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Review Essay

Attachment and Eros: Opposed or Synergistic?

Virginia Goldner, Ph.D.

Can Love Last? The Fate of Romance Over Time by Stephen A. Mitchell (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2002, 224 pp.)

In *Can Love Last*, Stephen Mitchell deconstructed the resistances—personal, metapsychological, and cultural—to sustaining vibrant and intimate sexual relationships over the long haul. This discussion is concerned with the way in which Mitchell's emphasis on risk shortchanged the importance of safety in long-term romantic passion. By showing how security and dependency needs can fuel rather than dampen eros, the author proposes an alternative thesis.

Where they love, they cannot desire; where they desire, they cannot love.

—Sigmund Freud

It is helpful to postulate the existence for the . . . child of two mothers—shall I call them the object-mother and the environment-mother? The mother as object . . . who may satisfy the [child's] urgent needs (id relation) and the mother . . . who actively provides care (ego relation) . . . are vastly different for the [baby]. It is the environment-mother who receives all that can be called affection and

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sensuous co-existence; it is the object-mother who becomes the target for excited experience backed by crude instinct-tension The opportunity for giving and for reparation that the environment mother offers by her reliable presence, enables the coming together of the object-mother and the environment-mother. Failure of the object-mother to survive or of the environment mother to provide . . . the opportunity for reparation leads to . . . splitting and even disintegration

—D. W. Winnicott, “The Development of the Capacity for Concern”

The parent and child’s mutual involvement in an adoring love affair as well as its slow undoing mark the developmental movement from oedipal to post-oedipal forms of relatedness. . . . How the dyad negotiates this transition speaks to the fate of oedipal passion in later adult love relations . . . distinguishing the person who can accept romantic defeat, and goes on to “try again” from the one who comes to see himself as a romantic “loser,” and dares not try, as well as the individual who compulsively seeks out unavailable love objects . . . from the one who maintains passion, romance, and intimacy well into old age. . . . The inability to relinquish and mourn the idealized oedipal parent emerges for two possible reasons. In the first scenario, the child has never become the object of the parent’s intense oedipal love. In the second, mourning and de-idealization occur too completely, precipitously, and catastrophically because the parent is unable to tolerate the rejection, aggression, or contempt implicit or explicit in the child’s turning away from a mutually adoring process.

—J. M. Davies, “Falling in Love with Love”

IN THE RECENT AUSTRALIAN FILM *LANTANA*, LEON (A DOUR, ALMOST-handsome police detective caught in the crosshairs of middle age) accounts for his brief affair by telling his wife that it was a desperate attempt to jolt himself into feeling. “I was numb,” he explains. As the plot thickens, this insight seems to hover over the intersecting lives of four married couples whose struggles with authenticity and deceit are tracked with riveting intensity. *Lantana* (Lawrence, 2001) was released within weeks of the extraordinary cinematic evocation of midlife marriage, *In the Bedroom* (Field, 2001), and just a few weeks shy of the publication of Stephen A. Mitchell’s *Can Love Last?* All

three projects challenge the cultural trope that romance is the sole property of the young, showing, on the contrary, that the nature and fate of romantic love over the long term yields countless stories worth telling and reflecting on.

Indeed, seeing these films while being immersed in Steve's passionately intricate text drew me inexorably into an unnerving reconsideration of my own cozy marital contract. My husband and I are easily 10 years older than most of these implausibly toned, 40-something movie couples, some just starting to take the measure of midlife melancholy. But the deeply romantic early bond between us had also imperceptibly devolved into a well-behaved companionable marriage, perched—of course—on a volcano of affects whose periodic eruptions, with their ferocious truth-telling, sometimes constituted the only proof of our mutually charged vulnerability.

