

“Madame Psychosis: Entanglements” Adam Fieled



Apologia

Imaginative representations of sexuality are (have always been) one of the pillars which gird up the humanistic arts. In the long tradition of represented sexuality, certain tropes repeat— thwarted desire, obsession, the pursuit of impossible ideals, willingness to take foolish risks and transgress just to satisfy physical urges. With the advent of modernism and post-modernism, representations of sexuality became more obtuse and/or objective—the female typist in “The Waste Land,” the semi-impotent quandaries of Leopold Bloom and Gabriel Conroy, the forced piety around sex and orgasms in D.H. Lawrence— all not buttressed by the raw candor of a first-person perspective, all sex processed and represented sideways. Most of the poems in this collection do feature a first-person perspective— albeit one torqued away from conventional (“Romantic”) concerns. If these poems do have some claim on avant-gardism, it is because they seek something other than epiphany or the development of subjectivity in relation to a sexualized (and thus fetishized) Other— rather, they dwell in a median space between ecstasy and agony (sometimes, too, “ecstasy” can be taken in its “olde” sense, as a state of having transcended the body completely). In this median space, the first person experience of sexual intercourse (and of sexualized interactions in general) is strange, fragmentary, and inconclusive.

The “Madame Psychosis” poems themselves investigate a kind of portraiture (loosely ekphrastic from de Kooning’s “Women”) which is also strange, fragmentary, and inconclusive. In the parlance of post-modernity, the poems, however conventional in other ways, reject closure. They also bang (with a certain amount of violence) Romantic, Modern, and post-modern models together— mixing direct representation and skewered perspective, positing an “I” which is nonetheless unprepared to sermonize or impose lessons and morals in a didactic fashion. They are polyglot. The important thing about their appearance in the Aughts and teens is that they refused resolutely to conform to contemporary avant-garde standards, which disavow anything but disjuncture, ellipse, and ironic parody. The post-modernists are closer in spirit to the Neo-Classicists than to any other specific movement (Ashbery and Hejinian to Pope and Dryden)— their rigid insistence on a certain form of propriety (always dry, impersonal, objective, and ironic) is matched by an equally rigid insistence on conformity to implicitly assumed aesthetic norms. If there is a relevant parallel running between myself and Wordsworth, it is this— just as Wordsworth ploughed past the dry impersonality of the eighteenth century, I have attempted to plough past the dry impersonality of the twentieth. To be sure, we have employed different tools— Wordsworth used the voices of the rural poor, I have been more disparate (sexuality in a chiasmus with philosophy, pure philosophy, meta-poetry, etc). But that this poetry century is more girded up with the possibility of something other than more dry impersonality is something I am proud of.

Adam Fieled, 2013

From “Madame Psychosis” (Beams)

Becky Grace

It's woven into her, that polo
shirt. She might even fuck w/ it.
Not "we", post-we or sub-we, but
just "pseudo", "quasi", "ersatz".
Nothing w/ "self" in it; nothing
implying discrete boundaries.
Becky isn't bounded, or has
boundlessness woven into her...

Polo shirts are what they are,
remain so. If I say "objective
correlative", I bring string into it,
so that Becky might be
strung up. I don't deny a "literal"
element, or that Becky might stay in.
All I mean is, between "us", there's
"more-than-us". That's what I'm
"getting at"; it's woven into me

Debra Harnigan

Noting/ cheekbone sluice/ china veneer
Impulses/ bathroom stalls/ naughtiness
I'm in on it/ gentle as anesthesia/ drops
Disrupt/ retrograde attitude/ mercurial
Your middle/ leaned up/ lifting belly
Your bottom/ budging metal/ melting
In-drip/ innards ingrown/ warm war

& then the how the went the into the flush

Lizzie McLean

was all pot roast. hope:
that I can't hold, doll.
for you write, wrong. big.
bold. ass, a nine-volt shite.
"boners were tulips", yes,
butt, I never, have never,
battered heads, as such,
w/ you. it's all weary
simper. I, conned, take,
your, "can't".

paula

chaos, order, clipped bird-like into
wings & cries. i could only ever
think: paula. all the thrusts &
pumps that could never be. “all”
that must be withheld, & that
it might be better that way.

you gave me the gift: savoring
wanting. how it really was you
i wanted. not a body but a soul.
i tell myself i’ve “been through
you”, forever & never. zero here,
same as two. empty. saturated. dark.

