband's virtuous qualities, she has nothing but scorn for his and Isabella's softness. It should be noted that this is anything but a condemnation based on gender roles – where men are meant to be strong and women weak – it comes directly out of her own rough and tumble experience. Catherine is as critical of Isabella on this score as she is of Edgar. Just because Catherine chooses a certain lifestyle does not mean that she identifies completely with role. Her candid conversation with Isabella contains none of those features that we might call feminine – she cuts to the chase, tells it like it is, without any sentiment, in fact without any sensitivity whatsoever.

Catherine's relationship with Heathcliff is particularly fascinating. While I would not completely deny a male-female dynamic, there is a lack of sexual tension here that is very telling. Heathcliff begins to feel betrayed by Catherine from the moment she adopts feminine fashion and manners. He feels totally forsaken when he mistakenly thinks that Catherine has chosen Edgar over him. For her part, Catherine clearly distinguishes her feminine feelings for Edgar – who she clear adores *as a woman* – from her soul connection to Heathcliff. If we are going to seriously consider the gender aspect of the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff, we should not interpret it as the kind of romantic love espoused by someone like Schlegel in *Lucinde*. The type of bond is much closer to that of a particularly intimate brother and sister prior to the bifurcation of roles and responsibilities. Certainly, Heathcliff and Catherine saw themselves as brothers and sisters in their youthful rambles on the moors. The difference that makes a difference here is that few brothers and sisters would ever have the connection that these two people did.

Conclusion

These considerations lead us back to where we started – the autobiographical context for *Wuthering Heights*. Where did Emily Bronte draw her inspiration for this soul-to-soul connection with its deliberate blurring of the lines between male and female? Emily Bronte bonded with her brother Branwell who was dying of tuberculosis at the time she conceived *Wuthering Heights*. While the declining Branwell had nothing in common with Catherine or Heathcliff as characters – they embodied the fierce will that he lacked – the tragedy of the Catherine-Heathcliff separation of intimately connected selves does mirror Branwell's inability to transfer his childhood promise into adult roles and relationships. Emily Bronte most certainly did have a death wish after Branwell's passing. Both Branwell and Emily equated desire with the imaginings of childhood rather than the experience of adulthood. *Wuthering Heights* is the literary testament to the promise of childhood and to the special friendship between a brother and a sister who dreamed together.

Whoever would have guessed that this literary homage to childhood dreaming would become one of the most important novels of the modern age? Certainly not Emily Bronte who willed her death soon after her brother's. Certainly not the author of *Jane Eyre*, who was closest to Branwell before he gave up on life but who didn't so much as give him an honourable mention in her introduction to the collected novels of her sisters. What makes *Wuthering Heights* an enduring and romantic classic, even more relevant today than when it was written, is the transposition of a very real and painful brother

sister parting into an ideal type of soul-to-soul connection that has become the very archetype of love. It is largely irrelevant now that this kind of relationship had its basis in a real brother and sister relationship and more important that this special kind of friendship is what many of us now look for in a mate. It does not seem to deter us that Catherine was petulant and Heathcliff a veritable villain. What counts overwhelmingly for is that they had this relationship – this intense connection, this sense of complete unity. It doesn't matter either that this relationship couldn't withstand social pressures; what matters more to many of us is that Heathcliff and Catherine finally get together again, even if it is as disembodied ghosts. Some of us are more than willing to *chill out the semantics* and ignore the social realities in our search for unity with our other halves.

The soul to soul connection of Heathcliff and Catherine haunts *Wuthering Heights*, although their earthly relationship pretty much ends in Volume I. As we move through Volume II, another love story emerges – that between Catherine's daughter (that we'll be calling *Cathy* to distinguish her from her mother) and Hereton Earnshaw. This is a love story with a happier ending. Since Cathy is in some ways very much like her mother and Hereton has been coached into sullenness by Heathchiff and his name also begins with H, we have to ask exactly what is going on? Is this a parallel version with a different ending, something we are very familiar with? What might have been? Or Is this the culmination of a family saga that returns to something approaching normalcy and patriarchal authority, as Nelly appears to suggest? Is something like brother and sisterly love possible in this world, and on what terms? Does the second love story complete the first or trump it? Why is it that we still think of Heathcliff and Catherine when he think about *Wuthering Heights* but so seldom Cathy and Hereton? And what about the weird ending, with unquiet ghosts strutting around? Your answer to most of these questions is probably as good as mine.

