Painted Poetry
For John Walker’s “Clammer’s Marks, North Branch.”

No words would come from
your Star-Spangled lips,
The Red Stripes streaming across
your face
Like prison bars
or the lips of the morphined hospitalized,
crack and peeled,
the shadows hiding black eyes and bruises as you

lay lady lay in the dirt,
mud and parchment covering
your curved faceless whiteness
and abstract emergency writing:
notes of a dying poem
being enveloped with its funeral shroud—

an “a” is there, and so’s an “s,”
the “and” is buried underneath,

Mein Irisch Kind,
What are you hiding?

A Victorian bather lying in the bath,
Impressionist men on les bicylettes
Or Two Panoptic Eyes,
the reflection of the seascape shining forth,
or a snowy forest, silhouetted deer and elks
and the moon,
rising,
on the horizon,
A castle in the wasteland that is sight.

Speckled showers on the canvas of your body,
glow-wormed flies
windswept leaves
Sunday school kisses
and peacock feathers
in the loops and swirls and transluence
of your world that is the color of Octobers. And so

I kissed you,

And smeared my lipstick in slit-wrist scars
that lay in lines across your face,
your ears your nose your miscreant curves and eyes
    that glitter like Versailles mornings,
mimic that palace made of ivory and moonshine.

To lie, to live?
A life, a lie?
What do you whisper in my ears?

I try to hear the silence beneath the brushstrokes
    And lie down next to you—
My face against your hips,
    lips against your glowing-eyed navel.
You’re naked against me,
    your sandpaper skin and the cracks
in your creamy coating crinkle like your tissue-paper sheets,
    Alive, you breathe, alive?

My ear leans closer, your ancient-Greek torso is cold as I look for life in
your Shiva-smeared cheeks, covered with ash and an expression
    as empty as an oracle’s,
but it’s not there.

So I tear your skin to bits,
    scratch away your Painted-Faces makeup
and get inside your butterfly wings,
Where all you smell is seashells and the saltless ocean air
and all you see is your whirlpooled eyes
and all you hear is whispering—

Over…and…dreams.

An effaced tombstone:
    It’s over.

Now dream.