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Kathy Acker

MEMORY (ONE KIND OF TIME)

It was a long hot summer. She lay moaning on the fields where the straw grew. The sun's blaze was so hot it had turned the grass into straw. One of her hands crept down to the pale printed old material as a slight breeze fluttered under it. Her hand was resting on her knee. She wasn't aware of what she was doing. A slight restlessness made her turn her knees, bent, just to the right. The sun was blazing her face. She felt that. Placing her hand on her cunt hairs, she cupped the slope; then, raising her hand, the third finger tip running lightly up the flesh turned to the inside. The flesh was as red as the burgundy of the country.

Behind her the hills were yellow. Not the color of gold, but a yellow that is greenless: dry shrubs tiny little animals who have nowhere to hide long dusty roads minute hills roll up and up so that before each hill there seems to be one long upward rise then roll; the real hill equals the roll, the rise of the earth's breast. Its nipple is dry yellow-as-dust holding-shrubbery-tossed-together-with-stones; but nothing's visible except the rise, for light almost blinds the eye. A carriage would be lost to human sight: a tiny black speck. Speck among specks. Another stone. A slingshot caught among rocks. It goes on and on. There're no absolute decisions. Rising part way up one of the hills, in its middle, there's a carriage. Three brown wagons follow the closed carriage. They move around a curve, then aren't seen again by the non-existent human eye.

It was the year 1860. The Garibaldis had just landed in Palermo. Then the Prince and his huge family fled from the Garibaldis through these hills. All around them the yellow wasn't now gold but white: parched, waterless. They weren't hopeless, but just uncomfortable always maintaining over discomfort, even when it becomes pain, that rigidity of control, that is, appearance apparent: the family's women aren't delicate and don't faint; the men who've spent their lives laying back in lawn chairs and feeding gaping-mouthed cockers are. The priest, a short fat man who sides with Garibaldi but has to do as his master dictates, shrinks into one corner of the carriage.

The youngest son, actually a nephew but since he's treated as a son is, is gorgeous. Black hair black eyes and white skin fighting each other parallel the sun's whitening of the earth. His clothes in contrast to his family's aren't rumpled, but slovenly in a manner that denotes the highest bohemian elegance. He just fought with the Garibaldists. Wounded.

When they returned to Palermo, the town had already, though not yet openly, welcomed the Garibaldini. A sleazy toady who has plenty of brains but keeps them hidden within unctiousness is the new mayor. The Prince's old flunky, a thin man in a tan coat torn every which way possible, is keeping his mouth shut. The women look up to the men as if they want to be raped. When The Prince walks in to vote, out of respect the mayor halts the election. Tiny crystal cordials hold brilliant red, clear, and brown liqueurs. The Prince votes for Garibaldi and when his fat priest hesitates, The Prince says, "You're not allowed to vote because every priest's a foreigner." The Garibaldini had changed nothing in the town: The Prince still ruled Palermo.

That night there was a festival in honor of Garibaldi's unanimous victory. The Prince saw the mayor's daughter as she stood on the balcony and listened to her father who was orating with pride. The Prince desired her. Her eyes were fixated on her father.

Human desire creates a story.

During a long hot afternoon while The Prince was hunting with his flunky, Ciccio, he asked Ciccio his opinion of their new mayor:

"How did you vote in the election?"

"I thought voting was supposed to be secret."

"It doesn't matter now."

After more egging, "I voted against Garibaldi."

"I told you to vote for Garibaldi. He's the better of two possible evils."

"How can I remain faithful to you and at the same time vote for Garibaldi? I voted against Garibaldi, yet the new mayor announced the vote was unanimously pro-Garibaldi. So it's as if I never voted; I don't exist."

"Do you know the mayor's wife?"

"She's an animal. She can't read nor hardly write. She can't speak. That sleazy Mayor keeps her under lock and key. But I've seen her because one afternoon I spied her through a hole in the church wall while she was praying. She's beautiful."

Some while later as they're standing between a tree's leafless arms: "What about their daughter?" This is the question The Prince wanted to ask all along. But he was unable to ask directly.

"She's as good and clean as her mother's an animal. She's paradise." He kisses his fingers, "She loves animals and everyone loves her."

"Don't talk that way, for now she's part of my family and above you. I've giving her to my nephew in marriage."

