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**FALLING IN LOVE AND LOVING**

## CHAPTER ONE

*We fall in love.* We say it, but what does it mean?

To capture the essence of this only partially-charted emotional territory, at once familiar and enigmatic to us all, we need to think in a new way. Admittedly, the rule in most scholarly work is to build up gradually to a revolutionary definition, but I think that to do so would be less than useful here. I want to entice you to think in a new way straight off. At the same time I naturally aim to be as precise in my language and theory-making as possible, seeing that an accurate definition for the state called ‘falling in ‘love’ means reaching, with all due respect, beyond the traditional realms of psychology, sociology, and art. But this is important because our ‘falling in love’ is *not* an instance of sexual sublimation, nor a phenomenon of everyday life, nor a trick of the imagination—it is something very different. Falling in love is a formative state; scientifically it may be termed “nascent”, meaning in more common language that

it is *the ignition state of a special collective movement made up of solely two individuals*.

I use the term “collective movement” intentionally because ‘falling in love’ is not an ungraspable, transcendental occurrence, divine or diabolic as the case may be. The experience of ‘falling in love’ shares the essential traits of any collective movement, which is a well-known sociological category, yet at the same time it retains its own unmistakable nature. No one would think, for example, to confuse it with such other examples of collective movements as the Protestant Reformation, the student protest movement of the 1960s, the Feminist movement, the Islamic movement led by Khomeini, or the No-Globals of today. It simply remains a special case within the same genre. Indeed, the great mass collective movements in history and the *ignition state of falling in love* are closely related in terms of the type of forces that they free up and set in motion, as well as in terms of the analogous experiences of solidarity and joy in life, or the feelings of renewal, which they stimulate. Their fundamental difference, on the other hand, lies in the fact that a very large number of people participate in these mass

collective movements, which are also open to any others who may care to join them. In so far as ‘falling in love’, however, is a collective movement with just two participants, it embraces only them and appeals to the universal values that only they hold. This exclusive aspect makes ‘falling in love’ both a singular state and, on account of certain of its features, an unmistakable one.

Sociologists have already studied collective movements in detail and described the specific sort of experience they represent. Durkheim is one of the first to come to mind. His analysis of states of collective excitement is this: “A man who experiences such sentiments feels himself dominated by outside forces that lead him and pervade his milieu. He feels himself in a world quite distinct from that of his own private existence. This is a world not only more intense but also qualitatively different. Following the collectivity, the individual forgets himself for the common objective and his conduct is oriented in terms of a standard outside himself...[These forces] need to overflow for the sake of overflowing, as in play without any specific objective...At such moments, this higher form of life is lived with such intensity

and exclusiveness that it monopolizes all minds to the more or less complete exclusion of egoism and the commonplace.”\* When he wrote these words, Durkheim was not thinking at all about falling in love. He had in mind the French Revolution and other great revolutionary events. In truth, however, the experience which he describes above extends beyond these. It characterizes not only great historical developments like the French Revolution and the spread of Christianity or Islam, but also historical movements smaller in scale. Indeed, it is present in the initial phase (which we are calling the ‘ignition state’) of *all* collective movements, and that includes, most curiously, that of ‘falling in love.’ We find another similar description of this experience in Max Weber’s study of social phenomena which generate much creativity, enthusiasm and fervent belief. In Weber, however, they become manifestations of power; in other words, something that depends on the emergence of a

\*Emile Durkheim, “Value Judgments and Judgments of Reality” in *Sociology and Philosophy*, trans. D.F. Pocock (Chicago: Free Press, 1953), pp.91-92

charismatic leader.\*\* With his appearance of the scene, this leader breaks with tradition, drags his followers into a heroic adventure, and inspires in the latter the experience of inner rebirth and radical change in outlook of the sort which Saint Paul termed “metanoia”.

Under the charismatic leader’s guidance, economic concerns give way to the unhampered pursuit of faith and ideals and to a life filled with enthusiasm and passion. Weber attributes all these things to the leader—that is, to the particular traits of the leader. In essence, he makes the same mistake each of us makes when we fall in love: we attribute the extraordinary experience we are having to the traits of the person we love, when in reality the person we love is not any different from others (any more than we ourselves are). The impression that this person is so extraordinary and unique-seeming actually stems from the nature of the extraordinary experience that we are going through and from the type of relationship that has come to exist between us and our beloved. At a deeper level, these same things render *both* of us different and extraordinary.

Here, then, is our point of departure. In both history and society there is this special phenomenon

called ‘a collective movement’ that causes the relationships between individuals to change radically and which transforms the quality of life and experience. Sometimes it signals the beginning of a new religion, such as in the case of Islam, Christianity, and the Protestant Reform, whereas at other times it accompanies the rise of a sect or a heresy, or else trade union or student movements. Last but not least, there is the sort of movement that witnesses the creation of a new collective “us” made up of only two people, as happens when we fall in love. In an existing social structure, the movement divides whoever was united and unites whoever was divided to form a new collective figure, an “us”, which in the case of those who have fallen in love is made up of the couple to the exclusion of all others. Yet in both broader collective movements and that of the couple, the forces at work display the same patterns of violence and pre-determination.

\*\*Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich (Totowa, N.J.: Bedminster Press, 1968) vol. 3, chap 14)



Up to now most sociologists, psychologists, and philosophers have seemed averse (perhaps out of embarrassment) to admitting to there being a common if not identical thread linking great historical processes like Islam or the Russian or French Revolutions to such a private everyday occurrence as that of two people falling in love. It is perhaps a question of professional pride: they'd prefer to study only large-scale phenomena, those big important things at the crux of human social life. For them, the love between two ordinary middle-class people or two teenagers, between an elementary-school teacher and a park maintenance worker, or between a middle-aged man and his secretary, must seem so paltry and dreary, so devoid of importance that it has never occurred to them that the same forces that they study might be at work in these passions as well.

A similar thing happened many years ago with biology—biology as it used to be studied. It was believed that first, at the top of the pyramid, there was man, king of all creation and made in God's image; then came the higher animals—the marvelous horse and magnificent lion; and at the very bottom, there were the worms, ants, and

mollusks. Yet today we know that every animal has the same cellular structure, the same proteins making up its cells, the same DNA, and the same synapses between its nerves. Of course, man and the higher animals are different, and we know very well how to distinguish a horse from a worm. The difference really derives from the fact that in the former the basic biological, biochemical, and genetic structures or processes are incorporated into far more complex systems than in the latter. Without belaboring the point, we can say that to understand things in our world we need to study both the identical structures or processes and those that are completely different.

The experience of falling in love is the simplest sort of collective movement, one we aren't about to confuse with the French Revolution, say, or the carryings on of the first Protestants. Nor are we tempted, for that matter, to believe that a revolution consists in the sum of many enamoured individuals, for that would be like saying that a horse is made up of the sum of many worms, or that a horse *is* simply a great big worm. The two organisms are very different, and yet underneath it all they are both

members of the same animal kingdom and function biologically in the same basic way.

The definition that I began with—that falling in love is the ignition state of a collective movement involving two individuals—fits this mysterious human experience into a theoretical category (that of collective movements), at the same time that the discovery that the experience of falling in love is a collective movement offers us, inversely, a formidable tool for investigating the nature of movements themselves. After all, collective movements spontaneously arise only very rarely. A man may live his entire life without ever being involved in one, or he may be involved only once. Moreover, when we are dealing with thousands or millions of people, with all their economic and class interests, and with every possible ideological variation on the same, it becomes very difficult to study the elementary processes at work. The intimate event of falling in love, on the other hand, is something we all know about firsthand, something we can describe and relate to others. It seems reasonable, therefore, that an ample analysis of what happens when we fall in love will open the door to an understanding of vastly more complex

processes that go beyond the realm of an individual's immediate grasp on experience.

Having said that, it is an issue that sociologists, philosophers, and historians should be addressing and not this book. We want to focus our attention more intensely now on our real subject: the collective phenomenon that we term "falling in love." That means immersing ourselves in this experience in order to pinpoint one or more of its distinctive aspects. To do that, we must shed any vestige remaining in our minds of the commonly-held misconception that falling in love has exclusively to do with sexuality and everyday life. I want to start by talking first about precisely that aspect of sexuality in fact, because it is here that the crucial difference between ordinary and extraordinary experience really emerges. And this is so important because the state that we call 'falling in love' belongs, like all collective movements, to the realm of the extraordinary.

## CHAPTER TWO

Many people think that the difference in the sex drives of human beings and animals consists in the fact that animal sexuality is cyclical—it explodes during mating season and then disappears, whereas that of human beings is constant and ever present; if it doesn't always seem highly intense, moreover, it is because it's repressed. In this way sexuality gets lumped in that class of “basic needs”, together with eating and sleeping, which are present always in the same measure day in and day out. This idea about sexual desire became wide spread when psychoanalysis started to appear in its popularized form. At the start, Freud himself thought that sexuality was the basic most pulse of vital energy that he was looking for in the human psyche. Seeing that we are active living beings, this form of vital energy must be taken to be a constant. On this “given” are constructed all the various theories about the “sexual unhappiness” that stems from repression and domination which, ever since the obscure reflections of Reich and Marcuse, have come to characterize the findings of countless public opinion surveys.\*

What is repeatedly being discovered in these opinion polls? That men and women have sex rather briefly for a limited number of times each week, and almost always with the same partner. The sort of sexuality being practiced here is continual yet at the same time minimal and anything other than intense. I repeat: an activity akin to eating and drinking. And yet the impression persists that it doesn't have to be like this, that everything could in reality go quite differently. Where does this undying certainty that we feel come from?

The answer I think is this: that all men and women have had periods in their lives when sex was frequent, intense, extraordinary, and exalting, and they would like it always to be this way. These extraordinary periods are the standard against which we (and the public opinion polls) measure the daily, ordinary sex which we perform almost

\*Giampaolo Fabris and Rowena Davies, *Il mito del sesso* (Milan, Mondadori, 1978), p. 367.

by rote. Now if we think carefully about the fact that we have all experienced brief periods of extraordinary sexuality and long periods of the ordinary kind, we have to conclude that, in reality, human sexuality is not something constant like eating or drinking. For though it is always there in its *ordinary form*, like our other ‘basic needs’, it assumes a totally different, *extraordinary* form and intensity in certain periods—those times when we fall in love.

Human sexuality is *not* cyclical biologically-speaking, but it *is* discontinuous, just like in animals. Also, it is manifested in all its magnificence only during extraordinary periods as we’ve said, in love and in the mating season. At these times, our sexual desire seems inexhaustible and yet possible to completely satisfy. We live for days on end totally absorbed in the person we love, and the last thing we’re thinking about is how many times or for how long we’re “having sex” with him or her. Indeed, each glance or thought addressed to him or her, like the slightest touch, has an erotic charge for us that is a hundred if not a thousand times greater than that which we experience during ordinary “sexual relations.”

At such times our physical life of the senses expands and becomes more intense. We detect smells that we weren't aware of before; we perceive shades of color and light which we usually take no notice of. Our mind expands as well, and thanks to our new powers we perceive relationships or connections which were lost on us before. We also understand an immense amount from the gestures, looks, or movements that the person we love may happen to make; in them we can read the story of his or her past and even childhood. We understand all his or her feelings, and we understand finally our own. We can distinguish between what is sincere and false in others and in ourselves because we have become more sincere. At the same time we are capable of creating a universe of private fantasies endlessly played out around the person we love. Impetuous sexuality, in the sense of an overwhelming desire for pleasure and to give pleasure, characterizes all our interactions with him or her. Our love embraces everything about this person, even what is concealed inside his or her body—and I mean the organs too—the liver, say, or the lungs.



The sexual act, then, becomes a desire to be inside the body of the person we love; to dwell there and also find him or her dwelling inside us in a total fusion that extends beyond the physical and may be expressed as tenderness about his or her shortcomings or naivete or weaknesses. We are even capable of feeling love for or moved by a hurt or cut that he or she has, which becomes for us a source of sweetness. All this is directed at one and only one person. It doesn't matter really who this individual is; what is important is that our falling in love unleashes a violent force that binds the two of us like atoms and makes each of us unique and irreplaceable to the other. That person we are in love with has become the sole special and at the same time suitable partner for us. All of this occurs without our being able to stop it even if we want to and despite our continuing, and possibly long-lasting feeling that, when it comes down to it, we can get by without him or her and find the same sort of happiness with someone else.

But it isn't true. A brief separation is enough for us to realize that we receive something special and unmistakable from that person we have fallen in love with, something that we'd always been looking

for and that can only come from him or her; if he or she leaves us, it will be lost to us again and this time forever. We are so convinced of our lover's uniqueness in this regard that we may fix on some small thing about his or her person—hands, a crease that his or her body makes, the voice, the shape of her breasts or whatever, because this is a private symbol for us of our lover's distinctive specialness, at the same time that it is also the indelible sign of his or her intrinsic charisma. Eros—which is to say this extraordinary sexuality—is in effect monogamous.

The facts, therefore, show us that our sexuality really does manifest itself in the two ways mentioned previously, one of which is ordinary and everyday and the other of which is extraordinary and discontinuous. The latter only occurs at special times, which is to say when we fall in love in that passionate, all-consuming way. If *ordinary sexuality* is what we experience when our life unfolds linearly and like clockwork, *extraordinary sexuality* is ours when our inner vital energy begins to flow along new and fantastic pathways. Thanks to this sexuality we begin to explore new frontiers and limits on what is possible in life and to expand our

imagination and nature: this all takes place in what we've termed *the ignition state*.

Intimately fused as it is with our intellect, imagination, sense of enthusiasm, and passionate emotions, this experience of extraordinary sexuality usually causes us to subvert, transform or break the previous bonds that we had. Though limited to two people, Eros is a revolutionary force. And revolutions don't happen every day. This means that the experience of extraordinary sexuality is not something we can obtain through the force of our will. Because it signifies a vital change, or an attempt at vital change, in us, its realization is full of risks and pitfalls. This Eros is a source of constant aspiration and longing for us, at the same time that we are afraid of it. To protect ourselves we use the same word to indicate both Eros and the humdrum sexuality which represents our usual daily fare, or the "bread and butter" of sex which constitutes the subject of those opinion polls with their unchanging conclusions. Though we learn nothing new from them, they serve to reassure us that other people are experiencing daily the same "sexual dreariness" in their lives.

Of course, these surveys are also deceiving. They essentially suggest that we will be happier if only we increase our number of lovemaking sessions from four to, say, ten times a week, or if we draw out these sessions over a longer time, or if we have sex with a multitude of partners. In reality, none of these changes will make any difference, because the ordinary humdrum sexuality enveloping sexual relations of this sort remains precisely that—ordinary. Anyone who has experimented these ways of ‘sprucing up his or her love life’ knows what I’m talking about. Furthermore, they quite possibly did so in an attempt to replace (for some reason) the one individual singularly capable of offering them the immense sense of peace and all-embracing wellbeing which sprang from those moments that the two of them spent together, moments experienced as eternity.

Accustomed as we are to measuring everything by the linear time of the clock, we tend to forget that time is experienced differently when we are in the throes of love, especially when we are taken up by the sort of extraordinary sexuality which is part of it. In Japanese Buddhism, the terms *nin* and *ten* refer to the two forms of happiness in life. *Nin* indicates

the sphere of peacefulness and daily serenity, while *ten* covers those extraordinary moments of intense emotion and love. *Nin*, therefore, is an attained state of joy, and one day of *nin* corresponds to a year lived in a restless world that is never at peace. A single day of *ten*, on the other hand, corresponds to a thousand or even ten thousand years of clock time. Yet in the *ignition state* of love, something even more marvelous than that occurs: the present is actually eternalized. If we ever lose our love, moreover, our sense of time continues to seem altered, and an hour's wait, say, seems to last years or centuries; the worst thing, however, is that nostalgia for that moment of eternity is always with us.

### CHAPTER THREE

Even the simplest and most backward person among us resorts to poetry, religion or myth to find words to express what he or she feels while falling in love. And though we might laugh at what comes out of his or her mouth, this doesn't change things

one bit. Indeed, religion and myth are just as much bound up as the collective movements we've talked about with the extraordinary experience that characterizes *the ignition state*. In poetry, though the love object may vary greatly from poet to poet (think of the psalms of David, versus the works of Dante or Rumi, say, where in the former it is the female figure to be mystically transfigured whereas in the latter it is God Himself to be pined for, and contrast all that with the love poetry by Neruda or Quasimodo, where the poet's homeland or peers or friends receive the main thrust of his attention), in all that poetry the tone, the feelings of hope, the sense of destiny, and pervading ethos are exactly the same. But the similarities don't stop there. We could, for instance, take a declaration of human rights expressed by the American Civil Liberties Union or by Amnesty International and put it unchanged into the mouths of two people who love each other but who have run up against a terrible obstacle that prevents them from being together. What we find here is the universal language of desire for something that is prized beyond all else; we find the universal expression of the concepts of freedom and rights. Here, moreover, is life itself

clamoring triumphantly to be heard and respected as the ethical basis for everything. What is established in every collective movement, and hence when we are in love, is established in opposition to customary interests and institutions; there is an intrinsic clash, and to bring that struggle off successfully, a new and equally strong foundation of values must be cemented into place. The fact that our 'falling in love' constitutes an inherent challenge to the institutions of the status quo points up its true nature: it is not some sort of private whim or indulgence but rather a movement made up of two people which both generates a new master plan for living and leads to the establishment of new (mini) social institutions (like that of matrimony) for the couple and others around them to respect.

All collective processes divide what had been previously united and unite what had been divided along lines established by tradition, customs, or institutions. At its start, Christianity separated numerous Jews from their traditional religion and many Romans from their imperial deities, only to bring then these Jews and Gentiles together. Islam tore the Egyptians away from their pharaoh worship and parted Persians from Zoroaster, in order to unite

Arabs, Persians, and Egyptians in a new way. When romantic love first appeared as a force to be reckoned with in the history of Western civilization, it, too, represented a violent rent, a form of separation from the past. Ancient tribal communities, primitive agricultural societies, and feudal states were all founded on the underlying principle of blood ties and kinship. As Lévi-Strauss has shown, this kinship system is based on bartering and the need to compensate for differences. One tribe, phratry, or clan offers a woman to another clan and receives another woman in exchange. The ultimate aim here is the formation of a new couple. The choice of a wife is a transaction between clans, who are usually the ones with the power of decision. Sometimes the individuals themselves choose, but they must select their spouse from within a certain clan. In the feudal world of the Middle Ages, the transaction took place between feudal families but only between certain families. With the decline of feudalism and the rise of the new bourgeoisie class, which signified the possibility of the many to accumulate wealth and achieve success—just as it also signified the advancement of culture and hence the opportunity to achieve renown and prestige in



various disciplines, these rigidly determined alliances weakened and it became possible for people *to reason* along different lines in terms of courtship and marriage. I repeat: it was now possible to *imagine* doing without the kinship system, whereas before even that had been unthinkable. On the other hand, the rules on which this system was based still existed and to violate them meant to commit a grave transgression that would be swiftly punished.

If at the base of all collective movements there is the fundamental dichotomy between the entrenched, surviving system of rules and institutions on the one hand, and on the other hand, the vast social transformations generating new classes, sources of power, and opportunities, all this is equally true of the process of falling in love. In feudal societies where the kinship system of relationships continued intact alongside the new arising bourgeoisie and heightened intellectual awareness, love began to ignite between a man and a woman who in theory belonged to two separate and mutually exclusive spheres. By seeking each other out nonetheless and uniting, they violated the

endogamic rules of all kinship- or class-based systems.

This was the case with Abélard and Hélöise, that famous couple whose love was the height of transgression and at the same time the story of a fundamental right—or value—denied. The love between them was undeniably sexual in nature—but it was not this sexual aspect to make it *love in its ignition state*; rather, it was how this how all this sexuality-love-passion-and-pleasure rolled up together asserted itself as a legitimate relationship even though it went directly against the kinship and class rules of that time. Abélard and Hélöise were eventually married as we know, but it was their love to give true legitimacy to their union. Centuries later, Shakespeare would portray in “Romeo and Juliet” an analogous case of forbidden union, this time between a young man and a young woman belonging to enemy families. Here too, love is presented as a form of transgression. It separates what was united (Juliet from her family, Romeo from his) and unites what was divided (two enemies).

Just as collective movements always spell change and a difference from the past, the

experience of falling in love always involves the *transgression* of a difference. There is no rule for what this difference or transgression will consist in: neither is fixed. Every case varies from the next, moreover. When in the modern world a teen-ager breaks away from his or her family, and from the emotional ties he or she has with his/her mother or father, the transgression is completely an inner one; this is the antithesis of what happened for hundreds and hundreds of years when that the experience of falling in love could only take the form of social transgression, i.e. the rupture of the conjugal couple, otherwise termed 'adultery.' Yet under it all, adultery, too, illustrates the general rule about what happens when people fall in love; and this, I repeat, is that this unique experience can *only* occur if it separates what was united and unites what had been supposed to remain divided. To use the terms coined by Lévi-Strauss when he came up with his theories of structuralism, love establishes a new system of difference and exchange.

When we think in these terms, we can begin to see the limitations of what Denis de Rougemont postulated over fifty years ago in his seminal work, *Love in the Western World*. He maintains that in the

West the experience of ‘falling in love’ has always been closely associated with thwarted or prohibited kinds of love, and that lovers want, even crave, these tremendous obstacles. They don’t really love each other, he says; they merely derive pleasure in being kept apart and only feel happiness when they are pining for the impossible. To give de Rougemont his due, it is undeniable that in many works of great literature love is represented as something obstructed or impossible (Dante, Petrarch, Shakespeare, Goethe, and others come to mind), yet the explanation for this most probably is that when there is no great obstacle or impediment to overcome there can be no ‘collective movement of two and only two people’, and *so no falling in love*. In other words, without some new, felt difference and without an obstacle to obstruct things, there is no need to establish another ‘system of difference and exchange’; there is no need to create ‘a new institution’ (which people perceive when the new couple becomes “established” and recognized.) In the world of fiction, this sort of obstacle represents a literary device, one used to construct a love story endowed with meaning. Literature, therefore, intrinsically generates

*imaginary* obstacles: the warring families in Shakespeare, Iseult's marriage in Wagner's *Ring*, the birth of the child in Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, Beatrice's death in Dante, and so on.

We will see later on how great literary works can help us understand two other essential elements of collective movements and hence of the experience of falling in love, for they often describe some profound *dilemma*, and at an even more fundamental level, the problem of perpetuating love's *ignition state*. At this early stage, however, it is more useful to focus not on what specific block to love might exist but rather on *the simple fact of its existence*. If at one time love was obstructed by the rigid rules of the kinship system, nowadays it might be a previous marriage, a political belief, a cultural or linguistic difference, a disparity in age, or a sexual difference (as in the case of homosexual love) to constitute a barrier. In any and all of these cases, however, the experience of falling in love will always mean the construction of something new out of two previously separate parts.

Let's go back for a moment now and look more closely at all those bonds which exist for an individual before everything gets overturned as a

result of his or her falling in love. What kind of relationship did he or she have with their family, social class, church, spouse, or 'ethnic or linguistic group'? Presumably, these relationships were pleasant, or at least acceptable, at the start; they could, moreover, be termed 'normal' or 'legitimate'. And yet, in all human relationships, no matter what kind they may be, there is always a more or less ample margin of dissatisfaction and disappointment. Though a child loves his parents and siblings and even the family as a whole, the family is ambivalently both an object of love and of resentment and aggression. In his theory of psychology Freud gave crucial importance to this factor of ambivalence: we know that the Oedipus complex is the manifestation of ambivalence toward the mother and the father, who are loved, certainly, but also hated. At the same time, this hatred and rancor are not openly manifested. Even though there is ambivalence, the image of father, mother, and family remains positive and intact. And this happens because we feel the desire (or more correctly, perhaps, 'the necessity') to preserve the object of our love in a state that is as pure and uncontaminated ('unambivalent') as possible. The

image that the child constructs of his mother and father, like the image that the adult constructs of his church and political party, is the most perfect image possible. And he does everything he can to keep it perfect in his own eyes. To bring this off, he learns, on the one hand, to take out his aggression on himself and express it as a sense of guilt (which takes the form of depression), and, on the other, to explain the imperfection he sees by attributing it to an enemy. To him, his father gets angry because he works too hard; the nation or party or church is imperfect because inside or outside of it exist enemies who are wicked people (here a sense of persecution takes over). Thanks to these onsets of depression or feelings of persecution, his love object remains as close to idyllic as possible. He—like the rest of us—considers this compensating to be a normal state in life. However, when things around us change drastically, when we ourselves change (as in adolescence), when we encounter other possibilities or realities, or when our relationship with our love object deteriorates, it becomes more and more difficult to preserve this ideal image, which is fed by our on-going cycle of depression and unconscious projection. In both historical

periods leading up to the formation of collective movements *and* in the personal relationships that an individual is involved in prior to his or her falling in love, there is always a long preparatory phase under way, a time of gradual change and the slow worsening in the way beloved objects or loved ones are treated. During this phase, however, our defense mechanisms of depression and persecution remain intact and we continue with all our might to try to protect our idealized love object and so ‘sweep the problem under the rug’ as it were. As a result, the collective movement (or the powerful experience of falling in love) which follows comes as a complete surprise. “I don’t understand it. He (or she) was always so considerate, affectionate, and happy with me,” says the spouse who has been abandoned. In reality, the other was already looking for an alternative—looking *and* at the same time obsessively fighting off all temptation. He or she was trying consciously hard to continue loving his/her wife or husband and to keep seeing that person as perfect and worthy of love. All that effort, however, had a cost, however. She or he—the spouse who was about to walk out the door—was becoming more and more depressed and



uncommunicative. She or he had begun to direct as much aggression as possible against her/himself in order to increase the consuming sensation of self-sacrifice. (Let us remember that an idealized love object—like a god—will be sure to survive only if nourished by increasing sacrifices. And, to take the metaphor one step further, that this idealized love object begins like a pagan god by asking for the first fruits of the season but then comes to demand the entire harvest, after which the seminal seed of life itself, and finally the self-destruction of whoever has been doing the sacrificing.) This impulse towards self-destruction leads to a phase of *excessive depression*, a paralysis which precedes all collective movements as well as the regenerative experience of falling in love. In struggling with such feelings of self-destruction, one loses all sense of fear—as well as his inhibitions about things which once seemed like seductions to avoid but which now appear in a different light. Aren't they also a natural part of life? Is whatever it is that sets them apart as despicable as people say? This questioning process continues until it reaches a *threshold* beyond which Eros overflows the existing psychological structures that one has erected for himself and begins to flood

prohibited territories; the violence that was self-directed for too long also overflows as something uncontainable, obliterating the rules that had imprisoned and contained it. This, yes, is *the ignition state of love*. It liberates these two inner forces of Eros and violence. Eros impetuously infuses one's new love objects, which are instantly transformed into ideals, while that previously self-directed source of violence lashes out against all the sorts of restraints one had previously accepted and endured. The experience is one of liberation, fulfillment, and happiness. What had been only a possibility now unfolds as reality: that pure and unwavering object of Eros is ours. Our feelings of duty and pleasure coincide perfectly now. And that awful sense of alienation gripping us is a thing of the past.

