

Afterword (Metaphorward?): The Dulcinean Shimmer

"O tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide!"
– York, Henry VI

Tiger Maker

A couple months ago, I completed a 26-piece chapbook called *The Timelessest Water of the Littlest Mouth of the Lightface*, which is a brief testament of both foolish infatuation and cosmic-proportioned soliloquy amidst the Lack, the Absence, the Unquenchable, the Her-lessness. Superior to the manuscript it precedes, *Timelessest* is the most important thing I've created to date, and it's my expiatory final statement on the Lightface with the Littlest Mouth, the deluginous (not delusional) song of Don Davidus to his shimmering Dulcinea. However, I choose to expedite it via self-printing, before anything can develop for the longer, denser work, which makes it into a prequel: a prequel that's really a conclusion. What was written before, but will follow after, is a book called *EuterpErato*.

The newborn idea of *EuterpErato* began with a metaphorical bridge, and that bridge was intended as a transitional part of a wider-scoped book: a connection between two other thematic parts, an interlude dedicated to a silken/titanium Muse. But the idea effloresced, and the bridge lengthened; the metaphor outgrew itself, and the idea roared and became a tiger, then the tiger prowled the bridge. The bridge led to her and *was her* at the same time. Such things are possible in dreams. What else could this dreamer do but dream her? And what other sorceress could turn a dreamer into a tiger?

The moment that Muse of silk and titanium called me "my tiger," the capacity of only a single section ceased to be tenable. The fog rolled in, the other end of the bridge became invisible, and the Muse's tiger-taming intensified. The abrasive beast had met the soft Softest; the snowy had cooled the sweaty; Muse-teeth pinned my bottom lip and nullified my incisors. Parallels, echoes, mirror images, rhyming shadows overflowed. The Muse couldn't be relegated to one part of a composition; the bridge and tiger demanded their own book. Furthermore, despite my preference for doomed girlfriend Gwen Stacy, I recalled Mary Jane's introductory lines to Peter Parker in *Amazing Spider-Man* #42: "Face it, Tiger...You just hit the jackpot." I needed no other auspice to compel me forward across that bridge.

EuterpErato is an overlong (emo?) song (or a little monument to a remarkably brief, half-assed "us"), a quixotic, ultimately futile paean for a blindsiding Muse (what Dali would call "the idiot-making archetype"), a pretty phantasm who made this smart person pretty dumb – in the best way possible. "A restless eye across a weary room," goes the opening of Pink Floyd's "One Slip," "a glazed look and I was on the road to ruin." That's almost exactly how this tiger got its stripes. And it's how the tiger became both bound and abandoned. I'd warned myself about falling for what began as a curiosity and swelled into admiration, but I also foresaw – and welcomed – my ensnarement.

Fundamentally, *EuterpErato* is a purgation/expiation/scream into a pillow – what neurotic art-Titan Man Ray might consider, as extreme as it sounds, an exorcism. After Lee Miller, Ray's

radiant, genius-artist-in-her-own-right mistress/Muse, eventually backed out, Ray's heart, needless to say, was obliterated, but his obliteration big-banged much paradoxical – exorcizing – creativity. As art historian Phillip Prodger points out, *Object to Be Destroyed*, a metronome with a cut-out photo of one of Lee's eyes paperclipped to its pendulum, represents panic-striking fixation on a beloved Earth angel until the enslaving fixation itself must be smashed to pieces.

In the theme of art inspired by heartsickness, Prodger also draws special attention to Man Ray's isomorphic *Observatory Time/The Lovers*, which features Miller's lips dominating a lonely sky and horizon. Not only are her lips giantized to a divine/cosmic proportion, but they subtly double as two fuck-close bodies, monumentalizing the vaporized desire and intimacy that the two lovers once shared. Because of the work's apothecic nature, Prodger believes that "Lee Miller's lips have now become the most famous lips in the history of art." (They're certainly up there with Warhol's obsessive-compulsive *Marilyn's Lips*, Dali's *Mae West's Lips Sofa* and John Pasche's logo for the Rolling Stones' *Sticky Fingers* album.)

