The Scripted Romance: A Bourgeois Descent and the Ontology of Desire

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We are wont to regard love as a physiological instinct as natural as respiration, as if the acceleration of the heart were innately calibrated for a specific other. Yet, if we strip away the tender veneer of modern civilization and scrutinize the coarse texture of history, we are confronted with a somewhat chilling truth: "*Romantic Love*," in the modern sense, is likely a long-rehearsed cultural performance, a conceptual trickle-down from the privileged classes to the masses, a golden myth we collectively weave to withstand the banality of existence.

In the vast expanse of pre-modernity, the crushing weight of survival stifled the soil where "romance" might otherwise bloom. For the common masses, who toiled from sunrise to sunset, marriage was not a resonance of souls, but a merger of two families' economic capital. It was a contract of labor reproduction, a partnership forged to withstand famine and risk. In that era, save for a few fortunate souls, no one possessed the entitlement to terminate a relationship due to a "lack of passion" or "incompatibility." The iron law of survival overruled the logic of emotion; the anxiety of sustenance suffocated the imagination of the moonlit garden.

Love, for a vast stretch of history, was effectively the exclusive luxury of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. Only when one possessed the freedom from scarcity—the "leisure" extracted from the burden of heavy labor—did one have the surplus energy to gaze inward, to savor those subtle, labyrinthine fluctuations of the heart. Courtly literature, chivalric romances, and the later tides of Romanticism were, in their genesis, sophisticated games invented by the leisured class to fill a spiritual void. They established the legitimacy of "love at first sight," invented the aesthetic of "madness for love," and elevated individual sentiment above the collective interest of the clan. This extreme cherishing of "self-feeling" is, in itself, a manifestation of class privilege.

That this aristocratic privilege evolved into a universal faith for the proletariat is a

triumph of mass media. With the advent of the industrial age, the ubiquity of print, cinema, and television breached the walls of class, allowing bourgeois values to osmosis downwards through screen and page. Hollywood films, romance novels, and soap operas served as the world's most potent emotional instructors, codifying a precise and standardized "liturgy of love." Through the screen, we learned that a confession requires flowers and specific lighting; we learned that a passionate embrace after a quarrel is the signifier of reconciliation; we subconsciously accepted that love must encompass exclusivity, eternal promise, and the concept of the "soulmate." Mass media transmuted love from a scarce aristocratic experience into a reproducible, standardized commodity. Ordinary people began to clumsily mimic the protagonists of the silver screen, reenacting tropes meticulously designed by scriptwriters. This mimicry is so profound that we can no longer distinguish which part is the genuine throb of the blood, and which is merely a conditioned reflex to cultural symbols.

Yet, a more fundamental inquiry arises: Even if love is a construct, why does humanity cling to "Eros" with such desperation, elevating it above the blood-ties of kinship and the rationality of friendship? Why do we feel fettered by parental care, and insufficient in the company of friends, yet pin our entire hope for salvation upon a stranger named "The Beloved"?

Perhaps it is because, in a disenchanted modern world where God is dead, love has become the sole "secular religion." Kinship is an a priori given; though warm, it carries the weight of blood obligation and hierarchical power—we are passive recipients in the realm of family. Friendship is a rational contract based on shared interests; though equal, it often lacks that trembling, exclusive possessiveness. Only romantic love offers a dazzling sense of "election." In the teeming sea of humanity, two individuals act as mirrors for one another, proclaiming the other to be "unique" and "irreplaceable." This exclusive selection profoundly satiates the modern individual's precarious sense of self-worth. We crave love not merely for companionship, but because we crave to be the "God" in another's eyes. To a friend, you may be interesting; to a parent, you may be important; but to a lover, you are absolute. This "ontological security" derived from being loved is something neither kinship nor friendship can provide. We are addicted to the vertigo of love, for in that moment, we seem to escape our mundane flesh and touch a fleeting, transcendental eternity.

Since modern love is a product spawned by leisure, constructed by media, and nourished by our own narcissism, what remains of its essence when the sociological veil falls? When we trace it back to its philosophical roots, the answers are as fragmented as they are profound.

Plato, in the *Symposium*, speaks through Aristophanes of the spherical beings, sug-

gesting that the essence of love is merely "lack"—an ontological impulse to find our severed half and restore a primitive wholeness. Schopenhauer tears off the mask more ruthlessly, identifying love as the ruse of the "Will of the Species"—a biochemical swindle of dopamine and oxytocin designed for gene propagation, where we believe we pursue happiness but serve only as puppets of reproduction. And for the existentialist Sartre, love is a war destined for failure, a futile attempt by two free subjects to capture the other's freedom; we desire to possess the other, yet in possessing them, we extinguish the very light of freedom that attracted us.

Yet, even so—even if we see through the class origins of love, penetrate the false rituals shaped by media, and understand the biological trickery and philosophical void behind it—we still crave it like moths to a flame. In an increasingly atomized society, the individual hangs suspended in a void of loneliness so unbearable that Fromm described it as the terror of "separateness." Love, even a constructed one, remains our ultimate attempt to breach the walls of the self and establish a deep connection with the "Other."

To acknowledge the nature of love does not mean we must cynically renounce it. Just as currency and language are social constructs, we rely on them to survive. The value of seeing through the script lies in obtaining a lucid freedom. It allows us to no longer anxiously chase the "romantic metrics" manufactured by a commercial society, nor to doubt ourselves for lacking cinematic plot twists. It enables us to distinguish between the social roles we are forced to play, and that faint, trembling glimmer that belongs truly to us, ignited when two souls meet in the wilderness of existence to ward off the encroaching cold.