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Unforgetting and Excess, the Re-creation and Re-finding of Suppressed Sexuality

Ruth Stein, Ph.D.

This essay addresses the American term *romance*, or passion, so as to reflect on the reasons for its fading in a long-standing relationship. It is suggested that passion is overcoming: excitement is linked to a kind of “oedipal triumph” over internalized parents, incorporated in a prohibiting superego. In a somewhat analogous manner, bodily pleasures become revitalized and resuscitated by breaking the barriers erected around them by “forgetting,” the oblivion that grows with development and socialization.

“Unforgetting” is a complex process, deeply involved with the vicissitudes of inner objects, or structures, which can be achieved during a couple’s romance as a narrative over time.

Stephen Mitchell asked, “Can love last?” The question is quite rhetorical: Love *can* last, we all know it. After all, there are love relations that last for decades, even as long as a lifetime. Love can deepen and grow; feelings of connectedness, devotion, and cherishment¹ can accompany people through long spans of time and grow with them. If resentment does not accumulate too hopelessly, if inner bad objects are not enacted too strongly, and if narcissistic vulnerabilities do not transmute into devaluatory processes stripping relations of benevolence and injecting them with vengefulness, love can last and grow. Admittedly, many if not most couples witness their good feelings wearing thin and leaving the stage

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¹The Japanese psychologist Tako-Doi wrote about *Amae* the need “to be loved indulgently and sweetly.” See Also Elisabeth Young-Bruehl’s (2000) “cherishment.”

for bad, sometimes increasingly bad, experiences and shabby feelings. The trust and generosity characterizing the early stages of a couple's love often fade through increasing cycles of disappointment, hurt, and alienation.² Still, there are many people whose loving bonding defies time and hardship, and even deepens with them.

However, a long-standing love often thrives at the cost of passionate desire. Plato the Greek and Augustine the Christian, each embracing the assumption that love tends to grow with time whereas desire is inclined to wither, recommended that we allow desire to run its course until the day when desire and its troubles come to an end to be replaced by a love that is no longer erotic but based in trust and companionship (Scruton, 1986).³

Obviously, love is neither the same as desire nor is it necessarily romantic. Though often juxtaposed and sometimes confounded, love, romance, and sexual desire are not synonymous. *Love* is a complex affect that—like affects in general—has a particular personal history, a rich array of cognitions, self- and other-evaluations, and contradictory faces. *Romance*, on the other hand, seems to be a certain mood, a certain state of mind that is imbued with a sense of out-of-the-ordinary, of glamor, of distant times and places; it stands for “sympathetic imaginativeness,” even for “picturesque falsehood.” The American usage, resoundingly absent in the English and other non-English dictionaries, links “making love” or “carrying a love affair,” or “the quality of being romantic/a love/love affair, or marriage of romantic nature” with *overstatement, deception and self-deception*, and with playing with the truth.

The American view takes “romance” to be that which is romantic, loving, idealizing—which I suppose is the familiar and habitual meaning ascribed to romance. But, most intriguingly, when *romance* is used in its verb form, its complexity and ambiguity shine forth and its links with exaggeration, deceptiveness, even disingeniousness are exposed. I have to admit that I have been quite ambivalent about this typically American term, be-

²The theory and practice of couples therapy observe the process whereby accumulation of an embittered experiences (e.g., being let down too often; having one's basic rights or feelings violated and betrayed) leads to an irreversible state of permanent loss of love and goodwill, which has been termed *disaffection*.

³The implicit advice here is that to get to the love, one must let unbridled sex run its course. This is quite different from trying to bottle up the *eros*. On the other hand, a Shakespearean love entails an immediate, true meeting of souls, which skips altogether Plato's first, sexual stage preceding the Ascent of Love. Bottling *eros*, or by letting it run its course is instead, in both cases, to get to love, to *agape*, the kind of love that should emerge in marriage out of the ashes of imprisoning *eros*.

lieving it is a sugarcoating term, perhaps deferring to ladies' horror of naked sex. But I cut out my ironical remarks here, for it is a private thing, and my irony partly defensive, partly refusing total assimilation, partly telling ...

