

# THE BODY AS LOVER

Trish Munn

*The sexual act is not for the depositing of seed. It is for leaping off into the unknown, as from a cliff's edge, like Sappho into the sea.*

D. H. Lawrence

When I was first asked to think about writing something on this subject, my automatic response was 'but it's all so long ago now; just a memory.' It's not that I am so very old (nor young), but it's a while since I had a lover - that is to say, I have not been sexually active for some time. I don't think I need go on, but it was interesting to catch my first response - 'oh sex' ... and the stirring interest.

Whether we like it or not we are sexual beings, and our sexuality is at the heart of our beingness. Why else does a room full of people suddenly wake up, stop in their tracks when they hear the mention of sex? It may be for any and all kinds of titillation but the fact remains that we are all plugged into this potent universal energy. 'Love makes the world go round.' Sexuality may or may not be part of love, but I suspect we are all deeply seeking the Beloved. That will mean different things to different people and to different traditions. I can only speak for myself here, but the very mention of the Beloved evokes in me a sense of deep deep longing for both mystical and sexual union - and the certainty that there is no difference between these two states of being. I am reminded of the powerful sexual imagery of the bride in the Song of Songs, 'My Beloved thrust his hand through the hole in

the door; I trembled to the core of my being. Then I rose to open to my Beloved, myrrh ran off my hands, pure myrrh off my fingers, on to the handle of the bolt. I opened to my Beloved.' Heady words . . . I can get a little drunk on them. This whole beautiful poem of the Song of Songs is full of longing and desire.

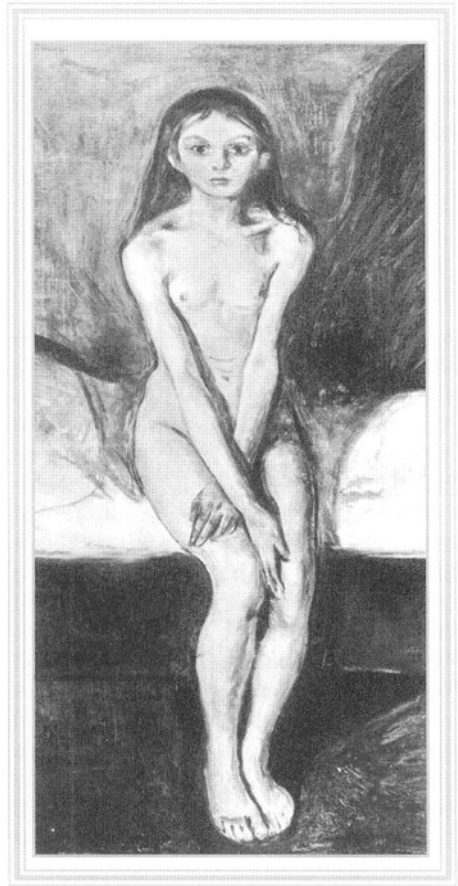
It's interesting to note that the word *sex* in fact comes from the Latin word meaning 'cut' (*secare, sectum*). John Welwood in *Journey of the Heart* says, 'sex cuts in the same way that meditation does; by shaking us loose from oppositional mind-sets and other mental distractions that keep us from feeling fully awake to the moment. When we experience it in this way - as a way of being present, rather than merely entertained - its sacred power can enter us. It strips away facades, exposing our pure, naked presence as nothing else can.'

For many of us, this doesn't seem to happen. I have had my fair share of lovers, 'hippie child of the sixties' as I was, but I realise now that much of the time I was hardly present at all, though I had no awareness of this. I didn't know really what it meant to be truly sexual. I didn't know that in order to be fully present, fully sexual, it was necessary to be fully embodied. I am only learning that now. Jack Kornfield in *After The Ecstasy, The Laundry* says, 'A loss of connection to embodied life is not just our individual predicament; this loss is embedded in the speed and pervasive disconnection of modern consumer society.'

It didn't take many of my young years before the area of genitals was somehow separated from the rest of my body, and like most children of my generation I was brought up to regard anything to do with them as something a bit nasty and shameful. My own private experience was different, and I enjoyed regular masturbation from the age of about four, even having my own unique word for it. I called it 'kiki.' But I knew it must be kept hidden and I'd be in trouble if I got caught. The message was clearly instilled that you don't touch yourself 'down there.' So began an upper body, lower body split.

During this time my young body was forming itself and adopting muscular and emotional strategies that would support me in the world and against the world. Not that I had any awareness of this of course. This is simply what we all do as we move through our lives, and depending on which particular defences we feel we need.

We live in micro/macro levels of reality. We are in our own particular story, but also in a much larger drama. Jung,



speaking of the necessary balance between our animal body and its connection through Eros to the highest forms of spirit says, 'The erotic instinct is something questionable and will always be so whatever laws may have to say on the matter. It belongs, on the one hand, to the original animal nature of man, which will exist as long as man has an animal body. On the other hand, it is connected with the highest forms of the spirit. But it blooms only when the spirit and instinct are in true harmony. If one or the other aspect is missing, then an injury occurs, there is a one-sided lack of balance which easily slips into the pathological. Too much of the animal

disfigures the civilised human being, too much culture makes for a sick animal.'

