

## A Quiet Dance with Sadness

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores dialogues of guilt, sadness, and the repression of those feelings in heterosexual relationships, and on a larger scale in our workplaces, our schools, and our neighborhoods. The people we want most to confide in – our partners, our lovers – are often the most difficult to speak with honestly. We fear losing that individual, or relinquishing the social crutches that figuratively keep us alive and moving. The feminine and masculine can often speak to a familiar shared form of sadness, yet there are qualitative differences in the ways they perceive, interpret and react to the sadness that they find challenging or nearly impossible to communicate. Without this tangible and open communication, dissociations can form between the feminine and the masculine, the wife and the husband. In coupledom we can isolate ourselves to an unbearable degree, where we no longer know our other, let alone ourselves. The dissociative tendencies that arise from truths that are too distressing to keep secret yet too terrifying to share are patterns from which we wish to be free.

A pair of dancers share a home within each other. They share a sidewalk, their feet move in unison. They share space, they move within it. The dancers share words, laughs, triumphs and the greatest of falls which are imprinted into narratives that don't always match. They share the fragile layer of coupledom, complete with boundaries and limitations that are both spoken and left unsaid. A dance shared by two people ought to have an intimate level of communication, sometimes verbal and sometimes nonverbal. One dancer might lead temporarily, but the other must follow closely so as not to scare a footstep out of sequence. The dancers are inseparable -- even in moments of detachment they remain intimate and honest. They are quick to notice their faults. They each write their own motions with their bodies and one cannot write the other...they may only dare to influence. The following two pieces can be understood as honest attempts to capture narratives of, respectively, the wife and the husband. While heterosexuality and heteronormativity

continue to prevail as privileged modes of being, we recognize that these bodies of being are carried by many and so long as they exist, there will remain the need to nurture a place for conversation. It is our view that through the unpacking of these modes of being we can attain freedom from their constraints.

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I am desperate for a comforting hug in the morning. I wake with such crippling anxiety that I am unsure as to whether I have even slept or just spent the night grinding my teeth. I rise alone most mornings, except on weekends, and scramble to get dressed and have a bowl of cereal before noon. Lately, my dreams have been both traumatizing and sexually satisfying. I am running from a man who seems to want me, whether for his own selfish pursuits or to only provoke a chase and in turn, keep me on some treadmill of fear. I guess that is still selfish. This man's face is hard to look at- he is a monster constructed out of my father, my husband and someone else who I believe to be my dead uncle. It's so invigorating to be chased. I find my fingers wandering into me after being immersed in these kinds of dreams. I get excited when I am scared. When I find myself on the cusp of revealing these exciting dreams to my husband, I hold back and pinch myself under the table. I won't disrespect him- or- introduce the complexity of my pains and desires with this kind of nonsensical storytelling. He is a good man. Don't get me wrong. God has given me too much already.

...we would masturbate in secret, not to go further, but to attenuate the tension a bit, just to take the edge off. And then as soon as we come, we go and make ourselves feel guilty--so as to be forgiven; or to forget, to bury it until the next time. Here they [women] are, arriving over and over again, because the unconscious is impregnable. They have wandered around in circles, confined to the narrow room in which they've been given a deadly brain-washing.<sup>1</sup>

I am fumbling to find my words. This happens when I am with him too, my husband. I want to talk about these things; you know, my desires, my unexplored passions! But I would feel as though I'd be bothering him and

<sup>1</sup> Helene Cixous, Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, "The Laugh of Medusa," *Signs* 1 (1976): 877.

weighing him down more than he already does to himself. He is a sad man, so I approach him calmly and quietly, often with a neck massage. Once he is calm enough to listen, I can talk. Sometimes I tell him that I'm having a hard time. Sometimes I ask him if he wants to tell me anything, you know, about what he *really* wants in life, whether he has feelings for other women...maybe someone at work?

