

ON A TRAIN TO ALTONA

MICHAEL CRANE

All the socialites in Toorak and Brighton
are buying gowns for the Charity Ball
and their Range Rovers are being serviced,
the catering paid for in advance,
while I'm on a train to Altona
as it winds past the oil refineries
far away from the Town Hall ballroom.

All the artists at the fair
held in the Exhibition Centre trade room
exchange business cards and resumes
preparing to ambush an agent,
while I'm on a train to Altona
and the Westgate bridge in the distance
carries the burden of drivers on its shoulders.

All the business men and fancy dancers
argue who will pay the restaurant bill
refusing to tip the waiter and scowl at the chef
and a million mobile phones receive text messages,
while I'm on a train to Altona
where impoverished choirs rehearse
in rundown warehouses by the beach.

It's a train to Altona carrying me
far away from the arguments of the city,
away from bickering women and demanding men.
Maybe the beautiful people don't live there
but the children don't seem to mind
singing nursery rhymes in kindergarten
as the flame from the oil refinery reaches the sky.