These poems incorporate myth, persona, science, and the personal in order to explore the ways we construct narrative and meaning. By examining these different narratives, they also call into question the way these narratives shape the self.
This thesis written by Emily Cinquemani has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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*Meridian:* “Watching Bats from My Kitchen Window After You’ve Left”

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Daphne to Emily

Beware *rooted, grounded*—
the way their soft consonants
nestle into your tongue. Beware
*dissolve*, which sounded sweet
as I said it beside the tree
branches, a fistful of sand
splitting in my throat
and settling just below
my ribs while my legs slowed.
It’s easy to be careless
with your prayers. It’s easy
to say *transform*. Don’t
ask to change, even as pin
pricks dance into a wild thrum
under your skin, even if
you’d like to disappear. Don’t
mistake my helpless form
for a *gracious* one, silence
for *radiance*. Be specific—
be no one’s shade
in the forest, no ring
of laurels. I would’ve
liked to become a monster—
rows of teeth, hunchbacked,
hands thick with veins,
sauntering, savoring the lightness
of my impossible weight, the way
even a god would have run.
Possum

In this story I live without you
and my therapist talks like Rumi—
says I should set a table

for what he calls *energy*
waxing into fullness
in the back of my throat

when I speak, that I should crack
a window and reach for it
as though it were a lost dog.

I keep hearing,
but still haven't seen
the animal crinkling over

grocery bags in my cabinet,
clinking its claws on dishwasher
metal, growing less afraid

of my tread on the tile. Despite
its persistence—the distinct
small taps it makes in the night,

I say it’s the neighbors
through the wall. I close myself
in my room, pool corners

of my apartment over with colored
fabric cut into patterns but never
sewn, listen to a woman swoon

over someone else's beauty
in a song. When it appears
one evening—dishwater gray,

thin-toothed, rat-tailed—
I don't believe it. I pace
the hallway. The fabric flutters

up, dusty. When men come
to put the trap on my floor, they show me the small hole, shrug

when I ask why it came up, how I went so long without noticing. It’s ordinary

and impossible—what can live here, nameless and out of sight, what can rise

without knowing what it wants, walking around, almost silent.
Watching Bats from My Kitchen Window After You've Left

What if I begin unfolding into flight at dusk—wings of stretched skin changing me into something not quite bird beautiful, making me so small that gravity can no longer pull blood to my head? What would end the dizziness of feeling pitched upside down like the light of beady-eyed stars cartwheeling to the earth, would stop the space in front of me from opening like a cave tangled in strands of silk, the future moth-like in its mouth, a white blur of fluttering? I want a voice that feels through the night's topography. I want to hear the distance between another body and my own. I pocket the low buzz of the dishwasher, my own humming, the rattle the forks make when I close a drawer. I let the sounds loose into the evening. The echo comes back, comes back again and again, each time still carrying your shape.
Evolutionary Theory

Even in my bathroom, where I fizz
the tub full of drugstore lavender
and sit until the water turns cold, my body
changes. My fingers shrivel, whiten
like the underbelly of a frog, wrinkle
to get a better grip in this submerged
world. And now I wonder
if there could have been humans
whose hands didn’t prune, envision them
alongside the short-necked giraffes
and hook-beaked sparrows in biology
textbooks, hypothetical and failed, peeled
from the mouth of the earth like old
skin, like the absent eyes
of cavefish. Every kind of loss
should be that clean and obvious—all scale
where socket should be, a whole
being no longer trying to see
what isn’t there. I’ll chart myself without you
in colored stages, like the creation of whales—
each gone land limb an important
undoing, legs becoming fin. I’ll regrow
gills. I’ll molt memory, scrape away
the pictures on the refrigerator, let nature’s
thumbnail cut the circle of my mind
you’re looped through, become raw
skinned, bright as any animal
reimagined from its teeth.
Sarah Prays to the God of Abraham

I've made a hymn of rags
wrung out by my bare hands,

a prayer of my own skin
pulled tight with child, then emptied—

miraculous. My God who's always called
the God of man. My God who lifted me

into his story with the same thought
I give the spoon I can reach

without looking—listen. I've prophesized.
I saw Abraham and Isaac leave, knew

they'd return, chests puffed wide
and empty as a shawl

swept into a storm. I know sacrifice,
transformed flesh, could show them

my hips—thumbprint of husband,
stretchmark from son. I know

their want. Anything taken up
by the sky flies in the wind's

teeth. Anyone becomes sacred
on an altar, given away. I offer my body

to the blue flame of each morning.
My ear, turned to the sky, burns

clouds to ash. Do you see your world,
the way it blackens, effaces

me with the slow soot
of night? And what angel

of yours will you send to stop
the trajectory of its knife?
Doubting Thomas

—Caravaggio. Oil on Canvas. 1602.