## CHAPTER FOUR

As we've said, the experience of falling in love divides what was once united and unites what was divided. What is special and unique about this new union, however, is that it constitutes a *structural alternative* to an *already structured* relationship: though we already have a girlfriend or wife, a lover or husband, a mother to whom we are morbidly close, or 'a special friend,' the new structure in our lives radically challenges this old one and degrades it to something of no value. At the same time this new structure generates the new community that we perceive radiating out around us, founded on and legitimized by the absolute right and value of our love; indeed, every other part of our life is reorganized around it. This reorganization does not happen instantly but is a gradual process. What does happen instantly, however, is the revelation to us of our *pure object of Eros*, which we talked about in the last chapter. This moment, however, does *not* constitute our 'falling in love', in that the latter is actually made up of stages. During these stages, our pure object of Eros appears for an instant, then disappears, then reappears, then disappears once

again, finally bursting back on the scene in a still more enthralling, concrete form and at last overpowering us. Because of the long time it takes for this to happen, we tend to tell ourselves at length that we are *not* in love when in fact we are. After living that moment of extraordinary revelation, we return to our everyday lives and think that it was just something passing and ephemeral—“an instant crush” or whatever. Much to our amazement, however, it comes to mind again and causes us to feel tumultuous desire and longing as such only the sound of that special person’s voice or the sight of him or her can ease. But then it disappears again, and we tell ourselves once more that it was an infatuation, perhaps a bit stronger than the usual sort but ultimately meaningless. And this may in fact be true, in that at the beginning we cannot tell if we have actually fallen in love, if we have actually experienced a radical restructuring of our social world and of the perception we have of our relationships. And yet, if that desire continues to return *and overpower us*, we *are in love*. Falling in love is a process in which the other person, the one whom we have encountered and who has responded to us, overpowers us as an irresistible love object. It

is this fact that compels us to rearrange everything in our life and to rethink everything, starting with our past. In truth, it is not a rethinking but a remaking. *It is a rebirth.* The ignition state (whether of collective movements or of the personal experience of falling in love) grants us this extraordinary ability to reformulate our past.

By contrast, in our normal everyday life we cannot reformulate the past—we cannot touch it in any way. Our past exists intact with its disappointments, regrets, and bitterness. Still, when we return to this past in our memory, we inevitably try to heal some of the wounds that have remained open. Why wasn't I given what I needed so much? Why so much effort, so much suffering, and then so little recognition? Why didn't the person I loved so much love me in return? And why did I have to react with so much heated resentment and hatred to remove him or her from my mind? Years pass and our past continues to weigh on our conscience. Most of the time, to protect ourselves from it, we do all that we can to forget; we turn to various distractions; we sublimate our past to our unconscious. And yet, as Freud said, the unconscious is immortal. Nietzsche, moreover,

attributes human unhappiness to the spirit of revenge, and defines revenge as the hatred we feel towards our own past and towards the things about it that cannot be changed. The will “is sullenly wrathful that time does not run back,” says Zarathustra. “‘That which was’—that is what the stone which it cannot roll away is called.” But then Zarathustra, alluding to what Nietzsche terms the ‘noble’ man, or superman, promises liberation from precisely this terrible burden: “To redeem the past and to transform every ‘It was’ into an ‘I wanted it thus!’—that alone do I call redemption!”\*

What Nietzsche promises with his ‘superman’ is exactly what happens in the *ignition state* of our falling in love: the past is rewritten and relegated to history. The person in love (or often both lovers together) goes back over his or her past and realizes that what happened happened the way it did because at that time he or she made certain choices, and wanted to make them, but now he or she no longer does. The past is not hidden or denied; it is simply deprived of value. “Of course, I loved my husband (wife),

\*Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1961), p. 161.

and I hated him(her) too, but I don't hate him(her) any more. I made a mistake, but I can change and be happy." The past appears as *prehistory*, whereas true history begins now. As a consequence, resentment, rancor, and desire for revenge all vanish. What has no value and does not count cannot be hated.

Strange as it may seem, this experience often makes for anxiety and worry in lovers. Let's say that the woman I love begins to talk about her past to me or in front of me. She describes her old loves, or the man she is still married to or lives with. At first she talks about him in a burst of anger and resentment, then gradually all that changes to a sort of, well, tenderness. "He's been awful to me," she says, "But he loves me and I care about him. I don't want to make him suffer; I want him to be happy." In reality, these words indicate how detached from him she now feels (because all the tension, fear, and desire for revenge are gone), yet these same words can also be interpreted as a continuing love, and as much they may arouse jealousy. Things are furthermore complicated by the fact that a person who has fallen in love can often *continue* living with her or his spouse (if the other accepts such an



arrangement), without feeling any resentment or anger but only a kind of affection. Her or his past has acquired new meaning in light of her or his new love. If you like, she or he can continue to love her or his spouse precisely because she or he is in love with someone else. The joy of this love makes the husband or wife *seem* kind, gentle, and good. It is generally, however, the other lover not to accept this situation, and not to believe that things can really work this way. He or she also simply wants the person all to her- or himself. Still, things tend to balance out in the end, for seeing that underneath it all *both* lovers want this exclusivity and certainty, they are often forced to discard more than each of them would prefer to.

There is a second illusion that the joy of a new love tends to generate: a belief on part of a lover that the people he or she is leaving behind can accept his or her new love calmly and pacifically. This stems from his or her own feelings, in that since he or she feels no hatred or suffering any more, nobody else surely does or will. “Let’s stay friends,” he or she says with utter sincerity. He or she would even like to sit them down and tell them all about this new love—why not?—seeing that the

past feels already relegated to its place and he or she bears no grudges. This illusion is further buttressed by the fact that the new community that he or she is setting up is able to accept old things, old friendships, and old relationships, because it transforms them. There are, for example, people who prior to falling in love were not able to stand being with their parents or their children: it had actually come to that. Now that they are happily in love, however, they are once again capable of feeling profound tenderness towards them. And conversely, as I said before, since these lovers have shed all resentment and no longer set store by the past, they delude themselves into believing that others can and will do the same.

The truth is that this never happens. Indeed, even if the relationship has deteriorated to the point of total bitterness and hatred, the effect of one partner's falling in love is to provoke in the other who is being abandoned a tremendous welling up of desire, almost as if the latter were falling in love in turn, except that it's with this spouse who no longer needs him or her and is beyond feeling hurt or pain. Everything connected with this person, moreover, which had become so mundane and boring in

everyday life takes on vital importance again. This 'all' is of great significance if we stop and think of its institutionalized or social ramifications. The abandoned person's loss devalues everything she or he is—his or her values, self-image, and self-esteem. The one who has fallen in love does not realize how terribly he or she has hurt the person that he or she leaves behind, or that this person cannot forgive him or her. In place of the understanding the lover expected to receive, he or she encounters a brick wall: there is denial, desperation, shouting and screaming. All this seems incomprehensible to the lover, who in love has found a world of goodness which is joyously animated by love and full of bright beautiful things. With this attainment of his or her sought-after love object, every aspect of existence is effused with Eros and the forces of negativity and non-being are driven away. This fundamental experience of *the ignition state*, this realizing that '*being is*' and '*non-being is not*', is the same that was revealed to Parmenides at the start of Greek philosophy: it is that old and significant. Then again, so is the backlash reaction that it evokes on the part of the outside world or, in the case of collective

movements, of the social structure which has been upset: because all this represents loss and deprivation, the world must react by rejecting it, by saying “no.” In the private world of two individuals who have fallen in love, there might be a disappointed father who rants and raves or else withdraws into silence. Likewise, a husband who has consistently been unfaithful may discover the virtue of fidelity, or a wife who has let herself go and become frumpy and unattractive may now do everything she can to appear beautiful and interesting in a desperate effort to win back her husband. Even in “open marriages” based on the principle of sexual tolerance, the partner confronted with the reality of his or her spouse’s new love may turn rigid and inflexible, and inwardly feel mortally offended; as a consequence he or she will do what they can to complicate and hinder matters, by withholding their consent, say, or creating insoluble problems. A husband who can do nothing to truncate a new love may say, “All right, leave. But you’re not taking the kids. The kids stay with me.” And a wife may say, “So go with her, if you have to. But don’t think I accept this. You’re driving me to an early grave.” From these words emerges the

terrible truth that the new world of light and love, which owing to the power of *the ignition state* has embraced these people—this husband or wife, or these children, has its radiant image dashed to ruin because these people say “no” to its “yes” and because they impose a choice—“it’s either your new love or the kids’, or ‘your new love or my death’.

Yet love was not created to work harm or do evil: it’s not like love to cause the loss of children, or anyone’s suffering let alone death. Rather, love is designed to bring with it the establishment of a new community, which is to install itself around the lovers and allow for a likewise-new, happy living arrangement, one so ingenuously concocted that everyone feels comfortable with and fulfilled by it. The stark fact of others’ negative reaction, however, dashes these hopes for harmony and forces the lovers to make a choice between their old world and their new one. In a word, the whole process of falling in love is the process of first refusing to choose and then learning how to choose. In the early phase, in what we have called *the ignition state*, however, this asking lovers to choose assumes the dimensions of a full-scale dilemma. It would be like asking a mother whose two children have been

kidnapped to choose which of them must be killed. There is no solution, no way out. The presence of a *dilemma* is a constant, something that inevitably crops up in the course of any collective movement or in any private experience of falling in love.

As was the case earlier when I was talking about forms of transgression, here too it does not matter what specific sort of dilemma materializes. A moment ago I mentioned two dilemmas contained in that husband's reference to "the kids" and in that wife's pronouncement of "over my dead body", but there are countless variations on this theme; indeed, there is *always* a dilemma—if not present then lurking in the background—in every experience of 'falling in love'. Even in a fairy-tale which ends with a "they lived happily ever after", the concluding silence designates a return to everyday life and an end to dramatic tension and hence to pathos, but, also, it prevents the arising of any dilemma. We can contrast that to works of great literature, where the opposite tends to happen. There is often a very evident dilemma contained in the plot, one taking the form of some insuperable obstacle which renders love impossible. Tristram is torn between his affection for the king and his love

for Iseult; Iseult between her affection for the king and her love for Tristram. Both Romeo and Juliet want to rebel against the inexorable rules of kinship and the hatred imposed on them, yet they do not hate their next of kin. When we love we tend to consider people apart from the law (or rules of society). Certainly, this love prompts us to establish new rules and laws, but this does not mean that at the same time it tempts us to harm or destroy others. All love wants is to love. The problem lies in the fact, however, that laws are applied and incarnated by human beings, and those representing the old order are given to opposing the two lovers' claim to a new order and new rights. Since one can't rebel against the established order without harming or trampling on those who represent it, there is—unavoidably—this awful dilemma. And this dilemma cannot but destroy *the innocence* that there was at the beginning when one first fell in love. Of course, we all know people who claim that sexuality and erotic desire can be freed of this spectrum of an inherent dilemma; they treat it as a white elephant of history, the consequence of ignorance or class domination or a repressive upbringing or whatever. Unfortunately, they are making a big mistake. They

are creating a dreadful mystification of reality; they are inventing a consoling ideology. What they are doing is similar to what a person does when he preaches revolution but imagines this revolution as a great celebration of friendship and love. Naturally, there is a lot of celebrating of love in the “honeymoon phase” of a revolution, just as there is in the ‘revolutionary’ *ignition state* signaling the start of our falling in love. This is inevitably followed, however, by a time of difficulty, when the revolutionary movement meets with all sorts of internal and external obstacles. Somewhere along the way choices have to be made, as to where it is going and what kind of revolution exactly it is going to turn out to be. Since it is not a completely conscious process, it can only be hoped that a given revolution doesn’t produce a slaughter, bloodbath, or terrible atrocities on the order of the barbarities of Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, or others. On the other hand, to ignore the fact that innocent and passionate enthusiasm inevitably comes up against some looming dilemma is unconscionable, because it means giving way to unrestrained irrationality and violence. To return to the private sphere of two people in love, this dilemma and how it is faced and



resolved (or maybe it would be better to say ‘sidestepped’) is really what their or our ‘falling in love’ is all about. Telling about these things is to tell the story of our love. Not only how it began—how we “fell” for him or her—but also how that love settled over our life, becoming our life plan, and in its own right, an institution.

## CHAPTER FIVE

The *ignition state* of love reveals our affirmative side and puts us in the frame of mind of saying “yes” to another person, even though there is no compelling reason for, or guarantees forthcoming from, our saying it. Anyone who falls in love has already made a great many previous attempts and opened him- or herself up numerous times before, but something always went wrong; perhaps he or she simply wasn’t ready for love yet, or perhaps the other person failed to reciprocate. It might also be that the other person *does* respond—only then the question becomes whether it is a sincere and total response or not. It is impossible to know. The one who has fallen in love is not sure of his own

feelings, let alone those of the other. Nothing is certain. I repeat: when someone falls in love, he opens himself to a foretaste of a different existence without any guarantee that it will actually come to pass. The magnificence of this love experience, however, is unique and very very human; it offers moments of happiness and eternity, and fuels a consuming desire for more of the same, without once providing any security. All the same, when the person we love returns our love, we receive it like a fabulous unmerited gift that we never imagined could be ours. Marvel of marvels: this gift comes wholly from our loved one, and it is bestowed by his or her choice. In the language of theology this gift is termed '*a state of grace.*' For when a man loves a woman and she says that she loves him in return and makes love with him, and he then feels her total abandon, he is happy and time ceases to exist: he is in a state of grace and that moment is eternal to him. He will never forget it—will never be able to. If he feels his love is being returned, then the memory of that eternal movement will be enough to get him through all kinds of adversity and suffering. He will feel protected and motivated by his love. If one day, however, the woman he loves decides to leave him,

that memory, precisely because it remains immortal, will be the reason for his unhappiness, and everything else will seem like nothing in comparison to what he has lost. And that memory will endure until if and when another experience of falling love—another ignition state—happens and reformulates the past.

We are aware of the terrible risk that things will end that way, but when we fall in love we accept it. We accept it, that is, having refused to run that risk countless times before or making in any case very sure that a relationship never came to that. When at last we fall in love, however, it is as we have said: certain things are revealed and prevail. If at times we say ‘no’ it is because we know how it feels and what it means to say ‘yes,’ and because we have no guarantee that opening ourselves up like this is not opening ourselves to despair. So we say our ‘no’—we claim that what we experienced was only an illusion—but then our mind becomes clear as a mirror, and we can see how on the one hand there is this intrinsic source of goodness, while on the other there is only the nothingness of everyday life. At this point we make the conscious discovery that we are incapable of choosing what is

meaningless and unimportant to us; we discover that we will necessarily opt for such inherently precious goodness. By comparison, our empirical life of every day seems devoid of meaning and value. Furthermore, our desire for this source of goodness is such that we stop feeling any fear about the future. Though rationally we know that every time we see the man or woman we love may be the last one, all we desire is this being together—should it turn out to be the last time or not. This just underscores how the dimension in which love operates is always *the present*, for it is this perfect instant to outweigh the lover's entire past. Paradoxically, it is precisely because we are “making time stop” that the happiness we feel in love always contains a note of sadness, for in ‘stopping the clock’ we are sacrificing our daily certainties and holding back on all the things that we could be accomplishing if we were employing our talents and resources. In this way, our ‘making time stop’ brings us happiness, yes, but it also means giving up our control over things and in general declining to manifest pride or exert our strength, power, or will.

In art and literature, this plunging into a life with no certainty of the future, accompanied as it is by a stopping of time, is usually represented as death. Only a 'love that ends in death' can (as a literary device) give full expression to the uncertainties, doubts, and longings of a person in love, as well as to the way in which these come to find their way from the past or the future into the eternal present, that cathartic end-all. Death is thus the interpretation that Art gives to the end to all time as a person in love experiences it. When Goethe's young hero Werther dies, for instance, he 'stops time' for Lotte and himself. And there are many other examples. Death is a fascinating metaphor and device which effectively evokes the pain and suffering that accompanies our search for love and even makes us relive our longing and pining for the person that we love but who is somewhere far off; makes us re-experience it so intensely that only finally seeing and uniting with him or her will give us that special sense of peace, the only emotion we are interested in. In real life, however, love as an existential fact is made up of moments of eternity, one giving way to another, in a continual process of transcendence. When love is mutual, the other

person says “yes” and later returns to say “yes” again. Time does not end; rather, the lovers’ desire wells up again to embrace the other, the precious love object. In this sense, the experience of falling in love is first a discovery, then a loss, then a rediscovery.

Nothing, of course, guarantees that this mutual love affair will continue; on the other hand, that sensation of being in ‘a state of grace’ goes a long way in making lovers sure it will. Believing this is a sign of trust. We have trust in our relationship, just as we trust ourselves to know what we want and feel and just as we trust the other person we love enough to abandon ourselves. By definition, lovers are not jealous. Granted, there are a great many individual differences in this regard, yet we can without a doubt say that the experience of falling in love *tends to produce trust*. This goes hand in hand with the desire lovers feel for authenticity, transparency, and truth. If they spend hours and hours telling each other all about their lives it is because each wants to make the other participate wholly in who he or she is, and this means also taking in his or her past. The response of the other lover is to listen in fascination to the account of this past, giving in every so often

to a tug of envy towards those others who knew before he or she did this intrinsic source of goodness, this fantastic woman or man that he/she has fallen in love with; hearing about them makes the lover feel that he or she has lost out on a precious and previous opportunity for happiness. Our lover is not disturbed or worried, however. And this is because although the past weighs on everyday life it never counts in this ignition state of our falling in love. As lovers we are all as miraculously privileged as the worker who in the parable received a whole day's pay even though he was hired right before quitting time.

One of the other striking aspects of our falling in love is how it tends to result in the fusion between ourselves and the person we love—which may seem overly obvious unless we stop to think how that fusion always occurs between two people who are different. That's right: I'm saying that for love to ignite there must be a difference, and that our falling in love entails our exerting our will and drive to overcome this difference (which nonetheless exists and *must* exist). The woman I love is interesting *because* she is different, because she bears her own unmistakable and specific

identity. This *uniqueness* of the other person actually increases when we fall in love. And it extends to us as well, in that our desire to be loved is caught up with our sense of being unique and even extraordinary, certainly irreplaceable anyway when we are being simply ourselves. We can't receive this love and recognition either from the various groups or organizations we participate in (for there all of us are replaceable and interchangeable) nor from our family in an everyday context (for here we are treated as unique and irreplaceable but not extraordinary; and furthermore, even if we are recognized as being unique, it is always viewed as a uniqueness with respect to others and not as an incomparable mark of distinction). Yet we all yearn to be feel we are ends in ourselves, and what's more, adored by someone who is also unique, extraordinary, indispensable—in short, an end in her- or himself. We can't stand the thought that we might be loved in return by someone unworthy, run of the mill, and mundane. And for this reason the relationship we begin when we fall in love is always monogamous. It can't be any other way, for no unique and extraordinary person settles for less than exclusive



treatment from the other unique and extraordinary person, the only one of earth capable of giving happiness and joy, who he or she loves and is loved by. We demand and recognize only the best, and because we are so demanding and particular we are monogamous. The woman I have fallen in love with is unique and I am unique; neither of us is interchangeable with anyone else. Every detail, moreover, of her voice, body or gestures embodies her fundamental uniqueness. A sure and unmistakable sign of love, then, is this appreciation of the other person's special, irreplaceable being. And this process of individuation occurs simultaneously with the other process of fusion, which we mentioned earlier. If by the former we mean how the appreciation of our individuality by the unique individual we love, enhances and deepens our own sense of self worth, the latter is about how our wills come to converge, how we end up wanting the same things. When two people are in love with each other, they want what is important to the other. By way of the fore-mentioned process of individuation, they value their differences—both those of the other and, because of the other's support and adoration, of their own; indeed, they

value them so much that they treat them as if they were set in stone, ideals that also reflect some higher law; the process of fusion, then, intervenes to make all these differences—these individual preferences—converge into one: the couple's 'general will'.

It isn't all smooth sailing, however. Precisely because these differences and preferences are so important they tend to clash and compete with each other. Love is also a struggle—two people working things out. When we are in love, each of us tries to show off our best part, what we feel is most ours and truest; this is what we want the other to appreciate. But the other person appreciates more something else about us; she or he tells us so. And since by the powers of love we not only see things from the other's point of view but most naturally and spontaneously embrace it, we soon find ourselves changing the image we have of ourselves, giving more importance to the other's "fantastic thing" about us and less to our own. We change to please the person we love. But it is not a passive occurrence: both of us pressure the other with our desires and at the same time make changes in ourselves knowing that it will give the other

pleasure. There is no imposition or coercion in any of this; rather it is simply a continual process of mutual discovery and deciphering. Every detail concerning the other—every single gesture or glance—becomes a sort of symbol to interpret. Both lovers receive and produce these symbols endlessly. In the ignition state of love the number of these symbols multiply like crazy. And they embrace the world beyond the two lovers, too: rain, sunshine, the shapes of clouds—all these aspects and more of nature may come to signify something in the past or present that is intimately connected with the person we love. They may strike us as good omens or else they may somehow signal the direction our relationship is taking or should take. These “signs” (which take in the most casual incidents, coincidences, and combinations of events) become all the more important for us (as we read into them interpretations, invitations, denials, etc.) precisely because we never lose sight of the fact that the person we love is different from us and for this reason his or her response to us can never be considered absolutely certain nor trusted to be exactly in keeping with what we are asking for.

Just as religion transforms buildings or towns or areas of the world into “holy places”, so does our love. We exist in a world with a “sacred geography,” where a particular spot, house, tree, or view of the sea or mountains becomes a sacred symbol intimately bound up with our love or the person we love. This transformation into ‘a sacred temple’ is a consequence of a place’s having hosted one of the eternal moments of our love (or at the very least, a foretaste of one of these moments). Like space, time too takes on a sacred dimension. Though in the *ignition state* of our experience of falling in love, happiness is measured in the eternal present, the string of these eternal moments taken together constitute a sort of liturgical year with its holy days. Each ‘holy day’ is special in a unique way and associated with a specific memory of outstanding happiness or pain, or even with just a moment in fact significant to the person we love, one that we take it upon ourselves to consider as ‘sacred.’ This sanctification of our love, therefore, grows objective and palpable: on the one hand, those strikingly evocative places located in space, and on the other, those significant days spread discontinuously over time. (Both dimensions are

sacred in any religion.) In so far as the experience of falling in love unites the sacred and the profane, it also creates countless possibilities of the sacrilegious. Years or decades down the line, two lovers who are no longer together will still feel upset, as if something in them had been trampled on, when the calendar gets to a certain day, just as they will feel a helpless flood of nostalgia if they happen to revisit certain places. Inextricably representative of the eternal moments of love that we have lived, these places and times acquire a sort of immortality. When forgotten, they live on in the unconscious. And only a new experience of falling in love—only another galvanizing *ignition state*—can erase them for good, and create in their stead new ‘sacred times and places.’

## CHAPTER SIX

Everyday life is characterized by disappointment. It comes from the fact that we always have so many things to do. Some of these may be a pleasure for us, but the great majority by far are requests made by other people that we feel

obliged to fulfill. The things they ask are always urgent and merit top priority, and if we don't do them at once, they will reproach us or hold a grudge against us or in some way 'make us pay'. The order of things does not have us at its center; we are not its principal actor. This is the result of the pressure put on us: we never achieve what we truly desire, and at a certain point we even wind up not knowing if we want that thing after all. In everyday life, our ardent desires take the form of fantasies: we daydream "how beautiful it would be if..." But something always happens to frustrate their realization. Our friends, both male and female, always have something else to do or no desire to do what we would like, or want to when we do not and ask us at the most inopportune moment. If we say, "No, let's do it some other time," our friend gets hurt or offended, and so we lose interest just as he or she has. All of this constitutes disappointment: we have the feeling that something is desirable but that it always eludes us because we must always go and do something else. The result is that our everyday life becomes one continual 'doing something else,' which is usually for some other person. It boils down to that. Never do we feel that

we are really understood; never do we experience a profound satisfaction; never do our desires completely coincide with those of other people. This unhappy state, however, always seems to be on the verge of coming to an end: after all, it seems impossible that things can continue to go on like this, in such a stupid, bitter way. And yet it continues for months or years—dark years of waiting for something completely unknowable, years of continual disappointment, years that leave no trace behind and contain no true happiness, an endless stretch during which we simply “hang in there.”

The profound attraction that falling in love excites in each of us is due to the fact that it introduces into this darkness a blinding light and an absolute danger. Falling in love sets free the tremendous desire we feel inside us—all of a sudden everything else in our life revolves around it. What we desire, moreover, is finally intended for us and us alone. That doesn't mean that we are now in some way selfish and calculating; on the contrary, we do a thousand things for the person we love. The difference, however, is that anything we do for him or her is not that ‘something else’ done for another

but *something done for ourselves*—for *our* happiness. All at once our whole life is aimed at this reward of happiness; whatever we do has this as its end. And it all seems possible because our desires coincide with those of the person we love. We sense this constantly. Just as we sense that our falling in love has transported us to a higher existence where everything is either won or lost. Though our everyday life is conditioned by the need to always be doing ‘something else’ and if it necessitates our choosing from among things that *others* want (and so meeting with greater or lesser disappointment), our falling in love puts us in front of a very different choice: between all or nothing. Each day we win for ourselves what is unthinkable in everyday life—a kingdom, power, happiness, and glory—yet this kingdom can always be lost...perhaps in a single battle. What’s more, while everyday life alternates between periods of serenity and those marked by disappointment and loss, our experience of love, on the other hand, alternates between the two opposite poles of ecstasy and the feeling of being torn apart. It’s as if in everyday life we are in purgatory, whereas when we fall in love we know only heaven



or hell. Needless to say, in the first we are saved and in the second we are damned.

