

**ON CORPOREAL COMMONALITY: OTHERWISE BEING A TREATISE ON
MYSTICS, CLEANLINESS, MAMMARY GLANDS, AND BIBLIOMANCY**

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(written shortly before
he became a Ph.D.)

The cynic's duty is to sneer at our pride and self-love, the ascetic must remind us that all pleasure is brief and fleeting, the holy man's duty is to shake his finger at the sinner, and the mystic's inclination is to smile indulgently at those of us who grovel in carnal dissipation. These men of the spirit are masters at telling us our limitations. They remind military conquerors and world leaders that they are mortal. They reprimand the rich for their greed and selfishness. They scold the glamorous people for their vanity. And they preach the message that we are fragile vessels of flesh, chained to carnal passions that are fragile and ridiculous, tethered to bodies that are encumbered by a variety of excretory functions, and all of our praising

and preening of flesh does not make for noble bodies since we are, each and every one of us, an incipient corpse whose interim destiny is putrefaction and whose eventual fate is disappearance.

But people of this modern age have become weary of such messages. Not wishing to transcend (and thus, de facto, reject) their bodies, they prefer to symbolically purify them. Why else the mania for deodorants, mouthwash, air fresheners, cosmetics, facelifts, pantyhose, wigs, liposuction, venectomies, hair removal, hair transplants, and such? Why else the love for cute babies, the glorification of beautiful bodies, the deification of actors and models and sports heroes? Why else the shots of estrogen, testosterone, steroids, and the search for miracle hormones to delay the process of aging? And why else the fact that from the very beginnings of civilization the decoration and preservation of corpses has become a highly skilled art?

Since the average person is this preoccupied with glorifying his own body, that average person should turn his attention to the holy men and tell them that their own bodies need to be purified. The mystic should

be reminded that like the rest of us he defecates. The holy man must be made to confess his wet dreams. The ascetic should confess his misery. The cynic, his glee. They should all have to accept the exigencies, contingencies, ignominies, and pleasures that go along with having a body. They should be forced to publicly acknowledge that every bowel movement has its aftermath of satisfaction, impatient erections find their ecstasies, and even misery sometimes yields reluctant pleasures.

One of the many miseries the body must suffer is its tendency to sully itself. We can easily understand why the man who digs trenches or repairs sewers must daily cleanse his body. But even the fastidious person who dons clean linen and lolls on silks, who carefully avoids all contact with dirt and avoids perspiration at any cost, will find that his body, of its own accord, is soon tainted by an insidious grime. Epidermal secretions, sphincterial excretions, even exposure to the air all sully the body and make it seek the bath.

In the course of this corporeal corruption, one's clothing is likewise begrimed and befouled. Hence, along with that ancient institution of the bath,

laundry has always been its sibling task. Years ago bathing and laundry were done but rarely. With the advent of civilization things are changed. Public baths for a while held sway, but as man's affluence continued to grow, he soon was able to possess his own bathing facilities and thus wash himself at leisure. As for his wardrobe, present-day affluence allows him to purchase a large selection of attire and thus do his laundry only occasionally. Such duties, however, are unsavory and tedious. The invention of the washing machine has helped make this onerous task less oppressive. No one knows who first came up with this innovation, nor, for that matter, is there any record of what enterprising businessman first invented the laundromat. This is a sorry gap in the history of our culture since the inventors of the washing machine and the laundromat have done a great service for our civilization. They have made laundering as public as the baths once were, and now there is a meeting ground for the holy man and the common man. People from all walks of life gather at the laundromat to purify their clothing: the farmer with his offallic overalls, the belly dancer with her

pasties, the ascetic with his hair shirt, and the executive with his tweed suits.

One day, frequenting the public library, I had run into an old friend whom I had not seen in years, and at his invitation I accompanied him to his home for an evening visit. While there I admired his complete collection of the National Geographic magazine, looked askance, or so I hoped, at what was an almost complete collection of Reader's Digest, and then for the next hour endured his boring conversation as he described his untiring efforts to obtain the three volumes he was missing from the latter collection. He showed me letters he had written to book collectors and dealers, photographs of the three volumes, a list of bookstores he had visited in the course of his search, and even asked me if I knew anyone else who collected the magazine.

