

Shelly McGlumphy - Fragments for delighters

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Glimmers – Towards a system

Before Shelly McGlumphy retreated into the twilight glimmers of what Dr. Carruthers referred to as “the infirmity of reason,” there was a time when she could sing with exceptional grace. She possessed a rare singing talent way beyond her ten years, and one of the most heartfelt compliments ever bestowed on her was when drunk shirtless people oozed forth from the verdant farm country to tap their feet, dance and yelp “Hell yeah!” at her songs during the Eaton Pig Festival.

The Ideal Thesis

Two years in a row Shelly took first place at the festival’s talent competition, beating out her classmate Oma Jean on the accordion the first year and a seventeen year old gay yodler from Gratis the second year. Seeing Oma Jean pinned with the scarlet second place ribbon pleased her into a convulsive fit of giggles, since Oma Jean was the insufferable goody-two-shoe type, the glowing, corn-colored hair princess, rosy and well-proportioned for her age, that aced everything and had taken up the endearing habit of berating Shelly with the jingle “Smelly Shelly” at every turn, because according to her, she shared common odors with a skunk.

The Manifold – Imagination has to bring the manifold of intuitions into the form of an image.

Just hearing someone sing, Shelly intuited how the person bared their soul. She could internalize the notes like delicious crumbs, feel them expand within, savour them in cherry mists and silky hues, and then generate the tones flawlessly, which was her tried and proved formula for reproducing Loretta Lynn and Barbara Mandrell favourites for her faceless audience of the shadows.

The Immediate Objects of the Mind

The third year of the talent competition, the year Shelly faced-off with Oma Jean once again, Shelly’s mother Constance, clueless and repressed as only a

mother could be, mopped her face in makeup and dressed her in a showy blue Charlie's Angels t-shirt and a frilled silk taffeta skirt. Constance insisted with a furiously wagged finger that her daughter needed to look "damn bona fide for this one." Huddled offstage with the other mothers and children downwind from a penetrating deep-fried Mars Bar aroma, Constance slugged back the remnants of her Schlitz beer and anchored her aqueous slit eyes on Shelly. "Hurrah to Shelly!" she exclaimed. "Hurrah!"

A Contestation to the Subject-Object Relation

"You're on in a minute... Go an' win dammit, don't let that Oma Jean take what's ours, ya hear? Jus' do it for the McGlumphys, alright honey... Nothin' gonna go wrong, your jus' gonna sing your littl' heart out and win. Remember the song, alright?"

"I hate this dress, ma. I told you, I don't look real," Shelly insisted, peering down with her intelligent eyes at the buoyant waves of taffeta that radiated out from her doll waste. She could have cared less about her song or the lousy talent competition that had tormented her in the mossy bowels of her psyche for weeks, but the last thing she wanted was to shimmy around on stage country-style like if she had a smile problem. Looking like a sell-out country girl was her nagging fear. She'd never live it down at school for the rest of her days, she was sure of it. She could hear, like a growing echo, the bloodthirsty children collected in their terror squads at the school gates, mercilessly chanting "Smelly Shelly! Smelly Shelly!" Someone would surely punch her face... and enjoy it.

"Dang, girl, jus' shut up, I mean it..." Irritation throbbed in Constance's voice, and Shelly noticed that her cheeks, normally two petite red apples, had lost their radiant flush and were overcome with a moist ash colour.

"But I hate this dress, ma, I hate it I told you..." Shelly whined softly. She pled for mercy one last time for whatever it was worth, because she knew full well what the terror squads could do to a person's insignificant ant-like life. "Please don't make me..." Before Shelly could liberate another squeak out of her tiny mouth she felt the sting of Constance's wrathful hand cut across her face. It was as if God had come down and struck her. The impact was swift, precise, and calculated even for a drunk woman, and it took a few seconds for the avalanche of pain to rush in and ignite the area.

Embarrassed, Shelly never shed a tear. She wanted to cry, but she activated every filament of strength in her restless fingers to choke back her tears so her mascara wouldn't run and anger Constance further. "Sorry" was all Shelly said, but it was a hollow, tin "Sorry," too malleable, too feathery and sonorous, that it wasn't even worth the breath it was carried on.

Constance clutched Shelly's stick arm and rudely wiped back a long, thin leaf of hair behind her ear. "Jus' get out there and don't let me hear 'nother word outtaya or you'll get it, I swears it. Ya have no idear how much that damn outfit costs, do ya my littl' princess? Now, do ya my little angel?"

