



THE RECESSION SESSION LIVE! EDITION OF BEAT THE DUST

MAY 2009

Introduction

The Recession Session Live! involving some of the best young writers around, took place on Friday 24th April 09 in the cellar gig room at The Betsey Trotwood, London. Organised and hosted by Steve Finbow, Joseph Ridgwell and Melissa Mann, it was a fast and furious (but thankfully Vin Diesel-less) night of rants, readings, burlesque and music. Here's the full list of runners and riders who performed on the night: Stewart Home, Tom McCarthy, Chris Killen, Paul Ewen, Danny King, Lee Rourke, Tim Wells, Christiana Spens, Mark SaFranko, David Oprava, Will Ashon, Vic Templar, Darran Anderson, Jenni Fagan, Cheri Shakewell (she was the burlesque act don'tcha know) plus the three hosts.

This issue of Beat the Dust features most of the pieces read on the night. Alas, a few pieces have been promised to other publications and/or are tied up in exclusivity clauses, so can't be posted at Beat the Dust. Similarly, BTD's ed doesn't self-publish, so that story performed on the night is also missing (a nation mourns - ha!) Anyway, it's as near as damn it a "hard copy" of the Recession Session Live! So, for those who couldn't be there, hopefully this will make you feel like you were. Obviously the hosts thought the lit gig was ace, but for a more objective view on how it went, a review of the event by Sam Jordison is included in this issue.

Big thanks to all the writers (particularly those who travelled some way to get to the gig) who took part in what was, at the very least, a memorable night.

Paul Ewen identifies the novel/play/poem/song he wishes he'd written



I hope to write a great New Zealand novel, following the lead of Janet Frame, Witi Ihimaera, Keri Hulme and others. I wish I'd written a Zucker brothers script, such as one of the *Airplane* screenplays, or more specifically the semi-obscure masterpiece, *Top Secret*. The poem I wish I'd written is *The Magpies* by Denis Glover, and the song in my head is Spike Milligan's *Q5 Piano Tune*.

rox by Paul Ewen

I was lying across a wooden bench in Ruskin Park, talking to myself about baking a tasty cake, and excitedly stomping my feet on the flat, wooden planks, when I felt something hairy rub against my dangling arm.

It was a medium-sized brown dog, and its tongue was out, and it seemed pretty excited. I leaned across to scratch its head and the back of its neck and behind its ears, and it laughed.

"YOU LIKE THAT DON'T YOU!!" I said.

I reached down to tickle it under the chin, and as I did I noticed a round plaque, affixed to a leather collar beneath its hairy neck. On the plaque was engraved 'ROX', and there was also a mobile phone number.

"ROX!" I exclaimed. "HELLO THERE ROX!!"

Rox laughed as I continued to gently scratch her neck, and with my spare hand I added her number to the 'Contacts' section of my phone. Suddenly, from somewhere in the distance, a shrill whistle sounded. At this, Rox's ears pinned back and she shot off, darting away behind some far-off trees. I slowly rubbed my fingers together, watching brown dog hairs fall gently towards the grass of Ruskin Park.

I was crying. What a disaster! I'd added two tbs of baking powder to my cake mixture instead of two tsps! What a blinking idiot! The cake had ballooned up inside the oven, and was soon crashing down onto the racks beneath, and the whole gloopy mixture had started smoking before catching on fire. My cake was ruined! I was so upset. I decided to text Rox.

SET CAKE ON FIRE. CRYING NOW. HAVE TO EAT RAW POTATOES.

A short time later, I received a reply.

SORRY, WHO IS THIS?

Rox had got my text!

WE MET IN THE PARK. AT THE BENCH...? I SCRATCHED U AND U RAN AWAY...

I waited for nearly eleven minutes for a reply, but there wasn't one. Rox was probably busy carrying a stick, or some slippers. I decided to send her another text.

HAVE U GOT A STICK IN YR MOUTH? I CAN SCRATCH U AGAIN U KNOW...

There was still no reply from Rox, so I started to clean the oven because the sticky cake residue was beginning to cool down and solidify.

David Oprava identifies the novel/play/poem/song he'd like to hear on his death bed



As I am kicking the bucket, I only want....

...to be listening to *Terrapin Station* by the Grateful Dead. The combination of lyrics and melody come together in a way that uplifts. The words chosen are precise and angled at those who

need redemption, who need release, who need something beyond. As I am dying, I am sure as hell going to need those things.

...to be read *Trout Fishing in America* by Richard Brautigan. His simple lines and gentle surreality, combined with a flow of easy place, time, living, whilst underneath lurked the suicide that would become him. He makes me smile and sad at the same time. A gentle soul bending the world around him. I'd die happy with his words under my fingertips.

...to be read my own poem *Segue*. So that I can ruefully reflect on the waste of so many years, but grin at the love I had in small glimmering doses amongst the hash I made of it all.

I don't like plays.

An audio recording of David Oprava reading his poem **Oblivion** is available at Beat the Dust website.

Lee Rourke identifies the novel/play/poem/song he wishes he'd written



Novel: Maurice Blanchot's *L'Arret de Mort*. It is sublime in both the original sense of the word and its bastardised modern usage.

Song: The Smiths' *Unhappy Birthday*. Simply genius.

Poem: Robert Lowell's *Skunk Hour*. Just for the line 'My mind's not right.'

Play: Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*. Because nobody can live with the end.

[BTD ed's note: At the Recession Session Live!, Lee Rourke read from his forthcoming novel, *The Canal* to be published by Melville House. Unfortunately, we couldn't get permission to reproduce the extract at Beat the Dust so instead, here is one of Lee's pieces of flash fiction.]

the same space by Lee Rourke.

They came. Screaming along-side him. Roaring. Outside. Again. And again. Endless. The endless screaming. The endless roaring. Never ending. Endless. Endless endlessness. Just outside. Through the window. Outside. Screaming. Roaring. Past him. He waited. Broken. Static. He waited. Traction. Rubber on bitumen. The sky above. Grey. The bitumen black. The white lines. His feet tapping. His arms folded. He remained. Seated. Static. Quiet. Even the radio broken.

Nothing. Just screaming. Just roaring. Over and over. Again. And again. Away. Going away from him. To their own places. One after the other. Caught in their space. The same space. Unthinking. Moving in transit. To the next destination. Travelling past him. In the same space as him. But moving. Forwards. Going places. The rumble of rubber on bitumen. Just by him. There. Outside. There. Alongside him. Facing the same direction. Moving away. Away from him. Again. And again. To other places. Occupying the same space. Moving away from him. Over and over. Again. And again. Unendingly. He waited. Broken. All energy gone. All energy stopped. The scream continuing. The roar continuing. Morphing into droning. One continuous drone. Mechanical. Man-made. Fumes. Cutting through the fumes. He waited. Broken. All energy gone. Soon they would arrive. He just wanted to get there. Soon they would arrive. They. The others. They were waiting for him. They were expecting him. He had told them. He had told them that he would get there. There. With them. The others. It just stopped. Stopped. As the others continued. In the same direction. There. In the same space. In the same direction. There. He waited. He waited for them. They said they would get there. They would find him there. They would find him in this space. This space. The same space. He waited. Tapping his feet. His arms folded. He remained. Seated. The screaming. The roaring. The continuous drone. Beside him. There. Out there. Alongside him. Moving past him. Beside him. Moving. In the same direction. Over and over. Again. And again. Past him. Going to their places. In their space. Beside him. In the same space. Not moving. Moving. Beside him. Over and over. The rumble. The vibration. Constant. Endless. Endless endlessness. Motion. Static. While they move. Beside him. Past him.

They said they would be here . . . Why aren't they here? . . . When will they be here? . . . They said they would be here . . . I'm tired of waiting . . . I want to get moving . . . Like them . . . Out there . . . I want to get to where I am going . . . To where I am supposed to be . . . I want to get to where I said I would be . . . Where are they? . . . Why aren't they here? . . . They said they would be here . . . When will they be here? . . . I want them here . . . I am waiting for them here . . . Why aren't they here? . . . I want them here . . . They said they would be here . . . Here.

He waited. He wanted to get moving. In the same space. Moving in the same space. He waited. Broken. Static. Movement. Motion. Continued movement. Endless motion. For them. The others. Those that were coming to him. Those that moved towards him. He waited. For them. As they moved away from him. Going places. Away from him. Over and over. Again. And again. Moving away.

