



LUMPEN

A journal for poor and
working class writers

Issue 005
Autumn 2020





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A Journal for Poor and Working Class Writers
Issue 05

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We printed this issue using an online print service because printing co-ops aren't affordable to us. All workers still got paid. But sadly, there was at least one boss involved in the process of publishing this journal.

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*LUM
PEN.*

Editorial

What the fuck can you say about human life right now? We are deep in some unfathomable mirth and I have a thousand words, in a journal for working class & poor people – as the Tories just cut free school meals, furlough payments are diving like Tom Daley and the North is being shut down with Boris’ pocket shrapnel as recompense. When the shit hits the fan, it hits us first, We know this.

We are already overloaded with a plethora of tweets, news, updates, podcasts and memes, each with their own analysis of the moment - an analysis that spans the full range of human banality and madness. So I slightly loathe to add to this cesspit with my own chequered understanding about what this moment might mean, and I haven’t got a fucking clue anyway.

It’s not like the world hasn’t experienced plagues and pandemics before; and perhaps this crisis is not so different from all the others, it’s just ours. Like the war generation it’ll come to define us - we’ll be the covid codgers. Where the former are strong, stiff upper lipped and haunted by the cutting sound of an air-raid siren - we’ll be wary of human contact, anxious with our handshakes, and forever unable to forget the dank smell of a face mask.

This crisis is predicated on a long sense of foreboding... after all, aren’t we just waiting for the world to end? The energy of this era could be well imagined as an airport arrival hall, the anxiety and anticipation felt at every opening of the automatic doors, here they come! That’s them now!, Locusts! Droughts! Plagues! O no they’ve been detained at immigration! We’re trapped in a monopoly of Starbucks, Costa, and WH Smith!

It's possible that I'm just so piped for signs of our reckoning that I'm projecting onto this pandemic something larger. I belong to a generation frequently told that our lives are not and will not be as good as our parents. It was better in the sixties, and the seventies, and the eighties, the nineties were still better (Ecstasy! Oasis!), and by the time the noughties came around (I turned 18 in 2009) a cold and icy winter of neo-liberal nastiness had well and truly set in, save for a couple of daisy patches.

So I am somewhat used to the atmosphere of dread, from the more mundane facts of millennial life; you'll never own a house, there aren't any jobs, opportunities or mobility, your parties are shit, your food is poisoned, your political hopes are futile, there's a recession, a huge and endless and boring recession, to the more existential; beginning (and ending) with the very top-trump of existential threats; LIFE ON A DOOMED PLANET!

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- The fucked-up tenets of sexism and racism seem a very long way from being behind us, the environment is being screwed, forests are burning, the sea is rotting like a brillo sponge, and the few people left in the world who are able to live in peaceful coexistence with nature are being regularly and systematically murdered to apparent disregard from any government anywhere. Here in the western world, the writhing, rotting seat of empire obsessed by its past, we have a miserable population flinging themselves at false prophets and phantom idols as our suicide rates go up and up and up and frankly just so much of the world seems to be fucking conquered by cunts.

There is a constant sense of things getting worse, like being at the beginning of a K-hole, the part where you cannot see an end, where even a flight of stairs seems insurmountable.

The brief hope felt by some for the Corbyn project is well and truly over; extinguished by the absolute rotter Kier Starmer. Most

revolutionaries will tell you straight that they don't think there will ever be a revolution. It feels despite the contrary phrase that they are so many, and we are so few.

There's no use telling the turkeys any different, we might as well be honest about the depths of shit we are in. And a lot of us are anxious and depressed. One of the horrifyingly acute things about depression is the feeling that you are seeing the world clearer than you ever did before; and that, rather than a dark cloud descending, depression is a cold light, a brutal illumination of the world we have built, and it's become harder and harder to deny the reality of a depressed person.

Good news is scarce while premonitions of further human misfortune are bountiful. From the Hollywood depictions of disaster and dystopia to the worrying scientific predictions about antibiotic use, human fertility and happiness, to the many seasons of hell that The Sun manages to summon daily. Tinder hell, cheating hell, bankruptcy hell, 7K holiday hell; though they strategically miss the only truly existing hell; the neoliberal one.

And as we await the next season, I wonder what it means to be living in a society obsessed by its own demise. Zizek pointed out that it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism and currently doom seems to be the only collective vision of a future we are capable of holding on to.

Tremendous!
Wonderful!!!
A fantastic place to live!! !

I'm sure supporters of Trump would attest to owning a collective vision, but it is a vision of a past not a future; make America great again. Trump style politics is about winning on a waving-while-drowning show of dishonest, deluded optimism. Basically, if the

world is burning and you deny it copiously and extravagantly enough you stand to do quite well. Like the alcoholic who cannot face up to the things they did when drunk, it's far easier to buy some more cans. Being honest about the economic, environmental, social and spiritual catastrophes we are facing is not motivating for voters.

But somehow, we have to come to terms with it and continue to move. For too many of us there is a lack of ability to imagine a world, to believe in a world, that is good and worth fighting for. Swallowed by narcissism and nihilism it's easier to proclaim that humans are shit anyway. A statement that unfairly overlooks the people that continue to live well and peacefully, while apportioning the blame for the dreadful actions of a few onto the whole of humanity – we are in this shit because of a remarkably small proportion of the population. Regaining faith in humankind is essential to move beyond this moment of seizure.

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- There are some hopeful things, from such dead-zones as parliamentary politics; where in New Zealand the re-election Jacinda Arden has shown that once in power policies that keep people alive are popular. While in Bolivia an apparent USA backed coup has failed, and the Movimiento al Socialismo party are back in power. This pandemic feels like the first convulsion of a dying body – and from the best flowers grow. Despite raving about the dire straits we're in for the last one thousand words I do remain enchanted by the world and its possibilities. People continue to love each other, and this is incredibly important. Alongside the horror beautiful things happen. I think often of a quote from Jose Maria Arguedas; who said that both those who advocate for and those who fear capitalist cultural imperialism err by forgetting "that man truly possesses a soul and that this is very rarely negotiable" (1975 :188). Find yours, find some others, and hang on. Welcome to Lumpen issue Five.

Illustration by
Betty Mengesha



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Josh Schoolar

Between a Job and a Hard Place

An enquiry into boredom, youth, anxiety and the limbo between working and unemployment. A non-workers enquiry.

The following piece was written by Josh Schoolar, who passed away in his sleep on the 20th of September 2020 at the age of 23. Josh was a working-class revolutionary communist from Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, who in his short life contributed massively to struggles both at home and abroad.

Born to a proletarian family with a keen sense of right and wrong, Josh was introduced to revolutionary politics as a teen when he came out as gay. He began reading widely, and became a revolutionary Marxist, joining the youth organisation of Worker's Power, a now dissolved Trotskyist group. Later, after starting university in Manchester, Josh went on to join the local group of Plan C, a pluralist radical left organisation, and involved himself deeply in student and tenant struggles.

But university wasn't to last. Bored and alienated by his studies and worklife, Josh began planning a trip to Rojava/northern Syria to volunteer in the social revolution there, led by the Kurdish Freedom Movement. Although not classically anarchist or Marxist, Josh believed deeply in the Rojava Revolution, especially its empowerment of women and the working classes through new forms of radical participatory democracy. In his statement on arriving he wrote 'in Rojava I can feel the victory and freedom I long for my class and my loved ones to feel back home.' He spent six months as an English teacher in Kobane, before joining the International Freedom Battalion, an internationalist united front of anarchists and communists defending the revolution. As an IFB volunteer Josh participated in the liberation of Raqqa, the "capital" of ISIS' so-called caliphate, returning to the UK shortly after.

Back in Britain Josh immediately got involved in local struggles, particularly as a member and then staffer of community union ACORN. He was heavily involved in organising tenants and registering working-class voters, representing his fierce belief that ordinary people can defend themselves and transform society, but only by getting organised and taking collective action. The last two years of Josh's life were dogged by state repression for his time as a volunteer in Syria, under investigation for "terrorism", and having his home and workplace raided by police, getting stopped and interviewed at borders, and getting his passport confiscated. This repression got him fired from his job as a SENCO (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) teaching assistant at a comprehensive, and put consistent stress on Josh right up to the day he passed away.

But Josh didn't let state repression, or the work problems it caused, get in the way of his commitment to working-class liberation. Those who knew him had the honour to organise with one of the kindest, funniest, most genuine comrades and revolutionaries we'll ever meet. Josh embodied the idea that the struggle for

control over our everyday lives is long and hard, but also joyful and beautiful at the same time. He was a beacon of hope to many of us, an inspiringly committed and developed revolutionary at such a young age. It's painful to know that he won't get to see the free life we build on the current system's ashes, but we now have the honour of building that world in his name.

The following piece was written in 2017 while Josh was a member of Plan C, and originally published on the organization's website. Josh was an avid reader as well as a working-class militant, and his love of beat generation writers really comes across in his style here. With spontaneous, conversational and unforgiving wording and pace, Josh sets out the monotony and everyday violence of life in urban Britain as a young and precarious working-class person in the late 2010s.

Nik Matheou, *One of Josh's Comrades*

The rascal, swindler, beggar, the unemployed, the starving, wretched and criminal workingman—these are figures who do not exist for political economy but only for other eyes, those of the doctor, the judge, the gravedigger, and bum-bailiff, etc; such figures are spectres outside its domain – Karl Marx

You realized some time ago between reading Marx in sociology at college and actually having to work, that work itself is second in its mundane torture only to the process of looking for it. Hours spent looking at indeed job search, flicking between tabs, checking your mate's facebook ("Just checked in at the hotel with the squad, loving Menorca! Tits and lines all round LMFAO!" – fuck off Tim you sad wanker) and getting lost in the latest #moralpanic on twitter. Hours wasted trying to look for the delicate balance of what you're vaguely qualified or experienced for and what you are willing to bother spending your waking life and energy performing. Though you know it won't last, don't you. If you actually cared about what it is you're going to be doing, and not just the hourly rate then you wouldn't be on fucking Indeed in the first place, would you? You know you don't really care, and for some reason that makes

you feel bad. Is it guilt? Not quite guilt- anger. But with no 'line-manager' to take it out on, you just end up angry at yourself.

You close the laptop and go and have a smoke, put the kettle on and sit down in the kitchen, click your neck and wait for the kettle, flick through the bills and the UKIP flyers and the leaflets for the local takeaway "Al Nabaabs got a deal on Fridays", you shout upstairs to your housemate -he's doing a masters like a prick, you should have done a masters shouldn't you really, so you're the prick here aren't you. The kettle boils and you fix a cup of tea, you bring it upstairs and you open your laptop and look at more jobs on Indeed. It would be an exaggeration to say your hearts not in it, your mortal physical form isn't invested any more than your fingers tapping away now. You won't be invested in the interview and you won't be invested on the shop floor. The hardest you'll ever try is when your manager's looking. But why should you care? You just need to pay your rent next week and you're not comfortable about dropping down to the last hundred pound in your overdraft again. So here you are clicking apply automatically and sending your hastily written and rewritten CVs to as many "POSITIONS AVAILABLE NOW!" jobs you can find. Because you're not just a shelf stacker now, you're a courier, a chugger, a fucking mixologist, a cleaner and a life model. So you sit in your shit room in your shit terrace house-share and you look for shit work. Not that you want to actually turn up, who the fuck would. You know it's bullshit, the stiff next to you knows it's bullshit, your boss knows it's bullshit and so does their's. Much of this work is literally pointless, sure sometimes you end a shift and you feel good, you reached your targets, you actually helped a customer, some old nan on the phone had a good chat with you. Sometimes at work it feels good when you feel productive and not just scared. Sometimes at work you're angry and you feel the beautiful fleeting moments of militancy, speaking in hushed voices to co-workers in the stock room, but mostly you're just fucking bored. The work feels pointless and with a flurry of part time contracts, falling profits and fast turn

over you know that your manager must know it too. The copy and pasted 30 word job description on the agency website shows that your boss knows you're just in it for the cash – ONLY SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES WILL BE RESPONDED TO -Despite that you've gotta smile hun, its company policy.

You check the time on your phone and realise an hour and a half has passed and all you've done is watch Facebook refresh, with 'Indeed' and a 'good CV template' Google search open on your laptop. You have another smoke, not bothering to go downstairs this time. You rub your eyes and crack your knuckles before staring at the wall for ten minutes. Fuck. You have another look at jobs again, not even reading the descriptions or the bullshit titles – you're not a Logistics Operating Assistant For a Major UK Supermarket, you're a shelf stacker mate. Your phone vibrates on the desk and you basically dive to answer it, desperate for a chance to read something that isn't more fucking job descriptions or CV guidelines or some bullshit on universal credit from GOV.UK.

- Your nan could be dead, you'd still read it eagerly wouldn't you.
- It's your mate, she wants to go the pub. Shit, you know you can't afford it. You put the phone down and leave the text unanswered.
- You haven't done anything productive today, you don't deserve to go out.

This is not living. The leaflet from the GPs said that if you feel depressed and anxious again you should go back and consult your doctor, but now you get out of bed so late in the afternoon you won't even make it there before it closes. Besides there's a waiting list for anything other than some shit pills that you looked up online, which you can't even get high off or sell to your mates. What you really want is someone to talk to, to feel loved, useful, and valid. Instead you feel crushed and tired even though you spend the whole day in your house sat down on your laptop and occasionally nipping out for a takeaway, an 8th or some cans, and an overpriced oven pizza from the off-license that you feel guilty

about buying on the walk back home. You're dangerously deep in your shark infested overdraft and your income is either benefits (if you're lucky), money begged off of friends or family (in the unlikely event they can afford it), or more likely whatever's left from your last temp contract in the bar/warehouse/coffee shop/festival/sorting office or whatever agency shit you got yourself out of the front door for. Hearing it slam as time slows down and it seems to be days before you open it again. This is not living.

If you tick the right boxes and do a bit of googling about what to say, maybe even get a letter from the doctor, you can get on benefits. Despite what you'd been led to believe by the Sun these aren't quite as rock and roll as you thought they were. Peanuts a week and maybe some help with housing or your childcare are the plus, the negative is an army of paranoid jobsworths looking to catch you out on anything. One sanction easily leads to another as you scrape together to get by for the next month, start cutting corners, and looking for a bit on the side. You search "how to get more benefits" on your mate's laptop, you can't use your own because they can access your internet history now. The bastards at the job center make you wait for hours, fuck up the time of your appointment or give you 8 forms to fill out perfectly- as desperate as you are for the money their equally desperate for an excuse not to give it to you. Of course what you don't see is the manager, the cutting hours, the weekly targets that they inevitably have hanging over them as well. This is a boring monotonous dystopia that does not in the least resemble actual living.

You pick up your phone and finish the text. You'll be there in 10, but you can't afford a large one: laugh out loud crying laughing face you type. You close the laptop, put on something more acceptable than the primark t-shirt and sweatpants you were wearing earlier. Chug the can of Carling left in the fridge and set off: 22 minutes later you're in the same Wetherspoons with the same 3 friends you're there with every week. You arrive late because you always

do, don't you. You buy a round and finish the tenner, you're having a good time you think, you flash your contactless and before you know it you've spent another tenner. Oh well it's a Friday, it could be worse. Your phone vibrates.

EMAIL: 2 NEW MATCHING JOBS FROM CV LIBRARY

Fuck. Suddenly you're brought out of the warm 3 pints and a rum and coke glow and you remember your overdraft, your rent, the fact you went over your phone data allowance downloading Carly Rae Jepsen on MP3 Converter and you hope that Vodaphone can't read what you used the data for, and the overall fact that you never have any money, you can't keep a job, you'll never own a house, you don't even know how a pension works. Sometimes you just feel like fucking hurting yourself again. All your problems could be solved if you just had a little more money, but you can't get any work and when you have it you get treated like shit and you hate it and it just seems nicer to curl up stoned, crying on the sofa when your housemates are asleep, listening to "Call Me Maybe". So you close the email and go outside for a smoke. Another hour, maybe more, a few more pints and you're in the Uber home regretting every meter of the 5.40 journey. But the driver's nice you think, he keeps smiling at you and asking if you how your night was, he offers you a mint and tries to start a conversation about what you do for a living. You tell him you work at a bar, that's the last gig you had over summer, better than the truth innit. But he's just as nervous as you are, he wants a 5 star review so he can work tomorrow and feed his kids, because it's not enough now that we actually do the job we're supposed to, we have to smile and act nice and emotionally prostrate ourselves in front of the customer. Which is you btw. Equally as poor and scared and anxious and pissed off as the person driving/delivering to/serving/selling the contract to you. So you get home and you get into bed, but you can't sleep – partly the blood alcohol content, partly the crushing depression of global late-stage capitalism. You open your laptop and look at the

Indeed job search as the blue light keeps you up for another hour before you can fall asleep. This is not living.

While you lie in bed popping sertraline you are as much a part of the contemporary production process as the woman operating a lathe in some titanic machine shop in Nanjing. Marx and Engels noted the existence of the reserve army of labour and its role in capital in the mid 1800s. While you sit waiting for your JSA, or diving 20,000 leagues into your overdraft, you're allowing for capital's safety-net to manage crisis in production. Mo Money Mo Workers. At least you are in theory. Today as the actual means of industrial production are less defined by borders and factory walls, least of all in Europe, where Marx first put pen to paper. The mass worker model doesn't exist in its combative form from the later decades of the last century. Capital reacted to the wave of militancy from the 60s to the 80s across Europe and the USA with a fighting retreat, the near constant offensive of the proletariat class was halted by a combination of the sharp counter attacks of state repression and increasing reliance on automated machinery, artificial intelligence, information technology and global logistics. We was robbed.

Not that this means anything to you, as you repeat the same day of waking up at 12, self loathing until 2, bothering to shower at 3, refreshing all the apps on your phone till 6, then hating yourself till you go to sleep flicking between Netflix, employment agencies and porn. Facebook and ad agencies mining profit out of you with your search history and group-chats that you will never see, desperately taking value you create while you remain idle and depressed. This is a permanent state of underemployment – not quite unemployed enough to get decent benefits (an almost entirely mythical creation of the right populist press anyway), and not employed enough to hold down anything resembling a career that your grandparents might have had. We find ourselves in cycles where we work for a few weeks or months, doss about for another month or so,

flirt with JSA or move from temp shit to temp shit. Student debt hanging over you like an ugly vulture just waiting for when the government slowly drips it into the private sector, and suddenly in 5 years it's not SLC letters coming through our door it's the boots of the bailiffs. While the state proclaims minimum wage increases, the cost of living goes up like the Hindenburg. The grand unions and parties of the past, nothing but pillars of capital then and now sell us insurance and push for closed borders; and the left parties either stick their fingers up their arses, splitting and bickering, or go full Greek and start imposing the austerity measures themselves.

