

THE MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS

Cornelis van Haarlem, 1590

Four women have a nude on his back
in the middle distance.

One nails his elbow
with her knee. Two seize
his other arm, a leg.
The fourth cradles
a dead child. Someone's fingers dig
into his eye sockets.
His privates
draped with lavender. For decorum.

*Herod the king, in his raging
chargéd he hath this day*

three front and center hunks, Mannerist
beach bully tableau.

A gluteus pair at viewer's eye level: chiaroscuroed
ass crack. Faceless muscle pile
leans across an infant's twisted cry,
sets a knife versus its neck. His legs straddle
mother's head. She grapples his
weapon. Could fix her teeth
on his thigh. Two stone-grey infants
tossed in a pile.
Her wrenched leg crushed underfoot

by the second stud without face,
modeled bum cheeks
anchoring a torqued torso. He strains
at a second mother's temple. She
forces a hand against
his chestnut curls.
His shadowed grasp across
a baby's throat.
Spread legs straddle a third mother
pressed
toward her child's lips:
this arch's capstone a concealed anus.

*his men of might
in his own sight*

Third mass of male matter
full frontal, face
topped by a red toque.
His suppressed phallic zone
wispily shielded by strands

of a fourth mother's red hair.
Forces the redhead behind him
as she wails on the diagonal.
In the crook of his elbow
blond nursling's shuteyed head
sliced by the canvas edge.

all young children to slay.

Hundreds grapple, flail, stab, flee.
A plain of small corpses.
Big men strip for slaughter. Sixpacks and abs.
Carrion birds patient under storm clouds.

Rachel weeping for her children.