

Divine Madness: Archetypes of Romantic Love

by John Ryan Haule

Copyright © 1990

All Rights Reserved

<http://www.jrhaule.net/divine.html>

Two

The Naked Sword: Opportunity For Love's Transformation

In the middle ages, one way of indicating that two people had fallen irretrievably in love was to say they had drunk the love potion. This meant that they were no longer in control of themselves. Their entire beings were bound to one another in a mystical and magical way, to be sure, but also in a physical way. As lead into gold, they were transformed by the alchemical draught they had imbibed so that they were no longer two. They were now entirely of one single substance, bound in such a way that even God could not separate them without abrogating the laws of Nature. They were changed so profoundly that the ordinary laws of society and church no longer quite applied to them. True enough, God prevents Lancelot from a full view of the Holy Grail on account of his sinful liaison with Arthur's queen. But God does favor him with a semi-conscious glimpse of the Grail. Only Lancelot's saintly, virginal son, Galahad, can gaze directly upon the miraculous cup; but he pays for this by having to leave this earth forever. Tristan, too, is actively favored by God's benevolence and the allegiance of the people. In the whole of heaven and earth, only the grasping barons are against the liaison of Tristan with his uncle's queen. Only scoundrels could possibly be against a love so powerful and pure.

Still, scoundrels there always were: clever, powerful schemers who would appeal self-righteously to the rules of the social order and of the church to bring shame down upon the heads of the lovers. Obstacles always abound to keep the lovers apart. Commonly the biggest obstacle to their union is moral and social. For Lancelot and Tristan it is that their beloved is already married, and indeed to the king to whom they have sworn fealty. But the obstacles in romantic love may take the form of any substantial barrier such as physical distance, class difference, the death or captivity of one of the parties, or political hostility between their respective peoples. For my purposes, the most significant of these obstacles is one which is freely chosen by the lovers themselves. I refer to the naked sword which they sometimes place between themselves when they sleep in the same bed. Romantic love is by no means always chaste, but distance between the lovers is not just accidental. It is a necessary dimension of a transforming, ennobling love.

The tension between the mystic potion which binds the lovers inescapably and the enigmatic sword which keeps them apart is the subject of my meditation today. I should like to begin by retelling a story from *The Lais of Marie de France* (1986), late twelfth-century poet of Brittany. It is titled simply with the name of its hero, "a knight worthy and courtly, brave and fierce: Eliduc" (p.111).

The Story of Eliduc

As the story opens, Eliduc is the beloved and highly trusted right-hand man of his king. Envious, less fortunate knights slander him, with the result that he is "banished from the court without formal accusation." He leaves behind a beautiful, wise and high-born wife with whom he has enjoyed many years of mutual love and loyalty, and goes wandering as a mercenary. It is not long before he finds a besieged king to serve and acquits himself very well, reversing the fortunes of the war and making himself as indispensable to the second king as to the first. Guilliadun, the beautiful daughter of this second king, gives herself unreservedly to Eliduc, whose heart is "trapped" by her although he has not forgotten his promise to remain faithful to his wife.

Eventually Eliduc's first lord gets into trouble and urgently requires the services of the man who was always the best and most loyal of his knights. As a result Eliduc becomes the right-hand man of two kings and the lover of two women. He finds, however, that he is no longer satisfied with his wife, and therefore sets sail with his beloved Guilliadun. Although he has made sure to select the smallest and most loyal group of assistants he could assemble, on encountering a fearsome storm, one of the sailors cries out:

"What are we doing? Lord, you have with you the woman who will cause us to perish. We shall never make land! You have a loyal wife and now with this other woman you offend God and his law, righteousness and the faith. Let us cast her into the sea and we shall soon arrive safely" (121).

Out of fear of the storm and her despair at learning of Eliduc's wife, Guilliadun falls into a deathly swoon. Eliduc intends to bury her at a hermitage in the woods, but cannot bring himself to do so as long as the color remains in her cheeks. His wife becomes suspicious of his frequent visits to the hermitage and finds the maiden. Chancing just at this moment to observe a weasel revive its companion with a certain herb, Eliduc's wife places the same flower in the maiden's mouth so that she returns to her senses.

