Salt in the form of sacrifice

Deborah Wardlaw

The University of Montana

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SALT IN THE FORM OF SACRIFICE

by

Deborah Wardlaw

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presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

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Approved by:

[Signatures]

Chairperson

Dean, Graduate School

Date

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I

The Heroic Labors of Golem
The Golem is the Surrogate Beloved

There is something settling in my room—cold cloak of confidence—
Didn’t I clean off all the surfaces?

Generation of a slick, dry web in the back of my throat,
membrane of consequence . . .

The gentle puffballs in the corner, oh so mistakenly kicked,
softly cough, Baptiste . . . Passive releasing yellow, curling fumes of spores—
the follicle ruptures, the spore is released—
again and again, the spores are released—

Green as aphids clinging to the underside of waxy fronds;
burst from a blister formed on the throat of a slender flower;

loosed from the silky gills of a white-capped mushroom . . .
The floor, a flawless golden sheet of agar bubbling with bacteria—
a brightly colored blue, green, phosphorescent. (Estrogen & Sugar) . . . Didn’t I remember to do this?

Far from the white walls of the waiting room,
a green surprise awaits. A man I planted—now,
only a sprig of a poplar tree, but green & green.

He fans high. His fur feathers out in green leaves,
heart-shaped plumes encasing his body.
He stretches up—he has reached the sunlight—

he sparkles—he has grown tall!
Shaking with electricity, leaves shedding
& sprouting anew . . . But he has false roots.

Green in the clinical winter.
He walks, he pierces the cold crust,
the soil heaves and cracks in his wake.
His head is a brick of ignorance,
his fists like catapults.
Down he moves, past parking lots,
past magazines and kneecaps,
through the air leaded antiseptic--
he joins me.
Fairest

Don’t stop explaining the meaning of obsession:
When I think of you. I think—irresistible.
You were soft and wonderful—like brown fruit.
Every time I see you, you are amazed.

_Did you think to cut me inside,_
the deepmost private pinch
and then, swabbed and stiff,
apply a poultice there?

Glue there the medicinal mash
of your own devising, and hope
that it might stick. Its unknown
constitution: the infinite variety
of possibilities.

_O tell me_, that it is nothing like a scar!
That it is not a plaster cast-making--

You were brown fruit. And unblemished.
Remember the gothic chunk
of a moth—spread on the stucco wall
like a pair of black lungs?

How, outside, there was another
one, and, another
--like a sequence of miracles
stopping at the last breath--

the slow, pulsing wings
and the plump bodies
with their sorrowful expressions.

How, at last--wings clotting,
one fell into a curved dish,
batting his wings in milk

the death was perfect.
And we saw then--they had all come here
to die.
Doctor? Have you fallen
in love with your creation?
The sculpture so expertly molded
into that finite female shape.

Is she as beautiful
as you thought she would be?
The Separation of Self from Myth

Unreal Pregnancy.
Always the size of a grapefruit:
the lobes of pink meat.
The man comes in--he lies down.
Witness the birth
of surgery.

He comes in
he lies down beside me--
all log-weight and numbing bark,
he offers a smooth knuckle,
he counts down, his breath evaporates.

Mother, he
assumes my pain--
Incision
a follicle ruptures--
it has hair and teeth!

Birth of ignorance--
(he comes in and)
cut from me--
passes through his thighs;
enters his core
a wooden, red tenderloin.

It swells and swells,
he accepts the issue--
the tumor.
Swells and swells
and splits himself in two
one side falls right
the other left, and is still.

I wake up, as women do--
he is
cut from me.
Crown of Violence  
Flower / Withering Nipple  

If I were human and not insect, I would practice  
free-sleeping without promises.  
I would allow sleep to find me,  
welcome visiting fumes of possibility:  

My second chance. Awake, I witness the cycles--  
feed up, bloom, then wither on a slant.  
The once generous, cupped tongues shrivel  
to hardened nub, a nipple, then fall  
off. I scoop a bowl the shape of my body in the dirt,  
line the basin with shrinking flowers--purple-gray  
gray-green, and pink. I nest into my nest, the theater-  
sky above me, shut my eyes. I wait  

for my head to push the lid open, bisect with my exit.  
I wait for the fluid sweep. The lathery finish of it.
Cupping

A maiden's hand
    cut from her once--
she is interrupted. A shiny promise--
    her nipples dappled
with fresh pigment   and she knows.

