Artemisia in Ecstasy

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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