Theory of Empathy – A refutation and antithesis

When Shelly finally was called out on stage, she stood underneath the warm lights a few moments basking in their humming glow. Before her was an infinite field of darkness. Faces existed in it, heartbeats too, but she could not see or feel them. When she finally began to sing, it was obvious that Shelly McGlumphly, contestant number 7 from West Alexandria, Ohio, stole the show. Quite simply, Shelly performed as if Liberace himself had descended from the Heavens in a sumptuous black and gold smoking suit and blessed her vocal chords with a flick of his divine finger. Constance was ecstatic when Shelly handed her the first prize ribbon, and she proceeded to wave it about as if her hand were on fire, and she extolled with bloated pomp the virtues of her daughter, a pureblood McGlumphly. "I knew from the day the Lord gave her to me, she was gonna be a gifted child, like her grandma an' me... see, we used to sing a little too, ya know? We McGlumphys, we jus' a littl' diff'rent I guess." There was no stopping Constance either. The remainder of the evening was spent adoring the ribbon and spewing miraculous tales about the McGlumphly line, and after a healthy dozen of Schlitz beers had massaged her innards, she even spoke of long lost uncles, aunts and cousins of the Civil War, and of how they had all contributed in some form or other to the betterment of mankind. "Jus' the McGlumphly way, is all," she'd say with a matter-of-fact tilt of the head.

What would Adorno have said?

At the school gates the following day, Oma Jean waited patiently with her underlings curling her long hair with their nervous fingers. There was a swishing in her eyes, she tapped her feet fretfully, and laughed a little louder than usual.

Every now and again, she quickly glanced down the street. Swirling around her like small hateful planets, children skipped and screamed, knowing full well that Shelly would be along soon; yes, Shelly would be along soon – the 8.50 am bell would announce the beginning of the school day.

Head down in thought and with her thumbs perched on her backpack shoulder straps, Shelly appeared before her nemesis.

“Smelly Shelly! Smelly Shelly!” were the first words out of Oma Jean’s mouth (it was custom). Dozens of detestable eyes honed in on Shelly as she backed up a couple of paces. Silence infused the moment in her mind like a bath of the warmest sunshine, and then Oma Jean’s fist came upon her.

No one said a word as Shelly fell to the ground. Bleeding from the nose, she began to whimper. Then Oma Jean rested her hands on her hips and said with a biting tone: “Didn’t ya jus’ look so pretty yesterday. I mean gosh Shelly, even my mama says you was pretty.”

“Sorry,” said Shelly crying. This “Sorry” was no tin sorry. She meant it.

“I hate it when my mama says you was pretty. I mean, I hate it!” Oma Jean leaned in and smacked Shelly repeatedly while the children around her watched and snickered. Then they too joined in and kicked her, then ran away like spooked deer.

Prior to that day, Shelly believed certain things about life, the things children normally do when they’re only ten years old. She believed, for instance, in what pastor Jud Ahmos had instructed her with kind words on leading a righteous and spiritual life and to always, always trust in Jesus (something he never managed to do); she also believed in the tooth fairy, even though she’d forgotten to pay out on four teeth; and she believed in what her English teacher told her about the happiness of being a grown up, and she believed, mostly, in secrets, rainbows, and ghosts that lived under bridges and dined on children’s toes. Yet, the instant she uttered the word “Sorry” at Oma Jean’s feet she knew her life would change. There was even something in the way she said it that didn’t seem quite right. The word refused to fly from her mouth, her tongue at first declined to budge, but she forced it, and pushed and pushed. Once the S had slithered through her teeth, the rest of the word, with its Y-shaped tail, scurried behind it and it was done. And Oma Jean, standing imperiously over her like Hannibal over Rome, relished at how the word kissed her ears.

“Ah. Look, she’s sorry. Now I should just say ‘Thank you,’ ain’t that right?” said Oma Jean. Recognizing defeat, Oma Jean remained defiant, and she simply skipped to class when the bell rang like nothing had happened.

Synthesis

The blood that trickled from Shelly’s nose stained more than her lips that day. It had enveloped her swiftly deep within. The inner silence, like the warm feeling that blanketed her before she uttered the ugly word “sorry” and meant it, had become known to her like a prophetic revelation she had read in the Gospel of Mark, and it had grown so terribly large and comforting that it choked her. When “sorry” had suddenly depreciated in sixth grade and the terror squads moved on to more rigorous forms of arousing payment, it tightened its hold further, burrowing below into the dimness, and choked her still a little more. Then again, a pinch more, when Constance beat into her the importance of the McGlumphly line at the string of talent competitions in Oklahoma, Indiana and Kansas that she refused to participate in the following year. And then a little more when Jesus, both man and myth, was not a simple matter of blind faith, and then a little more when she freed herself from Constance, from West Alexandria, from her odious school, and headed to Chicago, where she descended into one of those ghoulish underworlds of experimentation that change a person; and then still a little more during her years of itinerancy, of scrounging and begging in Washington and Oregon, of lice, pneumonia, and rape in California; and a little more for this or that, until only the inner silence remained, master of every inch of territory like a foul, resurrected God.