But even if you like the way the second love story turns out, my guess is that you'll find something unsatisfying about it. The biggest single problem with Volume II I'll tell you in advance. It's the happy ending. Happy endings are obviously boring because…what can you say? They planted flowers outside of the Heights. So what ? It's not only the lack of dramatic tension that disturbs so many of us, however. It's something more significant. One of the most profound new ideas of love is that it is not necessarily related to our happiness. Indeed, any definition of happiness seems insipid in comparison to our modern idea of love. It is not just the traditional idea love involves 'suffering', or is measured by suffering; it is that love transcends either happiness or suffering. Late romantic love is an idea and an ideal that relates primarily to itself rather than anything outside itself. Love finally became culturally autonomous.

Wuthering Heights (2)

Divided Selves

Last week I suggested that one of the most important ways to read *Wuthering Heights* is in terms of our search, not simply for love, but for a soul mate. A soul mate is another person who connects with us at the most intimate level – another self. Unless we find that soul mate, we will stay forever divided from ourselves. If you think back to the beginning of the course, you will remember that this idea is not new in Western civilization. It is the definition of love that Aristophanes offered up in *Symposium*. The original human beings were joined at the hip, but to punish their hubris, the gods divided us into two. Now we spend our lives looking for that other half to complete us. You may also remember that Plato attacked the idea of finding love or unity with another person. At best, other people are stepping-stones to what we really lack – goodness or virtue. Christianity adapted Plato's discussion of love to the search for unity with god in heaven. Only very slowly did the love of two people, for their own sake, emerge as an ideal and, even then, it competed with other ideals.

Ever since Plato, the love of two individuals for each other was submerged within a web of social ideals and relationships. What was new in works like *Wuthering Heights* was the possibility that love was its own justification and that the love connection could trump social ideals and relationships. What particularly disturbed Victorian readers, including Emily Bronte's sister Charlotte, was the fascination of distinctly asocial kind of loving with distinctly demonic elements. The soul connection between Heathcliff and Catherine was established in childhood, a time when social norms and gender roles were not fixed in the individual, and when play allows individuals to imaginatively enjoy themselves and their partners. Heathcliff and Catherine were subjected to rules by a patriarchal father and a sermonizing servant, but the point is that they didn't allow themselves to be defined by those rules. By social norms, these children were *wild*. In terms of their psyche, Heathcliff and Catherine were *free* to be themselves.

The romantic writers put considerable emphasis on childhood freedom and childish play because they firmly believed that modernity fragmented consciousness into rigid and rational rules and roles that deprived culture of *spirit*. Against an abstract rationalistic *society*, they appealed to the imagination of the individual, and especially the individual's capacity for "intense attachments" during childhood (189). With modern adulthood, with the one big exception of the time one falls in love, relationships with other people tend to be cool and calculating. The warm feelings of childhood are either forgotten or so diluted that they become nostalgic emotional relics rather than active principles.

The early romantics were anti-social in principle rather than practice because they wanted to change modern society by releasing creative imagination. But there was a distinct tendency in romanticism to indulge in emotionalism for its own sake and to make strong feeling its own justification in a world they regarded as unfeeling. As romantic writers became more pessimistic about changing the world, they tended to beat a retreat from

bureaucratic reason towards an irrationality with demonic properties. One distinct advantage of the uncanny realm of ghosts and hauntings, for example, is that it invokes primitive and childhood terror and effectively dissolves the power of the everyday. The unquiet ghosts of Catherine and Heathcliff serve precisely this purpose.

'Unquiet Ghosts' versus 'Ancient Associations'

The ghosts of Catherine and Heathcliff haunt Volume II of *Wuthering Heights*. The other worldly power of their soul connection puts Emily Bronte's novel firmly within the genre of romantic pessimism. That connection eclipses, and to some extent, explodes conventional social norms. Catherine and Heathcliff's bond has nothing to do with goodness or religion. Their love is much closer to hate than to kindness. It operates completely outside the spheres of family and kinship, so much so that Heathcliff actually says that he "*detests*" (and he means it!) Catherine's daughter. He makes a point of ruining the lives of those who were closest to his soul mate. His love is possessive and aggressive. Heathcliff's aggression cuts completely through the veneer of civilization, simultaneously shocking us and at the same time exposing the violence just bubbling beneath the surface in all of us.

The emotive power of this late romantic critique of modern culture and civilization is so potent that the alternate reality represented especially by Nelly Dean rarely gets its due. What makes *Wuthering Heights* much more complex than a typical romantic novel is that the *ancient associations* cherished by Nelly and the kindness and affection that Edgar Linton bestows on his daughter Cathy are given considerable scope, especially in Volume II. Emily Bronte also dwells much more in that Volume on the dangers, indeed the horrors, of indulging one's individual feeling. All of which begs the question -- why is this novel so overwhelmingly interpreted as the tragic love story of Catherine and Heathcliff and their ghosts. The main answer has to be the romantic emphasis on the individual. *Wuthering Heights* is not so much a love story that extends beyond the material world as it is an exploration and liberation of individual obsession. What attracts us to Heathcliff and Catherine is what repelled many contemporary readers. Not only are we more willing to embrace the irrationality of life than many Victorians, but also we tend to interpret our world more in terms of individual desire and will. The disregard social restraint and control is what appeals to us.

