

DIVISION

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REVIEW

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A Playful Science David LICHTENSTEIN, Editor

At a recent conference in Reykjavik, Iceland (Psychoanalysis on Ice) the participants enjoyed a brief debate between Danny Nobus and Otto Kernberg, from London and New York, respectively, on the character of psychoanalytic science. Nobus, a psychoanalyst much influenced by the work of Lacan, had just given a paper invoking Nietzsche's idea of a *gai saber*, *la gaia scienza*, or *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1974) as the inspiration for psychoanalytic science. Kernberg was not convinced to say the least and argued instead for a scientific approach that would place psychoanalysis firmly in the ranks of the natural sciences and a good neighbor to neuroscience and biology. Indeed, he thought that

Nobus' vision of a future for the psychoanalytic field that relied upon the art of poetry, as Nietzsche had envisioned for philosophy, would be nothing short of a disaster for our clinical discipline.

This instance of the old art vs. science debate regarding psychoanalysis had the virtue of invoking Nietzsche's formidable text and its principal claim that the way to approach the fundamental questions of living is by bridging the apparent contradictions of reason and passion. It is our view that psychoanalysis is properly located on this bridge. What Nietzsche was advocating in philosophy ultimately found its best expression in psychoanalysis.

Die fröhliche Wissenschaft has been rendered a number of ways in English. "Joyous Wisdom" is one possibility, but "gay science", closely following the Italian, is the more accepted form. Its original significance is the art and science of poetry and song; that skill and know-how that goes into the creation of a poem. That in contemporary usage "gay" has an additional significance only adds to the richness of the phrase. It is a science, a knowing, that is mirthful both in character and in object. It is a passionate science but also the science of passions; indeed, Nietzsche suggests that the Provençal poets of the *gaia scienza* in fact created the very passions they were writing about and then



COMMENTARY

Man Like Me a letter to Curzio Malaparte Bettina MATHES

Reading is a strange activity – it makes me want to speak with the dead. Literally. I exchange letters with authors that have long passed away; I write notes to characters that don't have an address. Why? Because I can. To play with reality, to dress up for a party and stay home – the joy of reading and writing.

This letter to the Italian-German writer, editor, and architect-of-sorts Curzio Malaparte was a long time in the making. Five years ago, (or maybe fifty) I read his lyrical essay DONNA COME ME, included in a slim volume of essays Malaparte published in 1952. DONNA COME ME / WOMAN LIKE ME. The text spoke to me; I wanted to respond. I wanted to write a letter, a letter with a title: *Man Like Me*. But I could not move past this title. For years *Man like Me* was all I had. Not anymore.

Dear Curzio,

you want your woman to become a pretext for your dreams, hopes and deeds. a pretext, nothing more. that is a lot, you say, if it is true that nothing is more difficult or more dangerous than being the pretext for a noble existence – a man's existence. i'm not only man, you write, but woman, dog, stone, river. / that is ambitious! so you stay put, a prisoner in this lonely, unforgiving house you built for yourself: La Casa Malaparte on the isle of Capri. a red block, sitting on a dangerous cliff, like a reptile. beneath it the green and blue waters of the gulf of Salerno. Godard's *Contempt* was filmed here: the house as cruel companion to Bardot's inconsolable beauty. a rational, masculine building, where nothing is soft, where nothing gives to the touch. the contrast between the calculated rigidity of the house and the untamed beauty of its surroundings couldn't be more extreme. man, woman? good part, bad part? i know, i know... you're into splitting. Malaparte is your name of choice, an assumed name you are quite proud of, which makes me wonder: do women have it easier?

this, Curzio, is for you.

i want my man to play the male part, with melancholy. i want him to feel the loss i am attached to; not to pity me but to help me dress up and leave the house. brave and sensible, i want him to be the back to my front. nothing more and nothing less. the guardian of my past. my knight in shining armour, with a broken heart and a face as white as the moon's. yes, i want my man to worship the moon – not to walk on her but to make sure she'll return.

because my man would always be ready, i could be late. there would be no need for me to keep time. i want him to be the beginning but not the end. i want him to have the first word but not the last. at the end of the day, when he will have spent his words, i want to see his tears – just as he sees mine.

