

Two Poems by James Owens

Walking Past a Farm on the First Day of Spring

Blades open the earth, with a smell
like blood or bread rubbed to crumbs.

I am thinking of the poet Dennis Brutus,
his *Letters to Martha* from prison

and the poems of exile. *Don't lie*,
I want to shout at someone,

torture is never for information,
always for the pleasure of the torturer,

or to assert the power of the state,
which is the same thing. Then a raw gust

tosses gulls above the plowed furrows
where they have come to pluck

small soft bodies, and shrieking
they hold themselves stiffly in place,

beating against the wind, working
hard not to be blown backward.

Body

1.

This violation. I left you at the door,
but passing your basement window, I saw ---
an accident at first, but it captured me.

Unbuttoning, private and practical,
without ceremony, you tossed your skirt
to the bed and stretched for pleasure
in bra and panties before the mirror and half-
swiveled your hips, flexing
to appraise the sleek-muscled calf and your silken
firm thigh, happy and secret.

It was winter and late.
I trudged home,
my breath clinging to the air, flush
with the good story of the body.

2.

Those last nights before I left, when you undressed
behind the closet door so I would not see,
we slept in the same bed, but meticulously
measured our separate spaces, keeping to what was ours,
the edges of the mattress, avoiding dangerous touch.

Often those mornings, we woke tangled
together, the foolish bodies still dreaming of us,
the summer morning light washing us like cool water
that we refused.
Eyes lowered then, careful, we crept apart.

James Owens's most recent collection of poems is *Mortalia* (FutureCycle Press, 2015). His poems, stories, translations, and photographs appear widely in literary journals, including publications in *The Fourth River*, *Kestrel*, *Connecticut River Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, and *The Stinging Fly*. He earned an MFA at the University of Alabama and lives in Indiana and northern Ontario.