

MOLLY BESS RECTOR

## Portrait of Mata Hari Before the Firing Squad

The eye of execution day opened on a woman  
whose many thefts included its own name.

Dressed in silk and velvet:

heavy black kimono, a cloak edged in fur,  
she wore a wide-brimmed hat, heeled slippers,

her hair in braided coils.

First she blew kisses, then heard guttering, rounds:  
thirteen bullets, the last in the head.

It is harder to see blood on a black dress.

She fell first to her stockinged knees,  
then bent at the waist, her skirt lifting,

as in dance.

Even then, some collector planned to sell the gold disks  
that had covered her nipples,

her sparkling jamangs,

the jewel-toned songkets she peeled off for audiences  
who had loved her just-enough darkness, the grit

in the pearl of her eye.

They wanted her badly: her conviction,  
a foregone conclusion.

You see, it matters a great deal  
what a woman wears to die in:

what parts of herself

she chooses to cover, or what she refuses—  
that she didn't wear the blindfold.