

Here there is no false sentiment separating love and lust. Of course, Shakespeare is partly sending up the convention of "love at first sight." It cannot be seriously thought that the lovers have really *detected* a whole bundle of virtues and perfections in each other. At best they can have detected a pleasing shape, a reciprocal interest. They have projected or imagined the rest. They have needs that will be met come what may, and under their pressure they fantasize that they have discovered the ideal, the one who in Aristophanes' myth will make them whole again.

One thanks heaven for Rosalind when one reads some more leaden approaches to the same phenomena. For instance, we can read that "social psychological conceptualizations of romantic love have been sexless until relatively recently. . . . love it was assumed was nothing more than a form of intense interpersonal attraction, a sort of liking run wild."⁵⁵ We also read that even now, earnest questionnaires find that 65 percent of undergraduates thought sexual desire was a typical characteristic of being in love, which still leaves 35 percent who do not. One wonders what they do think.

CHAPTER TEN

Hobbesian Unity

Which brings us to the heart of the matter, and the issues that separate pessimists about sexual desire from optimists. We said that lust was the active and excited desire for the pleasures of sexual activity, leaving it unsettled what these pleasures are. The best clue comes from the seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes, famous for the bleak view of the state of nature as the war of all against all, but who nevertheless wrote:

The appetite which men call LUST . . . is a sensual pleasure, but not only that; there is in it also a delight of the mind: for it consisteth of two appetites together, to please, and to be pleased; and the delight men take in delighting, is not sensual, but a

pleasure or joy of the mind, consisting in the imagination of the power they have so much to please.⁵⁶

Here things are going well. A pleases B. B is pleased at what A is doing, and A is pleased at B's pleasure. This should please B, and a feedback loop is set up, since that in turn pleases A. The ascent does not go on forever: we cannot separate A being pleased at B being pleased at A being pleased at B being pleased . . . for very long without losing track. But we can get quite a long way. I desire you, and desire your desire for me. I hope that you desire my desire for your desire, and if things are going well, you do. There are no cross-purposes, hidden agendas, mistakes, or deceptions. Lust here is like making music together, a joint symphony of pleasure and response. There is a pure mutuality, or what I shall call a Hobbesian unity.

Pleasures here are not just bodily sensations, although the body will be playing its part. The "delights of the mind" are pleasures *at* doing something. These pleasures involve the idea of oneself, but they are not properly called narcissistic. The subject is not centrally pleased at himself or herself, but at the excitement of the other. Admittedly, it is not just at that, but also at the fact that the other is excited by the self; but this is to be secondary to the perceived state of the other. The mutual awarenesses increase as the body takes over, as it becomes flooded with desire. The involuntary nature of sexual arousal is here part of the pleasure,

the signal that the other is beginning the process of involuntary surrender to desire. As Thomas Nagel puts it:

These reactions are perceived, and the perception of them is perceived, and that perception is in turn perceived; at each step the domination of the person by his body is reinforced, and the sexual partner becomes more possessible by physical contact, penetration, and envelopment.⁵⁷

Hobbes helps to answer the question we posed early on, of why the ecstatic finale can be an experience of communion or being at one with someone else. It is so in the same way that successful music-making is a communion. When the string quartet comes to a triumphant end, the players have been responding and adjusting to each other delicately for the entire performance. No wonder there is a sense of communion on completion. Some philosophers have thought of sex as if it were something like an excited conversation, but that implies more control than should be expected.⁵⁸ In conversations we can branch out in all directions, and we devote conscious thought to what we say. Such a model misses out the domination by the body. So in general, a better comparison is to music-making, where the reciprocal sensitivities can be more or less unconscious, and also for that matter where difficulties such as timing are perhaps more salient.

Hobbes also explains why the communion in sex has a better chance of being real than communion with the divine. Conversations with the divine tend to be more one-sided, and some of us think it is an illusion that there is a conversation going on at all.

An extremely important point about Hobbesian unity is that it can be what philosophers call "variably realized." That is, as with a conversation, there is no one way of doing it. This is why sex manuals are so dreadful, except perhaps for unfortunates who do not have a clue anyway, and who need the equivalent of *69 Ways To Have a Conversation* (there are even books that are the equivalent of *69 Ways to Have a Conversation with Yourself*, or so one deduces from subtitles such as *The Secret World at Your Fingertips* or *A Hand in the Bush*). This is also why the "scientific" discipline of sexology, the kind of research that culminated in the Kinsey reports, misses the point, in the same way that an analysis of a conversation conducted with stopwatch and calipers would miss the point. It is not the movements, but the thought behind them, that matter to lust. The way the symphony unfolds can be anatomically as various as the partners can desire or manage, and as psychologically various as well.

Unlike Aristophanes' unity, a metaphysical fusion of two distinct persons, Hobbesian unity is not intrinsically impossible, any more than communication is. In conversation and music it is not just that I do something and you do something that

conveniently fits it. It is rather that *we* do something together, shown by our alertness to the other, and the adjustments we make in the light of what the other does. Bodily contact may not even be necessary. In the Nausicaa episode in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom and Gertie McDowell, eying each other across the beach, use each other's perceived excitement to work themselves to their climaxes. Unlike President Clinton, whose standards for having sex with someone were so remarkably high, I should have said that Bloom and Gertie had sex together.

However, there is much that can go wrong. As with conversation, there is the boor (and the bore) and the solipsist who loves only the sound of his own voice. There are people paralyzed by shyness, or who fear to speak because they compare themselves, or dread comparison, with others. There are people who are suspicious, and who cannot interpret each other. And the unity may be achieved only because one partner has been "constructed" or molded by the other, obediently taking pleasure in what the other does regardless of his or her suppressed bent, like the wife caused to pretend to enjoy conversations about football and car mechanics until the time comes when she actually does. But whether even that is a suppression of a "real self" underneath, or the comfortable change to new interests, might be a matter of interpretation. Not all education and change is the loss of a Wordsworthian true and innocent self.

We can imagine we share a Hobbesian unity when we do not actually share one. You can think you have caused reciprocated delight when you haven't, as the first page of *Tristram Shandy* reminds us, when at the very moment of his father's crisis, the moment of impregnation,

*Pray my dear, quoth my mother, have you not forgot to wind up the clock?—Good G——! cried my father, making an exclamation, but taking care to moderate his voice at the same time, —Did ever woman, since the creation of the world, interrupt a man with such a silly question?*⁵⁹

Tristram trembles to think what check this must have been to the “animal spirits” and what a sad foundation it must have laid for the growth of the poor dispirited fetus that became him. But then we all know lust *can* go wrong, and its trials and strains are the stuff of humor as well as tragedy. There is a nice cartoon of two somewhat disappointed-looking people in bed: “What’s the matter, couldn’t you think of anyone else either?”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Disasters

We can contrast Hobbesian unity with Immanuel Kant's account of the matter. In a notorious passage, Kant tells us that

Love, as human affection, is the love that wishes well, is amicably disposed, promotes the happiness of others and rejoices in it. But now it is plain that those who merely have sexual inclination love the person from none of the foregoing motives of true human affection, are quite unconcerned for their happiness, and will even plunge them into the greatest unhappiness, simply to satisfy their own inclination and appetite. Sexual love makes of the loved person an object of appetite; as soon as the other