Debbie Jaffe

& that i must caesar. arms, curd
went down. found, mice, shelf, armor
machine. wasp it up, & up, & up, real
member a machine. then, head, shot,
“she said”, she said. feel, linger, can’t.
belly, caesar, belly. debit, giraffe, red-
headed. purge to null, urge, two, pull.
eye, belly, belie. ()

Eye Eye Eye

nile-wide, eye eye eye.
a sylph, bee low my buzz.
it wants, to do, at mouth.
no. not every one. can end,
dare-a-licked, like is. or:
put it, porn again. dew wit
like its done, on, cyber.
space, opened, bee twain. no,
went in sight. tight tight.

helen lee

you said (it was a way of saying)
hold me, touch, kiss. vagaries of
bliss, explosive, like, lemons. like
“like”. reach behind, “blind”. i’m,
progressing, make. miner, key,
brooding. expressive of the sole’s
rubber. only a lamp through wind
clarities. (not a, not, a, formula).

changing lit’s lace. how fetching,
fowl. red, buttons, noticed, before,
she, came. not tender, tenderly
rendered, heart-rending lee “deus
ex machine-esque”— “like glory”

Hell In

There's a "she" across the street, who cooks
butternut squash soup, an "I" & a "he". One
really wonders. Sometimes she's seen in the
window, stroking her pussy. It could jump
out the window; nothing would change. Twenty
feet of air divides "us".

She could be painted abstractly. I've done it.
Rhythmic brush-strokes, swirling pink for her
pussy. He hung it; he's hung. I hung
around eating her butternut squash.

What kind of composition is this?

Lucy Stingle

yr back's back in back. black.
fingers ride cheeks like sea-foam.
soft cut of a hard look. tow-
headed horse's ass pony-tail.
rather a strong black-strapped sit.
quick tongue-dart like plane's
blinking beacon. now I'm "back",
or you're fronting. easy trick. Rote
gimmick. gerund: "gallivanting".
meaning: to parade, wantonly.
I'll, we'll, give it "back". easy. still black.

From “Apparition Poems”

#555

Wood-floored bar on Rue St. Catharine—
you danced, I sat, soused as Herod,
sipped vodka tonic, endless bland
medley belting out of the jukebox—
you smiling, I occupied keeping you happy,
un-frazzled— suddenly sounds behind us,
the bar wasn't crowded & a patron
(rakish, whisker-flecked big mouth)
lifted a forefinger at beer-bellied
bartender bitching back, soon a real
fight, violence in quiet midnight,
I, scared, got you out of there

but you had to dance, you said,
had to dance so we paved Plateau, tense steps,
found nothing, you started crying & stamping
your feet like a child, I grabbed you & dragged
you back to our room you stripped, curled
into fetal position, beat your fists against
the mattress, in this way you danced
through the night, dozed & woke ready for more—

#1473

Passages that shudder between
blackness between legs between
what moves (taps head) between
us like this (taps head again) hints
she may not be the animal bride I'm
looking for (by this I mean seed carrier,
not the same as mother-for-kids, almost),
what's between what used to be between

us, what now is, is between her, others who
have more claim to be animal brides, but she's
here, that's the key, here now, actually, which may
be all that matters, if to matter is to lie back, legs
apart, between being, becoming, moving, removing
all barriers, fences, boundaries, expenses to move again.

#1328

The girl on the trolley
had pitch black hair,
eyes to match, I got
her vibes instantly—

so, what do we
want to do? Do
we want to do
this? Is it OK?

took her back here
took her clothes off
took her not gently

I'll never take the 34 again—

#1327

She said, you want Sister
Lovers, you son of a bitch,
pouted on a beige couch in
Plastic City, I said, I want
Sister Lovers, but I'm not
a son of a bitch, and I can
prove it (I drooled slightly),
took it out and we made
such spectacular love that
the couch turned blue from
our intensity, but I had to
wear a mask because I'd
been warned that this girl
was, herself, a son of a bitch—

What a tussle it was, I
could only see her eyes,
tiny bits of red above,
stark, blank blueness, I
felt animal fear between
us, but a poltergeist was
pushing our bodies into
one another, dead flesh
inhabited by spirits, for
the time nothing came
from our mouths, dead
liveliness, deep into the
wolf's hour this went on—
our eyes couldn't close.

