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**“THREE LOVES”. A PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN
DESTROYED BY AN INEVITABLE DESTINY**

Fusco A.

“Three Loves” (1932) is A.J. Cronin’s second novel after the first successful “Hatter’s castle” (1931). The author reveals all his genius in using his pen to create stories from everyday life, dealing with social problems and interior conflicts, which interest human society. Lucy is a woman who firmly struggles to build her destiny through three loves: her husband, her son, Jesus Christ. Her determination will bring her to give herself completely and desperately to her three loves in such a way to destroy herself.

Keywords: A.J. Cronin, success, failure, love, possession, faith, unbelief, shelter, escape, sublime ecstasy, madness, happy premonition, inevitable destiny.

**«ТРИ ЛЮБВИ». ПОРТРЕТ ЖЕНЩИНЫ,
РАЗБИТОЙ НЕИЗБЕЖНОЙ СУДЬБОЙ**

Фуско А.

«Три любви» (1932 г.) – второй роман Арчибальда Кронина, вышедший сразу за успешным «Замком Броуди» (1931 г.). Автор проявляет весь свой писательский гений, создавая истории из жизни обычных людей, имеющих дело с социальными проблемами и внутренними конфликтами, интересующими человеческое общество. Люси – женщина, которая старается выстроить свою судьбу через три своих любви: к мужу, к сыну, к Иисусу Христу. Ее решительность приведет ее к абсолютному посвящению самой себя трем любовям так отчаянно, что это разрушит ее саму.

Ключевые слова: А.Дж. Кронин, успех, провал, любовь, владение, вера, неверие, убежище, бегство, возвышенная радость, сумасшествие, счастливое предчувствие, неизбежная судьба.

The first and second love

A.J. Cronin introduces Lucy in the first page of the novel emerging from a beautiful natural scene “She stood behind the long lace curtain, letting her eyes mirror the white stretch road which followed the estuary shore towards the town, nearly a mile away” [1, p. 7]. Her soul is illuminated by “the glorious scene”, “the splendor of the sunshine”, “the golden light” [1, p. 7]. The author colors the scene using all his literary creative genius “the glistening water caught within the arms of the sweeping bay, the woods of the promontory of Ardmore shaded to coolness by a blue haze, the rifts of the western mountains tumbled in abundant majesty across the pale curtain of the sky...” She can enjoy the view from her house feeling all her happiness. “The autumn! She sighed from sheer happiness” [1, p. 7]. Nonetheless, since the first page, we can realize that something mysterious is hidden beneath the picture of a woman looking at herself in the mirror “half smiling to herself, she turned and paused before the oak wardrobe, now confronting her image in the glass...” [1, p. 7].

Lucy is a twenty-six house-proud woman [1, p. 8] and a very determined person “it was her nature to make success of things. Failure! She did not recognize the word” [1, p. 36]. Frank, her husband, was all her life and she used to wait for him coming back from the city day by day. “She loved always this moment, which usage had not staled, of Frank’s return from the city: she dressed and ready, her work done, her house immaculate, awaiting him: it gave her unfailingly a little thrill of warm expectancy” [1, p. 9]. She loved him immensely: “She was, ah yes, she was so fond of Frank” [1, p. 20], but her love for him was very possessive: “He was completely hers; he was her creation; moulded so consciously by her love that she had almost the possessive instinct of the artist towards the finished handiwork; become so manifestly a part of herself that she rose with a swift reaction of defence when the weakness was impugned or his failings called in question” [1, p. 37].

Anna, accuses Frank, his cousin, “to belong to her too much” [1, p. 46]. He tries to deny the truth but he knew he could not be free from Lucy’s power on him “there had been impulses in the past of course... but they had been for the most part

transitory, unsatisfactory in their achievement” [1, p. 46]. Therefore, he will never assert his position as “head of the household” [1, p. 79], he will never be “the king of the castle” [1, p. 79]: Lucy will be the “boss” [1, p. 91] of his life.

Lucy’s life was based on an apparent happiness: “It gratified her to contemplate her felicity and to exhibit it without self-consciousness” [1, p. 37]. According to her, “the beauty of life” [1, p.37) had its fundamentals in: “the constancy of love... the loveliness of little children and their laughter, the sweetness of sacrifice, the acceptance of God in all his providence-reject these facts and you were lost in a wilderness of darkness” [1, p. 37].

Frank, on the other hand, was not a man of any great ambitions, a weak person defined even a “queer fish”, a lazy person who thinks “It’s easier doing nothing”(p.20). Lucy was attracted by him because of “that indefinable something that was he” [1, p. 106].

