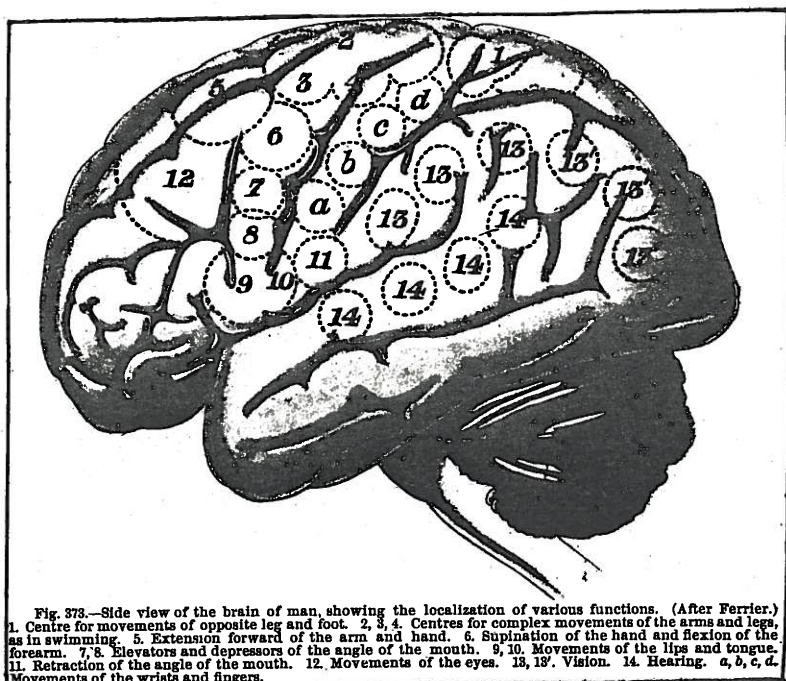


# Jealousy



The Heart Has Reasons  
Reason Must Understand

Isaac Cronin

## 1

Modern society is accelerating its own decline by encouraging the discovery and publicity of problems that it cannot solve, and in many ways is only capable of exacerbating. This is already a banality on the terrain of technological development where scientists are capable of measuring, with increasing accuracy, how much damage their latest anti-pollution corrective did to the environment.

## 2

On the terrain of personal relations, the spectacle strips away archaic institutions, values, and roles in a frenzied reflex of reform, forcing individuals to confront problems before it supplies them with the means to resolve the newly emergent contradictions which are lived out as the *unavoidable* bitterness, frustration, humiliation, tedium, and horror of individual experience. In shedding the old skin of the nuclear family, in attacking male supremacy, in criticizing the excesses of the couple, in encouraging the expression of "individual" desire, an increasing number of jealousy-producing situations are created, so many so that jealousy seems like one of the most epidemic forms of modern social disease.

## 3

For the modernist individual jealousy is frequently a source of *embarrassment*, displaying his out-of-date, old-world character, which he would like to hide as long as possible or at least until he has had a chance to develop an appearance of nonchalance. But jealousy is not a disease in itself. It is only that the organizers of desire (the sociologists, psychologists and other ideologues of personal relations) would like it to appear that way, to appear as a self-contained problem which can be defined in the language of this society—that is as one resolvable through *reform*. That would mean continuing the logic of the social experimentation of the last decade which saw *the* sexual problems as prudishness and monogamy and the remedy as looseness, and which sees the solution to jealousy as a kind of institutionalized *laissez-faire* or letting go attitude. (The Fourierist alternative to jealousy—increasing the availability of partners will supersede possessiveness—assumes the material base of jealousy to be scarcity. It continues the spectacle's quantitative logic at the same time as it minimizes the concrete relationship between sexual misery and the social question.) Jealousy is not a disease; it is a *symptom* of a qualitative lack, *the* qualitative lack, the lack of individuals capable of consciously

constructing their own daily lives without the domination of any external authority.