Volume II begins with the obsessive and violent embrace of Catherine and Heathcliff, followed shortly by Catherine's death. Heathcliff will not accept Catherine's death; he says "I 'cannot' live without my life! I 'cannot' live without my soul!" Like Catherine in Volume I, he spurns the consolations of religion and the norms of society because he desires Catherine. Catherine is his one single obsession. Nothing else is important to him unless it is his intense hatred of anything and anyone who has ever stood in the way of his desire. Heathcliff is a vicious, nasty, sordid person. Actually, he is not so much a person as the demonic personification of desire. What fascinates us about this "goblin", this near sociopath, is that he accepts no other reality than his own. Even in his relations with Catherine, his attitude is one of all or nothing, and his obsession effectively destroys

her and the lives of several others in the process. One of the people he tries to destroy is Catherine's daughter Cathy.

Cathy is an interesting literary construction for a number of reasons. She's an amalgam of her mother and father and an ideal type merging spirit with kindness. But we are first introduced to her as an unwelcome child. We never even hear that her mother is pregnant until she gives birth to a premature baby. You would think that there would be some mention that Catherine is going to have a child, especially since this fact would obviously relate to her physical and mental health. The literary reason why the pregnancy isn't worked into the story may be because Catherine's death, like Heathcliff's obsession, is an act of will. If she can't get what she wants, she's going to make everyone suffer, including herself. Another reason why the pregnancy goes unmentioned is that expectation of a child would detract the reader's attention from the only relationship that really counts for Catherine and Heathcliff – the one between themselves. The extreme soul connection that Emily Bronte describes cannot extend outwards, only inwards.

Catherine is better socialized than Heathcliff, and she's a much more interesting and dynamic character as I described in my first lecture. But the bottom line is that she is still a spoiled child who wants what she wants, and she wants everything her own way. She is willing to tolerate others like Isabella, and even to show kindness on her husband Edgar, but only as long as she gets what she wants. She has a child's sense of entitlement. She thinks that the universe revolves around her. What attracts us to Cathy is her childlike enthusiasms and embrace of life. But when this abruptly turns into an embrace of death, why is it that the reader finds her so enchanting? It can't be simply that we 'buy into' the soul-mate connection she has with Heathcliff, since this connection is so blatantly a function of desire and will. Can we really, for example, imagine Heathcliff and Catherine getting married and settling down? If so, what exactly is it that we are imagining, since Heathcliff is not a nice person and Catherine is something of a princess? Do we really buy Catherine's justification that she can be married to Edgar and help out Heathcliff with Hindley? Is she really that selfless a person?

Nelly certainly doesn't buy into Heathcliff and Catherine's reality, although she is sympathetic to the fact that they were once playmates and that the *separation of friends* was hard on both of them. Do we buy into it? Perhaps we do subscribe to the soul-mate connection to some extent, but my guess is that what we modern readers really identify with, besides Cathy's strong attachments to a place and a person, is her sense of freedom and her unwillingness to compromise. It is Catherine's individuality rather than her love for him, that attracts Heathcliff and us to her. All of us desire to return to that relatively liberated state of childhood. It is the little *waif* in Catherine that we relate to. Ever since the romantics, childhood attracts us all.

Of course, for the romantics childhood represented much more than unlimited desire and relative freedom. A child is imaginative and uninhibited. A child is capable of "intense attachments". Even the selfish and willful aspects of childhood, when connected to strong attachments, make the child a powerful force. What distinguishes Catherine and Heathcliff from some of the more socialized characters in the novel is their sense of

personal power that implodes into a death wish when it is thwarted. That sense of power is lacking absolutely in Heatchliff's son Linton and relatively in Edgar and Isabella (the products of the Grange). One of the tactics of late romantic writers is to present individuals like Edgar, Isabella, and Linton as bloodless and insipid characters in comparison to romantic figures like Heathcliff and Catherine. Thus, Catherine dismisses her husband as a posturing weakling in comparison with the ferocious Heathcliff. Isabella is a dupe; her son Linton is feminized in the worst possible way; and Lockwood is a perpetual adolescent, who desperately wants romance but is totally incapable of acting on his desires.

