

Roads to Leeds

Despite the schoolbook canal
Leeds was always far from the sea,
landlocked, a city of reverse fractals
bulging at the seams; whereas Bradford
(via Queensbury) was a regular bus ride
to the ice-rink & 'the Alhambra';
Dean Clough, Saville Park & Wainhouse Tower
unmistakeably Halifax from Beacon Hill.

Neither posh like Harrogate,
nor cherished as Oxenhope & Haworth,
Leeds *was* United: Don Revie,
Jack Charlton, Billy Bremner, Johnny Giles
& Peter Lorimer's 100 mph shot.
The death of a poet had made the news.*
David Oluwale was hounded and killed.
There were rumours about 'The Ripper'.

* John Riley

Anthony Costello

First Sight of Leeds after Leaving the M1.

Here's home
with its sleeks of glass and
polished stone. Past Bridgewater Place
where crosswinds catch wagons in their fist
and hurl them – there's a dead man would
testify to just how hard.

If he could.

Along the edge of the canal,
old wharves razed, resurrected as modern

menhirs,

the tow path a cycle-way, steel balconies,
café chairs, umbrellas, blank windows,

bell towers of finance.

The impudence of buddleia,
brazen, intimate with glossy marble,
flags of Yorkshire stone ablaze
with ragwort,

the casual indifference of water,
curling, sliding,
mocking the ponderous sky,
towing atolls of scum
and rusty sycamore leaves.

Here's home

in the company of wind and rain
and small things
like

“Gouranga”

orange graffiti on the iron blue bridge.

Lesley Quayle

A Walk Around Leeds

City loop ---Train Station
to Park Plaza Hotel
via the Pinnacle and Joules...

Poulson's 'House', Corn Exchange,
Boar, and Call Lane, the East Waterfront
(Leeds Minster)...

The Duck & Drake, Playhouse,
Quarry & Ridgate Hills,
The Wren's Hotel, The Grand Arcade...

Headrow (St John The Evangelist),
The Light, Briggate, Town Hall,
Albion Court, Commercial Street, Lands Lane.

Anthony Costello

The 7.25 to Leeds

The bus-stop 7.25 – two women, two young men, three suits, one shopping bag, four cigarettes, a headscarf, one shaved head, a hat.

No bus.

The bus-stop 7.30 – a tattooed girl, panting, out of breath. “I thought I’d missed it.” Shaved-Head lights another fag, breathes smoke and curses. “Fookin bussis always fookin late.” A nervous, shiny soft shoe shuffle from the suits and headscarf, pussyfooting round her disapproval with a huff, lips pursed, tight as a cat’s arse.

No bus.

The bus-stop 7.39 - lickspittle breeze with sleet on its tongue, sky like wet concrete, a mile of tarmac and car after car after car after car.

No bus.

The bus-stop 7.42 – queue re-united, annoyed-r-us. Early morning indifference, so well-rehearsed, shelved like a Victorian spinster. Shaved-Head offers Tattooed-Girl his Sun to keep her dry, Suits, Hat and Headscarf discuss the weather, tardy buses, local politicians with agendas. Cigarettes are proffered, offered, shared along with smiles and “thank you very much, have one of mine.” Sleet desiccates on withering gusts to specks of snow. Feet stamp, lips turn blue, perms frizz, cheeks pinch.

No bus.

The bus-stop 7.45 – two buses.

Lesley Quayle

Bus to Box B

- Sunday, 26th July, 2015

I have sung in a choir - The Phoenix Singers of Edinburgh - and attended classical music concerts but never been to a concert where a massed voice choir and orchestra performed in unison. From the opening number 'Ain't No Mountain High Enough' via the ensemble encore 'I'm Gonna Be' the orchestra of Opera North and Inspiration were licensed to thrill the audience with cinema music classics. A packed Leeds Town Hall were treated to film music from Barry and Black's 'Born Free' to Vangelis's 'Conquest of Paradise', with 'The Lord of the Rings Suite' and 'Down to the River to Pray' in between.

The music director, Gary Griffiths, allowed the choir to display a range of singing styles and approaches to songs as diverse as 'The Rose' and 'Dry Your Tears Afrika'. There were group and ensemble performances, two soloists, melodies, stab and double-speed singing, tiered harmonies. I liked the excellent alto/soprano collaboration on 'Evergreen' from A Star is Born, the understated harmony of the bass singers on 'Suddenly', the exquisite percussion section of Opera North on the emotive rendering of middle earth in 'The Lord of the Rings Suite', the high note finish by the sopranos on 'Born Free'.

A special mention for the soloist Anna Stothard who stunned the audience with her piquant rendition of 'Skyfall', and Gary Griffiths whose textured and precise conducting guided both orchestra and singers throughout; his unshowy arrangement of 'The Wind Beneath My Wings' and the clever pacing of Leonard Cohen's 'Hallelujah' stand out.

