

Emily Skaja, *Brute* (2019)

In General

- Pay attention to the epigraphs for each section—how do they set up or signal key themes?
- What kind of story is being told, within each section and the book as a whole? What does it mean to be written out of one's story and how might one reclaim/rewrite that story?
- Track patterns in imagery, metaphors, tone, and word-choice—how do these contribute to our understanding of themes and the overall narrative?
- How does Skaja engage with history of women's writing and confessional poetry?

1. My History As

- **Themes**
 - Writing as a way of dealing with trauma
 - The desire to find a home or place in the world when home is no longer there
 - Recovering or confronting one's personal history, no matter how ugly or painful
- **Imagery**
 - **Birds:** vultures, ravens, crows, swallows, starlings, grouse
 - **Trees:** "Elegy Without A Single Tree I Can Name" (11); "The Brute / Brute Heart" (18-19)
 - **Mouths:** "I was running my mouth / like a bathtub tap" (6); "It's Impossible To Keep White Moths" (8-9); "My mouth is rotted and anonymous" (10); "...a fish with a hook in its mouth" (15)
- **Form/Tone:** Elegies—who or what is being mourned?
- **Title/Word-choice:** *Brute*—what are the different meanings and associations with this word? How does it help us understand the major themes as well as persona, experiences, and journey of the speaker?

2. Girl Saints

- What does it mean to be a saint? What kinds of girlhood narratives are offered in this section? What does it mean to be a girl in a patriarchal society/culture? What are the many ways in which girls are silenced?
 - Blood, bruises, self-harm, anorexia, addiction
 - Abusive relationships, sexual predators vs. sexual agency
- **Key motifs**
 - Girls—Birds—Flight: "in a story, a girl is a tree / is a bird / is a wilderness" (35)
 - Freedom/Falling: "Indictment" (32-33)
 - Water/Drowning and Ropes/Traps

3. Circle

- Love and violence
- Myth and identity
- Insect imagery

4. Bright Landscape

- Suffering and Survival: Eurydice as structuring myth = end of a marriage