

Hard to Deny

Intimacy and independence
- Robert Stirnberg

Hard to deny that intellect may be
as one swerve of the *yin-yang* would have it
a cruel product of constraints on male bodies,
barely if at all aware of the images
being constructed in less rational cells
that inform mental and bodily actions

a mentality that works by means
of impersonal organization of formal rules
founded on control of an object-world
enforced by all the binary oppositions
(public/private objective/empathetic
justice/compassion self/not-self. . .)

misusing for instance what it supposes to be
the more fluid malleable as yet
unspent potential of femaleness —
a utopia-desiring production
lying fallow intact undirected
not yet socially defined

thus closer to the unknowable unconscious
there to encode their own desires their own
paradisos the object of *eros* no longer
even the image — once the poet's joy
but now instead (since imagination,
the site of love — was ruled unreal for dealing

in counterfeit means of exchange: image of an image
of an image) the ever unattainable
cogito — male desire for women
having little to do with actual women
but part of the unending search
for a territory of satisfied longing.

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Before all else, survival
mechanisms genetic
strategies a matter
of physical proportion

symmetrical body parts —
hip-to-waist ratio
waist-to-chest and -shoulder,
size of lips and eyes

and biochemistry —
pheromones, hormones, scent
turning on the reptile

brain's erogenous zones

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Several months before birth, chemicals
naturally part of the fetal environment
induce their brains to grow centers of meaning
will and communication on average larger
than their brothers', making them more adept
at mimicry of others' body language

instinctively mirroring in their own bodies
and sense-of-self the differences of others,
even in early infancy exercising
the gift of looking long into others' eyes
earlier and more perceptively
reading faces for signs of danger — aggression

especially — prone most of their lives
to empathy intuition the magic some say
of reading others' minds and states of mind
feelings intentions — wanting to make connections
organize and orchestrate the world
so they feel more at home in it

feeling themselves failures if they don't —
taking it upon themselves to seek
more earnestly for gentle means
to avoid avert quiet and settle disputes
peacefully amicably and if necessary
using three times more words to do it

their brains near the end of the track shrinking
more slowly — in particular
the hippocampus fusiform gyrus temporal
lobe prefrontal white matter,
those centers of concentration memory
listening language emotions and decision-making.

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eros/amor quest for the beloved
image the lover has in mind embodied

orexis/appetitus a moving toward
a compulsion a craving to have and to hold

mania/insania obsession
jealousy possession by imbecile demons

epithymia pangs of desire
hunger lust *concupiscentia*

pleonexia/cupiditas
a clinging to recreating the mundane

philia/amicitia
a fellow feeling, a bond of trust

agape/caritas love thy neighbor
without expecting reciprocity

pothos/desiderium a fond
regret a yearning after a longing for

storge/dilectio companionship
a slowly developing mutual affection

eleos/misericordia
loving-kindness mercy in action

pragma/pragmatica taking to heart
the loved one's cultural situation

eusebeia/pietas awe
reverence service to the divine

loid/ludus a playful game-like manner
lovers might adopt to their greater joy

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but then a quisitive generation thinking less
of each other than of the relationship

how it might or might not be the liberating
catalyst by which each achieves themselves

a geometry of love where size shape
and obliquity signal levels of involvement

degrees of mismatch for instance — real and unreal
or how we think the other feels about us

and how the other does feel about us
or how we would like the other to feel or what each

thinks the other thinks reality is
or is to be or what you think you want

and what you think you are and are in fact
getting out of the relationship