

# our lady of perpetual degeneracy

i started in the morning  
with just my backpack, full of  
only apples & two peanut butter  
granola bars. i left to find mary,  
to coax out her apparition.  
i walked ocean & highway,  
the earth a rubber ball beneath me.

I.

*lourdes, france*

a half-sized statue in the mouth  
of the cave like a tongue ring.  
i crouched down, touched her stone face.

bernadette soubirous,  
who first saw mary here  
& mistook her for a woman,  
tells me that there's  
nothing anymore, that she  
wonders if she had ever seen her here.

we draw mary using chalk,  
her outline on the cave walls.

II.

*guadalupe, mexico*

mother moon goddess, the snake  
in between toes, the scent  
of roses in her basilica.

i sit in a pew next to juan diego  
who mary spoke to on his  
way to tepeyac. he shushes me.  
he's tearing out the pages of  
a hymnal & they're turning  
into petals.

III.

*fatima, italy*

when i arrived all the peasant children  
were crawling on each other's shoulders;

the acrobatics of forming the shape of a great  
giant mary.

the others build a great big fire  
in the street. they praise it as  
the sun, they say *milagre do sol*

& i ask where mary is  
& they point to the mass of children.

IV.

*degeneracy, in my bedroom*  
i return as the sun is setting  
& everything is orange &  
everyone is orange

i resist the urge to pray  
because i don't know who  
i would pray to &

that's when they comes.  
the click of tall red heels on  
the hardwood floor,  
the sick sweet smell of  
papaya perfume

she's so much orange  
that i can't look at him & i sob  
& ask them not to hurt me.

his fishnets glow,  
hot copper wires

she's an algorithm  
of godless energy

carrying two buckets  
of oil that he pours  
on the floor, all rainbow  
& river

they're everything but  
an apparition & touching  
them is painful, but i have to  
do it. she's wearing

a bright pink strap-on  
even though they has a dick  
of his own.  
she doesn't fuck me though,  
they just stare at me & laugh  
until i laugh too.

he wraps me in an orange  
feather boa that turns into  
a real snake & slithers  
in the oil.

they tells me to touch myself  
& i say that i don't know if i can.