Romantic writers typically enlisted readers' sympathies with the strong feelings of their protagonists by presenting their more restrained and controlled counterparts as emotional weaklings. Emily Bronte is no exception although she is unique is providing us with other points of view. She also deploys a common romantic descriptive technique to partly excuse the extreme polarities of emotion of heroes and heroines. Heathcliff is a hater, a *detester*, even of his own child. But he is not a hypocrite. Similarly, Catherine is quite up front about her belief that everyone *loves* her or, at least, *ought to love her*. The more civilized characters in the novel, tend to hide their savagery from others and from themselves. Lockwood's rubbing of the child ghost's hand against the glass and Edgar's sucker punch and hasty retreat from Heathcliff evidence cowardice. Linton is a colossal sissy, a whiner, and a self-confessed coward. But, when given a chance, he is just a cruel as his father and with far less reason, because his bad behaviour is towards Cathy who has shown him nothing but kindness. Cathy herself tends to be cruel towards social inferiors and her victim, Hareton Earnshaw was seen by Isabella "hanging a litter of puppies from a chair back in the doorway" (183). Even that stout defender of common sense and "ancient associations", Nelly Dean, could be viewed as a meddler and a megalomaniac in her attempts to assert patriarchal authority.

From the romantic point of view, therefore, the Catherine-Heathcliff axis is the legitimate center of the novel. Healthcliff may be more of a symbol and a metaphor than a real character, but he is dynamic in ways that other male representatives are not. The reader identifies, not so much perhaps with their soul to soul connection, as with Catherine and Heathcliff's willed childhood reality. And many of us desire that soul partner even if it is really our own freedom and identity that is at stake. We can, if we wish, view all the other characters in the novel as phoney, hypocritical, inspid, boring or some combination of those traits. Only Emily Bronte is not a typical romantic writer, and she is not going to make it that easy for us.

From the Heights to the Grange and Back Again

One of the strokes of genius of *Wuthering Heights* is that the action all takes place in the space between two houses. The Grange represents gentrified civilization and socialization whereas the Heights represents natural wildness and childhood exhuberance. In terms of literary emphasis, the Heights might seem to be the winner, but the tale constantly moves between the two *houses*. If the Heights is in the title and the romantic consciousness, a great deal of the narrative takes place in the Grange, including the

highly emotional embracing and kissing between Catherine and Heathcliff. Catherine may wish to return from heaven to the Heights, but she dies in the Grange and is buried in the local churchyard. At the end of the novel, the Heights is boarded up and left to the Joseph and the ghosts of Catherine and Heathcliff. Hareton and Cathy are moving back to the Grange. So, if there is a winner, you might say that it is the Grange.

It makes little sense to talk about winners and losers in a novel that is so very ambiguous. Nelly may think she's won the day when her erstwhile "children" Cathy and Hareton decide to get married and inhabit the Grange. But the ghosts are still hanging around, and even Nelly is scared of them. The only people who aren't scared of ghosts is Cathy and Hareton because they are making a new life in love together. But Hareton is Heathciff's psuedo child and Cathy is Catherine's real one. They must be in some sense reflections or resemblances of each other. The question is how to make sense of this. It's crucial, I think to take the story of Cathy and Hareton as seriously as that of Heathcliff and Cathy despite all the romantic attention to the latter. And its important to take the Grange and seriously as the Heights.

Since the female characters of Emily Bronte are always the most interesting, let's begin with Cathy. She clearly is a version of her mother in her 'sauciness" and her "capacity for strong attachments"; she's just as strong willed and rebellious as her mother (189). The telling question is how she is different from the elder Catherine. Emily Bronte wants us to know she is different because, unlike some of the other characters who bear a strong physical resemblance to Catherine that terrorizes Heathcliff, Cathy doesn't resemble her mother. Most important, Nelly tells us that she's softer and milder and more thoughtful than her mother. She doesn't get as angry as her mother did whenever her will was thwarted. And the big issue, she loves differently than her mother. While her mother's love was "fierce", her's was deep and tender.

A key relationship that operates differently for Cathy than for Catherine is the relationship with the father. Catherine's father represented patriarchal authority, while Edgar Linton combined duty and kindness in relatively equal measure, but with a tendency always towards the tender end of parenting. As a result, Cathy is a much more complex and adaptable person than her mother was. Catherine must think everyone loves her, and if they don't they must be mistaken. When people don't give her what she wants, Catherine wills her own death. Cathy weathers the calculated abuse of Heathcliff and refuses to return hate for hate. She's clearly not perfect in the way she handles her initial exchanges with Hareton, but she learns from her mistakes. An interesting example of her ability to deal with people is her heated exchange with Heathcliff once she knows that she has the affection of Hareton. She initially *assumes* that Hareton will take her side against Heathcliff, but she seriously underestimates Hareton's affection for his stepfather. Once she realizes that Hareton is pained by attacks on Heathcliff and by Cathy undermining what he considers a positive relationship, she avoids giving offence and tacitly accepts that her and Hareton's impression of Heathcliff will always be different. One cannot imagine her mother adopting a similar stance with a lover – for Catherine, Heathcliff and she are one person – one soul -- against the world.

