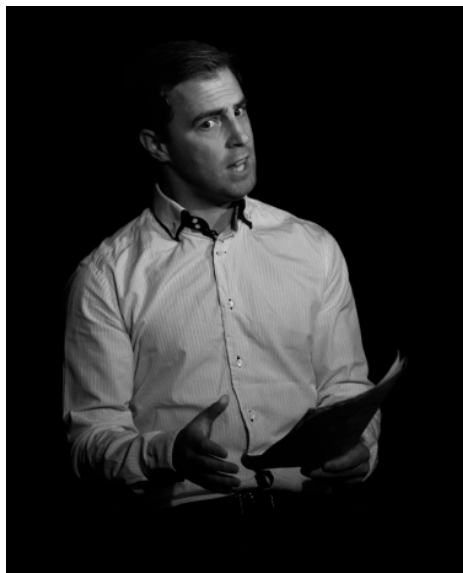


EYES: A Monologue

By Christopher O'Shaughnessy



EYES performed by David Bibby, The Blackshaw Theatre Company's New Writing Night at the Hen and Chickens Theatre, London, 19 September 2016. Photo by Richard Stratton.

The driver seated, faces the audience. He's first in a line of chairs.

Concentrating on the road—I'm looking—
I'm looking at the road and beyond it—
It's very green, it's very very green—
Not that I am meant to be looking, no—
But it is green and I like that vibrant—
I like that vibrant *fuck-you* moment, yeah—
When the landscape smiles and I smile right back—
A kind of green spiritual orgasm.

Pause.

Driving can be a lonely business—here
To Edinburgh and back, motorway dong

Not the half of it. How I earn my bit.
A journey through hell: what do you expect
For £21 a pop? It ain't
The driving did my eyes in. No. No. No, no!
That passage through hell—toilet stops en route.
Ecstatic at Scotch Corner, on my way ...
Ecstatic at Scotch Corner ... (*Laughs.*) On my way ...
You ever had an accident, you ask?
Concentrating on that road, the journey
There ... And then, when it's dark, when it got dark,
When it got very *very* dark, the eyes
Mad towards me, spinning out of control,
The eyes, meteor-like out of the night
And rushing like an ill-remembered dream
Past the shadows of my soul. (*Slight pause.*) Can't drive now.
Pause.
It's like a board game: the journeys, epic.
And the resolution, the blood and gore finale
With local anaesthetic. (*Then, emphatic.*) Cornea ...
The way we picture what happens: blindness.
I—sight. Me in the operating chair.
Waiting for the graft, necessary graft.
Odd how the sounds magnify, smells increase.
Judder and throb of the wheels, sparks, spinning.
Sparks. And the moon floating like a dead child.
Alone in the driver's seat, that diesel smell.
Pause.
An owl swept down like a hovering pain.
Each town like a broken diamond necklace ...
And the silence, the stillness, driving through.
Ever driven at night through a sleeping town?

Pause.

Night sea journey, only it's tarmac.
Sixty miles an hour upright past Newcastle.
Only way to earn a living, Jean says.
Jean says without my income we'd all starve...
No roof over our heads, homeless.
Homeless. Forever in the driver's seat.
Listening alone to the shipping forecast.
Back and forth, this way and that.
And Daisy, how could we have *afforded*—?
Just how on earth could we have afforded—?
Shit. Have I ever had an accident
You ask. Have I ever had a—*what* ?

Pause.

I'm—I'm in Edinburgh at 10.00am.
Should arrive at eight. It's—it's a day case.
Ker-o-to-plasty. Scissors and fork job.

Pause.

Ever driven at night through a sleeping town?
Passengers asleep. Behind me. Baggage. (*He looks round.*)
When the headlights glide across the green verge,
Illuminating the edge: luminous
In the darkness. I count wildflower *names*:
Cow parsley, dandelion, buttercup,
Creeping buttercup, slow among the oil
And the exhaust. Winter heliotrope,
Red campion, meadow cranesbill, knapweed,
Nettle, toadflax, bluebell, cuckoo pint,
The rosemary drift of purple willow herb
Screening a vista of distant pain.

