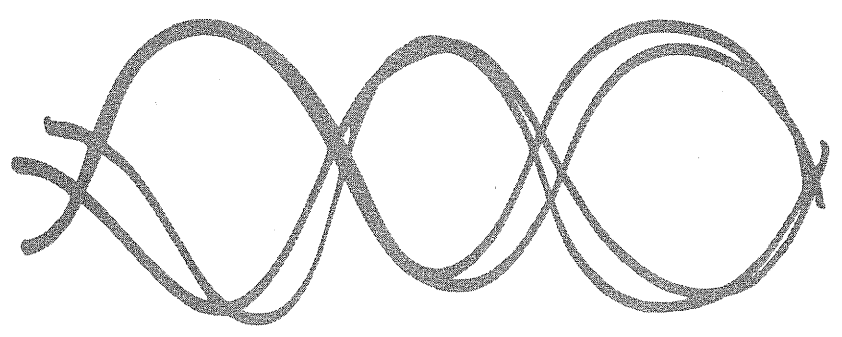


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TRAGIC SENSE OF LIFE

carnal in spirit itself. Thanks to love, we feel all that spirit has of flesh in it.

Sexual love is the generative type of every other love. In love and by love we seek to perpetuate ourselves, and we perpetuate ourselves on the earth only on condition that we die, that we yield up our life to others. The humblest forms of animal life, the lowest of living beings, multiply by dividing themselves, by splitting into two, by ceasing to be the unit which they previously formed.

But when at last the vitality of the being that multiplies itself by division is exhausted, the species must renew the source of life from time to time by means of the union of two wasting individuals, by means of what is called, among protozoaria, conjugation. They unite in order to begin dividing again with more vigour. And every act of generation consists in a being's ceasing to be what it was, either wholly or in part, in a splitting up, in a partial death. To live is to give oneself, to perpetuate oneself, and to perpetuate oneself and to give oneself is to die. The supreme delight of begetting is perhaps nothing but a foretaste of death, the eradication of our own vital essence. We unite with another, but it is to divide ourselves; this most intimate embrace is only a most intimate sundering. In its essence, the delight of sexual love, the genetic spasm, is a sensation of resurrection, of renewing our life in another, for only in others can we renew our life and so perpetuate ourselves.

Without doubt there is something tragically destructive in the essence of love, as it presents itself to us in its primitive animal form, in the unconquerable instinct which impels the male and the female to mix their being in a fury of conjunction. The same impulse that joins their bodies, separates, in a certain sense, their souls; they hate one another, while they embrace, no less than they love, and above all they contend with one another, they contend for a third life, which as yet is without life. Love

VII

LOVE, SUFFERING, PITY, AND PERSONALITY

CAIN : Let me, or happy or unhappy, learn
To anticipate my immortality.

LUCIFER : Thou didst before I came upon thee.

CAIN :

How ?

LUCIFER : By suffering.

BYRON : *Cain*, Act II., Scene I.

THE most tragic thing in the world and in life, readers and brothers of mine, is love. Love is the child of illusion and the parent of disillusion; love is consolation in desolation; it is the sole medicine against death, for it is death's brother.

*Fratelli, a un tempo stesso, Amore e Morte
Ingenerò la sorte,*

as Leopardi sang.

Love seeks with fury, through the medium of the beloved, something beyond, and since it finds it not, it despairs.

Whenever we speak of love there is always present in our memory the idea of sexual love, the love between man and woman, whose end is the perpetuation of the human race upon the earth. Hence it is that we never succeed in reducing love either to a purely intellectual or to a purely volitional element, putting aside that part in it which belongs to the feeling, or, if you like, to the senses. For, in its essence, love is neither idea nor volition; rather it is desire, feeling; it is something

is a contention, and there are animal species in which the male maltreats the female in his union with her, and other in which the female devours the male after being fertilized by him.