This is not dissimilar to what Welwood is saying and for me endorses the urgency of marrying the sacred to the sexual, and the urgency of recovering embodiment.

Awareness and responsibility are two words that come to mind when I read Jung's words. Perhaps responsibility follows naturally after awareness and it's only awareness that we need to be concerned with. Only! Again we're talking about multi-level layers of awareness, and if it happened all at once we'd probably explode into a thousand pieces with the shock of it! We didn't construct our defences for nothing. Our history is recorded and held in every cell in our body. This understanding is far from new and much work was done in the late 1950's by Alexander Lowen, John Pierrakos and others in what became known as bioenergetic therapy. In a nutshell bioenergetics rests on the simple proposition that each person is his/her body. Your body expresses who you are and your way of being in the world. The more alive your body is, the more you are in the world. 'A person is the sum total of his/her life experience, each of which is registered in their personality and structured in their body. Just as a woodsman can read the life history of a tree from a cross section of the trunk showing its annual growth rings, so it is possible for a bioenergetic therapist to read a person's life history from their body.'

However deceived I am by my mind or caught up in a maelstrom by my emotions, it is my body that will reveal the true story. Only my body is to be fully trusted. My poor old body that

I've mostly hovered around and lived a short distance from, not knowing any different.

It's funny how life happens - the synchronicity of it. Last week there's a knock at my door. I open it to see my old friend and 'could have been' lover standing outside. I haven't seen him for two years, and now he stands outside my door - as I attempt to write something about sexuality. This is someone who I've sensed instinctively could meet me sexually. Someone who is so at home and restful in his body I am somehow reminded of a graceful and alert cat. He in fact described himself as a lynx when I asked him 'what animal he was'. In my Medicine Cards it says, 'If Lynx is at your door, listen. Brother or Sister Lynx can teach you of your personal power and of things you have forgotten about yourself.'

I must say this brief visit did indeed put me in touch with things I'd forgotten about myself. I noticed how I had woken up. I noticed my features in the mirror had taken on a softer countenance, I was aware that something felt easier - more fluid, I was happier, more alive, more ready for life . . . plugged in again. I ask myself about this basic ache that I experience when I don't feel 'plugged in' to the mystery of life? It feels like I have lost a sense of connection with the rest of creation and I am only in touch with the pain of separateness and my own isolation within that. In time I forget that it can be any other way and harden myself simply to endure. Each cell in my body registers the disappointment of my heart.

This visit from the 'Lynx' reminded me of the wild elemental juiciness of sexuality. To be able to dive deeply into this element it is necessary to

have learnt that it is safe to fall. When we speak of 'falling in love' or 'falling asleep,' we are speaking of our ability to surrender ego control. Lowen says that, 'Anxiety stems from an internal conflict between an energetic movement in the body and an unconscious control or block set up to limit or stop that movement. These blocks are the chronic muscular tensions mostly in the striated or voluntary musculature which is normally under ego control. Conscious ego control is lost when the tension in a set of muscles becomes chronic. This does not mean that control is surrendered but that the control itself has become unconscious. Unconscious ego control is like a watchman or guard over whom the ego or personality has lost authority. It functions as an independent entity in the personality and gains power in direct proportion to the amount of chronic body tension. Charge, discharge, flow and movement are the life of the body which this guard must restrain and limit in the interest of survival. One wants to let go and flow, but the guard says, 'No, it's too dangerous.' This quality of surrender is identical to that which we're invited in our spiritual lives.

The surrender of the ego involves a descent of feeling in the body, a pulsing downward flow into the deep abdomen and pelvis. It is in this flow that the delicious melting occurs - one literally melts with love. And after the descent, the fall, there is the rising up. This, too, is an echo of our spiritual lives - the descent and the rising, this constant flow of movement. Do we dare to descend and lose our control?

Of all the primates, it is only human beings that make love through sex, as it is only human beings who lie front to front, with the softest parts of our

bodies fully exposed and in contact. There are at least two feeling centres located in the midsection of our soft front. Around the navel is the home of our gut feelings - where we experience erotic resonance with another person, and the area around the heart where we sense more delicate feelings of openness and surrender. Emotional exchange also takes place through the eyes and the mouth. Unlike other primates we exchange the energy of aliveness by making love face to face, belly to belly, and heart to heart. I find the vulnerability of this unbearably moving. It's not difficult to understand how and why we helped to create our own musculature armours that sadly go on to create the very thing that keeps us from the possibility of experiencing our sacred connection through sexuality.

Perhaps it will take until the end of all time to dance with grace in the balance of 'too much of the animal disfiguring the civilised human being, and too much culture making for a sick animal.' My hope is that as we try, we will be bold enough, brave enough, tender enough, and wise enough to listen to the voice of our wild spirit coursing through our veins and hearts.

### Further Reading

Welwood, John. (1991). *Journey of the Heart*, HarperCollins.

Kornfield, Jack, (2000). *After The Ecstasy, The Laundry*. Rider.

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Song of Songs, *Jerusalem Bible*, D.L.T. 1966

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