

CLARA

As a child--I did sometimes see the devil removing--christian bodies from consecrated ground--
 He had his spade--hooves and horns and tail--Black dirt and sod--over his shoulders--Carefully
 he pried the dead from--their womb--Their jaws--with spirit--animated--bone and--ribbons of
 skin--flapped--How they pleaded--The devil only--smiled--

Many years since I saw him last--I have walked--churchyards moonlit--Called and called--for
 him--For me--he no longer comes--Now I see only his ways--

I have walked the valleys of our land—mountains—rivers--great dark forests no true christian
 dares enter--Gulping bogs--The heathens--thatch dwellings—dogs lie in the dirt—I have met
 with—mayors—the governor—Dined in their halls—faces in the candlelight—at my story
 astounded—To think all this splendor and horror from one mind--emerged--

Such immensity is—terrifying—

A woman alone--I think--understands--A man--with his mathematics--his electric current--and
 dogma--is incapable--A man in his feathered hat and ruffled collar examines a human skull and
 sees a skull--A woman sees there--everything--

It is astonishing so few women from these rooftops--jump--Perhaps they fear the height too
 mild--They lie--crippled--maimed--screaming--Such screams over many miles heard--A beast so
 devastated is relieved of its misery--a woman is nurtured to what they call health--Now she must

account for her carelessness--Now she must blame the--frailty of nerves--She must say--I was
asleep--this is how I awoke--

If not for this war--would I now in bed beside my husband lie--Sounds and shapes of our chamber--so familiar they even now seem before me to rise--No matter where I am--my familiar world--comes--I close my eyes and now in that place other--It is terrible--Would I have remained what I was--a fury--restrained--Perhaps I did always threaten--burst through the cracks--Perhaps this was inevitable--No organ or skin could contain--my true shape-- -

We knew so long their--approach--by heavens--sweltering--crimson--A wind of murder does
come--flesh burning--from plantations mere miles distant--devastated--We have heard--stories--
travelers come upon towns in flame--There is nothing left--they tell us--save--evisceration--

A cow--through a fog--wandering--the long black earth--entrails from her belly torn--dragging--

We are not so well garrisoned as those towns--my husband does say--We will need to build high
walls—He gestures—there—stone—he says—spikes—Another man nods—yes—Yet you have
seen how these heathens do climb--even the steepest fortifications--

There is a map drawn--our settlement--the township--the dwellings--Here we are--I think--The
further reaches--English fields--The wilderness bordering--He draws a circle--a line between us
and--this darkness--Here will go our wall--he says--

The beasts would drive us into the ocean--my husband said--if they could--

Some roads it is said--blocked with horses--shot through their necks--hacked open--Some--of leg
removed--some--their heads lifted free--thrown in this dust--The heathen in his madness does
little consider the folly of this slaughter--There is no logic in his animal mind--only malice--
deviousness--The heathen--my husband said--

My husband--his name is French yet--he is not--

Progenitor of my children--I think--He is stout--aged--He smells of--fire--labor--He is a man of prayer--When he comes to ravish me--he bids me do not move--utter no words--When I was a child he did--terrify me--Now I know to find terror in the lord--

This man before we did marry--made his will known to me--with authority--He wore the—splendid costume of his fathers—Perhaps the very clothing they wore—emerging from the forest—white trousers and jacket—blue pocket square—straw hat—blue ribbon—loafers—His legs crossed—blue stockings—His fine dwelling—there are many rooms within his house—He swings a walking stick at his side as he leads me about the garden—although there is no impediment to his gait—He dabs his throat with a handkerchief—his face reddened—This heat—he says—is burdensome—He sits me in the shade at a table his servants have prepared--cloth and umbrella and chairs—a pitcher of lemonade—glasses are filled—Yes that hits the spot—he says—Now little pastries—apple--cherry--cakes—are brought—You will be mistress of all this—he tells me—gestures to the vast yard—the house—servant's dwellings—the servants themselves—

I don't look at his servants—When they must be spoken to—I look at my hands—twisting—

His grandfather--joins us—Venerable man—His birth year by no one remembered—Silver haired—thin skin stretched--shining—where it does not hang—In his chair he rocks—bone and vein and loose skin folded atop—a wool blanket across his lap—His teeth jut from steel gums—

teeth from his servants harvested—Servants no one alive remembers—in the forest somewhere buried—our lord has swallowed them—When the sun does wane he must return in doors—The man I will marry takes his grandfather's shrunken hand—Good night dear Grandfather—he says—The old man does no more rise—his servants carry him seated yet in his chair—

My husband's previous wife—when I was a child—she seemed—so elegant and fine—She wore blue—her skin so pure and white—translucent to the bone—I do not dare ask about her—She remains a mystery—her manner—delights and frailties—There is nothing to know—he would say—

I know only a woman--carried forth in portrait—Here she hangs—I sometimes lean closer—the lamp light glows—I remember her--I a child--she a lady--How beautiful she seemed—was her hair so dark—her neck so slender—her nose—aquiline—This mark upon her cheek—Surely this was so—yet you remember nothing of it—What of her voice—this too is lost—

I have long admired you—he told me--our courtship—Carriage rides—His gloved hand—the softest leather—covers mine—in lace—He gifted me bracelets—necklaces—silk gowns—stockings—I watched you at your father's knee—he whispered—Your eyes—sapphires—your skin—porcelain—your tender lips—rubies—I thought—there is a beautiful child—

Ungown thyself--he insisted--that first night--At the edge of his bed he sits--A woman must live in submission—if she is to live in glory—he said--as I removed my covering--slowly now--he

whispered--The hearth did burn brightly yet--still I shivered--He continued--Her submission brings her glory—even as man's glory comes from his freedom—To give yourself—without reservation—unto an authority—higher—How I stood--trembling--in his silence--His gaze -- Come--he said--his hand--a gesture subtle--

Mornings his secretary arrives--Jonathan--a heathen savage in youth made--christian--His hair trimmed to a length--civilized--Much of his beauty covered--suit of black wool--carefully brushed--his shoes--gleaming--black--His good manner--christian politeness--His hands clasped--head bowed--He shifts in place--will not even look at me--until I bid him sit--