They said they would be here . . . I want to get moving . . . To them . . . They need to get me moving to them . . . To them.

Danny King identifies the novel/play/poem/song he wishes he'd written



Novel: *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. Perfection is simplicity (Also, I can't see *The Burglar Diaries* making it onto the schools curriculum any time soon).

Play/script: *Thieves Like Us*. Sitcom on BBC Three. In actual fact, I did write the scripts for that show. I just wish some people had fucking watched it.

Poem: "*The boy stood on the burning deck, his pockets full of crackers... etc*" because again, perfection is simplicity.

Song: That single note that plays when you start an Apple Mac, as long as I get a PayPal penny in royalties every time it's played.

quentin kirk by Danny King

Quentin Kirk, a library clerk
was bored at home and bored at work

A wife two kids his life was nice
but Quentin Kirk desired spice

So each night he'd kneel and pray
to make his life change day by day

The Gods above they heard his call
and told him "Quentin you're a fool!"

But Quentin Kirk was feeling blue
so for his sins, his wish came true

He left for work the normal way
but this was not a normal day

He'd lined up a treat to surprise Mrs Kirk
and took the afternoon off work

And the Gods did see from up above
Quentin's wish for a day of love

And strange enough his wife did too
but Quentin it was not with you

She was in bed, but not alone
Quentin found when he got home

"Oh Quentin please I hope you see
I fancied some variety"

But Quentin chose to air his view
by beating his wife black and blue

Alas, one blow too many hit her head
and finally she dropped down dead

He eyed the corpse that was his wife
a hollow shell devoid of life

Now her young man, he tried to run
when Quentin whipped out a hand gun

But he'd not let him get away
so Quentin Kirk gunned down his prey

The bullet struck him in the thigh
and this young man he did not die

But cos he'd been his missus' lover
Quentin thought he'd earned another

His cries for mercy found deaf ears
as did the patter of his tears

When Quentin brought the gun to aim
he blasted out half of his brain

But when he saw what he had done
he thought it best that he should run

Out on the street, he was quite thrilling
and sought some more that needed killing

Down the road another body
evidence of Kirk's new hobby

The postman, the milkman, the paper boy
all gunned down with cries of joy

Ordinary people, people of fame
the lad with the sheep, who lived down the lane

People of work and people of leisure

people lay dying for Quentin's pure pleasure

Back in the distance police cars raced
so Quentin thought he'd best make haste

After dropping his gun he got into his car
He put peddle to metal and made for afar

But just up ahead, a long bus queue stood
a few more victims, now that would be good

So up on the kerb, Quentin did drive
people had little or no chance to dive

One by one they all struck the hood
oh goody, oh good, oh goody, oh good

A banker, a broker, a Steptoe, a son
nevertheless all cracking good fun

Quentin before hadn't had such desire
since his childhood house, when he set it on fire

But the car gave a shudder and ran out of fuel
and playtime was over, oh how life can be cruel

So he climbed from the vehicle and was going to flee
when all of a sudden, his balls met a knee

As he fell to the floor, somewhat reeling in pain
he thought it unlikely he'd have children again

His attacker leaned over and said with some joy
"Oh Quentin, oh Quentin, you've been a bad boy"

"I didn't do it on purpose, I was just having fun,
oh father please promise you won't tell our mum!"

But father decided, "Enough of this crap,
assume the position, it's time for the strap!"

Just then, Quentin awoke to some very odd looks
and found real life was surrounded by books

He'd been far away to a land of his own
where his frustrations were venting and his passions did roam

But now he'd returned to his prison of paper
Quentin the book clerk and daydream escaper

Mark SaFranko identifies the novel/play/poem/song he wishes he'd written



Script: Allan Scott's adaptation of Daphne DuMaurier's *Don't Look Now*. Why? It's utterly perfect. As perfect as the screenplay for, say, *Chinatown*.

Novel: Dostoyevsky's *The Devils*. For its uncanny anticipation of a few days that would shake the world.

Poem: An obscure poem by Charles Bukowski called *Giving Thanks*. For having the balls to say what no one else would dare say.

Song: I'd hardly know where to start. But today I'll take *The Pleasures Of The Harbor*, the song by Phil Ochs. Why? Because it has a great melody. Don't hear them much nowadays. I'm a sucker for melody.

Available at Beat the Dust website is a video recording of Mark SaFranko reading a short extract from his first Max Zajack novel, *Hating Olivia* published by Murder Slim Press in the UK and by 3X Note in France as *Putain d'Olivia*. The video was recorded at Mark's home in New Jersey especially for broadcast at The Recession Session Live! lit gig.

Tim Wells identifies the novel/play/poem/song he wishes he'd written



Novel: *Confessions of a Pop Performer* - Timothy Lea. Though not penned by me, I'm still living the dream.

Script: *Angels With Dirty Faces*. Then I'd know if Rocky really died yellow or not.

Poem: Michael Hofmann's *Marvin Gaye* is a poem I frequently come back to. It's a lesson in how to compact the meaning of someone's life.

Song: Tough one this. Probably *The Night* - Frankie Valli. Absolute floor filler with a stomping beat and bizarre lyrics for such an upbeat song.

there's a ghost in my house by Tim Wells

I remember when fruit juice was served as a starter.

I remember the Corona lorry coming round, limeade was my favourite. I hope those green chemicals caused no lasting damage.

I remember chanukka lights on the menorah atop of Volvos driving around Stamford Hill.

I remember Danny Kendall dying in the back of Bronson's car.

I remember the 253 bus, the 'Yiddish Flyer', when it was a Routemaster. "Fares please!" and hanging onto the pole from the back of the platform, dragging one foot onto the road, sparks streaming up from our blakeys. One time we sped past the Rainbow and yelled abuse at Osmonds fans queuing outside. They chased after us, the bus got stuck in traffic and we had to get off and leg it. Me and me mate never told anyone we were run by girls.

I remember girls practicing dance steps in a line at the bus stop.

I remember us all taking sports bags to clubs, each had a towel and talc in it. We'd sprinkle talc on the floor, spin, shuffle, slide, dip and fall back. In the morning my black brogues, red socks and hem of my blue strides all dusted with white.

I remember my dad not letting gingers into the house in case they soured the food.

I remember herring milt, kidneys and brains on toast, the smell, the texture, the taste.

I remember the Beano plopping through the door on an Autumn morning and reading it on the sofa with a mug of hot Vimto.

I remember apple doughnuts at Brick Lane on Sunday, blokes on dodgy corners with shabby sheepskins, their forearms high with watches.

I remember when football managers dressed like geezers.

I remember "Oh! Ori Ori! Ori Ori Ori Ori Orient!"

I remember antiquing 8 hole Dr Marten boots, melting cherry red polish, brushing, then rubbing black into the creases and buffing 'til they shined. I smelt clean for hours.

I remember twin tubs and my hands red raw from lifting out the steaming wash with wooden tongs.

I remember going to the sea and my sister and I being scrubbed down outside with white spirit to get all the oil that had spilled ashore off us.

I remember the Cod War and Fisherman's Friends. We had competitions at school as to who could hold the most in their mouth.

I remember sitting on the grass bank outside our class whilst all us lads shouted the theme tune to 'The Sweeney'.

I remember when the Hammer House of Horror meant an adolescent lad's best chance of eyeing naked ladies.

I remember video nasties. One time we watched 'Texas Chainsaw Massacre'. My mate went to the toilet and shit himself at the noise of the washing machine kicking in.

I remember shining pennies and slipping them into the front band of Frank Wright loafers, just behind the tassels.

I remember going to Petticoat Lane to buy Sta-Prest, going out Saturday night, getting drunk on barley wine, kissing a bank holiday tart, sleeping on me mate's sofa and them still having a crease come Tuesday.

I remember 'Skanga, skanga skanga... Do you believe in love?'

I remember calling fit girls 'lush'.

I remember kung fu films at the flicks, 'Broken Oath' with Angela Mao prancing about with a silk scarf. Little did those lecherous villains know it was full of scorpions. Ah ha!

I remember Beardy, Leung Kar-Yan, in 'Thundering Mantis'. They kill the teacher AND the kid! He goes berserk, kills the baddies and eats them. Woah.

I remember the Dr Who Museum at Longleat.