Mitchell took romance seriously; for him, romance was both authentic love and sexual passion. So does Spezzano, who, in response to my paper, wrote

There is this "romance" idea in America. ... The sexually excited man, Freud wrote in 1920, displays humility toward the object of his excitement. He sublimely overvalues her, renouncing all narcissistic satisfaction for the possibility of ultimate satisfaction of his sexual excitement. He does not really even care if he is loved, Freud argues, he just wants to be allowed to love the object of his excitement. Humility, idealization, renunciation in favor of the pleasure of the other, the wish simply to be given permission to love what excites one - all of these unconscious attitudes toward the sexually exciting object are seen as having a good (maybe even necessary to get two people past the obstacles to marriage) side and added altogether their good sides equals romance⁴ [personal communication, 2002].

I remain convinced, as I wrote then, that the most poignant, frenzied, and obsessive passions come from states of absence, sin, abuse, and pain. However, passion—any passion, whether "extra-marital" or "marital"—encompasses an "otherness" that subverts, displaces, revolutionizes the quotidian and habitual. In accordance with this view, I do not speak the language of attachment or that of transitional phenomena and play. For the purpose of making my points, I have transgressed these fruitful and important concurrent frames of reference and gone back to the oedipal conceptions I find helpful.

The Otherness of Passion

We tend to forget how very different sexual experience is, or can be, from our daily functioning and "regular," ordinary states of mind. On a concrete level, most of us (particularly as we grow older, in age, or in the relationship), tend to

⁴ "... the affective roller coaster of what we silly Americans call 'romance,' even if, yes, it was carried on a higher wave here by various versions of pre-feminist offerings to idealize women on the sidelines rather than have them on the team."

ignore sexuality, to find less and less time for it, to “forget” it. Our world is secular and profane, and it becomes increasingly straining and effortful to allot time and space in our mind and body to this experience, that, once we have settled in a relationship, is liable to become increasingly dispensable. Letting ourselves forget it, we renounce the magic of it, its “sacredness,” its transformative power, which subverts and violates the “secular” and the mundane.⁵ What I have in mind is the experience that is described by writers on religion (such as Mircea Eliade, 1957, or Rudolph Otto, 1923) when they portray the suffusion of the world for the believer with the halo of numinous meaning. In religious thinking, it is taken for granted that, because religious meaning and perception can be forgotten and buried by daily routine (the “profane”), it is the believer’s constant task to remember and restore to the center of his or her existence the experience of the sacred, where time is not evanescent duration but “a succession of eternities” (Eliade, 1957, p. 104) and “a living of something more” (Otto, 1923, p. 35).

In an analogous manner, there are moments when life is, or can be, deeply suffused with sexual meaning. Like religious feelings, which, Christo⁶-like, wrap and envelop huge monuments and enormous bridges of vast landscapes of the world in otherworldly, glamorous packings—so does the erotic feeling work when we are desirous and/or in love: It envelops the sense of life and the perception of the world with a distinct aura; some writers call it ‘sexual haze.’ De Rougemont (1954) saw erotic passion as being “more religious than sexual” and linked it to the loss that has occurred in the sense of affinity between sexual passion and religious experience. We may speculate that contemporary loss of religious feelings may be responsible for viewing adult preoccupation with passion as childish, or adolescent.

Let me begin from this end of the earlier and sharper portrait of what is called romance, namely, the intense and notorious passion of *courtly love*. De Rougemont, its classic chronicler, teased out the “state of passion” from love but also from sexual desire. Most of de Rougemont’s writing is immersed in the precious, heroic, sacrificial life-and-death passion that features prominently in the Western novel. Amidst his stories and analyses, de Rougemont notes, almost casually, the lack in the Western novel of *a passion that is in-*

⁵We need to free the notion of the “sacred” from its moral–ethical moorings to reach its earlier roots of otherness. The sacred (*qadosh* or *sanctus*) is not originally a moral category at all. Rather it signifies to “set apart,” to “put aside,” “put beyond” or “put above” (cf. Stein, 1998b) and has affinities with the transcendent (cf. Otto, 1923). Otto saw it as a purely ontological attribute (i.e., as a quality of existence) rather than as an attribute of value (p. 52).

