

KATHLEEN WINTER

History in the Louvre

Invisible pictures
hang between
the masterpieces in museums

as women lived in history,
silently.
Ours are such slender

centuries, exhausted
by waste, graced
by emancipations.

The bodies of half
of humanity
achingly

becoming
visible as human,
as human

is a dark and halting
animal,
ever possessive

of its own
framed place
in hallowed space.

In the Clutch

As my Wills and Trusts professor said,
When you carry a hammer,
everything looks like a nail.

When your hammer is poetry,
everything's a poem,
even the horrible pet-store rabbit

loosed on Sonoma Mountain,
furtive but bright white, elliptical,
low to the ground, scuttering—

not exactly greased lightning
on those rabbit's foot feet—
across the road at dawn.

Last week, my husband spotted it
against the autumn weeds.
How that rabbit survives

from one day to the next
is mystery to me,
and how it came to be here

and what furred or feathery inevitable
will snatch it up
to feel the shudder of its misplaced life.

Morning

they come as promised and fractional gifts
our dreams of the dead

we live with them
to lose them over again

to hunt them in the skittering
instant of waking

as owl scours darkness
for quick tenderesses

our parents' careless faces
explain themselves

in terms we understand,
invented by our longing

Song for Alberto R. Gonzales

Of all evil, the root
is wishful thinking,
to conceive of a single root,
convenient as god stinking
with human consciousness,
to conceive it dumb
enough to be grass, watercress.
Evil as plant will plumb
not do it. Even evil as a grizzly,
shredding skin from bone,
can scratch the surface merely
of human mind at work to hone
delivery of injury, to sustain,
by law, application of pain.

—U.S. Attorney General (2005-)

Florida; or, The Luxury of Diversity

trying to find the alone spot
on sand complicated by bodies

envying the man on his back,
his legs a vast, libertine V

treading away from radios,
from loose-limbed children of a certain age

marking the young men assured in their indifference,
the possibility of being beyond their desire

now listening for bathers
chattering in a different language

granting me sympathy of their present voices
but fused to sweet foreigner's solitude I suck

from my ignorance,
whenever I travel out of English

The Swan

I want to see the air-conditioned home
where it happened, in a July night's reprieve
from visible humid heat: galley kitchen oven
of trout baked in vinaigrette, in foil,
the twin beds of a ground floor unit
whose windows, yes, even blessed fenestration,
the best part of a building, were forgettable.

I know there was a couch in the furnished
living room where my just-grown woman's body
sank in a reverie of wine, of dialogue unraveling.
That I was fresh, was ignorant, was confident
the specific gift two bodies can make together
existed, eventually was knowable, was good.

The swan, friend of a friend, was first-time
visitor invited in to supper on a whim,
a self shameless in the critical instant
of its demanding, making my words
a language outside animal understanding,
pretending I was willing though together
we knew I was slack, the body a swag
of sinewless resistance over his arms, lifted
from the couch and carried to the bed,
the sheets, the naked skin of him,
the blackout.

When I opened my eyes
to daylight, swan in my narrow bed,
the verb he said amazed me awake—
its unpretending precision, first shock
of the truth of it as painless as the instant
of a skin slice, fresh slice, deep harm
that would be and be.
That smug and unrepentant word,
wielded, was another deed.

Economy

I was young when my father sold me
for two missing cows,
the cows he'd sold to buy
my brother's wife. So I went
to the neighbor who'd left them
in my father's care, to feed.
Rich man, he took me
when I was fourteen,
the father of my babies,
two and three.
He was fifty-four that year,
maybe. He has a farm, a house,
a tile roof where I work.
The children belong to the father.
My kids are girls:
it hurts to watch them grow.

Anti-Peace Activists

The anti-peace activists congregate today
in our small green town,
as though to demonstrate there can only be

so much enlightenment, their pale faces
having had enough of it,
their mouths set grimly for business.

The sun slants past their signage on its way
to orchards, to vineyards, to the chill waves
falling over themselves to be touched.

This town is surrounded and the marchers
know it. Now, after years of getting by,
they feel themselves hedged (how did it happen?)

by the organic fields sown round their trim
streets, their downright houses, hemmed in
by the prevailing wind, loose views.

The anti-peace activists congregate today
in our small green town,
waving the flag like there's no tomorrow.

Agricultural Evening

Evening as a word,
crepuscular.
Evening seems almost too mild
a precursor to night,

yet hear the flight of the owl
stalled in a salad of other sounds,
the harvest carrying on
dangerously with its equipment.

Looking into obscurity
as into a future,
satisfactory as a dream
that burdens dreamer

with the taste,
the intention, of comprehension,
only to release her
to herself again peering

into the dusky medley
of wind, of bird,
of human whirring.
Evening.