A Woman is Not a Body
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Hera Lindsay Bird writes of the Library of Alexandria

*burning in alphabetical order*

But I wonder

Did they not start

as they did with all holy places

with the soft flesh bodies

before burning the vellum and papyri

And I am trying not to think of my own body

it’s pages littered with blue cursive and pale pink reminders

d of its own encounters with flame and steel

I look at myself in the mirror and I am only a body

an ashen imitation reflecting back

a woman / monster / body

I write a poem about Circe

the Witch Goddess of ancient Greece

banished to an island alone by her father

for daring to be more than a quiet body

who turned Odysseus’s men into pig bodies

and used her body to ensure Odysseus never used his body against hers

And in that poem I write

*Between a woman and a monster*

*Between a goddess and a witch*

*A body of water / A fire to hum with*

And I know

A woman is not a body

not a slab of flesh in a warm bed or on a metal table

A woman is not a body
is not a mouth
is not a tongue
to be bitten, chained
by syntax and romantic metaphor

A woman is not a body
not tits thighs and ass

A woman is not a body
not a strawberry heart or cherry lip-gloss
not a bubble-gum-popping dream-house

A woman is not a temple, doors open wide
blood oozing down her holy steps—
Scratch that
A woman is not a temple, period
she cannot be desecrated

A woman is not a rib
not a second or afterthought

A woman is not a metaphor
except that she is
And I am all of these things and none of these things and I want to set them all on fire
and salt the ashes flickering into breath

A woman is not a siren
at least, not the ocean kind lullabying you sweetly into oblivion
But that keening sound
bleeding in the dark, splitting open the night sky
At that sound, every woman looks up in unison, wonders
if this time that siren will be her

And meanwhile, somewhere in Alexandria, the library is still burning
and I am wailing
a bleeding siren wading through smoke
So I remind myself
A woman is not a body
A woman is not a body
A woman is not a body
A woman is not a body
is not a body is not a body is not a body

I am not a body
I am not the product of their actions
I am not the product of his actions
I am not a body
I am my own
For what is a woman if not the home I make for myself?
*Between a woman and a monster* is a body of water I call home.

A woman is a forest
blooming blooming blooming
pouring light and colour and oxygen back into the sky

A woman is a novel rewriting herself forever and ever until she burns ‘for a woman’
or ‘asking for it’ or ‘grab ‘em by the–’ out of their vocabulary

A woman is an idea,
yes,
but she is not *your* idea

A woman is a dictionary
the keeper of any word brave enough to speak itself into existence
Which is to say a woman speaks herself into existence
Which is to say
she is all of these things and none of these things and what you say has absolutely
nothing to do with it
Shira Erlichman writes:

*I believe in courages more than courage*

*If courages was a bird*

*like a murder of crows*

*it would be a practice of courages*

Here I hold out my practice of courages
and my hands will shake
and that is ok

Because a woman is not a body
unless you mean a body of water
waves breaking
sweeping across the shore
kissing our feet
saying, yes, we may rest here

Saying, yes, we will march here
until we are the new horizon
and the dawn, breaking
sweeping across every body of water
so that young girls and women everywhere
can point and say
There
I am that light
I am that body of water, that fiery potential
I am that woman / monster / goddess / witch
I am my own
Notes

The italicised lines in this poem are language borrowed from:

- Hera Lindsay Bird’s poem ‘Wild Geese by Mary Oliver by Hera Lindsay Bird’ from her collection *Hera Lindsay Bird* 2016.
- My poem ‘Circe’ from my unpublished manuscript *Planêteës* 2018.
- A tweet by Shira Erlichman. @sheer_awe, ‘I believe in courages more than courage’, *Twitter*, 3 March 2019, 9.09 a.m.,
  https://twitter.com/sheer_awe/status/1101967836359155713?s=21