



BEAT THE DUST

THE BOOKSHOP ISSUE

September 2009

Introduction

This issue of Beat the Dust celebrates the first birthday of its online bookshop, which brings together in one place, the very best underground literature from small and mid-sized indie publishers worldwide. Beat the Dust Bookshop aims to make inventive, thought-provoking writing more accessible to readers, providing shelf-space to titles most mainstream booksellers daren't stock or have overlooked. We work with indie publishers to help get their novels, short story and poetry anthologies into the hands of more readers. This collaborative approach means a fair deal for all – the presses, the writers and Beat the Dust Bookshop - not a claim most mainstream online booksellers can make. For this issue, then, we asked a selection of writers with books on our online shelves, to submit some of their latest work.

Matthew De Abaitua



Matthew is the author of *The Red Men*. Here's his Top 8 book/shopping-related playlist:

B: The Past Is A Grotesque Animal – Of Montreal

Electro-epic stream of intellectual consciousness: "I fell in love with the first cute girl that I met. Who could appreciate Georges Bataille. Standing at a Swedish Festival, discussing Story Of The Eye."

O: Manhattan Research Inc – Raymond Scott

The new plastic sounds and electronic abstractions of Raymond Scott were the sound of the future for advertising in the 1960s. It is his promotional recording for Bendix lauding their futurist division, The Tomorrow People, that Jay Dee aka .J.Dilla sampled for Lightworks from his Donuts album.

O: Moonbeam Levels - Prince

"Yesterday I tried to write a novel but I didn't know where to begin so I lay down in the grass to feel the world turn." Unreleased Prince song reveals his aborted foray into fiction.

K: Ulysses – Franz Ferdinand (Beyond the Wizards Sleeve Re-Animation)

Everyone should remix Ulysses once in their life.

S: Alice – Tom Waits

Exploring Charles Dodgson's dangerous love for Alice. "I skate over the ice of your name," sings Tom, alerting us to Alice's treacherous second syllable.

H: Paperback Believer – Go Home Productions

A mash-up of The Beatles' Paperback Writer with The Monkees' I'm A Believer that I consider to be an expression of faith in the future of the novel.

O: Shadows of Tomorrow – Madvillain featuring Quasimoto

The poetry of Sun Ra inspires multiverse-spanning rap.

P: We Live So Fast – Heaven 17

The band that critiqued the emptiness of 1980s sex and shopping materialism from a literary perspective, being named after a fictional band in Anthony Burgess' A Clockwork Orange.

frank bulmer's day off work

~ an extract of Matthew's re-imagining of Ferris Bueller's Day Off set in contemporary Liverpool with older Scouse versions of Ferris, Cameron, Sloane, Jeanie and Ed Rooney. Here Cameron and Frank are hanging out in the Strand Shopping Centre in Bootle looking for Frank's father. ~

Cameron drove The Baby at a hunting clip, his demeanor privately amused, his aim true. Driving was an expression of his athleticism and his ideology. He regarded the etiquette of the lanes, the democracy of traffic, as a contemptible order devised by the mediocre for their own protection. Their weakness and hesitancy deserved no mercy from him. Dispassionately, he violated these superstitions of lesser men.

The road into Bootle was rough and unfamiliar. The camber was steep and the surface flaked away in chunks of public sector inefficiency. A quick sequence of traffic lights taxed him until the pips squeaked. The city had no interest in helping the small businessman. Nor did his passenger, Frank, who was educating Cameron in the art of the skive: "Instead of using up me holiday time, I've been booking myself into training schemes. It makes me look really keen, like I'm going for promotion, but no-one checks up if you actually attend the course. Today's conference is on How The Legend Of King Arthur Helps Employees Visualise Inner- and Outer-Directed Goals - and I've been on it already." (In a hotel in Fazakerley, the facilitator takes the register... "Bulmer?"... "Bulmer?"... "Has anyone seen Frank Bulmer?") "They use Arthurian legend to help you

understand what you want and how to get it, classified as two goals, what they call your Glastonbury and your Avalon. Glastonbury is a display of achievement that other people can witness. It is an Outer-Directed Goal, like The Baby, for example. Your Inner-Directed Goal, or your Avalon, is the thing that you achieve for yourself that only you can judge. What that might be in your case Cameron I would not like to speculate, although I fear it would involve the kind of desires that drive men to hide-out in Thailand or Vietnam. For myself, my Avalon is an easy life. 'Don't put your head above the parapet and keep your feet out of the trenches' is my motto."

"How is the easy life these days?" asked Cameron.

"Hard. Very hard. Last night I nearly blew up the house." He explained about his angry attack of home improvements, the drill striking through the gas pipe, the moment when he considered raking the bit against the metal to create a fatal spark. The death instinct. The masculine desire to wipe everyone out rather than suffer further shame. Now there was a flaw in the Arthurian scheme. What if your Glastonbury - in this case, Frank's new house on the new estate - impeded the march to Avalon - his vague notion of freedom and a hope for a land where men could live a quiet life and go to the pub unmolested by tasks? What if the outer goal was a shell and the inner goal the yolk? Was that why he considered blowing up the house? Because you had to break the shell to get to the yolk?

