



BEAT THE DUST

July 2009

Heidi James' Carbon



Heidi James – the song, poem, play/script and novel I'd like to hear on my death bed:

I want silence on my death bed, or certainly nothing man-made. Perhaps just birdsong.

carbon – an exclusive extract from Heidi James' novel due out on BLATT in Oct 09

I am shorter. I can still reach the light switch as before, I can still reach the shelves, my clothes don't trail, I appear to inhabit the same proportion of space as always; but I am shortening. My cumbersome mouth flaps about my morning mug of tea, morning again. I have become peripheral to myself, to my body. It's slumped around me, tripping me up. I move about the house avoiding the critical surface of the mirror; what do I care what it reflects?

A warm front rolling in from the south brings fog and causes the world to recede. It is safer, easier this way, there seems to be less need for vigilance. What you can't see, what you don't know, can't hurt you. The flat street outside the door is straight and barely populated. Women walk small dogs and large children. Men, when they are seen, bound out of plush cars or stoop

elegantly over shooting sticks. Employees usher the necessary accessories for a life well lived into the tasteful doors. This part of London has rolled itself into a defensive little ball and shut its eyes to the dealers, thieves and conmen casing the marbled joints. What you don't know can't hurt you. Money seems to throw a quilt over frail little people, warming their grey flesh, like lizards baking in the midday sun. The indestructible glow of that warmth pulsates and throbs, is too hot to be near for those unaccustomed to comfort. The cosy world of money is snug and soft to the touch.

My fortune sits sturdily at my feet like a patient dog. The hinged metal lids stand between us, but have long given up resistance. I have waited for this. I waited until all the crap and filth accumulated by the snotty-nosed old bitch was scraped up and discarded. I waited till the old bitch herself was razed to cinders. I have waited and waited. I waited in my secluded school with its expensive atmosphere, lonely, always lonely, to finally get the comfort of my money. To realise the only potential I have ever really had—did I tell you just how derelict I am? The geometry of the room nudges me forward, the floor tilts, tipping me into the box. I reach out, my impatient hand rushing ahead of any conscious command. But this can't be rushed or fumbled; this is the moment when everything is mine. When the house stops its hollow defiance and shapes itself to me, when the yellowed bonds and the keys to the safety deposit box lie in my hand with the curled weight of a dead rat. When I can buy peace and escape the gape of my body.

I kneel next to the boxes; they are sound, painted a solid and dependable green. The lids open easily under my hand, flipping back like the mouth of a Muppet from Saturday night's television. Inside, the key and various papers lie indolent like fat rich wives nibbling sweetmeats; keen signifiers of my family secrets. Outside it is now midday, time has somersaulted over the house. I make a second mug of tea and sit next to my boxes, in my house, on my floor with my grandmother's silk wrapper tucked tight around my body. The papers can wait, there aren't many. Grandfather said that money was alive, fluid and changeable like the worst kind of human or the best horse and couldn't be predicted to rise and fall, so he rarely bought shares or invested in anything he couldn't see, hold or eat. So, the truth of it, the diamonds and pearls, oh what a thrill, the vulgarity of it! The truth of it is chaperoned safe in a bank vault. Clean as a whistle, jewels ripped from the chronically diseased bowel of the African earth, slaves trapped into the tight bonds of my families' largesse, rubies as cute and round as a baby's fist, diamonds, Jesus, diamonds as large as bullets, cut to fit, cut too sharp, cut just right. The hunks of mineral wealth clawed from the coiled soil, these would furnish me with the life I want. I have to wait just a little longer. Of course the old lady wouldn't keep the goods here, far too dangerous in

this conspicuous neighbourhood—far too clever for that, the old girl in her taut sinews and saggy skin, far too clever, the old man and his autocratic capital and expenditure. I need to get dressed for the bank.