How polite and meaningless our chatter--His studies--his professors--I nod as he speaks--How fascinating it all is--I once say--He betrays no sense of his task--The room wherein he disappears with my husband--returns downstairs--in the late evenings--appearing half of his former size--sunken--It is as if my husband does consume him--particle by particle--Indeed--how full and red--my husband is at the dinner table--Jovial--Falstaffian--Is it youth he consumes--vigor--I regard myself now--am I no more the girl I was--Fed upon and fed upon--until--a thin crone of twenty-five--

How slowly time moves while he--awaits my husband's summons--Each click of the--great clock--

Finally--black boxes behind--potted ferns--crackle--whine--It is a terrible sound--an unearthly rising--From these boxes--a thin noise--jangling--a bell my husband shakes in some room other--Now his voice--far off--crackling--a hearth--burning--Jonathan--he says--Jonathan--he repeats--an urgency--stern--Jonathan--he continues--Jonathan--where are you Jonathan--Jonathan--I will not wait a moment longer--this is madness--How he seethes--his teeth clamped tight--His face must burst--bright--red--He can scarcely speak--a cry--gargling--strangled--Jonathan--I will not

tolerate this--foolishness--Silence--now--some long seconds of static breaking--flaring--Boxes
hissing--steam escaping--Jonathan--he finally says--his low flat voice of life--drained--
Jonathan--Jonathan--Jonathan--

Does Jonathan know how he groans--almost--inaudibly--at the box's first crackle--an--unmanly
sound--fearful--inadvertent--Does he know how slowly he rises--the hesitation of those first
steps before his pace accelerates--How slowly the distant stairs--creak--

I do not blame his hesitation--I know not what goes on up there--but I believe I would rather--
flee to the wilderness--than meet such a summons--

This boy--Jonathan--no more than nineteen years--Slender--wrists and hands--Cheekbones--how
lovely--if rouged--Shoulders and arms--Delicate little bird--With the servant girl alone he is
abrupt--No--he insists--correcting her pronunciation--Demands she repeat--again--again--until
finally--Yes--now you know--he says--

It is true I know nothing of--His life--beyond his life within this room--waiting--There is a world
to you unknown--I sometimes fancy he will tell me--

The heathen--my husband said--may be trained to the mimic the christian--This is true--Yet such mimicry is--a wane approximation--Yes--there are three such savages at our college--remarkable heathens—They seem to read—write—converse—in the manner of christian men—Upon apprehending such a savage—one must blink—to distinguish them—from christians—then one nears—perceives—clear distinctions—His attempts at articulation—wit—prayer—

There are many such men as my husband--landowners--farmers--men educated--who listen to him on these matters--A man well read on the latest advancements in European thought--German--English--French scholars on the heathen problem--The various underdeveloped species of man--Was he once a man as any other--only to degenerate in the forest--Was he formed on some entirely other branch of the tree of life--

No this--literate savage—my husband said--this half thing—is a dangerous business—You have all seen—a wolf—chained—It does seem to become docile--tender—but a wolf cannot hide its derision—it grows in madness—frenzy—The native seems to assume our guise--as if to wear a christian name is to--walked draped in his skin—But it is otherwise--We believe we are--civilizing them--bringing them into light--when in truth they--drag us into their darkness--The heathen does infect us from within--By proximity--the christian is drawn into--savagery--You see already how few men on campus do attend daily service--Choose instead to--carouse--gather at ale houses--Merriment of the flesh--sinister--

You will notice how their bodies seem to perish in our proximity--civilization is devastating to their condition--You will notice how even those exceptional few--do--become diseased--incapacitated--One fellow dies choking on blood--Another walks off a rooftop--found broken necked on the cobble street--a wretched hound--laps at his blood--

My husband--called to examine--a heathen corpse--frozen--Discovered--shadowed beneath the ice--They crack open the pond and hoist him free--He wears a grey suit--leather shoes--His skin bluing and hair held fast with ice--Was this murder--suicide--They do not know--Was the heathen inebriated when he here wandered--You see here where the ice opened--another man said--Yes--glazed now with new ice--

Here where the hands--forearms--scrapped--torn--Perhaps--one man said--fish--No--another--he did claw at the ice--a murdered man so thrown would not claw--said another--My husband did split the dead man's chest--You see the lungs--he said--He could not have been breathing when he went under--

It little matters--my husband said--He paced now before a gathering of men such as himself--in the end--if some scoundrel murdered this heathen--or if this heathen did in drink wander onto the ice and thus plunge to his death--Or if this heathen did will his own demise--(if such an unreflecting creature may feel so consuming a melancholy--perhaps there is more to such men than we know)--Such a man could not--within this world of ours--persist--Our civilization expels him naturally--

The heathen is an infection--my husband said--You see how the infection--spreads through the
blood--A limb now must be removed--He draws a line along--where his arm and shoulder meet--

Before he comes to me at night he must for considerable time bathe--

Softened--yet flushed from water boiled--he stands at the foot of my bed wearing only a
nightshirt--He insists--I must lie on my back--close my eyes--

Cotton to skin--How his flesh does burn--swell--within me--

He presses his hand to my throat--deeper--as if to push through--My gasping sounds--Lights--
flare--shower--some divine message--sent--How exhilarating--this terror--

To bring a child into this world--I thought--is a cruelty unbearable--

By the river's edge—I watch women--swollen—undress—Gowns onto rocks--cast—How they
 creep—hand in hand—Toes—ankles—slowly into the water they wade—They are giggling like
 children—splashing each other—Soon too I'll swell—Soon too some organism within—
 murmuring—

All life wandereth from—the vacuum mysterious—There is nothing—and then—the first pulse
 electric—is this the soul—welded now to the flesh—The prison house forms—heart and vein—
 blood—eyes—lungs—bone—Is this you—in fluid suspended—observing without understanding
 —a dull light through membrane—like shadows upon screens—while sounds and voices foreign
 —drone—From nothingness gathered—into flesh of woman—