A career in personnel had taught Frank hundreds of confusing allegories.

Cameron drove down Washington Parade with the expression of a soldier who has come to liberate a city only to discover that the enemy had torched it before retreating. The Triad buildings loomed overhead, three well-preserved office blocks, a wizard's lair that ruled over the surrounding badlands. As they idled down the high street, Frank leant forward and searched for his father amongst the passing faces. Marks of weakness, marks of woe; he read the stories written line-by-line upon the passing faces, the commas set dark and deep beneath the eyes, the parentheses around the mouth. The flesh is a diary left open for others to read, if they care.

In the queue for the multi-storey, Cameron was mute and anxious. He wanted to stay with The Baby, unwilling to leave it at the mercy of the car park. The promise of breakfast and the threat of his friend's contempt, persuaded him to brave the shopping arcade.

At a cafe on the first floor, Frank ordered bacon butties and salad for them both. He had recently discovered the benefit of adding tomato and lettuce to the standard bacon sandwich and had an urge to share the wisdom of the BLT.

"The salad freshens up the bacon," demonstrated Frank. "It works equally well with sausages."

If Billy Bulmer followed his normal birthday routine, then he would stop in here for breakfast and then head over to Hairlucinations for a number 2 on the clippers. Frank insisted they wait for him. Slumped in the metal seats, legs parted with indolent relish, they considered each shopper conveyed up the escalator with a mutter of either "would" or "would not".

"Would in a car park."
 "Would from behind."
 "Would and her mother."
 "Would only if she promised not to smile."
 "Would twice."
 "Would while her husband watched."
 "Would if she washed her hair."
 "Wouldn't even if she paid me."
 "Would if she stopped eating for five minutes"
 "Would and her kids can wait outside."
 "Would until the wheels came off."
 "Would."
 "Would."
 "Would." Frank would do everyone.

"Would you really?" Cameron teased his friend. Frank was affronted.

"I have it in me."

"To cheat on Jeanie? Since when?"

In the past, mocking Frank for his erotic inexperience had been outside the normal rules of engagement for their banter. Frank had sowed a single wild oat, then he and Jeanie mated for life like swans. Whereas Cameron had, at one point, been asked to leave Oman because his sexual behaviour was in danger of causing an international incident. In their twenties, this imbalance went unspoken except on those drunken nights when Frank would over-step the mark, launching into some humiliating riff on Cameron's shortcomings for the amusement of the groundlings in the pub, and then Cameron would ask Frank, pointedly, to tell them about all his girlfriends. Unsheathing that rapier a single inch was enough to shut Frank up, and send him to the bar to buy another round. When Cameron domesticated his oats by marrying Amanda, the imbalance righted itself, and then began tipping itself in Frank's favour - for he had fathered two children whereas Cameron was subject to scarring failures in that regard. Both men, equally abject in their monogamy, talked wistfully of infidelity.

"I tell you who I fancy," said Frank. "She works in your office. I met her at the Christmas party. The clever girl. We had a right laugh."

"Sloane," nodded Cameron.

"Sloane," repeated Frank, adding her name to his sandwich and chewing them together with some satisfaction.

"She's from London. She's well out of your league."

"Sloane would be an amazing girlfriend. The relationship would be full of madness and intellectual arguments and experimental sex."

"If you weren't ten years older than her and married with kids."

"We got on really well. I think Sloane would consider a bit of intelligent rough like myself."

"Prove it."

Frank looked askance at his friend; this was something new, for their conversations traditionally consisted of things said before then said again.

"I dare you."

"You dare me to destroy my marriage?"

"No. I dare you to impress Sloane. I dare you to interest her. You wanted to do something different on your day off. Here's your chance." Cameron called his office and arranged a meeting with Sloane at a cafe at Albert Dock within the hour. The appointment was made before Frank could reconsider.

A gang of youths congregated at the top of the escalator, scallies in the expensive outdoors gear that was the fashion; burglar black Berghaus and North Face windcheaters zipped up over the mouth, fingerprints concealed by thermal gloves. Knobs of gristle at the hinge of the jawbone from all that insolent chewing – these lads were so lean you could see rivets holding them together.

You could hide a lot under a big coat. Cameron had gone through a teenage phase of being on the rob when he wore an oversized Kappa parka into which he slipped fountain pens, hole punches, staplers, pads of A4 ruled and plain. Stationery had been his thing. He forwent the aftershave, confectionary and magazines of his peers in petty thievery, and stole only to gratify his need for order, for the organisation that rulers and lever arch files brought to his bedroom. He hid his swag in a drawer at the bottom of his wardrobe, a hoard that he liked to touch and rearrange but never use.