Sure capital has reacted, with zero hour contracts, Deliveroo piece-work bullshit, so precarity and anxiety are the order of the day. Because unemployment is down if everyone's working for a few months at a time. Get it? You're surplus population buddy. You're literally disposable. You're render in the cracks of slowly breaking capital. Obviously some of this is very profitable: struggling to crawl out of the pit of the last crisis, capital is more than happy to use this new permanent underemployment to its advantage before the next collapse. Modern logistics are quick and nasty, Just In Time stock levels and the almost immediate flow of data mean that companies need to be quick on a global scale. The demand for a certain product in the West needs to be transferred to industries in South East Asia and then transported back to the West, providing short-term global employment on that certain logistical production line, before changing to the next demand. But this is also a fatal flaw, because we can't afford to buy anything anymore can we. Crisis after crisis is inevitable: workers finding their militant feet in China are demanding higher wages and better conditions, while the West doesn't have the income to buy them. The cost of production rises as technology is developed to keep up with the changing pace of production and try and reduce the workforce and the environmental damage of the decades of brutal strip mining is catching up. So our friends in their factories will strike, so the prices will go up and we'll lose our jobs stacking the

shelves and calling people's homes in a desperate attempt to sell them something and before you know it the economy is burning at both ends. In their haste to extract as much surplus value out of us as possible, they forgot they rely on us and when we act they have to answer and now maybe, just maybe in their arrogance they forgot how to. If we're not mistaken they might have gone and sold themselves the rope.

You close the laptop and grab your phone and the pack of half full pack of Players Kingsize. You stand up and you go down stairs to smoke, you throw the bills and the UKIP flyers and the takeaway leaflets in the bin under the sink and you're reminded about how you used to recycle. Fuck remember that? You had to do that in school, there were adverts on TV for god's sake, now you never hear about it. It's like we don't believe in things anymore, you know? Like we've lost something. But maybe you were just stupid for believing there were things to believe in anyway, you think. Fuck. It seems there is no future and no real past worth remembering, four decades of neoliberalism and the current slow-burning crisis has reduced almost all radical movements to something of a joke, the only thing that wins elections is someone offering some form of change, as people grasp at anything in the hope of not being powerless forever. A day after Brexit shocked pollsters and the liberal establishment in the referendum, people, many who presumably voted Leave, searched "what does Brexit mean" in their tens of thousands. We don't believe in anything anymore and we don't know what we want, as a result of this 'othering' by capital outside of traditional wage and workplace relationships. From the overcrowded cities of Europe to China's Pearl River Delta there is a crisis being born. Proletarians drifting between lumpen or surplus population at the edges of capital have already started to kick back globally. Hyper exploited migrant workers and futureless urban youth across the old and new productive bases of the world have been a premonition of what is soon to come, strikes, blockades, looting and escalating bitter clashes. Sometimes with set and

clear demands, sometimes with none- there doesn't seem to be a formula to this new wave of struggle yet, or a program which can be adopted. The role of communists who find ourselves in this swell of partial proletarianisation must be to study it and see what shapes the routes we can take. The terrain has clearly changed, despite the pomp and banners of the right and the old dead left there is no utopia to build and no glorious past to revive, whatever world we have to win is still to be explored.

But you don't think this as you sit there at the kitchen table, you just think about the here and the now. Your overdraft, your rent, your fear, your boredom. You'll feel better tomorrow, you tell yourself, as you look out the greasy windows, past the shit lace curtains your landlord had put in and you all hate but can't be arsed to change because it's not like you really live here, is it. Your phone vibrates on the table and you leave it for a moment. Maybe it's an interview, maybe it's one of your mates, your mum who you'll lie to and say you're doing fine (please let it be an interview), maybe it's even a callback. You stub out the cig in the empty Red Stripe can you've been using since some bastard stole the ashtray at the New Year's do. You do the PIN on your contract smartphone (maybe you could sell it? Nah fuck that, you love Instagram and without Grindr how would you actually get laid anymore) and see what it wants now...

EMAIL: 1 NEW MATCHING JOB FROM CV LIBRARY



**REST IN PEACE
JOSH SCHOOLAR**

Working Class Literature

**in Manchester mid-1970s
to early 1980s**

Heena Patel





Looking at working class literature from the past connects us to a long tradition of resistance, survival and the struggle for liberation through words. Like other forms of working class culture, working class literature has been ridiculed, discouraged and effectively hidden. We are told that it's not 'proper' literature by the mediating classes. But why should they exclusively have a say on what's proper or good? Especially when there is plenty of well-resourced mainstream culture that is accepted and even praised, when actually it's mediocre and with a distinct absence of feeling.

Here I will be looking at the origins of Commonword, an organisation set up in Manchester to encourage working class writing. I will also be discussing the working class writer movement of the mid-to late Seventies and early Eighties and describing some of the work that came out of it. I have chosen to focus on the work developed and published by Commonword because I have been working on an archive project for the organisation over the last two years. This has given me the chance to read some of the literature and share it with a wider audience. Some of my information is drawn from archive material and from interviews and correspondence with people involved in Commonword in its early years.



Early 1970s in Partington, a somewhat isolated overspill estate nine miles south west of Manchester city centre: a group of local

residents take part in a rent strike. The reason they are taking action is that their landlord, Trafford Council, wants to raise rents paid by council housing tenants up to levels found in the private rental market. It is this act of resistance that eventually leads to the formation of Commonword, a Manchester-based organisation set up to encourage working class people to express themselves through words and writing.

Around that time of the strike a man called Greg Wilkinson had a job as a community development worker in the area. Wilkinson was born into a white middle class family in London. He was educated privately, then at Oxbridge. He worked in the 1960s as a journalist for Reuters and was sent to Algeria to cover their struggle for independence, but he became disillusioned and quit the profession. His experience made him realise that, “there were too many people like me talking about other people and that people should be talking for themselves.” He returned and ended up working in Partington.

Wilkinson knew of the residents through his work. For support to the striking tenants, the funding for his role got stopped and he was made to leave the accommodation that came with it. When the strike finally collapsed he got the idea for Lifetimes. “We’ve been meeting all these people, tenants, trade union activists, youth workers, and we’ve talked about the work and about sport and the weather but we’ve never really talked to each other about ourselves or our backgrounds. And Partington, as a new estate, has no history that people bring in with them.” Wilkinson set up a project in which thirteen Partington residents shared their life stories and created a history for Partington through a mixture of their own writing, taking part in one-to-one interviews with Wilkinson and then meeting in each other’s houses to contribute to group discussions with the other project participants. The resulting texts were then published in a series of booklets with the support of the Institute of Advanced Studies, then part of

Manchester Polytechnic. He said, “The writing came from a position of weakness, not strength; that we took to words when action had failed.”

The introductory text for *Lifetimes* explains that the project participants “are not a random sample. They are people who for various reasons could not accept the non-community in which they found themselves. And in one way or another have tried to do something about it. That is how they met.” They all come from different circumstances and families, but by coming together to share their stories, they find they have more in common than all living in Partington. All of them have experienced difficult circumstances caused by poverty and some kind of neglect or abuse. Not all of it is grim. Within these pages there are also stories of survival and escaping oppressive conditions and getting politicised and educated and growing in confidence. Wilkinson believed it was fundamental that everyone had something to say and that people should be able to tell their own stories.

It was in this spirit that Wilkinson went on to set up the Commonword Writers Workshop, a space to bring your work and get feedback from others. It was a free weekly session open to all but held on Monday evenings in city centre pubs. Some of the people Wilkinson had met through *Lifetimes* got involved, but they also advertised for participation from “inner-city working class people who weren’t too keen on high literature as their end in life”. Commonword was set up as an organisation, and got grant money which paid for office and workshop space above what used to be a bank at 12 Piccadilly in the centre of Manchester. Funding also allowed for the employment of a handful of part-time staff. The first issue of *Write On*, Commonword’s quarterly magazine came out in 1977. It was produced and printed in-house and showcased mostly poems, life writing and short stories brought to the workshop. In later issues, there were contributions from other writer groups from Greater Manchester area.

Here it is also worth mentioning another quarterly Manchester-based publication of working class writing. It was called *Voices*, and it was set up in 1972 by a communist English teacher called Ben Ainley. It ran for thirty-seven issues until it ceased publication in 1984. Describing itself as 'Working class poetry and prose with a socialist appeal', the quarterly magazine initially focused on writers based in Manchester. It later went on to become the official publication of the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP), a nationwide network of working class writing organisations. Writing developed by *Commonword* and published in *Write On* would end up being published *Voices* because *Commonword* was a member of the FWCP at the time, but occasionally pieces that first appeared in *Voices* were reproduced in *Write On*.

It would be useful to explain the term 'worker writer' here. Describing yourself in this way acknowledged how your job or occupation shaped your life as a writer. It showed that writing wasn't just a pursuit for the academically educated and that you could still be a writer even if it wasn't your sole occupation. In practice, worker writers supplied brief autobiographies along with their piece that mentioned what they did or used to do for a living when. The problem with this is that some occupations are more respectable and mention-worthy (e.g. joinery or factory work) than others (e.g. sex work). That some women writers describe themselves in their biographies as housewives may be recognition of the unpaid labour of domestic work. One writer mentions his blindness in his biography, but disability is usually more socially acceptable when it is visible. There are writers who describe themselves as unemployed, which may have helped to reduce stigma, but may also have been a way of covering up invisible conditions such as poor mental health.

Write On and *Coming up!*, a one-off *Commonword* anthology of new writing from the same time, gave many of their contributors

their first experience of being published. Some had left school with few formal qualifications, spending most of their lives doing physical or manual work and only starting to write in middle age or after retirement. The writers cover universal themes like love, family, childhood, living environments and day-to-day activities, but you also find accounts of incarceration, being taken into care and of course, work, all written from a working class perspective.

A lot of the writing you find here is rough around the edges and underdeveloped, but that is not to say that it doesn't have value. What really stands out in a lot of the pieces is the lack of pretentiousness and self-consciousness. The writing here feels freer, more driven by encouragement than by policing. The autobiographical writing is refreshingly unsentimental probably because it is written by working class people simply writing about how they experienced their lives. They aren't asking for the reader's pity, approval or even understanding. Some of the most powerful pieces are by older people writing about how the Great Depression and the General Strike in the twenties and thirties made a lasting impact on their lives.

As well as experimentation from individual writers, there is also editorial experimentation. In *Coming up!* you find interviews with members of the Mental Patients Union, stories of emigrating to Britain interwoven with childhood folktales and writing by adult literacy students mixed in with short stories and poems. Students with low literacy levels are not excluded; instead their stories are recorded then get transcribed. This is writing by the people of Manchester with some of them setting their writing in Manchester or writing in local dialect, something you rarely find in a mainstream British literary landscape dominated by stories set in London or a romanticised version of the countryside.

What may be surprising to readers of this work is how political a lot of this work is, given that most people did not go to university

at the time. This could be because working class people were able to access formal and informal political education through their trade unions. Along with cultural institutions like Commonword and adult education colleges they formed a fertile network of organisations that encouraged thought and creative output from working class people. Writing workshops that took place in these settings provided the model for creative writing degrees now offered by universities that cost thousands of pounds to attend.

Write On ran for nineteen issues and came to an end in about 1984. By then Commonword, as well as running its original Monday night workshop, had set up women-only and gay and lesbian-only groups in response to demand for them. Not long after that, Commonword worker Mike Narayansingh would set up a group in Moss Side to encourage more work by Black and Asian writers and a group for disabled writers would follow a few years later. This was a time when people were being inspired by the liberation and independence movements of the Sixties and Seventies as well as the anti-Apartheid struggles that were still going on at the time. There were those who were not happy with the direction the worker writer movement was going in. When Rick Gwilt, a working class writer, lorry driver, Commonword workshop attendee and sometime editor of Voices was interviewed as part of Commonword's archive project, he explained that, "Greg [Wilkinson] and I had very different views on what the workshops were. I think it was a period where identity politics was beginning to blossom and Greg was very much into what became known as identity politics. He saw Commonword as a mouthpiece 'for a thousand voices' so, a reflection of the diversity of society and people of different gender, sexuality, culture, everything. And [my fairly simplistic view at the time was that] I felt the main barriers in our culture were to working class writers. ...that was the gap that we were trying to address. There were real differences in how we [i.e. Voices and Commonword] saw the worker writer movement developing and what we saw as being its unique role."

The absence of contributions to earlier Commonword publications and in Voices that are by lesbians, gay men, disabled people and black and Asian people is glaring, even though they can be and usually are working class. Women writers fared slightly better, but they were almost always white and their work always made up much less than half of the contributions. Creating separate groups based on gender, sexuality etc. may not have been the perfect strategy but it was clear that something had to be done.

Looking at the writing in Commonword's archive from the mid-Eighties onwards, you see fewer pieces of work by people strongly attached to a working class identity. This could partly be explained by the government dismantling trade union power and closing down heavily unionised industries (and destroying the communities and networks that came with it) whilst pushing ideas of private ownership, individualism and aspiration (i.e. shame of being and staying working class). It may also be because black/gay and lesbian/disabled/women writers felt alienated by the working class writer movement and did not strongly identify with it. That's not to say that Commonword stopped supporting working class writers completely. It continued to provide free meeting space for its writer groups, held writing competitions and gave new writers the experience of being edited and published as well as organising live events where writers from the different groups would meet, perform and socialise. But by the end of the Nineties, the government, state funding of the arts and technology had transformed society and culture irreversibly. This leaves us with a very distinct style of writing from the early part of Commonword's history, which although has some parallels with life now, is never to be repeated.

Commonword continues to support marginalised writers today, but mainly focuses on black and Asian writers. It is one of the few cultural working class institutions to have survived from the late Seventies. Its work cannot be sustained in isolation; ideally it would

be part of a broad ecosystem of well-resourced non-competing organisations committed to giving marginalised writers and artists a platform.

To look at some of the Commonword archive material go to commonwordarchive.org

The entire back catalogue of Voices was digitised and put online at manvoices.co.uk, but sadly without much mention of the names of the working class writing groups that existed around the country.



Voices 17

SPRING/SUMMER 1978

40p



Northern Powerhouse

● ● ● Natalie Wall

Away for so long
I learned to view the place in profile,
remembering only traces of truth.

The past seen through a warped,
single-pane window, a thin celluloid membrane,
shifting and supple but truth-devoid.

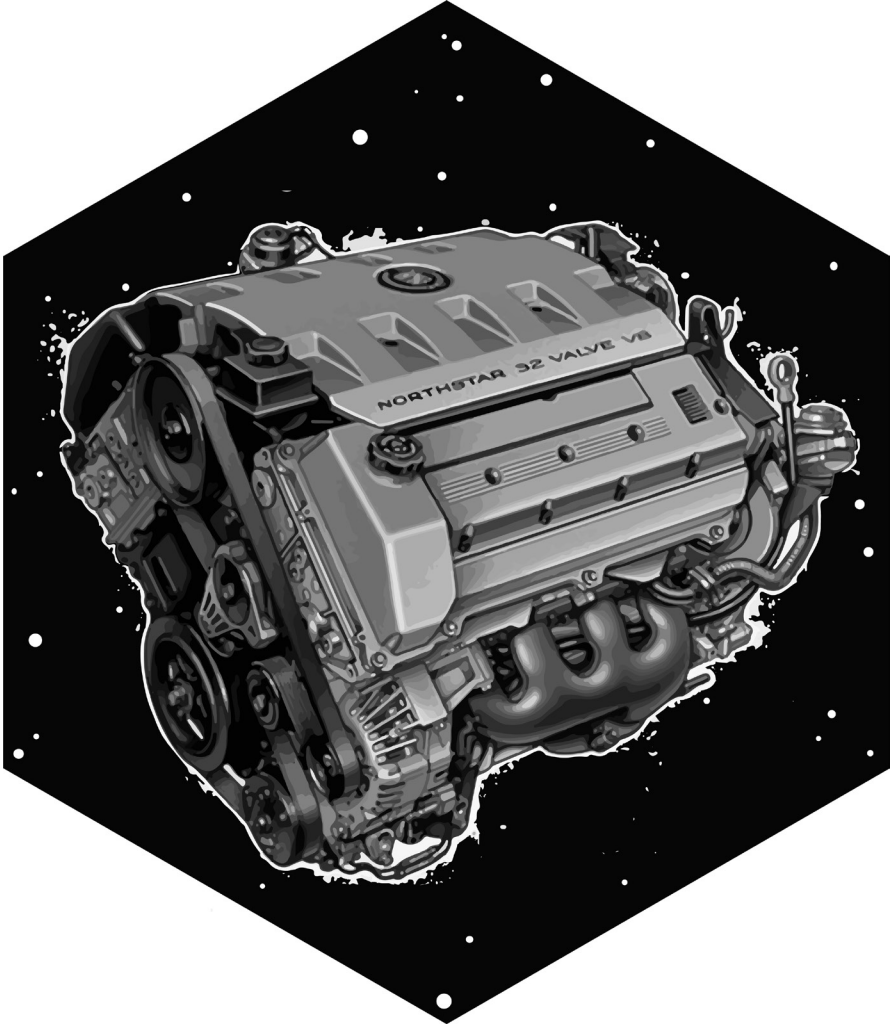
Memory makes no justice,
my abused home rusted,
ransacked, ripped-off and still left smouldering.

One thing left to do is ruin yourself,
live innumerable and forever shouldering burdens
in the stark confines
of greyed-out telly static.

Building disrepairs,
erratic, life-melting closures,
business lost, too many on the doss;
saving so many incurs a cost
too steep for those with anything to offer.

The youth that flee in lemming droves
are deaf to the dulcet tones that drone,
memory scented but tarred with that shade life
and cut off from the Arcadian hills where meaning might be
tended,
shepherded, farmed, recorded, and detailed.

It seems measurements have failed there,
that we've all dropped off the scale there.
But peeling back the layers and years
of pot-holed tarmac and peeling facades,
the daily drudge and neighbourhood fights
reveals the same rich dirt we looked away and coveted,
but far more potent for the depths it's plummeted
yet still lived on.



In The Red. In The Black. In The Rented, white Cadillac.

Russell Christie

I still don't know what money is, apart from the cash in my hand. Everything not in hard currency is still just an idea, just numbers, unreal and abstract, not part of my world. My dad didn't have a bank account. We lived in a rented house, cash in hand, week to week. Money, like possessions, was hard copy or nothing. There was no theoretical money or financial instruments, no elsewhere of money. And, after, there was neither cash nor trust fund to be passed on. Being working class means both a lack of inheritance in hard copy (property, savings and investments) and a lack of inheritance of knowledge in managing these things. Financial knowledge is not part of working class cultural inheritance because there is no material inheritance that it represents and regulates. In wealthier families, a knowledge of the abstract operation of money and property comes with the territory. It's in the blood. It's absorbed from conversation. It surrounds you in materials that speak. The house around me whispered, 'Not yours'. Rather than a knowledge of mortgages and credit, my inheritance was cynicism about wealth and the instruments of wealth, perhaps born of resentment at not having them. Cynicism and ignorance, in relation to wealth and its instruments, combined in phrases like, 'Mortgages are just millstones round your neck'.

For most of my life, when middle-class friends have discussed inheritance and property, I've said, 'Oh, I didn't have any inheritance'. 'What, nothing?' some of them are astonished. 'There must have been something?' And I'm equally astonished that there wasn't, because it feels like there was. A void stares at me. Wait: this void is not nothing. There was an inheritance. I inherited blanks and absences, debits and inhibitions rather than credits. I inherited disdain and contempt, a resentment for wealth

and its instruments, perhaps as a self-defensive formation, a self-protective dismissal. I inherited a lack of knowledge along with an absence of money. Inheritances are both financial and cultural. For the working class, because what is passed on is in this negative territory, it is taken as simple non-existence, but the lack of material inheritance has a corollary function. Financial voids are repeated as cultural voids. A lack of knowledge represents an empty 'will' in all its meanings. In a financialised world, ambition is difficult if you can't even see the structures of its financing. The practical rungs of the ladder are invisible and unknown.