As Steve's emblematic case in point, I want to begin these remarks with a personal endorsement: "This book shook up my marriage of 23 years." [VG, NYC]. The book worked on me, it crept up on me, it gave me the encouragement to disturb our peace, and it brought results. "Life is short and inhibitions in living are wasteful," Steve (2001, p. 186) wrote when describing the "getting down to business" side of his analytic work. For all its intellectual complexity, *Can Love Last?* is unabashedly inspirational and reveals Steve to be a gifted interlocutor of the myriad stratagems through which we create and maintain lifeless relationships in order to evade the risks of intimacy.

The galvanizing effect of this thesis on my habits of living was all the more remarkable since I wasn't in the market for change or enlightenment, believing that my husband and I had aged out of our multiple and various mid-life crises with a cautiously honest, sufficiently sexual (this oxymoron does not escape me), reasonably friendly marriage in tow. Romantic transcendence? Exaltation? Risk? My appetites ran more in the direction of a nice meal out.

In this, I think I illustrate rather nicely Steve's spot-on point about how marriage is culturally constructed as the site of a faux adulthood that provides a convenient rationalization for the defensive impulse to conflate pseudomature deadness with being a grown-up—becoming cardboard facsimiles of the adults our parents once appeared to be. As a consequence, the flattening out of passion in long-term relationships comes to seem impersonal and axiomatic, when it is actually deeply personal and psychodynamic. In this sense, marriage

as an institution not only gives us the cultural authorization to avoid the psychological challenges of long-term intimacy; it gives us a self-esteem boost for doing our bills instead.

Steve's work on romantic love was meant to trouble that defensive project by deconstructing the resistances—personal, meta-psychological, and cultural—to sustaining vibrant and intimate sexual relationships over the long haul. Romance was Steve's subject here, but that is because romance potentiates the passionate faith in life that was his *true* subject. "Romance," he wrote, is central to the "very lifefulness of our lives, the texture, the tonal quality, the verve. . . . It generates emotions, stimulates imaginative play, and nurtures devotion to ideals, creating the sense that life is worthwhile and that important events happen within it" (p. 26).

But he was not promoting romantic enthrallment as an elixir, a midlife drug of choice for the boomer cohort who could no longer tolerate mushrooms. Rather, he was thinking as a scholar and a visionary about what constitutes romantic faith in any individual life, and as an historically specific worldview we need now. He argued his case for enchantment with the brilliance and lucidity we came to expect and depend on. Deploying his unique readings of and seminal contributions to the psychoanalytic canon, and bringing to bear a luxurious array of related literatures turned to his purposes, Steve worked to invest romance with a gravitas that would transform its meaning—from a mercifully brief state of adolescent intoxication to a personal act of imagination, laced with risk, through which we enchant our relationships and enliven ourselves, lighting up the somber landscape Freud mistook for reality in the process.

Relational ideas that took years of painstaking thought to make happen are here distilled, purified, and put to work in the service of that project: relationality as the defining dimension of the human condition; the self as multiple, decentered, and context-dependent; reality as made, not found; dialectical thinking and paradox as a "third way." It was an education of another sort to see how these insights, so beautiful and resonant when doing no more than being, could be used to such powerful effect in the wider arena of culture theory and critique.

This was Steve's most sustained effort in applied psychoanalysis from the relational perspective, and with this book he was beginning to develop his voice as a public intellectual. It is one of our many losses that we will never know how that identity would have ripened

and where it would have taken him. But he has left us the legacy of this very wide-ranging and complex text, and I do not mean to short-circuit our obligations to it by reading it reverentially. Now the problem of being immersed in a mind like his is that one's own ideas turn out to be so dependent on the work one aims to critique that standing up to his thinking can seem like biting the hand that feeds you, the competitive quibble that masks one's massive indebtedness. But I am going to forge ahead because we are building this theory collectively, and it is only in the parsing of nuance that we come to discover what turns out to matter: going forward.

