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Odysseus 2.0

The Autobiography

by CHARLES L. MEE

ODYSSEUS 2.0

I grew up in a little town outside Chicago
where I could walk to the end of the block
and cross the street
and step into the countryside
and keep walking through the fields
past the trees and lakes
crossing the little streams
all the way to Iowa or Nebraska or California
or the south of France or India.
That was my life
when I was growing up.
My formative years.
Anything could happen.
That was my life.

Music.

Odysseus 2.0 turns and sees:

A guy wearing a garbage can upside down
so his head is a yellow glass bowl
in a hole in the bottom of the garbage can
his shins and feet can be seen at bottom
his arms come out the side
and he sings

UHNUHNUHNUHNUHNUHNUHNUHNUH
UHNUHNUH
EEEEEEEEEEEE
POOH-POOHPOOH-POOHRRRA
slslsl

drrrrroomoom
UHNUHNUHNUH
aaaaaaaaaatzen
UEEEE EE EE EE EE
HAHAHAHAHAHAHA
rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr

Rrumpfftilffto?
Bee bee bee bee bee
Zee zee zee zee zee

Pe pe pe pe pe
Pii pii pii pii pii
Poo poo poo poo poooo?

Grimm glimm gnimm bimbimm
Grimm glimm gnimm bimbimm
Grimm glimm gnimm bimbimm

[And the poem/song goes on and on.
Here is the whole text of the Kurt Schwitters poem “Ursonate” text:
http://creativegames.org.uk/modules/Art_Technology/Dada/schwitters.htm]

while, a moment later,
as Odysseus 2.0 continues to stand to one side watching—
in fact, he will be on stage for the entire piece,
watching everything that happens—

a decayed rotting beautiful tree stump
from the middle of the woods
is brought in on a little red wagon.

And a guy comes in wearing a crown of flowers

A girl or woman wearing a Viking helmet with two horns
brings in a blue toy car in the shape of a loaf of bread
with six small flashlights in a row,
sticking out the top of the car
that she pulls on a string

Somebody brings in a giant wire insect.

a box of miscellaneous women's high heeled shoes
with a glass front on the box.
And other such boxes of
tea kettles and house painting brushes
a box of trumpets with a glass front,
a box of monkey wrenches.

A dress mannequin
on a stand with wheels
and hanging from the sides
a pitchfork and a big cane harvesting knife.

A perfect rectangle
made of crushed beer cans.

One big shiny ball
with another one placed on top of it
kind of like a snowman
but pink or orange.

A vast assemblage of
giant red lips
the reins and bit for a horse
blonde hair
a red sweater
etc etc etc.

a kid's red wagon
with three tv sets attached to poles that stick up from the center of the wagon

a cocktail bar and tv set
on top of a giant, bed-sized pillow

an orange body suit
made of bear's fur
with a ten foot "tail" coming out the front
and a brightly colored striped tie and white shirt collar at the neck

a pair of black rubber rain boots,
eight feet tall

two stone pedestals
each about three feet tall
one with a rooster on top of it
the other with a chicken on top of it

a baby carriage with wire frames on top of it
holding a boulder

a tower constructed of household furniture—
little chairs and bedsteads and guitars and socks
and women's high-heeled shoes
a mannequin
with a basketball head
and two little baseball bats for rabbit ears

The garage door opens.

20 people in brightly colored silly swimming suits
with drinks in their hands
sing a raucous song,
joined by the last couple of people who have been
bringing in the mannequins and baby carriage—
and then, after a bit,
one at a time,
and finally everyone,
they put down their drinks
and
dance—

dancing to what might as well be Italian Beach Boys music
it goes on and on and on
happily ecstatically
until they are finally all running around aimlessly
some of them screaming
at the tops of their lungs in joy
and all the others singing and dancing
singing and dancing
singing and dancing
singing and dancing
singing and dancing
singing and dancing
singing and dancing
singing and dancing
singing and dancing
singing and dancing
singing and dancing
singing and dancing
singing and dancing
singing and dancing
singing and dancing
singing and dancing
and occasionally throwing themselves to the ground
and occasionally throwing themselves to the ground
and occasionally throwing themselves to the ground
and occasionally throwing themselves to the ground
and occasionally throwing themselves to the ground
and occasionally throwing themselves to the ground
and occasionally throwing themselves to the ground

and a guy bends over to a woman who is on the ground
and locks lips with her
and “pulls her up” with his locked lips

and this happens again and again

guys picking up women
women picking up men
men picking up men
women picking up women

a solo guy turns front and takes a dance posture
and flexes his bicep
he flexes his bicep to the music
5 guys join him in bicep flexing dance
all in unison
then they all do a hip thrust
very macho
then turns upstage and wiggle their butts
doing the butt dance
(not SO macho)
they move through other male display dance moves
finger snapping, etc

then three women step up and do the same male display moves

the piece ends with a flat out hard rock deafening
dancers hitting themselves in the head with stuffed animals
and throwing them on the floor

a woman lifts her dress up above her head
hiding her upper body entirely
exposing herself from the waist down
and takes a long, slow exit

others all dance out

one couple is left behind
a woman sitting at a café table
and a man sees her
and approaches the table

JEAN FRANCOIS

Pardon me, is this chair taken?

NANETTE

Not exactly at the moment, but....

JEAN FRANCOIS

You are waiting for someone?

