

Black Snow Flying Upwards, or: My Embarrassment

a solo performance piece

by John Crutchfield

(At rise: a strange little man or CLOWN wearing a three-piece tweed suit, apparently too small for him, a bowler hat, and a bow tie. He stands center, alone in a pool of light, and is noticeably "listing" to stage right. He remains very still. NOTE: the choreography throughout the piece should be abstract, comic, and punctuated with moments of intense stillness.)

(He looks at the audience.)

(He continues to look at the audience.)

(The audience looks back at him.)

(Something happens.)

(beat)

Dear Audience.

It was bound to happen sometime.

I dreamed of her again, why deny it? I wish that I could deny it, Heaven knows I do, it's embarrassing.

If it could somehow and by some miraculous and indubitable means be demonstrated that she also still dreamed of me, it wouldn't be nearly so embarrassing, not by half, but it can't, so it is.

Dreaming of someone who isn't dreaming of you is, I find, a highly embarrassing situation. It is so to speak a monotonous crucifixion.

And also kind of sad too, really, don't you think, Dear Audience?

For some unfathomable reason, the image of a little boy with a red balloon just popped into my head, and I'm left with the distinct impression that life is after all rather mysterious.

Who knows why things happen the way they do?

I myself for instance am often if not to say constantly haunted by the feeling that there is someone else inside me who entertains opinions quite different from my own and who at this precise moment is thinking quite different thoughts.

How he got there I don't know.

From time to time one or more of his thoughts will escape the Death-Star Tractor Beam of his inscrutable mind and tumble out into my own thoughts, with which they mingle willy-nilly, and yet are always recognizable by their peculiar dress, or by the fact that they're facing the wrong way.

Like the little boy with the red balloon.

What the devil is he doing there, and why should he make his appearance at precisely the moment when I was considering the embarrassment of having dreamed again last night of My True Love?

Why should these two thoughts seek each other's company? Does the little boy feel lonesome there with his red balloon? Is he sad and frightened, thinking how some day he will grow up and meet a girl and fall in love and dream about her years later after she's gone?

(He clenches into a violent and realistic dry heave. The force of it throws him to his knees.)

(pause)

(He thaws, looks up at the audience.)

Dear Audience, I myself am sad and frightened and not at all sure I should continue.

(He begins rising slowly to his feet, then suddenly bolts upright:)

THE SUN IS SHINING DOWN THROUGH THE SKY AND DOWN THROUGH THE RIPPLING BRANCHES OF THE TREES AND THROUGH THE WINDOW AND THROUGH THE DUSTY AIR AND ONTO THE SHEET OF PAPER IN THE NOTEBOOK WHERE SOMEONE IS WRITING SOMETHING AS HE SITS ON A STRANGER'S FAUX-LEATHER COUCH IN A STRANGE PLACE WITH HIS LEGS CROSSED AND HIS FEET PROPPED-UP ON THE COFFEE TABLE AND I DON'T THINK I'LL EVER FIND LOVE AGAIN that's silly.

(beat)

Of course I'll find love again, Dear Audience. Shame on you!

Meanwhile, the world continues to bang into my eyeball like a rusty snowflake, and I am left pretty much to my own devices, unless of course my car has been towed, in which case I am swept all at once into the whirling maelstrom of human strife, deceit, folly, greed, arrogance, and petty bullying, and it's a wonder I can find a single verb to conjugate with.

I almost said cogitate. Perhaps I should have said cogitate. It would have amounted to the same thing, and yet required only seven letters instead of eight. Brevity is the soul of wit.

As the poet saith.

But there's no time to linger over such grammatological niceties, Dear Audience, for now I feel myself wafted on the Wings of Inspiration to another topic of general interest, namely: my bowtie.

Perhaps it will surprise you to hear me call it thus. For is anything in this life truly ours, Dear Audience?

That is a rhetorical question.

And yet, the fact that it is indeed a bowtie, I presume no one here will be so obstinate and obstreperous and obstacular as to deny.

Besides. By calling it "mine," I mean after all to lay no more than a temporary claim to it, a tenuous, indeed almost accidental sort of mutual belonging, very much in the manner of the fragment of a dead leaf that sojourns tenderly for a moment in a lock of blonde hair.

The hair is lit up, moreover, by the late-September late-afternoon sunlight, which pours in from the southwest and fills the whole sky like the purest water in a blue glazed bowl.