4

When the individual becomes intensely jealous, he\* is forced to admit that he is dependent on another for the affirmation of his individuality. In other words that his individuality belongs to another. This is what is possessed, this is what makes for possessiveness: the more one realizes that the other is responsible for one's "individuality", the more indispensable that person becomes. In jealousy one does not make the other into an object so much as she is made into the image of a subject, the necessary complement of the "subjectivity" of the jealous one. In jealousy the image is everything, practical truth is nothing. Jealousy is the realization of the spectacle of love, in which social relations are completely dominated by images. One projects onto the new "happy" couple an image of pleasure which is *total*, just as he maintained or tried to maintain in the first relationship a situation in which the obstacles to development were never concretely seized and attacked. The appearance of a third person makes the repression of the original repression, which was part of the invisible cement of the first relation, an active pastime. When he personifies the image of the happiness of his love in the third person, it only serves to make him more miserable without providing any practical alternatives to his misery. The more miserable he becomes, the more inevitable seems the enjoyment ascribed to the new pair and vice versa. This vicious cycle must be broken, but it requires seeing jealousy as a *necessary* result of the protection of existing social relations, and therefore demands that the individual attack the basis of his inadequacy at a moment when he feels most inadequate.

5

*Until 9:15 the being with whom you have lived for so long was endowed with unrivaled attributes and moral qualities; she was, to hear it from you, the embodiment of an ideal, like an angel who descended from the sky charged with the mission of keeping you company and rendering your earthly existence worthwhile. At 9:20 you have realized that this unique being, this extraordinary perfection of perfections, has slept with someone else—yesterday, or last week, or last month or six months ago. At 9:25, it took you five minutes to think things over, this perfection of perfections has been transformed into the most hideous monster the world has ever seen. Her presence has suddenly become completely odious and you have no other choice except to leave forever the place where you shared so much joy, but even more important, so much pain."*

—E. Armand, *The Sexual Revolution and Amorous Comradeship* (1934)

As in psychoanalysis, the jealous one feels that he is laid bare. His misery is public, objective, and makes him vulnerable. If he accepts this position of weakness, he will probably continue to subjectivize his misery, to see it as only his inadequacy, only his problem. Most likely he will: flaunt it; rationalize it in natural, biological or psycho-determinist terms; sublimate it in an orgy of work; or tear himself apart in a spree of self-negation. His only possible escape from the misery which has overwhelmed him is *consolation*, which is sought principally from his lover. The middle person in the triangle, in turn, often manifests a certain compassion for the suffering of the jealous one, respecting his "humanity" even though she regrets the unpleasant effects of misery's manipulations and melodramatics. This complicity remains loyal to the couple form, though it may come at the end of a particular couple, because it respects the traditional rules of love ("I understand, you don't have to have a reason for everything") which encourage putting misery in common. One of the first elements of this "love" which must come under critical attack is the constantly reoccurring cycle of "unfathomable" happiness and desperation, each of whose stages is blindly lived out and accepted as inevitable: as in many forms of commodified activity, each period of intense activity is followed by a dissolution of that arrangement, which is often unexpected or inexplicable. Unhappiness engenders a new search with the inevitable outcome. Through this pattern society terroristically imposes its sordid notion of social relations, using the threat of isolation whenever the comfort of the privatized relation proves insufficient to neutralize the dissatisfaction of individuals.

6

The "paranoia" of the jealous lover, in which he animates the material world which surrounds him so that every *thing* speaks to him of the happiness of the new couple and of his own misery, is not really such an irrational response to the miserable world of the commodity which is indeed "out to get him", to take him over and use him. The inadequacy of the "paranoia" of the jealous lover doesn't stem from the fact that it is too extreme, but that instead of illuminating the social dimension of his grief (which would mean, first of all, looking objectively at the second relation from which he is excluded) it disarms him as long as he sees a world hostile to *him alone*.

7

There are those individuals who can carry on without being dominated by jealousy, who feel no sense of loss or even discomfort when their



lover has a relation with another. For certain affluent strata this is a simple matter of having enough money to maintain a sufficient geographic separation between situations. A few arrive at such a position out of callousness or cynicism. The most visible advocates of the attack on jealousy are specialists of personal relations, often equipped with a basic critique of authoritarianism, who take the ultimate measure of the individual to be his ability to work out "human" interactions in a sick society. They are as determinist in seeing the role of the individual's personal history as any Freudian, but substitute an image of man as inherently good where traditional psychoanalysis sees a more ambiguous nature. The disappearance of each constraint is seen as radical-in-itself because it brings the individual that much closer to his hidden authentic self. Individual complicity in reigning values is reduced to a minimum ("I believe that I am never to blame for my jealous feelings. They arise spontaneously when my partner's actions combine with my own past painful experience; none of this is within my control right now, and no one is to blame." Sara Winter, *Issues in Radical Therapy*, Fall 1975), since recognition of this complicity would destroy the supportive communal atmosphere which is the *fantasized* antidote to the pressures of bourgeois individualism. Blinded by the positive accomplishments of "letting go", they become unwitting publicists for the spectacle which incorporates their achievements as a proof of its lack of rigidity.