Karl Koweski



Karl Koweski – the song, poem, play/script and novel I'd like to hear on my death bed:

Poems: Forced Poem - Melissa Hansen and Surreptitiously Kissing - Denis Johnson

Novel: A Confederacy of Dunces - John Kennedy Toole

Songs: Idiot Prayer - Nick Cave and Big Balls - AC/DC

Film script: A Christmas Story – Jean Shepherd

little kindness

I'd been fishing around for a compliment
for the better part of a week,
ever since we consummated our affair

and I thought I'd fucked her
for all I was worth,
sweating out nearly three pounds
of water weight during the night

I still would have liked
to hear a few kind words
regarding my performance
something I could write
in my journal and gloat
over at a later date

but she seemed to be
the sort of woman who believed

sharing her body with a man
exemplified the highest compliment
she could bestow

my ego, however,
demanded a greater sacrifice

since she couldn't prove
her ultimate devotion to me
through matrimony
beings how we were both
already married
to other people
I decided to settle for
a nice remark
about my cock size

it was obvious
she wasn't about to choose
my cock as a conversational topic
of her own accord
so I began sprinkling
self-deprecating jokes
about my length and girth
in random talks such as

if it rained two inches today
my cock would have drowned

hoping she would leap
to my genital defense

after about thirty
off hand comments
comparing my cock
to everything from a gnat
to a mint julep

she finally took the bait
and admitted

it is pretty nice
that I can ride you
for an hour
and my insides don't hurt

marriage is a coward's hell immolating the slaves of convenience

and I'm burning
especially bright
tonight

relations with the wife
 have devolved
 into a business partnership

the business
 of raising two children

how did it come to this?

playing checkers with my past
 moving diagonally
 at my memory's expense

have I always been faithless?

is it true what she says,
 despite twelve years of marriage
 I've never been a husband?

regardless of
 how many wives I've loved

i can almost hear my theme music during times like these

you catch me staring
 at the outline of your breasts
 through your Cubbies wifebeater
 as often as I notice you
 glancing at the contours of my gut
 hugged by the too-tight Acapulco shirt

that extraneous roll
 between hip and ribcage
 not nearly as enticing
 as your perky b-cups

would you believe there was a time
 I was so skinny
 I was ashamed to wear short sleeves?
 so slight I could gaze
 through a keyhole with both eyes
 as my father liked to claim

I didn't start gaining weight
 until I was too old
 to run through neighbors' yards
 uncontested.
 too old to carry laser guns
 defending the block
 from alien invaders

I wish you could have
seen me then

I wish you could have
been the princess
to my charming scoundrel

the princess
to my callow farm boy

the princess
to my rebellious hellion

I wish you could have
seen me when
I was still heroic

Mather Schneider



Mather Schneider – the song, poem, play/script and novel I'd like to hear on my death bed:

Favorite novel: Journey to the End of the Night - Celine

Poem: Bluebird - Charles Bukowski

Song: Tomorrow Is Such a Long Time - Bob Dylan

Play/film script: I honestly can't think of anything.

the nature of the oozing material

Ray has a weeping hole in the back of his head.

He thinks a spider bit him.

The hole is about the size of a penny
and his hair is matted up around it.

Ray is thirty eight years old,
about five feet tall with his cowboy boots on
and maybe a hundred pounds
with his knife on his belt.

Ray takes a lot of pills.
 He takes pills to sleep
 and pills to wake up,
 he takes pills before he eats
 and pills after,
 he takes pills for depression and anxiety
 and adhd.
 His stomach, pancreas and bowels
 are shot,
 he has Krone's Disease,
 chronic asthma and allergies,
 he messes his pants sometimes
 and drinks 12 cans of soda a day.
 And now he's got this
 hole in the back of his head:
 more pills.
 He fingers the hole and tries to understand
 the nature of the oozing material
 that stains his pillow in the night.
 He doesn't know what's
 happened to him.
 He drives a cab and stays
 with his ma.