(Her mother knows), her mother says,
    I know it is.
She agrees to the extraction.

The father
    is in the corner
lucent    as a devil
    clicking his long nails together, a pager
at his hip.

Her mother grips her forearm, says,
    A man can tell when you have
had a child;
        you aren't clutched close
    but stretched--a man can tell.

She is so pretty
her hair is pink.
She will look
at her mother's face--her blonde hair the same as . . .

The maiden's pursed hand
    once anchored to the walls
    of a safe place,
    is dislodged--
    shredded tissues
fighting their way out.

The second time
    she is all graces    blessed
    several times over--
health, youth, antitoxin--elastic
--a boy.
Her mother says, It will be a boy; I never had.
His life mapped and measured.
    His secret shapes revealed
    and represented— soft crown,
    bunched knees,
    tiny feeding fists—
    the suggestion
    of a penis
    in starched, monochromatic composition.
    He is beginning to be named.

    Her mother and the doctor
    calculate a day for the harvest
    one day to cut the baby from his mother.
    His stolen birth—not his struggle—not his will
    A man will cut him from her
    and take the labor from her
    deny the mother to be
    a mother. Born not of her:

    He will not nurse,
    the milk will be gone.
Stalk on Stalk

Stalk on a steep pitch of roof
she will not jump
she says, “no,”
herself full of loose teeth
shuddering jaw.

The teeth spill out
hot white coals
speckled with pink
foamy saliva
bloody yellow nerve-roots.

Her mouth hangs open—more teeth
shed, this one like the last.
She cups her hands over
her mouth—it fills
with blood, and up
into her nose.

So that she might breathe
she opens her mouth
and takes a breath.

Blood shellacs
her chin, stains
her shirt. She is finished
now, she climbs down
goes inside, presses tongue tip
into tender, raw sockets
tastes the rust of blood.

She says, “I am more
than thirty—how much more
of this? This daily threat?”

Outside, a tooth hits the solid ground;
one rolls into a fissure
in the sidewalk; one
is caught in a close-grown hedge;
one lost in a ditch of rain water;
one is in the driveway, cracked
under chains, its slippery seed-coat
shed, its hard mantle
compromised, the crumbling
dentin pulverized.

Deep inside, a green
thread-bundle, cramped
and pulsing-flexing--
ready to grow.

It settles into a concrete cavity
inverts itself and takes root.
Good Morning, Mr. Magpie

Good morning, Mr. Magpie.  
How does this greeting find you?

Squat atop a chain-link fence  
Leering down my yard.

Ground hard, barely wisped  
With dry grass. Bald lot,  
Bearing little shrew or worm.

You stop here this time.

Trees nearby bare as ladies’  
Arms offer more comfort  
To carrion claws--

My yard has two pines,  
You chose that fence.  
I don’t dare refuse you,

Have you seen  
What I have done?

Stung fur on the ground,  
color of yours, black-and-white.  
Queer clumps and batting  
matted into hollow grass-shafts.

Chalky death-tipped wings  
Tucked away, I’ll tell you

About a woman.  
The courtship: lewd wink  
Of a mare’s vulva,  
She invited him in.

The conception: slap of feathers,  
Bodies undulating, cells  
Dividing and doubling.
The termination: soft, connective
Filaments, scrape and suck
Of machine, a woman
The hollowed-out husk
Of a jack-o-lantern.

Day after, she calls long distance,
she dials, deposits $2.75,
there is no answer.

She hangs up, dials again, no answer.

I tell you, my womb
Is a crucifix. You see it?

I cannot let enough of my meals
Get cold; be sick enough;
Save enough; clean enough;
Give enough to ever be sorry
Enough for you.

You scold: Where
Is the black-and-white body,
The corpse,
The baby—I'm hungry.

Left in some sterile setting, pickled
In some unnatural sauce,
Plasticized, bagged, and disposed
Of, unused.