8

The revolutionary does not escape the anguish of jealousy and rejection. If anything he experiences a greater subjective loss since for him love has provided the *appearance* of the reconciliation between revolt and daily life. Since "real pleasure is forbidden", we rebel when we experience it. Everyone in town would like to know our secret. So would we! Making love is the practice, the consequence of our theory. But what is our theory? The familiar feeling, that being in love makes everything seem possible, becomes inverted. Nothing is possible. He wants to break with the world, to give it up, because everything reminds him of his failure to transform himself and the society. He subjectivizes the world, though it feels like it is no longer his. Those enchanted places are now ghastly. History still exists, but it seems irrelevant unless it will redeem his lost love, either by making the other person see the error of her ways or by reducing her to stupidity. History becomes the justification of failure, whereas before it was like an old friend, bringing greater intimacy and depth to the amorous relation. If the revolutionary resigns himself to this loss, the very

notion of practical critique is undermined because an essential universal moment of daily life has escaped the domination of the individual and of his theory. (Theory itself becomes a joke as long as one can "understand" some alienated aspect of love and yet conduct oneself as if that comprehension did not exist.) The counter-revolution of daily life is still able to count love amongst its strongest allies.

9

*Hope always leads to the mystical expectation of an external solution.*

—Daniel Denevert

The hope that one can always find another lover, which is one possible consolation for the jealous lover, perpetuates the original jealousy-producing context by respecting the dominant notions of time and of the individual. The passive acceptance of the "healing power of time", which is derived principally from the society's ability to eventually produce an acceptable *equivalent* for the lost love, reduces one's amorous history to a series of interchangeable and therefore effectively timeless relations. The individual feels justified in suppressing the critical consciousness of his own practice because, if he has always failed *in the same way*, he will probably also succeed in a like manner. Love and jealousy tend to present non-supersession—which is nothing other than individual submission to the anti-historical, authoritarian logic of spectacular time—as inevitable and even therapeutic. A radical critique of daily life is not a guarantee of individual success in love, nor is it supposed to be. It only expresses, in a more concentrated and uncompromising manner than any ideology, that the positive development of the individual is inseparable from the negative movement of practical consciousness which seeks to destroy all forms of external authority.

10

When the individual is objectively, or feels that he is, being deserted by his lover, the shock and anguish that such a realization produces is frequently out of proportion to the actual loss. One of the reasons for this is that one despairs not only for oneself, but for the future of love in general. This link with generality which has always been one of love's greatest attractions—lovers are the most easily recognizable universal sub-population—is also one of its strongest defenses. The identification with the universal is both a compensation for, and an abstraction from, the individual's particular misery, which is really his only possible concrete starting point for a critique of the totality.

The fact that generality is the sole agent invested with the power to bestow humanity on the individual (which is what he most sorely lacks at such a moment of isolation) encourages him to minimize the importance of the contours of his own misery so that he will conform to the de-volatilized image of the wounded lover presented by the dominant society. The reform of love is possible as long as the question of its misery is not posed concretely.

11

Even if it is true that men often become more violently irrational because their pride leads them to feel a greater sense of loss, while women's maneuvers take more subtle, conscious forms, this is simply a confirmation and perpetuation of the dominant alienated modes of male and female comportment. In finding the means to attack *any* social problem one must supersede both the *impulsive* and *poorly informed aggressivity* of the man, and the unarmed sensitivity of the woman.

12

*It is because he cannot give an accurate account of the reason for his emotions that even the wisest man is fanatical on the subject of music.*

—Stendhal, *On Love*

I insist that irrationality is a moment of *reformism*, and that reformism is the practice of *adjusting to this world* as much as it is adjusting this world. That whether it takes the form of romantic love, madness, character, the fetish of artistic imagination or 24-hour-a-day somnambulism, it serves to maintain the individual in a state of isolated, hyper-conscious subjectivity seen as an acceptable end-in-itself. That this is a *conscious choice* made by the individual to avoid confronting the consequences of his own alienation and the society of alienation which he is a part of.

\* Despite the conventional usage, whenever "he" is used I also mean "she."

Isaac Cronin  
Box 5336  
Berkeley, CA 94705

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