⁶Christo the artist (not Jesus Christ).

flamed by an object that is close by, easily accessible, and is morally permitted. “The erotics of marriage is a *terra incognita* for Western literature,” he stated.

The *easily accessible*, and in particular the *morally permitted*, are key words in our attempt to understand romance. Considering these as markers of the “romance” variety of passion, I propose taking Mitchell’s “romance,” that is, passion-in-long-standing-relationships, or de Rougemont’s “erotics of marriage,” that is, the easily accessible, morally permitted close-by “object,” and amplify such phenomena with notions of narrative, supplement it with theoretical concepts of internalized objects, unconscious fantasy, the inner world, and the superego. What we hope to come up with will be a fuller, psychoanalytically informed, notion of *romance*. On this account, the element of *passion* in romance can be explained by a repeatedly and fantastically enacted *transgression of oedipal prohibitions*. To describe experientially what I posit theoretically, that is, to depict the experience of excitement and the retrieval of the magic of passion, I suggest and articulate a term, *unforgetting*, to which I return after I develop the narrative aspect of it.

Romance-as-Narrative

Romance in its literary (and American) connotations is a narrative over time, a vision for an ongoing future of a romantic relationship that is rooted in an ancestral past. In contrast to sexual desire, which is rushing and poignant, an acute impulse that longs for immediate fulfillment, romance has a long breath. Although it does encompass desire, romance is more “friendly” and less tyrannical. It can perdure in those couples who hold an idealized image of their partner (this is the reason, I think, why couples who marry young can sometimes hold on to romance better than couples who meet in later stages of life).⁷

Romance, as is denoted by its kin, the literary genre (see my aforementioned dictionary research), lends itself to a telling narrative, a telling of a narrative. Such tale involves the weaving together of a *coherent* whole (solidified by the two vectors of deepening meaningfulness and thickening linkage) as well as the construction of *history* (with its highlighting of the unique aspects of the couple’s individual story). In romance there is a future that is strongly linked to a past. The longings for the “golden age” of the

⁷Note that this whole exploration is made possible by our having liberated ourselves from “love” as a transformation of “the” sexual drive, together with getting beyond mother–infant attachment dynamics. Otherwise, these distinctions would have little (differenential) value, apart from different grades on the continuum discharge-neutralization!

past and its “regressive and childlike” leanings that Schafer (1976, p. 33)⁸ attributes to the Romantic Vision of Reality, accompany the quest for an imagined perfect (i.e., eternal) future. At the same time, as Reisner (2003) said about (literary) romance,

Romance is the genre whose most serious challenges exist not at the beginning, where we are in a position of lack, nor at the end, where we are in the position of gain, but the middle, as we learn to negotiate the transition. . . . We find romance in those narratives whose events and figures are pervaded with longing, and . . . such longing has a strong figurative influence. We alter the perceived by the sought [p. 17].

The intimate time the couple lives together becomes converted into the story they tell themselves about themselves. The deep roots of “romance” in the epic tradition, and its link to telling, makes speaking of love the telling of adventure, the overcoming of obstacles, and an unending quest. We could compare the ebb and flow, the vicissitudes of coming together and going away from each other in a couple’s life to the reversals and triumphs of epic history some (e.g., Goldner, 2003), compare it to the coming and going of the mother in her narrative of attachment with her child on the other. De Rougemont regarded loving passion, or passion-in-love (*passion amoureuse*)⁹ as what lends itself to telling at a certain “lyrical moment,” which creates a kind of “dream.” Neighborly love as well as “simple” sexual desire are real only in the *act*, whereas telling them, far from inflaming the hearers (as in romance), tends to quickly bore the hearer (and perhaps the teller himself). Seconding his portrayal is literary critic Patricia Parker’s (1979) view of romance as *a form which simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end, objective, or object*. In romance, the focus is *less on arrival or completion than on the strategy of delay*.¹⁰ Cultural critic Fredric Jameson (1982) approaches the subject from a somewhat different angle when he noted that, from the 12th century onward, romance necessitated the projection of an Other and came to an end—defined

