

*On Love...
Aspects of a
Single Theme
José Ortega
y Gasset*

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Single Theme
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Translated from
the Spanish by Toby Talbot



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before knowing the person or situation which satisfies it. Consequently, anyone is able to satisfy it. Instinct does not show preferences when it is mere instinct. It is not, by itself, an impulse towards any perfection.

The sexual instinct assures, perhaps, conservation of the species, but not its perfection. On the other hand, genuine sexual love, that is, ardour for another being, his body and soul in indissoluble union, is in itself primarily a gigantic force entrusted with improving the species. Instead of existing prior to its object, it is always born in response to a being who appears before us, and who, by virtue of some eminent quality which he possesses, stimulates the erotic process.

Scarcely does this begin, than the lover experiences a strange urgency to dissolve his own individuality in that of the other and, vice versa, to absorb the individuality of his beloved into his own. A mysterious longing! Whereas in every other situation in life nothing upsets us so much as to see the frontiers of our individual existence trespassed upon by another person, the rapture of love consists in feeling ourselves so metaphysically porous to another person that only in the fusion of both, only in an 'individuality of two', can it find fulfilment. This view recalls the doctrine of the Saint-Simonians, according to which authentic individuality consists in the unity formed of man and woman. However, the longing for fusion does not end with simple, uncreative union. Love is complete when it culminates in a more or less clear desire to leave, as testimony of the union, a child in whom the perfections of the beloved are perpetuated and affirmed. This third element, precipitated by love, seems to sum up its essential meaning in all its purity. The child is neither the father's nor the mother's: he is the personified union of the

Love, strictly speaking,² is pure sentimental activity towards an object, which can be anything - person or thing. As a 'sentimental' activity, it remains, on the one hand, separated from all intellectual functions - perception, consideration, thought, recall, imagination - and, on the other hand, from desire, with which it is often confused. A glass of water is desired, but is not loved, when one is thirsty. Undoubtedly, desires are born of love; but love itself is not desire. We desire good fortune for our country, and we desire to live in it because we love it. Our love exists prior to these desires, and the desires spring from love like the plant from the seed.

As with all sentimental 'activity', love is different from inactive sentiments, such as joy or sadness. The latter are a sort of colouration which tinges the human being. One 'is' sad or one 'is' happy, in complete passiveness. Joy, in itself, does not constitute any action, although it may lead to it. On the other hand, loving something is not simply 'being', but acting towards that which is loved. In this regard I am not referring to the physical or spiritual movements which love incites; love itself is, by nature, a transitive act in which we exert ourselves on behalf of what we love. Although we are quiescent, when we are a hundred leagues from the object and not even thinking about it, if we love the object an indefinable flow of a warm and affirmative nature will emanate from us. This is clearly observable if we compare love with hate. To hate something or someone is not 'being' passive, like being sad, but, in some way, it is a terrible negative action, ideally destructive of the hated object. This observation that there is a specific sentimental activity, which is distinct from all physical and spiritual activities, such as those of the intellect, desire and volition, seems to me of a

crucial importance for a refined psychology of love. When love is spoken about, there is almost always a description of its consequences or concomitances, its driving motives or its results. Love itself is scarcely ever seized by the analytical pincers, with respect to its peculiarities and differences from the rest of the psychic fauna.

It may now appear admissible that 'love of science' and 'love for a woman' have a common denominator. Sentimental activity, that is, a cordial, affirmative interest in another person for himself, can equally be directed towards a woman, a piece of land (one's country), a branch of human activity such as sports, science, etc. Moreover, one might add, leaving aside pure sentimental activity, that all the differing elements in 'love of science' and 'love of a woman' are not, properly speaking, what love is.

There are many 'cases of love' in which there is a bit of everything except love. There is desire, curiosity, persistence, madness, sincere sentimental fiction; but there is no intense affirmation of another being, irrespective of his attitude towards us. As for the 'cases of love' where we really find this affirmation, we must not forget that they contain, *sensu stricto*, many other elements besides love.

