

Still

Counting the sounds of the train
in the beat of her blood, she is leaving,
leaving again. His fat fists beating back
and the crash of the falling still.

Flat blank fields by the tracks,
with no words, just like her, on the steps
when they called, when they heard, when they stared
at the red pockmarked bricks of the barn.

Skin which had once been so smooth,
a landscape of ridges and cracks.

Mouthing the sounds of a bird:
no it's fine, I'm all right, we're all right.

Crossing the dark widowed plains,
she won't stop till she reaches a mountain,
granite, she tries to dream, but she sees him,
she sees him again, with his red puffy face in the half-dark,
brewing his broth, fermenting the slop,
malting the grain and stilling the clear cold burn of brandy.

He climbed on the beams, fixing the tiles on the roof,
poked out the nests of the swallows,
smashing their eggs, he never fell down, quick as a cat.

Leaning her head on the glass,
in the white of the sky she unwinds them:
silences coiled up and folded away.
Her lips never move, the scars on her throat keep her quiet,
but she murmurs it deep in her chest,
the speech which will come from the distance,
the croak of the swallows, somewhere still alive.

Wrong is a difficult word –
not for him, he would savour its taste.
He could brand her with each slow sentence,
stuff her full of rotten fruit and leave her to ferment,
he told her, brandy would blind her, let her be left there, left in the still.

Counting the sounds of the train,
she prepares, she prepares to pronounce it,
painfully shaking her head:
he was wrong, he was wrong, he was wrong.