

Late Spring · *Stephen Berg*

It rained last night. Patches are drying  
on the fragrant streets. Still thick air.  
Some kind of cooking smell or whiff of old age  
drifts from the houses. Fried eggs, mattresses, laundry

too wet to dry in this humidity,  
the mind indifferent to itself, simple, all here.  
I walk downtown to my office, hearing  
Wordsworth's *To A Butterfly*, wondering

Is it good? It touches me, gently, as this morning does—  
life quietly itself, quietly  
passing; whatever is, whoever is  
held in a clean gray mood of peacefulness.

Stark details keep returning from a walk  
which, in a way, I'm on again now. Sitting  
up ahead of me on someone's doorstep,  
there's a fat woman in a housedress stamped with pale, blotchy,

purple flowers, her legs only a little apart, I think,  
the thigh closest to me, as I approach, blocking  
the other leg, her skirt draped down over the near leg,  
crossing her lap, it seems, the whole scene looking accidental

—like those times you've been to the theatre and sit there  
waiting for it to begin and stare at the middle  
of the curtain where it isn't quite closed and are sure you see  
flashes of hands and secret preparations through the black crack.

I'm half a block away. Then I'm in front of her and turn to look.  
She does have her legs open, wide, and the far leg,  
the one I could hardly see, is flung back,  
the skirt bunched up now to the tops of her thighs,

no undies, no look of awareness of *him-and-me* on her face  
or in any change of her eyes, big, wet doll eyes,  
so that I or anyone can look directly at it,  
unpredictably hairy, bearded, Mandarin-like, innocent,

the lips that would have been almost unbearable to see  
not there—I mean, Thank God, not in sight.  
As I passed I wondered what I felt, if anything,  
then reached the circular park on the Parkway half way

into town. It has a fountain. Child-sized copper frogs squirt water,  
nude, giant female and male Gods stretch out beneath sheets of water  
in the immune, aloof poses of sheer pleasure.  
I looked down at the beds of tulips everywhere.

Nothing left but the stalks; sprawled, rain-flattened leaves;  
grass up in ragged clumps; a few bright red, tiny, unrecognizable flowers.  
I still don't think I know what I felt about her thing.  
Its casual, outdoor presence defined it as ordinary.

I had strolled by, surprised by no thought, no feeling,  
her indifference like a myth, like this May morning,  
the glistening frogs and Gods happy in a kind of static, timeless, orderly  
stage of knowledge, the stripped, fuzzy-topped prongs unyielding.