



The Lovers 1928, by René Magritte

Jack Foley

Date: Dinner and a Movie, April 2020

*Personae:*

John and Mary

Narrator (a disembodied voice)

NARRATOR: John and Mary meet in a nearly abandoned parking lot at six o'clock. Still light but night is coming. There is the muted occasional sound of firecrackers exploding as the play progresses.

*John and Mary remain six feet apart. Both are wearing protective gloves and masks.*

MARY, *apologetically*: Some say ten.

*They move a little further apart.*

*Each has brought a folding chair and a folding table. John drops a rose enclosed in plastic in the space between them. Mary bends to pick it up.*

*They seat themselves and begin to talk. Because of the distance, they must speak a little louder than one ordinarily does in conversation.*

JOHN: Hi, what have you been doing?

MARY: Not too much.

JOHN: My mother cut my hair.

MARY: It looks nice.

JOHN: Have enough toilet paper?

MARY: Plenty.

JOHN: Me too. And there's always newspaper. It's funny. Some moments I'm not okay and other moments I'm creating a magical new normal.

MARY: I'm afraid a lot. I don't get the magic. The future looks like—I don't know what. *(Pause.)* It looks like night.

*Pause.*

JOHN: I've been reading a big book. *Moby Dick*. It's a classic.

MARY: Oh, yes, I've heard of it. What's it about?

JOHN: A whale, a big whale.

MARY: Oh, my. I've been watching *Game of Thrones* from the very first episode. I like it but I'm getting a little tired of it.

JOHN: I'm getting a little tired of *Moby Dick*, too.

MARY: Things will be so much better when all this is over.

JOHN: Oh, yes.

*(Pause)*

NARRATOR: The sky is getting darker. *(Lights.)*

*(Pause)*

JOHN: Shall we order something to eat?

MARY (*enthusiastically*): Yes!

NARRATOR: John orders pizza, which arrives in about twenty minutes. Two identical, separate pizzas are brought to them by a man who says nothing but “Here they are” and puts them on the tables, carefully backing away once he had done this. John pays the man with a credit card. The man leaves. John and Mary partially remove their masks, open their folding tables, and begin to eat. They each drink a coke. When they are finished, they put the masks back on. (*All this is mimed.*)

NARRATOR: The dark grows deeper. (*Lights.*)

JOHN: How about a movie?

MARY: Ok. I hear *The Irishman* is good.

JOHN: OK.

*They each watch the movie on their separate cell phones.*

JOHN: Did you like it?

MARY: Oh, yes, though I found it a little violent.

JOHN: Yes, it was. I liked Al Pacino, though.

NARRATOR: They begin to discuss the movie. (*BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ*) Finally, there is an awkward silence. John is uncertain how to begin.

JOHN: Mary—

MARY: Yes, John.

JOHN: We’ve known each other for over a year now and we’ve emailed and texted and Skyped and FaceTimed and telephoned.

MARY: Yes, John.

JOHN: Mary, you have come to mean a great deal to me.

MARY: And you mean a great deal to me, John.

JOHN: Mary... *(Long pause. JOHN gets down on one knee and gestures.)* Mary, will you marry me?

MARY *(Relieved)*: Oh, yes, John!

JOHN: Mary, you've made me the happiest man in the world.

MARY: And you've made me the happiest woman.

NARRATOR: Darkness has taken over the entire sky. *(Lights.)*

NARRATOR: John and Mary stare at each other, masks still covering much of their faces. They stand a little over six feet apart. Their emotions are almost unbearable. Love bursts from their hearts.

Breathing heavily, they wave to each other in the almost deserted parking lot. They remain six feet apart. They are afraid to touch.

Then they go home.

*At first only the NARRATOR's voice is heard. As he speaks, JOHN and MARY turn towards us and join the NARRATOR in the concluding statement.*

NARRATOR, JOHN, MARY:

*(Singing, from "Mack the Knife")* "Here it comes now, happy ending.  
Everything is in control..."

Ladies and gentlemen, we have shown you two particular people and their struggles with our present situation as they try hard to achieve some kind of normalcy. But coronavirus goes beyond the struggles of two people. We have stepped out of character to end the play with a kind of song. We hope the song extends the feeling of the play beyond the problems of two characters. What after all can we do with death except talk back to it? It is our breath that enables speech; breath--as in the first breath we take--is the agency of life. Song is a kind of prayer.

We are in the grip  
of what seems to be a new god  
*(softly)* song is unending  
a god who distributes  
death in vast numbers  
*(a little stronger)* song is unending  
This false god warns us  
not to act  
not to "do"

but to stay put  
in the shell  
of our lives  
and fear  
(*stronger still*) song is unending  
He is fierce  
and powerful  
so that we need to believe  
we will be better  
for the experience  
when the experience  
(*if* the experience)  
ends  
We do not know his name  
though we see his crown (corona)  
everywhere  
Do not touch  
Stay separate  
(song is air song is air)  
*He may take  
our breath*

## DARKNESS

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Jack Foley has published 17 books of poetry, 5 books of criticism, a book of stories, and a 1300-page "chronoencyclopedia," *Visions & Affiliations: California Poetry 1940-2005*. He has presented poetry on radio station KPFA since 1988 and has received two Lifetime Achievement Awards. A new book of Foley's poetry, *When Sleep Comes: Shillelagh Songs* has recently appeared, and *Duet of Polygon*, a collaboration with Japanese poet Maki Starfield, is forthcoming. Poet scholars Dana Gioia and Peter Whitfield have edited *Jack Foley's Unmanageable Masterpiece*, a book of essays dealing with Foley's *Visions & Affiliations*.