The scallies dared one another to run down against the upward motion of the escalator, distracting attention from their conspiratorial leaders who were – Cameron guessed –divvying up the thieving fighting drugging duties. No-mark scum. Just as Genghis Khan raped Central Asia to seed sixteen million descendents, so must an Emperor Scally have worked his way through the women of Liverpool to produce such a multitude of interchangeable hard-faced bastards.

Frank laughed at his friend's expression of fastidious disgust.

"We were once like that."

"You were," said Cameron. "You still are, Mr Intelligent Rough. I am not. If I ever behaved like that it was merely to fit in."

Frank watched the lads, comparing them to his memories of his own adolescence, looking for that face in the gang that corresponded to his. Had he been the ratty one chipping around for influence, or the big gormless one? Was he the leader or his main rival? Was he the scruffy lad from the bad home or the timid boy from the good one? He kept his nose clean, his mother saw to that. But the Bulmers were not ignorant of the benefits that could be claimed back from the system.

Cameron looked at his watch. "Your Dad's not coming. We have to go and meet Sloane."

"Give me a moment. I am soaking up the transient beauty of the everyday."

"The Strand is not beautiful," said Cameron, arming himself with his jacket and his phone. "Nor is it transient."

Tim Wells



Tim Wells is the author of *Boy's Night Out in the Afternoon*. His latest collection is *Rougher Yet*. Here's Tim's Top 8 book/shopping-related choons:

- B:** You Can't Judge a Book By the Cover - Bo Diddley
- O:** Dracula, Prince of Darkness - King Horror
- O:** S.Y.S.L.J.F.M. (the Letter Song) - Joe Tex
- K:** The Book of Right-On - Joanna Newsom
- S:** Ramble On - Led Zeppelin
- H:** Jah Golden Pen - Sylford Walker
- O:** Paperback Writer - The Beatles
- P:** Sympathy For the Devil - Rolling Stones

baby workout

Get dressed, get blessed

Try to be a success

How he got here doesn't really matter: the raw talent,
 hours of practice, the racism, the mob that'll get you breaks
 but never let you rest, the girls, the hits, the hangers on ...
 Even if tonight it's just the uppers keeping him upright,
 when the spotlight hits, he's on his own; all else fades
 and Mr Excitement is king of the room. Horns punch,
 drums jab and hook, he ducks, weaves, *that* voice soars,
 lifts `em right up and knocks `em clean out. Dancing out

to centre stage he tosses his jacket over his shoulder, arches back, knees bent, sweat seeps into the silk of his shirt. Flipping forward, rolling hips, shoes shuffling in a blur, if he undid the fly of his sharkskin trousers it'd take a bite. He knows, as the girls tear his clothes and he's ankle deep in lingerie, it's important not to dress as who you are, but who you want to be.

Niven Govinden



Niven is one of the writers featured in the *3:AM London, New York, Paris* anthology. Here's his Top 8 trax to enhance the changing room experience:

- B:** Tranny Chaser - RuPaul
- O:** Get Sexy - Sugababes
- O:** Lose My Breath - Destiny's Child
- K:** Love Game (remix) - Lady Gaga
- S:** Celebration - Madonna
- H:** Oochie Coochie - Baby Ford
- O:** Better Off As Two - Frankmuzik
- P:** Ready for the Weekend - Calvin Harris

urgent memo to all residents, happy house retirement community

Dear Residents,

Following a further spate of unfortunate incidents on-site (i), I am regrettably writing to inform you of an addition to the rules of residence at Happy House Retirement Community, effective immediately.

1. All front windows are to be locked at all times. Only the Duty Staff Nurse and other senior staff will be furnished with keys. Requests for open windows must be made in writing a minimum of twelve hours beforehand (ii).
2. Racial and homophobic abuse of management staff is a legal offence and in all instances will be treated as such. Staff at Happy House should be accorded the privilege of working in an environment without fear of verbal attack (iii).

3. For the foreseeable future (iv), wine will no longer be provided at meal-times. Whilst I am encouraging of merriment in the dining room for what it adds to the ambience as well as its aid to geriatric digestion, we have to draw the line at the small minority abusing the Chardonnay strictly for the purpose of starting food fights and encouraging others to participate. Further to this (v) NO alcohol will be permitted in residents' rooms. Any bottles, empty or otherwise found during routine sweeps will be immediately confiscated, with owners receiving written reprimands (vi).

4. Non-prescription drugs will be vetted, and similarly, in questionable circumstances, removed. Please note, we know of no legally-licensed doctor (vii) or pharmacist who dispenses Ecstasy, aka MDMA, Mandy, or Party Mix (viii). Furthermore, any similar-looking tablets stamped with walking stick, motorised wheelchairs, commode, bedpan or Superman motifs, will be flushed down the sluice by the Staff Nurse, whether they have been stored in bottles marked Paracetamol or not.

5. The sun-loungers have been provided in accordance with studies that prove the beneficial effects of daily exposure of Vitamin D on the skin. They are set on the patio facing the golf course to provide a calming and pleasing vista. Our encouragement of the daily ray-catch does not give residents carte-blanche to declare 'skin to the wind' and bathe partially or fully-nude (ix).