I remember holidays visiting the battlefields of England; Bosworth, Maiden Castle and Sedgemoor.

I remember Airfix 1/32 scale soldiers. Afrika Korps, Eighth Army, Ghurkas, German Paratroopers, Commandoes.

I remember my girlfriend sewing a ¼ inch turn-up on my 501s.

I remember, remember the 5th of November, gun powder, treason and plot.

I remember history lessons, opening a text book to a picture of the Nuremburg Rally. Some card had drawn a speech bubble so that Hitler was addressing the party faithful with; "und now der UK Subs."

I remember detention. There was no Molly Ringwald. Just a gurning, liberal gimp who was wasting his time for my benefit. I made a point of regularly telling him how much I'd enjoyed 'The History Man'.

I remember scratchy toilet paper. My grandad used it, even when we'd stopped at school and gone over to the soft stuff. He was a war hero.

I remember the lumps in the school custard.

I remember Mrs Harris' dumplings. If me and Kevin had to work late she'd bring around a big pot of rice 'n' peas 'n' ackee with salt fish and huge fried dumpling.

I remember pre-release, white label, discomix and slates.

I remember getting a parting razored into my No. 2.

I remember girls with feather cuts and $\frac{3}{4}$ length tonik jackets.

I remember the clothes horse and the airing cupboard.

I remember we called my mum Captain Howdy because we'd hear her creeping about upstairs.

I remember going to the zoo'. The rhino was asleep and scratched onto the hide of its arse in big letters was Tina. My mum's name.

I remember Saturday, the sofa and a steak and kidney pudding with World of Sport wrestling; Cyanide Syd Cooper, Fit Finlay, Mark Rollerball Rocco. The old biddies would bellow, wave their handbags and throw their shoes into the ring. Mick McManus would tear 'em in half and toss 'em back.

I remember thinking that colour was an invention. That all old TV programmes, films and pictures were black and white led me to this conclusion.

I remember the kid down the street's first word; 'Bugger'.

I remember our first dog, Topper. Originally he belonged to an old man. Every day my dad would pat him and give him a biscuit on the way to work. When his owner died nobody else could get near him and they were going to have the dog put down. So, my dad brought him home.

I remember goldfish from the rag 'n' bone man.

I remember sending old clothes and blankets to charity.

I remember shrinking crisp packets on the school radiators.

I remember our English teacher telling us we weren't allowed to read Tom Sharpe but he was glad we were.

I remember being too big for the swings and sitting in the rec' reciting 'Sonny's Lettah'.

I remember my grandmother and her golden cans of Special Brew. Us lads drank Old Nick barley wine. It was strong, it was cheap and it had a picture of the Devil on the bottle. The morning after you felt like Jason King looked after a hard night with Ingrid Pitt.

I remember 'Babylon'. "Straight from JA to me!"

I remember being flattened by a tidal wave of girls at an Eek A Mouse show.

I remember throwing punches at the 100 Club. It was better than the band.

I remember the Rumble in the Jungle, the heat of that African night stoking the world. "Ali, bomaye!" Ali, that rarest of people; the loudmouth with something to say.

I remember Eddy 'the Cannibal' Merckx racing Le Tour with a broken jaw.

I remember Derek smashing a plaster statue of the Sacred Heart to pieces with his shoe and then eating them.

I remember painting Airfix kits on the frame, then assembling them and giving them the once over.

I remember the Saturday after payday, wearing a new Ben Sherman to the pub and thinking, 'There must be more to life.'

Christiana Spens identifies the novel/play/poem/song she wishes she'd written



Novel: *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. I'm reading it just now, and I'd love to have accomplished that perfect, witty, modest prose.

Play/script: *Clueless*. Such a great script to read, so much fun, and I adore the doe-eyed sarcasm.

Poem: *The Sick Rose* by Blake. For whatever reason, it's the poem that always touches me the most.

Song: It's a tie, right now, between *This Time Tomorrow* by the Kinks and *Play With Fire* by the Rolling Stones.

the idiots' club, the first page of a new, unpublished novel by Christiana Spens

The Dinner off the Mirror Party

Clementine died sometime in between the third course and the fourth, but nobody noticed her demise 'til breakfast time. Emmanuel and Ivana were upstairs together so they didn't notice anything was strange until the sirens woke them from their sleep. By the time they got downstairs, Angie was in hysterics and a lot of the guests had left already, running away and

pretending they had nothing to do with this whole misdemeanour. Ivana realised later that she should have followed them.

Instead she waited with Emmanuel until the press, the police and eventually the ambulance arrived, standing around in a way that must have looked guilty, because it wasn't long until Angie's hysteria turned on them both. Although Angie planned the *Dinner off the Mirror Party*, and she had fed her guests course after course of lines of drugs on silver plates, and she had given Clementine her accidental poison, she put it all on Emmanuel and Ivana instead, and then lay back to watch things fall apart.

It wasn't very long until Emmanuel got crucified and Ivana got her picture in the papers, and Angie got worse, and Ivana wondered what the hell had happened these last few months to lead to this. She could only really say that it started in New York.

Steve Finbow identifies the novel/play/poem/song he wishes he'd written



I wish I had written lots of things. Even my own stuff. Started earlier. Worked harder. Kathy Acker's *Blood and Guts in High School*. Buzzcocks' *Breakdown*. Television's *Little Johnny Jewel*. Any poems by Ted Berrigan, Clark Coolidge, Charles Bernstein, & Tom Raworth. *2666* by Roberto Bolaño.

reading instructions by Steve Finbow

They had to restrain me. Give me some kind of sedative. And it had all started so calmly. Hold on. Let me think. That could be so different. They had to restrain me, give me some kind of sedative, and it had all started so calmly. That's better. Or is it? The first has an imperative feel. Direct. Urgent. They had to restrain me. Fact. Am I still restrained? If I am, then the sympathy is with me, the empathy. If not, I have escaped, I am the hero, the revenger. If they let me go, then where am I? Hiding in a broom closet? Beneath a table? In the boot of your car? Could this

be a tale from beyond the grave, a manuscript found hidden under the thin mattress, written on sheets of toilet paper using blood as ink, a tongue depressor for a pen? Or a memoir – now rich and famous, be-robed in Egyptian cotton, ensconced in a sumptuous suite, recording how I rose from oppressed individual to become advisor to kings and governments. Perhaps nothing really happened and the narrative you are hearing is a fancy, drawn up to keep you amused while other more important things play out behind your back. While you're not watching. For what we have to ask is: who are "they"? Why no names? They? It's rather vague isn't it? Some shady organization? An experimental medical facility kidnapping people off the streets, drugging them, tying them down, injecting them with viruses, diseases, bad blood. They. Or family? An argument. An insult. The dredging up of not-so forgotten feuds. A wisecrack about weight. A complaint about the turkey, the lack of chestnut stuffing, the consistency of the cranberry sauce. They. Or friends? A confrontation. An intervention – all of them there when you get home, the women sitting on the sofa, the chairs, the men standing against the wall telling you you have to pull yourself together, stop drinking, stop taking drugs. Or someone stopping you punching someone who spilled your wine, your beer, insulted your girlfriend or boyfriend. Stopped you going around to your ex-wife's or ex-husband's house to: give him/her a slap, kidnap the kids, abuse the new lover, slash the car tyres, sit outside hunched in your soon to-be-repossessed motor. They. But it was I they restrained. They. The faceless mass, the nameless throng, the shadow crowd. It could have started so differently. He had to... She had to... You had to... Or better. The police had to... The doctors had to... The nurses had to... Or better even... K had to... X had to... V had to... Or better still... Sue had to... Mike had to... Gary had to... Whatever it wasn't, what it was was, "They had to restrain me." They didn't have a choice. Nothing they could do. I didn't give them an option. Or you. If I wrote, "They didn't have to restrain me," or "They didn't restrain me," or "They failed to restrain me," then I would be free and there would be no They. No imperative, categorical or not. And not in my case. I've just thought. Maybe you are they. The you of you with other yous lost in the they, the them. And if so, then you must want to know the story. Must want to know why you restrained me. Why you were impelled to restrain me. What I did that made you join in with them, lose your you, become one with the horde. What did I do? They had to restrain me. Had. The past of have. The saddest words. Have. Has. Had. He has money. He had money. The book has a meaning. The book had a meaning. I wanted to join the priesthood but they wouldn't have me. I have a role in a film. I had a job as an extra. Have a great trip. I had a bad time. I have morals. I had ethics. Have him bring me wine. They have no beer. He has two brothers. He had two sisters. He has a beautiful wife. He had a faithful girlfriend. He had the balls to question my actions. The book has a flowing narrative. I will not have any distractions. Rumour has it. He had it. To have neither love nor happiness. To have a monster of a child. He has you where he wants you. After you have

