

the *I*deal lover

Most
people have dreams in their
youth that get shattered or worn
down with age. They find themselves dis-
appointed by people, events, reality, which can-
not match their youthful ideals. Ideal Lovers thrive
on people's broken dreams, which become lifelong
fantasies. You long for romance? Adventure? Lofty
spiritual communion? The Ideal Lover reflects your
fantasy. He or she is an artist in creating the illu-
sion you require, idealizing your portrait. In a
world of disenchantment and baseness,
there is limitless seductive power in
following the path of the
Ideal Lover.

The Romantic Ideal

One evening around 1760, at the opera in the city of Cologne, a beautiful young woman sat in her box, watching the audience. Beside her was her husband, the town burgomaster—a middle-aged man and amiable enough, but dull. Through her opera glasses the young woman noticed a handsome man wearing a stunning outfit. Evidently her stare was noticed, for after the opera the man introduced himself: his name was Giovanni Giacomo Casanova.

The stranger kissed the woman's hand. She was going to a ball the following night, she told him; would he like to come? "If I might dare to hope, Madame," he replied, "that you will dance only with me."

The next night, after the ball, the woman could think only of Casanova. He had seemed to anticipate her thoughts—had been so pleasant, and yet so bold. A few days later he dined at her house, and after her husband had retired for the evening she showed him around. In her boudoir she pointed out a wing of the house, a chapel, just outside her window. Sure enough, as if he had read her mind, Casanova came to the chapel the next day to attend Mass, and seeing her at the theater that evening he mentioned to her that he had noticed a door there that must lead to her bedroom. She laughed, and pretended to be surprised. In the most innocent of tones, he said that he would find a way to hide in the chapel the next day—and almost without thinking, she whispered she would visit him there after everyone had gone to bed.

So Casanova hid in the chapel's tiny confessional, waiting all day and evening. There were rats, and he had nothing to lie upon; yet when the burgomaster's wife finally came, late at night, he did not complain, but quietly followed her to her room. They continued their trysts for several days. By day she could hardly wait for night: finally something to live for, an adventure. She left him food, books, and candles to ease his long and tedious stays in the chapel—it seemed wrong to use a place of worship for such a purpose, but that only made the affair more exciting. A few days later, however, she had to take a journey with her husband. By the time she got back, Casanova had disappeared, as quickly and gracefully as he had come.

Some years later, in London, a young woman named Miss Pauline noticed an ad in a local newspaper. A gentleman was looking for a lady lodger to rent a part of his house. Miss Pauline came from Portugal, and was of the nobility; she had eloped to London with a lover, but he had been

If at first sight a girl does not make such a deep impression on a person that she awakens the ideal, then ordinarily the actuality is not especially desirable; but if she does, then no matter how experienced a person is he usually is rather overwhelmed.

—SØREN KIERKEGAARD, *THE SEDUCER'S DIARY*, TRANSLATED BY HOWARD V. HONG AND EDNA H. HONG

A good lover will behave as elegantly at dawn as at any other time. He drags himself out of bed with a look of dismay on his face. The lady urges him on: "Come, my friend, it's getting light. You don't want anyone to find you here." He gives a deep sigh, as if to say that the night has not been nearly long enough and that it is agony to leave. Once up, he does not instantly pull on his trousers. Instead he comes close to the lady and whispers whatever was left unsaid during the night. Even when he is dressed, he still lingers, vaguely pretending to be fastening

his sash. • Presently he raises the lattice, and the two lovers stand together by the side door while he tells her how he dreads the coining day, which will keep them apart; then he slips away. The lady watches him go, and this moment of parting will remain among her most charming memories. • Indeed, one's attachment to a man depends largely on the elegance of his leave-taking. When he jumps out of bed, scurries about the room, tightly fastens his trouser sash, rolls up the sleeves of his court cloak, overrobe, or hunting costume, stuffs his belongings into the breast of his robe and then briskly secures the outer sash—one really begins to hate him.

—THE PILLOW BOOK OF SEI
SHONAGON, TRANSLATED AND
EDITED BY IVAN MORRIS

forced to return home and she had had to stay on alone for some while before she could join him. Now she was lonely, and had little money, and was depressed by her squalid circumstances—after all, she had been raised as a lady. She answered the ad.