Romantic relationships may be particularly constraining on women's leisure when such relationships are highly gendered... In these types of relationships [women and men] adhere to stereotypical masculine and feminine gender roles and exhibit stereotypical masculine and feminine behaviors....In some relationships, women are expected to be primarily responsible for making their intimate relationships work, by being the caretakers and emotional workers in their relationships.<sup>2</sup>

I mean, I don't know who he talks to. But often times, I mumble something stupid and burst into a fury of tears. I don't even know if I want, or am ready, to hear his truths. He stops taking me seriously when this happens. My anger in those moments is deep, but I retreat. I continue crying on my own and I believe I'm crying because I think I am the one to be distrusted and unloved. He is so patient with me. Here I am having dreams of fucking other men, and sometimes women. It's disgusting but I can't stop. Often, these dreams are the only joyful part of my day. I want to be desired by more than just him, and I am so sickened by these fleeting impulses. I can say they are fleeting because there are days and weeks where I am satisfied with my husband and our routines. Ideally, I would be able to...cheat...on him and still maintain the security of my life now. If he knew this he would be destroyed and he doesn't deserve that.

Her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide. Her writing can only keep going, without ever inscribing or discerning contours, daring to make these vertiginous crossings of the other(s) ephemeral and passionate sojourns in him, her, them whom she inhabits long enough to look at from the point closest to their unconscious from the moment they awaken, to love them at the point closest to their drives; and then further, impregnated through and through with these brief, identificatory embraces, she goes and passes into infinity. She alone dares and wishes to know from within, where she, the outcast, has never ceased to hear

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2 Kristi L. Herridge, Susan M. Shaw, and Roger C. Mannell, "An Exploration of Women's Leisure within Heterosexual Romantic Relationships," *Journal of Leisure Research* 35 (2003): 274.

the resonance of fore-language.<sup>3</sup>

My body craves validation. I want someone to appreciate my hips again, and my breasts. I wish I could find this validation in myself but I wouldn't even know where to look. I find glimpses of my beauty in the eyes of strangers whom I have come to know- the cashier at the Sunday market, the crossing guard. I make a special effort to walk with confidence around them. In the very least, they will hold me as an intelligent young woman in their minds. I always have that to come back to when I'm feeling low. It's when I am feeling low that I force my way out of the house. I count the steps to the nearest coffee shop, and buy a biscotti and a latte. I need to buy something, even something as insignificant as a dozen eggs, to feel productive during the day. I guess that is a little sad in itself. I want to love singing again -- I sang soprano in the college choir. I used to love a lot of things, and I guess I still would love them. But I imagine it takes a certain level of self-confidence to approach hobbies. Unless they were secret...like letter writing, maybe. I'm sorry that I can't keep with a single focus here; my scatteredness is unintentional. I want to feel alive again, if you couldn't already tell. I've been dormant for some years -- my friend tells me I am just "stable" and "questioning it". I don't know whether feeling alive again will come from a secret lover, or from myself, or... I just don't know. I am hoping God has some answers for me- that is, if he can forgive me for what I might do.

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Every day I look upon the same crawling parade of dust, inspecting the same innumerable stones for chips and cracks as they move along the same rusty conveyors – and every day I ask myself for what? Sometimes I swear she does it on purpose, aggravates me for the sake of aggravating me. Or maybe she doesn't even notice what she's doing. I just don't want to deal with it after a long day's imprisonment in this place.

Sometimes you climb out of bed in the morning and you think, /  
*I'm not going to make it*, but you laugh inside / remembering all  
 the times you've felt that way, and / you walk to the bathroom,  
 do your toilet, see that face / in the mirror, oh my oh my oh my,  
 but you comb your hair anyway, / get into your street clothes,  
 feed the cats, fetch the / newspaper of horror, place it on the  
 coffee table, kiss your / wife goodbye, and then you are backing

<sup>3</sup> Cixous, "The Laugh of Medusa," 889.

the car out into life itself, / like millions of others you enter the arena once more.<sup>4</sup>

I come here for us, so we can be happy, and all I need is some time to unwind, to sit down, have a drink or two, watch some TV without having to talk so much.

