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