The book is exuberantly contentious in making its multifaceted argument about how and why we hide from love. Yet despite all that is right, even mutative, about it, I remain unsettled by the way Steve argued his most provocatively original point about the relationship between romantic passion and safety. Here again is his central thesis: romance and passion degrade in long-term relationships not because they are safe and comfortable, but because they are dangerous and risky. Intimate love entails profound dependency on another whom we cannot control, a condition of helplessness that is potentially humiliating and infuriating. "Romantic passion requires surrender to a depth of feeling that should come with guarantees," he wrote, "but there are no guarantees" (p. 54). To be in love with someone you actually depend on is very dangerous indeed, he concluded, and in one of my favorite sly reversals, he tweaked conventional wisdom by describing marriage, that emblem of aging domestication, as a "hazardous arrangement" (Mitchell, 1998, p. 571), not recommended to the faint of heart. (This point cannot be made often enough, especially given that the family, rather than being a haven in a heartless world, actually turns out to be our most violent social institution outside of the military at war; see Gilligan, 1996.)

Steve's point was that the comforting but antipassionate sense of security that we ascribe to love in primary relationships is not a given, but an orchestrated numbing and dulling, unconsciously motivated by the need to manage the enormous emotional vulnerability that comes with a long-standing romantic commitment. Moreover, he argued that once "deadness has been established as a requirement for security in actual relationships . . . passion can be deflected into the safer realm of flirtation with those on whom one does *not* depend . . . safe thrills, like the roller coaster that dips and loops but never leaves the tracks" (1998, pp. 567, 570).

My issues with this elegant and socially important thesis have been hard to pin down, because they concern the unremarkable background of what Steve has foregrounded to such profound effect. Specifically, I found myself with questions about the way in which safety was being positioned in order to make the case for passion in committed relationships. As someone who spends many clinical hours with couples on the brink, I began to feel that Steve's rhetorical emphasis on risk implicitly shortchanged the place of safety in relationships that matter. Although he was careful to say that it is not safety, but *safety-operations* that make long-term relationships oppressively cozy, his emphasis on safety-as-contrivance took safety itself for granted. Although he always acknowledged that safety was an essential ingredient of any serious relationship, it remained undertheorized because it was not his subject in this project. Steve was working out something more original and, seemingly, less obvious.

Reaching the passion buried under encrusted habits of deflection, withdrawal, and resentment can entail enormous risk, and Steve's exhilarating insight was that romantic engagement over the long term requires an act of courage. Indeed, he located the potential for renewal in one brief phrase: "no risk, no gain" (p. 136). But to find the courage to risk despite the risk requires, in a context of intimacy, the safety of thirdness—the condition of being held by, and holding, a relationship while simultaneously acting within it.

In what follows, I shall try to complicate Steve's rendering of romance, risk, and courage, which tends toward a one-person heroic vision, by adding a second lens that privileges the two-person action of thirdness. This is not intended as a counterthesis, but as an attempt to think alongside Steve, and perhaps over and under him—romance and sexual passion being too unruly, and also too fragile, to be containable by either a one- or two-person perspective.

So, to begin: the dangers blunting romantic expressiveness in the genuinely loving relationships Steve describes in his book *presumed* a background of safety, much in the way that the child's capacity for adventurous exploration presumes the mother as a secure base, or that the capacity for solitude presumes the mother's containing presence. And, most important for the matters here at hand, remember Winnicott's (1963) critical insight that "the coming together . . . of affection and instinct [requires] the reliable presence of the environment mother" (p. 75).

The mother's holding work must be unobtrusive if the child is to construct its interiority, but grown-ups need to *know* about the conjoint work they must do to create the third that is their relationship. This is a point Steve himself took pains to make, writing that "love and passion are not subject to our conscious will, but . . . we have a lot to do with constructing the contexts in which they are generated" (Mitchell, 1998, p. 571).

