

to the merry muses of america, with gratitude
for Sylvia and Anne, in their own words

Lindsay Parnell

The Ritz. Boston, Massachusetts.
The next president is a Catholic.
Enter the witches two, half-assed Protestants.
And so they meet again...

They sling martinis,
these wicked witches of the east.
One's spring skin melts into a
gold lame bodice.
The other's pastel cardigan,
the colour
iced cupcakes should be.

I prayed.

*I forgot.
Another round please.*

Sisters in arms,
duelling blue-eyed gazes
with drunken pupils,
pits of little plums
floating in hollowed sockets.

Midnight sermons
from teetering barstool
pulpits, considering
each other's could have been endings,
Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,
breathing unprotected
on the feast days of dead namesakes.
Saints are virgins, witches are not—they
neglect daylight
greedily gnawing fusty bar nuts

but the poetess is not silly,
the poetess is a witch.
A witch is a whore
who dies without baptism,
with her teats hardened and puckered
like tweaked buds.
Twelve fingers with flesh of
marbled bruising

the witches gather closer, cackling
 round small fires possessing
 the limp wax wet. Hissing
 near the full amber hips of the swaying flame,
 and warming their palms. Sharpened
 talons empty the gin cauldrons
 sweating halos onto the bar top, and so

the heckling witches,
 in iambic congregation,
 spew gospel
 in the tongues of sisters before them:

*...my husband Kayo hates when i read my poems,
 says i read them like some kind of minister—
 in beauty from the throat i make monsters.
 i could have been the mother of a son, so
 i become her. have you heard this one love?*

*no? oh darling, have i got a story for you!
 little laundry list to the nuthouse
 guns razors knives pockets full of bricks
 stone bits, concrete beneath the waves,
 tides, thrust fuck of the current*

*at the ocean floor—deep tidal tombs
 echoing whale song and pills pills pills,
 little girls like little pills
 dark rooms caverns damp
 basements and barren tombs*

*—what do you know?!
 all this before tits! before i soaked
 my sponge in the devil's mouth when
 he made me his wife. what do you know?
 are you having fun with this one love?
 i probably have some Shakespeare somewhere—
 i like Shakespeare and salem smokers.
 does Cal Lowell still smoke salems?
 can always bum a cigarette off a salem smoker.*

*flower child and beekeeper's daughter,
 the first witch cackles, what a funny little pair!
 so what say you my living doll? blonde and pretty
 as a fat gold watch with honey for hair.
 you're still not choking on that swastika
 are you?*

the second witch preaches,

*well,
daddy's nesting in his grave, you know,
and me—
straddling the atlantic, still,
what a funny thing
to say.
with syllables
caught in my cavernous throat
i'm afraid
i'm an american, just an
old-fashioned american.*

*with their gauze helmets
and corpses and babies
i much prefer doctors to artists.
midwives, lawyers—anything but writers.
but what am i called
without a toothbrush
in my poems?*

*then, i was named His
at St. George the martyr.
He hated god, and
was the poet
whose blood i drank.
my tongue tasted
the dribbling trail
from His ear lobe
down His neck.
with the sour breath
of a smiling woman,
we danced at falcon yard and
i was His.
He chose my dark-eyed rivals
before mounting them,
but i'm the one who's overfed.*

*enough about Him—
you'll always look beautiful
my sweet snow white
mistress of the dwarves,
my sweet hart girl—
weren't you a hart girl, my sweet?
oh you'll be searching
for madness
and Christ
long after i'm gone—
searching frenzied
amongst the peasants
for a Jesus fix and a cigarette...*

when God whispers from your typewriter
asking
what's the difference between an ashtray and a silhouette?