

E.L. Grant Watson "Unknown Eros"

The way I chose the author for this assignment was the ol' method of opening the book at random, twirling my finger with my eyes closed, and pointing. Sometimes this is the best way to discover something new and because of this, I discovered E.L. Grant Watson. He was born in England, but truly found himself in the Australian Bush when he went on an anthropological expedition to study Aboriginal marriage customs. He moved around frequently and loved to travel, writing more than 40 books about traveling, philosophy, and nature! He has two essays in our Norton book that are wonderfully concise and worth the four-page read!

In "Unknown Eros," he describes the mating rituals of slugs, but not with the detached language of scientists describing slug genitals or excessively using the word "penetration," but rather with a poetic tenderness that describes an act of intimacy, even for such "lowly-seeming creatures." The way he conveys this act of the slugs' mating ritual, as they are suspended by "a thick, twisted thread of their own slime," he makes the process sound striking, opening the readers minds to the idea that hermaphrodite slug sex could ever be anything more than alien and terrifying.

Watson describes, *"Their interlocked bodies formed a single sphere, in such intimacy of embrace as would not have been possible with any skeletoned animal. Their soft and yielding substances flowed and pressed and welded one against the other, every inner curve finding its counterpart, and as they pressed closer and closer, they hung so supported on their thread that every part that could be in contact, should be, and all their outer curves were touched only by air, with no earthly contact to offer any resistance to their movement."*

He goes on to say, *"Surely no physical union between higher animals or humans was ever consummated with such completeness. Hardened and formal limb-shapes are incapable of such blending; only with our invisible emotions and with the subtleties of our souls can we humans so harmoniously and intimately interpenetrate. For this reason, and perhaps for others, the physical-sensual cannot alone completely satisfy us, as it must satisfy such lowly-seeming creatures as slugs."*

Watson uses the words "lowly-seeming" to refer to slugs, which are the "creatures of the mire." It is a very accurate sentiment most people have in regard to slugs that look disgusting, ruin garden produce, or are even associated with that unproductive, "sluggish" feeling. Most of us don't think about the love lives of slugs but after hearing this description, it's hard not to...after all, who'd have thought that slugs would have better sex than humans, connecting on a purely physical level? For us, the necessity of our "androgynous souls" to connect is needed to achieve what our "too-rigidified and formal bodies are incapable of achieving."

At the end of his essay, Watson describes his conflicting feelings of what he just witnessed and their potential future impact on his freshly planted garden. Not wanting to kill them he puts them in a box, travels to the country, and lets them go in a distant meadow. He furthers our understanding of something previously associated with feelings of disgust, annoyance, or fear, by setting an example of tolerance and peacefully coexisting with such "lowly-seeming creatures" by

relocating them. Sadly, I still remember the ritual slug and snail salting with my cousins in my younger years, thinking them unimportant and gross, and relishing in the sizzling sounds that came from my grandma's sidewalk.

Q: Another "lowly-seeming" creature is the spider, which is quite misunderstood and feared. So maybe instead...we trap them in the shower, instead of drowning them, and take them outside like Watson did with those slugs. How easy do you think it would be to adjust to this method of dealing with creepy crawlers?

Q: (really weird question - sorry) Is a slug's love more intimate than our love because their physical boundaries (or lack of) connect in ways that ours can't?...leaving our souls to compensate and our brains to interfere when we try to connect with another human being?