

Roger Craik

LOVE POEM TO AMERICA (Back in the pub, an English oaf explains the rudiments of baseball)

Wot oi mean is, meantersay, frinstunce, roight?  
Snot loike cricket, this boiseborl milarky,  
Least, not frum wot oi could tell.  
Moin jew, oi wuz pissed as arseholes in the first arf owwer  
Wot wiv orl that beer jus' porin' down me frote!  
Corsit's not *proper* beer, loike 'ere in Englund,  
But it's so bloody 'ot in 'merricuh you jus' keeps yer elber goin', roight,  
An' then yore not poxed off, fyore a discriminatin' bloke loike wot oi am.

Wot *else?* Well, for starters there's this bloody big soign, roight,  
Orl 'lectric, wot flashes fins— *listen*, will yer?—  
Workin' geezers inter a larver, artyfishul loike:  
Mister Gary Fuckin' Glitter 'imself Esquoire, woodjer bleeve,  
The one wot goes “rock 'n ro-ole, rock 'n role,”  
An' orl the wankers goes “HEY!” an' shoots their fists inter the air  
Loike it's fuckin' Nuremberg orl over again.  
Christ alive, don't people ever bloody *learn?*

Cumterfinkuvvit, dunno wossermatter wiv 'merricun blokes. . .  
There's orl that totty there, roight, jus' gaggin' for rumpy pumpy  
(Smashin' bazookas 'n orl, as Wirdswirf wooduv sed)  
Showin' the goods loike there's no tmorrer,  
(An' ow many toimes jersee a bint at cricket, eh,  
An' then they're orl so hoity-toity 'n lardy-dah  
you wood'n wanter shaggum anyway?).  
Fuck me, oi 'ad a stiffie loike the rock uv Gibfuckinraltar!

Wodjer *mean*, “the game”? Oi jus’ *told* you, didn’oi? *Didn’oi?*  
(Soime again, Alice, an’ a packet uv salt ’n vinegars.)  
Well, it’s rounders wiv knobs on, turd’n polish job.  
Everyone gets a go, seems t’mee,  
So if you balls up first toime you gets eight goes more—  
Nuffink loike real loife but that’s ‘merricuh for yer.  
Oh aye, you ’ave to ’ave a fat neck ’n spit. An’ the bloke oo chucks,  
Ee orlways looks the uvver way first: oo the blue blazes ud fall for that?

Wood oi go again? Yer ’avvn’t got the brains God gave a maggot, you blokes!  
Bloody *roight* oi’d go again! At least it’s got some *loife* to it, boiseborl, some joy de vivvy.  
Moikes you feel you can *do* fings. Any uv you cunts ’erd uv the ’merricun dream?  
Well, ooever ’erd uv the *English* dream? ’An *why not*, eh?  
Because there fuckin’ *isn’t* one, n’less you corlit a dream  
T’go down dole wivver UB40 on Monday mornin’  
An’ t’ave nuffink for cumpny evry artnoon but foive-fingered Mary and the nags on the box?  
Fyarsk me, a one-legged man at’n arse-kicking party

’As a better loife than orluv us. Lennon, John *Winstun* Lennon *hiff* you please,  
Now ee got it roight, (’part frum bein’ shot, natcherly),  
Cos ee didn’t fuckin’ fiddle when Rome started burnin’ but went’n scarpered sharpish instead.  
Scandal? Oi’ll give you scandal— oo gives a finch’s fart ’bout Gobjobgate  
Arter fifteen fuckin’ years uv fuckin’ Fatcher?  
Well, firteen then. Cmon! Jus’ *look* at us bunch! An’ take a butcher’s at this dump:  
Soime pickchers as ’uv been ’ere since me ole dad’s toime,  
Soime ole fish-oid sifflitics playin’ darts, Duran Duran. . .

## DAVENPORT

That late evening in his prime,  
once he heard his mistress' car  
go purring down the rhododendron-shrouded drive  
and disappear into the hum of Dorking Road,  
Davenport did not, as usual,  
stride up to the deep maroon  
Victorian bathtub with the lion's claws  
and turn both taps on full.  
Instead he settled down to read.

High summer, the last of twilight  
deepening around the stucco hall,  
the alabaster table lamp a jewel  
honeying the gloom. Davenport read on.  
The book was one he had not read  
in over forty years. It spoke of a wood  
named Morkery after dark, and one small boy  
alone on a railway train as it drew near  
a country station, and an old man waiting.

The known forgotten words  
in their appointed fonts.  
It seemed to Davenport as he read on  
that there had been no intervening years:  
the schoolboy's broken promise, adulthood.  
At length, from the shrubbery or nearby wood,  
one bird struck voice, and held the world.  
In due course, all the others joined, each one  
distinct to Michael Davenport, grown young.

“WE,” AND I

“We” means both of you in quiet  
unison, poem after poem sharing  
your plump capsule of a syllable  
smooth as halibut liver oil.  
What subservience of married verbs!  
(What absence of demur.)

That said,  
there’s  
me.

I term myself I—

gouged, a split-nibbed  
stripe  
gibbeting from page to retina and

bitternish,  
grallatorial,  
drawn up as if

furled to a spike  
in a brackish marsh  
of bulrushes, my beak

skewering the sky.

KINGSTON, 1978

Winter and an indeterminate time  
on Sunday afternoon, and I'm  
living with my grandparents rather than  
with Kim and Carolyn, as I had planned,  
on Putney Hill. Within an hour  
the light will start to fade. It's too late  
to stroll down Orchard Road to stare  
into lit unpeopled shops. So I'm here  
in the living room. The TV's on:  
"The Big Match" with bald Brian Moore.  
Sunderland v Middlesborough, half-time score  
0-0. All the games are yesterday's.

My grandparents' cigarettes are poised  
cylinders of ash. The ceiling blurs  
in seas of slowly-heaving smoke, like Elgar.

## FACULTY MEETING

Ripplingly, at the long  
formica table's furthest end, the Dean  
amidst her fearful friends or those  
she thinks of still as friends  
is giggling at her own conceits and it's

Monday and it's noon or almost  
certainly after. And there, oblivious,  
(they elected him Chair), sits

Drunko—Drunko of the check-stub doctorate,  
Drunko grinning his Glenfiddiched laugh  
in death's antechamber from a mouth  
rictic as a postage stamp. It's—*it is*—

imperative (as order's called and isn't),  
imperative I feign to heed  
the Halloweened, the bulleted,  
agenda sheet, portending Christ knows what;  
imperative, too, I not invoke  
shades of Hogarth, Grosz, Hieronymous Bosch,  
still less the massy veinous head,  
piranha-lipsticked, Alice Cooper green,  
that's Mussolini apoplectic,  
springing into Rome.

Beyond the airless carping room,  
beyond the swivel eyes  
concentrated to the point of spite,

spreads in quiet magnificence the college lawn  
that once a year is crowned with dandelions.  
I stand and muse.

A small-town university,  
become small-town.

I am living in a different country.  
A skein of geese goes creaking down the sky.

## 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.