

27
SUSPENSE

CURRENT TRENDS
IN
AMERICAN FICTION

MISERICORDIA: Fifteen Dreams and a Story / Fifteen Stories and a Dream (excerpts)

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For Carlos Fuentes

1.

It was at the time that I decided to write that work in which I would plunge further into the layers of fiction than any man had ever plunged before, that I also decided to visit Madrid.

2.

DREAM. On the coast, 27° below zero; in a pension, seemingly safe. I hear footsteps and groans. Someone enters the room where I've been sleeping with my back to the ceiling. I am put into a large sack and a noose is placed around my neck. I shout for help three times. I free my head from the sack and see only the dark outline of a face (sharp profile, long hair); I can't make out who it is. Twice I shout, "Who is it? Who is it?" Then I awake.

As I said above, I decided to visit Madrid at the same time that I decided to write that work in which I would plunge further into the layers of fiction than any man had ever plunged before.

I hadn't been well for months. I was all languishment and self-pity. I couldn't accomplish a thing. My fiancé—on whom I'd placed the last of my hopes and trusts—was beginning to have her doubts. I'd long been in psychoanalysis. That course seemed interminable.

I'd also read a novel. It was a fictional account of the age of Philip II. His symbol—El Escorial (symbol of intolerance, the closed, un-poetic intellect)—became the reflection of my heart. The final vision of the novel—intellectual, social, sexual, that is to say, human, liberty—became for me the vision I knew I needed to achieve.

As well, I discovered those geniuses of the Spanish pictorial imagination, Goya and Velázquez. "I must see those paintings," I told myself. I would dash my dreams on the canvasses of ages long past, in a language I did not know. I would find myself—somewhere else.

But isn't that what I'd always tried to do? To be somewhere else? Someone else? Hadn't I always denied my childhood so as to rediscover it all later in adulthood, through that denial? Hadn't I simply tried to become the lack of my lack, hoping that

through some obscene magic, that double lack might become my happiness? But that double (and at times triple) lack had proven to be a dead-end. I had only become more lost to myself: We cannot compound the Other.

(the time when I so sorely needed to be alone, to be completely honest with myself; to abandon the facility of poetry: the final confrontation: to record all of my dreams)

But in Spain (I resolved to myself), not only would I be in another place of another tongue, but too, I would be so alone that I would be forced to confront my demons (to use that tired phrase). I'd at least chosen the site of battle.

That battle became only too vivid.

(that work which would be but an outline, as I felt myself to be but an outline ((my head pierced by two glasses (((the uppermost larger than the lower))) on which were outlined "Las Meninas")), an outline of some self or another that I'd resisted for far too long)

Three weeks evenly spaced. In the first, those demons tormented me as never before. They all came to the fore, taunting me with all of my shortcomings, my fears, my worst. In the second, in the third they were simply there, there for me to watch. Finally I decided to take them in tow. By the end of the third week, I'd accomplished a new order; I'd confronted and overcome my lack; and I was able (truly able) to perceive that vision of liberty.

Ah, that time!

Ah, that work!

Ah, ah, Madrid!

6.

DREAM. I am angry at Y _____. Why? Because she is ignoring me.

Rupture. Suddenly I find myself with three weeks on my hands, without commitments or demands. Too, my fiancé has gone north to visit friends. I haven't enough money to travel in the manner I am accustomed to, so I simply decide to spend the time in San Francisco. I will relax, visit old friends I've neglected for far too long, and go again to the galleries. In short, I will try to be happy.

One evening my young brother invited me to a concert of "punk" rock 'n' roll music. "Why not?" I said, "it's youthful energy, and my artist friends have praised its uncompromising nihilism to me." I was interested.

We went that evening to the Mabuhay Gardens ("The Mab", had they read Shelly?), a Philippino supper club in the evening which its owners turned over to the local "punk" entrepreneurs late at night. The combination was too much for me to resist.

I enjoyed the evening thoroughly. The music was wild and vicious, the audience as outrageous as it intended to be. Does punk really represent a crisis in the culture? Are we really in a context similar to Berlin of the Thirties? Is punk so far left that it can easily slip into Fascism?

But political and economic considerations were far from foremost in my mind that night. The energy and aesthetics of the music were. And with my fiancé absent, so was sex.

