

MICHAŁ SOKOLSKI
(UNIVERSITY OF SZCZECIN)

LOVE AS SUBVERSION: THE LONG AFTERLIFE OF THE ROMANTIC IDEAL

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to confront two opposite views on the romantic idea of love and its role in contemporary Western societies. According to one of the analysed perspectives, represented most fully by Anthony Giddens, the romantic idea of love is seen as a dangerous delusion, bound to be abandoned in the rapidly changing societies of today. According to the other view, proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, romantic love is still the only means to escape the power of symbolic domination. In conclusion, both accounts are analysed in terms of their underlying mythologies: Victorian in case of Giddens, Romantic in case of Bourdieu. Notions of ‘ontological security’ and the ‘unity of the loving dyad’ are shown to be the cornerstones of powerful mythological systems encompassing our aims and modes of expression.

KEYWORDS

Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu, romantic love, intimacy, ontological security, masculine domination

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Michał Sokolski
Institute of Philosophy
University of Szczecin
e-mail: michal.sokolski@gmail.com

The aim of this paper is to confront two opposite views on the romantic idea of love and its role and place in contemporary Western societies. According to one of the analysed perspectives, proposed by Anthony Giddens, the romantic idea of love is seen as a dangerous delusion bound to be abandoned in today's rapidly changing societies. According to the other view, represented by Pierre Bourdieu in his work on masculine domination, romantic love is considered the only means to escape the power of ubiquitous symbolic violence.

The structure of the article is as follows. In the first section I flesh out the notion of romance and trace the origins of the romantic idea of love. In two subsequent sections I address the claims made by Giddens and Bourdieu. The fourth section offers a short outline of what may be called 'the labour conception of love', which is used as a framework for further comparison of the two views. In conclusion, both conceptions are analysed in terms of their underlying mythologies: Victorian in the case of Giddens, Romantic in the case of Bourdieu.

The origin of romance

We should start by clarifying the meaning of 'romantic love'. The term will be used in the sense proposed by Krystyna Starczewska, who has defined it as a 'disposition for action motivated by the urge to achieve a state of absolute unity of will between the loving subject and the loved object'.¹ According to Starczewska, this disposition is always accompanied by a strong tendency to sanctify both the object of love and the romance itself. Therefore, the idea of romance is geared towards transcending the mundane world and its grimy necessities and obligations. This conception of romance is built on a well-known thesis formulated by Max Weber in his work on the sociology of religion, according to which romance should be perceived as a thoroughly modern invention that has emerged with the development of the bourgeois society.

According to Weber, the process of modernisation is coextensive with the progress of rationalisation, bureaucratisation and 'disenchantment with the world'; it leads to a breakdown of traditional social bonds and progressive instrumentalisation of all human relationships. Erot-

¹ K. Starczewska, *Wzory miłości w kulturze Zachodu*, Warsaw 1975, p. 46.

ic love, however, is a unique relationship that cannot be rationalised, based as it is on a certain charismatic element also present in early or-giastic forms of religion. Thus, according to Weber, in modern Western societies ‘eroticism was raised into the sphere of conscious enjoyment (in the most sublime sense of the term). Nevertheless, indeed because of this elevation, eroticism appeared to be like a gate into the most irrational and thereby real kernel of life, as compared with the mechanisms of rationalisation’.² Thereby, the romantic notion of *true love*, freed from any utilitarian functionality, was conceived as a means to escape from ‘the iron cage of rationality’.