"You can't do that! This connection'll ruin your family: her grandfather's a peasant they call 'Mr. Shit.'"

"Her father's now politically powerful and wealthy. You're a fool."

The Prince's desire for the daughter's making him marry his elegant nephew to her.

The Prince to himself: Alone. Alone my heart. This, for you. I've decided I love you. This is a decision. I like being alone and I love you. Black dress all rumpled up into the sofa. I want to say this: this is *I love you*. I hope that we'll carefully fashion, though there's no human who can do anything, our loving because it's slow and sure and we're smart. Are we smart? I'm doing this for you because I love you.

:My heart.

:I woke up this morning and I needed you. I screamed. "She's going to leave me." I know I don't know if you're going to leave me. I screamed, "She's going to leave me." The scream is my realization I need you. There's nothing I can do about it. Nevertheless I'm calm, though I might end up in disaster; either there's disaster or there's happiness.

Red and navy and umber and deep purple.

Soldiers descended on the town. Red white and blue clothed soldiers lay dead on the street. Tancredi, the nephew, had just fought at Palermo against the Garibaldinists. The Prince exulted in the return of the monarchy. The priest informed him that a sexless and spineless female relative of his adored and wanted to marry Tancredi. The Prince replied he was about to marry his nephew to the mayor's daughter cause he wanted money for his family. The mayor's daughter's absolute sensuality owned him now. The Prince began to act:

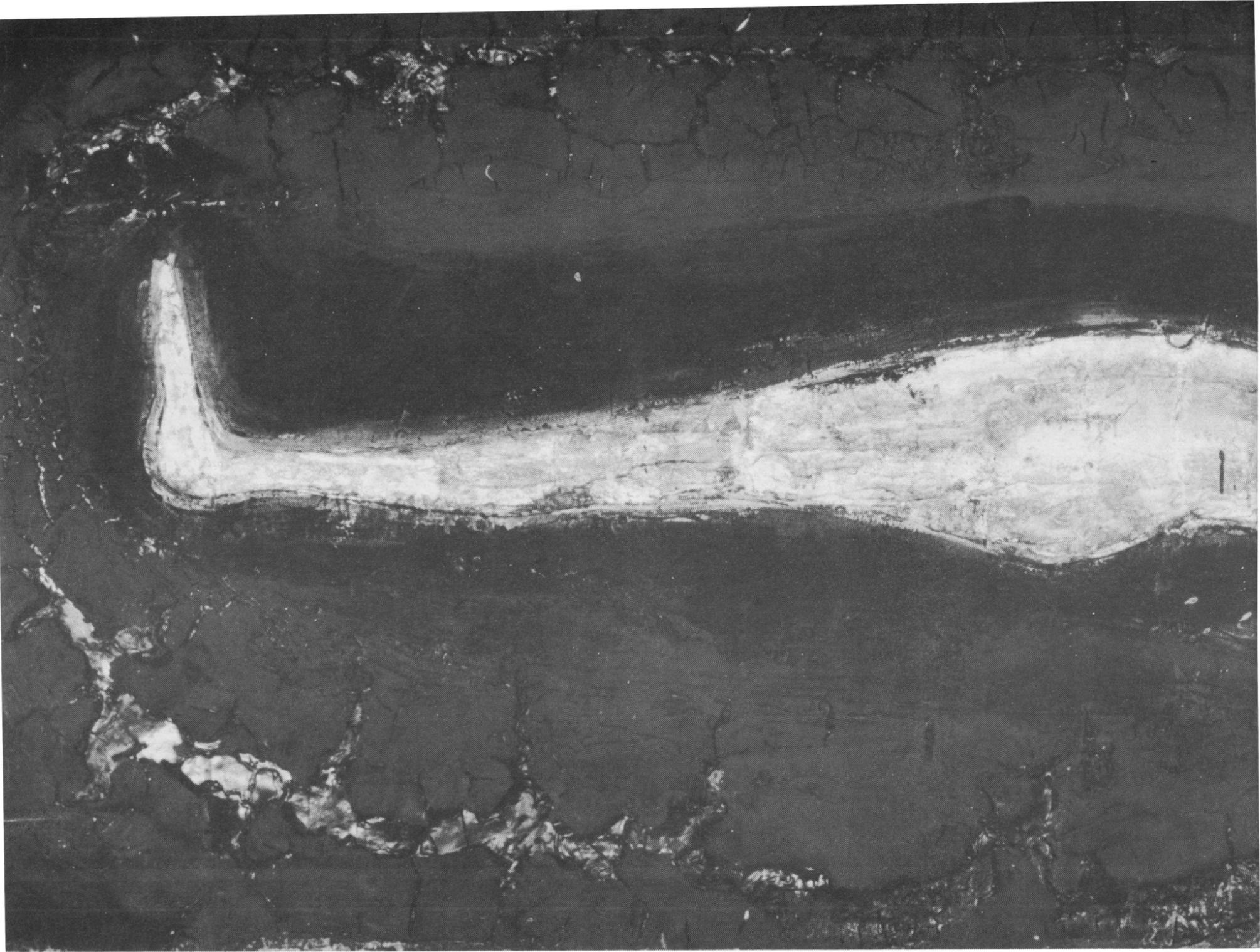
The daughter and Tancredi physically and mentally obsessed each other. Their lips were on each others'.

