CHAPTER 8

Friendship and Love’s Paradise Lost

1. In the nascent state individuals feel transformed; they see each other as holding heroic, splendid characteristics. These are, however, fragments of a single fusion, personalities that are basically undifferentiated and therefore interchangeable. In this molten, burning lava, where individuality dissolves into collectivity, personalities form only later.

Let us pause to reflect on this process in the case of being in love. At first we know nothing concrete about the individuality of the loved person. We know that we love her before knowing where she lives, whether she has brothers or sisters, a father and mother, whether they are rich or poor, healthy or sick. To please her we have to know her tastes. But we pretend to please her solely with ourselves, with our presence, our dedication. We suppose that she is interested in only one thing: our love, and therefore, we offer proof of how great it is. On the other hand, whatever she is suits us perfectly. And so, why shouldn’t we suit her as we are? Not even her affections interest us. If we do come to know them they move us like Charlotte’s love for her siblings in Werther.1 That is, these affections strike us purely as qualities of Charlotte; her siblings do not count.

This difference can be seen in the way in which we choose presents for lovers and friends. The lover chooses something that can make the beloved more desirable and beautiful in his eyes. The first thing a woman in love does is to change her clothes in order to be attractive to her man. The second thing is to radically change her man’s clothes in order to please herself. Although she was in love with her man as he was before, she no longer wants him to be the same. With her presents she seeks to change him to bring him as close as possible to the image of perfection she has created in her mind. But the man in love too seeks to underscore or enhance the beauty of his woman. In substance, neither lover gives something the other already likes, is unconcerned with satisfying his or her tastes. They give in order to help make the other even more desirable. But when we make a gift to a friend we choose something that will please him, something that will enrich him, something that empowers him on the basis of his own criteria. We can certainly give something that he doesn’t expect, that he doesn’t know, but always assuming that whatever it is accords with his interests, his tastes, his sensibility. To give a present to a friend we must think

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about who he is, what he can do with it and where he can use it. We do not wish to make him beautiful, attractive, desirable to our eyes. We essentially put ourselves at his service. We are not, like in love, looking to put ourselves at the service of an ideal.

We do not seek to guess the everyday needs and daily preoccupations of the beloved. We suppose a total revolution in the other (just as it occurs within us).

The person that says to her lover “you don't understand me,” inferring that he doesn’t care about all her usual desires, does not love him. Because falling in love is an abandoning of habitual desires, those infinite habitual desires, in favour of only one essential desire. The lover is solely concerned with what he considers essential, and the essential is not the sum of all the particulars that have made the other. The essence precedes the particulars that acquire their value from the essence. Not one particular thing, and even less so all of the particulars together, would make us love that person. But while in love any particular becomes beautiful. It is basically irrelevant. During one's falling in love the empirical I loses value in respect to the I emerging from the fusion of love, which is almost completely detached from what it was before. The I is reborn and its essence is situated in this rebirth.

Falling in love says: “let’s love each other and all else is an added extra.” If the beloved is worried the lover feels this as an obstacle. “Until you are with me don't think of anything else” love says. “May this hour be as splendid as the sun. Leave these miserable and vulgar worries behind. Don't pollute with banal things what by its very nature is extraordinary.” The beloved is neither prepared to step into your shoes nor to take on your problems. Love asks to transcend these problems, to move on into regions where they appear to have no value. Actually, the goal of falling in love is not to satisfy desires or to confront an individual’s problems, but rather to lay the foundations of a new society. Whatever obstructs or hinders this is rejected or ignored. The respect for the individual can return only when this society is founded. Only then reciprocal understanding becomes again essential.

Only much later, when the couple is established, there is a slow process of discovery and recognition for the single individual, for who he truly is. Love that aims at the essence learns to satisfy the loved one’s practical, concrete desires. It seeks what it likes and rejects what it dislikes. It penetrates its apprehensions. This, then, is the transition from falling in love to love.

2. For as long as it is alive being in love renders the other unknowable. It tends towards a collective and pushes the individual to transcend itself into this collective. When we continue to be in love with a person, even after many years of separation, we continue not to know who he really is and what he really thinks. Of a love that was not consumed in the everyday but was cut short