EXERCISES IN DAMNATION AND GRACE

By: Emily McLemore

I’ve found myself at odds

with empathy, have a messy

history with apathy. I’ve struggled

with sympathy and sanity, reflected

on countless conceptions of divinity,

contemplated a variety of relationships

involving couples and other women.

I’ve almost been married – twice,

absently abandoned loyal lovers

for new ones – not necessarily better

ones – as a result of penis size, politics

and their complete lack of ideas

about God. Call me a saint,

a sinner, a heretic

or an anomaly. I’m a paradox

on two lovely legs, easier to analyze

when I’m off them, transparent

only in the embrace of sexual release

as my experience demonstrates,

most human beings are. Reckless

and impatient, I’ve left men

more passionately than I’ve loved

them, worn the ink in my skin like armor

the kindest caresses could never penetrate.

I’ve used my body in ways that made men

reconsider their consensus on the universe,

given birth to enduring enigmas in ecstasy. I

have been accused of heartlessness and treachery.

Guilty of faithfulness and dishonesty, apparently

I’m some perversion of the perfect woman

and the Devil.