The two women identify themselves to one another, and Eliduc's wife promises to restore Guilliadun to Eliduc and step out of the way herself by taking the veil. Once she does so, Eliduc and Guilliadun marry and live in perfect love and happiness for many years "until such time as they themselves turn to God." At this point, Eliduc builds a monastery which he enters "with his own men and other pious persons"; and Guilliadun enters the convent of the first wife.

[The women] prayed that God might show their beloved His sweet mercy and Eliduc in turn prayed for them, sending his messengers to see how they fared and how their spirits were. Each one strove to love God in good faith and they came to a good end thanks to God, the true divine (126).

Literally, there are no naked swords in anybody's bed in this tale, but the meaning of the sword of separation is unmistakable. Separation in love cannot be avoided. Every relationship, however shallow or deep, however long- or short-lived, suffers its partings and its failures to join. Indeed, loneliness lies at the very heart of love. It is there at the very first moment when we feel ourselves being drawn by the person who is not quite yet our beloved, for she is calling us out of our aloneness. We may not have adverted to this loneliness or become aware of our isolation, but it is there as the context which makes her very being into a call for us. Secondly, we find ourselves alone in a whole new way during our beloved's inadvertent or deliberate absences. If we had been unaware of our loneliness before she appeared, we are now more intensely alone than we had ever imagined it possible to be.

The naked sword between the lovers symbolizes this aloneness acknowledged, taken up, and lived. In our present cultural situation, we have very little in the way of models or precedents by which we could begin to understand the symbolism of the sword. Why should

anyone deliberately place a sword -- let alone monastic walls -- between himself and his beloved? Even the famous monastic lovers, Abelard and Heloise, did not *choose* their seclusion from one another. To our everyday consciousness, it sounds like some kind of perversion -- masochism is what most people seem to think it is. I disagree, and it is going to be the burden of this speech to show you that the sword of separation is a blessing in disguise.

Denis de Rougemont, in his classic book, *Love in the Western World*, sees the symbol of the sword exclusively in terms of its effect of setting the lovers aflame; and he identifies this as pathological. He says:

Tristan loves the awareness that he is loving far more than he loves Iseult the Fair. And Iseult does nothing to hold Tristan. All she needs is her passionate dream. Their need of one another is in order to be aflame, and they do not need one another as they are. What they need is not one another's presence, but one another's absence (41f).

De Rougemont is not wrong to see their choosing the sword of separation as inflaming. But he is wrong in believing that there is nothing more to the sword's significance than that. A great deal more than heating up can be accomplished through separation. Jung adverted to this in his 1928 dream seminar, when he said:

The strongest thing in man is *participation mystique*, "just you and your dog in the dark"; that is stronger than the need for individuality. . . . This identity, this clinging together, is a great hindrance to individual relationship. . . . Relationship is only possible when there is separateness (1938/84: 63).

English novelist, Thomas Hardy, was also very much aware of the opportunity which distance provides in a romantic love relationship. This is to be seen in all of his novels, but particularly in the plot of *Far from the Madding Crowd*. There, between the time Bathsheba Everdene loses Gabriel Oak and finds him again, she struggles through relationships with two lesser men: the sanctimonious manipulator, Boldwood, whose heart she tries very hard not to break, and the callous heartthrob, Sgt. Troy. When Bathsheba and Farmer Oak are finally united at the end, Hardy sums up the theme of the novel, as follows:

Theirs was that substantial affection which arises (if any arises at all) when the two who are thrown together begin first by knowing the rougher sides of each other's character, and not the best till further on, the romance growing up in the interstices of a mass of hard prosaic reality. This good fellowship . . . is seldom superadded to love between the sexes, because men and women associate, not in their labours, but in their pleasures merely. Where, however, happy circumstance permits its development, the compounded feeling proves itself to be the only love which is strong as death -- that love which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown, beside which the passion usually called by the name is evanescent as steam (368).

Hardy's commentary tells us that distance, the sword, enables us to get to know our beloved better; but the plot of the book, looked at psychologically, tells us that distance makes it possible to get to know ourselves better. I want to argue that distance in romantic love relationships provides the opportunity for both of these accomplishments. The Bathsheba who could blunder into an entanglement with an emotionally petrified Boldwood was not yet capable of falling for the gallant flatterer, York. She becomes capable of recognizing her "strong-as-death" connection to Gabriel Oak only after these earlier mistakes have been understood. Thus she needs to experiment and to dare to live life actively, but above all she needs to experience her loneliness.

