re: Play

Michael Gregory

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Nothing happens for the first time. . . . To make it new is to make it recur.

- Norman O. Brown

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Encore

God how I loved the feel of her the rhythms moving us chord by chord into each other while I tried to learn her hardest lesson, her song, by heart: how to love without desire, hope, expectation, or her.

Audition

The same seawind that beats the cypress back toward the Mendocino headlands

whispers among the giant redwoods whistles through the bristlecone

rushes across Death Valley's brittle sage and three days later

breaking against the Chiricahuas these last reaches of the Sierra Madre

spills her Pacific waters on this high desert valley bringing autumn's

chill and your primordial scent here where most of the year the rivers

run dry and the heart is expected to keep good time wound up with thorns and reptiles

Plot

The tantrists say the lover, looking in the eyes of his beloved, must visualize the goddesses he needs to carry himself out of his dreadful mind and body.

That's the easy part. What's difficult, once I've gone behind the image you make in candlelight, behind the self-reflection in your eyes, to see you where you live,

is coming back unable to bring you with me or going wherever you might go through mine or just staying put loving one another embodied in this time for what we do to and for each other and who we are with eyes closed in each other's arms here even when we're somewhere else.

Type-cast

I open your book and pieces of my life fall out amazingly intact, the brittle facts restored with strange upholstery, the skeletons fleshed out articulating events I feel I must have lived though I've seen them only through your proverbial eyes.

These printed sheets unfolding your particular colors, the instants of your life, remind me how thin personal history is, how easily the fearful symmetry resurfaces in faces glimpsed, bodies barely touched, the past imperfect imposed on the present tense. If they burst into flame, these pages could not insist more plainly that we have known each other forever, sharing our innermost secrets, our intimate ineffable selves

—but then you break the narrative, disappear into untold episodes of lovers making love to a second person plural you, cutting the whole cloth of our possibilities into a patchwork affair or period piece at best, leaving me to wonder if characters like us can ever touch one another except in signatures bound together in some unauthorized version.

Backdrop

Painstakingly on all fours slithering when need be

seeing like bats
in the dark
a few words
a short tune
pushing back
the shadows

Strike flint to oil Mix the pigments

No man here since me

crescents circles

equilateral triangle point down bisected

> ellipsis a thin line down the middle

hands

infinity signs

redundant curves: water, bird, lightning, snake

crosses

stickmen: five limbs

sometimes a head

the horned and hooved muscles tensed eyes alive in rut in labor

I try to keep you in mind but in this echoing silence this sputtering flame feel alone

on the way up don't dare look back

Bemused

The sight of you after all these years, the sound of your voice, the sense of your words remembers me and should be like spring rain to a man lost in the desert, but it's been dry too long, too long since I allowed myself to walk these winding paths trailing you elusive as moths on a moonless night, watching the darkness pretend to brighten, a leaf to sway in the direction you had passed, catching your essence on the blossoms you touched — more pungent than their small perfumes. In those days, I had thick dark hair, quick ears and blood unclouded by misconceptions, failures, stipulations served up with their inevitable deaths.

I'll never know why you passed me by. It's true I never could have played those airs that led you over the edge, but he at least had someone's word that you were there; I had only hints, whispers and fantasies, no way to know shadows from shades, a dream from a Dream, no promise from either that bitch goddess or her consort that you would follow me out of that snakepit into the sun.

Now you appear in the flesh.
Once I would have been torn apart
by the audacity of my vision
but having grown at this late date
used to ignoring artful women
I find myself too old for these games
and you too beautiful to believe.

Trademark

Mirror images separated before birth, spirited down diminishing tunnels behind the stone eyes of the two-faced god, returned in the dark of the moon blind as the scales of the goddess by what may be not chance

we face one another through the edges of our presumed identities, tentative fingers reaching across the sacred line by which our respective tribes mark their common grounds and justify their differences,

the no man's or woman's land where making signs under cover of darkness we place offerings in trust come morning we'll find them exchanged like for like among the headless bodies and bodiless heads.