I like the apostle who wouldn't believe until he saw Christ cut-up and un-dead, who wanted the wounds, the wreckage of rising. I want to trace

the angle your bent elbow made on my couch while the Nabisco factory spit sweet smoke into humidity, while your hands broke me open beside the naked evening. Come back

and prove that I existed

with you—transfigured like a sheet blown alive with wind, transfigured in the way I knew you'd rattle me loose by leaving, but stayed and let the streetlights' bright fingers run all over my face, my shoulders.

I stepped through the spot of night between us and touched your jawline, your arm. I like Thomas because he understood that nothing ends until it opens

into a gap wide enough to reach through, that the abandoned believer doubts not God, but the body—the body sifted through, untouched, the body unstitched each morning by the sun's gangly arms.

---
No—
if you come back, you can dig through my ribs, smooth a white tomb into my wrist. I sing through the crack of my footsteps on the floor, the sound of my breathing alone. My veins bloom beneath my skin—blue split ropes, rogue as a string of perennials—always weeping their color up from the dirt, wagging their petal tongues.
The Truth Is

It’s a terrible show & I love it—

all the drama cut & re-mixed
like music, sleek-haired women
fighting for a single man, always one

in red who says I didn't come here
to mess around. Me neither,

girl. I’m here to claw any dull prize
from the world’s fist & flaunt it
like a summer home, to showcase
my life like it’s the backstory of a contest
I’ve already won: the apartment

not clean enough, my healing salt
crystal & inspirational quotes,
every man who never loved me rapt

with my winged eyeliner. Let the host
say can you imagine—one some nobody

wearing sweats until noon, crying
in the shower over the New Zealand Gannet
that died wooing a replica of itself.

Look at her now—chosen, cheekbones
glossed sharp enough to cut the sun. See—
even the sad girl can be made worth

watching. Tune in to see a contestant’s
tears sparkle, a glass of Prosecco
at her lips. This morning in the real
world—highway traffic, commuters

slowing to see a sedan on the shoulder,
the crushed hood caving into itself. I was taught
once, that if in trouble, I should scream
fire instead of help.
After My Mother Warns Me Again About Jogging Alone

“The girl’s head vanishes, becoming a treetop”
—The Metamorphoses, Ovid

I.

I would like to talk about anything but women turned cow and tree-root, un-bodied beside Cypress blooms or in the swan-arms of a mad god, but my mother emails me the stories of running girls ground into moss and teeth ten steps into the woods of a public park. She sends them as though I could wear their bodies as amulet, as though knowledge wards off evil, the gods, fate, the thing she sees stalking me in her sleep. In the thump of my run, a man slows to yell damn, and my gut turns to stone, or on the train, smile baby, and I shrink, and I know all the women cursed into bird or scale must have once shut up, made the right sacrifices to heaven, must have tried to be home before dark.

II.

Before I jogged beside stone homes, before my cul-de-sac sidewalk cracked skull-open to spit me into suburbia—knots of seaweed grew in my grandmother’s breasts, and my mother learned that girls should be seen and not heard.

Before my cousins and I shook fireflies in jars and stuffed glow-sticks into our mouths like jack-o-lanterns, I learned to thin myself into less-than, into quiet.

Before the boy at school asked but what did those girls expect to happen? my mother taught me to walk, always, like I knew where I was going.
III.

But even in the movies, the women know—
look over their shoulders
and claw themselves with car keys
before the hero detectives tape
their pictures to the crime board.
Even my grandmother could feel the bulbs
with her fingers as they grew, was told
she felt nothing.

