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Faust et Moi

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I was always young. It needed no transformation music, pretty as it is, for me to seem so again. My beard and fusty robes sprang away from me the way leaves rush from a lawn, cleaned away by an invisible wind.

“To seem so again.” To seem to myself young, and seem so to you. To her.

I was the devil I sold myself to.

And Germany is calling again.

Faustus= *favustus* =fortunate, favored, favored by fate.

Faust = fist.

Which do I mean, my force or my fate? Am I agent or am I angel'd?

Spoused fun. Faust pun. He needs a wife I need a wife. What's true for him truer for me. Comparative of bliss.

He goes from woman to woman, not out of licentiousness but to seek the perfect wife. No matter how many he has. Marriage is no obstacle to married bliss. Find her, whoever she is. Whoever I seem to be.

Marguerite = *margarita*, 'pearl.' A string of pearls.

One after another.

Because he is a perfect husband he must marry everyone he meets. Or at least everyone who seems as if she might be the perfect wife.

His desire is the fire in which they're both to be refined. Defined. They are transformed by what he wants. A hoax, like the hoax of poetry.

This is not adultery but its opposite.

This is not infidelity. It is a pilgrimage of faith itself.

Faith in the perfectibility of person, in the perfectibility of relationship.

Adultery, adultery is settling for imperfection. Settling. When we say of a substance that it is not purely itself, we admit it has been adulterated. Something is adulterated when it is not utterly true to itself.

So wrote Faust. (Take this out later so the reader can't tell me from him From her).

I am a bottle, dark green glass, barely translucent but translucent.

In me is a message, carefully and neatly written, on sturdy paper with a decent ink, screwed tight and stuffed inside.

My name, personality, history and so on—all those are just the cork snugged into the mouth of this bottle.

The message is intact inside. I am in the sea.

I wait for you, wave. I wait for you, shore. I wait for you, hand.

Certainty was never my business. A puff of smoke, greenish, from my chalice. A few dead leaves, scarlet symmetries. Enough to go on. Guess.

She knew she was in trouble when she felt his eyes all over her, her body, not just the face, not just the glances that smooched along her cheeks to linger on her lips. Lips open,

moving. To speak. His eyes were on her body. Body: midriff, loins, nape of neck, socket of knee, small of back, hollow of throat, curve of belly, chute de reins. She knew she was in trouble when she could feel him reading her skin, her shallow breath, her cautious smile.

He stole her feelings. Shanghaied them into his huge complicated design where he worked them in, her feelings, so important to him, as if he had none of his own.

His phantom city he built around her. Live in me, he seemed to be saying. But he had no in.

She knew she was in trouble but knew he was in worse trouble. A perfectionist has no peace, ever.

He was a pilgrim through a world not yet finished. Never finished. He was to go on forever. He called that living, sometimes he called that loving.

She was afraid of him, so she took him in her arms. Maybe so close to her he could not hurt her.

She could see him: he studied her the way a blind man faces the rising sun.

How (she thought), how does what he sees have anything to do with me?

Open me, open me and read! He would say things like that, and no god, no devil, could say what he meant by such jargon.

The language of enthusiasm is always inexact. If one truly knew the thing one wanted, one would not go on wanting it, since want is consciousness of deprivation, and knowing is consciousness of possession.

Enthusiasm speaks from deprivation; it approximates, it yearns.

The shadow adds dimension to the man. She studies it in turn, trying to know the thing he makes happen, the thing of which he cannot be fully aware.

No man knows his whole shadow, she said, and he thought her clever for saying it. It made him more determined to possess her. Or not so much possess her, as possess that power which simultaneously summons, appropriates and dismisses all such images into and from the niche in the world, in the mind, that she occupied at present. Her amber yellow hair.

The lover of chastity. I yearn for chastity the way a poor man hungers for money— anxiously, energetically, dreamily, in vain. The turbulence I bring to the quest for the object of that desire annihilates the quality sought.

Parable of Midas, whose fingers found the same quality in everything, and made it what he sought. His so-called gold.

My touch imbues even the chastest beloved with my own immunditia.

I make unclean.

Parable of the leper. What I am, I make you too.

Immundus. Unclean. As if: un-world, un-worlded. The world is clean. The only chastity (he is told) is everything htat is, left just the way it is. The unclean lover takes his love out of the world.

Come home with me.

How I want to wake and see you beside me on the bed, your head pillowed in the bedding I have left for you. I have saved you from the world. I study morning light on your cheek, the stain of shadow along your throat. I hear you breathe. Not meaning to, you have saved me from the world.

There is a strange ancient novel called *The Recognitions*. It begins with a sentence that haunts me all my life: “I, Clement, a native of the City, have been all my life a lover of chastity.”