Lucy’s was “convinced” [1, p. 36] that she would lift her husband to a better social level and so she “would make their future more secure” [1, p. 36]. Frank was another *object* of “the immaculate perfection of her house”. [1, p. 8]. He was part of her obsessive daily routine as a “house-proud-woman” [1, p. 8], an almost *maniacal* repetitions of habits “making a last swift inspection of the room to ensure its order, noting the shining linoleum, the exactitude of the antimacassar, upon the fluted rocker, the smooth hang of the white bed-mat” [1, p. 8].

Lucy struggles firmly to achieve all her objectives, but she will be dragged into a wearing conflict with a reality out of her consciousness. Anna represents the first menace to Lucy’s projects for her future. The principle of her philosophy of life is in contrast with Lucy’s “formula of honesty and virtue” which she calls “the satisfaction of doing the right thing” [1, p. 37]. She ridicules her with bitter irony for being part of a “sentimental mush” which believed in “the sanctity of marriage”, “the beauty of motherhood” and “the immortality of the soul” [1, p. 113]. She concludes her preachment warning Lucy that her “fancy notions” would burst in the air like “balloons in the air, like smoke” [1, p. 113].

Lucy is frightened by Anna's words and feels all her weakness in front of her "oppressive presence" [1, p. 116]. She remains alone with herself "one arm leaning upon the mantelpiece, gazing into the fire" [1, p. 116]. The image of a lonely woman assaulted by "the old intangible longing" [1, p. 116] from "something long, long past" [1, p. 116] reveals her desperate search for something unknown. "The light dancing warmly within her dark eyes" illuminates the deep desire to find an answer to the interrogative "What was her desire?" [1, p. 116]. She needed an answer and the only one was her love for Frank: "It was. It must be, her love for Frank" [1, p. 116]. Her possessive love for her husband was necessary to fill a deep gap, *something* "latent within her, dormant and unappeased" [1, p. 74]. She was tormented by something indefinite inside herself that she could queerly feel: "On the return trip, lulled by the indolent impulse of the boat, she closed her eyes in a pretence of sleep: she had indeed a curious fatigue, a lassitude ensuing from some unconscious spending of her spirit" [1, p. 74].

Frank had been her object-subject, she had brought him towards his tragic destiny, consequently she was responsible for his death. She was wrapped by a terrible sense of *guilt*: "What-oh, what had she done?" [1, p. 143]. She feels lost in the universe she had built "the universe with all its constellations, had ceased to move" [1, p. 143].

Lucy will soon recover from the emptiness of her life, using what she called the "keystone of her life" that is Peter, her son and second love. He will be the *object* of her second possessive love. She will struggle and sacrifice herself to fulfill all her projects for her son: medicine studies to become a qualified doctor. She abandoned herself in a pleasant fancy future with her son in "a small house with a square brass plate upon the door. And how she would have that brass shine!" The brass plate brings all her old obsessive maniacal on the scene again: "the immaculate perfection of her house" [1, p. 8].

Peter is her own creature just as his father "she identified herself inevitably with him" [1, p. 366]. She will continue her protective attitude towards Peter since he was dependent from her determination as Frank had been "his piteous face... so

strangely reminiscent of Frank's weakness; this attitude so close and so dependent; that sweet relationship which she wished always to continue, moved her with a powerful impulse of protection [1, p. 267]. Peter is Lucy's new hope for her future and also her new man: "Her devotion increased. She would look at him occasionally with a sort of brooding happiness: again she had a new man within the home" [1, p. 311].

Lucy's dreams will not come true. She will not "contemplate her felicity, her well-being, her success" [1, p. 37] together with Peter. She will be alone again because he "had gone off with Rose... he had deserted her-his mother" [1, p. 386]. She is desperate: "A dreadful coldness assailed her, like a pang of dissolution and fearful blackness of despair closed over her like death", but she will find the strength to get on "her body felt dead; but her mind was not dead" [1, p. 386].

Lucy could not renounce all her idealizations. Nothing was impossible for a woman obsessed by the image of an ideal perfection strongly rooted in herself. Her brother had warned her against an inevitable destiny because of her "striving after the unobtainable" [1, p. 273]. He had invited her to be more realist: "listen to reason. Leave the impossible alone" [1, p. 273], but Lucy was inevitably dragged by her own way to be.

