

Another Vision of the Goddess

The midwife paid to lay out the dead
swore the last field hand to be enslaved
was not just lined with age –
there were words – distinct as moles –
a whole book of female parchment
opened up beneath her neck.

The face was plain, brown paper scrunched too small.
The corpse was underfed;
but the words were fat and curling bold.
My father and our country
etched on her right shoulder;
My children sold across the left.

A cave spelt out on a sagging breast;
A winding path on the other.
Then placed beneath them both:
A hill went down to a bush.

I loved a man who loved me too
was scrawled across her gut.
Him killed in cane. I hid was caught –
these words were placed on both her legs,
along with the names of all her masters,
the fields she had to work.

Her knees were swollen as if water
dripped on paper – dried.
The letters spelt out *Punishment*.
A rape.

I ran was written on one shin;
the other was left blank.
It did no good was printed across both feet.

There was nothing written on her back –
the spine immaculate;
but dipping down towards her waist,
the boldest script of all:
My mother prays with me at night.

The midwife gave her word,
then faltered to explain
how all this writing disappeared.