Cathy is the product of Edgar's duty with kindness and Catherine's 'warm attachments'. Another way of putting this is that she is a combination of civilized Grange and the natural Heights. The Grange and the Heights are often 'off limits' to the inhabitants of each, and sometimes for good reason. Evil, in the form of Heathcliff, resides at the Heights. The hatred between Edgar and Heathcliff means that the former is right to be vigilant about his daughter. But if there is a lesson in the novel, it is that the Grange and the Heights need each other.

What does it mean to say that that the Grange and the Heights need each other? Why does a romantic novelist spend so much attention on the Grange? Why did Catherine need to go and live there with Edgar, if it didn't end up doing her any good? From an individual viewpoint, the Grange could only be a foil to Catherine wild emotional attachment to the Heights. From another and longer term perspective, the mingling of Grange and Heights was an entirely positive development. The Hareton-Cathy connection is good for everyone, for them, for Nelly, for the tenants, for their future children and so on. The underlying meaning is that civilization without deep feeling is just as inadequate as strong attachments without civilization. For a romantic writer like Emily Bronte, strong attachments to place and person are important. The attachments of childhood are crucial. Throughout all the significant relationships in the novel, childhood or childlike behaviours dominate the character's consciousness. Heathcliff plays with Catherine, Cathy plays games like shuttlcock with the whiny Linton, and the ideal relationship between Cathy and Hareton Earnshaw is like that between two classmates, except that the educated girl is mentoring the rustic farmhand. However playful these friends may be, however, culture and civilization still loom large in the equation. The central symbol of culture – the book – must be present.

Emily Bronte, her sister Anne and her brother Branwell, all died young of tuberculosis. It is interesting therefore that this sickly romantic writer thought always in terms of health. The Grange represents civilization, but by the mid nineteenth-century, civilization seemed diseased. A feeble adult world, as represented by Edgar, and a decaying civilization, as represented by Linton, badly needed rejuvenating by the vitality union of childhood and romance. There is a particularly telling exchange about *heaven* between Cathy and Linto that I think sums up Emily Bronte's approach to modernity. Linton's heavenly ideal is that of a civilization in decline – he seeks to laying "in an ecstacy of peace". Cathy, on the other hand, wanted all to sparkle, and dance in a glorious jubilee" (248). The injection and survival of that vital spirit is best represented by an alliance with Hereton who thirsts for knowledge and connection.

The supine apathy of Linton is a defensive strategy at best. The overall structure of *Wuthering Heights* is a compelling argument that you can't hive off the Grange from the Heights. Civilization can't protect you from Heathcliffs. And you can't fight civilization by staying loyal to your childhood and the Heights. One day, the unsuspecting servants leave the doors to the Grange open, and Heathcliff comes in and destroys all their security. Characters in the novel keep closing doors and lattices and windows, but the outside comes in, even in the form of ghosts. Heatcfliff shuts up Isabella and Cathy; it might work for a while; but eventually they find a way out. For a time, characters feel a

sense of security and normalcy in protected situations, but it's always a false promise. Heathcliff seems to be the most successful at *shutting doors* on others and getting in closed doors. But his flaunting of polite conventions ends up being a futile struggle. Towards the end, he confides to Nelly that he can no longer give his attention to controlling Hareton and Cathy and destroying their prospects. Hareton looks so much like the dead Catherine that his very presence mocks "my wild endeavours to hold my right, my degradation, my pride, my happiness, and my anguish":

> But it is frenzy to repeat these thoughts to you; only it will let you know, why, with a reluctance to be always alone, his society is no benefit; rather an aggravation of the constant torment I suffer – and it partly contributes to render me regardless how he and his cousin go on together. I can give them no attention any more.

Even if you achieve what you think you want, you'll discover that it wasn't what you really wanted. The only place left for Heathcliff to go is death.

The symbol of the mingling of the Grange and the Heights, that could finally be completed once Heathcliff is dead, is the "importation of plants from the Grange" (317). By the time this happened, Heathcliff was totally disinterested in life and effectively starving himself to death. The cutting down of the traditional currant and gooseberry plants to house the roses marks the end of the reign not only of Heathcliff, whose already become a walking ghost, but also Joseph and Nelly. Joseph, a remnant of the old patriarchal authority, represented the world dominated by dogma and subordination, which Heathcliff and Catherine rebelled against. Joseph's power was always limited, even against children, as the spiritual world of the past was replaced with a more tolerant secular one. More interesting is the effective shift in power between Cathy and Nelly. On the surface, Nelly still asserts her claim to power. She says that both Cathy and Hereton are in a sense her children and her family and that she has achieved her purpose in seeing them come together and combine the properties of the Grange and the Heights. And Nelly has taken over the books for the tenancies because Cathy doesn't know how to do it. All this is very misleading, however, because Nelly's common sense authority and appeals to filial duty have been eclipsed.