Quick Study

Think of me as your Third Eye.
I have been where you have been face to face with the primal pair involved in our family romance before the first word was uttered at the end of the white rainbow, scouring the deserts when they were oceans searching out the geologic faults of your beloved coastline when they were merely ragged edges of continents drifting toward each other.

Think of me then as you inside out, your pineal consciousness meandering through the silvery mists where Albion meets Avalon: the unexpected ghost in your heart the half-life you dreamed at eight the unmentionable touch at nine the eye you tried to hide from lovers the unbeautiful eye that looks inside the red-rimmed eye where the sun is lost reaching into the acid-etched mirror breaking through the engendering codes behind our long love affair with the earth tasting the hot tongue of your ancient witness, your black Irish soul, the lover who left you for another nightmare, the brother you never had between your damp and quivering thighs the man who mistook you for himself the man you mistook for someone else both of you thinking he was not you because you were burning too bright to see.

Comic Relief

Remembering how last fall Holding the hard green calyx Behind the scarlet pliant fruit

Testing it first with my tongue Then with pursing lips, my teeth Barely touching the taut skin

I sucked the sweet persimmon pulp From its bursting tip until my cheeks Filled out so full I had to swallow,

I come again to the easy conclusion That this soft Persian luxury Not the hard-skinned thrifty apple

Must be the fruit of Ishtar and Eve. Now persimmons are out of season, Nowhere to be found, not even the firm

Temptingly dark ones you think might Ripen at home but whose flesh regardless Of how you treat them puckers the lips

Leaving your mouth full of bitter Aftertaste. Praise be for mangoes. Even the *supermercado* in Minneapolis

Has them this time of year. Red Yellow or green, ready or not, I'm saved: pulling back the skin

I lower my face into this sweet Revelation; closing my eyes Holding on with both hands

Throwing etiquette to the wind I give myself up to lusciousness Sucking the slippery substance, kneading

It with my urgent tongue, my lips

Feeling the cuttlefish seed at the center, The tantalizing resilience, give up

Its tropical succulence, smearing
The sticky juice on my nose and chin,
The filaments caught like hairs in my teeth.

Pillow Talk

You of course will call it love and I afraid to rope it in like a calf for its first branding will say I don't know what to call it.

I will say there is something I don't know what my words can only make it small and you of course being more familiar with the heart will call it love.

I will know in my heart it is not this, not that but try to please you with metaphors and similes: moonlight cupped in the hand, flight that only exists as wings in motion.

You will point to the stars coming up each night, rivers joining the resurgent tide, the ache of flowers to become fruit and you will call it love.

I will fall silent wanting not to lose in a generosity of words the delicate mystery of feeling. You will think me sullen, try to tease me out of it and that too call love.

I will say it is like parallel lines converging at infinity, the opposite sides of squares becoming round, not to be confused with the flesh and blood that embodies it, the desire of a moment, appetite that is satisfied and dies.

You will grow somber speaking of flames rekindled, the seasons' rise and fall, life itself consisting of moments, calling it love that gives each moment birth.

I will say Andreas and Marie having nothing better to do would have delighted in what they would call this sweet dispute. You will counter with Medb and Ailill, Penelope and Ulysses,

ask what better use could be made of their time together. Than talking about it? I will ask, and you will say, than knowing what they're talking about.

I will say I'm at a loss for words, the cat will have my tongue, touch being the only language in which I understand your meaning and you of course will purr and call it love.

Refrain

In the pale pre-dawn I reach across to you but you are still asleep. I lay my palm in the lush curve of your waist, my finger tips barely reaching the soft rise of your belly. It's all I can do not to slip my hand down the smooth pelvic slope below your congenial hip, my middle finger slowly parting the pliant passage where the inner thigh meets your pubic mound, sliding gently over the curling hair into the cleft of you still wet from last night. Instead, not wanting to wake you even to love, invoking all the husband gods, I practice due restraint, in time doze off content to wait, remembering the way in your own time you open to me, unfolding layer after layer, resurgent flesh drawing me in deeper and deeper I fall asleep puzzling over the word refulgence. Then the wind pulls a platinum blue sun over the eastern mountains igniting the western peaks, a waking finch hazards a tentative chirp, you murmur a reply nestling your back against my chest as dawn gives us back our bodies.

