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# Sabbath for a Dry Season: Poems

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# Sabbath for a Dry Season

poems by Anne Marie Rooney

# Acknowledgements

*Parthenon West Review (2007)*

Sabbath for a Dry Season

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When Miss Prolific Left

Gospel of Mary

Siphon

Bonnie and Clyde at a costume party

*Oakland Review (2006)*

Italian Winter

Dead Red Waves

Winter (iii)

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# Sabbath for a Dry Season

It was not raining, had only  
once rained, would never rain  
again. Across the river, the sun  
made angels appear stoic.

In a dark wet room two people  
burn holes in each other. In Styx.  
In the middle of a dope dream  
and the walls are very quiet  
and the sky is burning

and Out There  
in the thin night  
a girl unhooks her bones

\*

If Love is  
strings and bark  
the backs of bows hitting rock  
ankles caught at the bottom of a bed  
Jupiter and his 63 moons

If faith is

Dumb Luck.  
Sticky lotteries in a pick-up truck.

\*

They write books about this sort of magic: It is dark  
forever and then it is light. Deer legs buckle into  
two shooting stars.

No one is bleeding behind that tree.  
No one is writing poems to stop

that make-believe blood.



## When Miss Prolific Left

I wrote love letters in silver. Many girls  
loved me. In my dreams I was Dorothy,  
dancing with eunuchs. I was at a loss  
for soup ingredients. I was not alone  
in my listlessness. All stars closed.

I became unknown. Streetlights opened  
in my presence. The pavement went all gold  
and wobbly. I followed a cloud  
of smoke down a dark alley.  
I drowned every daddy

long legs. Mainly girls loved me.  
I dreamt I was Dorothy, lost  
in a deck. I slept  
on white porches where my name  
meant nothing. I bought an airplane.

# Italian Winter

January was cold even in Italy. Rome was dry  
and windy but Florence snowed wet stars  
in my eyes. In churches my breath fell up  
the apse, or: I was smoking the morning  
I met god. The Italian boys were religious

about my hips. They plucked roses from  
the white ground to make a crown  
even an atheist could pronounce. I painted  
my lips red with their prayers. I knelt  
in piazzas and lit candles for my enemies.

Every night my boots filled with ice.  
I tracked puddles into swollen confessionals.  
At one such service, a swollen Brit noted  
my melting and bought me a gold beer, told me  
I would die like Galileo, swallowed

by the sky. "Where is your religion," I asked  
Giovanni in July. In January my hands  
were too cold for such piety.

## On Thursday, I save the princess from her forest of suicides

She turns to the harpy starting on her thigh; says, *Stop*. The whole red river stops, does not freeze: Stops. All the wings stop beating and each navel stays sewn to its mother. With her blackest needle, she begins unstitching. The trees must be unfastened from their songs. There are no histories, only minutes. I have been saving my kisses for this princess. On Sunday we are married by the golden Caterpillar. He is smoking his smoke.

# The Green Door

I had to get off that floor, the walls  
were dripping. "Try the green door,"  
said one of the spies. After ten seconds  
of free-fall the red ground rose  
& when I woke opened  
to a sunken ballroom. A sunken chandelier  
hung, its prisms blinking every colour  
with the light of the Object's eyes.  
"Come closer," he whispered across the plush  
velvet canyon. Clouds of hands  
carried me across on stolen  
ore: Enter dust storm,  
statuesque. I wore stolen silk  
to the wedding.

## Bonnie and Clyde at a costume party

A long red bullet extinguished on her forehead. A feather winking off his Stetson, dark brow sweating silver bird shot. Billy's topless, table-dancing for sand dollars. Ali plies salted half-steps across the crystal. Andy's alone with his staple gun. Jackie and Lex, necking about nothing. Midnight is fool's gold blooming. Two robbers in drag, shooting out stem glasses. Waterfalls of costume jewelry hit the floor. The powder room fills with first wives.

