

OGAGA IFOWODO

## **RATHER THAN BURN**

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.