In the Wings

You don't write, call, wire, send

pigeons, rainbows, camels

you don't say why,

what, who, when, you don't you don't

I flood the mails of various countries, UPS, Western Union

(now there's an idea),

radio shows, flower

shops in several cities

with simple messages:

Hello. Thinking of.

How are, is. Every

little. Doing what?

About? When? You name it.

In my mailbox nothing

as far as I can see,

nothing to put my hands on,

a museum piece whose gaping

mouth I reach into daily:

a runaround by Escher,

the modern wing, Dali,

di Chirico, room after

room, the recent past

black on black on black,

the foreseeable future

Bosch, then hieroglyphics,

animal heads on stiff

humanoid bodies, carved

boxes, tons of sand

Pantomime

I gnaw on the knuckle of your absence crack it open enter the hairline fracture descend the deep rift

with spectroscopically pure x-ray vision investigate the odd angles

the white splinters the jagged ends
Divine nothing. There is no marrow.

Behind tight skin my useless lips
I beat the aching drum of my tooth
worry it sick with my tongue

my second sight blind in the pulsing rhythm of you not here

4

Keeping time Losing touch Up and down Back and forth

rhapsode episode

I work my snake-eyed wand

mark of the blind seer physician thief

Shuttling through the weaving pattern

woof and warp lock stitch unstitch

I exercise my walking stick
my threadbare story
my motley garment
my Irish penance
my raveled life

4

Hopscotch A spinning top Skip rope No hope

Toss out jacks Pick up sticks
Mumblety peg Lonely bed

Somersault My fault Bounce the ball Chase my tail

Teddy bear Solitaire
Games played One by one

4

I stand on one leg close one eye flap one arm gabble trumpet

squawk and prophesy the bleak the nowhere



Like cotton candy I spin and spin I breathe out

I breathe in

conceits pour

from my pores

Concentrating
the power left
I dervish myself
a whirling eft
a spinning top
a luminous egg

Inside the blur
my heart goes numb
I cross my arms
I suck my thumb
My eyes turn to smoke
I speak in tongues

#

Like the blind I live in a sea of time between your voice and touch

Take Three

Actually, it's kind of cute, you in his arms, me alone, an empty space over our heads,

you in my arms, him alone, an empty space in the left corner where the heart would normally be,

all of us alone, disarmed, wondering when all three of us at once will spin off from sheer

velocity into a next dimension or simply wobble out of kilter, indiscreet objects weighted

unequally or collapse to a single plane line or period snuffing out our particular dreams

or lie here on location armed to the teeth, triangulated viewpoints defining a vicious circle.

First Cut

Don't you just hate it when the weather conspires with the moon to throw everything out of round? April is just too weird. It was hot, already summer a month early, the passion flower and lizards out already, the apples past full bloom. Then after our talk on the phone the wind turned cold the sky grey and the rain blew in out of the northwest entirely out of season; my heart leaving a cave the size of Portland fell halfway to the Forbidden City to sit among the primal microbes tormented by monkeys with steeltrap jaws cold as Hell who poke at it, bite out pieces and fart them back to earth signed With love.

Properties

I'm trying to understand
"male pattern despair"
this predisposition to die
inside the inflated forebrain
pinched by your recession
as naturally as the forehead
capitalizes upon
the hairline receding toward death.

Speaking of which, I do understand his bottom line, his threat if you should back out to go into final closure. I think I understand too your interest in saving him from bankruptcy, protecting your investment by not withdrawing the good faith offer you made him to underwrite his venture, overcompensating present demands due to unresolved past debts. May even understand the give and take by which abused beauty keeps on giving: like Janis said, another piece of my heart.