# Boardwalk

We were on such a large ship! The sky the size  
of Montana. You wore orange sequins. I made martinis  
out of men. At night we threw gull feathers  
at the moon. Then the birds got angry and spit  
their old pearls at us. Then we were flying  
down Central Park in a very small bus.

## Dead Red Waves

I was a dancer with the Dead Red Waves.  
My debut took place under a waterfall  
awning. All the anenomes were tuned to A  
augmented. Notes began to dust each reed.  
The dunes lifted & resettled to these plumes.  
I assumed a southpaw stance. There was no sound  
but the fish whispering. From the stands, a soft silt  
rustling: *The caves are flooding*, cried a lawless  
alto. Such dripping begged a solo, so I spun another  
dress. Such molting, stems slowing  
from their stalks. There was no applause  
but the fish kissing, but the sand growing  
from my mouth.

# Water

Having learned very young the crabs' sidewinding purpose, I decided to go to Venice. The day before I left, my mother packed me a lunch of tuna, radish, dry crackers, two fishnet hands, red as her wet eyes were blue. When the captain asked for his gold, I had only to pull at the fingers and there, like carpenter's magic, my passage was guaranteed. We sailed six long months without sight of land. I was seasick often but shouldered it well, burping with the wenches and throwing crumbs at the gulls. In December, the sailors strung the mast with votives and hoisted me atop. Above my nausea, I ungnarled my braids and let the salty air blow like sand from a mermaid's floating breast. I loved the men, their low gruff laughs, their long nights of moonshine under the stars, their seahorse tattoos, when they'd let me take turns on their knees, listen to giddy stories of women and large fish, fall dizzy from the smell of freshly stirred whiskey in their beards. On the first day of Spring, we saw land. On the second, a lighthouse. By the third we had lowered our sails, were riding more warmth than wind. Another week passed and I learned blackjack, ate the last of the corn, said goodbye to the beards I'd called Father. Venice was more beautiful than I had dreamt. I gave my gloves to a painter and crawled down dry streets on my hands and knees.



## Three Letters from Home

April in New York  
is thawing  
bodegas blooming yellow,  
*jaune*  
is purple-haired terriers  
melting  
the cherry blossoms  
green blood  
down the Spring of  
the trees grow limbs  
to grow against  
her drowning arms  
and the bee waves  
and my taken knees  
and because it is your street

the Hudson  
across the Harlem  
in Jamaica  
and uptown  
the reservoir  
and down on Mulberry  
bleeding slight  
When I walk  
your street  
like a mother  
drowning, or  
grow around me  
take me,  
sink rivers  
are new again.

## Winter (i)

drives me  
to a dead parking lot  
and (pants off skirt up) fucks me  
in the back of his car hips  
parting knees trees beating  
faster under orange light  
under skin November stipple  
of mouth on neck shadow  
of breath against glass

I tell you this for its ecstasy  
the way he held my tits  
against the coldness how his cock  
shook and came and for after  
on my back looking up  
watching night enlarge  
its edge of moments  
hearing the traffic  
below us fall

## Betty and Veronica

We were sort of like stars. We rode on the backs of strangers' Harleys, got to the party, mixed drinks for school boys. We told them our names were Betty and Veronica, and laughed when, in the dark of their rooms or our eyes, they confused us, blondie for jet black. Their dicks were exclamation points inside us. Later, we left them to roam supermarkets, steal kisses in the cereal aisle, shout our mothers' names into the spinach, just hoping for that blue light special to shine down.

# Villanelle

Under the red scaffold I open  
my mouth against hers: black light,  
holy dirt. The city breathes

dark steam from all its corners  
and like cloud, summer unpleats me.  
Under the red scaffold, I open

her white shirt and her white  
breast shines away my  
holy dirt: the city, breath,

the stick of thighs, chlorine  
and fire water, dead gin sweat.  
Under the red scaffold I open

her like a snake opens its skin —  
puddle of body in gutter, some  
holy dirt. The city breathes

many angels but this one  
sighs like a virgin.  
Under the red scaffold I open

her life with my teeth.  
I am moonless sin, the clean,  
holy dirt the city breathes.

