

The War Against Love

THE modern world does not only pervert our beliefs and our actions, it also devastates our feelings—as witness the violation, by almost every sector of contemporary society, religious, secular and ‘esoteric’, of the realm of romantic love. We used to say, ‘Love conquers all’; but since nothing is left to us now of the word ‘love’ but dumb sentimentality and the automatic reaction to sexual stimulus, we have forgotten the incomparable power of that Conqueror, forgotten that only Love can press all the human faculties, including courage, self-sacrifice and strategic intelligence, into Her service.

Romantic love has been a buried foundation, and sometimes an acknowledged pillar, of European civilization for almost a thousand years. It reached its highest literary expression in the *Parzival* of Wolfram von Eschenbach, and in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, the greatest single compendium of spiritual knowledge in Western Christendom, where the lore of the troubadours was fully reunited to the Christian tradition, culminating in the figure of Beatrice Portinari as an incarnation of Holy Wisdom. And since, if my family genealogy is accurate, I am 29th in direct (though often female) line from Eleanor of Aquitaine, who presided over the famous Courts of Love, and thus 31st in line from her grandfather Guillaume of Poitiers, the first troubadour, my ancestors now press me to speak for Love again, in the face of the darkness of the latter days, and to refute the slander of ‘the World’ that Love is blind. On the contrary, it is passion that is blind, but Love’s vision penetrates like an arrow, into the depth of the spiritual Heart.

The Antichrist will be the perfect shell. He will be politically, culturally, religiously and even metaphysically ‘correct’. Everything he does, according to all explicit criteria, will initially appear to be right. Those who recognize and oppose him will not seem spiritual in the eyes of the world; perhaps not even in their own eyes. They will appear unbalanced, arrogant, reactionary, petty. In the face of the towering emptiness of the Beast, only a healthy emotional nature which has endured the shame of Love, whose feelings are grounded in Love Itself, will have the power to smell the corruption, the ‘dead men’s bones and all uncleanness,’ hidden in that whitewashed tomb.

The Love of Many will Grow Cold

The system of Antichrist will be, and is, an articulated, established regime of emotional coldness. While criticizing corrupt social trends or false metaphysical ideas, we must never forget that the mind cannot be darkened, nor can human society become really monstrous, unless the affections are also polluted with false glamour, numbed and petrified with arrogance and self-loathing, poisoned with un-lived sorrow and repressed fear.

The plague of emotional coldness which is now pandemic in the world affects us without our being aware of it. Gross atrocities may temporarily awaken us to our collective condition, but they also numb us. Once our basic trust in God is eroded—assuming we ever possessed it—we fall back for emotional security upon human society, upon a kind of collective mammalian warmth which we hope will protect us from the metaphysical anxiety we feel. And when society becomes insecure, we attempt to fall back even further, upon instinct itself. Just as humanistic sentiment replaces faith in God, so addiction to the energy, glamour and viciousness of sub-human emotional reactions replaces sentiment. But as collective human behavior is beginning to demonstrate, there is even less security in instinct than in society, since for human society to exist at all a certain amount of human responsibility has to be exercised; somebody has to ‘mind the store’.

In 2 Tim. 3:3, St Paul says that, as the age draws toward its close, people will be ‘without natural affection’. And contemporary American culture—to limit my critique to what I know first-hand—shows every evidence of this. For parents to abuse children is common, and it is not unknown for children to murder parents. An all-pervading lovelessness has led to a general emotional flattening and a weakening of the texture of the soul—as if, in our hunger for security, we unconsciously aspired to be transformed into something on the order of computer-generated images; such images cannot suffer from existential angst, and there is little to mourn if they end by being ‘deleted’. This emotional flattening manifests in gross terms as a plague of psychotic violence, as if the perpetrators of monstrous crimes were somehow trying to shock themselves back to three-dimensional reality (while only numbing themselves further), and in a more subtle way as a widespread lack of what used to be called ‘common’ courtesy, apparently based upon a deep-seated, I might almost say *superstitious* fear

of sentiment. Nor are these two poles unrelated, since a collective lack of sensitivity to the feelings of others means that everyone is always being offended, and offended people are always getting angry.

