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Artemisia in Ecstasy

Emily A. Francisco
Gettysburg College, emily.a.francisco@gmail.com
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**Author Bio**
Emily Francisco is a senior, Art History and English with a Writing Concentration double major.

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After Saint Mary Magdalene by Artemisia Gentileschi. Currently exhibited in the Galleria Palatina of the Palazzo Pitti in Florence.

Is this she
   the woman of golden skirts
   one who clutches at her breast

as if tormented by some
   innermost burst vein of longing
   black room lit from beyond the frame

(because agony is best felt in the dark)—
   she who cut her long golden tresses
   in penitence

frayed ends threads of hair
   hanging like shredded sinews
   by the ears—

I can see her, gilded dress
   falling from her shoulder
   in an act of spiritual freeness

her bare collarbone blessed
   by the sacred unseen flickering flame
   and it is to me she glances emptily

woman-hero of my New Testament
   tortured paintress
   humble barefoot Maddalena—

The lips part
   and in that singular silver
   breath of piety
(or perhaps it is regret)
    she becomes the afflicted
    no longer a face of fortitude

yielding instead
    to the aging of feminist progeny
    her story exhaled

before me and into my lungs
    with the sigh of longevity
    and it shimmers—

saturated with the thick
    iridescent narrative
    of one who has endured