I am a wet sun tonight,  
my heat unparts seams.  
Under the red scaffold I open  
holy dirt. The city breathes.

## Winter (ii)

“What does that feel like,” D. asked me one day, “against your thigh?” He was not The He but A he & maybe even for a month a He but certainly not mine. His hair was too long & he bought me roses. I laughed at the ice on his forehead & held my shoulders together all the way down the west side subway line. The poodles got off & the LaGuardia kids got on. Then it was only kidney transplants heading for St. Vincent's. I was not cold but I asked for some blood. They gave me that, because it was winter, because I was hungry & opened my hands.

# We had one May

Brooklyn's  
sky was orange & starless & every  
night that month I sang starry  
blues across her neck

. . . Till the moon got stuck  
in the tree she planted & later  
I touched while high & declared  
prophetic

## Queens

We're born under Franky's moon so of course  
we're fast friends; meaning, you kiss me first  
under the "Moonstruck" diner, your hands on  
my earrings, my teeth on your tongue.  
Because it's July & the city has gone  
to the country & the taxis are empty  
& the pizza is better downtown I take you  
downtown & we eat Ray's on some rich guy's  
stoop & when we're done spit on his step  
& slip our plates under his door. It's like that  
scene in "Taxi Driver" when Bobby  
brings his blonde to the dirty movie  
& for a moment they just sit there in the dark  
& you can feel her discomfort & you can feel  
his hardness & then something breaks &  
they're back on the mean streets & he is pleading  
& behind her mean face a hooker hooks another.  
So we hop a freight back to Harlem, shuffle  
two stories up, smoke a mean line to my room  
in the sky. I don't love you yet, though I let you  
play me all the tunes, wax Romeo,  
sleep with the chambermaid & steal  
my best jewelry. It's like that scene in "King  
of New York" just before the hit squad busts  
Chris & co., when it's still diamonds & blow  
& blowing Cristal bubbles across some white  
broad's chest. We spend the weekend lying  
hip to hip & on Monday I sweep grit off  
my window, press nose to glass, imagine us  
on the ferry, faces pink in the wind, bellies  
full of beer, watching Manhattan like it's going  
out of style.

# That beating

Aprils ago, I felt it, that beating  
on chests. Tonight the moths  
gather like mourners, sweat beads,  
scum. Yesterday's a black hole, deflated  
of light. *I want you to hang me*  
I tell a lover before marrying  
his wet back to the bed.

Desperate  
slowness, the quicksand  
of blues...

Not like sleeping with  
a scorpion, less a death  
rattle than the tempered weather  
of milk. The moon is like that,  
full of itself. This was spring: my paper  
knuckles, my sugar spoons.

An island swims beside me, its stroke  
green and sure. It's fate that  
wades unspoken—flat splashes  
in the thickened night. Before  
blackness, gold. After August,  
come. You can find me  
at the water, waiting,  
thrumming like a heat wave,  
holding my breath.



# How we breathed

How for months the village smelled  
like burnt flesh. How the bridges  
shut and rot tunnelled under  
the river, announced itself from  
the steeples, spread the pigeons  
and stayed in the sheets. How  
the people stood in the street  
staring up. How the sky was silver  
cold and smoky. How shadows opened  
and emptied in the dead  
autumn air. How it was hard to  
breath. How we breathed those bodies.

## some apocalypse

churches ablaze. past the window, the sound  
fur makes. taken for homeless. when i touched her cheeks  
i felt a sadness. hollow and heavy. the foyer empty.  
the horses loosed. outside it was still  
warming. she held me in her white arms.  
i went down to the water with only my gut.  
i dragged for miles through the salty waves.  
the sun blew its ash over my throat. the moon  
rose like a fever. i dreamt of winter. i was  
hungry for something. hollowed weight.  
some apocalypses are like wind. girls ripped  
open. river to the ankle. fire and whistling air.

