

1976

# Underground

Charles Tomlinson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview>

Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Tomlinson, Charles. "Underground." *The Iowa Review* 7.4 (1976): 118-120. Web.  
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.2130>

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Iowa Review by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact [lib-ir@uiowa.edu](mailto:lib-ir@uiowa.edu).

Refuse all final outline, drift  
From a dew-cold blue into green-shot grey:  
In the intensity of final light  
A time of loomings, then a chime of lapses  
Failing from woodslopes, summits, sky,  
Leaving, for the moonrise to untarnish,  
Hazed airy fastnesses where the last rays vanish.

## Underground

Tall—too tall  
for a dancer—I'm  
a dancer' was all  
she'd say, shrieking  
clacking a routine  
in the one space  
they'd cleared between  
her and the wall: those  
nearest, on the packed  
platform were backing  
away to avoid  
her flailing legs:  
animal activity,  
decay of faculty  
bespoke a woman  
who moved with neither  
pain nor thought,  
insensibly subdued  
to endless sound:  
all the crowd  
she disowned utterly  
facing her wall,  
lost in the space  
they'd left her  
and never once  
did she turn  
round to accost  
or denounce them: well-  
dressed, you could see

with her matching  
tartan coat  
and trousers, she belonged  
in the general prosperity:  
even her song  
and patter seemed  
merely an acceleration  
of the battering set  
left to itself: never  
lost for words  
but lost among,  
infested by them—  
whether it was feet  
followed tongue  
or tongue feet—  
she neither slowed  
nor rested: her scat-  
song, her drop  
into sudden blues  
would stagger  
towards a pattern:  
she had sleep-talked  
her way to an exact  
sorrow and then  
her voice cracked on it  
and drowned in the sounds  
she danced to:  
the train came:  
would she take it?  
She got in:  
at each stop  
her din broke  
as the doors parted,  
then was shut  
back under the roar  
as we slid forward:  
getting down  
I looked to where  
her song sprang  
to try and see  
the face she'd hidden:  
she rode standing:

and two hands  
beating a rhythm  
on the shut pane  
as the doors again  
closed to, were all  
you could catch  
except where,  
the metal frame  
masking the rest of her,  
the mouth flexed on  
fulminating its song  
into the tunnel.

## Charles Tomlinson: With Respect to Flux / A. K. Weatherhead

The poetry of Charles Tomlinson is of interest not least for its comment on form, in a period when discussion about form and literature is lively enough. Whether there is form in reality, whether form in a scene is part of the act of perception, or whether it belongs not to reality but to the alien "order of discourse," in a word whether in the literary act form is discovered or imposed—these questions arise in Tomlinson's work; and though they receive, usually, ambivalent answers, they firmly secure our engagement. Also, if it is true that geometrical regularity in art by momentarily arresting the flux of being offers repose to the man disquieted by the obscurity and confusion of the world,<sup>1</sup> then again in the manipulation of geometric lines in his poems Tomlinson may be considered a spokesman for these entangled times.

He has amassed by now a substantial number of volumes of poetry, his own and translations. They contain no lines that spring or will spring to the mind to appease it in specific situations—the criterion Auden once proposed for testing; for of the clothes of the perfectly dressed man one remembers nothing. The poems are formed, one must imagine, with exquisite care; and they are exquisite. Tomlinson is admired by traditionalists, obviously; but he is accepted also by the radicals—those in whose presence one mustn't praise Philip Larkin.

He bridges in fact a number of divisions. He is from Staffordshire, the