

LUCKY STAR

HE'LL BE BACK SOME TIME, LAUGHING AT YOU ¹

In what space are you supposed to get over the sudden death of your true love while becoming Babalon? This opens two questions:

what is trauma?

what is its consolation?

and: what does it have to do with Babalon? (and even then more so, what is Babalon?)

In spring 1952, Cameron runs errands to prepare for a trip with her husband, Jack. They are leaving the USA. Maybe they will start a school. They are or have been closely watched by the FBI. She drives home. Up the large, Parisian-like but Pasadena-Suburban boulevard, Orange Grove. As the month is June: maybe – for once – the sun bows in face of tragedy, instead of beaming like some radiant black hole. But: would Cameron want gray skies in face of death?, or sun? Do you even pay attention to weather in Pompeii? While, left to mourn that you are also not, very dead.

And when she gets home he is dead, gone. Ashes in their garage. Who saw it happen? The explosion?

STATE ROUTE 79

In the fall, she escapes to the desert. She clutches the wheel, and drives. Her face disrupts a purple veil. She eats nothing, drinks nothing. Tastes saliva until she is dry with nausea.

Pretend that California is a hedonistic experiment by scorpion-like forces larger than all governments combined. The sprawl lifts dust to make way for larger angelic cities. Red-haired, she is at the heart of this experiment. How is she even supposed to gush? Seven years after the war: Cameron is now a widow amongst widows. Amongst a wave of women who join the workforce in time of war. She was in the Navy. It's new. She's thirty.

PSYCHIC TRAUMA INVOLVES INTENSE PERSONAL SUFFERING, BUT IT ALSO INVOLVES THE RECOGNITION OF REALITIES THAT MOST OF US HAVE NOT YET BEGUN TO FACE ²

In her third novel, *Torpor*, Chris Kraus compares the grammatical rules of the complex past tenses to the psychic circling discussed in trauma literature. Trauma cannot be experienced as it occurs, and in its wake, the subject is unable to focus on the extreme emotional pain of the event while continuously troubled by the image of the event – spinning from numbness to haunting. “Within this state, all future life is predicated by the past; becomes conditional.” The complex past verbs allow for “longing and regret, in which every step you take becomes delayed, revised, held back a little bit. The past and future are hypothesized, an ideal world existing in the shadow of an if. It would have been. ³”

In winter 1952, Cameron writes to the silent film star Jane Wolfe. Jane is in East Hollywood, on Fountain Ave., next to what is now the Sunset 99th store. Cameron is in Lamb's Canyon, a small nook in the desert, on the way to what is signaled on the highway as “OTHER DESERT CITIES.”

The wind blew all night – and the eye of the moon rose like a sentinel from the frozen mountains. I awoke at dawn with a great feeling of peace. I went out in the rising sun and my whole body drew to a fearful point of pain. I carry within me something black and dreadful – it writhes in my womb like a monster of Hell. Black nothingness – black death. I cried and called out to Jack. Finally the pain abated and I was compelled to open the black box. Within it I found a little book in which is inscribed the Equinox Vol III No I in An XV Liber XV Ecclesia E Gnosticae Catholicae Canon Missae. I suddenly remembered that last Spring I brought home to Jack a record of the Lovely Lass of Inverness. I began to cry as I have not cried since I was a child. I found a map of the British Isles and found Loch Ness and Inverness, and my crying grew to the howl of a lost child. I remember home. The memory has plucked incessantly at my thoughts for so long that I have been near frenzy and madness seeking the key

to my memories. Oh Jane, beloved Mother – I want to go home – but it all happened so long ago. Am I to find nothing there but ghosts and memories and ashes of fires long grown cold. Ah – I seek you my Beloved – but where have you departed? ⁴

ANTIGONE WAKES UP INSIDE A QUESTION

I listen to “The Lovely Lass of Inverness” by Beethoven. Are the Romantics the only ones who get trauma? (And the Goths. I am reminded while having lunch with my friend Taylor in Chelsea. Photocopies of Cameron’s drawings fitted on the table between Andrew Palmers and *salade Niçoise*. King David auto-decapitates. In three strident lines, his crown brims and condenses the opening terror of black metal. Her work always looks Neo-Goth, but done from a place of Sincere Goth – where Goth is arcane, immemorial, true and anguished. Taylor laughs and says: she is the only one who can get away with this stuff.)