## Bird or Bust

The muscle on the door struck  
twelve. Seven cigarettes and one  
ash tray met in a dark  
kaleidoscope. Every faucet  
went off at once. Whistles  
were useless. Fire extinguished  
the city's wetter spots. The Hudson  
cracked like dead lightning.  
I was waiting for my exorcism  
but the moon came first.

## St. Peter's

Lucia taught me to turn favors into bread.  
Her sister showed me how to eat it: teeth  
extracted like bear claws after an avalanche.

For eight months, I held their knowledge  
between my knees. I had only my own  
rosary and broke that praying for thunder.

I swallowed nothing but meat and hard  
confessions. I wove whole dresses  
from the guilt of cities.

In between moons He came to me  
with round gifts. He touched his hips  
to mine, and, speaking in tongues,

promised an end to dead  
idols. He left two  
sticky psalms on my lips:

In the morning I was immaculate;  
Wailing at his wall, naming my  
thumbs for sunken saints.

# Mozart on the Quad

I wear a crown of ice to the fraternity.  
My dress trails wet tulle through the drifts  
outside. Girls unstitch clouds. Two tides  
higher, the harem sighs orange smoke  
into the night. It is time for my aria.

A thousand pricks of lightning hit  
the mark: Our queen to die at dawn.

The encore's always the same.  
One puddle. One empty gown.

## Winter (iii)

This is winter, this is night, November —  
some kind of heavy, slow as a ribbon.  
So low a cover, light pressing in.  
My dreams are thick, what I remember's

thicker, still. How just last December  
I wrote what words I could of your cold, thin  
face; caught just so with my last good pen,  
it shone, bright as an ember. How you never

say my name unless you mean it. The weight's  
too much, these days, the month's too slow to steep.  
Listen: above the bed, your hip is

moving my hip like a restless sea.  
The moon blooms, half of what it used to be.  
I hold you in my arm. It is very late.

# Thirteen

Did I touch him? When I touched him,  
how did it feel? When cold, what caused it?  
Was it fear? Where did his fear live? How  
did it dress? What did it hold? Did I hold it?  
When I held it, who was I? Did I sleep?  
Did I eat? Did I touch him? What was it,  
to touch him?

At first. Like thunder. Fear. Yes.  
In a house of dirt and young boys  
who treated women unkindly. In black  
and leather footfalls. The edge of smoke.  
Close. A naked pile of bones. Like a pile  
of naked bones. Snow and blood fruit.  
Yes. Fearful.

# Esther in New York

The planks of this fever are sorrow-bound  
I am no longer interested in milkshakes  
He touches my neck like a lynching  
When I kiss the walls I hear thunder

I do not like bathrobes or the smell of ginger  
I do not think winter is a thimble but  
Like a thumb-sized prick a globe of red  
And when he touches my neck I think

Of lynching how the first night  
It rained he shut out the lights  
And the dark bloomed like a new  
Life But life was thin for a woman then

It promised very little

No wonder I was sad with a name like  
Esther Virgin in alligator pumps  
Purple hair reaching towards  
Ether in the god hour thick  
With white heat In the morning  
Ester waterlessly bonded  
To nothing

Dear Mother	I return to you wingless and
mounting	This morning I returned
my nightgowns	to the wind
Mother	New York is terrible
There is too much	to love
Buildings sag like	tired whores
chrome fish	without eyes
I could not	Mother
listen	I returned my wrists
to the bathtub	I returned the doctors
to their bottles	and so I return again
to you	laughing like a pill

# Two

after Rod Serling

*This is the first day of the sixth year,*  
the last war still nameless. This is

Elizabeth Montgomery and Charles Bronson  
in a ghost town and across a trench, rats

being born. This is no word for "Wish,"  
only crashed maps, the sound of Death

drying. She says *pretty* in waterless vowels.  
He points her legs to the empty sky.

*Or sooner, before letters existed,*  
*another kind of jungle* is wilting

against the sun. Or these are the songs that will  
be written, that these lips were thirsty, and so

made rain. That combat was bloodless.  
That *this has been a love story, two*

*lonely people,* just a man and a woman,  
three guns, at High Noon, glistening.

