A Myth of Colonial New England

“On April 30, while they were yet it may be about an hundred and fifty miles from the Indian town, a little before break of day when the whole crew was in a dead sleep (Reader, see if it prove not so!) one of these women took up a resolution to imitate the action of Jael upon Sisera, and, being where she had not her own life secured by any law unto her, she thought she was not forbidden by any law to take away the life of the murderers by whom her child had been butchered.” (Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana, 1697)

My baby took a bullet with him
to drop at St Peter’s feet – a quick communion
if elected, or God’s left finger struck
the earth with Algonquian reapers
clearing blighted sprout. Pray!

he tells us. Pray when Satan
halved the stars your spirit was put aside.
Pray your children plant their seed
like crosses beyond the hills,
and it might just be this New World’s womb
is that very oldest, to which the rivers knelt
to drink. I pray his house burns down.

My name is Hannah Dustan, clawed
from nothing into Cotton Mather’s pen.
Seven Indian boys he named
to my hatchet, as if his were the word
death waits for. Seven bodies, he said,
cracked sanguine, opened like doors to God.

Oh God those eyes, rolled
from sleep when the blade dropped,
rolled on earth’s whole axis
like night rises from the east,
rolled forever into my palms
which once held a child. Mather said

the men who emerge, beautiful, from the forest
are the vessels of heavenly wrath,
but He never shuddered when I struck
His resting hands, never offered His cheek
to carve the name of my baby. Just bodies –
eight now I’ve made, and I am told
they’ve the faces of an American God.