It has been said that love is a mutual selfishness; and, in fact, each one of the lovers seeks to possess the other, and in seeking his own perpetuation through the instrumentality of the other, though without being at the time conscious of it or purposing it, he thereby seeks his own enjoyment. Each one of the lovers is an immediate instrument of enjoyment and a mediate instrument of perpetuation, for the other. And thus they are tyrants and slaves, each one at once the tyrant and slave of the other.

Is there really anything strange in the fact that the deepest religious feeling has condemned carnal love and exalted virginity? Avarice, said the Apostle, is the root of all evil, and the reason is because avarice takes riches, which are only a means, for an end; and therein lies the essence of sin, in taking means for ends, in not recognizing or in disesteeming the end. And since it takes enjoyment for the end, whereas it is only the means, and not perpetuation, which is the true end, what is carnal love but avarice? And it is possible that there are some who preserve their virginity in order the better to perpetuate themselves, and in order to perpetuate something more human than the flesh.

For it is the suffering flesh, it is suffering, it is death, that lovers perpetuate upon the earth. Love is at once the brother, son, and father of death, which is its sister, mother, and daughter. And thus it is that in the depth of love there is a depth of eternal despair, out of which spring hope and consolation. For out of this carnal and primitive love of which I have been speaking, out of this love of the whole body with all its senses, which is the animal origin of human society, out of this loving-fondness, rises spiritual and sorrowful love.

This other form of love, this spiritual love, is born of sorrow, is born of the death of carnal love, is born also of the feeling of compassion and protection which parents feel in the presence of a stricken child. Lovers never attain to a love of self abandonment, of true fusion of soul and not merely of body, until the heavy pestle of sorrow has bruised their hearts and crushed them in the same mortar of suffering. Sensual love joined their bodies but disjoined their souls; it kept their souls strangers to one another; but of this love is begotten a fruit of their flesh—a child. And perchance this child, begotten in death, falls sick and dies. Then it comes to pass that over the fruit of their carnal fusion and spiritual separation and estrangement, their bodies now separated and cold with sorrow but united by sorrow their souls, the lovers, the parents, join in an embrace of despair, and then is born, of the death of the child of their flesh, the true spiritual love. Or rather, when the bond of flesh which united them is broken, they breathe with a sigh of relief. For men love one another with a spiritual love only when they have suffered the same sorrow together, when through long days they have ploughed the stony ground bowed beneath the common yoke of a common grief. It is then that they know one another and feel one another, and feel with one another in their common anguish, they pity one another and love one another. For to love is to pity; and if bodies are united by pleasure, souls are united by pain.

And this is felt with still more clearness and force in the seeding, the taking root, and the blossoming of one of those tragic loves which are doomed to contend with the diamond-hard laws of Destiny—one of those loves which are born out of due time and season, before or after the moment, or out of the normal mode in which the world, which is custom, would have been willing to welcome them. The more barriers Destiny and the world and its law interpose between the lovers, the

stronger is the impulse that urges them towards one another, and their happiness in loving one another turns to bitterness, and their unhappiness in not being able to love freely and openly grows heavier, and they pity one another from the bottom of their hearts; and this common pity, which is their common misery and their common happiness, gives fire and fuel to their love. And they suffer their joy, enjoying their suffering. And they establish their love beyond the confines of the world, and the strength of this poor love suffering beneath the yoke of Destiny gives them intuition of another world where there is no other law than the liberty of love—another world where there are no barriers because there is no flesh. For nothing inspires us more with hope and faith in another world than the impossibility of our love truly fructifying in this world of flesh and of appearances.

And what is maternal love but compassion for the weak, helpless, defenceless infant that craves the mother's milk and the comfort of her breast? And woman's love is all maternal.

To love with the spirit is to pity, and he who pities most loves most. Men aflame with a burning charity towards their neighbours are thus enkindled because they have touched the depth of their own misery, their own appareniality, their own nothingness, and then, turning their newly opened eyes upon their fellows, they have seen that they also are miserable, apparenial, condemned to nothingness, and they have pitied them and loved them.