Maybe *Observatory Time/The Lovers* was amidst my subconscious iconography when I decided to apotheosize my own Muse's remarkable teeth (which rival those of, say, Annie Lennox or Kate McKinnon), since she, a force of wilderness and atavism armed with carnivorous sharpness, is adept at swift devourment of human hearts. And, to a minuscule lesser degree, her ego-destroying eyes also are infinitely iconic: founts of fantasy, transcendent dazzlers that embellish and abstract the real human of flaw and folly, urine and feces.

Susie Asado, Sussudio, Del Toboso, EuterpeErato

As an aphoristic creative creature I tend to home in on particulars rather than wholes, and this tendency applies to my comprehension of desired bodies: The parts emanate from the person, the person emanates from the parts. Just as a film's best scenes outperform the overall film, so a jugular notch or a buttock dimple can aurify a woman. Her unique genetic happenstances are notes, marginalia, lists, blurbs, epigrams. In Walt Whitman's eyes, a poet's greatness involves the dilation of so-called diminutive things to a grand, universal scale. Likewise, atomized physical features have the magnitude and momentum to penetrate to the existential depths more than romantic declarations or dedicative vows. "As waves drown the reeds/In the aftermath of a storm," writes Boris Pasternak's Yuri Zhivago, "So her forms and features/Sank to the bottom of his soul."

Aesthetic/erotic atomization can be as radical as adoring even the love object's/subject's embodiment of a name. Though the name itself may be shared by hundreds of thousands of people, affection and attraction transcend the name, make it itself and her- or himself. Sooner or later the focal person becomes the *only* one with that name. The name becomes an incantation or a mantra, so that the very utterance of it sparks mystical energy, inspires, invigorates – not to mention its ecstatic repetition.

Consider the sonorous name in Gertrude Stein's "Susie Asado" poem and how the name's nature seems to deserve infinite recital: "Sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet tea./Susie Asado." Everything in me cries out with insistence that songster Phil Collins had Stein's creation in his veins when he wrote and sang "Su-Sussudio,/Just say the word, oh,/Su-Sussudio" in the 1985 *Billboard* chart-topping single. All one must do is "say the word" – the word that goes from throat to cosmos, that becomes verbally and aurally talismanic, that is somehow omnipresent. "There's this girl that's been on my mind all the time," Collins sings on.

I've sworn my sword to the lady fair and exalted her somewhat commonplace name with a new tongue, dramatized and unique-ized it with courtly-love verse. Don Quixote changed "Aldonzo Lorenzo," the name of an ordinary prostitute, to "Dulcinea del Toboso," turned dull to doll – to Dulcinea, because he sought for her "a name, to his mind, musical, uncommon, and significant." ("Just say the word, oh.") Though Aldonzo Lorenzo is just as sonorous as its replacement, and though the title of my Aldonzo/Dulcinea is much more familiar, to my defensive reverence I apply words Ezra Pound unwittingly articulated in "Francesca": "I who have seen you amid the primal things/Was angry when they spoke your name/In ordinary places."

Euterpe/Erato is my Sussudio, despite the former's plosive (sweet sweet sweet sweet sweet) *ts* clashing with the sibilant tripled *s* of the latter. She's also my Del Toboso.

Tiger Maker/Tamer

Life is full of honeymoons. Our ecstasies are interludial, parenthetical, ignitions rather than conflagrations. A piece of ripe fruit has a longer shelf-life than the intense rushes of joy and adoration. Sooner or later, for whatever reason, the Mused artist must descend from the clouds, slide down the rainbow, run aground on dry Ararats after topsy-turvy floods of purgative fancy. After surfing sensual surreality for a spell, there comes a time when the flown Muse must be emotionally – not destructively – exorcized. Often, it's a process of heart-purgation rather than *her*-purgation. Via this process the artist turns the affection subject *into art*, which spits out the bees and preserves the honey. It's a reverse-Galatea transformation: sculpturizing flesh and blood rather than making a sculpture mortal. The subject is truly objectified, and her formerly exponential, unchecked power is genie-bottled to a safer degree. Far from humanization, *Euterpe/Erato* has been a process of increased Muse-making. Mine has been further fictionalized and hybridized as composite iterations of both lyrical Euterpe and erotic Erato.