The gentleman turned out to be Casanova, and what a gentleman he was. The room he offered was nice, and the rent was low; he asked only for occasional companionship. Miss Pauline moved in. They played chess, went riding, discussed literature. He was so well-bred, polite, and generous. A serious and high-minded girl, she came to depend on their friendship; here was a man she could talk to for hours. Then one day Casanova seemed changed, upset, excited: he confessed that he was in love with her. She was going back to Portugal soon, to rejoin her lover, and this was not what she wanted to hear. She told him he should go riding to calm down.

Later that evening she received news: he had fallen from his horse. Feeling responsible for his accident, she rushed to him, found him in bed, and fell into his arms, unable to control herself. The two became lovers that night, and remained so for the rest of Miss Pauline's stay in London. Yet when it came time for her to leave for Portugal, he did not try to stop her; instead, he comforted her, reasoning that each of them had offered the other the perfect, temporary antidote to their loneliness, and that they would be friends for life.

Some years later, in a small Spanish town, a young and beautiful girl named Ignazia was leaving church after confession. She was approached by Casanova. Walking her home, he explained that he had a passion for dancing the fandango, and invited her to a ball the following evening. He was so different from anyone in the town, which bored her so—she desperately wanted to go. Her parents were against the arrangement, but she persuaded her mother to act as a chaperone. After an unforgettable evening of dancing (and he danced the fandango remarkably well for a foreigner), Casanova confessed that he was madly in love with her. She replied (very sadly, though) that she already had a fiancé. Casanova did not force the issue, but over the next few days he took Ignazia to more dances and to the bullfights. On one of these occasions he introduced her to a friend of his, a duchess, who flirted with him brazenly; Ignazia was terribly jealous. By now she was desperately in love with Casanova, but her sense of duty and religion forbade such thoughts.

Finally, after days of torment, Ignazia sought out Casanova and took his hand: "My confessor tried to make me promise to never be alone with you again," she said, "and as I could not, he refused to give me absolution. It is the first time in my life such a thing has happened to me. I have put myself in God's hands. I have made up my mind, so long as you are here, to do all you wish. When to my sorrow you leave Spain, I shall find another confessor. My fancy for you is, after all, only a passing madness."

Casanova was perhaps the most successful seducer in history; few women could resist him. His method was simple: on meeting a woman, he would

study her, go along with her moods, find out what was missing in her life, and provide it. He made himself the Ideal Lover. The bored burgomaster's wife needed adventure and romance; she wanted someone who would sacrifice time and comfort to have her. For Miss Pauline what was missing was friendship, lofty ideals, serious conversation; she wanted a man of breeding and generosity who would treat her like a lady. For Ignazia, what was missing was suffering and torment. Her life was too easy; to feel truly alive, and to have something real to confess, she needed to sin. In each case Casanova adapted himself to the woman's ideals, brought her fantasy to life. Once she had fallen under his spell, a little ruse or calculation would seal the romance (a day among rats, a contrived fall from a horse, an encounter with another woman to make Ignazia jealous).

The Ideal Lover is rare in the modern world, for the role takes effort. You will have to focus intensely on the other person, fathom what she is missing, what he is disappointed by. People will often reveal this in subtle ways: through gesture, tone of voice, a look in the eye. By seeming to be what they lack, you will fit their ideal.

To create this effect requires patience and attention to detail. Most people are so wrapped up in their own desires, so impatient, they are incapable of the Ideal Lover role. Let that be a source of infinite opportunity. Be an oasis in the desert of the self-absorbed; few can resist the temptation of following a person who seems so attuned to their desires, to bringing to life their fantasies. And as with Casanova, your reputation as one who gives such pleasure will precede you and make your seductions that much

The cultivation of the pleasures of the senses was ever my principal aim in life. Knowing that I was personally calculated to please the fair sex, I always strove to make myself agreeable to it.

—CASANOVA

The Beauty Ideal

In 1730, when Jeanne Poisson was a mere nine years old, a fortune-teller predicted that one day she would be the mistress of Louis XV. The prediction was quite ridiculous, since Jeanne came from the middle class, and it was a tradition stretching back for centuries that the king's mistress be chosen from among the nobility. To make matters worse, Jeanne's father was a notorious rake, and her mother had been a courtesan.

Fortunately for Jeanne, one of her mother's lovers was a man of great wealth who took a liking to the pretty girl and paid for her education. Jeanne learned to sing, to play the clavichord, to ride with uncommon skill, to act and dance; she was schooled in literature and history as if she were a boy. The playwright Crébillon instructed her in the art of conversation.