Is this you--my darling—from my body pried—strangled—blue—What was your consciousness
 —a candle--snuffed—By midwife swaddled and handed to—me—sallow—blood wretched—I
 hold you against my breast—coo—When I force a nipple--swollen--to your lips--Your eyes—
 into your head--lolloped—Is this you—or you no more—Has the essential element—fled—

They place you in—a casket no larger than a breadbox—Your shoulders pressed to the walls—
 your little feet swaddled—Your head--flopped to the left—Upon your eyelids--illustrated--a gaze
 unto the world—So you were captured—transubstantiation of light—bitumen—sheet of pewter
 —into flesh—

How quickly one is no more what one was—How quietly one becomes something—new—Is this
you—Your name into slate etched—To touch the inscription—the angel, a skeleton—Is this you
—under lawn—flesh--blackening--splitting—Is this you—soil and root—beetle—worm—

How he--how my husband--never again spoke of you--I did fancy his--faraway looks did
signify--

A man--my husband wrote--from christian influence removed--becomes a shriveled thing--

In the wilderness—my husband wrote—the soul degenerates—the light now glowing becomes a small thing—a pin prick—We have heard—a howling—These devils—I have often said—my husband said—were once men—much as you or I—a thousand generations previous—they too spoke in tongue recognizable—They too wore costumes—perhaps silken—They too—

So my husband into the forest went—with musket—A dozen dozen men—through swamps dismal trudged—gulping—muck—Mosquitoes fat—our own blood smears--necks—palms—A constant whine—men deranged—thrashing against the air—muskets—explode the emptied air—echoing—

The cries came from trees—brush—shadows—a malevolence—shrill—They are here—a force—incomprehensible—Skulls cleaved—the body spasms—Necks spurt through—fingers desperate—Finally—a musket ball explodes one backward—his belly gulping—They are gone then—clouds of smoke and steam—

Some days a smoke—the horizon blackens—There comes a wind of murder—

We set camp amidst the trees—fire—the sounds of the forest alive—the silence then the crackling sounds and an owl—there are wolves here somewhere—perhaps they will come to us in the night—The silver moon—blotted now—darkness complete—We sit in the awful nothing

—A man clears his throat—another spits—Some foulness does here operate—I say—In this
place the very air—does shift and warp in ways—unchristian—If we should from the earth rise
—into the atmosphere float—I would show no surprise—

Sentries at camp's edge say no man has there trespassed—neither sound nor outline—At dawn—
Four stakes from the earth protrude—draped--the black hair of dead men—A mile distant—we
hear first—From tall grasses—their boots—legs—We hear the flies—pungent death—already—
How sweetly lie these christian boys in their doom—From the grasses they are unmoored—
Carefully laid—hands across breasts—repose respectful—We brush away the flies yet still they
blacken—red gaping heads—We shroud them—Blood wounds—into white sheets—stamped—

My husband's room--He alone carries the key--great and iron--from his belt it swings--A long stairway--narrow--upward into the furthest extremes of the house--the floor beneath him groans-- Then there is the sound of the door opening--it does seem to exhale--Then it does behind him close--

There are days he does disappear into this room--for hours--the morning into the afternoon-- Only once did I--creep up those stairs--how carefully I tread--slowly--lightly--Perhaps inside his room he stood listening for the--slightest infraction--Perhaps he sensed my--desire to know--

Up those stairs I--creep--the narrow walls upon my--shoulders press--The humid air--my brow and throat and underarms--my belly--swelters--I lean against the wall--upward yet--an impossible distance--A line of light beneath my husband's door--How the air *thickens*--How I must--pull myself over the floor--through--film of dust--When a board seems to creak now I must stop in my motion--in this time I do not even breathe--How I listen--Now from his room-- voices--not his own--Now from his room--song--instrumentation--a sound swelling-- glorious-- Human voice--sometimes--a language--foreign--Human voice stretched beyond the natural allowances of human voice--While instrumentation--rapturous--Such sounds can come only from--some god whose soul--burns and swells--a seething--boundless--exceeds the regions of his form--It is terrifying--I thought--

When my husband emerges from his room--his eyes and breathing--when he joins me in the parlor--when he does sit across me cross legged--ask of my needlework--When men do sit before

him and he does carry on now of the matters of the day--the savages in their instruction--their belligerence--the crops of corn, tobacco--cattle, swine, chickens--while I listen from some room other--When he does consume venison and milk and cheese and bread in his famishment--When he does drink of ale--cider--When he believes he has emerged from his room a man as any other--returned to the world as he left it--you alone perhaps perceive what condition of exaltation persists--What glory does--transfix his earthly flesh--radiate and burn--

How my husband--his communions--secret--In his room amidst--sounds perhaps from some god thrown--prophet of the lord--privy to voices strange--A mania terrifying--There are days soon when you see him no more--when you know you must not ask--Where have you been--I have little seen you husband--

The servant girl he beckons to his room--Come--he calls down to her--Hurry child--The sun does yet rise when she disappears into his room--it is high upon its arc when I next see her at her tasks--Her various positions about the room--I am--at my needlework--labor delicate--a bed rug--the tree of life--Later--this same girl--brings me a silver tray--lemon cake--sliced--How delightful--I say--Yet--there is a fly--striding upon my lemon cake--I say--How soft I make my voice--How--inviting--When finally she leans to see--She falls away--yelping--Tears--Fingers held--clasped--at her cheek--

How--I apologize to this girl--Hand her a handkerchief--even as she shrinks away--Cloth swells red--Her eyes--what terror--The slim light scar she carries thereafter--The frail story she tells my husband--a slip--fallen against the stove--

This first time I tell myself my apologies are sincere--This first time I plead forgiveness of the lord--

Evenings--a hearthlight--my needlework--the servant girl lights candles--How kindly I thank her--My husband watches from across the room--as if apprehending some--element--new and terrible--What a strange girl he must think me now--

