

In the Loge

(from a painting by Mary Cassatt)

It's all about seeing
and about being seen without knowing
and about who sees whom.

The woman in black is the closest
and first one we see.

Her face and dress

lack the color and lace
that would bring our eyes back
again and again.

Limply tied at her neck
is a matching black hat.
What catches our eyes

are the glasses held to her eyes
with one hand; the other,
clutching a closed gold fan,

lays in her lap. We see
through transparent gloves,
her ivory flesh.

Her glasses are trained,
not on the lit white stage,
where the baritone bows

and an ardent soprano curves at his feet,
but on someone outside of the frame
whom we cannot see.

Farther back and unseen
by the woman in black
is the blur of a man in an opposite box.

He, too, is suited in black,
and he leans his white head toward us
and toward the woman. Like her,

his right hand holds glasses to his eyes;
his point precisely at her.
Both the woman in black

and the man in black watching her
rest their arms on the rim of the rail,
linking the two, unaware,

in a velvet-toned curve.
Though through the eyes of the painter,
we see the woman and man

in the black, gold and red composition,
neither we, nor that man, see who is seen
by the woman in black,

the same seen by the painter
who kept her or him forever
out of our sight.

—Marilyn Bushman-Carlton



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