The Narrators: Nelly Dean and Lockwood

When discussing her sister's novel, Charlotte Bronte badly wanted to affirm Nelly Dean's sense of propriety as the authoritative 'voice' in the novel and to excuse the novel's rude and demonic elements. She reflected a very Victorian sense of fear of bewitchment by the Catherine-Heathcliff relationship. A close reading of the novel suggests that the real meaning of *Wuthering Heights* does not reside in that one relationship, although the appeal of the childlike soul to soul connection is real. The ultimate meaning of *Wuthering Heights* is that the child can and should be civilized but not at the expense of crushing the childlike spirit that an unhealthy modern society badly needs. That meaning is symbolized by the Cathy-Hareton pairing that improves significantly upon the Heathcliff-Catherine bond. Nelly Dean's interpretation of the

Cathy-Hareton pairing is limited by her overriding commitment to duty and old connections. She cannot see Cathy-Hareton as a new development.

It is not surprising that Charlotte Bronte would place so much emphasis on Nelly Dean because she represents the combination of a stable social order mitigated by common sense. But, as I remarked earlier, Miss Dean represents only one voice in the novel and not the one that attracts our heartfelt emotional sympathies, which tend, despite the demonic elements, towards the Heathcliff-Catherine axis that dominates the novel. Despite the fact that Nelly becomes the primary narrator, replacing Lockwood fairly early on, other viewpoints keep intruding. Not only the explicit voices of Heathcliff and Catherine who affirm a love that contradicts the Victorian social order and common sense, but also their adoption of a different conception of *time* that love is familiar with. To anyone who has been romantically in love, the interpretation of the relationship is that it is timeless even eternal. Nelly can't understand this conception of love and so she does what many contemporaries did when confronted with a romantic vision – she either attempts to make it fit her own paradigm as in the discussion of love with Catherine – or when pushed she regards such notions either as 'silly' or diabolical. And, although Heatchliff may really be diabolical, a reader with any sensitivity understands that love of this kind may be impractical but it is anything but silly.

Emily Bronte structures and intervenes in Nelly's narration in ways that force us to deal with the fact that neither viewpoint is conclusive; both are valid. Nobody in the novel represents an undisputed right way of looking at life and love. As if to emphasize that point, when confronted by Nelly with his deceitful dealings with young Cathy (she labels him a "despicable liar", Heathcliff rightly tells Nelly that she is also a very deceitful 'double dealer' who manipulates situations and emotions according to her own definition of rectitude. Heathcliff's truth is his timeless, but thwarted by historical considerations, connection to Catherine. He is not at all disturbed by Nelly or Joseph or Cathy's negative judgments, because they don't fit his deepest reality. Ironically, and demonstrating Emily Bronte's brilliance in exploring dueling realms of consciousness, the 'words' that disturb Heathcliff the most, are not Nelly's but Isabella's. She explodes by trivializing Heathcliff's sense of a timeless connection with Catherine:

> "…if poor Catherine had trusted you, and assumed the ridiculous, contemptible, degrading title of Mrs Heathcliff, whe would soon have presented a similar picture. *She* wouldn't have borne your abominable behavior quietly; her detestation and disgust must have found voice."

Isabella's comments infuriate Heathcliff, as they were meant to do, but they are hypocritical. She herself was looking for the kind of connection with Heathcliff that her sister-in-law had.

One of the few redeeming personal qualities possessed by Heathcliff is that he "likes' Nelly Dean, even though she never very much liked him. Why does he continue to like her when she more than anyone else represents the threatening reality? It is really not clear; perhaps he views her still with childhood eyes as his nurse in a serious illness. In

any case, a close reading shows that Nelly is not entirely guiltless in many of the personal tragedies that occur in the novel. What decisively undermines her status as an authoritative voice, however, is that her attempted manipulations do not succeed. The novel concludes with two unions, Cathy and Hereton as an earthly, and Catherine and Heathcliff as a ghostly, couple. The second is completely beyond Nelly Dean's comprehension, and the first is wonderful surprise that Nelly Dean didn't anticipate. In fact, Nelly was actively lobbying for a more traditional and secure pairing between Lockwood and Cathy. Had she been successful, the ensuing relationship would, at best, have approximated that between Catherine Earnshaw and Edgar Linton. I say *at best* because there are reasons to think that the Nelly *solution* would have been disastrous.

