

## THREE POEMS



*Peter Sirr*

### THE BEAUTIFUL ENGINES

Seeing at last into the heart of things,  
I could have stayed all day  
hunched over a milkshake in the burger bar  
watching the doorstop grip the door, marvelling

at all that came together there: the inclined plane in action,  
the upward and the downward pressure, the friction  
holding the wedge to the floor.

I was trying to be exact, I was trying to lean  
a little farther in.  
The children's book I bought today,  
tells me how things work: the lock, the key, the plough, the  
hoover.

There's a page  
for the city splayed before me like a toy,  
full of holes and the brightly coloured engines  
which make, then fill, the holes

as there must be, flapping in my skull,  
for the king eider seen off Brow Head, the scarlet rosefinch on  
Rockabill,  
Baird's sandpiper seen last evening (Fri) in Ballycotton

flocking in daily error to my computer,  
fluttering their names as I log on,  
with dates and times, with exact locations,  
colliding with each other,

with the fridge churning in the kitchen,  
with the water pistol, the dishwasher, the fire extinguisher,  
with Des and Margaret, flown home from Cyprus

to wagtails on the north slob,  
announcing their engagement *en route*,  
with my face pressed close to the book  
as if something might fly out from it

it would have been terrible to miss:  
an engine released at last from its name  
to flicker like lightning in the brain,  
the valves of the planet looming through glass—

#### CITY

A white ship glamouring the river,  
the Custom House blazing its granite poise  
in the wrong place, the lit stones full of themselves,  
but a few paces on an elevated bridge obscures the view—

*Sometimes the word is stone and sometimes water.  
Sometimes to go home is to find it swells the room  
as if the city had poured in  
such beguiling distances everything is touched  
across the longest street, the widest river.*

At the pawnshop auction  
a hair-dryer, an identity bracelet, a saxophone  
and the gavel snapped down:  
a kind of salvation, pledge  
by pledge the city redeeming itself.

*Sometimes it is the whole population of want,  
a furious traffic,  
and sometimes the very stones are needy  
begging us to listen.*

Monumental  
security industry  
—from rooftops, bearing spears,  
the statues watch,  
barring ascent.

*Sometimes you think you have it  
and it vanishes, sunk behind stone,  
revealing nothing,  
and sometimes we vanish, scattered everywhere,  
as if it had lifted its head from the river  
and shaken us loose.*

The sea leaks in:  
a dolphin coiling  
over the door of Dolphin House,  
fish gaping from lampposts on the bridge  
to where freight  
thunders in, thunders out.

*Sometimes you can say it and it stays.  
Sometimes a million mouths make the sound  
and you stop dead, failing to comprehend.*

Fully illustrated, fully described  
but sometimes the briefest line,  
the last lot a gent's watch  
no sooner flourished than acquired.

## SHIRTS

To visit him was to be assailed by ghosts, angels, rumpled souls;  
was

to feel the airy giddiness of his life.

His shirts were everywhere, all white, bought by the dozen on  
trips home.

Where was that?

No one knows: the place of the white shirts and an old pickup  
truck, fondly remembered.

On the floor, cellophane wrappers, collar stiffeners, pins.

Clean shirts hung in light, dirty ones by the door, and these, in  
need of ironing.

The room flaps, about to fly, to be lifted by a decisive gust into  
the heavens.

They are parachutes, tents, flares sent up to say

I'm here, and here, and not distressed: send shirts and money.

Where is he now?

This town, that town, in the place of a thousand shirts.

Standing in class, sweat marks under his arms, pointing at the  
board.

He is wearing his one tie, chalky and fading.

He has moved on, dropping shirts on the way.

They flock to the air, they fly north and south.

Sometimes at night we wake in them, we spill out the bedroom  
window.

We float, we fly across cities and oceans, we descend with great  
slowness.

No one knows where we are.