

*from*  
**WE'VE HAD A HUNDRED YEARS  
OF PSYCHOTHERAPY  
AND THE WORLD'S GETTING WORSE**

**by**  
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**and**  
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*Most of We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy and the World's Getting Worse is in the form of a conversation. Hillman and Ventura taped a number of conversations and edited them into a book-length conversation, interrupted in the middle by their exchange of essay-letters*

**HILLMAN:** Then she realized that what love is all about is heartbreak. And when you realize that what love is all about is heartbreak, you're all right. But if you think it's about fulfillment, happiness, satisfaction, union, all of that stuff, you're in for even more heartbreak.

**VENTURA:** Well, love is a very funny place to go for safety.

**HILLMAN:** A *very* funny place to go for safety.

**VENTURA:** You get totally vulnerable and infantile with somebody you're in love with, you're vulnerable to their moods, their needs. And you become more vulnerable to *yourself*, your *own* needs. Things you didn't guess were inside you will come out with a loved one, including the fact that you have needs that no one can possibly satisfy.

**HILLMAN:** The thing is that two people *do* go to love for safety, safety *for* their vulnerability. Both people want to be vulnerable, but as long as you're open and vulnerable nothing is safe. They want a safety for their vulnerability, but because of their vulnerability they can't be safe.

**VENTURA:** My friend George Howard said a very disturbing thing to me in Austin. He said, "The Self is hostile to love. It will not long tolerate that preoccupation."

**HILLMAN:** It's got a lot of other things to do, that's the point.

**VENTURA:** Anyway, the reason you're with this certain person, this certain lover, is not about love, or at least it's not about "having a good relationship." You're with this person because your soul is hungry for them, your soul is seeking something with or through them, and it will insist on what it wants. It doesn't care what price YOU pay for that; the ego-driven, agenda-ridden *you* is not your soul's priority. The nice thing about getting older is that you learn to pay some prices more gracefully, but the soul doesn't care. The soul is absolutely merciless – toward you, and toward anybody around you. The soul doesn't give a damn about human values.

**HILLMAN:** The Gods do not care. That's the basic old Greek idea, that the Gods do not care about that kind of human concern. Our happiness, our security doesn't interest the Gods.

**VENTURA:** God has all of eternity to play with, and all the worlds, so... God doesn't care about the price.

We are creatures of limited means, so I suppose we can't be blamed for worrying about the price.

**HILLMAN:** What *is* the price of love? T.S. Eliot says, "Costing not less than everything." So one of the things you begin to see is, what gets sacrificed in love is *love*.

**VENTURA:** Ohhhhhhhhhhh.

**HILLMAN:** Ohhhhhhhhhhh.

You think you're bringing a lot of sacrifice to it, but the sacrifice demanded, the ultimate sacrifice, is the sacrifice of love itself. All your notions of love – *that's* what's given up. Your *idea* of love, what you've thought of love, what you expect from love, what you cling to as love – that is what you give up.

In that sense the real lovers, to my mind, are the burnt-out lovers.

**VENTURA:** The burnt-out lovers, eh? I've been thinking lately that you're never really married until you're divorced. Because at the moment of divorce, what's been done with the marriage has been *done*. Then it lives like a novel or a movie in your mind, a memory you go back to and back to and back to, but you can't change what happened. And at that point you are *really* in the marriage, because there's no escaping it. You can leave a wife; you can't leave an exwife.

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**HILLMAN:** The philosopher Ortega y Gasset asked himself, "Why do I love this woman?" What does the psychoanalyst do with that question? Go into it: She's like your mother, she's not like your mother, she's your anima projection, she reminds you of your first love when you were seventeen or seven, "she's got these incredible qualities that I don't have" or "she's so different from me that it's extraordinary" or "she's just like me, we get along like brother and sister, it's remarkable." We dig and dig and dig to find the reasons why.

What does Ortega say? He says, "You love this woman because – because it is *this woman*."

**VENTURA** (*trying the phrase out*): “Because it is *this woman*.”

**HILLMAN**: And that makes her the unique woman. That’s the important thing, the uniqueness. Because it is *this woman*, it’s not another woman. It has nothing to do with any of the rational qualities. It’s not, as Stendal would say, because she’s a little ugly and therefore you can see the beauty in her. It’s not because she’s beautiful.