Just as the erasure of mothers in culture and in theory can be traced to the need to deny our absolute dependence on and indebtedness to them, I wonder if we have made the place of safety in adult erotic life uninteresting and obvious because it is associated with the taken-for-granted circumstance of domesticity and thus with the maternal. A gender perspective would also call our attention to safety's shadow (which is, of course, need) a psychic state that codes experientially as childish, which itself reads as feminine—the whole package being shameful. Is it a wonder that we would all prefer to find a way to eroticize marriage via an emphasis on its risk and danger—conditions we associate with masculinity, with adolescence, and with the paternal: the hero Daddy throwing us up in the air (as mother quietly holds the situation)?

But what about adding a culturally unnerving maternally drenched thesis as a counterpoint to these gender tropes? What about the possibility that safety and dependency might, in themselves, be *generative* of the erotic? Steve demonstrated how romance agitates feelings of and conflicts around dependency, which in turn threaten and dampen romance. But he did not trace the implications of the reverse scenario—how dependency might inspire, (indeed, incite) romance, or how romanticism could itself be a defense against dependency and the shame of dependency—this often being the case in relationships that devolve into intimate violence, for instance (Goldner, 2000).

Whereas he was clear that authentic romance could not be split off from the longing for security, Steve conceived of safety and desire as dialectically opposed and only episodically reconcilable in the same relationship. But is it so obvious that safety and need are inherently—or, in Steve's terms, dialectically—opposed to the erotic, or aren't they also part of its charge?

His most brilliant and loopy rhetorical moves succeeded in enigmatizing the familiar as a strategy to revitalize the erotic—all

versions of the question, “Do you *really* know her?” But in that very tour de force, he conceded cultural ground that I am still contesting: the equation of eros with alterity. Let me be clear here. No one should argue against this delectably transgressive pleasure. The libidization of Otherness is one of the tropes that launch passion’s beginnings, just as the libidization of aggression can transform the inevitable hostilities of intimacy into erotic play.

But I don’t think these ubiquitous aspects of sexuality’s plasticity and pleasure constitute bedrock, because they do not provide a sufficiently *relational* characterization of sexuality’s psychic charge in relationships that last. Do we have to find the foreign in the familiar, to make old love brand-new, in order to make it sexy again? Or is it the *refinding* of the very person we love and need, and the thrill and relief that she too is reaching out for us, that turns on the tap?

Steve’s elegant thesis focused on illuminating intrapsychic resistances to romantic experience in committed relationships. Although he sometimes spoke of “collusive efforts” to keep marriage dull and predictable, he was thinking, for the most part, about the creative potential and psychic threat of romanticism from the perspective of a single subjectivity. But once we conceive of the security issues that drive those resistances as relational dramas as well as one-person conflicts, we can think of the risk that is central to eros in intersubjective as well as intrapsychic terms.

Steve argued that security and adventure, dependency and romance, pull us in opposite directions, but I counter that, over the history of a profound relationship, these opposing trends become interimplicated, like drops of water that converge in a stream and disperse through evaporation. The experience of romantic love *with this particular person* becomes imbued with an affective density particular to that relationship—with its specific poignancies, transformational moments, and trauma history.

In this context, the desire for adventure and the need for safety are not one-person affairs, driven solely by the internal dynamics of each partner. They are, rather, two-person experiences that co-evolve over the length of a long relationship, each framing the other, held in the tension of figure and ground. In other words, the risk of falling in love with the one you love is possible only in a context of safety—not the flaccid safety of permanent coziness, but a dynamic safety whose robustness is established via the couple’s lived history of risk-taking

and its resolution—the never-ending cycles of breakdown and repair, separation and reunion that constitute the history of authentic, noncoercive intimacy.

Embedded in that passionate history, dependency can fuel, rather than dampen, the drama of desire. In the context of romantic thirdness, dependency can transmute from a secretly shameful, solitary need to a mutually enlivening, conjoint state of risk. Through the relational action of mutuality, the shame of dependency can become eroticized as *that lack that is desire*. Think of it this way: where the fear of abandonment or narcissistic injury keep us out of the bedroom, the risk of rupture where there is hope for repair draws us in. Isn't *this* the dialectic that makes sex in authentically intimate relationships so hard and deep? Makeup sex, in Seinfeld's terms?

