

Divine Madness: Archetypes of Romantic Love

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Nine

The Lovers' Quarrel: Fight For Renewal

It is no accident that Shiva and Parvati, the gods of love-play, are also renowned for their quarrels. O'Flaherty (311) shows that the structure of the quarrel myths parallels that of the myths of love-play: while playing a game of dice, they quarrel and part; subsequently Parvati seduces Shiva, and Shiva returns to *tapas*, his heat-generating meditation on the One. Parvati's complaints about Shiva are quite predictable, given the picture we have of him as the dissolute god of sex and meditation. She reviles him for his shamelessness, going about naked, unkempt, and covered with the ashes of the grave yard; for his improvidence as a householder, in that he holds no job but depends on begging like an ordinary mendicant monk; and for his fondness for drugs and low company. The quarrel polarizes the pair -- as it often does, too, among mortals -- until she stands for temporal values such as material comfort, respectability, and orientation to the here and now, and he, for his part, champions what stands outside of time, transcendental values, the One, and realities which lie beyond death and are inaccessible to ordinary states of consciousness.

In the lovers' quarrel, matters which it is the business of relationship to harmonize and integrate fall into conflict with one another. The love potion's wonderful sense of unparalleled unity is suddenly called into question. Just yesterday we knew without a shadow of a doubt that our relationship was made in heaven and would survive forever. Our love made us immortal and indestructible. We felt we had returned to some original state of oneness for which we had longed all our lives without knowing it. We thought we had awakened from the twilight of a dreary dream into a glorious reality in which the dingy yellow light of the terrestrial sun had been replaced by the pure white brilliance of the Sun of the universe. And now look at us, squabbling in the most demeaning and vicious manner as though each of our very lives depended on annihilating the other.

This is how matter must have appeared to Dido in Vergil's *Aeneid*. The Trojan hero, Aeneas, had been directed by the gods through his dreams to leave Troy, while the Greeks from the Trojan horse were besieging the city, and to found a new civilization. He wanders from one place to another until his dreams clarify that it is on the west coast of Italy where he will establish the city of Rome -- on the site of the ancestral home of the Trojan founder, Dardanus. His mother, Venus, intercedes with Jove to smooth his course, while Jove's wife, Juno does everything she can to impede Aeneas' progress.[1] These warring forces drive his ship onto the coast of Libya, where Queen Dido is building the city of Carthage, Rome's historic rival. Now Juno and Venus collaborate to have Dido and Aeneas fall in love. With these two goddesses cooperating, this could be a marriage that combines both practical and

transcendental love. Aeneas has just about consented to help in the founding of Carthage, when Jove sends Mercury to tell Aeneas to leave immediately for Italy. Aeneas at once sets to work on his boats, without a word to Dido. Her rage is withering:

. . . No goddess was your mother!
No noble Dardanus forebear of yours, you scum,
But the foul Caucasus breached you out of its rocks,
Hyrcanian tigresses gave you suck . . .

. . . Go. Go -- seek Italy
On the tempest, seek your realms over the storm-crests,
And I pray if the gods are as true to themselves as their powers
You shall be smashed on the rocks, calling on Dido's name;
O, I will shadow your course like a black star
And when cold death possesses my body and soul;
I will haunt you wherever you go, you wicked creature,
I will see to your punishment. Report of you
Will filter down to me even among the dead . . . (Virgil, 85).

That love can change its face so quickly from angelic bliss to fiendish spitefulness results from its being founded on our woundedness. On the one hand, we are never so complete and so satisfied as when we are with the individual whose being and whose wound corresponds to our own. On the other hand, no one else is so capable of ripping open that wound as the one to whom we have given our heart. Indeed, before the fall into love we have typically learned to defend and protect our wound in a nearly automatic fashion. Not infrequently we succeed in convincing ourselves that we are whole and unwounded before meeting our beloved. Then, in her incomparable presence, we dare to rip off the bandage, like Tristan before his union in death with Isolde. We only brave this risk because we have already experienced some hint of the sublimity and peace we can obtain in union with her. And, for this very reason, we find our betrayal -- as it seems -- rocks the foundations of our world and calls into question our worth as a person.

Such, surely, was the condition of Dido. She had risked everything -- including her reputation and her political position in Libya, whose powerful King Iarbus had wished to marry her and was enraged by her affair with Aeneas. Like Tristan and Isolde, like Shiva and Parvati, she has chosen romantic love over the social and political security of a sensible marriage. She has staked everything on the vision of Aeneas' soul she gained through the animus lens. That transcendental truth has the feel of eternity, and she expected a mutual *fana* with Aeneas.

