

Roger Craik

SURREAL

A cylinder  
of gas on fire is roaring you  
over living seas and lands unseen.

Finger-driven down, the window blinds  
compress the cabin to a tube  
bejeweled with unrealities.

Habitual now the fearless  
petrification: the seat leaned back, your eyes  
contracted to a screen.

Decades beneath,  
the leaves, the breeze, each leaf

uniquely moving!

And suddenly, as if a benison,  
the loping languid flaps that mean

Sir Heron on the wing.

JOHN FRED (1941-2005): “JUDY IN DISGUISE, WITH GLASSES”

I was in Brennan’s in the Harbor  
shooting the smutty breeze  
with Seedy Dave the sociologist

when in came Drac,  
twenty minutes late, at least,  
stammering out that he had read

a two-paragraph obit in the Times  
for him:  
John Fred.

Christ was I aggrieved at that! Only April,  
and Miller, Bellow, Hunter Thompson and the Pope,  
and Jim Callaghan (they called him “Sunny Jim”)

all gone – and now him. Seedy Dave  
said it was a goddam motherfuckin’ shame,  
but then I started woozling his one hit song

and Dave put his dark glasses on  
right there and then in murky Brennan’s bar and  
moved them up and down with both his hands

and then set up a drumming on the table top  
with those yellowed finger ends of his and kept  
on drumming till we got all through. What Drac’s

reaction was, or what he did,  
I can’t tell you:  
I was so transported.

That’s how we commemorated him  
two days after he died:  
John Fred.

## THE COCK AND THE CHORUS GIRLS

Laughingly the driver told me how  
the stockbroker, new to the village,  
objected first to the cock, so  
inconsiderately early starting to crow,  
and then to all the cows, lowing down the road  
from byre to field.

The driver called the cows the chorus girls  
(in his mirror's view I smiled)  
and said they'd been this way, you understand,  
nigh on five hundred years.

Nigh on five hundred years. Check-in, passport control,  
and England dwindling below, obscured  
increasingly by cloud.  
I leaned back in my seat to drowse

but couldn't. The laptops glowing  
like icons in their rows. The drinks cart  
jostle-slabbing down the aisle. Everything  
surreal as usual

apart from what the driver said,  
jarring into something never meant  
of England's countryside, its very heart,  
moving in me still.

“Of course he thought that he’d gone mad”

Of course he thought that he’d gone mad, stark mad,  
when all his poems dodged his clutching hand  
and haywire dashed themselves upon his pad,  
truant from meter and the grey-ruled page.  
Askance he stared at them, and could not grasp  
that forty years of educated thought  
that questioned all but questioning itself,  
were gone, and had returned him to the boy  
whose fistful crayons, each with one bold smear,  
created sky a grass-red wave above  
the blue-beamed circle of a fire-green sun.