

Trifecta

I. In true love

*Ultimately, one loves one's desire
not the thing desired
- Friedrich Nietzsche*

1

In true love the soul embraces the body
he said quoting that old French saw,
then old Benjamin Constant: 'Of all feelings
love is the most egoistic and in consequence
is when crossed the least generous';
love and greed the same animal instinct
called by two names maybe the most
ingenuous expression of egoism,

for while love in woman is a wish to surrender,
to be taken, and in man possessive thirst
(woman gives herself, man accepts,
acquires, and requires ever more of her),
it is for both a carousel brass ring
glorified and deified by culture
(our concepts formed by society and language
our sense of self a mask of civility)

and while man in love is delusional,
a slave, woman in love becomes more perfect,
an actress adept at appearances, artistry,
playing gender roles, embodying
the dionysiac magic of action at a distance
(an art akin to his own of poetry)
moving offstage the reality of our bodies
that under the skin by no means inspire love

and while woman's intellect is perfect
control, presence of mind and utilization
of advantage, man's dwells in the darkness of will
— from woman intelligence, from man heart
and passion (women often amazed at the honor
men pay to woman's heart) though his passion may be
for things more than people — from him rhythm
and harmony, from her melody.

2

I want more and more he said to see as beautiful
what is necessary, not to wage war against
what is ugly, not to accuse even those who accuse,
but to be one who makes things beautiful,
my only negation to be looking away.
My formula for greatness in a human being
is *amor fati*: to want nothing different —
not merely to bear it, but to love it.

3

We were friends who had become estranged,
but this was right and we do not want
to conceal and obscure it from ourselves
as if we had reason to feel ashamed. We are
he said as two ships, each with its goal.
Our paths may cross and we may celebrate
a feast together as we once did
when the two ships rested in a harbor so close

it may have looked as if they had reached their goal.
But then the force of our tasks drove us
into different courses and different seas
and we may never see each other again
may pass each other at night wholly unknowing,
or meet without recognizing one another
our separate paths into different waters
under different suns having changed us so.

As long as we know the word *knowledge* the world can be known
but is subject to interpretation which means we must
in a society of individuals detached
but for the legal fiction of equality,
under compulsion to imagine concepts,
forms, ends and laws, adapt that world
to ourselves so we feel adequate to it,
so our existence is possible

4

Law and religion cognate *forma* — *dharma*:
good form, bound by rule of custom;
a sense of duty to the status quo;
a reverential attitude towards the holy.
Out of such abysses one returns
newborn, having shed one's skin,
more ticklish and sarcastic more childlike
yet a hundred times more subtle.

II. As with a tempest

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, efforts

to put individual existences
rather than a rational system at the center of thought,

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.

III. Seeing in another tongue

Only this: letting each other go
- Rainer Maria Rilke

1

Seeing in another tongue points of multiple view
a trickle of light below the ear more or less
musical, non-euclidean, a mirror
porous as a sponge absorbing more than it reflects,
image to tangential image on the edge of obsessive
hope or faith or both in one another and sweet
nothings inhabiting the emptiness furnished
with mortuary art silently protesting
our undying love to the point of necrophilia.

2

The melancholy of the myth, love collapsing
back into itself: the rose the unicorn
the reverse pathos of a maiden dying in the mirror

incomprehensibly intersect she said
and so will produce erotic melancholy,
this perplexing tangle unfurled only

in response to another's loving comportment
who alone legitimates, in a manner
we can bear, our body as us.

3

The world is retracting into itself,
even the things themselves are complicit.
You know and understand.
I want to love the things he said
as no one has thought to love them
until they're worthy of you and real.

4

I'll be true to my memories
I once told myself but never

to other people. And you years later

wrote of me in a prayer to God
Who are you and who am I
if our minds are not as one.

5

I did put so indescribably much hope
in at last achieving the proper loving attitude
toward a human being because with that he said
all distances would have been put in proper order:
the one toward the world would again equal infinity
the one toward one's own body zero
and in between all numbers in divine gradation.

