

1976

The Dream of Execution

Henry Carlile

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In the cathedral
there is a smell
of oranges
and the bad cigarettes
the old fruit vendors smoke.

This troubles my soul
for it is not
a religious smell.

My soul is the clear glass
of the flask, my body is
the wine. It has never been
the other way around.

Sitting in a brown pew
a slender woman weeps,
and her body is in her tears.
She catches her tears
carefully; she is crying
into her open hands.

The rectory is upstairs.
Its white wall crumbles like chalk.
The paintings are really windows
of clear, thin glass.

There are certain acts, once done,
that make you a prophet.
I have no way of knowing
what they are.

The Dream of Execution / Henry Carlile

At dawn they led a man out and tied him to a stake.
They were going to shoot him and leave him there.
There was nothing anyone could do about it.
The commanding officer stood smoking a cigarette
while the firing squad composed mostly of conscripts

leaned nonchalantly on their rifles, and a priest
droned the last rites like a black fly in summer.
No one would come in the final moment with a pardon.
Whatever the man had done would be remembered:
Possibly something as trivial as speaking out of turn.
The man looked around him as though unaware
that sentence had been passed and he would die.

Just before the order was given they led a woman
into the courtyard, evidently for a last visit.
We heard her say to him in a high, clear voice,
"If I love you, it is not for anything you have done."
And that was all; in a moment she was gone,
the man was dead, and the troops were marching away.
I don't know why I remember this sequence,
or why it keeps happening over and over, as though
I were somewhere outside myself waiting for it to end,
to become something other than it is, her name
the one word opening like a bullet in his lung.

The Woman in the Big Boy Restaurant and I / David McElroy

I love the way she bites the O
of the donut and eats it into a C,
the glazing sugar sprinkling her lap
where a pink package crinkles in the heat.

I want to kiss the curlers in her hair.
I want to flex my biceps,
make payments on her station wagon,
caress her cheek with all the little holes
in it looking like a minute steak.
I want to eat her face.

I want to take my clothes off
and just like a pussy cat in catnip
slither and hiss and squirm and roll all
over her four blond brats.