The Tapeworm is not the Problem: *Dipylidium caninum*

Take the cestode for its lack
Of body cavity or reproductive tracts,
Its swirl of egg and larvae,
It encysts. You see its segments that grow
Wider than long until they are gravid
And break off:

Proglottids, the glob of pieces,
the aesthetic of white wriggles in stool,
And pored, pinpricked with egg-holes
For laying in the moist
Steam-warmed worm home
Of feces.

The tapeworm is not the problem
Enterically, the dog’s intestine
Is not fileted villi, is not
Diarrheic or diseased, is not
Malformed by flat worms
Or sick.

And the problem is not the tapeworm’s
Slender section of pale, stark white
So we see them immediately
in shifty glimmer of sunlight over dog dung,
worm giving life to new worms,
and spreading:

we can’t keep from the fleas,
egg packets already in feces, already
carrying them to new dogs,
whose new itch requires teeth to scratch,
who swallow jumping bugs, and their eggs,
and worm eggs, too.

The problem is there are worms leaving
Unseemly places, and worms
In backyards, and, imagine, feeling
Wigglings deep in bellies,
The shiver of something gravid
Leaving you

As it came, with stealth, and silently,
Imagine a worm not named worm,
But clean, alabaster, surviving,
Shimmering tube, simplistic living,
Imagine the disgust we attach,
Viscerally, to worm.

Imagine the tubes and meat we keep
Under skin to feel human
Think, without these, we would be
Flat-lined and in need
Of a warm host, and moist home
We would need

Hooks and suckers, and faces
Like vacuums, and no one
Would even know we were there
Until we left, until we made new of us,
More of us, and we would say
This is all we need.
Fasciola, Prometheus, the Eagle, Augury

I. Fasciola

This is the liver full of flukes:
Tar pigment teased trails,
Trapped flats without pores,
Cirrhotic nodules, pocked
Specks of pecked flesh,
Tissue hems, inflamed.
These are the parasites,
Platyhelminths, named:
Magna, for size, hepatica,
The lesser, the common,
The finding on necropsy
You get without many
Signs, without much
Suspicion but the plenty
Of snails, with right-handed
Shells, in the cow pen,
The good host for young
Flukes beginning, learning
Migration through bodies,
Through feet, first, then out
Opposite ends, onto leaves
Of the wet grasses cows eat.

II. Prometheus

It’s no surprise the liver
Resembles a snail’s foot,
In that soft-shape way
That way that makes you
Want to touch, to feel
As something other feels,
Makes you want to be
The water washing salt
Away from snail’s feet
The liver, expert filter,
Must be more feeling
To know what to keep
And what to bleed out
In bile than the heart
Pumping blood through
It twice, as if it’s unsure
About being in charge
And so fragile with power,
And the liver so capable
Of taking pain in drink
Or drug or for the sake
Of some parasite,
Regenerative, forever.

III. The Eagle

We know that organs
Look different after
Infection, but what
About the difference
Between a few inches
And the sky, what about
The colors, up-close
You might find, each time
You look after leaving,
After feasting, imagine
Your feast returning,
As you glide off, the air
Of dead tissue fading,
Imagine eating the same
Thing every day your whole
Life, never changing, what
Zeus knew about eagles
Was their taste for good meat,
Imagine it changed with each
Meal, Prometheus’ liver,
Once fluked, once toxic,
Once green with bile,
Each different from the Eagle’s
Last, imagine this liver
Rearranged, recreated,
Even becoming a new liver
After each meal, a sicker
Liver, but a real one,
A good one, for the scavenger
To return, liver after liver
After liver after liver to eat.

IV. Augury

This is medicine telling
A new story, predicting,
From entrails, disease,
And what the world
Might know, years
From now, this:
Livers reorganize
Futures, apparently,
They are incidentally
Nodular, reliably
Reliable, and sturdy.
Pick a piece of flesh
For later and listen
To the organ, listen
Like an eagle, head-hole
Ears peeking through
Feathers slicked back
With blood, the last
Meal painted dark
Across tympanic
Membranes, the eagle,
Who knew how to read
Food, who knew a new
Day would hold more
Yet, more liver to peck
At, more pieces to read,
If sick, if parasitized,
If lumped with old scars,
The liver is a new study
Every hour, a new groove
Every minute, new blood
Beating through it,
The liver is predictable,
Unreliably, the liver
Is fortune telling sick
Bodies new medicine.
Sonnet for The Many-Named Louse:
*Papillon d’amour, Pthirus pubis*, The Pubic Louse

Why *do* you think this louse would want to live?
this lazy flightless buzzard sucking skin
for pleasure, creeping, crevice-finding itch
that crawls a nest in coarse-haired places, then,
in folds of flesh, it burrows claws, and head,
and teeth until it must not breathe a breath
of air unless it’s dander filled, or dead
 integument. A hungry ick who lets
its eggs, like glue, create another bug
of short and ugly build. Relationships,
it relishes. It shares itself, a drug
of lust. Unsealed, this louse’s crusted lips
might wheeze: it lives for *this*: the product of
desire, crab louse, *Butterfly of Love.*
Questing

If anything is to be said of blood suckers
It is their prayer,
Questing. Eyeless,
Their scent
Glands will find you.