The effects of this freezing of the human soul are nowhere more apparent than in the world of heterosexual relations. Among its consequences are promiscuity, bland serial monogamy, and what I call the 'parallel marriage', derived from the mores of the singles culture and supported by the structure of the two-career family, in which one's spouse is only a kind of roommate, where the practical act of facing the world has almost completely replaced the emotional act of facing each other.

Sociologist Herbert Hendin, writing in 1975 when the present regime of emotional coldness was being established in the comedown from the psychic and social upheavals of the '60s, recorded this impression of the college students he studied:

Women . . . to shield themselves from male anger . . . attempt to create a life that seems expressly designed to rule out the possibility of being affected by a man. The fear of involvement is profound, pervasive . . . a fear of being totally wiped out, or losing the fight for self-validation . . . most young women avoid real intimacy with a man, feeling that caring itself is self-destructive . . . for both sexes in society, caring for anyone deeply is becoming synonymous with losing. . . . In a culture that institutionalizes lack of commitment, it is very hard to be committed; in a nation that seems determined to strip sex of romance and tenderness, it is very hard to be a tender and faithful lover.

These words in many ways echo those of the medieval German poet, Gottfried Von Strassburg—just to remind us that Love has been under the gun in this world ever since mankind first sought the fruit of a 'knowledge' that Love cannot give:

I pity love with all my heart; for though almost all today hold and cleave to her, no one concedes her due. We all want our pleasure of her, and to consort with her. But no! Love is not what we, with our deceptions, are now making of her for each other It is really true, what they say, 'Love is harried and hounded to the ends of the earth.' All that we possess of her is the word, the name alone remains to us;

and that, too, we have so bandied about, misused and vulgarized, that the poor thing is ashamed of her name, disgusted with the very sound of it.

Once a person's heart has become cold, he or she has already lost the faculty by which that coldness could be discerned, just as someone whose conscience has died can no longer feel his or her own lack of conscience, or a person whose taste has become jaded can no longer 'taste' his or her own bad taste. There are plenty among us—let us pray that we are not among them—whose hearts are dead already, leaving their rational minds relatively intact, and even more capable in some ways of operating efficiently in a society based on 'spiritual wickedness in high places,' on a psychopathic coldness which is on its way to becoming the norm. As Jesus said, when his disciples asked him what would be the signs of his coming at the end of the present world, 'because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold' (Matt. 24:12).

The story of this unconscious freezing of the emotions is told by Hans Christian Andersen in his fairy tale 'The Snow Queen': A demon, who is also a professor or schoolteacher, invents a mirror in which all that is evil grows to monstrous proportions, while good things appear distorted and shrunken. He and his students travel all over the world with the mirror, mocking everything that is good. They even try to fly up to heaven and mock the angels, but the higher they fly the heavier the mirror becomes, till it slips from their grasp and shatters into a million pieces. Some pieces of the mirror are taken and used for windows, through which the world appears ugly and twisted. Tiny slivers get into people's eyes, destroying their ability to see the good in anything, while others work their way into people's hearts, which freeze into blocks of ice.

These developments announce the coming of the Snow Queen, who lives in an ice palace beyond the Arctic Circle, and flies over the world with the snowstorm to destroy warmth and love wherever she finds it. The young hero of the tale is kidnapped and taken to her palace, where he is taught how to play a kind of board-game called 'the ice-pictures of reason'. He is finally rescued by his childhood sweetheart, who must go on a long and dangerous quest to find him and restore his soul.

'The Snow Queen' is undoubtedly an unconscious allegory of the fall of the 'Hyperborean Paradise' spoken of by René Guénon as the original

land of the Primordial Tradition—the last folkloric vestige of which, strangely enough, is the myth of Santa Claus. The Snow Queen is a kind of ‘Anti-Santa Claus’ who replaces warmth and generosity with a frigid possessiveness. The same kind of frigidity can affect those who try to understand metaphysical ideas with the mind alone. In many fairy tales, such as the Spanish tale ‘The White Parrot’ or the Persian ‘The Bath Badgerd’, anyone who approaches the sacred Center with the wrong attitude—curiosity, for example, or the hunger for power—is turned, not to ice, but to stone.