finished this story you might think you have been had. This sentence had me stumped. I had a devoted follower. She has left me. She had left him. I have to go soon. You had better get home. They had to restrain me. They. They had. They had to. To. Not from. Approach and arrival. Insistent. Help if you want to. I went to the house. The road was clear all the way to the off-ramp. The road runs perpendicular to the facility. Turned to me and said. Loved her to a fault. Brought her back to life. Slept from one to three. Stepped out to relieve myself. A rag to the wind. Take me to a doctor. Had the room to ourselves. Guiding the blind to the darkest room. Their faces close to the whirring blades. Nose to nose. Searched for the bullets to the gun. Unsuitable to punishment. Pull the door to. I'd like to leave. To hold back. Restrain. They arrested me. They put me in binds. They fitted a white polythene bridle in my mouth. Chained me to the bed. Confined me in a room. Constrained me. Contained me. Controlled my breathing, my heart rate, the flow of my urine. Curbed my flight impulse. Curtailed my freedom. Delimited my liberty. Detained me. Fettered my limbs. Gagged my mouth. Handicapped my legs. Harnessed my body. Hindered my movement. Hog-tied me. Held me. Impounded my papers. Imprisoned my family. Inhibited my movement. Jailed my friends. Limited my access. Locked me up. Manacled my hands, my feet. Muzzled me. Pinioned my arms. Prevented me from escaping. Repressed my natural instincts. Restricted my vision. Subdued my thoughts. Suppressed my ideas. Tied me up. Tied me down. Twisted my words.

Will Ashon identifies the novel/play/poem/song he wishes he'd written



Novel: *Turning To Glue* by Marty Ackermann. Coruscating sixties expose of the glue industry written in an invented dialect from the point of view of a glue brush. Poor Ackermann committed suicide a year later. Or did he? Literary conspiracy theorists point to the involvement of vested Big Glue interests.

Play/script: *Stick Up* by Marty Ackermann. Early play from the teenage Ackermann. Dismissed as juvenilia by academe, it eerily foretells his death by head-in-glue-pot and, though the dialogue is boring, repetitive and unrealistic, has a rhythm which the mature Ackermann would make his own.

Poem: *Too Attached* by Muriel Felt. An expressionist narrative work written in sestinas by Felt - Ackermann's lover and muse - shortly after his death.

Song: *Sticky Ends* by Cosmic Binding. The high point of Ackermann and Felt's journey into psychedelic rock. Ackermann's four minute, one note guitar solo has to be heard to be believed.

muslims and bankers by Will Ashon

The Muslims were thrilled about the banking crisis. It took the heat off them. But then again, they felt bad about the Bankers, who seemed like a nice enough bunch of people.

The Muslims decided to have the Bankers to dinner. The Bankers were more than a little surprised. They'd had very little good to say about the Muslims for a number of years now. But then again, they were lonely so they cancelled their reservations and set off for the Muslims' hut.

There was a moment of tension on the doorstep when the Bankers handed over the cases of Dom Perignon they had brought with them, but the parties agreed afterwards that the first course went very well. Two hundred and thirty two Bankers had grapefruit and the rest opted for the prawn cocktail.

The main course, likewise, passed without incident, and while the conversation was a little stilted and some of the jokes were lost on one or other group, it was nevertheless friendly.

It was only when one of the Bankers tried to flick a gobbet of arctic roll at an *old school chum* and instead hit a Muslim that things began to go wrong. The Muslim asked for an apology and got it but didn't like the Banker's tone. The Muslims told the Bankers to leave and they agreed. But as they stood they asked for the champagne back and, even though the Muslims weren't going to drink it, they thought that was a bit much. Reluctantly, after a tense stand off, they handed it over and one of the Bankers opened a bottle as he walked out the door, only it had got shook up in transit and fizzed out the top and all over the carpet.

If that had been all perhaps the Muslims would have decided never to speak to the Bankers again and left it at that, but as the last of the Bankers filed through the door, he muttered something and the Banker ahead of him laughed. None of the Muslims knew what had been said, exactly, but they could tell an insult when they almost heard one, knew when a joke was told at their expense. They were more than a little defensive about their image, justifiably so.

If the Muslims had only burned the prospectuses and annual reports of the Bankers outside their glass tower, then maybe things wouldn't have escalated. But when they ripped down the corporate flag from the flagpole, spat on it, covered it in lighter fluid and torched it in front of the Tabloid Journalists they were asking for trouble.

The Bankers poured out onto the sundeck of the restaurant at the top of their tower and masturbated vigorously until sperm rained down on the Muslims and all they could hear, tiny, from so far above, was the voices of the Bankers telling them to stick that in their burkas.

The Muslims sent a suicide bomber to destroy the tower but he got the fuse wrong and blew himself up out on the forecourt. His blood sprayed bright red all across the windows of the lobby and the Receptionists tittered into their hands and said it looked like tomato ketchup.

The Bankers called in all loans to Muslims and repossessed their hut.

The Muslims hijacked a train, stole sleepers and built a line to the tower's door. Then they drove the train into it and killed all the Receptionists. Unfortunately the tower didn't come down.

The Bankers called in all loans to all Small Shopkeepers serving the shanty town the Muslims had built near the tower. The Small Shopkeepers went out of business. Now the Muslims had to walk miles to buy tinned soup.

The Muslims hijacked another train, bought a nuclear warhead from the Russians, mounted it on the train, ran it along the same sleepers and detonated it at the bottom of the tower. This time it did come down or, rather, went up.

The Bankers had already been tipped off and were hidden underground in a nuclear bunker. Only the Support Staff and some Visiting Members of the Bankers' families were killed. The Bankers called in all Third World debt and bankrupted most of the countries that the Muslims' parents came from.

The Tabloid Journalists came to interview the Muslims and the Bankers and then ran stories about their racy affairs with Football WAGs.

The Muslims hijacked a train, hijacked a tunneling device and bought another nuclear warhead from the Russian Football WAGs. They dug down to the bunker and detonated their warhead.

The Bankers were on holiday in Mauritius but the bunker was being used as a crèche and all their children were fried.

The Bankers made the crops fail. The Bankers poisoned the water supply.

The Muslims said that all the Bankers were Jews. The only Bankers who had ever admitted to being Jews were Muslims who thought it was the done thing. The Bankers threw them to the Muslims and the Muslims tore their flesh from them.

The Bankers poured coins into cannons and fired them at the Muslims.

The Tabloid Journalists ran up huge mini-bar tabs in hotel rooms and took mucky pictures of the Russian Football WAGs.

The Muslims bought some Kalashnikovs from the Angry Husbands of the Russian Football WAGs, disguised themselves as Bankers using the suits of the dead Jew-Muslims and went on the rampage in Mauritius.

The Bankers smuggled long, sharp, pointed knives home in their hand luggage and used them to slit the throats of Muslim babies.

The Muslims captured Bankers one by one, tied their haemorrhoids to a post and catapulted them up into the air.

The Bankers filled a bath with tiny scorpions and lowered the Muslims into it headfirst.

The Muslims dug pits, poured in napalm, gave the Bankers fat cigars and pushed them in.

The Bankers made great burning bundles of banknotes and stuffed them down the Muslims' knickers.

The Muslims converted some of the Bankers into suicide bombers. The Bankers who'd been converted into suicide bombers turned round and walked back into the shanty town. The Muslims moved their shanty town so it was underneath the Banker's bunker. The Bankers hid in the shanty town. The bombs strapped to the Banker suicide bombers went off and everyone was

blown to bits, tiny scraps of Banker rushing out with tiny bits of Muslim, their blood mingling as it moved away from the blast.

The Tabloid Journalists ran a story about a Paedophile caught with a Football WAG's dead baby impaled on his erect penis and the Bankers and the Muslims thought everything would be alright.

The next day it turned out that the Paedophile was a Tabloid Journalist and they were sure everything would be alright.