For the attentive and engaged reader, Nelly's is a viewpoint to be taken seriously but most definitely not unilaterally. Emily Bronte forces her readers to consider two different realities and to confront the painful irony and ambiguity of modern life, where readers have to navigate their own personal meanings in a world full of meanings. Meaningful relationships are not synonymous with stable and orderly relationships. The couple in the novel who have a chance at something approaching a meaningful and stable relationship in the real world, rather than the world hereafter, are Cathy and Hereton. But that doesn't mean that it is going to be easy. What bodes well for Cathy and Hereton are three things: 1) they are playful and childlike and imaginative towards each other, which implies that they will generate meaningful moments and memories as they go along; 2) unlike Catherine and Heathcliff, they are flexible about finding what works in their relationship, and 3) while they are not obsessive or exclusive about their relationship, they give it primacy over the both the sermonizing of Joseph and the common sense interpretations of Nelly Dean. "*They* are afraid of nothing", Lockwood **grumbles** "Together they would brave satan and all his legions' (337).

Lockwood, of course, was the original narrator, the naïve but searching individual who introduced all of us into the world of Wuthering Heights and the Grange. In typical romantic stories, like those of Walter Scott, the hero is on a quest for meaning and love. Lockwood fits this romantic model for the most part; he wants into the world of Wuthering Heights because he's looking for something different and better than social norms and conventions. He's initially attracted to and identifies with Heathcliff precisely because the man represents solitariness and independence. His interest and attention soon lights on Cathy's red lower lip, and increases dramatically when he hears her tragic tale from Nelly. If Emily Bronte was composing a typical romantic novel, we would expect Lockwood to go through a series of tests that hardened and matured him as a person and made him worthy of someone as precious as Cathy.

The novel starts out as a romantic template, and at first we accept Lockwood as the voice of the romantic author and prepare to see the world through his eyes. Emily Bronte quickly undercuts her readers' expectations, however, by allowing us to see through Lockwood. In a novel full of 'immature lovers', we rapidly discover that Lockwood is an "uneasy and comical" emotional adolescent who is incapable of becoming an interesting love interest for Cathy. (Knoepflmacher, 16) He hovers constantly and is stuck into permanent immaturity, between his desire for personal authenticity and a deep connection

with a soul mate, on the one hand, and social artifice and politeness, on the other. Whenever push comes to shove, his habitual pattern is to try to *escape* from commitment and into social convention. While he intuits that he might learn something interesting about love and commitment from the characters at Wuthering Heights, he relies on superficial language and gestures to engage with Heathcliff, Hareton and Cathy. The enormous difference between his civilized veneer and the reality of the passions and desires of the inhabitants of the Heights makes him engage in a comic series of blunders that might conceivably make us sympathize with him, *except* that we know he is a shallow and foolish adolescent and that his romantic quest is nothing more than a "pose".

He's incapable of real love for an adult, if potentially playful, woman like Cathy. In fact, he is more unnerved by Cathy's "cool, regardless manner" than Heathcliff's outright rudeness. Rather than being a romantic searcher, he's much more like an artificial 'gallant' or story-book 'courtier'. He's an urban "flatterer" rather than someone who is prepared to communicate. He hides behind words rather than seeking the deeper meaning in communication. And who is the person who hides and evades. He's exactly the kind of person who considers himself superior because of phoney considerations of status and culture. He not only misreads everyone, but he misreads them as country *bumkins*, *clowns* and social inferiors, caricaturing them even in their redeeming qualities.

When Lockwood is tested, even on his own adolescent grounds, by the *waif* that is Cathy's ghost scratching at the window, he not only fails to see an essential affinity between himself and the young Catherine, but he demonstrates what a shallow person and pathetic coward he is. Lockwood is incapable and deeply fearful of real connection at any level, unless he is able to rely on conventional status and the attendant language of an elite and effete superior class. Thus, Lockwood avoids meaningful relationships not only by 'flattering others' but by **flattering himself that he is a genuine seeker with a "succeptible heart"**. Instead of putting himself of the line, he *expects* others to recognize that he is superior, especially to rustics like Hareton. In effect, he flirts with rather than engages other people. And, when he's not successful, he moves on, notably back to the superficial urban civilization that he came from.

It should not be surprising that Nelly Dean takes over as the principal narrator because Lockwood soon demonstrates his inability to penetrate past the doors, locks and hidden recesses of Wuthering Heights to discover emotional well-springs of the characters. Nelly Dean clearly has a lot more going for her than this superficial creature; she is far more substantial. But Nelly also lacks the kind of in-depth engagement and wrestling with ambiguity that Emily Bronte wants her readers to show. Although she has nursed and raised Cathy from a child, and recognizes many of her strengths and weaknesses, she regards Lockwood as a potential marriage partner for her. Lockwood is no one's potential soul mate. Like so many people, he is an emotional tourist in life and is unlikely to find a home for his heart.