Don't you know I need this more?
Death is my meat, my sustenance--
You have wasted it, wasted
It all, you pant

Your purply-black tongue, shake
yourself, fly off--shock
of white-on-black, warning
sign: I am a victim
of rumination. I cannot let go.
Emergency of the Smallest Possible Particle

My nostrils stink of brine, crystal sediment crust, puckered red & sore. Maneuver the olfactory image up to my sinuses. How colorful it is! Like the vibrant values of an old bone to a dog.

A frequency snuffed into my registry—yes I know it—
I know wombwater, the giving puzzle, the puddle of dish of cup of tears. Clear, pink lens, smooth and brimming full, permeable

water-salt transfer, ions across membranes, it's there it's all the molecules swimming through, pumping across the other side. The womb a raisin plumped by dense surroundings;

the womb a fat grape withered in distilled water. Issue pruned from the vine, when there is not element enough outside, I try, I try to achieve a balance

surrounded by the slip of minerals, the body swells, fruitful to maintain that same atomic tonic, slosh & cushion, bellyful of water I breath,

through nostrils, through choked abundant rind of umbilicus--
Finally, they are developed, feathery many-lobed gems. I call them lungs. Breathe

the breadth of me--
balance of oxygen and other elements.
I accumulate this crust of instinct through the dried lens of my first wink.
II

The Symbiosis of Self & Legend
Of Ignorance

I could never get close enough.  
I craved with a hollow passion.  
The sun is an absolver: I could evaporate  
into that powder.

A searing ecstasy often comes too late.  
A father & his endless puzzles.  
A man with a bull's intellect.  
A feathered thing.  
Ambition a lofty climb. I did not subscribe to.

I was my own:  
The cold sea embracing my hot skin,  
cooling wax;  
fiery pinions. My desperate soul.
The Wedding Guests, Those Who Survived, Are Prisoners at the Louvre, Along With the Bride

I am Margot, Queen of Whores--that's fact, not value judgment. Princess, property, see these scores my brothers marked upon me:

The youngest nipped a ring of teeth upon my saintly shoulder, the middle one did think it meet to brand my thigh, the older
cut sweet across my quinny.
Do you want my body?
It's lovely, lovely, lovely!
May we play croquet? Mais òui!

Kiss in public? Sodomize
my thoughts? Wed to hypocrisy--I adore protestants! Let's kill them all for the pleasure!

Never did I feel God's will as heavy as the king's hand crushing my neck while cullions slapped my backside. I need a man
to fill me up with hatred.

I'm not perfect. I will chop my breasts off like white apples into diseased hands. I will lob them at you, brother/lover,

brother, mom. As you seem to enjoy me, as you seem to have a taste for my body.
Tragedy

I am fluent in cardinal proclivity.
Swallow of extemporaneous excess.
My veins are an open road.
Blood little birds. Symbiotic parasols.

Little hoof-cells pour over my gills--
I smooth suffocation with spongy frog.
Briar candy. Patchwork attack.

I smooth separation of sediment bodies
mulled in centrifuge. What shuts
you down? Listen to this:

the same word over and over. Birds are blood
are hoofed animals. Cloven contemporaries.
Piercing orange skin. Wait & stop & smell

This is the architect of instinct:
Drop everything and save yourself.
I lie down & share--

there is only the self
ache of being the goat.
There is only one goat. Above the bar the goat
sings, under the bar the goat, dies.
He Spies A Manticore In The Desert

I have followed them to here,
where the earth perspires its poisons.
He is wearing a fedora--
it makes no sense.

I have been careful, keeping behind, always
a dune between us. Only
a few dates left in my pocket.

I hope they are not going too much farther--
Yeats and the lion. I have been following them
for nineteen days out of Marrakech--
Who knows what has possessed that lion!
It's sure that Yeats doesn't want to be seen;
he is tracking the beast carefully, dodging its view.

A caravan! Crossing west of us--
I had not noticed. They are quite near.
Caravan, I have left you behind
once enough; I won't join you now.
My camel, riderless, trails at the end
of her rope. Her lip droops, her nostrils are spoons--
She looks at me! She is snuffing, snuffing--

Where is the poet? Where is the lion?
Have I lost them? I stumble through the sand
marring its rippled surface--
Then--he's there!
I almost send an avalanche on top of him.

