



The Fairy Fellers Master-Stroke

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Richard Dadd is a trickster, a pre-post-modern enigma wrapped in a Shakespearean Midsummer Night's Dream, an Elizabethan Puck living in a smothering Victorian insane asylum, foreshadowing and, in brilliant, Mad Hatter conundrums, entering the fragmented shards of today's nightmarish oxymorons long before the artists currently trying to give them the joker's ephemeral maps of discourse. I think of Bob Dylan's Ballad of a Thin Man, that cryptic refusal to reduce the warped mirrors of reality to prosaic lies, or, perhaps All Along the Watchtower or Mr. Tambourine Man. Even more than Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot, which curiously enough comes off as overly esoteric, too studied, too conscious, Dadd's entire existence foreshadows the forbidden entrance into the numinous, the realization of the inexplicable labyrinths of contemporary existence, that wonderfully rich Marcel Duchamp landscape of puns and satiric paradigms, that surrealistic parallax of the brilliant gamester Salvador Dali, that smirking irony of the works of Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, and Robert Indiana, that fragmented, meta-fictional struggle of Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse Five. John Lennon certainly sensed it and couldn't help but push into meta-real worlds in his own lyrics. Think of Strawberry Fields Forever, I Am the Walrus, and the more self-conscious Revolution Number 9. In Yer Blues, he even refers to Dylan's main character, Mr. Jones from Ballad of a Thin Man. If Lennon's song is taken seriously, literally, then it is a dark crying out by a suicidal man, Lord, I'm lonely, wanna die; or, if taken as a metaphor for a lover's lost feelings about his unfulfilled love, it falls into the romantic rant of a typical blues or teenage rock-and-roll song. However, even on this level, it has an irony about it, a sense of laughing at itself and at Dylan's Mr. Jones, who knows something is going on but just not what it is, and then, by extension, all of us who have awakened to the fact that the studied Western world doesn't make sense, all of us who struggle to find meaning in the nonsense images, characters, and happenings in the song, and perhaps, coming to a conclusion that the nonsense is the sense. When Andy Warhol made the intentionally overly obvious punning cover for the Rolling Stones' Sticky Fingers album, depicting a man's crotch (presumably Mick Jagger's - though not literally) covered by jeans with a real zipper to be unzipped to reveal the sticky underpants from a man's cum, the connection with musical creativity and sexual creativity was humorously conjoined, but the real irony wasn't so much that sexual double entendre, as it was a self-mocking, a laughing at the creator, a fun conceptual undermining of the search for meaning through art, a presenting of the artist as trickster, very much in line with Carl Jung's trickster as the impulse to anarchy, a light-hearted metaphysical joke similar to Robert Rauschenberg's Bed - a literal quilt and pillow (rumored to have been from the actual bed he shared with Jasper Johns. Which only makes the mixing of realities even thicker, because whether or not the rumor is true, it becomes real, perhaps even more real simply because it fits so nicely into human maps of meaning), that is then transformed with splashes of paint, hung on a wall, and designated a work of art, in the tradition of Duchamp's ready-mades and the whole irreverent Dada movement.

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