In other words, I met a woman. She called herself Ursula Thule. She was exquisitely

beautiful, thin and pale. Though perhaps by punk standards her dress was not at all outrageous, if one looked closely at her, he could see a purity of anger and nihilism in her eyes and in her clothing, that far outstripped mere outrage. And that's perhaps why she chose me above all the rest: she being in a very dark blue (almost black) of silk and leather; me in my customary light blue cotton. Though my seeming naiveté of dress appeared mismatched to her negation, once again the theory of color proved to be destiny.

(that work of measureless rhythms, my "Song of Songs," every stroke of the erotic brush ((and faithful to Desnos' erotic: pure and licentious in the Absolute")))

She took me home that night. It was a well-outfitted apartment with a beautiful view of the City and the Bay (I've come to love so much). In a very definite order, and thereby meant to create a specific effect, were her sketch-books and her paintings. Her art hearkened back to those great visions of Bosch and Moreau (and here I played Puvis to her Moreau). An entire galaxy of monstrous colors populated her canvasses. Here indeed was the vision of evil some artists have struggled to attain for centuries. The theory of color had finally achieved its ultimate masochism.

Strangely (and perhaps appropriately enough) she'd not seen nor heard of that great eroticism of line and color that Wunderlich has achieved. The ambiguous and ironic sexuality of her art was not in the least a dreadful mixture of philosophy and what passes today as eroticism. Nor was it a catalogue of manias and male fantasies. These great black forests of the imagination were hardly the "divine pubis," but only its much entangled hairs. Line was here supreme. And in its matted mass of color she saw fit to depict (in her own curious version of representation) the great battles of history. Reversed. On her walls she was painting a fresco of the sexual battle of Lepanto. But here the fragrance of the Turkish spices (between so many thighs) overcame the Spanish intolerance of sheer physical beauty.

Her battle against intolerance was not unjustified. Doctors had advised her that she had little over a year to live (the blood of course). She could never finish her great painting in that time. She'd therefore decided to leave it in its half-finished state (for after all, the battle against intolerance is hardly finished). Punk was all she would live for now. And my sex.

I'd never met a woman so dedicated to the practice of fellatio, and who could so ceaselessly lyricise about it too. (Indeed, she'd written an essay on "The Rhetoric of Fellatio," and another called "Cunnilingus: Fact or Fiction?". With my own piece, "The Double Negative of History," we published the trio as a pamphlet ((which needless to say, has never sold out its first printing)).

Though punk allies itself with Dada, she'd quickly perceived that its real ally is pornography. Hence her paintings and her essays. Hence too, our relationship. Ours was no simple in- or con- version, but a true *subversion*. Like punk, excess outdid value.

That my penis became allegorized in her painting never gave me any qualms. I thoroughly enjoyed her obsessions. There was never any humiliation of me on her part; nor on my part did I ever feel any pity for her condition. (After all, how often have I felt myself to have but a year to live?) Never have I been so respected by another individual.

She had said good-bye to her few close friends long before. Each midnight we would walk from her Telegraph Hill apartment to the Mabuhay in North Beach. We would drink and listen to the groups. Energy itself was sheer delight; we'd freely

abandoned any critical point of view. Too, she knew my fiancé was soon to return. Early one morning after a concert, and without a word, she drove me home, fellated me in the car, and left quietly.

The next week I read her obituary.

She sent me a note written on a photograph of my penis in her mouth: "My mouth, my painting, your prick, live now only in the imagination of your wife's thighs."

In their own unique way, those three weeks proved to be a decisive part of the liberation I was seeking to achieve.

7. (Tangles / Miscellanea / Options)

DREAM. A friend of mine whom she hated was caught in the ice. She prevented me from rescuing him. Was it my mother flinging knives at me?

Before we begin, let us return to...

I've heard it said that it is said that...

Seeing as I believe in order almost as much as I believe in disorder...

That couple had finally achieved an impasse (a cul-de-sac, a stalemate) from which they could not (or perhaps ((and perhaps we had better leave it unsaid)) would not) extricate themselves. Tangled in that (far too) familiar web (labyrinth, artifice), they could not (see above) determine whether they were the weavers or those (predictably enough) being woven. Like a poem spinning on its (often uncertain) axis—an axis or poem (sometimes only slightly, sometimes even moreso) off-centered—their roles in this game (this play, this dance) would oftentimes meet (coalesce and be rent asunder), only to meet (coal...) again. I.e. it was no dream.