The third love

Lucy is alone and feels upset because her projects of life have vanished. She feels the "bitterness of her defeat" [1, p. 390] but in a short time she is guided by a force "almost spent", a feeling of "indefinite and intolerant craving" [1, p. 391] towards the third universe. She "set out for church" but not for St Patrick's where "she was known". She enters into a small church she "vaguely had heard" [1, p. 391]. The author reproduces the scene of Lucy in the little church with details about her movements, little gestures to let the reader understand the miserable condition of a woman who wants to hide herself from what she is. She kneels "half concealed behind a pillar" [1, p. 395]. Lucy is desperately in search of herself in a place where she used to go for "habit" or for "duty" [1, p. 391] and repeats her prayer "mechanically" [1, p. 395], but she is a person destroyed by the illusion to build her

ideal future, “all her life she had been chasing phantoms” [1, p. 395]. In the little church “the miracle” [1, p. 391] happens: she finds in Jesus Christ suffering on the cross the relief from “her insufferable burden-racked by the pain within her” [1, p. 391).

The author devotes two pages [1, p. 395-197] to report Lucy’s “sublime spiritual experience” [1, p. 395]. Lucy’s *calling* from God in those pages is exasperated by the use of frequent redundant repetitions: “ecstasy”, “miracle”, “miraculous”, “unbelievable joy”, “nothing she had known”, “nothing she had seen”, “nothing more”, “suddenly”, “suddenness”. The time of Lucy’s entrance in the church is repeated twice “Nine months ago it had happened, upon that Sunday. Oh, blessed, blessed day” [1, p. 395, 398].

We have to appreciate, however, Cronin’s artistic ability in portraying the image of Lucy “flowering” with an increasing interior happiness [1, p. 397] in a little church, a “sweet refuge” where the wretched woman “inevitably” turned [1, p. 397]. Cronin wants to emphasize that Lucy basically needs to protect herself from her interior anxiety, her “intangible longing” [1, p.1165] and finds in Jesus, her third love, new hopes for her future.

Lucy is firmly convinced of her choice “I’m going to offer myself to Jesus”. Her determination once again will face any warning from Frank’s brother, reverend Edward. Lucy, imbued by “the priceless possession of the Love for God” [1, p. 407] will overcome all obstacles on the way towards her ideal future. She will face submission, mortification, humiliation, in her three years’ life in the convent but at the end she will feel so exhausted and completely destroyed that she will feel *separated* from reality “the moment she rushed from that doorway she was absorbed, detached from reality” [1, p. 456].

The destiny of a woman “struggling for something never achieved” [1, p. 462] is getting to the final conclusion. Cronin uses all his literary competence to create an atmosphere of pathos in the portrait of human sufferance: “No tears came to those large, dark eyes which fixed themselves so stiffly upon the ceiling, but they dulled and grew distant and the pale lips of the face drew downwards with an infinite

pathos” [1, p. 162]. Sublime the author’s idea of identification of Lucy’s three loves in a unique love “the trinity that was one” [1, p. 458]. The author wants to stress the reader’s attention on the status of “chaos” [1, p. 458] in a mind that “madly” transfigures her three loves “mysteriously” in “a trinity that was one”. He reports all the interrogatives of a mind lost in her doubts “had she come to this place to lose her faith?” [1, p. 458]. Lucy’s fragility brings her to find shelter in her own fantasies. “Those flame leaping around the tabernacle” are defined “vision of an exalted mind!” [1, p. 459]. The garden out of the convent is the space quite representative of the chaos in her mind: a mixture of reality and memories: “As from a long way off she seemed to hear the ringing of a bell... Was it a bell, or merely the ringing within her ears? Was it from the asylum where, with bell and key, her life had moved so uselessly, controlled by the swing of the one and the turn of the other? The sound went on” [1, p. 459].

Lucy, in spite of all failures, will continue her desperate struggle to get “something which never came” [1, p. 462]. She is dragged by an inexhaustible force that brings her “farther, farther” [1, p. 470] from the past towards her future: “She had the future; she always had the future” [1, p. 470]. Unfortunately her “conviction” [1, p. 470], “a happy premonition” [1, p. 470] will change into an “inevitable” [1, p. 477] destiny.

Lucy cannot find an equilibrium between reality and her obstinate idea of herself perfection, “it was her nature, to make a success of things. Failure! She did not recognize the word!” [1, p. 36].

Cronin did not give any information about Lucy’s childhood or her teens but he reports her status of anxiety that often accompanies her. She was probably tormented by something remote, indefinite she could not control: “For a moment, born of her agitation, an old intangible longing gripped her, that curiously poignant yearning that often took her, welling upwards as it were from something long, long past” [1, p. 116].

“Her final impotence” triumphs in the last chapter of her story on a scene colored by “the eternal darkness”. The universe she had created around her, the three

concentric circles, her three loves, had collapsed. “The immaculate perfection of her house” [1, p. 8] had fell in: “no resistance-no reaction-it was quite inevitable” [1, p. 477].

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