## The end of the world (Bennington, VT)

I hunt fireflies. July cocked  
on my thigh, an envelope of hair  
sewn into the hem. It is raining  
on Venus, while across the state  
a woman with red braids explains  
absence of Hope to her ankle.



# Thorn Botanical

*The names of plants which can cause abortion were preserved orally  
and in old books, mostly written and published by men...  
We are left to piece together the clues they left behind...  
(Sister Zeus)*

Angelica

wore her pain like a kimono, bled through the evening's cool silk  
slices. Temperature fell  
when she danced down throats.

Angelica

was the first daughter, the salt  
and the quicksilver.

Black Cohosh

was the lantern burning at midnight, awake with her  
fever of sea and sour milk.

Black

took hits off the brass lobes of doorknobs, shook  
the sex from tango and the hope from sin.

Blue

knew how to lift welts from skin, wore this duty  
like a nun.

Cotton Root

did not want to be a mother alone in the sun.

Evening Primrose

came wrapped in a watery sleep. She sighed veils of blue. Her killing  
grew famous for its softness.

Mugwort

spun dreams from a damp smoke. Her purple  
tunic was sheered from a nightmare's downy back. Its fear-skin  
buttons shone like radios.

Nutmeg  
cured boredom with her swift pink tongue.

Papaya  
was drunk. Her ink leaked to a puddle beside the well.

Parsley  
opened her leaves to the hot green earth.

Pennyroyal  
hurt.

Tansy  
was the seer, encanting warnings in the white morning after.  
Tansy  
sang a fast magic, shot from the gut, drained rivers for their fish  
eyes, laughed  
under the red moon.

Silphium  
was a heavy weed, the matriarch, smelling  
of money and the rounded  
bluntness of cunt.

Wild Carrot  
was quiet, the nervous runt. She dug through the darkness  
with her nose and sharp hands. She worked slowly, was often forgotten.  
Carrot  
did not like the way her toes curled up. When it was bee season she wore  
white. When she found the living  
she stamped it out.



# Hecate: Apocrypha

Crows I have come to your winter  
with cry unthroated  
and cunt of snow

I have come with apples and spider wood

I have come with the heart of horses

Day rubs fire to the shoulder and at night drops  
below death

I have written of death  
and candles  
and women's mouths  
Now it is white and crows I am done

I said love is a giving  
and I mean music

When Calliope is tired she comes to me  
and I hold her  
I kiss her neck

Crows the rivers no longer move me  
I no longer bleed or live for toothaches

Once I leeches milk from the spine of an owl  
Bore fire for fire's sake  
Slept with kings and wild sheep

That ink is gone too

Crows your feathers are black lungs  
I have given up curses and the tongue of witches

Having nursed the moon I give it up  
Having become curse I give it up

Now it is white and my hazel is spent

Where are the waves you promised  
Where are my dreams rough as magic

## Dejanira: Arsis

He was not a god  
under a weary star  
weaving light

I saw him  
wearing a white dress  
from the moon's round spin

I'd heard of his wandering  
queen, how he  
mounted her breast

and the Amazon  
stamped with gold seed,  
like a trophy

I didn't care  
I was a princess  
I never cried

for his hardness  
in black boots  
for a lion

Well I held  
by the neck  
his angel face

that bastard  
I told him I'd take  
his father's blood

I made him dance  
stuck with leeches  
spit like

on the grave  
I made him  
a woman

Sun spent  
over waters  
white skirts

he squatted  
I lifted  
and laughed:

There between  
thighs, the small  
still kicking

his pink  
sad  
world

# Io: Aegis

I lived like a hymn: quick and  
wailing, no goddess but orbit,  
kept clear by gravity, head bent

to a glassy river. He was a living  
brush, the red soil rolling, a steer-  
pulled sun, the sound of heat

opening. I loved nothing but catching  
fish in my hands so I did not  
love him. Still, when he held my face

I felt a fondness. It was summer,  
thick, black, thunderous, like wild  
boar we were careless, wearing

clouds between our eyes and calling  
the wide sky golden. When it was light  
we stayed in the water. When it was dark

I took him wholly. And when his wife  
turned the sea I was not sorry  
but like the moon, awake in its

sheath, stung across oceans, I shone  
and shone and alone in the night I still  
shine my silver on their marriage bed.