That was a rather nice image.

And yet I find it hardly manages to capture the glorious sunlit blondness of the situation, to say nothing of the leafy precariousness, nor the death-defying derring-do I demonstrated when I stepped right up close to her as she stood there on the rocky ledge, so close in fact that I could feel the warmth of her body, and yet all that touched were our cheeks (my right, her left).

And the aforementioned hair, which tickled my nose somewhat and in any case smelled wonderful.

We argued about whether the sound rising up from the already dusk-steeped valley below was the sound of a river or the sound of the wind.

I said river.

She said, "Stand back, or I'll never get down this mountain."

My knees were likewise impaired in their natural function, Dear Audience, and seemed suddenly to have been transformed into grape Jell-O, which caused me to sing inwardly.

(He does a little dance.)

HOW COULD ANYONE BE SO BEAUTIFUL?

(Again, he is thrown to the floor by a violent fit of dry-heaves.)

(pause)

(He thaws, looks up at the audience.)

And yet she was.

Oh, she was very, very beautiful, Dear Audience.

Especially with the fragment of a dead leaf in her hair.

(He rises slowly to his feet.)

If I had that fragment now, I know just where I'd put it.

Or perhaps I would make tea with it.

I have some wonderful pictures of that day...

(He puts his hand in his coat pocket, and steps forward eagerly toward the audience.)

(Torn bits of photographs spill everywhere from his hand.)

(beat)

(His smile fades very slowly. Only his eyes pan down to the mess on the floor.)

(beat)

And now, Dear Audience, I feel irresistibly moved to sing a little song. It goes like this:

(He fishes a small hand-held recorder from his inner coat pocket, holds it up, presses "play." NOTE: the music might be some baroque guitar or lute piece, with no discernible relation to the words of the song. The sound quality should be poor.)

*O leaf, or rather, O fragment of a leaf,
O leafy fragment, where
shall I seek for thy wholeness?
& where shall thy perfection be found?*

*Surely thou camest not into the world
already stamped with fragment-hood,
broken & sorrowful, as 'twere,
not to mention adangle*

in somebody's hair?

*Well, at least it's My True Love's hair,
O thou emblem of all fragmented
& by the wind grieved leafiness.*

*Nay, for it could just as easily have been
someone else's hair, O shard-of-leaf,
in which case I would have no cause
to sing of thee in such raptures.*

*Forsooth, thou canst perchance inform me
what the hair whispered to thee then
—or what else was all that soft, giddy,
sunlit fluttering about, huh? Also,*

*what happened to that hair, O leaf-crumb?
That's what I'd really like to know.*

(The music stops)

(beat)

Have you guessed it already, Dear Audience? The Golden-Haired Girl is indeed My True Love, if I may be permitted to put it thus.

(He slaps himself violently.)

(beat)

Though on second thought perhaps I should have said that she *was* My True Love.

(He slaps himself violently two or three more times.)

(beat)

Yes, the more I think about it, the more scandalous that “is” appears. And it grieves me to think that I should have offended against the Truth so early in this my otherwise strictly factual narrative. Let me assure the Dear Audience I shall henceforth spare no pains to prevent a recurrence of this embarrassment.

(beat)

And yet, to say that she *was* My True Love presents its own, albeit rather different, epistemological difficulties.

Why are my sentences so ugly all of the sudden?

Perhaps I'm tired.

But why should I be tired?

Perhaps it is from the effort of resisting the urge to die an accidental death.

(beat)

No, that can't be it.

Dear Audience, I honestly believe it is from the effort of thinking about the word *was*.

And so I ask you: is it meaningful to say that someone *was* your True Love? Does *wasness* not contradict the essence of the thing?

(beat)

(He explodes into violent movement.)

WELL I'M OF TWO MINDS ABOUT IT. ON THE ONE CRANIAL HEMISPHERE, IT SEEMS OBVIOUS ENOUGH THAT A TRUE LOVE IS BY DEFINITION NOT SUBJECT TO THE LAW OF WASNESS. MY TRUE LOVE WILL ALWAYS BE MY TRUE LOVE, REGARDLESS OF HER DELIGHTFUL CRUELITIES.

(He turns on a dime, and proceeds in the opposite direction.)