Later that evening, very much needing diversion if not relaxation, I sought out a laundromat. As the washing machines did their work, I set to my own work, which this time involved attempting to write a short story about a prostitute I had visited for reasons that, I hesitate to admit, pertained to her

professional services. Taking out a notebook, I scribbled some ideas in the margin, pondered a while, and then the words started flowing. I began by describing the excruciating state of loneliness, existential despair, and callous machismo that had driven me to seek out the prostitute's services in the first place. At this point, in writing the story, I became rather ashamed of myself and had to pause until I could concentrate again. At this moment three women sat down at a table behind me and began chirping away, going on about how difficult the deliveries of their various children had been. Just as I had almost succeeded in putting them out of my mind, one of them said, "My but it's hot in here! I feel like I'm going through menopause again!" Another of the women clucked sympathetically. Then they switched their conversation to that unseemly subject.

I went to work with a fervor. I started describing the whore in detail. First I described how all her pubic hair was shaven. I even entered upon a digression about how modern Turkish women do more than shave their public hair—they pluck it to make themselves (or so they believe) more attractive. At this moment someone

turned on a portable radio and tuned in a baseball game. Two announcers, their voices excited, began discussing the game. One with a high-pitched voice kept saying, "This is going to be a big game! A big game! A real big game in fact! Yes sir! We have two big teams here! Two big, big teams, and they promise a big battle for this big title!" And the other announcer kept breaking in with, "Yes! A big, big game! That reminds me of the time ... ," and then he would start recounting previous games.

Putting down my pen, I picked up a book I had been given by a former girlfriend. Its subject was "psychoanalysis of the female sexual personality," and it was written by a Doctor Kandanzy who, according to the preface, called himself a neo-Freudian and proto-Jungian. Reading through the introduction, I managed to get a vague idea of what he supposedly would prove in the course of the book. He would prove that a woman's desire to have children is nothing less than a sublimated desire for an appendage, i.e., for a man's penis. "Species Neurosis," he termed it, and went on to explain that a woman's trauma at childbirth is caused by a castration complex that accompanies her sublimated

penis-envy. He explained that the child, as it struggles to be born, is a penis about to protrude from between the woman's legs which, at the moment of birth, is then—most traumatically—severed from her body. "Two irreconcilable desires, with the persistence and power of instinct, are locked in a fierce but irresolvable struggle," Dr. Kandanzky wrote. "Each neurosis is enkindled and reinforced by the other. Together, they threaten the woman's very identity. The only outlet is for the woman to hope for a male child who possesses a penis and thereby is her surrogate penis. All women, overtly or covertly, desire a male at every bearing. It is this desire which saves them from a schizophrenic catatonia."

I put the book aside. Looking over at the washing machines, I could see that my laundry was now on the rinse cycle. I had fifteen minutes during which I could continue writing my short story. But now the radio was louder, with the game in progress, and the announcers were getting more and more excited. I decided to let my writing be.

Behind me the three women were talking about problems with their teeth, each wondering if she would

eventually have to get dentures. In front of me were rows of yellow washing machines, some resting quietly, their lids open like baby birds waiting for the worm. Others were making sloshing sounds, some were buzzing, and one machine—apparently out of balance—was dancing a jig. Over to my left was a row of dryers, most of them spinning crazily.

The old lady in charge walked by, wearing tight slacks that showed every flaccid wrinkle in her sagging ass. Along the wall to my right were three hair dryers. A young girl, maybe ten years old, was sitting under one of them eating a bag of candy while reading a magazine. There was a pay-phone, a coin changer, a machine that dispenses little boxes of soap for a dollar, a machine with little bags of potato chips and other such snacks, a soda machine, a little horse called "Cow Pony" that kids could ride for fifty cents, a cigarette machine, a candy-bar machine, a coffee machine, and finally, the restroom door.

Just then a little boy of about three came skipping past, pausing to look at the cow pony before hurrying into the restroom. Right behind him came a young woman carrying a laundry basket held tight

against a green sweater that covered the most delectable pair of breasts I had ever seen (beneath a sweater) in my life. I nearly went blind trying to see through that sweater. Those heavy rounded curves where firm breasts caressed that green sweater! Such delicate protruding points those nipples were! I was ready to prostrate myself. As she swung her hips to avoid the edge of my table, her breasts did a slow bounce and seemed to lift themselves even more as she hurried on past. I jerked my neck around to watch her ass as she walked away. One of the ladies sitting behind me noticed I was looking and pretended to be shocked. But my eyes followed that ass all the way to the back of the room. There the woman put her basket up on a table. Now the basket almost hid those beautiful breasts from my eyes, and I finally took a look at her face.

She was beautiful. Nothing but beautiful. At that moment she looked directly at me and smiled. I had no choice but to feel embarrassed and look away. I simply could not absorb that beautiful smile, what with those three older women looking sternly at me. I fumbled for my book and sent it skidding across the table, picked up my pen and tried to concentrate on my notebook, then

watched the old woman with the wrinkled ass as she walked by again.