#512

as if I would strike you,
as if I, myself, were pushing
your face away, fists livid
against yr soft, wasp-y cheeks.
in some other world my parts
bear nectar, my hands clasp
your own like wanted shelter.
in some other dream your
eyes don't freeze but melt,
sugar cubes smashed by light.

#1557

Since you are a scorpion
that stings herself to death,
after so many stings, redness
never leaves my joints, I feel
zilch. I call this *your* passionate
time, as I have no intent of
tempting the scorpion again.
I've seen nests for you all over
Philly, from Front Street right
up to Baltimore, and you know
what? You might finally get the
death you want. A sultry night,
desert all around, legs akimbo.

I'm having a better time now,
I told her, its unfortunate that
you were happier fifteen years
ago, but you certainly had your
chance, those days we sat next
each other different places, and
of course your best friend the
idiot, Queen of Sheba, now here
you are back hot to fool around,
suddenly I call the shots, I'm a
real hot-shot, there's a shot we
might actually shoot each other,
because violence is what you want—
she unzipped her dress, frowning.

#1121

How I wanted her!
Everything pointed
me into her—
 gossamer silk
 over her belly
 black panties
 head turned
 towards me—
I nailed her to my wall,
I nailed her—

she never forgave me

#1065

Black-shirted,
bright eyes in
dream-blues,
parents dead
of a car crash,
I kissed her so
long I felt as if
I would crash,
South Street
loud around
us, lips soft—

#1313

we can't stop trying to conceive,
even though our bodies are dead
to each other, and nightly deaths
I took for granted are razors in a
 part of my flesh that
 can never live again—
certain possessions possess us.

#1316

Hunters get smitten with their prey,
but to kill is such an amazing rush
who could possibly resist, I'm into
these thoughts because you dazzle
me away from words into your red
pulpy depths, which I resent, but I
can do nothing about, because you
have nails in your cunt and crucifix
in your mouth, when I come I'm a
perfect personal Jesus, but the gash
is all yours, did I mention I love you?

#1342

What's in what eyes?
What I see in hers is
mixed greenish silence,
somewhat garish, it's
past girlish (not much),
but I can't touch her
flesh (set to self-destruct),
anymore than she can
understand the book
her cunt is, that no one
reads directly, or speaks
of, there's no love other
than "could be," but I
think of her throat cut—
that's her slice of smut.

#1497

nothingness grows vast,
nothingness tastes sweet
only for ten seconds— of

this, depth without depth,
crass substitute for realms
of total glory she effaces

(once spilled milk cries)
like a chalk-stain on blue
jeans, a just-smoked joint.

#1070

I said, “I can’t
even remember
the last time I
was excited, how
can I associate
ideas?”

She pulled
out a gun, a tube
of oil, and an air
cushion,

and it was
a spontaneous
overflow,

powerfully
felt, in which we
reaped together—

From “When You Bit...”

Three Sets of Teeth

Three sets of teeth: who
can check for cavities?
A three-way circuit: who
will start the striptease?
Three lovers in three ways:
how merrily the dance
begins. We spin, we spin,
we forget our instincts,
anima, the part of teeth
that cuts. We are sluts.
There is an "I" here that
stands for all of us, but
its eyes are shut. Sleep
lulls it to rest, not think. Or speak.

Big Black Car

Your middle: tongue
(hers), man (me), riding
together, I bitch (middle's
middle). I tongue man
you, her, spacious, it, of
you, all of us, can't feel
a nothing, I can't. Not
of this, of you, of her,
of all of this riding, in
what looks big, black,
has tongue-room. I
can't feel a thing. I feel
nothing of bigness, black
fur interior her you. Ride.