Did my unfamiliarity with the financial world, my ignorance of its reality and my inherited cynicism about it, feed into my blithely becoming involved in credit card fraud in the US in the 1990s? Was my lack of conscience based on an inability to feel any repercussions for the card holders? Incomprehension that they would open their statements to numbers that would, in the moment of seeing them, be a heart stopping horror? Was I callous in relation to numbers on a page because I had not been inculcated into their joined-up pertinence? Even now, several lifetimes later, my indifference and cynicism about taking on a mountain of debt, as a mature student, is a peculiar legacy. My unfortunate fortune, at this new point in time, is that the numbers on the screen of my student loan account will never prove real to me and still do not concern me in any affective way.

We flew to New York, rented a Cadillac and drove up to Boston. A new, white Cadillac with the just introduced, high-torque Northstar engine. An aspirational machine, adding power to luxury. It roared and its front end lifted as you put your foot down. The air was full of leather, the couch of the front seat was cream with tan piping. The dashboard automatically illuminated as dusk fell and we hit the interstate. Driving, I stretched my arm across to Max, a curly headed, brown-eyed, New York Jewish boy who'd picked me up one Sunday afternoon in the End Up bar in San Francisco. He'd

managed to prepare a dose of heroin, melting a lump of Mexican tar into a teaspoon of salt water held steadily above a lighter, thanks to the smooth ride of the Cadillac. The veins in the pale crook of my arm were neon blue by the dashboard light. He fixed me as I was driving. The warmth poured into the capillaries of my liver, heart and brain. The Caddy lifted and rolled on the cotton of its dynamic suspension. We were going dumpster diving for credit card information.

Growing up, I came to understand (it was never mentioned or discussed) that my father had been declared bankrupt. Strange: there had been a declaration of a thing I'd never heard. A declaration: a going about and telling everybody, warning them off. But I only came to know of it incidentally, adding up the clues of this absent absence. This was why we had a coin meter for the electricity supply and this was why dad had no bank account. But I was perplexed and surprised that he'd had the sophistication to even get that far, as far as bankruptcy. Kenneth grew up in Salford, Manchester, one of thirteen children. He began work as a butcher's boy at 14, in 1944. He had only a basic literacy - he could read the local paper and *The News of the World*, but he wrote with difficulty and there were no books in the house. I wrote any necessary letters for school and he would sign them. Dad had a good head for figures, for working out bills in the butcher's shop where he worked, but knew no algebra. I had no idea how the bankruptcy had come about or how he'd reached that position. It wasn't discussed but hung in the air as a disdain for banks and the world of finance generally, and an imprecation about what he saw as the trap of debt.

Every three months, the electricity man would come to empty the meter. Because we had no credit, the electricity was charged at a higher rate. This meant there would be a rebate of what we'd overpaid at the end of each period. My brother and I looked on, wide eyed, as the electricity man unlocked the coin bin from under

the stairs and tipped its contents onto the living room table and began to count the coins, flicking them in pairs across the surface with two fingers – 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 – into the palm of his waiting hand, and then stacking them in neat piles. He did his sums, bagged his share, patted us on the head and left, leaving what we were owed. These grey columns, black dirt in the grooves of their machined edges, rising to silver moons, were pocket money for me and my brother until the electricity man came again. A day of joy. Budget well, you who have nothing.

I don't know if my father had been declared bankrupt before he met my mother. She moved on when I was three and my brother and I were raised by him as a working, single parent. My mum and dad weren't married. They had three 'illegitimate' children in the 1960s. The further I am away from it, the more abnormal my early life seems. A single parent family, headed by a man who continues to work while looking after young children, is still an unusual occurrence. Dad worked in a butcher's shop, eight until six. My brother and I sent ourselves to school and back, and waited for him to return after work to cook tea, usually a piece of meat acquired for free from the shop. These circumstances formed the background of my relationship to credit and debt and the world of money. The world of work and no money, of the presence of absences. Dad worked long hours in the run up to Christmas, under a lot of pressure to cut, pack and prepare orders. The season filled him with dread. A dread passed on to me. He had three heart attacks, over three separate Christmases. Work filled me with dread. Work and money operated in an isosceles triangle, the vertex of which was absence and a vacuum in my life: absence of my parents, ignorance of what was going on. And that's where I stood, in scepticism, resentment and ignorance, looking on.

I'd been about to give up on my odyssey to San Francisco when I met Max. He became more interested in me when he found I was already living under a false identity. In the 1980s, the UK, headed

by Margaret Thatcher, was a cesspit of homophobia. As a growing gay boy, this homophobia compounded the marginalisations of my life and stymied any opportunity to break out of them by reaching for and finding others. I knuckled down, didn't go out (what was there to go out for?), lived in a bedsit, worked in a shop, saved until I had enough to head for San Francisco. Gay Mecca: playground of the beat generation poetry that I'd been reading. I arrived with \$1,000 in my pocket. \$500 to rent an apartment, \$500 to eat. I was some sort of refugee. I found work as an illegal alien in a warehouse until discovering a way to acquire American paperwork: a driving licence, a social security number, a legitimate job (on illegitimate paper). Then I met Max at the End Up, on a Sunday afternoon. Chestnut hair, an easy smile, an easy accent. His eyes and body: bottled mischief. My false ID and my being gay clued him up to my 'immorality' and recklessness; both these things meant an outsider status with respect to the law, which was then carried across to scepticism about conventional morality. Sex had been illegal in the UK until I was 21, a law that remained until 1994. I was an already alienated, illegal/legal alien. When we met, Max was already involved in occasional credit card fraud and heroin use. He had the knowledge of the operation of credit and finance that I lacked. White collar crime and heroin were fashionable accessories for a generation-X, middle-class, gay Jewish boy who listened to Nirvana and Jane's Addiction and whose father was a lawyer. Alienated by boredom at the ease of his life, he was keen to befriend somebody else who was already off grid and looking for more. When Max and I got together, we pursued all these things full time. At one point, we shared a dealer with Courtney Love. We thought we were cool.

Already technically outlaws, in the early 1990s our pariah status became even more negatively characterised. Gay men, especially drug using gay men, were further outcast as untouchables in a new wave of marginalisation as the media negativities around HIV and AIDS spiralled. Against this background, we didn't care

for the judgements of the law, the media or popular morality. We were on a roller coaster ride set against the social history of our lives. Already accused of hedonism, we were in it for ourselves, determinedly appropriating our 'unnatural' behaviour as natural. We rode the air-cushioned suspension of a rented V8 Cadillac and headed up the interstate to Boston, to gather information for our habit-serving and lifestyle-sustaining credit card fraud.

I'm tempted to say my crimes have nothing to do with me and yet they have everything to do with me, were my decisions. And yet every moment speaks of how it is history that comes together in social, personal and technological collisions: in people. Psychological structures are not separate from sociological situations. Nor are we separate from being channelled by the technology of our times. The Avis car rental in downtown Boston lobbed its rubbish into dumpsters out back. Carbon copies of rental agreements in black bags. Layers of purple addresses, purple impressions of credit cards and purple reproductions of signatures: the holy grail, unshredded. Oh, analogue days before the internet. When you could touch information in its purple imperium. When homos took on the mantle of trash thieves in the romantic lower depths of night. We spread the carbons out across the floor, names written in the mechanics of the time. Each name a person in history at a given moment, betrayed, as if the configurations of technology were themselves in on the plot. The cardholders undoubtedly still remember the moment at which they discovered their identities had been stolen. But did they speculate on where the moment had come from? Could they have any idea of its long, international conspiracy? The folding of homophobia, debt and illegitimacy into their lives? The karma of my resentment? I was living under a false identity – one of the products of LGBT exclusion. I was excluded from the machine of money. Identity and money were paperwork, paper thin. Names and numbers both betrayed, stolen and negated. What comes around goes around.

We stayed bed and breakfast in a glass-fronted house in a leafy suburb of Boston, threw back white sheets above a green lawn, the Caddy parked in the drive. 'Would you like your orange juice out back?' Our hostess was wearing a navy blue suit and bouffant hair. She was heading out to work. 'Lock this on the inside and pull the front hard when you leave.' She trusted us. It was a good attitude. We had no thoughts of burglary. We returned to New York, bin liners in the trunk. The glass and steel of the World Trade Centre shimmered in blue above the ozone layered hazes of Manhattan. We surfed the Cadillac into downtown, stayed over at Max's mum's. The pages of rental agreement information copied to a single document, the carbon copied signatures cut out and kept, we flew back to San Francisco. The flight put a whole country between our sourcing and using of information. Our sophisticated, white-collar criminality felt like exactly what was called for, a natural response falling into place, an inevitable circuit.

Embracing the repercussions of your own life experience as inevitable is a relaxation, a testing of the waters of the world. Giving up on moral struggles, absolving yourself of blame, seeing the world turning through you in a historic perspective, is a kind of self-affirming wonder. Even as you are subject to its forces and its operations on your psyche, it fits like the power assisted steering of the white Cadillac. The white Cadillac helps. Had I already read too much Jean Genet: his embracing of his rejection, the propagation of the embers of betrayal, the speaking sensuality of theft? Are explanations excuses? Are excuses conscience? The world makes its own outcastes. Some of them embrace it, and say, 'Well, fuck you!' Such was the fashion; rebellion was still more lauded than conformity.

Soon after my father died, I was passing a row of recently bulldozed shops on the edge of The Meadows estate, just outside the centre of Nottingham. Mum, who had returned for the funeral, told me, 'That's where your Dad used to have his shop.' Apparently, he'd

gone bankrupt because he gave away too much meat, adding an extra chop to the packets of those he knew to be hard up and letting customer accounts slide if they were unable to pay. I was astounded that my father had once been the proprietor of a shop. As far as I'd known, he'd only ever worked for others and he ended his days on a production line in a meat processing plant (Pork Farms, Lenton Lane, Nottingham). The new story was that he'd slipped into debt through giving food to his customers. As absent as he'd been from my day to day life, as little of him I knew, I admired this freshly revealed aspect of his character. Working class himself, raised through the hard times of the war, he took pity on the next generation of poor kids from the estate and, instead of exploiting them to enrich himself and pay his financiers, the borrowed money slipped away.

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The Platinum American Express card we'd ordered a duplicate of, using the information from those Boston dumpsters, arrived at our drop box in San Francisco. For Platinum Card holders, the full credit limit (then at least) was available in cash. And in a single withdrawal. I hired a dark green Chevrolet Monte Carlo, an anonymous but executive car. I drove north, over the Golden Gate Bridge, to withdraw the money from somewhere more obscure, with fewer cameras. The suspended roadway of the Golden Gate hummed beneath the wheels. The taut cables of the bridge strung their red-ochre against a blue sky. The pale summer hills and vineyards of Marin County rose across the bay. Being a white-collar criminal in the beautiful setting of Northern California felt apt. If I was going to be treated as a criminal anyway, this was recompense for my resentment. And yet, I also believed that I'd gotten there entirely on my own initiative, that the drive was my own. I'd not yet fully worked out the interplay of myself and social history. I believed my self-image was good. And I was high on the drug of arrogance: a mixture of resentment and contempt with pride at my and Max's cleverness. I coasted to the kerb two blocks from a cash machine in a leafy mall on a quiet side street of a small town

nestled among vineyard hills. I strolled innocuously, in my triple anonymities and multiple detachments, still oblivious to the extra securities provided by my white skin and masculinity, toward the hole in the wall. Deep breath. 5755. Glance around. 10,000. Pause. Whirr. Silence. Oh fuck, come on, work. Then: Kzunk. Zuk zuk zuk, zuk zuk zuk. Shrrr. The first wad rolled out. Zuk zuk zuk, zuk zuk zuk. Shrrr. Second wad. Zuk zuk zuk, zuk zuk zuk. One more. I pocketed the four wads. God Bless America. And my UK inheritance. Whistle walk, back to the car. No more ten pee pieces.

Bitter? No. No regrets. I wouldn't have been where I've been if I hadn't been there. I love tautologies, read inevitabilities everywhere. My education could have been more positive, I could have gone elsewhere. (What is it they teach now, as banks move into schools? Is it any different?) An absence of material and cultural financial inheritance went hand-in-hand with the emotional detachment I developed in the absence of parental affection as my father worked. These voids of knowledge and experience were amplified by homophobia, denying me connection, ejecting me from England. Equally, once I'd been introduced to heroin, coming off it took a while exactly because the cleaning up process paralleled coming off the neglects and absences, the alienation and the lovelessness, the homophobia and the blanks of my childhood. Heroin and my odyssey were the avoidance of addressing these absences, at the same time as trying to surmount them by heading to an idealised San Francisco.

Back in the UK, reconciliation between myself and the 'regular' world proved difficult. There has been recent progress, so far as homophobia is concerned, and technology has enabled LGBT people to find each other. Getting back into the world of legitimate work, though, is still a challenge for me. Whereas homophobia has been outlawed, other difficulties remain. Dad died of his fourth heart attack. I see work as having killed my father. This is a challenging resentment to overcome, a poor education. There

used to be an out, a possibility to step aside, a social space to breathe and consider. But now: resistance is futile. Four years ago, I was about to have my Job Seeker's Allowance sanctioned and to be turned over to G4S for a work program: indentured labour at 40 hours a week for six months, if I wanted to continue to receive benefits. Looking around me desperately, I saw that, at the same time as cutting benefits, the government was pumping borrowed money into education through future-trading financial instruments and debt bubbles, meant to equalise the world of higher education by giving everyone equal access to loans. I didn't really want to go to university, that ship had long since departed. I took advantage of a student loan purely to escape the about to be imposed, re-socialising work experience with G4S. And I thought I might as well at least attempt to have the education that had previously been inaccessible to me through exclusions of class and homophobia.

- Three years of London-weighted student loans (maintenance and fees), have added up to £67,000. Interest is currently 6%. The
- interest on my loan is now, ironically, the same as the JSA the DWP were threatening to refuse me, amassing at £4,000 per annum. But this
- £80 a week of government liability has fewer requirements than JSA: I am not required to repay any of it, until I am earning in excess of £29k. Earnings over that amount will be subject to a 9% deduction at source. Hmm: for 9% of earnings over £29k to keep up with even the interest on my current balance, I'd have to be earning £74k per annum. This is the 98th percentile of UK earners. At this rate, only 2% of students (assuming an unevicenced correlation between graduation and highest earnings) with my debt level will even meet the interest on their student loans, let alone repay the capital. There's going to be a lot of debt left over here. For those who never earn £29k, and never make any payments, the total amount due to the financiers from the taxpayer (with compound interest averaging 6% over 30 years) from people in my situation will be £310,000 per student. It's an expensive education.

Of course it is. Newly built, on-campus accommodation at Brunel University rents at £163 per week per room. The Vice-Chancellor, again coincidentally—in one of those numerological messages in which it seems the numbers are trying to tell us something—is on £310k per annum plus a generous pension pot, totalling say £8 million over 20 years. This is the ongoing debt of hundreds of students. A good, for-profit business model. And a good way of transferring public money from the future into private hands now. It would be cheaper, for both the country and its students, to cancel all loans and outstanding debt and fully fund education, but the financiers would miss out on the long-run returns and the builders and vice-chancellors would have to forego their recent beano of easy finance. As we see in the business models now being practised by most universities, and as we see in the current distribution of public money under Covid-19, financial education is an important inheritance: it stops you from being a petty criminal. ‘Crimes’ and the ‘individuals’ who ‘commit’ them are socially structured and classified by power. The rented, white Cadillac was an Eldorado, the green Chevrolet a Monte Carlo: a dream of gold and a casino; these cars were mocking me with their transience in my life. I still didn’t know where the real money was. I do now.



One in All in

● Charley Weldrick

●
●
●
Eyar, stash your can behind that bin
Those lads are staring at us
Let 'em start you know we'll win
Give over boys we don't want a fuss
Fuck em, one in all in

They're looking for trouble before they begin
Always happy for a scrap
They come out angry, already fumin'
Bouncers see a calm facade, but it melts like an icecap
That's how it goes when it's one in all in

What's that fucker want, with his shit eating grin?
The posh cunt looks like he wants trouble
Comes here and thinks its his city, that's the thing
Yeah well we'll burst his fucking bubble
Remember lads, one in all in

Only took a second to send a life into ruin
Soon as his head hit the floor
They heard the snap, even above the nightclub din
They knew they wouldn't be doing this anymore
Now it looked stupid, one in all in

Christ, we've fucking done 'im in
Shit lads we've gotta run
It was only one on the chin!
Doesn't matter! We might as well 'av used a gun
Boys it was fuckin' one in all in

They scrambled away - no longer king
Like a herd of startled deer
sirens, ever closer, were blaring
it was their turn to fill with fear
They soon forgot that mantra, one in all in



UNIVERSAL

BASIC

INCOME

NOW



People Love Real Work

Micheline Mason

Ian Duncan Smith, the well-known architect of Universal Credit, said “Don’t bring in universal basic income during the pandemic as it would be a ‘disincentive to work” (Independent, March 19th 2020). What world does this man live in?

Well, to be fair he might be right in a way. Having enough money every week to cover the basic needs of life for yourself and your family might well remove the motivation to get up every morning to drag yourself to a miserable, badly paid, unappreciated and often useless job which serves only to make money for some rich business owner, but this doesn’t mean that once the danger of starvation and homelessness has been removed people would stop working altogether. Far from it. It depends on how you define ‘work’.

It doesn’t take a lot of thought to realise that most of the things that keep us alive and functioning are done voluntarily anyway. Caring for our children, cooking meals, shopping, cleaning, putting out the rubbish, maintaining our gadgets and machines, answering emails, mowing the lawn, visiting grandma and so on are the things we do when we get home from ‘work’.



There are the actual voluntary jobs in addition to this daily labour – hundreds and thousands of them. In the last two weeks alone

670,000 people have volunteered to join a scheme to support the NHS. Charity volunteers, church workers, blood donors, political activists, and even life-risking emergency services such as the Royal National Lifeboat Institute, Blood bikers and Mountain Rescue. No one is forced or paid to do these things.

This doesn't include the thousands of people who provide 'more than 35 hrs a week' care to disabled and ill people on a pittance called 'Carer's Allowance'. According to IDS they are people who cannot therefore 'work'.

Retired people continue to work for free. The government estimates that 63% of all grandparents with grandchildren under 16 voluntarily help out with childcare, allowing their adult children to go to work to make ends meet. They also lend their experience and skills to thousands of clubs, societies, and voluntary organisations through joining the committees and governing bodies necessary for such not-for-profit enterprises to function.

There are the many faith communities who are currently offering voluntary services which keep people alive through the provision of food e.g. The Trussell Trust and the Sikh Community with their food banks and free meals for homeless people. In fact, the faith communities are a form of additional social care for many, including, obviously, attending to people's spiritual needs.

