



Love, Madness and Transformation

Paper presented to the AHPb Annual Conference, London, Saturday 30 June 2018

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After I was approached to speak here today I began pondering on the given subject. And I got into my head that it was passion, madness and transformation, and 'passion' suggested an intensity that I associate with the notion of madness as well as transformation – both compelling movements into the as-yet-unknown – and an unknown of a radical order. We are not in control of that into which we are unfolding. We are likely to be bereft of choice. This essentially human capacity will be severely compromised. But most crucial is the choice to surrender to the unknown (as opposed to feeling overtaken by it). And then I began to feel uneasy, and checked what I had actually been asked to address. And of course it was "Love, Madness and Transformation". Surrender can be a profoundly creative act, especially if emanating from love, empowering it as an act of choice.

A sudden sense of expansion, of spaciousness, arose in me. The subject of exploration was indeed transformed. And love, in itself, is transformational. Although it does indeed include passion, it has potency and profundity of a different order. It can engender illumination – more comprehensive, inclusive, subtle and transcendent than any other energy that we experience as arising from within us and through us. Love is a sublime exchange and circulation of energy directly experienced by humankind.

Love is our greatest gift and our greatest challenge – both the giving and receiving of it. The most ineffable of all states of being, for it never dies. We don't stop actively loving someone after they die. If it is indeed love, we discover that it cannot die. Death offers its own vibrancy. Love for another is not diminished by death, for love emanates from soul and is inborn in each of us. It moves within us and beyond us. Maybe blocked or imprisoned or twisted by our woundedness. For the existence of both light and darkness leads to paradox – the stuff of tragedy – just as the violent can be profoundly tender. And the truly kind can also manipulate and act out with a twist of cruelty when their wounds are ignited.

Many years ago I was working with some people who had a problem with violence. I caught a fleeting loving look of tenderness in the face of a man, and sensed an impulse in his body to reach towards a woman in her distress. And then a sudden switch – a tightening contraction of the body and a harsh angry dismissive tone and gesture followed. When I shared what I experienced of the interaction he was confused, and then began to weep. He had assumed rejection – an early wounding had stirred. Being recognized can be both terrifying and healing. It leaves us open and vulnerable. Dare we trust the as-yet unknown? The undreamt of possibility? Familiar agony can seem an easier path – survivable. It takes enormous courage to be vulnerable, and even more courage to dare risk love.

But so worth it. And worth contemplating on the fact that the light of love – especially when nourished by awareness of spirit and soul – is more potent than the power of darkness, though we flounder if we refuse to acknowledge darkness, and that it does indeed have archetypal power. Power that can fascinate us conscious beings if we evade integration of all aspects of our being, however unpalatable some of these may be. Or the fragmented ones, inviting madness, who know of spirit and disdain the ordinary. The centre cannot hold. Not once we give way to fascination, or active exploration of, or with, the dark, without being grounded, and having lost access to the seed of love tucked away in the underground of the psyche.

We have entered the terrain of madness. The fragmented personality certainly becomes a candidate. But is there some resonance between love and madness? Easier of course to relate madness with passion (and passion is *an aspect* of love). But what about those powerful feelings that cannot find acceptable expression? Or drive a person beyond that which they can process, integrate or understand – provoking a sense of being tossed around on a sea of confusion – the imagination run wild? Love undermined by old insecurities, perhaps – igniting distrust and jealousy, as with Othello. Not aided by Desdemona's

youth and contained overprotected early life. Wisdom not yet available. One of the stumbling blocks of many early romantic relationships.

I see love as our essence. It calls us home to the centre and depth of our being – back to the rich, resilient dynamism emanating from the heart. There is no other expression of our humanity that can contend as its equal in potency and range, for love draws from, and is nourished by, spirit, soul, mind and body – expressed through inspiration, intuition, imagination, even if notions of spirit or soul, let alone those of divinity, are not consciously claimed as such. I know this from my atheist days. We can't understand the transcendent, but we can participate in it. And it transforms us.

I could never have lived the unimagined and sometimes extreme challenges of my love relationships, along with the day-to-day repetitive trivial demands of family life, without intuitively accessing the multi-dimensional source of love itself. If I had relied on romance and passion of which I have plenty (many can find my intensity too much), I simply could not have lived the life that I have lived. And I wouldn't have missed living this life for the world.

However, as a child I thought being a human being was a most puzzling and appalling state. Born in South Africa in the mid-thirties – a time of a frozen awareness, of all races, before any signs of unease, concern, questioning, let alone action, were evident in my environment – I came to the alarming conclusion that grown-ups – including my parents with whom I had minimal interaction – grown-ups, it seemed, didn't know *anything* – simply didn't know how to be. And the trouble was, neither did I – however hard I thought and thought.

