

## *The Connoisseur*

When it came to happiness she was a gourmet,  
a connoisseur of small moments and extravagance.  
Like a hummingbird, free as jazz, she floated away.

She wasn't immune to love. But her need to stay  
on top of things meant she didn't rate romance  
when it came to happiness. She was a gourmet

of the ungraspable now, savouring on the spot, without delay,  
what the rest of us reheat at a bitter distance.  
Like a hummingbird, free as jazz, she floated away.

I envied her of course, which isn't to say  
her dance, her casual way, didn't leave me in a trance.  
When it came to happiness she was a gourmet.

To recognise contentment was her gift, her forte,  
sipping the nectar from selected instants  
like a hummingbird. Free as jazz, she floated away

from me with the old line: *Is there anything I can say  
to make this easier for you?* Not a chance.  
When it came to happiness she was a gourmet.  
Like a hummingbird, free as jazz, she floated away.

## *Still Life with Frozen Pizza*

*to Ger Gleeson*

I unwrapped the plastic and slid the icy disc  
onto the oven shelf. 15 minutes later, as the TV rippled

into wakefulness, the tray made a presentable still life:  
the pizza's cracked lunar surface, its pepperoni nipples,

the burnt ridge round its edge, the remote  
that liked to sit in my hand, snug as a gun

in its futuristic sleekness,  
a phaser set permanently to stun.

I navigated *Countdown*, sitcoms, pantomime wrestling,  
rolling news. Somewhere bombs were falling:

the crosshairs at the centre of the grainy video.  
A building dissolved in dust, its crater spoiling

the streetscape's geometric perfection.  
*The next one*, I thought, *will probably be pay-per-view*.

Full, I balked at the pizza's final quarter,  
then pierced its plasticky skin with a spurt of goo.

A girl bawled at the camera, weary, untranslated,  
a film of dirt on her denim, her face.

I popped the last cheese-string into my mouth, sat back  
with a quiet burp of contentment, and flicked over to *Will & Grace*.

## *Monet's War*

He must have known, when he chose to stay pottering  
about that garden he'd managed to within a lily of perfection,

when he chose to stay painting instead of evacuating,  
that the barbarians were only a few miles to the north.

One imagines he can hear the howitzers, throwing tantrum  
after tantrum at the firmament, and smell the fields that are spongy

with the tissue and fluids of wheelwrights and dentists  
dressed as soldiers, as he dodders over the Japanese bridge,

past azaleas and irises and a furnace of nasturtiums  
to the lily-pond. Stubborn old man. Why does he keep on pouring

water into canvases and just stand there staring into them,  
at marmalade water, pad-blobs, a lush and rippling turbulence?

Why shape each depthless surface of indulgence,  
each oceanic vertical puddle, in the hour of the bayonet,

now gouache is impossible, now bi-planes clatter above the garden  
and the second gardener has absconded south?

## *Breaking Even*

DEBIT

*Lower Basin Street, 17.05.02*

'The apartment blocks were stubby, tobacco-stained fingers. There was this kid in the drizzle hurling. I heard him before I saw him, the sliotar's hollow *thwock* echoing through the empty yard. There was just shit everywhere, man; empties, what might have been syringes, a rusting upturned bicycle. I mean it wasn't raining like it does in Florida but it was coming down pretty heavy and, dude, I'm telling you this guy was wearing nothing, just jeans and some kind of T-shirt. He was, like, thirteen or fourteen I guess. There was something almost attractive in the way his body flicked and twisted, in his canine scrawniness. His skin was like a shower curtain, beaded with water and almost see-through. It was one of those moments, Kelly... I could have...He was still there, taking aim, I kid you not, over and over again at a sodden election poster. The buildings' shadows...I really felt something.'

CREDIT

*Gruel, 17.05.02*

A joke archive, a grainy video about somebody's father,  
dresses that were commissioned by BT2,

photographic self-portraits by a big-titted Swede,  
brown envelopes that held nothing but an IOU,

and our young adulthood in their many colours  
(but mainly black): 'I just *adore*  
Caiomhe's new stuff' ... 'my third opening this week' ...  
'sort of; the critic as host' ...

I sipped salty wine, dreading the mention of insurance  
or house prices, of *Friends* or the word 'post',

and thought of the spilt milk and the money spent,  
our wastefulness, of all the possibilities we were sure to miss

and of course did. Will someone mention the fucking *election?*  
We might have been otherwise. We were and are like this.

I raised my glass to Dame Street beyond the window,  
to the fine diners scuttling through the rain, to wealth

and German engineering, to the rain-lashed ATM queue, the pubs,  
the Chinese girl sprinting in her Subway uniform. Your health.