I realize that there may be a couple of objections (as I see them, contrasting ones) to this conception of opposing modes of being. The first goes like this: “misunderstandings and continual frustrations do occur in everyday life as you say, but this is because our social relationships are imperfect; they tend to have flaws in them from the start. And as regards married couples in particular, if they feel dissatisfied with their relationship and the lack of understanding between them, they need a marriage counselor or the like. With therapy (be it psychoanalytic, behaviorial, systemic, Gestalt, Lacanian, Reichian, Catholic, Buddhist, or Marxist), these misunderstandings and conflicts will disappear.” Now I don’t deny the value of individual, let alone “social or political” style, therapy, because it serves, it’s true, to create a situation in which suffering is reduced (or social conditions improved and society bettered). However, this therapy can’t change by one iota the existential nature of everyday life. In other words, behind this therapeutic attitude lies a concept of ideal normality that is based entirely on fantasy. As

a consequence, a husband and wife who undergo psychoanalysis will certainly get along better and hurt each other less, but they will not achieve that sense of constantly renewed fulfillment in life.

A second objection as I see it concerns the description of love as a constant shift back and forth between ecstasy and those torn feelings of fear, doubt, and jealousy that we used to call “a lover’s torment.” For many people, true love is, on the contrary, a state of constant happiness, constant understanding, and perfect harmony, where any minor disagreement to arise is settled instantly and effortlessly—because otherwise it wouldn’t be true love. There are people who think, furthermore, that true love can only be achieved over time with a lot of hard work and patience. This is, for example, what Erich Fromm would have us believe: doesn’t he call his prescription for happiness ‘the art of loving’? In truth, there is nothing behind these two assertions except the fairy tale myth of a happy ending, i.e. the illusion that there can be a sort of everyday serenity and joy that statically lasts forever—an everyday fount of emotion that no one has ever in fact experienced.

Those “couple of objections” I mentioned before boil actually down to one. I say that because under all these arguments one sees that overriding concern with “the fairy tale myth of the happy ending.” Marriage counselors and therapists, just like social workers, psychologists and sociologists, all basically advocate the same thing: complete and continuous happiness; a life lived in “the happily ever after” which would appear to be the easiest thing in the world to achieve. Personally they remind me of those traveling quack doctors of many years ago, who used to hawk their little bottles containing the elixir of long life or eternal youth. And if their claims were biological nonsense, something very similar can be said about the continuous happiness and serenity packed into that formula of living “happily ever after”: it is nonsense on the level of existential experience.

Pure myth—that’s what we’re dealing with here. But this myth is widespread across most of Western culture, and, unwittingly, we all constantly re-enforce it. Its power and hold on us are such that a normal person is bound to wonder about its origins. How did this myth get started? Or better, what forces inside us caused it to get started? Let’s

go back to what I just discussed a moment ago, to that dichotomy between the nature of everyday life (marked by alternating periods of serenity and of disappointment and loss) versus that of our experience of love (a shifting back and forth between the two extremes of ecstasy and inner ‘torment’). Clearly, in each of these two states there is a positive extreme and a negative one. The terrible myth of the fairy-tale happy ending that we’ve been talking about is “sparked” anew each time we select *only* the two positive “poles” (serenity and ecstatic joy) of these two states and *join them*, discarding the negative ones (disappointment and inner turmoil). Of course, it’s not hard to understand why this happens, why we choose to do this. Though we may be trapped inside everyday life and burdened down by disappointments, we continue to yearn for a richer and fuller life—the one we know to be true and authentic in the absolute: it is the happiness we savored in the *ignition state* of our falling in love, a happiness which continues to live inside us in the form of nostalgia.

When we are outside this experience, we are aware both of its heavenly and hellish sides, but we

tend to forget, to sublimate, the latter. We are convinced that some day, if we manage to fall in love again, all we will know is the splendid, pure side of love with its continually arising ‘eternal moments’. This is not to say that we don’t tend to do the same thing *inside* the experience as well. We do—we do indeed. In the thick of it all—the sweet passion and happiness on the one hand and the inner turmoil, anxiety, and tumultuous desire on the other, we covet the desire that this happy state will become stable, durable, and serene, and that we will be freed of those other things that accompany it. For this reason, some people don’t seem to be able to “withstand the tension” of falling in love; they feel a tremendous need to curb, control, and domesticate the experience immediately; they try to superimpose peace, normality, and serenity; it is the very experience of falling in love that leads them to do so.

The only problem with this is that this dive back into everyday life makes it impossible for them to keep experiencing the ecstasy, the spasmodic intensity of desire and self-fulfillment, that has been making them so happy. To achieve, and keep up, that happiness we have to commit a transgression:

*we have to break with everyday life.* And yet it is not up to us to decide when this moment will be. Our falling in love becomes something “evident” only after certain fundamental aspects of it have completed their slow maturation process: then and only then does “the event” of love overwhelm us. Simultaneously, the existential condition of calm serenity also eludes our grasp. With its uncontrollable force, our love transcends us, pulling us along and forcing us to change. To succeed in transforming this thing into the serenity of everyday life, we must destroy it. And I repeat, many people, men as well as women, aren’t satisfied until they have transformed the splendid experience of their love into something controllable, circumscribed, and defined. The price, however, is that they stop falling in love and the ecstasy disappears. What remains is the same banal everyday existence as before, and that serenity interspersed with moments of bitterness, boredom, or disillusionment.

From all this we can see how in the everyday there is a desire for the extraordinary, whereas in the extraordinary there is a desire for the everyday. In our everyday existence, moreover, we crave ecstasy, while in the throes of our extraordinary experience

of love we crave the serenity of a calm life. Many of us insist on joining together these two opposite desires (each of which is completely impossible to realize) all the same; many of us continue to stubbornly pursue that “happily ever after” sort of life, oblivious to how it purports to replace the mythical elixir of eternal youth...to how it makes the impossible promises of a philosopher’s stone.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Is it possible to love two people at the same time? Of course. Is it possible to love one person and yet fall in love with another? Certainly. Is it possible to fall simultaneously in love with two separate people? No—and the reason for which this is impossible should be clear in a moment. But let's go back and look at these cases one by one. The first concerns the non-exclusive love most of us feel for our mother, father, children, and friends—where no one need be excluded or slighted in that we have abundant love for all. The second case describes what happens oftentimes when a man takes a second wife or a woman a second husband: it's true that they have fallen in love with another person yet this does not preclude their continuing to love their first spouse. The third case, however, is drastically different from the other two: it is simply impossible for a person to fall simultaneously in love—and experience that *ignition state*, as we've called—with different people at once.

I realize that may seem strange or exaggerated. After all, we've all heard some friend say (if not said it ourselves), "I've fallen in love with them



both” or “I don’t know who I’m more in love with.” Let’s consider these two claims separately, as each represents a somewhat different situation. Whoever proclaims to “have fallen in love with them both” has in reality *not yet* fallen in love: he or she is still in the preparatory stage. We’ve already talked a bit about these initial ‘inklings’ and sensations; we’ve already said that a man or woman who is ready and about to fall in love is attuned to—or, is half-consciously “searching for”—the special person who will respond to him/her in a certain way. If the moment comes when he or she feels that he/she has found this soul mate, he or she *starts* to fall in love. The feeling, however, is not trained exclusively on one special person; indeed, he or she may meet a lot of “special-seeming” people at this time and start to fall in love multiple times, *with possible overlaps*, as a consequence. This is why he or she might say, “I’m in love with both of them.” This sensation grows stronger still when he or she is on the receiving end, i.e. if two other people simultaneously fall in love with him or her. Since he or she is already open to—already on the outlook for—love, and senses a positive response from the other two, the threesome form a little group, a

*ménage à trois* as it were. It may very well consist of a man (the central figure) loved by two women who are close friends or sisters; situations of this sort are anything but rare. In a parallel way, collective movements often include among their ranks groups of women who idolize and adore the same leader. (To take that one step further, didn't Freud say that the masses are made up of individuals who identify both with each other and with their leader?)

If we take a step back and reflect a moment, we have just moved effortlessly and seamlessly from a consideration of "the collective movement of two people in love" to that of mass collective moments. We have done this before. Here, however, the comparison runs into a major complication. Let's go back to that mass collective movement at the center of which there is a leader adored by his women (though the same may be true of a famous actress, or even just a fascinating woman, surrounded by her ardent male fans or love-stricken acquaintances). I ask you: can we say that he (or she) has fallen in love with any of them? No, we can't. Like all of his (her) followers each of these (wo)men is replaceable, for in a mass movement of this sort *no*

*one is indispensable* and, what is more, *all participants are interchangeable*. This also applies when the group is whittled down to just three in number. Even with three participants—even in our *ménage à trois*—the collective still exists and the experience still continues if and when one of the three leaves. In the case of a couple, however, everything changes. If one of the two leaves, the collective is destroyed; only in the couple is the individual indispensable, specific, unique, and irreplaceable. The presence of the individual is *the objective condition* allowing for the existence of the collective, we can say. As I've argued before, this is a unique and remarkable occurrence as far as collective movements go; it testifies to what specifically makes the experience of falling in love beyond comparison. A declaration like, "I'm in love with them both", therefore, always indicates a state of transition. This state of transition always exists at the start. It may lead to nothing, to returned love, or to one-sided love (be it for the special person we'd like for our lover, as is the specific case here, or for the Leader).

Let's go back now to two other things we said at the beginning of this chapter. We can love many

people at the same time. We can, furthermore, love one person and meanwhile fall in love with another. The third thing that can be added to that now is that we can—and usually do—love numerous others (our family, our friends, our children) at the same time that we are falling in love with our ‘special one.’ This new love, however, causes us to rearrange (‘restructure’ or ‘re-map’) our affections. Our emotional ties acquire a new order and geometry. This occurs because we have “carried our loved ones with us” into our new relationship; they are part of our personal history and a component of our individuality and preferences that we want the person we are in love with to recognize and love for our sake. In other words, though we shed many things about our old life, now regarded as worthless and insignificant, we also retain certain bits of our “unique identity” which simply must be ‘revamped’ and (in so far as our falling in love means overcoming obstacles) integrated into our new love. *Just certain bits*, of course. If two people who are already married to someone else and have children by someone else fall in love, for instance, each of them separates his or her spouse from the children in his or her system of affections, discarding the

former and incorporating the latter. The spouse ceases to be included in that 'essential self' asking to be recognized, whereas the children remain part of it.

When the two people first fall in love, however, there are no children involved. Things take place in seeming isolation, in a sort of vacuum: only the two lovers exist. They seek love from each other, and in reply receive it from each other, before the children appear on the scene. A lover's initial request for love is never for his or her children but for him- or herself. But, as we have been saying, the *overall* process of falling in love consists in integrating into the relationship those parts of self which had at first been excluded, and hence the children as well. One lover embraces—or emotionally includes—the other's children, but he or she does not fall in love with them. He or she is in fall with that special person only, and the children are loved inasmuch as they are loved by that person, not for themselves. At any moment, moreover, the kids may turn into an obstacle (even an insuperable one) to the unfolding of the two lovers' relationship. They may oppose it, for instance, or they may become an instrument of pressure and blackmail

used by the two families. This creates the sort of dilemma discussed in Chapter Four.

All this interaction between two people in love and the outside world should make it clear that it is a complete falsification to represent the experience of falling in love as an encounter between two isolated individual, with no ties or bonds to anyone else and free of obstacles and impediments, who are seeking to live their love in absolute solitude. To believe that is to disregard the reality of the contrasting dual dynamics at work: how while the uniqueness and individuality of each lover is perceived and re-enforced in the relationship, *at the same time* both lovers are seeking to be accepted as a couple and integrated, socially speaking, into the circle of their family, friends, and peers. If they make some serious attempt to isolate themselves—completely, constantly, and definitively, it can only mean that there is a major problem. This could well be that the reality surrounding one of the lovers is hostile or unbearable, and that this situation is weighing on their new love. When it becomes impossible for a lover to integrate that part of the self composed of his or her pre-existing affections, he or she begins to seek refuge, peace and freedom

for his/her new love by temporarily withdrawing into a completely private space, from which he or she regularly returns to face the world again. If both lovers find themselves in this situation, then what prevails is the desire to escape. They actually do go off together, with every intention of giving their new life a firm footing (and avoiding the pressures of the old situation completely) in the hope that eventually they will be able to regain what they have lost. In any case, they are together and experience together the desire to accommodate in the not too distant future the “salvageable” old pieces into their new life. Things are not so easy in the other case, where it is only one of the lovers to be torn in this way. He or she, yes, conceives of this new love as a refuge from the rest of the world, but this conception and these plans clash with those of the other lover, who wants to realize their love in the world in a very concrete way, integrating what can be integrated of his or her old self and discarding what must be discarded. In other words, for the former, love is a haven, a happy island whereto escape, a vacation from real life, and a rose garden in the middle of an existential desert; for the latter, however, this fantasy is unacceptable; he or

she refuses to evade reality in this way because his or her plan is to make the world *into* a garden. This is a classic example of how the experience of falling in love generates in the two people involved two different conceptions of how to proceed, of how to live in this extraordinary dimension. Their two sets of plans being incompatible, the lovers must make a choice: either one or both of them must change, or else their love will be massively damaged by this inner contradiction and end.

We have said that it is possible to love one person and meanwhile fall in love with another, but impossible to fall in love with two people at the same time. This is so because the experience of falling in love is in fact a lover's reshaping of every one of his or her relationships around a *single* special person.. His or her new love indicates a *single* direction to move in. Since it is beyond any of us to move with all the strength of our spirit toward two absolute but completely different objectives *at the same time*, we can't be simultaneously in love with two people.

Given this exclusive nature of the experience, a natural question to arise is what happens if and when the two lovers have a child? Does it make a



difference if both of them want the child, as opposed to just one of them? Let's take a look at both cases. First let's consider the situation where one of the lovers does not desire this child. The way things usually go—don't they?—is that when the child is born, the one who was against having it experiences the other's love for the child as an authentic betrayal and abandonment. The experience of being in love abruptly ends, the way it does in a famous Islamic legend from Persia, wherein Eblis (Satan) rebels against God because after He creates man, He asks this archangel of light to love his creature; Eblis, however, cannot. He protests that he loves God alone and isn't able to abide His love for man. Rather than share God with another creature, he prefers to incur God's wrath and to lose Him. So much for a couple divided on the issue on children. And in the other case—when both lovers desire the child that is born to them? Unfortunately, because their love begins to revolve around the child, the experience of being in love with each other also ends. Admittedly, there is that old saying about how having a child re-enforces the love between a man and a woman and can even save a faltering marriage. There is some empirical truth

to that, but the emotion being strengthened between the two people here is love, *not 'falling in love'*. Instead of being in love with each other, they now fall in love with the *child*: it's the child who becomes the object of desire for both. As a result, their own relationship changes; it depends now on the existence of a third party (Baby) and loses its exclusive nature. The claims and demands to be met are those inherent to and generated by this third personality. Neither one of them is essential to the other anymore; neither is the other's 'god.' Instead, they bow down to a new-born 'god' who is external to them—as all busy new parents know. When any friction or misunderstanding arises between them, they have the child to look to for comfort. This is especially true for the woman, the child's mother, who has carried that baby inside her for all those months of pregnancy and who now nourishes him or her; for these first months, at any rate, she is the child's exclusive point of reference. Furthermore, all her interests, cares, and anxieties come quickly to focus on the child, with whom at birth she most probably *fell in love*—in the full and proper sense of the experience.

Can there be any doubt that this new exclusivity is incompatible with the old one that once existed between the child's parents? The "Oedipus complex" (and its secondary emphasis on the child's envy of and rivalry with the father) gets a lot of press, but we hear much less mention of the "Laius complex" (the father's envy of the son, i.e. of the symbiosis between son and mother), which arises even sooner in the family. Externally, nothing seems to be happening—for not only are the parents and the baby fine and happy, but the love for this child has "cemented" the couple's union and "stabilized" their love, as they themselves may actually say. Under the surface, however, there has been an end to their experience of falling in love. And yet... And yet, this experience can paradoxically continue or 'be revived' *if* an external force separates the two lovers, or *if* their love becomes one-sided (and hence unhappy, as when one of them is jealous of the child).

For all its being universal, this end to a couple's 'enamoured state', this falling out of love when a child is born, is for some curious reason disregarded by our culture. It is a sort of hidden experience, one that people don't talk or even think

about very often. In general, in fact, it comes as a surprise when we notice that the person who love is neglecting us or is no longer so ardently wrapped up in us, or has simply lost that fantastic, all-consuming desire. But surprise or no surprise, everything has indeed changed. An intrinsically unstable configuration, that of the couple head over heels in love, has given way to a potentially permanent one. In other words, even if the experience of falling in love ends and even if love itself should disappear and the two lovers leave each other, *the collective survives*. How? It's not hard to guess: in the form of the two highly stable couples of mother-and-child and father-and-child.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

The Bible recounts that when God expelled Adam and Eve he settled them “east of the Garden of Eden (and) stationed the cherubim and the fiery revolving sword to guard the way to the tree of life.” (Genesis 3:21). By way of analogy, we can say that when we enter the *ignition state* of love, we knock that fiery sword out of the cherubim's hand and dart

into Paradise. We aren't ever able to stay there very long, however; we can't make it our home or mark it off as our territory. This is because this initial part of falling in love is by definition transitory: it is not a stagnant phase but rather a forward motion, a "going on to something else." Entering it means leaving it behind. When all goes well, our falling-in-love experience ends in love; what begins as an unstable propulsion becomes a solid and stable institution: we and the person we love are "a fixed couple." There is really no point in asking whether falling in love is better than love, because one cannot exist without the other; it would be as pointless to ask if a plant's flower is better than its fruit or vice versa. Life is made up of both. On the other hand, the two things mustn't be confused, because they are quite distinct. The way we feel, think, and live while we are in that *ignition state* is different from that of our everyday, institutionalized life. And when I say that the way we think is different, I don't mean that we merely think different thoughts in these two states but that *we use two different conceptual systems* for everything.

In everyday life our goals and objectives are usually well-defined or at least limited in scope in

what we can reasonably expect to accomplish given our initial resources. Our desires, on the other hand, tend to be limitless, shifting, and hard to pin down in precise unwavering terms. Think a moment about what you would say if a genie appeared out of a magic lamp and granted you three wishes. You'd probably puzzle over this for a bit, trying to decide. Do you want to be rich or in perfect health? Are you asking this for just yourself or for loved ones as well? Do you want to live forever? Again, just you, or should a few other people you care about also be granted immortality? How about resolving all these problems by simply asking for 'happiness'? That just adds to the confusion, in reality, because happiness isn't a thing but comes from 'things'—the ones that "make us happy". And those things are...? Contrast all this to what a person in love tells the genie; this lover knows exactly what to ask for: "I want him/her to love me the way I love him/her." As a second wish, this lover wants his or her love to never end, and as a third wish, he or she wants the other to feel the same way about him or her forever, too. These desires are very precise and limited...the way our goals (but not our desires) are in everyday life. Unlike our everyday life objectives, however,

our ‘love objectives’ have nothing to do with our “realistic” means or resources on hand. Indeed, first we fall in love, then we desire the other person’s love, and then—only then—we try to find a way (“the means”) to make him or her love us back.

The differences between the way we ‘reason’ when we have fallen in love and the way we do in our everyday existence are truly far-reaching. Another of these, for instance, concerns our ability to distinguish between *essential* and *non-essential* needs. We can discern between the two types in everyday life, but when we find ourselves in the *ignition state* of love, the perimeters for this distinction change: essential needs become those things that help us to reach the person we love and that will hopefully make him or her love us. Everything else is relegated to the other category. Perhaps we used to find fine cuisine important; now we only will if it also gives pleasure to the person we are in love with; otherwise, it ‘doesn’t matter,’ it loses its significance. Not only, but we are even willing now to go *without food of any sort*—and maybe also go *without sleep*—in order to make the most tiring of trips that will allow us to be with the person we love. All this hardship doesn’t bother us;

in fact, it makes us happy and sometimes even elated. Without thinking twice about it, we do all sorts of things that we would find unbearable in our everyday lives.

Another fundamental difference in how we conceive of things when we have fallen in love derives from something called “the political economy of human relationships.” Simply put, it means that if in everyday life I give someone something, I want something from that person in return, and it must have the same value as what I am giving (hence ‘the principle of calculable exchange’ is at work), whereas when I am falling in love—and am in the ignition state of that experience—I keep no record of what I give and what I receive, nor does the person I love. Though I know it might sound odd to say this, the concept of *communism* emerges here—‘communism’ in the magnificent, original sense of the word, whereby each person gives according to his or her abilities and receives according to his or her needs. Two people in love exchange gifts all the time: things that seem beautiful to the one or that embody something of his or her being, which will give pleasure to the other, or remind the other of their love. This gift-giving is



usually very spontaneous and spur-of-the-moment, for with their gifts, lovers want to signal their total availability to each other. The message attached to a gift is “here is a bit of myself that I am presenting to you”. Does each lover expect a gift in return? Absolutely not. There is no score to settle: a lover is repaid instantly by the other’s joyous appreciation and satisfaction. To reiterate, there is a) gift-giving but no exchange of goods, and b) each lover’s giving what he or she can and receiving what he or she needs: i.e. utopian-style communism. It works like that if the two people are in love, whereas the moment each starts counting gifts and complaining about receiving less than what he or she gives, it is clear that the experience of falling in love is waning, nearing an end. When the two lovers sit down and reckon up the exact tally of what they give and what they get, it is completely over.

Bound up with this “communistic” side, is the *egalitarian aspect* of a love affair. Both lovers have the same right to make demands on each other. They have no other pre-determined rights beyond that, however—and we might say that the two lovers are “equal” in this regard. Furthermore, they are “equally powerful”, in so far as they hold equal

and absolute sway over each other (seeing that each knows that the other alone can fulfill his or her desire). Except in the case of a one-sided love relationship, this power balance is perfectly symmetrical. Each is at the mercy of the other.

In addition, during the ‘ignition state’ of their falling in love, both lovers share *the truth* and *their real authentic selves* with each other—these, too, are constants. The process of falling in love is always also a search for our deepest sense of self. We achieve that thanks to the person we love, to the dialogue we have with him or her, wherein she or he accepts, understands, approves, and—eventually “redeems”—us, as we are asking him or her to do. In order for that to happen, especially for us to be redeemed of our past, we must tell the truth—the whole truth. This experience of being utterly honest, candid, and open doesn’t occur in everyday life, for even if we decide to pour our heart out to a total stranger (as may happen on occasion), it doesn’t help us in the least: that stranger has no sway over us. Only by telling our truth to the person who represents to us all that is good and precious in life can we shed our former selves and change, that is, achieve our own highest potential share of

goodness and happiness. Something similar happens in psychoanalysis, where if the patient tells the truth it is because the process of transference reproduces in part what spontaneously occurs when we fall in love. Unlike in psychoanalysis, however, where unconscious barriers may take years to dismantle, what occurs in the *ignition state* of love is of such a force and magnitude that these subliminal barriers may actually be broken through in a few hours or even a few minutes. This is possible because two people in love no longer fear the past in any way. After making their mutual confessions, each has the power to absolve the other of his or her past (or of his or her initial resistance to love), and does so.

I realize that I'm using terms here (like "redeem", "confess," or "absolve") which belong by tradition to the realm of religion—especially the Catholic religion. This is unavoidable, in that it has always been theology and metaphysics to provide the language for the dynamics of what we are calling the *ignition state* of love. While there is no reason to discard this terminology (indeed, it is profoundly evocative), we must always keep in mind that we are using it to describe the relationship between two people and no longer the relationship

one has with God. In this mind frame, mutual *confession* and *absolution* are thus two essential aspects to emerge when we fall in love.

Another thing lovers do constantly is ask each other about what they are thinking. Naturally, deep down the question really is, “Are you thinking of me?” And as all lovers know, answering “yes” to that is never enough. The one who is asking not only wants to know everything there is to know about the other but also wants to insert him- or herself there in the other’s secret thoughts as a sort of interpreter or guide, or if nothing else than an unequaled consolation. To this end, the lover who is asking must have—absolutely craves—nitty-gritty, concrete details...i.e. the precise direction of the other’s thoughts when he or she answers, “I’m thinking about you.” However banal or insignificant the actual details turn out to be, they are *transfigured* by love into something of incomparable richness and value. To use another religious word, that change is a sort of *transubstantiation*, or an alteration of substance. And as I’ve already said before, even the physical defects, weaknesses, pain, or illnesses of the person

we love become transfigured—come to be endowed with *value*.

This distinction between what has value in itself and what does not is the basis of metaphysics, and it is for this reason that metaphysical thought lends itself so well to a description of what occurs in the *ignition state* of love. The metaphysical distinction between what has absolute value in itself (and so represents ‘the Reality’ to which we cling) and what on the contrary has variable (or “contingent”) importance, runs through everything, ourselves included. When we are at one with profound Reality, we are transfigured; we manifest our absolute worth and exercise our absolute rights in this Reality. When, however, we are at odds with this Reality, we feel how worthless and insignificant we are. These metaphysical dynamics are at work when two people fall in love, though they don’t live through merely *one* shift or slide from one existential condition to the other but many, constant transitions—a continual shuffling of experiences and objects from a love-inspired state of transfiguration to a degraded ranking as ‘worthless incidentals.’ Let’s take an example. I give a pretty pin to the woman I love; she accepts it, she is

pleased. She starts wearing that pin so much that it seems to become part of her, and also I (or a bit of me) am part of her for she is wearing my pin. Now let us suppose that we have had a bad fight. I'm still suffering like a dog when I happen to run into her and see she's wearing my pin. Suddenly, that pin is transformed into my love's mouth and body, which is telling me, "I still love you." This is an example of how a lover's positive response—his or her way of "saying yes"—gets instantaneously incorporated into an object. The opposite may also happen, however; an object may be degraded rather than upgraded in value, simply because one's love makes a comment. Whatever that thing about my person is—that style of clothing, that accessory, that jewelry, as soon as my love expresses disapproval, it loses all sense of worth (no matter how much it cost).

