At the Museum of Funeral History

Craig Beaven
CRAIG BEAVEN

AT THE MUSEUM OF FUNERAL HISTORY

In the back, encased in glass,
on a pedestal like a shrine: the original filament
from JFK's eternal flame:
thin wire heated by electric,
gas breath sighs over, igniting,
just a coat hanger or piece of trash, filament
from his original fire. A strand of genes
is also a filament,
holding your blood's
code, the element

that will form
your bones. How many wept at this fire?

Who came to pour their lament—
and then it began to falter, new element

installed, this one boxed up,
sealed in its own coffin,

we no longer even know
what these elements

help us remember: They have the programs
from Lincoln's funeral—small element

of history; they have the bill of sale
for McKinley's embalming, fiber
weave paper burning yellow at the edges.
A new two inch wire filament

burning at Kennedy’s grave,
surviving the elements,

wind ruffles its glow, snow melts in a circle, rain
cannot douse its light. You must know

by now what I’m talking about.
You must know what I mean by filament,

element, strand of DNA. In one there is a thin wire flame
at a grave in Virginia. The other heats up

inside a bulb, and the bulb—frosted—emits light.
In one it is all the elements

that make a body. In another, it is all the elements
that do not.