Virgil makes it clear that Dido's love for Aeneas is a fatal wound:

. . . The fires
Slink'd mining through her marrow, the tacit wound
Sucked inward from her breasts. Unhappy Dido
In frenzy staggered and reeled through the whole city,
Like a wild doe in the mountain groves of Crete
A shepherd has shot at a venture, at long range,
And does not know his lucky shaft has stuck
And the flying barb clings like a burr in its wound --
And through the woods and plains of Dicte it reels
The deadly weapon fast in its dying flank (77).

We know that Aeneas' wound must be comparably grave. This son of the goddess of love has lived through the utter destruction of his homeland, his people murdered and enslaved -- all for the love a woman. In his many years of stumbling from one inhospitable shore to another, only Dido's Carthage opens its arms and invites him to become joint founder of a Libyan Empire. His victories have been small and his losses, rejections, and devastation overwhelming. His dalliance in the cave with Dido must have been a monumental experience of timeless unity and surcease of temporal care. Vergil tells us that he abandoned his armor in her bedroom and never returned to claim it (88).

We want to know how he could bring himself to break such a bond and expose again his wound, festering with abandonment and failure. Vergil tells us almighty Jove made the decision. In the language of the psyche, the mythic image of the king of the gods refers to the central organizing principle of the Self. Jove wants Aeneas to found the *Roman* Empire and not to mix Trojan blood with Libyan. Vergil leans too much on his political motives. He wants the *Aeneid* to make Romans proud of their heritage. We may therefore doubt whether he has done justice to the power of the bond between Dido and Aeneas. The poet might have sung a different story, had he taken Dido more seriously. But had he done so and still retained an episode in which Aeneas breaks the erotic bond, he would surely not have eliminated Jove. The image of Jove is a kind of short-hand notation to tell us that Aeneas had to have been powerfully moved from the very center of his soul to relinquish what had been achieved with Dido. Vergil leaves us no doubt of this, when he describes Aeneas' reaction to the appearance of Mercury bringing Jove's orders:

Cowed by this apparition, terrified Aeneas
Was dumb; his hair stood on end; his tongue clove;
He burned to escape, to quit these lotus-lands;
Thunderstruck with this stark ultimatum
From the god of gods (82).

Only after Jove has thundered from the center does Carthage seem to be a "lotus-land," a realm of debilitating oblivion. What a change in love's valuation! Is it the highest of human truths or a mind-numbing delusion? Very frequently this conflict lies at heart of the lovers' quarrel. One partner fights to draw the other back into eternal oneness while the second struggles for individuality, autonomy, and ordinary everydayness. The polarizing which occurs in the quarrel reveals the two major components which a successful love relationship needs to integrate. The story of the troubadour, Heinrich Tannhaeuser, dramatizes very well the function of the lovers' quarrel in bringing out the split between the eternal and the temporal or the archetypal and the personal. And his career shows the struggle of one man to integrate both sides of the split. Tannhaeuser was an actual historical character, a Minnesinger, or wandering knight-minstrel singing of courtly love (*Minne*). He was born around 1200, squandered his patrimony, participated in a crusade, and later wandered from one European court to another looking for a patron to support him. He was famous for his love of wine, food, women, and bathing twice a week. His story was told in an anonymous poem of fifteenth century Germany, which is the source for its retelling by the Brothers Grimm. Richard Wagner's operatic version is indebted to the Grimm legend as well as to an unrelated story by E. T. A. Hoffmann in which a Minnesinger named Heinrich von Ofterdingen has employed witchcraft to lend irresistible, passionate force to his songs.

The Story of Tannhaeuser

The opera begins with a long, sensuous ballet in which scantily-clad couples seem to be making languorous love on a dimly-lit stage. The music in the orchestra is other-worldly, even spiritual. It seems to have no beginning and no end. A chorus of "sirens" occasionally calls from off-stage urging hearers to come to this land, where the glowing arms of love will provide blissful release from care.

As attention gradually focuses on Tannhaeuser and Venus, lying in one another's arms at center stage, the atmosphere of love-play changes quickly to quarrel. Venus asks with loving concern where Tannhaeuser's mind has drifted. He responds as passionately and sharply as a slap in the face: "It's too much, too much! Oh, let me now awake!" [2] He has been dreaming of the old familiar sounds of earth and wonders how long he has been away. Here within the Venusberg (the "Mountain of Venus," or, in Latin, *mons veneris*), there is no way to distinguish the passage of time; no sun, moon, or stars. Venus asks him if he is not happy to be like a god. He responds that he is very glad for the gift of song she has given him but that unfortunately he is still a mortal and cannot handle all this bliss. Unlike the gods, he says, a man requires change. The quarrel goes on for some twenty minutes until Venus cries, "Return to me, I am your only salvation." In reply, he brings the scene to both dramatic and musical resolution, declaring: "My salvation lies in the Virgin Mary." This is an unprecedented pronouncement, for nothing distinctively Christian or in praise of chastity has been part of this argument. It immediately brings the scene to a close, and we find ourselves in a bucolic valley on earth.

