In Dijkstra's words, by 1900,

> writers and painters, scientists and critics, the learned and the modish alike, had been indoctrinated to regard all women who no longer conformed to the image of the household nun as vicious, bestial creatures. . . . Woman, in short, had come to be seen as the monstrous goddess of degeneration, a creature of evil who lorded it over all the horrifically horned beasts which populated man's sexual nightmares.[47]

As Dijkstra also points out, in the twentieth century it was not too difficult to transfer these fears onto other degenerates who are supposed to predate on the purity of male Aryan manhood, sapping and impurifying precious bodily fluids, with the consequences we all know. Fear of lust quickly translates into fearful politics.

CHAPTER NINE

Shakespeare versus Dorothy Parker

In Shakespeare's view, erotic love is a kind of overlay or varnish over lust, and what it adds is not itself very much to do with good things like truth and trust. Love is more associated with unreasonable dotings, fiction, madness, bubbles, blindness, and illusion. As Duke Theseus says in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,

> Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
> Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
> More than cool reason ever comprehends.

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.[48]

That is, there is nothing to choose between them for extravagance of imaginings. The lunatic "sees more devils than vast hell can hold," and as for the lover and poet,

the truest poetry is the most feigning, and lovers are given to poetry; and what they swear in poetry it may be said, as lovers, they do feign.[49]

The communications of love, the sighs and promises, are a performance. But the performances of love may also be communications and invitations to build.

It is very important that Shakespeare, rightly, goes beyond supposing that the lover is simply disposed to lie to the beloved, as a deliberate strategy of deceit.. He does not agree with Dorothy Parker:

By the time you swear you're his,
Shivering and sighing,
And he vows his passion is
Infinite, undying—
Lady, make a note of this:
One of you is lying.[50]

Shakespeare is more subtle. The Shakespearean lover sees what he or she imagines, what she desires to see. This is why the god of love, Cupid, is painted as blind (it is only evolutionary psychologists, whom we come to later, who depict him as not merely open-eyed but also carrying a calculator). Cupid is also a child, because like children he is impetuous, is incapable of self-restraint, has no conscience, and especially is addicted to play, where there is no distinguishing between make-believe and reality, fact and fiction. Hit by Cupid's arrow, an old self dies and a new one comes into being.

Love's illusions are first and foremost in the imagination. Or is illusion the right word? Philosophy is full of theories and disputes about how much of what we think is due to nature and how much is an artifact of our perspective, our take on things. People have suggested that feelings, values, and colors belong to our imaginations, and only get projected onto the world. Idealism is the philosophy that almost everything is in the same boat: space, the passage of time, our very selves. Various words and images accompany the idea. We can talk of fictions and illusions. But we also have the language of constructions or inventions, which are real enough although equally products of the mind.

If we use the latter set of words, then the poetry is true. We can contrast Shakespeare with Stendhal, who later produced the admired image of "crystallization" whereby the lover projects all manner of imagined perfections onto the beloved:

> At the salt mines of Salzburg, they throw a leafless wintry bough into one of the abandoned workings. Two or three months later they haul it out covered with a shining deposit of crystals. The smallest twig, no bigger than a tom-tit's claw, is studded with a galaxy of scintillating diamonds. The original branch is no longer recognizable.
>
> What I have called crystallization is a mental process which draws from everything that happens new proofs of the perfection of the loved one.[51]

This sounds nice for the loved one, although Stendhal's image seems a little overdone to me. If a partner sings out of tune, the lover does not so much hear it as in tune, as finds it strangely untroubling. Lovers are not literally blind. They do see each others' cellulite, warts, and squints, but the strange thing is that they do not mind them and may even find them enchanting. Hume put it like this (the appetite of generation is the sexual appetite):

> The appetite of generation, when confin'd to a certain degree, is evidently of the pleasant kind, and has strong connexion with all the agreeable emotions. Joy, mirth, vanity and kindness are all incentives to this desire; as well as music, dancing, wine, and good cheer. One who is inflamed with lust, feels at least a momentary kindness towards the object of it, and at the same time fancies her more beautiful than ordinary.[52]

It is nice to be thought better than we are; indeed a lot of human effort goes into appearing better and more beautiful than we are.

Shakespeare stands in contrast with Stendhal and Hume in noticing that it is not only that the lover's vision is clouded. His or her sense of self is affected just as dramatically. The poetry and the performance show the lover not only making up the object of desire, but also making himself or herself up in their own imagination, in something of the same way that people are said to brace themselves when they look at flying buttresses, and to rock to and fro when they imagine being at sea. The poetry or feigning can take over the self, and for the moment at least we are what we imagine ourselves to be. He and she swear eternal truth, and in their imaginations they are, for the moment, eternally faithful. They swear never to look at anyone else, and neither would they, were they always as they now imagine themselves to be. When things go wrong, it may be unduly severe to charge the lover with making lying promises, because at the time of making there was no definite self other than the one in whom the promise was sincere, and no definite intention need have been misrepresented by the promise. A faithful self was being constructed, even if it later fell down.

The performance can bring about its own truth, and evolutionarily this may be the function of romantic love. The imagining is in part a fixing of the self and of a decision, and the communication is in part a request for a like decision from someone else. If all goes well, the play becomes the reality; the poem becomes true.

All this talk of poetry and feignings raises the question of whether we should not prefer to take our lust neat, without the fantasies and crystallizations of love. Conventional wisdom gives us that lust is just about all right, provided the partners love one another. But if it is a choice between lust plus illusions, or straight lust, it is not obvious why anyone should prefer the first. Indeed, the admirably rational classical philosophers Epicurus and Lucretius did not prefer it. What they really mistrusted was love, because love is a kind of madness and overcomes the rational soul. Lucretius warns that being in love entails distress, frenzy, and gloom. If you feel it coming on, you should distract your attention at once by releasing your lust, which means having sex indiscriminately. Lust is better, and indeed an excellent medicine against love. True to this creed, Epicurus was widely supposed to have made frequent use of prostitutes. In Shakespeare the same remedy is urged by Romeo's friend Benvolio at the beginning of the play, after Romeo's extravagant declaration of love for Juliet's precursor:

ROMEO: O teach me how I should forget to think!

BENVOLIO: By giving liberty unto thine eyes.
Examine other beauties.[53]

Benvolio's down-to-earth advice is good only up to a point, because almost immediately Romeo examines Juliet, and we know the rest. Romeo is not cured of love, but simply dumps it somewhere else, crystallizing poor Juliet.

In spite of sonnet 129 with which we began, Shakespeare is by no means consistently a critic of lust. In general, and certainly in the love comedies, love is a class thing. The upper classes deck themselves out with it, but the earthy lower classes (the "country copulatives") have a more robust attitude. Perhaps the best summary is given by Rosalind in *As You Like It:*

> for your brother and my sister no sooner met but they looked; no sooner looked but they loved; no sooner loved but they sighed; no sooner sighed but they asked one another the reason; no sooner knew the reason but they sought the remedy; and in these degrees have they made a pair of stairs to marriage, which they will climb incontinent, or else be incontinent before marriage. They are in the very wrath of love, and they will together. Clubs cannot part them.[54]

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

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

CHAPTER TEN

Hobbesian Unity

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

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