

– like fifteen minutes at a bus-stop – if as casually as my glib wave, when something moves from my hand, or the road receding in the driver’s mirror, we are gone?

Suddenly it’s beyond me:
how I’m turning my thoughts to the bird or two in the bush
and to all the fish in the intervening sea.

The Miracle of F6/18

Walking with him was like walking somehow in shadow.
The sun went out of her way to keep us in the dark.
Once, I was told, as he was entering a friend’s house
the lightbulbs – even the fridge’s – exploded in splintering hail.
And it should have been easy had he not broken every rule
like when I awoke – I had laboured, his little handmaiden! –
to find him by the bedside: his face, in a kind of cloud,
was the face of a stranger; and so I dozed again,
and so I woke – to find him, in negative, lying
– like the Turin Shroud – on this white sheet of my memory.

My Dream Mentor

My dream mentor sits in his room overlooking the city.
He can see the far swell of the Pentlands, the folk milling below
hapless as maggots. So we sit there in silence
like a couple of kids in the bath, till he says:

If you can’t be a prodigy, there’s no point trying.
Don’t fall for the one about the drunk, queuing in Woolworths,
who tells you his Gaelic opus was seized by the state.
If you can fashion something with a file in it for the academics
to hone their malicious nails on – you’re minted.
And another thing, don’t write about anything
you can point at.

What You Get

Two roads diverge in South Gyle Industrial Estate
and you would take the one less travelled by
if it were not, you think, possibly the cul-de-sac
where the snack vans park at night, or where the trucks
are moored, fed and watered, after their delivery
of precious things.

One afternoon you watch
as a host of Styrofoam balls comes billowing through
and covers the close: a great Andrei Tarkovsky
slo-mo, and you’re pleased with it –
its basic wage, take-what-you-get epiphany.

LEONTIA FLYNN

Perl Poem

Surrounded by bric-à-brac – mugs of stale coffee and old manuals –
Lawrence works at his desk.

His computer screen burns like a Cyclops’ eye. He is writing pro-
grams

for drinks companies in Dublin – helping keep Ireland, North and
South, awash with hooch.

```
while ( <FHND> ) { s/\x0a/\x0d\x0a/g; push( @m_arr,  
Hio:parse( $_ ) ); }...; he writes,  
for ( $_; $_ < @m_arr; $_++ ) { print FHND $m_arr  
[ $_ ]; }.
```

Programming language, he says, is no dry, fussy abstraction. There’s
tremendous wit

in its usage: the elegance of Perl – Edwin Morgan’s ‘great, final
ease of creation’

in tuning the lines most perfectly to their function. It’s not science
fiction.

It’s not like: *If we can just hack into the mainframe of the computer
we should be able to upload the virus on to the mothership.*

And it's not like poetry; it doesn't log out or go off into the ether
freighted only with itself;
it walks a network of roads, getting dust on its feet and saying hi
to people –
sub cZap { my \$sig = shift; &cleanup; die "Recd:
SIG\$SIG\n"; } \$SIG{ INT} = \&cZap; –
It doesn't hover over the country – like poetry does – like a special
effect.

The Myth of Tea Boy

Every evening, at the same time, Tea Boy comes into the shop
and orders his regular, please. If he thinks he is getting Earl Grey
and the brew in our teapot is sometimes, more or less, Tetley,
then nobody acts the wiser; the fronts on the Golden Mile,
their windows rinsed by the sun, go on cranking out their
awnings
and espresso machines – and we'll act like we're in diners
from everyone's favourite Hopper poster, Nighthawks.

All of the waitresses, and even some of the waiters, secretly
believe
it is to see her, or to see him, in particular, that every evening
Tea Boy pays this call. His cup rests on the intersection
of four or five sideways glances from our busy spots round the
floor.

As the room fills up with 'Eternal Flame': the cover version, on
the radio,
and, floor to ceiling, the last of the summer light, we also know
for as long as this pose is held we won't spill a single drop.

The Furthest Distances I've Travelled

Like many folk, when first I saddled a rucksack,
feeling its weight on my back –
the way my spine
curved under it like a meridian –

I thought: Yes. This is how
to live. On the beaten track, the sherpa pass, between Kraków
and Zagreb, or the Siberian white
cells of scattered airports,

it came clear as over a tannoy
that in restlessness, in anonymity:
was some kind of destiny.

So whether it was the scare stories about Larium
– the threats of delirium
and baldness – that led me, not to a Western Union
wiring money with six words of Lithuanian,

but to this post office with a handful of bills
or a giro; and why, if I'm stuffing smalls
hastily into a holdall, I am less likely
to be catching a Greyhound from Madison to Milwaukee

than to be doing some overdue laundry
is really beyond me.

However,
when, during routine evictions, I discover

alien pants, cinema stubs, the throwaway
comment – on a Post-it – or a tiny stowaway
pressed flower amid bottom drawers,
I know these are my souvenirs

and, from these crushed valentines, this unravelled
sports sock, that the furthest distances I've travelled
have been those between people. And what survives
of holidaying briefly in their lives.