

Matisse in Lesbian Pastiche

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Matisse dans un pastiche lesbien

Comment les femmes peuvent-elles créer un espace public pour exprimer leur désir pour les femmes, un espace comparable par exemple à celui dont Henri Matisse disposerait pour ses peintures, pour son propre désir? Dans «Matisse in Lesbian Pastiche», la narratrice met en scène deux femmes, touristes, dont l'une est amoureuse de l'autre et qui visitent une exposition du peintre, à New York. En occupant le double rôle de narratrice et de personnage, la narratrice réussit dans un même temps à sexualiser son «je» et à confondre le véritable lieu du réel – s'agit-il du lieu de l'écriture ou d'un lieu à New York? Dans cette fantaisie lesbienne, une fantaisie qui repousse les cadres du représentable, les tableaux de Matisse prennent la couleur du désir d'une artiste amoureuse. Et, en définitive, les deux femmes en viennent à quitter le lieu poétique pour entrer ensemble dans l'espace public.

There are always flowers for those who want to see them.

– Henri Matisse, *Jazz*

1.

"It looks like rain," she says
"Let's stop for coffee," says the other
"Christ these bags are heavy"
"Let's stop for coffee"

the two speakers are women

one woman is moved by an urge
to spend all of her time in New York
shopping for shirts for her husband

the other woman is in love
with her and can't say
anything except
"let's stop for coffee"

making "coffee" like Stein's "cow"

readers grazing the poem
for meaning will know
that this is what artists must do

if the landscape is to change at all

2.

future lines in the poem will occur

in which the poem exudes
a strange asexuality –

the narrator writing subjects onto a stage only
to have the subjects wander off, wordless, leaving
the narrator naked here

talking about structure

talking about reality

talking about the reference to reality

the texture of two women

(By the time she looks up from the page and out to the street, the two
women are gone)

belated by explanation

(Now rushing to catch up with her subjects laughing as they shop for
souvenirs on Fifth Avenue)

or an emotional resistance to

the next moment:

("I could not bear another cup of coffee")

3.

handily, the Matisse exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art
appears on the horizon as if
a plausible reference to a reality
two female tourists to New York might move in

actually they have tickets

and the narrator is only pretending to be
in the present tense
with the reader

watching the two women read
the guidebook which says
Matisse's lifelong struggle
was between colour and form

knowing already a slippage
in referent will occur
in which the two women will struggle
in a gap between form
and the colour of her own desire

which is not meant as a slight to Matisse
or the Museum of Modern Art
or even to reality

the narrator pays to get in
on credit

4.

the two women stand in front of "La Desserte,
Harmonie Rouge"

the woman who is loved says:
"see how his subjects refuse to recede"

points to the woman holding red
foreground, red background, concurrent
in the present
stress of her dress

and a window framing perspective
that is escape

"On one plane, she cannot recede," she says

"On one plane, she cannot proceed," says the other

who, standing close to her, desiring in the public space of the poem, tries
to create a psychic frame with her skin

"But it is not for the subject to proceed," she says,
"but the artist. It is not the woman, but the painting of the woman itself
that becomes present"

and rushes on to look at "La Danse"

leaving the form of the other left behind pulled
in ways violent to description

"can't you recede gently," says the other

then louder:

"they called him a beast"

5.

the narrator realizes she could save herself
some pain, write stanza eight and
call it a day

but she is obsessed with something real
what occurs outside the frame
and wanting to make the frame
conform to that outside
and not vice versa

she is obsessed with making desire
of one woman for another woman appear
in the present stress
of Matisse's desire for women

where is the window?

one difficulty with reality:

moving through the background of the poem are people who actually
paid 15 American bucks to see the show

some not that well off

having to see on credit

6.

either one woman will seize the textual moment
turn to the other
and kiss her
or sentences will grow unbearably long

the narrator's deference to convention
to the smooth passage
of crowds through a museum corridor
wreaking havoc on the surface
of her poem

perhaps another woman, glancing at her Cartier so as not to elicit undue sympathy from the reader or attention in the background, could wander by the two women staring at "La Danse"

could notice the orange spiral of desire struggling to free itself from a blue frame, turn to her husband and, in just such a tone as to indicate radical displacement of referent, say, "it is beastly, isn't it"

7.

desire having its way with structure
eventually
the narrator (even without
the problematic kiss)
will admit her desire
to be just like Matisse

that she wants a public space for her desire

(even wants people to pay 15 American bucks to read it)

which will involve concessions
to museum conventions
to the reality of museum conventions
to our reverence of reality

concession: an act or instance of conceding

inside a concession: hot dog vendors cash in

8.

should the narrator's desire not conform exactly
to such structure, she might
slip her subject out of form into
something a little more
colourful

claiming the blue-green in Matisse's canvas as her blue-green, the blue-
green she associates with the depth of a northern Ontario lake of her
youth, which has become her depth too

she claims her right to this colour, to give her excess of it to the desiring
woman in the poem so that the blue-green becomes the colour of the first
woman's desire and the orange-red (metonymically linked to the hair of
the desired woman) the subject of her desire

what is left of narrative frames the orange-red inside the blue-green, an
erotic landscape:

the woman with the orange sheen of red hair, brown eyes, fawn-like,
fauvian, wanders into a new sense of that blue-green, nostrils quivering
in drink of it, pink tongue thirsting, swirling, stirring the surface like
stones skipped like heart beats like waves emanating out

sentient in the mornings after the narrator will write and rewrite that line
bending it in circles ever back and rushing to the tip of that pink in that
blue-green until she cannot bear to think that line (slipping in a comma
here) one moment (another comma) longer

9.

in the museum, the woman with the Cartier glances back at "La Danse,"
notices the blue-green, the red fire

missing

the two women gone

in the place where the sentient was, she feels November outside,
Monday morning, the museum pressing a heaviness into the line above
her brow

her husband, touching her elbow, feels her flinch, reads
a space into the line which he had not read before

10.

months later, at Shakespeare & Co., the woman with the Cartier will
sneak a glance at Lesbian Pastiche cached inside a collection of Lawrence

will think back to the two women

“La Danse”

knowing it now as the frame of her astonishment

she will buy the Pastiche

a poem about two women going for coffee