

A REPORT FROM OUR TEAM IN THE FIELD

We have discovered a monster
in bits and pieces, bones
we chisel from rock it took millennia
to form, and millennia again
to remove grain by grain by tweezer
and brush. We toil in shifts
to extract her. Our cutting-
edge instruments, furnished
by the University in their liberal
support for our prodigious efforts,
shine. A complex creature,
she is headless, all body, daily
exiting the mountain in a slow
trickle of limbs and digits (heart
and lungs and belly long gone)
we fill our satchels with. Yes,
she is dispersed and has allowed
this incremental carrying
away, a continuous gifting
and diminishment. But far from
generous, she insists on holding
back from us, resisting our tools
and our innocent task that
will surely lend fame to her.
Each movement brings a little pain,
so she stiffens against the inevitable
disclosure, increasing her own difficulty
like any young, laboring mother.
So, we work not only despite
the rock but the beast's rigidity also,

her panic as we unlatch time. We admit,
some days it's hard to maintain
a neutral heart regarding
the outcome of a job that's never finished.
Our department is unwavering
in its faith, yet our wives tire
of the local market's measly
choosings, the rough society here.
Still, be assured of the team's confidence
that we'll fulfill our purpose
and collect sufficient data to prove,
finally, our own worth even
against her evident greatness.
Even if she did, in essence,
give us birth, we believe our race's
proportions to be superior both
in function and form (though
it's true the coupling
of refinement with brute strength
found in items A-16 through A-25
are impressive—an unparalleled
marriage of opposites
which may appear perfect
to the untrained eye).

MITOCHONDRIAL EVE

Please go down and thank her
under the arched branches
where she sits on her heels

arranging a circle of leaves
for a good bed. And on the inside
of her skin thank the mosaic.

Take what little she has and
give it back—one piece
and another, marked with plastic

tags. How high can she count
from your sieves submerged
in water sorting her shards

that lay a mosaic over the earth?
You know the entry when
you see it, in fact

you'd recognize her anywhere—
Reclining in pain on her bed
under a mile of boulders

always with the door open.

DARWIN'S MOTHER

He lolled on her belly like
a piglet on a sow, his skin
caked in white paste.

A draft lifted her
ruffled collar, and Darwin's
mother's memory of pain

was just now seeping
out of her. He was taken away
and then, in a moment,

placed back in her lap, prim
and dry. Newly civilized
in lace and linen.

She recoiled in sullied
silk and ribbon when she first
saw his face: In a way, he was

already a man, therefore
discomfited by the smell
of her good clean blood.