i would like his face to be as soft and variegated as only marble can be; the colour of his skin like the sky at the crack of dawn. i would like the lips to be full but not parted; the eyes sensitive and sad, like the surface of a very still lake. i would like the nose to be noble and straight. i want the head to be small and round. the hair dark, curly, and full. thick curls. curls as luxurious as those adorning the head of an ancient roman emperor's statue. i want his body to be slender, and his hands to be small. the way he resembles a statue by Michelangelo would satisfy my need for perfection.

i don't need to tell you that perfection is a hard place to make a home. you, who spent much of your life alone, exiled, envied – for no one could reach you in your splendid isolation. LA CASA MALAPARTE. what crime did you think you committed, committing yourself to this beautiful prison. man is not meant to live freely in freedom, you wrote somewhere. is it that bad, Curzio? could it get any worse?

silence.

i want to love my man as one loves music. with the ear not the eye.
i want to swim in his song, immerse myself in his harmonies.

i don't want him to entertain me.

i'm not a fan.

our eyes won't meet.

i want him with his back towards me, like the young lute player sitting with venus in a painting by Tiziano: moved by her sorrow, attentive, sympathetic, kind; mindful of that space between, where his desire and her creativity coexist. i'd be able to plunge right into the stream of sounds. to feel, to dream, to play.

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TO BE BRAVE and daring, to pursue a thought to its very end, to exhaust an emotion, and a fear. like venus and the lute player, i want us to play it by ear; relieved from the exchange of glances, we would confide in one another.

i want his movements to be measured and swift. i don't want anything languid and stiff about him. i want him to dress like an italian dandy. the comforting cashmere of his coat, the softness of his shirts, the silky radiance of his ties, the brown leather of his shoes – in all of this i would find the confidence to move without fear. i want youth, and i want style. and most of all i want beauty. for this is the curse of aging: one has to look elsewhere for consolation.

to attach myself to him at the right time. not as appendage or adornment, not as private property, but like a woman dons a veil: with dignity. those days when i was reduced to nothing but a blind mirror reflecting a man's ambition // they would be over.

i want my man to help me recover from the wounds of summer.

i want him to appear suddenly, like the saddest fruit of the earth breaking through the soil on a cool rainy day: quietly, almost unnoticeable. yes, i want him to be private. in the shade is where he would thrive; and he would always wear a cap. it is true, his unobtrusiveness would be deceptive, perhaps even dangerous. for there is a longing to be discovered. my man would fall in love too easily – that is his fault, and his greatest gift.

i want my love for him to be a secret. i want him to be a stranger, for we must find ourselves elsewhere. i want unrequited love to be his first memory of love. in this i want him to resemble me most.

i want him quick witted but not sharp, well read but not clever. i want him to entertain and amuse me. i want him to serve me lavish dinners, exquisite wines, subtle desserts; i would share my table with him, but not my bed.

i would like him to be my captive. like a statue in a sculpture garden to which i possess the only key, i want him to be available and beautiful in an unobtrusive way. for in his solitude i would drink my morning cup of tea. i pity those who can't begin their day in his silence.

you may not want to hear this, Curzio, but it must be said.

i want my man to be a eunuch. for i put my trust in those who have foregone their male parts but retained their masculinity. i have reason to believe that those afflicted with a wound take good care of other people's secrets. more than anything else the eunuch is the guardian of his mistress's privacy: he bathes her, cuts her hair, makes her bed, dresses her; he takes out the litter, sorts through the mail, prepares her night potion. the first person to greet her in the morning, and the last person to see her at night.

i like to imagine the private chambers of an ancient emperor as healing spaces. yes, that's right: spaces where healing takes place.

i like to think that eunuchs are the first psychoanalysts.

neither male nor female, the bed keeper does not take sides. his ambiguity is his strength. for those who are neither this nor that are not afraid of the other. that's why i want my man to wear his secret wound with pride.

at the end of the day,
i would like him to mend the mask i put on when i can't find my face.

dear Curzio, resemblance is our first encounter with love.
you, like me, don't know what love is,
until you've loved a love you had to lose.

you know that song, don't you?
i really do hope you know.

yours,
B.