At 67 metres high, and one of the biggest buildings in the city, Leeds Town Hall does not lend itself to warm and cozy acoustics. It is a big space to fill with music even with a full orchestra and a big choir. However, the response to the choir, sleek in black and all wearing red accessories - ties, rosettes, bands, badges, roses - was adulatory and profound. Even Harry Gration, the self-styled James Bond of presenters, had a good time, but even he could not match the Italianate splendour of the interior decor, my company in Box B, or the positive effect 'Inspiration' and Opera North had on me.

Anthony Costello

The Grove Inn, Back Row, Leeds.
(i.m. Geoff Wood – 1924-2013)

(The Grove is one of the oldest folk club venues in Leeds. Geoff Wood ran the club there for years and was responsible for collecting the song 'Lish Young Buy-a-Broom')

Sacrosanct when bulldozers rolled in
to tear down visions of Victoriana,

obliterate the decomposing gravitas
of Leeds' industrial past, The Grove

still squats, scratched by ghosts,
with its reek of mill-smoke, peeling,

overpainted skin of soot and dust,
stubbing its toe on the sharp and shiny

city edges where all clocks have been
set forward. But the long dead linger,

the young strutters, old gimmers, slack
lipped over an ale, hogging the fire,

the hollow-cheeked whores, shivering,
sallow, stick-ribbed children laikking

in asbestos dust, like a fall of snow, all
unseen keepers of bygone days – watching,

listening to the tracks of years, flickerings
of decades out of reach - except for the singing,

hearts and throats thrusting frail shadows into light,
stories jostling to the front, all elbows and knees,

countless lives passed down, repeated many, many times
until we know them off by heart, their voices hanging round

the door like smoke. Inside, the folk club bar is stalled
in pre-war gloom, threadbare plush, dark wood, stained

anaglypta, shouldering the smells of damp and sweat,
a loiter of nicotine, stale beer. "We dunt sell Chardonnay

in ere. Tell yer missus it's lager or nowt." But when I've sung
my songs he calls me through, "Ah've got this bokkle under t'bar.

Reet good white wine. Geoff said yer'd like it.
Ye c'n sing me t'sleep, love, any time."

Tenderness was razored on his face. The wine burned yellow, tasted like piss,
I sipped and smiled and sipped and smiled, laid low by magnanimity.

Two years since Geoff ceased his Grove recitals, filthy monologues
and sexist, pornographic verse – even more since he came hammering

my door with scraggy pigeons asking me for pies and songs, indulging
anarchist philosophy, enraged by politicians' right wing bending,

Thatcher's children. I soothed him with 'The Durham Lockout,'
'Workers Song,' 'Parcel of Rogues.' He flattered me with

"just like Maddy Prior" lies, then drank more tea, devoured more cake,
expounded detailed histories of the IRA, Karl Marx and Ghandi,

radical, reactionary, old and lonely, fading like a discarded newspaper,
torn pages everywhere. Around the Grove, the River Aire exhales

a corridor of fog, time shrinks, the modern towers rubbed out
as old ghosts meet beneath the unquenched lamps to sing their choruses.

*"For she was right, I was tight, everybody has their way,
It was the lish young buy-a-broom that led me astray."*

Lesley Quayle

NEAGU

(at the Henry Moore institute)

from Romania to Leeds
via
starhenge & cabinet curiosities,
from human cake man
to full-on tornado,
from one empty brain cell
signifying the amygdala in ceramic
to the subject: generator
to the subject: dash
to the subject: I
from the mystery of
Nine Catalytic Stations
to the palpable joy of the blind

Wood
Metal
Paper
Card
Glue
Tape
Leather

take a material bite,
feel the temple activity,
hear (Hitchcockian?) music,
smell bread, taste polenta

steps to door, door to hall, hall to stairs, stairs to bridge,

outside: Scottish and Canadian rugby fans,

--- a red telephone box.

Anthony Costello

You Have One New Message.

(a double acrostic)

Meet me by the Barrel Man tomorrow after
evening surgery is done. Please come. We
ended badly and I'm sorry as I feel
that it was all my fault. This may seem
mere indulgence on my part, pure melodrama,
except this time it isn't, I'm a wreck, a ruin,
between you and me, I just can't seem to get
you off my mind, can't sleep or work, wherever I go,
there's you, like fire and ice around my heart, your arm
heavy on my shoulders, your kisses on my neck, so
exquisite, drifting across my skin like summer
breezes, the memory almost too intense to bear.
And so, I'm asking for a second chance, please don't say no,
remember, I'll be waiting for you by the Barrel Man tomorrow.

Lesley Quayle