But it wasn't, it never was, and they were all too busy to work out why.

Vic Templar identifies the novel/play/poem/song he wishes he'd written



Novel: My instinct is to say *Billy Liar*, as that is my answer to most questions. However, how literally do I have to take the question? In order to have written any of these things I would have to have led a similar life at the same time and location as the author/playwright/poet, which puts a different complexion on it. I am pretty happy with my lot and the life I've led. Could I still be Vic Templar, born in Gillingham, Kent in 1965 and write *Hunger* set in 1890's Oslo or *Ask the Dust*? John Fante was a huge influence on and inspiration for my own writing, much more so than Waterhouse and *Billy Liar*. I saw something in his voice, the hopes, aspirations and day dreams of the young man, who wanted so much to be a writer, a big shot. I like works by Waugh and Pahalaniuik but wouldn't like to have lived their lives. Ditto Orwell, Camus. Alan Sillitoe seems to have led a full life - would feel very proud of *Saturday Night*, *Sunday Morning*. Heck, let's just say *Billy Liar*. Read it about 9 times between ages 16 and 41 and it has never let me down. I think it earned Waterhouse a few bob too. Ah, changed my mind. I wish I'd written *Oracle Night* by Paul Auster. I have only found him in the last 3 years, but am rarely less than dazzled by his imagination and his style, which makes me think I could have written his books - but of course, I couldn't. I'd be equally happy to put my name to the *New York Trilogy*, *Timbuctoo*, *Red Notebook*, *Mr Vertigo* and the last one (can't recall the title).

Script/Play: *Billy Liar*? Okay, let's pick something different. Forget script, assume you mean stage play. I like Pinter and Orton. Shaffer's *Sleuth* is another favourite. JB Priestley did some good plays about time slips, which I have read but never seen. I liked *Faustus* by Marlowe but have never seen it performed.

Poem: I have a bit of a blank spot with poetry, a bit like I do with opera. I don't understand the form or language. Studied Keats and Wilf Owen at skool, both of whom I liked very much. I like

Under Milk Wood (poem or play?). I like my mates' stuff - Billy Childish, Wolf Howard, Sexton Ming, Joe Ridgwell. I like Bukowski too, though not read him for a long time.

Song: Bloody hell, how am I meant to pick a song I wish I'd written? *The Amorous Humphrey Plugg? Waterloo Sunset? I Say a Little Prayer? Too Much Monkey Business?* One thing about writing a song is that other people might sing it. I'd like to have written a song and hear it covered by Paul Robeson, Sammy Davis, Frank Sinatra, Elvis, The Fall and Pulp. I'll go for *Merry Xmas Everybody* - still sung by Noddy Holder of course. Royalties would be good, but the main reason is that it always makes me very happy (though tinged with a little melancholy that it is no longer xmas 1974) whenever I hear it. I imagine thousands feel the same. I couldn't care less about the thousands who hate it like I hate *Stop the Cavalry* or *Last Christmas*. *Merry Xmas Everybody* is about the family, young and old, coming together, forgetting all their troubles and having a good time, which is exactly what my family did in those days. It is what I have tried to capture in my novel, *Taking Candy from a Dog*.

bobby charlton was our dustman by Vic Templar

No he wasn't, that's a lie, but it sounds good doesn't it. At least I don't think it was him. This would have been the late 1960s or very early 1970, before I started school. Every Wednesday they'd come round and empty our bin into that lorry of theirs. What a wonderful ritual. It was different back then.

We had a proper bin, made of corrugated metal. Galvanised metal, like the watering cans at the cemetery. They must have weighed half a ton. There was no plastic in those days. The rubbish was just chucked straight into the bin. Mum used to wrap potato peelings in the Daily Mirror, but otherwise it was just slung in the bin. No black sacks, no Tesco's' carriers and it all fitted in the bin. All the rubbish from a family of four. It wouldn't even reach the top of the bin.

And then, every Wednesday, Bobby Charlton and his mates would come and collect it. He looked just like Bobby Charlton. I'd wait for them, and when I heard the lorry I'd run to the window. Sometimes I'd wave at them and they'd wave back. It was best when Bobby collected our bin, but some weeks it was one of his mates.

I loved seeing the rubbish being eaten as it was emptied into the back of the lorry. Like a huge hungry ogre, it gobbled up the lot.

Three things make me think that it wasn't really Bobby Charlton. One, he was still playing for Manchester United and England at the time, although he was nearing the end of his career. Two, footballers train in the morning. Though, by all accounts, Georgie Best was skipping training and getting up to mischief with Swedish dollybirds and actresses, so it's not beyond the realms of

possibility that Bobby Charlton was also skipping training to help empty our bins. You always hear about Georgie Best skipping training, but never Bobby Charlton. Sir Matt kept that hushed up pretty well, didn't he? Three, we live in Chatham and if Bobby is going to empty bins anywhere, he's probably not going to make a 400 mile round trip to do it.

So, this morning I was sat at my PC, which is what I get up to these days, and I heard the grumble of the dustbin lorry. Actually, the first sound I heard was the distinctive rumble of several plastic wheelie bins being hauled across pavement and tarmac to be fed to the hungry ogre on wheels.

And I remember what my Mum used to do every Christmas. You have to give the dustmen a little something, a few bob, to say thanks for doing a job that no-one else wants to do. When I was four there was no job on earth I wanted to do more than hang out with Bobby Charlton and feed a hungry dustbin lorry and watch it gorge itself all day long. Yet, by six I wanted to be a soldier, by eight an archaeologist, ten a journalist, twelve a gardener and by seventeen I didn't have the foggiest, and still haven't 27 years further on.

At 44, I don't want to be a dustman, even though you don't have to lug a thousand metal bins on your back every day. Besides, Bobby Charlton has retired.

But I'm glad that someone does it, and though I'm now on the dole, I have £70 in my pocket, some debts have been paid. I think about it for a minute, and stand at my window to see them approaching. He looks like Ralph Coates. Should I peel off a tenner? I ask myself.

It's the right thing to do, and even when you're unemployed, or self-unemployed as my mate Wolf points out, you don't not do the right thing when the opportunity arises.

sharp focus or dark temptation by Vic Templar

You girls have it easy. And so did I till Boots stopped making that one with the black bottle and red writing. They still do the shaving cream but no longer the roll-on. Stopped it whilst I was in Australia 11 years ago. I came back after 9 months to find I could no longer buy my deodorant.

Since then it's been the same thing every time. I go to the supermarket and search for the plainest looking bottle I can find. Usually household brands like Nivea or Dove. But it's the same

back to zero approach every time. I no longer know what brand I wear. Every time I go to the shop, it is as if I am buying deodorant for the first time and have to go through the rigmarole of selection.

I still check Boots now and again, just to see if by some miracle my deodorant is back in production. It had a good smell. That's why I wore it, obviously. Like a cross between Refreshers and burnt timber; a proper man's smell. Sandalwood, I think it was called.

For women it is simple. You can smell of vanilla, lavender, coconut, cucumber, freesias or lilies. Your deodorant contains the word extract. This implies a link to nature. Honey with geranium extract. Lemon with honeysuckle extract. Pomegranate and strawberry, Nasturtium and daffodil. I admit I haven't fully researched this area.

Today I needed a new roll-on. I hit on the novel idea of checking the men's toiletries section. Plenty of choice, oh yes. Lynx offer a range that includes Sharp Focus, Dark Temptation, Instinct, Touch, Click, Boost, Africa and Zeus. What do these flavours actually smell of? Lynx's advertising is aimed at 16-year-old boys. This is not for me. I need a man's smell; an Old Spice for the 21st century.

Morrison's own brands offer a choice between Dynamic, Polarise and Magnetism. Mr Adidas and his people provide Deep Energy, Fair Play, Victory League and Ice Dive.

Right Guard, now there's a name from the 60s. Surely they can be trusted to come up with a men's fragrance that I recognise. No: Fresh Blast, Freeze or Silver.

Gillette provide Cool Wave, Arctic Ice and Power Rush.

Maybe it has always been this way. What exactly did Brut 33, Blue Stratos, Denim and Hai Karate actually smell of? Allure? I somehow doubt it. Potting shed and Austin Allegro more like. Anyway, to cut a long story short, I used Debbie's.