The aim of romantic lovers is to re-enchant their world. As Weber puts it:

the erotic relation seems to offer the unsurpassable peak of the fulfillment of the request for love in the direct fusion of the souls of one to the other. This boundless giving of oneself is as radical as possible in its opposition to all functionality, rationality, and generality. It is displayed here as the unique meaning which one creature in his irrationality has for another, and only for this specific other.³

It should be noted that this approach to the erotic sphere is deeply subversive. Romantic love implies the rejection of everything considered reasonable and respectable within the petit-bourgeois worldview. According to Starczewska, a fight against the hostile and uncaring world is thus a necessary leitmotif of any modern romance. Romantic lovers constantly strive to achieve unity, but on their way they actively seek to face as many difficulties as possible. They see omnipotence as a constitutive aspect of true love: as a result, they try to reach unattainable goals merely to demonstrate the power of their mutual involvement. While their aim is to attain absolute unity of the will, they try to achieve this by rejecting the rational code of conduct of the bourgeois *homini oeconomici* and replacing it with rules of their own creation.⁴

In a more mystical idiom, this radical reinvention of two loving sub-jects can be described — as Weber puts it — as ‘the direct fusion of

² M. Weber, *Essays in Sociology*, New York 1946, pp. 345–6.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

⁴ Starczewska, *Wzory*, p. 33.

souls', which in turn presupposes boundless devotion to the beloved subject. In this aspect, romance is both closely related and profoundly different from mystical forms of religion. According to Weber:

Certain psychological interrelations of both spheres sharpen the tension between religion and sex. The highest eroticism stands psychologically and physiologically in a mutually substitutive relation with certain sublimated forms of heroic piety. In opposition to the rational, active asceticism which rejects the sexual as irrational, and which is felt by eroticism to be a powerful and deadly enemy, this substitutive relationship is oriented especially to the mystic's union with God. From this relation there follows the constant threat of a deadly sophisticated revenge of animality, or of an unmediated slipping from the mystic realm of God into the realm of the All-Too-Human. This psychological affinity naturally increases the antagonism of inner meanings between eroticism and religion.⁵

As a result, there is always a mounting tension between the mysticism of love and that of religion. The devotion of the religious mystic is truly objectless, whereas the romantic lover is devoted solely to the chosen unique human being. The mystic wants to attain absolute unity with God: he loves God in every man, but he loves no human being as such. The lover wants to attain similar unity with the beloved subject, who effectively becomes his God. Therefore, the relation between love and religion is *substitutive*: these two kinds of mysticism, while psychologically close, are mutually exclusive as ways of life.

To sum up: according to the Weberian view the romantic idea of love is a self-consciously irrational one; it emerged as an answer to the progress of modernisation and it breaks completely with any notion of conventional happiness offered by modern society. It is a subversive way of experiencing transcendence amongst the dreary routines of everyday life. As such, it can be perceived as a modern substitute for religion.

This subversive aspect of romance reaches its most extreme manifestation in the voluntary death of both loving subjects. Perhaps the most striking real-life example of such a conclusion is, to this day, the suicide pact of the Romantic writer and poet Heinrich von Kleist

⁵ Weber, *Essays*, p. 348.

and his terminally ill lover, Henriette Vogel, which resulted in Kleist shooting Vogel and himself on 21 November 1811 on the banks of the Kleiner Wannsee. What makes this case different both from its literary counterparts (such as the deaths of Romeo and Juliet) and later incidents of a similar kind (such as the case of Dagny Przybyszewska and Władysław Emeryk) is the fact that it was very carefully and self-consciously staged by its participants.

As observed by Hilda M. Brown, the suicide of Kleist may have been precipitated by many important factors: his lack of recognition as a writer, overwhelming financial troubles, the dire political situation and the terminal illness of his lover. Brown claims, however, that at the same time the poet 'may have believed that the deep significance the "Doppeltod" held for him and for Henriette would be clear to others and would send signals to his friends and family of the meaningfulness of the joint act'.⁶ When put into this perspective, what happened on the banks of the Kleiner Wannsee can be seen as the staging of his last drama: a subversive manifesto. The death of Kleist and Vogel was meant to be perceived not as a irrational act of despair but as a meaningful conclusion to their romance. The innkeeper who offered them accommodation described the lovers as cheerful and effusive — they were clearly unapologetic about what they were intending to do. According to Brown, the implicit rejection of the petit-bourgeois values was met with considerable outrage:

Even more liberal minds, schooled on the popularity of works such as Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (1774), could not condone the drastic step. The minute recording of the preparations taken by Kleist and Henriette Vogel at the inn near Wannsee, their festive, even joyous character (eyewitnesses spoke of the 'exaltation' and 'enthusiasm' exhibited by the pair), and the deliberation with which they carried out their plan, to say nothing of the impropriety of the relationship itself, constituted a scandal of the first magnitude.⁷

⁶ Hilda M. Brown, 'Ripe Moments and False Climaxes: Thematic and Dramatic Configurations of the Theme of Death in Kleist's Works', in: Bernd Fischer (ed.), *A Companion to the Works of Heinrich von Kleist*, Woodbridge 2003, p. 211.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

The *Liebestod* of Kleist and Vogel should be seen as the ultimate manifestation of the subversive aspect of romance. This element, while rarely recognised with equal clarity, is nevertheless always present in every intimate relationship true to the romantic ideal. It should be stressed, however, that romantic subversion is, in a way, always ‘private’. The aim of the loving couple is, first and foremost, to isolate themselves from the world they have rejected: as a result, even the most extreme realisation of their project cannot influence the society at large. What can be achieved is, as in the case of Kleist and Vogel, a somewhat successful artistic statement, which in turn can be easily reinterpreted by the bourgeois philistines as a mere ‘scandal of the first magnitude’. Thus — in full accordance with the Weberian thesis — what was supposed to be an act of mystical union slips abruptly into the mundane ‘realm of the All-Too-Human’.

Giddens on intimacy: the reevaluation of romance

It has already been noted that the view of the role of intimacy in modern societies proposed by Anthony Giddens can be considered a further development of the Weberian perspective.⁸ Giddens agrees with Weber’s conclusion, according to which erotic passion is one of the modern-day ways to achieve a secular equivalent of redemption. In the era of radicalised modernity, hopes of self-emancipation are still located in the erotic sphere. As Giddens puts it:

Sexuality has the enormous importance it does in modern civilisation because it is a point of contact with all that has been forgone for the technical security that day-to-day life has to offer. (...) Sexuality has become imprisoned within a search for selfidentity which sexual activity itself can only momentarily fulfil.⁹

⁸ C. Lindholm, ‘The Future of Love’, in: V. C. de Munck (ed.), *Romantic Love and Sexual Behavior. Perspectives from the Social Sciences*, Westport-London 1998, p. 21.

⁹ A. Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy. Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*, Stanford 1992, p. 197.

This statement, while in accordance with Weber's thesis, goes far beyond it in its further implications. Whereas Weber had seen romantic love as a sort of private, mystical escape from reality, Giddens asserts that the new form of intimacy which emerged out of the aforementioned fixation with the erotic sphere is actively transforming modern societies in many ways.

Giddens claims that in the era of radicalised modernity, self-identity has become reflexive. Instead of being determined by gender, age or social status, it has become an open project. As a result it is now obligatory for every individual to find out who (s)he is. In this quest for self-identity we increasingly rely on various 'expert systems', such as academic knowledge, therapeutic discourse, media, popular guides, alternative medicine, esoteric knowledge, etc.

According to Giddens, our intimate relationships have also become reflexive. This transformation of intimacy took the shape of the new model of *confluent love*, taking the place of (now outdated) romance. This new concept of intimate relationships can be seen as a demythologised version of the romantic ideal. Whereas romantic love was perceived as a unique matching of two perfectly fitted souls — 'a marriage made in heaven' — confluent love is definitely a more mundane affair, based on a rational agreement between two partners engaged in a so-called 'pure relationship'.