Then there are the students - children, young people and adults who 'work' to learn something valuable, not just for themselves, but to make them more competent, knowledgeable and skilled participants in the life of the community. School students do many hours of homework even after spending hours studying in classrooms and libraries. At the other end of life, the success of U3A, the University of the Third Age, is one example showing that an inner desire to keep learning new things never stops, even when it no longer is necessary for earning a living. Likewise, the

explosion of free tutorials on You Tube from practitioners of every skill under the sun shows that teaching is also a natural desire – possibly as great a need as learning.

And what of paid work? 16.5% of the working population, a staggering 5.3 million people (2019) chose to work in public services such as schools, hospitals, the Fire Service, Police and Ambulance Drivers, social services, local Government, the civil service, the environment agency and so many more. This figure rises every year. Apart from a few well- paid managers, most staff in these jobs do it because of the reward of feeling useful and necessary and not just for the poor salaries or low status such work usually brings. Most people work shifts, unpaid overtime, and go well beyond the call of duty to try and answer the needs they see around them. This definition of work is more like that of the famous poet Kahlil Gibran “Work is love made visible”. It is unknown how many more people would choose to do this sort of work were it better rewarded and made available to a wider number of people through subsidised training and the increased nationalisation of services such as transport or utilities. My guess is many.

Then there are the artists, poets, writers, dancers, musicians and craftspeople whose hearts beat to the inner drive of their own creativity. A lucky few are paid to practice their art, especially performers and designers, but again, most do it because they need to in order to stay sane. The intense competition from globalisation and mechanisation make it impossible for most to earn their living through their own creativity. Their passions may be relegated to ‘hobby’ status but these are people who fill the lives of others with colour, thought, beauty, imagination, emotional expression, intellectual stimulation, entertainment and fun. It is hard to imagine how bleak life would be without their contribution to our everyday lives, or how undeveloped and ‘sick’ we would all be if we did not have a chance to engage with this part of our own minds.

And what of the healers, the listeners, the arms around you, the shoulders to cry upon? Is this not work? This current Coronavirus crisis with its enforced isolation is already making people yearn for a hug, a kiss, even a handshake from someone who cares for us. The invisible ties that bind keep us going, make life worth living, yet we barely have a language to describe it.

As a disabled person who was told that I would never 'work'- indeed as a part of a whole subsection of society who were deemed unable to make a contribution to the 'Economy'- who were told we were in fact no more than drains upon the economy - I have railed against this dismissal of our value all my life. Most disabled people I know work very hard at many of the things above without much recognition and certainly without any status or reward.

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The fact is that the word 'Economy' means the system whereby some people exploit others in order to make money, to keep that money and to use that money to make more money. They have distorted the meaning of work to mean a sort of servitude, and denounced all real work to be a distraction from their overall purpose. In the UK the richest 10% of households hold 44% of all wealth. The poorest 50%, by contrast, own just 9% (Office of National Statistics 2016). Every year they own more and we own less (see www.equalitytrust.org.uk). The 1% globally have accumulated so much of the wealth we create that they could choose to right many of the wrongs of the world and still be rich. But they don't.

They are not going to give it back voluntarily, that is for sure. Their invented justifications for owning half the world have literally 'gone to their heads'. Yet, in such a crisis as we now find ourselves, many people are seeing that continually subsidising business (the 1%) instead of individual people is going to lead to both people falling through the net, and a future of debt, unemployment and insecurity for most of us. The hope that capitalism will 'bounce

back' is only hoping that we will avoid a quick death by returning to the pursuit of our slow death through propping up a system which is unsustainable. Instead, a simple bank transfer of a monthly income to every adult, and an allowance for every child, would change everything. Abject poverty would end overnight. Of course it isn't all we need to do, but it would give so many ordinary people the chance to think, and so many hungry kids a meal every day.

The fear that we would stop working is unfounded and doesn't bear any reflection of how we are as people. We would start to change the sort of work we do, and for whom we do it. In an age where we have an underlying crisis of overproduction leading potentially to a catastrophic change in our climate we would have the chance to think about what constitutes real work. We could create more jobs which are satisfying, purposeful and aimed towards a co-operative and sustainable future. We need to raise the voice of demand for this until we raise the roof holding us all down. Let's do it!

Lost Girl

Rainbow Fadeyi

I wept into the night
Prayed not to die here
Choruses of pained voices sang back
They said when they
have tried to drown you
Steal your voice
And your belief in self
defence
Convinced you your
skin is dirt
Filthy and torn apart for
diamonds

- When you have wished
- to dissolve
- When you have dissolved

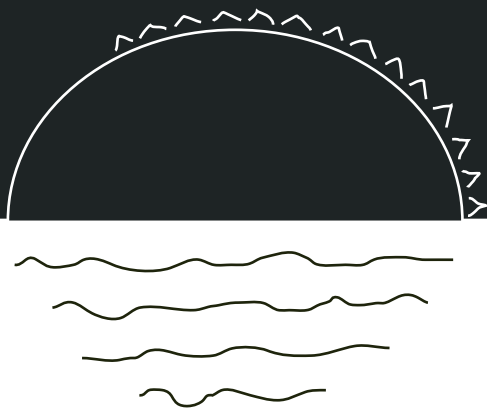
When you have seen
yourself slave
When you struggle to
unsee yourself slave
Felt the brutality of a
master or owner
Cry, grieve
Weep, so your heart
can know it's not being
foolish by hurting
But please do not carry
the neglect and
dehumanization
The world treats you
With

Into your heart
For every lost&stolen
black kid
You are loved
You are worthy of
saving
You are worthy of
being free
There will be years of
Hurting
It may hurt more before
it does less
I wish I could tell you
there wasn't
But you're going to
need to breathe
through it all
But there is hope out
there
Please believe me
Remember when
building walls to leave
room for doors
For hope and love
You have survived
You are surviving
Hold your head high
Borrow strength from
those before you
if you need to

Recovery Shouldn't be a Luxury!

Bryony Jade Ball

co-founder of The Radical Resilience Project



As survivors of rape and sexual violence from working-class backgrounds, support for our trauma recovery was limited. Access to resources to help healing was minimal and any financial support, including applying for incapacity/disability benefits due to trauma, was complicated, long-winded and incredibly stressful. Any free counselling services had such long waiting lists and the support was both conditional and temporary. The services providing this support were also controlled by the middle class. Building a solid support network and accessing necessary mental health assistance is just not possible for survivors without money. Trying to make ends meet is hard enough, so self-care is not always something that we can easily achieve.

Recovery has somehow become a luxury that only a privileged few can engage in.

Having been let down by the systems in place and having worked within support services ourselves, we saw the absolute necessity for an alternative space for survivors to be able to build resilience and recover from trauma authentically. We set up the radical resilience project for survivors of rape and sexual violence to have autonomy, challenge harmful stereotypes, own our healing and claim back our space.

It started as a fund where survivors could take out mini grants or loans for things to help with their healing processes but is now growing to include mutual support, education and consultancy.

The fund remains central to our work.

One of the things we found growing up working class and broke is that middle-class people don't understand how difficult it is to find money to support self-care and healing. Simple things like buying some healthy food, a herbal tincture, a record, a takeaway, some moisturiser, a new pillow or a yoga class are all a complete luxury. But small things like these can have a massive difference to our day or even a whole week and the importance of being kind to ourselves and giving ourselves pleasurable gifts - particularly through trauma - is undervalued.

What people with money often don't understand is that every penny counts, it isn't just a saying for us. Finding a spare fiver is impossible when you don't know how you are going to cover rent and know you have nobody you can borrow from - as people around you are all in similar positions.

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- Being able to have an extra £5/£10/£15 to buy something small you need, even if it is just phone credit or a magazine, is something that is so important when you suffer mental health issues.

Recovery and healing from trauma are costly and completely unaffordable for people in our position. Even when counselling services, therapists or holistic centres do 'concessional rates' it is usually just £5 off the original cost and doesn't address the issue that finding any money (especially over £10) for anything outside 'essential living costs' is extremely difficult. On average a counselling session costs around £40 - £60 a week (alternative therapies can be way more) and concessional rates are rarely below £25. This is simply something many people cannot afford. Yes, it is cheaper but we still don't have that to spare. This failure to appreciate what affordability is for the working classes is rooted in the skewed perception of wealth inequality of the middle and owning classes. In their ways of analysing what 'low income'

and 'real poverty' means, we are seen to have more expendable income than we do..

The services that are available for free or subsidised are mainly snapped up by the middle classes because they have time to look for and apply for them. They know how to game the systems because they or people like them essentially created them and they know how to use the right language to gain access. Waiting lists for free trauma counselling can be up to 2 years.

If we can manage it we usually have to go through the uncomfortable process of 'proving' our poverty to be able to access the concessional rate. Proof can include bank statements, earnings, financial living costs broken down, concession forms and benefit letters. This is uncomfortable and often humiliating as there is immediately a distrust from the support giver around our lack of money. It creates uneven, unhealthy power dynamics from the start, where we are inferior and have to prove our worthiness. It is a forced vulnerability that we should not have to have put up with - particularly when already dealing with trauma.

When applying for financial support such as grants and loans of any kind, we are also subjected to these same painful processes of measuring our worth and finances in order to access even the smallest financial support.

This is why in setting up our fund we were adamant that it was built on trust, solidarity and mutual support rather than charity. Our form to access mini grants and loans only has six questions and only two are actually required: your PayPal account (or if you don't have PayPal, the PayPal of someone who can receive the money for you) and the amount you're requesting. The process is based on self-identification and autonomy. We don't control who accesses the fund, what they do with the money after they receive it or ask for any kind of reporting or feedback. Mini loans

are repayable whenever people are able with the understanding that if it is not possible to pay back, that is totally ok and there is no expectation or judgement. We don't keep data or information on anyone and people are welcome to apply more than once.

At the moment we are only offering tiny grants and loans of up to £15 but we hope to offer larger amounts once we find more sustainable incomes. Unfortunately, major funding sources and sponsorship options are centred around proving impact, evaluating outcomes and controlling how money is used. These systems further oppress working class folk rather than support us. This is why we are independently funded and reject official charity and organisation structures.

When we explain how we operate one of the first things we are always asked is "How do you know people are telling the truth and that it is definitely real survivors applying?". Again, this shows what immediate distrust people have (particularly privileged people) of those who are asking for help. The underlying thought is, are they worthy and are they deserving? Yes, maybe some people will apply who aren't 'survivors' and might not seem like they 'need' the money but we are not here to judge or control who does or doesn't need support. It is up to individuals to decide for themselves.

We are not a charity; we are a community and a movement - responsibility for distribution is shared by all, not owned by a privileged few.

There is more to this project than just money. The support services that offer free counselling, support groups or various therapies are usually set up by people with middle-class, white, able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual privilege, a saviour complex and a superior attitude. Even if we jump through all the hoops to access support or resources there are often many layers of problems.

Services are delivered inappropriately, with no real understanding

of our experiences or needs.

A new part of our project is the mutual survivors support collective which is a response to the lack of appropriate one-to-one support available for survivors. We link survivors or people who have experienced rape or sexual violence with each other to co-support each other in a way that we choose individually with our co-supporter. We want to dismantle the idea that all care and support should be led or controlled by a superior. We need choices, agency, freedom and trust.

Another problem we have found with charities and support for 'vulnerable people' within them, is how privileged people approach giving. Christmas is a great example as many rush to donate things to those who are worse off than them. What is uncomfortable about this - other than the fact the compassion and kindness seems limited to the festive period - is that the actual items people donate are distasteful. They reek of charity. I used to work in a safe house and one Christmas a very wealthy company donated shoeboxes of gifts for the survivors. A couple of days before Christmas I opened them to check what was inside before putting them out. Wrapped up was a biro, a Tesco Value notebook, soap, a toothbrush and hand sanitiser, a £99p hairbrush with the tag still on and a sachet of cheap hot chocolate. I was disgusted. Particularly as many of these gifts were basic cleaning products and the women who were going to receive them were survivors of sexual exploitation and trafficking. It was implying they were dirty - hand sanitiser for xmas really? (This was pre-Corona.) What this rich company was actually saying is "This is your worth". I imagined what presents the people who had wrapped these had bought their families and what their Christmas day might look like. I imagined them patting themselves on the back after they had packed up these shitty gifts that they would never dream of giving to anyone they actually knew.

It's similar at homeless shelters when rich people donate food

parcels of supermarket basic cans and cheap food they would never even feed their pets, while enjoying Waitrose organic range at home themselves. We are supposed to be grateful for what we get, but these kinds of gifts come loaded with supremacy. Unfortunately, this kind of giving is not uncommon.

People with the most oppression and least privileges are used to being given second-rate things. Survivors in safe-houses often get donated awful second-hand clothes (stained, broken, baggy or just grim), badly knitted hats and gloves all in one style - as if we don't even have taste or need choice because we are at the bottom of the ladder. What people donate says a lot about how they see us.

Not being able to afford to treat yourself is bad enough but when you are given 'treats' that are worthless and shitty you feel worthless and shitty. It does nothing for building up self-respect and resilience when you are feeling vulnerable.

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When we started the Radical Resilience Project one of the things we wanted to include beside the fund was real gifts and treats for survivors. Things that can bring pleasure and excitement - because we need this for recovery as well as meeting our basic needs. We very deliberately looked at asking specific businesses to donate the very best. That is what we all deserve. We got things like gift vouchers for award winning hairdressers, festival tickets, a cookery school course, bottomless champagne brunches, a series of resources on sexual pleasure, vouchers for meals and drinks at top restaurants, pole dancing classes, tickets for cinemas, a women's herbal medicine course, yoga classes and independent film subscriptions. Gifts should be joyful. Something of real value that makes us know our worth!

Recovery from trauma is hard and slow. We need finances to support our basic needs, we need access to counselling, therapeutic support, holistic therapies, knowledge around natural healthcare

and we need real treats.

Even when we try to access these things the holistic world is dominated by middle-class, privileged people. Things like healing centres, herbal medicine, natural remedies and self-care support have become lucrative corporate commodities constructed for middle-class, able-bodied, white, cisgender, heterosexual people. This is ironic considering many of these practices and traditions were originally birthed from Black, Indigenous and People of colour, people without money, and outside the capitalist society. Now the most oppressed people can't afford to be part of this world. When we can find a way in, it is a very uncomfortable space to be in as we feel like outsiders when most of us are not represented.

Because we have been made to feel like we don't belong in these types of spaces, and because systems of access to healthcare force us to prove our worth repeatedly, many of us now feel undeserving of support. We discovered this early on in our project - it was incredibly difficult for people to feel able to take out mini grants or claim gifts as they don't feel worthy enough. People we speak to always say "I don't feel I deserve it" or "Someone else deserves it more than me". This illustrates just how dangerous the conditions of our healthcare systems are. People have learned to measure their worth and needs in an extremely toxic way. For example, as survivors our worth is often based on being seen to behave in a way that society expects us to (show signs of suffering, trauma and fear) and to do what society thinks we should do (report to the police, accept support that we are offered that might not be right for us) and to visibly appear vulnerable and to be worthy of support.

We are trying to challenge this attitude of unworthiness within our project but are still unlearning it ourselves as it is hard-wired. In the meantime, to make our project more accessible we have created an option where people can nominate each other for a

mini grant or gift..

While our project is tiny and still just at the beginning, we are hoping to radically shift the way people understand recovery and healing. Recovery and self-care is a human right and shouldn't be a luxury. The Radical Resilience Project is about creating open spaces where we unlearn what we have been conditioned to believe that we deserve and what the 'right' way to heal is. A space where building resilience is not a privilege but a right.

To access the fund and mutual support or get in touch, go to www.theradicalresilienceproject.org. We are also on instagram @the_radical_resilience_project. We are independently funded so any financial support literally keeps this project possible - to donate you can use Paypal (theresiliencefunduk@gmail.com).





From left to right - Bryony and Meg from RRP

Photo by Bryony

The Woman Vegetable Vendor

FABIYAS MV

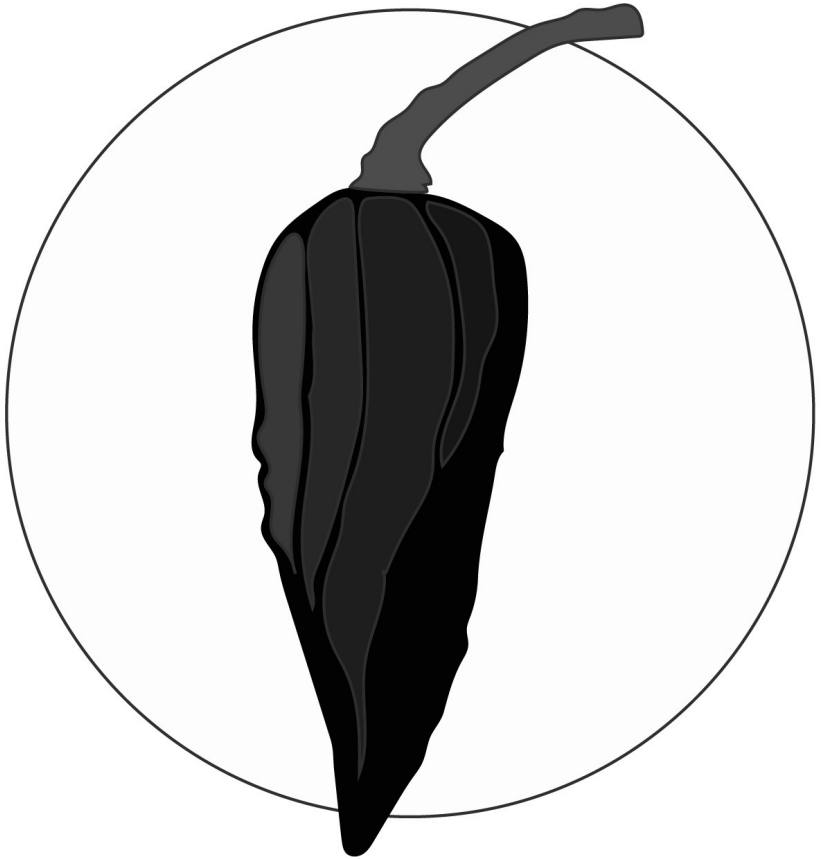
She pulls her handcart through her dream-debris.
Now her PhD is just an agonizing adornment.