Unlike the electrical charge of a foreign body, romantic surrender with the one you love and hate occurs in the shadow of melancholy of the depressive position. In returning to the well, safety and adventure oscillate as each partner provides a secure base for the adventure of sexual exploration, freeing the otherness of one's own desire to encounter the strangeness of the lover's sexual subjectivity. Yet even this characterization is too orderly, because the object and environment mothers that Winnicott's infant (and our propriety) segregate will not keep their hands off each other once passion makes its claim. Thus, the familiar and the novel, the body you know and need, and the one you discover and destroy, interpenetrate in a paradox of erotic simultaneity.

Attachment as Myth, Metaphor, or Fact?

In considering the fate of adult romantic love, the legacy of Winnicott's passionate and vulnerable baby has been overshadowed by the attachment struggles of Bowlby's toddler. Adult love relations map onto both of these prototypes, as I attempt to show in my Winnicott-inflected reading of the romantic intensity and risk-taking that are central aspects of the attachment situation. With this move, I am in another posthumous disagreement with Steve, but it is of the sort, I think, that can generate the good conversations he believed were necessary to move truth along.

Steve was quite explicit in arguing against attachment as a metaphor for adult love relations, going so far as to call attachment “the great enemy of erotism” (p. 83). “We learn to love in the context of the contrived and necessary safety of early childhood,” he wrote, “and [adult romantic] love seeks perpetually a kind of safety that screens out [the very elements that fuel the erotic:] the unknown, the fantastic, the dangerous” (p. 46) “Secure attachment,” he wrote in an earlier version of this argument, “is not a useful model of mutual adult love, except in fantasy, since love by its very nature is not secure, we just keep wanting to make it so” (Mitchell, 1998, p. 564).

This position, while rhetorically persuasive, is oddly weak on scholarship. In the last decade, empirical and theoretical work on attachment has not only succeeded in making the case for childhood attachment as a *template* for adult romantic love, it has proffered the elegant distillation that “romantic love is [in itself] an attachment process” (Beebe and McCrorie, submitted). Hazan and Zeifman (1999) use almost the same language in their overview chapter on adult attachment published in the standard reference volume, *Handbook of Attachment*. “Just as Bowlby surmised,” they write, “romantic bonds are the prototypical adult instantiation of attachment . . . in [every] technical sense [of the term]” (p. 336).

The conceptualization of attachment as an ongoing dimension of adult relationships, implicated in romantic-pair bonding, has important ramifications for Steve’s core thesis, and for my own. As I argue the case, the interimplication of adult attachment and romantic love leads, inexorably, to the conclusion that romance and dependency are not inherently opposed, not even dialectically. On the contrary, theory, research, and clinical experience point to the reverse conclusion—that safety and eros are, in fact, *mutually catalytic*, not only in adult life, but throughout development.

I do not know why Steve didn’t engage with the rich scholarly tradition of research and theory that has been addressing the concordances between attachment and romantic love for the past 10 years, or how he would have evaluated it, once immersed. *Can Love Last* would have been the richer for it, because his dismissive view of the attachment analogy never went much beyond the rhetorical.

Steve’s characterization of secure attachment as an “illusory, cocoon-like state of certainty and control [orchestrated by parents] behind the scenes” (2001, p. 46) simply bears no relation to the complex and nuanced definition of this critically important concept

in the attachment literature. He seems to have mistaken the necessary and obvious contrivances of the attachment situation for the profound and subtle dimensions of parent–child relationality that are its true determinants.

