

### **Groanings Too Deep For Words**

My first years were spent steeped in the Christian world. Before that, I don't know. I don't know if there was a before that but I have echoes of a voice, shallow impressions that have shaped me, a distant haptic gaze reaching out or around through time, and holding my eyes. For as long as I can remember history, or the past, or the distant has called to me. For as long as I have been I have sought out my identity, my frame, through the lives of my ancestors. I think this is why, while my two brothers were never drawn in by my parents religion, I was in from the beginning. The emotional hook made tangible in the incarnation of Love through a man and then from that man into symbols and ritual.

I remember walking down to the altar and embracing the frame offered to me, that of sinful, in need of repentance. I remember feeling like I did right before a spanking: repentant and heartsick, wanting more than anything to be the good girl that my elders were expecting me to be but not really understanding my short comings. In the church, self flagellation starts at a young age.

As I grew older the message of incarnate Love seemed to skew and splinter, and my passions began to feel constricted. I remember speaking to my pastor about not feeling like I could talk to God anymore. I don't even know what to say I told him. He referred me to Romans 8:26. "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" - Romans 8:26 New American Standard Bible.

I did find comfort in this. As my adolescent body flooded with emotions I couldn't quite hold, the idea that I didn't have to understand myself, my passions or my pains, in order to look for fulfillment and relief was heartening. But my relationship with Christianity was still strained and I still found myself hopelessly lacking and shameful before my parents' God. I went to church camp that year and instead of my faith being braided together with my peers and strengthened by community, my questions were looked at with scorn and suspicion. I abandoned my faith but still clung to the verse in Romans. I felt the power of unmitigated emotion flooding from the mouth of animals, humans, and found hope in that honesty.

In my high school Spanish class I found a new Lover. My Professora introduced us to Federico Garcia Lorca. We read *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*. We memorized his poetry. We viewed his sketches. And it was impossible to not be possessed by his sensuality and spirit. Where God had made me feel shame, Lorca made me feel radiant and glowing, full of perfection and possibility. He made passion and creativity a part of sacramental living. The one commandment was to live fully and immediately and generously. I ran to Lorca and poetry to escape the God who had once consumed my life.

That year I started to devour everything I could written about and by Lorca. I lived in his words. I read his biography religiously. I found healing in his journey as it became mine. With him, I chose passion over comfort, to focus on creativity over trauma. And when I finished the book, when he died, I revived him again at page one.

In college I procured a book of letters between Salvador Dali and Federico Garcia Lorca. I spent hours sometimes combing online used book catalogues, and when I saw the book of

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correspondence my breath caught as if I had found a book of letters addressed to me. I immediately bought it.

Obsession was a word that easily fit my relationship with these men. I adored Lorca for his unabashed authenticity. I wanted so badly to be as fully myself as he was himself. The way he lived for the right to be open and free: full of passion, unrestrained and undefined sexual desire, and sometimes deep sorrow. He wrote to me.

I loved Dali for his skewed view of the world, the way he was willing to pull the margins off the page and shake an image up or collapse it in on itself, but my love for Lorca was foundational, devotional.

The only problem with my book of letters was that it was in French, and the only language that I knew outside of English was conversational Spanish. So I ran paths with my fingers over the photos in the book, as if I could find my way to their world, and they mine.

I held onto this book through college, through seven years of working mindless jobs and occasionally asked around for someone who might read it to me. I never found anyone who cared as much as I did, who would have been willing to sit down with me, drawn in to these remarkable lives, and into the controversy of did they or didn't they have an affair. I wouldn't have shared that unfolding with someone who felt less drawn to these men than I did, not for anything.

But now I have started translating the letters in this beloved book for myself using both homophonic translation, along with some associative writing from the French, as well as Google Translate. First I take the letter and spin it back from French to Spanish where it began, and then

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I take it through to English where I can better get a grasp on the language. From France where Dali spent so much time with Gala his wife after Lorca's death, back to Spain where the two men met in University, and through language again and time to me, to end in a jumble of English words, intricate pieces of the language puzzle to fit back together as sound and meaning permit. Fantastic fodder for poetry.