Back of a Car

Asinine, as is, this ass is:
ass I zip down into zero:
anal, a null, a void, this is.
I'm behind a behind that
sits smoking, rubbing, pink-
tipped, tender, butt, button.
She watches me watching as
I go brown-nose in another.
Only *her car-ness*, averted by
eyes to a wall, seems happy.
Only she can stomach rubs
of the kind that want plugs.
Sparked tank, here comes
no come, & aggravation.

Cocaine Gums

I ache: dull, sharp,
in a heap of paper.
All paper: picture,
bright, bold, dark.
I have nailed you
to a piece: black.
I darken touched
things: I'm used.
I write you, you,
you, as if kissed
by a fresh body,
rose-petal bliss.
I drowse: numb
as cocaine gums.

Deodorant Redolence

Rage is senseless, I rage
in a cloud of senselessness
against the confines of a
first layer of rage against
the confines of a region
of loneliness buttressed
by a feeling that deodorant
is an insult against redolence
that I haven't guts to embrace.
I shower every morning, I
even bathe after I shower,
what this has to do with
anything is beyond me,
except that I like your dirt.

Framed

Nailed, two, across— I
have been glimpsing me
from above, as a camera
would, I am a still, this
is a film, this has to be
framed, no, don't hold,
I can't, it's an offstage
arm, both you & you
speak like I'm (so) not
here, I'm celluloid, I'm
varicose, vein-soft, fake-
bloody, cut, I can't move,
you & you & I minted,
taped, uncensored, dead.

When You Bit...

I knew every Dracula-like whim
I felt every pulse of salt-water
I screwed every screw into wood
I was with you in Atlantis

you were daft, exalted, pinkish
you were drunk on Margaritas
you were dark, pliant, rakish
you were ready to be examined

by my hands, twin detonators
by my tongue, laid on a half-shell
by my teeth, rabid officers
by my torso, raw, wave-flecked

this is not merely afterthought
this is as first-time sparks

Screw

I want you to be like a bull.
I want you to call me a fool.
I want to be ass-proud for you.
I want you to call me to screw.
I know this iambic is dry.
I know this excess has to stop.
I know I can laughably cry.
I know blood can come drop by drop.
I come for you kicking my ass.
I've come to be making a pass.
I've come undistracted by "I".
I killed off my "I" as it's dry.
I start off these lines in the sand.
I want to end up in your hand.

Kurt Cobain

About Kurt Cobain: I swear
(as I always have, even in high
school) that I don't have a gun,
& when I shoot it won't kill
you (much.) Suicide applies
also to pairs of people who
make one person lying down,
& every two-backed beast
must decide at some point
to live or die. These are the
kind of thoughts you have
on really long nights, when
you find yourself too old
to do drugs. Comfort in sadness?

From “Equations”

#1

Here's my equation: sex is more human than everything else. Let me put sex to the left of me and you to the right of me. In the interstices between me and sex, I have achieved my greatest consonance with humanity. In the interstices between me and you, I can (hopefully) give you a greater consonance with humanity, just by showing you the seams, the zippers, the ruffles, the cuffs, all the accoutrements that dress us up to be naked, in a text with its own nakedness. If I start with Marie, it is to show you her humanity so that you know why this was, for both of us, a fortunate fall. Marie had pale flesh. I am watching her; she is sitting on the little grass upwards-going slope behind the White Lodge, sipping a bottle of beer. Her straight, shoulder length black hair is parted in the middle. Then, a big open field with a peninsula of woods behind it; we're in the woods, making out. She wants to lie down amid the ferns, twigs, dirt, grass, and have it off. She's a teenager and I'm 22 and I'm freaked out, can't do it. So that I learn two kinds of hungriness can't always converge. Our bodies are slaves to different masters: duty, propriety to the right of us, impetuosity, passions to the left. When two hungers meet, they must negotiate. My hands go up her sleeveless, multi-colored blouse, but I'm going down the slope towards duty and right action.

