

Memories of Beef

Margaret Webb

Souvenirs du bifteck

Sept heures et le vétérinaire veut rentrer chez lui pour y trouver son bifteck et sa femme mais il a le bras pris jusqu'à l'épaule dans le cul d'une vache...Le "je" poursuit avec le rêve d'un fermier engraisé qui donne naissance à un veau anorexique, mais le tout sort à l'envers.

Ce texte explore la question de la mémoire à travers le réseau de substitutions et de déplacements symboliques qui la tissent. Webb trouve dans la métaphore un rythme qui l'empêche de dévier le sens. Elle travaille donc la métonymie, cordon ombilical de la mémoire. Son texte rompt avec la logique de la métaphore, logique qui coupe le lien entre le veau et sa mère, logique qui transforme la génisse en bifteck empaqueté et congelé. Au lieu de répéter cette logique et de transformer la génisse encore une fois – cette fois en un signifiant dans un poème – le texte souligne la contiguïté des termes, les rapports intimes qui retracent le cheminement de la mémoire.

"The female sex organs are the blind spot."

– Jane Gallop

"I think where I am not, therefore I am where I think not."

– Jacques Lacan

1.

seven o'clock and the vet wants to go
home to his steak and his wife but
he's got his arm to his shoulder up the ass
of a cow yanking the calf
out by its hind legs already 100
pounds too big to walk even jerkily the way new calves
do and blind

steam from the manure
steam from the afterbirth

steam from the uterus that's come out
with the calf

2.

in Montreal, where memory is
occurring, metaphor leaps over whole
decades of my life with slant regard
to metonymy, what simmers beneath
the surface and connects me

oh, I buy *The Gazette*, get groceries, go to the bank
but what I'm saying is
I don't go out in the city

3.

when I'm 12 and watching this cow
having been fed to make beef
too fat to have calves
its calf too big to stand
my father says
go to the house already
an hour ago

the cow never getting up the next day
becomes string-wrapped
packages in our freezer

in the summer it's my job to wash the grey liquid
oozing from the blind calf's eyes
to keep flies off the blind calf's eyes

4.

I don't know why I'm having this memory of beef
I stopped eating it months ago
maybe I'm anemic; I sleep too much
last night I went to bed at 11 woke up

at 3 went back to sleep
at 6 got up at 10
face of the clock ticking a kind of metonymy
relating what passes
for days, lying in
the heat watching flies
mate on the ceiling
too lazy to get up
to close the screen

you think I'm depressed
on account of the sleep
on account of not going out in the city
on account of watching the flies

my father scraped the uterus up with a shovel

not that I want a connection
between that uterus and my
not going out in the city
I'm not trying to make one

I'm trying to make a poem

what the flies are doing here I don't know

5.

I am writing the poem because I believe a poem can

- a) soak up the excess of metaphor
- b) supply memory with its own metonymy
- c) release me from trying to bend not just lines but the whole of my being into its absurd connections and
- d) give me my life back

when I think in metaphor there is
a certain rhythm which does not let me change

direction seemingly changes
of its own volition, leaping
over logic to create another kind
of logic which makes street
corners hazardous keeping
me indoors and dreaming
a fatted farmer birthing an anorexic
calf and a fence I'm trying to jump over
which is too

high or a man and a woman who have invited me to dinner when
I would still go out in the city but they discover that I
have these memoies of beef and they pretend not to have invited me to
dinner, saying there is no roast in the oven
and the table is set for their inlaws who I wouldn't like
any more than the beef

6.

it was after dinner that I dreamt
the fatted farmer giving birth to the anorexic
calf though it came out
the other way around

there might be a connection
in the breech
if you don't fill it in
with connections

it was Freud who said you need
the blind spots to see

how the flies squeezed black body to black body
over the face of the blind calf
to drink the liquid from the blind calf's eyes

and the blind calf not having a mother

7.

that relation being another kind of metonymy
the umbilical cord of metonymy
that is cut

turning the mother into a free-floating signifier
or three-quarter-inch steaks
in the deep freeze

metaphor breathing cold or hot in its searching
and taking schizophrenic leaps
on young calf's legs

8.

in the city that I don't go out in
there's a bar that I don't go into
riding my bicycle one day
(in a time I used to go out)
it caught my attention
that bar being a lesbian bar I lost
sight of the straightness
of the road I hit the curb I flew forward
and jammed my pelvis
when I hit the curb

it wasn't that my uterus had to be
scraped up off the street
only that it felt that way

9.

my other cow memory is of selling that calf at the end of
the summer I got \$100 for wiping the goo off its face for
three months I got new clothes for school in the fall it
went to the slaughterhouse