The Author and the Reader

So why bother introducing a character like Lockwood as our first interpreter of the dark, mysterious, tense and troubling emotional cauldron that is the Heights? When you analyze a great novel, it is crucial to assume that the author knows what he or she is doing. You can certainly take your own meanings from the novel and interpret it in a way that feels good to you. But you should still consider that the *author* makes decisions about the novels structure, overall meaning and characters. This is especially true at the beginning of a great work, where the author deals with her readers' expectations and establishes the work's trajectory. Emily Bronte has Lockwood there for a least three reasons. First, he represents the naïve and superficial reader, who will never discover the deep meaning of *Wuthering Heights*. Second, by exposing the way that Lockwood misreads everything, to the extent of transforming dead rabbits into cuddly cats, Bronte alerts more intelligent readers to the fact that they will need go deeper if they want to really engage the emotional tension in the novel. Third, the author suggests that the *wish* to engage and incorporate one's own, let alone others', emotions involves much more than a mere *add-on* to modern urban civilization.

To the extent that a superficial tourist and ultimately marginal figure like Lockwood acts as the "the contemporary reader's agent, he only shows how unwilling his creator is to accommodate the values of that reader's culture" (Knoepflmacher, 27). In order to get to a relatively happy ending in the Cathy-Hereton axis, we are going to have to move through the heart of darkness. The synthesis of a polite civilization and meaningful personal emotion is an intense and intensely difficult one to achieve, which is why Heathcliff and Cathy reject civilaed life in preference for an unheavenly life after death. The outcome is doubtful to say the least, and most of us will be like Lockwood and escape back into our superficial but civilized and orderly lives.

Emily Bronte is defiant in the face of the reader's desire for facile solutions. "Although she will eventually allow Cathy to transform Hareton into a civilized version of Heathcliff" (K, 27) the novel as a whole fails to make the reader confident about the possibility and benefits of this domestication of emotion. It somehow isn't compelling and "Heathcliff, after all, not Hareton, remains the most memorable figure in *Wuthering Heights*" (K, 28). And the novel doesn't end with Cathy and Hareton's hard earned happiness; it ends with those troubling "unquiet slumbers" underground. Emily Bronte takes us through hypnotic terror and brings us back to the *normal pulses of life*, but whatever modern civilization does it can't get rid of the ghosts. It can only suppress them.If we want to explore ourselves and have meaningful relations with others, we need to appreciate that there are troubling ghosts and demons within us. Lockwood shakes off those ghosts and demons – he cannot tolerate "unquiet sleepers" and so he reluctantly returns to him common and superficial understanding of the world, grumbling about what he has lost.

Lockwood is not only a tourist, but a trespasser into the world of deep individual emotion. To the extent that he represented the expectations of contemporary Victorian society, Emily Bronte wanted to make the imaginary world of the Heights 'off-limits' to those conventional readers. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the novel's greatness was not appreciated by contemporaries. And those who glimmered its inner

meanings were put off by its demonic aspects. This is not to say that some readers grasped the novel's importance, especially its imaginative force. The intricate structure of the novel had to await the penetrating insights of later literary critics. While the novel was always read, it speaks to *us* more than it did to Victorian contemporaries. The reasons why this is the case are not far to seek. First, as readers we are far more comfortable with the irrational and demonic aspects of life – as witness the spread of supernatural and uncanny literature – and much more suspicious of order, rationality and what passes as *civilization*. Second, we are far more individualistic and freer to move away from social norms to discover our own personal meanings in the world. Third, in the absence of religion and shared values, many of us yearn for connection. And, increasingly, our ideal type of connectivity, as hard as it may be to discover, is with a *soul mate*. Ultimately, *Wuthering Heights* is about finding that soul mate. What makes the Cathy-Heathcliff connection a modern parable for us, certainly more than it did for the Victorians who were clearly fascinated but frightened by it, is first and foremost its affirmation of the soul mate.

In some respects, many modern readers are the inversion of Lockwood. They are equally naïve, but in a very different sense, because they privilege the search for a soul mate above anything else. Emily Bronte did not want her readers to dismiss culture and civilization; she did not dismiss order and stability; there was a lot of Edgar Linton and Nelly Dean in her. What she sought was an injection of individual meaning and romantic connection in that world. Whereas Lockwood was most comfortable in civilized trappings, many of us are very comfortable in pursuing our individual desires and our search for a soul-mate. The modern Lockwood is always looking for love and ignoring society. The Victorian Lockwood retreats into society and the Modern Lockwood retreats into herself. The brilliance and timelessness of *Wuthering Heights* is to keep both civilization and the individual in play, to describe the tension between them, and to push us to consider the claims of both. At the end of the day, civilization without romance is meaningless. Love that ignores civilization may not be as meaningless but, ultimately, the individual fulfillment and the dissolving of differences that it supposes lead to the grave. Catherine and Heathcliff are united only in childhood and in death. They may even be happy, but that's not the sort of happy ending Emily Bronte was advocating.