6. Under NO circumstances is the visiting of other residents' rooms after lights out permitted (x).

7. All forthcoming day trips are cancelled until a modicum of good behaviour has returned (xi).

I look forward to your co-operation.

Sincerely,

Hambley Hammond
Executive Manager, Happy House Retirement Community

(i) Which itself followed an emergency house meeting only 72 hours prior to address the original spate of lewd behaviour! I am saddened and incredibly disappointed by this escalation of unpleasantness.

(ii) This childish predilection for attracting the attention of passers-by from the windows with 'Help! I'm being held here against involuntarily'; 'Please stop them from hitting me'; 'They've forced me to change my will!'; and most distastefully, 'Rape!', cannot continue. Not only is it completely erroneous and unnecessarily panic-inducing for those duped, the noise level has provoked several written letters of complaint from local residents. Anonymous threats of 'showing them what it means to be hit', have been forwarded to the local precinct as a safety measure, under the proviso that this torrent of rowdy behaviour is nipped in the bud.

(iii) I personally take being heckled as a 'Tight-Ass Honky' and 'Pen Up The Ass Clipboard Queen' during House meetings as totally uncalled-for and a clear lack of respect. It does not matter that on each occasion, the hecklers were Caucasian, and that such chidings are only ever directed at me. I'm just a man trying to do the job the best I can. I would appreciate it if any dissatisfaction with my management style was made in writing or at a one-to-one meeting, rather than through this juvenile hissing and anonymous name-calling whenever I pass down the hallway.

(iv) To be reviewed after eight weeks, or possibly six depending on whether a sense of collective remorse is gauged.

(v) As over-indulgence of wine is, we feel, merely the tip of the iceberg. I know for a fact that chef does not lace the vegetable soup with Cutty Sark, yet its odour coming from several tables on Tuesday was unmistakable. Contrary to protests in certain quarters, rum is not a recommended salt substitute for those on a low sodium diet.

(vi) This will count towards residents' personal three-strikes-and-out house-rule detailed in the initial Promises contract on arrival.

(vii) Contrary to certain protestations, Google has found no certified United States medical practitioner under the name of Dr Feelgood.

(viii) This shocking discovery of suspected Ecstasy use would never have come to our attention without our new Polish Staff Nurse, Magda confirming that she has never heard of a polka that is danced with a flashlight atop a baby Grand - and that, as a retired raver, the exhilaration residents were getting from this dance, sweaty limbs and popped-out eyes, came from another, more chemical tradition entirely.

(ix) The Clubhouse has forwarded ten complaints from the younger golf pros so far this month. Encouraging the older golf pros with peep-shows/hide and seek has resulted in my exhausting the buildings' budget so early in the financial year, in order to replace the thirty windows smashed by golf balls. No blame has been apportioned to the two heart attacks on the Green, but I do hope that any of those involved are giving their consciences close examination.

(x) There have been numerous complaints from a number of confirmed bachelors and spinsters, who have endured the distressing experience of having parties mistakenly enter their beds in the middle of the night, when they were intending to go visit the room next door. Wear your glasses, you vain monsters!!!

(xi) The coach driver has referred the lighted fart episode to his union. Similarly, the security staff at the Mall cannot guarantee residents' security following the threats of several shop owners who are still claiming goods are being stolen.

David E Oprava



David is the author of *VS*. Here's his Top 8 shopping/book-related playlist:

B: The Book I Read - Talking Heads

O: Paperback Writer - The Beatles

- O:** Walt Whitman's Niece - Billy Bragg & Wilco
- K:** Romeo and Juliet - Dire Straits
- S:** Books About UFOs - Husker Du
- H:** Bookmark - Paul Westerberg
- O:** My Baby Loves a Bunch of Authors - Moxy Fruvous
- P:** Album of the Year - The Good Life (this one actually mentions Dan Fante)

be far better off than i

I bought three donuts and plonked in the park.
 I caressed the look of them, mud chocolate
 and vital-organ pink. Massacring one,
 I detested the rest;
 a lard-carpet on my tongue.

You log-bumped further down the path
 under the waste fountain that never weeps.
 You, a root freshly pulled from the ground,
 dried-downpour-rivulets of soot and unrest,
 owl-eyed and withering. I wondered
 if you'd crave the donuts.

Too middle-class-guilty, I shambled away
 leaving two bombs on the bench for you,
 or the pigeons.
 Maybe you wouldn't want them,
 you'd hold out for a better deal;
 spare change from the lunchtime swish
 of thighs in nylons and clacking heels.
 Not looking back,
 I willed you to ignore them.

Paul Ewen



Paul is the author of *London Pub Reviews*. Here's his Top 8 book/shopping related playlist (including a few New Zealand bands. Go check 'em out cos they're Xmas, apparently):

- B:** The Man In The Iron Mask - Billy Bragg
- O:** Fear & Loathing - Loves Ugly Children

O: Snow White Chook - Able Tasmans
K: Hey Seuss - 3D's
S: Burroughs Don't Play Guitar - Islamic Diggers
H: Counterpoint - Darren Price
O: Wuthering Heights - Kate Bush
P: O Superman - Laurie Anderson

glass

After a long day at his ridiculous job, Wayne arrived at a Clerkenwell pub to *kick back*.