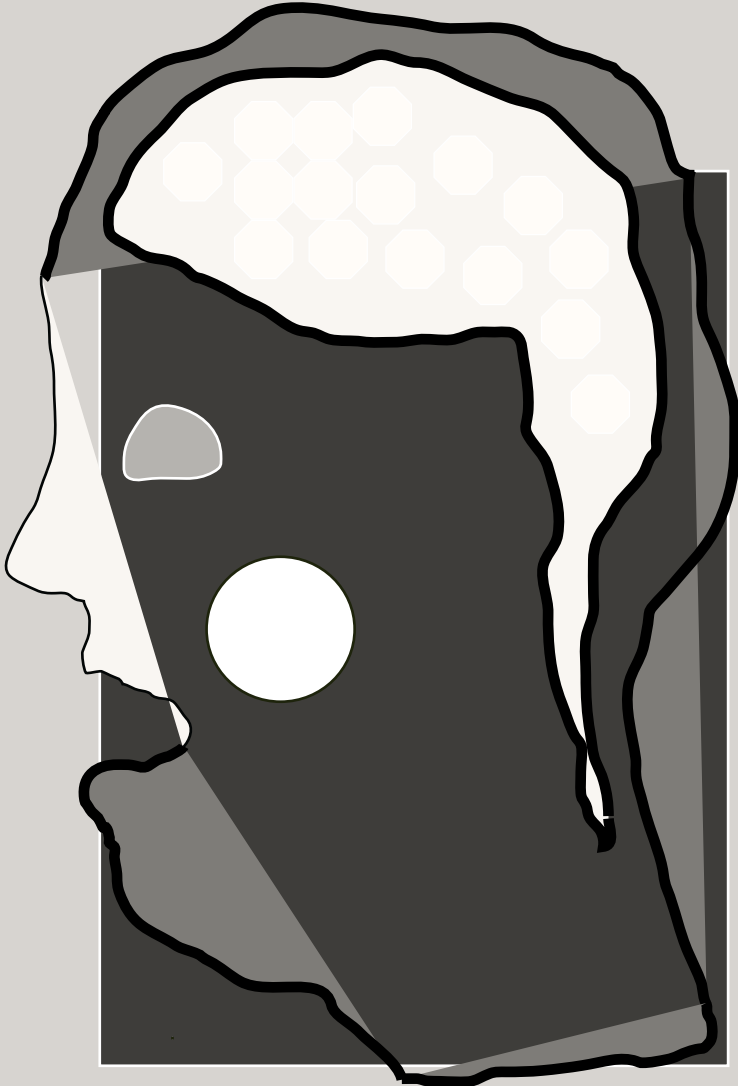
She's been denied white-collar jobs for religious reasons. Even a name is flammable in the fanatic drought. Here religion doesn't purify, but petrify.

- Yet she surfaces, scuba-diving through her secret
- sorrows. The toot of hunger from her children's
- stomachs keeps her installed in the masked street.

They come again to drive her away – this time, under the pretence of the pandemic protocol. She protests vehemently in English. The crowd is enticed by her fluency in the foreign language. Her molten emotion spurts. Hers is never an artificial countenance of a contestant in a beauty pageant. Her words are not tomatoes and potatoes, but the hottest red chillies.

Will the dark rubber eyes see her close-cropped life?





The Good Divergent

Money, Class and Neurodivergence

Lara Cosetti



Disclaimers

My essay deals with the impact of money and class on the lives of neurodivergent. I myself am neurodivergent with overlapping diagnoses and mental health conditions. The language and imagery I use may be triggering with mentions of: suicide, abuse and self-harm.

I will offer a brief explanation of terms below.

Neurodivergent people have a condition that affects their neurological makeup and processing of the world, such as ADHD, autism, Tourette's, dyslexia, or dyspraxia, although other conditions have been contested. Neurodiversity: is when these conditions are seen as natural cognitive diversities, which are neutral in and of themselves. A neurotypical person does not have any neurological condition, although they may have their own mental health diagnosis.

The limited scope of this article, gaps in research for different conditions and little research into neurodivergence generally, means I have referenced some conditions more than others. Where I have included statistics, however disparate these seem, it is to offer concrete examples of discrimination for neurotypical people to understand.

I grew up believing I was a changeling in a human world. I filled hours with fantastic stories, scripting adventures between my toys and on the back of notepads. I achieved good grades in school with little effort in most subjects.

I loved to socialise, until my deficiencies – the gaps I left in conversations, eye contact I couldn't maintain, interpersonal complexities I didn't understand – became noticed by my peers. I preferred analysing biographies about my special interests to making friends, believing conversations with Tim Burton, Steve



Irwin and Roald Dahl would be easier than with my peers. A Dr had diagnosed me with dyspraxia but reassured my parents that this purely affected my co-ordination and would be easily grown out of.

I spent my formative years trying to figure out the puzzle of what exactly had gone wrong with me. I didn't understand how I could read and research well above my years but have daily meltdowns where my emotions and senses drowned out the world around me, where I'd scream at the torturous noise of the vacuum or feel sick under high vis lights.

I hid these symptoms as best I knew how from childhood, which helped me achieve well in school. This is due to the phenomena of 'masking.' Masking is where neurodivergent, particularly autistic, people 'put on a mask' and suppress our feelings and symptoms. The problem is that we cannot suppress this forever, and they can become more intense because of the effort of suppression. This can result in severe meltdowns, and even self-injurious behaviour.

In hindsight, the way neurodiverse children are treated precludes how they are treated later in life. If we can mask and show few outward signs of strain, it is assumed we don't require any help. Any flaws in our lives are assumed to be the product of our own failures. This attitude is part of why money and employment are so inaccessible for neurodivergent adults.

Adults who could be described as 'high functioning' can obsess about employment and finances to the detriment of our physical and mental health and wellbeing. The term high functioning is often used clinically to rate our level of symptoms, but neurodiverse advocates dispute the term – as even high functioning adults can struggle with disabling symptoms, however well they're hidden. Just like grades in school, our employment record and bank accounts are seen as indicators of how much we struggle, and

even whether we're entailed to treatment and diagnosis in the first place.

Neurodivergence is assumed to be inherited, with diagnosis hinging on childhood symptoms, so I often look back at my childhood in my small village in Wales. Studies have found that up to 90%1 of autistic people are bullied in childhood, and I was no different. It plagued me in various forms till university, from snide remarks to stones pelted at my back.

I was told that I was bullied because my peers were jealous of my achievements and potential. I coped by assuring myself that I would achieve and earn much more than them. I convinced myself they were all 'thugs' - idiot children who spoke in ugly slang. Everyone in that village was working class, but I decided if I had to be different, I might as well believe I was better. Anyone I deemed too comfortable with their little life in our little village was seen as a verminous opponent. I classed tracksuits and trainers as markers of bullying and ignorance.

Though unofficial, many autistic people believe they have an 'autistic accent2' – a posh, detached accent unrelated to where they were brought up or live. I used some favourite films to mimic a broad RP accent. It started out clumsy enough to attract yet more bullying, but had by adulthood refined itself into an asset for navigating middle class workforces and institutions, like university.

I was well aware of the thousands I would pay in tuition fees and debts. I tried to use this knowledge to make the most of my investment. It felt odd even getting to university, making an improbable 300 miles journey to start my creative writing degree – itself regarded as a potential financial misfire.

Still, the university, whilst prestigious, seemed doable. It wasn't revered like Oxbridge. It was in the middle of nowhere, just like

home. None of my family could point to it on a map. My final reassurance was that three other students and a teacher from my school had attended it over the past three decades.

When I settled down there, I was bewildered by how many of my peers were middle class. Wales was my whole world before. Grammar schools and academies, non-existent there, suddenly became facts of life. It seemed like almost all my peers had gone to them, attending better lessons taught by less beleaguered teachers.

Classmates came to university seemingly attuned to its inner workings, knowing techniques from dedicated classes and workshops, armed with industry contacts. My comprehensive, which had cut French, drama, and Christmas plays at the mercy of their budget, created nothing for the benefit of a few self-indulgent students.

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- I should have understood this as a reason why my grades often faltered in creative modules. But despite noticing the class advantages of my peers, I was convinced that their writing, they themselves, were inherently superior. Worked harder. Had more worthwhile things to say.

I listened longingly as smart, sharp words fell from their mouths without any visible twitches of self-consciousness. I stumbled on my words, glad I was spared a Welsh accent, and slumped into my chair.

I felt stupid. Arrogant for taking an arts degree, daring to assume I'd succeed, let alone even eke out a living afterwards. Writing became like pulling teeth. Whether class, schoolwork or normality, I used to be able to perform. This time I failed. I couldn't write. I didn't.

Hyper-aware that a degree in creative writing wasn't destined to be a money-maker, I thought a bad creative writing degree would actively impoverish me. The graduate jobs market seemed slim and impenetrable. I felt compelled to make something of myself. Something meaning money.

As well as grades, over time my friendships began to flounder, strained by different symptoms like unreliability, poor housekeeping, and lack of emotional regulation. My emotions seemed to flow through me, separate from me. I felt like a vessel hopeless of controlling them. This symptomatic dysregulation is often familiar to neurodivergent people, particularly women, who may receive mental health misdiagnosis such as BPD because of it. Without having a name for what I was going through, I was too absorbed in my own confusion and self-hatred to hold myself accountable to behaviours I didn't even understand.

If nothing else, I had money, thanks to the tainted privilege of savings granted to me after a car accident. I felt compelled to pretend this money wasn't real. Spending it would mean that I remembered the cost of acquiring it. I saw student finance however was not as the pittance that some students thought it was – but manna, more money than I'd seen in my life.

Money acquired new meanings and possibilities for me. It could solve access to housing, to stability, to the privileged class even if it could not soothe my other struggles. I felt compelled to money as if it was a protective charm. Something to save me from my volatile grades, volatile friendships, volatile self.

I applied to jobs with restless fervour, often leaving applications unfinished when unpredictable depression steamrolled through my good intentions. I achieved a few superficially impressive successes, but unhealthy strategies usually lurked behind them. For example, I'd acquired a paid internship by filling out the

application just 30 minutes before its midnight deadline.

At a time when all words I used- plotted, written, or spoken – seemed misplaced, misdirected, or misconstrued, some words somehow earned me money. More than that, they earned me praise, validation and the camaraderie of being part of a team. I believed work was more objective than my vague university assignments. The results were tracked more easily.

I siloed all my mental efforts and energy away for it, seeing university as a distraction to a profitable life, rather than a way to achieve it. Under the strain of my obsessive work ethic, the other cracks in my life expanded into chasms. After work, I'd crash back into the house in the early afternoon and sleep until late evening, leaving alarms for classes and piling dishes equally ignored. I believed my single mindedness would naturally translate into success – but my chronic inattention, disarray and sadness eventually bled into my work. I was naive, and slip ups came despite my belief that I was thriving.

After years of trying to understand my mind, I realised that the various mental health diagnoses flouted over the years didn't seem totally to fit. With more research into my symptoms, I instantly found that the high functioning, female presentations of autism and ADHD resonated with my life. Whenever I faltered at anything else, I accepted it as par for the course for my flaws. But once I failed at work, I decided that I must be diagnosed and treated. I juggled crucial diagnostic research with an intense compulsion to apply for even more, and better jobs.

Work life balance was a laughable idea – I had already unbalanced my life. Work became an escape. While I obtained some brilliant opportunities that built much needed self-confidence, I relied heavily on them as a reprieve from my chaotic life and relationships spluttering on life support. I honestly believed if I worked hard

enough, I could buy not just myself but all my loved ones out of our problems. In reality, I'd only sold myself.

My ADHD assessment cost £300, confirming ADHD and a while cautiously suggesting a secondary autism diagnosis. I felt that this diagnosis gave me a reason, and thus, permission to be defective. That felt priceless.

But poor and working class neurodivergent people are often locked out of diagnosis and appropriate treatment. NHS waiting lists are years long, usually with only the most severe of cases placed on them. Many people find that diagnoses are easier to obtain when at university – which is useless if you were never inclined or enabled to go there.

Even when I had saved up enough to apply for medication privately, a process costing thousands, I was loathe to draw the money out of my account. There was no number it could have reached that would make me feel safe or comfortable enough to pay out so much money. Once prescribed, medication can cost up to £100 each time, an enormous financial burden which the NHS is not always obliged to pick up on, and often doesn't.

While not every neurodiverse condition can be medicated, it's highly suggested that available medication improves our quality of lives, and can even reduce our risk of suicide.⁴ Our treatment should not hinge on our socioeconomic status.

Eventually, I turned to stories of neurodivergent people with glittering careers. Most of these came with caveats – the people mentioned were usually too old, too dead or too exceptional to have received an official diagnosis. It barely occurred to me that class could be another caveat. I longed to follow these examples and believed that only my own incompetence had stopped me. These unquantifiable names had made it. Sometimes even made history.

I felt compelled to achieve it. I had to. There was no question of choice.

Now I bristle when resources speculate about famous names like Richard Branson. Almost everyone is poorer than a billionaire, but neurodivergent people are likely to feel justifiably anxious about managing finances. Anyone counting pennies week to week couldn't feel more different from Branson and his yachts. This disparity must only feel worse for multiply marginalised people such as black or queer neurodivergent people, who rarely see anyone like themselves in such speculative material.

My hyper-focus at work had given me what little security I had. On the other hand, while trying to promote our disabled student's society (which encompassed all disabilities, whether to do with neurodivergence, physical or intellectual disability, chronic or mental health) one well-meaning girl sweetly smiled and said "aww" – putting disabled students at the same level as abandoned puppies.

No wonder that high functioning adults often exhaust ourselves to try and gain recognition as 'The Good Divergent.' The alternative is to be pitied or ignored.

We seek out glib success stories as a form of comfort at the same time that neurotypical people portray narratives of 'inspiration porn', content that allows people to live vicariously through our achievements in order to feel more comfortable with our disabilities.

Well-meaning articles often emphasize positive capabilities linked with neurodivergence like creativity, intense focus and loyalty to preach that we can not only maintain but rise above the normal standards. But such articles often fail to suggest concrete support methods or acknowledge the financial and emotional costs of

maintaining outwardly high functions. In reality, even if our conditions come with positive symptoms, these will always be balanced out with negative ones which inevitably show themselves at work eventually.

Media promotes the attitude that we can achieve anything despite our symptoms. This sounds like a good thing, but this attitude means we're more likely to judge ourselves harshly when we fail, and spiral to self-loathing when our impairments become obvious.

Like other minorities, we're only acknowledged as worthwhile when we are exceptional. Most neurodivergent adults are neither exceptional achievers nor exceptionally impaired. The lack of nuance in how neurotypical people understand us leads to discrimination in our finances and employment.

This is tied in with the stereotype that neurodivergent people have disproportional 'savant' qualities to make up for our negative symptoms. The stereotypical neurodivergent savant is always male, and thrives in science, technology or mathematics. Employment programs such as Microsoft's Autism Hiring Program⁶ play into these stereotypes, as they typically focus on hiring male candidates from these industries.

It is not that these programs are wholly negative, rather that they seem to be a well-funded, well intentioned distraction. Why can't corporations instead ensure their hiring processes are so accessible, that anyone from a secretary or cleaner in their offices to their next CEO could be neurodivergent?

Neurodivergent people are often discriminated against throughout the employment process. Interviews which can discriminate against autistic candidates because of their reliance on social communication, and timed employability assessments which can discriminate against autism, dyslexia and dyspraxia when assessing

social behaviours. Even the ordinary job descriptions seeking 'sociable', 'well organised' candidates can make neurodiverse applicants uncomfortable if we feel pressured to lie about our capabilities and struggles in our applications.

In most organisations, employers are not educated about neurodiversity. They are baffled by initially high performing, high energy employees that stumble over mundane tasks or socialisation. Most employers draw the conclusion that the gaps between our best work and weakest skills could only be the result of laziness. Government anti-discrimination employment laws are well intentioned but almost impossible to use.

No employer is required to undertake awareness training about neurodivergence, and the private companies that offer it are often too costly for most businesses to invest in. No employer would say outright that they declined to hire a candidate based on their neurodivergence. It is incredibly hard to put forth a discrimination case, with the process requiring extensive paperwork and organisation that overwhelm our weak executive functions: a set of cognitive skills that encompass flexible thinking, self-control and working memory that are impaired in neurodivergent people.

There's no legal protection offered to employees who have worked in a company for less than 2 years in the UK— and many of us simply don't last that long before being fired or otherwise pushed out of the workforce. ADHD people, for example, are 30% more likely to have chronic employment issues and 60%7 more likely to be fired from a job, while only 16% of autistic adults are in full time work. 8

Unemployment is of course a huge issue. Even before I knew I was neurodivergent, I was terrified that my flaws would lead to it. But should it be terrifying in the first place? Or should we assemble new markers for neurodivergent success?

It seems troubling that studies about neurodivergent people in work only seem to classify full time work as valid, while anecdotally neurodivergent people find part time, ad hoc, portfolio careers or voluntary work offer them a better lifestyle, with less pressure meaning distressing symptoms such as meltdown and burnout may come up less frequently.

Our emaciated benefits system puts millions of people through cruel ordeals, but unemployment or underemployment may actually be an informed trade-off a neurodivergent adult makes for a better-quality life. It may give us more time to soothe our often-fraught relationships, study the alchemy of chores and try to understand ourselves more deeply.

Benefits need to be genuinely accessible to all neurodivergent people. The length and bureaucracy of the process seem to be designed so that people give up halfway through, far more likely for people who are predisposed to struggle with phone calls and paperwork.

Better accessibility may mean that people stay on benefits for life, or that they find it easier to maintain stable work without the pressure of financial anxiety. Either way, poor neurodivergent men and women would no longer be condemned to foodbanks, halfway houses and homelessness, improper or ineffective treatment. A workable benefits system would make the choice to work a genuine choice.

Not a decision made from corrosive pressure, that can make small work of corroding mind and body until our ability to work is taken from us. We need neurotypical advocates to acknowledge our worth whether in or out of work and stop seeing our financial and employment statuses as the best indicators of our quality of life.

At various points in my career, I believed the old success stories and

inspiration porn as if they were scripture. I tried earnestly to show my friends that they could turn their conditions into positives and succeed as much as I had in the workplace. There's nothing wrong with aiming high, but fellow neurodivergent people recognised that my frenetic energy was unhealthy on the cusp of burnout. Even if they could achieve as much as I had, even if they wanted to, they didn't want to end up in hospital as often I did.

I could almost allocate a corresponding disorder to every job I had acquired since my first ones in university. Over the years I experienced excruciating gallstones, embarrassing hernias and humiliating blood loss from a six-month long period that seemed like some Biblical, physical purging. These health issues only briefly paused my relentless drive for productivity. I couldn't stand the idea that I'd have to leave the security nets of work and money behind for my own safety.

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I had saved my money into an enviable position – but the thought of my financial future made me queasy. All I could see were potential problems, ghosts of failures yet to be lived. Every pound in my bank was an attempt to counterbalance these. My objective privilege was overshadowed by my profound anxiety.

Until now work and money had, objectively, protected me in the ways capitalism always said they would, despite me being too anxious to believe it. No one with my financial knowledge or security would ever need to worry about homelessness. Yet I did, constantly. Kept up at night by the pervasive certainty that it would be my karmic debt if my safety nets were ever broken.

In one job I accepted out of desperation, I lay awake at night in my childhood bedroom, certain from whatever horrible news had drifted on the TV that the world would end before I could wake up to meet it. Whenever I waited to take reliably late, overstuffed trains I imagined them crashing into each other, passengers dying in bloody accidents.

Cracks showed in my work again. I wrote off hours where any attempt to work against my feelings would be futile. I bent over my desk, silently crying, films of loved ones dying playing repeatedly in my mind's eye. When pouring myself tea, I purposefully scalded the tips of my fingers. I was ill.

Worse, I was unproductive.

Earlier, more tactful criticisms of my work seemed laughable. I barely teased out any work alongside my rigorous daily regime of intrusive thoughts and suicidal thinking, all while trying to present as 'normal' to my colleagues. I became paranoid about my social performance and my hygiene – two of the most shaming, damning fault lines that marked me out as palpably abnormal.

