Meredith Devney

Salute Viscera

In my afterlife,  
St. Peter hands out  
canopic jars and their  
lids—the iconic heads  
of Mary, Jesus,  
Emerson, Walt Whitman.  

One for the liver.  
Another for the lungs.  
The most embellished  
for the brain  
which we refuse  
to discard. Organs  

swathed in layers  
of linen we must  
cultivate on our own.  
Harvested flax  
winnowed and  
woven into ecru.  

Hand carved calcite,  
adorned in symbols  
detailing our lives:  
births and marriages  
are included, divorce  
and death are not.  

October is etched  
into the trunk of an elm;  
grape vines entwine  
my vows, fashioning  
into a 25. But the 13th  
is not allowed—  

one’s beginning should  
ever mark one’s end.  
His name encircles a timpani,  
quarter notes float  
from my cornet. Vintage  
volumes stack the sides,
their spines gleaming
gilt titles. Maps of Boston
and New York trace
the northern halves,
North Carolina and Kentucky,
the south. Initials of nieces

and nephews mask space
future miscarriages
leaves blank. Family trees
form an overlay
from front to back,
cradling us into death.