To sum up what we have said in this chapter, the *ignition state* that two people go through when they fall in love is characterized by structural aspects and dynamics which do not change from couple to couple. We've looked at the most important ones, namely the experience of "eternal moments", elation, each lover's precise and limited

objective of having his or her love returned, each lover's self-limitation of needs, the communistic side to the relationship, the egalitarian aspect, both lovers' overriding need to tell the truth, and the manifested absolute value of the Real embodied in the objects and experiences of a love relationship, which may, however, shift into a perception of the same things as incidentals. Such things are proof that when we enter that ignition state of love, we think, feel, and judge things in a radically different way. The extraordinary experience is *not* something that exists in the external world and that merely "happens" to us; rather, it is a totally inner experience by which we—and not the world—change (though we seem to see a different sky and landscape as well as different men and women). From this private experience, however, we do try to reach out and change—remake—the world, with our living example (as a couple) of a new way of thinking and living. We would like to see the rest of the world achieve that absolute solidarity which we have experienced. In this sense, we begin to explore (or feel the temptation to explore) what it might be possible to bring about in the world around us, starting from the impossible—the attainment of a

paradise on earth. This is why at the beginning of this chapter I said that in the *ignition state* of love, a man (or woman) tears the flaming sword from the cherubim's hand and enters the Garden of Eden. Of course he or she can't make it into a permanent home; the experience of falling in love doesn't last forever. The extraordinary always coexists alongside the ordinary and becomes ordinary itself soon enough. But it is the Garden of Eden. We are all familiar with it, we have all been there, we have all lost it, and we all know how to recognize it.

## CHAPTER NINE

Dante wrote that love “swiftly seizes the gentle heart” and “spares no one from loving.” Let's reflect for a moment on that first statement. We have seen that a person who falls in love is predisposed to do so, and that this experience happens on the basis of certain preconditions—that is to say that the person is already inwardly prepared for such an experience and has probably already made past attempts or trial-runs. The curious thing about Dante is that he says that gentleness of spirit



(in Italian, *gentilezza*) characterizes a person who is likely to—or looking to—fall in love. This feeling predisposed towards another (or towards others in general) is a powerful component of the *ignition state* (as we've defined it) and may lead, yes, to one person's falling in love, but also to another's religious conversion or participation in a political cause. And this brings us to another important point: that the experience of falling in love is already in some way predetermined not only by one's individual psychological propensity *but also* by one's culture. The very term "falling in love" is the cultural end-product of a process that led to the reshaping, transformation, and *articulation* of a fundamental human experience. People in ancient Greece and Rome certainly experienced the thrill of love's ignition state, but they did not speak of falling in love. The Islamic world boasts a very early and rich tradition of mystical love poetry, which, however, for centuries contained no mention of what troubadour poetry in the Christian Middle Ages would recognize and describe as "falling in love." All this is to say that a person's psychological readiness for love in its ignition state (summed up in Dante's "gentle heart") may be thwarted or inhibited

by the cultural mores or ideologies surrounding him or her.

Dante's second remark, that love "spares no one from loving," is dual-edged. It seems to deny the obvious truth that a person who falls in love is very often not loved in return, or if he or she is, he or she doesn't receive the same kind of love or the same intensity from the other (who, it can be said, *is* "spared from loving.") On the other hand, Dante is right if we apply his observation to two people who are "ready" to fall in love when they happen to meet each other; indeed, their falling in love is highly likely, since each will probably "recognize" the other as the person he or she wants to be one with. The underlying explanation for this was discussed in the preceding chapter: there, we said that people who find themselves living life in the extraordinary dimension that "*the ignition state*" makes possible, and so thinking, seeing, and feeling in a completely different way from how they are in their everyday context, these people will understand each other *profoundly*. Although their background and life history may be radically different, they relate to the world in the same way and are drawn to each other. Again, this takes us back to the fundamental affinity

between a couple in love and a large collective movement. In the latter, thousands and thousands of individuals of different ages and from different socio-economic backgrounds “recognize” each other as being profoundly similar and form a collectivity, which officially underscores this distinction between “us” and “them.” The same thing happens with a couple who has fallen in love, as we’ve said. Thus, entering the *ignition state* always entails our instant recognition and understanding of each other (or of many others, in the case of a collective movement) on a deep, intuitive level.

The famous medieval mystic Ramón Lull seemed to be driving at this when he wrote that “Lover and Beloved are distinct beings, who agree, without any contrary element or diversity in Essence.”\* The word ‘*essence*’ evokes the fusion between two people that at the same time remain unique individuals, and as a “structural trait” explains how it is possible for two lovers to feel a mysterious and immensely strong spiritual affinity. This affinity doesn’t pre-date their falling in love, however; it did not exist before they met each other. It is only when they experience the *ignition state* of

love that the profound structure of their way of thinking (which transcends their individual personalities) becomes the same. Moreover, because every experience of falling in love is “structured” in an identical way, even two people who speak radically different languages—like French and Japanese—can fall in love and ‘understand each other.’ We might say in this regard that when we fall in love we are granted the fabled ‘gift of tongues’ which is mentioned in the Bible.

\* Ramón Lull, *The Book of the Lover and the Beloved*, trans. E. Allison Peers (New York: The Paulist Press, 1978) p. 66.

But let's go back to Dante because there is yet another thing that he seems to be telling us. His observation that 'love spares no one from love' may also be taken to mean that a lover tends to draw the person he or she loves into his or her love—i.e. he or she tends to arouse a similar "emotional awakening" in the other. If the other person is just as poised and ready, the couple really does fall in love. However, it also happens that while the other person does feel aroused love, it is love intended for someone else...some 'special other' she or he is already interested in. She or he is indeed transported to a higher level, emotionally speaking, but the person who is the object of this love is not the one who evoked them.

Is love *ever* equally or fairly distributed between two people who have fallen in love with each other? At the beginning, I'm afraid, it never is. At the start of every experience of falling in love, only one of the two people is enamoured. This is because the experience of falling in love is individual, involving internal transformations, and a consequential straining towards a love object, which only that person can bear witness to. Most of these times when just one of the two people falls in love,

things end almost immediately. Occasionally, however, the process continues, and two possible outcomes present themselves. The first is that the person in love has chosen his or her would-be partner very selectively and wisely, the result being that the other member of the couple is also pre-disposed to falling in love, and so the *ignition state* of the experience begins for both of them. Emotions catch fire and before you know it they are both—mutually—in love. The second possible outcome is much messier. The other person *does not* fall in love, and yet this doesn't rule out his or her thinking that he or she has. The demonstration that this is not true lies in the fact that he or she does not undergo any real internal change; he or she simply vicariously participates in the other's authentic experience. Passively he or she accepts and participates in the use the other makes of the symbolic, but it is a game. He or she hasn't out-and-out refused the other's love, of course. He or she might feel flattered by it. But the reality is that he or she only has *a desire* for love...or for adventure, for that matter...or else this person is merely attracted, erotically or intellectually, to the other. This imbalance is usually obvious to any attentive

outsider: one of the couple seems to have fallen deeply in love, while the other much less so. Yet for all its being “plain and clear,” this sort of unequal relationship occurs quite frequently and can last for a long time—even leading to marriage. When it endures like that, it is because the two lovers come to feel a deep affection for each other. Should the relationship encounter a serious obstacle, however, the distinction between ‘who is in love’ and ‘who isn’t’ makes itself felt. This often happens if one of the two lovers must be away for a long time, or when the fact that one of them is already married or has children to care for begins to put a damper on things. The member of the couple who has been “drawn into” the relationship begins to feel that he or she can live without the other, whereas the one truly in love feels desperately sure that he or she cannot. People who haven’t fallen in love feel that they have alternatives, that their back is not up against the wall. People aflame with love, on the other hand, are convinced that their love *must* go on, that there is no other way for them to be or feel. At this point, the member of the couple who really isn’t in love begins to dictate his or her conditions: “I love you but please go solve your problems. Don’t

come back until you have.” The message is that of ‘*get yourself together.*’ The problem is seen as the other lover’s alone. That is very different from what happens when *both* members of a couple have fallen in love. Because they are so caught up in each other’s life, they tend to think that every problem is not “his” or “hers” but “*ours*”. They seem to be saying: “this is something that only *we* can solve.”

An unequal relationship between two normal individuals, one of whom is not truly in love and the other of whom is, is quite like the unbalanced relationship that results when a simple and practical person falls in love with, and is loved by, a highly creative one—an artist or a writer, say, or a scientist. These creative individuals live in part in an imaginary universe of their own creation, and when they fall in love, they tend (feeling as they are more creatively inspired than ever) to transport the person they love into this world of theirs. Though they are fascinated and attracted by this world, the non-geniuses in these couples tend to prefer, like most earthy creatures, concrete accomplishments. Their ultimate reaction to the other’s fantastical creations is that there is something unreal or simply false about them. (This is an illustration of the differences



that falling in love cannot erase or even bridge. The unbridgeable difference here is that while a complex person can understand a simple one, the inverse is not true. To a simple soul, complexity seems like falsehood or madness. Literature and literary history are full of such examples. Consider the case of Dostoevsky, who could understand the girl he fell in love with during his trip to Italy, though she could not fathom him at all. We can find another wide a gulf of sensibility separating the characters of Werther and Lotte in Goethe. Also--but there are countless examples in reality—the works of Virginia Woolf come to mind, in that they often underscore the loneliness of the genius who cannot be understood and so cannot find love.) But why assert that an unequal relationship between two average people is similar to this? Remember what I said at the start of Chapter Three: when a person falls in love, she or he feels an overwhelming need to use poetic language; also, most of the terms that humanity has for talking about the *ignition state* of this experience derive from mysticism, theology, and poetry. By way of analogy, then, we can say that in an unequal relationship, the person who *is* in love tends to create an imaginary, poetic universe,

which the other (who is *not* truly in love and who makes nothing but practical, concrete requests) reproaches him or her for. Being more arid, or if you like, limited, the person who is less in love senses the artifice of the other's world where all is play or fantasy, and where there is a superabundance of symbols, metaphors, or gifts. Like the creative genius in our previous case, the person in love in this lop-sided relationship is reproached for being unperceptive, selfish, and obscure, and for living in a dream world.

Yet for all the criticism that he or she may take, there is something that *only* he or she continues to do incessantly, in a thousand ways. Having truly fallen in love, he or she never stops asking the essential question: "Do you love me?" And he or she is the one in the couple who gives all the gifts.

## CHAPTER TEN

If, as we've said, anyone who falls in love is already predisposed and willing to do so, does it mean that when we get the terrific urge to fall in love, we automatically go ahead and do so? No.

There is no relation at all between the desire (however strong and consuming) *for* love and the authentic experience of *falling in* love. There are plenty of people walking around whose fondest hope for years has been to find their one true love, and though they go out of their way to stay socially active and open to new encounters, they never find their soul mate. They end up blaming their failure on bad luck, or on the company they keep and the circles they move in, or on themselves for being excessively choosy and hard to please. That said, they do live through a good number of ‘close calls’, during each of which they really do think they have met the person they are looking for. They feel emotion and desire and longing to see the other again. But it doesn’t pan out. They receive no response—nothing beyond indifference—to their passionate yearning to be loved. Their desperation *seems* more than understandable. But is it? Probably every once in a while they meet someone who *does* show interest; funny, isn’t it, how they tend to always find something wrong with that person? If it’s not some physical trait of the other to bother them, then it’s the fact that that person is too old or young or naïve or sophisticated or too

exuberant or too reserved. This goes to show that while such people declare a tremendous desire to fall in love, they are NOT in fact *predisposed* to do so. As we've said, this predisposition stems from a person's compelling inner need to break completely with the past, put everything about his or her life into question, and plunge head-first into what is risky and new.

No one can fall in love if he or she is even partially satisfied with what he or she has or who he or she is. The experience of falling in love originates in an overwhelming depression, an inability to find anything good about one's everyday life. The telltale "symptom" of a person who is predisposed to falling in love is, therefore, *not* the intense conscious desire for something wonderful that will enhance his or her existence but the awareness of something very different and negative, namely his or her profound sense of being worthless and of possessing nothing valuable, all of which makes him or her ashamed. I repeat: this perception of nothingness and the ashamed feeling it produces mark the first clear sign that a person is ready to fall in love. It is no coincidence that falling in love happens especially to young people, so insecure and

often times embarrassed or ashamed of themselves as they are. But people of other ages may also feel such nothingness, when their youth ends, say, or they start to grow old. In such cases, it is as if there were an irreparable loss of something inside a person, who experiences the haunting feeling that he or she is on the road to ruin and bound to end up devoid of all value (especially when compared to his or her former self). And this means that if this person falls in love it isn't because he or she is bent on "finding love again" but rather that the present prospect of nothingness is such that he or she believes that there's nothing to gain from life. *That* is why he or she develops the inclination for the different and risky...which no person in his or her right mind, who is halfway satisfied with his or her life, would dream of following up on.

Can we identify any other 'symptom' signifying that a person is predisposed to falling in love? Yes, we can. This one manifests itself when, in alternative to an overwhelming sense of depression and worthlessness, a person may be gripped by a profound, radical *disappointment* in him- or herself or in what or who he or she has loved. This disappointment may hit one with the

same shocking impact as a terrible illness, and be the outward consequence of years of feeling neglected, or it may represent a pile up of the many small disappointments that one has always denied feeling. One's natural reaction, in any case, is to become despondent and to withdraw into oneself. And then one day it happens that one begins to notice how happy other people are. This is the sign. One is ready to fall in love.

Mind you, this perception of other people's happiness is not the usual intermittent, distracted variety, but rather it is strong and visceral enough as to feel almost painful. The long and short of it is that we are wracked with envy—though the word 'envy' is a bit misleading, in that what we specifically feel is that we have been deliberately excluded from a world of intense desires and pleasures. We can't yet see that the desires and pleasures we attribute to others are in fact our own desires and our renewed ability to live life intensely. At this early stage, unfortunately, this knowledge eludes us. We recognize against our will that others are leading a fuller life, and as a consequence of this the world strikes us as being both a more vivid and painful place than before. During this stage (where

our propensity to fall in love is being fostered not by desire but by this envy of others' happiness) the only reality granted us to live is one constructed on duty and self-denial. By accepting our everyday obligations as an unquestioned imperative we manage to hold together the fragments of our embittered ego. Then, in this dull everyday routine of obligations, we occasionally feel something like an omen. At times we may have a premonition of terrible ruin, the sense of an imminent catastrophe involving the whole world; in this case, the conflict building up inside us acquires objective overtones: we have an obscure, tantalizing fear that the world is about to be overturned. At other times, but especially when we are weary or, inversely, excited, we may feel seized by a sense of destiny; our sensation is that something terrible but grandiose is about to happen—and this may inspire us to utter words to that effect or to sound strangely elated. Then the moment passes and everything returns to normal. But the list of possible “flash intuitions” does not end there. We may just as well be haunted by a song that spontaneously and mysteriously has surfaced in our mind. Or we may feel so moved by a poem that we just have to read it to someone (and

half expect them to answer in kind). We may even experience actual visions or strange, inexplicable and even exhilarating fantasies—some people do. These are all brief, half-obscure revelations of the extraordinary side of life. They are the sign that a transcendence of self—of one's presently worthless self—is taking place...almost as if there could be another self lurking in the wings and poised to make its appearance, legitimized by the fact that it is external and objective in nature. The world that is to be the home for this new self seems for the time being *distant*...whether that be measured in terms of social distance (the gap that still exists between me and those other 'happy people') or of temporal distance (the time still in the offing until something happens to make this world mine). Certainly, for now this world has not materialized, and yet there is a certain hierarchical structuring already taking place—a fundamental distinction between what is important and has value and what is insignificant and worthless. We experience the tremendous feeling that we have the latter and *lack* the former. We are also just as sure about our premonition that there is something different to come.



It follows that a person who is *only seeking to better or enhance* his or her present life (which remains in its essence satisfying) is not someone who will fall in love. Rather, dissatisfied people who feel a crying need for something are the ones destined for the extraordinary experience that unfolds in the *'ignition state,'* whether it lead to love or to the establishment of a broad collective movement. The *ignition state* prepares a person for either. Indeed, someone who fails to meet 'that special love', and who at the same time is immersed in a social context which is ripe for the eruption of a collective movement, will tend to adhere to that movement and identify with the other participants. Instead of falling in love with another person, he or she bonds with the group in ferment.

So, an intense desire to fall in love does not constitute a cause to think that we will. But what if we intensely desire to *make someone else* fall in love with us: can we? Yes, we can—such a thing is possible. And the reason why it is possible is that out there in the big world there are always at every moment people who are ready to fall in love and eager to rush head over heels into a new life. When such people meet someone who seems to be the

Way to freedom and joy, someone who understands them profoundly and urges them on in their process of self-renewal, someone who boosts their confidence and is willing to share the risk of the future with them—someone who will stand by them forever, who embodies a certainty and makes them hear the call of their destiny...that their happy time has come, that this happiness is written all over their face and is foretold by their past, then these ‘predisposed’ people feel they have been given the sign that they were waiting for, and with this ‘unique someone’ they fall in love.

All of the above can be for real (as it is when both people mutually feel this way) or it can be an illusion—a trick, as it were, put in act by someone who is not in love. Who would want to deceive another person this way? Unfortunate as it is, there are plenty of individuals engrossed in the task at this very minute. Remember our discussion about people who want to fall in love in order to enhance or enrich their present life? There’s the first type for you. They try so hard and so long to find “that special someone” that sooner or later, given all their efforts at seduction (efforts enhanced by their desperate fear of failure), they obtain what they are

after from a person who has readied him- or herself for love's call. Akin to this motivation are truly ignoble motivations like the desire for success, money, or power, which the person not in love hopes to achieve by getting involved with the other, who in such a smitten state is destined to become his or her "slave in love."

Eventually, this extreme case of a one-sided relationship based on deception (in which one lover truly loves the other, who in turn is not and has never been in love) becomes heartless and ruthless. On the positive side, however, it can be said that in the great majority of cases this deception comes to light and the truth gets revealed. Actually, this is a rather automatic outcome. By this I mean to say that since people who fall in love are put to the test (they face in reality *a series of tests*, but more on that later), anyone who has made another person fall in love with him/her without being in love him/herself, quickly grows tired of such trials. If nothing else, such individuals get tired of being constantly asked, "Do you love me?" in ways and forms they can't answer to. Since they "fail the test", and the deception is revealed, it can be said that the test or

tests really do work and genuinely detect mutual love.

Reliable tests aside, nothing cannot erase the immense pain and desperate sense of loss experienced by the member of the couple who was really in love and who now must face the truth. A bit of comfort, however, may be found in the fact that the more brazen, maladroit, or obvious the deception is, the less damage the victim is destined to suffer. The certainty quickly establishes itself in his or her mind that the other person never at the start fell in love with, nor came to love him or her; in a sense “nothing ever happened” between them, and seeing it was all an illusion, the pain begins to vanish.

Less frequently, the situation arises where one member of the relationship is *more* in love than the other, yet at the same time remains convinced that the other is sincerely in love with him or her. There is no clear-cut deception about to come to light here and end things. Any decision to break off the relationship, therefore, is tinged with doubt and uncertainty. For people in love, this sort of doubt assumes the stature of a full-scale *dilemma*. I will return to this point later, but let me say here that the

way out of this dilemma involves letting oneself grow apathetic...and that of all states of being, *apathy* is truly one of the most terrible.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Are we always convinced that the person we fall in love with is perfect? I realize that many of things we've said in previous chapters might convey that impression, but actually we never really think that he or she is such an unblemished repository of truth. Though this person embodies everything we desire, and though at times he or she may have the most amazingly profound things to say which give us a new perspective of things (one we couldn't have arrived at on our own), we inevitably disagree with some of his or her opinions or plans, and try to convince him or her that our idea is better. And yet, though neither lover has a monopoly on the truth, each one is *the way* to the truth for the other. (We could even call it the Truth, to underline how when we fall in love, the truth becomes something that not only exists but is accessible.) This because though we conserve our separate perspectives on things, the

“point of view” of the other person is much more than an opinion; it is a fantastic *window* that opens onto existence. By putting together what we both see out our “windows,” we can grasp an immense amount more of the reality around us (a reality which in part escaped us before, though it was staring us in the face). And because we are in love with each other, we are convinced that we can count on ourselves to discern what is true and right and that we can find a solution for every problem that may come our way. Though neither of us is infallible or perfect, we realize that together we are able to get as close to the truth as is humanly possible.

In the *ignition state* of large-scale collective movements, the others (“the Group” in other words) never represent an end but a means, the way to—or *a window onto*—the absolute end which is desired. The same thing goes for a couple in love, only instead of all those people there is just that single special person. She or he is not the truth incarnate but the door guarding the truth, which is sometimes wide open, sometimes half-closed, and sometimes shut completely.

The person we love is not usually blessed with sublime intelligence or any other supreme talent that can account for this marvelous proximity to the truth. In fact, he or she makes mistakes and says dumb things just like everyone else. On first impact, we dismiss what he or she is saying as wrong or naïve or maybe even stupid. But then, since we're in love, we tend to mull over those comments in our mind and grasp their inherent value. We appreciate that they stem from his or her experience and beliefs; that they make up his or her subjective understanding of life. While we can readily dismiss other people's subjective perspective, this one is special; this subjectivity is precious to us. *'Aha, we think, the world is also this way, as my love sees it.'*

As I said in a previous chapter, both members of a couple in love gain in self-understanding as a result of each having his or her own authentic perspective and unique subjectivity appreciated by the other. Their two perspectives are perceived as having the same value, which does not mean that they lose something for becoming relative; indeed, a couple in love does not cancel or balance out each other's diverging opinions but integrate them. They grow in wisdom for it.

This ability to see things through another's (imperfect yet special) eyes develops when people fall in love and continues to be important, in a somewhat different way and in keeping with somewhat different give-and-take dynamics, when the galvanizing experience of falling in love ends, and in its place a steady "institutionalized" sort of love unites the couple. To understand by analogy what changes and remains the same, let's consider the case of two parents who have a mongoloid child. They know that their child is not as intelligent as other children, and that when he goes to school he can't do the same things others can. The parents don't love their child any less for this. Yet, in order to love him in the full sense of the word, they mustn't judge him against the standard of other children; if they did so, they would regard their child as limited, incomplete, insufficient, and even worthless. In that case the only love they could feel for him would be the compassionate or pitying sort that tries to compensate for what is lacking in him. Fortunately this is not the case: they can grasp the ins and outs of their child's perception of things and at the same time ascribe value and importance to it. When he gets frightened, bewildered, or amazed by



something that another child would see as ‘normal’, they participate in this response and see in it an authentic perspective on the world. This isn’t hard to comprehend. They’re just remembering all of a sudden the amazement at things they once felt as children, back when the world still seemed a magical place! Their child’s gaze is full of an innocence that ‘normal’ people have lost or perhaps never had, and the world seems a richer place on account of that gaze. The love of these two parents has made them the guardians of a different (and lost) view of the world.

As I said a moment ago, this example illustrates one of the most important shifts that occur when a couple eventually leaves the *ignition state* of love and enters its calmer territory. While they were in the throes of falling in love, each opened his or her heart and mind to each other’s perspective on things; now that this passion has turned into love, each becomes the protective ‘guardian’ of the same. Does this “entering into the other’s mind set” mean that when we love someone we lose our ability to judge and/or critically assess reality? No, it does not. Think back to the parents of the mongoloid child. Think about how they

understand their frightened or amazed child without feeling frightened or amazed themselves. They never lose touch with reality; they know the actual situation, and in spite of their awareness, they don't deride or scorn the boy but love him.

This distinguishing between the experience of falling in love and love itself, as we are doing, may seem arbitrary to some and quite reasonable to others, and I suppose we could spend hours debating it...unless we want to put this distinction 'to the test' with the aid of an immense theological problem, one that has arisen countless times through the centuries in both Islam and Christianity. That problem is this: *can God, who is infinite and omniscient, love man, who is finite and capable only of error?* For once let's try answering it by applying "the laws" that seem to govern our falling in love. If a lover cannot admit that the person he or she is in love with is inferior to him (because, if anything, he or she should be superior, representing as he or she does the way to truth and goodness), then for the same reason God cannot fall in love with man, who is *infinitely* inferior to Him. On the other hand, one of the principal fruits of the experience of falling in love, which is each lover's

coming to value as an absolute what at the start was only subjective, this acquires predominant importance in the stable love relationship that follows. This means that when we love someone (and no longer are just ‘in love’ with him or her), we are both aware of the other’s weaknesses and able to forgive—or even appreciate!—them. (When would we appreciate them, you ask? Why, in the case where a virtue, like altruism, generosity, or enthusiasm, passes in a real life situation for a weakness or flaw.) If we recognize this as true, then we likewise can appreciate the centuries-old answer to our theological problem, mainly that God *can* love man. (All the more so when man, with all his flaws, acts virtuously and disinterested.)

The necessity of distinguishing clearly between the two states, between falling in love and love itself, should now appear beyond argument. On the other hand, we know that many bridges and roads connect them and make love *a consequence* of falling in love.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

It's often said that falling in love is something for teenagers, or in any case for young people. It doesn't befit a beefy middle-aged man, a married woman with three kids, a politician who wants to get re-elected, or a priest. It's all right for movie stars or artists, though, because everyone knows how crazy and rowdy and adolescent creative people can be. In any case, it's basically connected with youth, as are rapid changes in mood, political fervor, mystical crises or religious enthusiasm, a thirst for adventure, criticism of the adult world for its hypocrisy, absolute bitterness and despair, the affirmation of absolute justice, and the passion belief in a better world to come. A quick glance at this list tells us that just about all the properties or aspects of the *'ignition state'* (of both intimate love affairs and broad collective movements) emerge in adolescence. Undoubtedly, adolescence is the time when this *'ignition state'* occurs most frequently. This is quite understandable, for adolescence is a period of transition between childhood (and one's original family) and the adult world with all its complexities, and this mirrors the separation process

that is a part of falling in love, where what was united is separated and what was separate is united. When this process of ‘dying and rebirth’ occurs in adolescence, therefore, the changes it brings about are inarguably radical. As adolescents, we continually experiment with limits, with the frontiers of the possible, not only separating from our family, and childhood values, emotions, and beliefs, but also joining groups and movements, becoming involved in politics, and acquiring scientific knowledge. On all levels, adolescence offers us a rapid succession of ‘new loves,’ a continual uniting and separating process stemming from alternating revelations and delusions.