## Kore: Apologia

I came to sex brave and young.  
I thought kissing was what crickets  
did so I let him. Back then  
I was covered in stings. Nights  
were rivers and golden. My knees  
were always bleeding. He put his mouth  
on mine and opened it. He tasted  
like chlorine and sea glass and I  
let him. I was biting drunk in the tall  
grass, opening fireflies and being  
blonde. He lifted my dress and my lips  
and he lifted my legs. I remember the half  
moon and the hum of electricity. I was the belly  
of a piano, the way he touched me.

# Demeter: Agon

I go walking to the earth's corners.

I drain each leaf of its harpy pulse.

I build looms of air.

I take my sorrow and bury it.

(In the womb  
(of the world  
(there is a sound  
(like punishment

## Psyche: Aphesis

How he kept me was this. Sealed. Under the rivers of dreaming. His cave was inhabited by nothing. When he kissed me I saw only monsters. One night wax dropped from my eyes to his and there, in the cloudy light, a steeped beauty. So he left me for blindness. Outside, the blood sun froze. Mountains rolled and angels fell. I shucked fruit under the swollen sky. I glued ribs to harder rock. An armless wind rubbed pepper between my eyes and tried with music to move me. Then the muses wrapped their presents in moss and knelt like prayers at my base. Spring's shade promised new bloom. When it touched me I cried sweet earth

*Clio my sleepless nights*

*Errato the water of dusk*

How I loved him was this. A wound to the hips, some bitter juice. My hands since fed to wilder women. My pleasure unspeakable din.



# Gloria

Because I was not in love. Because I prayed  
with a hard ink. Because when I thought  
I was pregnant I drank a tea of black  
fever. Because every night I fingered  
the gun under my pillow. Because  
every morning my mouth tasted  
like motor oil. Because I threw ice  
down my throat. Because I liked  
to watch the moon collapse. Because  
when it snowed I fell to angels and when  
it rained I need no one. Because I bet  
all my teeth on two aces. Because I slept  
in red lace and spit up blood roses.  
Because the Bible burned when it saw me.  
Because I thanked no one for my name.

# Grace

*Child remember night and day...*  
(Didache 4)

*First concerning the cup*

You move fast from this temple, you fast  
with a living water.  
A running water. This is a story  
forever moving. The morning fresh  
and opening.  
You drink cold water and if there is no cold water  
then warm. These mountains bore you. These crags  
and crones.  
You are a new sea, you rock  
and raise fierceness. Soon  
you will strum wind. Fast  
and deep. The torch  
song is an old one. Soft  
and dark. Leave this.  
You are the fox woods.  
You are the teeth of deer.  
You rise with puddles  
of salmon.  
You come with boatloads  
of lost clouds.

*And concerning the broken bread*

Tell the stories before praying. Tell the stories  
you were told. Let your prayers come emptied  
of light. Wash your body in a beautiful river.  
For the drum of your body  
is beautiful.  
For your grief in the morning  
is beautiful.  
For you are the witness,  
the first and the last. Your flesh  
is your own. Your voice is the sound  
of many waters. You are jasper and carnelian,

the smell of white stone. You are olive oil and wine,  
your face is shining. This morning  
is many colors.  
Receive them.  
Holy of holies. Be received.

*As this bread was scattered in the mountains*

As you walked the towers with hands of water.  
As the sky smelled of flour.  
For the clouds turned to grey and then to black.  
As the night rose from the sea.  
As the sea turned to nectar.  
For the evening came braided with a trued water.  
For you drank and it filled your throat with fire.  
For you were the glory and forgiveness  
and you moved with a terrible thunder.  
For you lay in the lightning in the day's last hour.  
For the sky fell upon your broken face like a fist.  
For when they asked for your name, you said "This."