Its exact shape is a matter of a contractual, freely negotiated agreement between free agents acting for the realisation of their own aims and desires. This agreement is always open to renegotiation. Thus, confluent love is not supposed to be everlasting or unlimited — the 'contract' can be terminated at any time, effective immediately. Moreover, any aspect of true dominance and involuntary — or voluntary — submission is strictly excluded. The chief condition of success for both parties is the full sincerity of negotiations and subsequent re-negotiations of the contract.¹⁰

The most important difference between both models of love — romantic and confluent — is the underlying idea of the loving subject. In the case of romance, the beloved human being has to be taken 'as is', with all of his or her unique qualities, both negative and positive. After the establishment of 'the unity of two loving souls', the beloved person is never

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 61–2.

supposed to change in any substantial way, for now (s)he is considered to be the cornerstone of the private universe that the lovers co-create. From this point of view, every attempt to find a new self-identity must be seen as a serious threat to the entire existential project of the romance. As the result, the lover is absolutely dependent on his beloved, or, to put it in terms borrowed by Giddens from modern therapeutic discourse, romantic love leads inevitably to neurotic co-dependence. In effect, it is absolutely irreconcilable with the idea of a pure relationship.¹¹

Giddens argues that in the postmodern context the romantic idea of love is seen as a dangerous delusion, bound to be promptly abandoned. He admits that romance has had its uses in the proper time and place — mainly as a way to assert the autonomy of the individual in early-modern patriarchal cultures. Today, however, subjects have become reflexive: as a result, they simply no longer fit into the outdated modes of romance. The reflexive subject is constantly obliged to change and to expect the same from his loved ones. To maintain a pure relationship, the individual must place his trust precisely in that unlimited willingness to change. Instead of sanctifying love for love's sake, the confluent lover considers his bond with his significant other to be a sort of life insurance: according to Giddens the purpose of confluent love is to achieve *ontological security*.¹²

As an aside here, it should be noted that the crucial notion of ontological security is never clearly explained. Probably the most straightforward definition of this term offered by Giddens reads as follows:

The phrase refers to the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action. A sense of the reliability of persons and things, so central to the notion of trust, is basic to feelings of ontological security; hence the two are psychologically closely related. Ontological security has to do with 'being' or, in the terms of phenomenology, 'being-in-the-world.' But it is an emotional, rather than a cognitive, phenomenon, and it is rooted in the unconscious.¹³

¹¹ A. Giddens, C. Pierson, *Conversations with Anthony Giddens. Making Sense of Modernity*, Cambridge 1998, p. 136.

¹² Giddens, *Transformation*, p. 75.

¹³ A. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge 1996, p. 92.

As we can see, Giddens takes care to distinguish between ontological security and the more mundane ‘trust’. In effect, the former term becomes somewhat vague: it might be understood as a kind of continuous feeling of emotional stability. Maintaining this state is supposed to be the main aim of a pure relationship; it must be noted, however, that there is no sure way to achieve this objective once and for all. This vagueness of a central notion may be seen as an important clue: ontological security should be treated more as an ideal — or a myth — influencing our actions than as a tangible reality.

It should be stressed that by placing emphasis on ontological security as the aim of a relationship, Giddens abandons the subversive aspect of loving. It is thus not surprising that he does not value the romantic idea of love very highly. Judged solely as a way to achieve ontological security, romance is clearly not the best option: it can offer some emotional stability, but at the cost of a potentially neurotic attachment to the beloved. Moreover, according to Giddens, romantic subversion is not a valid means of emancipation for modern, reflexive subjects.

Dissemination of the confluent idea of love is supposed to be a main agent of democratisation in the contemporary Western world. As Giddens puts it:

The possibility of intimacy means the promise of democracy (...). The structural source of this promise is the emergence of the pure relationship, not only in the area of sexuality but also in those of parent-child relations, and other forms of kinship and friendship. We can envisage the development of an ethical framework for a democratic personal order, which in sexual relationships and other personal domains conforms to a model of confluent love.¹⁴

The recent transformation of intimacy is thus to be seen as a dissemination of the revolutionary idea. The idea of a pure relationship presumes the equality and autonomy of both partners: it offers both stability and emancipation at the same time. Instead of rejecting the world in a romantic manner, confluent lovers transform their societies from within. Therefore, although the romantic idea of love is surely a subversive one, modern society has no need for this subversive potential.