Jenni Fagan identifies the novel/play/poem/song she wishes she'd written



Song: There are so many songs I wish I'd written I think I'll go for *Time of the Season* by the Zombies, as its one of the few I would have covered.

Novel: I genuinely can't think of any novels I wish I'd written. I don't know why. I just want to write what I write and when I read I just like to read. Perhaps I should go for a bastardised amalgamation of the *Malleus Maleficarum* and the *Bible* being shit down the neck of Sartre on the sixth day Burroughs gave up junk.

Poem: A poem I wish I'd written is *On Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird* by Wallace Stevens. The stanza 'Among twenty snowy mountains, the only moving thing, was the eye of the blackbird' is enough to make me wish I'd written the whole thing.

Play: The 1604 version of *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe is a play I'd like to have written. It was rumoured that actual demons were seen on stage at some of the performances and also, that some members of the audience went irrevocably mad after seeing it.

she's in my dream by Jenni Fagan

The gypsy girl,
she thunders by on a runaway rock horse

her mustachio'd cigarettes twitch,
quit nicotine, refuse matches.

In Montreal the whisper
Ménage e trois, si vou plais?

I hear this as they lay her casket
in frozen ground, branches stripped bare

no leaves or mulch to feed the soil.
Grey sky ignores my opal eyes,

torn tresses by the gravestone
flutter in the breeze.

this with no stop is a jail cell cold catch, they get HIGH off this by Jenni Fagan

Your girl fists pound
hard as a man's punch,
'Fae the home?' they say,
you smash in, split bone.

All they stand, smoke,
take bets, ten or five,
the girl you haul back off the road sobs
begs, feet push on ground,
her scorn is gone now.

RIP ear, blood, you punch in again,
she's OUT
the dark CAN'T stop,
too far gone they say,
eyes slide to me an' I stare back.

Watch, they get high off this,
they LAUGH like TIN then stop.

'If you don't STEP IN she'll die' they
try to plead nice but with glints in their eyes,
rain spits, lamps curve to see.

Her head limp, teeth CRACK,
scud off stone
phlegm flies,
I step in from the back
take your arms, talk fast an' low
arms of four, now two, pound an' slow

Watch. They get high off this.
Blue lights wail, wail, wail in the dark,
I take your hand.

Watch, they smoke us in to woods
wheels screech, hands point
but we are gone.

You shake, match flares you suck in smoke
I stroke skin, leaves soothe an' wish by,
jail will not TAKE you from me.

Joseph Ridgwell identifies the novel/play/poem/song he wishes he'd written



The song I'd like to have written is *The Ten Commandments* by Prince Buster, as I often recite the lyrics to my new girlfriends. I never wish to have written a play because they are crap. Novel? Only my own, which I have. Pome? *So We'll Go No More A-Roving*. You know, Byron wasn't a very good poet, but he lived the life of a poet in all its romantic glory, plus he shagged, whored, and drunk untold and had lots of adventures. I wished I'd written this pome because 1. It isn't totally original. See the traditional Scottish poem, *The Jolly Beggar*, or the traditional sea shanty, *The Maid of Amsterdam*; 2. It's beautiful, and 3. I think I probably was George Gordon in another life, and so I probably did write it.

the assassination egg by Joseph Ridgwell

It was a grey, non-descript Sunday evening and I was resting in my beat apartment, sucking on an ice-cold beer, when the buzzer sounded.

As I had alienated all my friends years ago, I picked up the hand-set somewhat reluctantly, hoping it wasn't the Jehovah's Witnesses, again.

'Hello?'

'Is that Mr Ridgwell?' replied a voice with a heavy Chinese accent, possibly Mandarin.

'Not interested.'

'Not what?'

'In God, don't believe in the fucker and if there is one, it's me.'

'It's you?'

'Yeah, I'm the Almighty. Now fuck off and leave me alone.'

'But, Mr Ridgwell, I'm an atheist. Why would I be interested in God?'

'Well, what do you want?'

'I have a proposition from the Chinese Government.'

'I thought you sounded like a tiddy-wink.'

'Pardon?'

'Forget it, what sort of proposition?'

'It's an offer you can't refuse. May I come up?'

An offer I couldn't refuse? I poked my head out of the window. Down below was a stout, middle-aged man, who looked remarkably like Charlie Chan. I returned to the intercom.

'Are you selling something, because if there's one thing I hate even more than God bothers it's....'

Chan cut me short. 'Mr Ridgwell, please do not insult my intelligence. Remember, I can always take my fantastic offer elsewhere.'

Always take his fantastic offer elsewhere? Fuck that shit, I wasn't missing out. I'd missed out my whole life! 'Ok, come up.'

I left the door ajar and went back to my beer. Moments later the chink walked in. He was holding an expensive looking briefcase.

'So what exactly is this offer I can't refuse, mister?'

The Chink stepped forward and bowed. 'Mr Ling, Peking District of the Chinese Commissariat. Very pleased to make your acquaintance.'

For a split second I felt almost important, but that didn't last, for despite outward appearances I was basically a bum.

'Cut the pleasantries Ling. Take a seat and give me the low-down.'

Ling eyeballed the beer-stained armchair dotted with cigarette burns, and other unidentified shit, and decided to remain standing. Then he opened his briefcase and produced an object of great beauty. It looked like a Faberge egg.

My eyes opened wide in wonder and Ling became visibly excited. 'This, my friend is the Assassination Egg!'

'The what?'

'The Chinese Government has been developing this technology for the last thirty years, and finally the time has come.'

'To do what exactly?'

'Commence operation Trojan Tiger!' Ling announced with a great flourish.

I figured the guy was doo-lally. 'And what the fuck has that got to do with me?'

'You have been chosen. Yes you, to act as one of our participants.'

Now Ling had totally lost me. 'Me?'

Ling let out a fiendish laugh. 'Yes you. We've done our research, Mr Ridgwell and we've read the writing.'

Hmm, I thought. They'd read my doodlings. Things were looking up. 'You have?'

'Yes, and our sophisticated profiling intelligence has identified you as a radical degenerate anarchist. One with strong rebel tendencies'

This was undoubtedly true. 'And I'm a non-conformist.'

'Exactly, and that is why you have been chosen.'

'Chosen to do what?'

'Eliminate enemies of the Chinese State.'

Holy moly. 'Shit Ling, although I obviously match the profile, I'm also a peace loving chap. The sort of guy who can't take a shower without saving any trapped spiders beforehand.'

'Yes, we know all that. But we also know that murderous thoughts flit through your brain at regular intervals, especially whilst at your place of employment.'

I had to admit this was true and often I'd thought about downloading a bomb-making kit from the internet and levelling the place. But even so.

'Tell me more Ling, I mean, what's in it for me?'

'Immortality, that's what's in it for you. Something you have unsuccessfully tried to achieve through your writing, but failed miserably.'

Immortality? I liked the sound of that. 'Carry on Ling.'

'Now let me tell you about the Egg.'

'Yes, do.'

Ling stepped forward and placed the beautiful object into my hands. It felt velvety and luxurious, like a woman's breast, or a snake.

'Shit, this Egg is the dog's nuts.'

Ling was confused. 'The what?'

'You know, the bee's knees, the cat's whiskers, the...'

Once more, Ling cut me short. 'Please stop there, Ridgwell and let me explain just what this special Egg can do.'

'What can it do?'

At this Ling once more became incredibly excited, like a kid on Christmas day, or a teenage girl about to have her first period. 'By touching the sides of the Egg three times and pointing it at your intended target you will be able to kill anyone in the world!'

'Anyone?'

Ling was barely able to contain himself. 'Anyone Ridgwell. The President of the United States of America, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, even your next door neighbour!'

Jesus Christ! 'Are you serious?'

'Of course I'm serious. And if you agree to our proposal, financially you will be made for life. You may have to come and live in the People's Republic, but that will be to your immense benefit.'

Ling was correct, while the West was in terminal decline, the East was in the ascendancy. And there were all those beautiful slopes to consider. I mean, I'd watched the opening ceremony of the Olympics. Not a minger amongst them, and plenty to choose from. 'Keep talking, Ling.'

Ling let out a half-smile. 'And as you will be returning a national hero, you will be sure to have your pick of our beautiful ladies.'

The fucker must have read my mind.

