

A Woman is Not a Body

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Hera Lindsay Bird writes of the Library of Alexandria

*burning in alphabetical order*

But I wonder

Did they not start

as they did with all holy places

with the soft flesh bodies

before burning the vellum and papyri

And I am trying not to think of my own body

it's pages littered with blue cursive and pale pink reminders

of its own encounters with flame and steel

I look at myself in the mirror and I am only a body

an ashen imitation reflecting back

a woman / monster / body

I write a poem about Circe

the Witch Goddess of ancient Greece

banished to an island alone by her father

for daring to be more than a quiet body

who turned Odysseus's men into pig bodies

and used her body to ensure Odysseus never used his body against hers

And in that poem I write

*Between a woman and a monster*

*Between a goddess and a witch*

*A body of water / A fire to hum with*

And I know

A woman is not a body

not a slab of flesh in a warm bed or on a metal table

A woman is not a body

is not a mouth  
is not a tongue  
to be bitten, chained  
by syntax and romantic metaphor

A woman is not a body  
not tits thighs and ass

A woman is not a body  
not a strawberry heart or cherry lip-gloss  
not a bubble-gum-popping dream-house

A woman is not a temple, doors open wide  
blood oozing down her holy steps—  
Scratch that  
A woman is not a temple, period  
she cannot be desecrated

A woman is not a rib  
not a second or afterthought

A woman is not a metaphor  
except that she is  
And I am all of these things and none of these things and I want to set them all on fire  
and salt the ashes flickering into breath

A woman is a not siren  
at least, not the ocean kind lullabying you sweetly into oblivion  
But that keening sound  
bleeding in the dark, splitting open the night sky  
At that sound, every woman looks up in unison, wonders  
if this time that siren will be her

And meanwhile, somewhere in Alexandria, the library is still burning

and I am wailing  
a bleeding siren wading through smoke  
So I remind myself  
A woman is not a body  
A woman is not a body  
A woman is not a body  
is not a body is not a body is not a body

I am not a body  
I am not the product of their actions  
I am not the product of his actions  
I am not a body  
I am my own  
For what is a woman if not the home I make for myself?  
*Between a woman and a monster* is a body of water I call home.

A woman is a forest  
blooming blooming blooming  
pouring light and colour and oxygen back into the sky

A woman is a novel rewriting herself forever and ever until she burns 'for a woman'  
or 'asking for it' or 'grab 'em by the-' out of their vocabulary

A woman is an idea,  
yes,  
but she is not *your* idea

A woman is a dictionary  
the keeper of any word brave enough to speak itself into existence  
Which is to say a woman speaks herself into existence  
Which is to say  
she is all of these things and none of these things and what you say has absolutely  
nothing to do with it

Shira Erlichman writes:

*I believe in courages more than courage  
If courages was a bird  
like a murder of crows  
it would be a practice of courages*

Here I hold out my practice of courages  
and my hands will shake  
and that is ok

Because a woman is not a body  
unless you mean a body of water  
waves breaking  
sweeping across the shore  
kissing our feet  
saying, yes, we may rest here

Saying, yes, we will march here  
until we are the new horizon  
and the dawn, breaking  
sweeping across every body of water  
so that young girls and women everywhere  
can point and say

There

I am that light

I am that body of water, that fiery potential

I am that woman / monster / goddess / witch

I am my own

Notes

The italicised lines in this poem are language borrowed from:

- Hera Lindsay Bird's poem 'Wild Geese by Mary Oliver by Hera Lindsay Bird' from her collection *Hera Lindsay Bird* 2016.
- My poem 'Circe' from my unpublished manuscript *Planētēs* 2018.
- A tweet by Shira Erlichman. @sheer\_awe, 'I believe in courages more than courage', *Twitter*, 3 March 2019, 9.09 a.m.,  
[https://twitter.com/sheer\\_awe/status/1101967836359155713?s=21](https://twitter.com/sheer_awe/status/1101967836359155713?s=21)