

## Interval

Parsing my words in his office at the back  
of the building, Archie Markham breathed in  
and leaned toward me. Something is missing  
from your poems -they need, he began  
then halted, a stillness ringing  
with movement. They need,  
eyes creasing, head shaking back  
and forth across a small span  
. . . mmnhh . . .  
the sound quick but not harsh,  
his hands opening upward toward me,  
chest tilted forward, spilling  
out the breath of it, not metaphors,  
not images, but . . . mmnhh . . .  
he who lived in words refused  
a word, or words at all,  
shoulders folding inward  
around the necessary absence,  
not better ideas or forms, he insisted,  
the quick compass of his gaze falling  
on the breach at the heart of my lines,  
but life and roughness and  
. . . mmnhh . . ., he exhaled, half-rising  
from his chair with the not-word.

Every gesture and jagged phatic  
of that single hour of his long existence,  
which began in Montserrat and took him  
to Sheffield, Maputo and Paris,  
writing them all and the interval  
between them,  
is with me still.  
Groundbreaker, you leapt  
without scaffold.  
That you leapt,  
and sometimes fell,  
revealed the interval  
and what breathes there,  
the jagged, the not-yet,  
the core.