

THROUGH THE WINDOW OF A CORNISH BUS

By Graham Lightfoot

Looking in his rear-view mirror, the bus driver muses
That no-one actually looks out of the windows these days,
Except mothers teaching young ones their first words.
The old folk chat to each other at 25 miles an hour;
They have made this journey so many times that
 Nothing short of a car accident or a horse on the loose
Will draw their head from the quotidian vocal workout of gossip.
The rest, fixated on their phones ignore the transient scenery
Of passing clouds, sea views, country lanes and idyllic harbours.

The driver remembers how it was for him as a child
When he and his mother would catch the bus to go shopping.
Because of Mum's polio they always had to stay downstairs.
He would run up the aisle and climb into a seat by the window,
She would fill the space alongside him, making him feel secure.
Through the Cinemascope window he had learnt *his* first words...
Esso, Shell, those shiny forecourt symbols he recognised
From their jingled adverts on the black and white television.
He always hoped for the funny conductor, with the hearing aid,
Who would turn the handle on the big metal ticket machine,
Spitting out the paper snake with a snappy satisfying whirr.
The ticket would be held out to the sparkle-eyed child
Only for it to be pulled away from his grasp at the last moment;
The ritual played out again and again at the giggling child's delight;
But such things always have to end and he remembered
A disappointment in triumph, as he clutched the spoils in his tiny fist.

As the window's landscape changed to more verdant scenes
His mother would encourage him to look out for grazing animals;
He'd crow with delight at the sight of cows, horses and sheep.

On cold, dank days, the windows doubled as a chalkboard
Where the condensation allowed him to draw cars and faces
Or to carefully write his name in the smoke-grey medium.
Wiping away, he'd be sad when there was nowhere left to write
And content himself watching raindrops race to the windowsill.

When he was older, he would go upstairs and peep.
Gazing into the unseen world of first floor windows
In the hope of seeing something (he never knew what).
It was better in the evenings when those rooms became aquaria
Lit from within, portraying the brilliance of wildlife on dark nights.

In the first aeons of adolescence and later as a young man
He would prize a nearside window to get a closer view
(the offside put you further away) of the 'fit 'young girls
As they parade their summer looks along the pavement.
The shy young boy, feeling as close as he would ever get to them.

Having meandered the bus through the archive of his youth
The driver dis-engages autopilot and slows to a halt
For a man with an outstretched arm running towards the stop
Time ticks as he fumbles through his bag for a weekly ticket
Places it on the machine; beads of sweat exude on his brow
And drop and track the valleys of his weatherproof sleeve.
Darting eyes betray the stress already driving his day
Hindered by his bag of worries, he sways up the aisle of the bus,
Slumps in a seat and reaches for the only thing that can help.
He swipes through the *CalmerU* app on his phone
Ignoring 'Mountain Stream', 'Garden Rain 'and 'Sunlit Sea'
To the one that works best for him...
"A vision of passing clouds, sea views, country lanes
And idyllic harbours"
He sighs...calmer now
It's called...

"Through the Window of a Cornish Bus"

