

Chance: A Conversation

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Chance, I know that my chances
of having a conversation with you
are slight, at the very best, I
know it's no use taking exception
to your presence, but what on earth
are you doing in this life? Your place
seems so arbitrary; and
if we could sit down together
I know the talk would be hopelessly
haphazard, since love could lead swiftly to gardens to garbage,
a line of poetry might read
"kohl adrift more she role ti dah."
There are those sure your heart belongs to dada
but you know its heart belongs to you.
So around the world we'd go on a
marvellous, maddening, richly frustrating excursion
in which go is only occasionally distinguishable from woe.
Some think you are not the ultimate
in godliness, which you find a glorious test;
you who know no meaning know meaning best.
Only when we get to death, in
which you see you have a role, we part company.
You say, "In the end that's the subject
which is for you, but is not for me."

The Gift

Small clouds flock outside the window
like phlegm in the sky's throat
that we fly into, hoarser and hoarser,
the engines coughing above cut outs
of paddy fields, deep olive green
plantations intersected by water,
and dry strips of land, where men
and women work: nature is being
put in its place. Lower and lower

until we are being whispered about
by destiny, or chance. We hang
dangling at speed, in fragile air;
but today luck chooses us, the
headlines will escape our names, we will enter
the miraculous serenity of procedures,
of routines, all our fear buckled up
in a gift of banality, of schedules
that even we will quickly forget;

then the rumble and crack of wheels
on the ground, hooked by gravity and
weighty again. The most valuable
elements of our lives are hardly noticed.
Now the sun's gleaming off the wings
and we're heading homeward in the light
at last unperturbed by its luminous
and utterly ordinary silence.

¹Dennis Haskell is Professor of English and Cultural Studies and Co-editor of the magazine *Westerly* at the University of Western Australia. He is the author of 17 books, including 5 volumes of poetry. His most recent collection, *All the Time in the World* (Salt Publishing, Cambridge, UK, 2006) won the WA Premier's Prize, and he is currently working on a critical anthology of contemporary poetry and prose from Southeast Asia.

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