scary

The taxi brakes squeaked
 when I pulled up to the Marriott
 I saw my fares: five women standing
 looking impatient with about three dozen
 two thousand dollar bags all of them obviously
 sorority bimbos grown middle aged they tried so
 hard to be beautiful but their
 knees gave it away dresses way too
 short for forty five their smiles when they surfaced
 were like trout after
 a dynamite fisherman

when I stepped out to open the door for them I found
 they were irritated because I was on time and
 not five minutes early then of course
 they thought the cab smelled and it was
 too hot then too cold then too
 expensive and I had to listen
 to it: book club upchuck People
 Magazine crap the latest
 movies who has the
 chic brunches

each one had a husband
 who made money and bad jokes and fucked around

with some exotic hobby they didn't speak
 to me naturally but they stared at me
 in the rear view mirror I was afraid to
 look had to use
 the side mirrors it was scary
 the way death watered at the corners
 of their eyes

Joe Nikita



Joe Nikita - mock obituary:

Joe Nikita was born, lived and died in Los Angeles. He died of skin cancer and/or smog inhalation.

adam's rib

"How's bout it, baby?" says Matthew as he jabs his open palm into Aunt Fiona's ribs. She crosses herself and shakes her head, looking at the big boy in front of her, over six-feet tall now, close to six-five maybe. But she will never know exactly how tall until he stops wearing his hair like a wildflower.

"Mattie, boy, you got to cinch that hair down. It may look great to you but it looks like a dandelion flower to everyone else. You got to think how others see you. This isn't a big town. It's easier than you know to get a reputation." She pushes his palm away and squeezes the flesh of his chest. "You don't have a self-conscious bone in you, boy. Dammit, Matthew, can't you have a little rhetoric in your walk? Are you that oblivious to the importance of body language? You got to understand what other people think when they see you move across the floor. You're all flappy, boy, all flesh. Get some spine in you, son. Get some guts."

"Now, baby, come on," Matthew says, holding out his hand again. Aunt Fiona's verbal cavalcades are followed by periods of indignant acquiescence. Usually. But tonight Aunt Fiona will not hand over the car keys. She clutches them in a grizzled talon. With her other hand she stirs a blizzard stew of coconut milk. An obscene carrot bobs on the surface.

"Fork 'em over, baby. Willy's waiting at Fleets."

"*Fleets?*"

"Come on, Auntie."

"*Fleets?*"

"It's just a nightclub," the big boy rolls his eyes and whines. "All's they do is dance at Fleets. It ain't fair. That *carrot's* dancing."

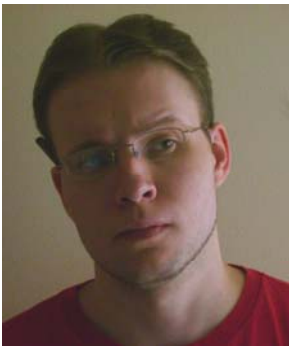
The old lady smiles. Her cheeks look like shiny ripe kumquats. She drops the keys in the cavernous expanse of her bra and slaps her sternum, slamming shut the drawer of her bosom. Her wrists grow limp, a magical detachment of bone and muscle. Her deep voice falsettos and lisps, and she mimics a dance, tossing her hips with great effort in various directions about the kitchen. She shakes 'em by the table. She shakes 'em by the treacherous pile of Time magazines. She shakes 'em by the hanging pans, knocking one off a hook with an unwieldy buttock. It sizzles on the linoleum, singing metallic. Aunt Fiona groans as she bends to retrieve it. Her fun is over. She goes back to the stove and stirs the coconut stew. The smell of coconut is everywhere. "They do more than just *dance* where you're going, boy," she says, out of breath. Then she peels Matthew's skin with a look, and he thinks that she probably knows.

Matthew steps out onto the redbrick terrace. He lights a cigarette and leans against the railing. He can see down into the canyon where the river cuts through the trees and carves its way to the ocean beyond the foothills. Nothing stops the river. It split the foothills to get where it wanted.

A red sunset glowing behind the hills reminds Matthew of the fiery protrusion in his lips. He tosses the cigarette down into the canyon, hoping for a gaseous combustion, a red and satisfying incineration of flora and fauna, deer bleating at their young, coyotes retching in the smoke,

crows and doves detonating into the black air, a feathered sonic boom. He hopes for a trickle of lava down into the canyon, swallowing the town, edging toward the highway where he can see the neon blink of that roadhouse where Willy sits waiting, checking his watch, drinking a second rum & coke, wiggling on the bar stool in tight white jeans to the tinny music of the jukebox. But of course nothing happens. Not even the crackle of a dry leaf. Matthew smokes another as the glow dies from the sky. He thinks about the story of Adam and Eve, and about Adam's rib, and how there's no way it happened like that.

