

Some Kind of Dream (after *Phaedrus*)

Lucinda Steward



Sometimes I wonder what purpose there is in self-pleasure. But to persuade myself to read my own work is easy. I am a sucker for my own lines, any time of day, and (if time permits before company comes over) I read myself again and again. I always remind myself how good it was once I'm done. After a while, my writing gets ruffled, and the pages wind up with my dirty fingerprints all over them from too much handling.

Since my work only reflects my perceived reality, I used to ask myself, "Why should I care if it were shared with anyone, or not?" My words are not cheap imitations of reality but an alternative interpretation that only a hitherto-undiscovered underground fan base might appreciate. My biggest fan would find the words ... telling.

If only there were someone like this ready to give me a try. It would likely be another woman, as I've always known my words fit the feminine best, like a cold dainty arched foot slips into a soft, narrow shoe. To get this reader's attention, my sensitive narrator

might be in order. They should have something in common, the reader and the narrator; and that should come naturally; I don't believe in force. If a reader decides she doesn't relate to the narrator, she can turn the writing down, like she would turn down any foolish lover who appalls her.

When I work in private I call it play. I lay figures of speech gently here and there, between literal lines of interpretation, so that each figure has its tightly crafted location. Sometimes, sounds add a certain sensation when synchronized with structural needs. But again there can't be force. Otherwise, the reader may feel pushed into an unreasonably echoing valley, moved against her will to accept Truth and objective meaning behind words.

Rather, it is better for me to allow my reader to make her own decisions. I've never used an introduction—sacrilegious! It censors and limits the understanding of the work. I might, however, give fair warning to the easily offended.

Something like Ishmael Reed's "Beware: Do Not Read this Poem" works to highlight my own odd play; and, at the same time it might prick up the ears of some lonely young woman who rebels through engaging in forbidden pleasures; and if away I push, hard, so hard she feels the pain that she hides under her skin, she might continue to turn pages.

As she turns, I hope that she discerns my work as a conductor or a receptor, a place that touches her deeply, even gives her a sense of camaraderie. She knows that she is not alone. She knows that I am with her. And I hope that she will come to me again.

Topics are often secondary. If you are still reading this, you must agree, since a writer writing about writing dries up the senses even more than a reader reading about reading. What matters is where and how the light exposes the skin of the subject and where and how it probes into that subject's depths. The "when" is important: I don't want to expose someone to something before the time is right. She needs to be persuaded one stage at a time, and, if I'm lucky, she will desire a second encounter with me: new narrator, new subject, and new characters. Perhaps she wants to see something different, like a foreign exchange student with a new dictionary, as if all that were important was to break my code, to decipher my map. She will need to trust what I'm hiding, where I'm taking her, that I won't hurt her. And, if she were the right reader, she might study me through my work, inside and out, from the shallow surfaces to my deepest secrets. For her to go so far, willingly, to seek out my motives, would be orgasmic.

But what about when she finishes me? For me to be forced to go again on that long lonely walk into isolation with my work might traumatize me, make me feel less than adequate, a bête longing for Belle. I would take my pen and paper and climb to the peak of some far mountain before I would make another effort with a civilized person.

For a while, I would console myself with other common and unremarkable beasts driven to despair. This consolation may well be my salvation; I know myself well enough to realize that this salvation, like my own pleasure in my words, will not satisfy. I would always need another reader.

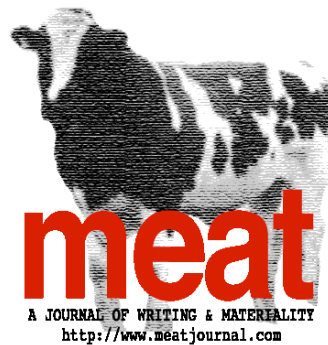
A new reader might even find interest in another side of my writing, since each of my sides loves acquiring different readers. I have several sides, of course: some short, some long, some simple, some less so, but no two are alike. The pendulum of my writing swings from side to side, front to back, top to bottom. I try different angles on different issues,

even if those angles are mysterious, obtuse, less than clear, and deserving of an entire reservoir of bloody red ink from the shaft of an editor's pen.

In time, in a hunger for a reader, I'm sure I will feel brave enough to put out my work, by some means. There are convenient spaces at coffeehouses in which to secretly place my pieces and then wait in the shadows of the corner table. Who picks me up? Who reads me from start to finish? I watch for any physical gestures that the work induces: an occasional cringe, a laugh, a raising of the eyebrows, or even a licking of the lips as the reader gets to the meat of the story. I would find a moment to appreciate myself.

Some people might think, however, that this writing is all a trick to get them to feel something they never before have wanted to feel. *But no means no*. If the reader puts my work back between the cushions of the coffee shop couch, I'm not going to try to change her mind by buying her a cup of coffee or some sweet pastry. If she's not willing to finish what she started, she's not worth the heartache.

But for someone who is willing, I would consider buying something hot with whipped cream and chocolate, and maybe a lemon bar; and I would try to get her to discuss this strangely placed piece of writing. If she would tell me of my work's seduction of her, it would be enough. At that point, I will imagine myself to be in some kind of dream.



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