

## In the Middle, My Mother

In the middle of the story my mother tells me about my birth:  
There is a moment when she imitates the she-wolf,  
her mouth in the shape of an empty howl.  
There is the moment I am airlifted by a pair of large hands,  
the bright lights beaming down on the placenta.  
You were as sensitive as a silkworm, she says, and you nearly died.

In pre-Maoist acupuncture it was said that cosmology could be read  
on the body. After that, we wondered about the fluid  
at the bottom of our lungs, the worms buried deep in our brains.  
Cybernetics I destroyed the organic metaphors.  
Cybernetics II tried to bring them back, argued that  
the best machines were in fact wet with life.

We tried to speak biology to the men behind the machines  
and they came back with an argument for capital  
and more capital. They saw babies hanging from the sky,  
their preternatural filaments spun fast into light.  
They saw legs as instruments of war, and more war.  
So we decided to spread our own, as if to ask, *what is this?*

## Zuihitsu

When I hear him say, “you’ll go to paradise,”  
I laugh and look away, open my wallet ready to pay him.  
He says it twice, with some insistence. I say I don’t believe him.  
It’s well to correct him on the price, even when  
it’s in his favor. I say: I’d prefer a break on my rent instead.  
He smiles into the awkward silence, handing me  
my falafel, and I feel myself grow red.

As when the agent in Charles de Gaulle said,  
“you are perfect,” referring of course to the weight  
of my suitcase, just a hair under the regulatory limit,  
though I’d been certain the books and booze  
weighed in at more than 30 kilos.

As when I dropped a coin into the plastic cup  
of the man who looked too much like my dead father.  
He lived for years in a dark corner of the Bastille métro,  
a headful of white hair hanging low to the ground.  
When I leaned down, he took my hand in his and said, “angel.”

Redemption makes us fools, I once heard someone say.  
So why did I take it?