

Coming to Terms · *Henri Coulette*

Being French, being 19th century, we know about boredom.
It is a glove, and having invented sex,
We know that the sex of the glove does not matter:

A glove, a simple glove, over the angry knuckles taut,
Over the long fingers twitching, over the three
Mad stars of the palm sweating, over the Devil's Workshop;

And where the glove opens like a wound, a bell, a mouth,
The pulse tongues out the one word *All*,
Which is to say *Absolute*, which is to say

Everything in our grasp, and we grasp the shoulder
Of a chair like the chair we knelt on, bare-kneed children
Saying our Aves, and the chair heard us out,

O Mother of π and radii and the irregular verb,
Of the Spitwad Wars and the elephants of Hannibal,
Of Doctor and Nurse, two times, in the cloakroom—

O Mother, hear us now in the hour of our knees!
All that was childhood, and the typographical error
Is not, repeat not, to be corrected; it is all

That remains of our innocence. We are grown-up now,
Which is to say *metaphysical*, which is to say *bored*.
On these long 19th century evenings, we walk the Boulevard,

Asking ourselves, What of the explosion in the desert,
The one no one witnessed? Was there sound there?
Or only the silence of Him in His long sleep?

And the chair? Does it become invisible even to itself?
Or does it dance the grave, stiff-legged Dance of the Chairs,
Our absence all around it like a strange music?

Or does it stand, faithful, in the desert of the mind,
And shall we welcome it, happily, reverently,
As wisemen an oasis, as children a mirage?