Man yearns to be loved, or, what is the same thing, to be pitied. Man wishes others to feel and share his hardships and his sorrows. The roadside beggar's exhibition of his sores and gangrened mutilations is something more than a device to extort alms from the passer-by. True alms is pity rather than the pittance that alleviates the material hardships of life. The beggar shows little gratitude for alms thrown to him by one who hurries past

with averted face; he is more grateful to him who pities him but does not help than to him who helps but does not pity, although from another point of view he may prefer the latter. Observe with what satisfaction he relates his woes to one who is moved by the story of them. He desires to be pitied, to be loved.

Woman's love, above all, as I have remarked, is always compassionate in its essence—maternal. Woman yields herself to the lover because she feels that his desire makes him suffer. Isabel had compassion upon Lorenzo, Juliet upon Romeo, Francesca upon Paolo. Woman seems to say: "Come, poor one, thou shalt not suffer so for my sake!" And therefore is her love more loving and pure than that of man, braver and more enduring. *Wife*

Pity, then, is the essence of human spiritual love, of the love that is conscious of being love, of the love that is not purely animal, of the love, in a word, of a rational person. Love pities, and pities most when it loves most.

Reversing the terms of the adage *nihil cognitum quin præcognitum*, I have told you that *nihil cognitum quin prævolitum*, that we know nothing save what we have first, in one way or another, desired; and it may even be added that we can know nothing well save what we love, save what we pity.

As love grows, this restless yearning to pierce to the uttermost and to the innermost, so it continually embraces all that it sees, and pities all that it embraces. According as you turn inwards and penetrate more deeply into yourself, you will discover more and more your own emptiness, that you are not all that you are not, that you are not what you would wish to be, that you are, in a word, only a nonentity. And in touching your own nothingness, in not feeling your permanent base, in not reaching your own infinity, still less your own eternity, you will have a whole-hearted pity for yourself, and you will burn with a sorrowful love for yourself—a love that will consume your so-called self-

love, which is merely a species of sensual self-delectation, the self-enjoyment, as it were, of the flesh of your soul.

Spiritual self-love, the pity that one feels for oneself, may perhaps be called egotism; but nothing could be more opposed to ordinary egoism. For this love or pity for yourself, this intense despair, bred of the consciousness that just as before you were born you were not, so after your death you will cease to be, will lead you to pity—that is, to love—all your fellows and brothers in this world of appearance, these unhappy shadows who pass from nothingness to nothingness, these sparks of consciousness which shine for a moment in the infinite and eternal darkness. And this compassionate feeling for other men, for your fellows, beginning with those most akin to you, those with whom you live, will expand into a universal pity for all living things, and perhaps even for things that have not life but merely existence. That distant star which shines up there in the night will some day be quenched and will turn to dust and will cease to shine and cease to exist. And so, too, it will be with the whole of the star-strewn heavens. Unhappy heavens!

And if it is grievous to be doomed one day to cease to be, perhaps it would be more grievous still to go on being always oneself, and no more than oneself, without being able to be at the same time other, without being able to be at the same time everything else, without being able to be all.

If you look at the universe as closely and as inwardly as you are able to look—that is to say, if you look within yourself; if you not only contemplate but feel all things in your own consciousness, upon which all things have traced their painful impression—you will arrive at the abyss of the tedium, not merely of life, but of something more: at the tedium of existence, at the bottomless pit of the vanity of vanities. And thus you will come to pity all things; you will arrive at universal love.

In order to love everything, in order to pity everything, human and extra-human, living and non-living, you must feel everything within yourself, you must personalize everything. For everything that it loves, everything that it pities, (love personalizes) We only pity—that is to say, we only love—that which is like ourselves and in so far as it is like ourselves, and the more like it is the more we love; and thus our pity for things, and with it our love, grows in proportion as we discover in them the likenesses which they have with ourselves. Or, rather, it is love itself, which of itself tends to grow, that reveals these resemblances to us. If I am moved to pity and love the luckless star that one day will vanish from the face of heaven, it is because love, pity, makes me feel that it has a consciousness, more or less dim, which makes it suffer because it is no more than a star, and a star that is doomed one day to cease to be. For all consciousness is consciousness of death and of suffering.