(that time when the possibility of suicide became acceptable, and when the dead could truly and finally bury themselves)

They had achieved an impasse from which they were unable to free themselves. Caught in the familiar web, they were unable to determine their respective positions. Like a dream's axis, they would continue to meet, only to part once more. Could they awake from this horrid dream?

I wouldn't deny that...

A text not unlike those texts we sometimes see of anatomy, physiology, and such
The day a literary text is composed somewhat like those biology and physiology

A text that would not be unlike one of those textbooks we so often see of anatomy, like: a text composed of a series of transparencies, one layered upon another, the textbooks which superimpose one upon another a series of transparencies, each one an anatomical text composed of a set—a system in its own right—of transparencies, whole forming for our vision, our glance, a composite, an image of the system of delving further than the other, into the complexities, mysteries, enigmas, of the body, each layered upon another, each revealing the various and unique systems (the systems, the parts in their respective positions, comprising and composing their space. the corpus, the text.

skeletal, the nervous, the reproductive, etc.), revealing their inter-relations, both

within and amongst themselves, in this system(s) of system(s).

Turn it over to:

8. The Reader.

9.

DREAM. In Chinatown he met the man who'd murdered his father when he was a child. No one would lend him a car to chase the man. "I don't need your reasons," he kept saying, "I need your car!"

PITY. Young and desperate, they'd had no alternative. Another young couple on the run. Through a twisted series of events, they'd pawned one another off.

Though never seen since, is it she I always carry with me? Or is it our mutual pity? Or is it that pawn ticket?

Early each morning while staying at the pension, I would awake from my dreams and go to the bathroom. Directly behind it was the women's bathroom, to which the concierge's daughter would be going at the same time. We would acknowledge one another in the hallway, and then proceed to our toilets, where we could hear one another urinating. Invariably, I would finish before her, so that as she exited from her toilet, I was closing the door to my room. This continued for three weeks.

Time or the weather? No, hardly. What transpired between us? What satisfaction did we receive? What desires did we acknowledge or create? At the expense of which desires not acknowledged? What is desire? What is repression?

POWERLESSNESS. Another time it was the telephone, the only connecting link of untouched mornings. She hurtled me out of my youth into adulthood.

How many poems not read? Conversations not said? How many crises avoided?

We're actually the best of friends now. When, after a long absence, we saw one another recently, we instantly recognized each other (much to our surprise, as we hadn't expected to). Such is fiction.

(Madrid, where everyone I saw reminded me of someone else; where people ((like fiction)) *blend*. ((Would I be exaggerating if I said that every Madrileña is beautiful?)) Where an exquisite woman—an outline of black and red, wearing one black glove—reads a cheap magazine)

I've a repertoire of images over which I can habitually and easily masturbate. Years ago it was a particular issue of a semi-pornographic magazine. Recently, while browsing in a used bookstore, I came across a copy (the same? my old copy?) of that issue. Instantly, memories of lonely nights flowed over me.

PROSTITUTION. Once I was a room service waiter in a fancy hotel. One evening I delivered an order to a room where two women were staying. They were obviously mother and daughter. As it was late, appropriately they were in their night clothes. The daughter was quite attractive, though to my mind self-conscious and a bit

repressed (the hair tied back tightly). After she signed the check and returned it to me, she realized she'd forgotten to return me my pen. I asked for it. She said, "Oh, sorry, I've a penchant for such things" (meaning, I supposed, for forgetting to return pens). I replied, "Penchant, eh? Not bad." She gave me a puzzled look as I left the room, once again glancing at her desirable legs. She returned my glance with another inquisitive look, wondering at my desire, and/or my (seemingly to her) improper remark. After I'd shut the door, I overheard her mother remark, "You shouldn't have looked scornfully at him, dear, it was a good pun." Obviously the girl was completely unaware of her language.

Who was truly more aware then of my desire, the mother or the daughter? And to whom then, was my desire directed?

Faces memories accumulate. Nights here, mornings there. (Mothers appear at indiscreet moments.)

Here is a dream of one face, thrice changed: Swinging in a loft, imagining the worst, followed by a strange allusion. Our name's denial: Prostitution.

13.

