

Why I Love Anjelica Huston

Personal Essay

by b. b. brown

During childhood, there was a person who permeated my daily life: Judy Garland. In reflection, it seems that it must have been around the age of puberty when my symptoms went from sullenness to shrieking. A fantastic pulse of emotional energy drove my moods from depression to unreasonable euphoria to an even more profound depression. A good day came to be a gray day, neither happy nor sad, just slightly down. Since happiness seemed to trigger intense and prolonged pain, happiness became a danger signal. And then somewhere about the age of twelve or thirteen, before death was yet a presence for me, Judy entered my life.

The first vivid recollection of severe and unaccountable pain was when I read a short account of her life and death. The tragedy of the story sank a hook in me on which I squirmed for years. It was not possible for me to grasp the Holocaust at that age, and I'm still not sure that I can, but Judy's single, needless death symbolized an immediate fact--the horror of a compromised life, of a wasted human being.

Although I have since endured depression and pain, nothing has ever exceeded that merciless string of days following the revelation of Judy. Her name and face and voice reverberated through my mind every day and every night. By indirection, any word or thought could prompt her image. Any feeling could prompt her image. And with it came pain.

Over time, though, a strange and welcome thing blossomed in my world. An identity grew between us, an identity of pain and persistence, drawing us into one. In a very real sense, Judy and I became friends. Standing firmly at my shoulder as I struggled, she shared my life's trivialities and hopes with unlimited compassion. While the pain associated with her life became less intense, less frequently did her image pop into my mind; when it did, it was a warm presence supporting me through years of desolate moments.

It is embarrassing to admit, but Judy was not the only "crush" of my young life. There was a long line of them. Each is still cherished, faithless as I am, as one simultaneously cherishes a Michelangelo sculpture, a Rembrandt etching, and a play by Shakespeare. Diana Rigg, Barbara Stanwyck, Audrey Hepburn, Katharine Hepburn,

Carrie Fisher--all of them are stored away in my own personal collection, like works of art once deeply felt, living in the flesh of memory.

One living work of art was Morticia Addams from the television series, "The Addams Family". Mind you, not Carolyn Jones the actress, nor Mrs. Addams the character, but Carolyn Jones as she embodied the matriarchic Morticia. At once she was passionate and unapproachable, loving and stern, fierce with pride and humble in the presence of truth. Who could dare to touch such a creature? Might they not disfigure the perfection? What curse might come upon them for impiety? No real woman could be so desirable and so frightening.

No real woman could be, unless that woman is a person like Anjelica Huston: not classically beautiful, but emanating grace and sensuality; not one who settles for what they are, but who seeks the ideal that should be. This is a person who recreates themselves in the image of the beautiful.

Life can be harsh, unjust, even murderous. There must be something to which to cling that washes these things away, puts them into their proper little holes, and imbues existence with richness. There must be something which asserts itself without the blind smash of a fist. There must be something that is the essence of life at its best despite existence at its worst. There must be.

For me, it is beauty: not prettiness, nor life without vitality, nor eroticism without resonance, but the beauty which holds life together. It gives the courage to say no when it must be said. It knows when hypocrisy and fraud smile in its face. It keeps us going despite the fact of horror. Beauty, the phoenix creating itself from the ashes, blesses the struggle of existence with meaning.

My particular life amounts to a couple of good but unpublished short stories, some published articles, an unproduced comedic play, several unproduced scripts including one that was a finalist for the 1991 National Playwright Conference, and a selection of still pictures that isn't bad. It isn't much to show for the hard years I've endured. At least, it isn't much when one considers the only true measure--quality. Quality living, quality work: the two are inextricably bound together.

The creative fact of life and of its capacity for beauty give meaning to this "real" world of horror; and they are the things which bind me to my bare, forked existence. Nothing else is strong enough. Nothing else can wash away the pain and the horror. I love life.

How could I not love Anjelica Huston?

Anjelica Huston

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