And even if someone believed her,
who could have stopped the great whoever from turning
its lightning eyes to her?

IV.

This is a timely warning of a crime on campus

It is estimated that one out of six women

attempt a safe way home

are encouraged to take precautions

V.

Look—I brag
with each snap of twig
beneath my feet. I’m nettle
tongued, clean
as the break in a bone.  
I’ll take whichever goddess

hates my unholy arrogance.  
I’ll hold the glowing world  
in my teeth.
Emily to Persephone

I’m stuck on
your myth, golden
goddess child gone
wrong—unstitching
it, imagining you
knew who you were
meant to be and picking
up the pomegranate
anyway, shaking
your hips beside the god
of death in some wild
party of the underworld,
teeth stained red.
Here, Fortune’s Spindle
snakes its way up
chestnut trunks for miles,
their roots unanchored
with the groove
of its choke. I want
to coil the world’s
sides, to dig in, to feel
the chill of a shadow
step straight through
me—no lesson or lost
girl crying for home
all through the night.
Always, I’ve heard
there are two sides
to your story. Tell me
which one is right.
Magic Act

A storm stuffs my yard's bare branches
down sleeves of ice, and you train the sun to lie
down beside you so that your shoulders split the sky
while it slips from dusk. You unzip
the street along yellow lines, turn
clouds to tulle-thin curtains tight across the moon, open them
into a dove's wing— night a fluttering
hand motioning look here here. Then
like a coin in my palm,

you

disappear. Go ahead—
cut me in two. Find the card I've chosen
tucked under your tongue.

I want to be what burns
in your hand, a rose
behind your ear, the string of ribbons
you pull from my body,
as though I am thin air.
Charybdis

Sure, I'm nothing
beautiful. Unladylike
with my growing gut
of salt, swinging hips
twirling my dark
skirt open, my mouth
a maw—churning, defiant
in the way it wants
its own growing.
Guts and salt, swinging
hips, no delicate face, no
sweetness stuck
in my myth's maw.
I'm churning, defiant,
in your way. I want
this impossible body,
a voice this loud,
indelicate. I'm no sweet
face stuck in myths,
no weeping goddess-
girl. I'm not here for you
to dote on my impossible
body. A voice this loud
drowns out song
and longing. You
can call me weeping,
goddess-girl. I'm not here
for you. Dote on
the shore. Say I'm
nothing, beautiful,
unladylike. You can
call me out, drown
in song and longing.
I twirl my dark
skirt. I open
my mouth.
The Arecibo Message

—Arecibo, Puerto Rico

And then the earth was given an ear
of aluminum paneling in the void
left by a sinkhole, beside the moss

and Pearly-eyed Thrashers
twitching their feathered heads in the trees.
Scientists created a transmission

in binary—formulas, atomic numbers, the outline
of a man. This, they wanted to say, is who
we are: this double helix, this distance

from our sun. On the balcony
above the dish, my phone signal cuts out—
the nearest cell tower tiny as the spots

stucco houses make along each wooded crest
where the horses eat Emerald Feathers—
the sunken ear silent, as though

it’s also waiting, as though some other-being
in a blue smear of galaxy has already
collected our human figure

and spent nights deciphering, wondering
what to send back. Or, no one contemplates
our noise of ones and zeros. No one

asks about the silence
of standing over a radio dish
in the middle of an island, thinking

about who lives in the yellow homes
along the curved streets, and if they
would understand my broken Spanish,

if they look out over electric lines
and Arecola blooms in their backyard
and ask who might be listening. Anything
beyond us may be a swatch
of absence and loose rock, but
here I am, stumbling

over soy, eres, es in my head,
and ascending a new body
of land. I’m taking up park maps

and switchbacks, my shreds of language,
listening for the frogs hidden in the forest,
their throats swelling with sound.
Wednesday Divinations, Midtown Assistance Center

