Cold Pastoral

Ted Kooser*

*Iowa State College
Cold Pastoral

Ted Kooser

Abstract

Beneath these weeds, within this swollen knoll, Entwined by rasping roots, a somber mole...
Beneath these weeds, within this swollen knoll,
Entwined by rasping roots, a somber mole
Puffs upward, blindly chewing through the lace
About an ancient wrist; with measured pace
He tiptoes, muses by a yellowed bone,
And violates the barren breast alone.
The coffin sighs as spring convulses earth.
Above, the haw buds burst, now brought to birth
By this, the singing season on the mound.
(Neglecting homage, licking from the ground,
The silence gasps of thawing liquid breath;
Beneath the blooming hawthorn bush hides death.)
The sky slips swiftly through the withered wreath,
The mole, ecstatic, sniffs the gold-rimmed teeth,
The gate bangs haughtily against the rails,
The milkweed rattles emptily and wails
At headstones, bleached and tipsy, end on end;
The snow melts back, the grasses stretch and blend
Their little noises with the lapping air
That licks the breathing earth and swings a pair
Of chickadees upon a hawthorn twig;
The mole, unnoticing, has grubs to dig.
A sparrow, flitting groundward, pecks the stone,
Aware of something earth-bound and alone;
Below, the ground-swell knocks the jaw ajar,
The mole, wet-backed and panting, hears the far
Resplendent thud, and scurries back to see
What enemy has crept beneath his tree.