

*Hotel Room in Liverpool: Mors vincit omnia*

It was in an hotel room  
in Norway,  
the thin, grey rain  
splashing icily against the window pane,  
that Alan Paton took a piece of paper  
and on it wrote (longing for his home):  
'There is a lovely road  
that runs from Ixopo into the hills.'

If *Cry the Beloved Country*  
could come to birth, I thought,  
in such a bleak and distant place,  
my chances of a novel (or a poem)  
might be high, in Liverpool -  
where,  
in an hotel room with lemon walls  
and ochre floor (powdered with  
the fluff and dust-encrusted stains  
of previous inhabitants),  
I sat gazing on a water-yellow evening sky.

Somehow, though, the muse was absent,  
overwhelmed perhaps, as I was,  
by the spindle-shanked four-poster,  
shrouded at each corner by dingy muslin swags,  
the lilac satin bedcover (with matching pillows),  
gleaming with the rictus promise  
of an undertaker's coffin.

It was a room of melancholy dreams,  
of lingering, cheap perfume  
and stale Woodbines,  
and the sound of a distant dusky saxophone in a Lime Street bar -  
a place of fumbling encounters,  
smudged lipstick and tear-besmirched goodbyes,  
the kitbag packed, waiting by the door  
to be stowed on the convoy in the harbour  
and, with its owner, pushing out  
into the darkness  
of the long, tumultuous, Atlantic swells.