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## The French Bed

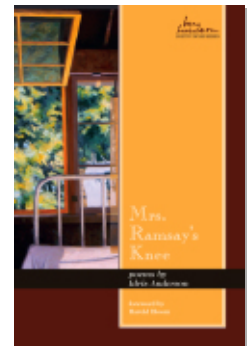
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## THE FRENCH BED

I can't speak from the man's point of view,  
but as a woman, I'd say this etching tells truth  
about sex. The lover is kneeling for his own pleasure  
first, then hers too, perhaps. His foot is flexed  
for pushing energetically. He's as deep  
as he can go into the soft folds of her flesh.  
And she, with knees frankly spread, is telling him  
with fingers where and how he should move.  
Notice the eyes, they are so wise with each other.  
It's not a brothel. He was in love with this wife.

Rembrandt, in his exuberance, gave the girl  
three arms. One hand we see stroking the side  
of her lover's back, another reaches round for his bum,  
and the third, a fully visible limb, lies limp  
on the bed, as if she's totally compliant, or done.  
The bed is well made, with canopy and draperies,  
the linens as plush as her thighs. She's relaxed into what  
he desires; she's eager and wants her own pleasure too.  
The drypoint's velvety strokes so accurate. He saw  
what he wanted and made it, and wanted what he saw.

After all the crosses, Christs feeding the peasants,  
rooftops and ruins, beggars in hats, here is  
domestic interior—fine inked-up lines swirled  
into rumpled bedclothes and bodies' vulnerable  
curlings—her sweet face, his competent shoulders.  
A scribbling style, tender and swift, all gesture  
and touch. The needle's hard burr softens and makes  
vivid the intimacy, the inwardness, the mutual desire.  
What comes after seduction, the drapery drawn  
for our eyes—what we want desperately is this.