

Andrew Jamison

# HAPPY HOUR



Gallery Books

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*for David Park*

## *The Bus to Belfast*

An unstubbed cigarette butt — I can picture it now —  
will be smouldering at the door of Toal's.  
Between the Mace and Carman's Inn opposite  
the chapel I'll lean on the lamp-post bus stop.  
The Ulsterbus will slink down the hill  
into Crossgar on the first Thursday after Christmas.  
The hydraulic door will huff open. I'll step in.

The tenner I tender will elicit an epic *tut*  
from the part-time bodybuilder driver,  
raising the plucked eyebrows on his sunbed-seared mug.  
There'll be a hair gel smudge on the window by my seat.  
The pane's black rubber seal will be nicked to bits  
by a penknife. The backs of seats will be plastered  
in permanent pen signatures, initialled hearts,

and patches singed by cigarette lighters;  
chewing gum and misspelt taunts in Tippex.  
December sky will dazzle Carryduff. A flash of sun  
will flare first, then flicker for a while through my eyes  
as we hurtle past Pizza Hut, Winemark, then the Spar.  
We'll shuffle by Forestside. Nothing will have changed.  
That house over the graveyard will still be up for sale.

## *The Curzon*

And when the credits rolled and lights went up  
the ceiling seemed unreachable as sky.  
On either side of us was hung an ocean  
of curtained wall. And yet the building seemed  
so small, so humble from without  
as if itself some sort of optical illusion,  
some special effect, a trick of the eye  
that got us every time. And there we are:

I see us now, my mother and my sister and myself,  
late-ish, last minute for a matinee perhaps,  
all greeted by a darkened room and backs of heads,  
steady as we go along the LED-lined floor —  
each aisle a dotted runway strip  
as seats are taken, lights dimmed, minds blown.

## *Listening to Ash*

Hardly Mozart but I can't beat it,  
can't knock these tunes that take me back, track after track,  
wherever I am (Dalston, Glasgow, Fife)  
to this road and that lay-by and every ditch  
and field that line the way to Killyleagh  
and it's 'Girl from Mars', 'Goldfinger',  
'A Life Less Ordinary' and 'Uncle Pat'  
and 'Jesus Says', 'Kung Fu', 'Oh Yeah' and 'Shining Light'.

And there I am, on the bus heading home from school,  
and there's the telephone exchange, Mullan's bar,  
the cricket club and then the Quoile, its greenery,  
the swampy underpass that is the river  
running through the bridge, the bridge, there's the old bridge.  
Adolescence summed and summoned up by a riff.

## *Afternoon*

I knew the afternoon was coming to a close —  
and it's alright that you weren't there with me —  
as I made out a star from my window.  
But that was fine. There is no afternoon  
that can go on forever, no sky permanently orange;  
no plane hangs in the air halfway to wherever,  
no jet stream and no cloud eludes the laws of water,  
no smoke rejoins the first flame of the fire,  
no tree with no leaf that falls over and over  
through a world where it is always afternoon.  
Afternoon — the word itself is easy on the ear  
full of soft *f* and those, those slowed up *os*  
that melt away to nothing on the tongue.  
We love it because it leaves us, becomes evening.

## *Valerie*

You'd been asleep and missed the tea and coffee cart.  
Through the carriage it was all sunlight and quiet

(I'd been rubbing the sleep out of my eyes)  
as both of us missed the minute's silence

that Sunday morning. Glasgow to Edinburgh.  
And you were wearing what I took for a pashmina;

breath-taking, while wreaths were laid round cenotaphs  
at Passchendaele, Marseilles, Nice, Nantes, Ypres.