It is May in the valley and a shepherd boy is singing about his dream of Lady Holda (Venus) as Tannhaeuser lies prostrate on the ground. The chorus passes through dressed as a column of pilgrims singing with transcendent sadness of the burden of their sins. Tannhaeuser, glorious full-throated madman, praises God's wonder and mercy, which he hopes will help him bear his onerous guilt. To this end, he chooses a life of toil and trouble. A small group of minstrels enters. They recognize the prostrate Tannhaeuser as a former comrade who has feuded with them and left. If he is willing to befriend them, they urge him to mix his song with theirs so that Elisabeth, the Landgrave's beautiful niece will again enter their Hall of Minstrels. She has retired since Tannhaeuser won her heart by his magic song and then departed the land of Thuringia. The name of this loveliest woman in the world rouses something powerful in Tannhaeuser. He sings out her name like a clarion bell which soars into the opera house and seems to absorb the whole orchestra into itself.

The Second Act opens with that paragon of beauty and saintliness emerging from seclusion into the Hall of the Minstrels. She says that, before his departure from the Hall, Tannhaeuser's song had awakened a new emotion in her breast. What previously had been dear to her had vanished before joys, pains, and longings she could not name. But in the months he was gone, her dreams were filled with anguish and her days haunted by pensive, gloomy shades.

The Landgrave enters and announces a song contest in which the *Minnesinger* who best describes the nature of love will win Elisabeth's hand. Wolfram von Eschenbach [3] sings a tribute to Elisabeth to whom he kneels, in awe of an angelic beauty which he would never sully with reckless desires. Tannhaeuser is outraged by this pious claptrap. As words become more and more intemperate, he becomes a wild man, praising carresses and rapture until he is finally provoked into the mystic pagan strains of the Venusberg music. He praises Venus as the source of all that is beautiful and wondrous. Only he who has enjoyed her passionate arms can know what love is. "So," he spits in derision at his antagonists, "go to Venusberg!" The whole Hall of Minstrels comes down on him. As chorus and principles all sing different phrases, righteous and vengeful melodic fragments pierce the babel of sounds, while Tannhaeuser's penitent tones roll uncertainly about like black fog. Swords are drawn, and Elisabeth's commanding soprano calls for forgiveness and charity. The Landgrave says there may be hope yet if Tannhaeuser can get the pope to absolve his sins. Tannhaeuser ends the act with an heroically determined but strangely gloomy, "To Rome!"

The Third Act finds us back in the bucolic valley which resonates with a penitent yet triumphant melody sung by a column of pilgrims returning, gratefully shriven, from Rome. Because Tannhaeuser is not one of them, Elisabeth is very disturbed and prays to the virgin that she might waste away to death in expiation for her *Minnesinger's* guilt. After she leaves the stage, Tannhaeuser appears, alone, ragged, and defeated. Although his austerities have been as single-minded and excessive as his former liberties, the pope has condemned him to eternal damnation. He has fed the demonic flames of venusian delight and therefore stands as little chance of salvation as the pope's barren staff of putting forth flower or leaf. What a turning point! His eyes are open, and he is disgusted by pious Christian deceptions. They turn his soul to ice. He looks instead for the bliss-filled, warm, and magic nights of Venus. As his voice soars again into the ardor of the Venusberg music, the love goddess' cave materializes up-stage; and she herself, raven-haired personification of other-worldly beauty and rapture, welcomes her prodigal with open arms.

In a frenzy Tannhaeuser is straining up the path to the Venusberg when Wolfram sings out the name of the Landgrave's niece, that angel who has hovered in blessing over her sinful troubadour and brought him redemption. Again the name of the blond exemplar of all that is pure and holy in love pulls Tannhaeuser up short, he sings out, *Elisabeth!* in the ringing tones of a man finally come to his senses. Venusberg fades as pallbearers enter bearing Elisabeth's coffin. Tannhaeuser stumbles to her bier and sinks to death himself, asking the holy Elisabeth to pray for him. Pilgrims arrive from Rome bearing the pope's staff, bursting with blossoms and leaves.