During the early 1970s, against a turbulent political backdrop that included the fiasco of American involvement in the Vietnam War and the downfall of President Richard Nixon's presidency in the Watergate scandal, a "me generation" sprang to prominence—and [Andy] Warhol was there to hold up its mirror. Unlike the radicalized protesters of the 1960s who wanted to change all the ills of society, the self-absorbed "me" people sought to improve their bodies and to "get in touch" with their own feelings. They cared passionately about their appearance, health, life-style, and bank accounts. Andy catered to their self-centeredness and inflated pride by offering his services as a portraitist. By the end of the decade, he would be internationally recognized as one of the leading portraitists of his era. . . . Warhol offered his clients an irresistible product: a stylish and flattering portrait by a famous artist who was himself a certified celebrity. Conferring an alluring star presence upon even the most celebrated of faces, he transformed his subjects into glamorous apparitions, presenting their faces as he thought they wanted to be seen and remembered. By filtering his sitters' good features through his silkscreens and exaggerating their vivacity, he enabled them to gain entrée to a more mythic and rarefied level of existence. The possession of great wealth and power might do for everyday life, but the commissioning of a portrait by Warhol was a

sure indication that the sitter intended to secure a posthumous fame as well. Warhol's portraits were not so much realistic documents of contemporary faces as they were designer icons awaiting future devotions.

—DAVID BOURDON, WARHOL

Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of a man at twice its natural size.

—VIRGINIA WOOLF, A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

On top of it all, Jeanne was beautiful, and had a charm and grace that set her apart early on. In 1741, she married a man of the lower nobility. Now known as Madame d'Etioles, she could realize a great ambition: she opened a literary salon. All of the great writers and philosophers of the time frequented the salon, many because they were enamored of the hostess. One of these was Voltaire, who became a lifelong friend.

Through all Jeanne's success, she never forgot the fortune-teller's prediction, and still believed that she would one day conquer the king's heart. It happened that one of her husband's country estates bordered on King Louis's favorite hunting grounds. She would spy on him through the fence, or find ways to cross his path, always while she happened to be wearing an elegant, yet fetching outfit. Soon the king was sending her gifts of game. When his official mistress died, in 1744, all of the court beauties vied to take her place; but he began to spend more and more time with Madame d'Etioles, dazzled by her beauty and charm. To the astonishment of the court, that same year he made this middle-class woman his official mistress, ennobling her with the title of the Marquise de Pompadour.

The king's need for novelty was notorious: a mistress would beguile him with her looks, but he would soon grow bored with her and find someone else. After the shock of his choice of Jeanne Poisson wore off, the courtiers reassured themselves that it could not last—that he had only chosen her for the novelty of having a middle-class mistress. Little did they know that Jeanne's first seduction of the king was not the last seduction she had in mind.

As time went by, the king found himself visiting his mistress more and more often. As he ascended the hidden stair that led from his quarters to hers in the palace of Versailles, anticipation of the delights that awaited him at the top would begin to turn his head. First, the room was always warm, and was filled with delightful scents. Then there were the visual delights: Madame de Pompadour always wore a different costume, each one elegant and surprising in its own way. She loved beautiful objects—fine porcelain, Chinese fans, golden flowerpots—and every time he visited, there would be something new and enchanting to see. Her manner was always light-hearted; she was never defensive or resentful. Everything for pleasure. Then there was their conversation: he had never been really able to talk with a woman before, or to laugh, but the marquise could discourse skillfully on any subject, and her voice was a pleasure to hear. And if the conversation waned, she would move to the piano, play a tune, and sing wonderfully.

If ever the king seemed bored or sad, Madame de Pompadour would propose some project—perhaps the building of a new country house. He would have to advise in the design, the layout of the gardens, the decor. Back at Versailles, Madame de Pompadour put herself in charge of the palace amusements, building a private theater for weekly performances under her direction. Actors were chosen from among the courtiers, but the female lead was always played by Madame de Pompadour, who was one of the finest amateur actresses in France. The king became obsessed with this

theater; he could barely wait for its performances. Along with this interest came an increasing expenditure of money on the arts, and an involvement in philosophy and literature. A man who had cared only for hunting and gambling was spending less and less time with his male companions and becoming a great patron of the arts. Indeed he stamped a whole era with an aesthetic style, which became known as "Louis Quinze," rivaling the style associated with his illustrious predecessor, Louis XIV.

Lo and behold, year after year went by without Louis tiring of his mistress. In fact he made her a duchess, and her power and influence extended well beyond culture into politics. For twenty years, Madame de Pompadour ruled both the court and the king's heart, until her untimely death, in 1764, at the age of forty-three.