When--no new child within me--swells—I no longer find my husband--in the night--leering from
 the foot of my bed—I lie awake--anyhow--What of myself am I to him offer--some devotion--
 What have I but my flesh—

Beneath quilt--layered--My thighs--fingers--motion--sublime--I roll onto my belly--Hips and
 buttocks--I would call a servant girl to me now--Lips--dusky--perspiration--smoke--There is a--
 tremendous wind--Windows--membrane against--the further world--From the wilderness beasts--
 howl--Somewhere in the world tonight--devils move as--shadows do—darkness—fluid—
 Someday they will venture unto this place--set fire to every rooftop--Someday--they will murder
 us all--Now--finally--my body spreads with--such delight--

What separates us--living from--dead--Frail tremulous--membrane unseen--Perhaps even now--
 naughty spirit--my daughter--*Annabelle*--Thing expelled--Hovers over me--cooing--wailing--
 Perhaps--spirit lips at my breast--clamor--yearn--

My mother's gravestone--Sara--Her daughters--Rebekah--Patience--Susannah--blue mold—
 grasses thickly grown—When I was--no more than nine years aged--I tore away the weeds--
 pressed my ear to the ground before their stones—cool--pungent—Can you hear me—I
 whispered—How I strained into the darkness—Somewhere below--humming--I thought—
 Perhaps—groaning—

They must look as I do—or have—or will—yet—they do not—I thought--within their caskets
they must lengthen—malformed—broken—

How it must have tormented them to—hear me at my play--How they must have longed to cavort
about the yard--sip lemonade—dangle string before kittens—capture butterflies—dust alive—
How they must have yearned--to hold my clothing against their bodies—death smeared—To
remove me from the universe—To stand in my place—sleep in my bed and assume my seat at
the table before—breakfast porridge—to hear mother call them by my name—to hear mother
call out—Clara—Clara my darling—my dear—Clara—Clara—

It is a terrible thing—to have died—and yet--continue—

It is true--I do sometimes--take my little basket into the world--raise my bonnet--Afternoon
streets--November mist--dead leaves sodden--Footfalls clicking on--brickwalks--Torches already
lit--for the gray hours--

So many eyes--inhaling--One sense the dead here too--yet it's the living who--impale me--

It is a terrible thing--to be observed--But I have always been watched--Who does not watch a
young girl--as she grows--who does not weigh her beauty--luxuriate in her--potential--What a
pretty child--She will make quite a--lovely woman--Who does not long to capture such youth--
educate them--attire them--shape them to their--desires--until such hour they are--ripened--fit to
burst--

I've never before told anyone this—but I will tell you now—

When I was a child—merely—I saw my uncle through a window—the room lighted from within
—Father's brother—A man—goodly—church going—Stooped--He steadied himself with one
hand against the wall—His trousers lowered—pale buttocks—black hair—I had never yet seen
so much hair on a body—He did not see me—he was quite lost within his task—I could not
comprehend at first—what he struggled with—

I wondered—if he saw me—would he desire my—trembling—wide eyes—Would he beckon me
in—offer to me his body—immense and strange to a child—How I longed—to explore—How

dry went my mouth—How I burned at the brow—Young as I was—yet at the threshold—I did not know—yet—I knew—

Perhaps—it was the air—a musk—This is how beasts communicate—I know—yet a man—I have learned—many times over—is no more than an animal—contrary to what my husband would tell you—

My uncle came to me at night—whispered to me of—his only child—long moldering—My companion—constant—Cousin Anne—we would—with little dolls—play—Do you remember—he whispered—Her still face when we—laid her down in darkness—He told me of his wife—wrapped in flame—I will remember always her screams—

I would watch you bathe in the river—he told me—Your pale body—hipless—legs in motion—the muscles of your—back—

I told my father once—my uncle did—speak to me in the night—No—child—he said—it was a dream—

Come with me Uncle—I might say—to the river's edge—green skin along--stagnant shore--Let us sit in grasses--hazy with gossamer—milk of dew—Oaks—ancient--autumnal—they wither and burn—Everywhere—miraculous smell of death—Not as you are—Uncle—so long in your grave—phantasm now—I know—I am not as I was—Yet there are others here—Young women draw up their skirts--pale bare feet--ankles--shins, even--Their family names to me--known--I have seen their faces in pews arranged--backs of heads--auburn tresses--Some girls porcine-- Some--rather delicate--How dear these ones are--

Watch them--carefully—I might say--as you would have watched me—Tell me what you—there see—

Delicate girls--vibrant--laughing--Have they no concerns--Do they not notice the--waters become--malevolent—red—Do they not hear--explosions--musket blasts--screams—echoing from towns distant--

They tell me—there is a place—a world above this mortal perch—In some manner—it is as—
this world mirrored—yet—it is not—I have been told—it is this place—perfected—

Now I believe—the true world—lies beneath this one--The face of the waters—moving—
darkness—the sun through fog—burning—the trees in outline—oily—the morning mist rising—
the shadow of the mist—What truth--monstrous--from us hidden--

What if I could I there travel--My arm—as if passing through—a membrane of glass—

There is death everywhere—Children cut down--swollen--shivering--They say it is the lord—
returning them to glory—

No—the truth is he is vast—insatiable—The little ones he brings to his light—He strips them of
their flesh--Their skeletons--miniscule--I might find them--collected by the shore--

From a darkness--outer--they hurtle--Screaming--hollering--mocking--Bodies obscene--nude--greased--Goodly christian men before them fall--Bullet and hatchet and spear--How red the earth--a cloth foul--menstruous--They fall upon these dying men—these men—in blood wallow—choking--From their clothing--ripped--In their mortal hour--they crawl--to and fro--blood slop--How pale becomes a man--of soul draining--Avert my eyes--christ--I cry out--yet still I--watch--

What ecstasy--I have so long thought--to allow myself--murdered--I long considered myself sprawled--split at the belly--entrails--how flies--fat--black--upon me do dance--I thought--knocked at the head--the white brain does spray--seat of intelligence--yes--but the soul--I so long thought--I would not allow them drag me into their--dismal wilderness--By heathen axe rendered into--flesh of my lord--christ's goodness--christ--author of my flesh--