‘The Snow Queen’ is the story of the occupation of the ‘pole’, the spiritual center of human consciousness, by the regime of materialistic rationalism, which is articulated in higher academia and disseminated to the masses through the public school system, veiling the direct perception of God and destroying the faith by which this perception might be restored. The ‘still point of the turning world’ symbolized by the Pole Star, the point where Eternity intersects time, is transformed into the regime of Fate, the inexorably circling constellations of the World Clock, expressed in terms of 19th century science as mechanistic determinism, and in theology by the error known as Deism, which denied God’s immanence in His creation, reducing it to a soulless mechanism. If, as Schuon says, the Renaissance was the revenge of classical Paganism on Christendom, we can see the figure of Andersen’s Snow Queen—who, at the end of the tale, is vanquished by Christian love—as a symbolic union of Neo-Paganism and scientism (both of which ultimately sprang from the Renaissance), something like the Goddess of Reason worshipped in the de-sacralized cathedrals of France during the Revolution.

Andersen’s way of opposing the coldness of rationalistic materialism was through sentimentality—which, as Guénon points out, is no more than the affective expression of materialism itself. Since materialism denies the existence of the higher realities available to Intellection, emotion must now root itself not in eternal Truth but in the world of nature and the senses, a world subject to time and decay. This inverted orientation necessarily transforms sound, intelligent human emotion into sentimentality, nostalgia and the attraction to death, as with the English and German Romantic poets who worshipped nature instead of God. To those with a sense of transcendence, the world of nature, like the human form of which it is the living *shakti*, is the locus-of-manifestation for all the Names and Energies

of God. For those without this sense, it is a heartless battlefield, a biotechnological mechanism, and ultimately a graveyard, whether or not they are able to throw over it a temporary cloak of lyric fascination.

When Guénon was writing, the regime of bourgeois sentimentalism was in full force; we need only remember the vulgar and cloying veneration of ‘the Little Flower’, St Theresa of Lisieux, to see what he was up against as an expositor of pure metaphysics—though we must remember, as Thomas Merton points out, that St Theresa was a real saint. Schuon himself had great respect for her, and even thought that some of her writings showed elements of true *gnosis*. This battle against a degenerate emotionalism partly explains why Guénon wrote with his particular brand of *sang froid*, which led some to describe him as ‘an eye without a body’. In order to defend himself and his mission against false sentimentalities and enthusiasms of all kinds, he wrote without fervor, protected only by the thorn of an aloof and measured irony.

Sentimentality, however, is no longer our problem. If there is any single sign of the transition from the twilight of the modern age to the dawn of postmodernism, it is the rage of both popular and academic culture to pull down all the idols of sentiment, idols which were well-established as of the late ’50s and early ’60s. If the officially established emotions of the Victorian era were triumphalism and sentimentality, so our postmodern status quo enforces vulgarity, emotional numbness, terror, sinister fascination, disgust and despair. That postmodernism as a cultural regime could presume to ‘establish’ itself on such a foundation of sand is a perfect illustration of the principle of ‘a house divided against itself’. It will not stand.

How the Denial of Love can Pervert Metaphysics

In these times, when all primary human relationships are being systematically devastated—through the mechanization of reproduction, for example—many of us have tried to take refuge in God from the destruction of human love, both by means of the group identity offered by exoteric religion, and through the mysteries and struggles of the spiritual Path. But since the very state of cultural decay which has brought human love to the brink of extinction has also removed the normal exoteric supports of the esoteric Way—for example, the support of a spiritually-based social morality that both nourishes and protectively conceals the inner Reality—the esoteric enterprise itself is now more exposed to worldliness and ‘spiritual materialism’ than perhaps at any time in its history. The spiritual Path is more and more being thought of not as the crown of human life but as a substitute for it; we forget that ‘none come to the Father’—God’s transcendence—‘but through Me’—God’s humanity. As Schuon has written:

In the case of some people the intention of loving God brings with it an inability to love men; now the second of these things destroys the former. In a vulgar soul solicitude for spiritual love and for mortification may bring with it an icy self-centeredness. . . .

