The Speed of Darkness

BY MURIEL RUKEYSER

I

Whoever despises the clitoris despises the penis
Whoever despises the penis despises the cunt
Whoever despises the cunt despises the life of the child.

Resurrection music, silence, and surf.

II

No longer speaking
Listening with the whole body
And with every drop of blood
Overtaken by silence

But this same silence is become speech
With the speed of darkness.

III

Stillness during war, the lake.
The unmoving spruces.
Glints over the water.
Faces, voices. You are far away.
A tree that trembles.
I am the tree that trembles and trembles.

IV

After the lifting of the mist
after the lift of the heavy rains
the sky stands clear
and the cries of the city risen in day
I remember the buildings are space
walled, to let space be used for living
I mind this room is space
this drinking glass is space
whose boundary of glass
lets me give you drink and space to drink
your hand, my hand being space
containing skies and constellations
your face
carries the reaches of air
I know I am space
my words are air.

V

Between     between
the man : act     exact
woman : in curve    senses in their maze
frail orbits, green tries,    games of stars
shape of the body speaking its evidence

VI

I look across at the real
vulnerable involved naked
devoted to the present of all I care for
the world of its history leading to this moment.

VII

Life the announcer.
I assure you
there are many ways to have a child.
I bastard mother
promise you
there are many ways to be born.
They all come forth
in their own grace.

VIII

Ends of the earth join tonight
with blazing stars upon their meeting.
These sons, these sons
fall burning into Asia.

IX

Time comes into it.
Say it. Say it.
The universe is made of stories,
not of atoms.

X

Lying
blazing beside me
you rear beautifully and up—
your thinking face—
erotic body reaching
in all its colors and lights—
your erotic face
colored and lit—
not colored body-and-face
but now entire,
colors lights the world thinking and reaching.

XI

The river flows past the city.

Water goes down to tomorrow
making its children I hear their unborn voices
I am working out the vocabulary of my silence.

XII

Big-boned man young and of my dream
Struggles to get the live bird out of his throat.
I am he am I? Dreaming?
I am the bird am I? I am the throat?

A bird with a curved beak.
It could slit anything, the throat-bird.
Drawn up slowly. The curved blades, not large.
Bird emerges wet being born
Begins to sing.

XIII
My night awake
staring at the broad rough jewel
the copper roof across the way
thinking of the poet
yet unborn in this dark
who will be the throat of these hours.
No. Of those hours.
Who will speak these days,
if not I,
if not you?


Source: Out of Silence: Selected Poems (TriQuarterly Books, 1992)
With the speed of darkness. III. Stillness during war, the lake. The unmoving spruces. Glints over the water. Faces, voices. You are far away.