Clark Moustakas learned this lesson some thirty years ago when his five-year-old daughter died in his arms, in convulsions, and screaming at him that he was the devil. Afterwards he found himself inconsolably alone, but instead of fleeing his loneliness, as most of us are prompted to do, he entered into the experience and discovered that it transformed him and his life in ways that he could not have imagined. He discovered new capacities and resources within himself. He also found that the world took on a new liveliness, vividness, and importance. He found himself anew; and he found a new sensitivity whereby he came more into touch with his own existence and more deeply aware of others'.

Being lonely involves a certain pathway, requires a total submersion of self, a letting be of all that is and belongs, a staying or remaining with the situation, until a natural realization or completion is reached; when a lonely existence completes itself, the individual becomes, grows from it, reaches out for others in a deeper, more vital sense (1961: 8).

He appears to have learned, entirely on his own, a fundamental principle of human psychology which Jung calls the "transcendent function." When life does not allow us to go forward any further on our path, when our child dies, when our beloved abandons us, we fall into a depression. At this point, our energy no longer flows outward into our outer-worldly activities, but backwards, in and down into our unconscious where it activates dormant and long-neglected talents, capacities, images, feelings, and the like. Moustakas understands this. He says, "In loneliness man seeks his inner nature" (1961: 54). Jung would agree, but I think he would turn the statement around: In loneliness our inner nature seeks us.

In romantic love, our inner nature has been seeking us all along. In the first instance, it appears to us embodied in the person of our beloved. We do not know our inner nature yet -- our anima or animus, to use the language of Jung -- but find it in projected form. This is why our meeting with our beloved seems so "meant to be," as though it were "destined," "fated," or "made in heaven." Our beloved seems to complete us, by bringing us into contact with this "inner nature" of ours which has been neglected and ignored. But then, when our beloved leaves us and we fall into depression, we experience our aloneness as if for the first time. She walks away carrying with her the anima we have projected onto her. Now we know something is missing; and through our projection onto our beloved, we have developed a pretty good notion of what it is. We are prepared -- even if we do not know it yet -- to recognize our "inner nature" when it approaches us from within. But this does not happen without a struggle. We have to struggle with ourselves to give up the quest for what we are missing outside of ourselves. We have give up searching and let ourselves be found.

These psychological realities are frequently expressed in myth -- e.g., Demeter's grieving for her daughter Persephone who has been stolen by Hades, the god of the underworld. Demeter is the goddess of grain, and she mourns every year between the harvest and the planting. For then her daughter, the very kernel of her "inner nature" lies dormant. Her loneliness and despair, therefore, bring forth the new fields of grain which sprout in the next growing season. Similarly, in the myth of Eros and Psyche, the maiden Psyche loses her god-lover whom she has known only unconsciously and sexually. He visits her bed every night, and she is forbidden to look upon him or to ask for his name. When, out of self-doubt, she violates this rule and his visits cease, she has to suffer a quiet, helpless abandonment and loneliness for some time before she is finally given tasks and therewith the hope of winning him back. These tasks symbolize the inner work that must go on in our depression.

Furthermore, they are beyond Psyche's powers to carry them out. Instead, she has to allow herself to be assisted by ants, a reed, and an eagle -- indication that the important work is being done by her unconscious and not by her ego. In her isolation and loneliness, her inner self seeks her.

I do not mean to imply by this that we should merely give up and become passive. We may be well advised to get to work in an indirect manner. For example, Clark Moustakas has written at least ten books on loneliness and related issues. He had in a sense precipitated his daughter's death by deciding in favor of surgery to correct her congenital heart defect. It was a side effect of that operation which brought on her horrible, convulsive and very, very lonely death. Her deranged fear and loathing for the father she could not recognize must have affected Moustakas deeply, for he has spent a great deal of time studying loneliness in children. In particular, he "decided to listen to the experiences of children in hospitals . . . to know the truth of the lonely process in its most basic, objective forms" (Moustakas 1975: 16). Later he gave workshops to nurses and physicians to teach them what he had learned and what could be done to make children's hospitalizations more pleasant and more psychologically constructive. Also, in addition to his workshops for adults on the experience of loneliness, he has developed experiments in childhood education to "humanize learning" by "fostering and encouraging individuality, autonomy and self-direction" (1975: 5). In all of this it is clear that Moustakas has placed his experience of losing his daughter at the very center of his life's work. Thus, despite her distance, she is present in his life in a remarkably intimate and transformative way.