I like to think that Lorca would have seen this as a sort of playful fate, that I am receiving just the right words after running them through these engines. After the letters are translated I have played with the language in a few ways. First I take the Google translated work and insert words, focusing mainly on sound quality and drawing out the sensual overtones. Next I take the french letters and translate them homophonically. And last I have created several erasure poems from Gertrude Stein's Lifting Belly and erasure poems from the same letters I have translated in previous sections. I twist these poems together to create a sort of DNA, building blocks for their relationship.

In Being and Time Heidegger talks about a circular nature of time. It was this idea that guided me through the process of reaching out through the seance ritual to touch these lives and put the building blocks of words together for a picture of what might have been, what might be.

Temporalizing does not signify that ecstasies come in a 'succession'. The future is not later than having been, and having-been is not earlier than the Present. Temporality temporalizes itself as a future which makes present in a process of having been.

(Heidegger 401)

Heidegger's temporality exists outside of the structures we have placed it in. The ideas of a past, a present, and a future are fine organizational tropes but when exploring Being and its relationship to time we discover that the future is not after the past, the past is not before the present, but all is a future reaching back into the present which is always already the past. Time is not so linear as we would like it to be. It is not a trajectory, but it is a messy business of overlapping layers, some touching and informing the others, melding together meaning and truth, leaving us always looking through a glass darkly, groping for a stable place to stand. These letters were the stability I was looking for. A place to stand that didn't necessarily make fact apparent, but offered footing by way of honest groanings between two men.

In the introduction to Carolyn Dinshaw's book *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*, she speaks about searching for ancestors through time. To find a kinship with those whom you may not have even known and to know them, to touch them, and to be touched by them through the barrier of death:

The queer historian...is decidedly not nostalgic for wholeness and unity; but s/he nonetheless desires an affective, even tactile relation to the past such as the relic provides. Wrenched out of its context of hypocrisy and stagnant, nostalgic longing for wholeness, the queer Pardoner's preoccupation with the matter of past lives can reinforce the queer sense of the need for and prompt the creation not of the kinds of books that would please 'historians,' as Foucault sneered, but rather of another kind of 'felaweshipe' across time. (Dinshaw, 142)

Not only did Dinshaw go back to early texts to identify a queer history but she also chartered a pathway for a community lied to by a society that would have us believe that there isn't a queer community of ancestors. With *Getting Medieval*, Dinshaw offers that community not only a pantheon of ancestors, but tactile support, a haptic fellowship across time, sure footing.

In order to access that fellowship, I experimented with spiritualism, particularly with seance. I centered my word play around time's circularity and the hope that extending my self through time and calling on ancestors, my instincts, and faith in my own wild associations, I could learn more about this relationship between Federico Garcia Lorca and Salvador Dali. I sought out to address them as divine. As something more opaque than deceased artists and writers and more like gods, even better lovers. With all of the power and affection of my parents' god, but with the sensuality, brokenness, and unabashed nature of something really close, though veiled. These were lovers without shadow, without hesitance, and what's more without shame. All that they had wanted in life but could not access. I addressed them as if they had. I offered them a reality to come into where they could speak freely. Where they could open up into themselves free of shame and assigned position; the same foundation they offer me.

I called on Gertrude Stein, a known friend of Dali's, and someone who freely embraced a homosexual lifestyle to be a spiritual guide of sorts. I had started to sink my roots deep into Stein's fertile soil and I found myself drawn to her in a similar way as to Lorca. They both knew so deeply who they were. They embraced themselves wholly and loved those close to them deeply. I looked to Stein's words to guide me to these men. Because Stein's relationship to her

lover, Alice B. Toklas was unapologetic I felt she was the perfect foil to the relationship in question. Her words, wrapped around theirs could draw their desire, their sensuality out from behind the shame veil. But there was also a healing I hoped she would bring to the table, an example of deep love between two people, separate from societal expectation and self definition. Regardless of how the world works, who reads the book, who tells the story Gertrude Stein loves Alice Toklas. No matter where history places them, their names are inseparable. I wanted that truth to be able to guide the spirits of Lorca and Dali, and myself to a meeting place. I wanted Stein to bring the two men together. And I wanted to lean on her myself, to allow myself fuller access to my self. To shirk the baggage placed on my identity by the meta-narrative society and organized religion offers.