Clement, whom we call Alexandria, says of himself, I am a native of the city of Rome.

This book translates me.

In vain again. For Clement in the book achieves that which he sought, finds it because he already has it.

Is Socrates wrong, then? So that Love, far from being penurious and full of hungry wanting, is actually all Surfeit and *satis* and serene with its own fulfillments?

He found what he was, and he found it in everyone.

If you must be chaste to find chastity, must I be or become the woman I desire?

Is Faust Marguerite?

So he looks (and what a sad story this is going to be), he looks for that quality he desires, looks for it in a person who is enough like him to support the inference: ‘this person is a lover of chastity,’ but also enough like him to warrant a foundational impurity, a looseness, a door somewhere in the back of the house slamming open in the hot prairie wind. Through that portal, unclean lust slouches in and out.

Faust writes on a piece of stiff cardboard: Never doubt your desires or your entitlement to them. Doubt is loud, and others will hear it, and come to doubt you too.

Faust looks at what he’s written and doubts it too. It seems childish, cynical, adolescent, merely true.

Faust in his dealings with men and women much prefers civility to truth. Truth changes with situations, while civility is permanent.

Faust in his dealings with angels and demons is much more likely to give and expect truth, imagining (wrongly) that angelic beings perceive situations better than humans, however wise. This is superstition, of course, and will get him into endless trouble.

Angels and devils are in the situation too. Or they are the situation. How can someone in a situation see the whole situation, which itself is part of an endlessly proliferating nest, network, of situations. Each situation bracketing all the others, and bracketed in turn.

Faust knows this too, of course, because he's smart. But because he is still a little boy, he believes that truth is the civility owed to angels. And true enough, it is. It is superstition, however, to expect it from them in return.

Because pure Presence alone is the only civility you can expect from angels, the only gift they have to proffer or withhold.

Faust feels the warm pearls slip through his fingers.

Pearl after pearl. Such a long string of beads. Has he ever counted them? How many pearls is forever?

Can he tell the pearls that are his past from the ones that are to come.

Pearls of identity.

What if this one warm lustrous pearl in his fingers now, round, sensuous, faintly exciting, between slope of thumb and fingertip, what if this one were the last pearl of all?

Would he know he had come to the end of the rosary and started again? Would it be again if he didn't know it?

How warm a pearl is. It never loses a certain animal warmth or spirit. You can tell it was alive once, before it was slain by admiration, desire, possession.

It may still be alive. Or capable of summoning (or is it only stimulating?) life from the body with which it rests in contact.

Is the warmth from the pearl or from the skin?

From her or from him?

Maybe it is a product of contact itself.

Faust remembers a Russian mystic who taught that the sun gives no light and no heat. Space beyond earth's kindly atmosphere is dark and cold. What we call heat and light are earth's response to the distant diamond fervor of the sun. Light and heat are response. They are the friction of earth's love song, earth's welcoming the sun's invisible ardent ray, the spill of glory from the touch of love.

Or maybe earth is just us.

Maybe heat and light are our answer, billions of humans metabolizing their lives, marrying the sky.

This heat comes from me, Faust thinks.

When he thinks this, all at once it becomes bearable for him to remember that after all is said and done, the pearl borrows its warmth from the skin.

As once it borrowed its substance from the tender self-regard of the oyster, the anxiety that spoke and spoke around a core of doubt.

Its luster is its own.

Where does the skin go to get its heat?

From the pearl, surely.

We feed one another.

I am Faust and you are Marguerite and the other way round.

Complete. All the properties of all the pearls are found in any pearl.

Everything, that is, except the allness of them. The many.

If one were enough, one would be enough.

If one were enough, there would only be on sunrise in the world.

Then one sundown and no more kisses.

[18 November 2001]

This must be why, on Easter morning, when the bells are dangling and the fools of the town, those ordinary people, are putting on their fuzzy pink cloth spring coats and their lime-green sports jackets and their two-tone shoes, Dr. Faust himself is slumped in his armchair, his hands, weary of pearls for a moment, toying with a small blue bottle.

This is the poison.

He doesn't propose to drink it in order to become young again. He is always young again, he can't grow old, he can't grow out of his adolescence, desires, requires, skin and silk and flying through the air, all the Witches' Sabbaths that a young man dreams and an old man, he is an old man, can no more stop dreaming than he can stop breathing.

Breathing too is a young man's folly.

Hence the bottle. Breath and folly, youth and desire, all can be escaped at once.

But what image will be the last one to loom in his mind's eye, clear or murky, as his consciousness, such as it is, dims down for the endless night, dims out, yields, stops. *What image last will lurk inside his mind?* He remembers asking that question when he was young, fifty years ago he asked it and still he doesn't know.

