



GRADIVA

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**Texts and Images Spun from the gait of Gradiva:
An Ode by Billie Chernicoff
*with responses from
Robert Kelly and Tamas Panitz,
and images by Charlotte Mandell***

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Charlotte Mandell, and Tamas Panitz.

As she has sprung out of the imagination of a fictional character she may be considered unreal twice over.

—from Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gradiva>

In her was embodied something humanly commonplace — not in a bad sense — to a degree a sense of present time, as if the artist, instead of making a pencil sketch of her on a sheet of paper, as is done in our day, had fixed her in a clay model quickly, from life, as she passed on the street, a tall, slight figure, whose soft, wavy hair a folded kerchief almost completely bound; her rather slender face was not at all dazzling; and the desire to produce such effect was obviously equally foreign to her; in the delicately formed features was expressed a nonchalant equanimity in regard to what was occurring about her; her eye, which gazed calmly ahead, bespoke absolutely unimpaired powers of vision and thoughts quietly withdrawn.

— from Wilhelm Jensen's *Gradiva: A Pompeiian Fancy*

Billie Chernicoff

GRADIVA

She who walks
walking, the
woman who walks
that woman
walking, a woman
perpetually walking
the splendid one
“unreal
twice over”
thus real, who walks
with her sisters
the three who walk
early, in the dew.

The dew, called
“what is it?” called
Dieu,
the teaching water
drops of the night
love that doctors love.

She who does not stride
who does not go dreamily
who is real, who walks
with naked foot
who lifts her foot and
sets it down

sets her heel down
in wet grass
she whose toes, whose
arch, the arch of whose foot
whose foot lifts
and flexes, whose toes
press the earth
whose heel is firm, whose
feet walk without thinking
she who walks off
or walks ahead
even of her sisters.

Across the wet field
of knowing,
who has risen early
who hears the owl
and mourning dove.

She who lifts her skirt
who lifts the heavy cloth
the folds of, the garment
the stuff of her skirt
who gathers in her hand
the soft heavy cloth
and lifts it up off the ground
walking with wet feet and ankles
with cool feet in the dew.

With warm thighs under her skirt
under the cloth, her warmth
her thighs that touch each other
softly as she walks, as she walks away
from chaos, history, obsession

she to whom the walls of the city
are as mist.

The rhythm of sisters
rhythm of hips, the
deep socket of the back
where the sway is,
spine uplifted
spine rising up out of
the cleft of the buttocks
the back rising, the torso
rising up out of the hips
the spine as if sailing over
and her gaze also,
sails over the field.

Each step lifts her
it is a rocking
and a sailing,
a moving forward
while hovering.

The unthinking acts of the feet
knees and hips, the hinges, the slip
the synovial fluency, the slip of her
thighs overtaking each other
the genital slip, the smallest dew.

Unreal twice over, therefore
real, she walks away
ahead of those who imagine her
who remember her, who deny
invent and pursue her, who

are perplexed, refreshed
comforted, pleased by her
who are pleased, vexed
shaken by her, who confuse her
with her name, she slips away.

She balances, acquiesces
goes forward.
Her gaze encompasses
it rests lightly
it is steady, her gaze is
as a sailing ship.

It is a pleasure to her
it is her pleasure
the pressure
of her foot on the earth
the earth
pleasures her
presses back against her
wet, naked feet.

The warmth of her clothes
her own warmth.

The dew is in her skirt
her cloth, her clothes
her hem heavy with dew
it can not be helped
her skirt, a silent book
her hem rains little drops
love doctoring love.

The moisture, the cloud
of breath, the breath of earth
her own perfume under her skirt
and in her armpit and breath
the perfume of her sisters
of the grass, even of her name,
all of these are in the air.

Yet she is free
of our supplication
free of our promises
and our imaginings
free of our books.
Her wet skirt is her book,
the wet she will wring out
the solvent, she who
resolves, who absolves
and reveals.

Your father is a dream.
Your mother the cry of a mourning dove
your sisters the laughter of her sisters.
She heals the letters of your name one by one.
She leaves her wet footprints in you.

The sun and the moon are in the sky.
The morning star is in the sky,
a wet flame. How pale the moon is.
How at one everything is in her gaze.

You are one of those
who walk with her

wait for her, become her
marry and abandon her.