Regretfully, the same can be said for a spiritual Path which emphasizes Intellection over sentimental devotion—not because this emphasis is not fully justified in the case of the *jñanic* spiritual temperament, but because a certain percentage of those attracted to metaphysics and the *idea* of Intellection will inevitably interpret this to mean that an attachment to spiritual knowledge justifies, or even requires, the abandonment of spiritual and human love. But as Schuon warns us, in *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*:

A cult of the intelligence and mental passion take man further from truth. Intelligence withdraws as soon as man puts his trust in it alone. Mental passion pursuing intellectual intuition is like the wind which blows out the light of a candle.

My wife, Jennifer Doane Upton, in the essay ‘Dante’s Vision of Spiritual Love’, deals with this error:

It is habitually assumed in today’s world that feeling is strictly subjective. But it is more accurate to say that some feelings are objectively true and others objectively false. If you love a demon, for example, your feelings are not *true*. The modern world revels in the passions, but in many ways it attempts to kill the ‘still, small voice’ of objective feeling. True feeling can often seem small and unimportant, like alpine flowers, even though these apparently insignificant plants have the power to endure great cold.

Many people today who have an interest in metaphysics tend to believe that feelings are mere ‘accidents’. Yet one can lose one’s soul through false feeling, while true feeling can save it, and nothing that has to do with salvation and damnation can be only accidental. In *Paradiso* 26:59–63 [Allen Mandelbaum’s translation], Dante says:

The Death which He, that I might live, endured
And hope, whereto the faithful, as I, cling
Joined with that living knowledge [i.e. the ‘bitings’ of
Divine Love in union with human love] have secured
That from the sea of the erring love retrieved
On the shore of the right love I stand assured.

Given the belief prevailing in metaphysical circles that affections are accidental, some conclude that because the soul is the realm of the affections, it is therefore the principle of the passions and vices, including pride. But feeling is certainly no more *inherently* prideful than thought. True feeling relates to the more spiritual aspects of the soul; only false feeling is involved with the passions. And Love, which is of divine origin, pertains to more than the feeling soul. But though Love is more than feeling, it never excludes feeling; if Love is there, feeling is there. The feeling may be there obliquely; sometimes one may be more objectively loving by acting against certain feelings. Nonetheless, Love is always the crown of true feeling, which means objective feeling. *Paradiso* 26:28–39:

[The] good, soon as 'tis perceived as good
Enkindles love and makes it more to live
The more of good it can itself include.
Therefore to the Essence, whose prerogative
Is, that what good outside of it is known
Is naught else than a light its own beams give
More than else whither must in love be drawn
The mind of him whose vision can attain
The verity the proof is founded on.
This verity to my intellect is made plain
By Him who to that prime love testifies
Which all the eternal substances maintain.

According to Frithjof Schuon, 'there is *bhakti* without *jñana*, but there is no *jñana* without *bhakti*'; though knowledge is higher than love, love is more fundamental than knowledge. On the other hand, Schuon's follower Martin Lings, whose work and presence are so admirable that I hesitate to criticize him, speaks in *The Eleventh Hour* of a perspective of knowledge *rather than* love as proper for our time. In my opinion, this is already at the very least a radical narrowing-down of Schuon's teaching.