Naming is taming, which makes the sense of *Euterpe/Erato's* central (fluctuant) tiger metaphor make sense. Sure, metaphorizing a tiger in erotic/romantic matters is far from rare and basically rather common. How *couldn't* the tenderer-fleshed female soothing the savage breast of the (uncouth/errant/ill-tempered/cocksure/beastly) male come to mind? This Muse is tamer to my tiger, without a doubt, but she also is a tiger herself, one with a tail I've chased and tried to grasp long enough to stop her perpetual flight. Oh, the tiger has eluded the tiger, perhaps by having never been there in the first place, and the tail for which I fumble might be my own. Consider these extracts from Jorge Borges' "The Other Tiger" poem:

*...the tiger invoked in my verse
Is a ghost of a tiger, a symbol...*

*...To the symbolic tiger I have opposed
The real thing, with its warm blood...*

*...already the fact of naming it
And conjecturing its circumstances
Makes it a figment of art and no creature
Living among those that walk the earth...*

Borges posits a huge chasm between art and real life. "[T]he moment I write about the tiger, the tiger isn't the tiger, he becomes a set of words in the poem," he told Richard Burgin in an interview, and Burgin replied: "You'll always be trying to capture the tiger." Borges: "Yes, because the tiger will always be..." Burgin: "...outside of art."

Though exorcismic artifying of Muses involves an obsessive-repetitive meticulousness, it doesn't necessarily involve a deep knowledge of the subject. "The 'loved' person becomes as well known as oneself," says Erich Fromm in *The Art of Loving*. "Or, perhaps I should better say as little known." *Little known* indeed. My pain isn't from knowledge of this particular Muse, but from *lack* of it. My heart-froth bubbles from imagination and curiosity rather than from evidence and familiarity. "[W]hen we really worship anything, we love not only its clearness but its obscurity," says G.K. Chesterton. "We exult in its very invisibility."

Since it's self-evident (to the self-honest), a very large part of each self is inscrutable, perhaps abysmal, so extensive knowledge of *other* selves is that much more evasive. Worship isn't necessarily love, and, often, love doesn't involve worship. Nor is love necessarily a thing or force or state (or virtual reality) of long duration, of substantial chronology.

Maybe "a love for" is the mode of love I'm addressing here. And maybe this mode needs to be explained as much as possible, in order to prevent readers from mistaking my dramatics as "being in love" and pining incongruently to a relatively minor meeting of two mouths. If anything, this Muse whom I've dubbed EuterpErato has inspired thoughts and feelings beyond the thoughts and feelings I've had for her. And this is an opportunity to update my outlook on the trips and traps of the heart and sex drive.

"And Don't Write About It!"

The term "love" may frighten or mystify you, or seem inapplicable to "lesser" relationships or couplings, unless you expand the concept, as I have. Love isn't necessarily a gradual, fallen-into state, a result or product of familiarity and mutual exposure. There *is* love at first sight, first hearing, first smell, first touch – with nothing more required. Sometimes *you* don't hit the jackpot, but the jackpot hits *you*. The term "love" can be applied to the flings of strangers in the night, the brief but profound fructification of mutual attraction via entwining tongues, even impulsively revealing apparently superficial crushes. And worshipful love thrives more in ignorant mystery than factual acclimation. Love is stratified, nuanced, a rainbow. It's so much larger than lifelong monogamous pairings, than "soulmates," than legal documents and shared surnames. Yes, Rose's cherishment of the few-days fling with vagrant Jack in James Cameron's *Titanic* is entirely justified as more precious than decades of marriage and progeny. Even episodes without sexual consummation can outweigh years of fucking, lovemaking and fuckmaking. (Those episodes often have much more impact.) Love *happens* (or *can* happen, if allowed) more often and more frequently and more widely than many of us dare to perceive or admit. Try this: Think of someone and imagine their non-existence. Does the thought choke you up? If so, you love that person, to whatever degree. Hate to break it to you.