In having Tannhaeuser saved by the saintly Elisabeth, Wagner has taken liberties with the medieval legend. There the pope's staff blooms three days after the *Minnesinger* returns to Venusberg -- a shockingly unchristian resolution which implicitly links the libertine's three days in the cave of sexual delights with Christ's three days in the tomb, whence, in the words of the Apostle's Creed, "He descended into hell." In my view, both outcomes are unsatisfying. The medieval legend rejects Christian puritanism in favor of sensuality while Wagner seems to do the reverse. But Tannhaeuser's central problem is how to reconcile these apparent opposites. Our next chapter takes up this argument at greater length. Here we will concentrate on the quarrel in the first act between Tannhaeuser and Venus.

The Venusberg music which plays throughout the balletic prologue and the long quarrel between the goddess and the minstrel has the shimmering, leaping quality of flames, without any sense of burning up or consumption. These are spiritual flames which occasion no pain but which transport and transform the soul. They are the divine presence which Moses saw in the burning bush. We experience them in those moments of joyful clarity when our whole being gently meets the being of our beloved and we find that the solid earthy substance of our body has fallen away and our anatomy has become pure flame.

The music has the sound and feel of rapture. And yet it somehow insinuates a subtle dreariness, as though a line has been crossed between a paradisaal eternity which knows no time and the malaise of time without end. On the blessed side of that line, we look up from our couch to see with dismay that only three hours of dalliance remain before we have to dress for work. What has happened, we wonder, to that glorious stretch of time we had so carefully set aside? Could seven hours have passed so wholly unnoticed? Once the line is crossed into tedium, however, even fifteen minutes seems unendurable. We find ourselves restless, preoccupied with the concerns of the day, held back, raring to go. Solidity returns to our flesh so that the silken flames which glided over one another so easily become sticky skin in need of a bath. We have a crick in our back from lying so long supine. Our lover no longer has anything fresh to say, nor do we. It is time for a change.

Tannhaeuser has crossed that line. He needs to become reacquainted with the seasons of the year, the movements of the heavens, the death and rebirth of the land. Venus offers him the softest of pillows and freedom from all discomfort. He retorts that only a God can dwell in bliss, that he needs pain as well as pleasure. This is no slight to her charms, for she is the source of all beauty and wonder. The flame in his heart will burn always and only for her. He will sing her praises from one end of the earth to the other, but he cannot stay. Her presence is too powerful for it; he is in danger of being absorbed. He must struggle, even though it bring about his death. In fact he would even embrace death, if that is what it takes to escape Venusberg.

Such sentiments lie at the heart of every quarrel between lovers. Every outburst of anger, every aggressive move is an attempt to reconstitute ourselves. When we find ourselves threatened, only two options are open to us: fight and flight. When we flee the challenge, we react with depression and sadness, as we mourn our loss of territory, standing, prestige. When we fight, we use our anger to recoup our losses. This is what happens, too, in the lovers' quarrel. One partner feels he has lost something, given up too much, or especially is in danger of losing identity. No amount of comfort and bliss can erase Tannhaeuser's need for the struggles which establish and maintain his identity. If he remains too long with Venus, he loses his own autonomy and becomes her slave. He loves her deeply and will never cease to sing her praises; he is grateful for what he has learned from her -- his gift of song and the delights of love -- ; but he cannot stay without losing his equality. He is afraid he will become nothing but an adjunct to her.

We imagine Tannhaeuser may even be surprised at this turn of events, for in the first timeless months of his dalliance he must have felt he was discovering himself. This is, anyway, what we are led to gather from his argument in the song contest. Had he not experienced the sensual and spiritual bliss of Venusberg, he could not have been so recklessly sure of himself, so confident that the pieties of the Landgrave's minstrels were missing the point about love -- and indeed of human relationship itself.

In his early novel, *The Joke*, Milan Kundera gives us a very good idea of what the surcease of temporal care through romantic love can provide an individual. Young Ludvik, has gotten himself into serious trouble with the Czech authorities by sending a crudely satirical postcard to a girl friend away at a kind of summer training camp. He finds himself sentenced to hard labor and stripped for life of all opportunity for professional achievement and social respectability. He is in the doledrums, almost suicidal, but too listless to initiate anything. In this situation, he meets a very strange girl, Lucie, psychologically damaged by childhood abuse and almost completely lacking in social adaptation. She walks with a slowness which radiates resignation, as though there could never be anywhere worth hurrying to. She sits as though waiting to be called in for surgery, and waves her hand as though she has learned that is what people do when they separate. She is capable of waiting weeks between Ludvik's furlough days and still greet him as though they had just parted the day before.

In meeting this girl who lives outside of time, Ludvik says he feels "inhabited" again. Regarding the tragedy of losing his career, he says:

Lucie had a miraculous effect on that deep pain. All I needed was to feel her close to me, feel the warmth of her way of life, a life outside the issues of cosmopolitanism and internationalism, vigilance and the class struggle, and what constitutes the dictatorship of the proletariat -- a life outside the whole gamut of politics, its strategy and tactics (60).