You dream you are her only errand.

She who advances,
who rose, who rises
and walks on,
splendid in walking.

She who slips between columns.

Do not forget to be her.
Do not forget to be her lover
and her husband.
Remember
to be the mourning dove,
remember to be the moon.

Freud is sleeping his animal sleep, his own male sleep, in his own warmth and perfume, his own dream. His eyeglasses on the night table, his pen and notebook, his book of dreams. His soft beard, his quiet breathing, his cock hardening, the dreams of his body. His couch of dreams, his house of dreams, the language of dreams dreaming the walking woman walking through dew with her sisters, his wet dream. He dreams she will wake him. He dreams he will dry her feet and rest his dream-heavy head on her lap.



Robert Kelly

**SIGMUND FREUD'S
UNPUBLISHED REFLECTIONS ON GRADIVA**

When I lie on my couch, of course, I analyze myself. I talk, sometimes sotto voce, more often just in my head. Mostly I speak in my own Vienna German, *r*-less as these English, sometimes in French when I want to keep a little secret from myself. But I do speak.

My couch is in a crowded little room I call my study, for what I study there is myself. I keep the room crowded as possible with pictures and photos in frames, shelves full of bibelots, cushions, spreads, afghans, pillows. There is a standing lamp that shines its light on nothing but the ceiling – illumination by reflection is, after all, what we seek in thinking about ourselves. There are little tables here and there, I forgot why they're round me, I forget they're there, stumble into them sometimes when I rise from self-study. I am a true auto-didact, I learn myself.

So I seem to be in a punning mood this morning, why not, I let myself stumble through language as I stumble around my shady, crowded room. *Lapsus*, a fall – my commentators have come to call it the 'Freudian slip,' as if I had made it first. *Lapsus*, I love that word, and here in London it has *laps* in it – lovely word we don't have in German – we have bosom, we have knees, but no word for the tender, erotic, chair-like amplexus made up of thighs and belly and chest, where roses are tossed, and children repose and ladies settle down on their lovers.

I keep the room as crowded as can be – the more things, the less to think. Things invite thoughts, but banish thinking. I don't want stuff in my mind, I want it out there on the walls, carpets, tables, shelves. Under glass or under dust, matters little. They are all antiques, protected from currency, safe from now.

When I'm in my study I commonly wear my slippers, but when I lie down for a conversation with myself, I kick off the slippers and set my feet free at the end of the couch. My upper body rests on the upslope of the couch, so I see my feet down there, a whole me away from my gaze.

And above my feet, the Girl walks. *Gradiva*. We are feet to feet now – the *relievo* plaque on which she strides is set on the wall so that her feet will be just above mine. I am walking up into the air, she walking in stone to meet me there.

Gradiva means something like The Walking Woman. I see her though as younger, a teenage girl. Her face is not that of the noble Attic goddesses – her face is younger, cuter, the face of a pert and pretty shopgirl at Harrod's, or a girl I might have seen flirting with two university students in the Prater. It comforts me that she is young and pretty, barefoot, walking my way. Walking to meet me.

Coming to me.

That is the important part of our interview. Whatever gets said or thought or implied or intuited, she is always coming to meet me. I am not bereft. Whatever she may be bringing – her veiled nubile graceful long slender body, her playful mood, the dreams she's going to claim are her own, her memories of the sculptor's hands that shaped her, the sadistic instruments of chisel and mallet that made her as beautiful as she is, ah, *Schönheit muss leiden*, we say, as the French say *il faut souffrir pour être belle*. What do the English say? (What do the English know about suffering? We Viennese could tell them a lot. We

Jews could tell them more). You need to suffer to be beautiful? Who is this 'you' of whom the English speak so glibly?

Her memories, then, of how she came to be. Her memories real, recovered, imagined, pretended. Imagine means to think something up. Pretend means to claim it's true.

I lie there and she comes to me. She has been coming to me for two thousand years, ever fresh, appealing, brave, barefoot in this cruel world, hurrying forward to meet what is to come. What an image of health! I think I love to see her also because with her comes the whole ancient world. She brings me Sophocles and Pindar, Virgil, Lucretius my master. In a sense, her veiled body brings me Isaiah and the Psalms too, her body is hidden, the hiddenness of God we are bidden to protect by making no image of beast or person. Yet here she is, all pagan, and here she is, all veiled and abscondite, her body filmed over with the veil of the Holy of Holies.