If, as Schuon never tires of repeating, there is no right superior to the truth, then it must be admitted, because it is true, that it is next to impossible to tell many contemporary Westerners that knowledge is in some sense higher than love (though, in another way, love is more fundamental than knowledge) without their *hearing* you say that compassion should therefore be de-emphasized, feelings distrusted, and the struggle to develop emotional intelligence abandoned. One reason for this is that many people who are attracted to intellectuality, both spiritual and secular, are simply in flight from emotional pain. Their attempt to pacify and harmonize emotion by means of mental discipline therefore often becomes a struggle to repress feeling, and a denial of the special quality of insight which only feeling can give. After all, in a world of mass suffering and dehumanization it is infinitely easier—initially—to despair of compassion, to repress emotion, and to seal oneself off in a shell of ice against the terror outside... and then (of course) to go on to reproduce that same terror, in a more concentrated, more intimate, and more soul-destroying form, within that very shell; to take it as one's teacher, and end by becoming its agent. In order to work

against this seemingly inevitable misunderstanding, I can do nothing better than quote Schuon's doctrine, from *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, on the place of emotion in the spiritual life:

Not to be 'emotional': this seems, nowadays, to be the very condition of 'objectivity', whereas in reality objectivity is independent of the presence or absence of the emotional element. . . . Emotivity manifests and allows one to perceive those aspects of a good or an evil which mere logical definition could not manifest directly and concretely. . . . If natural dignity requires a certain impassibility—thereby manifesting the 'motionless mover' and the sense of the sacred—it does not, however, exclude the natural impulses of the soul, as is shown by the lives of the sages and saints, and above all by everyday experience. . . . In a spiritual man there is a continuity between his inward impassibility—resulting from his consciousness of the Immutable—and his emotion. . . . In the emotion of the spiritual man, the 'motionless mover' always remains present and accessible. As his emotion is linked to knowledge, the truth is never betrayed. . . . Fundamentally, we would say that where there is Truth, there is also Love. Each *Deva* possesses its *Shakti*; in the human microcosm, the feeling soul is joined to the discerning intellect, as in the Divine Order Mercy is joined to Omniscience; and as, in the final analysis, Infinitude is consubstantial with the Absolute.

This relationship between feeling and spiritual insight is further elaborated by Jennifer Doane Upton:

There is, in contemporary society, a profound ignorance of true feeling, leading to an emotional coldness which opens the soul to worldliness, even when doctrinal understanding, in its own dimension, had successfully shut that world out. Developed feeling is refined and subtle. Far from being merely sentimental or demonstrative, it often withholds its own demonstration when such a manifestation would destroy the context in which it appears; this explains why, while he is in the *Inferno*, Dante never pronounces Beatrice's name. Feeling must be cultivated, both for the sake of the fullness of human life, and because it itself can be a perfect

vehicle for union with God, not only due to the psychic energy it releases, but also because of the particular perceptions which only developed feeling can give; this is not *bhakti* as we usually think of it. There are certain avenues to the transcendent Intellect which are only open through feeling. *Paradiso* 28:1–12:

When she who hath imparadised my mind
Hath stript the truth bare, and its contraries
In the present life of wretched mortal-kind,
As one who, looking in the mirror, sees
A torch's flame that is behind him lit
Ere in his sight, or in his thought, it is
And turns to see if the glass opposite
Have told him truth, and findeth it agree
Therewith, as truly note and measure fit;
So is recorded in my memory
That I turned, looking on those eyes of light
Whence love had made the noose to capture me. . . .

Go back to that old melodious phrase 'true love'. It sounds merely sentimental to us now. But 'true' equals 'objective'; true love is objective love. Many a time a person has reached the Truth by starting from the thinking function, only to have that Truth destroyed in his life through false feeling. True feeling, on the other hand, can be a 'homing' faculty, drawing us toward the Center almost faster than we could travel on our own initiative. In the words of St Bernard, symbol of divine contemplation, to Dante in *Paradiso* 32:149–150: 'And do thou with thy feeling [*l'ajfezione*] follow on/ My words, that close to them thy heart may cling.' According to Dante, Love is the Supreme Goal of the spiritual life, not simply the energy driving it. That Supreme, objective Love is another name for the transcendent Intellect. In *Paradiso* 32:142–144, St Bernard says:

And turn we to the Primal Love our eyes,
So that, still gazing toward Him, thou may'st pierce
Into His splendour, as far as in thee lies.

