

POETRY

MARK SANDERS

The Selfless Man

The man who gave up everything
held onto his tongue. It refused, protesting,
so he locked it into a cherry wood case
where the tongue lay close to the captive notes, which, winged,

slapped and beat the tongue raw. All those lashes
for silence's sake. Nouns had faces;
verbs arms and legs, a stomach that chewed
on quiet's abyss. A mob of accusers, brash

and angry at what he had done. Had he set the tongue free,
it would have been too late. He knew. A barn, lee
to the wind, has more eloquence. The tongue
was mute, those notes vicious, hawk-beaked.

Forever, he lived with the box, the tongue,
the silence beating notes that hung
in the dark of wooden walls. Was it wrong?
Sometimes speech makes too painful a song.