

MY TRANQUIL WAR AND OTHER POEMS

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The Abu Ghraib Images

The zero seconds in the pulses
animating Goya's *Third of May*
have ceased: it is how we hood
the crimes of the past, how we
steal from classical conceptions
of pathos, irrefutably current.
Guernica doesn't do this justice.
Nor Milgram's prison experiments.
Something about the dark
solitaries crowding the ghost-rooms
of the imperium, something
about the thumbs-ups, the wide
grins, the signal-choked embraces
of the iced detainee, the textbook
postures (wires trailing from genitals),
is beyond instant recall, even if
familiar like the hair on our wrists:
we find this night slit open like
our favorite poet's suicide,
anomaly piling on anomaly,
making us afraid of shadows,
which linger inside these doors.
And the benign names—stress
position, sensory deprivation,
“fear up,” “ego down,” “futility”—
deprive us of rational bearings:
it is how we viewed the barbed
wires of our fortress cities
from the distance of fiction.
I hear in the pyramids of naked
men, piled in easy symmetry,
the accordion of religious zeal:
finally the equality of sexes,
the equalization of man and beast,
the erasure of borderlines,
we have been seeking
since Luther nailed his theses,
heralding the climax of eros.

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I Watched Executions Last Night with My Sister

The football field, where I used to cheer as a twelve-year-old,
had been prepared to accept the deaths of forty murderous men,

whose souls we witnessed exiting with the ease of needles
running out of thread. It was like kicking

in the style of Pelé and getting only the goal post
on your bloody shin, and falling twisted and embarrassed to the ground,

your playmates laughing over your sundered body, screaming:
he is just like his sister, Daud pees sitting down like his sister.

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To Djuna Barnes, on *Nightwood*

At last I see your aesthetic quarry:
to trump the flood of lewd words O'Connor's
watery-grave mouth leaks, after horrors
we spawn as if the state were our glory.
I see how Nora's fealty is treason.
I see how Robin bowing to the dog
in the last hours of the blunt monologue
evokes the return of the dead season.
Djuna, are you vanquished, do you now laugh?
Women have chosen swords over deaf words,
dictators have unpaid armies for staff,
Guido the idiot self we kill in thirds.
They read you then as warbler of passion.
They thought you a fad, a passing fashion.

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