How far do they plan to go? I can continue
as far as Egypt, where my good friend lives in Cairo--
he is a wise man; perhaps a prophet. He tells me things;
I have a towel I carry with me that he used as a prayer mat;
I have followed his advice every time but once.
I know the monster has seen Yeats: This afternoon, it slowly turned its heavy head and looked back. I saw a prognastic face: overdeveloped brow ridge; lipless mouth; robust, divided jaw—a human one—turning, a face framed in a bottomless black volume of strangled hair.

I think I am more curious about Yeats than I am the beast with its scorpion tail. How did Yeats discover it; Is it sane to follow such a beast; Does he plan to do so forever—until time?

We are nearing Egypt. I am tired of this. I can’t visit my friend in Cairo because he is dead. I am leaving Yeats here with Monster, whom he evidently loves. Monster is indifferent to this, like everything.
Chickmoth

O the slip of sustenance. In the divine purr of recollection. A season is sure to provoke--

(In the blue purr of morning) Gin & Drag.

In the molt, I peel bliss from my fingertips. It is deserved. My feet track the natural purchase of things.

Wail & whittle in the scarlet sacrifice of expectation. There is nothing. Watch it

shed its bark, horny layer, mineral skincrust. Milk hairs like moth pelt

like babies' fuzz, birth or injury. I covey my wounds like a tiny winged element, account for my disfigurement.

Know the larval purpose of my resuscitation, the carnal thrill of asphyxiation--throat choked full of worms.

Barefoot, in the tradition of purpose, a pin screws into my heel.

I lose my wings. I lose my crepe antennae. I lose my filmy eyes. My nascent furr, my purple siphon.

Boozy nectar-leech! What tastes that good you can't eat, is for the Gods.
Golem as an Effigy for the Beloved

My fingers sticky.
I've left the residue
on everything I've touched today.

Rub my fingers together
in a circular motion, and notice
a tiny ball has formed.

I have produced a pearl:
My agonies are legion.

Freed from adhesiveness,
it is rolling around in my palm.

This pinch of resin I warm;
press in your ears;
you will only hear my voice--
thoughts of me,
sealed inside your head.

Spread it thinly,
waxy, fragile--
glue the memory of my skin
onto your whorls and sighs.

This sediment is
what's left of me after I've burned.

Pollen, wax, ash--
whatever I had to offer.

I'm the same degree of wrongness:
micro-detritus of hardened sap
left carefully with you.

One day I will reinvent myself,
wholly dissimilar
from the old disappointment
you might have preferred.
Glean from your ears and naval;
comb from your hair;
scraper from your skin;
flake from your eyelids and waxy lips--
this numbing amber remembrance.

Mix with what’s left
of a figure in my old image
that will resonate.
False Hive

A small girl works the tangles of string--loose.
She pries the loops and massages the hard knot between thumb
index finger.

The stunned bees make slow readjustments
across a mesh surface--
Blur of static. Paper cells, pulpy masses of bee larvae.
Her yellow fingers.

She holds tiny scissors--silver--
body of it a stork, two feet rings for her fingers,
curved beak shiny blades.

In her hand, the wad of string--
The bees hum in agitation, voices rise--

Cuts open the knot,
the ball of string disintegrates on the green,
inches of white shift into the blades.
_They are fingers too_ she thinks--

Snips away all evidence of violation,
thinks of slicing chubby bodies--her smallest finger
even the unborn bees.

She stands the scrim vertical, slides it into slot
of the bee-box. The bees regain their wits, fret
& coo over their brood--

The girl draws string whole through shallow dish
of honey, spans between tree-branches,
ties the ends.

What is this? A waxy white mantis. Albino
clings to the bark--tiny husk of body,
fibrous legs. Alien head swivels sideways,
smooth, garnet eyes gaze--
She picks up a glass jar, stabs breathing holes.
The mantis is still on the tree. The bees
are organized. The honey is dripping from the string.

She offers a dry twig to the mantis--
it unfolds and snaps.
The girl drops it into the jar, screws shut the lid.
Once Released

You’ve left me with the question of how to fill my tank:
A combination of killers and community fish?
A cooperative of black mollies?
Or the ravenous wolf-fish? He rests
his belly on the gravel, he watches fingers
on the surface of water.
Rush and shred,
with each bite he grows longer and less buoyant.

