

Editorial

PHOTOS OF ABUSE

1.

"There are no lies," wrote Benyamin (Baruch) Spinoza,
"Only the crippled truth." Well, in its meticulous
Concern for virtue and unqualified love
As an ideological issue, rather than the human
Miracle which occurs between people without
Any touted freedom of choice, fraudulent
Cognate of shopping, owning, throwing away--
Yes, and thanks to the sentimental, bogus courage
We adore in the meek, *all* of humanity
For every ferocious millennium
Of its history, has excelled in embracing
The easy lie, the truth's comforting cripple:
Kafka's coal-dealer's wife exclaiming
She sees no starving, freezing, impoverished
Customer, the coal-dealer who hears
The man so desperate and frail
He's floating in his empty coal-bucket
Above the coal-dealer's doorway lintel,
Who's unable to rise from his sick-bed to see
And oppose his wife's custodial will,
Which is, after all, obedience to life,
Which must go on. And so does death,
And both our petty and grand self-exculpatory
Dishonesty. *Baruch*, by the way, means blessing.

2.

And besides, de-humanizing humiliation
Is indifferent to its victims: its purpose
Is to pierce with terror the heart
Of the humiliator, to refresh gratitude
For the grave luck of solidarity with the mighty:

Rosen

*The white people think this country belongs to them-
The whole country changed with only a handful
Of raggedly-ass pilgrims that came over here in the 1500s.
And it can take a handful of raggedy-ass Indians to do the same,
And I intend to be one of those raggedy-ass Indians.*

-Anna Mae Pictou-Aquash (1946-1976)

Within an empire, activity in behalf
Of a human truth is its most dangerous frontier.

3.

Abu is a village or family endearment
Which precedes the bad joke embedded
In someone's nick-name or tag, their
Kunya in Arabic. Hence *Abu Graib*.
But forget the joke, those photos
Were procedural, one of fifty-five
Newly approved techniques, the old
Name, rank and serial number, souvenirs
Of World War II movies, and they weren't
Snapshots, either: someone knew how
To point and click, someone
Indoctrinated in the icons of western
Terror in the name of necessity. So the soldier
With his arms folded behind the pyramid
Of naked Arabs recalled a Tudor executioner
About to swing his ax on Mary, Queen of Scots,
Or Lady Jane Grey, the ladies fluttering
Their fingers to hurry the end
And convey superior delicacy,
The enlisted woman's two-fingered
Victory signal, her rabbit ears likewise
Signifying an enriching feminine presence.
The body pile centers the viewer's eye,
Ascends through the medium of her
Into the powerful, heraldic serenity
Of him. Or the hapless victim
Of collective arrest in the medieval hood
And matching gown, arms extended,
Hands supplicant. Or the leashed kneeler
And the virgin maid (pregnant in cornpone

Editorial

Actuality) more forehead than brains,
Promenading her dragon. Or the fellow
Crouching to shield his groin, contorted
Like Saint Sebastian riddled with arrows,
From police dogs, his testicles tender
As oysters, and a testimonial guarantee.

4.

A U.S. Senator from Oklahoma-
Where public art, according to poetry,
Is truncated, remember?

*In Oklahoma
Bonnie and Josie,
Dressed in Calico,
Danced around a stump.
-Wallace Stevens*

Expressed his outrage at the outrage,
Or as Dante wrote of one of hell's devils:
Ed elli area cul fatto tombetta! (He turned his mouth
Into a trumpet and blew a mighty fart.)
-Inferno

5.

My grandparents framed for their bedroom wall
Magazine photos of their families' conversion
Into bodies stacked like cordwood for burning
As the Nazis strove to conceal proof
Of their half-hidden enterprise, much like
The pyramid of naked Iraqis. America
May well succeed, go crazy with poison,
But swallow the products of its truth,
Which like graffiti in a public toilet,
We discreetly ignore-the coarse art
Of ex-convicts addicted to violently
Degrading sex, or lynch mobs
Hoarding roaring photos of themselves,
Perversity's the dark goad of piety.
Put a born-again redneck or Cossack
In charge of a chicken house and you'll have

Rosen

A lot of hens on your hands with ruined
Rectums. Yet try to see yourself
As Lynndie England, empowered at last,
Expressed, and cherished by her sergeant.
Twist your heart and squint, and don't
Be so confident you won't be the next
Token victim of social control, dear
Un-threatened, busy consumer, the truth
Of a digital photo useless as a coin
In the currency of your expensive life,
And your inexpensive honor.

Kenneth Rosen