⁸Schafer followed literary critic Northrop Frye (1957) in his famous categorization of literary genres.

⁹The French *passion amoureuse* is equivalent to the American *romance* (note the different connotations of this state in the American, which emphasizes the amiable, and in the French, which stresses suffering).

¹⁰Later, noted Parker, “romance” had acquired connotations “well beyond the strictly generic . . . which made it frequently a synonym for the escapism of ‘pure fiction’ or allied it with the passive state of trance and dream” (pp. 4–5).

as a “Promised Land” or “Apocalypse” when the other reveals his identity, or “name (p. 72).”

My inclination is toward the former view, which privileges the processual, and the forever undisclosed, ex-territorial time and space that hovers between past and present, and which links to both, as in Reisner’s description presented earlier. From such a perspective, romance would be a story that privileges the passion of the ongoing narrative itself, whether transgressive, morbid, or heroic, over the passion of eventually discovering what the narrative conceals. It would link somewhat with the courtly love of the 11th and 12th centuries, the poetry of the Troubadours, who put their soul and utter devotion in their adulated highly imaginary *dame sans merci*, the elevated Lady whose smile or even nod was sufficient to sustain their spirits for years. All these phenomena, as Staten (2002) argued, ushered the momentous transition in Western culture whereby women, no longer considered household assets, came to be pursued and desired, loved and idealized, occasionally (or ideally at least) with the humbleness of romance in modernity. The demystification of the sublime Lady and the wandering knight, and the growing symmetry of the two people in their relationship, had historically the effect of moving the courtly to the backyard but without at the same time having to give up the magic of exaltation and idealization. Now “normal” romantic life wants to have the power to change reality. Demythical and considered to be within the reach of every couple (even if not noble or feudal), romantic life can still be seen as an imaginative creation that can transform into a plan aiming at modifying reality to realize itself in the world, in the fashion of the revolutions that are spawned by social movements (Alberoni, 1983).¹¹ Alberoni, who formulated the project thus, deemed it an impossible task, because the sheerly incidental and material make every realization the loss of perfection. Loyal to this realization, Alberoni concluded that every experience of falling in love that lasts a long time *can only be created in the imagination*. Paradoxically, falling in love is an endeavor that compels *the two lovers to renounce seeing their desire* actually fulfilled, as the more the experience of being in love insists on its concrete and immediate realization, the more it is doomed to extinction. Alberoni’s idea of the necessity to create and realize a private courtly love

¹¹Alberoni seemed to be under the influence of Sartre’s theory of the emotions, in which emotions are conceptualized as magical means to change the world and reality as perceived. I am grateful to the late Emanuel Ghent for drawing my attention to the work of this wonderful writer and for getting me a copy of this particular out-of-print book.

in the imagination strongly echoes with my own notions regarding vicissitudes of the inner world as a condition for the longevity of passion.

Long-Standing Relationships as Viewed “From the Inside”

Passion is etymologically linked to suffering and passivity, but it has come to acquire the significance of a counterforce, a striving to overcome and surpass adversity and negation. It signifies a mostly unconscious readiness to embrace a negating power and triumph over it, to drown it while drowning in it. What is there to overcome in a secure, long-standing relationship? To my way of thinking, the answer is to be found in resonances from the past that are alive and vibrant in us. These past scripts and layers, with all the anguish and drama they enclose, lie dormant in us unless we “unforget” them.