And in *Paradiso* 33:85–92, Dante declares:

I beheld leaves within the unfathomed blaze
Into one volume bound by love, the same
That the universe holds scattered through its maze.
Substance and accidents, and their modes, became
As if together fused, all in such wise
That what I speak of is one simple flame.
Verily I think I saw with mine own eyes
The form that knits the whole world. . . .

In *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, Schuon says: ‘What is “love” at the start [of the spiritual Path] will appear as “Knowledge” in the result, and what is “knowledge” at the start will appear in the result as “Love”’; and ‘The love of the affective man is that he loves God. The love of the intellectual man is that God loves him; that is to say, he realizes intellectually—but not simply in a theoretical way—that God is Love.’

Dante concurs with this view. In *Paradiso* 28:109–111, he places knowledge firmly above love:

[The] celestial bliss
Is founded on the act that seeth God,
Not on that which loves, which cometh after this.

Throughout the *Paradiso*, however, he never tires of repeating that God is Love, calling Him, for example, ‘that Primal Love’ (32:142). What both Dante and Schuon are saying, in other words, is not that God is Truth rather than Love, but that the full and serene knowledge of God as Love (and thus also as Truth) is greater than the emotional response to Him, no matter how intense and devoted that response may be, and how necessary for the purification of the soul.

The Devil loves to set up false antitheses, so that whichever side one takes, damage is done and darkness spread. And perhaps his favorite of all is the one between love and knowledge. What could better suite his purposes than to pervert affection till it darkens the intellect, thus identifying love with foolishness in the popular mind, so that the most

loving among us are continually wounded until their affections freeze? And what better reveals the quality of satanic pride than that knowledge should be identified with emotional coldness, gnosis with social prestige, and intelligence with cunning, till hard-heartedness itself is seen as a virtue, since if the intelligent are cold, then to become cold must be to become intelligent? In terms of the 'unseen warfare' between the order of Divine Reality and the infernal subversion of that Order, some of the most powerful and intelligent of the 'fallen cherubim' would seem to occupy the split between love and knowledge, and war against all who try to bring them closer together, or intuit their intrinsic unity. (One is reminded of the Norse 'rime giants', spirits of abysmal cold, or of the frozen ninth circle of Dante's *Inferno*, reserved for the betrayers of love.) Instead of our being 'wise as serpents and harmless as doves', these forces would rather see us 'harmless as serpents'—brutally cunning—and 'wise as doves'—naive.

And all metaphysics apart, the complementarity of love and knowledge is, or ought to be, a part of simple common sense. If the collective mind were not so smogged by the corruption of the times it would be easy to see that whatever truly serves love equally serves knowledge, while whatever wounds love also darkens the intellect. If we become comfortable with stupidity we will lose our ability to love God and our neighbor, since we can't love what we don't want to know; and if we become comfortable with lovelessness we will inevitably fall into stupidity, since we can't know something if we are laboring to avoid all intimate contact with it. What could be more obvious? And if we have never learned to love others through knowing them, and to know them by means of loving them, then we will not succeed in the Divine realm after having failed in the human.

The Wasteland

Knowledge has two roads open to it: the road of Love, and the road of Power. If Knowledge marries with Love, thus subordinating Power (which is transformed into the servant of that union), it defines the state of Paradise. If it carries on an adulterous affair with Power, and in so doing subordinates Love (making it the victim of that liaison), it defines the state of Hell.

In the Orthodox Christian icon of St George, the saint is shown as a knight mounted on a white horse, in the act of rescuing a princess from a dragon by impaling him with his lance. If St George is Knowledge, then the princess is Love, and the dragon is Power. In the outer world, the dragon manifests as tyranny, oppression, collective vice, and the established regime of heartlessness; in the inner world, he is the *nafs-al-ammara*, the passional soul, the rule of concupiscence over the human heart. The dragon, in other words, is Satan, the spiritual archetype of Antichrist. And the princess is the energy of Eros, who is either a slave to the power-motive, as with the Whore of Babylon 'with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication' (Rev. 17: 2), or the bride of Knowledge, the living body of Truth, as in the case of the Heavenly Jerusalem, described in Rev. 21: 2 as 'coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.'