Mathias Nelson



Mathias Nelson – the song, poem, play/script and novel I'd like to hear on my death bed:

Poem: The Strongest of the Strange – Charles Bukowski.

Novel: The Road - Cormac McCarthy.

Song: Ain't Talkin' - Bob Dylan.

Film: There Will Be Blood – Paul Thomas Anderson based on the novel Oil by Upton Sinclair

battle island

At Black Hawk Recreation Park
 I crouch with my six year old nephew
 and gaze into Bad Axe River
 once tainted red with the blood of fleeing Indians.
 all who surrendered were massacred —
 women, children, warriors.

Mosquitoes buzz about our ears
 and my nephew refuses to swat them;
 he says they must eat too.

Instead, he upturns his half white forearm
 while three suck the red out. I
 can almost hear the gunshots.
 The boats' cannon fire.
 Screams —
Give your blood to this land.

middle of the lake

A male friend calls me, crying
because a woman left, found out
that he cheated. He's one of my best
so I hear it. He's sorry
and so am I.

Then another friend calls, complaining
about work. The boss did this,
he had to do that.

Don't these people realize
that I'm two sips
from being a bum?

And my brother, that son of a bitch
all he does is talk about the job, caught
in some kind of muck like the rest,
going down narrow channels in the river
trying to get somewhere.

But for me, everything is wide open here.
I plan to sift through this lake until—
ah shit, until a great blue heron
takes me away.

I did, however, almost try to get a tan today for a woman
I can't keep,
only lasted five minutes,
between the neighbors'
humored faces and sweat stinging my eyes:
I shall be a pale white man for as long as I can.

Though I love you all,
who of you can blame me
for staying in this contained body of water,
brimming
until the flood?

Lee Rourke interviews Heidi James



Background info on Heidi James and Lee Rourke:

Heidi's novella, *The Mesmerist's Daughter* was published by Apis Books in July 07. Her novel *Carbon* will be out on Blatt Books later this year and has been published in Spanish by El Tercer Nombre. She has collaborated on projects with numerous artists, including Delaine LeBas, Marisa Carnesky and Tara Darby. Her essays and stories have appeared in various publications and anthologies, including *Dazed & Confused*, *Brand*, *3:AM Magazine* and *pulp.net*. She is currently studying for a PhD in London on the poetics of autotrauma as parenthetical gesture.

Lee Rourke's novel *The Canal* is due out later this year on Melville House and follows on the heels of his anthology, *Everyday* published by Social Disease.

the same fake snow – Lee Rourke's interview with Heidi James

Lee Rourke: *Carbon* was written a number of years ago; firstly, I'd like to know why you wrote it? And secondly, I'd like to know what you think about it now, is there a detachment from it?

Heidi James: I wanted to create something exultant, in a language that exceeds that which it describes. It's an attempt to exploit idiom, but not a pastiche. I hope its hyper aesthetics attempt a move, a dynamic....

I feel detached in that my work has necessarily changed of course, and I feel removed from it, but I always feel like that when I feel I've finished a text.

LR: You mention your work in terms of exploiting idiom within a realm of 'hyper-aesthetics'; what is fiction for you? As a construct what does it offer you? What is *Carbon* as a work of 'fiction' trying to artistically resolve in you as a writer?

HJ: It offers me endless variations of construction. I can explore and play, I can climb inside language. I have no idea what I'm attempting to resolve except accepting that there can never be redemption no matter how seductive. Genet wrote 'that we lie in order to tell the truth', that

certainly expresses something of what I seek... To write a truth; or to write the silences that attend our words.

Having said that, the act of fiction and the instability of language necessitates an evasion of any attempt to reduce a novel to mediator of 'truth.'

LR: Carbon's many allotropes include coal, diamond, graphite et cetera, substances that, at first, seem at odds with each other (the hardness of diamond juxtaposed with the softness of graphite for example), yet obviously contain the same source. What attracts you to carbon?