I did not understand myself--I thought--when the moment came--I would--

I believed I would allow myself murdered--yet when came the hour I could not--In that hour I knew only a--fleshly terror--I could not even scream such terror filled me--I could scarcely move--yet I did run--Terror at our backs—

In a bedchamber meagre—Shadow bodies of—learned men—by tallowlight cast—A man lies--
 his final hour—His wife pushes through—this gaggle—intellectual—The woman's pathetic
 desperate ministrations—Dab at her husband's mouth—brow—a cloth wet—His lips glazed—
 sputum bloody—His ragged wheeze—The learned men—their remove—fascinated—The man is
 drowned from within—your husband says whilst--indicating the fellow's throat—his lungs—The
 man's eyes open—clouded—He buckles—his arms—flail—You see how he clings to the mortal
 frame—your husband says—even as he is--dragged under--

Your husband's hands—to the wrist in—blood—With scalpel—he trims loose the lungs—wings
 in hands held—blood black—sagging—

What a curious mechanism—is man—your husband says—

You see how his body in its affliction did consume itself—How—what was a man—becomes
 now some beautiful—other—Is this the man—he says—He pries the skull top free--with motion
 practiced—removes the brain—halves and segments it—One such piece quivering he holds
 between thumb and—forefinger—Is this—him—he says—or is the light of the man—by the lord
 —consumed—the man itself—

If we remove of man his--every organ--Lungs and heart—spleen—liver—loaves of kidneys—
 brain—If we pull free his stomach and intestine coiled—If we render the man—organless—is he
 yet a man—If we strip him of skin—now muscle and blood and vein—Scatter him for the dogs

—If we do boil the bone until he is—loose ivory alone—Remains he yet—the man itself—your husband muses—

Perhaps you would say—if you knew the words—If you knew—what your husband knows—

Who is to say what we call heathens are the not the true substance of his flesh—Who is to say my husband in his room—all the learned the men of his books—the wise men of the church—the university—Who is say they are not the—malefactor—the element—insidious—Who is to say—to drive them into the sea is not—his true will—

One hears stories--villages by heathens ravaged--Torn at the throat--hatchets and arrows--Found
 blackened with fire--flies--the feast of--wandering animals--One hears such stories--atrocities
 unto christians--brought--What a gift—I have thought—to become cleaved open—spilled—
 eradicated—

Yet at first cry I flee--stand garrisoned with a hundred others--Weeping--human pungence--
 Praying--What are your prayers to a god who--beats down our door--I think--Do you fools not
 see your christ has returned--howling--What glory is there--beheld in we--no more than hogs--
 squirming--screaming--

Heathens fall at our rifles--it matters not for--he is infinite--Men leave to extinguish the--burning
 roof--They do not return--I will see them later--as if rubbish--discarded--How pale they are--of
 blood removed--

I thought--murder them all and leave me--I saw myself alone survived--Do not think I wouldn't
 have--relished my--aleness--

It was my husband who--brought this annihilation—

If it must be murder—my husband told the men—then there is no question this savage met some devious end—You see here—the flesh—from struggle—torn—The throat—here—bruised—the neck—broken—

There was a heathen witness brought before these men—who identified the assassins—A heathen conflict yes--said my husband--but the murdered man was converted christian--His murder then--an affront to god--

These men hanged in the square--I did make some show of looking away--Yet I heard clearly--deliciously--the ropes snap taut--twist--

Now--I will explain the--long hour of my captivity--Their dwellings--quickly constructed--
disassembled--Deeper into the swamps we went--at rifle shots--echoing--Smoke of fires--You
christians burned the forests in pursuit--

Their king--a magnificent heathen--He was aged--yet not--His savage garment scarcely covered
his flesh--bronze, powerful--His english name--Phillip--Our christian meddling--an affront
unforgiveable--They had no recourse but remove us from the land--

The women who tended to me--brought me plates of venison--mushrooms--mash of heathen
corn--Savage--yet their touch--delicate--with their infants--with me in fact--gentle always--
nurturing--I must eat--drink--for the long marches to come--They did worry at my weariness--the
hours I could only scream and weep--allow them no entrance to my dwelling--One young
heathen girl holds me as if I am her--mother--or child--How tender I feel toward this one--yet--
had I some stone--some dagger--

I am to Phillip led--crouched in his great dwelling--the fire before him--So near to him now I see--the lines of his age--weathering blistering--His hair does gray--Yet the shadows shift and he is much younger--no more than my age--These savages contain--a permanence--we christians have not--

He is mortal--certainly he may be killed--yet he allows no evidence of this before me--When he speaks he does so of the ages as if he witnessed--the first breath of mist--upon ancient waters--

His son--beside him sits--Half bred--an abomination perhaps--yet beautiful--his blue eyes--

How quiet they are--expressions--beckoning--Phillip--a smile--faint--I begin to tell them--the information I expect--they desire--My father--I say--was a wealthy man--my husband is a man of--high standing--A ransom--considerable--

Phillip gestures for me--to quiet--We want for nothing--what could your husband possibly give us of greater value than yourself--You would be better off remaining with us--anyway--within the year the rest of the christians will have been murdered or driven back into the sea--

His great dwelling--cathedral of tree limbs--trunks--the smoke rises through the sunlight--He smiles--sweetly--apologetically--for the self-evidence of the statement--

I call him king--once--He insists--a king has no place within their conception--He insists he is no king--yet he cultivates an air--regal--If he says we must abandon everything with no notice--we do--If he departs for days--we await him as--the rising sun--

There are many inexplicable sights--within the wilderness--One does learn not to gasp--

In one place we find--a carriage--yet--not--a carriage--collapsed into the grasses--metal--
rusting--glass and leather--They prod at the mechanism with spears--swords--

To look at it--to near--one fills with strange horror--there is no danger in the thing--yet--I tremble
and I cannot stop--I do not know what it is--I am compelled to say--again and again--