Pause. He looks round.

The passengers now asleep behind me.
The one under the newspaper, the one
Holding his boyfriend's hand, the old woman
Drinking absinthe, and the nice young couple
With their legs entwined, the others
Snoring in rhythm with the wheels, the small—
The small child dreaming in the long back seat,
And the priest reading—who knows what?— not me ...

Pause.

Concentrating on the road—I'm looking—
Yes—I'm looking forever at the road
And beyond it. 'It's National Express:
The board game.' For Fantasy Flight Games if—
If they'll have it. If they'll take it ... If they—
I tell Jean the money I can make.
The money I can make if it sells. Take—
Take a journey into the dark kingdom.
Rescue the slimy princess from the monster.
Everybody's doing it. Buying the fuckers.
Slaying the farting dragon by the volcano.
Leading the army of wraiths in battle.
Smoke. Fire. Bangs. Screams. Whistles. Pan-de-mon-i-um.
Could be me. (*He lurches to one side.*) Into the forest Tegoth.
Under black mountain. Dwarves. Goblins. Werewolves.
You ever had an accident? you ask.

Then the inevitable toilet stop.

Pause. He gets up authoritatively.

'Tea and toilet!' They all need to go. Now.

'Go now: save the onboard facility.'

He watches them move from their seats.

'Thirty minutes. *Thirty.* Time for a fag

And a leg-stretch. Sandwich at the kiosk.
Yes, it is sad the café is closed ...
Yes, you *might* need a brolly in that rain.
No, I *can't* look after your bloody iPhone.
No, I *don't* have any spare change. And no—
It *can't* be more than thirty minutes. What?
We've got a fucking journey to finish.
That's what. *Report me*. Lost five minutes, right?'
And off they go. Except for the dream child.
And me, waiting for the cornea fix.
Waiting. That—that really goddam waiting.
Unsent letters. Other end of the phone.
Pause.
Questions, the family asking questions.
Unspoken things, incommunicado.
Waiting for the transplant, waiting for that.
Pause.
Left it behind now, left it all behind.
Gaining speed, I'm gaining speed, swift...
A real success, the fork and scissors job.
Like a bird picking at a worm.
But could I drive back? But could I drive back?
Laid off. Gaining speed, as I *remember* ...
Swift. Like a pterodactyl with bright wings.
The blur, the shadows, the swift nothingness.
And those Job-Centre queries, the stupid –
Job-Centre queries. But ... if ... what ... how ... ?
'Come again, come again tomorrow morning
We might have something.' My wife almost cried.
Your *eyes*—? No known cause, inherited.
Pause.

Inherited? Not in my family.
And Jean wondering, wondering ... No *words* ... !
The entry to the forgotten cave, wet
Footsteps by torchlight; sweating; echoes;
Reflections in a phosphorescent pool,
The welcome silence of a darkened space.
And the bus turning, lumbering, rapid
In moonlight.
He gets up, stands to one side and looks back at the chairs.
Sometimes I'd like to walk away. (*Slight pause.*) From—from—
He indicates the coach.
I'd like to disengage while still en route.
I'd like to see the coach just disappear,
The person who's left behind still driving...
Still driving. And rush, rush, rush, rush, rush, rush
To another station! Another world.
But the road I am on is a different road.
Like to walk away ... And I will ... all right ...
Slight pause.
Sometimes I dream I am still in that seat:
Safe, warm, *me*—driving along through the night—

About *EYES*

A long-distance coach driver remembers and articulates his difficult, traumatised life-changing journey towards a cornea transplant. His authentic and real self emerges during the passionate recall. Transcendent and ideal worlds clash with the former, embedded acceptance of the mundane and the cyclical.

Written in iambic pentameter to convey tension, clogged feeling and speed of memory and experience, the monologue had its first (and well-received) performance by actor/comedian David Bibby at the Hen and Chickens Theatre, Islington, on September 19, 2016. It was directed by Alexander Pankhurst under the aegis of the Blackshaw Theatre Company's New Writing Night.