Shall I be a passive, foraging discus?
Hovering like a space craft, face
an extraterrestrial innocent pressed against glass?
I prefer to swell in salt water.

It might be fitting
to fill my room with a mollusk that can squeeze
itself into a crevice,
disappear in an ink cloud. Or one that can
shut itself away in its own shell.

Shall I subsist by picking dead flesh
from my neighbors' skeletons with my deft,
pink-tipped, elegant claws?
Shall I shit and eat from the same mouth?
I vacillate between Scylla and Charybdis.

I am all that is left of us.
We might meet again someday
in the sea. I think of you while sifting plankton
through my baleen,
thinking I have seen enough of you.

I am circling with the orcas above a baby seal
that must come up for air, sometime. Now,
I am that seal. A bull near the beach shore,
I have a penguin by its feathery pelt,
and snapping my great neck,
I have shucked the bird from its skin.

After I have eaten, I shift onto the rocks.
Ah, heaven! My oily nook!
True Love is Simply Sacrifice, Even for Monsters

Lamia: He kisses me—the water rises—mothmilk at my birthgate.

The tips of his fingers tap the back of my neck
clicks, a kink in the gelled humor of my spine

a feral stitch unmends itself to my horror my skin
crumbles to dusk under his touch
keratinizes, sprouts silver.

My bones shift angles &. articulations. I narrow
in his grasp, slide out, leaving a slick sheath behind.

He is smiling. I am in agony:

I stretch into a river—my body is a river. The river
I have stretched myself out of my skin.

I unfurl like a silk sail, purl the glossy whiteness of my reverse hide--
a nymph denatured.

The river is upon my back, drained.
I hear only the dry hiss of my scales.

He sees my soul is sublimated.
He sees I am the horned serpent curling in the sand.

I need,
I would fill the hollow husk of me, the cornsilk filaments, with blood.

If he cries tears of blood, I will lick them from his blest cheeks
with my split tongue.

I stir from a nest of mineral shingles,

foul, spent integument piled on the forest floor
nearby the shucked wet mesh of my skin.
My body is cured. I rise in a silky helix
of white arms and legs,
the high report of my laughter through the forest
like locusts.
III

(I cannot get close enough)
Avian

Her face blooms in springtime bluely obscured by dignity, everything shuffles its culls— the birds. the church.

As through a lidless womb they move from shallow depths & abysmal purchase of her eyes— she is Saint / has no soul.

Lashed without & sick of sunrise, lashings of feather tips make bloodless cuts unskin. Crevasse.

Her star is sacrificial satellite. Easter me through this time when birds scaffold her ribcage, fly wingtips across her lips.

Bring me that which never can be compromised-- a feathered thing-- "Dance, Vidanya--" all the will is I will ever know.
Homologous

A black wolf emerges from the thicket kinetic. Which is not to say I am that wolf: I have the capacity to destroy.

Lesion is a rare bloom. The cyclic existence of some worms, legacy of ligature, ribbons,

bare white shaft. Fluke bathed in fishslipperiness. What was I trying to say?

I am so close to monarch. What if I told you I turned my skin down, curled inside out? Length of bone. But I am still larval. I expect to slip through your gills—Please don’t touch the animal. Scurf & skin. How do you say, split with a knife and laid open lie wings?

I mean cluster, racemose. I mean to cut that deep. Skip to the surface & wreck the religion of things.
Black Poppy

I know this flower--
a riot of red skullcaps,
black urn of fruit.

A small clutch of slumber
bows at the foot of Schliemann’s treasure mound.
Nearby, a pastoral vista.
The shore not far, and this an unlikely hill
in so much farmland.

This is Troy—seven levels of it.
The well-built part—what’s left.

The sleepy treasures
are cloistered in the ruins
among a choir of grass pipettes--

The hill slopes up--curling like a woman’s
spine, to the unnatural fold of crest

and collapses into farmland
stretching as far as stones
carried away to construct walls.

There’s a place in my book for this--
I pick one petaled gem for my pages.

Hands reposition stones
squandered by time;
Schliemann’s wife--
her neck heavy and cold;

my own crisp vanity.

Someone says—It will turn.
Saint Augustine

I won't wake, but be awakened--by a call, or hyacinth, or heat.

My feet don't move--they scull & skim like silvered needles.

