

**TAKAMICHI OKUBO**

**Self-Portrait as Grendel**

I am the shadow stalker    sin-dripping  
& God-cursed    begotten of the descendants  
of Cain. From between    the claw scales  
of my body seep    solitude & words  
meant to be scrawled    monstrous across  
the walls of my cave    as war-blood  
& bone-rattle.    Bored & insomniac  
I stand staring    outside my den  
at the pretty haloes    of pine torches  
burning in the distance    in their disparate pulses  
& listen to the singing    the bright laughter  
& calloused clapping    their cackling voices  
honey-hued    & at home in the brogue  
of their own kith    & kin. While I

flense the bodies lying 'round my cave  
& stuff myself inside their skins & scalps  
from head to toe & loping down the hill,  
across the moors & through the night, I reach  
their mead-hall, trailing blood & strips of skin  
to join their wassail. There I toast & boast  
among the men I used to butcher, glib  
& loud in this loose hide I've jury-rigged  
from their dead. My tongue is riven as I fight  
the urge to mount the bench & roar in their faces:

Don't you hear    the music in my howling  
in the hard-struck    syllables of this sibilance  
in these rough-hewn    runes of my roar?  
So different from your tongue    the tempered cadence  
of your dumb iambs    like the drumbeat no one  
dances or sings to.    Do you see the edges  
in my keening, their gleam    & grace, grooves  
& jags brittle    in their barbed beauty?

But the rage-cry    gets caught in my throat  
stays there quivering    unsung like an arrow  
just struck    striving to be more than  
itself: a murmur    a melody, a hymn.  
So I remain stuck    in their skin, mute  
& enormous with war    & words, unnoticed  
to the end of the night.    Unnamed. Englished.