NANETTE

Yes.

JEAN FRANCOIS

And you are expecting this person soon?

NANETTE

Well, I don't know, do I?

It could be fifteen minutes.

It could be five years.

JEAN FRANCOIS

Five years?

NANETTE

Possibly. Who knows?

JEAN FRANCOIS

And you are planning to hold onto this table for five years?

NANETTE

If necessary: yes.

JEAN FRANCOIS

This must be an extraordinary person
to wait for this person for five years.

NANETTE

Yes, it could be.

JEAN FRANCOIS

In fact, this person must be the great love of your life,
what else?

NANETTE

Possibly.

JEAN FRANCOIS

Possibly! What do you mean possibly?

NANETTE

We have not met yet.

JEAN FRANCOIS

So you sit here day after day....

NANETTE

At the same table....

JEAN FRANCOIS

At the same table

holding onto an empty chair

in the hope that the great love of your life will pass by

happen to glance at you sitting here alone,

notice perhaps the striking color of your eyes

ask to join you for a coffee

engage you in conversation

so that all your hopes and desires are suddenly

miraculously fulfilled

you fall deeply in love in an instant

you leave the cafe together

and from that moment on

you are never without this person?

NANETTE

Yes.

JEAN FRANCOIS

I see. May I join you for a coffee while you wait? Because

all the other tables seem to be full.

NANETTE

Yes, I suppose it's alright. Yes. Please.

JEAN FRANCOIS

Allow me to introduce myself.

I am Jean Francois
and I am the great love of your life.

[Arian and Hilda come in.]

ARIAN
Do you come here often?

HILDA
Oh, yes
all the time
ever since I left home to follow the man I love
when he came here

ARIAN
and you're together?

HILDA
oh, no, he doesn't know I'm here

ARIAN
he doesn't know?

HILDA
and my mother doesn't know I've left home

ARIAN
well, she sees you're not there any more

HILDA
no, because I'm still at home in bed

ARIAN
home in bed?

HILDA
because my spirit has split in two...

ARIAN

so you mean, as a metaphor, your mother doesn't know you've left

HILDA

she sees me still every morning when I wake up in my bed at home

ARIAN

she sees you....

so your mother....

HILDA

you think she's crazy

ARIAN

I think someone may be a little bit living in a dream

HILDA

this is how it is to love someone

ARIAN

indeed

HILDA

yes

[Arian and Hilda sit at a table.

Not at a table

but standing to one side

are Susan and Becker.]

SUSAN

So often we find

we look at someone

and

we are disgusted.

BECKER

Oh, yes.

SUSAN

We think: here is a real dirtball
and we think
if we get too close
we might catch something.

BECKER

Yes, we do.

SUSAN

And yet, as far as we know,
we ourselves might be the contagious ones
not knowing what it is we have
but having it even so
without knowing it.

BECKER

We never know.

SUSAN

Still, we think
get this fellow away from me
lock him up, put him away
send him to an island
you know, the island of the damned,
the island of the rejects
whatever
just get him out of here.
And yet, life twists and turns
sometimes like lightning
you don't know
suddenly you've got cancer
and you are facing death
or in the least likely place
you see someone
and you fall in love

you look at the guy
and you think:
I don't think so
and yet there it is
you don't know why
your friends all say: are you crazy?
you love him?
but you love him so much
you just want to knock him down and kiss him

[She knocks him down and kisses him.

Not at a table
but standing to one side
are Edmund and Herbert.]

EDMUND

I think you are lying to me, Herbert.
You are always lying to me
because you wish something would be true
but it isn't.
You are a weak spineless person, Herbert,
feckless, feeble and ineffective.

But I love you like a cicada.

HERBERT

A cicada?

EDMUND

Yes.

HERBERT

Like a grasshopper you mean?

EDMUND

Do you know what a cicada is?

HERBERT

I thought I did.

EDMUND

There was a time long ago, in prehistoric times
when cicadas were human beings
back before the Muses were born.
And then when the Muses were born
and song came into being
some of these human creatures were so taken by the pleasure of it
that they sang and sang and sang.
And they forgot to eat or drink
they just sang and sang
and so,
before they knew it,
they died.

And from those human creatures a new species came into being
the cicadas
and they were given this special gift from the Muses:
that from the time they are born
they need no nourishment
they just sing continuously
caught forever in the pleasure of the moment
without eating or drinking
until they die.

This is the story of love.
If you stay there forever in that place
you die of it.

That's why people
can't stay in love.

But that's how I've loved you.
And how I love you now.
And how I always will.

[they sit at a table

then more objects are brought in
while we have the dialogue down below,
between Benny and Tingying.]

a Christmas tree
with fork feet holding it up
and decorated with large silver fish

a section of ruined roman column
but coated in gold leaf
like the ruined fortunes of today and yesterday

a skeleton's skull
five feet tall
with an upside nose in the shape of a heart, painted red
and deep black curving lines defining various parts of his skull

a wooden beam
from which six slender four foot tall poles stick up.
On each pole is a painted cardboard cutout of a human figure—
a guy in a swimming suit, a guy in a business suit,
a woman in a fashionable dress,
a guy in work clothes wearing boxing gloves, etc.
And atop each of these figures is a head—
one head is a bunch of bananas,
one is a cluster of dark storm clouds,
one is a television set with a human face on the screen, one is a thick, u-shaped, wooden block,
etc.

a naked body of Christ
holes are poked in it
and blood gushes out

a whole chamber orchestra enters,
and we expect they will play,

but they quickly put together two cafe tables
and have lunch

while the following conversation occurs:

BENNY

I wonder:

would you marry me

or

would you have a coffee with me

and think of having a conversation

that would lead to marriage?

