

JOHAN HUYBRECHTS

The Visit

The hardest thing to tell—as I come in
and pass through the vestibule, the scent of dried roses,
tomatoes, beeswax, oak—is not the tempered cool of the old
bluestone dalles floor, the faint light

brighter as I step into the hall,
a garden view, the empty vase and the cut-glass bowl,
the boy-flutist in the red pantaloons, *A Night Mass in Irimbo*,
and the unreasonable height of the roofbeam—

is not the quiet of the Haut-Bailly
in the dark below emanating through the (locked) cellar door
or the cherry and mahogany inlay in the commode
under the oval mirror, nor the oak itself,

massive and ancient, swallowtailed,
scarred, time-worn and hard like stone, or quarter-sawn,
and the flakes, medullar rays, bare like gold veins, eyegleam,
a light in the hardest core—

is not the way summer mornings shone
with a light that came pouring in from the south
nor what I sense to be the wake of time gone by or even loss,
but more like a change of the arrangement—

is not the way the Ninth hung here
like a thick impenetrable fog that will not clear, suites
like nebulae, Cohen, Fournier (comparing them over and over again),
nor is it the pounding sound of Young and Crazy Horse

or the special sensation one has when piercing
the foot on a surprisingly sharp-spiked wrought iron fence
while trying to enter (the shoe stuck and filling with O-negative, then
dripping a bloodline or *fil rouge* towards the knocker

three steps up)—it's more like a noise without sense,
a crack, or a snap, a velvet-muted sound from inside the case
or the house, or the natural hollow of the chest, that almost passed
unnoticed, and then this squeeze, a tightening of joints

and phren and the vocal cords more tense,
more tuned, and with every new column of air more
ready for piping a language that will not come, something to do
with the overall condition of the instruments,

a hairline fracture in the maple body or the neck,
a loss of hair suffered by the pernambuco bow, or the horse,
the loss of wood of the tree, a tone gone astray, a missing timbre
or peg, or the zing of strings touching strings

out in the draft after being safely stored
away for years, the first and last sound that comes with it,
the baton ticks, brass, *clef à remonter*, lock that turns, returns and released
springs and clicks back into place, then this plain silence

of origins, absence, passing clouds, waves
running through fields like wild galloping mane, the push within
the thin green peel (and all else woodenly skeletal), me leaving here in '93,
keyless—*this unease I felt when she opened the door.*