

The Blackwood River's Song

*On either side of the grand piano and behind the clarinet
and the soprano, stand two very large paintings.*

It is as if it were a painting
as if the river in its depths
of solitude had always been a painting

waiting to be brushed with vibrant colours
that late afternoon summer, waiting
for the music to begin

to hear the clarinet's song and the clarinet
taking its solo part seriously, drawing
together the voice, the poem speaking

in rhythms of night, drawing itself
to a close yet open to voices
lost chords branching out

sucking in movement
the quiet slapping
lapping the water's slim ledge.

The clarinet is the first to speak, a melancholy circling
words around the room, taking sweet breaths *sotto voce*
taking sweet breaths and speaking in tongues

slowly and measured
a story remembered
as if heard once before

then the piano joins in as if from a distance
lowly at first, clinking, clinking, now louder
a tinkering rain on the roof

reflection working to keep sweet music together
an umbilical cord stretching the clarinet, a silence
wound to the surface. A heron dipping one leg, lifting

then slowly putting it down, feathering the river's worn edge
the music tinged: the soloist lifting her voice.
her tongue flying to the roof of her mouth

barely touching the air, holding it there
a treble, a sound near perfect, opening the vowels of the poem
mouthing each syllable, cradling each word, sifting and lifting

lifting the o's and the i's, and the m's, keeping them separate
but moving together like wind, wind that only that morning had passed through
curves and crevices of the Blackwood, sending a buzz down the back.

When she touches the high notes, the singer looks upward
piano chord holding her there, the clarinet letting her down
so the poem is born, murmuring its journey

voicing its way down the Blackwood
clipping colours and branches, clouds
delivered from sky to mirror the surface, and the audience

taking each scene with wide open mouths, sky retracing
its steps, trees dipping their branches, sunlight
finding its reflection there on the face of the river

blurring the edges to where you and I are sitting, landscaping the scene
with brushes, the scene a whole dark green, midnight blues, some black
but at all times the painting, if that's what it is, a myriad colours

reflection: sky, cloud, music
bringing the water's surface and stillness together
to a blanket spread under trees.