Perhaps this place--to my husband--even--unknown--

In the wilderness--one stands between--a light burning--the coolest shadow--One falls into such
reverie--I reach an arm far enough forward and my arm is here--no more--In my hand--a teacup
perhaps--a candle--

The wilderness falls away--from a distance--leers--Before us--a hillside--fog discolored--glazed--
We follow a stone road--shooting with grasses--flowers--My husband would no doubt deny--
such a road through the wilderness does pass--Yet it was there--we followed it for--I know not
how long--In this place--beyond--all christian measures of time--There is the sun--then there is
not--Moon and constellations through the canvas glow--pallor unearthly--There is a brick wall--
skin of moss--An iron gate--fallen--

We come to--a stone manor--many gabled--Some distance from the structure--an air of
woodsmoke--Nearer now--Before lighted windows--pass shapes of men--They comprehend not
what--visits them now--Perhaps one looks out the window--skin pricks with--awful desperation--
Yet--none can truly know--when the mysterious hand around them tightens--

The great red door stands ajar--a warm air wavers at the threshold--They anticipate us--I think--
Perhaps--crouch in postures murderous--muskets--sabres--Yet Philip has many times known--the
air of murder around him--safely pass--His existence inseparable from--the threat of oblivion--
extinction--Yet he persists--So into this manor Philip--the wandering tribe of Philip--went--

This manor--inhabited--yet--empty of life--Within some rooms--glass orbs suspended--flicker
with light--In a dining room--a chandelier radiates--light unnatural--A table--set with silver--
porcelain--beefsteaks--blood pool--asparagus--a dish of butter--glasses of wine--At the head of
the table Philip sits--Of poison--he is without fear--No proxy chews his meat--it is Philip devours
the beefsteak--nods--before the others divvy up the rest--

In this place--screens of glass--hang upon the walls like--silk draperies or--portraits--These are
not mirrors--I think--squinting for my reflection--Curious fingers click the screens--hollow
echo--Some lie mute--darkened--Other screens--flicker--glow--Yes these screens writhe with
motion--Images--shimmering--They seem to depict a snowstorm--perhaps--We stand--
transfixed--Now--one imagines--from the maelstrom--images coalesce--Yes--it is clearer now--

Here a man--walking--Now his face fills the box--aged--weathered--He seems to speak--
Destroyer--his lips might say--Worlds--

How quickly this manor becomes Philip's domain--His soul stretches to every room and corner--
even as he sits in a great leather chair--His eyes filling with light--the motion of screens--Do you
understand this--he asks me--gestures to the screen--A light fills the horizon--Men shield their
eyes--a cloud swelling--a terrible wind--trees--houses--swept away--The image is repeated--
Now--bodies of ash--bodies--against walls--shadows of bodies--I shake my head--I've never
seen anything like this before--Yet--I know--Yet the images follow--my thoughts--

Philip's mouth hangs open--as if a groan now--Philip now in the darkness--flickering light--

This manor--immense--foreign--Yet I wander knowing--what room will follow--before I enter--I
could navigate the halls--with eyes closed--There are staircases to quarters--beds--musty--
disused--yet the hand finds a pillow--a quilt--yet warm--Impressions there--seem to shift--A
library--Phillip's son reads aloud--haltingly--In death's dream--kingdom--these do not--appear--I
sense what he will next say--My lips begin to move--yet the words--do not follow--An orb to the
wall--affixed--pulses a--white light--I reach as if to touch it--over the heat my--palm hovers--To
burn alive with this--unnatural fire--radiate and glow--impossible heat--a moth--ragged--
deathless--beats against the glass--my hand--

It is true--I am--a thing of substance--flesh and hair--bone--teeth--weighed to the earth--There comes an energy seems to--lift me from my place--yet--*I am here*--no place other--Here is the proof--Before a mirror--a basin--a spout--a steady drip of water into cupped hands--spread over my face--Soap--pale--blackened in my hands--

Here is the proof--Any common butcher or butcher's apprentice--or heathen savage--Any--attendant to a--slaughter--We who have seen--the carcass--split open--understand--the soul--radiant--perpetual--fastened to--a doomed animal--Here I am--I thought--flesh stretched over bone--Bone atop organ--assembled--Organs--artery--vein--Now comes--our decay--I thought--

Now--our decay--How the vessel--atrophies--the membrane--thins--hangs--Hair once auburn--black--now--gray--The floors rattle with our teeth--fallen--We shuffle along--stooped--Philip too--perched in his leather chair--hoary--shriveled--The screens--His eyes--clouded with images--flickering--men marching--men--naked--emaciated--men--dead--piled atop each other in--great pits--A hand passes before Philip and he--knows it not--

How long in this manor--There comes a groaning--One speaks and cannot hear their own voice--Perhaps the structure itself--means to devour us--Who can say what such a place--wants--

Yet--none of this is real--

Yet I know--none of it was real--After we depart--it is as if we were never there--A place once magnificent--recedes and recedes until it is--gone--

Yet is not the very tissue of the world more mysterious than we suppose--Perhaps many devils wander the wilderness--phantasms--shadows--in and out of substance--lesser versions of our dead god--

A bear headless--on hind legs stands--clawing a tree--In gesture--futile--to consume some life within--We keep our distance--the men circle--motion us further away--without themselves nearing--They could shoot it and--shoot it--still it would stand--quilled--a hundred arrows--fluttering from its hide--Somewhere yet--the head does lie--moaning--

Other scenes of wickedness--follow--

A heathen man cuts his own throat--We find him--against a tree--drained of life--He was smiling--laughing--when I last saw him--They leave him where he lies--Crows and foxes will come--A heathen woman--lost to the river--I alone saw her leap--She did not scream until--the current--*swallowed*--A pit--human skeletons--a hundred perhaps--entangled--Steam--from the earth--scarred--gapping--A fire--gusts--The air--trembles--bends--Grasses wilt--A tree--ignites--

One dawn Phillip will leave--the other men--They go into the wilderness to murder--pillage--It is a terrible task--Phillip says--We take no pleasure in eradicating your people--Yet--note--how he smiles when he speaks--