In a broad sense, we usually consider love to be what is in fact only the 'act of falling in love', a highly complex state of mind in which love in the strict sense has a secondary role. Stendhal refers to this state when he titles (with an abusive generality which reveals the inadequacy of his philosophic horizon) his book, *De l'amour*.

In regard to this 'falling in love' which the theory of crystallization presents to us as a hyperactivity of the mind, I should like to say that it is, rather, a contraction and a relative paralysis of the life of our

and night). This is a declaration of obsession. In truth, nothing characterizes us as much as our field of attention. It is differently modulated in every man. Thus, for the man given to contemplation, who follows every subject through to make it yield its innermost substance, the lightness with which the worldly man's attention skips from object to object is a cause of vexation. Conversely, the man of the world is wearied and distressed by the slowness with which the thinker's attention advances, moving as it does like a dragnet scratching the rough bottom of an abyss. Moreover, there are different preferences of attention which constitute the very basis of character. There are those who, if a fact of economics comes up in conversation, react as violently as if they had mentally fallen through a trap door. Another's attention will spontaneously descend towards art or sexual matters. This formula might well be accepted: tell me where your attention lies and I will tell you who you are.

I believe that 'falling in love' is a phenomenon of attention, but of an abnormal state of attention which occurs in a normal man.

The initial stage of 'falling in love' immediately reveals this. In society many men and women are confronted with each other. The attention of each man – as of each woman – shifts indifferently from one representative of the opposite sex to another. Reasons based on former sentimental ties, greater proximity, etc., will cause the woman's attention to rest a bit longer upon one male than upon another; but the disproportion between attention to one and inattention to the rest is not great. To put it another way – and barring slight differences – every man that a woman knows is equidistant from her attention, in one straight line. One day, however, this equal division of

attention ceases. The woman's attention of itself seems to rest upon one of those men, and soon it requires an effort for her to dismiss him from her thoughts, to mobilize her preoccupation towards other things. The straight line has been broken: one man stands out at a closer distance to the woman's attention.

'Falling in love', initially, is no more than this: attention abnormally fastened upon another person. If the latter knows how to utilize his privileged situation and ingeniously nourishes that attention, the rest follows with irremissible mechanism. Each day he will find himself further advanced before the line of those others, the indifferent ones; each day he will occupy more space in the mind of the attentive woman. She will begin to feel incapable of ignoring the privileged man. Other people and things will gradually be dislodged from her consciousness. Wherever 'the woman in love', whatever her apparent occupation, her attention will gravitate by its own weight towards that man. And, vice versa, it will require a great effort on her part to tear her attention away from that direction for one moment and orient it towards life's obligation. St Augustine wisely observed this spontaneous absorption in an object which is characteristic of love: *Amor meus, pondus meum: illo feror, quocumque feror.* (My love is my weight: because of it I move.)

It is not a question, then, of an enrichment of our mental lives. Quite the contrary. There is a progressive elimination of the things which formerly absorbed us. Consciousness contracts and is occupied by only one object. The attention remains paralysed: it does not advance from one thing to another. It is fixed and rigid, the captive of one person alone. *Theia mania* (divine mania), said Plato. (We shall soon see

where this surprising and excessive 'divine' comes from.)

Nevertheless, the person in love has the impression that the life of his consciousness is very rich. His reduced world is more concentrated. All his psychic forces converge to act upon one single point, and this gives a false aspect of superlative intensity to his existence.

At the same time, that exclusiveness of attention endows the favoured object with portentous qualities. It is not that non-existent perfections are imagined in it. (I have already shown that this can happen; but it is neither essential nor necessary, as Stendhal erroneously supposes.) By overwhelming an object with attention and concentrating on it, the consciousness endows it with an incomparable force of reality. It exists for us at every moment; it is ever present, there alongside us, more real than anything else. The remainder of the world must be sought out, by laboriously deflecting our attention from the beloved.

