THE NEXT TIME WE SAW PARIS

"The next time was the last time."

One morning we saw de Gaulle
himself in uniform chauffeured
alone in an open Peugeot.
He seemed to dare assassination
as he did near Notre Dame
during the Liberation parade.

On house fronts and doors we noticed small bronze plaques with names followed by *Victime de Nazis*.

We'd read reports that *Enfants*des Boches reached 100,000

during the Occupation.

"Horizontal

Collaborators" were shorn bald, spat upon and marched naked through the streets.

De Gaulle pronounced all executed traitors justly punished.

We focused on Paris of the postcards: Sacre-Coeur, the Eiffel Tower, the Champs-Elysees, the Louvre. The Folies-Bergere booked sellouts. The Bateau Mouche was packed. Lounging by the Seine, a fisherman propped his rod against a bench and smoked a Gitanes

as if catching a fish meant little or nothing at all.

VIGIL

Darkness is illiterate.

You

wait for a word, but there's nothing;

You wait for a sound and there's nothing.

Midnight's

a time of its own.

Whatever

it hides is yours to imagine.

You almost hear a voice you loved above all others.

You'll hear it in your dreams.

But now there's only midnight and silence.

You close your eyes and keep them closed, and listen.

THE EYES OF LOVERS

They'll look at each other until whatever prompts them to keep staring surrenders.

They'll learn that all they ever hope to see stays near as here but hiding.

Their eyes

will fence to a final draw that neither even wants to win.

They'll think no more of elsewhere or yesterday or anything ahead to interrupt the marriage of their eyes, mating.

INBRED

Finches arrive in bunches.

They helicopter down and hover like hummingbirds before they peck in order at the feeder --- each to his ration.

No one

fights.

A wild but definite civility prevails until each finch is full.

To share

and share alike is worlds away from all our public massacres or wars we wage for warfare's sake.

It seems

we are the lone species
that kills its kind by choice.
Lately we've invaded space
and set our sights on Mars.
Will we retain our malice
in the stratosphere and be
as lethal there as here?

The first murder on the moon will tell us.

THE PAINTERS OF NUDES

Like girls not yet aware of what a woman's body means, they offered Renoir the texture of skin.

On canvas they became an old man's dream of women playfully nude for him alone...

Picasso's early nudes look almost like cartoons.

His fans anointed them "Picassos." Compared to what he mastered

in his "Blue Period," they seem at best a phase...

Pearlstein's

nudes appear exhausted.
The only feeling they arouse is sympathy...

Egon Shiele and Gustav Klimt painted like "Peeping Toms."

The yawning thighs of their nudes expose the hidden orifice of queens.

Drawn to perfection, they qualify as art.

Photographed, they'd be pornography...

Compulsive over cleanliness, Bonnard's wife spent hours in a bath tub.

Her husband painted her there time after time...

Rembrandt painted Saskia in costume or naked in bed.

Her expression stayed the same in both.

Theories are a waste of time.

A woman attracts; a man reacts.

Art as reaction says less about the woman, more about the man.

I think of Luther, Rosa Parks, St. Joan of Arc and Albert Einstein.

Could

Luther have assumed that saying "I can do no more" would launch the Reformation?

Did Rosa

Parks foresee that keeping
her seat in the front of the bus
would change the South forever?
Who could predict that Joan
of Arc would rise as the soul
of France after being cursed
and burned alive?

And Albert

Einstein?

His perfect equation of energy, mass and light has nuclearized the world.

The formula is small enough to cover with a postage stamp.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO

Unless we feel, we fail to remember.

Those killed in war become just names or numbers.

And those who took their lives by choice?

Additional numbers.
Or those who took the paths

of least resistance?

More numbers.

If we believe Erasmus,
the world is ruled by folly.
What passes for honor is folly.
Statues commemorate the least noble.

The infamous and wealthy are known eternally by name.

Assassins and saints are buried alike in cemeteries groomed like gardens.

The folly of faith without love or action sullies what passes for religion.

Entrepreneurs

and men of state confirm Erasmus as a prophet...

It takes

a rebel, often a woman, to choose the option of fools and live for others. Folly

has no defense.

By feeling what she means and loving how she lives, she cares for what is overlooked or lost and makes what's lasting last.

For Janine Bayer