



Gellu Naum

Medium

(Fragment)

I still think of the woman whose slight swaying walk disturbed me deeply, whose long fingers tore the air into thousands of thin threads that I hurried to breathe, under whose eyelashes I wanted to take shelter from all the storms, this stranger who, representing to me a petty unknown that I refuse to accept, her secret so easy to remove with a few words, with a few smiles, the stranger who might stop to talk to me about her, about love, about night and who, however, prey to an unacceptable sense of relationships, even of life, continues on her way without even blinking. She turns to me this time, straightens with her fingers a strand of hair that falls into my eyes, she maybe loves me, in any case we walk arm in arm on a wonderful street, we hug in the middle of the most awful crowd, we hold hands and nothing can separate us.

She suspects herself—and maybe I do too—of not being herself, or at least taking the place of another, but that doesn't matter much, the horribly real time we are together we spend in the most pleasant or the most awful way possible, the others can wait, we feel terribly well strangling each other in the purest ecstasy. What is dangerous in the disturbing freedom of the dream is its fragility. A leaf hitting the window, or no matter what noise or what touch, and everything goes out, the stranger with her wonderful eyelashes continues to walk without blinking, I look sideways at her intriguing shadow that goes farther away, amazed that her hair, tightened with the greater care, looms over the shiny asphalt unraveled, as it was when I stroked it.



make me startle in my sleep, all the songs of owls that split the darkness, all the cries, far or near, low or shrill.

Tonight the moon was only how a pencil could draw it. A light mist enveloped everything as I walked through the yard, and the black jackal that jumped unto my back, ready to thrust its fangs into the back of my neck, broke its teeth against my locks of stone.

The air currents that flowed through the small town from one end to the other were more than ever filled with the moans of lovers. I didn't see any of this, or I saw everything, I remember the odd shapes of the trees,

the very pale stars, the light silhouettes that crept along the fences.

At my place, I lit the candles, set out the table covering it with a white cloth, broke the bread in half, poured two glasses of wine, made the invocations according to the strictest ritual and waited for the appearance of the predestined woman. If this time she came, she certainly didn't want to wake me from the leaden sleep I fell into almost immediately. I think she found the wine good enough, to which, given an understandable care, I had added a few drops of my blood.



Gellu Naum, portrait of Lygia Naum

I also dream of the silent walk, my hand listening only to the urge of my heart, my eyes measuring only the extent of the same distance. Tonight I looked at the moon without any revulsion. I could talk about my poetic situation with incredible ease, I could tell all the little misfortunes that



Lygia Naum, dream of December 2, 1944

I know that I was not the one who, viewed from a certain angle of the room, could be seen sleeping, as I was not the other one either, the one in the dream who was doing this or that action, kissing this or that mouth, walking through a deserted corridor listening to his own footsteps, the one who would pluck a flower or flatter himself that he kept the eye of a maiden on his heart.

I know that I, the other one, who am always me, can only be found in the moment of awakening. My hand then still stretches toward the cheek in front of me, the one in my dream, which the image presented to my eyes of

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Gellu Naum



Victor Brauner, *Portrait of Gellu Naum* (1930s)

The Remembrance of Memory (I) (1943 – 1944)

I was making love to an extremely beautiful woman. I didn't see her face; I know that she wore shoes and green stockings. Next to us, an old woman.

*

I want to go downtown from a house where I just moved. There is a corridor. A few men with whom I am in a choir. At the end of the corridor, in a meadow, lots of people. They shout: "Let Naum sing, let Naum sing!" My name is pronounced in an unusual way, the final "m" is almost inaudible. I walk forward along the corridor up to the middle of the meadow, making all the time cheap tricks like a revue actor. Once in the meadow, I stop and ask: "Where are the people who wanted me to sing?" Numerous drinkers, men and women, gathered together toward the left, acclaim raising their arms and feet.

I talk to Mi (a repugnant character), next to a tree. I tell him how stupid is this audience that could be satisfied with my monkey tricks. At a nearby table, three actors eat, they are very attentive, I suspect they can hear us.

I walk several times through the restaurant, whose exit is through the grocery store. I take a few walnuts with no intention of stealing them, absentmindedly, while reading. The grocer appears and looks at the walnuts. Sensation of embarrassment. It's a mistake: I had come to pay off my debts that I thought were lesser. His wife messed up the accounts. I go look for her. I know that she is somewhere in the attic. There I find



Victor Brauner, *Drawing* (undated)

M. who sweeps the floor and tells me that she doesn't feel well. To the question "With whom?" she replies: "WITH THE GENTLEMAN THAT HAS DIED." Then she lies down, dead. I suspect a simulacrum.

*

In the house of an artist. I got there through a courtyard. Something about an electric doorbell, very vague and complicated. I have in front of me a chest with his objects. On top, a few African objects: a shield, a few sticks. The artist suffered from tuberculosis and had some head issues. I take the objects and want to leave with them. The artist's sister appears, who is a kind of maniac, and I know she won't give me the objects so as the deceased wouldn't suffer, or something like that. I put the objects on the table. It's all the same to me. Actually, I don't like them and I've had all the time the impression that the dead man was a cretin and I'm mistaken if I expect to find anything at his place that could interest me.