Here is where we encounter a great similarity between falling in love and mystical ardour. The mystic frequently speaks of 'the presence of God'. It is not merely an expression. Behind it lies an authentic phenomenon. Through prayer, meditation and addressing God, the latter acquires such objective solidity for the mystic that it is never permitted to vanish from the range of his thoughts. It is always there, precisely because attention does not let go of it. Every activity of the mystic's day brings him into contact with God, that is, makes him revert to his idea. This is not something peculiar to religious orders. There is nothing that can attain that everlasting presence which, according to the mystic, God enjoys. The sage who spends years at a time thinking about a problem and the novelist who is constantly

instinct. Love uses it like a brute force, as a brig uses the wind. 'Falling in love' is another gross mechanism, ready to be set off blindly, and love, good horseman that it is, merely utilizes and harnesses it. Do not forget that the lofty life of the spirit, so esteemed in our culture, is impossible without the contribution of innumerable and inferior automatisms.

When we have fallen into that state of mental contraction, of psychic angina, of which falling in love consists, we are lost. During the first few days we can still fight; but when the disproportion between the attention paid to a woman and that which we devote to other women and the rest of the universe exceeds a certain measure, it is no longer in our hands to restrain the process.

Attention is the supreme instrument of personality; it is the apparatus which regulates our mental lives. When paralysed, it does not leave us any freedom of movement. In order to save ourselves, we would have to reopen the field of our consciousness, and to achieve that it would be necessary to introduce other objects into its focus to rupture the beloved's exclusiveness. If in the paroxysm of falling in love we could suddenly see the beloved in the normal perspective of our attention, her magic power would be destroyed. In order, however, to gain this perspective we would have to focus our attention upon other things, that is, we would have to emerge from our own consciousness, which is totally absorbed by the object that we love.

We have been entrapped in a hermetic enclosure that has no opening to the outside world. Nothing from the outside is able to penetrate and facilitate our escape. The soul of a man in love smells of the closed-up room of a sick man - its confined atmosphere is filled with stale breath.

12
Falling in love automatically tends towards madness. Left to itself, it goes to utter extremes. This is well known by the 'conquistadors' of both sexes. Once a woman's attention is fixed upon a man, it is very easy for him to dominate her thoughts completely. A simple game of blowing hot and cold, of solicitousness and disdain, of presence and absence is all that is required. The rhythm of that technique acts upon a woman's attention like a pneumatic machine and ends by emptying her of all the rest of the world. How well our people put it: 'to suck one's senses'!³ In fact: one is absorbed - absorbed by an object! Most 'love affairs' are reduced to this mechanical play of the beloved upon the lover's attention.

The only thing that can save a lover is a violent shock from the outside, a treatment which is forced upon him. Many think that absence and long trips are a good cure for lovers. Observe that these are cures for one's attention. Distance from the beloved starves our attention towards him; it prevents anything further from rekindling the attention. Journeys, by physically obliging us to come out of ourselves and resolve hundreds of little problems, by uprooting us from our habitual setting and forcing hundreds of unexpected objects upon us, succeed in breaking down the maniac's haven and opening channels in his sealed consciousness, through which fresh air and normal perspective enter.

At this point in our discussion it would be well to propose an objection which may have occurred to the reader while considering the previous chapter. When we define falling in love as a fixation of attention upon another person, we do not sufficiently draw a line between love and the thousands of situations in life in which serious and pressing political or

3. THE ROLE OF CHOICE IN LOVE

I

The essential core of our individuality is not fashioned from our opinions and experiences; it is not founded upon our temperament, but rather upon something more subtle, more ethereal and independent of these. We are, more than anything else, an innate system of preferences and distastes. Each of us bears within himself his own system, which to a greater or lesser degree is like that of the next fellow, and is always rigged and ready, like a battery of likes and dislikes, to set us in motion *pro* or *contra* something. The heart, an acceptance and rejection machine, is the foundation of our personality. Before knowing a total situation we find ourselves gravitating in one particular direction, towards certain particular values. Thanks to this, we are exceedingly wise about situations in which our preferred values are brought into play, and blind about others in which different, whether equal or superior, values exist which are alien to our sensibilities.

I wish to add to this idea, which is vigorously supported today by a whole group of philosophers, a second which I have not yet seen mentioned.