In the twelfth century Persian poem by Nizami, *The Story of Layla and Majnun*, the lovers spend nearly their entire lives apart, a situation which enables them to achieve a sublime kind of oneness. Despite their separation, however, they do not stagnantly pine for one another. Rather a great deal goes on "inside" them. A recurring image for this inner work is Majnun, the "madman" and desert-dweller as lord of the animals:

[E]ven a Majnun has companions. His were the animals. . . . He had crept into their caves without driving them out. . . . He possessed a strange power, unlike that of the lion, the panther or the wolf, because he did not catch and devour smaller animals. . . . [T]hey came flying, running, trotting, creeping, drawing narrowing circles around him. Among them were animals of every kind and size, but -- what a miracle -- they did not attack each other, and lost all fear, as long as this trusted stranger stayed in their midst. . . . It was a peaceful army that travelled with Majnun as he roamed the wilderness, his animals always at his heels. . . . Many [people] pitied him and brought him food and drink, knowing that out of love of Layla, he had become a hermit. But Majnun accepted no more than a bite or a sip. Everything else he gave to his animals (Nizami, 1966: 126-9).

Symbolically, this means that he made friends with his anger, pain, loneliness, and despair, so that, far from being rent to pieces and devoured by these powerful emotions and instincts, he gave them their due and they became the source of his strength. It is a process of integration and whole-making. Majnun was more than "sought" by the core of his identity; that identity was assembled and forged as he patiently plumbed the dank, reeking caves of his loneliness.

Jungian analyst, Robert Stein, names this process "psychization"; more felicitously, James Hillman (cf. 1983: 26-8) calls it "soul-making." They refer to that increase in consciousness which results when the instinctual forces within me and their projected images

outside me lose their "otherness" and I begin to integrate them. Generally this requires the sword of separation. When the immediate fulfillment of my needs is frustrated, the inhibited instinctual drive can "stimulate the formation of images which are mental equivalents of the desired object" (Stein: 28). The desired object, my separated beloved, is no longer an autonomous other. I begin to find that she is part of me, a part that had long been unconscious. The greater the disruption or transformation she has effected in my everyday life, the more important a piece of my soul she represents. In soul-making, I come to know this part of my soul for its own sake. Jung calls it "withdrawing the projection" from the woman I love so that I can (a) see her for who she really is and (b) allow this piece of my soul ("my anima") to become a helpful, functioning part of my psyche (1928/35: par. 374).

Jung means that when I renounce my ego-bound intentions regarding my beloved, I begin to find my soul's own guide within me. This is why Nizami's Majnun can say: "The name [Majnun] is only the outer shell and I am this shell, I am the veil. The face underneath is hers" (125). This process which Jung calls "withdrawing the projection," we might more picturesquely call "becoming Layla." Or "becoming Majnun," for Layla undergoes the same process. She says, "Once I was Layla, now . . . I am madder, more 'Majnun' than a thousand Majnuns" (145).

These considerations give us new access to the story of Eliduc which ends with the three lovers building monastery walls between themselves -- deliberately choosing the sword of love. If our contemporaries cannot comprehend such a story, they do not understand the work which goes on in loneliness and depression. We can hardly blame them, insofar as our extraverted culture has provided us so few models that we scratch our heads, too, at the stories of Eros and Psyche or Layla and Majnun.

Death is the ultimate sword of separation, for there is no longer any possibility of waiting for the beloved to return. It is not a sword we freely choose; but please note that also in the stories of Demeter and Persephone, Eros and Psyche, and Layla and Majnun, the sword is not actively chosen but rather freely accepted after tragedy has made it unavoidable. This implies that neither death nor the sword accomplishes anything by itself. What is of utmost importance is our attitude toward the obstacle which separates us from our beloved.

Consider for a moment, one of the most famous death-robbed lovers in English Literature, Heathcliff from Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. About thirty years ago I saw a television dramatization of the story which ended with the following words -- words so impressive that they still come back to me; they seemed to be some ultimate truth:

Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living! You said I killed you -- haunt me, then! The murdered do haunt their murderers. I believe -- I know that ghosts *have* wandered the earth. Be with me always -- take any form -- drive me mad! only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh God! it is unutterable! I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul! (163f).

