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DOCUMENT A

Colum McCann, *Transatlantic*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. 29-33.

The cloud grows tighter around them. They both know full well that if they don't break it now they will spiral-dive. The plane will gain speed and shatter in an immensity of pieces. The only way out is to maintain speed in a spin. To have control and lose it, too.

5 Do it, Jackie.

The engines throw out a taunt of red flame and then the Vimy hangs motionless a second, grows heavy, keels over as if it has taken a punch. The slowing form of falling at first. A certain amount of sigh in it. Take this weary effort at flight, let me drop.

10 One wing stalled, the other still lifting.

Three thousand feet above the sea. In the cloud their balance is shot to hell. No sense of up. No down. Two thousand five hundred. Two thousand. The slap of rain and wing in their faces. The machine shudders. The compass needle jumps. The Vimy swings. Their bodies are thrown back against the seats. What they need is a line of sky or sea. A visual. But there is nothing but thick, grey cloud. Brown jerks his head in every direction. No horizon, no center, no edge. Good God. Somewhere. Anywhere. Keep her steady, Jackie boy.

15 One thousand feet still falling, nine hundred, eight hundred, seven fifty. The pressure of their shoulder blades against the seats. The whirl of blood to the head. The heaviness of the neck. Are we up? Are we down? Still spinning. They might not see the water before they smash. Undo the belts. This is it. This is it, Teddy. Their bodies are still pinned to their seats. Brown reaches downwards. He tucks the log journal inside his flight jacket. Alcock catches him out of the corner of his eye. Such glorious idiocy. A pilot's last gesture. Save all the details. The sweet release of knowing how it happened.

20 The dial turns steadily still. Six hundred, five hundred, four. No whimpering. No moaning. The scream of cloud. The loss of body. Alcock maintains the spin in the endless white and grey.

25 A glimpse of new light. A different wall of colour. It takes a split second for it to register. A slap of blue. A hundred feet. Strange blue, spinning blue, are we out? Blue here. Black there. We're out, Jack, we're out! Catch her. Catch her for godsake. Christ, we're out. Are we out? Another line of black looms. The sea stands soldier-straight and dark. Light where the water should be. Sea where the light should crest. Ninety feet. Eighty-five. That's the sun. Christ, it's the sun, Teddy, the sun! There. Eighty now. The sun! Alcock gives the machine a mouthful of throttle. Over there. Open her. Open her. The engines catch. He fights the jolt. The sea turns. The plane levels. Fifty feet to spare, forty feet, thirty, no more. Alcock glances down at the Atlantic, the waves galloping white-edged beneath them. The sea sprays upward onto the windscreen. Not a sound

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40 from either of the men until the plane is levelled again and they begin to rise once more.

They sit, silent, rigid with terror.

Oh go 'way man

45 *you just hold your breath a minit
for there's not a stunt that's in it
with the Maple Leaf Rag*

LATER THEY WILL joke about the spin, the fall, the rollout over the water – *if your life doesn't flash in front of your eyes, old boy, does that mean you've had no life at all?* – but climbing upwards they say nothing. Brown leans out and
50 slaps the flank of the fuselage. Old horse. Old blackfoot.

THEY LEVEL OUT along the water, at five hundred feet, in clear air. A horizon line now. Brown reaches for his drift-bearing plate, corrects his compass. Almost eight o'clock Greenwich Mean Time. Brown scrambles around for his pencil. *Ticklish?* he scrawls, with a series of exclamation marks. He catches the sideway
55 grin of Alcock. It is the first time in hours they have had a run without fog or layers of cloud. A dull, chewy grey out over the water. Brown scribbles down the last of the calculations. They are north, but not so far as to miss Ireland altogether. Brown reckons the course is 125 degrees true, but allowing for variation and wind he sets a compass course at 170. Rudder south.

60 He can feel it rising up in him, the prospect of grass, a lonesome cottage on the horizon, perhaps a row of huddled cattle. They must be careful. There are high cliffs along the coast. He has studied the geography of Ireland: the hills, the round towers, the expanses of limestone, the disappearing lakes. Galway Bay. There had been songs about that during the war. The roads to Tipperary. The
65 Irish were a sentimental lot. They died and drank in great numbers. A few of them for Empire. Drank and died. Died. Drank.

He is screwing back the lid on the flask of hot tea when he feels Alcock's hand on his shoulder. He knows before turning round that it is there. As simple as that.

70 Rising up out of the sea, nonchalant as you like: wet rock, dark grass, stone tree light.

Two islands.

The place crosses the land at low clip.

75 Down below, a sheep with a magpie sitting on its back. The sheep raises its head and begins to run when the plane swoops, and for just a moment the magpipe stays in place on the sheep's back: it is something so odd Brown knows he will remember it forever.

The miracle of the actual.

