

As with a Tempest So with Love

the longing to merge
- Lou Andreas-Salomé

1

As with a tempest so with love, it blows itself out.
People can remain faithful if their elemental passions
aren't involved: crimes of passion happen
but passionate marriage is a contradiction in terms.

The choice is between sacrificing one's wholeness
or becoming unfaithful — keeping in mind
that unfaithful need not mean betrayal if
for instance one leaves one not for another but for oneself.

2

Sexual love is first and foremost a physical need
like hunger and thirst, an animalistic force pure
and simple except in man it's combined with mental effects
associated with nervous excitement which leads
to romantic idealization of love then demands
that it be permanent — eternal faithfulness
from those we love even when we know in reality
all animal needs are quickly appeased so clamor
for change and requited love dies of satiation,
habitual performances deaden the stimuli
thereby increasing the need for novel inputs.

Since instincts are subject to the law of diminishing returns
it follows she said that the natural love life in all
its manifestations (and maybe in its highest forms most of all)
is based on the infidelity principle.
If the two are entirely serious with this
most transitory act, demand no loyalty
but are content with each other's happiness, they live
while it lasts in a state of divine madness: love
is elemental, to try to conserve it unrealistic.

3

Underlying the urge is desire for total union
(*total surrender* she called it and *the unity of being*)
which in humans (for anatomical reasons) must be
partial and often, because partial, accompanied
by a sense of shame and, coincidental with the desire to merge,

a heightened sense of one's own existence;
so *every love leaves a positive surplus*.

4

It was her spontaneity said one, her mind,
the way she anticipated one's every thought.

There is with her said one no trace as with most women
of any quick judgment or prejudgment yet she is
a typical woman in wanting not to reflect when she loves.

I have never met anyone else in all my long life
said one who understood me so quickly so well
and so completely. And then her almost startling frankness:
she would discuss her most intimate private affairs with nonchalance.

I do not pay compliments to those I respect said one
but she is a gem I hope not to harm by saying so.

She could be very passionate only for a moment said one
and with a strangely cold passion. Nietzsche was right
when he called her an evil woman but evil in the Goethean sense:
evil that produces good. One grew in her presence.

There was something terrifying about her embrace
said one: elemental archaic ruthless yet pious.
The reception of the semen she said *is the height of ecstasy*
for me and for it she had an insatiable appetite.
Conscience she said is weakness.

Never again said one have I experienced such a feeling
of conciliatory kindness (or call it compassion if you wish).

She could never give herself completely said one not even
in the most passionate embrace (and then she was by no means
cold). She talked about it but could not do it. She was
in the deepest meaning of the word an unredeemed woman.

A sybil in the realm of the spirit said one. She loved the spirit.

5

I still don't get it she said. *What the devil*
have I done wrong? I thought you'd be singing my praises
but now you say you always thought total
dedication to purely spiritual goals —

the path that you set me on — for me
would be merely a transition. What
is that supposed to mean? If there are any
further goals behind these, goals for which one
would have to give up the most magnificent
and hard-won thing on earth, namely freedom,
then I hope to stay in transition because
I won't give up my freedom for anything.
No one can be happier than I am now.
What I need from you is not your advice.
I need your trust. Not in the usual sense
but trust that whatever I do or don't do
it will be within the circle of what we share.

6

The rarest and most glorious relationship created by eros
consists she said in the loved friend remaining the means through which
our own deepest desires are fulfilled, the strongest contradictions of life
resolved: both of you in the realm of what for each is divine,
sharing the mutual loneliness to make that loneliness
so profound that you see yourself open within the beloved other
to everything procreatively human, protected by your friend from ever losing
that sense of loneliness, protected even from one another,
the ecstasy which transfigures you both turned not upon one another
but towards an object of mutual desire that lifts you above
being into a spiritual realm of your own shared vision.

7

Objectivity no less than love is a willing opening to
the darkness inside us which insisting on our shared roots in the universe
has never ceased denying isolation.

No matter what else was going on
we could always she said touch our love and understanding of animals —
beings not yet self-conscious as for better or worse we are.

The more one is inclined towards eroticism the longer one is able
to withstand the demands involved without generating conflict between
the satisfaction of desires and accommodation to reality:

such persons (those who fulfill not those who abstain) thus are she said
capable of abstaining even longer because they know how close they are
to their inner sanctum and having not split themselves into body and soul can gather

as human beings into a single vital strength able since

the most intimate and most transcendent are both divine to believe
that joining into another is to in some way embrace the whole.

8

The most ideal love can become sensual again
precisely because in its purest state the great emotions are released;
it is she said an unpleasant fact this revenge of the body.

9

On her deathbed she listened to a young professor read
of latest trends in philosophy — modern efforts to put
our individual existences into the center of thought
rather than imposing any rational systems —
yet heard little new except names of men and names for forms
eternally returned that she and those close to her
had struggled with what seemed not so very long ago.

Once she looked up suddenly and said in a surprised voice
All my life I have done nothing but work . . . work. Why?
Towards the end her eyes closed and she murmured as if talking to herself
If I let my thoughts roam I find no one. The best after all is death.