

ROARSHOCKS PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION POEM

"This is my public transportation poem.

Fuck Muni!

Fuck BART!

Fuck Southwest Airlines!"

~ The Mad Scotsman of the Tenderloin

Whenever I meet someone, and they tell me
That they are a world traveler
My first question for them, always,
"How long have you been riding BART?"
For me the answer ~
50 years.

Though hardly having seen
Much of the world
Lately I have journeyed
Through far off lands
Via networks of public transportation.

The first Monday in October
My bags awkward
Feeling clunky
And of mixed balance
I walked to the corner
And caught the 1
San Francisco Municipal Railroad
Oldest bus line
The distinct beep
Tagging on with my unregistered
Cash loaded Clipper Card
In the "old days" we would flash
Our monthly Fast Pass,
Before that, drop coins into the till
Get a paper transfer from the driver
Supposed to be torn to expire
A couple of hours after payment of fare
What you always really wanted
Was an untorn Late Night
Transfer good all night
There were always guys selling "Late Nights"
@ 16th & Mission
Or other well-traveled corners
But this day in October 2022
The bus climbs up Clay Street

Passed the studio where I lived
In the Ardmere Apartments
Passed Le Beau Market
Up over Nob Hill
And down the other side
Through Chinatown
Downtown to Drumm St
Transfer to Embarcadero BART
Use the same unregistered Clipper Card
The train soon arrives
Takes me all the way to the airport.

SFO BART Station
Leads directly into
The International Terminal
The first gauntlet
My travel bag
Checked into the hold
Boarding pass secured
I endure the indignities
Entering TSA secured area
Awkwardly removing belt and shoes
With cell phone, wallet
Passport and carry-on bag
On a conveyer belt through the scanning machine
Me in the scanning booth
Remarkably
I set off no alarms
Am in the secure area
To find my boarding gate
And wait.
The airplane seat narrow
The flight long
But I am aboard Air France
So, the food in flight
Not bad
And a sky entry
Into the French world.
Some 10 hours later
Applause as we land
@ Charles de Gaulle Airport (CDG)
Just after 11am the next day, Tuesday
Off the plane, I buy an RER ticket
Plus 2 carnet of Paris Metro tickets
@ Information kiosk
Collect my checked bag
Step out into the pale French sunlight
Get on the RER train
Wheels climbing over the tracks
I have done this trip before
Several times

As we roll along through the stops
Ancient buildings across from the stations
And more people getting on the train
On the outskirts of Paris, we go underground
And roll into Gare du Nord
Then on to Chatelet Les Halles
Where I transfer to the Metro
Just a few stops to Place de la Bastille
A few short blocks from there
To my hotel on Rue Amelot.
Nine days in Paris
Sometimes on the Metro
But mostly on the bus
The buses in Paris
Take you all over town
While seeing the sights
But when I go to read poetry
@ Paris Lit Up!
It is in the 20th
On a street unfamiliar to me
So, I take a taxi
My second Paris taxi ride
The first was 12 September 2016
Inaugural visit to Spoken Word Paris
The frenzy of Paris traffic
The cabby banging on the horn
Looking at me
With an exaggerated French shrug
“It’s Paris!”
On this trip
Traffic is less severe
The driver winds
Through many narrow streets
Before dropping me on Rue Julien Lacroix
@ The side of the club, Culture Rapide
Fare ~ 20€
After an amazing night
Of poetry
I hail another cab
Back to my hotel
From Bd de Belleville
Down midnight
Boulevards and streets
Fare ~ 10€
Which goes to show
The first cabbie
Was a sly old cheat.