Ed, who claims psychic abilities, returns from his solo vacation to New Mexico to volunteer, and today, instead of stones meant to emanate an aura or a plate of flea market ammonite fossils, he brings a Ziploc of baby orchids, only to show me that they are leafless, the width of a matchstick. We are late into May, when food stamps run thin. Lady, a man says on the phone, I don’t have no family. Who else can I call? Ed’s clairvoyance blossoms here—he sensed my pen would fall just after it rolls from my desk. Or, he asks to touch my boss’ pregnant belly because he feels an energy he can’t quite put into words. I bag groceries for a woman who calls me honey, sit close enough that our knees nearly touch as she tells me about the ex-husband who shattered her windows. Later, in the pantry, I break down boxes, shelve cans of potatoes. Ed studies his own palm lines, closes his eyes. I’m not afraid that I too will end up alone, but that one day I’ll choose loneliness the same way I decide to ignore the drip in my ceiling until it becomes just another piece of my home. There’s no magic to how, before it rings again, I start to reach for the phone.
Rebekah Prays to the God of Isaac

Fine I'll be your promise I'll be the virgin the girl who shows up just in time a jug of water on my hip I'll kneel I'll say drink dress in gold cover myself in a veil to couple to join I'll be my namesake secure your tree of holy men holy sons fasten even the sand to the little path the breeze makes lull smoke into perfect plumes marry the right man I'll sprout from the stem of the glass he tilts to his mouth how easy it is to tangle sun bending through glass easy to hold so many futures in my hands at night I lie awake I say Rebekah until it's just sound until its meanings dismember in the air

Rebekah
to link to tie & to bind Rebekah to snare

I’ll Admit to You Now that Parables Reduce the Individual
to lesson, that they value the prodigal son
only for his father’s mercy, the tax collector

for his symbolic corruption. And maybe the morning
bus did conspire against you, along with the weather,

most men, or anyone who might have a damn
problem with the way you said shit

*I look hot in this.* Maybe it wasn’t so crazy
that you met half some country’s consulate

in a bar and brought them inside while the rest
of us slept because *they were, like, so nice*

*you guys, and the really had to pee*
or that you told me *my god, you are a modern*

*woman* and *let it go.* Still, I don’t know what to do
with your friend who died, her pelvis shattered

by a truck. I can’t sort through each space
you left for me—the hours you abandoned us

at Mardi Gras, the weekend with the guy
who bragged about getting kicked out

of boarding school, the day your student
couldn’t pay for his son’s surgery

and you closed yourself in your room.
You’re probably on the train in Chicago

now, vanishing into crowds of people
on the street. Let’s say God loved no one

for their conversions, but instead for their cursing
and bad jokes, their weak knees. The world

feels like a clock someone wound up and left
out on a porch in the rain. I’m trying to stop
circling the gaps I find here, to live
without giving each hurt a name.
North Carolina By Train After You've Left

I've smoothed my life flat
as a field of soybeans and split
it down the center
the same way a train undresses

the woods, cuts through secret
spaces as though they are the open
rooms of a doll house. At each
cross-section, I find you

hidden like a ring of tents
in a thicket of bristle-still trees

or sitting in the shaded corner
of an overpass, your image

as stubborn as shed door ajar
and rust-stuck in a backyard

beside a plastic toy car left
too long in the rain. And what
do I do with you, with your fingers
crisscrossing each dip in my spine

past a glass-smudged pane, your now
far-away body lacing its soft shadow

into thick underbrush? A man stands
by the tracks, waiting
to spray a broken line of bright
paint on the pavement,

and a woman claps her hands
to her ears. I want you
to remain at the track's edge—
face almost in eyesight, feet
marking the ground while we
pass. Or, I want the noise

and tremble, something to confirm
the weight of what travels through

me, the nearby shudder of houses
and dishes and glass.
Sacred Things

If God kisses dirt so He can breathe
his beings into being, or grows the world

into a lotus flower blooming
from his belly button, if the universe

sticks in the back of his throat
like a piece of fruit,

if he touches his apostles with tongues
of flame, if the heavy song of a church

organ spilling into air is holy
as the negative space left by nails

struck through an ankle, if an open-face
flower drawn with rice chalk

is swept away by strangers' feet,
if hymn and amen, aum, I am, hallowed

hallelujah, if ashes sketch into crosses
on my forehead, if the gilded sliver

of a saint's finger bone glints
behind glass, if a whole sea can split

straight in half, if a downpour in the desert
floats over flat land like a ghost—

then my skin cells are also divine
when left on your sheets while I shiver

from stepping out of sleep, coughing
in front of the mirror, my feet

on dimpled linoleum. Tell me
that the sun might mark me

with blisters, that red dirt will write
itself into my hands. Press your mouth

to the hollow of my neck while I count
the beats inside your breathing. Say

we'll stay outside as a storm
steps closer, until it reaches us

with its gauzy jaw. Point to our
outlines on the ground

after it passes. Show me my body
taking space away from the rain.
The First Siren to Drown Herself After Odysseus Sails Past

