

The Sleeve

You took your arm out of its sleeve last night
with a sigh like a train
about to exit
from York's Victorian station—
arc of cast iron, plate glass and air—
leaving so quietly it seems to disappear,
so brilliant that lunette
of expeditionary light
beyond the platforms,

so bright that hand of yours
entering the arc
of the lamp, the tweedy semi-dark
of the sleeve abandoned and falling to the floor
as a building might crumple
in the soundless shockwave
following an explosion.

A Vacant Lot, Boston

The ground is grey,
the colour of the moon through rain
and sugared underfoot
probably like the moon,

and that stadium
bobbing in the distance
somewhat out of focus
may be a moon-mooring station

on which the moon might settle,
golfball on a tee
or a round blimp netted
in case it blew away.

Up the hill in the ex-Christian church
Zen Buddhists in unison
bellow and brandish
wooden swords in a dance.

In the churchyard flourish
their zinnias, carrots, lettuce,
sunflowers, marigolds; basil,
and, among red dragons, cabbage.

In the lot there's only chicory
in crevices, more root than stem,
filaments of silvery string
and faded blue flowers.

That bitter root with its papery bloom,
it's what we'd use
for famine coffee and famine flowers
if we were on the moon.

January

Fog thumbs the wrinkles,
fuzzes roofs, telephones,
road lines, steeples,
skylines, brightnesses,
smudges the ends,
blots sheep, blobs a lit window,
the lights of an oncoming car;

varnishes paint on iron gates also,
polishes slates on roofs,
waxes pantiles,
butters tarmac,
beads the loft of wool on a coat,
frizzes hair, spangles eyelashes.

Trees that stood by the wall
rigid as shotguns
begin to rust and melt;
the walls themselves
blur and moss over.

And it is cold—as cold as Jericho—
it might as well be Jericho:
big solitary stones in fields
dislodged as though by trumpets—
the face of things remote,
a friend's whose thoughts are elsewhere,
a bad slow blocked time
when nothing works,
when zero begins to repeat
zero, zero, zero.