

# The question is one of ashes and dust

by [Jill Alexander Essbaum](#) in the [November 29, 2005](#) issue

It is not my name, which you have already  
inked into one interminable book or the other. Also,  
not what virtue I've claimed to store up

in two unrelenting fists. Also, not the hands  
which wrap around them, these hands  
from which I feed, strong though they are,

but defiled. On the Eve of the End of it All,  
it is only this: how my lips catch fire,  
how I burn *exactly*, an effigy in my heart, awful

as an offering. How the darkness blesses its shadow  
as the indigent lauds his begging bridge. How like a virgin  
I've trimmed my wick. How well I can wrestle

your mystery to the ground, Angry Angel.  
How I blunt my feathers on the blade of your tooth.  
How I bleed like Christ through the white of my dress,

my fingers so steady, so stained.