

DA LEPER

Da love fur Jesus wis cowld an joyless
i' da spinster's spartan hoose,
frugal an sparing
sterile an chaste
as da dank dettolled lobbies
drab as a brönnie.

Colour wis extravagance,
aathing a scroity greeny-grey
o thrift an abstinence
self-denial an temperance,
da waas, da waxcloth, da table, da dresser, da coorteens, her claes,
'Pooscat' her companion,
even her face, stern an severe,
laek Naetir wis scrimpit on da faetirs
o a paesty parsimonious oval
bund in a heid-square.
Da beady wattery eyes,
parsnip nose,
da Sunday bun
o fluir-mop hair.

Stiff wi boredom da lay preacher listened
tae da prudish newsin o royalty -
Chaurly an Di, an da scandalous abdication
o Edward VIII.

Mirlin on a herd chair,
da dullness wis a mirr bi da hömin
his mind an da sheeks o his erse numbin,
as dey sat i' da mirk
speculatin on da electricity bill,
an whan he could thole nae mair
o 'dowry daeth' an da abomination o mairage in India,
da leprosy mission,
or idder sic causes shö championed trow da kirk,
graciously apologisin tae his hostess he wis hedd a lang day
an hit wis time tae turn in,
a bony cheese-parin finger
pointed da wye.

Whaur even da spare beds o spinsters
ir chastised wi scorpions,
he levered his leegs doon trow da frigid layers
o starched sheets an scratchy worsted blankets,
tryin ta pull slack frae da hospital tucks
ta lit some boady haet circulate,
whaur comfort wis sin

sufferance wis godliness
sleep wis sloth
an love wis debauchery,
i'da foosty damp o an unhaeted room,
he felt leprosy all aroond.

Hit wis aa trow da hoose.
I'da v-lining,
i'da galderous heeder-tank cistern i'da bathroom
i'da gritty green brick o carbolic sopp,
i'da paw-fittit vim-scoored enamel bath,
i'da pea soup sturkened i'da skullery,
i'da brönnies an cheddar cheese,
i'da electricity.
Tryin ta keep da leprosy ooto his mooth
he pursed his lips an took short shallow braethes wi his nose.

I'da bulgin distemper o da poodery lime-lath ceiling
he saw an efflorescent watter-mark frae a laiky skew
da shaep o Africa.
Oh fur da sweet love o Jesus! wis der no leprosy dere too.