She knew nothing of the *major problems of our times*, the problems she lived with were *trivial and eternal*. And suddenly I'd been released; Lucie had come to take me off to her *gray paradise*, and the step that until such a short time before had seemed unthinkable, the step enabling me to "make my exit from history," was suddenly a cause for relief and rejoicing. Lucie held me shyly by the arm, and I let myself be led (61).

Tannhaeuser, too, must have let himself be led. For what is even a mad genius who sings like an angel compared to the goddess of love? She has to have led him on tracks he could never have found for himself, and he must have found them liberating.

The tracks along which Venus led her *Minnesinger* belong to the archetypal levels of the psyche: the realm of the mythic image, the pre-imagistic Self, and the instinct-archetypes. Here, there is no sense of time; it is always *now*. One is overwhelmingly impressed with the interrelatedness of all things. A sense of Oneness oscillates with a roaring chaos. There is no sense of ego or personhood, no history, no personal memory, no "style," nothing characteristic; for these things belong to the conscious individual and to the personal unconscious.

As he was led into this archetypal realm, Tannhaeuser must have been delighted to have found the "depth dimension" of his song-making, his love-making, and his "bumming around" from one European court to another. Like the first troubadour, William of Poitiers and Aquitaine, Tannhaeuser must have found his august lady to be his completion, that obedience to her was equivalent to perfect fidelity to himself, that she was the sole source of his salvation. But something has changed. He repudiates her declaration, "Return to me, I am your only salvation," with that puzzling reference to the Virgin Mary.

A recent interpretation (von Rhein) of the opera by Peter Sellers solves the puzzle too easily by making Tannhaeuser a fallen television evangelist. Accordingly, the Venusberg becomes a sleazy motel somewhere in the Bible Belt; Venus is a prostitute; and the bucolic valley of penitence and reconciliation is replaced by O'Hare airport with an American Airlines tarmac in the background. Here the drama depends on conflict between the irreconcilable principles of compulsive, sensual sinfulness and idealized, letter-of-the-law perfectionism. I think it misses the point of Tannhaeuser's struggle. Seller's televangelist enters the Venusberg cynically or naughtily for a diverting debauch, while the *Minnesinger* enters honestly in quest of wholeness and truth. Wagner's Venus is not a bawdy temptress; she exists on a different plane from the Christian literalism of Wolfram von Eschenbach and the Landgrave's other minstrels. As in his other operas, Wagner is striving for a vision of a higher integration. Because the pope's staff, in blooming, repudiates the pontiff's arrogant puritanism, neither Wagner nor Tannhaeuser puritanically condemns Venus. She is not repudiated as evil, but transcended as incomplete. Goddess though she may be, she suffers an abandonment very much like that of Dido. Tannhaeuser has gone on to something else.

Ironically, Venusberg is both "too much" and not enough for Tannhaeuser. The painfulness of the quarrel depends on there being no clear alternatives of right and wrong. There would be no quarrel if the lovers were not bound to one another very deeply at the

level of Self. Fighting erupts when one of the partners finds that this archetypal bond is not sufficient or that it is threatening to his autonomy and identity. The conflict is not between good and evil but between two goods which are incomplete and in search of reconciliation. In order to make this point clearer, we can consider the very well documented^[4] love affair between the American novelist Thomas Wolfe and the stage designer Aline Bernstein.

They met in 1925, when she was forty-four and he twenty-five. He describes her as a matronly woman, energetic, with a fresh, ruddy face, whom few people passing on the street would have given a second glance. Yet she became for him "the creature of incomparable loveliness to whom all other women in the world must be compared" (*The Web and the Rock*, 312-14). For her part, she felt she had "already known" this awkward, passionate giant. In her novel about the affair, *The Journey Down*, she says that right at the beginning they experienced an inadvertant merging and began to marshall their defenses against it (15).

Wolfe was eloquent in his praise of Bernstein or Esther Jack, as he calls her in his last two novels. He found her rich in joy, dignity, and imagination, a real contrast with the general run of people who "have little power of living in themselves" (*Web*, 380). She transferred this energy directly into his blood:

And instead of the old confusion, weariness, despair, and desolation of the spirit, instead of the old and horrible sensation of drowning, smothering, in the numberless manswarm of the earth, he knew nothing but triumphant joy and power (*Web*, 447).

"For the first time in his whole life he mattered deeply, earnestly, to someone else" (*Web*, 389). The great city of New York which had formerly terrified this small-town southerner, came together for him in Aline. "She was the city he had longed to know" (*Web*, 390), and the "world" (405). Whereas he lived in disorder and confusion and could not seem to get either his life or his career together, her life was a very model of the clarity, control, hope and integrity which a great artist required (*Web*, 463).