Methodical baby-watchers would be the first to point out how it is the child, not the adult observer, who is our most astute judge of the necessary conditions of attachment security. It often takes years of watching and coding to “get” what’s wrong with this picture—to see how the nicest, most motivated mothers are unconsciously creating the most extreme instances of disorganized attachment, let alone garden-variety insecure patterns. In truth, it is adults who are deceived by candy-coated lookalikes, the contrivance standing in for the real thing: children are unerring in making this distinction, because they cannot survive without an accurate reading of the caregiver’s signals.

Moreover, remember that the research designation of attachment security is *not* the child’s apparent ability to go on with life when left by, and eventually reunited with, the mother in the Strange Situation—this apparent sturdiness is often the sine qua non of *insecure* attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978). When mother leaves child alone with the good-enough stranger, asserting her implacable intentionality against the child’s need for her to stay, the secure child is the one who is able to risk revealing the enormity of his fear and dependency, which now must be experienced and borne. This is the child who fights for the restoration of care and protection through angry protest, and who will refuse to be fobbed off by lookalike caretakers. This child stays true to himself, bearing the pain of knowing that only his one and only, the very love object who abandoned him, can restore him to himself. And, when mother and child are finally reunited, the child’s palpable joy and profound relief demonstrate that he is not afraid to show how much he loves and still trusts her. Only after allowing himself to be healed by their reunion does the child return to the pleasures of his own matters and projects. How much more romantic can you get?

This never-ending drama of love lost and found gives the lie to the studied pseudoindifference that passes for attachment security in predictably cozy marital partnerships. Indeed, there is evidence that the insecurely attached, avoidant children whose cortisol levels are through the roof, but who go on playing “as-if” nothing catastrophic had occurred (sometimes even taking up with the friendly stranger) grow up to be insecure/dismissive adults, just the sort who are likely to complain of romantic boredom while looking for love in all the

wrong places (Main, 2000; Waters et al., 2000). Remember that in Bowlby's (1988) view, it was not loss and separation per se, but the denial of attachment trauma and the suppression of protest that were the crucial determinants of neurosis.

Attachment security seems, in fact, to thrive in the dynamic thirdness of mutual recognition, rather than in the ministrations of an omni-available mother completely identified with the child's needs (see Benjamin, 2003). Consider, too, that attachment security depends not only on sensitivity and reliability, but also on the mother's capacity to absorb protest (Holmes, 1997) and on her "mind-mindedness": the ability to see and respond to the child as an autonomous, sentient being with feelings and projects of her own (Coates, 1998; Meins, 1999).

Whereas such a mother cannot be domesticated because she just keeps coming and going, she also bears and metabolizes the child's protest as part of the fabric of her intentionality. In her robust survival, she gives the gift of externality, and in her recognition of and responsiveness to the child's expression of need and desire, she ratifies the efficacy of his nascent agency.

To my mind, this is the romantic template of loss and reunion that can fuel erotic intensity in long-term relationships, distinguishing the emotionally rich passion that is only possible between lovers who have a history from the safe thrills of the illicit affair. Indeed, we could say that the ongoing cycles of coming and going are, in themselves, the processes that heal the (gendered) split between safety and eros. Instead of the housebound mother who *has* to be there, or the exciting father who *happens* to be there, the (m)other we joyfully fall in love with over and over again *wants* to be there. Each time the parent returns, each time the partners separate and reunite, we bring the freedom, strangeness, and excitement of the outside back into the safety of home, which is now imbued with its own shimmering poignancy, just because we have gone away.

Oedipal Winners and Losers

Romantic tension in long-term love relationships is continuously being refueled by these (preoedipal) dramas of coming and going. Another source of vitality comes from later oedipal motifs. Consider Davies's

(2002) relational reformulation of the Oedipus complex as “neither won nor lost, but BOTH won AND lost” (p. 10). Arguing that the oedipal love affair is not a one-way street, but a “deeply mutual, intensely romantic and idealizing drama” (p. 9) *between* parent and child, Davies elucidates how children necessarily cycle between moments of oedipal victory—when the girl(boy) “apprehends in an unconscious way that she has ‘won’ her father(mother) in ways she knows her mother(father) never can, and experiences of oedipal defeat—when the boy(girl) accurately perceives that his parents have a sexual and emotional intimacy from which he is excluded” (p. 10).

