

The Banished Gods

Near the headwaters of the longest river
There is a forest clearing,
A dank, misty place
Where light stands in columns
5 And birds sing with a noise like paper tearing.

Far from land, far from the trade routes,
In an unbroken dream-time
Of penguin and whale,
The seas sigh to themselves
10 Reliving the days before the days of sail.

Where the wires end the moor¹ seethes in silence,
Scattered with scree², primroses,
Feathers and faeces.
It shelters the hawk and hears
15 In dreams the forlorn cries of lost species.

It is here that the banished gods are in hiding,
Here they sit out the centuries
In stone, water
And the hearts of trees,
20 Lost in a reverie of their own natures—

Of zero-growth economies and seasonal change
In a world without cars, computers
Or chemical skies,
Where thought is a fondling of stones
25 And wisdom a five-minute silence at moonrise.

'The Banished Gods' by Derek Mahon, from *New Selected Poems* (2016), is reproduced by kind permission of the author and The Gallery Press. www.gallerypress.com

¹ moor: open, wild, uncultivated land

² scree: mass of small loose stones on a mountain slope

Explore the techniques used to create a certain atmosphere in this poem.