THE STRUCTURE OF JEALOUSY

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Unforgettable is the work of Edvard Munch titled "Jealousy." We see a disembodied face in the foreground whose physiognomy is twisted in a miserable countenance. The face seems to come out of nowhere, but in the background we see the reason for the suffering. There are a man and a woman oblivious to any aspects of the world but themselves, and their postures accentuate that the central figure has been left out of their behavior. Munch did the picture several times, but the central arrangement of the three personages remained the same. Since 1895, when the first picture of this title was exhibited, viewers have continued to feel the tension of the back and forth attention which must be given to the one figure, then to the group of two, and back to the single figure again. There is no rest, nor is it possible to identify completely with one or the other.

Painting is, of course, not the only art to present the passion of jealousy vividly. In Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and D. H. Lawrence, the theme of jealousy is pursued with relentless intensity. Shakespeare wrote the drama of jealousy about Othello and his unfortunate marriage to the fair Desdemona. In a broader sense, all of Shakespeare's major tragedies can be viewed as revolving around a theme of jealousy. Hamlet is jealously possessive of his mother, King Lear of his position, Macbeth of his ambitions. Ibsen has considered in detail the repercussions of the resulting conflicts when one character feels that another is encroaching upon his/her territory. He or she, mostly she, jealously guards her prerogatives and uses various weapons, real, verbal, or symbols, to oppose the adversary. In Strindberg the central character, he or she, mostly he is jealous of a real or imaginary rival.

Manifestations of jealousy are usually best seen as exemplified in erotic possessiveness. The same phenomena may, however, be just as clearly seen in aggressions connected with territoriality or in the serious competitiveness of business. It is also to be seen as an aspect of ambition in society or politics, and its playful features show themselves in the gamesmenship found within formal or organized sport. Indeed, one may be inclined to say that the emotion of jealousy is so varied that there is no common core meaning. It is the contention of this paper that despite the great variety of content that there is a recognizable and abiding structure to all these examples.

A part of the confusion concerning jealousy is its being interchanged with other emotions, such as envy, resentment, spite, or hatred. It seems most often to be confused with envy. One is said to be envious of his rival

for the affection or attention of another person. That person who is envious is also said to be jealous of the one he envies. But these two should be kept separate. As Georg Simmel puts it, "where it is a matter of attaining, we . . . speak of envy, where of keeping, of jealousy." He further says that it is possible to keep "the psychological, sociological processes . . . clearly distinguished."[1]

There are also other feelings akin to but not the same as jealousy. Resentment is based on the feeling one has toward an intruder who enters the situation where one does not feel he belongs. One is not necessarily jealous of a person to whom he feels so superior that he only shows contempt. One may also resent a situation which makes him feel uncomfortable. Spite is an emotion whose aim is the lasting embarrassment of a group or individual. One may be spiteful because he is jealous or envious, but in most cases spite is an autonomous emotion with no rewards other than the feeling itself. The spiteful person tries to capture the attention of a lover, not because he values the lover, or thinks he has a right to the lover's solicitation, but just to see if it can be done. Spite is malicious because it has no reason for being, whereas jealousy may have. Hatred is the adverse emotion one feels toward a person, characteristic, or situation which one thinks should not be in the first place or it it does exist, should be obliterated or modified. One is not jealous of the hated object since it is not something which he can acknowledge with a right to be as his own possession. One cannot be jealous of something to which no one has a right, but he can hate it.

The structure of jealousy proper consists of four features. (1) It is a tripartite relationship involving a subject, an object, and a third person for whom one is jealous. (2) It entails a peculiar arrangement of equality and unequality. (3) The progress of jealousy proceeds from an empty self confronting a completely worthy object and the fully developed rival to a position where the object becomes questionable and the rival degraded. (4) This progress is both facilitated and hindered by a specific kind of reflection.

Jealousy may be defined as a passion which comes to the individual from without. It is not something voluntarily chosen. Nor is it something for which, in the beginning at least, one can take full responsibility. The person may control the intensity of his response to the jealous situation, but he would be insensitive not to have any response at all. The situation in the triangular arrangement is such that he who is jealous thinks that someone is competing for the attention, the affection, or the sexual favors of one who, according to tradition, rights, or morality, should bestow them upon him. He thinks the intruder is attempting to acquire openly or by stealth what rightfully belongs to him. In the first stages, at least, the individual experiences hatred for the intruder and protectiveness toward the one for whom

he is jealous. Jealousy seems in all cases to consist of three parts or aspects: (1) a victim who is jealous; (2) a worthy but neutral objective about whom he is jealous; (3) the perpetrator of the moral imbalance between expectation and reward.