His son remains--follows me on my walks to the river--helps me fill skins with water--He wears only the thin tanned garment of some--animal--flayed--The grasses these mornings are frosted and his breath escapes in white mist yet he betrays no sense of cold--How glad he is--to finally speak his mother's tongue with someone other than his father--I do not ask how his mother perished--it is all the same--Her name was--Sara--How carefully he articulates her name--as if felt within his mouth this first time--He watches my reaction--Did you know her--he finally asks--He knows only--she was long ago taken from a village such as mine--I shake my head--It is impossible to say--I insist--

With a branch I--draw in the mud--lines--words--perhaps--The son watches me--To him--I say--Men such as my husband--long reserved this wilderness for themselves--dabbled in its--particular obscenities--Here a toe--perhaps--a foot even--submerged--He would go no further--a man has not the fortitude to be the shown himself--I said--

His mother--Abducted undoubtedly--Christian from birth--Her devotion to eternity--the lord--annihilated before the wilderness--What must her soul have felt--in this--darkness--transformed--

When again we meet--will my husband even know my name--Or will he look upon me--
bewildered--*Who are you*--When again we--I will greet him--a mystery--in new skin--draped--
My soul--will burn--He will know me not--I will know him--well--I will see through to his
organs--bone--marrow--I will see every particle--He believes--opening one upon a table--a
revelation--No--he sees nothing--compared to what I will see--

When the men return--ears from their necks--strung--boasting of how many christians killed--
farms burned--cattle--mutilated--None of their heathen number ever seems diminished--

They have captives--christian--women--weeping--meek--Their children before them--
slaughtered--babes against rocks--dashed--What kinship am I meant to feel toward them--Some--
wail--Their homes--treasures--marauded--burned--Most in their horror do not speak--respond--
when I place before them--meat--corn--Some chew--distantly--Their eyes--vacant--lonesome--It
is not so terrible--I say--Other times I insist--We will be rescued--My husband will pay our
ransom--

What of theirs remains--Have these women any home--family--Their husbands decay in some
forest--anonymous--Even their lord in this hour--No--What reason have they to live--Am I so
sinful--*corrupted*--To hear their wails-- look upon--mortal terror--I feel only disgust--d disdain--
When came this corruption into my soul--It was not the heathen--At first light--pulled into this
world--a child--unblemished--would I have wept for these women then--

Alone at night--my dwelling--seems to expand--cavernous--the roof to the stars extends--Scrapes
that place where the lord must drift--His light touches me not--I feel only the soil--

Some god perhaps beneath the soil does move--I think I do sometimes feel him below--

How vast the wilderness is at night--Incomprehensible--Noises--alien--one's mind must meet the void or become--devoured--

I almost laugh to see myself as I was--wandering about this place--I in my little bonnet--my plain simple dress--my basket--A lighted torch to fend off the dark yet--how it oozes over me--

How long before I fall in terror and the creatures onto me leap--It was impossible to comprehend such ravishment before--torn--dismembered--conscious of my obliteration--I would not have known to arch my back at the thought--clasp tight my thighs--rock in motion to--screams--phantomous--How exquisite my terror would have been--I would taste it now--a mouth brimming with blood--

I cannot know what I would have thought then--How incomprehensible Clara as she was now seems--freed as I am of my--Clara skin--

I could never have thought--much less to my husband said--darling lay me upon your table--directed him to take his fine little knives--I could not have pleaded--open me--please--open me--you must--

Outside our camp--within the forest dark--Heathen prisoners--bound at wrist and ankle--They wear our--christian garments--brass buttons--stockings--leather belts--boots--Jonathan--I long to cry out--He must see me--yet he shows no recognition--

For Jonathan alone--I cannot sleep--He is--sweet--tender--He is not--these other men--He alone
would I protect--cover with warm blankets in the night--

Did he too carry a rifle at my husband's command--unfurl maps across some table--makeshift--

Did he tremble to kill--

For Jonathan alone--I appeal to Phillip--He is a--goodly man--gentle--docile--He carries no
malice within his heart--Phillip smiles--as I speak--massages between his thumb and forefinger--
a christian woman's ear--blood blackened--Yet into the wilderness he went--says Phillip--

For him alone I would--creep into some captive woman's dwelling--Such a woman in her terror--
might not--even struggle--How pathetically she might mew as I--remove her garments--Quiet
you--I will hiss in her ear--If she begins to bray I will take a rock to her skull--

As a woman--gowned--he will sit before me--My neither this--nor that--

You were never that man they saw--now you are that man no more--I brush his hair from his
eyes--How long we will allow it grow--How fine and lovely he will look--I am your sister now--I
tell him--Your true sister--

Together we will lie down in the weeds--our secret voices--in this wilderness--united--

Our days together--when we are--to the world returned--Our every fancy shared--Books of poems together read--We take tea--Bid him whisper his--various amors--men he has married in--ceremonies secret--What is the marriage bed for two men--I will ask--How he will answer while I brush his hair--slow strokes--Weave braids--luxuriant--

Into town we go--hand in hand--our minds--united--We give into our--little impulses--What they call sinful--Shops--ribbons--fabrics--how lovely a garment we could--Chocolates shared--we giggle like children--Daily beside me on church pew--We must pray to this god--yet someday--perhaps not--

It seems there is no place I could not go now--having seen the world--high and low--

Together we will go to his tavern--what secret rooms therein--Smoke--thick--musicians--men in this place gowned ornate--So too--Jonathan is gowned--wild flowered in his hair--while what spare whiskers once--to the skin--shaven clean--How beautiful you are--I tell him--What man would not want such a bride--

Enough delusion--Even a child understands--there is no reprieve in this world--Little agonies--
 terror--miniscule--Between trees a web--dew glowing---a fly--devoured of life--Worms from the
 earth struggle forth--Drowned in rains--they lie pale--sodden--A fox--a husk--no more than--pelt
 and pale ribs--bleached--a single soul once--made plentiful in death--