TINGYING

Oh.

Oh.

Well,

a coffee with you

I would have a coffee with you.

BENNY

You are free now?

TINGYING

Free now? No, well, no

right now

I am busy.

BENNY

OK then maybe later this evening?

TINGYING

Well, later this evening also I am busy.

BENNY

Or late supper.

Or breakfast tomorrow

or lunch or tea in the afternoon

or a movie
or dinner the day after
Thursday for lunch
or Friday dinner
or perhaps you would go for the weekend with me
to my parents' home in Provence
or we could stop along the way
and find a little place for ourselves
to be alone.

TINGYING

I don't think I can be alone.

BENNY

With me?

Or by yourself?

You don't like to be alone by yourself?

TINGYING

No, I mean with you this weekend.

BENNY

Oh.

Or then just we could
have coffee over and over again
every day
until we get to know one another
and we have the passage of the seasons
in the cafe
we could celebrate our anniversary
and then perhaps you would forget
that you are not married to me
and we can have a child.

TINGYING

A child?

BENNY

Because

don't you think
after we have been together for a year
it will be time to start to think of these things?

TINGYING

We haven't been together for a day.

BENNY

You know, I have known many women.

I mean, I don't mean to say....

TINGYING

No.

BENNY

I mean just
you know
my mother, my grandmother
my sisters
and also women I have known romantically
and then, too, friends,
and even merely acquaintances
but you know
in life
one meets many people
and it seems to me
we know so much of another person
in the first few moments we meet
not from what a person says alone
but from the way they hold their head
how they listen
what they do with their hand as they speak
or when they are silent
and years later
when these two people break up
they say
I should have known from the beginning
in truth
I did know from the beginning

I saw it in her, or in him
the moment we met
but I tried to repress the knowledge
because it wasn't useful at the time
because,
for whatever reason
I just wanted to go to bed with her as fast as I could
or I was lonely
and so I pretended I didn't notice
even though I did
exactly the person she was from the first moment
I knew
and so it is with you
and I think probably it is the same for you with me
we know one another
right now from the first moment
we know so much about one another in just this brief time
and we have known many people
and for myself
I can tell
you are one in a million
and I want to marry you
I want to marry you
and have children with you
and grow old together
so I am begging you
just have a coffee with me.

TINGYING

OK.

BENNY

When will you do this?

TINGYING

Right now.

BENNY

Oh.

Oh, good.

Good.

[he sits at the table,
and he kisses her hand]

Good.

[A guy crosses through with several dogs on leashes.

a guy crosses the stage
with a skeleton on his back
its hands and arms
over the shoulders of the guy carrying him
so the guy can hold the skeleton's forearms
to keep it on his back

A girl enters
with her computer held close to her head
listening to the music that comes to her
from her computer
and dancing.

A guy rolls up his pant leg
puts one naked foot in the air
and paints it ten different messy colors with oil paint.

Odysseus 2.0 has been here all along,
watching and listening to everyone.

ODYSSEUS 2.0

When you come to the end of your life
I don't know that you're going to care about much of anything
except
did you love someone
did someone love you

how was it being together
what was better than sitting in a café in the late morning
or after lunch
talking about nothing much
gossiping about Martha
maybe a little time together in the afternoon
in bed
or even just thinking about it
making a plan for the following afternoon
dinner
a concert
things you think:
this is a boring, conventional, routine life
but so filled with pleasure
it's unique
the two of you
this concoction of different histories
tastes, impulses, neurons, memories
brought together in complete delight
for a millisecond on earth
and then gone forever
and then
if you have children
the pleasure in their joy
in their company
in the paths they take
to places you've never gone
and never would have imagined
and then, too, some good friends
of course they might enrage you from time to time
tedious, annoying, bullshit
but they're the universe you live in
you may enjoy the idea of the planets
even though you never see them
you may enjoy the ocean
and the Grand Canyon
of course you will if you see it
you can't avoid being affected by
the economy

international relations
imperial aspirations and xenophobic rages
assholes and bastards and lunatics
raving maniacs
even
—if you are among the dreadfully unlucky—
you may have your life made wretched
or brought to an end by these things
they're not trivial by any means
and still, when your life is brought to an end
I think
when you come to the end of your life
I don't know that you're going to care about about much of anything
except
did you love someone
did someone love you
how was it being together.

You think life is
a causes b causes c causes d
and it all takes place pretty much in the same place
even just in the living room
and over a straight span of time
but really
a causes b
causes Phoenix
causes 327
causes purple
causes a song and dance
causes a volcano eruption
causes seeing your old high school friend again
after all these years
seeing your old friend in Afghanistan
that's how our lives really are

and now we hear the music—
Benny Goodman or Guy Lombardo or Bing Crosby—
as a woman in red dress
enters, dancing solo
with a floor lamp
with a lampshade made of underpants
looking for a place to put it
trying the lamp here, not liking it,
trying it there, not liking it,
trying it somewhere else,
finally placing the lamp and exiting

WILSON

How could you just suddenly: disappear?

