

## Four Poems · *Barbara Hamby*

### THE OVARY TATTOO

Etched on my abdomen like a botanical illustration  
is the reproductive paraphernalia of a flower

or *facsimile animalis*, the oviduct named for  
Gabriello Fallopio, Italian anatomist,

no artist but a careful researcher, his vellum  
untouched by the meandering entrails on the table,

untidy detritus of tissue and blood, a reminder that,  
above all, God is Albrecht Dürer, an expert draftsman,

peculiar in his tastes, untidy but organized, peripatetic,  
not particularly ecstatic in the connubial state and bent

on a sort of subtle revenge, for bare form tells all,  
the apparatus itself like antlers or the antennae

of some marvelous insect, a bee, *apis mirabilis*,  
yet on its side becomes a spilled cup or pincers

and darker still when capsized, an anchor,  
ponderous iron, pulling hull, mast, sail, sailors

into the unfathomable bowels of primal craving. Some say  
love is a cave, unlit and mysterious, or do they say

it's a long corridor in a lavish French château  
lined with mirrors, icy laughter caught on the dripping

crystals of chandeliers? I forget. Perhaps it's both,  
a declivity and *une galerie des glaces*, goldleaf nymphs

bearing platters of light into musty caverns beneath  
the castle, the sheen of their skin in candlelight

belying the bastinado of blood, evil and completely  
seductive, Scheherazade on a cellular level, because

if there is one thing about love that I will never  
understand, it's how pale it is, unaccustomed to daylight,

yet how it seems to live in the mad drumming of the blood  
and then can sit in the chest like a high-toned cleric who, upon

closing his lesson book, crawls along the intestinal tract  
like a transvestite demagogue, preaching to the E. coli

and the mutating cells, "Replicate, breed, multiply, procreate,  
propagate, proliferate, make more babies for God,"

until every square inch of ground is awash in humanity,  
the mad pulse of a trillion aortas, the tick, throb,

stroke, thump, pant of blood rising like a deep jungle moan:  
we are hungry, we are angry, we are helpless, we are here.