

Griffith University

**Inez Baranay**

*paralipsis: drugs, money, sex*

*don't talk about drugs*

There are things you had better not speak of. There are words that cannot be heard without a jolt of attitude. There are words that are laden with prejudice and experience.

Don't talk about drugs. Don't even wonder if without certain drugs you would not be who you are, would be, that is, worse, lesser, diminished. You think that drugs saved you, in a way, but don't talk about that, saved you from strictures internal and external, saved you from being locked away from those doors.

You became a teenager and you began to experience yourself as yourself, separate, that is, from your family, very separate, very different, disagreeing, disagreeable, and rebelling. It was the sixties and you devoutly listened to the music. Well of course you began to smoke pot, as who did not, and you really liked it. Actually, you were an early adapter, no one you went to school with had tried it, you were queer, different, scandalous in your silly little schoolgirl world. You had to go to the city to find the people, it wasn't everywhere like it is now, no one started really young like they do now.

In Malaya you smoked for the first time. You took to marijuana like a duck to water, the way it slowed you right down while it speeded you right up, the way it made you pay attention. Attention, that's what it taught you (before you were ready for yoga), attention to the way music is made, attention to the intricacies of the taste of an apple or a lover's mouth, close attention to sensation, including the sensation of thought. People can seem very silly, can be very silly, when they're stoned. People will say that pot makes you stupid. Drinkers will say that. You really do want to know when to stop, when to give it up, when it's not the time or the place. But you also knew when to say yes.

There was speed, a couple of years of methedrine and benzedrine weekends when you didn't sleep, and then that time after days of it that you hitchhiked from Sydney up to where your parents were living and then screamed and howled, it was called coming down, you scared them, you scared yourself maybe...I don't know, I don't remember. You didn't stay with the speed. It's not a good drug for very long. At least you know. You know when you eventually, decades later, write a character who loves her speed. (You should know your characters' drugs like you know their dreams.)

And then there was acid. Acid way back then. LSD when it was a new and truly psychedelic thing, mind-expanding, mind-altering. There was Timothy Leary and Aldous Huxley and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which, Leary told us, miraculously - synchronicity, meant-to-be - became available to us at precisely the time that Tibet was closed off from the West, closed off, you probably thought, ignorant as you were, because it chose to be, keep its purity or something, keep on being Shangri-La. You

read your Leary and your Huxley and your Watts, you were a believer, such a believer, you took your LSD like the holiest of sacraments and in the doses they had back then, kids of today don't know. You went off to the country - there was always some fabulous house in the country to go to - with a reverend basket of fruit and bread, and worshipped the revelations of the natural world. It was only later that you found, how strange, that you could take it in the city, how tough, how gritty, how real, walk the gutters of the inner-city, go back to a city house and play Velvet Underground.

There's two kinds of people, those who took acid and those who didn't. It's a deep divide. You didn't miss out on the particular camaraderie of drugs, the particular humour. I really think you'd be so much more ignorant if you had missed it. I wouldn't want to know you.

All that matters is, Can you write, did it help you?

What drugs really taught you is how they're the excuse for the greatest amount of hypocritical bullshit.

But don't talk about it. Remember interviewing Neville Drury in the late 1980s for a series of features on the New Age, and he said that he refused to believe his revelations were somehow not valid because they were acquired by the use of drugs.

Certain *kinds* of drugs, it was understood, and definitely not certain other kinds.

You quite agreed, although you didn't take acid any more, that ended years before, in the 70s, and you've only taken it once since, for the Sleaze Ball in 1989, something your eternity in a grain of sand days had not imagined.

At this age, mostly coffee provides alteration enough.

### ***don't talk about money***

In my later twenties and early thirties, I went through a period of several years when everything I touched turned to failure. My marriage ended in divorce, my work as writer foundered, and I was overwhelmed by money problems. I'm not just talking about an economic shortfall or some periodic belt-tightening - but a constant, grinding almost suffocating lack of money that poisoned my soul and kept me in a state of never-ending panic.

There was no one to blame but myself; my relationship to money had always been flawed, enigmatic, full of contradictory impulses, and now I was paying the price for refusing to take a clear-cut stand on the matter. (Auster 19)

You can say that when you're Paul Auster. You can call your autobiographical writing *Hand to Mouth: A Chronicle of Early Failure* when you turn into Paul Auster. Don't even think about talking about your own flawed relationship to money if you haven't turned into Paul Auster, don't say "Me too: enigmatic, full of contradictory impulses". Don't begin about the price you paid. Don't read this as a sign that you can talk about the place of no money money no money in your life.

You can not talk about money. You can not talk about its lack. Not even when you suspect this struggle reveals your failings and fears, your misfortunes, mismanagements and ineptitude.

Don't start telling about those years, long after you'd left your student years behind, long after your peers had made successful careers, some of them; others were in the

same boat, writers too, or actors or musicians (and don't even start with questioning the equating of success with income); - years where you still couldn't go anywhere you couldn't walk to and made excuses to turn down invitations that meant bringing a bottle of wine, or at least a rose, or getting a taxi home, or even a train over there. Invitations you accept lead to new invitations, invitations you don't accept don't.