Sometimes she reproaches me, speaking of Jerusalem. Sometimes she tells me I am not Jewish enough, that I have tried to put all that behind me, or veil it over. For each one of us is a God, should I say G-d, a god in his own temple. I am a God and I am the temple of that God.

When I think such thoughts, she frowns. She seems to imply that my thinking is grandiose, thrilling perhaps but unfounded, the kind of thought a *Luftmensch* might have, how shall we say that in Britain, an air-head? She seems to pout a little, as if the mild blasphemy of my self-apotheosis displeased her. Maybe she wants to be my god. And why not?

She lets me think beneath her flowing dress, lets me present myself, votary, at the mill of splendor she runs between her thighs, she lets me stroll about on her legs, her back, her lap, all the unseen places from which meaning comes.

Meaning is never overt. Meaning is the name we give to *understanding disclosed*. That is why psycho-analysis works, why it is necessary. There is no meaning except that which we seek and find. Seek is as important as find.

Sometimes when I have turned down the lamp and this northern latitude brings evening early, she is able to overcome her shyness (or is it my shyness?) and come near me, tease me, touch me, stretch out beside me. Or upon me. Sometimes she takes me in her mouth, the way the woman I called Dora never did, though she wanted to, I wanted her to. But you can't have everything, as I tell my patients, though I say it at greater length, usually with quotations from Goethe or Lichtenberg. But secretly I tell myself I can have everything, and if I couldn't, what would be the point of the whole thing? *Wozu, wozu das ganze Spiel*, as Pfitzner has his tenor sing, poignant with sad rapture. I remember that opera, beautiful once before the Nazis took him up as their pet *komponist*. But music, art, cannot survive its political deployment, any more than a man can get rid of the smell of his own armpits, the taste of his spittle.

But I was speaking of her, and this digression was clearly evasion. (Evasion, far from being evil, is a necessary part of the search. Evasion tells you that you are hiding from something. Solve for what that something is.)

Yes, Gradiva. She comes to me sometimes with an odd look on her face, and somehow it doesn't seem so pretty anymore. Different. As she comes close, bends to be near me, I start to be afraid. I think she is coming to circumcise me with her teeth. Her sharp little regular gleaming teeth.

No, no, I almost cry to her, I am circumcised already!

No, no, she answers, You are not circumcised enough. I will bring you right.