What is the final image?

And suppose it is her, the last one, the one who still is waiting for the answering letter, the phone call, the promised necklace, the book of Sufi proverbs, the weekend in the mountains, all the feints of love? Can he leave her so unsatisfied?

Why should she be more satisfied than I, Faust wants to know. That is crabby and selfish of him, even to think it. He knows that, he unthinks it, the thought turns into Well, at least I can satisfy her, a little, maybe, now if not later, now if not forever.

But he'll have to stay around to do that. He puts down the blue bottle and picks up the green telephone.

[18 November 2001]

Not so strange that the West, in love as we are with masks and those who wear them, has never noticed that its chief heroes are different stages, different ages, of the same man.

Don Juan—who has somehow been the one speaking often here—is an immature version of Dr. Faust.

Run out of steam, he can now be described as learned, doctus, doctor. That is, he can be defined by what happened to him, his hap. The weary wisdom that accumulated in his heart. It stifled passion without in the least extinguishing desire.

And both of them, I suspect (but who is speaking?) are the middle-aged and old respectively stages of the young hungry happy hero we call the Grail Knight, pierce-the-veil. Parsifal is the larval stage of Faust.

But maybe the man, the hero, does not age at all. His society changes around him. Some angel out of Adorno could tell us, but doesn't it seem that when the chivalric age ends, Parsifal's quest for the Holy Grail makes him a different person, since there is no Christ, no blood, no cup to fill with it, no company of love in the mercantile proto-bourgeois world—Phillip II's Spanish Empire, Vermeer's Delft. The Grail Knight must become the Girl Knight and seek out women, who alone remain prized, mysterious, imaginably holy, and who unlike the Grail remain multiple, sacred in each instance, each instance compelling to the next, the whole holiness graspable only when all the instances have been embraced. Women are many. Manifold as the opportunities for grace in a godly world, manifold as the opportunities for profit in a merchant world.

And then he is a very old youth indeed, and the spirit of his quest is alive enough in him to make him uncomfortable with his wise, displeased serenity. Serenity means night music. And he doesn't want to go to bed yet. Not yet.

Nobody home. The green phone rings and rings. Nobody answers. He puts it back on its cradle, reclaims the poison.

In his discomfort with his stillness, he writes essays on Nomadic Poetics, on the Art of Exiles. He rediscovers in the curlicues of his fleshy brain the lost Germanic epic the poet Ovid wrote during his exile among the Goths. He argues that literature reveals its truth best in translation, when it is estranged from what it supposes to be itself and becomes the other, or at least the other's. Undistracted by the sound of its won voice, the smell of its own breath, it is candid in translation.

Faust puts maps up on his walls—stained, wrinkled, discolored sheets that represent, usually ineptly, the glorious landscapes of the earth that once were women, stayed women long enough for the eye of the artist to observe them, and recognize their lineaments afterwards in the habit of sea and the haberdashery of rock and cloud.

A map on the wall is always a woman in disguise. He writes this and thinks about crossing it out.

Then he fears that doing so will make it all the truer, since the hidden is worth more than the evident, isn't it?

Elle, qui fut la belle heaulmiere.

Hidden in time.

Heart hidden in mocking ribs.

Faust thinks of a woman standing at a window, taking in a view of the city, perhaps giving the city a view of herself.

Which comes first, to see or to be seen? How are they different?

Sometimes he sees her as if he were looking up at her from the sidewalk several stories below. Sometimes, though, he is in the room with her, watching from behind, observing what little of the sky and house roofs and steeples is not obscured by the graceful curve of her opaque and curious body.

She stands there against the light.

She who used to stand for the light. The only light he needed. Once.

Sometimes he sees her as from a window directly across the street from hers. At those times, their eyes seldom meet. But sometimes they do, and they dare to stare.

There, each thinks, that is the one they call the other.

And when they stare, then it is that Faust, not she, is the first to look away, shy not of the woman (I think) but shy of the sudden suspicion that he is looking into a mirror, and that she is he.

Or that the only woman left to him is the one projected from his eyes.

A woman is a mirror he writes, and crosses it out.

Maybe she is the only woman he ever knew, even though years ago he successfully courted one thousand and three of them in Spain. Were they just the several, separate breaths of his sighing, his desiring?

Maps, walls, women—all symbols of one another. But of what else?

That too he thinks about crossing out, and does, then realizes—as if a moment too late, that Else is a woman's name too.

He wonders: the poison in the little blue phial, warm from my touch now, a blue pearl, a blue rose of forgetfulness, haven't I drunk it already, many times, haven't I died many times?