The next week
Wandering full
After my big lunch

@ Les Fabricants
In a dreamy state
I must have turned around
The opposite direction
From Rue Jean-Pierre Timbaud
I walk up the hill
Back deep into the 20th Arrondissement
To Belleville
Until I am tired of walking
So, I get on a bus
I notice a young man
Enter the bus
Through the back door
A few stops further on
He makes to exit
The crowded bus
But there are a half dozen
Fare inspectors and transit police
Waiting
The youth becomes quite agitated
Trying to push through
"Laissez-moi passer!"
Burly cop stands firm
"Non, monsieur, laissez-nous voir votre billet!"
They take him off the bus
His reward to be a large fine
For fare evasion.
I have seen it many times
On SF Muni
The bus pulls in
Usually, a big transfer point
Van Ness & Market, 24th & Mission
But it could be any stop in the system
Transit inspectors doing a job with attitude
Swarm aboard and check that everyone has paid
Often somebody or several have not paid
And are hauled off the bus
Given tickets that they probably
Can't afford to pay.
On the bus
Through the heart of Paris
Rue de Rivoli
Passed the Musée du Louvre
Across the Seine
Passed the Musée d'Orsay
Through winding streets
Of Saint-Germain-des-Prés
Passed Invalides and the École Militaire
Disembark at the last stop
@ Champ de Mars
Beneath the Tour Eiffel

And back again
Up to Gare Montparnasse
And walk from there
Through old familiar streets
Of the Quartier latin.

When time to leave Paris
I have discovered it easier to ride the bus
To Gare du Nord
Rather than the Metro
I board the Thalys
Fast train to Amsterdam
Across from me
On either side
Of a train table
Are four fashionable Dutch women
With many bags from fancy Paris shops
The older woman
Obviously in charge
And she has the money
The younger women
All three have glossy lips
That protrude in perpetual pout
These girls have had injections of Botox
It is not an attractive look
They have been on a shopping trip to Paris
The train was delayed leaving Gare du Nord
For unspecified technical reasons
As we approach Rotterdam
It is announced
The train will only go to Schiphol
Not Amsterdam Centraal
As originally scheduled
The train begins to roll
Out from Rotterdam
A man walks along the platform
Slapping the windows of the coach
A woman seated in front of me exclaims
“My husband!”
The conductor tells her
“Too late to stop the train”
He will have to catch the next one
Meet her in Amsterdam
“But I have all this luggage!”
She laments.
“He is not answering his cell phone!
Oh, why did he get off the train?!”
@ Schiphol Airport
Everybody off the train
Worried lady disappears in crowd
Tramp across the platform

To crowd on a local commuter train
Takes us those last few kilometers
Into Amsterdam
I carry my bags and walk to my hotel
In Amsterdam on the trams
The mechanical voice sounds like a jolly gentleman
Announcing the stops in Dutch
Reminding you to tag out
When exiting in English
They have a modern subway
Runs deep under the city
Seeming modest compared to the Paris Metro
London Tube and New York City Subway
Still to come
More like MUNI Metro
A miniature version of BART
Exit the system @ De Pijp
But Albert Cuyp Market closed Sundays
And find today the city split in two
For running of the Amsterdam Marathon
Friends and family along the route
Urge the runners on.

Eurostar on to London
In Brussels herded through British customs
Speeding through the Chunnel
Emerge in London daylight
St Pancras International and Kings Cross Station
Have a room nearby
@ The California Hotel
Central local
To explore London
Via the Tube
And those double decker buses
A week and I would say
I barely know the London transit grid
But make it to Euston
On a rainy Sunday morning
And a First-Class ticket to Liverpool
Voices behind me in the carriage
A man talking up a young lady
And they talked and drank and yelled
All the way to Liverpool
But they had just met on the train
She said she was a barrister
He an online model
Across from them an older fellow
They called him Uncle John
A musician from Liverpool
Who asked if perhaps he should get Botox injections
Our loud young man said it was a one-way street

