

TRAIN RIDE, INDIA

The ticket inspector dismisses
my passport with a gentle motion,
the pad of his fingers bat backhand,
not needed, he says in a clipped British
accent. He's enjoying his authority,
so we go with the script, deferential,
doff our metaphorical caps. But we recognize
the ex-empire in him, imperial grains grafted
onto our DNA; can't help being impressed
by British imperiousness, but how we rage at it
and wish it weren't so; so we take English,
that fabulous plastic language, and make
it even more malleable, circumventing
its certainty with our soft t's and aspirated w's,
whisper at its edges, soften up our targets,
saying what we mean, but never really
meaning what we say. Hidden in the layers
of sounds and intonations, in the lilt
and humour, the *tú*, the *tusa*, the *Taoiseach*,
the this, the that, the those, our tongues,
our native tongue touches its mark,
feels the dentine just behind our front teeth.