

MARK PARSONS

THE ONE WHO LEADS

1.

School desks arranged in a circle
clasped with a grey Formica podium
in the absence of students slouch.
The blond spatulate arms
as if each desk were hunched over,
working and hiding its work from its neighbours,
or reclining in its deskness,
feigning disinterest and idly examining
scratches and gouges, initials, a date or a gang sign
carved in its surface,
like one's hand at arm's length
held in a way as to better evaluate light
refracted in a ring-set gem.
The carpet sends up blossoms of silence
at the end of shoots of silence
with every step the lone occupant takes.

2.

Outside of town, along the road
north of town and south of town,
along the north-south road that bisects town
the green signs with place names
and mile and exit numbers in reflective tape
are gone: in the headlights,
only dull metal shafts and dangling bolts.

3.

Cars pulling in
the parking lot below
douse with light interiors of parked cars and cabs of trucks:
headrests shaped like shallow spoons,
serrated steering wheels.
I rub my scalp
and feel the briars prick.

4.

The one who leads
forbids the use of proper nouns,
blacks out
place names and people's names.
During break we speculate in small groups about the blanks.
Smell of fresh dough and grease,
confectioner's sugar.
Class is long and late in the day;
the fried bread helps us concentrate.

5.

The librarian cuts out a word or a phrase from each work
and then fixes the word or the phrase in an album
beneath an adhesive transparency.
I remember the phrase she chose last week:
Still in a dip in the manicured, undulant lawn.