Not only the flaws in my work, but my constant chronicles of doctors, absenteeism and presenteeism were all picked up on.

Before this role I barely dared to worry about being fired. I knew it was common for neurodivergent people, but I thought my obsessive single mindedness could protect me. Somehow, this time I knew it was coming. Yet my overwhelming feeling was apathy. I already failed at life. At being a person. Failing at work felt like nothing in comparison. I took yet more time off work for uncontrollable depression and was duly let go.

Nowadays my biggest expense is in my medley of medication. For a while, unemployment felt fulfilling, healthy. My circumstances finally pushed me to acknowledge it was the right thing.

Still, slowly, my regime of self-care, housework and maintaining my relationships felt lacking, redundant. I had now become the ghost that had haunted my previous self. In a circular twist, the achievements that I had once obtained, albeit in unhealthy ways, haunted my present. I felt so much less worthy, much more palpably disabled and deficient.

My old temptations to overwork are calling out again. Initially I laid these to rest through creative work undertaken on my own terms, with no formal expectations. My writing flourished, and I wrote far more frequently than at university or even before.

But I am worried about the lack of safety nets for my long term future, and despite trying to ease myself gently back into work, I feel that employment will once again be necessary for me just to live, before I build the necessary coping skills to work without eclipsing my own life. I am trying to find out what types of work are most sustainable for me, and see if I am entitled to any benefits. I am privileged enough to be able and confident to navigate complex and hidden support systems and advocate for myself.

I hope that my essay has enlightened you, whether you are neurodiverse or neurotypical, to the relationship between money, class and experience of neurodivergence. Together, we can advocate for a world that values neurodivergent people according to their own hopes and desires and provides enough financial stability for them to thrive, whatever their socioeconomic status.

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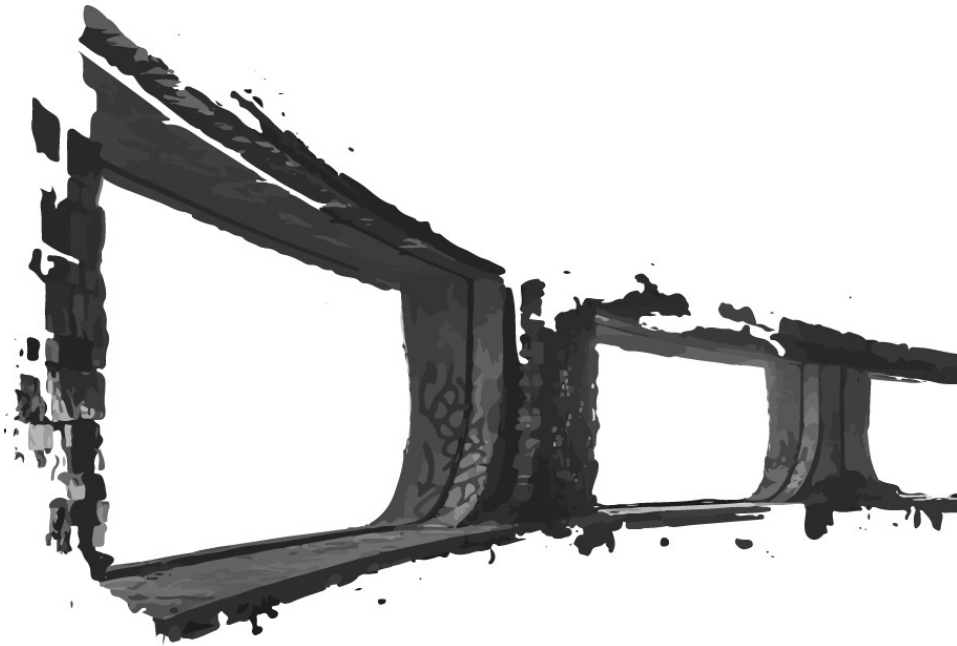
Wasteland and Abandonments

Tommy Pewton

As stray young pups
Spray Wolves upon the viaduct
I retch it up from the pit of my guts
Next to a wench etching her love into a bus stop
Two Slumbering Monks at the dram shop
● A jukebox hit, different coloured balls click
● A man has got the sniffs
● Where you're s'pose to have a shit
A silence around here
That only paranoids hear
Over wasteland and abandonments

Flowers next to the tramps in the subway
Live off drunkards piss
And young hooligan spit
Love to earn some quid but
Theres been fuck all since the pits
Two spoons of trouble in her cup of tea
With just a splash of misery
She mutters her disgust towards the bourgeoisie
Cause the sun never shines
Behind the barbed wire
Onto wasteland and abandonments

Fag in hand running with prams
All the way through the garbageland
Son of a bastard she calls the babbies dad
Has just gone down half a gram
With his Argos chain and razor blades
Stanley knife oh what a life!
So run run dear
Through the streets of fear
Scraps from the palm of his hand
Lost somewhere in Nowhere Land
Besides the wasteland and abandonments





Omnipotent

Alison Gray

How can you lose money so many times in one weekend, my mammy would have asked, if she hadn't been in the hospital dying.

It had been in my hand, with a packet of sandwiches and a bar of chocolate. I knelt to see if it had dropped under a cage of crisp boxes but I tipped a card stand onto its side, and got in the way of the thin man in front of me in the queue who was pushing his fat sports bag with the tip of his toes.

'Sorry. I'm no queue jumping,' I said.

I don't remember his face. Just his sports bag, splat on the floor like the carcass of a child whale.

It was years later when I realised that he had slapped his bag down on my fiver: my borrowed fiver: the last money I had.

Not that, in the end, I didn't deserve it. I shouldn't have been going back to Lancaster, back to the new place I called home. I should have been staying in Glasgow to help my mammy, daddy and wee brother. Now, I remember it so cloudily, bogged up by stress and pulled away by time. All except the money loss, the money losses.

Previous to all this, by maybe a day, I had been in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum where I had hung my money pouch over the chair while I drank a pot of tea. And left it there. I can see even now: the string of the pouch, pink and purple, my favourite colours at primary school, hanging over the chair knob. Maybe the colours reflected that happy mid-twenties stage of life. Maybe those were the only colours Oxfam had. Buying from Oxfam was part of who

I was, a person inclined to help people less fortunate, to support people poorer than I would ever be – than I thought I would ever be. So, I remember the string of the pouch and the chair nob, but I have no idea who I was there with. Or what I had with me. Or the visit, which I must have just made, to the Beatson, the cancer hospital across the Kelvin River. Because that must have been why I was there. Because that visit must have been made because my mammy had been taken into the hospital again and it was bad, and she was dying. I don't know if I knew she was dying, or if I just knew it was bad.

Small random acts of unkindness – the hippy pouch with my week's wage, the fiver on the floor, given to me by my dad, so I could eat on the train, because I had lost my week's wage. What happens to them? To the unkind. Do they just get away with it?

- The fiver on the floor and the hippy bag

- Joe the Blow was a cunt.

- In his black sports bag he carried: two pairs of jeans, three pairs of pants (boxers), three long-sleeved shirts and a cotton hoodie. (I want to give him a scratchy cardigan and a badly coloured tank-top, but that's the hate talking, not the desire for realism.) There are extra trainers – Adidas, Nike, or something else expensive enough to impress, but not actually worth the price. And some sort of man-spray.

No.

In his black sports bag, there are black denim jeans, several sporty T-shirts, with teeny green alligators, and smart, fashionable zippers. And a bag of sprays that go under the arm or over the freshly shaved chin, and all the stuff for freshly shaving the chin. And the girlfriend goes 'you smell him before you see him' to her friends and laughs,

but she is getting fed up of him and is watching the door for a new opportunity. And his name is not Joe, it is Arthur. It's not a common name up here, but he isn't a common person. While those around him revel in their left of centre, socially democratic fantasies, he is soundly conservative. Secretly, soundly conservative, the man keeps shtoom and nods and agrees, and thinks of the time when he will be away from them. When the girl pushing the trolley along the train gets near, he remembers the fiver. Not that he is hungry. And he is only going to Carlisle. A packet of crisps, no, make it two. And a couple of beers. He sits back in his chair, stretches out his legs and cracks one open.

In the west of Glasgow, in the park abutting the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, the money has nearly run out. It was Markie that took it, so he decided what it would get spent on, and since pizza and chips from common chip shops was never eaten in his Milngavie home, that's what he chose. Then when The Big Shoe joined them, they got beer and Buckie. They weren't allowed those either, though when he turned fourteen, he had been offered wine on birthdays and when they went on holiday to France. He'd bought too much pizza, but that's cos he was expecting more people, so they, well, the lassies, ended up feeding it to the wee birds. But then the pigeons had noticed and moved in and the feather and the flutter of their nervous neediness had repulsed them all and they had moved away.

'Yeah, aye, you need to be fast,' he said miming the swipe and gather he had earlier performed.

'So, was she still sitting there?'

'Naw, she forgot it. Aw laughing and shit with her uni pals.'

'Telling you Markie, gallery's the place to go for stuff. Load of gallery nobs, eh.'

‘Telling you,’ said Markie. Though the only reason he knew about it was because his mum and dad and big sister used to go there every other weekend when his sister was studying to get into art school. He had been dragged about the pictures until his moaning got him money to sit in the café and wait. He had always had a skill at annoying.

The train strained like a grim case of constipation as it drew out of Glasgow Central. By Motherwell, there were people standing in the corridors, looking with fulminating, all-encompassing hatred upon the knees of the seated. A witchy, twitchy, grim-faced feminist type had glared at the sideways stretch of his thighs – what did they know about how much space his boys needed. She’d finally rasped at him, ‘Is this seat taken?’, and squeezed her, admittedly not that fat, arse into the seat beside him. He could barely move his arms to open his crisps. But he did and with a fine sleight of elbow, regained the arm rest. And stretch.

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- Markie threw the purse into the river and pocketed the tenner that was left.

She had said she would come.

When he got back, they were sprawled out on the grass. The cider was strong and someone had produced a bottle of vodka. The lassies were totally hammered, curled and sweating in the sun. It was ages before they had to go home. The groggy sobering up would soon begin. He lay down beside them, balanced on his side to see who was really sleeping. Katrina was a laugh but he didn’t fancy her. He looked down at his watch. Mags had said she would be here at two and it was four o’clock now. When he looked up, Katrina was looking at him. That’s all it took really. He crept his fingers up her arm and she swatted them away. Then he crept his fingers, more heavily, from the dip in her waist down. She opened her eyes wide, took his spider paws and placed them on his own

waist. Her elbow had woken Paula, who flopped onto her back and muttered, 'God, I don't feel good'.

'I need to go for a wee walk,' said Markie.

'Aye, me too,' said Katrina.

They walked towards the river, towards the darkness between the trees.

Even before he drank down the last of the beer, even when he was still halfway through the second packet of crisps, he could feel that there was something not right happening in his stomach. Too much beer, too early? That station-shop sandwich? He'd hesitated over the prawns – he'd heard all the warnings – but prawns were his favourite: the sharp creamy sauce, the firm crunch against the softness of the bread. And he'd never got a bad one.

'I can see what you're doing.'

'I'm God. Nobody can see what I'm doing except me. It's one of the things that makes me God.'

'Aye, well I'm God too.'

'Aye to Jews.'

'Still God though.'

'Aye, but are you a god that counts?'

'You're a right scunner, you know.'

'Out my story, beardie.'

He didn't know it was coming. Then he did but couldn't work out where from. The not-that-fat feminist had regained the arm rest and was beginning to stretch. The aisle was packed. A weedy, bearded guy that had just got on, was sweating, holding up a black bag and looking pathetically at the overhead storage.

'Excuse me,' Arthur slurred, 'I need to go to the toilet.'

The feminist looked at him, then up at the aisle-squeezed train customers. 'I hope you can fly,' she said.

He liked Katrina, but he only fancied her a bit. They did it anyway. Under a whole umbrella of green bushes with daft pink flowers. He began to back out when it was finished, but she grabbed his arm.

'I didnae think you'd even noticed me.'

●
● That would be because he hadn't.

●
'I always thought you fancied Mags.'

Mags. The short, bobbed hair, the sharp, wee nose and they eyebrows that were always moving. She looked like a film-star, too fancy for Milngavie and too cool for his crowd. But laughing and funny. And always something to say: 'Animal lib, Markie,' 'Women's lib, Markie,' 'any lib that could be found, Markie'. He had taken all her leaflets and they had burned warm in his pockets. She had said she would come. She was doing some weapon's lib thing in the town centre. Then she would make her way to the West End. Definitely, she had said. Too late now.

'That crowd. They think they're it,' he said.

'Aye. They think they're too good to hang out with anybody that's lived in a council house. Not like you, Markie. You treat us like your

equal. That's what I like about you.'

'Mags and them, do they no talk to you?'

'Mags does. She's all right. But some of they ones she hangs about with...'

'She said she was coming. Maybe we're no vegetarian enough.'

'Who cares? Stop your havering and come here.'

He couldn't fly. He couldn't stand. The thought of squeezing past the non-fat feminist made his head spin. But he would have to. He stood up and faced the beardy guy with his bag-blockade.

'We're nearly at Lockerbie,' beardy said, trying to shift to the side. 'People will get off.'

'I can't wait till Lockerbie.' A spasm hit and he doubled up. The feminist stood on the chair – she'd got a whiff – and he squeezed out and pushed his way down the aisle.

'Out the way, excuse me.' He got within touching distance of the toilet. A black leather-jacketed back remained unmoved by his pleading, intent on defending its right to stand still.

'Move ya fucking cunt or I'll be sick on you,' he growled. The cunt turned, squaring up his shoulders as he did. He was a lot wider from the front, but Arthur was carrying his own secret ammo. The fountain of pinkish vomit burst out and the squaring man found himself square with it. And even before the sea of people miraculously parted before him and the 'Fucking' and 'Jesus' and 'God' and 'Get back' broke out around him, the reverse spasm hit. Then it all flowed: from both directions, it flowed. The top half, the partially digested food stuff – prawn, bread, crisps, beer – could not now be halted; the lower, dealing in that which had

been digested – the copious piss and the piss-like shit – had burst out, briefly but pungently. The attention – small mercies – was on the northern flow; the tight space expanded; the people created a circle of safety, as if holding hands for a hokey-cokey. All except the broad guy in his pink-vomit patterned leather. He was looking down at himself. He looked a bit Jewish.

‘Oy. Don’t be such a tit.’

‘Oh, all right. A Muslimy looking guy.’

‘That’s not fair either. Why are you being like this?’

‘No, it’s not fair.’

‘Who said that?’

●
●
●
‘God.’

‘Which one now?’

‘Muslim God.’

‘Jesus! Can I just say ‘one singer, one song, one storyteller, one story’, and can I ask you two to butt out while I reach climax and set off for denouement.’

‘Keep stereotypes of our peoples out of your story and we will happily desist.’

‘OK. Fine.’

Except the squaring up, utterly generic person of no height, weight, sex, etc., who looked upon the prawn-spewer slash shit-sprayer with righteous indignation, if not murderous hatred. Nevertheless,

safe passage was assured, as the stench from the nether made its presence felt. The people, creatures, generic humans, moved to widen the hokey-cokey circle and the big bag, prawn-loving, liquid expectorating man, called Arthur, stumbled into the toilet.

Him and Katrina, it was all around the school now. The guys punched him; the lassies drew their eyes off him. Today, Monday, was his favourite day, sitting beside Mags in double English. He wondered if she'd heard too.

She was swinging back on her chair speaking to Jules and wee Sarah on the desk behind her.

'Are you going?' she was saying.

'Can't wait,' said Jules.

'What's happening,' Markie said, sitting down and swinging back to join in.

'None of your beeswax,' said Jules.

'We're going over to the dam, Friday,' said Sarah. 'For a picnic.'

'This Friday?' Markie said.

'Invitation only,' said Jules.

'Anyone got an invite for me?' said Markie, pleading, looking sweet.

'You'll be off with your new girlfriend,' said Jules.

'She's not my girlfriend.'

'We heard all about it, Markie,' said Mags.

‘Does that not count with you?’

‘Or did it no mean anything?’ said Mags.

‘Cos she doesnae live at our bit?’ said Jules.

Markie let his weight fall forward, and he crashed towards his desk.

He heard Lockerbie go by. There were knocks on the door. There was little point in trying to wash his trousers in the water that dribbled from what they called a tap, but he did what he could. There was nothing left in his body. He would walk out of the toilet just before Carlisle, and straight off the train. He’d get his bag from lost property later. He felt in his soggy pockets for his wallet and found 57p, the change from that fiver. His wallet was in his jacket pocket, on his seat. If he could get his bag, he could get his sweet Lenor-scented black jeans, a fresh T-shirt, his Armani, that new Ralph Butler he’d bought on Buchanan Street. He cracked the door open and peeked out. There was space, a wet spot, a bleachy smell, but no faces to recognise him and no big, sick-covered man. The feminist was still there. Outside, the green had changed from smooth and flat to majestic, silencing hills. The announcement came – Oxenholme for the Lake District. He had missed Carlisle. He had missed Penrith. On his seat was the beardy guy, curled towards the window. Arthur leaned in and grabbed his jacket, stretched up and pulled down his bag. Fucking Oxenholme for the fucking Lake District. He dragged the bag down the aisle. He felt so weak. But it would be over soon. Find a toilet. Change. Cold water. Find a platform. Trains to Carlisle every half hour. Explain. Sick. Missed stop. He was sure he still looked grey.

Markie would go to the dam and explain. It would be fine. He knew Mags liked him. He was all-right looking. They liked the same stuff. He’d spoken to Katrina. He’d made sure she understood.

‘But,’ she had said. She looked stricken, damaged. She shook her head as if to hold the tears back. ‘I thought that me and you. I thought we...’

He walked away, trailing after him the quiet second half of her sentence. Then they gathered around her, their arms loose and soft, looking over at him. Friends, girls, curved like a hug, all arms encircling, and inside the noise of something breaking.

It had been a misunderstanding. He got home and took one of his mum’s good reds from the cabinet. And a corkscrew. ‘And bring stuff for a picnic,’ Jules had said. Not to him. He took the tenner that was left to Sainsbury’s and bought a mezze platter. Definitely vegetarian. And big, colourful, expensive, apologetic.

They weren’t at the dam. They were up on a hill, looking down on it. A safe spot, away from the currents. He found the path up and thanked the lord for the free wine and the sort-of-free platter.

They didn’t seem to hear his greeting. He knelt on the edge, put on his most gallus face and flourished the corkscrew.

‘It’s a nice one,’ he announced. ‘Mother’s cellar, organic no doubt.’

Jules turned around and stared at him.

‘Ta da,’ he said, pulling the plastic bag from the mezze and sliding it forward. Appeasement. Offering. Forgiveness. Acceptance.

Jules leaned over the platter, but Mags had her back to him, huddled with a girl he didn’t recognise.

‘Completely vegetarian. I checked,’ he said, a little louder.

Mags turned then, a smile still resident on her face, till she saw it

was him. She turned back to her friend.

‘Ooh, olives.’ Someone he didn’t know leaned over and scooped some onto her plate.

‘Help yourself,’ he said, still staring at Mag’s back. ‘I’ve got this lovely red, if anyone wants a drop.’ He cringed at his mother’s words coming out of his mouth. The olive-eating girl held out a cup. Mags stood up, linked arms with her friend and walked off.