#2

When hungers meet in the middle, who wins? I held onto the top of my black mattress for leverage, Marie beneath me. Black mattress feels like a black Sabbath with this teenage princess on it, who has brought us hydrochloride pot to smoke. It's a cloudy afternoon in late November. To the right of us is the empty red fuzz coat with black buttons Marie likes to wear. To the left of us is the sense that you can't get what you want without breaking rules. I am consonant with the knowledge that morality is an ill-fitting glove for most mortals. The rightness of this is the rightness of me going down for the first time, thus expunging everything in my system that does not want to serve Marie. Intoxication traces its way around us and if I have fallen (and I know that I have) it is because what the preachers will tell you leaves too much out. As there is no bed (just the black mattress) no one in the house hears the pounding. She offers to take my streams, but I must not. It is in her nature to want the promise of motherhood hidden in the folds of her body. So our deepest hunger remains unsatisfied. Marie is naked except for the series of necklaces she likes to wear, and as she sits astride me they make little jingling noises that tell a tale of bitter bliss.

#16

There is the Godly and the diabolical. Someone has stolen Trish away from me; I'm using the Devil's wizardry to get her back. She comes to my apartment, drunk, in a white frilly skirt, hair in a bun, eyes half closed. When the inevitable laying on of hands takes place, Trish mouths a few negatives. Our bodies know that her mouth is being ironic. Faith is something (or someone) you have above the Earth; hands are for taking up out of the Earth to put something else back in again. I am overpowering Trish because we secretly know she is overpowering me. I am part of her equation: let's have sex about art. Since sex about art is meant to turn back into art again, drama, betrayals, secrets, and passionate consummations are all not only valid but mandatory. Her skirt is off, panties down, and for once I don't care how fast this is. I'm in with such ungodly relief that it takes ninety seconds for me to release myself into her. When it's this fast and this good, who cares what the equations are? The only equation is dissolution, and it's as permanent as hokey contrivance, where the human race is concerned. If the diabolical results in as complete a clench of dissolution as Godliness, then who's to say if God and the Devil might not be the same thing? The Devil's universe is as heightened as God's is; the Devil *goes up* just like God does. And, when it ends, you're left with recognitions that all binary systems dissolve in the sexual act, when it is performed without inhibition, and with full knowledge of no consequence.

#19

Have I ever stood wholly on my own reverse mountain? I met Cindy at the Bean on South Street. She had long, stringy black hair, large, frightened blue eyes, and a full figure. Moreover, she exuded a mood of emotional desperation. She was a scared kid and I (age twenty-nine) was on the prowl. The equation was mutual neediness, for separate reasons—she needed me to allay her hunger for affirmation, her need to be needed; I needed her to provide food for a voracious hunger for female flesh. And when I saw her apartment (almost a loft, pictures she had taken strewn everywhere), it added to the novelty aspect of the experience. I penetrated her sans protection, knowing how her neediness could be manipulated; and a torn condom wrapper by the side of the bed painted a picture that could not be mistaken. This girl was lonely. I was in this for the high (no other reason), and while she slept I rode the high out into the universe. I learned that the universe is not only *higher up* but *deeper in*. Because I was only higher up, I felt my high fade into a depression. Cindy clung to me, but the man I was for her that night was a nothingness. Everything I'd done had hurt her, as I later found out. When notches start accruing to your bedpost, it is hard to avoid the crassly materialistic attitude that another notch equals victory. The cost is a series of flights into nothingness, the sensation of a nitrous high gone bad.

To dwell on that siren call: it isn't really transcendental. It's meant to lift you up, then plonk you back down again (wet or dry, as the case may be). It serves the siren, not you. Trish knows these rules very well, has studied them. Her approach to playing the role is methodical— you give them this much, and then draw back. Not everyone responds to Trish's particular wavelength because it presupposes not just intelligence but artistry. You must be a figure worthy of representation for her to take you seriously. Conversations must shoot up around colors, forms, images. The drunken nights I spend at her studio (white and red wine) are an epiphany. I've never had my mind and body turned on at the same time. Trish knows this; she is going down the checklist. Her postures and gestures are bold and dramatic; when she takes the pins out of her bun and lets her long hair fall down her back, part of me falls, too. It's winter; the studio (three of the four walls being mostly windows) is chilly. I've grown a slight moustache but, at twenty-five, still look boyish. Trish doesn't take my songs or poems seriously; they are unproven, not high enough. My thoughts crave her approval as my body aches for her submission. In this way, we dance. Trish is shrewd; she knows that, with my intense urgency, she must give in (at least once) almost instantly. She likes taking the superior position and her long torso contrasts neatly with Lisa's petite squatness. But (importantly) she hasn't fallen. She's played her part well; I've fallen alone.