SUSAN

I didn't.

WILSON

I thought you did.

And I thought you loved me.

SUSAN

Well, I do love you.

[The other characters exit.]

WILSON

Oh, yes, you love me,

but you don't love me in that way.

SUSAN

I never pretended to love you in that way.

WILSON

I can't go on in life

without being loved in that way.

SUSAN

A lot of people are never loved in that way.

WILSON

How can you tell
if you are really alive
if you're never loved in that way?

SUSAN

What do you mean: in that way?

WILSON

Unless I thought you were crazy for me
so crazy for me you couldn't stand it
you just had to kiss me
you just had to knock me down and kiss me
because you couldn't stand it
that you laughed at my jokes
or thought I was so cool
or like said really intelligent things that made you think
maybe not all of those things
but even just any one of them
just one of them

[Silence.]

You see what I mean, not even one.

SUSAN

I'm sorry.

WILSON

Why did you live with me, then?

SUSAN

I thought I loved you
but I guess I didn't know what love was.
I liked you in a way
not much

but in some ways
or at least in the ways I thought guys could be likeable
and the rest of it I thought maybe that's just
how guys are
and as time went on maybe it wouldn't matter so much
but then I find it does matter
I can't help myself
some stuff you do
I just can't get over it
and the stuff I liked:
that I thought you were a responsible person
and mature
solid and dependable
all those turned out not to be true at all
so what am I left with?

WILSON

It's not your fault.

SUSAN

No, it's not.

WILSON

Or maybe it is
that you weren't thinking very clearly
or being very focused when you made your choice
and a lot of people were depending on that choice being really clear
or at least I was

SUSAN

I know.
I'm sorry.

WILSON

Being sorry doesn't cut it somehow.
I know people always say they're sorry
and probably they are
and I don't think it means nothing
I'm sure it means something

and it's essential for people to feel it
and to say it
in order for life to go on at all
and yet
the truth is
it doesn't cut it.
I'm sorry: but it doesn't.

SUSAN
I'm sorry.

WILSON
Is that somehow now
supposed to cut it?

SUSAN
I know a man who will say I want to take care of you
because he means he wants to use you for a while
and while he's using you
so you don't notice what he's doing
he'll take care of you as if you were a new car
before he decides to trade you in.

The male
the male is a biological accident
an incomplete female
the product of a damaged gene
a half-dead lump of flesh
trapped in a twilight zone somewhere between apes and humans
always looking obsessively for some woman
any woman

because he thinks if he can make some connection with a woman
that will make him a whole human being!
But it won't. It never will.

these cheap pikers,
these welchers,
these liars,

these double dealers,
flim-flam artists,
litterbugs,
psychiatrists!

Boy babies should be flushed down the toilet at birth.

You
are an ignorant shoot from the hip cowboy
with your boots in cowshit
like a cow puncher savage
thinking you are such hot stuff
rolling your cigarette with one hand at a full gallop
but in reality you are a baby
a baby dude ranch greenhorn dweeb
who knows nothing
nothing
nothing about whatever
nothing about life
nothing about women
nothing about men
nothing about horses
you are a guy that's all
you are just a guy
I could spit at you
[she spits]
I could spit at you and spit at you
[she spits and spits]
because what you are is a typical male
I'll say no more
a typical male
you are a
typical
male
which is to say a shithook
and a dickhead

[The garage doors open and one woman is in the garage
standing against the back wall
which is filled with scrawlings,
black line drawings a child might have done of animals
that are lovely but that seem,
accompanied as they are by a lone woman in the garage,
a little sad and desperate.

This could be the bride.

She sings a lonely solo: A Crazy Girl Is Hard to Find

a lonely solo
a lonely solo
a lonely solo
a lonely solo
a lonely solo
a lonely solo
a lonely solo
a lonely solo
a lonely solo
a lonely solo

And now big music
and
out of the other garage door:
comes a parade of dresses
both men and women in fancy clothes
both men's and women's clothes
men in men's clothes
and men in women's clothes
and women in men's clothes—
summer and winter clothes
kids clothes
pajamas
a guy with an immense woman's wig full of feathers
Christmas outfits
fantastic outfits

swimming suits
underwear
Halloween costumes

a fashion runway show—
coming down, strutting, then stopping for a pose,
turning, strutting off—
they enter, flaunt, exit
and then enter again in a different outfit
until they've all done two or three turns
and then they're all gone

Even Odysseus 2.0 gets involved in the fashion show
toward the end
and puts on half a costume.
And now, alone on stage, he speaks.

ODYSSEUS 2.0

A lot of these things you're seeing are things that I've
like
arranged for you to see in a way.
Or just
like
shared my memory of them
or some of them are things that are just happening
as we talk.
And I know it's ok for you to see all these things,
because my family is out of town
so I'm not invading their privacy
by talking about them
and showing you what they do
because they have their right to privacy, too,
and I don't think it's nice the way novelists write novels
about their families
and sell their novels to Hollywood
and make a ton of money
by invading the privacy of their own families.

Everyone in my family has the right
to reveal as much as they want about themselves
and not have someone else in the family
invading their privacy.
So I'm not invading their privacy.
Now I'm just invading everyone else's privacy.

