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Monet in the Fields

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MONET IN THE FIELDS

How I paint these haycocks is how I remember
 you and Manet in the garden
 painting Camille, with
such different
eyes you saw her, in such a wholly different
 light. How he would look
 at you and grimace,
or whisper
so you could hear: "This Renoir, he's no good.
 You who are his friend, tell
 him, please, to give up
painting."
When we could, we had to pose for one another,
 we were so poor: Courbet
 on the strand at Trouville
for Whistler
whose mistress sat at her toilet for Courbet.
 I did Manet at his easel,
 and you, I posed for you
that summer
while I painted the garden behind our cottage.
 Such ways of seeing then,
 so mine now. And you
must not
go back to thinking that truth is only in form
 and line. No, think truth
 is a room without
furniture;
you say this is so: first, a red damask chair.
 You add geraniums, and it
 changes. You add a sofa,
then images
of Muybridge's old horse running in the center
 of one wall, each one a facet
 of the truth but not
the truth,

and him sitting on the sofa beside the geraniums,
 you add him, he is the man
 who makes the horse run,
he is true:
he is everything and the room composes itself
 to his impression of it,
 and it all changes or
remains
like the lake at Argenteuil shifting from blue
 to green, with one catamaran
 or none. Manet was joking,
friend, you
have always had talent, and it hurts me to learn
 that you have taken up form
 and line, like
Ingres,
that “bourgeois Greek” (as Whistler called him),
 you, with such an ample
 eye, painting
fleshy
ladies in the old fashion, of which I disapprove.