Louis XV had a powerful inferiority complex. The successor to Louis XIV, the most powerful king in French history, he had been educated and trained for the throne—yet who could follow his predecessor's act? Eventually he gave up trying, devoting himself instead to physical pleasures, which came to define how he was seen; the people around him knew they could sway him by appealing to the basest parts of his character.

Madame de Pompadour, genius of seduction, understood that inside Louis XV was a great man yearning to come out, and that his obsession with pretty young women indicated a hunger for a more lasting kind of beauty. Her first step was to cure his incessant bouts of boredom. It is easy for kings to be bored—everything they want is given to them, and they seldom learn to be satisfied with what they have. The Marquise de Pompadour dealt with this by bringing all sorts of fantasies to life, and creating constant suspense. She had many skills and talents, and just as important, she deployed them so artfully that he never discovered their limits. Once she had accustomed him to more refined pleasures, she appealed to the crushed ideals within him; in the mirror she held up to him, he saw his aspiration to be great, a desire that, in France, inevitably included leadership in culture. His previous series of mistresses had tickled only his sensual desires. In Madame de Pompadour he found a woman who made him feel greatness in himself. The other mistresses could easily be replaced, but he could never find another Madame de Pompadour.

Most people believe themselves to be inwardly greater than they outwardly appear to the world. They are full of unrealized ideals: they could be artists, thinkers, leaders, spiritual figures, but the world has crushed them, denied them the chance to let their abilities flourish. This is the key to their seduction—and to keeping them seduced over time. The Ideal Lover knows how to conjure up this kind of magic. Appeal only to people's physical side, as many amateur seducers do, and they will resent you for playing upon their basest instincts. But appeal to their better selves, to a higher standard of beauty, and they will hardly notice that they have been seduced. Make them feel elevated, lofty, spiritual, and your power over them will be limitless.

Love brings to light a lover's noble and hidden qualities—his rare and exceptional traits: it is thus liable to be deceptive as to his normal character.

—FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Keys to the Character

Each of us carries inside us an ideal, either of what we would like to become, or of what we want another person to be for us. This ideal goes back to our earliest years—to what we once felt was missing in our lives, what others did not give to us, what we could not give to ourselves. Maybe we were smothered in comfort, and we long for danger and rebellion. If we want danger but it frightens us, perhaps we look for someone who seems at home with it. Or perhaps our ideal is more elevated—we want to be more creative, nobler, and kinder than we ever manage to be. Our ideal is something we feel is missing inside us.

Our ideal may be buried in disappointment, but it lurks underneath, waiting to be sparked. If another person seems to have that ideal quality, or to have the ability to bring it out in us, we fall in love. That is the response to Ideal Lovers. Attuned to what is missing inside you, to the fantasy that will stir you, they reflect your ideal—and you do the rest, projecting on to them your deepest desires and yearnings. Casanova and Madame de Pompadour did not merely seduce their targets into a sexual affair; they made them fall in love.

The key to following the path of the Ideal Lover is the ability to observe. Ignore your targets' words and conscious behavior; focus on the tone of their voice, a blush here, a look there—those signs that betray what their words won't say. Often the ideal is expressed in contradiction. King Louis XV seemed to care only about chasing deer and young girls, but that in fact covered up his disappointment in himself; he yearned to have his nobler qualities flattered.

Never has there been a better moment than now to play the Ideal Lover. That is because we live in a world in which everything must seem elevated and well-intentioned. Power is the most taboo topic of all: although it is the reality we deal with every day in our struggles with people, there is nothing noble, self-sacrificing, or spiritual about it. Ideal Lovers make you feel nobler, make the sensual and sexual seem spiritual and aesthetic. Like all seducers, they play with power, but they disguise their manipulations behind the facade of an ideal. Few people see through them and their seductions last longer.

Some ideals resemble Jungian archetypes—they go back a long way in our culture, and their hold is almost unconscious. One such dream is that of the chivalrous knight. In the courtly love tradition of the Middle Ages, a troubadour/knight would find a lady, almost always a married one,

and would serve as her vassal. He would go through terrible trials on her behalf, undertake dangerous pilgrimages in her name, suffer awful tortures to prove his love. (This could include bodily mutilation, such as tearing off of fingernails, the cutting of an ear, etc.) He would also write poems and sing beautiful songs to her, for no troubadour could succeed without some kind of aesthetic or spiritual quality to impress his lady. The key to the archetype is a sense of absolute devotion. A man who will not let matters of warfare, glory, or money intrude into the fantasy of courtship has limitless power. The troubadour role is an ideal because people who do not put themselves and their own interests first are truly rare. For a woman to attract the intense attention of such a man is immensely appealing to her vanity.