¹⁴ Giddens, *Transformation*, p. 188.

Bourdieu on love and domination: the power of a loving dyad

Masculine Domination, by Pierre Bourdieu, is, first and foremost, a book about symbolic power and symbolic violence. It is organised around three main questions: how masculine domination is naturalised, why it is misrecognised by its subjects and how it is socially reproduced. Moreover, in an unexpected twist, the book contains perhaps the most compelling contemporary defence of the romantic idea of love.

Bourdieu asserts that the cognitive structures prevailing in both modern and traditional western societies are organised around sexual difference. The fact of being born a man or a woman locates a person within a cognitive grid in which masculinity is associated with all that is dominant. These cognitive structures are linked to the objective structure of society via the sexually differentiated dispositions (*habitus*) instilled into gender-differentiated bodies in the process of socialisation. Thus, the legitimisation of domination is achieved by the social construction of bodies. According to Bourdieu, the strength of what he calls the *masculine sociodicy* ‘comes from the fact that it combines and condenses two operations: it legitimises a relationship of domination by embedding it in a biological nature that is itself a naturalised social construction’.¹⁵ In effect, masculine domination remains largely misrecognised, because the social differentiation of sexual dispositions ‘lead[s] the dominated to take the point of view of the dominant on the dominant and on themselves’.¹⁶ This misrecognition can take the extreme form of *amor fati*: the desire to be dominated.

It is clear that, in the world of masculine domination described by Bourdieu, the very idea of a ‘pure relationship’ in the Giddensian sense is absolutely unworkable. One cannot create a balanced relationship just by asserting his will to do so, and no amount of therapeutic work can help individuals to change the habitus instilled into their bodies. The only possible breach in the rights of male domination can be made by love, pure and simple.

The curious ‘Postscript on domination and love’ contains an almost ecstatic apotheosis of the selflessness, reciprocity and trust achievable

¹⁵ P. Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, Stanford 2001, p. 23.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

only by two loving individuals. According to Bourdieu, 'pure love' has nothing to do with grim *amor fati*. The quasi-mythical unity of the loving dyad is the only possibility for the attainment of true symbolic autarky, allowing the lovers a constant recreation of the world, outside of history and outside the social structure. As Bourdieu puts it, the aura of mystery surrounding *pure love*:

(...) is easy to understand from a strictly anthropological point of view: based on the suspension of the struggle for symbolic power that springs from the quest for recognition and the associated temptation to dominate, the mutual recognition by which each recognises himself or herself in another whom he or she recognises as another self and who also recognises him or her as such, can lead, in its perfect reflexivity, beyond the alternatives of egoism and altruism and even beyond the distinction between subject and object, to the state of fusion and communion, often evoked in metaphors close to those of mysticism, in which two beings can 'lose themselves in each other' without being lost.¹⁷

The quoted passage is rooted firmly in the Weberian tradition. Love is perceived here as a form of charismatic ritual in which the loving couple attains mystical unity. The focus is put entirely on the private sphere: 'pure love' has no political uses. It is an aim in itself. Nevertheless, in a certain way, it can offer us freedom in a private world of our own creation. In this sense, pure love is the ultimate subversion, because, as Bourdieu puts it, only the unified loving dyad has 'the power to rival successfully all the consecrations that are ordinarily asked of the institutions and rites of "Society", the secular substitute for God'.¹⁸

The labours of love

In addition to their many differences, the presented concepts of love share one common point: both Giddens and Bourdieu claim that love presumes hard work. The intimate relationship involves a continuous labour of reinvention in which the loving subjects must willingly par-

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 111.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 112.

ticipate. This activity is to be seen as a sort of ‘career’, certainly not a hobby, and most certainly not as useless toil. It is tacitly assumed that the labour of love is in some way productive, since it may bring tangible rewards, some of which can be somehow accumulated. And, just like all work, love can be done well or poorly.