The passion that is “romance” in Mitchell’s words, or the “erotics of marriage” in de Rougemont’s, is sustained when we unforget. I call unforgetting *the retrieving of the poignant feelings and sensations we used to have*, either as children, or in the first stages of falling in love. Such experiences have to be dug and dragged out from under a blanket of ordinariness, which has covered and muted them. Of course, psychoanalytically speaking, these experiences have not been just forgotten due to the eroding power of time, familiarity, or life’s demands. They have been transformed—repressed—through the machinations of inner objects that go on living inside us and influence our experience of each other.

However, an enduring relationship deeply activates different parts of the partners’ psyches. Not only memories and old relational patterns, but also one’s own internal relation to these patterns—whether as internal commentary of approval and empowerment or of censorship and prohibition—become revived and active. The richer and a more multiply linked inner world we have, the more life, variety, and continuity we possess, and the more promises for gratification we expect. At the same time, as we know, the deepening of a relation also liberates primitive aggression from diverse memory layers of the psyche, as when inner objects are activated, what are enlivened, among other things, are repressed or dissociated pathogenic (“aggressive”) internal object relations.

Married relations inevitably resonate with the oedipal situation in the individual’s history, a situation charged with the challenges, stimulations and prohibitions, and the defeats and triumphs that everyone carries for

life. The excitement and curiosity of the oedipal situation—a situation that is not limited to a certain age or a particular developmental stage—fuel and erotize passion. Passion always implies *a hurdle and its overcoming, a desire not met, a suffering and being tantalized*. Passion therefore always carries *connotations of a conflicted or forbidden desire*, ranging from unconsummated love to the spikes of lust and longing within a long-standing relationship. Passion is a desire that has to overcome a hurdle (death in Jesus the Savior, societal norms in *Romeo and Juliet*, marriage laws in adultery, internal oedipal prohibitions in marriage). Against the desire within a couple there is, I suggest, a counterpoint and an inhibitory force—the superego—an extended sense of prohibition, taboo, censorship, fear and love, the Law, internalized forces of socialization and culture, training and adaptation. The superego itself is only part of the oedipal constellation, a permanent feature of human relations. We assume that the partners in love actively reconstruct their individual past history of oedipal relations. Parental oedipal images, fantasies, desires, frustrations, transgressions, and experiences of mourning reverberate along the actual, “external” relationship with a partner. The oedipal longings and excited curiosity, the need to defy parental barriers and prohibitions and satisfy the desire to know and to have the mysterious relations between them, stimulate sexual passion in each partner in the couple. The powerful attraction to what is behind the scenes (or under the clothes), the fascination with what is enigmatic, allusive, enticing, but not quite within reach, produces a desire to cross boundaries, to lift the veil over the enigma. As Kernberg (1980) said,

insofar as all crossing of boundaries implies a defiance of prohibitions directed against entering forbidden territory—and, particularly, defiance of prohibitions against sexual and generational barriers ... there is an implicit, intrinsic quality of sexual passion that directs it almost by definition against superego functioning [p. 296].

The presence of the supererogo that is thus activated in both partners becomes sorely visible when strict rules and prohibitions are implicitly and increasingly laid down in the joint life of the couple, or when mutual accusations and blamings begin to fly around. Such painful and mutually punitive interactions can be seen as processes of projection by both partners of their unconscious or dissociated guilt aroused by their desire for each other, which are translated into oedipal transgressions against the internalized parents. The projection of guilt now makes the partners experience their own self-blame and the charge of their badness as being leveled at them

from the outside, by the partner. Oppression and devitalization spread and the relationship changes its valence from passion and exhilaration to the famous downtrodden dullness that ousts passion.

There are, however, other situations when the relationship goes well, and permissive, forgiving internal objects in the partners neutralize oppressive superego commands and punitive sanctions. This is the case when one or both partners feel “guilty” in response to self-accusations that are projectively attributed to the partner. When in such a situation one partner (or both) rebels against the other partner, who, although basically accusing herself, is perceived as accusing oneself, the partners can then liberate themselves from their inhibitions and now can experience passion again. The dance and ongoing waves of tension between succumbing to deep prohibitions and transgressing them makes for passionate and eventful vitality, a vitality usually not aware of its origins.

