

## How We Love Now · *Stephanie Strickland*

In bed you think of her  
hollow cheek and strong jaw.  
How difficult to graft them  
to my apple face. Easier for eyes  
than fingers. But your fingers  
only go one place  
urge me: you are anxious  
to make us disappear on these sheets.  
Her silence, her secrets; her complex  
attention, how difficult to graft them  
to me who want you  
or not, in season. When I warm  
along your length, when our heads touch  
some whole circuit comes complete—  
you could be a tree, I rock so high  
on a tree-top. You are here for the tree  
as I am here for her. And she  
reminds you of your mother  
when young, a flirt, hardheaded.  
The image that compels you  
when her long body swings by, you press  
to my body, hot, rushing. I am surprised.  
I feel her closer to me now  
than I was ever able to bring her  
before. I see how we are using her,  
how she has used. And it all comes back,  
what that was, being an embodiment, so close a match  
to my lover's dream and he streaming toward me  
from the sea of mine. Silver fever  
lived out for three years, and rage  
at what was not dream; leaving him. You there.  
I blamed myself. If only  
I weren't restless, I wouldn't have resisted  
being exact, the matchless  
match. How did we go on then?

This hot afternoon, years later,  
when you bring her to my bed,  
agitated, I'm remembering him  
and what in all this time has stayed unsaid:  
how more than once you saved my life,  
and how many years it took  
to say goodbye, to know I'd left;  
how I've loved you and with whom.