

The Parable of the Lost Coin

Theodora Ranelli

1

You breathe on me
My breath,
Leaving my mouth,
Is Your breath.
You who made the universe
With this sound:
Forgive me,
I know not what they do.

You are the hole in the couch. You wanted to be loved, so You created us in order that we might know you and pick at Your stuffing.

3

I am the lost
Sheep over and over
As You find me
And carry me back
To myself
Using amorous talents.

You keep many parts of me hidden.
For You know me in my nonexistence
And loved me into the present tense.

I love it when I feel Your 'come-hither' eye thing
And all You can do is look.

6

You treat me
With ferocity and
I am bending over
To fix Your copy machine
In a short plaid skirt and no panties.

I even write erotica for You,
I exasperate.
You wish we could be complete,
So I tell You about the temporal,
But what good does that do?
I don't often yell in prayer, but I am
Getting angry and then You kiss me harder
And we slip away into myself, into the night.

Since there is none other than You,
That is what You and I will concentrate on today –
My I folding back into You, yes, all of You.

*I'm sort of a sexual anthropologist.*¹
You romance me into each moment.
I did not want to be bound –
There would be suffering if bound.
But each time You renew me from nonexistence, I feel
More grounded.

¹ Carrie Bradshaw, *Sex in the City*, Ep. 1: “Sex in the City.”

I should change those verses
In regard to our relationship
Because of so much data embargo,
Honey, it's not seek and you shall find,
It's withdraw, withhold, and you will later climax.

Author's Note

Many of my early poems deal with boundaries in human relationships, with God as the one who enforces borders rather than a God who is beyond all. I studied Russian literature my first year in college, which helped broaden my interest in gender and sexuality to a force beyond myself. Many of the Russian writers I read seemed to be wrestling with staying in an organizational structure and finding a God who will take all pieces of them. As someone who is trying to figure out what gender I am, I took great refuge in the idea of a boundless God, one beyond all types of theoretical invention.

All of these ideas about withholding and withdrawing seem very Catholic to me. As I remarked to a friend once, “at the root of Catholicism is a rich, tactile, and sexual nature.” Although medieval Catholic writers were not invoking physical metaphors of the deity to say they were really horny, there is a connection between their work and mine. Much of my imagery is supposed to be sexual, as I am a student informed by theories of the body, but the goal is salvation and union with God – not simply jacking off in place of a partner. Like many of the medieval Catholic women, I surrender my earthly constraints to a God who will one day blow my mind in a boundary-less way.

I am also indebted the meaning of the Qur'an, the work of Ibn Al-Arabi, Rabia al-Adawiya, and all I have learned about Islam in my brief time exploring connections between Near Eastern religions. I hope this influence is evident on the pages. Because much of the material I studied seemed like things I could easily buy into as a Catholic, I hope my readers will see a powerful portrayal of a God who, in the words of the popular bumper sticker, “Bless[es] the whole world. No exceptions.”

Finally, I have many inspirations in popular and theoretical culture. Many Catholic women mystics were influenced in their word choice by popular court ballads and romance stories. Through looking at sexual imagery in popular culture, I am finding new ways to think about words said to express sexual desire, and how to transfer it to Godly desire.

I still remember a sermon in church once where the priest said that we tell someone we love them without thinking about it. It's often easier for me to say casual I love yous or say that I love pizza or something than to tell someone I really care about that I love them. Or reflect on the passionate relationships expressed between me and the creator and carried out in the temporal realm. It has been easy for me to fear God, but fearing God is one of the blocks to a healthy relationship. These poems are a step toward love; an attempt to make each I-Love-You easier and more heartfelt.

Many thanks to those who taught me about love, especially my parents, sisters, and extended family. Blessings to Mohja Kahf, for whose guidance and friendship I am eternally grateful. A special thanks to Naomi Shihab Nye. Gratitude is due to Fr. Roger Schmit, Fr. Carl Gallinger, Fr. Gary Lazzeroni, Elizabeth Williamson, Ted Anderson, Patricia A. Krafcik, Julia Zay, Meredith McLaughlin, and B. Much appreciation to the Writers' Colony at Dairy Hollow for giving me a space to produce this work. Thanks to David Wolach and all of the folks at *Wheelhouse Magazine*. Hugs to everyone I forgot.