Wing-beating her weight
over black waves,
she counts
jagged rocks, calculates
the depth
she’ll crash
through, but this ending
is still better
than the dreams
where her voice swells
like a sponge
behind her tongue,
where a ship slices the shore
and her mouth flies
open shut
open like a broken
sail, while seamen
footprint her bone
-washed beach, dig
daggers between
her breasts, steal her
part-beast body.
They stuff her claws,
pose her
elegantly, extended
as though she’s offering
herself, replace
her eyes with glittering
ovals of blue glass, trophy
-hang her from the bow
pluck quills to pick sand
from their teeth.
Far from men

imagining her
into fine feather and skin,
she used to dance
on her talons, think
of Persephone
below the earth laughing
with shadows.
She squatted, slurped oysters’ soft bodies from their shells, let salt sun itself on her chin. Listen—the men sing too. And her own song keeps slipping to wind.
Leah Prays to the God of Her Father

"Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was beautiful"
—Genesis 29:17

My father gave me
over, the shroud
of evening so thick
it thumbed me
into nothing
more than a trick
of the eye. My husband
tried to cheat
the sting behind
his lungs— what
the first man named
lonely before you
built someone
from his rib. But
like you, I saw
the future—waking
up the wrong
sister, living
in his house, stepping
into drapes of night
so the air could wish
itself into the line
where my thighs
meet, collect under
my breasts. I remained
quiet, couldn't fix
the way his hands fooled
me into believing
the morning might
not come, couldn't craft
a new companion
from my bones. Men
teach me to pray
to the God of floods,
to their Almighty
Lord of sons
and land. But I know you
already, God of my plain
face, of my untouched skin, God who created the space in this bed where a different woman should have been.
Dream Leaps

Let’s say the ordinary world works this way—that you see sneakers on the floor & begin running through the dry-gold grass behind your old elementary school, the linked fence just barely ringing like china shoved together on a shelf. Like the loose quarters you find in the dryer, you find a woman’s face in your mind & she’s there too, ankle-deep in the ocean—the field now all wet sand & you’re running to her or from something, the wind spider soft on your face while the sand swallows your legs. Let’s say you can tell your friends about all this at work & look it up online. You can search, woman, silence, consumed by sand, can say I had this strange reality the other night where someone was burning churches in my home state. You can search school, shooting, a shopping mall, recurring or running from & someone will interpret it for you. Or, you’ll laugh it off. You won’t be worried when everyone shrugs, shimmers & disappears, won’t worry about the silence growing from your mouth, how the empty chairs keep swiveling.
The Speed of Light

— to my brother

Imagine an ant, you say
as we split sandwiches
at the table, windows already December
dark. Imagine it at the end
of this placemat, the way it
would look out over warp
and weft and see an eternity—
its insect brain unable
to untangle each ridge of weave
or envision an end. You
brush crumbs off the brown fabric
square, which is now
space-time, and fold it so its edges
touch. We watch
the invisible ant step from end
to end. Then you let go,
and the cloth sprawls open.