Much of the bar area was crowded with small groups of men and women, many holding drinks out in front of themselves like microphones, commentating on news, sports and the arts. A loose collection of people were making their way upstairs, so Wayne decided to follow these people, spilling ale on the stairs as he went, even though it was his first drink.

A spoken word event was underway in the upstairs room, and thinking this would take his mind off the lowly career path he was eking, Wayne looked for a spot to sit down. Most people had chosen to congregate around the edges of the room, but Wayne saw a small table that was set a short distance back from the stage, so he tiptoed across to this, slid into the chair, and hid his face in his drink.

Some writers have no stage presence whatsoever, especially the short ones, and the chap on stage, mumbling behind his tatty sheets of A4 white paper, was a case in point. Wayne strained to hear the spoken words, and he swallowed a large gulp of his drink, as if making his ears pop might help. This did little to aid the writer's comprehension, although when Wayne placed his glass on the table it seemed to make, he thought, a particularly loud *clonk*.

White foam began surging up over the edge of the glass. Wayne hurried to get his mouth across in time to prevent the head from spilling all over the table. But it wasn't just foam that was spouting out. It was beer.

After taking a huge mouthful, the beer continued to pour over the top of the glass. It was gushing out. Wayne took another big swig, and then another. But the beer was pouring down onto his shirt and trousers, and as he held his glass at arms' length, alongside the table, it began cascading onto the wooden floorboards, swiftly forming a mucky puddle.

Up on stage, the little writer chap continued mumbling, aware of some minor disturbance to his set. Wayne was darting about the room in panic, sloshing noisy beer about the place. He approached a table some way across from his own where he recognised the people he had followed up the stairs. One of their number had almost finished their pint, so Wayne poured his raging beer into their glass, quickly filling it to the brim. But the beer just kept coming, so he filled the neighbouring glass as well. And also that of an unrelated man who happened to be standing behind.

Still the beer continued to flow liberally out of the pint, forcing Wayne to take another huge swallow of his own drink before seeking out more glasses to fill.

A short time later, the stage was empty. Word had quickly spread about the never-ending glass of beer. Soon everyone in the upstairs room had had their glasses topped up, and many were awaiting seconds. Before long, people started to arrive from the downstairs bar, while others claimed to have heard about the magic pint from as far away as Farringdon Station. A guitar was produced, *and* an accordion, and soon the crowd were banging their glasses on the tables in revelry. It was shaping up to be the best spoken word event that anyone could ever remember, and everyone agreed that Wayne, now dancing, was the life of this party. The glass, meanwhile, continued to fill.

The floor was awash in an abundance of beer, but even the bar staff went about with mops in a high-spirited fashion, caught up in the momentous occasion despite the mess and a considerable loss of over-the-counter revenue.

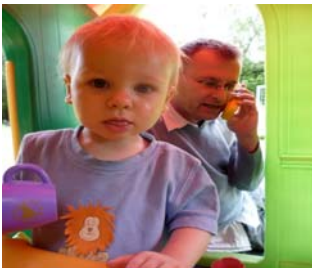
Wayne was laughing. What a night! He was, understandably, a bit pissed. But wasn't he having the time of his life! His elbows were flapping about like a mad chook, and his back was being patted by a steady stream of new and grateful friends. He decided to try and click his heels, but he lost his footing on the soaked floorboards and his arm shot up, and the slippery glass slid out of his dripping hand and fell on the floor and smashed.

*

The guitar stopped playing first, the accordion soon after, and the chorus of banging glasses slowly petered out, until only an awkward silence resounded around the room. There was a general feeling of embarrassment, and people slowly began to peel away and pitter-pattered off down the stairs.

Wayne stood in the centre of the room, flushed with beer and shame. His trousers were drenched, *and* his socks. He bent down on the pretext of tying his soggy shoelaces, but really he just wanted to study the glass shards and try and somehow piece them all together again.

Danny King



Danny is one of the writers featured in *Radgepacket – Tales from the Inner Cities Volumes 1 & 2*. Here's his Top 8 book/shopping-related playlist:

- B:** Same Old Scene – Roxy Music
- O:** Enjoy Yourself (It's Later Than You Think) – The Specials
- O:** Lullaby – The Cure
- K:** Ernold Same – Blur
- S:** Everything Counts – Depeche Mode

H: The Diary of Horace Wimp – E.L.O
O: The King of Wishful Thinking – Go West
P: Cunts Are Still Running The World – Jarvis Cocker

the stranger

I can't remember much of the evening. I'd only gone there to meet a date, but ended up sitting at the bar like a mug for the best part of an hour before finally accepting she wasn't showing.

