

New Mystic Alchemy by Joey Madia
Electronically Published by xPress(ed)
Espoo, Finland
ISBN 951-9198-57-1
a review by Ric Carfagna –

Joey Madia is a remarkable and burgeoning talent. When one cruises to and through his webzine: www.newmystics.com, which also coincidentally happens to be the name of Joey's new volume of poems, one gets a good sense of how prolific he is in all aspects of the arts. It is an impressive oeuvre. His *Memoirs of an Antichrist*, an ongoing serial novel/drama, is daring and huge in its undertaking and scope. It seems to have aspirations of achieving the status of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* and/or the voluminous works of Homer with which we are so familiar. I say more power to Joey, and may he keep on offering us such inspired writings.

New Mystic Alchemy is subtitled *A Journey of Dreams*. It is an unpaginated tome published by Jukka-Pekka Kervinen at xPress(ed) in e-book format. This unpaginated configuration lends itself to the illusion of dreams: no boundaries, no time and no metronome to keep us marching to a mechanized beat. We are freed from all that enslaves us to a world of constantly ticking clocks, deadlines and the whole work-a-day routine. We begin with an invitation; actually it is an *Invitation to Song* in which we are told:

LISTEN TO THE SKY. RIDING ON HIS HORSE
LISTEN TO THE WIND AS IT MOVES ALONG THE PLAINS.
HEAR THE WORDS OF STREAMS, AS THEY RUN ON TOWARD THE SEA
THIS IS WHERE WE LIVE, AND WE KNOW ITS SACRED SONG

We are also asked to:

IMAGINE A TIME LONG AGO.

...

A TIME BEFORE OUR TIME.

A TIME OF MYTH AND SONG.

The 'song' is an evocation, an opening of doorways, an invitation to not just enter into the pages of this book but to enter into all the mind can envisage and all the human heart can dream. It is a fitting overture to what we will encounter on this voyage that *New Mystic Alchemy* maps out for us. The dreams that we come across lay out for us a variegated world: poems that open up a spectrum of the seen, the unseen and of the imagined; poems that cover the vast macroscopic dimensions of a celestial-mythological cosmos, a Tolkienesque middle world; poems reaching into the arcane interior ontological universe of the human mind and its acclimating to the evolving environment it finds itself immersed in. Joey successfully enters, interrogates and extracts the essence from these realms, then translates the

message into thoughtful well-wrought poetry. This from “Alchemetum”:

There is a meditation
in the breaking of the circle
Serpent echoes
imprints of ancient locks
for which no keys were cast.
Within the tapestries
of woven truths and innocent beliefs
are the whispers of madmen
and the free and ringing songs the sing

Joey’s cinematic narrative technique is one aspect that jumps to the fore immediately. In “Comes the Mad Countessa”, an ancient, distant scenario combines with a seemingly present day setting - “surrounded by its chain-linked war defenses”- to offer the reader a disturbing anachronistic mix of possible circumstances:

In the godless, raped, forsaken earth-
this tar pit of ancient secrets,
surrounded by its chain-linked electric war defenses
there are lips that whisper of indolent
melodic madness.

. . . .

Vaguely principled, dogged and gruesome,
she awakens,
unsnug and rabid
from a bed of blood-crossed Passover doors
and immediately orders
The Slaughter.

Might this mad countessa actually be a current wielder of power and influence, or is she just a shadowy figure from the dusty pages of a historic memory? Perhaps both. This poem is one of the many in *New Mystic Alchemy* which Joey fills with compelling images and animated players; he presents and portrays the characters in a convincing, vibrant and real way sustaining this energy throughout. Even though it is

A Journey of Dreams, we do not encounter any woozy, never-never land semantics creating untenable situations. No, we see Joey’s characters and their situations as real flesh and blood, vital and passionate participants in an unfolding drama. This from “Portent for New Kings, II”:

Burrowing up in the fat flesh
of the mad king’s mind,
the eye-spiders sucked and supped.

