

MARTIN BENNETT

In Victoria Coach Station

Exhaust fumes, urine, immemorial cigarettes—
A reek even freezing cold cannot dispel;
Passengers in groups, in queues, in seats
As the Rapide from unsunny Carlisle
Flexes brakes, with faces in a sullen row
The coach for Coventry prepares to go ...

By the railings a mouth works up-and-down
At the universe and no one, the man
Attached identikit twentyish, lean.
The radiation he emits is all his own.
Studs like Braille, his jacket reads “Exterminator”
And makes fashion an advert for a wide berth.

Daubed beneath, as if for bad measure,
Is “Chaos Day, March 4, 1996,”
The tatty diktat, “Let’s start a war.”
Self-picked anti-hero in a B-movie
He cannot, thank Heaven, control, lack of script
Recasts him as sidewalk nihilist.

Bystander furioso whose mutters
Complement the chains about his wrist
And waist, spiky violet-tinged clusters
That are his hair. Minutes bristle. In a twist
He has not envisaged, a squad-car
Pulls up. “May we look inside your bag, sir?”

Misted breath. "None of your fucking business"
This the expected give-away. Snap search.
Routine interrogation. One man's mess
Others' law, he's led away. Also a bystander,
Though seated, here from the 5:10 for Digbeth
I shuffle sight with words, a verbose voyeur:

Have mercy upon policemen, punks and poets,
O Lord. Defend each of us from over-
righteousness; though this bus is no Chariot
Of fire and our Arrows of desire are
Blunted, somewhere amidst the fume-bleared concrete
A dream of Jerusalem, that Countenance, those feet ...