HJ: It's a paradoxical substance for our society. And works as an extended image for my themes - greed, disintegration, etc., and fed in to the pseudo Cartesian duality that informs the protagonist's breakdown.

LR: I really like the sound of 'pseudo Cartesian duality'; please elucidate further?

HJ: The protagonist experiences her breakdown as a separation of mind and body. The body shrugs off the mind's control, or so it seems to her in the midst of her coming undone.

LR: Who, if anyone, inspired your protagonist?

HJ: No one at all.

LR: Is 'construct' important to you then? Is it a means of, say, fucking with the important things in art/life, like the symbolic order?

HJ: Perhaps, but I don't consciously set out to fuck things up. It's just a case of exploration - 'what might occur if...?' - a futile attempt at closing the gap between us humans.

LR: What is this 'gap' to you? A foothold in the void?

HJ: It's the melancholia of always being at the limits of each other. We are always on the outside, never truly knowing or touching. There's always the boundary, the gap, the unknowable, unsayable. Irrevocable. Utterly poignant. See how sentimental I am?

LR: Do you mean our failure to grasp why there is something other than nothing? Who are the writers you feel attempt to bridge this gap? Which writers could you allow yourself to be 'sentimental' about in this respect?

HJ: No, I mean only that we are always alone, our molecules may touch but we are always held in suspension at the limit, at the edge of one another. For me writing is a way of closing that gap without the narcissism of incorporation or assimilation. I suppose it's schizoid. I'm crazy for writers such as Elfrieda Jelinek, Clarice Lispector, Marie Darrieussecq, Jean Genet... The usual. Kathy Acker etc., W G Sebald.

What about you? Which writers excite you?

LR: Oh, I love Lispector and Darrieussecq too. I can see in your writing the same lyrical, haunting element and the same fixation with subject that is evident in theirs. Do you think writing is a form of schizophrenia?

HJ: Thank you, that's a charming thing to write.

In its aspects of splitting etc., yes, for me, I think it is. Jung said however, that the schizophrenic ceases to be so when they meet someone who understands them. So we come back always to the need to connect, to close the gap, as I said before.

LR: And to come back to your novel, *Carbon*. Who are you hoping to connect to with this? Do you have a 'reader' in mind? Or is the reader something that doesn't concern you?

HJ: In the first instance I'm hoping to connect with the characters, in the constant removal from others, and their existence only in our imaginations. I don't see that they are any less human or 'real' than any other person in my life. I don't have a reader in mind, but that doesn't mean I'm not concerned. I suppose I'm reaching out, or reaching in maybe. I want to voice ways of being. Less interested with plot or happenings, than with moments. What it is that creates the movement, our drives etc.

LR: Do you see these same themes developing in your fiction? What are you working on at the moment, for instance?

HJ: I think so, but I try not to be a spectator of my own work or self; I'm too embedded. I'm writing a novel about auto-trauma, so: guilt, self harm, language really. A parenthetical gesture. Joy and squandering health. I was told recently that I write about disappointment, and I think that might be right. I imagine that disappointment is fairly universal, but what do I know? I'm also working on the thesis for my doctorate. So busy, but happy!

LR: Speaking of 'disappointment' is there anything you find disappointing about the British contemporary novel? Are we in a good state, or do things really need shaking up?

HJ: I don't think I'm in any position to comment. I don't read much British fiction to be honest, though I know there are some fantastic writers out there creating work that is challenging and aesthetic and purposeful - Home, McCarthy, yourself, Adelle Stripe for example. I think work should just be made, and hopefully read; as soon as one attempts to 'shake things up' then you are participating in the state you claim to wish to change. It's merely rearrangement like shaking a snowdome – it's the same fake snow just in a different place. Anyway, you're always writing to an absence and what does it matter which nationality the writer claims? I'm in danger of becoming a hermit. I read and write all day, sometimes seeing no-one except family for weeks. I should pay more attention, but I find it hard. I sit in my study and listen to the birds. I love birdsong, it's pure language.