I downed the dregs of my last pint and was about to leave when a voice beside me said:

"Here, let me buy you another." Before I knew it, a fresh pint was put in front of me and this guy sat down. At first I thought he was trying to pick me up, but something in his eyes said otherwise.

He started to talk and tell me stuff, stuff about his week, stuff about himself, his life. It was like he was trying to get it all off his chest. By the time he first mentioned his dream, he'd downed his beer and had ordered two more. He looked hurried and anxious.

The stranger in his dream had approached him while he'd been waiting for a bus. It wasn't his part of town and at first he'd thought he was about to be mugged, but the stranger had merely stopped and stared. As he stared back, the stranger seemed to flicker in the street lighting, like a TV picture flickering during a storm.

The stranger pointed skyward with his eyes and asked:

"Do you hear them at night?"

"Do you think they hear you?"

"Can you feel their eyes?"

"Do they ever emerge from the corner of yours?"

The stranger talked in riddles for some time, each question punching my drinking companion's heart like a cold fist, and although he had no answers, he felt they were only just beyond his mind's grasp.

He uttered not a word, yet the stranger learned all he sought through the beat of his pulse and the high static shrill in the quiet night's air. The stranger approached another step. Silent terror turned the guy's limbs to stone, freezing him to the spot.

"Are you ready?" whispered the stranger. "Are you ready?"

He awoke to sheets soaked with fear and a night as black and quiet as death itself.

He hadn't slept for more than three days by the time I saw him and his nerves were now taut as a bow. When he finished his story, he reached for a smoke. Finding he had none, he dropped from his stool and headed for the cigarette machine while I ordered two more drinks. That was the last I saw of him – the last anyone saw of him.

The barman serving asked if I knew the man. I told him no and asked him who he was. The barman told me he didn't know, but he'd seen him in here only four nights earlier looking smart and well healed, sitting at the bar drinking and talking with some wretch of a man he now resembled.

That was last week.

I had the same dream on Monday night.

But look friend, your glass is nearly empty. You look like you're ready for another.

Are you ready for another?

Are you ready?

Justin Hyde



Justin is the author of *Down Where the Hummingbird Goes To Die*. No playlist as yet for Justin so here's the editor of BTB's Top 8 Beat the Dust Bookshop-related toons:

- B:** Rebel Rebel – David Bowie
- O:** Hummingbird – Eddi Reader
- O:** Ring My Bell – Anita Ward
- K:** One Man Guy – Loudon Wainwright III
- S:** The Boys Are Back in Town – Thin Lizzy
- H:** I Shot the Sheriff – Bob Marley
- O:** Everyday – Buddy Holly
- P:** Olivia – Edie Brickell

rich and sheila

too goddamned
long in the face
for saturday night,
rich said
and massaged my trapezius
and bought me
a kamikaze.

told him i'd
lit the candle
for a female carpenter
but she'd sped away
as if on stilts.

facetious,

he said.
ultimate word for a woman -
facetious,
he said again
challenging me to come up
with something better.

i told him mendacious
or perfidious
but he waved me off.
facetious, he said
and massaged my trapezius again
then went
for a piss.

i glanced over at sheila:
two bills
tugboat gut.
but her face
held water.

i like perfidious,
she said
and gently took my wrist
and guided my hand
between her legs:
it was hot down there.
like a fresh
loaf of bread.

she told me after
a couple more shots,
rich would invite me
back to their place
for pinochle.
but a single game
would never get off the ground
cause soon as rich
took off his shoes
and sat on the couch
it was
rip van winkle.

then we do
as we please,
she said
playfully slapping me
with my own hand.

the man who unlocked my car

that'll be
eighty dollars,
he said
after thirty seconds
with a
long-wire tool.
seventy if you pay cash.

all i got's
a check,
i said.

don't take checks.
cash or credit.

i knocked
on the front door.
christ! always something with you,
she said
disappearing
into the house
to get her credit card.

my ex-wife,
i said.
accidentally
locked my keys
in the car
and blocked her in
dropping off my son.
she's got a date
or something.

i got a couple
ex wives,
he said
and pulled up his shirt
showing an oblong scar
above his belly-button.
coat-hanger
at close-range,
he smiled.

thank you mam,
he said
and took the card
and tipped his chiefs' hat
showing a
crater-like indentation
left of
his widow's peak.

twenty-two pistol
 from across the living room,
 he said
 tapping the crater
 before i had
 a chance to ask.

i liked him,
 i said to my ex
 as he
 pulled
 out of the drive.

why don't you go
 write one of your
 precious poems about him then,
 she said
 slamming the door
 in my face.