Tom's importance to Aline was no less significant. At their first meeting, when he began to praise her beauty and to kiss her, she thought she must leap into the sea and drown, for life could only be down-hill from this moment on (*Journey*, 24). She was in love with his passion, violence, and neediness; his ability to write and to see and remember so marvelously. "Darling you must never be not wild, but naturally I like to be wild with you. -- I should like to go like lightning somewhere" (*Stutman*, 45).

Their relationship flourished as long as his writing went well (*Donald*, 164); their course was rocky. After a fairly successful tour of Europe together in the summer of 1926, he stayed on in England in order to be away from her to finish his book. Although he wrote a great deal, he felt alone and lost, like a phantom in the world of people, or a person in a world of phantoms (*Stutman*, 82), writing her letters of colossal length and then not believing in the mails to get them to her (*Stutman*, 86). Still, as he headed home, he wrote in his notebook, "What rut of life with the Jew, now.?" (*Stutman*, 143).

The big quarrel marking the turning point of their relationship occurred about nineteen months after they had met. Aline appeared radiant and cheerful, as usual, one day when Tom was particularly depressed. He immediately felt betrayed. He was entangled in her web;^[5] she was "entombed in his flesh," (*Web*, 556) absorbing all his thoughts and energies while he

was sunk in doubt, suspicion, and madness. Perhaps he was just one of many young men whose blood she sucked. He'd given her his youth and she had very likely never loved him at all. He accused her of this and of being as depraved as any in the world of the theatre -- being the daughter of a travelling actor and promiscuous playboy. There was an element of truth in this taunt, and Aline raged in a sobbing voice that she would smash his face in for maligning her family. *His* family, though -- and here she spoke the truth his *Look Homeward, Angel* denies and which he was never able to face -- did not care whether Tom lived or died. Worst of all she attacked the father he needed to believe was a "great man":

"Yes, a great bum!" she jeered. "A great whiskey drinker! A great woman chaser! That's what he was! He gave you a fine home, didn't he? He left you a large fortune, didn't he? You ought to thank him for all he's done for you! Thank him for making you an outcast and a wanderer! Thank him for filling your heart with hate and poison against all the people who have loved you! Thank him for your black, twisted soul and all the hate in your mad brain! Thank him for making you hate yourself and your own life! Thank him for making a monster of you who stabs his friends to the heart and then deserts them! And then see if you can't be as much like him as you can! Since that's what you want, follow in his footsteps, and see if you can't be as vile a man as he was!" (Web, 566).

He threw her out of the apartment and a few minutes later went running after her, thinking that he was just a grumbling baby while she cheerfully did the work of a titan. They had a noisy, argumentative reunion in the street in which he accused her of making the bystanders laugh at him.

There is always a struggle in romantic love between oneness and separation, though perhaps not always so violent as in this affair. Typically, too, when a struggle does emerge, there is a polarization of the two parties. Although both lovers want unity with the other *and* a separate life and identity, the quarrel results in their identifying with only one of the poles and forgetting or even fearing their need for the other. As Tom tries to break free of Aline's "web," she is doing all in her power to further and champion their oneness and the archetypal dimension of timelessness. In her short story about the affair, she wishes "they could just freeze like this, turn to stone, never be forced to go to some inevitable end" (Three Blue Suits, 56). She delighted in experiencing him as "all encompassing"; "he had wrapped her in a cloud, and taken her up and away and beyond all other people" (Journey, 272). Because she had a husband and two children in a comfortable brownstone, as well as acclaim in her profession, she could afford to long for timeless hours of undifferentiated oneness. Because her life was so well-organized and efficient, she could aspire to share in his wildness. Things were quite different from Tom's perspective. For him, unity was a trap which stripped him of his individuality. He was determined to separate himself with violence, if need be, "from the sense of ruin, desolation, and loss unutterable which had possessed and conquered him" (Web, 614).

The foundation of Wolfe's problem was that he needed love and unity so badly that he found it all but irresistible. His father had been distant, both physically and emotionally, and his mother's affections had been treacherous for him. One moment she would smother him, longing for release from her own loneliness, and the next she would push him away. In the words of black, Lesbian poet, Audre Lorde, he *needed* love but could not afford to *want* it:

To the first woman I ever courted and left. She taught me that women who want without needing are expensive and sometimes wasteful, but women who need without wanting are dangerous -- they suck you in and pretend not to notice (5).

