Poems

Ian Saw

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Abstract
ON THE RADIO, THIS IS NOT THE ONE, THURSDAYS
there's an interview with the mother
of a young bloke
killed by the I.R.A.
in The Netherlands
by mistake
    they were deeply sorry
they said
and she is breaking down
and I am coming up
to this green light
and I can't
get in the middle lane
    in front
    someone is turning right
    but I'm not
    I'm going to get stuck
    behind them

and there's this wog
in a battered white
Nissan van
won't let me in
and I'm waving my arms
and cursing
    bloody wogs
but I accelerate
through a gap
and I catch
the amber
    and
    I wish they knew how I feel
she says.
THIS IS NOT THE ONE

you see
    head down
jabbing and hooking
weaving
and dancing
his way down Pitt
like Joe Louis

the one who somebody said
nearly fought
for a Commonwealth Title
once

and
this is not the one
with the contorted face
you hear
mouthing obscenities
so incoherently
and mysteriously
to random appalled faces
along George

and
this is not the one
whose bare
swollen
purple feet
are so rivetting
outside the Lebanese take-away
on Kent
the one who is always in the same place
and looks like Tom Waits
in Ironweed

somehow
he always has
a steaming-fresh cappuccino
and a long butt hanging from his lip

and
this is not the Asian one
Korean?
Vietnamese?

who haunts Broadway
with his beatific smile
and his magnum of champagne.

No

this one
confronts strangers
with an awful vacant shrug
on the upper
end of Castlereagh
this one's arms dangle
loosely
as he opens his hands

    palms front
    thumbs sticking out

and continually
pulls his head down
between his shoulders
and just shrugs
as if those whose paths he blocks

    momentarily

each ask him
some terrible searching question

    like
    is there a God?
    why are we here?
    do you believe in destiny?
    what about the theory of chaos?

or some other question

    repeatedly

but they only frown

    in reality

they step aside
or look at him incomprehensibly
or simply smile
and hurry on
and there are no questions

    ultimately

there is only the man
in the thin tee-shirt
denying his way along Castlereagh Street
in the brisk wind.
THURSDAYS

when the people have been paid
he plays the flute
near the base
of the escalator
at Hurstville station
where the herd
of commuters emerge
sheep from a stock-shute
most barge
past him
most ignore
or simply do not hear
or abjure
the sweet surge
and flow of notes
he executes
so perfectly
even
to a good ear
and the urger
at the cut-price
sell-out
closing-down-sale
sooper-dooper
battler's-bargain
store
bawls into
the microphone
it has a built-in
cockney accent
always
the same flat vowels
about your last chance
to buy
the tops and sweats
not at last year's price
but the year before's
eight bucks
he says
but you know he's thinking
in quids
and you bend deliberately
place
a dollar
in the flautist's hat
and
playing on
he bows
oh
gracefully
Thursdays.