The relation of the victimized subject of jealousy to his rival is a complex one. He must take the rival seriously, otherwise there would be no justification for jealousy. His contempt, therefore, is always for someone who is co-equal with himself in need, ability, and skill. The rival is on a parity with the subject in that he at least has had the good taste to appreciate what is really desirable. Unless the rival is competing merely out of spite he appreciates along with the victim the goal which they are both seeking. The jealous person must also acknowledge, however begrudgingly, that his rival may be in some ways superior to himself. If he were sure that he were the "better man," he would not fear his rival and thus respond to possible defeat; but without this fear he would not be jealous. Only the insecure are jealous in that they feel threatened by their rival. The one area in which the jealous victim feels superior to his adversary is that he always accepts his superior worth as a person. When this is absent the emotion he undergoes would not be jealousy, but merely competition. If the rival deserves the prize as much as the victim then to feel jealous is petty or silly.

The attitude of the jealous person toward that person about whom he is jealous is also ambiguous. In the conventional love triangle, he must think that she is a worthy objective who merits sacrifice, inconvenience, and suffering. If this is lacking then the jealous one simply retreats from the situation, laughingly acknowledging that the prize is not worth the trouble. If the jealous person feels he wants to protect the objective only because it belongs to him, then his jealousy becomes unconvincing because it loses its moral quality. In jealousy, from the beginning there may be some suspicion of the objective. In erotic jealousy she must bear a part of the responsibility for creating the situation. It was she who beckoned, invited, or even demanded the attentions of the rival. In the jealous occasion there is no complete innocence. The attitude of the jealous individual toward himself is also never clearcut. The jealous person alternates between the pride of thinking that he is right and the other is wrong, and the humble inferior feeling that he is being victimized and can do little about it. These two contradictory attitudes are never completely resolved and as long as he is jealous he feels this contradiction acutely.

Jealousy is not a static emotion. The dynamics of the triad are in continuous disequilibrium. The situation moves from a state where the individual feels completely threatened to a state in which he thinks he has become master. In extreme cases, the resolution is the violent elimination of the rival by murder. In any case, there is a movement from respect for the rival to one where he denigrated. If the rival is not degraded in power he is

at least degraded in moral worth because the longer the jealous situation continues the more blame is heaped upon the rival for his intrusion. If the jealous person should lose the battle for his objective, jealousy is replaced by melancholy or depression. Jealousy seems to have its own cut-off point beyond which he who is jealous cannot go. This is why in many cases, over a long period, the jealous emotion culminates in either suicide or permanent depression.

During the course of development of a jealous trauma the attitude of the jealous person toward his objective is inevitably changed. His initial feeling that she is completely worthy is gradually replaced by suspicions that her innocence is a pose or hypocritical. At the outset "the outsider" is blamed completely for bringing on the threatening situation. Later on, however, the person about whom one is jealous is thought to be in various degrees of compliance. Her moral status suffers in consequence. When the jealous person reaches this point, he is likely in retrospect to "see" examples of flirtation and coquetry in what he formerly took to be innocent communication and cuteness. From this point forward the jealousy turns into a kind of wish to dominate. Incidents are used as a means to club the loved one into constant submission. It is almost that the subject has turned his jealousy into something completely different from what it was originally. In the few instances where a jealous sequence of events has a happy ending and the rival is routed, the victory is always precarious. The jealous individual continues to be afraid that a new rival will appear on the scene and the entire situation will be repeated. Since he now has a tarnished image of she whom he loves, a secondary inadequacy as to the ability to handle the next situation is likely to occur. In some cases, however, the jealous person may actually seek out situations to test his new-found confidence. He may push his beloved and himself into a position where jealousy will again be aroused. Occasionally this becomes a pattern whose strategy is continuously to prove one's worth.

There are some emotions, such as anger, fear, and depression, which are modified or alleviated by reflection. Jealousy is not one of these. To think about why one is jealous, whether the emotion is rationally justified, how other people are also jealous, and other possible formulas to lessen jealousies are in most cases futile. Reflection, whether introspective, scientific, or phenomenological, seems to feed the intensity of the jealous experience rather than assuage it. Throughout its course, jealousy pivots around possibilities, and since thinking raises ever new possibilities, it cannot be effective in stopping the jealousy. There also seems to be little likelihood of learning from past experiences of jealousy. Even with similarities of situations one is limited in anticipation or prediction of the sequence of the jealous experience. Jealousy is not future-oriented, but is rooted in the present which the jealous person thinks will last indefinitely. There is also

little point in thinking back to a past before the onset of jealousy since the emotion has been thrust upon one and there is nothing to be done to ward it off or prevent it. Even where one has mastered the phenomenological structure of jealousy, this seldom means that he has been innoculated against it. Where jealousy appears, it will emerge in all its destructiveness to the philosopher as well as to the man of action.

