

Does True Love Exist?

Forgive me for asking such a silly and important question. But it is a serious question, one that must be asked, and no better question can be asked that calls for an answer more lighthearted than this one.

The hardest task when dealing with difficult questions is deciding where to start. What or who or where is love, what does it do, what makes it true? Who can I talk to love about? I need an interlocutor. Send the girls away – they'll only interrupt the flow of my thoughts and sway my choice of words. Let me talk to my brothers.

I confess to my friend: I like your sibling. But as you and I know, we are young men, and *since love in young men is, for the most part, nothing but appetite, which, having pleasure as its ultimate goal, ends when that goal is achieved*¹ I am sure you can't be very happy about my partiality. I won't lie to you. I am not so naïve and young as to say that what I feel is true love, that she is my soulmate, my other half, and that all I want in this world is to be bound together with her for eternity. You and I are past that age of idealistic romanticism, we have both had our hearts broken before, we no longer have the capacity to feel all a flutter in the face of our beloved. We love now just like we thirst and we hunger. Our desires are carnal at heart, we seek only the intimacy of sex, and whatever fancies of fealty our minds imagine in the absence of satisfaction are quickly forgotten in its achievement. Forgive me for being so blunt with you and look past this poor sentiment and weak offering of mine, but it is my only avenue into the discussion. I turn to you sincerely now and ask – what do you advise, dear friend of mine?

¹ Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Translated by Edith Grossman. First Part, Chapter XXIV.

My friend looks at me and says: In reality, friend, our love for each other is unrivalled and of the purest kind. If we could be united, we would have cause to laugh at this silly but serious question, but as it stands God has ordained that we only love each other in spirit and not in body.

I raise my hands up to the sky: If only we were of that other sort!

My friend says: So be it. Now let me ask you, why is it that you find her so appealing?

I think for a moment: Well, of course, it is because she is beautiful, and it is in my nature, being young and healthy and full of vigour, to desire beautiful things. And of course, you being my friend, and our love as you so rightly put it being so pure and good, it would not be right of me to simply satisfy this urge without your consent.

My friend says: Yet you desire her only so long as you do not have her. If you were to have her, would your thirst be quenched? Do not tell me you only want to be enveloped in her warmth for a night, as though you imagine her body to offer any new pleasures you have not already tasted in that host of consorts you have so famously enjoyed?

I say: You are too kind friend. But yes, as you grant me, I am sufficiently educated and cultured in that regard. My desire for her body is not for a particular feature, but for the signification she has as being your sibling. I could not enjoy her for a night and leave. Our families are too close, our destinies intertwined. I cannot play the rake in this situation and expect to escape through the grillework of her ventana unscathed and indifferent to the threat of retribution.

My friend responds: Well there you have it. You desire her not only for a moment but for eternity, for you know our love could not persist if you were to ever wrong her, and no greater calamity could ever befall either of us. I tell you now you can sleep with her so long as your promise to marry her. In this way our love will persist, and we will each have cause to remain together. This matrimony encapsulates

the true love you seek, because it combines every aspect of that emotion that gives meaning to human life. Firstly, it will cement our platonic relationship. Secondly, it will satisfy your animalistic desires. Thirdly, it will be a love that persists beyond the confines of a night and into eternity. And finally, it is a love that goes beyond the individuals involved, because through it our families and the products of it will be greatly improved, for its children and its children's children will be educated and favoured by the foundation we have so painstakingly set.

I am overwhelmed with joy: Friend, your mind is more beautiful and appealing than any body you could ever offer me. I am glad we have had this discussion, for it has awakened a new understanding in my own. I see now that love, *true love*, is a compound substance. Love can only be regarded as true when it fully captures our human nature. And that is to capture both our animalistic and rationalistic sides, our hunger and our work. Formulated, it would read: *Love = Desire + Responsibility*. I accept your offer of matrimony and wait delighted for the boon. For as you know I am very hungry, and my appetite is large, and I have had an eye on that particular sibling ever since we were pre-pubescent, and now that everything is coming to fruition in such a mutually beneficial and socially rewarding way I am already experiencing the rush of emotion that accompanies such thoughts, so without delay we ought to put this plan into action, before I set my gaze upon you and do what God has willed we don't.

We embrace