And then he forgets.

He forgets, just as he has forgotten many times before.

Only in forgetting can he go on.

Startles, wakes, starts again. The blue poison is surely my ink. Why didn't I know it long ago? The clear poison took color from the bottle in which it lived so long.

Now writes the world dead word by word.

Death lives in glass.

Faust is almost sleeping now. Blue ink.

I have used this ink to poison the world, infect you. Love letter by love letter, poem by poem, treatise by treaties, I have infected you with my own virus, with me, with me, with

the view from my window I made you once, once think was your own

and in that rapt moment when you knew me as yourself, we lay down together as it always was, became as close to one as two can get

and this love lasted till the light faded from both our windows

and all our doors were banging in the wind

and one of us got up to shut them and other was alone

and never came back and still am alone.

Faust is sleeping. The blue bottle rolls out of his fingers and drops, unbroken, into the skirts of his warm robe that bunch at the foot of his chair.

[20 November 2011]

I have achieved the transmutation. The work of thirty-seven years has finally, quietly, been completed. The stone. Bred in mind then banished to the world of objects, returns and recognizes itself a subject again. Returns to my body. To be my bones. Every bone renewed. Every integument by which one bone knows another.

He takes out a postcard of the Tour saint-Jacques and turns it over. He writes in Latin on the message half of the card. In translation, he has said: This erection in Paris not far from the Town Hall, the Woman's Cathedral, the River, this upthrust emblem tells much of my story. Stonework, the little lizards who run down from the sun, the girls who make

waterspouts of their hands so that the rain says something to the street below. He has room only to sing: *your Faust*. But he does not write anything in the name and address side of the card. He does not know to whom to send it. He turns the card over again and admires, above and on either side of the mysterious tower the uninflected vivid blue of the sky.

I have achieved the stone. It has come home and claimed me.

I belong to all the things I ever said.

He crosses that out and tries again: I belong to all the things I never made.

Awake now, he gets up with a stiffness in which he imagines he can distinguish the muscular torpor of recent sleep from the clumsy stiffness of age. He goes across the room, away from the window, and pours himself a glass of liqueur, green pastis, and pours some water onto it, so that the clear emerald green turns yellow and grows turbid. He drinks some of this, and goes back to his chair, balances the glass on the chair arm.

They know my name but they do not call me. I know their names but do not touch them. We are even in our sad desuetude. Equals.

As he sips his pastis, he remembers a few phrases, imageless, that chased through his head while he slept. Whenever he woke they were there, then he'd drowse again and wake up to check if the words were there. There they were. But what did they mean?

Sexe couleur de moutarde, is it all right?

Faust teaches how to relax into ardor. His pupils come up the stairs one by one most days, he embraces them one by one as they come in. Hour after hour, life after life. When they leave they take the wax of his candle, leaving him to keep his flame alive as well as he can. They take the glass of his glasses, the sand of his hourglass, the Christ off his crucifix, the words out of his books, so at midnight he has to pray to an empty wall.

All they leave him is geometry. All they leave him is empty pages. Who will fill them?

No wonder on Easter morning when all the businessmen sit in the cathedral remembering the lap dancers of the night before, and all their wives sit in the cathedral trying to remember nothing, no wonder that Faust is outside, upstairs, griping, danceless, unforgetting, sourmouthed from his breadcrusts sopped in morning wine mixed carefully following the ancient Roman custom, one part strong wine to eight parts water. But Germans can't grow red wines, he thinks, not strong ones. But we have method.

He sips the pastis to take the taste of the breakfast away, and then the taste of the dream.

Sex color of mustard—what did it mean by saying that in sleep, his sleep? Was sex the anatomical feature (sex of a gladiolus) or the socio-physical behavior (they had sex) or the gender (the female sex) or the issue (Freud's views on sex), the endlessly absorbing human discourse or its momentary crises of physiological enactment?

And any, all, of these acceptations—how did it, they, comport with mustard? Mustard-colored excrementitious evidences of podicopenetrative raptures (how enterprising lovers are?) The unfolding flower of her sex (whose?) opening not the mauve petal works we expect but to something yellow-brown, faded like certain roses? How sad. How old.

is it all right? –that seemed to be asking, is it all right that this (what?) happened, we did it (or did not do it) this way, is it all right that we did, is it all right that sex is that color, is it all right between us. Are we ok?

But who was speaking? She lies on her back, already asleep in his mind. He lies on his back and asks himself, was it with me that she was herself? And how did I like that?

[22-23 November 2001, Boston]

We did know it all along. Dr Johannes Faust we read in the old book, John Fist or Lucky John, John = Juan, Don Juan so lucky in love.