Suddenly I envisaged the scenario. Me in bed with four or five lithesome Chinese sorts in the penthouse suite of the Shanghai Oriental. I had to admit, it was an enticing prospect.

'But Ling, I must again ask the question. Why me? I mean, why not a Chinese national?'

Ling tried hard to hide a grimace. 'The one flaw of this marvellous Egg is that for some inexplicable reason the Chinese are unable to harness its devastating power. Our scientists are not quite sure why, but the Egg can only be operated successfully by white Caucasians. This quirk has baffled and defeated the greatest scientific minds of the People's Republic. That was when our intelligence got to work on the matter and began identifying suitable insurgents.'

'And that led you to me?'

'Yes, for despite outward appearances, the tedious homespun philosophy, even all the drinking and whoring, we have decided that you are the man for the job.'

'I am?'

'And one more thing.'

'Yes?'

'You don't have to be in the vicinity of your intended victims. You can actually point the Egg at a television screen and it will still operate successfully.'

'Fucking hell, that's amazing.'

Ling smiled smugly. 'It is, isn't it. So, are you with us? Are you prepared to defect to the People's Republic and help annihilate the West, even your own government and fellow countrymen?'

I thought about my country then, my government - the powers that be. What the fuck had they done for the likes of me? Fuck all, that's what. I eyeballed Ling. 'And what if I turn down the offer?'

Ling remained expressionless. 'You will be eliminated.'

Put like that, I didn't need a second invitation. 'Fuck it, let's do it!'

Ling smiled from ear to ear and handed over a business card. 'I knew you would come around to our way of thinking. When you have met our targets, contact me, and I will arrange a safe passage to the East.'

After Ling had left, I grabbed a cold beer from the fridge, and then gazed at the magical Egg. I switched the TV on. It was live news, something about the recent American presidential elections. I caught sight of the eventual winner, the Democrat Candidate, a one Barack Obama.

The guy appeared incredibly plastic. A rubber man. Just another cardboard cut-out in a long line of political puppets. The words of Ling came back to haunt me.

'You don't have to be in the vicinity of your intended victims. You can actually point the egg at a television screen.'

I took a large swig of beer and pointed the Egg at Barack Obama. Immediately the screen went black. Shit, I thought. Then there was a newsflash.

'President Elect, Senator Obama, taken suddenly ill at Democrat Conference, dies minutes later!'

I drained my beer and looked at the Egg. It all seemed unreal. Had I just murdered America's first black president? Apparently so. It hardly seemed to matter.

I stood up and walked over to the window. Outside, one of my neighbours was washing his vehicle. A huge jeep-truck-like monstrosity. I'd never liked the man. A fat, balding, pompous smug-faced prick.

I pointed the Egg and watched with a strange sense of satisfaction as he grabbed his chest, keeled over, and rolled into the gutter. I smiled evilly. I was beginning to get a taste for wanton killing. God, what a fucking power trip! Suddenly I understood the pathological actions of all the world's tyrants: Hitler, Idi Amin, Pol Pot, Ivan the Terrible, even Alexander the Great. Mass Murder; it was the way forward!

I stayed up all night killing people through the television. First it was world leaders, current and ex. Tony Blair, followed by President Putin, Robert Mugabe, Margaret Thatcher, George Bush, Osama Bin Laden, etc, etc. Then I began killing irritating celebrities: Jonathon Ross, Lenny Henry, Jamie Oliver, Victoria Beckham, Simon Cowell. On and on and on. The list was endless. But I savoured each and every death, the buzz from killing useless hunks of shit, overwhelming and life-affirming.

When I awoke the next morning my body count stood at over seven hundred, Oprah Winfrey being the last victim of my spree. I went into work that day with a spring in my step. On the train someone annoyed me just by the way they looked. I pointed the Egg at the fucker and the dude was toast.

In work, at the monthly meeting, I pulled out the Egg and pointed it at each and every one of my co-workers. Even the ones I liked. It didn't matter. They all had to die. Anyway, I was putting them out of their misery. After that I walked into the Management Suite and pointed the Egg at each and every one of those over-paid incompetent wastes of space as well.

By the end of the day I'd popped off over six hundred civil servants. Again, it hardly seemed to matter. The work they did was completely and utterly pointless and didn't affect anything in anyway. On the way home I wasted an entire train full of tired and weary commuters, just for the sheer hell of it.

The next morning, after a night spent eliminating all the successful, but terrible writers I was jealous of, I switched on the television and wondered who to kill next.

After zapping an idiotic newsreader, a piece of breaking news caught my attention. Russia had replaced the dead President Putin with an identikit. The guy looked, talked, and acted exactly the same as Putin, and for a moment I thought he had somehow been brought back to life.

Over the next few days, the other countries followed suit and replaced their slain leaders with duplicates. And the dead celebrities were also rapidly replaced. As fast as I laid the fuckers down, new ones appeared to fill their shoes. And if anything the new batch was worse than the last.

As time went by I began to feel depressed, and the futility of my task began to overwhelm me. No matter what I did, the human situation remained the same. The untalented, the liars, and the crooks took pole position, while the great majority were force-fed shit and anyone interesting, original, or different, was destroyed by the simple pressures of an impossible life. It was clinical.

Then, one day, after another lengthy killing spree, I realised my heart was no longer in it. I drank several cold beers then pulled out Ling's business card. It was time to live in exile. I dialled the contact number.

'Ling?' I said.

'Yes, Mr Ridgwell.'

'I'm tired of all this killing shit.'

'What are you saying, Mr Ridgwell?'

'I'm saying I want out.'

'But you have yet to reach our targets.'

'Who gives a shit. Just put me on that plane to Shanghai and make sure six or seven sexy chink mother fuckers are waiting for me at the hotel when I arrive.'

'I'm afraid we can't do that Mr Ridgwell.'

'You can't?'

'Goodbye Mr Ridgwell.'

And I didn't even feel the bullet hit.

Darran Anderson identifies the novel/play/poem/song he wishes he'd written



Novel: Nearly every book I read these days I think "you bastard, why didn't I think of that?" and then crawl into a corner and cry (*Sum* by David Eagleman being the last one). The *Bible* would be interesting I 'spose, to see what you could get away with. The addition of space aliens when the plot starts to sag, wouldn't have done any harm. Maybe Bob from *Twin Peaks* as an apostle...

Script: Once in a while, these strange and disreputable oddballs are thrown up like Emperor Joshua Norton, Adolf Wolfli or Mad King Ludwig. Werner Herzog is a master of exploring these types of character and events (megalomaniac conquistadors, mirages, Russian mystics). His films are incredibly beautiful, but dark as hell too. The word genius should be used sparingly, but he's got a better claim than most. Could pick any of his scripts but *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* stands out. All the more because it's based on a true story. (Failing that, I'd like to have control of any Richard Curtis film and end it in either a literal bloodbath, or a really depressing orgy).

Poem: Tom Wait's *Ninth and Hennepin*. There's more poetry in this than most so-called laureates could manage in five lifetimes.

Song: John Frusciante's *Running Away Into You* because it doesn't really sound like anything else. Or Kate Bush's *Wuthering Heights*.

the old man and the traffic island by Darran Anderson

It appeared, these days, that even the sight of an elderly man publically masturbating was not enough to stop traffic. "What was the world coming to?" he thought, as he put his flaccid member back into his pants. It's all gone to hell.

He hated them. Every occupant of every car that kept him marooned. The adults who ignored him. The imbecilic children who waved. The dogs with their heads out the windows, tongues flapping like stupid flags. He hated their faces. Hated their gormless fucking faces. Each more wretched than the last. In fact it was safe to say, the only thing he hated more than their gormless fucking faces, was his own face. Gazing back at him as he lapped at the puddle. The kind of face that made him believe that God was an arsehole.

He had not taken care of it, this face of his. His beard had gone biblical. His clothes had become rags. Toes peering out through mouths in his boots. If those who drove past even saw him, they'd just mistake him for a diseased tree or a care in the community case, and they'd find reasons not to stop. If he were they, he wouldn't.

He knelt again and studied the puddle. He wondered how many inches of water a man could drown himself in. No chance, alas. *Puddles only exist after it rains. Before that they're just holes.* That was the problem, all his thoughts were drivel. He'd spent three hours trying to remember how to start a fire using wood and stones, and as he racked his brain, the facts it gave him were useless. I before E except after C. In Hungary, none may wear a feather in their cap unless they've killed a Turk. *Beans Meanz Heinz.* Where had all this junk come from?

