

You Made My Heart Malleable When You Poured Yours Out Before Me

Nella Aarne

I-met-her-some-thirty-five-years-ago-maybe.

And although I have probably never understood anything about it, although I have not understood her yet, we have probably never been apart. It is *as if* we had *almost* never been apart.

Yes, I believe, I-met-her-some-thirty-five-years-ago-maybe.¹

– Jacques Derrida, *H.C. for Life, That is to Say...*

You took cautious steps towards me, ensconced yourself beside me and changed all of my 1087 selves. Perhaps there were always hundreds of me, and constantly more in the making. But I did not hear all of what was me until you shook me awake with your song and sparked the first discordant tones in the array of hundreds of voices within me, which had until then been perfectly synchronised into one. The discord began as minor whispers, gently out of beat, but soon grew louder demanding to be heard. These new voices circulat-

¹ Derrida, J. (2006) *H.C. for Life, That is to Say...* trans. Melisi, S. and Herbrechter, S. California: Stanford University Press p5 Originally published in 2000

ed with yours, singing with it, in turn complementing and interrupting it, at times even disturbing one another.² In the presence of your warmth, a wave of unfamiliar tones and intensities traversed me and changed the course of my thought and movement. I discovered that I was, in fact, many, and thrown to the mercy of inevitable metamorphoses. It was the first moment in which I felt love.

As your voice stirred the depths of everything that I could be, I tried to cover my ears and resist the heat. You see, at times closeness can appear threatening. Profound intimacy is not only an occasion of tenderness, shelter and discovery, but also bears the inescapability of succumbing to the radiance of the other, slowly becoming malleable in the other's warmth. Reaching for me fearlessly and with unforeseen openness and generosity, you obscured the boundary between you and I, and melted my outline, which had until then been defined and impervious to the movements of the other. Every word that you enunciated, every instance in which our eyes locked, and each fraction of a second during which I felt the thrill of your presence, left a permanent imprint on all of my 1087 selves – the constantly multiplying abundance of me, whom I had only just discovered because you had incited me to speak in *1,000 tongues*³ at once. On your part, it was a meticulous process of loving persuasion. When you poured your heart out before me, mine, too, became fluid like molten tin.

In your scarlet glow, I transformed into formless silvery-white metal. I became uncontainable and luxuriant, fluctuating yet intermittently congruous with your movements. Overcome with my unanticipated love for a living other and enthralled by your difference, I attuned to you, awash in your indecipherable, compelling and intoxicating unfamiliarity. I took a precipitous leap of faith and dared for all of what you were – you, too, were incalculably many. It was because of your eloquent presence, soft in its persistence, that my molten heart now resounded with the entirety of your inexhaustibly multiplying

2 Derrida, J (2006) *From the Word to Life: A Dialogue between Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous* p1 In: *New Literary History*, vol. 37, no. 1, *Hélène Cixous: When the World Is a Stage*, Winter 2006, pp. 1-13

3 Cixous, H. (1976) *The Laugh of the Medusa* p889 In: *Signs*, vol. 1, no 4, Summer 1976, pp. 875-893

choir, which I knew was bound to be as dissonant with mine as it was within itself. All of my 1087 selves aspired to absorb each and every dizzying note of your tune – no, hundreds of tunes – whilst recognising that I could never master them or claim them as my own. This love did not seek to subdue you, but to embrace everything that you already were and were about to become.⁴

Of course, the astonishing intensity with which our utterances circled one another, the relentless polyphony, which allowed no chance for silence, hauled both you and I to the brink of exhaustion. Again and again, I heard hundreds of our voices being engulfed by yet another interminable dispute. Crescending as a tangle of disagreeing pitches and timbres, and with an infinite range of unprecedented languages, this incongruous composition of broken chords strained my eardrums. At times, my perpetual motion in your blazing heat was as draining as it was exhilarating. In an uncontrollable frenzy, all of my 1087 selves strove at once to adoringly concur, and contentiously conflict, with *the amplitude of songs*⁵ emanating from you. You were in your absolute difference so enigmatically capricious, that your closeness felt overwhelming, dangerous, unbearable. Still I revered you. You were like oxygen with which I wanted to fill my lungs; a nourishing life force holding the capacity to ensure my survival.

It was a ceaseless erratic dance, swinging me back and forth between a desire for ardent attachment and a panic-stricken urge for distance. But the vehemence of the fleeting, harmonious sequences in our tremendous dissonant choir sustained my movement. These silver-toned waves of sound sporadically rushing through us were sublime, and their enduring effects altered the course of our imminent metamorphoses. As my amorphous metallic essence continued to obtain new forms under the influence of your evolving aura, I understood that you would remain forever different and inscrutable to me, just as the

4 Cixous, H. (1986) *Sorties: Out and Out/ Attacks/Ways Out/Forays* In: *The Newly Born Woman* Manchester: Manchester University Press p 78 Originally published in 1975

5 Derrida, J. (2006) *H.C. for Live, That is to Say...* trans. Melisi, S. and Herbrechter, S. California: Stanford University Press p13 Originally published in 2000

potential embedded in the hundreds of voices within me was to remain unfamiliar to myself and to you. My heart never solidified after our first encounter. In love, you gave me *this gift of alterability*,⁶ the capacity of always being several, of always being in the making, of always taking impetuous leaps for the other. Now, my 1386 selves echo in confounding discord the multiplicity of our tunes, still circulating around an intangible trace of your voice.

⁶ Cixous, H. (1976) *The Laugh of the Medusa* p889 In: *Signs*, vol. 1, no 4, Summer 1976, pp. 875-893