I think many of us tend to dish out more and more of our own secrets and emotions and vulnerabilities in hopes of eliciting them in return from too-trusted others. This barter rarely results in mutuality, sadly. One's self-revelation is either exploited or starved of reciprocal communication, leaving the hasty gusher feeling foolish. Joyce Carol Oates distills this absolutely in "Don't Bare Your Soul!":

*Don't bare your soul to anyone...
Don't do it!
And if you do it, don't talk about it!
Not even to yourself!
And don't write about it!
Especially not that!*

Well, I committed all three sins (soul-baring, talking, writing), with flying colors (no: dolors!). Not for the first time, and, I hope, nor for the last. Our current realities, hers and mine, made this particular deviation untenable, and though I've had more realities than she's had and should've known better, almost every ounce of stoicism in me evaporated, leaving her to be the reality-checker, the sensible resetter. I flew up, beyond the stratosphere, clinging to a feather, knowing that it wasn't a wing, let alone equipped with a parachute, and that a plummet was destined sooner or later. The pages of my Muse-portraits became fast-ascending steps to a sheerly destined cliff. Oh, what a glorious way to shatter one's skeleton!

Romantic invertebrates, sexual zeroes and erotic unfortunates lack the capacity to appreciate the profundity of sudden enthrallment by blindsiding Muses. My own cumulative insight into and natural harmonization with women inform and justify my crush. Rather than rare sugar on a sweet tooth's tongue, it's a favored artifact under substantive appraisal. As I age, however, I fear that every song could be a swan song, and I'm certain that time itself is a wounder rather than a healer – a killer, not a lover. Of course, in *Agon* wisdom-fountain Harold Bloom correctly said that "only Eros or figuration is a true revenge against time," at least as far as human action goes. So: I literarily combust in perpetual sensual magma. So: This book. According to Berlioz, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony mirrors the composer's "innermost thoughts, his hidden grief, his pent-up anger, his reveries full of misery, his nocturnal visions, his moments of bliss..." The same goes for this book, my go-to go-to, my carnal sanctuary, since I know that despair is bottomless, so if the nihilist on one shoulder pulls a Cain-and-Abel on the Mister Rogers on my other shoulder, I'm done for.

Dull to Doll to Dulcinea

An insightful colleague/friend of mine previewed *EuterpeErato*, and one of his best adjectives for it is "Klimtian." Right on! This book's language is in the spirit of similar sensual excess, all of its gold being mental rather than metal, secretion rather than solid. Like the imagery of Klimt's works, it's dreamy and fanciful and metaphorical (maybe meta-metaphorical).

Though dream and fancy compel, the so-called ordinary is often extraordinary and preferable to flimsy fictions, and the natural (the asymmetrical, the cellulite dimple) can intoxicate despite lucidity. Idealization builds on worthy raw materials. I do deny that most idealizers of Muses are unwittingly mistaken about the worthiness of their obsessions. Rather, they play with forced perspective, which produces such optical illusions as the apparent sizes of the buildings at Disneyland and Disney World. Mental/emotional Photoshop is conscious, methodical; it's deliberate intoxication by neurotransmitters and endorphins, voluntary indenture to surreality and rose-colored *glosses*, willing addiction to cocktails of affection and lust. "For the romantic-minded artist everything hinges on this give-and-take between appearance and reality," writes art historian Gert Schiff in *Picasso in Perspective*, "thus many have succumbed to [the] lure of finding in it a justification for insisting on appearances."

Under attraction's, affection's, love's spell the rudest aspect can be material for limitless exaggerations and the most outrageous metaphorizations. "Whenever I start thinking of my love for a person," says Nabokov in *Speak, Memory*, "I am in the habit of immediately drawing radii from my love – from my heart, from the tender nucleus of a personal matter – to monstrously remote points of the universe." I liken my self-conscious game of cosmical proportioning and artistic enhancement of Dulcinea to what Erle Loran saw as the from-within (*ab intus*) nature in the chromatic power of Cezanne:

Cezanne's color creates light that emanates from the picture itself and bears only incidental relation to light and shade in nature. It is an abstract orchestration of warm and cool, light and heavy, saturated and neutral elements of color, transcending the appearances of the objective world and giving us a new vision, a new reality.