The assertion that falling in love is something for teenagers, however, carries with it another message, which is that *not only* is it fine for them but it is *wrong*—inappropriate and out of place—for anyone who is older. If it happens to a burly middle-aged man or to a married mom, then society likes to point a finger at them and say that they are “acting like kids”. They are doing something unsuited to their age, circumstances, and responsibilities. Only teenagers are allowed—permitted and encouraged—to break away from the family; since the manager

and the married mom aren't teenagers, they have lost that socially-sanctified 'right'. Saying that they are "behaving like kids" (without being so) means that they are trying to do what they shouldn't ever be seen attempting: cutting ties and 'burning their bridges' in the institutionalized society around them. Haven't they, as adults, "made it" in the world? Haven't they achieved a certain status and found their place and role? Teenagers, on the other hand, rebel because they can't—they mustn't—stay children forever; they have a deep compelling reason that society recognizes. And though older people who fall in love—who are drawn into that '*ignition state*'—have just as deep, driving reasons, society doesn't like to acknowledge them; their falling in love means there will be a rupture with the consolidated and institutionalized reality of their lives. These workings of the '*ignition state*' must be discredited. As long as it is a matter of "child's play" it is tolerated, but when such a thing happens to a mature adult it becomes frightening and devastating.

Institutionalized society is horrified by an '*ignition state*', whether it convulses people in love or sparks large-scale collective movements. It is

perhaps the sole thing feared by what used to be called the Establishment, because its unexpected appearance inevitably shakes all institutions by their foundations. Since the logic that fuels the '*ignition state*' is not that of everyday life, it is incomprehensible. Since the values upheld are the same as those held by institutionalized society, only 'purer' (thus exposing the hypocrisy of the latter), it passes for fanaticism. Since people in its throes tend to 'rewrite the past' and declare previous bonds or contracts dissolved, it is termed monstrous. All social processes and all the wisdom of tradition aim at suppressing it or rendering it impossible. Where destruction fails, society tries to make the threatening experience of the '*ignition state*' assume some recognizable and delineated form. In the case of two people who are already married but happen to fall in love with each other, these are the accepted categories of engagement, separation, divorce, and remarriage, and the associated stereotypes of mistress or secret lover, not to mention marital revenge. These institutionalized terms only come to be used after some time has passed, however; at the start, a couple is seen as having no right to use (or we might say "take advantage of") them. Since from

the standpoint of society, this falling in love of theirs shouldn't even be happening, society makes sure that its beginnings remain 'something indescribable.' In a way, falling in love at first seems to be taking place in a silent movie. At most, to describe it society allows them to use a harmless term or two drawn from everyday life, none of which are appropriate. In this way, pressure is put on the two lovers to define themselves differently ("we're just friends, even if we're attracted to each other," they might say)—any definition will do as long as it steers clear of the truth. And if they are crazy enough to insist on 'calling their spade a spade', as it were, they risk hearing their experience declared as 'mad folly' or 'foolish nonsense' or the equivalent in the latest slang.

This derision is unrelenting from the start. A professional man who falls in love with a teenaged girl is called pathetic and ridiculous. His crying about it is particularly grotesque, because tears are for children and weaklings, not for a person like him with a prestigious position in society. To make it easier to him to 'snap out of it', his friends resort to winks and humorous ribbing. They construct a wall of good cheer and merriment between him and



them, because he's doing something that can't be serious and stopped acting like a serious adult. "Ah come on, don't act like a baby," they tell him. His therapist, meanwhile, either re-enforces this message that what our lover is doing is infantile and regressive, or else is ready with another, diametrically opposed interpretation. The therapist talks about "pure sexuality", or "repressed sexuality" or else he says that the lover's relationship with the girl is merely a "sexual outlet." If falling in love is reduced to a question of sex, it is much less frightening, for sexual desire is not directed at a single, exclusive object. If the relationship continues on unabated, the messengers of society begin to say that our middle-aged lover sees an impossible sort of absolute perfection in the girl that he's in love with, and since there isn't a human being on earth who doesn't have defects and shortcomings, he must be delirious.

Another ploy is to say that the person who has fallen in love is sure not to have his or her love returned: 'unhappiness is in the cards for you' is the line taken by friends or relatives. They claim that the other will be sure to leave him or her. 'You know, just like he/she did that other woman/man.'

And even when society must concede that this new love is mutual, there's another distortion ready to be whipped out and used: 'you two are too wrapped up in each other. You're cut yourselves off from everyone else. All you think about are yourselves. Real love isn't selfish like that. This is just an infatuation, an obsession.' In adopting this line of attack, society is contradicting itself, for on the one hand it admits that the lovers are truly united in mutual love and on the other hand, it claims that they are 'going overboard' in their clinging to each other, and so not truly in love. What makes this fuss and criticism even more absurd is the fact that love is *always* a joyous opening of ourselves to the world, which our eyes transform into a beautiful and happy place; and love, moreover, *always* goes beyond the couple to include other people, all of whom seem like sympathetic friends.

We know that there are more formal, institutionalized aspects as well, about which society is extremely unforgiving. For instance, we know that although our falling in love is an act of liberation, granting us the right to be independent from bonds and from the consequence of past binding decisions made by us or others, and

although our falling in love will lead us to ‘reshape’ and so reclaim certain things from our past, the cultural and religious mores of society stand in categorical opposition to this (this even today, albeit in certain cultures more than in others); they affirm that ‘a promise is a promise’, and ‘a contract is a contract’: *these cannot be broken at whim*. No one in his or her right mind, however, would maintain that a married person who has fallen in love with someone else is acting on a whim. That person does, however, quickly discover that there are *two* sides or facets to the contract—to the wedding vow—he or she made in the past, one of which can be (or must be) willfully adhered to and the other of which can only be spontaneously respected. The clear ‘willful’ part of the contract centers on that question: “Will you love this man/woman in sickness and in health?” In saying ‘yes’, each partner pledges to love and help the other. This is a possible thing to pledge. However, each cannot pledge ‘to be in love, to love passionately and desperately.’ And this is the second, hidden part of the contract which the person in love (but already married) denounces. We can imagine him or her saying, “I hold firm to my legal commitments, but no one can swear by his

feelings. Authenticity is the important thing, not carrying on with pretenses. *I can't lie.* Besides, when I made those vows *I swore not to lie.*” This person is revoking his or her side of the contract for reasons having to do with the principles, for those higher moral values, implied in it. His or her motives are so authentic that he or she feels ready to pay for this decision with his or her life. If not now, then later. Because there is always a moment when love becomes conceived of in terms of ‘all or nothing’, life or death.

Any lover who is already in a relationship, even if it's not marriage, realizes that at this point he or she is merely going through the motions in a world of rules, certainties, clearly defined options, and prohibitions, a world in which he or she meets his or her routine responsibilities without knowing in his or her heart why, a reality that he or she rejects now that he/she has fallen in love. As part of the transformation process, people in this situation realize that they are lying to themselves and also to others. In short, life has become constant falsification of reality. The institutionalized society—or ‘establishment’—around them want them to continue living this lie because all it is

interested in is their outward, observable behavior. Intentions don't matter, and a person's deepest feelings and values are regarded as things, as commodities. In reality, this 'establishment', as I'm calling it, takes in the husband, wife, fiancée, partner, or lover who is being abandoned. This member of the couple now come asunder begins to hyper-focus on the continuing physical presence of the other (the one in love with someone else). Though powerless to make the other love him or her passionately again, the jilted partner is keenly interested in the other being there, by his or her side, rather than with that new love. The pain and desperation that the person in love is experiencing is of no importance. It's as if this abandoned partner were saying, "I'd rather have you next to me crying through the night, than lose you." Without intending to, the abandoned partner is treating the other like a thing. Hegel calls this attitude *reification*: Marx describes it as commodification.

It is for these reasons that we can say that institutionalized society (or the 'establishment') continues to turn an inhuman face towards people going through the *ignition state* of love. There is tremendous irony in that, seeing that the

institutionalized society of today was itself generated from an *ignition state* once, and that the institution of marriage in which a couple participates now springs from the previous experience of falling in love. We will trace this development in detail in the next chapter or two, but one thing we can say already is that this institution claims that it allows the incredible experience of the *ignition state*, now at its end, to “be activated” in an everyday context. This, however, is not necessarily true, any more than the ritual of bread and wine which “becomes” Christ’s body and blood in the Catholic Mass is necessarily experienced as such by everyone present in church that Sunday. A mystic relives it, but a distracted believer does not, because he or she is thinking of something else. However, the Mass (which sprang out of the original *ignition state* experience of a small group of apostles) continues to re-evolve the sacrifice of the Cross, with or without the participation of many people, for the sole reason that it and the Church (which has codified it) are an *institution*. And as I just said, it is extremely ironic that while many celebrations, holidays, laws, and institutions owe their origins to movements composed of real men and women, in

their codified form they no longer need popular consent; *they no longer need humanity*. A correlation of this is that if institutionalized society is not continually galvanized (or at least ‘revitalized’) by *ignition-state* experiences, it becomes inhuman and tyrannical; and the people who live in it are reduced to objects.

All of this points up how any institution (be it of marriage or otherwise) that people must respect and any *ignition state* that people are destined to experience are necessarily on a collision course with each other. Since falling in love is the *truth* of love, and since the former is the ‘ignition state’ and the latter ‘the institution’, the settled love of an established couple passes as something devoid of truth, a potential weapon, the source of power ploys—when compared to what came before. Viewed the opposite way, however, which is to say from the standpoint of institutionalized society, falling in love appears to have few of the virtues that will come later but only incarnate precarious, fleeting, pure being...a vision that sadly re-enforces the prejudice that it is an irrational state, a sort of plague that many times produces madness and scandal.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

How exactly do we go from falling in love to love itself? By putting ourselves, our relationship, and the person we love to the test, that's how. And by letting circumstances impose these tests on us. Some of these tests are crucial. Passing them means that our experience of falling in love has "set", and that it has become the compact cluster of daily certainties that we term 'mature, stable love.' Not passing them, on the other hand, means that instead of love we end up with something else, be it a mutually-decided end to our relationship, or its sad transformation into apathy or estrangement. Yet no matter how things turn out, the peculiar thing is that we quickly tend to sublimate the experience of undergoing these tests. If we end up in a solid love relationship, we will probably at most remember them as trivial games. Indeed, our memory selectively reconstructs in a different way the shift from our initial falling in love with each other to our current consolidated love; filling in that stretch of time with episodes of daily caring and emotional commitment. Our initial passion and enthusiasm, we believe, has gently evolved into loving devotion to



our partner. And the last thing we are prepared to acknowledge is that this serenity is the product—it is *always* the product—of dramatic tests whose outcome remains uncertain till the last possible moment. Even if we don't end up with love because one or both of us failed the tests, we sublimate these tests all the same. We are, for instance, unable to recall ever having imposed such trials on the other; in hindsight we see only that the other did not love us 'enough' (which is the same thing as saying 'not at all').

None of this sublimation and projection, however, changes what I just said: like it or not, the process of falling in love always involves a series of tests, some of which are relatively painless and others of which are pure hell. The first and perhaps most important are the ones we submit ourselves to. These tests help us determine the true nature of our feelings: for that reason we might term them "*truth tests*." There is one 'truth test' that typically arises in the earliest phase of falling in love. A strange state of mind comes over us and we begin to tell ourselves, "I have reached with X the utmost happiness I will ever be able to achieve; now I can even lose him/her and it won't matter; I'll just

go back to the way I was before and hold on to my beautiful memories. I've obtained what I longed for; that is enough." In a sense, we are convincing ourselves that we feel satiated. To achieve the maximum that is possible and then do without it: is this not the fantasy behind satiety? In the wings, however, lurks our unwillingness to yield to the existential risk of putting ourselves completely in another person's hands. It constitutes our *resistance to love*, which co-exists alongside our falling in love. If we continue to abandon ourselves completely, it is only because we allow ourselves to think that *this time is the last time*. By thinking that, we create a separation—however brief—between ourselves and the person we love. In this lies the "truth test": we are pulling away merely to test ourselves, to see if after a separation occurs we notice that our desire returns and that we continue to be desperately in love; if so, we need another 'last time' ...and another and another. Our falling in love begins afresh and the person we love is impressed on us (by our own mind) as being the only truly authentic object of Eros imaginable. This peculiar inner resistance to love is a struggle against ourselves that we must lose. We surrender, *we yield*

*to love*, and yet this does not mean that the struggle isn't real, any more than realizing it prevents it from taking place. What is more, our detachment is sensed by the other person.. And since he or she, too, is experiencing the same thing—putting him- or herself to the test, our two phases of detachment, and resistance to our powerful feelings of love, may coincide. In this case, the time we spend apart may lengthen; during this separation, furthermore, we may perform actions that later will give the other cause to feel jealous or else seem retroactive proof that we don't love him or her. In any case in our detached state we feel torn. We evaluate all those little 'she/he loves me and loves me nots', half-desiring to do without the beautiful, unmerited grace of the other's love, which would leave us so vulnerable should we unconditionally open ourselves to it, and half-desiring to take what we see as signs of certain reciprocity. 'Does he or she need me as much as I need him or her?' Everything gets analyzed in light of this question or 'truth test,' starting with the smallest details, such as whether he or she arrives late or ahead of time, or whether he or she looks with interest at someone else. Often, however, what these things signify is far from clear.

Take, for example, his or her arriving late. What does it mean if he or she shows up, yes, late, but panting and out of breath? Is this a sign that he or she forgot about me till the last moment, or rather does it mean that the other person had to go through considerable trouble to get here, and thus this lateness only indicates a great deal of tenacity and caring about me? Does anything really change if the former is true? Not necessarily, because a sincere explanation, look, or caress from the other is enough to right things and make us forget about his or her ‘failing the test’ that we set today. Yet how can we say that what we’re getting is true sincerity? Clearly, seeing that we are in love, if we *experience* it as sincerity, then it is.

People in love both administer and undergo another test, which I’m going to call the “*test of reciprocal commitment*.” Unlike ‘truth tests’, this type does not involve the weighing of evidence but rather means making genuine demands on the person we have fallen in love with. We re-organize our life and work around this person, and all our previous feelings, ideas, and plans as well; he or she does the same around us. Almost immediately it becomes possible to talk about what ‘we’—both of

us—want. The actual, nitty-gritty selection process involved in determining those ‘wants’, however, is neither straightforward nor simple. To start with, this wanting *together* as many of the things which each of us as an individual authentically wants signifies our being open to change. Certainly, during this reciprocal exploration of what can be integrated into this new love, each of us tries to “stick in” as many of his or her desires as possible and inevitably makes certain plans which do not coincide with those of the other. Each of us, however, asks the other to recognize our plans—especially when it’s our *life plan*, our vision of the future. Thus the other person’s “Do you love me?” also means “Do you agree to take part in my plan?” On the other hand, our “I love you” means “I am modifying my plan and approaching things from your perspective. I am giving up something that I wanted because I want what you want, along with you.” We follow this statement of “I love you”, however, with the question that the other has just asked. And this “Do you love me?” means “What are *you* changing? What are you giving up?” It is something else besides. On yet another level, this question is a request—a request that the other person accept our

concrete ideas about the future as well as all the things we've ruled out as being beyond us, even though his or her own plans and sense of limits may be different. If that sounds like a tall order to fill, in reality it is and it isn't. After all, in making those plans of ours we have the other person in mind from the start; we have geared things around both of us; the result is a life plan proposing *what we both have to want together*.

This is not to say that divergences won't arise. Lovers are only human. A couple is bound to have incompatible desires sometimes, things that both do not want. If it's for something trivial, the person with that desire usually finds that he or she can forget about it, do without it. Even if the desire is for something more important, its fulfillment can sometimes be deferred—even put on hold for years and years. Remember, there is nothing static about a couple's life plan; rather, it is a continuous process of creation and revision. That said, one member of the couple may have certain desires that are so vital and essential that if they are not fulfilled, love itself loses its meaning. These essential desires inevitably crop up as a couple goes about revising its life plan; they represent *points of no return*, in the sense that a

place must be found for them; the couple find themselves at a turning point. The other member must accept and embrace these “indissoluble knots” and insert them into his idea of the future. It is a test. If he or she fails to do so, the lover with this life-essential desire feels there is no room for his or her real self in the other’s imaginary world. There is no acknowledgement of his or her impulse for profound renewal, for being new and different and alive. The other says “I love you” but in reality he or she is not allowing the person he or she loves to exist. The latter feels in danger of yielding to the other too much and so losing him- or herself.

Let’s take an example. Let’s say that I’ve fallen in love with a man who says he loves me too, but then he doesn’t do anything to make me a real part of his life. He keeps his work separate from our relationship. When he travels, he doesn’t travel with me. I feel he wants to confine me to the role of the mistress that he comes to see every so often—a silent lover who he loves on the sly. He continues to act very much like his old self and changes nothing in his relationship with his wife or with others; everything about his life remains intact. I’m supposed to be his hidden refuge, even if that means

limiting my daily existence to a waiting game, to seeing if he is going to show up today or not, to accepting that he will come when he wants and is able to—in keeping with the mysterious rules of propriety that he's set for himself. But I'm getting fed up now; I've decided that this isn't acceptable, this isn't living. For another woman it might be all right, for that was how I myself used to feel. It isn't good enough anymore. I want a real life now. Sometimes I ask him if I can come with him on his business trip. My question is *a test*. If he refuses, that means for me that he is forcing me back into a corner where I refuse to stay, where life is impossible.

For him, the problem is the reverse. There is a delicate balance to his system of relationships at present, which he has had to adjust and set right more than once. Any abrupt shift now might make things explode. He needs time to reorganize everything gradually, to change jobs, to provide economically for who knows how many people, and to make new arrangements for the care of his children. His new love gives him the strength, courage, and confidence to tackle all that, to change his life plan. Thanks to this love, he *is slowly*



making changes in himself and in his life. It is really not all that long before he finds and starts a new job, moves to a new city, acquires some new daily habits, and—very importantly—begins to make explanations to his wife and children. It's taking a while, it's a gradual process, and yet soon he will be *free* and "available." All he needs in the meantime is love, and the certainties that love brings with it. For this reason, he is frightened by what I am demanding of him—this decisive, sharp break with his past is a tremendous amount to ask. He is supposed to throw himself totally into this new central reality of ours and risk losing everything that he loves and that he wants to gradually incorporate. If he indeed loses all this, because he's been rash and hasty, our central new reality stands to become an empty shell. In that case, he would seem half the man he was to me; he would feel mutilated and incomplete; he would be wracked by both a sense of nostalgia and guilt. He cannot abandon a part of himself like that without ceasing to be himself.

*Thus both of us have reached a point of no return.* Each of us is asking other to give up something essential—that our new love makes seem so essential as to, ideally, incorporate it. When we

stop to think about it, however, this request is terrible, unspeakable cruel, and dehumanizing. Because by asking the other to give up an essential part of him- or herself—to give up what makes him or her fully capable of loving, we are asking that person to destroy his or her humanity, his or her fundamental human essence.

In the Old Testament God puts Abraham to a similar, dehumanizing test. He asks Abraham to kill his beloved first-born son, Isaac. Abraham is faced with the most terrible dilemma. Whichever choice he makes, to obey or to disobey God, signifies the loss of his essential humanity. With either choice he becomes less of a man, a monstrous being. We face this monstrosity ourselves when we go from that ecstatic state of falling in love into love's commitment stage, where we realize that we are being asked by the other to become less than human, a mutilated being, a monster. But the hard part doesn't end there. We are supposed to trust this other person, to love him or her, even though he or she is asking this horrible thing. Conversely, in so far as we have asked the same dehumanizing thing of the other, we need to somehow prove we deserve to be loved despite it all. This reciprocal test means

that we must demand the other's 'unconditionally surrender.' We are demanding that the other mutilate him or herself, that he or she destroy what he or she treasures so much. On one level this struggle is being waged between two people who love each other; on another level, however, it is a fight to the death that has nothing to do with love. Being put to the test like this makes us desperate. The only 'comfort' we have is that it is always reciprocal. In the Bible, God tests Abraham but at the same time Abraham tests his God. What would happen to God, in fact, if Abraham really did kill his son? He would no longer be the God of love that He says he is, but rather some sort of cruel and bloody deity. There are other reciprocal tests in the Bible: think of Moses, for example, whom God puts to the test when He asks him to fling himself and his people into the waters of the Red Sea. Also here, however, God, too, is being tested, in that He cannot ask this and then allow His people to drown. A God who practiced such deception would be not God but the Devil.

We're saying, then, that *there is this tremendous, inhuman testing process that is an inherent part of love, which comes to a brutal and*

*even barbaric crisis point of no return.* How do things ever get sorted out? How is it that we see countless couples settled into enduring relationships when we look around us? The answer lies in the fact that *the act of pushing past this point of return is demanded but in the end not required:* for each lover, it is like a check that gets signed by the other but that will never be cashed. In a similar way, the prophet Abraham is, yes, on the verge of killing his son, only at the last minute God does not require this sacrifice. Both of them, Abraham and God, thus pass the test. Both have effectively given up something; both have come up against and acknowledged an insuperable limit. Just like in the Old Testament, in a couple's relationship love has been proved to exist when one lover takes the other's point of no return as his or her *own* authentic limit, as that line that mustn't be crossed. Moreover, each lover not only takes this upon him or herself, but he or she *desires* it. It is *right* as a limit; its violation would be subjectively experienced as wrong.

When all this has been sorted out, we can say that the lovers have reached a very special kind of agreement: they have made *a covenant* with each

other. Each knows that the other will not ask what he or she cannot ask. Out of desperation has come the *certainty of mutual trust*. This is an integral part of the couple's reality: we might even say it is so set in stone as to be '*institutionalized*' within their love relationship. Both people know that they love—indeed, they cannot keep themselves from loving each other. Both also know that they have limits that they cannot overstep, and they accept this. Love is what emerges from the covenant they have made. And this pact, in turn, has come out of the awareness that there are limits, that it is not possible to have everything. Seen from this perspective, a couple's matured love is always a love for what-was-not-wanted.

This process doesn't occur once but many times in our lives. There is desperation, followed by a covenant. Each time there are new certainties, thanks to which we can reorganize our daily existence.

That said, there is no guarantee that what we experience when we fall in love will necessarily become love of this sort. Our life plans can be so radically different that they may not admit compromise. We might not reach the razor's edge of

that point of no return because we lose each other first: we may demand that the other undergo this terrible dehumanizing process, and give up this essential part of self, only to lose him or her at this delicate moment, either because he or she refuses to go through with it or because he or she does in fact carry through with this self-mutilation—does indeed ‘cash that signed check’, as we said before. The greater the difference in life plans, the more probable the loss; then too, the greater the difference, the more disruptive the original experience of falling in love is likely to be. There will be an increasing (and sometimes daunting) number of things in the lovers’ lives that must be changed around, reversed, or reorganized. Little wonder if the most intense sort of love is one that gathers into its whirlpool as much of a lover’s life, livelihood, experiences, and responsibilities as possible. In so far as the experience of falling in love is bound to revolutionize a person’s existence, those existences that are immensely full and complex to begin with undergo the most disruption. Here is where the process of falling in love, therefore, is most fraught with danger and risk.

When such a person, with his or her wealth of experience, falls in love with someone who has seen less of life but who can be more flexible and open to change because of this (and also because he or she has fewer ties and obligations), the prospects of the two ‘settling’ into a stable love relationship afterwards are not particularly good. This is frequently the case when the couple is made up of a currently married person and an unmarried person. Or when one of the two is much older than the other. Or when one of the lovers is fervently committed to a religious or political cause while the other is not. Certainly the partner ‘with less’ loves the other for his or her fuller life or more educated mind or well-established career, and this is not hard to understand, seeing that this “complexity” gives depth and meaning to his or her own plans for change...and then too, because it may feed his or her desire for power. Yet though ‘opposites attract,’ diversities pull apart. It is undeniably easier to transform the passion into a stable love relationship when the two people are more alike in the way we’ve been talking about: when, say, they both have few ties (as is the case with most young people or adolescents) or when they both have already broken

off numerous love relationships in the past or gone through more than one divorce.

Paradoxically, however, the experience of falling in love for a couple like that is also less intense. Its “revolutionary task,” the upheaval it brings to the life of each lover, is smaller. At times, there may be almost nothing to revolutionize. In any case, what happens to a couple when they fall in love is analogous to what happens to society when a great collective movement gets underway. Some collective movements shake the entire social system from top to bottom; there are violent struggles and battles and sometimes even a war, a long dark period in other words during which no new, stable form of power or authority emerges. Other collective movements, however, quickly end with the seizure of power. For every French or Russian Revolution in history, there is a movement like the Protestant Reformation, which spread through Europe without provoking the ecclesiastical equivalent of the storming of the Bastille or of the Czar’s Winter Palace.

As I said a moment ago, there is no guarantee that just because we fall in love we will end up in a stable sort of lasting love relationship. The initial



*ignition-state* experience may cause great upheaval and leave a profound mark on one or both members of the couple and yet not lead to love. Conversely, this solid, stable sort of love doesn't always come—when it does come—out of the galvanizing experience of falling in love. In place of that, it might come out of a nice calm interval of getting to know each other, or from the pleasure of being together, or from the discovery that both share the ability to easily generate a desire for what the other desires most, and so form that covenant which, as we said, 'sets this all in stone.'

As I pointed out in another chapter, any *ignition-state* experience, and also that of falling in love, is an exploration of what is humanly possible, *which takes as its starting point the impossible*. It is an attempt, in other words, to impose the imaginary on real, concrete existence. The harder that is, the longer it takes, and the likelihood of it succeeding diminishes. To tell the story of a person's falling in love, therefore, is always to tell the story of a private journey filled with hardships and struggles, at the end of which there may be no homecoming or even festive port of call.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Once we've fallen in love with someone, we don't usually feel any jealousy. This probably stems from the fact that when we feel that our love is returned, we are reassured as to our own intrinsic worth. Though we know that there are better, more intelligent, more attractive, and sexier people than us in the world, we love and appreciate ourselves because we are loved, because the other person makes us feel that deep down there is an irreplaceable uniqueness about us (which he or she recognized and loves). Even when the other person asks us to change, he or she is really only soliciting us to let our uniqueness emerge more fully, to activate our intrinsic potential. This sort of immense request, however, is more the exception than the rule. Most of the time, in fact, our happiness consists in appreciating each other in the here and now: each other's bodies, clothes, books, ideas, desire to travel, etc. Things proceed swimmingly in this direction for a good while. For some couples, forever. For others of us, however, this process unfortunately gets interrupted. We get jealous. We believe (rightly or wrongly doesn't matter at this

point) that, for the realization of his or her desires, the man or woman we love depends on something that some third party possesses. We are never jealous of a thing, an animal, or a profession, only of another person—a person who in our eyes exerts an irresistible fascination on the one we love, similar to the irresistible fascination that the latter exerts over us. We reason that if he or she loves us deeply enough, we in turn should have this same magical power over him or her. Our feelings of jealousy, however, reveal that this apparently is not the case. Our jealous eyes are opened to a weakness or flaw in the person we love: certain things should not have all that much value and sway, yet they do for him or her.