This brilliant, instantly persuasive reading of Oedipus reformulates the romantic conditions of childhood in relational terms, showing how we all grow up as erotic subjects *and* objects, Oedipal winners *and* losers. For my purposes, one of the most important aspects of this both-and variation on the classical family romance is to be found (once again) in the *background* of Davies’s radical vision. Remember that the on-again, off-again romantic love flowing between Davies’s postmodern Oedipal child and his parents *occurs in the context of his profound dependency on them*. Like the paradox of the rapprochement crisis, in which the child needs recognition of her “independence” from the very person on whom she most depends (Benjamin, 1988), the oedipal child needs to be recognized as a sexual subject and object by the very person(s) who must also *prohibit* (contain, symbolize, delimit) his desire—and that adult person’s own—while continuing to meet the child’s ongoing, age-appropriate dependency needs.

Davies’s masterful discussion of the numerous variations of and pathways through the oedipal romance traverses these multiple layers of experience and charts their implications, but Davies does not conceptualize the action of the Oedipal situation relative to issues of dependency in these formal terms. I would like to make a contribution to her project along these lines.

In the one-person oedipal story, desire and its prohibition are one-way processes, split between the child’s erotic “yes” and the parents’ firm but tactful “no.” In Davies’s two-person model, we might think in terms of an oedipal *dialectic* in which the bidirectional tension of erotic recognition/mutuality and erotic prohibition/negation would be played out against a backdrop of environmental provision, or the lack of it. This would allow us to formulate, in abstract terms, how the highs and lows of romantic triumph and defeat are intertwined with the ongoing risks and requirements of dependency and need.

In the passionate circuitry of family bonds, and in all subsequent love relations worth the risk, the paradigm shift I am proposing construes the oedipal situation as the dramatic crucible in our lifelong encounters with the interpenetration of romance and dependency, how winning and losing are inflected by the presence or absence of provision in the context of need.

Long-standing love relationships map onto this template at many levels. Simply by staying together, long-term partners are eschewing the constraints of a win/lose binary that would limit the definition of their relationship to one that can only succeed or fail. Operating instead with the dynamic ambiguities of the win AND lose principle, they step into a continuous stream of opportunities to relive and rework these oedipal themes in the context of their mutual dependency.

Such relationships (if they are not in a state of defensive lockdown) can derive much of their internal charge from the action of these oedipal cycles of winning and losing, in which “moments of sexual power and potency, the capacity to attract, entice and allure, commingle with experiences of romantic and sexual failure, the sense of being small, sexually and romantically impotent, even insignificant” (Davies, 2002, p. 11). Here again, consider how, under adequate conditions of relational safety, the oedipal split between exhilarating victory and humiliating failure can transform itself into the erotic tension that sends partners back to the bedroom.

How Love Lasts

Recognition and negation, destruction and reparation, the drama of love lost and found and of romantic victory and defeat, are ongoing interwoven processes that give parent–child relations their passionate intensity. Long-term romantic intimacy gets its charge from the same daily dramas of relatedness that heat up the original family romance: the never-ending cycles of breakdown and repair that animate the earliest relations between infant and mother (see Beebe and Lachmann, 2002; Beebe and McCrorie, in press), the preoedipal dramas of coming and going, separation and reunion that constitute the attachment situation, the oedipal cycles of winning and losing, and so on.

Fueled by all of these wellsprings from within, grown-up love hardly needs a dose of the exotic to keep it alive and kicking. The tension between romance and dependency plays out in intense pleasure and pain throughout our lives. As Steve always said, it is boredom and deadness that we must work to manufacture—by collusive, unconscious design.

How I wish he were here to process this dialogue with me—to lob that ball back over the net just for the sheer joy of connecting!

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