Despite the traditional characterization of Quixote as myopic and delusional, and aside from the Chaucerian/Shakespearean diagnosis of love as blind, poetic courtly love doesn't necessarily turn a man slavish, but, rather, usually *aggrandizes* him, crowns him with the importance of wooing, occupying and sustaining the Muse's attention. A healthy courtly lover doesn't debase or devalue himself, but, rather, broadcasts: "I *deserve* her!" Though she's been pedestalized, it's to show off her awesomeness, not to emphasize his lowliness. If the courtly lover (writer, painter, sculptor, whatever) is of low value – or, worse, a worm, then why would any Muse accept his adoration? I've had little problem in attracting and getting intimates, which provides me with the know-how and latitude to discern and pursue worthy prospects. Simps and egregious incels lack the comprehension and skill to even step foot on the playing field.

Really, what's happening when an artist portraitizes a human Muse and elevates (reverse-Galateas) her to the level of a more durable – and controllable – abstract work of art is a radical revision, an absurd absolutism: impassive, manipulative, egotistical, an emotional/erotic Manifest Destiny. This isn't ignorant whitewashing, nor is it loveblindness. In fact, the portraitist works *with* the facts, fully aware of flaw, foible, fallenness. Despite the contradictory, miasmatic depths, the portraitist treads his subject's water dauntlessly. "He saw my complications," Joni Mitchell sings, "and he mirrored me back simplified." Artist, dispense with the pesky complexity of warm-bloodedness and exalt in the non-living figment! Also, poetic portraitization is completely incontinent on how the subject/object views herself. This is why in *EuterpeErato* I referred to myself as "a Muse-splashed observer who likes you more than you like yourself." And it's why I quoted Faith No More's "Midlife Crisis": "You're perfect, yes, it's true, but without me you're only you."

Whatever, just as all blissful dreams are perishable and at the mercy of the dreamer's impending awakening, the illusion of courtly love's poetry isn't indefinite (nor does it ever survive matrimony, which is the antidote, to put it politely, to such rapture). Then all the metaphors and similes of elusive love erupt forth: the futility of holding water in a sieve, the vanishment of Eurydice every time Orpheus looks back at her, the mistaken desire of Kant's Gallow's Man, Lacanian/Zizekian *jouissance*, the paradoxical pull and push of women and men. A group of singing philosophers called The Delfonics put it best in "She Said Don't Love Me": "Don't try to hold me, 'cause I'll only run." Dreams, like ecstasy, are episodes rather than epics. They come and go, and the only way to savor them for more than a spell is to abandon waking life and the process of one's existence. Endymion must remain in infinite slumber to be close to and loved by moon-goddess Selene.

Gloomy Phantom of the Opera must let go of radiant Christine. We must awaken sooner or later; all grooves must be disturbed. The music's temptation and rapture give in to "the garish light of day" of the surface world.

The following spiel by ingenious relationship counselor/author Susan Winter conceptualizes this splendidly:

Why do you get hurt? Because none of this is actually about them...[A]ll the love that you have, it's your love. It involves them, but it's not about them. They have bumped into you, your love spills out of you, it falls onto this person, and this beautiful dream is created of how you'd love to see this scenario played out. But in reality it is you looking at the reflection of another person and how you are participating in this incredible design...And this beautiful gift that you've been given, whether it's for a minute or for a decade, it's your experience...The person is the bait, the experience is the catalyst, for our growth, and in the end what we are experiencing is our self experiencing life.

Skin of a Dog, Hide of a Tiger

Lord Tennyson says the lacerate loss of love should be preferable to the safe absence of love – and he's right on. A special kind of bravery is required in matters of Eros and love. Only a brave person can be chicken enough to *chicken out* of aborting growing affection. Only a spiritual adventurer can suppress the dread of exponentialized romantic emotion toward and for another person. Actual lily-livers prefer being wallflowers to braving the gnarled jungle; milksops and milquetoasts and mediocrities are afraid of the volatility and risk of daring heart-connection. However, such emotional cowards have a reasonable reason for their recoil: the radical mortality of love. There's guaranteed risk and injury, and veneers and idealizations are bound to dissolve, disappoint and douse lifegiving auras. "You are in no danger," says the Opera Ghost, "so long as you do not touch the mask." Also, love isn't durable, as many poets and songsters claim. It's frail, wispy, fickle, futile, a shamefully fallible force. As Rhye sings, "love is terminal, not built to last, burn bright, burn fast." Predating that lyric by about sixty years, Carl Sandburg says in *Honey and Salt*: "Love is a clock and the works wear out./Love is a violin and the wood rots.../This is the end, there is always an end."

