1989

St. Theresa's

Peter Desy
the body’s parts snuggled together
to make one multiple thing.

I blame it all
on St. Paul. And Plato,
whose philosophy of the air Nietzsche
called ‘the higher swindle,’ and
it was, the best shell game in town,
until Jesus raised mouldering Lazarus
whose stench blew through mainstream Christianity
like a bad fix, a jolt to stiffen the veins.

That’s why a statue is a soothing thing,
why we pray to them and erect them in cemeteries
and put them on courthouse lawns, all the juices
that make us go, frozen on the spot,
the same each time we pass.

I could watch a great piece
of sculpture all day, planted root-like
on a concrete bench, my blood slowing
and turning to sand, my eyes smoothing, I
commanding the mutable world, a stone sword
at my side, my stallion caught bolt
upright, for at least a thousand years.

ST. THERESA’S

Stuffed into layers of wool,
we sledded in lucky winters over the hills
to the school that lay at the bottom
of a small scooped-out valley,
enclosed by a Cyclone fence, with no horizons
to give children’s minds their drift and dream.
It just sat in against the land,
dirty windows and a hard geometry of bricks.
It had a cinder playground where once I skinned
my knee to the bone. The nuns told me to offer up the pain for the poor souls in purgatory. I bled the whole way home where my mother called me sweetheart and precious all day long. Angels sat next to me on the couch where I lay and thought about the sisters, their bony white fingers, their yellow teeth and their rock-scarred sign that said NO RUNNING that we threw stones against for pennies, even during summer, but the thing just stood there, its concrete foot dug in deep.

**Out of Body**

The ladder leaning against the house
Is missing a rung,
So you have to take a giant step
Half-way up. I’d fix it but I like
The feeling of leaving the earth
For that extra stretch. It’s like
Stepping outside my body, and I think
I could take more steps like that
And scale the entire distance
Between body and spirit, extending one
To leave the other—non-matter
On its way up indefinitely.
All you need is a slight wind to start with,
One that brushes but doesn’t bruise your cheek—
And just the right degree of forgetfulness,
The sky so full of stairs
I could step off, and walk anywhere.