

A BAPTISM AND HIRED HAND

Adam Tavel

Miss Henrietta Snodderly eclipsed
the distant Schuylkill shore the night she braced
against the current's swirl to say the words
no preacher man would waste. Her bundled girl
had wailed away two days with jaundiced lips
that refused to suck or latch. A marble face
shone out the swaddled apron. Its straps curled
like wavered eels. Above the mud I heard
these lips that tore the floor of heaven down
repent for pity's sake and beg for grace
to bless the scene my lantern's flame obscured.
Empty-armed, Henrietta swam her gown
atop my cart to snatch the bonnet lace
she tossed out for the river to endure.