But this is not a fair trade trade fair or mutual fund. His claim on you is nothing less than emotional blackmail or cheap protection racket that doesn't engage your talents or psyche wholeheartedly, an expense of spirit you can ill afford. At best (if you're not very lucky which you usually aren't) you end up selling yourself

short and buying dear, losing your shirt, pants and self-respect in the bargain.

Not having a life myself I can't pretend to be a transactional analyst or investment counselor, not even a businessman, but as one sincerely trying to understand your long term needs (and male pattern despair) I have to believe that you could get the far better return you deserve simply by taking advantage of the present bullish market to move your liquid assets into a premium shared account. We're not talking hostile takeovers here or junk bonds but high yield futures with built-in equities not to mention all the peripheral bennies like meetings of minds and other customer satisfactions.

Tech Run

I sit inside knowing you must be with him wherever you are whoever he is but down this street they're beating another man to death a block away they're raping another girl whole nations are being liquidated next door under a crudity that smothers the oceans, refined, dissolves the sky, so what you're doing to me with him is insignificant and we're alone in any case locked in our first person singular I do understand perfectly I can't disagree despite this wrenching in my guts this clenching hatred wringing my heart twisting my serpentine mind.

Credits

Oh shit. You're never going to believe this isn't just another line of hormone-happy conceits baying the moon, one more sentimental male cop-out. All those years of loving disappointments, of serial despair, have built such walls that even simple hope takes more than Kierkegaardian leaps can accomplish, more than Jamesian will alone can do. We are the children we were warned against who cut our eye teeth juggling Hitler and Love, who learned to crawl under the newsreel eyes of Hirohito, Stalin and FDR. Now we're in the realm of Sartre and Camus the justice courts of Kafka and Lacan the virtual hands (Okkam help us) of Ouspensky and Vico. In this program Heidegger plays Hermes, Schopenhauer becomes our Atlas, Sorel our Vergil, Arendt the Sybil and Heisenberg's principled shadow falls like a scrim before all our gestures and attitudes.

Teaser

How do two people with so much in common so collective an unconscious come together consciously in good conscience as they say without misreading or misleading in this day and age of gender bending animosity when texts lie in tactical layers when being just friends just won't do.

How might two psyches recoalesce despite the piecemeal way we have to go at it, depending on what's in the dumpster, eyes glistening toward the light, sticky tongues and antennae trembling from overload as we lift the rusty lid to find our bag lady lying inside.

It's hard to rebuild the heart from scratch hard to forget what never happened write off what never will be.

What am I supposed to do with this history your hands have written in me, this emptiness you filled so beautifully, these nameless things that visit me at night?

Argument

It's often true (at least of things we like: a loaf, a cup) that half is better than none. But half of even a double rainbow, even at dawn, is less than one; and half a kiss — your lips' impression, say, on cards and letters, even with the best intention — is still less than one hand clapping, a promise unkept.

Besides, I dream too much about Nazis these days, the Salamander loose in a landscape of burning books, the pledgeclass lockstepping out of Georgia under his impish grin, under God, the ghost of Liberty, her once-exposed breast removed for security reasons, leading the way, waving the once-proud banner of blood-red stripes and bone-white pentangles right past the red insides of that watermelon green body hanging by the road north to the House.

So yes, let's try without denying whatever this is between us — consanguinity, shared conscience, cohabitation of psychogeotemporal space, incarceration for our bad language habit to *love* without falling *in*, if that's possible, electing to humor our affinities, making a virtue of this apparently happy coincidence, offering one another not peace of mind (a consummation not likely when lovers, since nothing human is alien, can't be expected to be less cruel to each other han they are to themselves), but two-way committed open-channel communication, a chance to know one another as deeply as we care to go into our selves, to delight and empower each other, enriching our work in the world, to have and to hold and to be someone to count on when things get just two crazy.

Ex Machina

One on the rimrock above the still desert

One on the windy crag above the restless ocean

One meeting one in the shining air

beaks and talons locked together

rising and falling tumbling and soaring

heart and soul body and mind

wing over wing eye to eye

Aside

Wouldn't that have been something, clinging there in the otherwise empty air wings whirring with absolute satisfaction our songs pure nectar on each other's tongues

Tableau

Here we are becoming memories again frail as dreams fragile as feelings fleeting as thought as flimsy as principles that shadow the killing field as we approach the sunset a mutilated angel tongue out on our knees to take the appointed miracle.