**VENTURA**: It’s not because she’s your anima. It’s not because she’s your muse.

**HILLMAN**: It’s not because of anything. *There is no because*. The because is: it is this woman. And that gives love back to the Gods. You see, the Gods hit you with her arrow, or they hit her with your arrow, or you both got hit – and that arrow is the reason.

**VENTURA**: The Gods of the Hindus, the Greeks, the Romans, the Gods of Voodoo and Santeria – all of them have a figure, a God or Goddess, who can strike anyone, even the most powerful of the immortals, with uncontrollable passion.

**HILLMAN**: That has a lot to do with falling in love, but it also has to do with long-term love. It’s the quality that makes people unable to let go. We call that in therapy an obsession or a sex addiction: you can’t let go till *it* lets go.

**VENTURA**: Love is a madness, then. Think about that a second. “Love your neighbor,” “Love one another,” “God is love” – given everyone’s *experience* of love, these become pretty disturbing statements.

**HILLMAN**: Love is a madness, *but what is the madness itself looking for?* Is it to make us more mad? Is it to grow wings, as Plato says? The question is not, why is it this woman or this man, but, what is the madness looking for? *What does the madness want?* Because in the madness we grow way beyond ourselves. Way beyond. It prompts us to write love letters, it prompts us to phone, to drive all night, it prompts us to do

incredible things. You're a fourteen-year-old kid on his bicycle fourteen times a day going past her house, you're tattooing yourself, you're completely mad.

**VENTURA:** You're willing to change your entire life, hurt people, break promises, turn everything upside down so you can have *this* woman. The madness wants something not from but through this person.

**HILLMAN:** What does the madness want? That's the big question. If therapy could understand what the madness wants, then it would treat love very differently, instead of reducing it to terms of the relationship, and the reasons for the relationship.

I don't accept a single one of the usual sentences, like, "This was only a sexual affair," or "We really understood each other, she had just to open her mouth and my mind already knew what she was going to say," or any of the others. None of them. There's a madness, there's an obsessive madness going on. What does it want?

And why do we think that if we marry it the madness will go away. Paul says, "It's better to marry than to burn." This burning is not just a sexual burning, it's the madness. And the Christians were right about that – marriage usually subdues the madness.

**VENTURA:** And we get very disappointed when it does. Marriage subdues the madness and we go, "Uh oh, the madness is gone."

**HILLMAN:** "Where did it all go?"

**VENTURA:** "Do you remember how it used to be?"

**HILLMAN:** "Do you remember what we used to do?"

**VENTURA:** "I don't wanna be married anymore, it's so boring without the madness."

**HILLMAN:** So we're chasing madness, and then – we don't know what to do with it.

**VENTURA:** So we marry to get rid of it! That's not what we *think* we're doing, but since that's what so often happens it has to be part of a secret intent – secret from ourselves and each other.

**HILLMAN:** And the madness is not reducible to hormones.

**VENTURA:** Reducing it to hormones is just another way of saying “God” anyway. DNA is just another word for destiny. We're a materialist, concrete culture. We have to say, “Okay, it's in this gene, your destiny.” What the hell is the difference, destiny or the genes? Destiny being lodged in a gene doesn't mean it's not coming from Heaven, Hell, or wherever it comes from – the Other World.

**HILLMAN:** Whether it's DNA or a hormone, it's the angel, the ancient angel, the tiny invisible thing that can dance on the head of a pin.

**VENTURA:** Yeah, yeah, DNA or angels, there ain't no difference. Or maybe the difference is, they think they can fuck around with the DNA. They'll splice this, combine that, they'll think they're controlling it. But all they'll do is take some angels off the pin – and expect them to behave and do as they're told. But angels don't do as they're told. They'll be as unpredictable as ever, it'll just be a new unpredictability.

