

quotations from train poems et al.
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1. from William Langland, *Piers Plowman* (translation)

But on a May morning on Malvern hills,
 A marvel befell me of fairy, methought.
 I was weary with wandering and went me to rest
 Under a broad bank by a brook's side,
 And as I lay and leaned over and looked into the waters
 I fell into a sleep for it sounded so merry.

2. from Hippolyte Taine, *Carnets de Voyage*

Alone in the compartment I have spent three of the sweetest hours I have experienced in a long time....I was alone in my carriage...the wheels rolled on indefatigably, with a uniform noise like that of a prolonged roaring note played on an organ. **All mundane and social ideas faded from my mind.** No longer did I see anything but the sun and the countryside, in bloom, smiling, all green and with a greenness so various and illuminated by that gentle rain of warm beams that caressed it.

3. Michael Longley, 'The Rabbit' (published February 2000)

I closed my eyes on a white horse pulling a plough
 In Poland, on a haystack built around a pole,
 And opened them when the young girl and her lover
 Took out of a perforated cardboard shoe-box
 A grey rabbit, an agreeable shitty smell,
Turds like a broken rosary, the slow train
Rocking this dainty manger scene, so that I
 With a **priestly forefinger** tried to tickle
 The narrow brain-space behind dewdrop eyes
 And it bounced from her lap and from her shoulder
 Kept mouthing 'prunes and prisms' as if to warn
 That even with so little to say for itself
 A silly rabbit could pick up like a scent trail
My gynaecological concept of the warren
 With its entrances and innermost chamber,
Or the heroic survival in Warsaw's sewers
 Of just one bunny saved as a pet or meal,
 Or its afterlife as Hasenpfeffer with cloves
 And bay leaves, onions - enough! - and so
 It would make its getaway **when next I dozed**
 Crossing the Oder, somewhere here in Silesia
 (**Silesian lettuce, h'm**), never to meet again,
 Or so I thought, until in Lodz in the small hours
A fat hilarious prostitute let that rabbit bop
 Across her shoulders without tousling her hair-do
 And burrow under her chin and nuzzle her ear
 As though it were crooning 'The Groves of Blarney'
 Or 'She Walked Unaware', then in her cleavage
 It crouched as in a ploughed furrow, ears laid flat,
 Pretending to be a stone, safe from stoat and fox.

4. Bernard O'Donoghue, 'The Rainmaker' (composed c. 1992)

In the café at Crewe, you can still feel
 The old excitement of trains: a stranger's
 Eye-contact, held guiltily too long.
 But as the Bangor train-time approaches,
 Gradually the glamorous melt away
 For Lime Street, Euston or Piccadilly.
 You take your seat alone, half-reading the paper.

At the second stop a man - knocking on:
 Seventy if he's a day - steps carefully
 Into the seat across from you,
 With neat cap and blue Everton scarf.
 He reaches inside his gaberdine mac
 And pulls out a small book. I can see,
 Without peering too obviously,
 That it is the poems of Dafydd ap Gwilym
 In Welsh. His lips begin to move;
 His eyes never lift again. He must be
 Going to Bangor too. Celtic Studies Dept.?
 But no: at Colwyn Bay, above the caravans
 And idle fairground stuff, he folds the book
 Back inside his scarf and off he goes.

And at that moment – 4:30 p.m.,
 On Friday, January the thirteenth –
 The bleared weather that effaced
 The long and horizontal English midlands
 Gives way to reaching bird-filled shores
 Where ringed plover vies with lapwing
 To catch your breath against the latening sun.

5. Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, 'The Binding' (pub. 2015)

When the train stops at the station he stands up,
 moves to the corridor window, looks out and up
 at a stone house quite close to the line.
 With a stumbling ruin behind it, how it intrigues—
 a view suggesting it belongs here,
 and yet holds something strange. When I ask,
 he says, Yes, I lived there once. I admire
 the plain reticent outside. Yes. And do
 people live there now? Oh yes, he says,
 they have to stay, they have the bindery
 and the herd. All that is still going on,
 and as long as they stay there nothing will change.
 You can see the big press for flattening the books in the shed.
 Or at least I can, because I know it is there.

6. from Gerald Dawe, 'Ron's Place' (pub. 1999; revised 2012)

And I fall back to sleep,
 this time in a couchette,
 listening to the wheels brace and tack
 to miles and miles of railway track.

At one station –
 its long name in black and white,
 the row of lorries parked in
 a yellowish light from the waiting room –

the deadpan voice announces
 where we are and where we are going next
 as we arrive and depart
 the all-night factories, the cubist blocks

of flats, the shapes of installations
 in the darkness, snowy embankments,
 sidings, cranes, sheds,
 and then nothing again.