*Let no one eat or drink*

You stroked a quiet music  
and you became music.  
You became quiet.  
You came with your teeth  
and watered throat  
and you gave these too. Gently  
the night fell around you.  
Gently  
the stars filled with a humming milk.  
You lifted buckets from the tallest hill.  
Gently your mouth bloated  
with whiteness.  
Gently  
you slicked your silver tongue  
across the moon.

*of your eucharist*

Of the birds  
and their crying.  
Of a mother's sound, broken  
from her first. Listen:  
You are of the guiltless  
skin. The unstitched. Of the river  
before it drowns  
its name. You are the trunk  
bending  
to that river. You are the nest  
of steeping moss.  
Rest.  
You come from the water  
and you return. That river  
will drown under another  
morning. Later.  
This storm is sewn  
of a darker light. A bruise  
of spring fruit. One  
golden trumpet.  
One swollen sky.

# Gospel of Mary

I have been waiting under the glowing cypress. I have grown swollen again. I have only the name you gave me and at night I speak it to the sky. *Ave*. Some moons find me drunk with the music of prayer. In the morning I rub honey into my ankles and climb your mountain so high I can no longer hear. One year I passed whole days just dancing. Then a spider made her home in my teeth and for thirty-eight months I did not speak. I coughed red fern, lay with tigers, swallowed thorn, glazed my spine in fire. Still, those eggs opened inside of me. *Ave*, I slept alone in your valley of terrible winds. *Ave*, you made me into cactus, I was sexless, *Ave*, dusted and saved. I wore your stories around my waist. When men put their hands on my knees, *Ave*, I didn't know what to do with my knees, *Ave*, I wanted your hands back. You sowed me with light and left before I knew the curse my womb would become. My skin would unbind itself. *Ave*. I would bury my tongue in veils. *Ave*. I would hold my lips to a telescope until my mouth filled with stars and then I would sing to you. *Ave*.  
*Ave*.  
*Ave*.  
*Ave*.

# Siphon

1.

Above the mesa, rolling  
tumbleweed, above adobe,  
the sun's cracked  
corona, above sand,  
the sword-shaped yucca, past  
midnight, New Mexico.  
For years clouds  
have pressed the desert  
into a low  
defeat: the dryness  
unfettered, dirty,  
esteemed.

2.

Green needles. Sky of endless  
swimming pools. Anatomy  
of piñon. The arroyo,  
a woman, filling  
and unfilling.

3.

Old people come here to die. Silent  
night, then: an urgent echo, mouths  
howling for water. By breakfast, still  
no rain. Lunch is burnt, is dried  
fruit, is planted in compost  
to steep. Like the unsteady  
flatness of just-rolled  
dough, the desert's borders  
come unhemmed.  
This is Mercury  
rising. This is flour  
everywhere.

4.

You can walk miles  
for water or you can drive  
sixty-six like a ghost  
rider. Either way, the road slips  
to —not dirt, not sand, something  
courser — creole, the country's  
garbled nearing, the musk of bleeding  
light. There are no clouds  
in the desert, only white.  
Chlorine writes  
its name in the hung air.

5.

To dusk: grit bone ground  
to nothingness, a loneliness  
too flooded to be called  
lonely. The brush, sun-singed, is  
humming — flowering — a desperate  
beat. So the desert sings itself  
a murder ballad. It is growing  
darker. Peyote bulbs thrash & alight.

6.

Under the waxy  
agave, a tarantula  
waits for her other.  
Unstung, unlifted,  
she sucks fruit until  
she is too drunk to fly.  
Crickets tick. Coyote bray  
against the cooling June  
night. She waits  
here, under the gutted  
flower, moon the colour  
of rose, desert sky  
full of insects.

7.

There is a sleepy logic  
to the desert: the lowered  
vanishing point, a black storm  
simmering. Four years ago  
I drove to New Mexico  
with a baby in my belly and the bible  
in my throat. I left them  
there, with the round wet  
moon, with the spiders'  
woven cradles, without looking  
back.