On the one hand, I feel this paranoia of, “Oh my god, they're messing with the DNA, they're gonna ruin everything.” And on the other hand I feel, “Okay, fellas, you wanna break the windows of Heaven, you wanna open the doors of night, you wanna invite the Gods in – let's party. You're not gonna change the basic situation: that life is unfathomable, unpredictable, uncontrollable. You're gonna get messed around, fucked around, it's gonna be with the DNA and gene splicing the way it was with electricity and plutonium. There is no escaping the fundamental wildness of the universe.”

See what a state I get into when I talk about love? What were we talking about anyway? What *does* the madness want?

I mean, listen to all those sirens out there. Constant sirens. I don't think there's been a moment since we sat down without at least one siren wailing down there. Talk about, "What does the madness want"!

**HILLMAN:** The madness wants to be let in the room that is has been excluded from. It wants to come in.

**VENTURA:** No matter what the madness is – we're not only talking about love now – it wants to come in.

**HILLMAN:** Partly because –

**VENTURA:** -- it's been excluded.

**HILLMAN;** That's Freud. It's repressed.

**VENTURA:** I think it's more than "repressed"; I don't buy that.

**HILLMAN:** Because that would suggest it would go away once it comes in?

**VENTURA:** Right.

**HILLMAN:** You don't believe that.

**VENTURA:** I think the madness is much stronger than that. It does not go away once it comes in. Freud may be right that we constructed civilization to keep the madness out, as a collective; and, with our nice little homes and lives, we try to do the same thing privately, keep it out; but it does not go away. It's right there, always, waiting, trying to get in. And once it comes in, it isn't easily appeased.

**HILLMAN:** In other words, you can't just give it a nice cup chair and a cup of tea and it sits down.

**VENTURA:** You can't say, "I acknowledge you, I own you."

**HILLMAN:** "I respect you."

**VENTURA:** "I respect you, I love the part of myself that is you... as long as you don't make any fucking trouble."

**HILLMAN:** "Or even if you make a little bit of trouble, I acknowledge you because you're really part of my creativity."

*Hillman and Ventura laugh nastily. On the tape it blends in nicely with the constant background of honking horns from Seventh Avenue.*

**VENTURA:** But the madness – at least my madness – doesn't care about being part of my creativity! Because in fact creativity is this fundamentally sane act, and the madness wants disruption.

**HILLMAN:** Ohhhhhhhhhh.

**VENTURA:** Ohhhhh.

**HILLMAN:** Well, that suggests – you say the madness wants disruption, it wants the disruption of the room that it's been kept out of. But that disruption is only from the point of view of that room. If you enter into the madness, does *it* want disruption? I don't think so.

From *its* point of view, it's walking in the door with a message, but you sit in the room and it knocks the door down and you think, "Shit, this is only bringing me



disruption,” but what does it carry in its hands? I think what it’s walking in the door with are the Gods. I think the madness is the messenger of the Gods. And that’s not Plato, not Freud. Different forms of what Plato called *mania*, each of them associated with a different God. So the madness is calling us to the Gods, in one way or another, either as a frenzy or as a love or as a ritual initiation into a new kind of life. Something more important than usual life is going on. It is drawing out of one thing and toward something else.

**VENTURA:** Michael Meade says, “The difference between blessed madness and insanity is: insanity is following the wrong God.”

**HILLMAN:** So the madness differs from insanity. Madness would be the mania that Plato talks about, which is the way the Gods reach us, as all the Greek tragedies show. Or, as Jung said, the Gods are in the diseases. Insanity would be what the human being does in relation to that mania. That is, it follows the wrong God, or it serves its God the wrong way. It doesn’t understand the ritual, or it literalizes the ritual. It gets inflated, it takes the mania to itself, takes credit for it, “The thoughts that come through me are mine, not the Gods”; or it says, “I am an instrument of the Gods, I’m their favorite son or chosen person.” Of all definitions of madness, I like the one in a poem by Theodore Roethke: “What’s madness but nobility of soul / At odds with circumstance?”

You know that what we’re saying ignores all the present systems of defining insanity – systems that say it’s a biochemical disorder or a sociological disorder or a genetic disorder or an early childhood dysfunction. I haven’t mentioned any of those as the roots of insanity, so I have omitted a whole set of contributing factors.