ON THE OTHER CRANIAL HEMISPHERE, HOWEVER, ALL THIS SEEMS THE VERITABLE HEIGHT OF ABSURDITY, FOR INSOFAR AS MY TRUE LOVE CUTS MY LEGS OFF AT THE KNEE, POURS RAT POISON DOWN MY THROAT, AND SETS ME ON FIRE BEHIND THE RAILWAY STATION, SHE DOES SO IN THE MANNER OF BLACK SNOW FLYING UPWARDS, THAT IS TO SAY, IF IT IS BLACK AND IT IS FLYING UPWARDS, IT IS NOT SNOW.

In the same way that one could plausibly assert, If it is walking, it cannot possibly be a tree.

It will be observed that in neither case can the copula *was* join the subject *She* with the predicate nominative *My True Love*, assuming of course that *She* is still *alive*, which I, for one, see no reason to doubt.

And yet, Dear Audience, is it not at least equally clear that My True Love neither *is* nor simply *is not*? And what other mode of being shall we then ascribe to her if not *was*? You see the problem, Dear Audience.

Therefore I am extremely tired, I'm exhausted, I'm pooped, I'm cashed, I'm wasted, I'm beat, I'm dead to the world, I am toast. Perhaps we both need a rest, Dear Audience. Do you not feel it too? Let us rest, then, and leave all questions of Wasness and Wasitude and Wasificence for some eternal yesterday.

(He appears to doze off for a moment.)

(pause)

(He starts up violently.)

ON SECOND THOUGHT, LET'S NOT REST, DEAR AUDIENCE, FOR IF YOU REST YOU ARE LIABLE TO FALL ASLEEP AND IF YOU FALL ASLEEP YOU ARE LIABLE TO DREAM AND IF YOU DREAM YOU ARE LIABLE TO DREAM OF OUTRAGEOUS ARROWS AND SLINGY FORTUNES AND VARIOUS AND SUNDRY OTHER INCONVENIENCES I WOULD JUST AS SOON AVOID RIGHT NOW IF POSSIBLE AND THEREFORE WE SHALL STAY AWAKE, DEAR AUDIENCE, YES WE SHALL STAY AWAKE, BECAUSE THE FACT OF THE MATTER IS I FEEL TRAPPED INSIDE MY OWN MIND, AS IF I WERE IN A DARK CELL WITH A TINY WINDOW HIGH UP IN THE WALL, WHERE SOMEONE, I NEVER SEE HIS FACE, HOLDS UP LITTLE PICTURES FROM TIME TO TIME: A RAILWAY STATION, TWO BICYCLES LEANING TOGETHER AGAINST A GARDEN FENCE, A TELEPHONE BOOTH, A LITTLE BOY WITH A RED BALLOON.

How long ago all that was...

I wish I could describe the feeling in my throat right now, Dear Audience.

Most of the time when you feel something you only half-way feel it, because you know it will eventually go away, the feeling will.

Is that not so, Dear Audience?

Yes, you let yourself feel the feeling almost like tasting something delicious when you're not really hungry.

But what I'm talking about isn't like that, Dear Audience, no, not at all.

What I'm talking about is rather more of an inescapable sort of feeling, sort of the way one's own body is inescapable, only worse.

(beat)

(He removes a small plastic toy from his pocket, "drives it" up his arm, and then back down, all the while making engine sounds, then the sound of screeching brakes as the toy "skids" off the end of his fingers, then a squeaky "Oh nooo..." The toy drops to the floor.)

(pause)

Is there a verb that means at once both *being* and *suffering*?

(A violent fit of dry-heaving knocks him to the floor.)

(pause)

(He looks up at the audience.)

My, what a fix I'm in!

(He slowly rises to his feet.)

And all because of a dream! And I don't even remember the dream now, Dear Audience, isn't that amusing? All I remember is that she was there somehow, and—

(Another dry-heave knocks him back to the floor.)

(pause)

(He thaws, looks up at the audience.)

Oh, and it took place in a dark restaurant.

(Another dry-heave.)

And she was leaving.

(And another.)

She—

(He pauses. Will he be sick again?)

(No.)

(The sound of the tape player is heard again.)

(He crawls back to his feet, dons his hat, resumes his position center stage, "listing" slightly stage right. His face is blank.)

(The sound of the recorder continues into the blackout.)

(END OF PLAY)