If trauma keeps the subject in a state of circling, it also denies the event into “narrative memory.”⁵ You cannot tell it, and you cannot not tell it. It would be obscene to quell its impact with the magic of language, therapy, telling. To funnel its intensity into cliché, a bored room with bright lights. How does the cure match the impact of the trauma? What are the appropriate rites?

Sophocles’ Antigone (daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta and forbidden from honoring her brother Polynices) says to her sister, Ismene: *I’m going now: to make a burial mound for my dear brother*⁶. To King Creon, who punishes her with death for doing so, she says: *If you think what I’m doing now is stupid, perhaps I’m being charged with foolishness by someone who’s a fool*. Burial rites force themselves as unwritten and unchanging laws – above the state. However stubborn and illegal Antigone’s tributes to her outlawed brother’s corpse, they fit.

Antigone is a character supremely defiant but also ambiguous. She does not fit into normative plans for familial relations. She is the post-oedipal freak. How do you mourn when you are a social outcast to prescribed rituals? Cameron, like Antigone, mourns someone outside societal cues of acceptability – her husband’s death a hallmark of his radical beliefs – an Occultist Rocket scientist for free love, he is the Antichrist to McCarthy’s nuclear family. And, Cameron, like Antigone, is emblematic of taboo by just BEING. “Denied a proper funeral, his body left bare, dishonored and ravaged,”⁷ Cameron is forced to find a way to mourn Jack’s death, to tell while not telling, to bury him who is denied a proper burial. She refuses to enter a mourning space where the impact (her mourning, her love, the whole situation) becomes squandered. It is no small story.

I call Aya, Cameron’s friend and confidante, to tell her I am now somehow again writing about Cameron, and that the period I am writing about sucks. Aya says: Yes, I think she was a little crazy then.

What are the appropriate rites?

REPORTAGE

Jane says: the letters are “a priceless diary on what is taking place in and through you.”

I have her letters to Jane. I have her drawings. I have an excerpt from her diary, a record of four days during the winter solstice in Lamb’s Canyon. In all of these: concentration and force fight to sustain constancy. This fight does not mean honoring her lover’s image, or creating a comfortable simulation of Jack. She explains this to Jane, in a retelling of Cupid and Psyche. Like Joseph Campbell (with whom she later carries a correspondence), mythological and archetypal figures provide a space where “...conscious mind and unconscious mind synchronize – the legendary adventure becomes the real, concrete present.”⁸ The myth a relic from before “shell-less” times, before the spheres left the heavens and the sun moved, and psychoanalysis happened:

August 23, 1953

Beloved Jane 93.

Three weeks ago – a beautifully illustrated edition of Cupid and Psyche was placed at my disposal at a most

appropriate time. I read it and wept profusely for the first time in months. As I have come so well to realize – the myths are not remote fables for entertainment, but the real archive of the human race and when conscious mind and the unconscious mind synchronize – the legendary adventure becomes the real, concrete present – and perhaps these incredible maps of the plights of Gods, are in truth, the only guide signs of the hero who ventures out beyond safer regions – the unknown – or dangerous regions being the godland of the mind.

As I have told you before – when I was at Beaumont, the presence I was aware of was not Jack. At that time, I became aware of love in a way I had heretofore not known. I believe I wrote you of my discoveries at the time. I quote as clearly as I can remember Psyche's like-discovery to her unseen bridegroom – "In deed I have surpassed love – being love itself."

As you will recall – Psyche – to calm the fears of her sisters who believe that she has been wedded to an ogre and prisoner of some terrible fate, persuades Cupid to let her bring them to her magic household and glimpse her fortune – Indeed, she becomes so anxious to share her happiness that she bestows upon them wonderful gifts from her household, – thereby – arousing their envy and falls prey to their scheme to expose her husband – whom they suspect is a God. And Psyche, as the result of human curiosity looks upon the beautiful countenance of her God-spouse and falls from Godly love – into the terrible lie of human love – "to become enamored of the image of love." . . .

Having fallen into the trap of the image self – which is suicidal – I returned to the pursuit of Jack – (the mirrored self). This could resolve itself only satisfactorily in death – since such a conquest-surrender can only result in the suicide of self.

Oh Jane – I know that your love is with me – but none can help me in this hour but my guardian angel. I love you. I promise you Paradise.