‘What’s up with them?’

‘Guess?’ said Jules, forking a marinated pepper.

He took a glug of the wine.

● ‘We heard about Katrina.’

● Mark half shrugged.

● ‘You are deluded,’ said Jules, following his eyes to where Mags was skimming stones and laughing.

‘Jules, I’m one of the nice guys.’

‘That’s what we thought.’

‘I made a mistake,’ he said, scratching the picnic rug in a way that suggested repentance.

‘Yeah, you did.’ She tilted her head back and opened her mouth, opened it wide until it was a cave, a wide, red cave that would draw in all things, and not just the curved, humous-filled crisp. And all things slipped past him: the tears and cries of Katrina, the dismissing eyes of Mags, the pink and purple pouch flowing and

drowning in the Kelvin River, the river that soaked up the pain of the Beatson, the fear, the pain and the death that leaked out of its walls. And beauty too; the green of the grass, his mother's face setting his sweated-over dinner in front of him, those pictures in the gallery, even them. And he was lifted up, the crisp and humous alongside him. He clung to the edges of the picnic mat and it became the sides of Jules mouth and he was taken in and he couldn't make a sound.

'Haw. Aye you, Christian God. You pure lifted that.'

Christian God could see who was talking – cos the guy was blue, then he was yellow, then he was, holy fuck, mother of God. Christian God covered his eyes.

'Jesus, Hindu God. I'm sorry. I just like that story. Sincerest form of flattery and all that. And I did put my own spin on it.'

Hindu God played with the scales on his neck. 'OK,' he said, 'But, like, could I do the ending?'

'Oh, Hindu God, I've got a doozy of an ending.'

Hindu God burned with the fire of a thousand stars, stars a lot bigger than the one in our wee solar system.

'Right, whatever,' said Christian God, moving aside and grabbing for his best Australian sunglasses.

His Lenor-black jeans. It was all he could think about. What he had on was clinging coldly to his arse and cock and the rubbing was creating rash throughout the whole groin. But Jesus, the bag was heavy. Or he was weak. It was as if he'd had flu for a month and then ran a marathon. He gave up trying to carry it and dragged it along the platform to the toilet.

Clean, white tiled, ye Gods. He pulled off his trousers, threw them into a corner and sat on the cool black pan. The whiteness calmed him, and he took a moment to feel the safety and serenity.

‘Get on with it, Hindu God.’

Finally, taking his cooled head off the wall, he reached over. Oh, to live in such heaven, to have such a bag, to have such small perfect things. He pulled the bag towards him and began to unzip it. But what was this? It was sticking. It felt fat, buoyant. If he had been in a better state, he would have paused, he would have noticed the smell. He would have felt the space. But he wanted the Lenor heaven, his nostrils were anxious to be there, it was all they could sense. He reached his hand into the small gap he had made, but all he could feel was plastic, thick plastic. He pulled at the zip again, he got off the toilet and crouching gave it a strong, manly pull – no zip had defeated him before. Neither would this one. It ripped through the plastic, and blood, organs and all the matter that was happier on the inside of an animal sprayed out into his mouth and his eyes and his ears. And kept spraying. And kept spraying. And kept spraying. Until. THE END

‘Em, Hindu God?’

‘Oh, aye, right. Hawd on. I held a bit back, Deus ex machina style.’

‘Don’t look so gallus.’

Back there in Motherwell, a guy got onto the train. Except it was a girl, beautiful under the beard. No seats. And nowhere to put her bag. It was a heavy bag – big and black and full – and she didn’t want anyone stepping on it. Because this was her first job. They had been picking up stuff from butchers and slaughterhouses. Stealing it, putting it in thick plastic bags. They would show them what meat was. The demo was planned for a big, new butchers in

Liverpool. They would smear it on the steps and on the pavements. They would show them what butchering animals meant. She held the black bag up, looking for a space in the overhead luggage. A young guy looked up and drew his eyes off her, disgusted. She looked like a guy, but not a butch guy, not like him. To him, she was a wee gay guy. Just before Carlisle, the tall man beside her, helped make space in the overhead rack, beside another bag. 'Looks awfy like mine,' she thought, as they lifted it above her head and into the space.



Aye Swear

Fiona McCulloch

Ah didnae realise the C word wis so offensive till ah
Moved in academic English circles.
That workin-class lassie daen her PhD,
Workin wi Words.

And it can be.

Like Witch, Bitch, Twat. Misogyny's rife.

- But C's a step too far.
- Fair game tae say it as long as you don't hiv wan.
- Taste its guttural liquidity and own its power;
C it's an asset.

If ah hink about it a wee bit mare, though, aw swearing's, like,
Totally discordant when it comes oot ae a lassie's mooth –
apparently!

Ah can mind ma maw when ah wis a wean, saying tae ma da that
Young lovely lookin lassie at work hid a mooth like a sewer,
Swearin like a trooper, so she wis and her so stunnin an aw.

It's jist no ladylike.

Billy Connolly, defender of the wee swearie.
Rightly notes it's aw made up. Mibbe it's a
Pretty bunch o' floers should we agree
Among oorsels its new meaning.
Sign, signifier, signified.

Janey Godley tae points oot the blarin'
Glarin' hypocrisies. Offended by women
Who swear, yet committing countless
Atrocities?

It's jist no ladylike.

Recollection: ah think Whoopi Goldberg once witnessed in
Church her granddaughter's F word met with affront,
But remembered whit they saintly facades can conceal.

It's jist no ladylike.

Mibbe when lassies swear it hauds up a mirror.
Like Oscar Wilde warned they might see Caliban's
Face. Look whit he goat fur haudin up a mirror.
An' Caliban learnt their language
Tae curse them.

Dale Spender says women should re-centre language
To avoid being diminished. Shrunk.

Antonio Gramsci's organic intellectuals speak for society's
subaltern.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak wonders whether Subalterns can
Speak.

Audre Lorde says you can't dismantle the Master's House with his
tools.

Écriture feminine?

Écriture Écosse?

Écriture feminine Écosse?

Don't shrink-wrap Others
Fuckin' hypocrites.

Shame and Class

Rosalind

There is something about class that evokes strong emotions within me. I struggle to define my relationship with class. I grew up in South West England in an affluent area with stark disparities in backgrounds. I was working class, undoubtedly, but we owned our home due to compensation my father received when he broke his neck in a car accident aged 28, ending his career as a builder and mechanic. My mother came from an east end Irish-Catholic family and was one of seven, she had never not been poor. The friends I made in my early years at secondary school came from a similar class background to me. But the friends I made later were middle to upper class. I felt placeless in the class system and carried shame

- with me around my working class roots, but felt unable to strictly
- call myself working class because of the home my parents owned
- and the ease with which I am able to present as middle class.

I shied away from memories of the years of my life where I was inescapably working class, but now they return to me and I have a strange mix of fondness for them, tied up with fear and anger that is linked to the trauma of my past. Whilst at university, I was unable to reflect on this time with fondness because I felt that to admit even to myself my class roots would Other me in a way I could not handle in an elite university. I am just now beginning to learn to undo the class associated shame I had inherited and had reinforced by the seeming lustre of middle class life, this is in no doubt helped by having a class conscious counsellor.

I choose now to reflect on these memories because they are an inherent part of who I am. I recall telling my ex-boyfriend that I was ashamed of having been able to live in an owned home due to compensation, and later to be able to do a master's degree due

to a medical negligence claim my mother had been compensated for posthumously. I felt like I didn't deserve the money I had been given and didn't deserve the advantages it gave me. He pointed out that he went to private school because of his parent's affluence, and it didn't necessarily mean he deserved that — so why should I feel ashamed to have been given some small advantage out of relative disadvantage?

It was around the age of fifteen that I began to realise my place on the class spectrum. I had made new friends who were more affluent than myself. I suddenly found myself going to houses I couldn't quite believe real people actually lived in. My new friends had parents who were any number of impressive and interesting and important things: doctor/lawyer/art historian/psychiatrist. This was the first time I realised how starkly different lives could be because of money and status.

I think I made a conscious decision around that time to propel myself forwards. I had yet to learn the term upwards mobility but I felt a need to be mobile, and I was privileged in that I could be. I propelled myself with urgency. In this time I moved schools and made new friends, I tried to liken myself to them — I studied with them, ate with them and found a new world I had yet to access. I ended up with very good A-Levels and, in the wake of my mother's death, whisked myself off to university in London. I was undeterred and determined to start life anew.

But there was the time before all of that, which I had largely forgotten, had pushed to one side in my efforts to reshape the person I am. What follows are recollections of this former self, which I now know to be in fact myself, a self I no longer hold strictly at arm's length but one which still exists in a bubble of hazy confusion. I choose to write about them now in an effort to dissipate the shame associated with my upbringing.

When we were thirteen we tried to behave like what we thought we would be like at sixteen. We'd stand on street corners with scraped together money and ask strangers to buy us a packet of cigarettes, or a bottle of lambrini, or three litres of cider. We became experts at spotting who would be worth asking, and who would look appalled, or raise an eyebrow and tell us to go home. We'd sit in parks and spin around whilst downing the cider, tripping over one another in a dizzy haze of drunken escape and prepubescent bodies. I remember that summer when Sofia and Hannah's 14th birthday shimmered in the distance. We went to Somerfield's every day after school and stole bottles of sticky, sweet alcohol in the build up to the party on 5th July. One of the girls would go and ask a shop attendant where something like ketchup was, something we knew was far enough away from the alcohol aisle for me to slip down and tuck bottles of Malibu and toxic blue WKD into my, also stolen, flaking silver handbag. Misbehaviour and rule breaking sent electric shockwaves of thrill through our young and changing bodies. We bought a portable pink CD player for the party which took place underneath a subway in town. We danced to Rihanna and hugged one another with the ferocious tenderness of teenagehood, admiring our haul which was laid out before us.

We bunked off school frequently and wandered around our small town, stealing Lunchable packs from the shops and smoking cigarettes in the park, an insidious mix of childlike behaviour and a desperation to appear older, and cooler. We did our makeup disastrously, pencilling blue onto eyelids and smearing too orange foundation across our cheeks whilst playing shitty music from what seemed like incredibly cool motorola phones. When we were at school we'd slink off to have cigarettes, be rude to teachers, get suspended, sell roll ups three for a pound, sell chewing gum ten pence a piece. At our most entrepreneurial, Sofia and I took orders for revision guides from other students in our class and later stole them from WH Smith, we sold them for a pound less than they would be in the shops, extra discounts were given for

large orders, the buyers got to save themselves a pound that their parents would have given them and we made money for free! It seemed like a no brainer at the time.

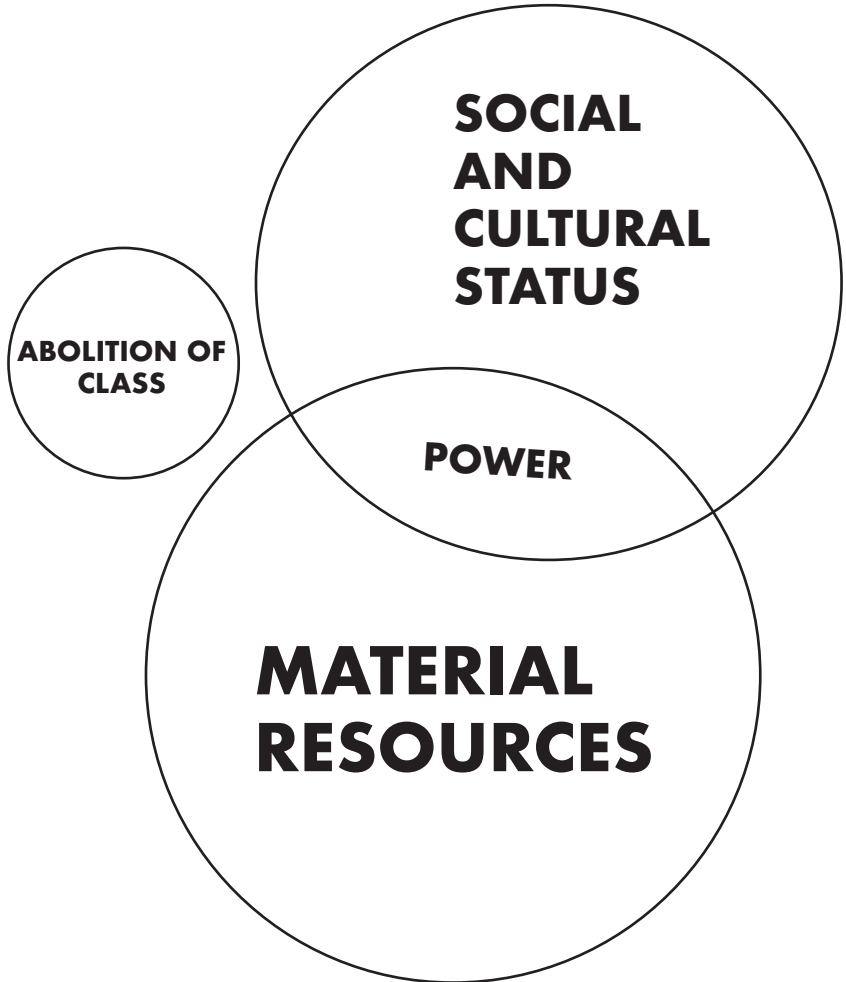
There were less fond memories, painful ones. I'd run away from home frequently, show my friends bruises given at the hands of my father, umm and argh about going to the police. I'd whisper to my siblings, do not tell the social worker about that, we will get taken away. We didn't tell the social workers, we didn't get taken away. We hated her, Sally, the social worker who it seemed was hell bent on tearing our dysfunctional family apart, looking for problems, trying to trick us into revealing truths about the family home. She didn't get it, it just was what it was and it worked for us.

I think perhaps I tried to quash my working classness because being working class had not worked out very well for me. I had grown up in an abusive household, my father couldn't work due to disability and my mother had to take sole charge of four children, eventually working part time as a medical secretary. She died when I was 18 of lung cancer. By this time I had middle class friends and some of their mums got cancer — they didn't die. I couldn't help but think that if we weren't poor she would have lived, and in some ways I was right. There are disparities in the prevalence and mortality rates of cancer, working class people are more likely to smoke, for example. This doesn't necessitate individual responsibility but highlights deep rooted disparities in the outcomes of those from different class backgrounds. I felt a deep sense of shame that I was poor, it seeped under my skin and entrapped me in a cycle of self loathing. The more that bad things happened to me, the more I resented my background. I came to view my upbringing, and consequently myself, as inherently wrong.

Whilst trying to incorporate myself more smoothly into my new group of affluent friends, and whilst under enormous strain at home living solely with my father after my parent's divorce, I developed

an eating disorder. I tried to take control over my life. I stopped eating and associated thinness with success and upwards mobility. I thought that if I could eat in a clean and pure way I would become clean and pure. I associated cleanness with middle classness, I felt dirty in some way coming from a starkly different background from the people I associated with. I slipped through my friend's houses with caution, wary of tarnishing their whole environments with my unwhole self. I imagined their lives as picture perfect — they would come home from school and be greeted with kisses and tea and cake. They would be asked how their days were whilst their mothers arranged flowers in their dining rooms, their fathers would love them unapologetically, they would do their homework before dinner and in a very continental way be offered a glass of wine, just the one, whilst they ate. I imagined that my life could be like that if I just tried hard enough to make it so. I imagined that if I could eat food like my friends ate I could become like them. I still carried shame with me, and it had expanded and engulfed me. ● If they were perfect, I was imperfect. Every part of my being felt ● wrong, I tried to make it right through cleanliness and control. I ● could not, shame is not an easy emotion to dissipate, it swallows you whole, clasps you tightly, won't let go.

I still feel a certain amount of shame associated with my class background, the shame is heightened by my confusion of where to place myself on the class spectrum, not only do I feel ashamed to come from a low income background, but I feel ashamed to believe I could allow myself to call myself working class whilst aware of the advantages I have had in life, despite the sometimes grisly circumstances these advantages have arisen from. It is messy and complicated to unpack, perhaps I do not need to define myself by class but I cannot avoid being who I am and where I came from. We are forced to consider ourselves on a class spectrum whilst existing in a society which has such stark differences in class outcomes.



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What is Englishness?

A Look Into What Can Be Learnt of Englishness Through The Industrial and Broadside Ballads of Manchester and Lancashire

J Parrish



Abstract and Observations

This essay will be attempting to theorise What Is Englishness. Through various methodologies, research and field work, theorising what can be understood of Englishness can be observed through the broadside ballads of industrial Manchester and Lancashire. By exploring England's colonial past, the subsequent lack of education, and attitudes towards its lack of education and the then subsequent identity that was wrapped up in that history as a case in point and context - said context can be used to examine how the attitudes and identity of, 'Broadside-ers' [sic] resonates within them as a group. Broadside-ers can be defined as an individual or groups of individuals who sing and perform Broadside ballads. Broadside ballads were cheap literature of the day, majority consisting of topical poems or songs. They were often sung in public houses or on street corners and would have sometimes been accompanied by a fiddle player. My primary sources were; *The Blood Never Dried: A People's History of the British Empire* (2006) Newsinger. J.; *Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire* (2019) Daley. K.; *Fakesong: The Manufacture of British Folk Song, 1700 to the Present Day* (1985) Harker. D.; *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology & the English Folk Revival* (2010) Boyes. G.; *The History of White People* (2010) Painter. N.I.; *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) Thompson, E.P.



It is often assumed that any conversation that aims to understand our colonial past is dragged into a metaphorical sea and drowned by other meaningless distractions from the narrative. This essay will also outline that such distractions tell us a lot more about Englishness than is first assumed. Whilst making some generalisations, (which in no way attempt to undermine the reality of nuance and is only necessary due to word constraints) this essay will explain how our colonial past and lack of reparations defines us including the distractions and how examining 'Broadside-ers' identities help us better understand England's identity. As is argued throughout this essay; the subsequent amnesia and retelling of England's past, as well as colonial history being the prominent philosophy, are what best defined us and will continue to define Englanders.

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“Britain isn't cool, you know It's really not that great It's not a proper country It doesn't even have a patron saint It's just an economic union That's past its sell-by date’

The words of the voice of the 1980s working class, in Billy Bragg's, 'Take Down The Union Jack'. (2002). Bragg, who is somewhat of Broadside artist himself, alluded to English identity being erased by an 'economic union', a sentiment repeated by the continuing:

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‘And pile up all those history books but don't throw them away They just might have some clues about what it really means To be an Anglo hyphen Saxon in England.co.uk To be an Anglo hyphen Saxon in England.co.uk’

In a white Jesus, post-civil war, post-independence, post-Brexit, North-South divide country, England forms much of its idea of Englishness from monarchs, elite scholars and academics, ex-prime ministers, the church, some historians, some musicians, the world

wars and colonialists. I would like to address this with short auto-ethnographic examples of quotes, which I will tackle one at a time. 'To be born English is to win the lottery of life'

I heard this a lot growing up, and it never made sense to me. In hindsight, I believe its intended uses were mainly ironic. Being working class, on the breadline, with free school meals, poor by Western standards, (whichever way you'd like to put it, I was that), it was sarcastic to suggest us, on the dole, are winning the lottery of life. Although meaningless to me, I know of those who aligned themselves with such a quote.