She is a real scientist,
Questing for truth.
Her truth is labor,
Hot sweat and yard sticks, measuring tape

The truth of ticks is resilience.
How many days without—
Do they live—
What do they fast for?—
Before

She finds them clinging to vessels
In her skin. And to the cloth net
She drags behind her,
Along the twenty or so feet
She’s measured out.

They have fallen,
The ticks, from the air,
It seems. And landed on plant
Stems, and looked back upward,
Front legs creating their waiting
Pose, hands, did they have wings
Once? Toward heavens,

At least toward her.
She is sweet, she is good.
She is life-blood
And she is here to find them,
and count them and give them a name. She is unafraid

Of the bloodborne,
Of the quick pinch
Of saliva leaking disease
Of mouthpart inoculation.
Of her hungry worshippers, finally feeding

After months, she is used to running
Fingers through thick crusts
In her hair at night, used to picking
Hard specks of blood off her skin,
And putting them in petri dishes to identify
Under microscopes.

The truth of ticks is not a truth at all,
But a motivation, for life,
A reliance on flesh, an admirable
Commitment to the best host, and the best blood.

She studies them, species supposed to be
Quarantined, diseaseless ones,
She peels off and leaves,
But she is the end
For the one or two she needs for samples.

“If anything is to be said of the blood suckers,”
She thinks, “It is their belief, in something good,
It is their quest for warm blood,
It is the cement in their spit that keeps them loyal
To things that can’t pick them off,
For as long as they can live.”
I Have Goat Lice On Me: Physical Exam And Anesthesia: Remembering

I.

On me, Bovicola,
Usual ruminant chewer

B-o-v-i-c-o-l-a
Caprae. The goat louse

Head and body louse, itchy,
The head and body

Ratio: 2:1: Big
Head for biting

And body, useless,
Half that width.

II.

I got this bug
From being

Thorough while I took
The heart rate,

Breaths per minute,
Temperature,

Of a Boer goat
With thin muscling

A tiny frame,
Lumbar spine

Like a bony purse
Handle to hold

While rearranging
Anesthetized body parts.

III.

How could this goat,
Asleep know
It was crawling
With the little beasts

And how would
It feel, anyway,

The hold of their tiny
Feet on its head

With almost no reflexes
Left to twitch at them?

IV.

Goats like to stop
Breathing

Under gases.
Rubber bags

Filled with drug
And oxygen

Pump their lungs,
My hands squeeze

The bag at three-to-four
Breaths per minute

At five minutes,
I scribble a heart rate

On an anesthesia sheet
With a temperature,

And my man-made
Breaths per minute.

V.

There is no time
To itch when learning

How to keep
An animal alive
But we itch anyway,  
Because lice don’t

Sleep like their hosts do.  
We don’t scratch

With the gloved hands  
Contaminated

With all manner of goat,  
Or busy with breathing bag.

But with the pen  
We sometimes hold

In our mouth while checking  
The patient’s vitals.

VI.

Even though  
Bovicola don’t belong

On us, we find  
Them later, still

Scratch them out  
Of our hair, still

Curse the slow  
Waking of our goat, still

VII.

For as long as we had  
To hug the infested thing

To hold her upright,  
We watched

Her heart speed up  
And her lungs move

On their own,  
Even breathing,
Until a cough
 Tells us to extubate

And stand her up
 On the floor again

Already forgiving her
 Her infestation,

And reliving her
 Anesthesia as the first

Time we brought a goat
 Back to life.

VIII.

This is how we remember
 The lab work,

Procedure, the record-keeping,
 Because we remember

What crawled on us
 That day, weeks ago

When we were so
 Thorough.

IX.

We are always already
 Doing something else

By the time we find
 Them, crawling still

On our skin, even
 When we go to sleep,

Reminding us still
 Of the skills we still

Need to know in a week,
 In a month, in a year,
And longer, and still
We itch to remember,

Goat lice and anesthesia sleep
And we dream slow

Heart beats and breathing,
And parasites even,

And the longer we wait to wake
Up, the itchier we get.