It is understandable that in living together with our fellow man nothing interests us so much as discovering what is his range of values, his system of pre-

ferences, for this constitutes the ultimate root of his being and the source of his character. Similarly, the historian who wishes to understand an epoch must, first of all, compile a list of the predominant values of the men of that time. Otherwise, the facts and statements which the documents of that age reveal to him will be a dead letter, an enigma and a charade, as are the words and acts of our fellow man if we have not penetrated beneath them and caught a glimpse of what values they serve in his secret self. This self, this nucleus of the heart, is, in fact, concealed to a great extent, even from ourselves who bear it within us – or, rather, who are borne by it. It acts in the subterranean penumbra, in the cellar of one's personality, and it is as difficult for us to perceive as it is to see the span of ground upon which our feet step. Neither can the pupil of an eye view itself. A good part of our lives, moreover, consists in the best-intentioned comedy which we ourselves play for our own benefit. We feign temperaments which are not our own, and we feign them in all sincerity, not to deceive others, but to enhance ourselves in our own eyes. Impersonators of ourselves, we speak and act under the motivation of superficial influences which the social environment or our will exercises upon our organism and which for the moment supplant our authentic lives. If the reader devotes a while to analysing himself, he will discover with surprise – perhaps with fright – that a great part of 'his' opinions and feelings are not his own, that they have not sprung spontaneously from his own personal self, but are instead stray ones, dropped from the social environment into his innermost valley, as dust from the road falls upon the traveller.

Acts and words are not, then, the best clues for identifying a neighbour's intimate secrets. Both are

everything. This error has its origin in the Platonic inheritance. (No one can estimate the penetration of concepts of ancient philosophy into the ranks of western civilization. The most uneducated man uses words and concepts from Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics.) It was Plato who made the everlasting connection between love and beauty; although by beauty he did not mean precisely physical perfection. Beauty was, rather, the name for all perfection, the form, to put it another way, in which anything worthy appeared to the Greeks. Beauty was superiority. This peculiarity in vocabulary has led subsequent thinking on eroticism astray.

Loving is something more serious and significant than being excited by the lines of a face and the colour of a cheek; it is a decision on a certain type of human being, symbolically presented in the details of the face, voice and gestures.

'Love is a desire for generation and birth in beauty (*tiktein en tō kalō*),' Plato said. Generation is creation of a future. Beauty is the good life. Love implies an inner adherence to a certain type of humanity which to us seems the best and which we find preconceived, inherent in another being.

And this, my dear madame, probably sounds abstract, abstruse and removed from concrete reality. Nevertheless, guided by this abstraction, I have just discovered in the look you gave to X what life means to you. Let's have another cocktail!

3

In most cases a man is in love several times during his lifetime. This fact raises a number of theoretical problems, in addition to the practical ones which the lover will have to solve on his own. For example: is this successive continuum of love affairs part of

error. Love sometimes errs, as the eyes and ears may err, But, like these, its abnormality is based upon general accuracy. Second, imaginary or not, love is excited by certain real charms and qualities. It always has an object. Although the real person may not coincide with this imaginary object, some grounds of affinity must exist between the two which leads us to fancy one woman, and not another, as the foundation and subject of those charms.

4

The idea that there is choice in love – a choice which is more real than many which are made consciously and deliberately – and that this choice is not free but, rather, depends upon the individual's basic character, must at once seem unacceptable to those who hold the psychological interpretation of man which has, in my opinion, failed and ought to be substituted.

The psychological interpretation of man is based on the tendency to exaggerate the intervention of chance and the mechanical contingencies of human life. Sixty or more years ago men of science carefully tested this point of view and sought to construct a mechanistic psychology. As always happens, their ideas have taken a generation to penetrate the consciousness of the average educated man. Unfortunately, at the present time, every new attempt to see things more exactly encounters minds filled with outmoded ideas. Aside, then, from the fact that the thesis here suggested may be true or false, it must of necessity clash with general currents of thought which are of a conflicting tendency. People have become accustomed to thinking that events, the totality of which forms their existence, do not have any meaning, either good or bad, but rather that they come about through a combination of chance and

quo of normal situations. Here our roads part. I cannot accept, without a great many convincing arguments, any theory by which human life, in one of its most profound and most serious activities – such as love – turns out to be a sheer and almost consistent absurdity, oddity, and mistake.

