

Nathanael David O'Reilly

Bayswater

Returning to my girlfriend's
after searching
all day for work
I find my backpack
abandoned
on the front steps

The note pinned
to the side-pocket
unnecessary – the message
clear – *Went out for drinks*

Last night I lay
on a couch in the corner
of her flatmate's room
facing the wall attempting
sleep while he loudly
enjoyed the favours
of his Swedish girlfriend

Under the weight of my luggage
I shuffle down Queensway
towards Kensington Gardens
in search of a quiet place to lie

Canadian Drinking Sessions

For J. B.

Discussing poetry in hotel bars
in Montreal, Toronto & Calgary
we drank whiskey & argued
ceremonially about who would pay

Drinking pints in Toronto
summer sun - outside English
pubs on streets with Scottish
names - our hemispheres merged

Churchill's Black Dog

Bitten by the black dog
in London, I made a call
to another hemisphere
where a former lover
suffered me kindly
and convinced me to discard
the bag of white powder
I was too weak to refuse
in the toilets at The World's End

Walking from Fulmer to Gerrards Cross

Uphill all the way
blue hands clench
deep inside coat pockets

shoulders hunch forward
as Antipodean melodies
crackle through headphones

drops of misty rain
bead on a woollen scarf
droop from earlobes

low grey foreign skies
smother lush green fields
bisected by the motorway

cracked leather boots squeak
faded corduroy trousers swish
aging knees and ankles crack

farm buildings and cottages
double-storied detached houses
behind stone walls and hedges

yield to former council estates
modest semi-detached dwellings
petrol stations and pubs

on the High Street
cafés restaurants boutiques
huddle together

face each other
on the way
to the railway station

Daylesford

Dressed in a three-piece suit
purchased from an op-shop,
you recited Auden's "Lullaby"
as we drove from Ballarat
to your twin cottages
beside the lake at Daylesford.
While your Labrador panted
by the fire, we sipped tea
and browsed a book
on Australian art, pausing
to examine pages devoted
to your late father's work.
Wearing Hard Yakka overalls,
your partner joined us, pregnant
with the child you conceived
on the slopes of Mount Franklin.
After we finished our drinks,
you took me next door
to your other cottage,
where I was stunned to find
every room full of books.
You found *The English Patient*,
told me it won the Booker
and insisted I read it, that contrary
to our lecturer's belief, literature
published after 1950 is worth reading.
Sixteen years later, I returned
and found a bookstore beside the lake,
but couldn't find a trace of you.