The rat/snake brain feasters lashed to god-right reason
and spit bleached bone outward to the shackled hay-sleepers.

Notice also the lyrical, singing quality on the poetic line, its alliteration and metered articulation. It seems many of these poems could (and should) be incorporated into a musical setting. I see an opera and/or musical in Joey's future.

~

These poems map out for us new, untried exploratory orbits with the constituents of both mystical and material elements. I don't want to use the connotation 'fantasy' for it is a term loaded with extraneous baggage, calling to mind a Disneyesque and contrived, non-real world. This is definitely not the case with *New Mystic Alchemy*. On the contrary, these articulately crafted flights of imaginings speak metaphorically of and to the conditions of our collective human situation; and Joey being a master storyteller makes us see that this experience is both sides of the same coin. This from "Reformata":

Their reflections are the collected redemptions
of the wrongly known and never meant.
Stripped of all deceit, stoned and seeded
 wall-hung, floor flung, they dance and jets
and speak halfheartedly of God's return.

Staring into the rune-hole, the accidental seeker goes mad,
screaming of deliverance in the oily alleys of hearsay and truth.

...

Joey is not always an observer or reporter. In "Ego-mentum" we enter into the personal, passionate realm of his (or someone else's?) lived experience:

I have no wife.
I have no mother.
I have neither son nor daughter.

...

I am an unsanctioned alchemist
painting lurid eyes on the empty faces of serenity.
 I am an arid baptizer in infant tombs
collecting splattered casket rattles and discarded umbilicals
as war trophies and demonstrations of random fate.

The 'I' adumbrates a mystery: another facet of Joey himself? Or maybe Joey, the shaman, tapping into humanity's collective consciousness, relating to us distant and disincarnate voices? The 'ego' in the title is a vehicle spawning indeterminacy in our ability to discern who exactly the 'I' is. But do we need to decide? Isn't life

and experience itself at times rife with doubt and confusion; symptomatic of creation's immersion in a dualistic universe? Nonetheless, in due course some form of 'resolution' is revealed, in the last line we read:

I am only words upon the page.

But this 'resolution' is again fraught with ambiguity: Is it just *words* that are speaking, or is it the mysterious 'I' that haunts the poem with its shifty and sleight-of-hand perceptions?

The question of the dubious 'I' also makes its appearance in the poem "Palette". At first we seem to hear Joey musing over the meaning, nature and the ironically ill-suited physical characteristics of 'modern man' to his environment and ultimately his evolution:

I tear at the stale bread
with the razor-sharp canines
Evolution so comically bestowed
on the otherwise
hairless, clawless, defenseless
form of Modern Man.

The opening two lines denote a primitivism and base instinctual temperament. They seem to question just how 'modern' we are, when we all have within ourselves aspects which harken back to a more primal nature; one that is at work within our own unconscious shadow world. As we read on, we enter a more disturbing 'metaphoric' realm:

I bleed from a dozen scabs
my Boredom has picked open
while watching TV talkers
prognosticate and fall short.
The raw meat eaten yesterday
in a degenerative delirium
is making my gut wail
...

The poem proceeds via strange semantic outburst and disruptions, the progeny of an ingested 'modern' world commingled with the strayed imaginings that 'evolution' brings:

The report of the rifle.
The lie of the news.
The laugh of the jackal.
The jester's bell-y quest.
...
This body looks frail,
all balding and defenseless.

The poem intensifies with tragic declarative statements peppered with profound transcendental utterances:

Death is always brownish-grey.
That is a mystery.

There is a power in these apparently disparate articulated trajectories, where they lead and what they reveal about the perception of the world around us. From Joey's mind we sense unease, a gradual diminution that works its way out from an absorbed internal ambiguity, eventually leading, via strange, freakish, almost nightmarish images and associations to a resigned state where the poem concludes:

I cannot paint my hours in such sullen brownish-grey
and expect anything but fear.

