

Of Anima

the bird was dead when the
children found it why should
grief exist at all the infant body
riding in the mother's mouth or
atop her head you have to
understand struggling to keep it
afloat plunging into the opaque
green waters hauling spinning
and diving with it you have to
understand how to gently touch
the skull of a dead adult to stroke
the bones rocking back and forth
to withdraw into solitude and set
aside food for your dead
companion even at the risk of
your own starvation you have to
understand I am alive she tried to
revive her but she couldn't
nuzzling and biting she used a
piece of dried grass to clean
debris from her dead offspring's
teeth when one died the other lay
with its head on its neck for
hours the word grief is made
illicit among us crows mob and
squawk magpies bury their dead
under twigs

Of Thirst

if this plant with yellow flowers
grows nowhere else if it survives
in poor soil full of boron and
lithium if thrown into fire flares
bright crimson if its full
significance is an iridescent
dream if it stands five or six
inches high if it puts food on our
plates gives us air to breathe
water to drink if rodents in
drought seek moisture in its
shallow roots if it casts almost no
shadow shines almost to
extinction palest gray to white if
it is a form without volume like
a human being her figure
reflected in tarnished water
waiting for the right words to be
born lost in the shape of the
bluish terrain

Of Tongues

we cannot agree whether the
high-pitched humming noise that
accompanies ducks in flight is
from air passing through the
beak or from the flapping of
wings vocal cords vibrating or
not vibrating a goddess in
dreamtime gives each of her
children a language of their own
to play with the shape of a flock
of starlings the architecture of
ice crystals galaxy spirals termite
nests at any given moment
speech is in this sense optional in
a society of stuck together
individuals we do things with
words I do I do imitating the
pleasing sounds of other animals
such as breath-hold laughing
tickling patting touching tongue
against the teeth followed by the
lips feeding and breathing see
hummingbirds how even my
mating song leaves no material
trace