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.