**Mercies**

It was a difficult year.

As could be expected, frost

seized

the fields and

promptly lost its hold.

Figuring them

in patterns that could not be read

as he knew he had once had the power

to read them before.

Struggling each morning

over a burgeoning maze of

ice, crammed with the stems of

useless vegetation

and–down in one corner

a solitary crocus. The unreadiness of which

troubled him with nagging disproportion.

-

For many nights, he lay below the eaves

on the bed he had kept since childhood

and thought about the burden of the land

which, alongside other fleeting things;

robins, battling with a ferocity

incongruent to their size–

the steady reliability of returning cows

lending their breath to the evening

had compelled him to witness

the terrible and unspoken diminishment

of his parent’s strength.

The swiftness of its passing only matched

by the slowly mounting bitterness

of barely weathered winters.

-

But things were not always as linear

as it seemed that they would be. When the frost

came back

and this time did its job–

blanketing the fields

with a patent uniformity of bleakness

It seemed that he was able to find, or was provided with

only under condition of that extremity

some lingering reminder of a sweetness.

-

He felt it, some days

in things as unassuming as the light

mustering itself

for one last burst of intensity

over a colourless sky

and, on others

through the quiet observation of his father.

-

Noticing in him

some reservoir of undiluted strength

kept, only for the most demanding

of physical tasks.

Or, on another occasion

after the frost had melted for a second time

the cautious re-assumption of a reverence

with which he approached the space

three stalls down from the store.

Accustomising its resident

to the startling coldness of a metal disc

and moving its surface to sound

the unwavering presence

of two neat calves;

hammocked in blood

under the ilium

which jutted like a blade

in lonelier seasons.

**Learning**

Coming in, the brightness of those lights

ranged in silent rows—great swathes of fire

shimmering their way

 to the quiet inconclusion

of the shadows in Ardale lane

was heightened, even then

by some unnameable aspect of the evening air

to the perfect epitome of heartbreak.

-

It is a lasting blueness—

 steady as the dogs

that warm their worn-out bones

 at hunting sites, and sites for burning flesh

and the poorly lit margins

of historical advancements.

Variations of which

 might be seen to lurk

in faded reproductions

of spaces evocative of romance.

-

Boulevards, perhaps

 or the borders of café squares.

-

Or—with more useful relevance

to the purposes of our example

some well-known minor impressionist’s

most celebrated image of a street scene

in the foreground of which

 from under a growing exhaustion

a woman lifts her glass.

The artless precision of her movement

muddied into check

 by something like a pall;

of terror, or watered chalk.

-

It was in similar straits

 that my father and I

sat in careful thought

in a far corner of the Eagle.

 My father was weeping then—

in such a way that only I could see

after the memory of a friend.

The reckless and impossible hope

of his own bright start

lost to a length of rope

in some bitter and long-gone corner

of the family home.

-

 Optical science suggests

 that many of the capabilities of human sight

 should be as impossible

 as witness accounts

 of certain religious miracles.

But still my father’s tears

carried on falling. Flowing freely then

over the ash-scarred surfaces of our table.

And might have been accused

 for sake of an easier out

of lessening his ability to protect me

from the mysteries of his grief

or the curious and visibly important men

who hurried around our table.

-

But I have never really been convinced

by such tired-out notions

as the finitude of grace

 and I was already lost—

in the details of a painting

 years and years away

from the pressures of linear time

 and something my mother had said

about the methods some little-known ceramicist had employed

in order to fuse the skeletons

of anaesthetised mice

into a setting glaze.