A Blast from the Past; Unlocking Hera’s Temple

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Reviewing: The Temple of Hera by Delaney Brown Issue No.71

As we eagerly await the release of The Kudzu Review’s 73rd issue, I find myself reflecting on the incredible works we've had the privilege to publish in previous editions. The Kudzu Review has long been a platform for undergraduate students to showcase their literary and visual art, offering a space where creativity flourishes.

Among the many remarkable pieces that have graced its pages, \*\*shout out some other great works) one from Issue 71 continues to resonate with me: “The Temple of Hera” by Delaney Brown. This work not only captivated me at the time of its publication but has lingered in my thoughts ever since. From the innocence of childhood to the complexities of adult relationships, Brown crafts a story that speaks to the heart of the female experience, weaving a powerful commentary on gender, power, and self-discovery.

This story has emotional resonance as it explores the nuanced, complex evolution of a girl's understanding of love, lust, sensuality, and desire. The structure, divided into vignettes that trace the character's growth from childhood naivete to adult disillusionment, provides a clear thematic arc, with each section reflecting a key moment in the character’s emotional and psychological development.

1. Love

A Child’s Understanding.

The story begins with a girl only six years old. This section focuses on the innocence and how our waking world controls our perceptions of reality. The young child witnesses her parents engage in a heated argument and is misled to accept a distorted understanding of love.

1. Lust

Navigating a World Built for Boys.

The girl is now a preteen and the narrative takes a dark turn. As she grows closer to her womanly form, for the first time the girl is subjected to a common horror in girl world. In gym class she experiences a violation of her autonomy. She realizes that “she will always be a girl in the world designed for boys,” and that the power dynamic at play is as ancient as the clay at the Temple of Hera. The sharp contrast of the fragility of her experience and the timeless strength of woman throughout history it’s a subtle but potent commentary on gender and power.

1. Sensuality

The Intoxicating Taste of Control.

The third vignette dives into the girl’s budding awareness of her own power. Dressed as a swan with the eyes of a *succubus*, she understands that she commands desire. This section plays with the idea of female empowerment, even in situations that may initially seem driven by male desire.

1. Desire

Seeing Blurred Lines.

We now meet the girl as a woman. She sits on a man's bed, knowing he desires her, but feeling detached from the act. This scene explores the blurred lines between giving and taking, lust and love. She lets the man believe he's in control, though she's aware that she holds the key.

The metaphor of the key is powerful here-this symbol of control, of holding the power to unlock something deeper. But after the encounter, the woman is left feeling hollow, and the piece ends with an agonizing, telling moment: she calls her mother at 3 a.m. There's a haunting sadness in that final act… a longing for true comfort, for a connection that transcends physical desire.

The woman is aware that the man desires her, and while she plays into this dynamic, she remains emotionally removed. This suggests a deeper, more existential crisis about the nature of desire itself. She holds the "key" to the situation, symbolizing control over the interaction, yet despite this power, there’s no satisfaction or fulfillment in it. The key, a symbol often associated with unlocking something deeper or more meaningful, here represents her control over the physical realm of desire, but also her inability to access a more profound emotional connection.

The act of sitting on the man’s bed, knowing she has control yet feeling emotionally detached, speaks to the profound difference between physical desire and emotional fulfillment. Even though she holds power in this interaction—letting the man believe he is in control when she is actually the one who understands the full dynamics of the situation—the power over desire is superficial, unable to address the deeper emotional needs that still go unmet. It’s a commentary on how empowerment, in the context of sexual dynamics, doesn’t necessarily translate to emotional satisfaction or true connection.

The story's resolution, where she calls her mother at three o’clock in the morning, brings an aching sense of longing and vulnerability to the forefront. It implies that despite all the encounters with desire, power, and control, what she truly seeks is comfort, validation, and an emotional bond that transcends the physical. The late-night call to her mother symbolizes the return to a foundational, unconditional form of love—a yearning for the safety and care that her other relationships have not provided. There is a haunting sadness in this action, revealing that despite all the growth and experiences she’s undergone, she’s still searching for the kind of love and connection that eludes her in her romantic or sexual encounters. There’s a distinct sense of hollowness that remains. This emotional detachment is crucifying because it highlights the chasm between what society often frames as "empowerment" or "control" and the deeper, intangible need for authentic emotional intimacy.

In short, “The Temple of Hera” is a telling of the emotional complexity of becoming a woman. It is a compelling piece that challenges the way we think about love and desire. For anyone looking to reflect on their own journey through these aspects of life, this piece will leave a lasting impression. Whether you're a young teen or thirty-six, The Temple of Hera taps into emotions we've all felt in ways both beautiful and heartbreaking. It is the emotional blueprint of becoming a woman that reminds us that the path to understanding love and desire is often winding, thus adding another layer of meaning to the phrase “I’m just a girl”.