

Caveat

I master you like a slow equestrian portrait,
the masterpiece with permanent guard,
brutally restored and never to be toured,
never quite owned by nation or industrialist,
priceless so they say in the catalogue raisonné.
Your provenance snakes through dubious dynasties:
bankers purloined you, then a White Russian.
Your student, I commit you to memory,
sly perspectives and iconography,
what every drake and strawberry plumply signify.
It is Christian but also fleshy, omnivorous,
excites the only epigram in my repertoire,
the sole sure phrase in years of war.
Though I shun the ring of dilettantes
I long to hear them praise your brushwork,
cloudy distances of grey and pearl,
the way you draw me into your orbit, your *sfumato*.

Annex

Little princesses on a wall, Clark Gable's cloudless smile,
those brute slides scowling in empty halls:
this is décor to outstare grimmest reckonings.
Yet they caper still and dance attendance. A looming brute
in Boston Raiders gear lips his vertiginous girl
who sways and staggers at the foot of the annex.
We are on the Prinsengracht, we morbid Monday regulars,
pitched down flights of stairs too steep for implication.
To the question how it happens no slide provides an answer.
Outside, autumn battens down, leaves stagnate on dun reflections
of gum-chewing menthol addicts. The bells of Westerkerk
toll *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*. Whipped by bereted jockeys
flossy draught horses haul beer to the weekday palace,
videoed by the indifferent who queue towards enlightenment.