

Summer 2011

# Certainty; The Storm Garden; Millet's Winnower; Domestication

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## Recommended Citation

Phillips, Siobhan. "Certainty; The Storm Garden; Millet's Winnower; Domestication." *Notre Dame Review* 32, Summer/Fall (2011): 44-48.

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CERTAINTY*Siobhan Phillips*

Back when you were sitting for exams  
 on Paul, the getting saved upset me more  
 than rules on women's hair: his little dictums,  
 touchingly ad hoc, for hats and headgear  
 seemed to apprehend a real request  
 for reassurance (male) with near-pathetic  
 care, but his commandments on the mix  
 of faith and works, his scorn for any sinner  
 trusting in the latter, his contempt  
 when banishing delusions over deeds  
 and sloughing off in wholesale condescension  
 epochs-tested acts as guesses dense  
 to facts *he* understands—it all seems clumsy,  
 bluffing, even, boorish; he ignores  
 how creeds of *sola fides* supersede  
 the duties countermanded with a practice  
 no less willed: a stuff of inner issue,  
 yes, but still a chore that's posed and done.  
 Belief while lacking proof: that's not a task?  
 Demands for resolution aren't law?  
 The merest daily habits show the flaw  
 in either-or, the smallest daily tests  
 and inattention, say (confirm you missed  
 a difference in the way I knot a scarf  
 or fix my part, for instance, then record  
 and nourish the offense), the steady need  
 for means as well as meanings. Something settled,  
 maybe, as in someplace we can dwell.  
 And even the apostle, incidentally,  
 holds that coupled skeptics might be blessed  
 by virtue of association. Well.  
 You passed. I stay apostate. There we are.

THE STORM GARDEN*Siobhan Phillips*

What was it—envy, sorrow—that tonight,  
when musing through your baby book of posed  
mementos, whispered back: okay, give up,  
you're right? Relentless rain all day. Now mists  
confuse the moon, exhausted as a cup  
of heirloom glaze; the battered creamy-white  
of petals from our neighbors' yard insists  
on crying its destruction, heart exposed.  
When we arrived, we questioned how the pair  
next door in jeans and All-Stars could afford  
three pre-war stories all their own, assuming  
trust funds: then, ashamed, we watched a bare  
half-acre lot put on a week of blooming  
light. Prepared and lost without reward.

MILLET'S WINNOWER

*Siobhan Phillips*

A picture of what works, and this bent  
body, tense as the resonant cut

of a violin, its signature.  
Pads of blue rags twine-tied

to its legs and, above the rough shirt  
some dubbed *egalité*, a red scrap

knotted around its head, mean hours  
on knees, bare to sunburn,

and dried sweat. And if that canvas  
blouse across its back

*should* draw our look  
somewhere other (light beyond the frame

shows the cracked, plastered white—strokes  
some disdained as scrubbing, trowelling—

to be chiaroscuro, a master's love  
of dark and difference) than down

to the tight grasp of hand  
on basket, still, the hand works: Its tilt

yields to the undiscerning wind.  
Its slack judges the weights of waste

and store. Harder, hard to see  
in paint, is the task of eyes;

their resigned downward measure guards  
what free crowds and critics,

what the Minister of Finance, the buyer,  
idealists, appraisers, connoisseurs,

what even the artist with his daring,  
redeemed brush, could only

presume: clean grain, hidden  
at the center of the work

by the body's shadow  
and the gold glow of the chaff's rise.

DOMESTICATION

*Siobhan Phillips*

Oh, my love, I hear you can pop champagne  
with a cleaver. Knife down an ice-cold neck with a slicing  
chop so fast and clear that it nicks the overlap

lip of the greenish glass and the mushroomed cap:  
boom. Two bits, the wood, the gleam, left plain  
on the square of blade. The motive? Flair, I presume,

vanity: why else risk the shatter and waste,  
the cuts? Though just last week in a Payless, trapped  
in line and watching a cross-dresser tap-dance test

some lavender pleather oxfords, me with heels  
I'd picked for nine-ninety-nine and already late  
for a meal with distinguished guests, I pictured trying

once at home in our scarred linoleum kitchen  
box a quick stroke flung toward broken: feared,  
here, before you or I exhale, even, rush

of foam in a steady flute—its crack-edge set  
in a soft, moist fist. Relief. Then stars of air  
unsealed at last on the covert, thirsty tongue.