

WENDY NOONAN

Lord, help me eat them bitter words

A butcher drives by a field, its flock of sheep,
thinks scrag, chump chops, and sees them stunningly;
complicit creatures nuggling the green grass
in their knotty, sheepish clot. At dawn, he's smelled
a smell so foul it bites down on his tongue and tastes him.
Up to his elbows in pluck, he watches a slender leg
stiffen on its way to mutton. Trying to mother
these days the Devil courts me, writes his names
in my journal, my mirror, my mornings filled
with hanging smoke, remorse like swarms
of Hitchcock's birds. The child learns by watching
and there he makes his home—of the many human
languages, hundreds of words for love, which one is
collecting flies on a block?