

Gerald Dawe

**MICKEY FINN'S
AIR**



Gallery Books

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Each day's light has more significance these days.

— Frank O'Hara

Déjà vu

Terence Chartres Bradshaw 1932-2006

I should say first of all that the Bank of Ireland
on the corner of North Street next to where your pal
Carly's mother ran the photographic studio
we all went to for annual portraits until that stopped,
in the '60s, that that wonderful art deco
building, is closed and boarded up, the doors
scrawled over — what would you expect after
all the mayhem? — and the Grand Central Hotel

you used to frequent in the snazziest of snazzy suits,
the film star look — it went years ago, alas,
replaced by the dire shopping mall, no GPO,
no grand hotel, just the date stones of buildings
laid in the nineteenth century when the city was all Gothic,
and your mother and father were conceived and started
to make their way towards each other and, by the time
you came about, the wars began, 'The less said the better'.

Now, a short life later, at the drop of a hat,
a mere seventy years on, you go and bow out on us,
the messenger boy, the boy entrant, the spark, the dancer,
the chatter-upper, the dab hand, the butterfly, the only boy —
you go and push off with no fly-past, no 'Dam Busters',
but an unceremonious last tour to your old school,
your old buddies like boys again in the Forces,
the white cuffs showing just so, the quiff,

the breast pocket handkerchief,
and always the laugh (the jaded look came later),
sitting where I am now, your feet jive
to the music of time, swivelling this way and that,
on the steps one day of the Central Library
you approached me and my mates —

'My uncle Terry', a whiff of drink taken in McGlade's,
your grandfather's spot, or Hercules of the horseshoe bar.

Daydreams and marijuana in the Waterworks,
tripping down Limestone Road,
the RUC band playing in Alexandra Park,
lying stretched out in the Grove,
for that was the Summer of Love,
blue skies all the way from Napoleon's Nose to Scrabo,
cadging admission to the Small Faces,
Pink Floyd in the Ulster Hall, Hendrix in the Whitla —

and hearing your step in late,
about four in the morning, the light in the back room
had started to spill from ceiling to floor,
in your wake cigarette smoke and aftershave,
like it was only yesterday: women pushing huge prams,
men in suits with lunch boxes and, of course,
The Sky at Night, which I will never forget,
from my little perch, my secret eyrie at the top of the house.

But no one asked after you, or said hello,
they just kept on — and who would blame them,
in the squalls of rain before the sunlight came
along with a sudden gust up North Street and down by
discount shops and ragged car parks and the view
all the way to where we once lived like everyone else,
or so we thought, swimming away in our own underworld,
the Czech vase in the bay window, the sunblinds,

the grandfather clock on the landing, waking up
in arctic bedrooms to milky skies and freezing mornings,
everyone heading to work, on packed buses —
could it have been so, through autumn and winter,
spring and summer? — women sitting on spruce porches

in behind their front gardens, and the kids,
like a breed unto themselves, hanging out down the back,
when the nights lengthened and you'd arrive in

from somewhere very different from this orderly world
that's gone now — like you collapsed in a heap
on the bathroom floor, like you acting the lig,
'Who goes there?', like the pop of the gas fire
being lit in Granny's bedroom,
the white columns that turned sky-blue,
the scraggy nights of racing clouds,
the kitchen lights going on, one after another

at the same time, the shadows on the ceiling,
the shining car parked where it shouldn't have been,
the sound of someone whistling down the lane
and the whole thing starting up all over again,
every morning without fail, come sun, rain or hail,
without you or me, without the blink of an eye,
the blinds drawn for mourning —
that's what should have been done,

all the way down the gardens and avenues,
just for you who'd sailed through,
schmoozing with the best of them until demob came
with the banner WELCOME HOME
and you're back on Civvy Street . . .
That day I swear I saw you all of a sudden,
the weather turned from foul storm cloud
to brilliant sunshine like a flash of light

and in a second gone as we beetled along
to the megastores in one-time fashion houses,
the fast food outlets on the mosaic ground floors,
the medical hall, the Ulster Club, the Scottish Prudential,

the red brick luminous in the falling rain,
stumbling up the stairs in fits of laughter,
gone like all the people dressed for the part,
gone like a ship slipping out to sea into the dark,

gone like that Easter break, rolling eggs down
the hillside until they smashed to smithereens,
the long silence of Sunday afternoons,
the foghorns blasting in the New Year,
the slow erosions of that life into fear
by which time you had well and truly gone,
and what remains, who can ever tell? —
to see it all again — the turning in a street corner,

the light on a landing, a door that was never
quite flush, the names cut one summer
in the softened flashing of the top window,
and all the things that seem the same,
moonlight on rooftop, the shouted question,
a slow silhouetted figure that moves
across the blinds, the brazen air of early spring
as everything becomes new once more.

For Sale

Pigeons fly in and out of stone-sized gaps
in the broken windows of the old lady's home
where she lived most of the time alone.
The kids shout and gather at the spot she'd look
down upon from the landing, seeing god-knows-what
(a coalman's lorry, chimney sweep, delivery boy?)
and, in the rooms stripped bare, gas mantle, iron
fireplaces, the stair-rods like twisted joints —
nothing gives her life back to this place
but the number 70, exactly as it was
when she moved in first, striped sunblind across
the front door and the trees made it seem just right.