

EWA CHRUSCIEL

from *Contraband of Hoopoe*

I take a hoopoe with me with its downward turning beak. His wings beat under my blouse. My heart has hoopoe's syntax; how he *enjambes* the air. Feel the apparition? My breasts flux as if they were singing the church hymns kneeling down, standing up, kneeling. There is a sound *udud udud udud* tearing from my nipples. Pagan pole-dancing. My breasts have Turret's syndrome. I have to stop and hold them with soothing cooing, with new lullabies. Hoopoe is the dybbuk chattering under my bra, a messenger. This action is not unprecedented. King Solomon sent the hoopoe across the oceans to the Queen of Sheba to urge her with religion. Pliny said nothing about hoopoe. On the other hand, Kirchen in his *Coleggio Romano* had a hoopoe in his collection of skeletons among bones of eagles, magpies, thrushes, and a Brazilian monkey.

Hoopoe, my valley of deprivation, my sprinkling from the cloud of unknowing. Pray for me *upupa epops*. Convert me back to wonder. To cure my heart of such morbid desire for appearances. It is hoopoe who takes me across the oceans just as he once took all the birds of this world on a pilgrimage to Simurh. He takes me to a new land where jays are not jaded and finches do not flinch seeds at small children. But the hummingbirds thief with herons stealing cotton candy from the church bazaar. They straw down all the sugar and throw the cotton threads to herons. The herons get entangled. The smoke goes out of their bellies and they waft it as incense and they take liking to that ministry and they start to sell us hosts and rich indulgences. In this country there are too many Jesuses. The hoopoe will put false prophets back in line. He will free the hummingbirds and herons of fast trills. When I cross the border, I start hiccupping. My breasts hiccup. The officer stares at their nipples. I carry wonder. I bring abundance. I stir the wings in him.