

## 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