When I was nothing but a swirling minnow, my mother filled this canvas with loam and olives—layer after layer of brown aromas—

She must’ve felt queasy perched on her artist stool, swooping her brush and palette knife side to side while I swam back and forth inside her.

Much later, after I learned to walk on land, I saw how she glazed buff over blue, dusk over amber—colors stroked on, colors scraped away as though she couldn’t make the paint behave. I think my mother wanted a Rubens scene like the one that inspired Yeats—

beating wings, loosening thighs, a shudder in the loins. But there was the tossing truth of me—always moving, always growing—

and the seasickness, and the smell of pee and turpentine, and the strange heart beating beneath her ribs. Instead of Leda with a swan, she painted an angry crone, knurled fingers grasping a blur of white feathers. I believe she’d like to wring the bird’s neck. Even now, those fierce eyes follow me across the room.