For it is better to marry than to burn.
—St. Paul

Rather than burn, marry,
said the apostle. And
the matter was simple enough:

for that we came equipped
with glands and organs
and a mind that stirs
to the task from puberty.
It is better to marry, he
said, who knew the unbearable

heart of sin, the intolerable skin
of a saint. He would not
say it, whence the fire

quenched only by the union
of two. Or the air
that keeps it aglow—though he

must have seen it
in the magic breath of God—
if he believed the word true

that we owe bodysoulandspirit
to him without whom
was nothing made: still mountain
as man and woman
    that can praise or spit
    at the hand that shaped the mouth,

the man and woman
    puzzling the breach between
    the dream and the wakeful hour

possessed by all the heart-coiled
    things thrashing in a ribbed cage.
    Marry! but if scorning

love of mother and the father,
    the one to whom the burning body
    must cling boasts the same sex

though the apostle’s church forbid
    marriage then, pray, how tell
    holy cause from holocaust?

A river denied the valley
    of its course to wider waters
    swallows its banks, rots

the roots of the ripening crop.
    And if they burn to be celibate
    —for a fecund God!—

what wonder that the puritan dyke
    succumbs, puts out the altar light
    to hood the hands that slouch

from temple to cradle?
    Or married to Christ
    flesh of sexless ecstasy,
the blood from his ribs
becomes the heady wine
in a heated chalice, craving

communion with the drained vein
for a wholly new covenant
with the body of a sperm-fucked egg.