The Prince: I don't want you if I'm going to have to feel this pain. I don't want you, or rather I don't want these feelings of wanting you more than anything else in the world. If having these feelings which you blithely call *love*, means most of the days I live through are spent in wanting that which can't be relieved: this is no fucking way to live and I won't stand for it.

:I have to erase you out of my life so I can keep on living. No matter how passionate no matter how perfect no matter how deep the love, it fades and there's nothing. I won't stand for it.

:I've never felt anything such as this in my life. No. Those are your words. I'm too tired to speak now, my darling.

:I refuse to give up a love which I believe's good. I believe it's good because it's not linear, just an obsession; but calm, rich, and many-angled. Her father visited me. The mayor's physically little and apparently a fool. Since his social



idiocy masked social power allied to intelligence, I welcomed the fool.

I can't remember what either person said.

The Prince: Since from far away, since from far away in my mind, I watch them kiss, I know I can't have her. When she kisses him, her eyes're looking at me. She has told me that she knows she owes everything to me including her marriage. I answered she owed me nothing. I loved her. She put her right hand on my cheek, and with it, she kissed me. It's very easy for a woman to tell a man she loves him.

:When she tells me 'I love you,' she means 'You'll never have me.'

:My cock's full for no reason at all.

:The first room in my castle: I can't talk: it hurts too much. Sexual desire dumbs. Sexual desire stops

:The second room: I've got to talk, I've got to tell you sexual desire's making the world impossible. You've a future husband to whom you're faithful. You only want me because you want a boyfriend in another country who doesn't quite want you so you're safe in imagining you're running to and adoring him. Does your marriage demand this fantasy? At the same time, since you want a love strong enough to force you to break up your marriage, you're pushing for more and more emotional violence despite your wanting this person who doesn't quite love you. Such a world isn't possible.

:The third room: You don't exist: When you're with Tancredi, he owns you. He tells you which people you're going to see. He tells you how you'll be occupied during each of your waking hours. He controls the money. He allows you to fuck other men. He gives you your work.

ABANDONMENT

The world is memory. I don't remember anymore because I refuse to remember anymore because all my memories hurt.

The Leopard equals these memories. I'll remember: I won't repress I won't be a zombie, despite the pain, I will have life. This is why *The Leopard's* romantic.

Band. The Mayor's Daughter: I was wearing a red velvet flounced though cut to the thigh skirt black velvet cut equally close though without shoulders or neck above, tiny black suede bowed shoes, ebony-and-silver around the neck. I brought the man who was living with me who was intelligent. He was going to abandon me the next morning. I've finally learned manners. I greet my hostess innocently, slightly haughtily, and distantly. Such distance is a grace which allows other people to act as they wish or need without fearing my judgement. Though my background and my manners have been

considered poor, now I have enough money and I'm so beautiful, many men want me. I don't know if they want more than this image of affluence and sensuality. Men now announce, from a distance which they've chosen, they adore me and haven't ever met any girl like me. But anyway people're treating me as if they look up to, rather than down on, me; so I find it easier to be at a ball, at this ball, so I can start to pay attention to what I'm seeing.