I do not deny that mistakes can occasionally result, as happens in physical vision, but these do not invalidate the accuracy of our normal perception. If, however, error is insistently presented as the normal occurrence, I must say that I think this view is inaccurate and that it results from insufficient observation. Error, in most of its presumed examples, does not exist: the person is what he at once appeared to be, except that later we suffer the consequences of his particular mode of being. It is this that we call our mistake. For example: it is not uncommon for a young bourgeois girl of Madrid to fall in love with a man for a certain looseness and audacity that his person exudes. He is always above circumstances, ready to resolve them with an admirable coolness and authority which are definitely the result of an absolute disregard of everything divine and human. One cannot deny that such flexibility in movement, at first glance, gives this type of male a charm which is usually lacking in more profound personalities. He is, in short, of that species known as the *calavera*⁷ or the playboy. The girl usually falls in love with the *calavera* before he performs his escapades. Shortly afterwards, he pawns her jewellery and abandons her. Friends of the little lady unsuccessfully console her for her 'mistake'; but deep within her being she knows very well that it was no unanticipated 'mistake', for she had suspected such an outcome from the beginning, and her suspicion was one element of her love, the thing in him that 'appealed' to her most.

I think that we must begin reforming the topical ideas of this magnificent sentiment, because love is now in a very confused state, especially on our Peninsula. A splendid triggering of human vitality – which, after all, not many enjoy – love should be clearly defined and freed from sordid attachments. Let us be cautious, then, in supporting the idea of ‘error’ when we are trying to explain the recurring drama of eroticism. I deplore the fact that the intelligent anonymous writer from Cordova, in another letter, resorts to the idea that we fall in love with the ‘physical proportions’ of the beloved, and since similar physical types ‘harbour very different and even contrary psyches’, errors occur. Such errors, he believes, make it impossible to affirm an affinity between the object that is loved and the nature of the lover. The fact is that, in his first letter, this courteous native of Averroes recognized that a person’s inner self shows through in his gestures and facial expression. I regret that I cannot accept the separation (which is another of the great manias of the past epoch) between what is physical and what is psychical. It is false, and completely false, that we see ‘only’ a body when we see, in fact, a human figure before us. It would be as if by another and later mental act we could magically add to this material object, by unknown means, a psyche taken from nobody knows where!⁸ On the contrary, the actual fact is that it is very difficult for us, supposing that it can be done at all, to separate and abstract the body from the soul. Not only when living with another human being but even in a casual relationship, the visual image we have of a person’s body is simultaneous with our psychical perception of his soul or quasi-soul. In a dog’s howl we perceive his pain, and in a tiger’s eye his ferociousness. Only by this means

not be confused with brown and, above all, that objects in front of one be seen with a little exactness and accuracy, without supplanting sight by mechanically repeated words. But, ordinarily, one has the impression of living amid somnambulists who advance through life buried in a hermetic sleep from which it is impossible to stir them in order to make them aware of their surroundings. Probably, humanity has almost always lived in this somnambulistic state in which ideas are not a wide-awake, conscious reaction to things, but a blind, automatic habit, drawn from a repertory of formulae which the atmosphere infuses into the individual.

It is undeniable that a large part of science and literature has also been produced in a somnambulistic trance; that is to say, by creatures who are not at all intelligent. Science, particularly in our day, at once specialized and systematized, permits the utilization of the fool, so that we constantly see undistinguished people performing admirable work. Science and literature, as such, do not imply perspicacity; but, undoubtedly, their cultivation is a stimulant which favours the awakening of the mind and preserves it in that luminous state of alertness which constitutes intelligence. The difference between the intelligent man and the fool is, after all, that the former lives on guard against his own foolishness, recognizes it as soon as it appears, and strives to eliminate it, whereas the fool enchantedly surrenders to his foolishness without reservations.