We have almost ceased talking about oedipal situations in psychoanalysis (exceptions are Jody Davies and Jessica Benjamin, when they juxtapose, each in a different way, the oedipal and the post-oedipal). There are normative and heterosexist undertones and assumptions that can be easily attached to notions of the oedipal. But it seems that the reason some of us have abandoned “the oedipal” lies in our thinking that we found better ways of putting our clinical experience and insights into words. Would it be possible that we have simply “forgotten” it? Could it be the case, though, that we have forgotten the intensely exciting, gratifying, and forbidden relationship that links parents and excludes the child and the longing and excitement of children about forbidden knowledge? Perhaps we have forgotten how painfully frustrating and enraging it all felt (or may feel some analyses for some people), the helpless jealousy and humiliating sense of exclusion, and the burning curiosity we were subject to. David (1971) wrote that “in both sexes, longing, envy, jealousy and curiosity ... induce the active search for the idealized oedipal object” (p. 43), a search that may energize sexual developments in both sexes. We are more familiar with oedipal curiosity and desire activating the guilt that undermines the capacity for establishing satisfactory love relations in the future than with the triumph of overcoming the prohibition and the inhibitions, the guilt and the shame.

Passion Is (Made by) Overcoming

A familiar notion is that passion fades in a couple’s life as the result of the work of inner objects and identifications, such as the superego. More and

more enactments of guilt, blame, and envy that are fueled by mutual archaic transferences evolve over time, to become an increasingly bitter and cloying narrative.¹³ In the struggle with the exciting, forbidden, pleasurable feelings, anxiety wins and boredom and alienation set in at the same rhythm as passion dies. These mutual archaic transferences express themselves in cyclical, or rather spiralling, patterns. What feeds these patterns are the layers and sediments, texts and textures, of other couples that preceded this couple, that are subsumed under the representations of “parents,” who are the origins, originators, and rivals of the couple’s romance. The more multiply linked inner world we have, the more life, variety, and continuity we possess, and the more promises for gratification we expect.

At the same time, as we know (at least those of us who believe in object relations theories), the deepening of a relation, in addition to deeper tapings of good internal objects, also liberates primitive aggression from diverse layers of the psyche born out of past traumas and psychic damage. In other words an ongoing relationship loosens the frozen and rigid superego from the past. This primitive aggression thus released calls for primitive defense mechanisms. Bad object relations (perhaps those that part along the lines of Jessica Benjamin’s “doer” and “done to,” but more particularly any relation that had been painful, abusive, tantalizing, or humiliating) leave their marks and create interaction patterns where the transferences of the partners deeply blend. A situation may be created where the erstwhile loving and now bewildered partners become painfully aware of how these interactions unwind, seemingly by themselves, with the occasional uncanny feeling that they are being almost willfully superimposed on their experience and interactions. Their awareness of premade “grooves,” of distortions and unavoidable painful scripts, is then accompanied by a sense of iron inexorability, of a repeated failure to change their course, despite all well-intentioned efforts. Most of us are familiar with the power and compulsive impact of such repetitive, predictable interactions, which seem to inexorably fulfill their trajectory, whether violent or beneficent (but usually the former). These patterns may (at least partly) derive from the result of primitive prohibitions against pleasure that are issued by an inimical superego, the (unconscious) fantasy being that sexual pleasure is reserved for

¹³I am not dealing here with the defenses against dependency Mitchell wrote about, but rather with aggression and guilt. Mitchell did stress their importance in romance, but although he talked generally about relational patterns (dependency, aggression, and guilt), I wish to add to his narrative and concepts more specific, fantasy-imbued concepts of enactments and transferences between the partners in the romantic narrative.

the parents. When the superego works in its archaic, prohibitive capacity, *it threatens the capacity for sexual love*. All passionate relatedness is then unconsciously experienced as incestuous transgression and aggression.