The Prince finds all this death-in-life in bad taste, especially since he's aware he's going to die soon. Sexual desires no longer interest him: he's hurt and been hurt too many times. All these older women have been his mistresses. Once sexual desire has passed, its object always disgusts. These women're no longer beautiful . . . except for Tancredi's fiancée.

The Prince: Since I want her and I know my sexual desire's declining and I've little time left to live, my desire is violent. Italians eat too much starch. Because I'm finding my own mental processes increasingly fascinating, I'm tending to have less to do with what or whom bores me. Less and less I know the rules of normal (social) reality; less and less I care about my ignorance. I'm anonymous: I'm at this party just like I'm watching a movie. No event touches me.

ON DEATH:

The Prince: As if I'm in a ball, I'm looking. For a long time I've been looking, from room to room, gorgeously decorated room after sumptuous silk room, dreamed room after sumptuous silk room, looking for I don't know what . . . Why? . . . Rational knowledge: Nothing matters. No one here knows me. I can do anything I want in a social situation. My sexual desire, sometimes overfull and sometimes minimal, is distant from me.

The Prince's rationality: Only intelligence can grab me. I want an intelligent friend. Since I've no such person, I've no language.

:In this world of nothing-and-no-one-matters, what is there? A palace which I've created or rationality. Every day the palace is larger and stronger. It's the place through which I'm walking. It's the place in which I'm less and less tired.

The Prince's irrationality: (: I'm ((again)) in the old house which is taller than wide and wood. I'm climbing up narrow gray ((carpetted)) stairs. At the same time I'm descending. The middle rooms, which I've seen before, 're libraries or like libraries. Books cram their shelves. Each room is more magical.

(: For the first time I've reached the bottom room. The room's larger than and different from the others. Its walls aren't dark or wood, but light green. In some of its ends clean white cloths cover banquet tables. Although a



Above **CARL APFELSCHNITT, *Knowledge from the Foreign Fields*, 1985**
Roplex and Pigments on linen, 8' x 4'.

number of people mill about, the room is more than half empty. Unlike the other rooms, there's light.

(: ((A party? An art party?)) A white wood door, almost in the center of one of the room's longer walls, swings open. For the first time I can walk through. I look through this partially open doorway. I feel no emotions: there're no emotions. In the next room I see girls in some sort of Catholic ceremony, walking ((in formations?)); each one is carrying a white china plate on top of which's a slice of chocolate layer cake. One ((several?)) of my friends walks through the partially open doorway. There my friend takes one of the small white china cups filled with dark coffee which is being served out of a large silver-colored coffee-maker. When my friend's ((friends'')) in the light green room, I ask how the coffee tastes. It's real coffee. I want some. I say aloud that I'm not going to drink any because I don't want to go into the other room. I decide not to die yet.)

The Prince's rationality: Since nothing matters, every event is every other event. This' called 'manners.' Decadence is aristocracy is rationality is gold is death-in-life. This' why aristocrats're rich. Being a rational man, I'm an aristocrat. I'll kill the Vietnamese and the Nicaraguans and I'll fall in love with whomever I please. Rationality has made me a totally free man so my country's a democracy.

The Prince's lust: Why do the Bourgeoisie shit? Bourgeoisie, you're not apart from the world. That's not your myth. You are the world. You don't create my palace: you're greedy for sensuality. You want want beyond all measure, Don Calogero, and you're poisoning this world by your greed. We control money or devaluation, and you control greed or things. "This suit must'a cost a lotta moola," my future daughter-in-law's father, Don Calogero, says to me. Insect, crawling along my suit lapel. Bourgeois shit.

The Prince's feelings: Maybe you're unhappy. You hold me in your heart with your large hands. This perception of humanity breaks through isolation and judgement.

:Yes, I love you. I'm beginning to trust you and give you my heart, that is, my trust. The only thing there is the only possibility against rationality which is shit and death is trust; you say that you want it.

:When I stop believing trust, I decide to die.

The end of the hall.

THE PRINCE: ON MY DEATH:

:O.K. I'm growing old. What does that mean? I know I've less and less energy. But I'm focusing more clearly so I don't have less energy. When I'm not focusing I can feel the energy's weaker:

:I'm no one. I'm no longer a personality.

:It's as if there's (me's) this black statue whose being is obsessed in and is its work. When the work goes, the being goes. The world obtrudes: there's only universe.