Victor Brauner, *Drawing* (1938)

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I am in a room or verandah, small and painted with lime, that reminds Spanish houses. I stand by the wall. My childhood friend R. Ch. comes, who is now an army officer. I don't remember what we talked about, but I was all the time displaying a reservation that was supposed to show him that we couldn't have anything in common.



Victor Brauner, *Man in Interior* (1934)

There appears another military man, an old soldier. R. Ch. complains to him that he lacks socks. The old soldier offers him one of his socks, that is dirty. They both talk about how socks are made. All this time I stay aside and say to myself: "It's his business if he lacks socks. It doesn't matter to me."

Even though they address me directly, I refuse to participate in their conversation.

Again there is a militarist talk, this time about tanks. I am with a lot of men and women, among whom I only recognize C. N. When I enter the room, he says jokingly that I am a tanker. His joke seems to me completely out of place and deeply bores me. I sit at a table and look at a woman's portrait. (The woman's eyes are shut, but they open if one turns the picture upside down. That is due to some lines made where the eyelids are, lines that I perceive very clearly.) The portrait doesn't depict any known character. It vaguely resembles Mona Lisa. Although I made it, I have, however, to make it just now, using a stillmancy technique. I wonder if I will succeed regarding the colors. For the eyes, I am sure that I will be able to make them open-shut. Suddenly, I am in a different room and I head toward a table where I have everything that I need for my work. I ask a woman who is there to begin the translation. (I forgot who that woman was, although I know her very well.) The portrait must be translated; actually, the portrait is the translation of some very short texts by de Quincey, that she will translate and I will place them between two glass panes. I thought the glass panes were round, but I observe that they have irregular shapes.

The woman proposes to me to translate into English and French. The texts are in French. We agree to have them translated into two languages:



Victor Brauner, *Turning Point of Thirst* (1934)

English and French—although the one into French won't be, in actuality, a translation. However, there will be two translations. I think of how useless is this woman. From time to time, C. N. sticks his head in through the door, as if interested in something. His intrusion bores me more and more. Presently, it is terribly boring.

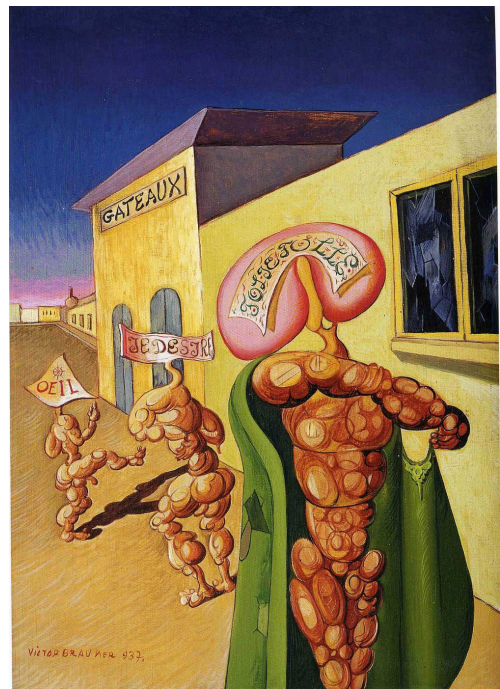
I take from the table a little box with drinks and offer the translator a bottle of beer that is already open. I take a bottle myself. (The intention to drink without being observed.)

Around me there appeared more profoundly repugnant characters. A woman eats greedily and in an extremely vulgar way something sweet. I can't stand it anymore and start making a terrible scene. I lock the little box with drinks and continue to make a scene.

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I am, I don't know how, paying a visit to M. I know from the very beginning that she must be drunk in the restroom. (I vaguely remember that I have read in the paper about a *tortto-seul* that her lover refused to eat. It was a short note, in the various news section.) I enter the first part of the restroom (there are two). I find the cook there, who turns her back to me so I can urinate. I explain to her that her presence bothers me. A reason for her to leave. She refuses under the pretense that in the next room there is M., that M. might feel unwell and, if she leaves, she won't be able to assist her, if in need. I tell her that I am strong enough, but she again refuses to leave and sits down on the floor by the door, gesturing to me not to mind her.

Then the door opens and M. appears in a nightgown. She walks toward me with outstretched arms. The cook leaves. I am cold toward M. I notice that she started to get wrinkles. She tries to explain to me that she is not too happy, that her lover refused to come to her place, even though she had invited him to a *tortto-seul* (seemingly, a cake meant to be eaten in intimacy). It is all the same to me. M. leaves. I remain alone.



Victor Brauner, *Crazy Crazyness* (1937)

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I am on a street, but am not alone. Ahead of me, on the right side of the street, walks a soldier. I walk on the left side. It is evening. I have the foresight that something will happen. The man on the other side is terrorized. A whip appears, wielded by an unseen hand, that starts to hit him. It is not a whip, but a leaden stick. I am walking somewhat behind. I tell myself that I am somehow related to the witch and, therefore, she won't harm me. Moreover, even if she tried, I am very strong.