6

His spiritual being was so detached from all
personal experience of him
it was she said almost impossible
to tell whether he was standing before me
in the flesh or only a memory.

7

An exaggerated attentiveness has moved
myriad separate details up close to me
in larger-than-life proximity and interposed
relationships between me and my body that keep it
in a state of continual excitation. The havoc
has gotten into every vein, every muscle
has received a spacious bulge. The body with all
its ancestral horrors. Like a little anemone
I once saw in a garden in Rome opened so wide
during the day it could no longer close at night,
I too am hopelessly turned outward
distracted by everything. My senses without asking me
attach themselves to anything intense, so I
want to be disturbed and am, without end.

8

The physical discomfort the way you describe it
is certainly and absolutely neurasthenic.
While you are perpetually feeling sick and miserable,
you also perpetually find expressions for that experience

and those expressions, in the distinctive form you give them,
would be quite impossible unless somewhere inside you
there is a flowing together, an experiencing in unison
of what you feel as one impulse fleeing outward and another

burrowing inward . . . those words with which you articulate
this condition are nothing if not *works*, works accomplished,
the coming about of the deepest unities in you
at the mercy of the body intrinsic to the work of art.

9

Art is the dark wish of all things.
They want to be images of our secrets
concealed and revealed so similar have they become.

10

Ultimately the final cause of all this
she said is displaced creative imagination
roaming around where there is no place for it.
Instead of psychoanalysis, she prescribed
that he give himself up to his worst forgotten memories.

Everything within you she said must become image,
an externality, something perceivable,
a work of art almost, because of the inwardness
of everything that happens to you. Try to be
tolerant of all the quirks of the body that can't be avoided,

the body being what it is: ignorant
and easily frightened and at the mercy of everything
imaginable. And try not to blame it if it sometimes
seems intent on subverting what your innermost being
is trying to accomplish — namely, outward articulation.

It will go on tormenting you; many things will,
and many will cause you pain, but be calm, be calm.
If you can get past the physical discomforts,
if you work, you'll always be sound at heart.
Be calm she said go toward your dark god.

11

Are these symptoms of the long convalescence that is my life?
The signs of a new illness? God knows that your being
was the door through which I first found my way out to freedom.
My need for someone who can help me, stand by me.
If only we could see each other. That is my great hope for now,
my support, my everything, as always I keep telling myself
that it is you alone through whom I am linked to the human,
in you it is turned toward me, senses me, breathes on me.

12

That distance from you of which you write should not exist.
I feel strongly both this purely spatial distance
and the senseless fact that it will not be bridged.

The magic of our subterranean connection
does remain with me and would persist
even if neither of us were aware of it.

It should be possible for us to be together
on invisible paths without any effort at all,
ought to be possible and one day perhaps will be.

For me it or something close to it already exists.
When I read your letter I do have you here with me,
to me it is as if you are still here.

Often, often I am with you in my thoughts and discover again
and again such fullness, so together with you during this
entire time that it feels odd having to write to you.

13

Loving neither strenuously nor patiently
but absolutely we need he said so much more
than understanding to realize the world (to raise it
from its sullen numbness into consciousness)
we need as well to be guardians of one another's
solitude to know among other things
(growing our deaths inside us like a talent or a tumor)
that differences aren't absolute, that everything
and part of everything (life and death included)
lie as colors do in a continuum,

but love is always freezing up into a mirror of itself
watching our every move making impossible
a viable life between imperfect men and women
by putting the burden of salvation solely on relationships
then trying to compensate with visions of realms
where one may dwell in peace forever if one will simply
not desire flesh of beast or beautiful lover
nor mop floors dandle babies masturbate
gamble curse nor condone such bodily functions for
without God the only transcendence left to us is
erotic and spiritual love between mortal women and men.