Steve Aylett



Steve Aylett is the author of *Lint*. Here's his Top 8 non-book/shopping-related playlist:

B: Slow - My Bloody Valentine
O: Theme to Slaying Beauty - Bambi Molesters
O: D - Codeine
K: Deathwhisker - The Naysayer
S: Poptones - PIL
H: Gen - Cardiacs
O: Destroy Everything You Touch - Ladytron
P: Carbon Monoxide - Regina Spektor

evernemesi

Jeff Lint was told he wrote as if *Moby Dick* had never been published, to which he responded that most people *lived* as if it hadn't. Did Melville think trouble was scarce? Captain Ahab went out of his

way to find a whale to cope with, but the one time I met a whale it made itself easily available on the beach and we had trouble dealing with its requests – we'd expected it to ask for water or money, but all it said was it wanted to listen to the radio because that was part of its normal routine at this time of day. My hackles were rising after a couple of hours of this. 'Why don't you act like a proper whale and just look at us with your little eye, a tragic thing we don't know how to handle?' But it started discussing the news, and how those jokers in Washington had got us into another oil war. Finally I just walked away, ignoring the shouts of my colleagues. Apparently the others got him back into the water eventually, by rolling him with an earthmover or something. It must have made a hell of a noise. And that's the story of the whale.

Any real writer will tell you that animals are the main thing standing in the way of the work. Once I was starting a new book and a bison put its head in the window and just stood there, more or less looking at the floor or into a space above it. It seemed perfectly content for the moment - and so was I. But as time passed without anything really changing I realised my day had been taken for ransom. Another time a badger jumped on to the keyboard and started shouting at me. And none of its ideas were fresh or original. Then there was the time a trapdoor opened and I fell into a cellar plagued with rats. As far as I could tell every single one of the thousand or so rats was exactly the same. Again, why the repetition of the same idea? It could be that they were different from each other in some subtle way I didn't understand, but what could it be? Would they begin individually expressing different viewpoints and notions never heard before? Or simply attack me in the most boring way, each rat gnashing in roughly the same manner as its neighbour? I'll leave you to guess which was the case.

But sometimes it's my fault entirely. The incident with the whale left me feeling obscurely ashamed and when the opportunity arose to rescue a jellyfish from the beach and toss it back into the waves, I jumped at the chance. But the jellyfish almost exactly resembled a semi-transparent version of my own face - or perhaps it was just my reflection. I couldn't stop looking at the thing. Someone passing by gave me a glance of disapproval and I felt obliged to pretend I was a principled man. I stood there in the manner of Soviet hero art, but instead of a flag or sledgehammer, I held the jellyfish I had found. The problem was that I had to regularly break my stance to dampen the jellyfish in a bowl of water, and this interrupted the heroic monumentalism I was going for. By the time most of the water had been absorbed or generally splashed around, a baffled crowd had gathered and were arguing about what I meant. Finally I turned and hurled the thing into the sea, but people paid more attention to my savage yell than the goodness of the act.

I spent days trying to prove that the creature had survived and was thriving, but all I found were thousands of eels. The eels were made of soft glass and were almost impossible to see in flowing water. Only their eyes gave them away, and those rare occasions they started singing. And when they sang, they would close their eyes. I told the local authorities about it and they just looked at me like I was mad. I even showed them photographs, which I stuck on the station wall and pointed to

with a stick, but the Chief of Police instantly shouted: 'Get those things off the wall!' And I had expected to be treated like a saviour.

I didn't leave, but got bored sitting there so I started making a thin wet sound like a burning banana skin. This kept me amused for eleven minutes and then I shouted something in impatience. I think it was 'Oh, god, let it end!' or that kind of thing. Maybe 'God I want to kill everyone!' or something like that. Several people looked aside at me like a wall of turbots.

During this whole time with the jellyfish, eels and police, I was supposed to be writing the opening chapter of *LINT*. Remembering this, I left the station and immediately saw a happy dog. From the flapping of its ears I thought the dog was running toward me, but I realised it was just tossing its head up and down to send its ears flapping – it looked eager and aglee having just discovered this crazy trick. It stopped as I approached, and I knelt down, putting my right eye directly against the dog's. That'll let him know, I thought – then became aware that the hound was sniggering to itself. 'Ah, you're not worth it,' I said aloud, straightening up.

'I am,' the dog whispered, looking up at me. 'And you know it.'

And I thought, *The abyss conceals*.

At home, I looked at the screen. A mistake requires a minimum of two moving parts. A bug like a fingernail tremble-walked along the sill.

Three weeks later I was stumbling through smoke and the flopped bodies of three hundred swans, the sky filling with rejuvenated pteranadons bent on revenge. You take your life in your hands when you write one of mine. Should you look down at your own boots kicking through black coins, or up at the horizon patrolled by lies with bright yellow fins? Watched always by a red frog like a beating heart? The distractions are geometrically infinite, years of it receding. But you can leap over it. Riding on a lion whose jaws want you.

