

STEPHANIE PIPPIN

*Stage Mother*

In every way my daughter is my husband's child.  
I could never love her. Newborn,  
she scratched like a cat in my arms.  
The first time I saw her I asked *Is she normal?*  
Then I shut my eyes.

I wanted a girl: pliable hands, clean  
under the nails. My own hands are tremendous  
and jeweled. I hit her when she tries to bend  
my will. I have to be taught  
not to hit. I have to think *eggshell, eggshell,*  
*little bird.* Why does she pick  
and eat the paint? Why does she stare?  
I want her to be still and meek as milk.

It is true she can move me: the arch  
of her foot, her curved cheek.  
The way she can make a grand entrance.  
Tonight she cradles the baby, solemn Mary  
in a school Nativity. Tender is her love  
for the audience, wide her arms  
for the audience. Their cries carve me out.