Program

While tending to believe the world is set up so we will live only once (we being more assembled package than body parts), and so not denying that past events and people, including ourselves as we recollect them, are merely images of ghosts of beings so temporary so unbearably light it's hard, no matter how ugly or beautiful their deeds, however much we consecrate their memories, to even think of them in the same breath with responsibility.

(Who can blame the butterfly's stealing of nectar for the global shortage since then or praise the dragonfly's perfect voracity for a certain absence of itching we enjoy because that carnal appetite was satisfied feeding on even more fleeting lives?)

Even if the world, unlike us, picking up density and velocity making quantum leaps through cloud chambers, endures in time and space subject to cause-effect and other moral imperatives, even if the fathers weren't without sin, who can blame us for things before we were born?

Nonetheless, not trusting coincidence, and pretty sure that what goes around comes around, rehearsing the moves from there and then to here the steps from here to where and now to next I'm trying (without getting blown away in mental freefall or lost in pointless repetition like that woman running off at the mouth pushing her cart around the convenience store parking lot, or that spaceman who packs his bag religiously every morning then sits all day watching the buses come and go), I'm trying to renegotiate the terms of living in eternity here now: feeling the burden of all the words in our heads (the meanings

bearing down on us from before our conception, this world of everything speaking its own name), as well as coming to terms with the obligation to share in this spiraling world of eternal return, this endless epiphany of our fluent selves, alive as one alone can never be where temporal matters have become concrete universals, each with specific gravity each with its particular enchantment where the squashed bug begs the question forever and eventually even the butcher must ask himself the point of killing again the lover the point of jumping off again where we have learned not to laugh too hard meeting ourselves coming around again.

Score

But fuck all this philosophy and time-weighted wordplay. Lady, I'm so tired of games. Death has me by the throat already and you too I suspect. Look. Here's how it is: the sexual revolution lost the social revolution co-opted the psychedelic revolution subverted by hip entrepreneurs media moguls and pop gurus.

Who can forget that woman who walks among the moonlit acacias crying for lost lovers lost brothers lost sons? Who can be happy that those we love and love itself sicken and die? Who can escape La Chingada slipping across the midnight desert to hex the works of laboring men? Who can find peace and happiness making necessity a virtue?

We knew from the get-go that nothing conventional was going to work especially now when there's no chance of making a home together having children together touching except very long distance. Burnt fingers, bruised egos, deconstructed hearts still convalescing from failures attacks and multiple by-passes: demons surround the blue lotus the blood swarms with god's own vermin forked tongues caress the Rose of Sharon betrothing her to dark-eyed lovers etcetera etcetera

ad nauseam. The question is, given all this run-of-the-mill catastrophe, this screenplay

fantasy and variations,
will you can you do you,
will I can I do I
recognize something different happening here
some flicker of light against normal subspace
something impalpable improbable
but nonetheless capable of transfixing us
transposing us out of the ordinary dead end,
transfiguring us zipping us together
from either side of our Pacific slope
the slippery truths of our declining years
and if so, are we finally going to let it happen?

Turning Point

I am not talking to the Muse I am not talking to the Goddess I am not talking to myself I am talking to you

"Where is the man, you asked, man enough to love?"

I understand, there is a tide in the affairs of women, *y entiendo que no maduros esten los mangos, la fragancia no apropiada*, *y que esta agua no es para chocolate*, but I ask you

Where is the woman woman enough to meet his love when offered?

Endnotes

Nothing happens for the first time: Norman O. Brown, Love's Body (NY: Vintage, 1966), p.207.

Plot. out of this. "It is the fate of Hermes that for himself and for those with him there is no chance of losing oneself. He cannot escape from memory." Karl Kerényi, *Hermes, Guide of Souls: The Mythologem of the Masculne Source of Life* (1944), tr., Murray Stein (Dallas: Spring, 1986), p.32; cf., "Always ourselves with no relief": Bruce Cockburn, "The Angel Beast" (1993).