I'll bind them, use my arms when I swim the ocean at a level beneath just breathable oxygen, surrounded by a rare reticulum of paths--I'll be forced to crawl into so many tubes of thought.

I tried to knit my lungs in air too thin, too dry to wet my tongue.
I tried to clean the green pith from beneath my nails. I have smelled hyacinths in glass jars, learned their obsequious musk, prayed the dusty crystals of their petals until their husks were under my skin, the prickly, the feverish, miserable poisons.

At low air, I once pruned and pinioned my lungs.

They lapped the briny tonic, were stoked in heavy oxygen.
In the front yard,
elephant ears dip like waxy parasols
beneath sterling beauties and climbing
blue girls,
& the smooth, thick fingers
of st. augustine cool in the wind
& the sun goes down, again

I am in the shade of my own planet.
Close Enough to Skin

Crystals—flakes of gypsum
under my fingertips

drift down through water
winking
like light on frost.

My body stretches
along seamless white surfaces
the water atop me in layers
of gentle pressure.

A pale, green yolk
of a spent oil bead breathes

through water—a jellyfish caught,
it clings
to my fingers, and spills
across the back of my hand
like mercury
across water-loving surfaces.

My wet arms attract
air-born bubbles

their flawless symmetry in clusters—
tiny air-sacs,
membranes
close enough to skin,
to blue eyes—

A single hair
slides
between two fingertips.

The water now hazed with scent—
crystals
untouchable now
   as they melt away
under the spreading tongue of water.

   While I am bathing

I hear you in the bedroom--
   --a fine, dry feather of talc.

Breathing, sleeping, and then
   *waking*

   Will you answer
an indelicate thirst?
A Good Norseman

Eyelashes all but unnoticed against the blue of the palest coldwater fish—the fringe

an afterthought, except the glint of cold, Nordic blonde. I am dark and love
to travel and luxuriate. You are a worker in your back, legs and hands. You dig

You refuse the precautionary wear. You cut yourself, by accident, your skin is torn
without regard for the hands that work you. You left blood on my sheets, ash in the firepit.

Everything says that you are gone. What works you is the motivation, the unshattered impulse
to get away. You work and you say that makes you happy. The only thing.

When does it fail to delight?
A Sorrel

The mantis slides against the slick prison of the jar, seizes each new blade of grass the girl drops in, quiets & observes her every movement.

Next door, a man washes a sorrel. Water gushes from the green hose arcs & gleams in sunlight thoroughly wets the horse's coat darkening healthy brown to deep, greenish-rich liver glossy & decadent.

The girl watches & notes every line: cut and roll of shoulder muscle harmonious curve of flank ample fill of thigh, swell of neck final, wedge-shaped head & terrified eye.
Tropism

The solicitous slick encumbent rolls in her syrupy vesicle, glistening white & esurient.

I am stung fathomed regardless abundantly poisoned & precarious. A rich lick of fact & substance. I am a ponderous shrug, a precious accident.

The parasite self is lewdly indulgent. I spill from my gelatinous nest into a revolutionary feast of salt.

My tegman roasts & crackles, splits the meaty fist in two till I am ambulant, reticent, voluminous. The born fume a respiratory miracle. Graft of divinity, absolution of a new degree--

Worthy scion to my predilection for obsession:
The Valley Birds

The Valley of Nightingales—not so long—
only a kilometer or two of road
winds through. The valley,

the only place on the island not hot and sunny,
but shadow upon shadow—
green-furred, ancient trees.

Weighty, tent-like foliage & glossy, dark ivies,
moldy rocks. The ground slick, spongy.
The air heavy & damp.

A doubled creek tumbles downhill
skirting boulders--magnifies. The valley
fills with inviting cold.

Her skin & his skin
chill & firm like sweating stones.
The textures of the valley: welcome cold,
rubbery touch of plant and skin,
& the sights: green cushion of valley floor,
thick of trunks, old throw of tree-tops

so inseparable from the sounds: birds,
fizzy creek, drip of plink,
that when the Nightingales sing it is like silence.

The birds are heard but not seen.
The birds are not heard & there is nothing to see.
Salt In The Form of Sacrifice

A lambless girl, her hair brittle, green as figs. 
Her skin dry as quick lime, transparent lids.