'The (British/)English sense of fair play!'

We like to think we're tolerant; 'The (British/)English sense of fair play!' - which was supposedly scientifically proven. Often the parable teaching this is English's refusal to use a crossbow, over a longbow, because of 'English fair play', Ignoring the fact English soldiers resisted the transition, over other European countries, as they were well trained in the latter and the weight of the new crossbow was far too heavy. Not because of fair play.

The research focus was heavily weighted towards English attitudes towards colonialism, as much of the discourse on Englishness is defined through colonialism. As well as the creation of the working class identity. Within the past decade, the combined efforts of historians have resulted in major changes in our understanding of colonialism. The very idea of 'Great Britain' is intimately tied to colonialism and thus the erosion of English identity - which is sympathetically alluded to by Bragg's, Take Down The Union Jack - but also not so great enough that it had to destroy papers documenting torture and murder in Kenya to maintain its 'missionary image'.

My methodology was to reverse-engineer what was observed of

Englishness through the 'Broadside-ers', and theorise a route in which created the culture that defines them. What was learnt throughout the process is that class in England is a defining contributor to English identity. It is also understood, working class identity and colonial identity have no business together. The notion that racism breeds or is innate within the working class is nonsense. As is addressed in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), 'making' because of the 'active processes' of the working class identity, refers to a separate group from and after the (other) 'English'. This is exemplified in Broadside songs with anti-monarchy and anti-slavery sentiments, the Broadside songs were sung and consumed by the English working class. A hopefully obvious observation; correlation does not mean causation. Although true, that English working class may be defined by colonialism, the true atrocities of the colonial project are burnt out of existence, dressed up as innocent patriotism and sold to the English working class.

- Many citing the significant working class vote for Brexit, which has been defined from the very beginning as being driven by English nationalism. It is also worth mentioning that of the data used to justify some of my conclusions, the sample sizes do not represent everybody and if anything showcase a generational divide with attitudes towards colonialism and Englishness.

There is however without a doubt significant momentum to 'move on' from England's colonialist past today. It is something examined much more deeply by Paul Gilroy's, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987). Gilroy theorises the atrocities of the British Empire, and in doing what it did to colonise, changed England's cultural identity. Gilroy observes there is no left-right divide on the issue either. Imperialism within the colonies created a 'mother country' out of Britain, but this is not a view shared by England's politicians and the general public. Nationalist politicians from Churchill to Powell were unwavering in their 'keep Britain white' - Gilroy was unfortunately proved correct by the events of the Windrush scandal. Anybody who drags up our history today is 'undermining

the suffering of some Africans' (an auto-ethnographic example one heard at an anti-racism protest) to use it as stick to beat England with, as if being anti-colonist and anti-imperialist somehow means using bodies to your own end. Indeed, this, including the usual 'you're anti-English' is what pro-colonialist, dressed up as patriots criticise anti-colonists for.

What is Identity?

The idea of self has been theorised by many different facets, perhaps the prominent philosophy within England coming from the Church (a fair generalisation as most, if not all strands of Christianity theorise afterlife) and its belief in heaven as a concept. If you, (oneself) experience an afterlife, who are you? Your physical self does not experience an afterlife. So you are not your physical self. It is then assumed you are your soul/ spirit, a philosophy that can be followed back to Plato, and his notion of true self. However, there is significant momentum that dismisses the dichotomy of soul and body as a Western interpretation of sinfulness, and not the actual Hebrew teachings which taught the body in turn becomes 'resurrected'. It is understood that this therefore does not justify the harming or exploitation of bodies, nor the Earth. It seems therefore the Western interpretation was subjugated to the cultural identity 'zeitgeist' of the colonial project.

Cultural identity came to the fore during the Enlightenment, where the self detached from the Church. Self identity and personal identity are fluid and we are our culture. However, one's identity may at first be confusingly hinged on how one looks or one may be treated differently; identity is not how one looks.

'Culture is man's cumulative learned behaviour' (Merriam 1964) and culture is "learned, not biologically inherited, and involves arbitrarily assigned, symbolic idea and notions'. (Bodley, J.H, 1994). Culture involves at least three components: what people think, what they do, and the material products they produce.

Thus, mental processes, beliefs, knowledge and values are parts of culture. Take living in a village community: to feel part of said community, you would have to align yourself with the village's ideology or collective spirit. The psychologists Ahlbrandt R. S. & Cunningham, J. V. observed one's contribution to a community hinged on the sense of one said community.

“They found that those who were most committed and satisfied saw their neighborhood as a small community within the city, were more loyal to the neighborhood than to the rest of the city, and thought of their neighborhood as offering particular activities for its resident” (McMillan D.W & Chavis D.M, Sense of Community; A Definition and Theory, 1986).

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● But, however committed one is to the sense of community, one's single actions would not define nor always change the sense of community. Bodley also suggests that by using the word 'culture', we refer to shared or group behaviour. Culture therefore has several properties: it is shared, learned, symbolic, transmitted, cross-generationally, adaptive and integrated. It is a social phenomenon which idiosyncratic behaviour can not nor would not change. The creation of culture is socially transmittable; an individual shares his/hers experience/ knowledge, thus creating the culture. Cultural identity is therefore culture-specific. And it is this culture-specificness, Englishness, which was subjugated by the state.

Is this Englishness?

To tackle what Englishness is, first it must be established who are the English as a group - what criteria must you meet to be considered English? Fun as it is to imagine ourselves as Anglo-Saxon, or descendants of Vikings, those days are long gone and would only serve a romantic vision. The reality is, we, the English, along with most Europeans and Central/North Americans (also

including 'expats') are cobbled together through a unifying white ideology, as examined in *The History of White People* (Painter, N.I, 2010). In what is considered a controversial title, Painter outlines the historical pretext to the white ideology, retrospectively observing the tribes of Europe before such a term of being 'white' was formalised and the assumed taxonomy of cultural whiteness. England has often been described as white and Christian. Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) establishes race as a global class hierarchy. So England is a byword for white?

But, of course, you can be of, say Jamaican descent and be English. But, do we think the definition of 'expat' would be granted to those who descended from 'the Windrush generation', living in say, Australia? In 2013, the then mayor of London, Boris Johnson, described 'Aussies' as 'just like us' 'culturally and emotionally'. We often refer to Australians as expats, alluding to our hand in colonising Australia. And as significant a statement as that is, it is indicative of England's attitudes towards its own identity. This is without mentioning the Home Office's hand in destroying the documents of the Windrush generation, which led to illegal deportations and in some cases, deaths (due in part to be branded with no recourse to public funds). It is quite clear he, Johnson, was not talking about the aboriginal people, thus evidencing the white ideology. Not to mention the conservatives 'Go Home' vans under Theresa May, which saw British citizens deported from the 'mother country'. The white ideology manifesting itself as (some) White = us/we. Everyone else = them/they.

When looking at the 1962 Immigration Act, an Act that caused British citizens from the commonwealth and colonies to lose the right to settle in the 'mother' country. The then Home Secretary, Rab Butler, wrote privately (now public) there was 'great merit' that the act of ceasing citizenship could be presented as nondiscriminatory, even though 'its restrictive effect is intended to, and would, operate on coloured people almost exclusively'. Other

ministers of the time stated that its obvious intention was to 'keep coloured people out'. It is clear that there are huge intentional gaps missing from our colonial past that are essential to hold up our identity as the epicentre of civilisation.

English history is colonial history. Some Jamaican history is our history. Some Australian history is our history and so on. There is a tendency to streamline English history in some places, but not others. This pretty much boils down to colonialism being conveniently misremembered on purpose. It's logical. Teach the things you want to exemplify English/British identity, thus not teaching the things you do not.

The Queens On The Dole

- There is no better modern-day, real-life example, that not one
- English person has not sat through, of English identity being
- intimately tied to vast inequalities, than our national anthem.

England is the monarchy. The monarchy is us. We do not have self. The monarchy is our identity. But what is its purpose? There are of course significant anti-monarchy voices throughout England's history, spanning back to post-civil war republicanism. To justify the monarchy, you have to create an ideology in which one group of bodies are worth more than another. It is within the monarchy's best interest to cement the ideology by perpetuating it through political policy. From the top, down.

It is often crowed by the English establishment that England were the first, in what became a domino effect of the abolition of slavery. But again, this is incorrect in numerous ways. But even when looking at the history of the abolition of slavery within England, it was outlawed here, but not in the colonies.

The state has sought at every turn to conceal the truth about the empire – including destroying vast records of its crimes, which, in

the face of these revelations c.2013, did not change the positions of pro-empire and pro-colonial historians retrospectively. Some of the documents destroyed documented the torture and murder of the Mau Mau in colonial Kenya following the Mau Mau uprising and massacre. We know such atrocities took place. In the English consciousness, these obviously heinous acts are a sadness on an otherwise great thing. A 2014 YouGov poll showed 59% of sample size found pride in England's colonial past. With 49% feeling the countries are better off because of colonialism. An identical poll was taken in 2019, and found over 65% either had no problems with England's colonialist past or thought England should be proud of it. With only 19% finding shame in colonialism. It is also worth noting that similar European countries such as Belgium and France had similar trends but not to the same degree, with Germany being statistically least proud of its colonial past.

Perhaps Englishness' is then up to interpretation. But are we supposed to believe those whose ancestors we murdered and bodies we stole benefited from colonialism?. You would have thought so with the chants you hear in a street protest held by the EDL (English Defence League). But, of course, this is with a certain identity demographic. The notion of our colonial past being a saving grace for those it was inflicted upon was justified explicitly in Christian missionary terms - although it is obvious that the real justification for slavery was economic, evidenced by the taxpayers reparations to slave traders which 'lost out' economically because of the abolition of slavery. These compensations were finally paid off by the tax-payer in 2015. The government's treasury announced this as a good thing, stating it was ended through our aid of paying taxes; aligning ourselves as the white English saviours. The way this was presented at the time in 2015 is again indicative of our view of ourselves as being proponents of fair play. The reality is, we (the working-class self) have got more in common with immigrants than we do with the state, but we are the state. English patriotism is built on a lie and sold to the public. We are told this is who we

are. But this is not true. We are not the monarch nor are we its views. When looking into the skinhead culture of the 1980s in England and subsequently Britain, it is often condensed down into a black and white, racist culture with the members of the racist far-right National Front defining it. When in fact, it was not as black and white as has been portrayed. The original skinheads were a celebration and amalgamation of multiculturalism, Ska and Reggae supplying the soundtrack. It was also a culture that celebrated being of working-class culture, often wearing your 'work gear' proudly and recreationally.

The Broadside Oxymoron

As much as it is true that broadsides from Manchester, Lancashire and beyond have been used by historians to explain away the working life of England, it can be said that they also cannot do just that. This is best evidenced by a look into who 'collected' broadside ballads. It is no mystery to us that the only reason most of the material was collected and subsequently printed was due to monetary gains. And those who collected were by 'generations of antiquarians and scholars' (Harker, 1985) and those who published were themselves under publishing suppression from the numerous cycles of monarch censorship. Even Harker's most ardent critics give him his due, often citing Tom D'Urfey's assembling of the much 'borrowed' (some prefer stolen) songbook *Pills to Purge Melancholy* as an obvious money grabbing romanticisation of working-class culture.

However true that may be, Broadside-ers are aligned with the working-class identity. This often manifests itself with remembrance of what is 'true' working-class history, for example, the clog fighting of Lancashire (known locally as 'purring') [see records researched by Anna FC Smith]. Broadside-ers in general do not align themselves with the Englishness outlined above, but live alongside it; completely aware of an idea of England that is false.

And false to themselves. The above Englishness is not a component of Broadside-ers methodologies, nor is it defining. The only way it is defining is much better described as identity in reaction or despite it.

The Coal Tits

‘It’s not about being English. It’s about being working class. It’s about being forgotten. And re-remembering’. This is a slightly paraphrased quote from one of The Coal Tits, Hazel. They write updated versions of Broadside, often lending the old tunes and re-writing the words to fit what they see around them. The Coal Tits are based out of the ‘new forest’, an initiative that saw old coal mines being sowed with 100,000s of trees, creating a square mileage of around 8 miles. They meet at the old mines, pubs and in the forest itself to talk about old geography specific tales, often much of it conjecture, but then in turn, aim to re-tell the real story. To account for this lack of information, The Coal Tits perform in the places where the songs are set, using geographical clues that are hinted towards within the old tales. And of course, there are wells of well-researched and authenticated resources in which they rely on. The Coal Tits perform songs collected by the very people they rail against - thus evidencing the fluidity of identity. The irony in ‘remembering’ as Hazel says, is then relying on sources collected by the upper-classes, which were in turn censored by the state.

The Coal Tits identify as working class, but furthering that as Mancunian working class. It is in the working-class’ best interest to be anti-colonial, thus being anti-monarchy and it always has been. This is highlighted in the broadside ‘The Citizens Guillotine’, an anti-monarchy broadside set to the tune of God Save The Queen. A broadside which was self aware enough that it disguised the anti-monarchy message so when the authorities were walking past the public house, they would just hear the tune God Save The Queen, and let them continue drinking.

Conclusions and Thoughts

It is obvious that much of what we know about self identity is applicable to ones sense of Englishness, thus being subject to fluidity; this fluidity enables the The Coal Tits to consciously and intellectually distance themselves from the antiquarians and scholars of the upper classes. The interpretation of Englishness from the Broadside-ers perspective is best summed up, funnily enough with the slave trader, Cecil Rhodes quote himself. As the actual quote, as allegedly stated by Rhodes goes as follows;

“you are an Englishman, and have subsequently drawn the greatest prize in the lottery of life.” (c.1880)

The often misquoted, melancholy for the colonialist Rhodes perfectly sums up English identity for Broad- side-ers; misremembered and misrepresented, to ease the noble Englishmen’s guilty conscience. Like a rechargeable battery almost depleted, these sound bites give vigour, sexiness and a convenient amnesia to the discourse and elite intelligentsia. Its English patriotism, which explains why leftist leave it be and are often branded ‘traitors’ from the right/centre.

In order to justify colonialism, you have to create an ideology that says the West is the moral epicentre, and the rest of the world needs to catch up. Then you must create a methodology that demonstrates that other countries and its people need ‘saving’. The reality of colonialism is murder justified through various racisms. Which as a byproduct saw the erasure and reestablishment of Englishness. We, the English, have such amnesia to what the colonial project was and is, due in part to racisms being erased from the discourse. The very thing that unites and defines us, is another falsehood-another fakesong. We are told this is us, so this is us (the ‘us’ being the state’s subjugated identity, which in turn was perpetuated through political policy and sold to us through

good marketing; this is evidenced as much of the Brexit vote was concern over immigration [see the Lord Ashcroft poll data taken the day after the Brexit vote], yet sees no irony in being one of the biggest sources of emigrants in the world).

It is however, important to mention that, and contrary to popular belief, racism was not cooked up by the working class of England. There is a correlation between working-class, English identity and the ardent pro-colonialists as mentioned above. This is often presented by the media as working-class culture breeds racism. Racisms were essential to the colonial project, and the colonial project was a product of the English establishment. And the English establishment is what has defined England, its people and attitudes. And now we live in the remnants of it. This state-induced, post-colonial, English Trojan-horse patriotism.

This Englishness perpetrates through England's cultural identity, including those of Broadside-ers. As to Broadside-ers, the history of collection is not a concern. Much of what we know of working-class culture in this sense is falsified. Like our self-induced amnesia to our colonial past, Broadside-ers take no issue with its falsification. Much of this reads like criticism, but on the contrary being a Broadside-er, and being proud of that, is an antidote to the little Englander anger at multiculturalism which threatens 'our greatness', where much of right-wing ideology flourishes. Broadside-ers working class identities finds pride in themselves. In this sense, Broadside-ers are self-aware. They do not suffer fools gladly, and they're correcting the historical greed and exploitation of the working class, which is much misrepresented in itself. E.P Thompson outlined how before the working class identity, the working classes were seen only as either cogs in the capitalist machine or an interesting old wives tale; the old English, Jeremy Kyle-esque, poverty porn. These attitudes have not wavered much in the centuries following the 'generations of antiquarians and scholars' falsifying 'old wives tales'. In fact, we still see the same

attitude towards today's footballers. An extremely rare example of majority working class individuals earning massive amounts of money, and the media runs cannon fodder narratives of them being overpaid, overvalued and clearly not deserving of what is earnt.

If we can understand this, our colonial past, if we understand that the thing that makes us English is murder, if we understand that we have a lot more in common with immigrants than we do with our leaders and those crossing the channel in boats are not to blame for the vast inequalities in this country, if we can be Broadside-ers, perhaps we can find ourselves.





Let the Light In

KALIGULA

Black night rumbles with the silence of age,
When earth croaks and splits, traverses fresh
rage,

Wounds open up, hungry mouths to obey,
Clambering to the surface to foul our bed.

What you said, the Them's, the Those,
Peering each from each, suspicious sockets.
Everything changes, nothing the
● same, Apart from rare faces who utter my
● name.

● Collapse your voice, won't you temper you
hide? Process your meat-thinned blood to
imbibe,

For if a husk stands where I had once
been, Would I be sorry that I'd led them
in?

A neglected shriek, Stops
short to reach deep, -
Enough, fret fatigued and terribly old.
A cry, it escapes, none managed to hold.

It's the only time I pray;
"Please let the light in"
"Please let the light in"



A puncture, a wound, a fist in a hole. Hang them, release me, and strangle their throat. No use, split my breast with a 'Thup', and a crack, Paw through black ooze, "bring one of us back?" Though I warn, "Don't concede, don't live by my void. You'll crumble through fingers, exhausted, destroyed." High on a low, rip at skin screaming "MADNESS!"

"Please let the light in"

"Please let the light in"

Putrid air sidles up to ones' side, Humid curls into nostrils not one can abide, Once it has wearied, run dry, then it lifts. The hatred, the hunger, all gone leaving Bliss.

My mind when its cruel, its rotten and black, Are you sure you don't want to turn around and head back?



*LUM
PEN.*

How to Guide for Writing (With Us).

Here are 9 points you need to know:

We only accept writing from those who identify as working class or have experienced long term involuntary poverty and economic hardship.

- 1.

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2. We may accept writing of all length, but generally we look for anything between 2,000 and 4,000 words.

3. We accept all styles of writing - fiction, non-fiction and everything else.

For each issue we will suggest several themes and questions. If you want to write about something beyond these drop us an email as we might be planning a later issue that fits with it better.

- 4.

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- 5.

- Don't worry if you're not confident about spelling, grammar, sounding educated enough. What we're interested in is hearing your ideas based on your lived experiences.
- 6.
- Concerned about style? Don't be, we're happy to publish openly angry rants written in staccato rhythm or fictional narratives about killer avocados on toast and everything else inbetween. Whatever voice you feel comfortable using.
- 7.
- Please title your work, if you can't think of one we can help you find one.
- 8.
- Name yourself as you would like to see it printed, or state if you would like to remain anonymous.
- 9.

Happy Writing!

Tips for worriers:

Don't know where to start? Start in the middle. Just try to get your ideas down on paper. It's all practice.

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