Going to school solved nothing. Radical unawareness again prevailed. Madness of a kind. Transformation frozen. I felt too different to socialize, and as I thought teachers, like all grown-ups, didn't know anything, I didn't listen much to anything they said. I stuck with my own ponderings, trying desperately to make sense of things. And then after two girls began giggling and pointing at me, saying I was mad when they caught me walking up and down in the playground talking to myself, it dawned on me that although I knew I wasn't mad, others, and especially doctor-type adults, definitely would think so and would tell my parents it was so, and after a time I'd be sent away somewhere – shut away on my own – in utter isolation until, eventually, I'd become mad and there would be no return. Like a ship going out and out and out into the ocean – into the mist. There is a powerful link between isolation and madness, and I know that could indeed have happened to me. How many people are at the mercy of having a different mode or range of consciousness, or more extensive imagination, than those in authority – or even caring parents who simply can't handle children very different from themselves? In this case there could, in a certain matrix of circumstances, be some connection between intention to love and madness and transformation. Transformation of mental states that morph

into modes of behaviour that lead to ever greater isolation – and madness settles in.

And so we have well and truly landed in the terrain of madness. For some – the fragmented personality, with no sound core of self as a reference point, nor integration of personality and ego. The fragmented personality certainly becomes a candidate. Difficult to find meaningful direction in life. Have clear goals. Discern the character of others.

I was fortunate in that respect because I had an inner receptor from another level of my being – what I came to call my 'knowings'. I've had them all my life from as far back as I can remember. They not only kept me sane as a child, but they later became the source of transformative expansion, sometimes emerging from most unexpected and unpromising beginnings. But would they have survived radical isolation? Especially if there was no one available to love.

I believe that it is love that can redeem us from madness – which holds us sane in times of tragedy and profound distress – tempers our intensity if it overwhelms the loved one; while passion, in itself, can isolate us from a loved one – blind us to their needs – feed a need to possess them. But love calls us home to the centre and depth of our being – back to the rich, resilient dynamism emanating from the heart and nourished by soul.

So although the passion of romance can instigate and draw us into an intimate relationship, it cannot alone sustain it. Furthermore, it can actively destabilize one, leading to rash actions like spending money on the beloved that we haven't got – even finding oneself shoplifting that expensive bottle of wine to impress the beloved. All justified by our ardour and consequences ignored and waved aside. Deceit can so easily slip in – such a separator – sneaking poems from the internet extolling your love, blanking out the possibility of being found out, and the agony of being shamed, and the relationship blighted, moving further and further away from one's core where love abides.

Shame casts an immediate veil over any kind of connection and thus over love itself. We shrink. It has nothing to do with its liberation – humility. What a sad descent in the name of love. All through grasping at further expressions of specialness. A brand of madness not usually included in categories of mental illness. Madness given a very different press in our society – a different status.

And what an irony that it is isolation that results, not just after but during that ecstatic sense of blissful union with the other. So painful and diminishing after so much promise. This is the real tragedy. When we genuinely believe we are seeking love – a profound longing arising from the very heart of our being – while often travelling further and further from being real. A dislocation from truth, a form of intoxication, alienating us from ourself and thus of course from our beloved. Love is crippled without its

helpmate, truth.

Romance, itself, can become an addiction – a pull to serial bubbles of intoxication – drunk with love – avoiding the challenges love entails that necessarily involve the whole of who we each are. Grasping instead at further expressions of specialness – an infantile notion of love. A brand of madness not usually included in categories of mental instability, even if someone is a serial romance seeker. It has struck me that romance is a form of regression that mirrors our original state of merging with mother.

However, it would be a pity to miss out on the delicious experience of falling in love, even if it does have a touch of madness. An instability of an attractive order. Also it may deepen into the multi-textured richness and profound challenges that love offers, demands and calls forth in us. Or it may turn into a valuable friendship. But love is another order of being. It cannot but be profoundly transformative, even radically transformational.

With love, ego finds its natural place, but never leads – or not for long! It is too insubstantial. There is joy in that ‘special other’ rather than a compulsive need to have one’s own specialness confirmed. And of course joy in experiencing our own expression of love, which has a lot to do with who we are in our own uniqueness of being. A loving relationship with yourself is indeed a gift to the loved one. Inflations of ego can never satisfy – only being loved for who we are with all our known, and yet to be revealed, shortcomings and annoying habits. When intoxication with undiscerning affirmations begins to wane – then love has to begin its long and wonderful and exacting journey. It alone has the depth and resilience, courage and resourcefulness, the humility and insight born of commitment to truth.