She speaks, her voice is a glass thread, “This lake is full of salt.
It is dead here.” The mountains refract waveless water.

Dust settles in ears, nostrils, the corners of her eyes, blur.
She hears & smells nothing, the soles of her feet burn.

Behind her on a low slope, white rocks stir,
Become sheep grazing on crystal needles of turf.

Grass shatters her feet as she climbs to the flock on the hill.
The sheep still & watching. They have hard shells.

She pierces armored fleece with fingertips, slices knuckles clean.
Burrows deep into lofty wool, feels warm, buttery skin

Of ram beneath. Her ears pop, she smells the earthy, oily smell of sheep.
She smooths her body with lanolin. Her wrists & shins seamless,

They glisten & twitch like frogskin.
Cheeks like ghee, hair bright & soft as pollen.

She leads the flock to the lake, the water is not chilling,
It is body-warm. “The salt will not hurt us, ‘though we have fallen

From the tree. Be still.” The girl tugs at the pink lacy veins
Of the ram's embroidered ear.
Unconceived

I thought I’d name her Delphi, or Memphis. Ancient cities like this one, navels like this one, rivers like this one where mud is legend.

I cannot get close enough--

Stone combs bore into soft dirt, pierce the hump of death beneath, the spongy, heaving soup of bodies layering bodies glazing bodies.

Lamellae collapse from the inside. Corpses in false carapace. Tissues wrapped in grosgrain mantles, shelled in wooden hulls. Some bodies cure in lye like fragile delicacies--tiny birds with edible bones.

I exhume a name from within these gates, pull stale air from dirt.

Her cells blast like fungal spores, settle as ash on forearms. She will finesse cold shoulders, solve sorrow, she will be brilliant as Napalm.

Death is mutable compared to hasn’t been born.
IV

Unable to Escape, the Body
The Bride, The Sacrifice

I am Margot,  
Queen of Whores.  
Fact, not  
value judgment.  
Princess,  
property,  
see these scores?  
My brothers  
marked me:  
ring of teeth  
on saintly shoulder,  
brand on thigh,  
cut across my quinny.

My body is yours.  
Play croquet.  
Kiss in public.  
Sodomize my soul.  
Married to hypocrisy,  
God's will as heavy  
as the king's hand  
choking me,  
cullions slap  
my backside.

I need a man  
to fill me with hatred.  
Do  
you want me,  
Paris?  
I am bait  
for gutterflesh,  
Protestants.  
Muse of  
catholic passions &  
pigdom.
Chop off my breasts, 
white apples 
in diseased hands. 
Lob them at my 
lover/brother, 
mother. 
As you seem 
to enjoy me, 
as you seem 
to have a taste 
for my body--
eat these!

I am poison page 
of a bible. 
I am fermented 
marmalade. 
An offering of peace 
from the gutted belly 
of an impotent God.
Cistern

They find the location far from the confusion of the fortress on the hill. They pass through rock face, descend down chiseled steps. The dusty tunnel dry, then wet--

the walls and stairway sweating stones. Now cooler air eases their breathing. The only light--the flashlight's blurred yellow disc--descends into a riot of flies with delicate bodies.

Their skins twitch with persistent advances of gnats--wings and legs claim everything. They don't speak. They can't communicate. The flies buzz in their mouths, whisper protolanguage, seduce with their collective voice. Where it is colder, it is primordial. Out of reach.

Skin covered in eyelash. To touch another body gives of insect.
Graft-Verses-Host

The fluid wash is not salvation. Emergent benediction. Dichotomy is a preserved malaise,

sumptuous spore of anatomy. Relationship is direct & necessary: I live according to lamb & am not sorry for it.

Motive is never easy when dissected from context: imagine me in a field of flowers, eating grass, clipping blades close to earth. Incise is prepared for the predatory second, the source at inception is symbiotic subterfuge.

Original instance of reduction is lepidote, omnivorous, cellulosic.

I now recognize the seductive fiction--I am beyond chimera.

Patience is an old vine. Umbilicus climbing my neck. I prune dependency with a dendritic flick, tendrils flexing in synapse, fingernails. Click. Drip. I replace myself every seven years.

Viremic renovation. Blue shock in blebbing. This is the body botanical.
Tropic of Capra

The new me I have to live with
the fact I “fired a “friendly”
face,” but a heavy, chitinous load.