After watching the television drama, I borrowed the book from the library and turned immediately to the end where I could not find these passionate words. On reading from the beginning, I discovered that they occur just about at the mid point of the book and that I had no interest in the eighteen chapters which followed. Apparently the author of the screenplay and I, as well as the majority of the television audience, were suffering from the same terror

as Heathcliff, the fear of being abandoned in an abyss of loneliness. We could not bear eighteen more chapters describing this torment.

A few pages before the end of the book, Heathcliff says:

I cannot look down to this floor, but her features are shaped on the flags! In every cloud, in every tree -- filling the air at night, and caught by glimpses in every object, by day I am surrounded with her image! The most ordinary faces of men, and women -- my own features mock me with a resemblance. The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her! (307).

At this point, he knows his torment is coming to an end; it is an image of eighteen years of stand-still:

She has disturbed me, night and day, through eighteen years -- incessantly -- remorselessly -- till yesternight; and yesternight I was tranquil. I dreamt I was sleeping the last sleep by that sleeper, with my heart stopped and my cheek frozen against hers (274).

The horror of *Wuthering Heights* is that Heathcliff got the haunting he prayed for, and that he has not changed a bit. His single-minded devotion to Cathy's memory would almost be admirable were it not so beastly and repulsive. He is at the opposite extreme from Layla and Majnun; instead of going into his loneliness and learning from it, he fends it off with his obsession. His uncertainty is sticking out all over the place. He must literally possess Cathy, even though she is dead, because he is uncertain of the strength of her love and uncertain of himself. To this end he carefully plots his financial moves so that he becomes the owner of Wuthering Heights; and he arranges with the sexton to have the side-boards removed from his and Cathy's coffins so that when he is buried his cheek can literally "freeze" against hers. He needs her to dote on in order to escape himself. He flees aloneness by refusing to "withdraw" his projection. By clinging to her image impressed on the flagstones of his kitchen floor, he prevents himself from sliding down into his inner abyss. He therefore never begins the work of loneliness. Because he never finds his anima, his inner Cathy, he never "becomes Cathy" the way Majnun "becomes Layla." He never accepts the inevitability of the naked sword. Heathcliff, we can understand.

What gives us trouble is Eliduc and his two wives in their respective monasteries. Heathcliff uses his pain to flee life rather than to embrace it. Eliduc and Majnun are madmen in our blighted view because they do not flee the abyss of loneliness. We cannot imagine how they bear it.

John of the Cross calls this pain the "dark night of the soul." It occurs only to those who have already experienced the considerable joys of divine love and favor. They have already developed a "desire to feel and taste" God in receiving communion (*Night*: I,6,5) as well as an "intense satisfaction in the performance of spiritual exercises because God is handing the breasts of His tender love to the soul" (*Night* I,1,2). They are possessed as well by a "solicitude" which "goads them, preoccupies them, and absorbs them to such an extent that they never notice what others do or do not accomplish" (*Night* I,2,6). In short, these beginners in the love of God resemble us very closely when we are embarking on an affair of romantic love. At such time we delight in the slightest word, gesture, or notice from our beloved. In the early stages of infatuation, we will do anything to provide for our beloved's comfort and to win her favor -- so much so that we become oblivious of everything else

around us. In Jungian language, we say we are "possessed" by our anima or animus. Our ego is paralyzed and obsessed by the unconscious entity which we call anima or animus. In the medieval language of courtly love, we may say that we are wholly under the influence of the love potion; we have not yet felt the keen edge of the sword.

Like Majnun and Heathcliff, the soul in love with God does not seek out the calamitous sword of separation. The dark night is always God's initiative, and it comes as a blessing in disguise. For, "Until a soul is placed by God in the passive purgation of that dark night . . . it cannot purify itself . . . God must take over and purge them in that fire that is dark for them" (Night I,3,3). In exactly the same manner, we require the intervention of physical, moral, social, or other obstacles to our union with our beloved if our love is to be deepened and transformed.