In order to make the seance structure work I needed a Medium. Someone for the men to speak through. I felt I could hold that role, but then I met Margarita Manso. Manso was a classmate in university that the men were friends with. In the depths of their relationship, when a consummation felt right, Dali was unable to go as deeply, physically as they would have liked. We learn from Ian Gibson in *The Shameful Life of Salvador Dali* that the painter was not fond of physical affection, even with Gala, his wife in later years. So the two men asked Margarita to step in for Dali. Lorca's physical encounter with Margarita was in a sense a mediumship. She allowed him to speak to Dali through her. I had to invite her into the process. She and I stood on the same ground.

To set the mood, and start the conversation I held a couple of seances, reaching out to first, Gertrude Stein, and then, Lorca, and Dali. I poured my attention into them, meditating on

their relationships with one another, their similarities and their differences, their artistic and relational endeavors. I tried to see them each intimately and objectively. And my love for them only grew and became more intricate and whole. These were my ancestors. They were my dispositional flesh and blood. Knowing they came before eased my own crooked and thorny path to self.

Though I am not a Christian, I have found another place to put my “groanings too deep for words”. Sound poetry holds my groanings, my moans, my wails, and my laughter. It is held by these ancestors who came before me, who are supporting and informing my work now and through time. But it is also informed by others. I studied Harryette Mullens’ brilliant sound poetry to find my own footing in language play. Rachel Zolf’s *Janey’s Arcadia* opened up for me what it means to focus on the past. Erin Moure is a fantastic translator that has done quite a bit of work in both French and Spanish. And her work in *My Beloved Wager* focusing on sexual, gender, national identity and what it means for writing, poetry, to be a way of life, really helped me to pry open those very same themes in my own work. James Merrill’s book *The Changing Light at Sandover* also gave me the confidence to move forward with the project in earnest, as he so openly and concretely communicates with his own channeled spirit. As if this is a common theme in literature/poetry. As if calling on these spirits is in a sense calling on Wisdom, another kind of knowing.

My love of symbols and ritual was nurtured and encouraged by the Christian church. Perhaps that is why using seance elements was so attractive to me. The repetition of the



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Invocation section of The Spirit Cabinet feels like a meditation. Ideally the reader would speak the invocations out loud. The goal is to hear the sounds that make up the names of the Hero: Federico Garcia Lorca, the Lover: Salvador Dali, the Spirit Guide: Gertrude Stein, and the Medium(s): Margarita Manso/the self and, over and over again. It's an invitation, a focusing in, and an opening up.

I used some of the tactile items from a seance as symbols to frame this collection. The title: The Spirit Cabinet was a binding cabinet used to tie down the Medium at the seance; thus showing that she was doing nothing physically to manipulate her surroundings, proving the validity of the spirit's presence.

The next object is the Spirt Slate. These were two slates bound together, to open up and reveal messages from the spirits. For this section I have taken erasure from Gertrude Stein's Lifting Belly, and erasure from my translated letters and spun them together. I was drawn to bringing Stein into the conversation because she was also a queer poet living in the early twentieth century in Europe. But she was in a committed relationship. She was able to express her love much more confidently and openly than Lorca and Dali seem to have. I brought Stein in as a sort of Spirit Guide, for the two men and for me. With her guidance maybe we could coax a confession of love from the Lover, offering him a sense of confidence.

The next object is the Spirit Trumpet. This object was used to enhance the whispered voices of the spirits. In this section I have homophonically translated the letters straight from the

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French, again focusing in on the sounds from the French, but also playing with some of the French meaning.

The last object is the Seance Table. This object is represented in the section “Table Tipping”. These poems are tipped and skewed by the words I have added to the translations. While writing these poems I strove to focus in on writing from the voice of these two lovers. I imagined the conflict that may have been there and the overwhelming passion, and I let myself be guided by the sounds in their words, translated.

This project is about submerging yourself in the world of two lovers, with all of the ups and downs, jealousies, and miscommunications of any relationship. But it is also about the revelation of identity, and the fluidity of passion. It is about how an openness to the deterioration of titles and definitions can lead to a concrete community and a tangible love.