The interesting thing about love is that it is beyond dualism. So for some it could at times appear mad, or be judged as destabilizing, because it may involve much that lies beyond what can be known by reason and the logic of the mind. It is beyond dualism and therefore has no opposite.

Anger is a popular anti-love candidate for this position, and because its forbidden status so easily slides into some mode of control of the other, love is thereby suspended. Control of another and love are incompatible. Momentary surges of hate are even more quickly disowned or diverted, as having nothing to do with love for another. And so often I have heard people assume that love involves not loving yourself, always putting the other person first without discernment of one’s own needs or concern for one’s integrity. Such a belief so distorts and undermines a loving relationship. Love, which dares to feel whatever we happen to feel, about ourselves or a loved one (even if, at times, remaining in a private journal) – love is beyond dualism and opens up a different level of consciousness, for it embraces all aspects of our being, expands our range of

experience and can awaken what lies dormant in us. It gives us the resilience to allow repressed material to emerge – as is likely to be the case, especially in a long-term committed relationship, whether friendship or partner. The resilience, trust and humility to face what once had to be pushed aside, in our earlier years, we are now ready to access, and willing to seek help with its integration.

One cannot love and not be vulnerable. Vulnerable, but rooted in oneself – one’s truth at that moment – and willing to keep unfolding as that reality further reveals itself. Many resonances here with what can emerge during the process of a residential therapy group, especially if some movement or meditation is included. And that is how I came, over time, to experience my intimate committed relationships. Stretched way beyond what I imagined would be required of me, only to discover that love itself can stretch, too – expand – and thus enable the living of undreamt-of pain, shock, fury and challenge. And such joy – delightful surprises and gifts from others and an ever-deepening response/communion with the other – as well as with nature, beauty, music, art, all the fruits of our creativity, and the creativity of one’s fellow human beings.

Love expands all aspects of who we are. Like breathing in – standing in one’s own uniqueness in the presence of the beloved – then letting go, breathing out, to meet in the fullness of union, so as to separate out again in one’s uniqueness, enabling the act of taking responsibility for one’s choices. The art of communication grows. Expressing oneself, and then letting go one’s position so as to listen with full attention to the other. How it is for them and then returning inward to experience where one now stands. And a fresh interaction unfolds. Love calls us to be vulnerable, flexible and strong. And enriched beyond measure, however much is also taken away. Love and transformation are inseparable.

I believe love is inborn in us. May we listen to that heartbeat at the core of our being. Yes, I believe love is inborn in us. I cannot otherwise account for how those I have known and worked with, who were grossly and appallingly abused by their parents, or were at the mercy of drastically ignorant and inept parenting, still clearly exhibit, in their lives, an extraordinary capacity to love. So potent is love as an energy that its blockage can indeed have devastating results; but these distortions can also be circumvented or released by work with a trusted therapist or the love of another at a later date.

Yes, I believe it is inborn. I myself, in spite of minimal parenting or meaningful interaction with my parents, had the direct experience, when alone in the garden, at about the age of five or six, of knowing that whether I was loved or not, that I could love. I could feel it in the core of my being, and my heart lifted. I chose to love my mother and set about forging a relationship with her. And it transformed my life. And hers. She responded – in her own way, of course. And needing to be accepted as who *she* was. It saved me from the misery of isolation.

So potent is love as an energy that its blockages can indeed have devastating results, but these can also be circumvented or released by the love of another, or a good therapist, or both, at a later date. She'd told me earlier that she didn't think babies were conscious, or that children were individuals, but she came to change her mind. So I understood the power of love, and that it is, indeed, transformative. Love isn't seeded from parents only nourished or tended or neglected by them. And it can also be discovered, encountered, tended and encouraged to flourish at any future point in life. Just as the myriad array and variety of plants in the gardens of the world find space or soil enough to flourish and flower in their own unique beauty.

Is love that pearl of great price? Love which embraces both self and the other at equal depth and commitment to

authenticity. In its focus on truth, in its richness, resilience and potency, is not love the pearl of great price (and especially if not hidden underground by our woundings); is it not the pearl beyond price? May it not be left in that field as we pass by.

Jill Hall was born in South Africa into an environment of extreme inequality and oppression, moving to London in her late teens and working as an actress until becoming a mother and philosophy student. Attracted to the arena of self-development in early Humanistic Psychology days, she tutored at the Institute of Biodynamic Psychology, and now runs weekend residential groups in Norwich. A guest lecturer for various professional bodies and universities, Jill is the author of *The Reluctant Adult: An Exploration of Choice* (Prism Press, 1993).