

David Winwood

AT AN AIRPORT

1

At an airport again. So I expect Paul Engle
to pass. Magazines tucked under his arm.
"Time" quite likely, "Poetry" almost
certainly. In his stride his long limbs

make the most improbable enjambments.
Standing in line brings other lines
to his mind. The smile on his lopsided lips
self-deprecating, which doesn't go down

too well with the sponsors, unfortunately.
So he has got a hide-out of masks dangling
on the lath and plaster. Gods. Monsters mainly.
But they're flawed as cover-ups, for the smile

is on all of them. In this curly crevice behind
the ear; the down-turn of this nose; and look,
there, in plain sight, it sits — and grins — right on
the forehead of the most ferocious demon.

His wife, a Chinese novelist, bought him
medicines in which rare reptiles were used,
thinking him a deserving cause. Love is always
a muddled affair, otherwise how could it

be real. He eyed the medicine as if his mind
was on a remembered Victorian painting,
"Love Conquering Doubt," and
barely lifting an eyebrow, muttered to me:

"Let's hope it was a healthy snake."

2

At an airport again. A man with one leg
too short hastens past. "International airports,
you know, have lost their magic for me."
He coughed. A trick rhetoric, as his airports,

his lungs, were working perfectly. The poem
Paul loved most at the time I was in Iowa,
was written by a Hungarian Poet, Gyorgy Somlyo.
About a heart attack. Its short first line

followed by a repetitive recount of
tubes and attachments, turning it into a perfect
portrait of an emotional seizure. It was years,
years before Paul's heart refused to transport

his oxygen any further. An evil spell
that struck him at an O'Hare news stand: his body
wouldn't obey this smile anymore; his mind
waved at him — "Bye daddy!"; his legs folding,

"Poetry" and "Time" dropping from his hands.
Did he die before he paid for them
or after, I wonder? I grin and realise
it's Paul's grin. And grief.

And buy my paper.

DREAMS

German, so his accent was worse than guttural
when he declaimed: "Oh, Illinois, how this state
would benefit from the invention of the tree!"
His arms flew wider even than his paunch, his smile
stretched further than the over-stretched horizon.