

The Deadening of October

I've counted 58 days of roadside pumpkins,
70 days since my midsummer birthday. Ridges
and warts jut from my fingers
drumming pumpkins, over the Holyoke Range. Below
the Deerfield River spawns out-of-season
salmon. I think of St. Peter, the fishing-miracle,
what would he say to Jerome, patron saint
of librarians.

November, how shall I bless your partying saints?
I'm lousy at stirring that sacred punch. See,
angelic doctors, holy martyrs hover above the church
pillars while the congregation chants
the *Confiteor* in Polish and English.

What a long glide from March 25, Angel Gabriel's
feast day, to this deadening of October!
Yet I'm full of pumpkin seeds I might wreath
into some sort of halo. Tonight
we bring in the darkness an hour early. I amass
names from *Lives of Saints*, cling to them
until they turn up as bones on All Soul's.

In six days the temperature drops to forty.
I have waited by the gilt edges
of my prayer. Wearing a bleached dress, I lift
myself into the vision's descent.
My mother glows among the hosts and hosannas,
a hunting moon. My father has me back in the fold.

Foxglove

for Don

This is implied in the animal name:
long pistiled fingers
speaking of nothing tame

but open lips; tongue plunging
down inside the flower
the way the white-tipped fox, tingling,

washes away his snakebelly-white gloves
at twilight as he fades pink before
he flowers. His burnt sienna loves

form again in little bells,
the strains from the foxflower
song of an animal crying inside his cells.

And in this pipe-thin
figwort, the ruined foxfire
distills into medicine.

Wing Biddlebaum

My hands talking like birds
give me my name, a “W” soaring
from the temple. They amaze me,
banish vowel, consonant of my baptismal
name like English sparrows. I taunt:
“roost-pigeon,” “piss-smell.”

In answer: the handshape: “dream.”
The “need” finger drifts,
shows me bright animals, prey
of air. I learn to link
the scarlet tanager
with scarlet fever. I’m
the shamed red woman, waiting
for cities to rise after
Babel, from a language of shapes.

In this night-anchor, my hand-
birds claim a field-harvest:
church, tree, fireflies.

Speaking About the Deaf Child

My play's a voice in a puppet
theater with only my tongue
for an audience. I unfurl
ballet words, translate
the wind's tongue
Into conch shell language.

People imagine I'm velvet
flung into a tree-nest
while I prance outside their gates.
But gratings from their inner
worlds reach me through my toes.

And I dance myself out
of my dance in tune to drums
you beat around me, teaching
a new subject you call "advanced
vibrations." Silent flamingo-
hairdressers: missionaries,
touch me.