Due to the fact of a constant stimulus, there is a greater probability that an intellectual will be intelligent; but I consider it a grave misfortune if, in any period or nation, intelligence remains, practically speaking, reduced to the limits of the intellectual. Intelligence asserts itself above all not in art, nor in

7. TOWARDS A PSYCHOLOGY OF THE INTERESTING MAN

I

Nothing is so flattering to a man as to hear women say that he is interesting. But when is a man interesting in the opinion of a woman? This is one of the most subtle and difficult questions to raise. In order to tackle it systematically, an entirely new and heretofore unattempted discipline would have to be developed, one which I have considered and reconsidered for years. I call it *Knowledge of Man* or *Philosophical Anthropology*. This discipline will reveal to us that souls, like bodies, have different forms. With varying degrees of clarity, depending upon individual insight, we all perceive this diversity of personality structure in the people whom we encounter. It is difficult, nevertheless, to transform our surface perceptions into clear concepts, into complete knowledge. We sense others, but we do not know them.

Everyday language has accumulated, however, a wealth of delicate insights which are conveyed by highly suggestive verbal capsules. One speaks, in fact, of hardy souls and gentle souls, of souls which are dour or sweet, profound or superficial, strong or weak, plodding or flighty. One speaks of magnanimous and pusillanimous men, thus recognizing stature in souls as well as bodies. One says of someone that

he is a man of action or on the other hand that he is a contemplative man, that he is 'cerebral' or sentimental, etc. No one has attempted to analyse methodically the precise meaning of the many different designations under which we classify the marvellous diversity of the human fauna. All these expressions merely allude to the structural differences of the inner person, and point towards constructing a psychological anatomy. It is clear that a boy's soul will of necessity have a different structure from an old man's, and an ambitious man a different spiritual make-up from a dreamer. This study, if undertaken somewhat systematically, might result in a new-styled, cogent character, which would permit us to describe with hitherto unsuspected refinement the varieties of human inwardness. Among them might appear what, according to women, is the *interesting man*.

To enter upon a thorough analysis of the interesting man fills me with fear, since we face thereupon a maze of problems. The first and most obvious thing to be said about the interesting man is this: the interesting man is the man with whom women fall in love. But this immediately leads us astray, and plunges us into greater perils. We are thrust straight into the jungle of love. And the fact is that no land in human topography is less explored than love. It could in fact be said that everything remains to be said of love; or rather, that everything remains to be thought about it.

A store of crude ideas fixed in people's heads prevents them from seeing the facts with normal clarity. Everything is confused and distorted. There are many reasons for this. In the first place, love, by nature, is part of one's secret life. One cannot tell about one's love; in the telling it vanishes or vaporizes. Everyone

has to rely upon his personal experience, almost always meagre, for it is not easy to profit from that of one's neighbour. What would have happened, however, to physics if each physicist possessed only his personal observations? In the second place, what happens is that the men who are most capable of thinking about love are the ones who have experienced it the least, whereas those who have experienced it are usually incapable of thinking about it, of subtly analysing its iridescent and ever-vague plumage. Finally, an experiment on love is a most thankless task. If a doctor talks about digestion, people listen modestly and curiously. But if a psychologist speaks about love, everyone listens to him disparagingly, or they do not listen to him at all; they never even bother to find out what he has to say, because they all believe themselves to be experts on the subject. In few instances does the habitual stupidity of people appear so manifestly. They act as though love were not, after all, as theoretical a subject as others, hermetically sealed away from anyone who approaches it with inadequate intellectual tools!

It is the same as with the subject of Don Juan. Everyone thinks he has the true interpretation of Don Juanism, that most obscure, abstruse, delicate problem of our time. The fact is that, with few exceptions, men can be divided into three classes: those who think they are Don Juan, those who think they have been Don Juan, and those who think they could have been Don Juan but did not want to be. The last are the ones who propose, with worthy intention, to attack Don Juan, and perhaps decree his dismissal.

There exist, then, numerous reasons why the sciences which everyone presumes to understand — love and politics — are the ones which have

progressed least. Those who are best qualified to speak about love and politics have kept silent simply to avoid listening to the clichés which ignorant people hasten to utter as soon as either subject is touched upon.

