

by Jenny Gropp Hess

Image Evolution

to tear the featherless hens apart [adductor sounds
suckle towards the body's dismantling, a hand
dry with epidermis pulls at a skinned leg, wetness clear
as beetle hemolymph], and sort like pieces, the end
market full of cut thighs and breasts, sealed [plumped white
palms push] atmospheres of plastic wrap
[swell] [protect]
[elsewhere I bound up a temple's limestone steps, I—no,
more than anything, water

I know] the earth follows
its slug-stone trail,
[the eyelid's line
and its underside]

I know, I excavate my image oyster by oyster,

[organ by apparition]

twist the shucking knife at the hinge, pry open the bill
backwards, find a white pillow resting in salt water
 [and there, too, complements
 rest in color, scent:
 lemon, butter], [different kinds of knives
 for each task]
oysters

 rolled in fingertips, I
 touch my ghost

 near identical slipping,
 mollusk after mollusk [manual after manual]

into a rough dark vat, flesh winter

 then vinegar—I am paralyzed

 in that puckered mouth, a green stalk

 in the throat, paused

at full inhale—air palms along in my chest, treetops walk, a base

 blinks—

feels [here, mollusks],

organs, edible, oracles, each
having been surrounded by shell, each

loaded with sand, blinks

part of real motion, windows—

the word I am looking for, how to say, *a conscious creature
filled with oysters*. But how to start,

when *oyster* defines the delicate meat
and *oyster* defines the entire creature, untouched?
Say *continue*: entire banks of oysters
have been known to break off and drift away.