No one wants to know about the time, only too typical, you had only a few potatoes and some muesli to eat for three days and you wet the muesli with tap-water. Then a friend rang and said she'd be able to pay back the ten dollars you'd lent her - there were a few of you living this way. Next morning you walk from your flat near Kings Cross to the Roma Café near Central and steamy fragrant cappuccino and pastries break your fast. With the change you could get some fresh food and the bus home and some other money was due, soon, some would always dribble in. It didn't kill you, never was going to. You feel rich so easily.

You are a grown woman in your thirties, you could have made different choices, you had choices, could have kept on working in television, say, you had the chance; but leave it out about the kind of life those people have and how you turn away from it over and over.

Keep silent about the humiliations, you can't even remember them most of the time. Shut up even about the lessons of all this, the things you know that you might not have known, the times you've noticed the richest people never have cash, the times you've noticed how expensive it is to be poor, the times you've noticed how generous we are to one another, us on the same boat, it's like if you weren't ever on this boat you can hardly imagine what friendship is. You give and you take, which is not always that easy or that natural, and having a life where you have to give and have to take is a blessing among all your blessings.

Then there was The New Age that promised a new era of spiritual values. A useful idea about the way we create our reality became a dogma that says, at its worst, and it is swiftly this worst, that everything in your life, including your parents, your birth and all your circumstances, is a choice, a free and precise choice, that you, an individual, have made, including the degree of your wealth and success. You don't have it? Too bad, learn to choose it. You have it? You're good at the one thing that counts, choice. New Age materialism seemed an ugly form of self-serving notions to justify greed and the refusal of compassion.

Keep it to yourself, too, that you have days like today, when you have everything you want, if you only *be here now*. There've been all those times when you had everything, you traveled, you ate at fabulous restaurants and danced at sensational parties and drank at the openings of shows and you were reading the very books you wanted. You've always been lucky. And you have always known that you have always been among the richest people in the world, there was always a roof and a bed and hot running water, and when there wasn't there could have been.

No one wants to know about your bargains with god or fate.

No one cares, and it would be worse if they did.

One thing only matters: Can you write, did it stop you, did it help you, can you write?

You wrote because you couldn't go out, couldn't go shopping, couldn't afford a shrink, a holiday or the best drugs. You wrote instead and you wrote to make the life you had intense and layered and unfolding. Maybe you'd have bought that instead if you could have.

You read many accounts of the poverty of writers. When you were younger, you knew this poverty would become something in the past, you knew that the writer's future

always held recognition and rewards.

Hemingway's last words in *A Moveable Feast*: "...we were very poor and very happy".

Later you knew something different. There are writers who die in penury and obscurity: Kafka, Christina Stead. Henry Miller had published seventeen books when he sent out an appeal to all his friends to help him out. So it can happen like that too. You, too, you have passed that point where you believe that if only you keep on working all this will pass. It may never pass. And you decide, again, just to keep on working.

Notice that one always thinks he must do something because he must earn that money which was involved. But that is nearly always a clever excuse we make to ourselves. We usually can do very well - even better - without that money. The only thing that truly nourishes is the doing what one wants to do. I tell you, everything else is crap, and futility, and waste. Let the angel be your watermark. (Durrell and Miller 103)

At this age finally you have faith in your survival.

### ***don't talk about sex***

Even if they keep telling you you should write about sex. They tell you this because, they say, that is what you do write about.

You are not interested in writing an account of the first time you had sex or the last time nor in about why you're not interested.

All that matters is: Can you write, did it stop you, did it help you?

From the earliest time you wanted to be one of those women who did it which in those days was rare and rarely admitted.

It was the way to adventure. It was the way to get inside, inside other people, their language their houses their bodies.

And get outside of yourself. Lose yourself. Lose language.

Sex gave you something to write about, gave you ways to see people real, close up and naked. Ways to release thought to sensation.

Gave you apparently endless pondering on sex and the creative and the spiritual all in such close embrace you couldn't tell where one ended.

It gave you a way to know the intimate and the strange simultaneously.

It gave you the world of people who did it. Sex opened doors, a novelist loves to look into other people's bedrooms and bathrooms. And the doors in yourself, the senses and sensations a body can discover, create. The total absorption in the present moment that is part of life's other best moments - the best conversations, yoga, writing.

Don't talk about sex because you've already said anything you have to say:

Writing is the most demanding of lovers, the most obsessive. Writing is the object, subject and creator of desire... All gender, all practices and no restraints are available to you... How will it be today? At the moment you wake up you reach out to it to resume where you fell asleep. Perhaps in your sleep you have been united for it will enter

your dreams, change them and direct them, confuse them or clarify them, your dear wicked writing... You are ready, it is ready, you turn to each other, and with the long history of your deep connection you unite at once. You enter it, it enters you. It is never the same, rarely what you expect... When it is how it is meant to be there is no division between you and it...in this union you glimpse the spiritual or the transcendent... (Baranay 6-8)

At this age it's all somewhat distant.

As for love.

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## TEXT

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