This phenomenon is of course not limited to women. When we need to fuse too much, the draw becomes terrifyingly powerful. Then, like Thomas Wolfe, we want above all to be separate and to avoid that suction. We will clutch at any means to pull away. In her novel, *The Ravishing of Lol Stein*, Marguerite Duras presents a dramatic instance of this cold will to break free from the prison of unity:

"In a certain state of mind, all trace of feeling is banished. Whenever I remain silent in a certain way, I don't love you, have you noticed that?"

"Yes, I've noticed."

She stretches, laughs.

"And then I begin to breathe again," she says (129).

The initiative toward separation is taken by the partner who feels his sense of identity threatened. The quarrel is a battle between the needs for unity and for separate identity, between eternity and time, between the archetypal and the personal, between "us" and "me." It is a battle to reestablish the relationship on a different basis. For all his drive toward individuality, Tom, as much as Aline, found their union fulfilling and whole-making. He does not want to lose this completely, only renew himself, reestablish his own personality and equality with this powerful partner of his. Tom wants to renew their separateness -- and threatens to do so with his very first move in the quarrel. Aline is then forced to defend the principle of unification. For her the quarrel, itself, is the threat which inspires her attempt to renew their oneness.

Really both are right: they need a new unity which will respect their individuality and a new sense of individuality which will respect their unity. But because the situation has become polarized, they can each see only one side of the picture. Each is aware, above all, of his own wound. For example, Aline speaks of the fibers, dangling, bleeding from her wound, tendrils which used to grow into him, before he tore them free. The suffering would be unbearable, except for her "unconquerable golden knowledge" (Journey, 209), i.e., the knowledge of his undying love which she has at the archetypal levels of her psyche. He has this knowledge, also; it is the reason he cannot bear to have her refer to their love. He knows it and needs it too well; thus he *wants* above all to deny it.

As a result, they engaged in constant plotting. He plotted to keep them occupied with their moves on the surface of the gaming board, while she plotted to remind him of that bedroom down below into which she has been dragging furniture. She used the most subtle tricks to bind him: "She moved her arm so that her hand lay against the pulsing heart, and so made one more channel for him to flow to her" (Suits, 56). And he used the coarsest techniques to prevent her: "I am ugly, cruel, and mad in a way you know nothing about; if another loves me I torture them, curse and revile them, and try to drive them away" [6] (Donald, 258). He was able to admit his love for her only when they were separated by thousands of miles. He terminated her regular Thursday noontime visits in January of 1932, when he arranged to have her met by his mother. In the last six and half years before Tom's

death,[7] they met fairly infrequently -- usually in connection with a cry for help from him. His last words were, "Where's Aline . . . I want Aline . . . I want my Jew" (Klein, 316).

In hindsight it appears that Thomas Wolfe was incapable of sustaining a deep, intimate, and balanced relationship. He was capable of momentary fusion and great dependency as well of a slashing, brutal drive to break free of the bonding which drew him so inexorably. Generally he indulged this with prostitutes and in one night stands with the women who pursued his celebrity status. In these liaisons he defended himself very well. According to his biographer (Donald, 364), he showed a total absence of affection or interest in his partners. He told Aline she had ruined him for making love with anyone else (Donald, 332). Thus he was not at all free of his union with her, but only tried to pretend he was. Evidently he was capable of only two dimensions of erotic experience: fusion and fighting fusion with the quarrel.

It appears that Bernstein was capable of a great deal more -- although she also manifested great weakness. She was hospitalized at least twice for psychosomatic reactions to Tom's mistreatment, had some severe bouts of drunkenness, and at least one nearly successful suicide attempt. She gives three accounts of how she eventually recovered from her obsession with Wolfe. In a letter to Tom in February, 1934, she says that she was brought to a transcendental realization through intense pain in a dental chair:

. . . suddenly I knew that the pain was hurting nobody but myself. Here was a man, so close that I could feel the human warmth exuding from him, and he could not feel my pain . . . I was an entity, a body so complete and so perfectly made that no one need know what I felt or thought if I did not choose to show it. I felt godhead in me and at once the tenseness of my muscles relaxed (Stutman, 370).

In *The Journey Down* she uses very similar words -- albeit in the third person. She won this realization through a pain like broken glass in her chest, incurred upon attempting suicide, about the same time as the dental incident:

She had reached the point the other side of pain, and she had found supreme peace, the calm that an angel might know; and if she lived, that would remain with her forever, a precious talisman.

"Nobody knows what I am like," she thought . . . "Nobody knows what I am made of, not a soul knows what is in my mind and heart, maybe I must live longer to tell it" (304).