In eighteenth-century Osaka, a man named Nisan took the courtesan Dewa out walking, first taking care to sprinkle the clover bushes along the path with water, which looked like morning dew. Dewa was greatly moved by this beautiful sight. "I have heard," she said, "that loving couples of deer are wont to lie behind clover bushes. How I should like to see this in real life!" Nisan had heard enough. That very day he had a section of her house torn down and ordered the planting of dozens of clover bushes in what had once been a part of her bedroom. That night, he arranged for peasants to round up wild deer from the mountains and bring them to the house. The next day Dewa awoke to precisely the scene she had described. Once she appeared overwhelmed and moved, he had the clover and deer taken away and the house rebuilt.

One of history's most gallant lovers, Sergei Saltykov, had the misfortune to fall in love with one of history's least available women: the Grand Duchess Catherine, future empress of Russia. Catherine's every move was watched over by her husband, Peter, who suspected her of trying to cheat on him and appointed servants to keep an eye on her. She was isolated, unloved, and unable to do anything about it. Saltykov, a handsome young army officer, was determined to be her rescuer. In 1752 he befriended Peter, and also the couple in charge of watching over Catherine. In this way he was able to see her and occasionally exchange a word or two with her that revealed his intentions. He performed the most foolhardy and dangerous maneuvers to be able to see her alone, including diverting her horse during a royal hunt and riding off into the forest with her. He told her how much he sympathized with her plight, and that he would do anything to help her.

To be caught courting Catherine would have meant death, and eventually Peter came to suspect that something was up between his wife and Saltykov, though he was never sure. His enmity did not discourage the dashing officer, who just put still more energy and ingenuity into finding ways to arrange secret trysts. The couple were lovers for two years, and Saltykov was undoubtedly the father of Catherine's son Paul, later the emperor of Russia. When Peter finally got rid of him by sending him off to Sweden, news of his gallantry traveled ahead of him, and women swooned

to be his next conquest. You may not have to go to as much trouble or risk, but you will always be rewarded for actions that reveal a sense of self-sacrifice or devotion.

The embodiment of the Ideal Lover for the 1920s was Rudolph Valentino, or at least the image created of him in film. Everything he did—the gifts, the flowers, the dancing, the way he took a woman's hand—showed a scrupulous attention to the details that would signify how much he was thinking of her. The image was of a man who made courtship take time, transforming it into an aesthetic experience. Men hated Valentino, because women now expected them to match the ideal of patience and attentiveness that he represented. Yet nothing is more seductive than patient attentiveness. It makes the affair seem lofty, aesthetic, not really about sex. The power of a Valentino, particularly nowadays, is that people like this are so rare. The art of playing to a woman's ideal has almost disappeared—which only makes it that much more alluring.

If the chivalrous lover remains the ideal for women, men often idealize the Madonna/whore, a woman who combines sensuality with an air of spirituality or innocence. Think of the great courtesans of the Italian Renaissance, such as Tullia d'Aragona—essentially a prostitute, like all courtesans, but able to disguise her social role by establishing a reputation as a poet and philosopher. Tullia was what was then known as an "honest courtesan." Honest courtesans would go to church, but they had an ulterior motive: for men, their presence at Mass was exciting. Their houses were pleasure palaces, but what made these homes so visually delightful was their artworks and shelves full of books, volumes of Petrarch and Dante. For the man, the thrill, the fantasy, was to sleep with a woman who was sexual yet had the ideal qualities of a mother and the spirit and intellect of an artist. Where the pure prostitute excited desire but also disgust, the honest courtesan made sex seem elevated and innocent, as if it were happening in the Garden of Eden. Such women held immense power over men. To this day they remain an ideal, if for no other reason than that they offer such a range of pleasures. The key is ambiguity—to combine the appearance of sensitivity to the pleasures of the flesh with an air of innocence, spirituality, a poetic sensibility. This mix of the high and the low is immensely seductive.