The story of Love enslaved to Power due to the immaturity of Knowledge is told in the Grail romance of *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach. The Grail King Anfortas, while still an adolescent, is wounded in the testicles during a joust, as punishment for foolish pride in love. His wound never heals, though the presence of the Grail, whose guardian he is, keeps him from dying. His kingdom languishes. At the same time the castrated magician Clingschor, in league with the tyrant king Gramoflanz, casts his evil spell over all lovers, and blights their love. (He was castrated by the King of Sicily, who found him in an adulterous affair with his wife, Queen Iblis—'Iblis' or 'Eblis' being the Muslim name for Satan.) Gawain and Parzival, knights of Arthur's Round Table on quest for adventure, come into the energy-field of this Wasteland, where love is enslaved and destroyed by pride and power. Gawain endures the ordeals of the Castle of Marvels, which is filled with many women bound by Clingschor's spell,

rescues them, and is united with Lady Orgeleuse, his beloved. And Parzival, after many struggles with his own spiritual and emotional immaturity, finally redeems and heals Anfortas, the Grail King, simply by asking what ails him, and is reunited with his wife Condwiramurs, whose name, from the French *conduire-amours*, means ‘to guide love’. Parzival himself becomes the new guardian of the Grail.

The regime of Clingschor/Gramoflanz, of perverted spirituality allied with political power, is one rendition, or foreshadowing, of the regime of Antichrist. Whatever curses love, whatever distorts or destroys sexuality—such as human genetic engineering—leads directly to that terminal Wasteland ruled by a castrated magician, where the Beast is ridden by the Whore (the Queen Iblis of the *Parzival* romance), who buys and sells all the goods and treasures of the earth, including the souls of men (Rev. 18:13).

Human Love as God's Mercy

The Western Romantic Tradition, from which this story is drawn, has acted as a balance to the ascetical otherworldliness of Western Christendom for nearly a millennium. And despite its early association with heresies such as Catharism, it went on to form an integral part of Christian culture in Western Europe, as the works of Dante and Shakespeare, which draw deeply on the Romantic Tradition, abundantly prove.

The central value celebrated in the Romantic tradition is that union of spiritual love (*agape*) and passionate desire (*eros*) known as *amor*. In the essay 'High Romance and the Spiritual Path', Jennifer Doane Upton has written:

Human love in some sense meets its death at the birth of divine love. But in another way it lives again through that very death, and becomes a symbol of that higher love. . . . In High Romance, the spirit descends into and fills out the human level. . . . Often, on account of the intensity of emotion this produces, we feel ashamed when we approach romantic material. All this loving of love, and having to do without love even as we love—it blisters our self-esteem. . . . When we deny romantic states, we distort the very forms the spirit is trying to ennoble. The spirit hovers above us, with no way to reach our humanity. We have allowed it to be stranded.

In Amor, the personhood of the beloved is central—just as, in true spiritual realization, God is not an abstraction or an insubstantial wraith, but the most concrete Reality imaginable. From the worldly point of view, this is viewed as mere lower-class sentimentalism, whereas from a standpoint tinged with spiritual arrogance, love of the human beloved is seen as nothing but idolatry, the worship of one's own ego in the person of another. In the face of such worldly cynicism, and a (no less cynical) false spiritual idealism, we are ashamed of romantic love—forgetting that, as Schuon reminds us in *Understanding Islam*, 'the "romantic" worlds are precisely those in which God is still probable.' Just as the Victorians indulged themselves in sentimental romance but were ashamed of sexuality, so we indulge in every form of sexual exhibitionism, but are ashamed of love. The

passion, tenderness, and courage of true romantic love, as opposed to mere sentimental romanticism, are among the few virtues capable of humanizing heterosexual relations. One might even say that this depth of love almost alone possesses the power to extend the spiritual grace of the Christian sacrament of matrimony into the psychic and interpersonal dimensions. Like all such reflections of God's Unity in the realm of multiplicity, there is always a danger of dissipation and fall—and, as always, this danger can be overcome in only one way: through sacrifice. As Schuon says: 'It is necessary to dig deep into the soil of the soul, through layers of aridity and bitterness in order to find love and live from it.'