Disco pink sequins glued onto his belly.
Who else is stuck in the 70s?

I realize what I am is not
obsessive. Usurp the incumbent.
The old goat.

The definition of species
is the potential capability for interbreeding.
For me, evolution is salient:

Love close to Monarch.
Rabbi Loew sent a mud-fashioned man out
to do his purpose in the world.

I am two generations removed,
the subway women won’t let me look
at them and see my grandmother.

What was I thinking?
Cuba looks like spilled milk
no sense in crying over it.
Proof

A green idea unwraps itself:
exact measurements,
markings representing infinity

as if this model of a plane were the thing
that goes on forever—it could contain
such symbols: points, segments, parallels,
instances of insection,

the angles that define them
as they are defined & realized.
See how they complement each other?
See how these two lines go on forever, stretching

in opposing directions?
No matter how far, they will never insect.

See how these two lines are parallels?
These are perpendiculars,
& any three points sum
to same measurement.

Keys and clues to the world,
the existence of angles, o how green!
Size, relationship, and relevance.

These symbols that represent reality
are reality: angles, lines—they know things,
they tell me things—how they bisect
each other.
Orb

This is the cleansing, the true renewal of body.  
The fitness.  Standardization of my being: chain of suicide.

I am warm-blooded, sentient animal.  I am bone  
remodeling myself & killing off old integument, piercing prophylactic scrim--

I am on the cusp of insect.  Living in the shoulder of a live volcano.

Forget my name.  Forget the brilliant facets of my wings.  
The gemmed cells lose their crystalline dust, their purpose of existence:

necrotic cascade into death.  Commit to this.

My new scales are serrated.  I scratch through blue pulp & prolific rouge.  
I bite into crown gall & cake.

I crawl, newly formed nymph from a black socket, slippery & basic as plasma.  
Wasp diva in the golden apple.
Vale

Rain-wet, the green plush of the valley floor--
a rivulet. Water slicks down the long leaves, richly indulgent.
A heavy mat of heresy.

The fluid thrust threatens exfoliation,
leaves tremble and loosen in their follicles.

Presently, hush of narcissus dips their golden brows in suppliance,
mindful not to sully their white mantles.
They extol in a single note from their golden throats,
mindful of the burden of their tonic freight.

Uncareless, obsessed with apology--it's true they are ashamed.
The issue at the fist of their union--not a bulb, but a tumor--
some malignancy--

What caused this rot? A visit from a hoverfly? What's left?
Vacuole in fleshy tissues. Stringy papers crushed between two fingers.
This closed fist was once an open palm
with honesty and rivulets, precedence and experience.

I must witness the machine that destroyed this,
viable plant the victim of internal phage.

An egg, yes, a promise. Jellied, in fantastic membrane,
satisfied and undelectable.

After the green show, the fruit ripens.
The follicle ruptures, its sentient parcel throbs and magnifies:
smear of protein,
chunk of soma,
garnet orb of blood.

This is the wrong cell--What have you borne me?
This happy growth is virulent, and what manifests . . .
Those treasured lobes aren't blackberries;
those precious nodules a ribbon of pestilence.

No longer the proud, turgid stems, now a vascular deficiency.
They bow their heads. In shame.
The narcissus are toxic with apologies. They offer only humility--Lysis
like a killing sigh: This is goodbye forever; this is goodbye.
Chimera Song Mosaic

Reckon against fulfilling the latest indignities:
bore of pink bollworm in floral pinna.

Reckon a lasting indiscretion:
artrial terror in the surety of.

Reflection is doubly justified,
I peck sure for worms:

I stand at noon, arranging the hours passed.
I stand at noon, arranging the hour’s past.

Reckon the evisceral instant—the turning out.
Bisected from manger-mud &. lamb-glut, nascent
cake of the sublime. Inhuman in new tegman:
scurfy, deciduous, textile. Recognize.

Reckon the hybridization of my being:
a fallow hold, a ship’s familiar.

The launch: a champagne cork.
Destiny is all in delivery.

Reckon sundial, smokestack, vowel of noon.
Recognize I am unaware, I

do not recall the other.
Reckon mutation, malleable progeny, voyage done.