

1.1 Syon Lane (1988)

Wallflowers shouted
from the immaculate beds
when first I knew it;
prize-laden, garlanded
with breath of the May-mown field,
Syon Lane was strung, a bright bead
on the fast and lispig track to Waterloo.

Poplars, tall custodian trees
caressed the sky and relayed
urgent whispers of the evening wind.
Young Raj, with the fleck in his brown eye,
presided in his station-master's cell
until that bright and dismal day
when the frail trajectory of his life
intersected with the fast up-train.

Till then the wolves still circled in the woods,
good order still prevailed –
the strutted bench embraced us
on those summer evenings: on
winter nights the gas-hearted room
cocooned some six or more.
But with Raj's going
the back of it seemed broken
and one by one the elements gave way:
the bench betrayed its function
to serve at last the eye alone,
a bare frame of calligraphic scrolls,
the panes, the signs, the locks – all,
all yielded to conspire
in the bitter slide to entropy.

And now the wolves themselves are gone.
Bare bones are left
where the summer wind
disturbs the nettle-heads waist-high,
the poplars lost their heads last year –
with shattered stems and branches splayed
they neutrally await
the final equilibrium.

And I again await, with sharpened ear
to catch that moment when
the iron rail sings to the impending train,
and I am borne away.

Gillette Corner – 1988