14

Your gift was always toward
expression of the almost ineffable,
temptation or seduction toward heavenly heights

while I myself never possessing
she said any strength but the one
innate in all happiness

became contorted overstrained
tortured (manic compulsions without
the compensating drive for truth),

continued to walk by your side
only automatically
mechanically could not put forth

any full warmth but only
my own nervous energy
unable to actuate what love does

when the heartbeat enters

into the rhythm of great love
transforming inside and outside

into a totally new union
comprehending suddenly
its entire treasure and leans

over it as over a bride
difficult and glorious
standing on the side of life.

But then, after we parted, despite
feeling an almost tragic guilt
toward you, I grew younger,

without knowing it I obeyed
the great plan of my life: only now
can I be entirely myself.

15

For two whole years I have been living increasingly in the midst
of an alarm whose most probable cause is a self-induced stimulation.
Just when I think I've overcome the temptation to indulge,
invariably, with devilish obsession, I exacerbate it.
It is a horrible circle, a ring of evil magic
that encloses me as in a Hell of Brueghel.
I don't know how I can go like this.

16

It is because your feelings of guilt are tied to it
and have been since childhood that it's had such a bad effect.
As children we're plagued by a moralizing guilt; then,
when that's outgrown, this guilt invades the processes
of the body engendering a hysterical tendency
toward the pathological in whatever organ it chooses.

Morbid attention to and interest in that organ
can be a kind of self-love but in your case is
lack of desire, the torture and quasi-hate
toward one's own body which are felt because the organ
has no erotic qualities; it has been robbed
of its natural function and once disturbed will avenge itself.

The vast grace which uses those infantile forces,
the creative discharge into the work of art, the excess
that makes everything one, the tipping-over into the tormented,
the forsaken, has been from the first intrinsic to the work.
You are in pain; through your pain transposed
to the page I feel bliss; forgive me for this.

17

Often I worry that at any moment pain can erupt:
so great is my dread of the body's abuse of the soul.
Because I was fortunate enough to meet you

at a time when I was in great danger of losing myself
in formlessness the world lost its clouded aspect.
Slowly and with difficulty I learned to love simple things,
found peace only in animals, safety in the angels.

18

Your inner complications drew me to you
with a ravishment that never abated. Then haste
was needed for you to enter free and clear
upon your own artistic development.

In ardent grieving nearness I yet stood
outside that which links man and wife,
untouchably cut off from that which remained
to grow on into your, into my, dying hours.

19

To love is to become a world
in oneself in response to another,
two solitudes that protect,
border and greet one another.

Death is our friend. It brings us into
absolute and persistent presence
with all that is here, all
that is natural, that is love.

20

I hold this profound and unique experience that is you,
he who most deeply experiences all that defines
the essence of being human. It is truly my solace
to know that you can undertake such a secret journey
all the way here to me. But how should I convey
to you yourself that indescribable closeness?

How make available to you this strange
capacity of yours whether it comes from the bliss
of feeling yourself given over to all things or from
the terror of being mixed up with everything,
isolated and unclaimed? How persuade you of this
confident joy that it is you in both cases?

You were the first truly real person in my life
body and man indivisibly one
our friendship the fulfillment of our underlying marriage
siblings from a time before incest was a sacrilege.
I could have repeated verbatim the words in a poem
you wrote for me: *You alone are real.*

21

Things appearing to come together as time ran out
in his medieval redoubt on the Adriatic cliffs,
getting down the last apothegms of the angels
in sonnets elegies letters to loved ones,

unsure if so much masturbation was driving him mad
or was it the other way around, the madness first,
God he said is waiting to be born of the artist's conscience
in order to grant mankind their individual deaths,
a blessing denied the anonymous masses who are not free,
to love human being our most difficult task,
to recognize the sanctity of poverty,
the divinity of death, deity
as all that demands our cherishing our shamed pity
our unswerving unrelenting dedication
our imagined experience of perfect love
the concentrated reality of all creation.