Picking up my pen, I started describing the breasts of the prostitute I was writing about. One might have thought that whore was a Venus, the way I exalted her dimensions and praised her beauty. "Such nipples!" I was writing. "The kind that make a man hunger in his sleep. Proud nipples with ... ," I realized that instead of writing I was staring at those beautiful breasts again. Another pleasant bounce as she twisted past my table, and another beautiful smile as she entered the restroom. What seemed like an eternity later she came out and smiled again.

Would she be so kind as to come over and introduce herself? No. She hurried past me, moving toward the back of the room, her sublime breasts leading the way.

Reaching for the book by Doctor Kandanzy, I opened it at random to a chapter entitled, "The Breasts as Appendages: Substitutional Mammarian Gratification for Penis-Envy." I barely suppressed a groan. Getting up from the table I went outside and walked over to the small grocery that was next door. Unable to gratify my genitalia, I would indulge my oral appetite. I looked

over the fruit and decided against grapes. I looked over the meats and chose to not buy a Polish sausage. Finally I bought a small package that holds a couple of cupcakes.

As I walked back through the door of the laundromat I could see her at the far end of the room, sorting through her laundry. Moving toward my table I never took my eyes off her, hoping ever so mightily to receive another smile. But she was either getting bored with me or simply did not notice. I sat down, began eating a cupcake, and started describing the face of the whore. Searching for inspiration, I turned around to catch another glimpse of the woman. She was holding a blanket up against her body, inspecting it, rubbing it against those beautiful appendages.

I turned back to my writing, reached for the other cupcake, and paused as I realized her little boy was standing beside me, eyeing that cupcake.

I picked up my pen, trying to ignore him. But he kept staring at the cupcake. My first impulse was to offer it to him. But then I thought that maybe his mother wouldn't want him having such things. Mothers can be paranoid about strangers. I didn't want to find

myself trying to convince the local police that I was neither trying to poison the kid nor kidnap him.

As I tried to ignore the little boy I realized that now he was holding out a hand for the cupcake. But he withdrew the hand, stood there for a moment as he puckered his mouth, and then, without further ado, started howling. He just stood there as he emitted a long, mournful, animal howl. Had he put out his hand this time, I would have given him the cupcake. But he stood there, hands at his sides, eyes closed, screeching as loud as he could.

All eyes were upon me. I turned to the ladies sitting behind me, hoping for help, but they were looking at the little boy, smiling sadistically at my predicament. And here came the woman in the green sweater, hurrying this time, her beautiful breasts bouncing up and down with each step. As she twisted that beautiful ass around my table those breasts did a tremendous bounce. She took her little boy by the hand while looking directly at me, and she wasn't smiling this time.

"Some gentleman you are!" she said. The anger was palpable, the sarcasm thick.

I wilted. My forward member went flaccid as a dead sponge. I would have groveled had she given me the chance. But while the old ladies behind me tittered, that beautiful woman with the most beautiful breasts I have ever seen gave an angry shake of her head which was accompanied by a sympathetic trembling of her breasts. Then she turned and walked away.

I sat there, stunned and humiliated. Five minutes earlier I had been fantasizing that she might go home with me, eagerly wanting to give me the sensual pleasures of her beautiful, bountiful body. Three minutes earlier, I could have used her little boy's outstretched hand as an excuse for walking over and introducing myself—while evincing copious politeness toward her personally and gracious generosity toward her child. But now she had dismissed me. She would go home, put her laundry away, tuck her little boy into bed, then take a bath and fondle those unbearably erotic breasts while soaping them down and rinsing them off.

I reached for my book by Kandanzky. Opening it to the last page, I read, "Why else do men admire a woman with large breasts? They thereby share the woman's own

neurosis by envying those two symbols of the penis. What a paradox for the woman! To realize, however subliminally, that her own symbols of the penis are coveted qua penis by a man. Denied a penis because of her biological make-up, men would even try to deny her nature's symbolic substitutes by coveting her breasts. Is it any wonder that every woman's attitude toward her own sexuality is ambivalent, and her desire for sex always ambiguous?"

I snapped the book shut. There was one more paragraph remaining. I did not want to ever read that book to the end.

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(A piece of juvenilia, this, I do admit. What is rather shameful: It was written at an age when I had little excuse to still be writing what later would warrant being called "juvenilia." Obviously I had my retrograde moments ... or hours. So here it is. Not bad, not good, with some degree of merit—despite its lack of veridicality regarding my supposed encounter with the prostitute.)