In the experience of John of the Cross, the first move comes from the divine Lover. God attracts the soul to spirituality by providing the so-called "sensual delights" of enjoying one's spiritual exercises. If this were to continue, we would surely develop a fixation on God's "nurturing breasts" and remain oblivious of much more sublime states of union (Night I,7,5). To prevent this arrest in our development, God withdraws these sensual delights from the soul. Left to itself, the soul would respond to this withdrawal by becoming quiet, and God would "infuse" it with contemplation. But the beginner tends to fight the soul's inclination to be quiet (Night I,10,1) just as we do when our beloved leaves us. Heathcliff's prayer to be haunted the rest of his days corresponds precisely to our wish never to lose the delights we have in our beloved's presence and in our habitual fantasies about her. For John of the Cross, this would mean that we cling to first impressions and let them block the way to deeper appreciation of our beloved. He thereby points out two very powerful inclinations in the soul, a conservative and ego-centered desire rigidly to retain what we have and another much less conscious impulse to explore regions which are still unknown. He has, therefore, made the same distinction Jung makes between ego and Self. Ego is the center of consciousness and decision making, while Self is the principle of balance and wholeness within the greater psyche, including both conscious and unconscious.

John of the Cross observes that the only way to proceed, once God has placed the naked sword of separation between the lovers, is to be quiet, to dare to embrace the abyss of loneliness. He says:

"If those in whom this [sensual night] occurs know how to remain quiet, . . . they will soon . . . experience the interior nourishment. This refection is so delicate that usually if the soul desires or tries to experience it, it cannot (*Night I,9,7*).

In our psychological language, we would say that we need to remain quiet on the ego-level of our psyche in order to allow expression from that deeper kernel of our identity, the Self. Whereas our ego can be pulled this way and that by "sensual" and "spiritual" loves, the dark night puts our several loves into "reasonable order" (*Night I,4,8*). It does this because it silences the ego and makes room for the balancing and whole-making activity of the Self. In the mystic's words:

My intellect . . . no longer understands by means of its natural vigor and light but by means of the divine wisdom to which it was united.

And my will . . . no longer loves in a lowly manner with its natural strength, but with the strength and purity of the Holy Spirit (Night II,4,2).

These words might well be a commentary on the words of St. Paul describing his own transformation, "I have been crucified with Christ; the life I now live is not my life, but the life which Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). For Jung, the experience of Paul is one of the classic examples of what he calls "enlargement of personality," an enrichment which comes from within. "The apparition of Christ came to St. Paul not from the historical Jesus but from the depths of his own unconscious" (Jung 1939/50: par. 216).

It is this same enlargement of personality and this same Christ from the depths of the soul that John of the Cross describes in the *Dark Night*. And he knows whereof he speaks. He is describing his own experience and that of the monks and nuns whom he has served as novice master and spiritual director. He describes the dark night as painful and terrifying, but it is also the sole means by which lover and beloved encounter one another. Faithfully undergone, it transforms a beginner into a proficient and a proficient into a mystic. It is "contemplation" (*Night I,8,1*) and "an inflow of God into the soul" (*Night II,5,1*). It humbles the soul only in order to exalt it (*Night II,9,1*).

The same is true of the sword of separation, in very much the same way and for the same reasons. Distance from our beloved provides the opportunity for love to transform us both. Because the separation brought about by the sword of love is meaningless without the drawing power of the love potion, the kind of distance I am describing, here, is never absolute. It always implies some kind of presence of the lovers to one another. Indeed, this is the fundamental tension of romantic love: that the couple must always be both present to and distant from one another at every moment. Sometimes the distance is more apparent and sometimes the presence.

The legend of Layla and Majnun, for example, describes what I call "presence amid distance." Physically, the lovers are nearly always apart, but their story is worth telling because the abyss of their mutual absence is filled with the golden light of a very powerful spiritual and psychological presence. We can see a hint of this in Edith Wharton's novel, *The Age of Innocence*. Newland Archer and the Countess Olenska have decided to end their affair and not see one another again. Four months after their parting, we catch a view of Archer's inner world:

Since then there had been no farther communications between them, and he had built up within himself a kind of sanctuary in which she throned among his secret thoughts and longings. Little by little it became the scene of his real life, of his only rational activities; thither he brought the books he read, the ideas and feelings which nourished him, his judgments and his visions. Outside it, in the scene of his actual life, he moved with a growing sense of unreality and insufficiency, blundering against familiar prejudices and traditional points of view as an absent-minded man goes on bumping into the furniture of his own room (262).