I've had to face that roads that once led to tender, ecstatic destinations eventually become the same roads that lead us away from them. Thankfully, sooner or later, as they should, some Away Roads become A Way Roads that lead to different bridges and other rainbow arcs. Pining is a masochistic Mobius strip; rumination leaves no room for salvation. The exorcism must be complete; what's gone is gone; what's flown has flown. Be fair, author. Play nice, painter. Sculptor, step back and allow the work to breathe. Her teeth left your flesh and her eyes closed long ago. "And I need you to let me go," says Samantha in Spike Jonze's *Her*. "As much as I want to, I can't live in your book anymore."

What sadistic irony: The starlight must be separated from the star; the portraitists' chairs must be devoid of models. The bridge has crossed itself and taken the other end with it. Remember that Borges and Burgin concluded that "the other tiger, the one not found in verse" is "outside of art." The minute you write her, author, the minute you paint her, painter, the minute you sculpt her, sculptor, you release her, lover. Naming may be taming, but it's also, in a weird sense, erasing. She can't live in your art any more than she could breathe underwater. She was never yours; you can claim only her transfigured image, which is really a preserved afterimage (for all

that remains is *after-her*). This transfiguration might be the saddest fucking thing a Mused artist ever faces. Artist, you've packed your heart with so much of your Muse, yet she is nowhere to be seen. The famous lyric "somewhere over the rainbow" must be modified to essentialize your situation: "It's over, the rainbow."

If she can't live in a book anymore, where the fuck does a flown Muse go? Who knows. Wherever she is, it's now none of my business. Euterpe and Erato have sundered into two again and returned to the timeless, amorphous pool of metaphors. The dream itself has awakened me from the dream. I've fallen from the paradise of her kiss, fell off of the foggy bridge, tumbled down the other end of the rainbow, but I'm left alive, whole, still confident and thankful for having had the blessed momentary disruption, getting closer to accepting that two situations can't always mesh, that disparate ages are more frictious than lubricative, that sworn responsibilities tend to squash transcendence.

Did I, do I love her? Surely I have *a* love *for* her, a love whose definition is indefinite, a love founded on a shimmer, "a glazed look," a flashing vision, which makes sense in the senseless realm of crushing quickly on someone: Epiphanies are epiphanic, shimmers shimmer and flashing visions flash. Such peek-a-boos compel more than the protracted and epic. Aphrodisiacal illusion relies on brevity, and, weirdly, the Muse-crowned love object/subject is both 100-percent unreal and 100-percent real, not "all that," but all *That*. Though my EuterpeErato emanates much lovable actuality, I agree with Susan Winter that the shortlived sweet spot is primarily about me, because "in me," as poet Siegfried Sassoon writes, "the tiger sniffs the rose." *My* heart lacerated itself; the claw marks are my own. "[I]t is a tiger that mangles me," says Borges, "but I am the tiger..." Mauled, bleeding, smiling, grateful, I'm left with and appreciate only an afterimage, a ghost, the Dulcinean shimmer that further obscures her illegible heart-text.

De-Mused and untamed, I, a *rōnin*, a Rodin sculpture of perplexion within my untenable reality rather than iconic pensiveness, must wistfully allow the sediment to settle and my bones to loaf for a spell at bridge's end. Metaphorical tigers work much harder for sustenance than their biological counterparts, so nourishing naps are necessary before next prowls begin. Though you may feel more like a stray dog, tiger, move forward, ever forward, farther and farther from her, the taming tiger, the ghost tiger, the artist-dreamed tiger. Lingering too long can ruin the hunt's thrill, so I, like Borges' narrator, advance in search of "the other tiger" beyond my book, bolstering my composure, svelting my posture: "inside the skin of a dog," as the *Hagakure* goes, "outside the hide of a tiger."