:I want writing is the world.

:Is courting writing, courting death?

:Approaching death changes your physical appearance. Just as when a fashion designer takes hold of your body, you no longer recognize your physical self. You act as you would never act, such as you shit in your pants in front of people. You have to flee from this self.

:Fleeing makes me want to die.

:Even though I'm more and more tired, I know there's more and more no need of sleep, cause soon I'm going to sleep forever. I have to be as conscious as possible every of these few moments left. I want to taste: I remember I've savored most of my experiences; I will enjoy.

:What do I enjoy? I'm apart from the world its social identities. I enjoy the mentality that leads to the world. The palace. (The world isn't separate from death.) All kinds of events're equally real. Memories're now the events most available for me to taste. As I care less and less about the world its social identities, I forget memories. I luxuriate in appearances. Every appearance or change's perfect. The closer I get to dying, the more time (its events) are perfect.

:I'm in the hospital. Cold tiled floors beneath the feet. Pale green walls pale green ceiling pale grey floor tiles. The hall outside this room: nausea-yellow walls nausea-yellow ceiling pale grey floor tiles. This is as far as the eye can see. This room is called "a luxury room." Even though (I remember) I've got money history etc., all my perceptions're narrowed down to this. My narrow bed in a box. I'm a narrow bed in a box.

:My perceptions're going.

:There's no one in this world of whirling. I've no one to turn to. I have to face the formal nausea alone. The formal nausea's absorbingly interesting: swirls of red slight lines of yellow some white within the swirls. I have to garner, and am, all my energy (me) to deal with this. Those who're in the world should deal with the world. Every human with where they're in. Giovanni, Stella, Frabrizietto: my blood, you should take care of blood. But you don't think anymore; you go after objects: it's the end of the aristocratic world, still, mine, and the beginning of the bourgeois.

:I no longer exist.

:It's not only that my senses've been deprived, shut in on themselves; now they're sending me in the priest whom I hate. Reality is taken away from me. I hate His cockless thighs. I hate the snot, cause He has no sperm, drooling out of His genital-less beard. They're making me do what I most don't want to do just when I'm my physical weakest. Priests're harbingers of death. I want booze, drugs, orgasms, sexual dramas, connivings, slaughters, the greeds of politicians, pre-adolescents giggling in the snow. At least I want a glass of champagne. A glass of champagne rather than Him! Of what use is all this—drama, tribulations? What is my life? Just phenomena? Even all that I've thought, I've spent my whole life contemplating, I've meditated. What're these theories and abstractions worth? Are they just the preoccupations of humans who don't have anything better to do?

:Humans who don't have anything better to do are rich. Are the world's controllers. Did I admit early enough I was controlling the world?

:Was I? I, an upperclass member. What I wanted most was love. What I want most now, even as I'm dying, is love, though the sexual component has disappeared. I would have this love which is neither control nor being controlled.

THE PRINCE: WHAT PEOPLE SAY ABOUT ME AFTER I'VE DIED

:“He fucked every female in sight. He had to have females, especially famous females. I'll tell you what he was like . . .”

:“. . . a ladies' man”

:“He was so sex-struck, you wouldn't have to be nice to him for it.”

:“I heard he's the best in town.”

:“He's dead.”

:“I hear he's the best in town: It isn't exactly what he does; he doesn't do anything special; it's that he shows he likes to fuck so much, he makes you feel good and that you're the only woman who exists, the only woman who can please him, and what he needs most in the world. You wouldn't feel insecure.”

:“As a race, Jews're remarkably insecure and need to be needed.”

:“He'd persuade, by his voice's timbre by his eyes by his desperation by his desperate emotion by his sweetness, that he needed and loved you while he was refusing to fuck you so he could lean on and depend on you to get you to help him in his sexual affairs. He used these women who were the ones he really loved.”

:“His friends regarded him as a piece of embalmed flesh.”

:“He didn't like being sucked because he felt guilty.”

:“Part of him wanted to be a female.”

:“Cause that part was too babyish to be a male.”

:“Cause that part was too scared to be a male.”

:“Potency in a man is limited because a sadistic element linked with it requires it to be repressed.”

:“His friends ran away from him before he died.”

:“He didn't know what love is.”

:“I'll tell you whom he loved. The one person he loved.” ■