I can smell the dirt collecting in my throat. I hate the thought of it invading my body, becoming a part of me. I looked across the conveyor and spat into the thick air of sand. It's not easy standing here all day. The pain in my feet is fleeting, bearable, but what's worse is when my mind wanders away from me. I imagine the happy family who'll decorate their backyards with these stones. They're strangers to the misery of this place, which is fine really, nobody's fault but my own, but sometimes I can't help but feel sad for my wife, for the guys here, for the life I've chosen for myself.

I have what I have always held to be a mildly discreditable day job, that of teaching philosophy... because about 85 percent of my time and energy is devoted to training aspiring young members of the commercial, administrative or governmental elite in the glib manipulation of words, theories and arguments. I thereby help to turn out the pliable, efficient, self-satisfied cadres that our economic and political system uses to produce the ideological carapace which protects it against criticism and change.<sup>5</sup>

I don't want to upset her but I can't help but get frustrated when she doesn't give me the time to relax, to let this place get out of my head. I know she does a lot more than me around the house. And she always makes sure to have food ready when I get home. I love her for that, but I don't understand when she says she feels unappreciated, as if it's unfair or something, or as if that's something I decided. After all she does have more time than me, and I do make an effort to show my appreciation every once in a while. I bring home dinner a couple times a month. And plus she buys herself little treats when she's out doing errands. That must be nice. My treats are dropped by a machine into my hands with the insertion of a loonie.

But what the hell do I know, anyway? Maybe I'm just too old and dumb and lazy to get it. All I know is it's not like it used to be. Not like

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4 Charles Bukowski, "*Gamblers All*," [http://bryantmcgill.com/wiki/poetry/charles\\_bukowski/gamblers\\_all](http://bryantmcgill.com/wiki/poetry/charles_bukowski/gamblers_all)

5 Raymond Geuss, "A World without Why?," *The Point Magazine*, Winter 2010, <http://www.thepointmag.com/archive/a-world-without-why/>

those days when we were really happy. I'd come home to surprise her and we'd see each other and laugh. The sex was wild and intimate. Now the flowers go straight in the vase, a kiss on the cheek, and life continues. Sometimes I think she can sense that I still try, that I'm still alive. She'll come to me cautiously some nights and touch my shoulder. I get nostalgic and sad and horny. I know she wants sex but how do we conquer the present? Our bodies long ago lost their youth. I remember when I could wrap my arms around her body. I remember when she still had her long, dark hair. Since then we've grown old and boring and our bodies uninspiring.

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Who if not ourselves can we blame for that strange but gentle stifling of our deepest hopes and desires, of our possibility for love and meaning and understanding? We are always responsible, and yet in a manner that wholly escapes us we are victims of a prevailing stupidity, of an unyielding masculinity that demands rationality and instrumentality at all costs. Today it is indecent to be unhappy, an insult to feel mistreated, a disorder to be depressed: one gets the impression that a person is sick and ungracious merely, a sentimental fool, a lonely idealist, a whiner or a woman. But what could be cleverer than the systematic repression of our own discontentedness? If we are taught at all costs to be happy for what we have is it not in order to conceal the fact that we have already lost everything?

Our unhappiness, our desperation, and our frustration: it is deeply political. By confronting it without guilt or shame or fear we can learn to articulate in a meaningful way the sense in which life for us has not been what it could be. There is an element of horror in our lives, of interminable boredom and absence, and quietly without our awareness we continue to perpetuate it in the deepest hollow of our souls. It is an oblique oppression that is forced upon us but self-imposed, and so we deserve to be unhappy. The world fell long ago somewhere outside our reach, and at present there are no means by which to meaningfully express it: we live in an era of therapists and twelve-step programs, of sitcoms and magazines, of shame and guilt and confusion, and together these concerns serve to eclipse real political questions. If we are not granted the freedom to understand ourselves, how could we possibly understand each other? Our relationships are dominated by an insidious antagonism in which nobody is permitted to

speak, where every thought and desire becomes blurred, and we protect at all costs that precarious comfort we derive from our quiet lives -- and we keep still, we hold it all together, and we hope: we hope that in the end perhaps everything will be just fine.

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