What this poem sees to be elucidating is that all of our 'life-improving' technologies, the television in this case, serve to occlude, deny or shelter us from the shadowy nature alive within all of us, creating a rift or schism in the psyche which manifests itself in unpredictable and sometimes disturbing emanations, be they thoughts and/or actions. And what are we subjected to by being a slave to the 'tube'? Well, maybe the constant reminders of hate, violence and brutality that 'modern' man manifests. No wonder why death is an omnipresent specter, and fear consumes the mind lost in its own alienating malaise.

~

Joey acts as an oracle and storyteller, one who weaves a convincing prophetic tale with both tonality and dissonance at his disposal. A unique blending of folklore, myth and mysticism pervade many of these poems. Even when the surface seems ostensibly impenetrable and dark, there is a peace and transcendent hue resonating from the core. Sometimes this peace is at first undetectable, revealing itself gradually in inconspicuous subtle (stealthy) ways. In "Slave" for example, we are witness to a slave's soliloquy to his (apparent) master. This dramatic monologue might be spoken or mental; transpiring solely in the speaker's mind, but the fact of that matter is irrelevant to the message that gets relayed. "Slave" begins:

These do I lay at your feet-
a basket of corn
carnations and cactus
bitters
bermuda grass
emeralds
champagne.

Things I have carried
in my boots, on my travels
For you asked of me once
to bring you the world.

This list of items from a 'basket' to 'champagne' does double duty in speaking of both the actual items and their allegorical significance in the mind of our speaker. 'Cactus' and 'bitters' conflict with 'grass', 'emeralds' and 'champagne': the hard against the soft, the caustic against the shining, sweet and intoxicating essence. More oppositions and dissonance appear in the second verse:

These things do I hang on your neck-
anchors and amulets
anacondas and amethyst

...

In the third verse we get a tellingly emblematic representation of the slave's master:

You've stayed in your temple
rainless and windless
lying dry as a dragon protecting its hoard.

The slave's resentment, lament and anger over his life of forced servitude grows to a climax as we read on:

Take then these treasures
they do me no good-
My back's gnarled and weighted.
My gait's lost its youth.
Take what you've killed for
and grant me my freedom.

The last two lines present a riddle, a decision that the individual reader must make for him/her self:

You asked me and I've given
What you had all along.

Are we now hearing the slave speak as we might initially imagine (this is a soliloquy, right?) or do we get a twist to the expected finale, and are we now hearing the master addressing the slave? Either way the ending presents us with an example of how peace, freedom and happiness cannot be seen or intimately experienced when we are absorbed in a life that is seeking gratification only at a corporeal and superficial level. This in no way justifies or negates the obviously dehumanizing plight of the slave's situation, or the master's eventual responsibility for his actions, but rather it puts things in a perspective which must be understood by our true essence and its higher calling to ultimately transcend the nature of this transient existence. As the mystics (both East and West) have always believed, the

physical world is ultimately an illusion, a reality created by our collective consciousness.

The book concludes with “New Idioms for Freud”; an appropriate and iconic figure to close this book and/or journey of dreams. It was Freud who saw dreams as the ego’s way to work through limitations of the ‘material’ world in order to fulfill its deepest desires. With “New Idioms” we enter into the psychological realm, but only to realize that it is where we’ve been all along. Our journey coming full circle brings us to a deeper understanding of the world of the conscious and unconscious, and hopefully leads us to an enlightened state of how to see ourselves and the world we live within.

~

New Mystic Alchemy augments our view of a conceived reality by expanding the potential of the imagination to envision an ‘alternate’ realm, one in which to experience life. And who’s to say which reality is ‘reality’? As is being discovered in quantum physics, we can only surmise what reality actually consists of and how it will, if ever, ultimately be revealed. We are being shown a world within a world, evolving and unveiling new dimensions and realms of possibilities. Likewise in Joey Madia’s poems we are presented with a panoramic view onto many diverse and varying landscapes. These are poems that are visionary in their scope, creating for the reader a similar world within a world, one in which we can experience an organic cohesive growth that leads to a gradual unearthing and a drawing out of our own intimate dreams and epiphanies.

Ric Carfagna