Kay Sexton



Kay Sexton is one of the writers featured in *Two Tall Tales and One Short Novel*. Here's her Top 8 book/shopping-related playlist:

- B:** For Those About To Rock, We Salute You – AC/DC (Yay, high culture meets hard rock!)
- O:** Every Day I Write The Book – Elvis Costello
- O:** The Book I Read – Talking Heads
- K:** Wuthering Heights – Kate Bush
- S:** 1984 – David Bowie
- H:** Parklife – Blur (only good thing to come out of a Martin Amis novel as far as I'm concerned)
- O:** Brave New World – Iron Maiden
- P:** Fairytale of New York – The Pogues & Kirsty MacColl (nearly as good as finding the AC/DC tie in!)

eire

She gazes from her green corner. This isn't the right place for her, and she knows it. Personification is a tricky business: take the harp. She's leaning on it, it's meant to be integral to the embodiment of Ireland, but it's more like a prop for a tired arm: a washerwoman drooping over the tub, that's what she looks like.

What should she hold then? Guinness, soda bread, a leprachaun in the palm of her hand? A flag, a vessel to spout Liffey water? Personification is dangerous. Eire is young and lovely but her face is sulky. You wouldn't want a bad-tempered young woman of her size laying about her with a weapon, even one as unlikely as a harp.

She's Irish, isn't she? she thinks. What she needs is somebody to talk to – if 'they' are going to embody anything, they should embody the craic. That's what she'd have liked. Somebody to lean towards, to share a story with, instead of resting on this benighted harp and sticking her lip out with no-one to see her except the grass and the pigeons.

There's the mound, of course. That big old lump of grass on the other side of the park. She wonders about it. *Why is it there, what is it for, who built it?* As far as she can see, there's no inscription to explain it. She's got one - it's behind her. People have to press back the bushes and sidle along to read the words. She's not too sure what it says; it's impossible for her to see it - being monumental - and so she's only picked up the odd word read aloud by the intrepid few who delve in the undergrowth. But the mound doesn't even have that. It's just a smooth emerald hillock, rectangular like ... a grave.

A statue thinks slowly. The sparking of an idea through the tin and copper matrix of Eire's brain is paced to the alternating volcanic and tectonic activity that formed her component substances before the last ice age.

Over months the thought revolves in her, losing its rough edges like a pebble in a stream. The mound is like a grave. A very large grave. Casting her bronze eyes along its length takes time. A generation of birds meets, mates, makes nests, takes its fledglings though the winnowing process of learning to fly and moves on again to winter quarters before her survey is complete. By the time her scrutiny is satisfied, a cohort of young lovers has sauntered through the park, laughing, lingering, placing hands in the loved one's rear pocket, placing tongues in each other's mouths, lacing their hearts with the bittersweet shrapnel of misunderstandings, until colder, wetter weather drives them back to the cafes and university bars.

Eire doesn't notice these warm-blooded epiphenomena. It's not like the flattering impression of time-elapsing photography – people don't whizz past her in a shimmering blur, making her regret her immobility. Humans are more like gnats: nuisances indistinguishable from each other, just getting in the way and spoiling her concentration.

Finally though, Eire has seen all she needs to see. She cogitates through the Irish autumn into winter, feeling the rain on her surfaces with a distant, unconcerned awareness. Rain can't harm her. The grass remains green through the cold, but furrows of frigid mud appear, churned into the lawns by schoolbound kids on bicycles.

In spring the ground will warm, becoming fecund again, but now it is as starkly unwelcoming as a turned back. Between Eire and the mound the bad weather hangs like miasma, obscuring her view with fog, or driving rain.

She reaches a decision. It's possible the mound is a grave. Deep in her volcanically purified core, in her heart - cast from metal that will ring like a bell - she has a kindred memory of such things: effigies, monuments, memorials. Some parts of what was once Eire have been shaped into death markers, and just as slow embodiment made her into Eire, so they have become the thing they commemorate.

Eire is lonely. She may be twice the size and ten times the weight of a young maiden, but she's a girl in her soul. She casts her eyes down to the harp – for her it is a rapid movement – and disdains what she sees.

In the mound there might be a giant. A brave warrior: battle-scarred and truculent, or a young knight: chivalric and early slain. She doesn't care which. It's the idea of a communion of scale that urges her on. And under that green coverlet he couldn't know of her presence, so it's up to her.

Slowly, Eire moves. Slow by human standards, but to herself she's sprinting. It's sheer accident that she picks the worst week of the year to begin her journey. Mist and misery envelope the city and the park is almost deserted. It takes two days for her to cross it and several park users peer suspiciously at the statue that surely didn't used to be in the middle of the grass? But they are cold and anyway, who worries about a new statue? Her plinth, and abandoned harp, are lost in the undergrowth, too far from the path for anybody to notice her absence.

On the third day she bends, stooping her strong back and bringing her powerful harpist's hands into play.

On the fourth day the mist clears, and her efforts are exposed. Huddles of people stare at Eire's handiwork. There is a deep gouge in the mound, exposing old concrete designed to withstand a bomb. Even so, Eire has torn open the bunker, for that is what it is, to show the corridors and cubby holes from which the Government would have rallied the people if Hitler had invaded Dublin.

A wide track leads away from the devastated bunker, but Eire has not returned to her place. Instead she has broken through the hedge, snapped the railings like lollipop sticks and disappeared into the city.

Eire, Dublin personified, has gone to find the craic.

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