It ought to be made clear, therefore, that neither the Don Juans nor those in love know anything in particular about Don Juan or love. Probably the only person who can speak with precision on both matters is he who lives at a distance from both, but is yet, like the astronomer in regard to the sun, attentive and curious. Knowing things is not being them, nor being them knowing them. In order to see an object it is necessary to be detached from it. Separation converts it from experienced reality into an object of knowledge. Any other view would lead us, for example, to believe that the zoologist, in order to study ostriches, must himself become an ostrich; which is exactly what Don Juan becomes when he speaks about himself.

For my part, I can say that I have not attained sufficient clarity on this important matter, in spite of having thought about it a great deal. Fortunately, Don Juan is not under discussion now. What should be said, perhaps, is that Don Juan is always an interesting man, contrary to what his enemies wish to make us believe. It is evident, however, that not every interesting man is a Don Juan – and with this comment on him let us eliminate his dangerous profile from these notes. As for love, it will be less easy to avoid its intrusion into our purview. I find myself, therefore, forced to formulate with apparent dogmatism, without development or proof, some of my thoughts about love which differ radically from accepted ideas. The reader ought to take them merely as a necessary clarification of what I have to say

being, as if he had torn us from our own vital depths and we were living transplanted, our vital roots within him. Another way of saying this is that a person in love feels himself totally surrendered to the one he loves; so that it does not matter whether bodily or spiritual surrender has actually taken place. It is possible for a person in love to succeed in preventing, by virtue of reflective considerations – social decorum, difficulties of any nature – the surrender of his will to the one he loves. What is essential is that he *feels* himself, regardless of the decision of his will, surrendered to the other.

There is no contradiction in this, because the fundamental surrender is not carried out on the plane of will, but occurs more deeply within the person. There is no will to surrender: there is an unwilled surrender. And regardless of where our will leads us, we remain unwittingly surrendered to the beloved, even if we are led to the other end of the world to be away from him.¹

This extreme case of disassociation, of antagonism between will and love, serves to emphasize the peculiarity of the latter, and should be taken into account as a possible complication – *possible*, but certainly quite improbable. Considerations of self-defence against the beloved rarely influence the will of a person genuinely in love. This is true to such a point that if, in practice, one sees that the beloved's will is active, that he 'presents considerations', and finds 'very respectable' reasons for not loving or for loving less, it is usually the surest sign that, actually, he is not in love. Such a soul feels itself vaguely attracted by the other but has not been uprooted from itself – which is only to say that this man is not in love.

The combination of these two elements, enchant-

nature of the soul. The characteristics of the person in love must be attributed to love itself. If the individual is not sensitive, how can his love be sentient? If he is not profound, how can his love be deep? As one is, so is one's love. For this reason, *we can find in love the most decisive symptom of what a person is.* All other acts and appearances can deceive us with regard to his true nature, but his love affairs reveal to us the carefully concealed secret of his being. This is especially true in the choice of the beloved. In no other action do we reveal our innermost character as we do in erotic choice.

Frequently we hear that intelligent women fall in love with stupid men, and vice versa, foolish women with clever men. I confess that although I have heard this many times, I have never believed it, and in every case in which I was able to draw closer and apply the psychological magnifying lens, I have found either that those men and women were not actually intelligent or that their chosen ones were not stupid.

Passion is not, therefore, the height of amorous feeling but, on the contrary, its degeneration in inferior souls. In it there is not – or, at least there does not have to be – either enchantment or surrender. Psychiatrists know that the obsessed man struggles against his obsession, that he does not accept it, but yet is dominated by it. Thus there can be great passion with very little love. This will indicate to the reader that my interpretation of the amorous phenomenon is in direct opposition to the false mythology which makes of passion an elemental, primitive force engendered in the obscure bosom of human animality which brutally overpowers the person and ignores any appreciable role of loftier, more subtle portions of the soul.