(Consciousness (*conscientia*) is participated knowledge, is co-feeling, and co-feeling is com-passion. Love personalizes all that it loves. Only by personalizing it can we fall in love with an idea. And when love is so great and so vital, so strong and so overflowing, that it loves everything, then it personalizes everything and discovers that the total All, that the Universe, is also a Person possessing a Consciousness, a Consciousness which in its turn suffers, pities, and loves, and therefore is consciousness. And this Consciousness of the Universe, which love, personalizing all that it loves, discovers, is what we call God.) And thus the soul pities God and feels itself pitied by Him; loves Him and feels itself loved by Him, sheltering its misery in the bosom of the eternal and infinite misery, which, in eternalizing itself and infinitizing itself, is the supreme happiness itself.

God is, then, the personalization of the All; He is the eternal and infinite Consciousness of the Universe—Consciousness taken captive by matter and struggling to

free himself from it. We personalize the All in order to save ourselves from Nothingness; and the only mystery really mysterious is the mystery of suffering.

Suffering is the path of consciousness, and by it living beings arrive at the possession of self-consciousness. For to possess consciousness of oneself, to possess personality, is to know oneself and to feel oneself distinct from other beings, and this feeling of distinction is only reached through an act of collision, through suffering, more or less severe, through the sense of one's own limits. Consciousness of oneself is simply consciousness of one's own limitation. I feel myself when I feel that I am not others; to know and to feel the extent of my being is to know at what point I cease to be, the point beyond which I no longer am.

And how do we know that we exist if we do not suffer, little or much? How can we turn upon ourselves, acquire reflective consciousness, save by suffering? When we enjoy ourselves we forget ourselves, forget that we exist; we pass over into another, an alien being, we alienate ourselves. And we become centred in ourselves again, we return to ourselves, only by suffering.

*Nessun maggior dolore
che ricordarsi del tempo felice
nella miseria*

are the words that Dante puts into the mouth of Francesca da Rimini (*Inferno*, v., 121-123); but if there is no greater sorrow than the recollection in adversity of happy bygone days, there is, on the other hand, no pleasure in remembering adversity in days of prosperity.

"The bitterest sorrow that man can know is to aspire to do much and to achieve nothing" (*πρὸλλὰ φρονέουσα μηδὲνός χρατέω*)—so Herodotus relates that a Persian said to a Theban at a banquet (book ix., chap. xvi.). And it is true. With knowledge and desire we can embrace everything, or almost everything; with the will nothing,

or almost nothing. And contemplation is not happiness—no! not if this contemplation implies impotence. And out of this collision between our knowledge and our power pity arises.

We pity what is like ourselves, and the greater and clearer our sense of its likeness with ourselves, the greater our pity. And if we may say that this likeness provokes our pity, it may also be maintained that it is our reservoir of pity, eager to diffuse itself over everything, that makes us dissever the likeness of things with ourselves, the common bond that unites us with them in suffering.

Our own struggle to acquire, preserve, and increase in our own consciousness makes us discover in the endeavours and movements and revolutions of all things a struggle to acquire, preserve, and increase consciousness, to which everything tends. Beneath the actions of those most akin to myself, of my fellow-men, I feel—or, rather, I co-feel—a state of consciousness similar to that which lies beneath my own actions. On hearing my brother give a cry of pain, my own pain awakes and cries in the depth of my consciousness. And in the same way I feel the pain of animals, and the pain of a tree when one of its branches is being cut off, and I feel it most when my imagination is alive, for the imagination is the faculty of intuition, of inward vision.

Proceeding from ourselves, from our own human consciousness, the only consciousness which we feel from within and in which feeling is identical with being, we attribute some sort of consciousness, more or less dim, to all living things, and even to the stones themselves, for they also live. And the evolution of organic beings is simply a struggle to realize fullness of consciousness through suffering, a continual aspiration to be others without ceasing to be themselves, to break and yet to preserve their proper limits.

And this process of personalization or subjectivization of everything external, phenomenal, or objective, is none