

NIELS HAV

Happy and Freshly Loved

Some talk of love, others call it sex. It is the great theme in a person's life. All pop songs, films and books focus on it: he was obsessed by a woman, he adored her night and day, he adored her summer and winter. She flung his book at him and ran away. He ran after her, he adored her. He lay in wait for her; he brought her home. They were alarmingly married! He ran away, but she ran after him. She brought him home, and so on. This is the endless story of all couples. A story with many morals; and they are all true.

Because real sex isn't just sex, it is all of it! It is the way she speaks, it is her jacket, her pen, her bag. It is her laughter, her wrists, her hips, but also her hairbrush, her books and music, her sewing machine. It is the way she eats, it is her bad arguments, her rages, the summer holidays in her childhood, it is her toenails. It is her grocer and the street where she lives. It is all her.

Sex is the moment of metamorphosis in human existence because in sexuality flesh and spirit meet. It is during intercourse the ego is lifted out of its self-obsessed psychic spasm. Good sex opens wide all windows of the soul and flesh and spirit frolic. It is in intercourse we become woman and man, become human.

That is why sex is surrounded by so much mysticism. All religions are concerned with it and attempt mythological explanations for the mystery of sex. The Judeo-Christian myth of the fall concerns sex. Eve was tempted by the serpent. She ate a fruit and gave some to her husband. The result was astonishing. They saw they were naked! And so this little orgy of fruit turned into a catastrophe, they were driven out of the Garden, and ever since Eve must give birth to her children in pain and Adam eat his bread with sweaty brow. Something of a down turn.

But the myth of the fall beautifully explains how sexuality is the field of insight. Before they ate Adam and Eve were as carefree kids, afterwards they felt guilty and hid. They had become conscious of good and evil. And this original myth still contains the key to our understanding of sexuality.

The psychologists know: Sexuality is surrounded by fear and guilt. The sexual debut is an eye of the needle the boy must pass through to become a man or the girl to become a woman. It is as sexual beings each of us becomes visible to him or her -self, before and after still makes the whole difference. The psychologists call it the process of individuation, and not even thousand hours of sex education could slow down the beating heart of a nervous beginner.

Sex is a mystery and all cultures ceaseless circle around it. In ours it is out in the open; advertisements, leaflets and political campaigns use sex to catch the eye. Sex sells. All

those suggestive film posters, book covers and car ads. All those breasts in the newspapers. People stream to sex fairs in the thousands driven by vague longings and sweet dreams of an experience that will relieve the constantly reborn hunger for more sex.

Advice columnists discuss technique, where, when and especially how. Does size matter, or what? Is it okay if there's an age difference? He wears boxing gloves in bed, could that be normal? With variations the same questions are raised again and again. And this entire market probably functions as a kind of mental petting.

For Freud the libido or desire was the fundamental drive under which everything else could be subsumed. Late Victorian Europe was saturated with repressions. According to its generally puritanical ethics only men, prostitutes and women of the lower classes were able to feel sexual desire.

The myth of the virtuous woman was utterly unrealistic but it poisoned all of official life in a system of prohibitions and regard. Women were put on a pedestal and most of them were bravely bored up there, until Uncle Freud arrived and brought them down. The dualism of flesh and spirit has plagued Western consciousness since the Middle Ages when spirit was sublime and sensuality was downgraded as sinful.

Since then a lot has happened and nowadays we have – apparently – dissolved this dualism by turning the issue

upside down. We no longer talk much about spirit, but much more about body and sensual intimacy. Science has taught us to look at ourselves as biological beings. Some have attempted to reduce love to chemistry. But living like the small animals in the woods we can't really do either, we aren't able to become pure nature and spontaneity. We think and so we are not only flesh and chemistry, but also spirit.

When AIDS appeared on the scene all the ancient metaphysic was ready to jump. It was tempting to see AIDS as punishment for free sexuality; sex was yet again riddled with fantasies of guilt.

Let us not fool ourselves; our entire life is about these things. Of course, it is possible to have a good life without sex, but it is through sexuality we succeed or fail as men and women. You may get it beautified, dressed up in poetry and metaphors. But then nighttime comes and you have a hard on and it must happen. Just like in a pop song.

And here I'm not just thinking of fucking. Mindless sex is an abomination. Copulation is completely without content because only the body is involved. In those wham bangs intimate psychic contact is impossible and the event is recalled with displeasure, as if you were left behind alone in your own desert.

That's why sex with prostitutes is so disappointing. She doesn't give in to it, she just simulates. She doesn't want to kiss, doesn't want to caress; there's no heart in it. That

kind of intercourse can be almost hateful, understandably, because it transforms the most intimate in life into a commodity, an exchange of services. Albeit the bodies are naked the psyche is all dressed up in uniform; there is no tenderness, everything turns mechanical.

But naturally even in professional intercourse – as an exception – a sudden tenderness can arise if the two people all at once feel they are actually seeing one another. She sees his helpless longing for tenderness and he sees her frail vulnerability. Something like that. The business part of the transaction suddenly evaporates; they are together. But experiences like that are probably so rare that it might as well be a lie.

Sex can drive people insane. Once he saw the perfect woman, and now he drifts from bar to bar at night in pursuit of her. By now, leaning across tables and bars, he has seen thousands of women, but he rejects them all, because they are not quite right, they don't have exactly that.

In the daytime we are CEOs, in the trades, stockbrokers, garbagemen or editors, but at night we are almost human: women and men chasing love, chasing sex. Or, we have found the one we sought and sleep arm in arm with the beloved under the moon.

That is what we long for, insatiably: to be seen, comprehended and understood – and to be loved beyond boundaries. The dream of the great love will never let go

of us and the one who falls in love turns all his longings, hopes and dreams onto this one woman. She must redeem it all.

That's just how it is. We want to be embraced by this tenderness, merge with one another, disappear and be reborn. Sex is the axis of existence in totality: work, children and lovemaking, the flat we furnish together, our friends, all of it. Sex is the moment of truth; in sexuality we meet ourselves as man or woman. And the better we know each other the better we know ourselves. Sex opens wide all windows of the soul, and God's angels ascend and descend. Maybe it's just a quickie but it wipes your windshield clean. You can face the world again, happy and freshly loved.

Niels Hav is a full time poet and short story writer living in Copenhagen, Denmark with *awards from The Danish Arts Council*. In English, he has *We Are Here* published by Book Thug, and poetry and fiction in numerous magazines. In his native Danish, he has authored six collections of poetry and three books of short fiction. His books have been translated into several languages including English, Arabic, Turkish, Dutch, Farsi and Chinese.

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