

Two Poems

Vi Khi Nao

THE MOTHER, 1985

The eloquent lungs of us twins are piled
upon one another. Mother, your
concealed nipples are the tents that the
feet of our existence step on.

I hope our breathing doesn't temporarily
upset your evening inside the tumescent
hide. This oblivion. This sublime maternal
gesture. Coming from you.

Mother, are you warm beneath the animal
hide? Does it nurture your lungs and keep
them from the cold and sunlight?

The cane lies next to you like a stiff
husband. He is not our father, is he? Do
not forget, Mother, the recurring motif of
our neonatal breath blowing on the
crippled twilight of your neck.

The father of civilization hasn't bothered
to clothe us. The earth lives without

statues, figurines, pantheons, and archaic
stones.

Mother, isn't the night breathless? We
love being snowed into your embrace. We
love the amphitheater of your chest. Our
heads are diminutive gladiators vying for
your tenderness and beastly lullaby.

The gods do not distinguish nature from
nature, biology from science, and you
haven't distinguished my brother from
me. You hold us with fastened ardor.

We know that farther below us the hide is
pregnant with your feet and something
else we do not have a name for.

Sometimes, in the darkest hours of our
breaths, I was led to believe that it was
our father's bloated dead body. When we
do not know what it is, our imagination
runs wild.

It's lovely to lie on top of my brother's
young, soft flesh. I hope I am not

crushing his fragile lungs and bones. But I
trust you know the scales of our existence
and I trust that you know how to balance
our breaths and draw the symmetries of
my brother's body and my body to meet
the shoreline of yours.

Is this how things will be forever? My
brother's skin is so soft. Sometimes I
forget that I am not a morning glory
pressed against another morning glory.
It's just that my skin and his skin are such
amicable neighbors.

I cannot see, with your back turned away
from the dusk, if it's morning-to-be or
night. It doesn't matter, really, the passage
of time.

DAWN, 1990

They made us pull our pants down,
stretch our legs and feet, and lift up our
chins.

Five clouds wiggle like white caterpillars
that have been recently promoted to
angels.

We saw one leaf dying in the strong rain,
battered by the wind, and we didn't stop
to eat it. We let it live.

We are famous for our ability to fuck on a
string. Sexual funambulists, they call us.
The women usually fall off when we try
to fuck them. But we let them fall anyway.

How could we save them if they don't
have legs that move like a swinging
trapeze.

[NOTE: These poems are ekphrastic studies of the figurative paintings of Norwegian artist Odd Nerdrum, from the time period of 1983–2005.]

