

---

NATHALIE STEPHENS

Memories of Sleep

vi

Is there a voice beyond my own? In the still echo of unworded thoughts the holler of bodies burned into themselves and the constant reminders of touch. These uncoded inscriptions, words to live by or not, the hollow course of time folded into me. On Yonge Street the constant clamour of anger and my feet to the sullen stretches of unlit sidewalks again, the onslaught of resisted offerings. Place Hôtel de Ville grumbles with quiet rage, city of unkept promises and invincible women.

Is there a voice beyond my own? There is a word for fear beyond language's base vocabulary and the body's inability to be spoken, where memory's promise is its own keeping and sleep its quiet vindication.

xx

The quiet grace of living. The interrupted movement of women's bodies like air trapped in water, gurgles of laughter, this intimacy stifled and stolen between awkward glances and the foray of remembrance. What motions me toward the present? Cruel tapestries of regret, muscles tight with wanting and the sequestered moment come unglued. The scrape of stories dragged across parking lots, garbage bags like gutted fish and their contents splayed and laughable. This night and others, air shredded by the vulgar clang of steel against concrete and the wail of rutting dogs.

xxvi

Always, the inopportune gesture, eyes heavy and low and the incessant tugging at flesh. This terror of depth, the fierce refusal of feeling and the bloody wail of slaughter. The lascivious tone of history, the tremorous current of stone and countless bodies burning. What violence greets innovation? The sweep of graveyards, fire branded into the earth and the awaited call to arms. Vengeance in a carrying case, gait too careful and all eyes upon me. The singe of fear and breath like a calumny.

In Paris, the bombing of a butcher shop, in Lyon, a resurrected trial; in Montréal, the observance of faith, in Toronto, the exposing of old rights of passage. Incidents isolated in the telling, faint markers for a guilt ridden world. My skin catches on a nail. No memory to live by and sleep too scarce to die.

*These texts are excerpted from a larger work entitled Memories of Sleep, which attempts to reconcile the seeming disparate aspects of identity. nathalie stephens is the author of french language poetry, hivernale (Toronto, Éditions du GREF), and a narrative in prose poetry, This Imagined Permanence (Toronto, Gutter Press). Her writing have also appeared in both french and english in various journals across Canada.*