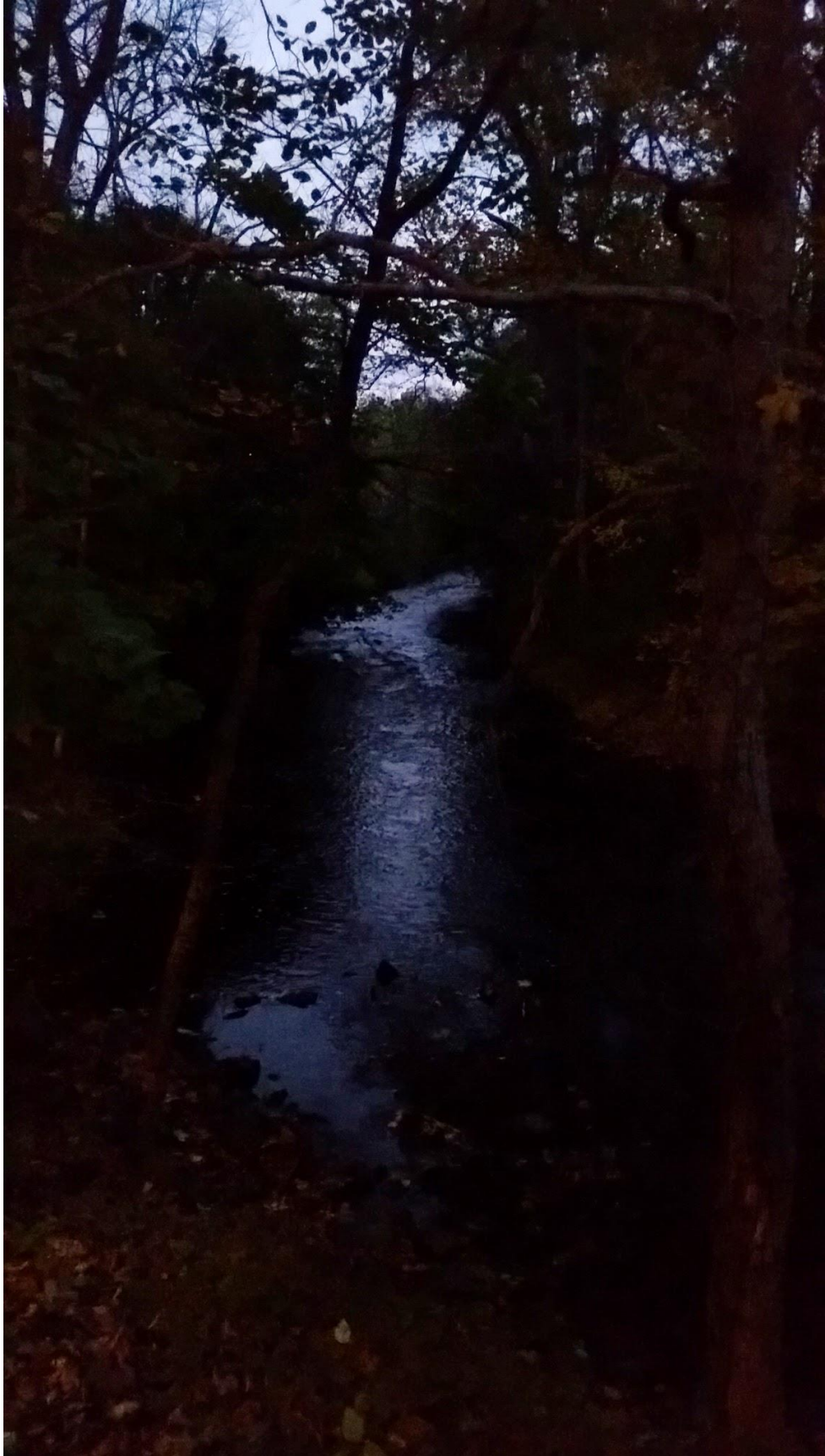
Then I pull myself out of that now-menacing reverie, make sure she's back on her tablet on the wall, shake my shoulders free of the pressure of her imagined hands holding me down. I sit up then, or even stand and turn on the lamp.

But all the while I'm fascinated, haunted really, by the strange thing she has just said: *I will bring you right*. What can it mean? It isn't English, is it, some local idiom? Subtly I've asked natives about the phrase, using it myself even, and they look at me with pity-for-the-poor-foreigner in their eyes. So nobody knows what she means.

But I begin to understand. Maybe what we lose is what defines us. Maybe circumcision itself was meant as a shared wound, no meaning but a wound that all men shared. All the real men. The hurt and the sharing. I must someday involve myself with circumcision, yes, that's what my ancient girl friend, my votary as I am hers, is trying to tell me. Is telling me.

I remember a Gentile friend asking once, in pretended innocence, You people talk about the Birth Trauma; what about the Circumcision Trauma: isn't that an even sharper agony? Are the circumcised and the uncircumcised forever alienated from each other by the presence or absence in them of that trauma, and all its consequences?

A smart question, I suppose. I don't want to think about it, not yet, at least. This is my hour with Gradiva. I feel the wafture of her body from her veils, I see her eyes, merry and not menacing now, looking for me across the eternal green field she strolls across, coming to me. I will stay in the dark until she finds me.



Tamas Panitz

FRAGMENTS FROM THE PAPYRUS

The dew
found me.
Walked by,

footstep
from sky

sky
from where it must have been

the characters branded me.
A felon's mark
she wrote

me on the grass I
her sign.

When I was with
I was somehow all wrapped in
snake. A piece
of water

undid everything,
their state, beyond the others

she went, a destruction
she held the secret
I was

no need to look.

I was.

Harbored through the party

an amphora, with golden snakes in delicate

she would not part with
begged by her evil sisters

broke through presently

the eunuchs were heard to whisper for even such a mind
she was

from the grand windows one saw
perhaps invented

no one had noticed the knife
an amount of blood proportionate
yet high and low the guards could find no trace.