What kind of work is done in an intimate relationship? According to Giddens it is mostly therapeutic. To be a good partner, one should ceaselessly re-establish his personal boundaries, eradicating every trace of co-dependence. The focus is placed here on developing the self and maintaining intimate communication with the other, with the final reward being ‘ontological security’.¹⁹ The same cannot be said about Bourdieu’s loving dyad, in which case the labour of love is mostly ritual and symbolic. Personal boundaries are not to be established but abolished, as the main focus rests on removing the very possibility of symbolic domination by attaining the unity of loving subjects. This, on the other hand, can be achieved only by the means of daily, private rituals in which the lovers freely and willingly participate.

It should be noted that these two different notions of love-work are the true cornerstones of both conceptions. It can be argued that the constant contribution of labour constitutes the backbone of love as such, and that love as a feeling is utterly inseparable from love as daily toil. The differences between the two concepts can thus be put in terms of two different sets of expectations.

The true confluent lover expects his partner, first and foremost, to offer him a ‘fair deal’. His capacity for labour is seen as an asset separable from all of his unique qualities: in theory, at least, everyone can be a good partner/lover if (s)he is willing to work hard enough. In this aspect, the idea of a pure relationship is deeply linked to a certain conception of human rights described by C. B. Macpherson as possessive individualism. The main assumptions which comprise this political theory were summarised by him as follows:

1. What makes a man human is freedom from dependence on the wills of others.
2. Freedom from dependence on others means freedom from any relations with others except those relations which the individual enters voluntarily with a view to his own interest.

¹⁹ Giddens, *Transformation*, p. 89.

3. The individual is essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities, for which he owes nothing to society.²⁰

The first two assumptions are crucial for understanding the idea of a pure relationship: it can be defined simply as a voluntary relationship of two parties, neither of which is dependent on the will of other, formed to achieve the common goal of ontological security. The third assumption is the key to understanding the concept of labour associated with confluent love. The individual is seen here as the proprietor of his own person and capacities, including the capacity for labour. As Macpherson puts it, according to possessive individualism:

4. Although the individual cannot alienate the whole of his property in his own person, he may alienate his capacity to labour.
5. Human society consists of a series of market relations.²¹

The idea of confluent love is based implicitly on these presumptions: the capacity of love-labour may and should be separated from the loving individual. On the one hand, the loving subject may have some predilections towards a specific individual and his unique traits; on the other hand, however, (s)he should not take those predilections into account when evaluating the relationship and its further prospects for achieving ontological security. What counts most is the capacity and the willingness to work, while the unique, charismatic traits of the beloved individual should be treated, at best, as some kind of extra romantic 'flavour'. One cannot measure and evaluate those intrinsic characteristics because they cannot be alienated from the person that one loves. As a result, the labour of confluent love must be seen as alienated: as such, it is not suited to be the basis for romance in any meaningful sense.

Therefore, from the romantic point of view, the pure relationship is still a market relationship masquerading as love. It should also be noted that, according to Giddens, it is virtually impossible to simultaneously sustain the kind of intimacy which forms the core of confluent

²⁰ C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, Oxford-New York 1990, p. 263.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

love and retain the true romantic ‘feel’ of associated emotions. Every step towards recognising the uniqueness of the love-object can lead to its sanctification, and consequently towards addiction and co-dependence, which in turn would put an end to the pure relationship.

The symbolic, ritual love-work of the unified dyad is aimed precisely towards the dealienation of love. The whole purpose of daily rituals in which the lovers participate is to become recognised as unique. Love is exchanged for love and nothing else: it is an aim in itself. It would be appropriate here to quote the well-known passage from Marx’s *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, in which the true lover is seen as a perfect example of a non-alienated human being:

Let us assume man to be man, and his relation to the world to be a human one. Then love can only be exchanged for love, trust for trust, etc. If you wish to enjoy art you must be an artistically cultivated person; if you wish to influence other people you must be a person who really has a stimulating and encouraging effect upon others. Every one of your relations to man and to nature must be a specific expression, corresponding to the object of your will, of your real individual life. If you love without evoking love in return, i.e., if you are not able, by the manifestation of yourself as a loving person, to make yourself a beloved person, then your love is impotent and a misfortune.²²