Let's take an example to show the ins and outs of jealousy in more detail. Let's say that the woman I've fallen in love with loves cars and is fascinated by race-car drivers. I notice her attraction to one of them and am jealous. I feel that something has been upset and overturned our relationship. Previously, this relationship showed me that my not being a race-car driver was absolutely unimportant (indeed, it couldn't have any importance because I, the one she loved, was not one). Now, however, her evident

attraction to one of them makes me feel worthless. Our love has been invaded by an external force, which is little by little reeking havoc on our joint value system. When both people who have fallen in love continue happily along in the ‘*ignition state*’, there is nothing in the external world capable of exerting this sort of attraction of this kind. The experience of falling in love here, however, has become no longer mutual—for the appearance of my irremovable jealousy is a telltale sign of this.

Naturally, not all jealousy is that serious or damaging. Jealousy might simply arise as a passing doubt, as something on the order of a tiny crack in a couple’s relationship, which widens when the two people feel distant from each other. There are times when it provides a fleeting reason for pulling out of the relationship. This sort of jealousy causes us to think, “It’s not worth trying to work things out. X wants other things, which I can’t give him/her.” This doubt, however, gets cleared up as soon as both people realize what is going on and take action. The two lovers once again come to embody all that is good to each other; there can be no external competition or threat to that, not in the ‘*ignition state*’ of love. The other’s ability to rise to the

occasion, charm other people, complete an ambitious project, and become successful are all things to rejoice in. There is no jealousy. And even where all that activity, socializing, and success prevent the couple's individual life plans from converging and cause differences to emerge (thus acquiring a negative rather than positive significance), even in this case there is no jealousy, only sadness. We feel a terrible lack of fulfillment; we feel that our needs and requests are going unsatisfied; we are at a turning point and must decide on how to change. This does not signify that we are jealous, but just that we are about to undergo those difficult tests discussed in Chapter Thirteen.

If the jealousy that we feel is not founded on the other's fascination with a third party and if it is not "a passing doubt"—if, in other words, that jealousy is completely unmotivated because the other person truly is in love, then it can only mean that we are afraid and at the mercy of an unutterable desire not to love or yield to the other or open ourselves to the experience of total trust implicit in the '*ignition-state*' experience of love. The reality is that the person we love really doesn't find anything irresistible in others; they truly have no

power over him or her. Yet we persist in thinking that they do because we have no faith in ourselves; we don't see the worth of our own unique identity. The person we love isn't measuring us against the rest of the world; we are submitting *ourselves* to this cruel, inauthentic comparison. There are even those among us that are so uncertain of themselves and that see life so much as one long, unending trial, that they partake of the extraordinary experiences of the *ignition state* of love without believing that they are the true protagonist. Something inside them won't allow them to shake the belief that 'grace falls upon others' and certainly never, never upon them. They are never so blessed or lucky. Are such unfortunate people jealous, though? Yes, they are. Because when we are jealous we recognize only in others what we cannot recognize in ourselves.

All of the above cases of jealousy involve couples who, at least initially, really do fall in love with each other. Yet as we know (and have in part already talked about) there are also couples in one-sided relationships, where one person "has gone off the deep end" while the other hasn't fallen in love at all. Jealousy here might seem like a natural given, but actually, it usually takes a while for the person

in love to get jealous of the other, who has meanwhile become attracted to someone else. Seeing things as a person does in the throes of ‘*the ignition state*,’ the one in love cannot fathom how a third party could have anything that his or her lover would see as precious. This person in love may see that his or her lover is attracted, yet not be bothered—not at first. Whatever it is attracting his lover is of no intrinsic value. Being worthless, this thing cannot represent a threat. In fact, the person who is truly in love tends to ignore this puzzling behavior until at last it comes time to ask the million-dollar question: “Does X really love me or not?”

If and when we ask *that*, we are in effect saying, “if X prefers that other person to me, it means that X does not love me. X may feel a lot of affection, or thrive on my company, or dig my body or mind, but X doesn’t love me.” This conclusion is of course devastating, for we are still very much inside the *ignition state* of our love affair. We don’t doubt *ourselves* or *our* love but the quality of X’s love. At this point, what usually happens? Oftentimes we decide to “fight for” X, to win his or her love back with our charm, love letters, poems,

music, or utter devotion and self-sacrifice; we try everything, we're that desperate. Unfortunately we realize all too soon that X still doesn't love us, and then we must decide whether to continue loving him or her without hope or whether to *try* not to love him or her anymore but rather detach ourselves, acutely aware that we are still in love and yet at the same time faced with the terrible loss of our love object—in a word, encroaching *psychological suicide*. We raise the terrible renting sword to divide ourselves from him or her, but most of our strength goes into self-inflicted wounds; metaphorically-speaking, we chop off our hands when they begin to reach for the other, and we blind our eyes to keep them from searching for the other everywhere. Then more time passes, and we realize that in order to effectively stop wanting and longing for X, we will have to find reasons for falling *out* of love; we will have to try to remake the past and poison all our memories with hatred. We are puzzled to find, however, that this hatred doesn't accomplish what it is supposed to. The reason is because the moment we decided to give up on our love, the extraordinary forces at work in the *ignition state* also halted. The past has become simply “what was,” and is



inaccessible to the will. When we were in love we could “fix” the past; now, however, we can’t.

We are left feeling numb. We desire nothing. We lose touch with that marvelous metaphysical dimension to existence that was ours when we were in love, and return to the superficial world of appearances. Nothing has meaning; everything seems worthless. We go through the motions, copy other people’s gestures, feel what little we manage to “learn to feel,” and speak empty words. In short, we enter a phase of bleak *apathy*. Exceptionally, we do experience one real, piercing emotion still, and that is *nostalgia*, the nostalgia for what we have lost. We find this so painful that to protect ourselves we must wage war on that now unchangeable past of ours. We must summon up all our hatred and resentment. Whereas once we knew what it meant to “say yes” to life, and see in it only goodness, now we must rechannel that into an experience of life as evil—and we must perceive existence only as a powerful source of negativity.

Is there any variation in the amount of pain and self-abjuration that a jilted lover is bound to suffer? Are there forms of abandonment that “hurt less” or “hurt more”? Why certainly. We all can appreciate

how being told by our lover that he or she loves (or even simply likes) someone else more is less painful than being told that he or she really loves no one else in particular but would simply like to “spend more time with friends.” One’s ego is less bruised in the first case, clearly...but is that all there is to it? Actually, something rather amazing is going on under the surface: the person who is in love and who is being left is so much under the sway of the “emotional logic” of that extraordinary dimension that we’ve been calling the ‘*ignition state*’ that he or she identifies with the falling-in-love experience of the other, *even though the latter is leaving him or her for someone else*. He or she profoundly understands this love and respects it, no matter how much pain he or she might be feeling. The jilted person’s own experience of falling in love allows him or her to be sympathetic, and to want the other “to be happy.” The event by which he or she has lost the other has all the characteristics of an immense, overwhelming ‘metaphysical necessity’ to him or her at this time. Since he or she can willfully do nothing to change this, the crushing weight of this “fate” may sometimes seem such as to make him or her entertain thoughts of suicide (thereby

liberating the other of “the burden” of his or her continuing existence). The fact that he or she has close friends or family, however, usually dissuades this suicidal lover from carrying through on it. In fact, when we see that though we are in terrible existential pain we can devote ourselves to our loved ones, we have found a reason for living. No longer able to obtain pleasure and happiness (let alone self-renewal) for ourselves, we will now try to give some of that to others. In our most profound depths of being, we can still call upon a remaining vestige of the extraordinary psychic energy that was ours when we were going through the *ignition state* of love: we are capable of an impulse for giving which is so encompassing that it extends to our former lover and his or her new partner. We want those who have fallen in love to be happy; to that end we withdraw in order to let them achieve happiness. *It is our ultimate heroic act: on an unconscious level we are giving someone else—our lover’s new lover—the source of our own life and hope.* After we have done that, however, we feel this extraordinary energy leave us completely. Apathy at last sets in.

Of all the terrible ways, fraught with jealousy and suffering, in which a love affair might end, there is one more that I have yet to mention—one that is the cruelest of all. Indeed, what could be worse than hearing the person one is in love with jeer, “Instead of making love to you, I’d rather screw the first stranger I see in the street”? To hear that is to witness the walls and foundations of one’s love and self-esteem come suddenly crashing down. Sadness—immensely gripping sadness—is one’s only reaction, once the rubble has settled. Everything sacred about love has been tainted, spoiled, defiled, ruined. The person one loves has decided that lewdness, trash, crude sex—the worst of the world of appearances out there—is preferable. No love can end in a worse way than this because further down the line, once the phase of hatred and apathy has been gotten through, there will be no nostalgia for this old lover. Indeed, one’s precious experience of falling in love has been debased in such a way that this lover—this individual—will forever appear morally and psychologically reprehensible.

The problem of jealousy should be viewed in a slightly different light when we are talking about homosexual couples—this, even though the phenomenology of homosexual love is exactly the same as that for heterosexuality. The main features of the *ignition-state* experience are entirely identical. We know that it is possible to read a piece of writing about love and not know whether that love is homosexual or heterosexual. One of my favorites is a beautiful essay by Roland Barthes, who was himself a homosexual, which takes its examples and language from the universal literature on love and speaks directly to any person in love.\* And yet, there is no denying that when homosexuals fall in love, there is something that makes the shift to a stable “institutionalized” love relationship more difficult. There is even today a certain resistance on the part of society, and in certain social strata, also scorn. In the past, cultural pressure was so strong that homosexuals themselves were traditionally very ashamed to talk about ‘falling in love’ and often resorted instead to a maddening use of vulgar language as a defense mechanism. The most profound, reason, however, why the homosexual experience of falling in love is more difficult,

convulsed, and (in numerous cases) plagued by jealousy is that it cannot become the stable love relationship of a couple *who has had a child*. It is an erotic relationship which precludes having children directly. Of course, each of the lovers may have a child with a person of the opposite sex (which then the other lover adopts, whether legally or otherwise), yet the fact remains that psychologically this “going off and having a child” remains a threat for the other lover: it is a lurking source of jealousy. Jealousy is furthermore a constant factor in the “brief homosexual flings”

\*Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978)

experienced by many young people. Or, as a variation on that, in relationships between an older, confirmed homosexual/lesbian and a young person who is undecided as to his or her sexual orientation. For all these reasons, homosexuals who fall in love often tend to remain in the *ignition state* of this experience, rather than managing to move on to a more serene, lasting love relationship. Very possibly this is why the homosexual experience of falling in love, with its note of anxiety and sadness, has on occasion inspired immensely beautiful poetry.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

There are countless men and women who *believe* that they've fallen in love when in fact they haven't. Cases abound, each different from the next, but all with one thing in common: the person who thinks that he or she is so passionately in love all of a sudden, or without much trouble, stops feeling those tingles: all the desire and emotion dry up, and this rather swiftly and easily. Apparently, it is because their strong erotic interest in the other has been satisfied (the old story of "It's been a pleasure;

thank you very much and good-bye”); or because they actually managed to feel desired and loved as “that exclusive chosen one” by someone who is intensely admired and desired by others (and for a while they mistook this heady feeling for love); or because they were on the rebound, after a disastrous relationship ravaged by jealousy, and on the lookout for a substitute, for “somebody to love.” A desire for power or success, which has been satisfied by becoming the companion of a rich or powerful person, may also feed the sensation that one is truly in love; just as the desire to escape from everyday life, to live a vacation as an extraordinary experience, can create the conviction that one has fallen in love—a conviction that is shattered, however, when the vacation ends and the person who one found so marvelous suddenly seems out of place and lusterless. This case illustrates to an extreme how the *authentic* experience of falling in love always brings with it a radical reorganization of our real life existence, and is never “a vacation from it.” An additional case that bears mention, representing as it does a variation on “the vacation scheme,” is where one “falls in love” (in the sense that one experiences extraordinary emotions but



does not truly enter the *ignition state*) with someone who comes from faraway to stay for a short time: a month, six months, a year. Since it is certain he or she will be leaving, quite like someone one meets on vacation, this love has a ‘cut-off date,’ which one comes to terms with from the very start.

As I said, none of these people were really in love. They did, however, make use of the language of love and passion, and claim to feel the dizzy spins generated by the ‘ignition state’, in order to enhance an experience—a “love story”—which would have otherwise been superficial and trite. This sort of love is to the genuine experience of falling in love what a Mardi Gras celebration is to a social revolution. A carnival is characterized by excess, transgression, and the disruption of everyday activity; it is permeated by a sense of the exceptional and extraordinary. A carnival, however, does not ever overturn the social order, the way a revolution does. Everything, moreover, that is considered an immense danger and risk in a revolution, is calculated and provided for ahead of time in a carnival. Mardi Gras has a pre-established beginning and end. Within the allotted time of its unfolded, rules are tested; when it’s all over, the

rules remain intact. When carnivals, holidays, and vacations finish, they are completely over. Just like those “bouts” of falling in love mentioned above. People who claim that they have fallen in love a thousand times, or that they recently fell in love with one (wo)man and then another, are talking about something they really know nothing about. Like any radical transformation process, the authentic experience of falling in love will happen to any individual only a few times in life; and to certain people, never at all.

The lop-sided love relationship that we’ve discussed numerous times already represents a case onto itself here. The person truly in love and caught up in the ‘ignition state’ experience may, by osmosis as it were, transmit passion and the language of love to the other, who is less in reality less emotionally engaged but who under the other’s influence “employs” these wooing techniques in turn. The illusion is re-enforced that he or she, too, is in love. At the same time, the member of the couple who is genuinely in love tends to attribute his or her own spontaneity and authenticity to the other. If the latter wants to, he or she can very easily play along. All he or she has to do is be affectionate

and tell little white lies. But can it really take so little to reassure a person in love? Most definitely, yes. The person who is “less in love,” and so less spontaneous and more controlled, can manipulate things and lead the other along; he or she readily perceives the other’s weaknesses and clumsy efforts at pleasure-giving, not to mention all the ingenuity. The other’s passion seems childish; the other’s “remaking of the past” seems a sign of superficiality and mental instability; his or her emotional crises pass for hysterical fits, and the anguish over what he or she really wants is taken as a sign of weakness of character. If despite all that, the one who has not truly fallen in love nevertheless feels affection and cares for the other, he or she will still probably make plans for a future together—ignoring, of course, all his or her doubts about the other’s “obsessions” and “instability” and trying to get rationally down to brass tacks. Repeatedly, however, he or she ends up annoyed, critical, and impatient, finding it constantly necessary to ask the other to make choices and come to decisions without getting lost in endless discussions about nothing (i.e. feelings). He or she continues to hide his/her true feelings and carry on as if one fine day

the other will come to his or her senses at last. At the same time, the one who is not in love is storing up examples of how the other “didn’t care enough” or how the other “never really understood” him or her. When at last the other becomes intolerably boring or melodramatic for the person who isn’t in love to stand anymore, the latter has his or her farewell speech all ready: it’s time to break things off because he or she doesn’t “feel loved” the way he/she should be, and so he or she is going to go look for someone new. This is the most frequent form that “falling out of love” takes. It is in a sense a travesty, however, for it is presented as the “revelation” of something that never existed.

There is also a less frequent variation on that “falling out of love” process, wherein both people really do fall in love at the beginning but then one of them becomes disenchanted and silently administers tests to the other (and to him- or herself), at the same time silently making new plans which preclude the other. The key word, clearly, is *silence*. Since all this is conducted in silence, the other person cannot understand what is happening. The latter comes off as the heavy or the bad guy—as someone unworthy of being loved—without

suspecting a thing. The disenchanted partner has not just failed to discuss the nature of his or her doubts or formulation of a new life plan: he or she has concealed something more important than these ‘thoughts’—*he or she has not revealed his/her desperation*. He or she has not given any sign of having reached a ‘*point of no return*’; having done so would have allowed the other, the one still in love, to desist, back down, insist no further. Unfortunately, however, this disenchanted partner belongs to that category of people who think that articulating their feelings is a form of weakness. Revealing their anguish or desperation means putting themselves at the mercy of another person (no matter if it’s the person they have fallen in love with). The sad consequence of this is that when they reach what for them is a *point of no return*, they do not explain, discuss, implore, or even just visibly despair. The other does not understand, and there is no way that he or she can understand. It doesn’t seem to be going too far to say that this fear of showing deep feelings and of trusting the other indicates that the person in question just simply isn’t in the *ignition state* of love. Or if that isn’t one hundred percent true, at least it shows how strongly

he or she is resisting it...and how much he or she feels a need for certainties and security that have little to do with the experience of falling in love. Naturally behind this resistance there may be other factors—bad past experiences or inexperience with love relationships, for instance. And we know (having examined this aspect in other chapters) how initially *resistance is always part of our falling in love*; everybody and his brother and sister try to protect themselves at the start. Here, the defense strategy is simply more persistent, and so achieves its aim.

Thus we have the case where one person has conducted painful “truth tests” and the like that the other has, unwittingly, failed—a result that causes the former to feel hate, then anger, and then apathy—again, unbeknownst to his or her partner. What follows, however, is very different from the case we studied in the last chapter (precisely because of the latter’s obliviousness), in that the other member of the couple *continues* in fact to love his or her reticent lover. The former breathes and writes words of love and does all sorts of thoughtful, anxious things intended as proof of his or her love, which the latter in his or her new state

of inner solitude finds pleasant and even soothing at times, but ultimately insufficient because in his or her heart he/she has already decided what he/she wants. Since the other has unwittingly failed the tests set for him or her, he/she can no longer be trusted, and the silent, reticent lover no longer feels love. At the same time, however, he or she not only feels pleasure in the other's attentions but also revels in the power over the other that this gives him/her. It is an enormous power, for with it the "silent, reticent lover" forces the other to accept him or her as he/she is, meaning that this disenchanted partner can humiliate the other and begin to break free of the past while readying him or herself to search out the new and to find—why not?—a new love. In essence, he or she is using the other's love to strength him- or herself until he/she no longer needs it. This is what this sort of "falling out of love" is all about. The terrible thing is that the separation from one's lover occurs while he or she is present, while he or she is still in love. Because she or he has failed those silently administered tests, a bitter, powerful revenge is unleashed against this unprotected person. And this with incredibly simple, sado-masochistic ease, since this person is so

enormously tolerant and trusting. When he or she finally breaks down in despair and severs the relationship, what awaits him/her is that previously-described state of total, abject apathy. By contrast, the other member of the couple, “the one who has fallen out of love,” will be free at last.

## **CHAPTER SIXTEEN**

The extraordinary realm of experience that is ours when we fall in love can end up transformed into the trite and commonplace. The danger of this happening stems from the intrinsic nature of the love process, which, as we have said, always involves mediation between what each lover wants for him- or herself and what the two want together. Differences are made to converge into a whole, to blend together. When things are going as they should, the quest for individual self-fulfillment is at one with the realization of happiness as a couple: the two coincide, they feel like the same thing. Unfortunately, however, in certain couples, bad memories of previous, failed relationships may reawaken fears, defense mechanisms, and anxieties.



The partner to which this happens is both passionately committed to the new relationship *and* taking every precaution at the same time. He or she both craves the other's uniqueness, that 'special something' which colors the world anew, yet at the same time he or she does everything possible to circumvent the other's bursting vitality—to put *a bridle* on it. I use the word "bridle" for a reason. Because the person that we fall in love with appears to be full of dynamic life force, and capable of free, constant, surprising transformation, we might compare him or her to a magnificent wild animal that is breathtakingly beautiful and extraordinarily alive—an animal whose nature is not weak and docile but rebellious and headstrong. The fact that such a being can become "gentle and tame" enough to love us puts us in that miraculous *state of grace* which I talked about previously. A partner who is particularly anxious and fretful (because he or she "has been burned before" and because he or she is frightened by what is free and unchecked in the other) may impose an endless number of small requests, limits, boundaries and sacrifices, during the couple's phase of testing each other, out of a need to render the other as gentle, safe, and

innocuous as possible. Little by little, the other lover accepts these rules. He or she does without that night out with friends, or stops traveling and stays home, or stops dedicating so much time to his or her beloved profession in order to be with the other more. This is all done willingly, to make the other happy; and the sacrifices are always in themselves small things—nothing to cause a “crisis point of no return.” After a while, the wild animal is tamed, domesticated. And then the partner who had asked the former to ‘submit to the bridle’ because he or she needed to feel reassured and truly loved, ends up no longer seeing in the other whatever it was that he or she found so irresistible in the first place.

This is what oftentimes happens when a man of a certain age falls in love with a much younger woman. He is also in love with her youth and potential, of course. Yet those are the very things that make him insecure and afraid; consequentially, he asks her little by little to give up her career, her friends, and her sociable and flirtatious ways, until finally he succeeds in turning her into a serviceable doormat, after which he begins to feel attracted to and pursue another young woman, who is exactly like the first one that he destroyed. This sort of

psychological violence happens all too frequently to women, who in many parts of the world unwillingly find themselves thrust into this role of victim. They are desired just as long as they are free and unattached (because they incarnate freedom in the absolute), but before much time goes by they are relegated to harems or secluded behind the four walls of their homes because their men's jealousy (which is merely the fear of continuing to desire what they at first desired in these women) is such that the extraordinary must be turned into the drab commonplace of everyday life—where neither falling in love nor even love in some settled form is possible.

That said, women can also be the victimizers when it comes to turning a lover into a drab and run-of-the-mill specimen of a human being. It's as if they've learned all the tricks for how to destroy vitality and unique personal qualities from men over the course of the centuries. Having been tamed and domesticated, they have only one way of defending themselves against men, namely to force men to wear the same leash and collar. Women suffer from the same deep insecurities as the opposite sex. This makes them crave security...and what could be

easier and simpler, as far as security goes, than utter control over a passive, monotonous partner who never has a new word to say and who is in all ways utterly predictable? When this happens to both the man and the woman in the couple, when both of them are frightened by their initial desire for intensity, risk, and vitality and begin to crave security so much as to pigeonhole and corner the other, the relationship grows rapidly tedious and disappointing; there is even bitterness, for having mistakenly believed that imposing all those limits and offering all those “guarantees” to each other was bound to lead to a kind of “happily ever after” existence. All that is left them then is to relive in their imagination what they originally had but lost—what was theirs but that they destroyed.

If this is the most common way in which love dies out between a couple, there are others, less frequent, which lead nevertheless to the same heartache. Take, for instance, the case of someone who falls in love with a person of a certain social or artistic success—with a singer or concert pianist or writer. Or with an athlete—a boxer or a ski instructor. Let’s choose one of these now, the concert pianist say, and consider the situation close

up. The extraordinary dimension of a concert pianist's life, from a social standpoint, stems from the musical world that he or she moves in, and from the applause and success. While the person who falls in love with the pianist participates in that (and indeed, his or her original attraction is intricately tied to that dimension), the reality of *living* with a concert pianist is quite different. Just as it is for the other professions previously mentioned, an intimate view of daily life reveals all the discipline, rehearsing or practicing, and determination to achieve a high level of perfection which the audience or fans never see, and which doesn't register on the person who falls in love at first either. He or she is bowled over by the other's talent and performance and doesn't consider all the humble, behind-the-scenes work that he or she will soon be asked to submit to without being truly involved in. In the end, it is very human to feel let down—and left out.

There are other, related cases where the extraordinary, thrilling dimension to love originally springs from one lover's high-profile abilities of a *non*-professional kind. Some men, for example, who fall in love with dynamic, vivacious, assertive,

intelligent, and ambitious women, come to feel brow-beaten and dominated. There are other men who fall in love with highly maternal and nurturing women who pamper them as if they were infants, men who after a while begin to feel as controlled as infants. And then, of course, there are the many women who are attracted to gentle men who turn out to be weak and spineless, just as there are the equally many other women who fall for ‘macho’ types who turn out to be nothing but thick-headed brutes. All these cases show how it is easy to mistake excess—here, excessive personal qualities—as signs of the special and extraordinary. Too bad that in the end it turns out to be nothing but excess.

Since a person who is ready to fall in love is drawn to what he or she considers to be as different and extraordinary qualities or aspects in another, he or she is *unlikely* to fall in love with someone who is already in love with and pursuing him/her. This other person represents what is already familiar and passé; he or she is like ‘a road not taken,’ to be excluded from consideration in the exploratory phase of love’s ignition state. Does this mean, then,

that we tend to fall in love more frequently or 'easily' with someone who is seemingly uninterested and who therefore seems more desirable? Is it true that if we have to choose between two love interests, we will probably choose the person who is eluding us rather than the one who has already fallen in love with us? Though this is a commonplace, there is only a small bit of truth to it. It may seem that way when, disappointed by our attempts at falling in love, we return to our 'safe harbor'—to the man or woman who we know is already in love with us, who appears to be 'our only option'. In a word, we have chosen to take refuge in our past, in a person who already loves us, certain of finding there the acceptance and understanding that the last man or woman that we fell unsuccessfully in love with wouldn't give us. (That said, we did not fall in love with this person because he or she wouldn't have us, but because he or she embodied all that was new, different, forward-looking, and extraordinary. By returning to the person who is already in love with us, we end all hope of having and exploring the new and the possible; in that sense, we give up on the experience of falling in love.) We can believe we have fallen in love, we

can think the world of the person we have returned to, we can even go on living happily with him or her to the end of our days—but what we actually live through is the ‘plateau-ing-out’ experience of stable and steady love, not the ignition-state thrills of falling in love. Those of us, however, that persist with the idea that we have fallen in love with the person we’ve returned to, end up discovering after a while that we’ve stopped feeling that way. It seems as if we’ve fallen out of love, but in reality it is just our belated inward acknowledgment of what was never true, of what never took place.

