

SWATI RANA
TO COW

We live by different imperatives.
You make me laugh, because nonchalant, because
tagged in daisy-yellow you poke your head to
one side. Your moo is
so understandable, a genial sound of want and
satisfaction. You scratch yourself
surprisingly like a dog.
Your hooves squelch winter mud. Near vertical
you maintain on hillsides your impassive
balance. Sometimes you look puzzled.
Yours is busy work in the fallow under the broad oak
with your kith, your friendly
bovine circle. The shitcakes
tenderly dot the landscape. Always the grass
is hanging from your lower lip
like an endearment. I try not to
think. I think I can
not think what it means to write now
to cow afield.

THE CONDUCTOR

He is a man wearing age
like a uniform to be removed
at day's end,

affirming our destination as if
we are lost when we lose
our ending,

fervid collector of ticket stubs,
complaints, five pesetas
and change—Charon's

over-particular cousin,
driven to conceit
as if it were the gods

who chose him.
He thinks the little red train will stop
before he does.

BAG LADY AT THE TATE

When I sat down beside her I smiled
with a contemporary warmth.
After all, we were in the Tate Modern
and she was looking at a book

of Mondrian. We sat in the yellow square
of his painting, translucently boxed, looking out
at reflections of ourselves, pretending
to look at art. Beyond the window

in a large hall before us
rose a hundred-foot spider,
languidly cast, eggs emerging.
In its shadow she turned

(Mondrian still nailed to the table)
and scurried to the far corner
to pick up her bags.
I looked at her

as I might
a lesser-known painting
by Picasso, unremarkable
but for the famed artist.

So she was:
ordinary (till her bags
found her), unmade
by the bold artistry of the street.