Although it is true that
I miss my family every day
All the time
I wish I could lie in the grass
In central park
All summer
With my wife and kids
I can't get enough of them
Some days I look at the grass
And tears start to come to my eyes
Because my life will end some day
Before I've spent forever
Lying in the grass with my wife and kids
And I would like to swim with them

And take them out to dinner
In an outdoor café

I just want to walk the streets of Greenwich Village
With my wife and kids
Past all the beautiful old brownstones
The ever changing stores
Stopping at a café
Seeing some friends on the street
It makes me cry
Not to be doing it forever

A kid's toy piano is brought out and put down.
A guy looks at it,

then turns his back to the piano,
and, squatting, sits on the keyboard,
and then “plays” the piano
by bouncing up and down on his butt.

Why does the chicken cross the stage?

A chicken crosses the stage—moving cautiously, stopping and looking around as he goes, scratching at the ground—maybe while we hear, as a voiceover, an astronaut talking to Houston base.

VOICEOVER FROM SPEAKERS:

A man in a chicken suit crosses the stage.

[Silence, till the chicken is almost off the other side.]

Why does he cross the stage?

The Beating

A guy comes on carrying a square of astroturf, a garbage can, and a baseball bat. He sets the astroturf down carefully, places the garbage can on the astroturf, takes out two earplugs and puts them in his ears. He beats the garbage can with a baseball bat. He exits.

A guy who was watching this now speaks:

CONSTANTINE

People think
it's hard to be a woman;
but it's not easy
to be a man,
the expectations people have

that a man should be a civilized person
of course I think everyone should be civilized
men and women both
but when push comes to shove
say you have some bad people
who are invading your country
raping your own wives and daughters
and now we see:
this happens all the time
all around the world
and then a person wants a man
who can defend his home

you can say, yes, it was men who started this
there's no such thing as good guys and bad guys
only guys
and they kill people
but if you are a man who doesn't want to be a bad guy
and you try not to be a bad guy
it doesn't matter
because even if it is possible to be good
and you are good
when push comes to shove
and people need defending
then no one wants a good guy any more

then they want a man who can fuck someone up
who can go to his target like a bullet
burst all bonds
his blood hot
howling up the bank
rage in his heart
screaming
with every urge to vomit
the ground moving beneath his feet
the earth alive with pounding
the cry hammering in his heart
like tanked up motors turned loose
with no brakes to hold them

this noxious world

and then when it's over

suddenly

when this impulse isn't called for any longer

a man is expected to put it away

carry on with life

as though he didn't have such impulses

or to know that, if he does

he is a despicable person

and so it may be that when a man turns this violence on a woman

in her bedroom

or in the midst of war

slamming her down, hitting her,

he should be esteemed for this

for informing her

about what it is that civilization really contains

the impulse to hurt side by side with the gentleness

the use of force as well as tenderness

the presence of coercion and necessity

because it has just been a luxury for her really

not to have to act on this impulse or even feel it

to let a man do it for her

so that she can stand aside and deplore it

whereas in reality

it is an inextricable part of the civilization in which she lives

on which she depends

that provides her a long life, longer usually than her husband,

and food and clothes

dining out in restaurants

and going on vacations to the oceanside

so that when a man turns it against her

he is showing her a different sort of civilized behavior really

that she should know and feel intimately

as he does

to know the truth of how it is to live on earth

to know this is part not just of him

but also of her life

not go through life denying it

pretending it belongs to another
rather knowing it as her own
feeling it as her own
feeling it as a part of life as intense as love
as lovely in its way as kindness
because to know this pain
is to know the whole of life
before we die
and not just some pretty piece of it
to know who we are
both of us together
this is a gift that a man can give a woman.

An old village lady singer sings
an old Italian folk song.

And the installation art objects on stage sing the chorus.

And the pope enters and exits on stilts.

And people just stand up and sing love songs
and love arias
sometimes step forward and do solos
just some bits of their favorite songs
and then
sometimes the whole group sings a song together.

While they sing,
an Asian woman appears in chinky/junky outfit
looking like one of the dancers in the Strange Mushroom company

she leaves,
returns in red shirt, white undies
with a pillow in her arms
looking for someone
and turns abruptly and leaves at once

she returns wearing a white shirt and tie and glasses
like an office worker
—as though she has been trying out identities that will be acceptable

now 3 women appear wearing only underpants
and join
3 naked men are at the dinner table
along with
one woman in evening clothes—
a snapshot of society

the Asian woman returns
this time only in white underpants

a rack of clothes is brought on
and everyone dresses in dinner clothes

it is as though they had stripped down to the essentials
or 'desocialized' themselves
and now 'resocialize' themselves
but this time in their own choices of persona/fashion''

they all gather around the dinner table
and Odysseus 2.0 sits with them,
or just nearby

breaking bread is the most basic social ritual
and, yes, here society is reconstituted

HIROKO

I'm glad to see you again.

CATHERINE

So you say.

And yet

I don't know how it could be true.

HIROKO

How could it not be true?

CATHERINE

Because if you were glad to see me
you would never have left me.

HIROKO

Of course I would.

CATHERINE

No, because

if you love someone

you don't leave them.

You hold onto them for dear life

you hold onto them forever

unless you are a stupid person

which I don't think you are

so

what else can I think

except you never really loved me

I was just another one of your flings along the way

whereas I loved you

I knew

if you love someone

you don't let them go

HIROKO

And yet you did.