This is very ambiguous. We do not yet know whether Archer will profit from his dark night. Clearly the image of his beloved has become a center of integration in his life. I am reminded of the composer Laos Janacek, who wrote nothing of enduring significance before the age of sixty when he fell in love with a young Jewish woman, Kamila Stoesslova, who did not reciprocate his love but who did allow him to write her love letters. Thenceforth his music became inspired. Distance between Janacek and Kamila enabled something very

important to happen, a kind of integration of the composer's inner life around the anima nucleus. Clark Moustakas did something very similar with his distance from his deceased daughter: all the books and training courses nourished by that "presence amid distance." If something like this is happening to Wharton's hero, Archer, then perhaps he is "becoming Countess Olenska" as Majnun "became Layla." Although it is too early for a prognosis, it is clear that the light which fills the abyss of Archer's loneliness is the irreal, silvery light of the moon and not yet the golden light of the sun which brings out all the rough edges of things in three-dimensional relief. He has no connection with the real world. His experience, though, when we compare it to that of John of the Cross, shows that there are stages in the dark night, moving toward a realization which Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 1273) has described very eloquently:

Lovers don't finally meet somewhere.
They're in each other all along
(1984: Quatrain #1246).

Rumi and John of the Cross can talk primarily about presence, because in their experience the sword of separation is more evident to profane eyes than is the love potion. There are cases, however, in which presence predominates over distance; and there the lovers long for the introduction of the sword and the dark night -- even if not consciously. When they are "in each other" all the time, they lose their individuality, or perhaps never found it. They begin to struggle with one another, even to invent arguments in order to get free and discover themselves. Whether they know it or not, they long for the abyss of loneliness and for what it can bring about in their lives. Richard Wagner's opera, *Tannhaeuser*, describes this situation very well in its first act. Heinrich Tannhaeuser, a wandering troubadour, has been making love with the goddess Venus for such a timeless time, that he has lost all sense of orientation. He misses the earth, the sky, the seasons, and the song of the nightingale. Without the tension created by distance in romantic love, he is beginning to languish. He does not at all denigrate the delights he has been enjoying; rather, he promises to sing the praises of Venus on earth if only she will let him go.

From now on my song will praise only you!
Your reward from me will be sung aloud!
Your sweet charms are the source of all enjoyment,
And every precious wonder stems from you.
The flame that you have struck in my heart
Will blaze brightly for you alone!
Henceforth I will be your bold and
Tireless hero, taking on the whole world. --
But for this I must return to earth;
With you I can be never more than slave;
For this I require freedom;
For freedom I thirst -- for freedom.
I will stand fast in any strife,
Should it lead even to my death.
But to do this I must flee your realm.
Oh Queen, Oh Goddess, let me go! --
(Act I, scene 2, my translation).

Tannhaeuser would rather devote his life to singing the praises of Venus than dally in timeless union with her. Heathcliff could never understand such a sentiment, but Eliduc and Majnun know very well what he longs for.

This concept of distance amid presence gives us a valuable tool for examining relationships. I refer, for example, to the fact that the occurrence of an extra-marital affair nearly always evokes suspicion that the partners have in some way become estranged from one another -- that the love potion has disappeared from their union. It may be, however, that one partner or the other -- like Tannhaeuser -- longs for relief from too much presence. Since in our culture we have so little which addresses this issue, it is not likely that we would be able to recognize our plight as a search for the sword of separation.

De Rougemont believes marriage is wholly incompatible with romantic love and that our contemporary romantic notions -- mere fragments of the medieval ideal of courtly love -- have distorted expectations. He thinks we want to keep ourselves in the early stages of erotic involvement where our fantasies about our partner preponderate over accurate perceptions. He thinks romantic love is a kind of sickness which we have to outgrow. It appears to me that he comes to this point of view because he has barely begun to appreciate the significance of the naked sword. The sword does far more than inflame our lust; it sends us back and down into the transforming dark night of the soul whence we have far more of ourselves to bring to our partner and our partner has far more to bring to us. Marriage works as a transforming romantic love and not just a social and economic institution of convenience when we can be simultaneously both present and distant.