

Three Poems by Angela Leighton

Poem

Olives vertes, vâtres, noires.

L'olivâtre entre la verte et la noire ... Francis Ponge

What is it *for*? the curious child enquired.
Who knows? To handle snugly as a glove,
to fit by chance, to change by word of mouth,
to dream to in a moment's carelessness—

perhaps to hold or hold by, all the world
a cover to discover how a word
might make a listening listened to, not heard,
and nothing come of it but just itself--

or else to pour like oil, an amber slick,
a liquid ingot from its nutty stock,
olivary, expressed from green or black,
and solar-golden in the winter light.

It is for *this*, or *this*, a tiny blessing:
words, by the way (no message) . . . cold pressing.

A Dog's Chance

No call, no thought, no tone—no ring-tone calling for reply,
 (I play for time),
 waiting for a theme (no reason), wanting to say,
 for starters, even:

no word, no wit, no way—no wayward start, no phrase
 to answer, explain:
 fear at the heart, wolves at the door, the clock
 that clocks up, daily.

No stop, no hope, no hold—no threshold from which to stay
 this blank, this blight:
 nothing to say, nothing to wish or write
 at the end of the day.

* * *

Who knows, dumb beast, why the mind is minded to rouse
 the tongue's articulate muscle,

to catch-as-catch-can the arch-memory of a phrase,
 the chance-medley of a line--

like dream in the logic of a find, discovering why.
 The point is point-device.

Who knows how, dog-tired sometimes, beyond clear speech,
 the mind's long tongue-tied stretch

catches, haywire, some line of untried sense,
 invites, like sound itself,

nothing you'd think while thinking, nothing to tell--
 but something, maybe, telling.

* * *

Remember that beast? the dog-brain's working machine
 running asleep,
 as a wayward synapse triggered his dream-nervy feet
 for the hunt, the chase?

He might be here by the fire, the loved creature,
 familiar-forester,
 with leathery pin-cushion paws that twitch to a wish-list,
 and ears that scan

the *forte-piano* of my hands among the cats and hares
 of a dream he's not
 so utterly lost to not to suddenly hear:
 how slyly Schubert

turns the scales of the world: the chord's diminished seventh
 scouring the nerves.
 And the dog's nap stresses like a wind-swept sea.
 The roused creature,

waking to a strange modality of the ear, fetches a call--
 queer lupercal
 from the ancient forests—and howls, *howls*--torn
 from the roots, forlorn.

Eerie cantor, your shocking plainsong sings.
 Nothing you'd know
 pitches that voice in you, sounding the whole body's strings.
 So speech begins.

Mémorial de la Déportation, Paris

(Two hundred thousand . . .)

Come in. Step lower. Enter a bare room.
The skull of a bulb enlightens no-one.

Is it a thought or thought's memorial
dangling high in the mind's cold hall?

At Europe's hub no candleglow
gentles the gloaming, no shade makes shadow.

Only the bald scone of a wired brain
illustrates inventories of pain.

Forfeit outrage. Count instead
one to a thousand, again, no again . . .

while Notre Dame like a crusted moon-probe
scratches the surface. Go deeper. Try below.