

*The Wicket*

Having received the password I'm unsure  
 (as always) where I'm now allowed to go:  
 could my, er, doppelgänger sign the register  
 in a love hotel (payment in advance)?  
 It could? Perhaps. But my personal liking  
 is for the shaded room, the glass half-empty,  
 the cat musing on the sofa, forepaws tucked  
 neatly under, enjoying his sinecure.

Now I speak the formula at the grille  
 and brace myself to suffer whatever offers,  
 however outlandish or highly coloured.  
 First comes the world as the police must see it,  
 the guilty and the blameless quite distinct;  
 then an unknown woman in moiré silk  
 begs me to pose inside her jeweller's shop  
 as a bulldog in a raincoat, dressed to kill,

or a decoy among the top-lit cases  
 glittering like diamanté whelk-stalls  
 before the wishful eyes of passers-by.  
 It's my dull appearance that's so reassuring,  
 the respectability, the viscous flow,  
 nothing could run crookedly in my slack veins.  
 Or that is how she seems me; and maybe rightly,  
 perhaps our spirits are truly in our faces.

Hold me up to a mirror: my fishlike lips  
droop at the expectation of days to come,  
time dribbles from the corners of my mouth.  
The password has come too late, and being spoken  
opens more doors than one. Out in the bog  
that tussock has the look of terra firma,  
but gives way under the pressure of the foot;  
up to the knees I'd go, or up to the hips

or further, but for the bleep of my sixth sense.  
The wicket gate opens away from me, making  
retreat more difficult, maybe impossible,  
if the smell of the future should turn me off.  
I should never have signed up, never consented  
to let my name go forward. Better to live  
with oil lamps, drawing water from the well  
in iron buckets, sitting on the fence.

## *Gas, Light & Coke*

It was after we'd crossed the Royal Canal  
that we got the feel of the country's otherness,  
people so chilly they were forced to burn  
the land they lived on, chopped up into sods,  
which they had to dry in the dark wet summers.  
One day they would have consumed their smallholdings.

We by contrast were always warm and comfortable,  
looked after by the Gas, Light & Coke Company  
(whose works on Misery Hill we avoided,  
not liking the dust and the smell of sulphur).  
As we walked our setter along the front,  
discussing the heavy going at Leopardstown,

newsmens' flashes flickered across the sky,  
as though triggered by angels on the prow  
for evidence to aid the prosecution.  
A bolt stabbed the West Pier's finger tip, dousing  
the light, while boulders rolled above our heads  
and downpours soaked us, clad in tweed and voile.

Once home, the Gas, Light & Coke Co took charge,  
heated the baths, warmed up the Turkish towels  
and made ice for our preprandial drinks.  
Not that we took it for granted. Pathetic  
turf-cutters were ever in our thoughts, as  
were the confessors who kept them in order.

And the Pigeon House raised a smoky finger,  
as though advising us against disdain.  
Meantime Bray Head with a chip on its shoulder  
frowned its Pre-Cambrian frown, while it tolerated  
the chairplanes and the side-show of freaks.  
Where in the compass would salvation come from?

Round the horizon, north, south, east and west,  
the band of sky was theatrically bright  
with the cheerfulness of departing guests,  
while overhead the clouds were like a lid  
under which we citizens, rich or shabby,  
waited with disquiet, as in a stockyard.