

Richard Hoffman

AN EMBLEM FROM DRESDEN

In Rembrandt's *The Rape of Ganymede*,
the boy, a chubby toddler torn from his play,
kicks and wails and pisses in terror as,
clamped in beak and talon, he looks down.
The sky is smoke, a billowing smudge
as after the bombardment of a city.

The eagle is unnatural, painted in the way
myth borrows nature for its purposes,
larger and more saurian, power from on high,
but the boy, as Rembrandt understood, is real
and not especially beautiful, a fat boy fed
the diet of the poor, potatoes, turnips, bread,
and for sweetness the grapes in his fist.
Ovid has Orpheus sing the story Hermes,
the slippery consigliare, tells the parents:

the boy will learn the language of the mighty,
an acolyte, loved and provided for, a story
that comes with a payment of valuable horses,
wealth enough to secure the future, more
than even a grown son could expect to earn
them. What does the boy see, rising? Over Laos
200,000 children trafficked into Thailand's
brothels, building sites, and sweatshops; over
Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Albania,

procurers riding shotgun, helicopter cargo
bound for prostitution in the streets of Athens;
from Nigeria, bush pilots make the short flight

over jungle to the secret auction, "Clean, no HIV. No HIV."
Euros for their trouble from the French, the Belgians,
dollars from Americans.² The eagle on the money,

each child a disappearance. "Too young," says the madam,
pulling back the beaded curtain for her client,
"no boom-boom this one, not yet, only yum-yum."

Notes

¹ 1635, Oil on canvas, 171 x 130 cm, Gemäldegalerie, Dresden.

² US Dept of State, Human Rights Report, 1999; ECPAT International, "A Step Forward" 1999; and UNICEF, "State of the World's Children" 1997.

HERMES

Ah, Hermes, yours is always
the subtlest touch, a fingertip
at my elbow, a movement of your eyes,
and I know, before you slip

away again, what I must do.
How many people have you been
since I last recognized you?
When will you come again?

GIFT

My father gave me a small globe,
“This is the world,” he said,
and showed me where to put the money.

“Good boy,” he said. “Good bye!
Good luck!” A lot of good
that did me. Or him.

Now the countries are different.
I lift and shake it: empty.
It doesn't spin.
It never did.