Bemused. "the love bestowed on a poet, however briefly, by a Muse-possessed woman, heightens his creative powers to an unparalleled degree. . . . The peculiar strength of the Muse lies in her need to bestow love freely and absolutely, without incurring the least contractual obligation; having chosen a poet, she then dismisses him in favor of another, whenever she pleases and without warning. He must never count on her constancy, or her honour, or on her sympathy with his sufferings, but remain faithful beyond reason." Robert Graves, *Mammon and the Black Goddess* (NY: Doubleday, 1965), pp.146-147.

Trademark. the two-faced god. "Janus, like Hermes, is a trickster and carries a magic wand": Norman O. Brown, *Hermes the Thief* (NY: Vintage, 1969), p.38.

the sacred line. "Crossing the boundary' was, in the eyes of the primitive Greeks, the essence of trade and economic enterprise. . . . Thus, Hermes, the god of the boundary-stone became the god of trade and craftsmanship, and, consequently, a culture hero and 'giver of good things." Brown, Hermes the Thief, p.13; also, "Ancient economics, both sacred and secular, was based on reciprocity, not on seeking advantage." Jeremy Rifkin, Biosphere Politics: A Cultural Odyssey from the Middles Ages to the New Age (NY: Harper, 1992), p.22. Cf. also, "A boundary is dangerous: a division in the heart," David Dean Shulman, The King and the Clown in South Indian Myth and Poetry (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p.3.

Pillow Talk. Andreas and Marie de Champagne and Andreas Capellanus. Cf., Andreas Cappelanus, *The Art of Courtly Love* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1941; pbk., NY: Norton, 1969).

Medb and Ailill. Queen and King of Connaught; cf., "The Pillow Talk of Medb and Ailil," the opening scene of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (tr., Thomas Kinsella, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969); and Michael Dames, *Mythic Ireland* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), p.239: "The word *Medb* (pronounced Maev) is cognate with the English, *mead*, the intoxicating drink fermented from the honey of flowers, including elder flowers, and associated with the English fairy queen, Mab. In Irish, Medb's name means 'The Intoxicating One'... Medb of Connacht was regarded as sister to, or 'the same as' Queen Medb of Tara, whom the High King of all Ireland had to marry before he could assume the title." Thomas F. O'Rahilly (*Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1946, p.395) says "Medb was originally the goddess-queen of Tara."

touch. . .the only language. "In touch there is embedded a profound mystery, wisdom perhaps beyond our understanding, an allegory of all our living," Jessamyn West, *Love Is Not What You Think* (NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959), p.11.

Pantomime. seer physician thief. "Besides the herald (and of course the king), the priest, the necromancer, the prophetess, and the bard carried the staff as their badge." Brown, Hermes the Thief, p.28n. "Hermes, the archetypal journeyer, inventor of language and consort of several Great goddesses (Hecate, Brimo, etc.) is also the great go-between. . . . To him belongs the soulconjuring wand of the wizard and necromancer. . . . the herald's staff, about which intertwine two antagonistic-loving serpents," Karl Kerényi, Hermes, p.77.

Argument. lovers can't be expected. Cf., "you can't expect somebody who loves you to treat you less cruelly than he would himself. The equality of love is always pretty awful. Compassion (not pity) can be a great thing but love knows nothing of it." Hannah Arendt to Mary McCarthy (7 June 1957), ed., Carol Brightman, Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy (NY: Harcourt Brace, 1995), pp.50-51.

Program. The endless epiphany. Kenneth Rexroth, "Lute Music," *The Phoenix and the Tortoise* (1944); in *Collected Shorter Poems* (NY: New Directions, 1966), p.143.

Turning Point. Cf., "Where is the man/ man enough to love." Sharon Doubiago, "Visions of a Daughter of Albion," *Hard Country* (Minneapolis: West End, 1989), pp.89-90.