

GREAT HORNED OWL

That summer when the keys jumped
and the letters were shaky, when the sky
bled like watercolor and the hands of the clock
moved slowly, when I lived at the edge of town,
in Ohio, and first played my staccato tune
for the colored stones in the clear pond,
for the whiteness of the moon;

one morning , so long ago, I was startled awake
by a distinct, deliberate-seeming sound:
claw feet tapping above my head.
As if a visitor had been announced,
a code evoked, or a fine pointed line,
a persistent feeling, etched upon my brain.

And I flew down the dim borrowed stairs
to meet the unearthly light of dawn
in those large and steady yellow eyes.
We stared and took the other in at once:
the wildness. From where I stood
on the gravel walk, I watched the immense
wings on the peaked roof shudder, lift, and spread--

that eerily back-lit larger-than-life life
which had swooped in on me, soared in silence

crossing the field as a dark emblematic span
back when the fluttering, the fluttering began.