Yet quirks and idiosyncrasies facilitate fluidities— we all like what we like, just as we want what we want. For whatever reason, when I break up with Trish for the first time I fall in love with Sara, who I meet at the Last Drop. Sara is just graduating from the University of the Arts, with a journalism degree. She has a bull neck, big nose, and a massive bust, but for some reason it works for me. Sara likes to leave things up in the air; her equation with sex is oriented around speech. That is, Sara likes to talk about sex more than she likes to have it. She loves the intrigue of conversation, rather than flesh meeting flesh; the sparkle of a public tete a tete, rather than actual skin scintillations. I discover this over a period of months, as I am baffled by Sara's behaviors. She moves me compulsively; I always want more of her. The final equation she leaves me with is this: the wanting is sweeter (and sexier) than the having. But there's something I notice amiss in this: Sara's equations are frightened. They presuppose a minimum of experience, and a maximum of insecurity on every conceivable level. My failure to physically penetrate Sara devastates me as much as the collapse of my established relationship with Trish. With Sara begins a life spent in bars. I learn the right way to tip, to stare, to make successful moves over drinks; all those street level skills are a mountain to climb and a primer to master.

New Years' Eve, 2004: I meet Patti at a bar off of South Street. We dance and play the usual touchy-feely games. Somehow the timing isn't right— either she's not interested or I'm too distracted. Months go by and I don't see her; then, I'm walking, alone, down Pine Street one spring midnight and Patti staggers into me. She's mushy and I can't make out what she's saying but we squish towards each other anyway. It's a nice squish and so we start sort of going out. Patti doesn't drink just sometimes like Sara does; Patti *requires* drinks. There is something bestial in her soul that only alcohol can conquer. But drinks make you say and do funny things that aren't strictly natural (whereas getting stoned can make things more naturalized) so that Patti and I establish immediately the artificiality of our together equations. Patti likes to speak in tongues, talk gibberish, talk Russian— I humor her. But in our drunkenness I realize that Patti is avoiding completely consummating our relationship. We take walks down side streets in the wee hours and make out and grope against walls; roll in the grass beside the Walnut Street Bridge, my hand in her skirt; but the big caress never happens. Everything has to be drama, everything has to be public, and since we can't have sex in public we might as well not have it at all. Then, she starts to torture me with other barfly guys. This is life *in the street*; not within reaching distance of the godly, or the diabolical. *You make your image what it is, then you are what your image is*— that's the basic street equation.

I learn from Trish the rules of intoxication. As you lift off, you leave behind everything in your consciousness that is tinged towards the mundane. Normal space/time dimensions need not apply; everything happens in a realm of perfected imbalance, expected surprise. Trish has lived with drug dealers; has spent years in circumstances extreme enough that ingesting hard chemicals becomes like brushing one's teeth. Trish does, in fact, find states of intoxication cleaner than sobriety. A sober mind dwells on hard facts; hard facts for Trish have no endurance. Trish wants every lover to be Lord Byron; every night to contain and perpetuate Greek-level dramas; and to be a heroine in such a world grants a crown of flame, of radiance, that Trish covets. But dramas demand conflicts; I learn that Trish will rock the boat for no other reason than this. There's always a solution sweet; but Trish enjoys the solution less than the problem. She wants to see me riled; there's always an impressive array of red flags at her disposal. When she does her seven-veiled dances, she can use her various highs to create a palpable ethereality. I never have any choice (once the drama has been set in motion) but to resolve the tension with a push into her, and a denouement involving another bowl, drink, pill. Consummate sensuality can have no reasonable end; it has to be pushed to its limits to be really tasted. This equation threatens to overtake my existence. They are a distraction from a shrewish reality— that the greatest escapists invariably have the most onerous obstacles and daunting responsibilities to escape from.

cover painting: "The Walls Have Ears" by Abby Heller-Burnham

