

The Gate At The Throat

Did Chinese ancients leave their villages
At dawn in rowboats carrying wicker
Baskets inside which was movement?
Did yellow stalks of arms row the boats

Across water, water and stop,
Where the oars were dropped and drawn
Inside the boats to rest?
Was a basket opened, a dark bird taken

Out and from a pocket a gold ring
Slipped over the neck to slide
Down the feathers and wait?
Was a long bamboo string tied

To the gold ring and the bird released
To sail over the water, no weight
Of the ring, no tug
Of the string on its breath?

Was a shadow seen swimming below,
Itself with many others? Did the bird
Waver, lunge, and emerge carrying
In its beak a fish?

Then did the universe try to swallow
And puzzle and puzzle until the string
Tugged, the ring turned to steel,
And the meaning rowed near.