A pertinent illustration of the structure of jealousy can be seen in incidents from the life and thought of Friedrich Nietzsche. In a few short paragraphs one can only hint at the complexity of Nietzsche's involvement with jealousy, but perhaps enough can be given to indicate how the profile outlined above was manifested. There are a number of advantages to using a historical figure for this purpose rather than a fictional one. If one were to choose a character from, for example, *She Came to Stay* by Simone de Beauvoir, it would be necessary to consider the arguments of Madame de Beauvoir on all sorts of issues besides jealousy. There would have to be a discussion of her views of human relations, literary criticism, and metaphysics. A similar broad discussion may be avoided if one simply considers Nietzsche's relations with Lou Salome and Paul Ree. The distance in time from these incidents also helps to weed out extraneous details so that only the essence of jealousy as it appears in this triad shows itself. There is much material from Nietzsche himself, from Ree, and from Lou Salome concerning the relations of these three. There are also many interpretations, some trustworthy, some not so reliable, about this situation.

Almost everyone in philosophy knows the story. Nietzsche, a lonely philosopher, remained free of intense human relationships particularly with women. His early Dionysian speculations were based solely upon imagination. In his thirty-eighth year, he met the Russian of German extraction, Louise Von Salome. At that time she was already involved with his friend Paul Ree. Ree suggested the possibility of the three of them living together in a common household. Even before Nietzsche met Lou he seems to have convinced himself that their destinies were joined. He was as yet not clear, however, as to whether this would involve Ree permanently. Gradually, when the three were together, Nietzsche began to think of Lou as a prize to be won and Ree as someone standing in the way of this winning. In her memoirs, Lou indicates that Nietzsche made at least two marriage proposals to her. In the first one he had even asked Ree to serve as an intermediary. Although the three referred to their relationship as "the Holy Trinity," it soon became apparent that it was the usual triad which produces jealousy.

Nietzsche's jealousy of Ree seems to have been reciprocated by the latter. Ree actually believed, or convinced Lou that he believed, that Nietzsche was interested in Lou's money and that before or after marriage Nietzsche would probably rape her. For his part, Nietzsche, encouraged by his sister Elizabeth, became suspicious of Ree and eventually Lou. He came to think

that both were out to degrade him by using him philosophically as well as personally. From a letter to his friend Franz Overbeck, one can see Nietzsche's initial reverence for Lou. He says, "my talks with Lou were the most profitable occupation I had all summer. Our tastes and minds are deeply akin and yet there are so many differences that we are the most instructive object and subject for mutual observation."[2] He further confided in Overbeck that he "hated his sister who for a year now has cheated me out of my greatest self-conquest by talking at the wrong time and being silent at the wrong time, so that in the end I am the victim of her merciless desire for vengeance."[3] Eventually, however, he came to see Lou as an objective unworthy of his attention. After her fall in his estimation, Nietzsche indicates she suffered from "sexual atrophy."[4] As for Ree, Nietzsche went from almost unconditional admiration to contempt and disparagement. He was tormented by the thought that their friendship had been betrayed by Ree in that the latter, in love with Lou himself, ridiculed Nietzsche's philosophy, and in other ways turned Lou against him. Nietzsche wanted to challenge Ree to a duel. He thought his cause a righteous one and that he would be vindicated by this duel as well as other types of confrontation. His need for a direct encounter with his rival to win Lou for himself was, however, frustrated. Ree had triumphed, at least for the next few years in which he and Lou lived together, and Nietzsche was left to his writing of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra,* in which he supposedly catharsized his jealousy and its defeat.

From this narrative one can see the structure of jealousy. Although I shall consider this exclusively from Nietzsche's point of view, an equally interesting account could be given from the point of view of either Lou Salome or Paul Ree. Despite his combativeness, Nietzsche did not seek out the jealousy in this situation. It found him and he measured himself, directly and as the disguised Zarathustra, in the way in which he responded to it. He even warned both Lou and Ree about this response. "My dears Lou and Ree, do not worry too much about the outbreaks of my paranoia, of my hurt vanity. Even if perchance in some fit of despondency I should take my own life, there would not be much cause for mourning. . . . Please friend Ree ask Lou to forgive everything. . . . It is much harder to forgive one's friends than one's enemies."[5] Nietzsche felt victimized by everybody including himself. He thought jealousy was a weakness, but he could not prevent it nor did he seem to be able to relieve its intensity. Only in his writing of *Zarathustra* in 1883 was there some relief. When Munch first did his many pictures of jealousy in the mid-nineties, he captured the full significance of the jealousy triad. In 1906, when he did two portraits of Nietzsche as well as Elizabeth Forster-Nietzsche, the head of Nietzsche could be inserted in the previous pictures of jealousy without loss of effect.

NOTES

1. George Simmel, *Conflict and the Web of Group Affiliations* (Free Press of Glencoe, 1955), p. 50.
2. Freely quoted. Letter to Overbeck, 1882, taken from Rudolph Binion, *Frau Lou* (Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 81.
3. Binion, p. 109.
4. H. F. Peters, *My Sister, My Spouse* (Norton & Co., 1962), p. 141.
5. Peters, p. 137.