

As with a Tempest So with Love

*the greatness of a person
is their intensity
- 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 do 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 humans it joins with mental effects
associated with nervous excitement which leads to romantic
idealizing of love then demands it be permanent,
eternal faithfulness from those we love though we know
quickly appeased animal needs clamor for change;
habitual performances by deadening
the stimuli increase 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 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

The most primitive form of union between living beings
is the fusion of single-celled organisms
the mind in its dream of perfection calls love.
A boy and a girl in love desire she said
such a total merging and are bewildered to find
they have to make do with a single part.

But then desire itself brings about something like
the total merging again as each separate organ,
each cell of the body in the sexual moment
remembers its descent from what was once
a one-celled animal and all the cells
are swept up in the excitement of the sexual cells.

Total surrender she called it, which in humans
must (for anatomical reasons) be partial
and because partial, often 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
so completely. And then her almost startling frankness:
she would discuss her most intimate private affairs with nonchalance.

I hesitate to use this word said one because
I never compliment those whom I respect, but still,
on the basis of her innermost essence, I call her a gem.

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.

She has dared to travel said one to the farthest horizon
of thinkable, moral and intellectual worlds, a genius

of heroic character in spirit and disposition.

I know of no one else said one with life so much on their side.

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

No woman said one has radiated a stronger influence
in German-speaking lands in the past 150 years.

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. In the name of the three devils
what have I done wrong? I thought you would praise me for this
but now you say you always thought total dedication
to purely spiritual goals — the path you set me on —
for me would merely be 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.
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, trust in the sense
that whatever I do or don't do it will be
within the circle of what we two share.

6

The rarest and most glorious relationship
created by eros consists she said in the partner remaining
the means through which our own deepest desires are fulfilled,
both of us in the realm of what for each is divine,
sharing the mutual loneliness in order to make it
so profound that you see yourself within the other,

open to everything procreatively human,
the ecstasy which transfigures you both, turned toward
an object of mutual desire that lifts you

into a spiritual realm of your own shared vision,
protected by your friend from ever losing that sense
of loneliness, protected even from one another.

Where love would be more than a sensual or sentimental
pastime — a coalescence with the cosmos, a sensation
of absorbing and being absorbed — each lover will tend
to experience everything through the medium of the other and thus
become the beloved spouse sibling parent friend
playmate judge compassionate angel all at the same time.

7

A woman doesn't die of love
but if she lacks love, she wilts.

Unrequited love dies of starvation,
requited love dies of satiation.

No path leads from sensual passion
to mental sympathy, but many the reverse.

For woman, the sensual moment is
the last word in love, for men the first.

The difference between man and woman:
anxious sperm and indolent ovum.

Not to have loved is not to have lived.
To be one, two must remain two.

8

For woman she said love is the whole of existence. For her,
sexual means something spiritual: her union is with God;
the man, like Mary's carpenter, merely helps her reach her desire.
Ethical and beautiful, like sacred and sexual,
can mean the same thing, kindred terms wherein are expressed
the prerogatives and limitations of the female.

Everything is included in this single truth: she must
in every case begin anew the conflict of her inner life,
the enigma of her being, and resolve it on her own initiative.
That is why grace in the highest sense remains the criterion
of her success and of her physical and maternal value.
The insane fascination with submission, the strongest impulse in us all.

9

Eros attracts, eroticism seduces,
sexuality is common, love almost
mystical: distinctions which depend
on whether one finds self-expression in
our innocent physical natures, satisfaction
in a pleasure as elemental as breathing, or whether
with our whole being we honor the mystery
of our relationship to all living things.

The lover and the creator are both characterized she said
by their own naive ecstasies (the objective value
of which is quite impossible to calculate), the need
of consciousness to catch in a single view
the mirrored confrontation between world and self:
primordial spontaneous creation of the divine,
an act of creative imagination: a magical
sublimation, the mind's sacrament of redemption.

10

Throughout my life no desire has been more instinctive
than that of showing reverence as if all further
relationships to persons or things could come only
after that initial act. Anything that is
bears within itself the whole weight of existence
the totalizing union we feel within ourselves.

Since both the most intimate and most transcendent are divine,
the more lovers are inclined towards eroticism — because
they then know how close they are to the inner sanctum,
and haven't split themselves into body and soul — the more
they can gather into a single vital strength and believe
that joining into another is in some way to embrace the whole.

11

Religion Sex Art — creativity
a religious intimacy known to artists and lovers,
what as a child she called God the Father and later,
depending on the situation and how much Spinoza
was on her mind at the time, Reality World
Union Love a boundless community of fate,
anything identical with everything.

Just as mysticism in its highest ecstasy
can reach a coarsely religious sensuality

so too the most ideal love can become
sensual again precisely because of its
emotional intensification of the ideal.
An unpleasant fact this revenge of the body she said,
a false pathos where the feelings lose their truth and candor.

12

The rapture of love she said differs from lifelong union.
There is a difference between looking for a friendly attachment
and searching for a wedded fusion. In the latter case not only

is a distinctly higher profound fondness included
but the desire and ability to relinquish one's own
individual being. It isn't a question of committing

but of being committed — something in us already
which unites and weds us something which lies beyond
friendly interests, much deeper and higher

a matter of realizing whether we already belong
in (not only to) one another in
an almost religious or at least purely ideal sense.

Love itself she said is of course not purely ideal
but I never understood why people whose love consists
primarily in sensual attraction get married.

13

In love as in anything else ultimate success
will remain the rare accomplishment of exceptional beings
predestined by birth. The supreme and rarest achievement she said
is not to discover the unknown or proclaim the incredible
but to explore day-to-day existence, the richness
of its full potential in the human spirit.

14

In her seventies, her one official marriage in mind
— agreed to in her mid-twenties under what she called
an irresistible compulsion, and only after
the groom's consent (at her implacable insistence)
to cohabitation forever unconsummated
in the flesh yet extramarital relations ad lib —

she wrote that though we can be close in thought
memory dreams imagination, in love

we must prove our oneness by consummating
it bodily. But this proof she said
cannot overcome the ultimate isolation
of each one within oneself.

15

On her deathbed, acknowledging her lifelong urge
to interpret all things for the best and happiest,
her lifelong proclivity to equate the highest and most
creative experiences with the deepest ones,

aware that as soon as she was gone or maybe before,
the Gestapo would confiscate all her books and papers,
she listened while a young professor read of latest trends
in philosophy — Jaspers, Heidegger, current

efforts to put individual existences
at the center of thought rather than a rational system,
emphasizing that *angst* is the one and only means
to attain insight into our authentic being —

she understood perfectly yet heard little new
except names of men and terminology for forms
eternally returned that she and those closest to her
had articulated what seemed not so very long ago.

Once, near the end, she looked up suddenly and said
in a surprised voice All my life I've worked . . . and for what?
Eyes closed, she murmured as if to herself,
If I let my thoughts roam I find no one. The best after all is death.