Such a situation is obviated, or reversed, when the mature “loving superego” (Schafer, 1960) attenuates criticism and guilt, and even helps transform primitive prohibitions and guilt over aggression into concern for others and for the self. The transgressive permission (derived from the partner’s permissive forgiving internal objects) to enjoy full relational sexuality can then be a sublime antidote. Such affective sparing (Stein, 1998b) protects the object relation and permits the crossing of boundaries of self toward the beloved other, so that the sense of transcendence and overcoming limits is heightened into the pleasures of romance and passion that reigned in the couple’s golden beginnings.

The sweetness of these pleasures accrues from holding the tension of both symbolically killing; “destroying” inner (parental) objects by defying them and transgressing their prohibitions, yet preserving them at the same time; giving in to sweet old desires, yet not summoning catastrophe. *The sense of “goodness” that comes from overcoming bad objects*¹⁴ mingles with the sense of exhilarating defiance: it is joyful self-love that is harvested in such experience. Boundaries are crossed, and the impossible opens itself to be tasted. An internal constellation of good inner objects and a mature, generous superego is presumably needed for this to happen. Loving and self-loving parts transform primitive prohibitions and guilt over aggression into concern for others and for the self, at the same time as they permit the crossing of boundaries of self toward the beloved other, even heightening them into the transcendent pleasures of passion—and romance.

“Unforgetting”

Let me illustrate this theoretical psychodynamic point through its experiential counterpart with the help of an extremely mundane example of what I call “unforgetting,” to be followed by “intersubjective unforgetting.” The experience I am going to talk about is embarrassingly banal and boring, and so negligible as to never be spoken about. It is that of the poignant pleasure one feels when urinating while unforgetting the delights of abandon that come with urinating freely, with no restraints of an appropriate place, pri-

¹⁴“Bad,” let us note, as in Kleinian thinking, that is, essentially from a subjective perspective rather than necessarily objectively or ethically bad.

vacy, and waiting time that come with the overcoming of our habitual inattention to the very sensation.¹⁵ I am suggesting that to have this experience, one must unforget—one must get back and return to the long-suppressed pleasure so that it can be restored in fantasy and in sensory experience. Unforgetting unearths, through disinhibited remembering, these quasi-pristine sensations, and the dizziness of boundlessness that comes with their reestablishment. Our well-internalized prohibitions and taboos made us forget the nature of our primal experiences, our preinhibitory, precivilized “cleanliness habits.”¹⁶ The good thing about such an experience is that we can now choose to have it both ways if we wish: We can subject ourselves to an exhilarating experience of freedom at the same time as we have mastered it and can do it in the “right,” acceptable, civilized way (on the toilet, in private, at the right moment), no longer forbidden by parents because it belongs to them, but having it “all for ourselves.”¹⁷

Another example, more in the domain I was talking about earlier, is that of the “oedipal-marital bed.” The “otherness” (Stein, 1998, 2000) or “discontinuity” (Bataille, 1957; Braunschweig & Fain, 1971; Kernberg, 1980) of sexual passion from everyday life, work, and intentionality, requires not only the defamiliarization of habit and fixed perception. It also asks us to contend with inner “bad” objects and a prohibiting superergo. Certain poignancies, such as the wonderousness of us (the couple) going to sleep, the awareness of the privilege of going to bed together and basking in it (without necessarily having sex, but with an awareness of the erotic), give the couple (which is by definition an oedipal couple) feelings of pleasurable freedom, even license. Getting to the core feeling of having the big (sexual) bed all for oneself, or rather, for “the two of us,” exploring the body of the other with a sense of thrill, are feelings that we may tend to forget with time each time when we go to bed to spend the night sleeping together. “The two of us” precisely expresses that the relationality and dyadicness of the experi-

¹⁵There is a question whether the transgressive pleasure in urination is an isolated experience, whether the person can liberate him- or herself from the earlier shame and/or superergo strictures, or whether this can be done only from within an intersubjective matrix that enables the person to take such a turn on bodily experiences.