CATHERINE

I never did.

HIROKO

You said:

if one day you are going to leave me

then go now

don't just keep tormenting me.

CATHERINE

And so?

HIROKO

And so.

It's not that I left you.

CATHERINE

Excuse me.

I didn't leave you.

And yet, you are not with me.

What else happened?

HIROKO

It turned out

we were at different points in our lives

we couldn't go on.

CATHERINE

I could have gone on.

HIROKO

Shall we talk about something else?

CATHERINE

I see

in the world

people have wars and they die

entire countries come to an end

Etienne has died of cancer

HIROKO

I didn't know.

CATHERINE

How could you?

And yet

there it is.

And one day I will die

and so will you.

And yet

you could leave me.

I don't understand.

I will never understand

how it is if you have only one life to live

and you find your own true love

the person all your life you were meant to find

and your only job then was to cherish that person

and care for that person

and never let go

but it turns out

you can still think

for some reason

because this or that

you end it

you end it forever

you end it for the only life you will ever live on earth.

Maybe if you would be reincarnated

and you could come back to life again and again a dozen times

then this would make sense

to throw away your only chance for love in this life

because you would have another chance in another life

but when this is your only chance

how can this make sense?

Do you think

there will ever be a time

when we could get back together?

HIROKO

No.

CATHERINE

Not ever?

HIROKO

No.

CATHERINE

Not ever at all
even ever?

HIROKO

No.

CATHERINE

And yet
this is so hard for me to accept.

More than anything

I love to lie in bed with you at night
and look at your naked back
and stroke your back slowly
from your neck to your coccyx
and let my fingers fan out
and drift over your smooth buttock
and slip slowly down along your thigh
to your sweet knee
only to return again
coming up the back of your thigh
hesitating a moment
to let my fingers rest in the sweet valley
at the very top of your thigh, just below your buttock
and so slowly up along the small of your back
to your shoulder blade
and then to let your hair tickle my face
as I put my lips to your shoulder
and kiss you and kiss you and kiss you forever

this is what I call heaven
and what I hope will last forever

[Hiroko stands to leave]

HIROKO

I love you, Catherine.
I have never loved anyone in my life as I have loved you
and I know I never will.
But we cannot be together.

[she leaves;
Catherine watches her go.]

The solo dancer returns.
Music.
The dancer takes the floor lamp lovingly in her arms,
dances around with it,
dances around with it sweetly,
nostalgically,
spiritedly,
warmly,
regretfully,
and finally

NIKOS

I thought,
I've always liked you, Lydia
seeing you with your sisters
sometimes in the summers
when our families would get together at the beach.
I thought you were fun, and funny
and really good at volleyball

which I thought showed you have a
well,
a natural grace

and beauty
and a lot of energy.

And it's not that I thought I fell in love with you at the time
or that I've been like a stalker or something in the background
all these years.

But really, over the years,
I've thought back from time to time
how good it felt just to be around you.

And so I thought: well, maybe this is an okay way
to have a marriage

to start out
not in a romantic way, but
as a friendship

because I admire you

and I thought perhaps this might grow
into something deeper
and longer lasting

but maybe this isn't quite the thing you want
and really I don't want to force myself on you
you should be free to choose
I mean: obviously.

Although I think I should say
what began as friendship for me
and a sort of distant, even inattentive regard
has grown into a passion already

I don't know how
or where it came from, or when
but somehow the more I felt this admiration
and, well, pleasure in you

seeing you become the person that you are
I think a thoughtful person and smart
and it seems to me funny and warm

and passionate, I mean about the things
I heard you talk about in school
a movie or playing the piano
I saw you one night at a cafe by the harbor
drinking almond nectar
and I saw that happiness made you raucous.
And I myself don't want to have a relationship
that's cool or distant
I want a love really that's all-consuming
that consumes my whole life

and the longer the sense of you has lived with me
the more it has grown into a longing for you
so I wish you'd consider
maybe not marriage
because it's true you hardly know me
but a kind of courtship

or, maybe you'd just I don't know
go sailing with me or see a movie

I talk too much.
I'm sorry.

I do that sometimes.
I wish I didn't.
But I get started on a sentence,
and that leads to another sentence,
and then, the first thing I know,
I'm just trying to work it through,
the logic of it,
follow it through to the end
because I think,
if I stop,
or if I don't get through to the end

before someone interrupts me
they won't understand what I'm saying
and what I'm saying isn't necessarily wrong—
it might be, but not necessarily,
and if it is, I'll be glad to be corrected,
or change my mind—
but if I get stopped along the way
I get confused
I don't remember where I was
or how to get back to the end of what I was saying.

And I think sometimes I scare people
because of it
they think I'm so, like determined
just barging ahead—
not really a sensitive person,
whereas, in truth,
I am.

one by one people step to the mike
and speak a song title or lyric.

SOMEONE

Rubber Ducky,
You're The One
You Make Bath Time Lots of Fun

ANOTHER

Fairy Tales Do Come True,
It Can Happen to You,
If You're Young at Heart

ANOTHER

A Crazy Girl is Hard to Find

ANOTHER

Who Let the Dogs Out?

Who?

Who?

Who?

Who??

ANOTHER

Pussy-Cat, Pussy-Cat, Where Have You Been??

ANOTHER

Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland

ANOTHER

Ev'ry morning, ev'ry evening?