**VENTURA:** When you say something like “contributing factors” – it seems the starting place for any analysis of this culture seems to be the concept of a safe white slate. Anything not on this safe white slate is a “contributing factor” to evil and madness. Anything that disrupts a normal safe day – where this normal safe day ever was in history, I don’t know – but anything that disrupts it is one of these contributing factors to madness. There’s something very wrong with that kind of thinking.

**HILLMAN:** Many are now saying that the “normal safe day” was the matriarchy.

**VENTURA:** Scholarship should be classified as a form of fiction. You can prove or disprove anything. The arguments for the matriarchy, or any ancient life, are based on statues, buildings, and tools, and *that's* a woefully incomplete record, but let's say you had all the statues, buildings, and tools, say, of that city out there. What would you know of all its different ways of making music, what would you know about all the stories its people tell or its poetry? How could you tell, from America's buildings and statues and tools, that we had feminism and the men's movement and the New Age movement and ecologists and Satanists and surfers and homeless and gay culture and black culture? You couldn't. And what if the Neolithic stuff gives just as incomplete a picture? Such scholarship is a polemical tool, and that's all it is – and not a very honest polemical tool, either.

I've done it again, I've gone off. Where the devil were we? You were going somewhere with madness.

**HILLMAN:** I think that to protect yourself against insanity, you must every day propitiate madness. You must take your steps toward madness, you must open the door toward the mania, let it in. That would account in my mind for a great many forms of what we call addiction. These are ways of trying to open the door and to let the madness in. Whether it's getting drunk on a Saturday night or sitting for hours drinking alone in a melancholy to let Saturn in, whatever – these are modes of letting the madness in. And in a sense they keep us from going insane, and we don't know that distinction.

**VENTURA** (*singing*): “I've always been crazy but it's kept me from going insane.” That's a Waylon Jennings song.

**HILLMAN:** Crazy means “cracked,” the cracks that let things in. It's not smooth, it's not safe. So what do you do, then, to let the madness in? What do *you* do to keep from going insane?

**VENTURA:** What do *I* do?

**HILLMAN:** Yeah, what do *you* do?

**VENTURA:** You mean other than hard whiskey, fast women, and loud music? Or is it fast cars and loud women? Hard women and straight whiskey? Could you repeat the question?

**HILLMAN:** I think you do one more thing, and I think I do too, and I think that's part of what this book is about – that we try to go out on a limb.

**VENTURA:** Oh yes.

**HILLMAN:** We try to go to unsafe places. We risk. With our minds, we risk.

**VENTURA:** With our work. In our work. Whether that work ultimately stinks or not is for others to judge, but it's risky, that's a fact.

**HILLMAN:** So we go *toward* madness, it doesn't have to just break in.

**VENTURA:** True. I am not happy unless I'm risking on that level.

**HILLMAN:** It makes me most happy when I can go the farthest out. Or as one writer said to me, it is not enough to go out on a limb, you've got to be willing to saw it off.

Now, could you connect how you let the madness in with keeping from going insane, in your life?

**VENTURA:** Every day I fear going insane. I've never had a day in my life when I haven't felt that.

**HILLMAN:** So letting the madness in becomes for you how you ban the Gods by giving to them. You keep them from possessing you by giving something to them.

**VENTURA:** Yes, but it's a dangerous game.

**HILLMAN:** Isn't it a dangerous game to close the door and sit on the sofa and depend on locks to keep the madness out?

**VENTURA:** Much more dangerous. Because the madness is a lot stronger than the locks.

**HILLMAN:** I think the way of letting in to most of our lives is pathology. The symptoms come – the marriage fights, the crazy child, the overspending, the drinking, the piling up of debt.

**VENTURA:** The dependence on TV, the compulsive schedules that eat your life, the endlessly repetitive family feuds.

**HILLMAN:** What goes on in the house is the pathology. Now, when therapy tries to cure the pathology, instead of seeing that the pathology is part of the crack or the broken window, and that something is trying to get in, then it seems to me it's creating more pathology and keeping the Gods even further away. And then they break in through the whole fucking society.

**VENTURA:** If we don't let the madness in, then collectively the society goes mad for us, and that's called "history." So in the long run there are enormous collective consequences for all these private evasions.