

*holding the line*

when I feel feverish  
I take the full moon  
and place it on my brow  
like a flannel

it is so cool because it has just  
been swimming in the sea

when I feel that my heart  
is clapping out of time  
I take it out and throw it  
up among the stars

who know all there is to know  
about holding the line

*if I could land*

as lightly as those birds  
floating down to the mudflats  
their shapes dark against the sky  
and the silver floor of the sea  
open to them again

if I could settle  
like they do, sharp feet cool  
in the wet sand, beak  
busy preening, feeding,  
exclaiming their belonging

under cover of darkness  
the soul fingers its own restlessness

and the night is a stray feather  
blown into moonlight, a small heart pounding,  
the sting of salt on a wounded, scaly leg,  
the cry of the first to rise  
the cry of the last to land

and the one cry that does not ease  
but folds the darkness into itself  
and bears it till morning

*tides*

the incoming sea  
bisects the harbour  
with a line so straight,  
so geometrical

I wish my heart  
could make  
such elegant metrics  
of its floundering  
muddy tides

*vigil*

someone is stretching me like a canvas,  
like the skin of a slaughtered animal  
left out to dry in the sun, like the high scraped  
cry of a bird threaded out over the estuary,  
drawn by the dragging tide

I am so thin the stars  
can see right through me

and they do, they do,  
they refuse to shield me  
from their brightness,  
from the lacerating  
tenderness of their  
barbed-wire  
gaze

\*

after we said goodbye  
I could feel you for days,  
like a live fur coat  
put on backwards,  
my chest warm,  
my back already  
feeling the cold

\*

and what about that sky I saw,  
the one so soft you could stroke it,

a dusky orange

like the feathery belly  
of a grey bird  
flying over  
a smouldering sun

or like ash falling steadily  
in the light of the flames  
from the cracked, ancient drum

as the cryptic fire burns on and on  
and the stern hills darken

★

and when I walked out last night  
it was cold, the coldest night this winter,  
and when the stars asked me to join them  
in the sting of their bareness, I let them  
take me, and they carried me between them,  
clusters of stars all along my body, and I arched  
right back and pointed my toes and fingertips  
and was as long as ever you could imagine,  
and they did not let me go