Let’s look now at a last case of couples who fall out of love: where one of the two passes a point of no return—perhaps without even realizing it. No one really knows where his or her points of no return lie: the only clue that one is at this sort of crisis point is a telltale feeling of inner rebellion and desperation, accompanied by a foretaste of the spiritual deadening and apathy that are destined to follow. That gripping sense of foreboding, however, does not always come; the knowledge of having passed a point of no return may remain concealed (in the sense that one hides it from oneself) or else be staved off with altruistic determination or



because the other person has promised that someday things will change (and therefore the impossible thing being asked of one will be rescinded). Think of a woman who works and who loves her profession. The man she loves asks her to leave her job because *his* job requires him to move; where he is going, moreover, there will be no job for her. In a case like this, the woman might make the immense sacrifice being asked of her, and hope that it will be possible later for her to resume working. The man might even tell her that it is only for a short while, and then everything will change. The woman leaves her job and career and follows her man. She isn't aware that she has passed a point of no return in doing so, until some time has gone by and she begins to notice that she no longer has any interests, that she no longer feels any vitality, that she constantly hankers for what she has given up and left behind. When that realization comes, she has fallen out of love.

At times, it is life itself, with its succession of events, that causes what has been set aside or put off till some later date to re-present itself, this time as a crucial point of no return. Let's say, for instance, that a woman really wants to have a child, but in

order not to destroy the relationship with her man, she has given up on realizing this desire at any time in the near future and simply postponed these plans indefinitely. Only then things begin to happen to her: her father dies, followed by her mother, and also the realization hits her that she is growing old. Faced as she is now with so much negativity, her capacity to create life takes on a new light and value: having a child means defeating death. What before was something shelved and deferred now becomes an urgent and pressing part of her life plan. The pact she made with her man gets rediscussed (if not immediately broken). The old dilemma, which already once came to a head in their relationship, re-explodes...but this time there can be no question of “a compromise”, of a further postponement. If he cannot accept and understand her essential need to have a child now, her love will begin to weaken. She cannot abide his ‘intolerable lack of understanding’ and ‘unjustifiable self-centeredness.’ She begins to think back over the past and to calculate what she has given (so much) and what she has received (nothing). Eventually, resentment extinguishes what remains of her love, and even the

memory of it (and how she and he used to be) fades to nothingness.

Points of no return occur much more frequently in life than we might imagine. Things that seemed secondary prove to be essential. In all the cases we've discussed, the couples have the impression that their love has slowly died out or faded into indifference. If we look more closely, however, we see that in reality there is oftentimes some central dilemma that has re-emerged and along with it an undercurrent of desperation.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Is it possible for someone to fall in love with another person for many years, or for a lifetime? Certainly it is. And is it possible for two people to remain in love for many years or for their entire lives? Again, yes, though at first glance both these assertions are likely to seem impossible, for, as everyone knows, falling in love is a transitional state that vanishes or is institutionalized or comes to an end. Indeed, this is the way things normally work. Yet there are exceptions—verifiable cases where the individual's or the couple's life plan becomes exclusively that of keeping the ignition state of love kindled and alive, cases where one lover may continue to love the other passionately even if the latter is out of touch or even dead. Precisely because the one we love is no longer accessible—as when Abélard was separated from Héloïse, or when in Dante's great poem Beatrice dies, or when the marriage and then death of Petrarch's Laura takes place—because this may happen and yet no rejection or spurning of our love has occurred, the sense of falling in love can continue in our imagination. Having been spurned, of course, means

that we cannot continue to love, and indeed our conscious mind will wage war on the past and destroy what it can of it; but where there is no such obstacle (where our absent lover has previously reciprocated our love or at least declined to refuse it), we are free to train our full powers of love on him or her. And seeing that fantasy cannot be disproved by reality, this love of ours can continue to flow on in its extraordinary dimension infinitely.

To get a better idea of what this experience is like (especially if it's never happened to us personally), we can reflect for a moment on those periods of involuntary separation that a couple deeply in love may be forced to go through. Each one is constantly in the other's heart and mind, and their love becomes channeled into constant longing and suffering (because they are not together) coupled with a direct experience of joy, which is triggered by memories, or by the thought of the other's love, or by the expectation of being eventually reunited. Everything else is overshadowed by this profound love, which is like a powerful hot sun around which all of existence revolves. Though on the surface, these lovers appear to be leading a normal and even active or altruistic

life, in reality all their emotions and moral purpose spring from this hidden source. Love is experienced as an inward place of regeneration, an indestructible island, a rose garden in the middle of the desert...or an oasis where the soul quenches its thirst before returning to the world. All of this is very close to mysticism. Of course, in pure mysticism, this love is addressed directly to God and there is no mediating figure, like a lover, standing in the way. Yet in great literature, and in real life, that mediating figure is a not uncommon presence. Think back to Dante's *Divine Comedy*: is it not in fact a great mystical poem, in which a beloved woman, Beatrice, becomes the companion and guide for the narrator on his mystical journey towards God? Then there's the historical case of Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Clare: didn't their relationship closely resemble a very human experience of falling in love, transferred to (or sublimated in) the sacred dimension of the Divine? Not that this sort of thing is limited to Western civilization or to Christianity. The greatest mystical poem of Islam, the *Mathnawì*, together with a collection of lyric poetry, the *Diwàn*, were written by Mawlana Jalal ud-din Rumi after the man he deeply loved (Shams-e Tabrizi) had

either died or disappeared. In the *Mathnawì*, Rumi never speaks directly of this man but only of God, yet in many parts of the poem the reader has the impression of a love so concrete and consuming as to blur the distinction between the figure of the human Friend and that of the Divine Friend. The *Diwàn*, by contrast, is explicitly dedicated to Shams-e Tabrizi, and here it is clearly through the medium of the beloved Friend that the poet chooses to speak of God.

Mystical love is akin to an unending experience of falling in love, which remains stalled in the *ignition state*, for no ‘pact of reciprocal commitment’ (as we’ve been calling it) is possible with one’s Divine Friend or Loved One. One can only love, and the other can only be loved; moreover, the other’s response to one’s love, which cannot be taken as a guaranteed certainty, can only be received and perceived as a gift of Grace. On account of the completely lopsided nature of the love relationship it inspires, as well as the insurmountable distance it places between lover and beloved, mystical love can only be understood if taken as the revelation of ‘being as love’...being as *nothing but* love. All else is incidental. Furthermore,

because of the distance keeping the two ‘sides’ (so as not to say ‘couple’) apart, there is always a striking amount of constant, incessant suffering inherent to mystical love, suffering that miraculously becomes joy. “My healing and my grief are both in you,” writes the mystic Ramón Lull. “The more surely you heal me, the greater my grief grows; and the more I languish, the more you give me health.”\* Saint Teresa of Avila concurs, finding that even in her ‘seventh level’ (the last and most perfect mystical state that she can conceive of) there “is a great desire to suffer, but this is not of such a kind as to disturb the soul, as it did previously. So extreme is her longing for the will of God to be done in her that whatever His Majesty does she considers to be for the best: if He wills that she should suffer, well and good; if not, she does not worry herself to death as she did before.”\*\*

The point of these citations, the aspect that I want to underline here, is that mysticism clearly shows us that our falling in love does not depend in any way on the qualities or traits of the one (or One) who we love; rather, it is purely and simply a product of our way of seeing (thinking, feeling, perceiving, imagining, and so on), which is to say it



is a conceptual system that exists entirely within the structure of our own mind. We do not see things as they are, but as we make them. Mystical love works according to the principles animating the *ignition state* of any falling-in-love experience, but since this sort of love cannot be directed at a living person (a person destined to be transfigured, naturally, by the lover's imagination), mystical love focuses on a pure, ideal object. From the standpoint of contemporary culture, this is antithetical to life. This is an instance of *non-being*. It seems so to me, too, but we must recognize that for millennia, mysticism has been a very important and intense life practice. One observation we can make, which is of timeless relevance, is that mysticism is an excellent demonstration of how a love object never ceases to seem real to the person who is pursuing it. After all, isn't the person we have fallen in love with in our normal way "realer than real"? In both cases (mystical love and 'normal love'), the contours of the person whom we love are a product of our fantasies. The significant difference between the two stems from the fact that, in 'normal love', what starts out as feeling and fantasy becomes a concrete, mutual project to modify reality and create a niche

for the couple in the world. Seeing, however, that 'something is lost in every incarnation' (as in every transformational process), the

\*Ramón Lull, *The Book of the Lover and the Beloved*, p. 25

\*\*Saint Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, trans. E. Allison Peers (New York, Doubleday, 1961), p. 220.

original intentions of the couple clash with unbendable parts of reality, with an array of inalterable facts, with incidentals and variables. Love gains its stable, institutionalized foothold, but this brings with it the end to the ignition state experience of falling in love. As we've said, the only exception to that, the only 'falling in love' experience that lasts a long time, is that which is created in the lover's (or lovers') imagination. Mystical love "permanently" prolongs this state because the mystical lover utterly disregards the existent, observable world (dismissing all that he or she sees as unstable 'incidentals') and takes for his or her only reality what he or she grasps by pure intuition. If on the one hand, this sort of love relationship acknowledges that the existent and observable world never completely takes in what is *real* (for to claim that it can, and so to claim that we can instantly and *outwardly* realize all of our *inner reality*—without any transformation or compromise, is to practice fanaticism), if this is true, it is also clear, on the other hand, that mystical love maintains the logic of the ignition state *indefinitely*, never intersecting with reality, but rather keeping the object of love "pure" and untouched

(‘untransfigured by the world’), and above all never affording the lovers any opportunity to put their love to any concrete, everyday test and so evolve. The ideal is separated off completely from the existent, and the “revolutionary urge” to force a merger is forgotten. The result is that the two lovers may live their concrete, everyday lives—be caught up in events of the world, struggle, work, and construct things—yet preserve on a parallel, invisible level the extraordinary dimension of their relationship. This happens infrequently, but it is not unheard of. It is not easy for an outsider to detect, seeing that these lovers do not talk about their love. Indeed, precisely because it occupies an imaginary space, they separate it off completely from their everyday lives, and get extremely reticent and bashful about it. They are not prudes, on the other hand; there is no reason to think that this kind of love is only spiritual or platonic. Actually, it may be highly erotic and sexual. Then why is it rare? But isn’t it obvious that it defies the usual experience of falling in love? A lover is usually eager to reconstruct his or her life (past, present, and future) around the new person that he or she is in love with and so lays plans for a concrete transformation of

his or her existence. By contrast, the kind of alternative I've been describing (stemming from 'mystical-style love') can only seem like incomprehensible nonsense—like the acknowledgment of failure—to most people. And in fact, the lovers who adopt this strategy do so only in certain, very particular circumstances, and generally after they have explored other solutions, which have proved to be impractical. When all is said and done, however, this sort of 'last-resort' love does not always last. The plan usually re-emerges to build a life together and realize their love in some concrete way. Further down the line, there may be yet one more (final) attempt made to do the same, after which their invisible realm usually collapses and their love fades away.

The curious relationship that springs up between the imaginary-as-real and the existing-as-incidental leads us directly into a consideration of the different meanings that fantasy has in sexual relations. What we do in our minds and what we do with our bodies can be two very different, simultaneously occurring things. We all know that during sex many people fantasize that they are

making love with someone different from their partner (or even with more than one); then too, they might fantasize that they are, yes, making love with their partner but in some totally different situation. Something similar may happen to people who have fallen in love with one special person. They too may start fantasizing—and possibly about having sex with various other people. The purpose of these fantasies, however, is to reveal the other lover to be one's only authentic love, the only one *worthy* (this worth having already been ascribed to him or her and just finding confirmation in the fantasy). In fact, at the end of the fantasy the others disappear and only this 'true love' is left. A second fantasy that a person who has fallen in love may have is that his or her love has gone off with someone else; a variation on this is that the person in love imagines him- or herself in the place of some former partner that the other once had. Even here, what the person in love is unconsciously doing is taking over or "absorbing" everything that could possibly have value to the other. Since jealousy consists in ascribing importance and value to a rival, the fantasy of taking that rival's place is a way of erasing this importance: the lover fills the other's place

completely, and nothing is left to be jealous of. The case of an enamoured lover who has (real-life) sex with other partners is radically different. His or her fantasies are generated for completely different ends with respect to those of a person in love who is *not* 'sleeping around' but simply imagining his or her love copulating with other partners. The latter attributes or, underneath it all, 'dedicates' his or her fantasies to the person he or she loves, whereas the former does not involve in any way his or her sexual partner in this fantasizing. Indeed, with any partner to come along, he or she continues to imagine that he/she is making love with the person he/she loves; furthermore, from those moments when he/she is not fantasizing he/she extracts an experience that will surface later in his/her imagination when he/she returns to his/her genuine love. Taken to an extreme, the paradox arises wherein a person may make love with someone that he/she doesn't love without ever actually doing so, while at the same time he/she may never make love with the person he/she loves and yet do so only with him/her. In point of fact, there are people who change their sexual partners constantly but continue to make love

with the same person. And they may never mention it, not even in analysis or group therapy.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Can the experience of falling in love lead to a stable love relationship that maintains the zest and freshness that were there at the start? This *is* possible, provided that the two lovers find a way of leading a new, active, adventurous and interesting life together—a life of discovery and of joint struggle against external difficulties. Of course, these difficulties must not be too great, for when two people fall in love every outward problem potentially feeds the dangerous inward suspicion that their individual life plans may not be compatible. Where these difficulties, however, have nothing to do with either lover's past, their magnitude is less of a problem, and the usual pattern of things is that the lovers readily unite in a *side by side* struggle to put their *common* life plan into effect. The "us against them" approach serves to smooth out their differences as to wants and goals, just as it enhances their sense of mutual solidarity



(whereby, as we've said, they want together the things that both concern them individually and as a couple), and, furthermore, seeing that these problems are external and not internal to the couple (as, for example, would be the case if one decided to leave the other), their 'reciprocal testing' is kept to a minimum.

Alongside all this, however, there must be an underlying element of adventure—and by this I mean the continuing experience of love in its extraordinary dimension. The vitality inherent to the lovers' *ignition state* gives them the strength and courage to face the unknown and all its eventual problems. Going off on a long trip or moving faraway to begin a new job are two experiences that can demonstrate what they have suspected from the start: that their strength comes from their being together and loving each other. There are also subtler ways, however, in which a stabilized love relationship may continue to be imbued with a sense of marvel at the new and with the feel of the extraordinary (which protects the couple from the burden of their individual pasts); the couple may, for instance, stay put in their city or region or country and yet find ways of "rediscovering" it

together. They may put together previously unthinkable itineraries that for them become important. The element of novelty keeps them from feeling that they are being forced to do the same old things and go the same old places as before. Nothing will end a budding love affair more quickly than a mass of experiences and obstacles which the two have previously lived through (in other relationships) and that are now forced on the new couple. Instead of the past being put to rest as 'old history', it returns to condition and shape the present and future. The couple's relationship is likewise in danger when one of them perceives as new experiences what the other views as old, stifling ones. While the former feels the thrill of change, the latter senses the oppressive return to what was identical in the past. Their life plans may begin to diverge more and more as a consequence, and the relationship may end.

There is still another way of prolonging and protracting the experience of falling in love, but it is very rare. Where the couple has no possibility of leading an active, outwardly changed life, in theory they can opt for the alternative sort of inward, mystical journey that was discussed in the last

chapter. However, most people chose to pursue a new, outwardly active life instead, perhaps because it is so much more in keeping with the burning need to transform their life that arises early on as part of the *ignition state*. And also, isn't the accumulating of new joint experiences the secret to prolonging love—at least love of the 'activated' variety? Certainly, these ever-changing joint experiences may assume the nature of 'a vacation' from life, of short breaks from everyday routine. But when they are lived in this way, as 'flash breaks', they usually aren't powerful and magical enough to prevent everyday life, with its codified rituals and tedium, from eventually taking over. The best scenario is when new shared experiences really do alter a couple's everyday existence for good, when these experiences either give rise to an authentically alternative lifestyle, or when, though still only short 'vacations from real life' they create a direction of exploration or discovery for the couple to continue along. Traditionally, 'a honeymoon' was nothing other than the socially sanctioned, pre-packaged remedy for such emotional needs; even now it is the institutionally-approved epitome of what I've just

called ‘a vacation from life’ in that it sanctions the desire to live an intense adventure as a couple.

The ‘trip alone together’ that friends or therapists urge on a couple that have grown ‘tired’ of each other has a similar aim—that of revitalizing the couple’s sense of living something unique and extraordinary in their love for each other, a sensation that has been buried and lost under the crushing weight of everyday existence and each one’s mounting disillusionment. After all, what do we mean by the ‘mundaneness of everyday life’ if not the faltering paralysis of the revolutionary, transformational processes set into motion during love’s ignition state? Certainly, the real turning point in a relationship (leading a couple out of the ignition state) occurs with the great sacrifices and those ‘points of no return’ we discussed previously, yet the change also happens in smaller, more gradual ways, as when the two people make their little compromises, drift into customary routines, and give into laziness, or into the habit of doing whatever is easiest or most convenient, or into accepting the conventional which lacks in all imagination, and giving in, as well, to the fear of taking risks. It doesn’t matter that they once found

the courage, back at the start of their relationship, to weather a tremendous upheaval in their lives—to move in together, to divorce their spouses perhaps, or to change their jobs, because since then, they have inevitably run up against the countless reoccurring aspects of everyday life that we all know about, the countless obligations that subordinate their imaginations to the everyday, until such time as the latter finally wins out—until it ‘imposes its dictatorship.’ We make an attempt to put an end to this tyranny with our vacations, parties, psychotherapy, or sleeping around. But there is nothing that can transcend the mundaneness of everyday life *except the affirmation of the superiority of the imagination over reality...*and what is that if not the *ignition state* of (another) experience of falling in love? And yet, whoever actually goes through another ignition state, if not two or three, divorcing and remarrying each time, often unwittingly rediscovers him- or herself in a situation that is not very different from the first one; this, because the great transformation *usually* (like it or not, it seems to be a rule or even a law) leads to a settled, if new, arrangement of everyday existence (with another house, other friends, other children),

which rests on a foundation of inextricable obligations. And perhaps the only observation to be made about this state of affairs is that no one—not even a pair of the most passionate lovers on earth—can by the force of their will make the world a perennially luminous place affording them non-stop spiritual rebirth.

So, the experience of falling in love inevitably fades, and love—‘just love’—takes its place. The only exception to the rule—the only time that ‘the excitement continues’——is when, as we’ve said in this chapter, the two lovers find or stumble upon a way to keep the extraordinary dimension of love ongoing in their everyday life. It is worth remembering that their ‘outward journeys’ will foster inward journeys and vice versa. It doesn’t make if the starting point is a shared passion for political activism or poetry or simply a sense of wonder at all that is new and creative in the world. In some way, the process of re-seeing and re-discovering, and so reawakening, manages to go on and on. Each partner is continually falling in love with the other over and over again. But it must be that *both* of them take the initiative here. If one of them is passive, if one of them waits for the other to

come up with all the ideas and plans or if one of them lacks the courage to voice his or her own ideas, or furthermore, if one of them doesn't take advantage of opportunities which present themselves because he or she is waiting for The Opportunity which never comes, then any transformational process of love in progress halts and the harsh old regime of resentment-laden everyday life becomes the only reality. A variation on this end to the experience of love in its extraordinary vein occurs when one member of the couple, who may be inherently a very creative, forward-looking individual, begins to limit his or her creativity to one realm (to his or her profession, to child-raising, to the intensive needs of sick or elderly parents), causing the other partner to feel mounting frustration every time he or she proposes something new for the two of them to explore or experience together. Eventually the clash in life views becomes clear, and, as always, the perspective belonging to the realm of the ordinary and routine has it out over the one straining towards ever new experiences.

I don't believe that an understanding of these dynamics can generate some set of 'useful

guidelines' on how to act when one falls in love. That sort of advice on the 'art of falling in love' is quackery destined to raise false hopes in people. Life creates the conditions for the *ignition state* of the experience of falling in love; life brings two people together; life encourages a couple to formulate long-term plans; life brings the time for mutual testing; life generates great opportunities and occasions; and life takes them away. In this great flow of life we advance like a small canoe caught up in a terrible sea storm. We don't make the waves and we can't change them. We may manage to stay afloat—with happy ease or thanks to desperate effort, if not a mix of both of them—until we finally arrive back at shore (or else do not make it back to shore at all), and feel joy at our making it back (or at our not making it back). Perhaps more than an art of loving or of falling in love, we really just need a basic awareness of what is happening to us, thanks to which we can make our decisions with the greatest degree of understanding of our own human nature.



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

This is a book about *falling in* love, not about love per se. But to continue to say new things about the former we are going to have to talk a bit more about the latter. If there's something special—and not tragic—about how the experience of *falling in love* tends to assume a stable institutionalized form that goes by the name in English of *love* (plain and simple), it has to do with the *ignition state* in its *final* version. Which is to say that 'the institution of love' (surely we can term it that, if we can talk as we do about 'the institution of marriage') establishes that *love's ignition state has been fully realized on a symbolic level, at the same that it has yet to be realized in practice*. Just as the Russian Revolution symbolically established a classless society and total equality between all human beings (and such was the seriousness of this symbolism that the plenum of the Central Committee 'had to' make all decisions unanimously and elections were held for the sole reason of demonstrating the lack of all dissent), what was in fact realized was *not* communism but only the dictatorship of the proletariat, a so-called necessary phase on the road

to authentic communism in its yet-to-be achieved form. By separating the symbolic aspects from the practical ones, an institution gets people to consider it as the harbinger of a real event in the offing. While institutions pay lip service to those aspects of *ignition state experience* that make human beings feel fully alive—and which are the reason for the institutions' very existence, in that they are designed to safeguard them, the actual implementation—the real life playing-out—is postponed to an increasingly distant future, like Judgment Day in Christianity. Since it is deemed that the *ignition state* has already been achieved on a symbolic level, it is in keeping with this that a society's symbols and rituals are deemed useful in re-evoking and 'reviving' it at regular intervals. The liturgical year is nothing other than this sort of evocation; on feast days, humanity is invited to participate in the divine origins and sacred events of time. But institutions (be them religious, social, or political) are not circumscribed by their own invented rituals; they overflow these bounds and enter the souls of men and women. This means that to a certain extent they do effectively 'reactivate' the original values that they embody; and that these values and their

meanings manage in small or large ways to mark our times. We can say, therefore, that for all its mundane aspects, everyday life still holds for us numerous moments when *we rediscover what there is to life...* which is very different from an eternal return to the same old thing.

The connections between all this and the experience of falling in love would fill another book; but I think that some practical examples can communicate the gist here. I want to take a limited number—just four, in fact—all of which are instances of gift-giving.

The first type we often encounter—or indulge in—at work. Our relationships with our colleagues and bosses are undermined many times by the power aspect: others may stand between us and the realization of our desires, and we must try to influence or flatter those people if we want to achieve what we are after. In our heart of hearts we could really care less about these people and tend to forget about them and the insincere relationships we have with them as soon as we stop ‘needing’ them. Our gift-giving and holiday wishes to them are servile and hypocritical. They are hypocritical in

that they convey an apparent message of respect and good will (if not affection), when in reality we the gift-givers or well-wishers are thinking only about how we have to ingratiate ourselves with these people because we need them. They are servile in that our gift shows that the person to whom we are giving it has power over us, however limited it may be. In any social hierarchy, gifts gravitate upwards towards the top echelons; those who are the most powerful receive the most good wishes or gifts. We can even say that these things are a sort of tithe or duty (to the benefit of the powerful) that the weak and powerless impose on themselves. The volume of postcards, letters, telegrams, and packages testifies to the geographical distribution of power in a society. If the power center shifts, all these other things shift too.

The visible result of all this is that many people who received gifts this year won't receive a thing next year; their power will have faded and so they will have been forgotten. But even the gifts that they are receiving this year convey something very specific in this regard: each carries the cryptic message that though, on the one hand, the gift bearer would like to be able to forget, ignore, and

even remove from his or her life the person that the gift is intended for, on the other hand, he or she knows that it isn't possible—indeed, the other person is central to his or her existence. “But just you wait,” that gift communicates silently, “because one day I'll have no more use for you and I'll thrust you back into the oblivion where you belong.”

The holiday season is marred by insincere utterances and gestures of various sorts, among which this type of gift-giving. Whereas holidays should be a ‘time for love,’ in great part they become a rendering of servile homage to the powerful. Not that this doesn't make us uncomfortable and uneasy about our own insincerity; we know perfectly well what authentic, genuine holiday spirit feels like or should feel like. We are keenly and profoundly aware of the difference.

Fortunately, there is another sort of gift-giving which aims at conveying these sincere feelings buried in our heart. We give these gifts to the people that matter to us: to our parents, children, spouse, brothers and sisters, and closest friends (some of whom may even have power over us but whom we care about and want to be with). Giving a gift to a

person we love is not an instance of servile and ephemeral homage; rather, it testifies to enduring nature of our relationship. Our gift communicates that we love and will continue to love that person, even though we don't always show it, or even though we don't stay in touch or go to see him or her very often. '*I haven't forgotten you,*' is the message our gift delivers.

In reality, of course, we *have* forgotten these special people. We forget some of them for months, and others of them for years. We forget about our parents, our husband or wife, and our children. Above all we forget about those who live far away, though sometimes we forget about even those who are nearby. This goes to show that we don't have a constant relationship with the people we love most. The dynamics are those of a long-distance friendship: we get together with them every so often, if not once in a blue moon. And when these people that we love live with us, the situation isn't really much different. We don't feel a constant need for them; they command our attention merely because they are there, and so we must necessarily interact with them—out of habit or as a duty, and often while complaining. Yet when they get sick, or

fail to come home at the usual time, or when there's a risk they might die, we realize how we might lose them and how essential they are to us. At the same time (and only at this time) we realize their precious worth, which overshadows that of everything else on earth; indeed, the latter loses all importance and becomes incidental. At such moments, the world appears to be divided in two: on one side there are our precious loved ones, and on the other, there is *the powerful negative force* that threatens to take them away from us. The power of this force of darkness, in whatever form it may assume (death, illness, terrorism, kidnapping) consists only in its depriving us of something: it is nonbeing as power. To the agents of this force, to the terrorist or kidnapper, our loved ones have no value. Even if nothing happens to threaten or harm our loved ones, we desire to destroy the specter of this possibility by recognizing and celebrating at holiday time their essential importance to us: our gifts to them are always special and thoughtful, never run of the mill. We are principally concerned with giving them pleasure, with finding something that speaks to their nature—*something that even, if possible, enriches their vital sense of self*. In this symbolic way we try

to make amends; we try to emotionally or spiritually nurture and strengthen our loved ones; we try to keep them from the long shadows of nonbeing—whether that is death, sickness, indifference, or forgetfulness (including our own).