LUV

What does it mean when Cameron says she falls to the image of love (human love) from Godly love? In Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse*, to read each excerpt is to live as a lover without a lover, with no beloved. We wait with Barthes in the corner of a corridor, looking at love, like a teenager. Awaiting. This love gives way to a kind of thrill. But also it acts as a mirror, a decoy of the sublime: "I am, sadly, an unglued image that dries, yellows, shrivels.¹⁰" A figment of their lives is not the appropriate rite.

As Antigone throws her hands to thirsty dust, she is not doing so to regain her lost brother. Nor does Cameron mourn in order to conjure Jack's image. Rite comes from the Sanskrit word for river = to flow. For creativity theorist and psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, flow is a state of concentration that happens when challenge and skill level are both high. He uses the example of Michelangelo painting the Sistine Chapel – he rides the wave, does not sleep, does not eat and paints in ecstatic force. Where, ecstasy means stepping to the side of something, living in an alternate reality. Jane warns Cameron: *You press the physical vehicle too far. Give it rest suitable to its plane and, for the time being, stop these flights into the Elysian Fields till your nervous system has been strengthened and attained its normal poise.*

DRAWING ON SEX

Songs for the Witch Woman is a series of poems by Jack. Cameron illustrates the poems. It is a project they start together. She continues the project after Jack's death. The drawings completed after his death are singed with the intensity of her circumstance, a bereft widow – but they also speak (as do her letters) to the symbolism of ritual magick. Like 'Peyote Vision', famously placed at the foot of Wallace Berman's altar at Ferus Gallery in 1954 and then censored, they are talismanic. And, they are different from the drawings done while Jack is alive.

The first time I see the full set of drawings and poems I am with my friend Henry, at Scott's house. The pages are green with age. I cannot imagine sleeping with these drawings in my living room, as Scott does. My stomach tightens at the ink on paper. Scott's doorstep is guarded by large crystals. Henry photographs Jack's diary with his iPhone. A month and a half later, I am in New York. Henry calls. He is in Lagos, New Mexico. "They're in my computer." What? "They keep sending me this image." Who? "The spirits. I was reading his diary out loud and

they sent an image of Harpocrates. And then another image, of a gun.” I find myself lighting candles, despite a growing desire to remain outside of anything remotely occult.

Where does it come from, index finger pressed to lips? The hush gesture. The guardian of inspiration, breath. Harpocrates, the Greek god of silence. Shielding the occult, is the hidden, the secret. It’s not for everyone. Why not? “Because the rituals work, to a medical degree,” I am told. By an occultist – trying to find my soul in an early morning Starbucks.

LINE

“Freud made everything about sex.”¹¹ Cameron’s drawings demonstrate the same marrying of unconscious drives to sexuality. Vaginas replaced with tattoos. Stars out of an erect penis. Naked bodies coiling, each movement, even each line born in the wetness of sex. The line shows strength and fragility in the same sweep. Her drawings mirror the art nouveau line, mirror nature and freedom – but more than that, an inner dialogue with the divine, a print of breath, of the still mysterious inspiration.

I USED TO BE SCARED OF THE DICK NOW I THROW LIPS TO THE SHIT

Within the preliminary remarks to Aleister Crowley’s *Book IV*, a script calls upon the reader to consider history’s great magickal retirements, when “a nobody goes away, and comes back a somebody. This is not to be explained in any of the ordinary ways.”¹² Everything is given up, no reinforcements except your own star. This, or something like this, compels itself to Cameron as the appropriate rite – which, faces and transcends the impact of the trauma, without diminishing its gravity.

NOT JUST SLUTCORE, EVERYTHINGCORE

Cameron’s Google search yields Babalon. There are scores of blog entries citing the time she, L. Ron Hubbard and Jack Parsons performed a series of rituals to invoke the force Babalon. The blogs toil with the idea that this ritual (done in 1946) flooded in the beginnings of the 60s Sexual Revolution. That the Babalon Working unleashes into the ether chorus-girls, divas, and sixties free love. The vague premise it signals a (pejorative) understanding of the women’s movement, curtailed into the simple image of the (self-)objectified yet educated/cognizant “owning it” performer: Marilyn, Madonna, Tina, Sinéad, Lil’ Kim, Gaga, Rihanna, Miley.

