

# 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.

# The Audiologist

The thick gray windows never reveal  
her shadowy figure. The audiologist  
always has something to conceal  
behind those windows. She only reveals  
to Mom how I did this year. I steal  
a look at my audiogram and her checklist.  
The thick gray windows never reveal  
her shadow figure: the audiologist

and I are at war  
over my ears, my headphones, my chair.  
First she makes a beep, or a low roar—  
and then I'm at war  
with myself. Did I truly hear  
that or not? My hand shoots up in the air,  
volleying against her score  
over my ears, my headphones, my chair.

The thick walls absorb my silence.  
I cannot hear anything from outside,  
except through my ear-burning, tense  
headphones. They absorb her silence.  
I wrestle with my ears, my conscience,  
as I close my eyes to listen, decide.  
The thick walls absorb my silence  
as her sounds come from the other side.

# Practice

I stared at the black telephone  
in Grandma's house  
a bike ride from home

The receiver drooped like a brick  
as I watched the slow wheel  
whir back into place to "0"  
after each number I dialed

In the dining room  
I held it upside down  
near my body aid

Exposed for the occasion

I stared at the kitchen  
almost warped linoleum floor  
a yellowing white

And waited  
a loud ring then three ripples

Then a man's voice said Hello

Hello

    Hello?

                    I stared  
at the lid of holes  
choked with brown dust

This is Ray

Oh Ray Raymond This is Dad

I squinted at the smooth tear  
under Grandma's old chair

Dad

Yes yes you understand me  
This is so great  
How are you doing over there

I wondered what kind of things  
would he say on the telephone

It's hot here

He laughed It's hot here too

I never heard his laugh so  
close in my ears

Ray you ready for your word

Yeah

Okay here we go Superman

What

Superman

I closed my eyes What

Superman Su per man

What

Superman Su per man Superman you know  
It's a bird it's a plane it's Superman

It's a word I know that

Superman Can you understand me

I thought No why do I have to practice

What is it now

It's Superman It starts with a S

Stupid man That's not one word That's two words

No Ray Listen Listen now Superman  
He's from the comics

The receiver turned hot in my hand  
finger bleeding with sweat

I don't understand Dad

No Try one more time Superman Su per man  
He flies like Peter Pan

Duperman Beaterman That doesn't sound like a word  
Super man Superman Ray

I stared at the cradle

Well I I can't understand you



Okay Bye bye now

I wished

my body aid alone  
on the kitchen floor  
smash

smash it  
with the receiver

## A Wish, Unheard

Once I saw him sitting in his crowded office from a new distance.  
Coworkers were laughing, giggling almost, beside his huge window:  
a view of the world grew shimmering through the morning glass.  
There were the usual skyscrapers, throngs of shoppers, impatient cars.  
As with anything else, he'd ceased to notice; it had always been his.  
He doubled over in laughter while others tossed in more jokes.  
He did not have to lipread or ask for a rewind: I wanted to sliver  
off my ears—forgetting I could catch only so much—and  
give him my bloodied ears on a satin pillow and say,  
Here. All this is my life.