

Gauguin's The Loss of Virginity (1890-1891)

These days it doesn't take two years:
post-game comfort after a tough softball loss,
John Lennon's birthday, or passing 10th grade
for the second time, but these are consolations.
Gauguin knew better: his Juliette,
her back pinched by the limestone,
needs the fox's paw to support
her spiralling, sunburned breasts.
She can barely keep her eyes open;
she has been there for months.
The bed at the inn is lumpy,
the coffee cold, and Paul can't keep
his genius fingers off the maids.
The lilacs and tulips won't re-straighten
and the rocks' moss itches like hell.
There are numerous other delays:
Paul has to run to the hill
and wave the kids away. The boys
aren't reluctant to go--there's
not enough action here anyway.

See how the narrowed horizon soon evaporates
near Cannes and other questionable virgins,

(Cont.)

("Gauguin's," cont., no break)

where less violent marriage processions
won't keep marching toward the canvas.
Here they are too small to fear,
but the noise disturbs the scene's dumbness.
Next week there will be another wedding march.
Paul will probably lose control again,
call it a day after the clouds shift,
and smugly rub down Juliette's sores.

As for the fox: he will bitterly complain
about the rocks speading in silence,
the vacancy in his eyes, a girl's thigh
getting top billing, the lack
of horizontal stroking. He says:
to hell with you and muted mauves.
He desires to become
Lassie, a track star, anything,
but will settle for the pastor
of this dead landscape
and take off on that impossibly-thin path
once again sure of his own four legs,
his power to smell real red blood.
On Sundays he will stalk sheep
and schoolgirls, evangelically
learning to love himself.