There is a third type of gift-giving, which takes us into the magical kingdom of two people in love. Gifts play their part from the *ignition state* of the experience of falling in love onwards. As we've said, at the very start of our falling in love, the person we are smitten with fills our hearts and minds intermittently but *not* always; there are times, in fact, when the magic seems to vanish, when we ask ourselves if we are really in love, when we think we can do without him or her, when he or she doesn't seem to be 'responding' or 'reciprocating'. Then the extraordinary experience reflourishes, again and again and again, and our doubts disappear. Love triumphs over the everyday world. What does the gift we give to our true love mean in such circumstances? Well, for one thing, it is never enough, never up to what we want it to represent. We'd like to give everything but we can't. We'd like somehow to give the best, most worthy part of ourselves, hoping that our lover will see it as such



and treasure it. We give whatever we decide to give in the hope of appearing to our lover to be as perfect as he or she appears to be to us; we hope that the gift—and we too—will be welcomed and embraced; in this way, we can find peace. Our gift is a way for us to participate symbolically in the triumph of being over nonbeing.

There's a final case of gift-giving that I want to look at here, having as it does to do with love. Though distinguishing between the state of falling in love and that of consolidated, 'institutionalized' love, I have also pointed out how within the latter there is a mini process continually in act of the two people constantly re-falling in love with each other. This occurs in the couple and this occurs between parents and their children. Because it is the gift-giving by mothers and fathers to interest us here, let's take a closer look for a moment at what such symbolic offerings allude to under the surface. Though a mother or father spends most of the time meeting the physical needs of their child, there are also moments—say, when the child is asleep and they go to check on him or her, when the sight of that child evokes desire, nostalgia, and utter tenderness, leaving the parent with a sense of

extraordinary fulfillment (the same that a lover feels gazing at his love object). Each time this happens parents are re-falling in love with their child. And even when that child becomes an adult, every so often the parents look at him or her with astonished, passionate eyes, grateful that he or she is with them in the world. It is not a question of seeing in the adult the child who is no longer there. No, they see the adult just as they used to see the child, and when they look they fall in love with who he or she is today. Every time they rediscover the completeness of what he or she is. It is always “like the first time.” Every parent, even the poorest, has been given this gift of love, which bestows fundamental meaning on existence. Love revives this fundamental meaning again and again. People who lose all hope of rediscovering it are as good as dead.

Yet perhaps—I say ‘perhaps’ because not every child psychologist would agree—*childhood is completely based* on this continual experience of falling in love, parents with their children and the children with their parents. Surely, a child makes his or her physical demands, rebels, and becomes autonomous—this is the essence of what it means to

grow up; yet during all that time he or she also wants to be held, caressed, hugged, and sometimes comforted at night; and, as any parent knows, a kiss can make a child instantly happy and greedy for more. Perhaps a child falls in love each time these things take place, perhaps each time—a dizzying number of times—it is his or her privilege to experience the astonishing, affirmative fullness of life. Growing up, the child finds him- or herself breaking away from this parental love *at the same time that* he or she continually re-discovers it, re-encountering it as a revelation (and comforting reconfirmation). This endless rediscovery cements in place his or her trust in the world, as well as his or her ability to live and function in it.

The gifts that parents give their children are, therefore, of a two-fold nature. In certain ways they represent or symbolize the parents' *giving of themselves*, that is, their impulse to offer their children the best about themselves, as lovers do when they fall in love. In other ways, however, parental gifts solidify and enrich a child's existence. But the child also gives gifts. I don't mean the flowers he brings to his mother, but rather his words, those astonishing linguistic constructions

that mature in him and that he utters at a certain point. With his words, he builds a door or a house and then eventually a castle, into which the adult can enter because it's been built for him. It is also a house or castle that the adult can complete with the child as a joint activity. Indeed, if a child's words are on the one hand a product of his personal attempts at objectifying his love (like all great poetry), on the other hand, they are the result of the activities and verbalization done with his parents.

With the above, the reader has hopefully seen how the dynamics of the experience of falling in love come into play in other important aspects of life; I trust that the reader has also seen that in love the tendency for everything existing in time to represent and reaffirm itself is at its most clearest.

## **CHAPTER TWENTY**

The theories contained in this book are likely to irritate three groups of people: those who believe in utilitarianism (like many sociologists and psychologists), those who believe in such important

political or religious ideological systems as Christianity, Islam, or Marxism, and those who continue to mount an attack on the dynamics of the heterosexual couple (like many feminist thinkers).

About one thing we can be absolutely sure: utilitarians will dismiss these theories as a lot of nonsense. By definition, utilitarianism rejects the metaphysical distinction between the real and the ephemeral implicit in this book's description of the *ignition state* as a social condition—a distinction that is to be found, by the way, in many famous philosophical systems. The distinction drawn between idea and appearance in Plato, form and matter in Aristotle, essence and accident in St. Thomas Aquinas, reason and intellect in Hegel, the class for itself and the class in itself in Marx, and the will to power and the reactive force in Nietzsche, this sort of distinction is simply foreign to utilitarian thought. Nowhere is this clearer than in field of modern economics, the most famous by-product of utilitarianism. Indeed, economics is based on a study of things (goods, items, commodities) that can be compared and exchanged—on things and material interests *alone*, not on fundamental values. Sociology and

psychology, too, betray this utilitarian bias insofar as they do not provide for these values and are often blind to the situations in which they come into play or to how genuine and spontaneous they are. Unfortunately, in our everyday lives we often reason in the way of social scientists. We too tend to think exclusively in terms of utility, material interests, ways and means, and advantages and drawbacks. *In short, utilitarianism is our mode of thinking in everyday life.* Great displays of enthusiasm, disinterestedness, and passion are viewed suspiciously, as forms of irrationality. Our everyday mode of being is designed to protect us from these, to keep us from being upset or thrown off track by feelings we can't handle. All this is logical and understandable, but if we want to comprehend what happens to us when we fall in love, we must keep in mind that the experience contradicts and even confutes this way of thinking. As a result it cannot be explained by utilitarianism.

The issue becomes notably more complex when we take as our measuring stick Christianity, Islam, or Marxism. Technically-speaking, all three may be deemed *cultural civilizations*. They denote the kind of conglomerate, pervasive social

institutions that the original political or religious movements of Marxism, Islam, and Christianity have given rise to, institutions of such massive proportions as to absorb any other movement and explain it in terms of their own language and symbols. During the medieval period of Christianity, for example, every possible revolt, religious experience, and cultural movement wound up being defined in Christian terms. And every new collective movement was forced, if its leaders wanted to be understood by people, to take as its basic point of reference the fundamentals of Christianity: the passion and death of Jesus Christ, the sacraments, the priesthood, the distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, etc. A cultural civilization, therefore, offers models with which both ordinary and extraordinary experiences must be interpreted; everything else goes unnamed and undescribed—deprived, as it were, of language. All of which has been just said applies equally to Islam. In those parts of the world where it has taken hold, every arising collective movement has been ‘forced to talk the language’ of Islam.

Naturally, such cultural civilizations also impose their language and social institutions on the

*ignition state* experience of people who fall in love. The Christian sacrament of marriage, for example, makes no distinction between falling in love and other aspects or states of the couple's relationship, such as sexuality, caring, and love in its steady and stabilized form, but rather implies all these things at once. If any of these receives special emphasis, moreover, it is the reciprocal caring (which buttresses the fundamental alliance between the two) and the sexuality (leading as it does to the birth of children). All the rest is considered of secondary importance. The dearth of words to talk about the specific experience of falling of love, which stems from the original imposition of the Church, carries over into our day. It is especially marked in French and English, which contain no specific, single term for falling in love (as opposed to Italian, which makes use of the word *innamoramento*), but rather make lame use of the verb "*tomber*" or "to fall". It is furthermore interesting to note that seven or eight hundred years ago, in Provençal the verb *adamare* existed, only to be repressed along with the Catharist heresy by the Catholic Church in the fourteenth century.



Since Christianity draws a fundamental distinction between human love and divine love, and not only that, but places an individual's love for God (termed 'adoration') on a higher level than the love felt for another man or woman, the Church Fathers (of the Catholic Church especially) would have certainly viewed my description in this book of the experience of falling in love as a painful aberration of the former. I am sure that they would have likewise objected to the use I have made of the concept of a 'state of grace', seeing that in the Catholic religion it is a sign of divine intervention, whereas in this book it is an utterly human experience. Unfortunately, all this borrowing of theological terms cannot be helped. I mean to say that they comprise the language which Christian civilization has given to any *ignition state* experience. Viewing this borrowing as improper or blasphemous or as even just an expedient use of metaphors does not change the reality of this experience one bit. *And as far as falling in love is concerned, it is often the only language we possess.*

Love seen from a Marxist point of view doesn't differ much in the end from that seen from a Christian or Muslim perspective. Marxism also

sprung from a collective movement and expanded by absorbing other movements. At its center, too, lies a conception of a vital *ignition state* in ferment (i.e. the end to alienation and the coming of true communism, the before-and-after distinction between prehistory and history, and so on). What is more, Marxism has forcibly ‘offered’ its terminology to every other revolutionary movement, and those which do not adopt that language remain without words for their cause. In Marxism, the “we” experiencing the ignition state is always and exclusively the social class and what emerges is a newly fused and vital *group* identity, i.e. the transformation of the class *in itself* to the class *for itself*. It follows then that in Marxism no collective movement is possible unless it involves a class, and when there is a collective movement that either does not involve a class or does not define itself in class terms, Marxism denies its existence or importance and refuses to consider it in the same category as the class movement. Since the experience of falling in love has nothing to do with class and, furthermore, may even unite people from two different social classes, it belongs to the sphere of the private and irrational, to that insignificant part of life that

escapes scientific scrutiny. Since, phenomenologically-speaking, falling in love manifests all the signs of being a collective movement (of two and only two people) but cannot be made to square as an experience of a social class, it is depicted as being bourgeois or even reactionary. This is not to say that Marx, Lenin, and Mao were never in love; they fell in love just as other people do. But this dimension of their lives was kept utterly separate from the public one. Being ‘a private matter’, it was considered devoid of all real value. At most it was fuel for gossip.

Now let’s turn our attention to feminism. Historically, this too was—is—a collective movement, and like every other one in the Western world, it has displayed all the telltale characteristics of *ignition state* experiences (for example, the separating off of the essential from the nonessential, the galvanizing sense of living through something authentic, the coming into a state of self-awareness, and the placing of all this in historical context—a process which may be equally well expressed as one of mythical times followed by prehistory followed by the advent of feminism and followed finally by the true liberation of woman, in a communistic state

of true equality and so forth). The ‘us vs. them’ dividing line here, however, is between women and men. The collective subject of the movement is women, to the exclusion of men. A corollary of this is that feminism (like every collective movement) has ‘separated people who were united and united those who were separated’, i.e. it has served both to unite women and to separate them from men. Since bisexual love does the opposite (uniting a man and a woman at the same time as it separates them from their families, relatives, class and so on), the feminist movement at its start (meaning in its *ignition state*), could only consider the experience of falling in love as something absurd and senseless. Admittedly, it is very hard to consider as inherently positive and good an experience that historically has served as a means by which to enslave women, an experience that has always been so closely identified with their historical oppressors and that has always reflected the way of thinking, feeling, and acting of the latter—of men. Feminism wreaked havoc on the couple in order to install solidarity between women and also attacked—or demystified—the experience of falling in love because in modern society it is through this

experience and its descriptive language that the couple is constituted and legitimized. The mainstream feminist movement, however, has never been out 'to get men'; it has not transformed the male into an enemy to be destroyed, persecuted, or suppressed. In this regard it is very different from Marxism, which has never made a secret of what it would like to do to the bourgeoisie. Feminism has always been an ethical movement that wants to transform the world by convincing people, not destroying them. Thus the feminist movement has wound up salvaging many aspects of falling in love while simultaneously making a serious study and critique of the experience. Yet precisely by reinserting a distance between men and women and making women more autonomous, aware, and stronger, the feminist movement has re-created the conditions of that tension between different things which constitutes the essence of falling in love. As feminism has evolved, moreover, women have learned to protect themselves better from the exploitation that can come of a love relationship, to demand real equality rather than settle for a melodramatic proclamation of the same, to attach much less importance themselves to things like

virginity, and to lay to rest much of the useless rhetoric and outdated customs putting a damper on the experience of falling in love. Perhaps it is precisely the maturation of the feministic movement which will make it possible for our culture to finally acknowledge what it means to fall in love and put an end to its stigmatic categorization of something either 'sublime' or 'smutty'.

Where does the experience of falling in love find its verbal expression at present? In great poetry. In genres of popular literature like romances or trashy best-sellers. In private love letters, memoirs, and comic strips. Why is the description of love in its ignition state limited to essentially two linguistic alternatives—that of the sublime (where it remains ineffable) or, with an immense leap, that of vulgar, popular language (where it is subject to ridicule and scorn)? Let's remember how we just described Utilitarianism, Christianity, and Marxism as three real historical forces that continue to operate in our society as conceptual systems through which we view and interpret the world. To use the French term coined by Michel Foucault in his seminal work, *The Order of Things*, each constitutes an *episteme* (a collection of rules imposed on a given

historical period), which taken together gives us our only way to think and, above all, to speak about something. Foucault observes that the only way for an individual to participate in the dialogue or debate specific to his times is to make his own discourse conform by way of terminology and structure to the set standards of that era. The only serious communicating in any epoch respects and reflects the dominant *episteme*. Since we in our epoch must articulate our knowledge from within the confines of Utilitarianism, Christianity, and Marxism, our understanding of the experience of falling in love, the subject of this book, is consequently produced in this restricted way. And indeed, what happens is that all three *epistemes* reduce falling in love to something else. This means that we do not have a properly scientific, religious, or ideological understanding of it. On these levels it appears not to exist. It cannot be articulated; it is denied verbal expression.

This lack of suitable language for love is not just a maddening problem encountered by university professors, say, or the well-educated in general. In truth it affects everybody's life, without exception. Think about it. Lacking these words, no one has the

means for thinking and reflecting on what he or she experiences, let alone for communicating it to others. Confined to the linguistic realms of the ineffable and the vulgar, the person in love feels like a stranger in his or her material culture. He or she has the impression that his or her experience is totally personal and not collective. Since people in love must utilize definitions, formulas, and explanations that are always inadequate or else distort the truth, and that always serve some other end (ideological, political, or religious), the more they try to arrive at a clear rendering of their thoughts and feelings, the more confusion they create. The more they try to solve their problems, the more they complicate them; and the more they seek advice from experts, the more they feel confused. To use a cliché-ridden but frequently used term, we can say that our official culture (political, scientific, and religious) ‘represses’ the ignition state experience of falling in love, making it impossible for the two people to talk about it in an appropriate way. In most forms of psychoanalysis there is also a denial of this state of being, in so far as psychoanalysis attaches great importance to sexuality and considers all life experiences as



transformational phases of the same. It is interesting to note that in the nineteenth century this process of denial was the inverse of what it is today, for back then the language of romantic love served as a means for denying sexuality. Today what happens instead is that all our openness and talk about sex, sexuality, and sexual techniques takes the center stage and 'crowds out' or renders unconscious other forms and manifestations of Eros. The end result is that conformity and denial of basic human experiences continue to exist; one form of repression has simply taken the place of the other.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Is it anti-social by definition to fall in love? Is it an escape away from the public (or even political) realm of our lives? Is it necessarily a retreat into the private and personal? The dictates of our official culture hold that it is so. Also, the experience of falling in love is for many people exactly that. Yet there is no scientific basis for these tried and true dynamics. Nor are there overwhelming, empirical arguments in its favor. Don't we find in any great political movement that the leaders fall in love just as their mass supporters do? This has been true for a long long time. Limiting ourselves to Western civilization over the last three hundred years, we note that even after the end to the great wave of Romanticism in Europe (important for having simultaneously fostered a certain political attitude, literary orientation, *and* a distinctive way of falling in love), there have continued to be many striking examples of couples who have participated in a collective movement while deeply in love with each other. Think of the "founding father" of united Italy, Giuseppe Garibaldi, and his Anita (the Brazilian Anna Maria Ribiero da Silva). Or Rosa Luxemburg

and Karl Liebknecht. Or Juan and Evita Perón. These examples alone show that the concept of an egocentric love that makes political involvement impossible is a falsification. Indeed, that the opposite is true has already been demonstrated in our discussion of the ways in which the freshness of the falling in love experience can be preserved or prolonged. Isn't the ideal condition that of an active adventurous life? I termed it "a side-by-side struggle"—and isn't that what it is here, a struggle by the couple not towards some personal goal but towards *political change*?

It is a more complicated connection (this blending of the private and social) than first meets the eye, however. Making sense of it means getting into a bit of heavy-duty analysis of the underlying urges and emotions at work.

The first thing to bear in mind is that in every collective movement, whether one on a vast scale or one with the mini-dimensions of a couple who has fallen in love, an individual is moved (or even "driven") to participate as a way of breaking out of an intense, intolerable state of depression. This depression stems from the incessant, increasing ambivalence that one feels about a person or a

cause, once adored and venerated but now a source of disappointment. What once felt right now feels wrong, and what once gave one a heady sense of full living now seems to be standing in the way of either one's vital self or (in the case of a collective cause) standing in the way of history. (In Marxism the term for the latter is usually 'an impediment to productive forces', but it means the same thing.) Faced with this disillusionment, most people begin to explore alternatives. In a love relationship, that usually means 'looking around for someone new.' In a mass collective movement, disenchanted individuals might turn to some new communal ideal, embodied for example in some other way of life.

As I have already explained, one prepares him- or herself to move beyond this depression and, at the first right sign from other, to fall in love, by way of a semi-conscious opening up of self to a new way of seeing, feeling, thinking, acting, and (when eventually it happens) of being with that special person. And the same thing is possible with a group of people caught up in a cause. This is to say that if historical conditions are 'structurally' right, meaning that there is enough pervasive ethnic,

religious, national, or class conflict and strive to generate a general call and need for renewed social solidarity and a reconstituted sense of justice, then an *ignition-state* experience begins to inflame a large group of people, thousands and thousands even, each one of which identifies in his or her personal and individual way with that political, religious or class movement. Naturally if the right historical and social conditions are lacking, nothing like this happens. Just as if the time is not ripe for an individual to fall in love, he or she will not. The parallel should be clear by now: there is a set of preconditions conducive to one's falling in love and another set of preconditions for the sparking of a collective movement. At times *these two sets may arise together*, though remaining on their distinct if parallel levels. In which case the couple who have fallen in love with each other enter a collective movement together. They form a unit within the movement; to use the old Communist term, they constitute the movement's smallest conceivable *cell*.

But there is more. Since the principal dynamics of the *ignition state* (the manifested absolute value of the Real in contrast to everything else which appears incidental; the supreme authenticity of the

experience; the egalitarian aspect; the communistic side to things; each individual's self-limitation of needs; the separation of the past and present into 'prehistory' and 'current realization') are in large part the same whether it involves two people or a large group, it can also happen that the former occurs *within* the latter. Indeed, it's been demonstrated time and time again that if two people in search of a different or "better" kind of solidarity meet each other while a great collective movement is about to erupt, they will almost certainly fall in love; this, because the timing is right. Their love will be channeled into the movement, where it will remain closely tied up with the ideology and values that are being collectively affirmed. In this case the couple participates in the movement as a unit (as we've said before). The *ignition state* convulsing the larger movement does not touch them, however. This is borne out by the fact that politically-active couples fall in love most frequently *right before* or else *at the beginning* of great movements. By contrast, when the two members of the about-to-be formed couple enter the movement separately, they tend to identify with either the group as a whole or else the leader, and hence do not fall in love

*exclusively* with each other. I'll say more about this exclusive—or non-exclusive—aspect in a moment. To return to the previous point, being in love regains new importance when the movement enters a period of decline, when its glorious initial *ignition state* lives on in the participants' hearts as nostalgia, which continues to stir up a profound, consuming desire for an ideal world that is no longer achievable by means of collective action. A couple's falling in love allows them to resuscitate those political, religious, or ideological values that have fallen by the wayside. They are free to feel themselves to be the tiny nucleus of a wonderful larger alliance—something on the order, we might say, of the great world-wide socialist movement as it was once conceived of.

A moment ago I suggested that things may get messy when an enamored couple identifies with the group movement in such an extreme way as to be 'absorbed into it'; this blurring of the boundaries between the group and private experience means that the *problem of exclusivity* may arise. Usually, of course, the couple who participates passionately in the movement remains erotically sealed off. The two people in love are committed to friendship,

solidarity, and a general purpose, but they do not admit *other* lovers to their inner circle. In a parallel way, the collective movement leads to the formation of a group that tends to become just as exclusive. During this consolidation process, however, the ideological component (inherent to any ignition state) of 'communism' may emerge: in the case of the couple, this means that they may now feel the desire to let other people participate in their happiness (or, more simply, wish to keep others from suffering); in the case of the group movement, the decision might be made to communalize relationships between the sexes (a practice otherwise known as 'free love'). However things go, the two alternatives (between the exclusively personal and forcibly communal) are bound to collide, and the resulting conflict is destined to generate a profound dilemma. The final, institutionalized outcome of this dilemma depends on what the 'points of no return' are perceived to be. In some group movements, the exclusive love relationship between a couple is viewed as a threat, an obstacle standing in the way of 'total communism.' In others, however, it is accepted on principle as a right of the individual, and so viewed



as one of those above-mentioned points of no return. As historical examples of religious or political movements in which this divergence emerges, one could point to the period of the Protestant Reformation, where the love between a man and a woman was accepted by the Lutheran and Calvinist sects but shunned (in favor of a communal model forcibly imposed) by the Anabaptists in Münster; in political terms there is a contrast to be found between the anarchic communes established in Italy and Andalusia, where the couple was accepted, and certain Russian nihilist groups, where it was adamantly rejected.

In all of what we've been saying, there lurks a seemingly enormous contradiction. This has to be admitted. After all, how can it be that we tend to fall in love with people with our same religious or political views and with similar ideas and ideals to ours, when (as I theorized at the start of this book) falling in love always involves the detection of some difference in the other and, with that, a desire to transgress or break with the past? The paradox can be explained if we bear in mind that first come collective movements and only afterwards do they

give rise to institutions like churches, or political parties or associations; only at that point, in fact, does it become possible for a person to talk about—and identify with—(church) ‘brethren’ or (political) comrades or (social-minded) friends. Prior to the original collective movement, such bonds of solidarity go unrecognized. Or better, they simply do not exist. When the collective movements enter their formative ignition state, however, a process of fusion occurs. And the *result* of this process—not its *cause*—is the fact that these once-different people come to share the same values, ideas, and life project. I repeat: these stem *not* from pre-movement affinities but only those affinities that people come to experience inside the collective movement during its ignition state. Their *pre-existing* differences, in fact, are eliminated or reduced—and this carries emotional consequences of interest to us here. To put it all rather bluntly, *during the ignition state of a collective movement, people generally do not fall in love because differences are annihilated by the group.*

Having established this, we can now go back to the original question (and believe it or not, answer it: why in normal everyday life do we fall in love

with people who are very similar to us?; why are we more likely than not to fall in love with someone of the same political persuasion or religious denomination? Political parties and churches (like business organizations, sports teams, and neighborhood committees) are institutions, not collective movements. They are what collective movements lead into. They are what remains after the original ignition state has passed. Such institutions as these offer us concrete opportunities to encounter others, create relationships, and even win approval and recognition. Such opportunities are facilitated by the fact we have common interests and values. In essence, it must be said that while differences play a part in two peoples' falling in love (remember the old adage which holds that "opposites attract"?), *when we go beyond certain differences we cannot fall in love*. We cannot, for instance, fall in love with someone whom we are completely unacquainted with, or with someone who can't or simply doesn't speak to us.

To go back to the issue raised at the very start of this chapter: *what accounts for* the widespread (if

erroneous) idea that falling in love constitutes an anti-social, selfish, egocentric, insular experience?

Many political, religious, or ideological institutions through out history have claimed the right to exercise control—even strict control—over individuals touched by or participant in or falling under their jurisdiction. Often out and out *totalitarianism* lies at the end of the road. From the beginning, all these institutions (spawned by collective movements) require that individuals be totally dedicated to the group. Take the case of the Catholic monastic orders, which initially sprang from scattered religious movements involving both male and female believers. Each time an order (an institution) was created, however, the men were separated from the women, and a regime of absolute obedience to superiors was put into practice. In more modern times (especially in the twentieth century, but even more recently under the Taliban in Afghanistan), ironclad discipline of this sort has been imposed within political or revolutionary groups. Where such dedication and obedience is demanded of the *individual* it stands to reason that the *couple* represents even more of a threat—

indeed, an intolerable obstacle to and restriction on the absolute power of the collective. The couple is viewed as an enclave of resistance, wherein the two lovers preserve an area inaccessible to group authority. This area is termed *private*. It is what the totalitarian group feels *de-prived* of, in that this “private” is considered a *privation* and loss. It simply must be combated and removed as a threat. The group does that by declaring it selfish, egocentric, and meaningless. This partially explains the negative view taken by radical Marxist groups of the experience of falling in love. The ideological attack mounted on the latter also stems from the inevitable association of *private* emotion with *private property*—which radical Marxists reject outright, being as it is an intolerable subtraction from the political and economic monopoly of the state (or party). Naturally, these two phenomena are not the same; it is just that they become tied up with the same ideological concept. The real point is that the more totalitarian an ideological, religious, or political system becomes, the more hostility it manifests towards individuals who try to subtract themselves from its authority. In this sense, the system is also hostile to the couple in love, since the

two lovers form the smallest social unit capable of defying it.