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the curtains moving slightly by the windows, that I also see, has not yet managed to make me lose myself into the mists of their folds, my eardrums still resound from the burble of the waterfall on the edge of which I am in this fraction of time, just as *real* as I really cast a shadow on the white sheets of my bed, and these waterfalls let into my ears, along with their burble, the equally unreal song of a gramophone probably playing by itself on a nearby balcony, or in the middle of a deserted sun-drenched street, at such a morning hour.

The equivalent of the moment of sleep and awakening, in which dream and waking state cease to exist separately, I recapture only in love.

And yet we stubbornly write down our dreams with utmost care, we appreciate the sad habit of looking in the dream for traces of daily life, of translating this symbol through that desire, this object through that object. Should I retreat in the dream? Should I flee what is commonly called

reality? It seems to me a beautiful cowardice to consider real this tram line that will always take you to the next station and never to the bottom of a precipice, to consider real only the woman who passes by under the brightest sun, so bright that every eyelash can be seen down to the smallest detail, to the disadvantage of the shadow that stands in the most secluded corner of my room and watches me sleep.

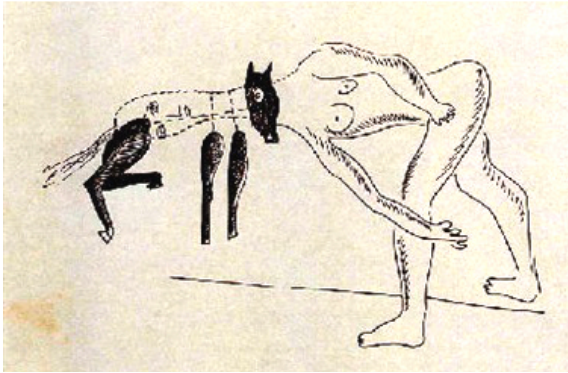
I tell you that tonight a jackal walked freely through my yard, also in my bed, and that, refusing him any symbol—although I have no doubt that the other jackals, those who roam under the moon in the distant jungles, are, in this sense, mere symbols—he was as *real* as those.

Our life, the petty part of our life that is called such, would perhaps deserve this defiance from the dream of not recognizing any reality of it, if it were not for the risk of being further cut in two, disfigured to the last fiber by the cretinizing subjectivism whose safe prey we have always been.

(Translated from the Romanian by Sasha Vlad)

(continued from page 3)

I arrive close to an iron stove, also on the street, where there are other people, I think. A black dog appears, that I know is the witch. I fight calmly, while I talk to the people by the stove. The black dog bites my hand lightly, superficially. There could be only a danger of rabies, but the black dog is not a dog, but a witch. I start to squeeze its muzzle, its head, to break it in my hands, to destroy it. It's not difficult at all: even though the black dog puts up some resistance, it is not capable of fighting me.



Victor Brauner, *Composition with Dog* (1929)

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I am in a public library. I walk on the left side of the large reading room, where there is a toilet that doesn't interest me at all. I look at it like I would look at an object that is where it's supposed to be, like a bookshelf, or a piece of furniture that is appropriate in a library. I remember that in the reading room there are countless beautiful women, that all seats are taken, and that, probably, I could "choose" a lover. I look at each and every one, but I give up. I don't feel like it. About in the middle of the room I see M. I walk to get closer to her, I want to advance, but I think that in order to do that I have to crawl under a table. However, I want her to notice me. I have a peculiar idea about what one could call pride, and I refuse to crawl under. I cough to get her attention, but am not interested in her reaction. What matters is that I am there.

Then I climb down some stairs. Someone is accompanying me. I make strange gestures with my hand. It's about escaping a king, who has become dangerous. If we get out in the street, we are saved. I tell this to my companion and we get out. At one of the upper windows there is the king, who amuses himself by hunting us. He fires at us. I am indignant and furious. We make detours onto several streets, but wherever we are we can be seen from that window above.

We reach the crater of a volcano. My companion goes inside the crater, because the king's men are near. He assures me that we can stay inside. I go in, too. The crater becomes an immense bell that balances at the end of a rope. The pursuers try to grab it.



Victor Brauner, *Untitled* (1931)

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I walk through a long courtyard to enter the deserted house. It is summer, at twilight, and a deadly silence. I peer into the two empty rooms and understand why nobody lives in them anymore. Here was committed the murder that put an end to Mr. Cri's life. The blood cannot be seen anymore, but one can feel it.

Now I'm no longer alone. Numerous women are working all around me. They are washing laundry. Among them there is Cri's wife. They don't have to know that someone entered the Murder House. One of the women screams, and all of them start to run and hide. Cri comes slowly down an alley. He is extremely weak and decrepit. He is walking about slowly. At first, I want to run away (before getting out, I think I looked under his books, but I know for sure that I saw under his bed a pile of giant coins and two light-blue letters, love and congratulation letters at the same time, one addressed to his wife, the other written for a little girl). I stop at the gate and come back as if I just arrived. Only then, Cri saw me coming. I explain to him that I'm extremely busy, that I don't even have time to undress at night when I'm going to bed, and that's why I didn't come by to see him. He is pleased to see me. We both go out through the gate and go somewhere. (...)

(to be continued)