DREAM. Stranded in London for five days. Great! Just enough time to see the Rokeby Venus.

Somewhere I've mentioned the piece of fiction I wrote at the time of my visit to Madrid. The fiction was to encompass all of my life until then. Too,—and standing outside of my life—I would abandon for a period of two or three years the kind of poetry I'd been composing, and spend that time solely on two long (and completely new types of) poems: one on Velázquez, and one on Goya.

Like that fiction and those poems, I see Goya and Velázquez in a similar manner: being both all of life, and its *outside*. Goya of course is always all of life. He is never not life. He is immensity and magnitude (even and especially his apocalyptic hallucinations). Velázquez is much more difficult to assess. A great part of his "oeuvre" (the dwarfs, the gods) is *utterly* life, but only as indices of possibility. Another great part (the many court paintings in particular) stands completely outside of life. It is the world of the courtier. What has that to do with real life? (Much! many of us might argue.) And what, especially, of "Las Meninas?" It is so utterly its own object, so true and precise a revelation, that its precision denies and over-turns its self-possession, and becomes completely and perfectly *ours*. Here I think is the difficulty of its enigma, and the problem of Velázquez' art.

Goya belongs then, immensely and intelligibly, to all of us. Velázquez is grasped, and then slips away. His art is both inside and outside of life. It accommodates, dares, and then defies possession. Goya's is the classical text, Velázquez' the radical: completely arcane, completely superficial. What then of my fiction and my two poems, and their relationship to these two artists?

(that work ((whose predecessors I saw as being Nerval's *Sylvie*, Breton's *Nadja*, O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds*, and Cortázar's *Hopscotch*)) which would possess a thousand exits, entrances, and ((self-)) references: a work all parenthesis, all tentativity; without top or bottom, beginning or end; neither circle nor diamond, but constellation. A light ((a darkness)); a guide ((a cul-de-sac)))

The fiction of the wholeness of life (with no outside) is thereby Goyesque. But in its deliberate artifice, it takes part in the Velázquezian view. The poems ("representing" the outside) are analogous to Velázquezian "representation." But in encompassing the two artists, they take part in the view from Goya's canvas. *Where, then, is fiction? And where was I to locate what passes as life?*

My suspicion: Not even in those spaces I've tried to outline above (the over-laps and dissolves of radical and classical art, the interior and exterior), nor even in their points of inter-section. But rather, in those gaps and margins, those *bulges* created as a result of these spaces of intersection: in that *accumulation of outsidenesses*. (Hence my love of the ((extra-)) parenthetical remark.) Has Velázquez the Erotician yet been appreciated? Or Goya the Cartographer of Perception?

And hence, too, from that precise and difficult perspective, my trip to Madrid (my trip to the Prado) became more than simply intellectually or aesthetically justified; but even moreso, it was an emotional necessity: The lack I have spoken of elsewhere was discovered to be over-flowing with life.

14.

DREAM. It was on the morning of the fourteenth of January, 1979, that the secret of death was revealed to me in a dream.

There were fifteen of us. Suddenly havoc was let loose. We were killing one another.

Each of us is more than double: we are each of us seven persons (or personalities?), either three-sevenths good and four-sevenths evil, or vice-versa, though in our conscious state we cannot determine which.

Eleven of us had died. The four survivors were in the house. We could see the eleven bodies strewn on the ground, each with their seven emanations. I was partially dead (out there) and partially alive (in the house), not knowing my proportions of good and evil. I was about to go out to that bloody, snowy, yard of death, to confront my seven emanations.

And now?

I work on my poems on Goya and Velázquez.

My analysis has finished.

I dream (literally) of Spain.

(that work which would prove that age-old fiction that all of life is a dream ((like "Las Meninas" and like poetry at times, it would negate itself and make necessary and possible a new aesthetic)); that would so reveal everything, that all could thereby be denied)

But. . .my childhood still haunts me. I remember a spanking my father gave me (and I recall that it was justified). I remember certain smells: of places and of aunt's kisses. I remember too, a cousin and her interminable magazines. (Oh, how we needed magazines!)

But. . .was my analysis cut off too soon?

But. . .how far can we plunge into fiction?

But. . .

After all, a simple piece of fiction never really changed a man. After all, where is my childhood now? Where am "I" now? Where is Spain?