¹⁶Admittedly this can be a rather mythologized “remembering”: I am not sure whether the experiences we had when we were too small to know better were felt as pitted against prohibition (rather as an accustomed routine). In an important sense it does not matter if we had. We can posit such types of experience in the past, before we became prohibited, inhibited, and “forgetful.”

¹⁷Incidentally we are thereby realizing the double significance of being a subject: subject to pleasure, and the subject over rules.

ence, at the same time as being an experience of us two being chosen out “of” other couples, such as the parental one. Being in bed in a “discontinuous” mode, an altered state that is discontinuous with the usual, relatively sober state of mind, and rejoicing, going on in an ongoing relation that loosens ancestral images into a romantic-transgressive narrative, is the intersubjective version of the kind of sharp pleasure one can have with our simplest body functions if we manage to forget them.

This transgressive state of mind allows us again (as in urinating) to inhabit both worlds, and the boundary-crossing joys of a long-standing committed relationship become mutual and spiraling, because shareable with another subjectivity that can amplify it. The unforgetting of original transgressive exhilaration is then intertwined with another subjectivity and another body, who may also be caught in unforgetting their own encrypted pleasures, and the whole is incomparably more meaningful than unforgetting the joy of primal body pleasures, like urinating. True to psychoanalytic thinking that first always goes toward the embodied and second sees a true continuity between diverse and differently positioned phenomena, transgression as a psychic act can (a) be experienced in body functions and (b) reach further into the highest social norms and the most intimate love relations. Whichever level transgression plays itself out in, it is an overcoming of a prohibition and a crossing of boundaries. Moving from the fixed images in the unconscious past to the fluid narratives of the conscious present requires a marriage bed that is relational as well as narrativistic. (It is relational even if the couple does not know how to create narrative: The relational is more fundamental.) The point would be that, in the complex and trusting context of a good marital or otherwise intimate relationship, the bad superego-related images can be defeated with pleasure, originating from the excitement of reversing such deep inhibitions. Obviously, procuring and maintaining such experience demands imagination, attention, cultivation, care, willingness—in other words, love.

If we realize that internal prohibitions such as those just described can act as stimulants to excitement, curiosity, and endless passion, we can also understand why passion may not last in a couple when the superego, the prohibitor of exciting, oedipal transgressions, is successful and achieves permanent victory in intrapsychic economy. In such an eventuality, the thrill of transgression is forever gone out of the relationship; the superego has won. From being synonymous with our regulatory protection against dangerous thrills and excesses, the superego has become an agency of discipline-and-punish turned against excitements and unabashed curiosity that have now acquired the cast of inappropriateness and are thus out of reach.

After all, the Primal Sin of the primal couple was that of curiosity and transgression of prohibitions. The partners then have the (alas too frequently observed) feeling that it would be ridiculous, “childish,” “adolescent”—in short, inappropriate and shameful, to engage in romantic and passionate relations.

Complementing this picture (and this is another aspect of superego functioning), is a state of mind where all the partner’s “sins” are remembered and aggravations caused by him or her fanned and kept alive. Counting and remembering the other’s (projected or true) “sins” one will not let oneself sin with the other, sin *together* and enjoy the sweetness of sin and transgression. With time, the intoxicating sense of trespassing, and the recurrent magic of being enabled to do whatever one desires, with *nobody* stopping us from doing it, gradually vanishes. Romance becomes degraded as time goes on. Because unconscious superego functioning has taken over, tolerance for the transgression that enlivens romance and makes it so moving, also diminishes. Repudiated, stalemated aggression becomes haunting and self-perpetuating; it is now colored by deep fears of the other sex and envy of it. The tired, ungenerous, faded colors of married life, those that have inspired mountains of weary, cynical, or acrimonious writing against marriage, have come to reign.

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