This might be seen as a perfect summarisation of the romantic concept of love: an interpersonal relation in which both sides manifest their true, non-alienated selves. It is worth noting that there is no notion of equality here. Whether your love will be fortunate or impotent depends on who you are; and furthermore, you cannot make yourself a beloved person just by putting some extra effort into it. It should be noted also that this kind of relationship is bound to be imbalanced, as one cannot establish clear rules of romantic exchange. As a result, the loving subjects can be considered equal only in a very abstract sense, in which ‘love can only be exchanged for love, trust for trust’, etc.

Romantic subversion should be treated not only as an irrational attempt to re-enchant the world. The ultimate aim of subversive microac-

²² K. Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, in: E. Fromm, *Marx’s Concept of Man*, New York 1961, p. 167.

tivities, such as the everyday rituals described by Bourdieu, is to dealienate our most intimate social relations. As he puts it:

These are so many features, brought to their highest degree, of the economy of symbolic exchanges, of which the supreme form is the gift of self and of one's body, a sacred object, excluded from commercial circulation, and which, because they presuppose and produce durable and non-instrumental relations, are diametrically opposed, as David Schneider has shown, to the exchanges of the labour market, temporary and strictly instrumental relations between indifferent, interchangeable agents – of which venal or mercenary love, a true contradiction in terms, represents the limiting case, universally recognised as sacrilegious.²³

To sum up: the union of romantic lovers is a mystical one: they seek to achieve a certain 'state of grace' through daily rituals. The result is a barely communicable, ecstatic state of transcending the social world and its mundane necessities. By contrast, the way of the confluent lover is the path of a Puritan. He tries to reach salvation through everyday toil, but he is never fully sure if he is moving in the right direction. At the end it could easily be proven that ontological security, always elusive, is merely the projection of his desires.

Conclusion

According to Weber, the romantic idea of love is a modern substitute for religion. The same assessment is present in both perspectives analysed in the above paragraphs. It is most obvious in the case of Bourdieu, whose idea of pure love stems directly from a Weberian root. The notion of 'the unity of a loving dyad' is self-consciously proposed as a basis of a charismatic, quasi-religious ritual. The attainment of such a unity is clearly impossible: it is always being approached but never fully achieved. Nevertheless, the myth of two lovers continuously re-creating their own world cannot be easily dismissed, for it offers us the means to dealienate our social being.

²³ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, pp. 110–11.

Giddens's concept of confluent love might be seen as an attempt to demythologise romance and cleanse it, once and for all, from all charismatic and religious connotations. This objective, however, is never fully attained. The vague idea of ontological security must be seen as a piece of a comforting mythology. Confluent love can thus be considered a substitute for religious commitment of the Puritan sort in which the elusive state of ontological security is a functional equivalent of salvation. It is also worth noting that the idea of a pure relationship would fit rather well into the petit-bourgeois milieu rejected by the Romantics: after all, Victorian families were nothing if not ontologically secure. It could be argued that the idea of confluent love is essentially an improvement on the Victorian template: Victorianism without the patriarchy and the repression of sexuality, in which the pureness of a relationship is seen solely as pureness of intention and fairness of the 'contract'.

It seems that in this era of radicalised modernity we are forced to choose between two kinds of involvement: a pure relationship of a market kind and the mystical bond of pure love. Both choices are linked with a different kind of everyday toil; therefore, they are mutually exclusive. Moreover, to make things worse, there is no easy way to choose between two concurrent mythologies: both choices seem rational and irrational at the same time. If we decide to follow Giddens, we should gain a valuable sense of direction in our romantic endeavours, but our search for ontological security could eventually lead us astray. If we follow Bourdieu, we may succeed in dealienating our intimate relations, but we may also find that our social world, permeated deeply by symbolic violence, has become even more insufferable than before.

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