

'to talk'
a poem for tom leonard
by brian hamill

to talk is

to listen to your teacher in school
shouting
at the top of his voice
saying
there is language for OUT THERE
pointing at the window
that faces the playground
and language for IN HERE
pointing at the floor
where you now look
with a boiling
hot
face

to feel a tap
on your shoulder
and be led to a meeting-room
in the call-centre
in which you work
so your team leader
wearing his
dad's shirt
can explain to you, smiling,
that you cannot
cannot cannot
say
hasny
to a customer

to read the messages
from your friends
and folk online
on your phone
and sigh at every
gonna
awesome
gross
weird-ass whatever
these people who go to george square
swathed in saltires
but are fucking terrified
of their own
accent

to stand at the front of the class
in glasgow
university
because the tutor has asked
you to do so
in 2001
so the rest of the class
can hear a
real
working-class
dialect

to shrug
and force yourself to say nothing
when your manager
repeatedly says
nae bother
nae bother big man
nae bother
in a daft voice
because he heard
you say it
on the phone
to your pal

to write then delete a huge and angry
email
to the young editor
who opened your story
in microsoft fucking word
and used its americanized
grammar checker
to apply rules to
the character talking
and insert semi-colons
all through
it
which makes you think
of kelman
semi-colons!
right out their mouths!
an incredible mastery of language!

to sit in the pub
with folk from a writing group
so an elderly lady
from hillhead
can explain to you
how your work
is not rendered properly
is not consistent
is not a story
and you
a wee bit drunk
talk again of leonard
and kelman
and june jordan
black language
and sam selvon
and fucking montaigne
and you are drunk
and they laugh
don't be so
defensive

to notice
the change that occurs
in your great auntie
who, when you ask her, says
aye I had a nice day
aye the weather was smashin
och aye
och aye
then when different company
arrives
she says
yeah
oh yeah it was lovely
just lovely
yeah

to see that look
that look that passes between
people
because of your speaking
voice
because they think you don't know
the code
he doesn't know
how to round it out
he should have rounded it
out
by now
how uncouth

to watch
the first time
you saw tom leonard
on stage
at the arches
and this feeling of
pleasure
waving all over
you
as he spoke to the audience
about bertolt brecht
in just his own
voice
and not the voice
of
IN HERE

to finally trust
yourself
your command of language
your own expression
your flow of words
your breath
their breath
to not check
to reject the rules
as needed
your command of voice
you've read leonard
honest
you've read kelman
glasgow in my work
we are not consistent
and every comma is my comma
every comma is my comma
hubert selby's
punctuation
music

to understand how tom leonard
used the phrase
luvur day yi
you see
luvur day yi
in the six glasgow
poems
it is three words
three
and it is important
for many
reasons
to do with
linguistics
grammar
punctuation
phonetics
politics
sociology
class
fucking blah-blah
it is important to
you because
luvur day yi
luvur day yi
ach well
is the voice of your
mam
your own mam
when you were 18
and your first girlfriend
had dumped ye
and you blubbered
and that's how
she spoke
to you
luvur day yi
ach well brian
ach well