The dynamics of the Ideal Lover have limitless possibilities, not all of them erotic. In politics, Talleyrand essentially played the role of the Ideal Lover with Napoleon, whose ideal in both a cabinet minister and a friend was a man who was aristocratic, smooth with the ladies—all the things that Napoleon himself was not. In 1798, when Talleyrand was the French foreign minister, he hosted a party in Napoleon's honor after the great general's dazzling military victories in Italy. To the day Napoleon died, he remembered this party as the best he had ever attended. It was a lavish affair, and Talleyrand wove a subtle message into it by placing Roman busts around the house, and by talking to Napoleon of reviving the imperial glories of ancient Rome. This sparked a glint in the leader's eye, and indeed, a few years later, Napoleon gave himself the title of emperor—a move that

only made Talleyrand more powerful. The key to Talleyrand's power was his ability to fathom Napoleon's secret ideal: his desire to be an emperor, a dictator. Talleyrand simply held up a mirror to Napoleon and let him glimpse that possibility. People are always vulnerable to insinuations like this, which stroke their vanity, almost everyone's weak spot. Hint at something for them to aspire to, reveal your faith in some untapped potential you see in them, and you will soon have them eating out of your hand.

If Ideal Lovers are masters at seducing people by appealing to their higher selves, to something lost from their childhood, politicians can benefit by applying this skill on a mass scale, to an entire electorate. This was what John F. Kennedy quite deliberately did with the American public, most obviously in creating the "Camelot" aura around himself. The word "Camelot" was applied to his presidency only after his death, but the romance he consciously projected through his youth and good looks was fully functioning during his lifetime. More subtly, he also played with America's images of its own greatness and lost ideals. Many Americans felt that with the wealth and comfort of the late 1950s had come great losses; ease and conformity had buried the country's pioneer spirit. Kennedy appealed to those lost ideals through the imagery of the New Frontier, which was exemplified by the space race. The American instinct for adventure could find outlets here, even if most of them were symbolic. And there were other calls for public service, such as the creation of the Peace Corps. Through appeals like these, Kennedy resparked the uniting sense of mission that had gone missing in America during the years since World War II. He also attracted to himself a more emotional response than presidents commonly got. People literally fell in love with him and the image.

Politicians can gain seductive power by digging into a country's past, bringing images and ideals that have been abandoned or repressed back to the surface. They only need the symbol; they do not really have to worry about re-creating the reality behind it. The good feelings they stir up are enough to ensure a positive response.

Symbol: The

*Portrait Painter. Under his eye, all of
your physical imperfections disappear. He brings
out noble qualities in you, frames you in a myth, makes
you godlike, immortalizes you. For his ability to create
such fantasies, he is rewarded with great power.*

Dangers

The main dangers in the role of the Ideal Lover are the consequences that arise if you let reality creep in. You are creating a fantasy that involves an idealization of your own character. And this is a precarious task, for you are human, and imperfect. If your faults are ugly enough, or intrusive enough, they will burst the bubble you have blown, and your target will revile you. Whenever Tullia d'Aragona was caught acting like a common prostitute (when, for instance, she was caught having an affair just for money), she would have to leave town and establish herself elsewhere. The fantasy of her as a spiritual figure was broken. Casanova too faced this danger, but was usually able to surmount it by finding a clever way to break off the relationship before the woman realized that he was not what she had imagined: he would find some excuse to leave town, or, better still, he would choose a victim who was herself leaving town soon, and whose awareness that the affair would be short-lived would make her idealizing of him all the more intense. Reality and long intimate exposure have a way of dulling a person's perfection. The nineteenth-century poet Alfred de Musset was seduced by the writer George Sand, whose larger-than-life character appealed to his romantic nature. But when the couple visited Venice together, and Sand came down with dysentery, she was suddenly no longer an idealized figure but a woman with an unappealing physical problem. De Musset himself showed a whiny, babyish side on this trip, and the lovers separated. Once apart, however, they were able to idealize each other again, and reunited a few months later. When reality intrudes, distance is often a solution.

In politics the dangers are similar. Years after Kennedy's death, a string of revelations (his incessant sexual affairs, his excessively dangerous brinkmanship style of diplomacy, etc.) belied the myth he had created. His image has survived this tarnishing; poll after poll shows that he is still revered. Kennedy is a special case, perhaps, in that his assassination made him a martyr, reinforcing the process of idealization that he had already set in motion. But he is not the only example of an Ideal Lover whose attraction survives unpleasant revelations; these figures unleash such powerful fantasies, and there is such a hunger for the myths and ideals they have to sell, that they are often quickly forgiven. Still, it is always wise to be prudent, and to keep people from glimpsing the less-than-ideal side of your character.