Ignoring for the present the possible connection between love and certain cosmic instincts latent in our being, I think that love is indeed the complete opposite of an elemental force. I would say – aware though I am of the margin of error – that love, rather than being an elemental force, almost resembles a literary genre. This is a formula which – naturally – will provoke more than one reader before he considers it. Certainly, if this claimed to be the final word, it would be excessive and unacceptable. All that I wish to suggest, however, is that love is not an instinct but rather a creation, and, in man, no primitive creation at that. The savage has no inkling of it, the Chinese and the Indian are unfamiliar with it, the Greeks of the time of Pericles barely recognized it.⁴ Could not both features – that of being a spiritual creation and that of appearing only in certain stages and forms of human culture – serve well as the definition of a literary genre?

Love can be as clearly distinguished from its other pseudomorphs as from sensual ardour and 'passion'. This includes what I have called 'affection'. In 'affection' – which, at best, is usually the form of matrimonial love – two people feel mutual sympathy, fidelity, adhesion, but there is no enchantment and surrender. Each lives absorbed in himself, without rapture in the other, and each emits from within himself gentle rays of consideration, benevolence, corroboration.

What has been said is sufficient to give some meaning – that is all I am attempting now – to this affirmation: if one wishes to see clearly into the phenomenon of love, it is necessary, above all, to free oneself from the common idea which sees it as a universal sentiment, within the reach of almost everyone's experience, occurring at every minute every-

love to uproot, invade or mould our character if the constitution of our soul is insubstantial and inflexible, dispersed or without vigorous resources.

In order to be enchanted we must be, above all, capable of *seeing* another person – simply opening one's eyes will not do.⁶ One needs a peculiar kind of initial curiosity which is much more integral, deep-rooted and broad than mere curiosity about things (like scientific, technical or tourist curiosity, or curiosity to 'see the world', etc.), or even about the particular acts of people (for example, gossip). One must be vitally curious about humanity, and more concretely, about the individual as a living totality, an individual *modus* of existence. Without this curiosity, the most eminent creatures can pass before us and make no impression upon us. The ever-lit lamp of the evangelical virgins is the symbol of this virtue which constitutes, as it were, the threshold of love.

But note that such curiosity, in truth, presupposes many other things. It is a vital luxury which only organisms with a high level of vitality can possess. The weak individual is incapable of disinterested, initial attention to what occurs outside of himself. He fears the unexpected which life may hold enveloped in the folds of its billowing skirt, and he becomes hermetic to the extent that he does not immediately relate to others with total interest. This paradox of 'disinterested' interest permeates love in all its functions and actions like the red mark which is stamped on all cables from the British Royal Navy.

Simmel – following Nietzsche – has said that the essence of life consists precisely in longing for more life. Living is to live even more, a desire to increase one's own palpitations. When it is not this, life is sick and, in its measure, is not life. The ability to interest oneself in a thing for what it is in itself and not in

source which produces rationality, the real force which originates and maintains it in our spirit.

Love, although there may be nothing intellectual about it, is like reasoning in that it does not spring up out of nowhere and, so to speak, *ex nihilo*, but has its psychic source in the qualities of the beloved. The presence of these engenders and nourishes love, or, to put it another way, no one loves without reason; whoever is in love has, all the while, a conviction that his love is justified. To love is, furthermore, 'to believe' (to feel) that that which is loved is, in fact, lovable for itself, just as thinking is believing that things are, in reality, what we think they are. It is possible that in both cases we are mistaken, that neither that which is loved is what we feel it is, nor that which is real is what we think it is; but in any case we keep on loving and thinking as long as we have our conviction. The logical character of thought consists of this quality of feeling oneself justified and living precisely *from* one's justification, relying on it at every instant, corroborating it with the proof of one's reason. Leibniz expresses the same thing by saying that thought is not blind, but that it thinks a thing *because it sees* that it is as it thinks it. Equally, love loves, because it sees that the object is lovable. Thus the lover comes away with the inevitable attitude of love, the only possible one which he could assume, and he cannot understand why others do not feel likewise – the origin of jealousy, which to some extent is of the same nature as love.

Love is not, therefore, illogical or anti-rational. It is, undoubtedly, a-logical and irrational, since *logos* and *ratio* refer exclusively to relationship of concepts. But there is a broader use of the term 'reason' which includes everything that is not blind, everything that has *nous* meaning.⁹ In my opinion, all