80 In the distance, the mountains. The quiltwork of stone walls. Corkscrew roads. Stunted trees. An abandoned castle. A pig farm. A church. And there, the radio towers to the south. Two-hundred-foot masts in a rectangle of lockstep, some warehouses, a stone house sitting on the edge of the Atlantic. It is Clifden, then. Clifden. The Marconi Towers. A great net of radio masts. They glance at each other. No words. Bring her down. Bring her down.

They follow their line out over the village. The houses are grey. The roofs,

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85 slate. The streets unusually quiet.
Alcock whoops. Shuts the engines. Angles in, flattens the Vimy out.
Their helmets applaud. Their hair roars. Their fingernails whistle.

FROM OUT OF the grass a flock of long-billed snipe rises and soars.

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DOCUMENT B

Henry Mayhew and John Binny, « An aerial view of London, 13th September 1852 », in Humphrey Jennings, *Pandaemonium, 1660-1886: The Coming of the Machine as Seen by Contemporary Observers*, Icon Books, 2012 (1st ed. 1985)-p.392-393

The moment after this, the balloon vaulted over the trees, and we saw the roadway outside the gardens stuck all over with mobs of little black Lilliputian people, with the hubbub of the voices below, and the cries of « Ah *bal-loon!* » from the boys, rose to the ear like the sound of a distant school let loose to play.

5 Now began that peculiar panoramic effect which is the distinguishing feature of the first portion of a view from a balloon, and which arises from the utter absence of all sense of motion in the machine itself, and the consequent transference of movement to the ground beneath. The earth, as the aeronautic vessel glided over it, seemed positively to consist of a continuous series of scenes which were being drawn along underneath us, as if it were some
10 diorama laid flat upon the ground, and almost gave one the notion that the world was an endless landscape stretched up on rollers, which some invisible sprites below were busy revolving for our special amusement.

Then, as we floated along above the fields, in a line with the Thames towards Richmond, and looked over the edge of the car in which we were standing (and which, by the bye, was
15 like a big “buck basket”, reaching to one’s breast), the sight was the most exquisite visual delight ever experienced. The houses directly underneath us looked like the tiny wooden things out of a child’s box of toys, and the streets as if they were ruts in the ground; and we could hear the hum of voices from every spot we passed over, faint as the buzzing of so many bees.

20 Far beneath, in the direction we were sailing, lay the suburban fields; and here the earth, with its tiny hills and plains and streams, assumed the appearance of the little plaster models of countries. The roadways striping the land were like narrow brown ribbons, and the river, which we could see winding far away, resembled a long, gray metallic-looking snake, creeping through the fields. The bridges over the Thames were positively like planks;
25 and the tiny black barges, as they floated along the stream, seemed no bigger than summer insects on the water. The largest meadows were about the size of green-baize table covers; and across these we could just trace the line of the South-Western railway, with the little whiff of white steam issuing from some passing engine, and no greater in volume than the jet of vapour from an ordinary tea-kettle.

30 Then, as the dusk of evening descended, and the gas-lights along the different lines of road started into light, one after another, the ground seemed to be covered with little illumination lamps, such as are hung on Christmas-trees, and reminding one of those that are occasionally placed, at intervals, along the grass at the edge of gravel-walks in suburban tea-gardens; whilst the clusters of little lights at the spots where the hamlets were scattered
35 over the scene, appeared like knots of fire-flies in the air; and in the midst of these the eye could, here and there, distinguish the tiny crimson speck of some railway signal.

In the opposite direction to that in which the wind was insensibly wafting the balloon, lay the leviathan Metropolis, with a dense canopy of smoke hanging over it, and reminding one

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40 of the fog of vapour that is often seen steaming up from the fields at early morning. It was impossible to tell where the monster city began or ended, for the buildings stretched not only to the horizon on either side, but far away into the distance, where, owing to the coming shades of evening and the dense fumes from the million chimneys, the town seemed to blend in the sky, so that there was no distinguishing earth from heaven. The multitude of roofs that extended back from the foreground was positively like a dingy red sea, heaving in
45 bricken billows, and the seeming waves rising up one after the other till the eye grew wearied with following them. Here and there we could distinguish little bare green patches of parks, and occasionally make out the tiny circular enclosures of the principal squares, though, from the height, these appeared scarcely bigger than wafers. Further, the fog of smoke that over-shadowed the giant town was pierced with a thousand steeples and pin-like
50 factory-chimneys.

That little building, no bigger than one of the small china houses that are used for burning pastilles in, is Buckingham Palace – with St James' Park, dwindled to the size of a card-table, stretched out before it. Yonder is Bethlehem Hospital, with its dome, now about the same dimensions as a bell.

55 Then the little mites of men, crossing the bridges, seemed to have no more motion in them than the animalcules in cheese; while the streets appeared more like cracks in the soil than highways, and the tiny steamers on the river were only to be distinguished by the thin black thread of smoke trailing after them.

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DOCUMENT C

Simon Roberts, *Penshaw Monument, Herrington Country Park*, colour photograph, from the *The Social : Landscapes of Leisure* series, 2013.

