It’s not the dresses
she hates most—
though after half

a lifetime of tropical sun
licking her back in afternoon
they fail to warm her

insides. It’s the layers
of smallclothes underneath—
bleached smocks and bodices,
laced partlets, corsets, and girdles—
that make her wonder why
she ever settled for Ferdinand

and civilization. She refuses
to accept how colorless
garments make her feel:
as if she should not love
the flesh alive, beneath.
She tries to imagine what

the monster who first desired her
might say about her swaddled form—
but then remembers he never

used language to shape lack,
until she filled the space
between their bodies

with words that now
unbidden come into her mouth,
making it hard to breathe.