The existence of socio-economic forces does not pin down or weaken the beliefs they (may) give birth to – and more importantly, the ensuing social demands they extend (medicine, wages, education). However, it is important to note market force in promoting a certain brand of youth (or a certain brand of feminism). In his essay ‘McLaren’s Children’ Dan Graham writes: “In the early fifties, economic changes in the world market bring in a new category of consumer, the adolescent, and a new ideology, rock’n’roll.”¹³ Leisure time gives way to a market serving an ideology it maybe does not like (anarchism) but one that sells big (to the teenage wastoids) and so helps the market. Similarly, feminism (anarchy to the patriarchy) sells. Because “Because I’m Worth It.”

Third-wave feminism begins in the throes of the early fifties. Against Communism, American McCarthyism pumps everything that can sell. Women are forced to recognize their sexualized bodies as commodity/power and to recognize that if they do not take over/own this power then they are fools. Others will then own that, too.

If post-war America leaves time for anarchy and rock ’n’ roll and a “new woman,” it is also the trauma of the war that adds to the shedding of conditioning and organized religions. Christianity and its partner, frigid fear, are meant to be undone. My friend Scott tells me: when Cameron drives by a church in LA, she shoves her arm out the window, middle finger down – a harsh thumbs-down, a hateful dislike.

Babalon is an energy that can be associated with Saturn. As Jane Wolfe explains to Cameron, it is “the disciplinarian and also the gate-opener.” The image of Babalon is a whore on a beast with seven heads, in her palm a cup of blood. The blood, I am told by a friend as I try to grasp this, eating a chicken sandwich in a New

York pret-a-manger, is about sacrifice. Everything goes in the cup – it is manna - to a cupped palm.

July 6–12, 1953: Cameron writes to Jane:

I had a very powerful dream last night. Word came that I was to prepare a place of contest since God was to appear to me and accept my challenge. When he came – he was a beautiful man of splendid physique. I had the feeling that we were equally matched – indeed it was as if I were looking at the inner image of myself – but the image of desire – since he was male with ivory skin and beautiful dark hair. The place of contest was a temple of marble tile – white with a vaulted ceiling. Here we engaged in physical combat – like Greeks in a wrestling match. There was a great feeling of power and ease in this contest of strength – and the joy was not in winning – but in the duel itself. There was no sense of struggle. I won the contest by placing his shoulders to the floor three times – but the victory was his as well as mine – there was great pleasure in this. And then we boarded a train and crossed the river.

The train – in Steckle's analysis is a death dream – and crossing the river is also the racial dream of the River Styx. – but death has a concept heretofore only guessed and in view of the way I feel I would interpret it as the death of ego. Then I was in Beaumont – I would awaken many mornings with the feeling that I had been somewhere wonderful – or that some one magnificent had just departed when I opened my eyes. Once I had a rapidly fleeting impression of great tides of flaming spheres surrounding me overhead. I did not even have the feeling that I had slept – but had stepped from one plane to another in opening my eyes. I had – and still have the absolute conviction that something magnificent had happened to me – which I was not allowed to remember when I awakened. The sense of magnitude and joy flowed over into the day time – but I would lie down at night with eagerness – since it seemed that what I learned in the daytime – was actually only a searching of my memory for the fantastic things divulged to me when I slept. That presence receded – and was replaced by terror when the physical pain and mental torment begin to come – until it deserted me altogether – except for occasional glimpses when I left Beaumont – until finally – in these last months it became only a diminished memory.

I feel now – that this unnamed urging that I am following is the beckoning of this presence again – and that all I have experience of late has been a necessary step before I could go on to that which awaits me.

I shall write.

Cameron

[1] Sinead O'Connor, 'Jackie', *The Lion and the Cobra*, 1987.

[2] Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 18.

[3] Chris Kraus, *Torpor* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006)

[4] Jane Wolfe and Cameron correspondence, 1952–3.

[5] Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 20.

[6] Sophocles, *Antigone*.

[7] Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia UP, 2000).

[8] Jane Wolfe and Cameron correspondence, 1952–3.

[9] Jane Wolfe and Cameron correspondence, 1952–3.

[10] Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), p. 15.

[11] Philip Rieff, "Introduction," in *Sexuality and The Psychology of Love*, Sigmund Freud (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963).

[12] Aleister Crowley, *Book 4*, I .

[13] Dan Graham, "McLaren's Children," *ZG*, no. 7, Summer.

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