3.

My mother had an ostrich puff, so soft that it hurt when we touched it. I hardly know how to explain that pain. A burning, that we sought, my sister and I. Putting aside the worry bird pin and the moonstone earrings, to touch the puff, to hold it in our hands. Lou's grandmother left her dreams, amulets, trances. Mine left me longevity.

4.

We went to Mama's villa on Lake Como. She was ivory, fragile, nibbled while we feasted. Her sons told stories of the war. How Mama stayed to guard the house while the men hid in the mountains. How Mama let the Nazis stay there to save the house, her family. Mama spoke and understood only Italian. Matriarch, she snapped her fingers for the white gloved servants. Her sons praised her in a foreign tongue. Mama smiled.

5.

I have changed all the gods in my poems to goddesses. I think about women. A smell of yeast, of fresh baked rolls, the shriek of Eero in the night, silver Kali with her necklace of skulls. Did you ever eat the dirt? As I lick the grit from my teeth I want to touch the ostrich puff, to hold it in my hand forever which is impossible. No one could stand the prolonged burning of that tenderness.

6.

My mother says that she suffers from a hereditary disease - longevity. She talks about

suicide. She remodels the house, decorates the kitchen, shops for bargains. She wants me to get married and have babies. I study Tibetan texts on enlightenment. I will never have children. My age is a gift. I will live forever.

7.

Baking in the kitchen, bread, rolls, the moist smell of yeast. Rising. I look for counter models to the despair. I make lists of goddesses; I study the changes of the moon. I smell yeast on my fingertips.

8.

I do not want to be a man anymore like my father. Nor do I want to be a woman. I study the limits of my humanness. I prepare myself for the next birth. I give birth to rolls. Brioches, crumpets, Parker House. Rolls that are hot from the oven, freshly baked. I pull one apart carefully watching the threads of dough stretching until the roll is open for the butter which melts in the center and gives off a sour smell. I eat a plateful and feel the warmth rise in me; there is a rock in my stomach. I eat myself sick and will eat again. I can never have enough of rolls.

Ellen Zweig