LR: And finally, apart from '*Carbon*' what else should we be reading?

HJ: I don't know - just read, rather than watch TV! Levinas is exceptional. Who would you suggest? I'm always interested in what others are reading.

LR: Like I said, I would suggest the world reads *Carbon* by Heidi James. Oh, and anything by Thomas Bernhard, he's like Beckett. And Jacques Roubaud, Stephen Dixon, Dumitru Tsepeneag and Jean-Philippe Toussaint - they are all very good.

Zach King-Smith



Zach King-Smith – the song, poem, play/script and novel I'd like to hear on my death bed:

Song: Hope There's Someone - Anthony and The Johnstons

Film: I'm Not There - Todd Haynes and Oren Moverman

Poem: For Jane - Charles Bukowski

Novel: Vanity Of Dulouz - Jack Kerouac

before she left me

Some
nights
i'd lay
in bed
my hand
on the
small of
her back
& her ass
taking in
the warmth
of her body

i'd get this
this sick sense
of grief
in my gut
knowing
someday
somehow
all i'd have
left is the
smell of her
shampoo
and maybe
a pair of her panties
in the piles of
clothes on the floor

but now the bones

in the ground
are crying
for us
you aren't dead
just in another
bed
but i'm
grieving

I guess we
couldn't
shake off
the world
coming at
us from
every
angle
kiss the
bull on
the head
& forget
the horns

it's inevitable.

Trevor Mitchell



Trevor Mitchell – the song, poem, play/script and novel I'd like to hear on my death bed:

Poem: Old Dust - Li Po

Novel: Journey to the End of the Night - Celine

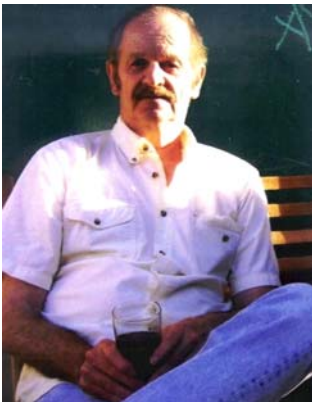
Song: Avalanche - Leonard Cohen

Play: Breath - Samuel Beckett

a world class customer focused organisation

The cunt clocks me before I'm even through the door. Ostentatiously, he examines his cheap wristwatch before raising his arm, beckoning me with a come hither motion like he's fingering an omniscient G-spot. I throw my bag at my workstation, buckle clanking the monitor and follow him into a small side office. He sits on the desk top, legs spread open. I take the only chair, directly in front of him, his crotch now at eye level. His pants are so high on his waist and so tight round his balls, it's like he's stuffed a couple of pounds of wet dough down there. The motivational poster on the wall informs me there is no 'i' in teamwork. He tells me this is the third time in two weeks I've been late; that this isn't really the standard of behaviour a world class customer focused organisation expects from its employees. Through the window behind him I see a girl smoking outside. She has the most beautiful ass I've ever seen. Once he's finished droning on about knuckling down, I raise my eyebrows and nod at the window. "Check that out," I say, pointing. "Now *that's* world class." And just for a second the expression on his face is even more beautiful than the girl's ass.

A D Winans



A D Winans - the song, poem, play/script and novel I'd like to hear on my death bed:

Poem: The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock – T.S. Eliot

Novel: The Old Man and the Sea – Ernest Hemingway

Song: Desolation Row – Bob Dylan

Film script: Barfly – Charles Bukowski

untitled

I push my way through the
Old Wild West bar room doors
At the Saloon "1232 Club"
Willie Nelson wailing
On the jukebox

I order a boilermaker dressed in
My blue-collar worker garb
Eye the old swamper
With a wheel barrel stomach
Who pays me no attention

I down the shot and beer
In less than sixty seconds
Pull out the key
To the hotel room upstairs
Walk the stairway
Fit the key in the lock
The young woman I picked up
The night before is lying naked
In a fetal position

I climb in beside her
Her temperature a perfect 98.6
Rekindles a young man's passion
Inside an old man's body

I rub my cock
Like Aladdin's Lamp
Hoping there is one more wish left