

Las Meninasⁱ

My writing is like
the male nude in Western tradition of art
soft, even the strongest most beautiful man.

I lie / recline
my writing is erect
in the smallest possible way taut but not extended suggestive
then discontinued to potential reaches of the image.

Whereas hands can touch / mouths can touch
eyes cannot touch.

Eye contact
is too naked to bear scrutiny, an eye for an eye isn't physical
complete uncertainty as to catching someone's eye
you could think you looked at each other
with intention but then she looks aside
conniving eyes darting glances
between the portrait which is the face and the landscape which is life
organs so open they have to close from time to time
with a fleeting shudder / shut
glistening
vulnerable undress.

Las Meninas

appears in my reading coincidentally

repeatedly, a travel scenarioⁱⁱ, me traveling

the traveler a woman whose lover says she resembles the Velázquez lass

then seeing the recreation by Pablo Picasso

a poetⁱⁱⁱ writes essays about Eros

describes the blind spot

into which the girls are staring / staring down the gaze.

The curation of my reading list morphs into an actual gallery

of images, am

I conscious of the fame

before other authors point me in visual / visionary directions.

Las Meninas is a whole lot of little girls.

Central girl radiant a conduit of light

natural light falls like a blessing directly on her temples

or light emanates naturally from her, angelic

she does not stand she hovers

compare Rembrandt's De Nachtwacht

that little girl luminescent

locks like wings halo

vision among the gloom.

The unsightly girl, her face recreated as a moon in the other picture

a negative space in the gloaming.

Could there be an understudy for the infanta
stripping beneath the dress that takes up so much space
layers and layers of maidenhood negligee
in the finest unheard of fabrics
make sure she structurally blows.

In the monochromatic room
crowded with antiques placed furnishings pieces of value
I hope that somewhere I am still burdened with a fragment of girlhood.
Fragrance of inconsequence with which he photographs
postures are just ways of laying out the body
the wake in an objective observance
fear of being caught out
in flagrante delicto
sofa bed occasional
sheets and needing / kneeling to pray
he always offers one image
to the sitter
thanks for posing
proposing nothing is the right way to let her down easy.

Every night I imagine his body either in front or behind mine
I sleep on my side.

When he is behind me, his arm reaches over waist and I should feel protected

but I feel safer when pressing my defenseless front against his back
and breathe the suffocating air
from the warm division between us.

Emptiness is an edge / on edge / an edge
these little feminist anatomies

I disallow my body from others
skin is way too porous a vessel for what it contains.

On the subject of nakedness most suppose an aesthetic
agreement to pose is to yield your outline to a definition of beauty
to hope that something good will come of it
the disappointment of body will be
elevated lasting a lofty homage to self.

Thinking about this no one I know longs to look worse.

Taking off my clothes is a form of in flight hygiene
cleanliness cakes to the skin, nudity shamed exactly for its divinity
being imagined as being
throng of models
larger than life disproportionate glorious
gorgeous anonymous
when nobody knows you anymore
and everything locks stoically to the perspective of an
unassisted eye / naked eye.

The maids of honor are those pictured in the nude.

Picasso undresses the Velázquez girls.

This is not perverted.

He takes things away from them wealth

the contrived innocence of their faces / the healthy glow in the cheeks

he takes away the ceiling the quiet space the dictated focus

fills the space with calculated disarray

robes and the painter

all curves like a male version of woman

smaller curves

moustache

ceremonial insignia

stimulus muse

light.

In interpretation he is no longer a self-portrait

deus ex machina coat check

here and there Velázquez towers like a champ.

I intended this poem to be way more brute force it's fine art let

the décolletage breathe deeper than the neckline.

ⁱ This poem is based on Diego Velázquez's painting and Pablo Picasso's version of it, both named *Las Meninas*.

ⁱⁱ Lynne Tillman, *Motion Sickness*

ⁱⁱⁱ Anne Carson, *Eros The Bittersweet*