

## When I Was A Woman

*Bloom undergoes many metamorphoses in Mabbot Street and perhaps the least spectacular of these is his change of sex.*

Anthony Burgess on *Ulysses*

the branches bowed to me the bus' wet roar made my ocean eyes tear when I was a woman all knowledge was a bread of thorns my bird breasts raged for more. I was biblical, fallen, a drip with seed. Flowers bloomed when I breathed. I slipped into indecency, was arrested for impersonating an Italian heiress paralyzed from the neck down. When I was a woman I built a room of my own, no wallpapers, no yellow, brick by brick with a fire place that worked, when I was a woman I slept alone and wept for more alone, I walked city streets buying time with broken meters. When I was a woman I forgot nothing – Confucius, Roosevelt, Mussolini, Walt Disney – were my children – bad, selfish, lost, evil boy-men. I was always hungry stared at marble statues for hours. I loved chicken wings and pistachio ice-cream chilled champagne and black berries. I liked to read Neruda naked on a mountain top in California where I could smell the ocean's salt rise up, an offering just for me. This pleased me, Lord, it did, when I was a woman the slender tires of 10-speed racing bikes aroused in me elegance and symmetry, old horses trotting down Old City Philadelphia on Continental Square carrying Alabama tourists turned me into one myself, my mane blowing in the June wind, the gold specks in my gentle eyes bulbous twilights – darkness reconsidered for pitch. When I was a woman I liked the small-boned feet of princesses, the muscled hands of kings. One minute the sun, the next, a door opens – the future pours in.