

TEMPTATION OF SILENCE

At the end of the pier where the moon rests
until needed, five posts worry at the water
as though to pull out a single word
of what the garbled sea says, dark fingers.

Light, and these chittering birds, indecision.
Always the sea and earth want you;
you can always go there; they
will take you in. And I have felt for some time

the encroachment of silence at my back,
like a forest. To live as stone, without history,
enduring . . . These posts rise like bare, black trees;
soon they will stride off into the water,

tearing land away, leaving only
sky, sea, a thin gray nerve of horizon.
On time also, like these long legs,
my thoughts move, focused in this dark lens.

There would be such comfort in despair,
in knowing. In silence I would hear endlessly
the message of blood, the shush of wind
in my chest, and have no use

for semiologies of sky. As though
this black mirror might shut above me.
A gull quits the moon-struck cloud
it needs no longer, as farther out

fish enter this world in a quick arc
and fail, falling back. Just as well: They might learn
to live on air, but the paperwork, appointments,
permissions would forever elude them.

In that diurnal sea I dwelled a long time,
until the language and disillusion were my own.
I would not go back there now; I would forget
the word for *wind*, for *bread*, for *pain*.

This low murmur, as of crowds whispering.
Semaphore of cloud, telegraphy of star. Yet
the human voice, that and music alone,
consoles us. This resting moon tears at our blood,

this heaving sea pulls us. Our eyes are flowers
endlessly blooming out into the world, endlessly severed
by the spinning blades of the iris. What force must be needed
to keep the world's things separate, to keep them

from collapsing into one another! Then a vast wind.
There is little wind tonight, enough
to barely rumple the sea, while moonlight presses
one door-like patch flat and bright as a bedsheet.

To watch from afar the storms
that make us human. On your right, ladies and gentlemen,
the dark night of the soul. You will be able to see,
as we pass, the rain of doubt, and high

in the trees, the whipping winds of love. (Please
keep your hands inside the car.) So: With words
we *do* dance over all things, speech *is*
beautiful folly. For we are of language as

the world is of silence. Words slice
through the surface of the mirror, of darkness, like
shark fins, shining under the moon. Into the world, then—
but with speech to hold these things in place.

For the night is still full of wrong,
earthquakes and executions; and unknown ships
gather towards us, towing in their wake
the speechless, unspeakable dead.

NEW YEAR

The hands of that clock will not hold you
long. In an upstairs room History tries on various
hats, begins improvising another of its long stories.
Always, when you approach the box, there is mail.

In this land of exile, lank women stride out
into sunlight carrying loaves of fresh bread in
baskets. Leaves clutch at the trees. The wind comes
out to explore new paths appearing in the forest.

What can I tell you of the words I use here?
You would not recognize them. They are gloves gone
inside out with the departing hand.

MEMORY AT 3 A.M.

The sun yet lurks in this night:
Somewhere a bright fin will suddenly
rip through, light spill
like gifts from a black piñata.

In the dark, as I shut
my eyes, they'll build another world,
those unseen engineers—their own
bright eyes on mine as I reopen them,

wondering. At first it seems much
like the old one. But then
every bird folding its fingers
on the branch outside

becomes another dark idea.
Insomnia, old friend, took me in—
scooping me from bed
at three, dropping me into

a lightrimmed chair. And there
in silence I celebrated departures,
all these revelations and masks
dredged down from the day.

Leaf by leaf now in morning I enter
the still forests of our past.
Gnawing its way
into wood, the saw sings.