1980

Dressing Game

Dennis Schmitz

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      peripheral animals,
squirrel or hen pheasant go still
straining for a blend
with burdock or in the windy fix

of a branch. maybe they hear
only the shotgun cock,
maybe the preliminary notes
if even simpler animals warn them:

the hunt for fishbait grubs
as man turns over
the eggshell white stump,
this cosmic gummy earth clinging.
he lifts the chain saw

to the snag, having himself heard
the grass leaf out
from the foot that crushed it,
the tent nails driven into laurel

sound high-C. he holds back
the cut for his wife to whittle
out old snuff for fire.
the ten-gallon drum with the marks
he rolls over rocky ground

for bass or continuo—
this song feeds through her hands
over the oiled superscription:
her fingermarks, her scars,
the thick crown of a wart,
maybe a hair between her flesh & theirs,

she cleans the game.
she follows the puckered skin with a match
to burn off pin feathers,
pushes & kneads squirrels from their hides,
printing against a haunch,

against the suddenly revealed
scraped breastbone, her live flesh.
the knife-nick will be cooked in—
even the trash organs

pick up her image as she sorts,
breaking the membranes, turning the joints
180 degrees to break their lock
on remembered fields,
burrows & slide-holes in the rye-grass.

afterwards she soaks in the stream,
the red curling off,
the current clotting around rocks.
she lets her soiled shirt fill,

removes it & wrings it. & her pants
as she swings them
emptied of herself fill too with a clear
though invisible body
which passes, shivering the denim, back
into the stream.