

Song of Ham's Wife

Oh, the dove returned
and we were half-delirious from the privations:
the scrubbing of wood, the lack of sleep
and endless shovelling of guano overboard.

I had been in charge of flighted things
and when she returned, the branch in her beak,
I eased her back in the cage with her mate.

There was such a welcoming clatter and squawk then.
Parakeets cheered, nightingales sang all night
and love birds necked along their perches.

All these long months
my husband had been absent from my bed, occupied
with the clean creatures and, though the old man had forbidden it,
I ran to him that night for I knew he had been dreaming of olives.

His skin was smooth and gold, his breath bitter-sweet.
I chewed his flesh, sucked the stone out of him
and we lay in a stupor of hope, there among the animals.

We dreamt of pressings between stones,
rich oil dripping, enough to light a lamp with,
and our children playing in gnarled groves,
their bare feet black with olives.