Younger sibling of physics
and logic, of the universe mapped
out in ten dimensions,
you say that this is how we might
move faster than light, say
did you know black holes
would sound like static
between radio stations if we
could hear them? You
explain that scientists saw matter
squared and knew it could be
negative, anti, ready to annihilate,
its other. Anthony,
so much of the world seems
this casually violent, reeling
up on the TV in the coffee shop,
scrolled over, regular
enough to warrant the usual how did we let this happen? Alone in my new city, I often feel far away from everything, a soft pang stuck somewhere in the back of my throat like the throb of prodding burnt skin with my tongue. Tell me again that darkness hums static while it drinks fistfuls of light. Say there’s evidence that we might pass over fields of life woven too wide to cross. And when we can’t move, what will bend to close the space beneath us?
I’m Afraid of What Exists Beyond the Ordinary World

like the Pentagon searching for UFOs—
the universe more than just our rodeo

of television noise and mall salesmen, miracle
shampoo. Though I know it’s just distance

that makes the night sky appear manageable—
turning perished suns into something small

and twinkling, undead. A religion teacher I knew
once said but doesn’t some part of you feel

eternal? And I do feel alien
to whatever part of me goes by a name

I don’t know—whatever part of me is not the sick
lung made sack of spit, not a buzz

of nerves, the skin a lover stopped wanting.
Like the stargazer or the guy watching

for light and pinning up snapshots
in his desert trailer, I’m desperate

for any kind of definition—even a cruel god,
a bad horoscope, a man

keeping my voice in the most distant orbit
of his mind. How do I shrink

to fit in the diagram
I want to make of the world,

to place myself neatly in someone
else’s hands? All the time I hover

over myself and never land.
I Try to Skip Past the First Week After You Leave Me, Only to Discover the Nature of Time

Unlike a line or dimension, time’s pinned through me like thread, so that when I rise away from my stack of unwashed laundry and oatmeal bowls, I begin to take it all with me. The mailman from this morning and his small puffs of breath dangle behind me, pull at the strings woven through the visible veins in my elbows. His tomorrow-self hangs in front of me, reaching into the mailbox, fixing his hat. I rise and time parabolas below me. The neighbor’s dog poking his head out the window into next week’s stretch of rain is swept up into the arch—pasts and futures on either side of my axis, facing each other mid-air. I can see the park you and I hiked through, your arm tight around my waist by the bridge, mouth pressed to the top of my ear, words traded out on your tongue, given over to anything you said, like my body defined in dark contrast to a winking skyline, the taillights of your car growing smaller. I can see all the way back to before I met you, to the night my friends and I went to the bar full of biker chicks, how it was funny that I looked like I belonged there in my leather jacket and dark lipstick despite nervously picking at the skin around my nails. I watch as I rub the red lips off into a cloud of smudge on my face. I watch for somewhere I belong in the future, for my nails
to be un-chewed, my jaw to be as tough
as those women smoking out front, alone
in that bright cold and breathing into it,

taking up space with their rings
of smoke, larger than I ever was
beside you and shivering

in a parking lot or on my own
under a wide apartment ceiling. Time scrapes
backwards on the wood floor and frictions

into spark. Moments rise and grow,
and in my panic I don’t know if I want
to skip backwards or forward. I turn

clumsily and strung to the ground
like a backwards marionette. Mailman past
and mailman future flail into each other

and letters scatter—postmarked
yesterday, today, tomorrow. Next week comes
in glances of morning and night. I turn

and time digs into my wrists as I try
to grab hold—suspended in place,
arms wrenched into awkward wings.
The Letter I Might Write You Now from This Mountain Home in the Blue Ridge

This weekend my friends and I drank
our mouths purple, dealt cards
of our futures—*the star, the lovers, the fool*. Ridiculous, I know, but I wanted
to believe it—there, on the table, a woman
pouring water at her feet—illumination,
renewal. The dark stopped

up the windows, covered the fir trees
and wrens. We talked about men—
about so-and-so's ex, L's boyfriend—
still three states away. Then L took a drink
and said *but Emily is the most alone*. Not too far

from my home, there's a drowned town
and the legend of a woman who walks
on the lake at night looking for her lost lover,
her sadness blown so wide inside her she floats
over the water. She and the lake are both called
*the lost one*—Jocassee. This sounds nothing

like me, but that night when some of us
heard mice scratching through the walls,
I thought of her. Ghost girl
carving his name over and over
into the siding, tired of the blank
pool of the lake always looking up, its giant
eye eternally eyeing her—*poor girl, lost one, the most alone*. But now I'm telling a story

I know isn't true, and I'm writing you
just to say that I sat a long time out
on the porch today watching the nuthatches
peck through the woods. The air had that pine
and dirt smell of fall. The wine I drank was good.
Rachel Prays to the God of Jacob

Don't forget that I was a shepherd

before becoming the pretty girl

of anyone's story, even yours.