Ain't we got fun??

Not much money ?Oh, but honey?

Ain't we got fun?

ANOTHER

Every Day is Ladies' Day to Me

ANOTHER

Let me call you "Sweetheart"

I'm in love with you.

ANOTHER

I'm forever blowing bubbles?

Pretty bubbles in the air

ANOTHER

I'm Always Chasing Rainbows

ANOTHER

In the Good Old Summertime

ANOTHER

You Are My Sunshine

ANOTHER

“A” You’re Adorable

ANOTHER

Aren’t You Kind of Glad We Did?

ANOTHER

We’ll build a sweet little nest,
somewhere out in the West
And let the rest of the world go by

ANOTHER

My Pony Boy

ANOTHER

I Want What I Want When I Want It

ANOTHER

Oh, you beautiful doll?
You great, big beautiful doll?

ANOTHER

Where do we go from here
Tell me where do we go from here?
You said you’d take me through the years?
So where do we go from here

And now

The five year old girl,
eating an ice cream cone, smiling,
enters
sitting in a red wagon pulled by her father.
They enter and exit.

A golf cart, driven like crazy by a caddy,
while, in the back,

a couple embraces passionately.
They enter and exit.

A couple being pulled along on a picnic blanket
with food and a champagne bottle in a bucket,
and she is drinking and drinking and drinking the champagne
enter and exit.

An electric wheelchair—
a man driving,
a woman sitting on the handlebars,
she running her fingers through his hair over and over and over
enter and exit.

A skate board,
with a woman lying on her back on the skate board
as a man twirls it round and round in ecstasy
enter and exit.

A silk sheet, with silk pillows,
she lying back in her lingerie
he taking photos of her
enter and exit.

A homeless guy with cart of stuff
enters and exits.

A man and woman on a bicycle built for two—
one peddles while the other eats pizza
enter and exit.

As many of these vignettes as there are vehicles with wheels.

a guy repeatedly falls through an open door

6 guys line up at front of stage
backs to audience

while 6 women dance for them
lonely, sad unison dance
while the soprano sings

THE SOPRANO

Ah! Sweet mystery of life?
At last I've found thee?
Ah! I know at last the secret of it all?
All the longing, seeking, striving, waiting, yearning?
The burning hopes, the joy and idle tears that fall!?
For 'tis love, and love alone, the world is seeking?
And 'tis love, and love alone, that can repay!?
'Tis the answer, 'tis the end and all of living?
For it is love alone that rules for aye!?
Love, and love alone, the world is seeking?
For 'tis love, and love alone, that can repay!?
'Tis the answer, 'tis the end and all of living?
For it is love alone that rules for aye!

three men
dance on, off, and around the sofa

a guy dances with a skateboard

there is a bucket dance,
whatever that is

everyone throws themselves to the floor
and bounce off a mattress

and a guy with his feet nailed to floor
(well, with shoes nailed to the floor that he slips into)
rocks back and forth

everyone has a guitar or violin or flute and plays it badly together

so you get a variety of relationships
some couples
some coupled objects
some do objects and then each other and then objects again
some go from one to another

TILLY

I would eat tarte tatins
and drink Châteauneuf-du-Pape
and sometimes a glass of rose
sitting in the garden in the afternoon
and, if it wouldn't hurt too much
or become a habit leading down the path to hell
I'd like to have just one cigarette every day
or even one every other day
with an espresso, in the café
one of the cafes
and then I'd drive out to the hospital
where Van Gogh spent that year
painting the cypresses and the olive trees
and you think:
he was crazy
and pathetic
what a tragedy
how he suffered
but you know
he turned out a hundred a thirty paintings
or a hundred and forty paintings
or, like a hundred and forty three paintings
like he turned out a painting every two and a half days
for a year!
that's where he turned out The Starry Night!
I don't even mention the olive grove
or the field with the red poppies
and that's what I would do
I would be a painter if I could even just hold a brush right
if I just had enough talent to dip a brush into some paint

and slather it on the canvas
because that is a perfect life
you just get up in the morning
and you get your cup of coffee
and you wander into your studio
and whatever catches your eye is what you do
you think
oh, that painting I was working on yesterday
that could use a little splash of red up there near the top
and so you dip your brush into the paint
and you splash some red
and then a little yellow
some green here over on the right
you think
okay
I could put a sailboat up there in the sky
and then you have another sip of your coffee
and you notice the little ceramic vase
you had been working on the day before yesterday
and you think
I could put some kind of flat, muted purple
right there where its stomach bulges out a little bit
and then you see that drawing
that fell on the floor
off that table down near the other end of your studio
and you go to pick it up
and you just can't resist
doing a little something to it
adding a little picnic table to the landscape
and by the time you finish that
you find yourself down at the other end of your studio
near the door out onto the terrace
so you go out onto the terrace
and sit at the little table there overlooking the vineyard
because by then it's time for lunch
and your husband brings you a sandwich
and maybe a little glass of Beaume de Venise

and after lunch
you make love for the rest of the afternoon.
That's the life I have in mind.

SALLY

You'd think
if you go to law school
you'd learn to think clearly
and think things through
you'd see your starting points
and you'd be able to reason your way
through to the end.
And then it turns out
you can't.

