**Tracts on a city life**

*For (and after) Rosemary Tonks*

You cannot sleep. Time swings its slow censer.

Rain clatters steel toecaps on rattling glass.

Yesterday’s crumpled thoughts lie strewn about,

unfolded, because the drawer where they belong

won’t shut, for something long stuck at the back.

Born half-orphan, half-mourning herb,

the full label flung around your neck too soon, too suddenly.

What a strange, haphazard city the mind is!

The old part huddled round its church of learned behaviour,

that darkened house always to be run past, and both now

hidden in a tangled web of odd, unplanned developments.

If you are lost (compassless), with sun, moon, stars

all unreachable, you must follow those tracts dropped

at your feet by corvids, the scribble of the river, bells.

No quick ascent to high hopes when lifts are broken.

Instead, a long climb up flights of stairs, where nicotine niches

hit out at each turn, and old breath still huffs about on landings.

Everything looks different in monochrome light.

Cup rings, or the ghosts of burst bubbles,

blighting once vigorously-polished wood?

Try as you might, you cannot wash out

the incense of rare things burning,

nor shake from memory their smouldering ashes.