The wheels at my head,
 the door double-locked.
 The countryside flees
 and I wake with a jolt.

7. Vona Groarke, 'The Galway Train' (pub. 2014)

From it, it's possible, possibly,
 to translate a shadow's down payment
 on the side of a hill

to a blatant future where one could admit
 'I was in love' or 'I was younger then'
 to be nothing more or less credible than

the throb of ragwört, excitable windows,
 a sincere line of rowans by the road.

A field's intake of breath
 could be the thing.

I think that what I make of it,
 is rampant privacy,

a way of extending
 what I see to be true
 past this specific urgency,

this journey slipping out, like twine,
 of a knot that does not take

to, for a finish,
 the kind of promise
 a field of buttercups / can make.

8. from Seamus Heaney, 'The Flight Path' (pub. 1996)

The following for the record, in the light
Of everything before and since:
One bright May morning, nineteen-seventy-nine,
Just off the red-eye special from New York,
I'm on the train for Belfast. Plain, simple
Exhilaration at being back: the sea
At Skerries, the nuptial hawthorn bloom,
The trip north taking sweet hold like a chain
On every bodily sprocket.

Enter then –

As if he were some *film noir* border guard --
Enter this one I'd last met in a dream,
More grimfaced now than in the dream itself
[[When he'd flagged me down at the side of a mountain road,
Come up and leant his elbow on the roof
And explained through the open window of the car
That all I'd have to do was drive a van
Carefully in to the next customs post
At Pettigo, switch off, get out as if
I were on my way with dockets to the office –
But then instead I'd walk ten yards more down
Towards the main street and get in with – here
Another school friend's name, a wink and smile,
I'd know him all right, he'd be in a Ford
And I'd be home in three hours' time, as safe
As houses ...]]

So he enters and sits down
Opposite and goes for me head on.
'When, for fuck's sake, are you going to write
Something for us?' 'If I do write something,
Whatever it is, I'll be writing for myself.'
And that was that. Or words to that effect.

9. from Heaney and Dennis O'Driscoll, *Stepping Stones* (pub. 2008)

"The account of what went on in the train is as it happened, yes. I make the speaker a bit more aggressive than he was at the time, but the presumption of entitlement on his part, which was the main and amazing aspect of that meeting, is rendered faithfully.

"It was all done pretty discreetly, actually. My interlocutor was the Sinn Féin spokesman, Danny Morrison, whom I didn't particularly know at the time. He came down from his place in the carriage and sat into the seat in front of me for maybe eight or 10 minutes ... I didn't feel menaced. It was a straightforward face-to-face test of will or steadiness

"I simply rebelled at being commanded. If anybody was going to pull rank, it wasn't going to be a party spokesman. This was in pre-hunger-strike times, during the 'dirty protest' by Republican prisoners in the H-Blocks. The whole business was weighing on me greatly already and I had toyed with the idea of dedicating the Ugolino translation to the prisoners. But our friend's intervention put paid to any such gesture. After that, I wouldn't give and wasn't so much free to refuse as unfree to accept."

10. Colette Bryce, 'The Quiet Coach' (pub. 2014)

Look, three loops from the silver locks
of my predecessor
whose journey southwards
earlier today, was a textbook
reversal of my own.

In the weirder logic of a poem
the woman is my mother
hurtling ever
backwards
through unseasonable snow.

She is steadily un-solving my Everyman
crossword, reinstating
each white space
as if in the wintry landscape
of her brain.

On arrival, all solutions
are undone. I bow my head
to the questions.

11. I come from a culture where the written word is simultaneously revered and feared. **My mother used to say, 'Put nothing in writing', which seems quite funny now in terms of my inheritance as a writer.** There's a cultural sense that writing is evidence that might be held against you...

12. Edward Thomas, 'Adlestrop' (composed 1915)

Yes. I remember Adlestrop—
The name, because one afternoon
Of heat the express-train drew up there
Unwontedly. It was late June.

The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
No one left and no one came
On the bare platform. What I saw
Was Adlestrop—only the name

And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
No whit less still and lonely fair
Than the high cloudlets in the sky.

And for that minute a blackbird sang
Close by, and round him, mistier,
Farther and farther, all the birds
Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

13. Saskia Hamilton, 'Flatlands' (composed c. 2011)

Flatlands

Horses and geese in a sodden field.
Solitaries with luggage on a wet platform.
Postage stamp house on a bit of land,
a copse, a fold, a quadrant of wood,
lines of beech, lines of poplar,
miniature commentary magnified
in the glass, winter streaking the window,
the train bearing, not bearing the weight
within. Let this be non-thought
(one thought to oneself), non-
thoughts of passengers on the way forward
backward through the hour.