The third account is placed four years later, in February, 1938, just six months before Wolfe's death. He had stormed up to the Bernstein apartment, drunk and enraged by her published account of their affair in *The Journey Down*. Among other intemperate words, he called for three cheers for Adolf Hitler; and she knocked him out with a punch in the nose. She told a friend afterwards:

It was the most sickening experience of my life; horrible, but it succeeded in finally freeing me from the spell. . . . I have always protected him . . . and . . . allowed for his behavior because of a certain greatness I have felt about him; but this was too much (Donald, 444).

It is clear that, although Aline had discovered the divine spark in this novelist whom Dos Passos had called a "gigantic baby" (Donald, 353), she was, for almost the whole of the thirteen years he knew Tom, unable to live sanely, integratedly, and as a whole person. She and Tom were demon lovers for one another. Quarrelling was an attempt to curb the excesses

of their mutual obsession, but it succeeded only in truncating a process and keeping it unresolved. The erotic bond held them because it promised and provided a taste for a transcending unity at the level of Self. They reveled in the feeling it gave them of being engaged in a whole-making and fulfilling enterprise. Although there were surely moments when they passed away (*fana*) into one another and, like Shiva, contemplated the One in the midst of their love-play, only Aline reached a point of calm and fairly self-sufficient resolution. But unfortunately she had to do it alone, by a unilateral acceptance of the sword of separation. She discovered the godhead in herself and the indomitable foolishness in him which she had been trying for thirteen years to excuse.

Tom probably experienced the spiritual flames of Wagner's Venusberg, as Aline certainly did. But it is evident that his neurotic defenses frequently converted them into the bumps and grinds of Peter Seller's Venusberg Motel. He apparently could never accept the notion that people he knew slept together (Donald, 126). Women he knew as having a sexual life were sometimes indistinguishable from prostitutes for him. His biographers seem to be agreed that he was a narcissistic personality who suffered so severely and constantly from his wound that he was rendered incapable of a sustained and sustaining erotic relationship. He tried to style his rejection of Aline after the heroic realization of an Aeneas, sadly leaving Dido to pursue a nobler destiny:

For he had learned tonight that love was not enough. There had to be a higher devotion than all the developments of this fond imprisonment. . . . So now he knew that if he was ever to succeed in writing the books he felt were in him, he must turn about and lift his face up to some nobler height (1973b: 249).

I have little doubt that this was his honest assessment of the situation. But the question is still open for me as to whether almighty Jove lay behind his separation from Aline. If it *was* a command from the center of his psyche, it must sounded like resignation: This erotic struggle is too great for you; you have learned and striven enough; it is time to settle down to tasks you can perform with confidence.

We have considered three titanic quarrels, Aeneas with Dido, Tannhaeuser with Venus, and Thomas Wolfe with Aline Bernstein. It is clear that in all cases, the participants parted with great sorrow and that their fight was for renewal. Generally one partner wants to renew his individuality while the other wants to renew their unity. One fights for archetypal, eternal values, while the other struggles to assert the necessities of personal differences and the realities of everyday. Insofar as each finds the other's position an annihilating threat to his own, they have fallen victim to the trap of polarization. In each case considered here, the quarrel eventually brought an end to the relationship. Ideally, it need not do so. It is not beyond the powers of human relationship to reconcile the heroic search for individual meaning with unitive contemplation of the divine spark. The next chapter will take up the issue of how the battle can achieve a higher integration of these competing principles.

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1. Jove (or Jupiter) and Juno are the Roman counterparts of Zeus and Hera, and they are having the same dispute over marital love versus illicit/religious love. The Trojans represent *rati* insofar as it is their hero, Paris, who started the Trojan War by abducting Helen, the wife of the Greek king, Menelaus.

2. All quotations translated by me.
3. Also a historical character (1170-1220), author of famous verse epics and love lyrics. In his christening of pagan legends, he glorifies married love and sane affection over the far less tame tradition of courtly love. He is a favorite whipping boy for Wagner, who has him lose another song contest in his last opera, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Wagner portrays him as an uninspired plodder, good-hearted but arrogant, an observer of the letter of the law who has never experienced its spirit.
4. Not only do we have biographies of both partners (cf. Donald and Klein) but also their love letters (Stutman) and fiction by both parties, which describes the affair with only the most superficial alteration of facts.
5. Before his death, Wolfe had thought he was working on a single novel, with the title, *The Web and the Rock*. As the city and the world, Aline was the *rock* of the title; and as his opponent she spun the *web*. After his death, his editor separated the gargantuan collection of manuscript fragments into two novels and named the second *You Can't Go Home Again*.
6. These words were uttered to Claire Zylve, Tom's lover for a brief period in Paris. His warning was clearly based on his experience with Aline.
7. He died of a tuberculosis infestation of the brain after what his doctor had diagnosed as a bout of pneumonia.