

My constant desire
to eliminate them—
I hope that caused
no damage.
I apologize
to my own breasts.

Just when you begin
an apology
it's too late.
It can be too late.
It may be.
I've seen it happen
over and over
in my—just now
I'm believing it—
my gracious life.

THE GUINEA HEN

Think of old Victorian women
gliding in dresses with bustles,
the tips of their shoes showing.
Now, think only of the bustle.
Imagine a bustle of feathers
and a bird head stuck on top,
a most hideous bird head,
a head not far from a vulture's
but less exaggerated, more
like a normal bird's, plucked.
All skin, pink and bluish
and shriveled and dry, flaking,
the head makes even the young
bird look ancient and frail.
The eyes close like a lizard's.
At the top of the head,

a few infrequent hairs come out,
like the last hairs of balding,
and the hard triangular horn there
only confirms the bird as elderly.
Unlike the pheasant, she lacks
the long tail which gives dignity
to her stride across the lawn.
In fact, she lacks length in general.
The legs and neck, meager,
the body, squat, she becomes
a bird consumed by feathers,
like a snail who has come out
of its shell only part way.
But the guinea hen is vulnerable
perched on the wooden beam at night.
Her feet deep under, her head
pulled in, is the best she can do.
Hoping, is it, to look like
something other than a game fowl?
A feather muff of sorts?
A decorative feather bouquet?
Her feathers are decorative:
pearls on rich dark velvet.
And graduated pearls, no less,
which grow larger toward the feet,
and, at the neck, a precious
collar of the smallest perfect circles.
Granted, the head is hideous,
but surely the body is the most
sensuous bird body I've seen.
Like the girl at the bar
whose face is nothing to look at
but whose figure knocks men out.
Like the woman we see
from the back in the late night
horror movies. The camera
closes in and she begins her turn.

The music hits the severe chord
just as the face, revealed,
halts the man in pursuit
who backs up slowly—
so as not to spur her on—
into his own stunned desire.