Captive men with rope--bound to each other--heathen men step forward--silhouetted against
 fires--thrusting implements--spears--swords--captive men--gouged--bludgeoned--The heathen
 crowd--cheer and dance with each blow--There is no atrocity they do not relish--

The heathen captives--buckling in agony yet--stoic--Jonathan alone wails--This is fiendish--I
 say--No--Phillip tells me--This is our gift to them--

You must watch--Phillip insists--I am--I say--I do not look away now--How easily one watches
 once--given permission--One feels the old hesitation--drain away--Jonathan--I think--could I
 have gone in your place--harden myself--I would allow myself not a grimace--not a sound--
 You are weeping Phillip tells me--No--I say--

In the wilderness there is no reprieve from the darkness--the stars loom ever--flaring--Even in the day one feels the universe in motion unseen around us--a dead god's soul outstretched burning--a million lights--

Through forests and swamps we trudge with urgency--ever greater--Rifle shots--echoing nearer each day--We wake coughing--the fires of forests christian men set in our wake--They are coming to free me--I think--

How clearly one sees the nearing--obscurity--They will slaughter every last heathen man--make servants of the women--clothe and house the children--educate them--They will burn every final tree of wilderness--build upon the carcass--farms and dwellings--churches--while--ever more christian souls--chanting and bowing and singing--How quickly they proliferate--They will need to build cities atop of cities to house them all--A million little rooms by candles lighted--Christian eyes--Mechanisms roaring--devices of iron--Funnels monstrous--the light of the universe blotted out--A dead god--crawling behind the skin of--forests incinerated--

What will they do with all the dead--the bones will burst from the ground--litter the soil--They will dig and dig and find only bones--The caverns of skulls hold nothing--I see that now--yet they will keep every mortal fragment--They will pile them in attics--house them in chambers--the buildings themselves--so constructed--Cities entire devoted to nothingness--

They will return me to civilization--Jonathan's bones--a burlap sack--at my feet--My husband in his--military finery--seated across from me--Carriage jolting--his medals--wag and clang--He does not remove his hat--red plume against--carriage ceiling--bent--

Already they are erecting new structures atop the ashes--

Other women once captured are now--returned to their houses--husbands--Some already round with--new child--We chat in shops--our bonnets--christian cheer--Fingers pass casually over--fabrics--candies--baubles--So many more delightful baubles already than before--Glowing--shimmering--What temptation--What vanity--displayed--as if they know the things their dead god once told them matter no more--Soon this city will become--a city of baubles--This dim woman before me--brought to the same wild as I--yet--she seems untouched--I search her eyes while she--talks of what inanities I cannot guess--silly lips--thin gray lines--I see only her expression--depthless--

What they call the world--is a skin--only--thin--lacerated--puckering--Through the membrane--shadows--move--I press against the--folds and scars--I think--*here is an opening!--and here!--*Nobody--save for me--sees how easily one may--push through--

Phillip alone escaped into the further wild--Devils weave him into their fabric--

They will never find him--I thought--transfigured--the forest substance--Phillip--become the trees and moss--the river--silver light and sun reflected--Become the fish--gulping mouths-- Become the swaying weeds fish feed upon--flecks of insects--drowned--Become--murder transcendent--pervasive--constant--Putrification--bone and hide of muskrat--fox--beaver--the gutless flapping corpse of fish--skin and skull and scale--Become--green filth collected--vile egg--spilling free--Fornication--rich obscenity--succulent--thrusting and shuddering--gasping--merging--Phillip--become the wild--Phillip--become--everything--

Yet I will find him--in every crevice--every--fallen tree--splintered--rotten--Somehow I prefer him here--to know he knows--my every footfall through dead leaves--my every breath--

Ripe berries--dusty--fragrant--burst--tart--moisten--my fingertips--my lips--I slurp the river water--from pale palms cupped--my hands ruddy while I drink and drink--My husband would cast me out if he knew my heart--Is this sin--I do not care--

I am at my darning when my husband tells me--Phillip is found--Slowly I say--He is dead then-- Oh yes--my husband nods--Even more slowly now--I ask--Did they find him--hanging from a tree--He seems to flinch--almost imperceptibly--astounded perhaps such an idea could enter my

mind--Now--he squints looking at me--How quiet he is--leaning forward--closer--as if he does not sit across the room from me--as if the closer he comes--deeper into my mind--

No--they dragged him from the earth like a squirming rat--The swamps around him--burned--My husband says--tunnels--through the earth--discovered--They set fires at one end--and waited at the other--Perhaps they called him King while--

O Phillip--you spill across the grasses--A man--transcendent--timeless and bodiless--made man again only so they can murder you--To your knees collapsed--you who knelt for no one--coughing--tearing your throat--Your eyes weep--for the smoke alone--A man made less than man--a man kicked and bludgeoned--stabbed--gouged--A man made--flapping meat and shattered bone--dirt and bruise--spittle--blood--

They suspend his corpse in the city square--his limbs outstretched--with rope drawn--The weird silence of the corpse in place of scream--Even were he alive he would not scream--I think--

My husband brings me to that place where Phillip's head on a pike--stands--blackening--tongueless and eyeless--What do you think of your lover--he says--I do not answer--Do not look down--he tells me--lifts my chin with his hand--A terrible waste--he says--What I could have learned--yet there is value in such displays--

There are many cracks in what I call the world--fissures--I am in that place beyond all places--

There is a room--I realize now--in the ether--for us each--

Within this room we--

This final day--My husband leads me finally into his room--You're ready now--he tells me--
Upon the walls--depictions--shining with sunlight--Look closer--he tells me--To them I walk--
How I tremble--I am almost overcome--He steadies me--Closer--he says--Now I see these
depictions clearly--A woman--women--costumed in black--lace--their flesh quite visible at the
belly--the legs--the breasts--They are--bound--Lifelike--as if the essence--captured--What
remarkable work--I nearly cannot say--Who is the artist--Nobody knows--he whispers--They
were painted by no mortal hand--Now I see her face--eyes--What is this--I say--

A funnel of smoke before me rises--If it wore a mouth it would speak in a voice--familiar--