The Western Romantic tradition, with its exaltation of a form of ritual adultery where strict faithfulness (on the man's part), risk of life and limb, and an element of ascetic rigor were the operative virtues, began as a rebellion against the heartless convention of worldly aristocratic marriage, where all personal and feeling-centered values were sacrificed to the quest for political power. The heartless convention of the present day, however, is not marriage, but a vicious lovelessness in all areas of life, coupled with an attachment to the most venomous forms of sexual self-indulgence. The ultimate result of this attachment is the devastation of sexuality itself and a general flattening of the soul, which then becomes vulnerable to worldly pride, as well as to seduction by the various forms of sub-human unreality proposed by technocratic society. Consequently, in the realm of relationships, the central act of liberating rebellion against the degenerate social mores is no longer the dangerous, formalized adultery sung by the troubadours, but loving marriage itself, where the power employed by God to create the universe—the power of polarity—reaches its point of greatest concentration.

In *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, Schuon enunciates the principle of personal, human love as a way to, as well as an expression of, union with God:

An indispensable condition for the innocent and natural experience of earthly happiness is the spiritual capacity of finding happiness in God, and the incapacity to enjoy things outside of Him. We cannot validly and persistently love a creature without carrying him within ourselves by virtue of our attachment to the Creator; not that this inward possession must be perfect, but it must at all events be present as an

intention which allows us to perfect it. . . . To be at peace with God is to seek and find our happiness in Him; the creature that he has joined to us may and must help us to reach this with greater facility or with less difficulty, in accordance with our gifts and with grace, whether merited or unmerited. In saying this we evoke the paradox—or rather the mystery—of attachment with a view to detachment, or of outwardness with a view to inwardness, or again, of form with a view to essence. True love attaches us to a sacramental form while separating us from the world, and it thus rejoins the mystery of exteriorized revelation with a view to interiorizing Salvation.

THE ESSENTIAL WRITINGS OF FRITHJOF SCHUON, pp 419–420

To love what is passing, ephemeral and destined for the grave, to love it with a love which, like all love, is eternal at the core, is to taste the full poignancy of existence amid ‘the red dust of this world.’ And to ultimately see the human object of one’s love as transparent to Love Itself is, in Yeats’ words, to ‘break the teeth of time.’ By means of a profound sacrifice of attachment leading to an alchemical transmutation of the affections, it is to transform the nostalgia for the past, which is corruption, into the nostalgia for Eternity, which is bliss. To live in the intimate knowledge of the inevitable death of one’s human beloved is, paradoxically, to see her or him *sub specie aeternitatis*: no longer as an object of love, but as a vision of Love Itself, in which the separation between this world and the next is overcome.

To love romantically in the face of the coldness of the latter days, without personal idolatry, and in the name of ‘the Love that moves the Sun and the other stars,’ is to risk all—power, prestige, security, even life itself, the whole spectrum of worldly, ego-based values—for the sake of that Love. The World, the System of Antichrist, the established regime of collective arrogance and despair, is profoundly threatened by this union of heterosexuality, spirituality and personal love which I have called Amor, and subverts it whenever possible: sometimes through puritanism, sometimes through libertinism, and often through an unholy amalgam of the two, like much of what passes for ‘tantra’ or ‘sacred sexuality’ in the world of the New Age, where impersonality masquerades as detachment, and subtilized physical sensation replaces both mystical ecstasy and human love. This sense of threat on the part of the kingdom of Antichrist is a sure

sign that there is something in the essence of Amor which, if purified of idolatry and dedicated to God, to Love Itself, has the power to sever that kingdom at the root.