And now I think
I can't imagine ever beginning to want to have an affair with anyone,
I'd rather be left alone in peace.
I don't see how it's worth it.
I can masturbate.
I can get a vibrator.
They have the most wonderful vibrators these days,
like saddles, you can sit on them like a horse
and ride and ride all you want to;
it doesn't buck, it doesn't whinny,
it doesn't talk,
you turn it on whenever you want,
and when you're tired of it,
you just push its button and it stops.
If you like you can get a little one
that fits right in your undies,
and you make it go with a little remote control
you can carry in your purse
so that while you're out to lunch
or at a wedding party
you can be masturbating

while you're in the middle of a conversation,
and when the conversation's over
no one has any hard feelings.

EDITH

Sometimes in life
you just get one chance.
Romeo and Juliet
They meet, they fall in love, they die.
That's the truth of life
you have one great love
You're born, you die
in between, if you're lucky
you have one great love
not two, not three,
just one.
It can last for years or for a moment
and then
it can be years later or a moment later
you die
and that's how it is to be human
that's what the great poets and dramatists have known
you see Romeo and Juliet
you think: how young they were
they didn't know
there's more than one pebble on the beach
but no.
There's only one pebble on the beach.
Sometimes not even one.

HARRIET

There was a time
when you came indoors from the fields
you would expect to see
traces of human occupation everywhere;

fires still burning in the fireplaces
because someone meant to come right back;
a book lying face down on the window seat;
a paint box
and beside it
a glass
full of cloudy water;
flowers in a cut glass vase;
an unfinished game of solitaire;
a piece of cross-stitching
with a needle and thread stuck in it;
building blocks
or lead soldiers
in the middle of the library floor;
lights left burning in empty rooms.
This was the inner life.

We miss it.

YVETTE

You know I like to cook

HENRY

Yes

YVETTE

And I like to make apricot confiture

HENRY

Yes

YVETTE

And I straighten up
but not right away
and usually I live in a mess
but then I straighten up later on
only it's not always straightened up.

HENRY

Right.

YVETTE

I do dishes, and I do laundry,
but I'm not good at really cleaning.

HENRY

Unh-hunh.

YVETTE

So that's how it is if you live with me
that's how it will be
that's all.
I just wanted, if we're going to be together, you know,
for everything to be clear.

HENRY

Right.

YVETTE

So you understand about laundry and dishes
and not straightening up
and there are no surprises
like you're not suddenly going to discover
oh, she doesn't straighten up
this will never work out
because I can't stand a mess
I'm sorry I wish I could
I wish I could just rise above it
but chaos makes me crazy
I just fall apart
and I can't go on living with you.

HENRY

Like that.

YVETTE

Right. That's not how it is for me.

Because, moving in with you,
this is a big deal for me,
and I don't want there to be any misunderstandings
because this is a big move for me
and I don't think
after I do this
that there will be any going back
I mean, if a year from now you were to say
oh, you never straighten up
I don't think I can live with that
the point is
I think I'd shoot you.

HENRY
Right.

YVETTE
That's how it is for me.

HENRY
That's it?

YVETTE
Yes.

HENRY
That's all.

YVETTE
Yes. I don't think there's anything else. I think that's everything.

HENRY
The truth is
I can do the laundry, too, and I do dishes.

YVETTE
Oh.

HENRY

So, I think everything's going to be OK.

YVETTE

Oh. Good. Good. That's good then.

HENRY

Right.

Plus, I cook, too.

YVETTE

You cook, too.

HENRY

Right.

YVETTE

Oh.

HENRY

Plus, I love you like crazy.

YVETTE

Oh,

you do.

Oh, good.

Good.

That's good then.

I can accept that.

some women bring out a string of six simple wood chairs, face front
one sews, one plays with a child or a dog, one reads a book;

a woman comes out with a green picket fence,
sets it standing up by itself
stands in front of it, to one side, for a minute,

then picks up the fence and leaves;

several naked bathers in a plastic wading pool

a piano is brought out for someone to play quietly

ODYSSEUS 2.0

In childhood, in our father's house,
we live the happiest life, I think, of all mankind.

But when we have understanding
and have come to youthful vigor,
we are pushed out.

And this,
we must approve
and consider to be happiness.

[A woman in a red silk dress enters,
stands a moment
and then begins to dance.]

No man was ever born
but he must suffer.
He buries his children and gets others in their place;
then dies himself.
And yet men bear it hard,
that only give dust to dust!
Life is a harvest that man must reap like ears of corn;
one grows, another falls.
Why should we moan at this,
the path of Nature that we must tread?

Heaven and earth were once a single form;
but when they were separated from each other into two,
they bore and delivered into the light all things:
trees, winged creatures,
beasts reared by the briny sea—
and the human race.

[A man enters
and dances with the woman.]

Let any man get hold of as much pleasure as he can
as he lives his daily life;
the future will always be unknown.

The best thing is a life free from sickness,
the power each day
to take hold of what one desires.

The time of life is short,
and once a person is hidden beneath the earth
he lies there for all time.

A man is nothing but breath and shadow.

Time makes all things dark
and brings them to oblivion.

A cup without a bottom is not put on the table.

First you will see a crop in flower,
all white;
then a round mulberry
that has turned red;
lastly
old age
of Egyptian blackness
takes over.

dance
and dance
and dance
and, while they dance,
they draw on the paper floor with pencils
and blood
red and black ink