My hair clung to the smell of dry grass

and dung, stuck to my cheeks with sweat—brown curls stubborn as the bulbs

of calluses budding at my feet.

I was a woman moving over the water

of a well, swatting flies from my face. I walked, and dirt bowed beneath me.

Do you worst,

or your best. Empty or fill me. I travel plenty

of barren fields. I never worry over the rough

landscapes of my own body—

blood rust-dark in the cracks of my fingers, wet salt

above my lip. I've looked into the long gap

of the well while dipping my bucket. I've already watched myself break

into soft edges, seen how beautifully I am erased.
Erasing *Annunciation*

—Caravaggio, Oil on Canvas, 1608.

Close your eyes & take away the blue robe. Pluck the angel's feathers & make him into the cold stitching itself through her skin, into the little legs the night grows in the back of her throat.

Take the veil & undo her kneeling—floor against her ear, while she lies there:

*holy,*

*virgin,*

*favored.*

Empty the room. Throw out the wooden chair.

Imagine the fistful of lilies stuck stem-straight in her gut, blooming there against her will. Close your eyes & revise rising into the ghost spots that appear after you've stared to long at the ceiling, into the dark pooling in the shallows of her hands.
The Moon Has Earthquakes

but no tectonic plates,
and while you’re sleeping you forget
most of what you dream.

Your eyes cut side to side
under their lids. The pigeons
roosted over the back porch

are never mistaken
for anything holy, though they’re doves
of the ground. Near the edge

of a canyon, some people fear falling,
others worry they’re going to jump.
It’s just the mind always needing

a story, a reason for seeing safety
when you step away. You checked
on your mother after talking about car accidents

at lunch last Tuesday. You know bad
things come in threes, let yourself feel
less nervous if the radio plays music

you like. It ended between you
and the guy you didn’t love,
but you keep making it

into some kind of tragedy, spooling
yourself up in the soft thread of how
comforting it was to have someone

touch your wrist. *To spool*
means *to wind*, but also
*to unwind*. Feelings can’t last

too long, your best friend is sure.
This is meant to be soothing,
though you’d like them to become

bright and symbolic, sharp,
wide-winged. When you were a kid, your mother promised birds
would find the ribbon from the balloon you lost in the grocery store parking lot
and stitch it into their nests. You repeated her words the way children lull answers into their minds, so taken
with her weave of ribbon, you forgot your empty hand hanging beside you—stuck half open, half shut.
The Truth Is

My most used emoji is the one that's laughing & crying at the same time & last week I dyed the ends of my hair purple. I'm that edgy now. My hairdresser asks if there's anyone special. I had one date with this guy who held a decent job & liked coffee shops. We saw a drunk girl in a leather skirt—heels hobbling down cobblestone, her thin bird-arm linked through a friend's. He rolled his eyes & said do you have a skirt like that? I got an online dating profile. It says loves dogs and mimosas. It's not a lie, but I'm such a liar. For example, I told that guy Yes, I have a skirt just like that because he pissed me off & I say things like I'm fine with whatever or this may sound stupid, but. I'm concerned I'm nothing more than a very nice young lady & soft in the hands of whoever will take me. I might give in to superstition—plant the statue of a saint in my mouth, upside down, to try & sell my shack of self, my untenable tongue while someone in the corner whispers, she doesn't really believe in all that right? But the truth is I believe fully in the not miracle of my dog-heart—always sighing in a warm room of comforts, resisting the instinct to bury whatever small goodness it finds.
Creation Myth

The birds perched in my mouth are unnamed and scale footed in pre-constellation night. I’m an itch in a god’s brain, a dark stretch of water watching a spirit step over my body, waiting for something to touch me, to say if I’m dust or skin. Feathers curl out from under my tongue, taste like the center of the earth, like air in the cool hours, ocean husking its torso from the sky. I want to be believed, to untangle myself into clean orbits. Or I want to be the scatter of rogue lights stepping out of an explosion when the universe first uncurls its fist, or the moment before forever, the pocket of a cosmic giant, a hum held in someone else’s throat.