

Melpomene, Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Muse of Tragedy

all that is left of her
 is this giant bronze head
half-submerged listing
like a shipwreck at the surface
 of the waterlogged lawn

her patina of cyan and ferozah
her cicatrices budding
silver pyrite and the rain's
 incessant chorus
 etching her skin

each night she hoists herself
 from her soggy bedding
gropes for xanax diazepam
 only to look
down at herself again

 her gravity-ridden body
still humming her drugged-dumb song
of civilization and carbon
 urn of her skull
 subsiding into soil

 under the thrum
 of her delirium
she can just about make out
microscopic eggs
 the ticking of ongoingness

Tardigrades

They are the scale of pollen,
bodies swollen as if stuffed
with fluffy down,
eyes tufted in, mouthparts,
puckered stems, spigots.

They barrel through soil,
stubby legs suspended
from bivvy-bag torsos
that concertina in an atmosphere
of green cells, jewells of dew.

Moss-dwellers, slow-steppers,
drifting like spaceships
amongst galaxies of spores —
survivors of extinctions,
of fireterror.

We blast them to outer space,
and still they persist,
ikons of earth-law —
yet despite the myth
are not immortal, nor our saviours.

Leopard Slugs

Limax Maximus

Back late we find you on your nightly raids
gliding through our space like a freight

train, grazing on the fallen odds of our home.
Mottle-robed wizards of the small hours,

you are all tenterhooks for what's ahead,
true visionaries, your gestures extend beyond

your bunkers to a patience, so what then,
hermaphrodites, do you make of love?

— like sweethearts, you lick and pet with the slack
pouch of your mouths, then climb and climb to the

highest branch, unspool a mucus rope, tumble
down in a pirouette, helixed, balletic —

eddy into a trance, a seance,
swapping the code, the difference.

Fall

Forget the opalesque
rays and orbital
glitter, god really
looks like a gutter,
not the newly-
fitted kind but one
that's haemorrhaging
leaf litter, bulging
with sky-mulch
and summer scum
and every now
and then a rat
shimmies down
testing its length —
these are your gods
attached to every
house, unnoticed,
siphoning
the heavens of
rain so the rain
might find
a throat