When they give you that first injection
Our barrister giggled that she loved having full kissable lips
They went by to find the bar car for more wine
I briefly saw the slender young blond woman
With the full lipped play dough face
And the very handsome plastic boy
They came back with another boy in tow
Alfie who they found sitting on the floor in 2nd Class
So, they brought him up to 1st and sat him with them
To banter with and see if they could corrupt him
“Alfie’s not sitting on the floor in 2nd Class! Not on my watch!”
Our online model declared
Alfie was 18
On his way to apprenticeship
In a Welsh mechanical concern
He could not possibly miss his connecting train
Or he would lose his apprenticeship
The ride continued with hilarity
The two were gone back down to the bar
When we reached Alfie’s stop
He left with his bag
“Where’s Alfie?!” in alarm when they got back
A new porter got onboard ~ A French Porter!
He unceremoniously moved John’s bag
From the seat it had been setting upon
John was extremely bothered by this
Words were exchanged
The porter said he was going to throw John off the train
At the next stop
John said if you get off the train with me
The porter left and returned with a burly conductor
Who told John he had threatened a railroad employee
If he didn’t get off the train
He would be met in Liverpool by the police
Uncle John did not get off the train
Said it was a bluff
He said to the other two
“When we get to Liverpool if they are there, we must...”
“Not we, John, you. You must.
I miss Alfie!”
The train arrived in Liverpool
I hoisted my bags
Walking along the platform
From the other direction came
The French porter
The burly conductor
And four police officers
I conjure things might not have gone well
For John that day.
I found my hotel
And had time to walk around the old port city.

Early next morning
From Liverpool Lime Street
On the train to Chester
Switch to North Wales Coast Railway
Rheilffordd arfordir gogledd Cymru
To Llandudno Junction and Blaenau Ffestiniog
Signs now in two languages
And no sign of the British flag
I am in a new country
Switch to Lloyd's Couch Busses
For travel on
To Porthmadog and Portmeirion
Riding with the locals
For me a truly new landscape
In an ancient land
When back again on the bus to Bangor
I notice the prehistoric stone circle
Just over there in the field
Next to the fork in the road
Those short old dudes
Walking along the high street
They know something about it
The train ends at Holyhead
At the end of Wales
In the howling wind
And the old tavern and rooms
By the ferry terminal
To wait the night
Here and share stories
With weathered sailors
On this far outpost
Of the old world

Another early morning
Depart across the Irish Sea
On the ferry to Dublin
Occasional bang of a wave across the bow
Queasy as my Full Welsh Breakfast settles
Have a beer before port
See the ferry boat W. B. Yeats
In Dublin Harbor
Shuttle bus to the old city
Heart of the Temple Bar
By the River Liffey
Three days to explore
Mythology, history, and energy
Of today's Dublin
On Sunday better hail a cab
To the airport
Because they are running the Dublin Marathon

I made it with time for the crowded lines
Security checks and American Customs
On Air Lingus flight
Attendant suggests we might want to buy drinks
They are cheaper here than they will be in New York
That's true
And the New York Express bus from Newark Airport
Inches through the Sunday evening traffic
The French family behind me snapping photos
Through the windows
I wish them Bon Suave
When they get off
At the Port Authority Bus Terminal
I get off at Bryant Park
Walk to hotel in the heart
Of Midtown Manhattan
Another week and a half
Learning New York subway and bus transit
And rail trips to the Hudson Valley and Long Island
Coming back from a Phil concert in Port Chester
After midnight on Halloween
And a young lady says
She will have to go from Grand Central to Penn Station
To catch her next train
I say, just walk down 42nd St to 8th Avenue and go left to 34th St
Voila! There it is
But I am not from New York
Seated lady says
You are doing a good job @ faking it!
What should be happening on Sunday morning
But running of the New York City Marathon!
Next day those who finished wear finishers medals
Crossing over the Brooklyn Bridge
Down at Battery Park
Along the Hudson River
I fake my way on the early morning subway
All the way to Jamaica
And the AirTrain to JFK
Alaska Airlines bumped me to "premium economy"
I notice halfway through the flight to SFO
The descend into the end of a storm
Cool and the air wet and breezy
Landing again in California
BART awaits
Yet again
& Muni line number 1
Up over the hill
To the Roarshock Den
There and back again
All on public transportation.

~ *D. A. Wilson*

© 2023 D. A. Wilson