

crooked letter 5: Your Momma, Your Daddy, Your Itchy Itchy Gram Mammie (Trash Talking with Me and Eminem)

I was listening to Eminem, the notorious bleach blond angry white boy rapper, the other day, and I started crying. Not because his lyrics were offensive. His songs are offensive, and in some he seems to have the emotional range of a peanut. The angry button in his brain got smashed too hard, too many times. Now it is stuck.

He is a skilled rapper. He has incredible breath control and a talent for rhythm and rhyme. He skillfully uses the musical quality of language. His music and sound samples can be delightful. Some of his songs show nuance that would surprise those who believe that conceptual sophistication is beyond “trailer trash.”

It wouldn't have been surprising, if I had started to cry because a rapper this good and this intelligent falls back on tired ass rap clichés where all women are “bitches” and “hos,” and the worst thing you can call a man is “faggot” or “pussy.” The misogyny and homophobia of popular culture have made me cry before. These days, if it is good enough, I filter out the hatred. Sometimes I need to channel my inner angry white boy rapper though I refuse to spend *my* money on CD's like *The Eminem Show*. (I checked it out from the library). I don't condone his hateful lyrics, but I understand them. He reminds me of my cousins and other boys I grew up with. The perverse part of me appreciates ugliness; Eminem is not afraid to get ugly. Besides, this white trash bitch ho knows that her pussy could crack his peanut head.

I cried because I was moved. I cried because Eminem spoke one of my truths. His *Cleanin' Out My Closets*, a song about his relationship with his mother, pulled skeletons out of mine. I had heard the song before and had not cried. But the events of the previous weekend made all my Momma buttons break through my skin.

Too many people seeing too many hours of too many talk shows of too many dysfunctional families revealing too much make me hesitate to explain why I have Momma buttons for Eminem to push, and why the protective epidermis that I have spent years knitting together skin cell by skin cell couldn't stop my Momma buttons from erupting into giant, ugly, painful spots. I also have covered this ground in some of my dramatic work, and no doubt will come back to it again and again since I am one of those obsessive, artistic types

Instead of the ho hum “my Momma is a nasty ass bitch, but she's crazy and was beaten so badly that she had no chance to be anything but cuckoo for coco puffs, so it isn't really her fault, but I can't help but be pissed that no one stopped her from fucking with my head when I was just a kid who so badly wanted her Momma to be whole and happy, and this is why Eminem's song made me cry” narrative, I offer you a musical number.

Me talking truthful trash about Momma is boring. Me singing truthful trash about Momma may be genius. I promise you will be amazed, even if it is only in the “what the fuck” kind of way.

I would like you to imagine me in a pink floor length gown designed by Edith Head. I wear grey elbow length gloves and a glorious pink and grey confection of a hat, like the ones in the race scene in *My Fair Lady*. I stand in front of black theater curtains in a spotlight. Slowly, a huge close-up photo of Eminem descends to share the spotlight with me. I turn to his photo and begin to sing in loud Ethel Mermanesque voice. This is a musical number not a rap song.

I was cruisin' down Archer Road
(*The tune of this song is all over the Broadway map.*)
It was one of those January days

Not at all hot, not too terribly cold
That make the goddamn tourists decide to stay
Then they bitch and they moan
And they moan and they bitch
'Cause most days are not like this

(Curtains open. I step back into the stage space. There is not set, no scenery. There is no skin to cover the "bones" of the stage space. Full lights come up. The image of Eminem rises out of view.)

But I guess, I digress
I guess, I digress

On came Eminem
(Fast, breathy and soft like any number of "whispering" sections in musical numbers, this is almost rap-like but not quite.)

Mister Slim
The shady
The angry
Rap any which way he
Wants to
'Cause he gotsta
say his piece
he has no peace
no peace of mind
he's angry all the time
(Slow, grand musical style singing, sweeping across the stage space)
He's angry all the time

He was rappin' about his momma
The trailer trash, mean ass kind
Of momma
His litany 'bout his fuck up momma
Made my own memories rewind

Made my own memories rewind
(very big)
Made my own memories rewind

"Your Momma"
It is the worst cut someone can make
The extended family rub
"Your momma, your daddy
Your itchy, itchy gram mammie"
(At this point, the audience gets a bit restless, because the tune is completely out of whack, and more than a little confusing.)
Is horribly lame
It doesn't made the grade
and is comparatively tame
to the Momma cuts I've made

But I guess, I digress
I guess, I digress.

He screams you selfish bitch
She wished that he had died
I scream you selfish bitch
She told me that I lied
Hundreds and hundreds of times
I did not lie, I was not wrong
She stills sings the liar, liar song
It is always someone else's fault
Momma's never to blame
Me and Eminem have Mommas
Who are similar though not the same

"I'm sorry, Momma, I never meant to hurt you,"
he sang
He sang, "I never meant to make you cry"
He cleaned out his closets

The flip side of raging madness
Is cut to the bone sadness
I have stood right there
Anger shading into despair

Momma, I'm sorry
That I called you a selfish bitch
I'm sorry, Momma
That you were broken beyond repair
Momma, I'm sorry
That I couldn't figure how to fix it
I'm sorry, Momma
That my words caused you pain
Momma, I'm sorry
That you're trapped again

I'm sorry, Momma
(This is the grand, glorious finale, a large close up photo of Momma drops down, and the lights go to a spot on me)

I'm sorry,
Momma
Momma, I'm sorry, Momma
I'm sorry
Momma, I'm sorry
I'm sorry
Momma
I'm sorry, Momma
I'm sorry
Momma, I'm sorry
Momma

(The last little flourish, slow, sad and softening, I reach toward the photo)

Momma
Momma *(almost a whisper)*
I'm sorry
Momma
I'm sorry

(Lights out. Curtain close. Silence. The audience begins to applaud in that bewildered, what the hell was that kind of way, for just a couple of moments. I come out several times to bow. The audience half-heartedly keeps clapping, not sure what else to do. As the audience leaves Eminem's Cleanin' Out My Closets comes on full blast.)