He wasn't cut out for this. He read *The Times* for Christ sake.

The clockwork in his watch had rusted to a halt. He couldn't tell how long he'd been on the traffic island or where he'd been going. Home he guessed. Or work. The first hour or so, his mood was one of polite frustration, puzzled that no-one would stop and allow him to pass. It was that night as the sun tired of him and the stars appeared, that reality took hold. He looked out on the headlights streaming on and on, and realised the traffic, like the Red Sea behind Moses, had closed in over his head.

The rain and the hunger woke him the next morning. His attempts to gain the driver's attentions failed. He waved and hollered, but the engines drowned him out. As the days passed, his methods became more erratic. He cursed them. He stripped naked. He defecated and wept in that order. They just zoomed by oblivious.

Focusing on survival, he found an empty beer bottle to collect rainwater, some empty bags of crisps, which he licked for nutrients. And he found that the soil, when clawed with manic laughter, was plentiful with plump worms.

In all weathers, he slept under his coat up against the plastic traffic bollard. After one night of terrors, he tossed and turned and shook it loose. It was the foul smell that made him look inside. In there, in that small white and yellow tomb, was a human skeleton of one who had been here before. One like him, who could not get to the other side nor turn back, and had starved to death. He wept thinking of this Man Friday he could have had by his side. It was then and there, licking those bones clean, that he knew he was done for.

Sam Jordison identifies the novel/play/poem/song he wishes he'd written



Novel: I'm starting to wish I would get round to writing any kind of novel of my own, let alone someone else's. But I guess I'd have to go for *A Farewell To Arms*. It's so far out of reach that all anyone can do is wish. Otherwise, you can't approach it. Every sentence has been chiselled and polished to such perfection. It's so hard, but also heart-melting. And the conclusion is so crushing. It took a mean bastard like Hemingway to kill that baby - but the world is richer for it.

Play/script: Easy. *Hamlet*. Because then I'd be the damn well greatest genius that ever lived.

Poem: *The Aeneid*. Because then I could have a fight with my Shakespeare self about who was actually the biggest genius, and serve me right for saying such choices are easy.

Song: Does lust for money count as a valid reason? If yes, *Suspicious Minds*. If no, probably *Suspicious Minds* too because it's a great song. And because, by writing it, I might have been able to meet Elvis... And ask him a few questions...

a review of the recession session live! by Sam Jordison

I arrived at Liverpool Street Station with time to spare before the Beat The Dust / 3AM Recession Session. In a few hours, writers like Stewart Home, Paul Ewen, Lee Rourke, Steve Finbow, Melissa Mann, Joseph Ridgwell, Tom McCarthy (and many others) were scheduled to rant for five minutes each about The Way Things Are in the Betsey Trotwood, Farringdon. But first I had to get acclimatised to the capital. I'd come in from Norfolk and it had been a long time since I'd been to The City. A lot had gone down in the interim. The stock market had gone down. A long way. The price of houses had gone down. Not quite enough. The government's approval rating had gone down. Even further than before. And so on.

But here in the belly of the beast that had eaten up the British economy, things seemed surprisingly unchanged. On these streets, there were no boarded-up buildings or Closing Down sales. The plate glass was still so fiercely polished that it cast back the soft April sun as a harsh glare. There were still proud corporate logos on every building. There were still flash bastards standing around wine bars drinking bottles of champagne worth more than a fortnight's dole.

The only change I could feel was in my head. Fresh from the provinces, I felt small against the pumped up, steroid-huge corporate headquarter buildings, and all too insignificant as I pushed

our pram against a sudden riptide of hurrying commuters. I had holes in my only pair of jeans, my new cheap shoes were rubbing the back of my heels and everything around me was too expensive.

I felt a moment of near-solipsism – as if the recession were only happening in my ego. But of course, the sad truth is that plenty of others have got the recession in their heads too. It's still a recession, even if it's a recession of the mind. There's been no sudden shortfall in resources. No less food has been produced. Technology still marches forward. But people are still suffering. The only failing seems to have been in the collective imagination – and the only solutions to the problem lie within the human brain. A good time then, for writers to flex their muscles – if only to provide a bit of escapism. There's a lot you can say against spoken word events like The Recession Session – but at least it was an attempt at... what? Something...

**

That's what I was thinking before I arrived at the venue anyway. I'd offloaded the pram and its precious contents at a friend's house in Finsbury Park, arranged to meet my girl at the Betsey Trotwood, and was getting the feeling of Friday in the big city. All I needed was a hell of a lot of coffee. So I first walked past the Trotwood and on up the hill to the once-pioneering gastro-pub The Eagle. There I drank a whole ostentatiously tasteful Bialetti 3-cup pot of coffee and wondered how it was that this place, this symbol of the wealth that had now fled the country, was still thronged with punters. Were they all trying to party like it was 1999? To pretend they weren't fucked? What did they have to celebrate with £7 glasses of Rioja? Was everyone, everywhere, in denial? Was I the only one feeling the pinch? Was London just sucking the life out of the rest of the country? What did this recession really mean to the average punter? I hobbled back down the hill in my agonising shoes, hoping for some answers.

"No one," Ben Myers explained to me when I met him on the street outside, "even knows what is going on."

Even before I'd gone inside, I'd had the only truth that I understood about economics confirmed. Myers and his warm Durham voice did the escapism part of my previous writer equation well too. Soon he was telling me about climbing Helvellyn, finishing a novel about Richie Edwards, fishing and the giant transvestite who had convinced him to leave his flat in Peckham and live a better, freakier, life in Hebden Bridge. Adelle Stripe came over and started describing the hoar frost she'd seen in Patterdale at new year. How it hung off the trees like a million white fingers. Paul

Ewen bought me a beer and told me how his two-year-old liked playing on swings. My feet still hurt, but I felt better.

But before I could get too sentimental about like-minded literary strivers, Joe Ridgwell, one of the comperes for the evening (and, incidentally, the person who had persuaded me to write this account) bounded over.

"Ben Myers! Adelle Stripe, looking as gorgeous as ever, Sam Jordison, Paul Ewen." He stuck a camera in each of our faces before turning it on himself and laying down the terms for the night ahead:

"Music, readers, music, readers, dancing girls, music, readers, music readers. It could go on forever... But people will only be allowed to read in five minute bursts, so we don't get too fucking bored."

"So what do you want me to write about tonight, Joe?" I asked during a brief gap in his monologue.

"Just something. Just write any old shit. Then throw it away. Whatever you want to do."

Then he was gone. It was the first time I'd met him. He'd come across like a shot of tequila: invigorating, fun, but not entirely helpful – and then gone.

The room beneath the Betsey Trotwood – I discovered – stank. It stank of old gigs and bad things. Stale sweat, spilt beer and, unfortunately, urine.

It looked worse. It was dank and dark and decorated intermittently with unwise psychedelic murals. The stage at the front of the room was lit by a standing lamp with a tasseled shade and hung with red velvet curtains. But the effect wasn't faded glamour so much as the dream room from Twin Peaks gone wrong.

Not a bad place to hold a down at heel literary gathering, in other words.

It was soon full and Joe Ridgwell was putting his larger than life Cockney charm to good use by making everyone laugh with some inventive swearing. Then he invited silence from the motley gathering for the first speaker Paul Ewen – and silence fell.

Paul Ewen, for those that don't know, wrote a book called London Pub Reviews, about a series of very normal pubs where very strange things happen. It's funny enough when you read it yourself but now, having heard Paul speak, I realise that nothing but an audio version can do it justice. His deadpan delivery and New Zealand crossed with Old London accent, offsets his skewed worldview like a quality frame. Everyone was giggling even before his story about "tixt messages" to a dog went seriously surreal. It got so that you could hardly hear him for laughs. And so you had to strain harder to catch the story, and the story seemed all the more warped for being received in small snatches. And so you laughed all the more, and by the end it was clear that Paul had stolen the show. Already.

I'm not saying the other readers weren't interesting, but my attention had already begun to waver. Partly this was because I was coming down off that coffee and hadn't drunk enough beer to stop me fixating on my aching feet. Partly it was because there's only so much spoken word I can take in a night. Partly because – as I was also starting to realise – the room had terrible acoustics. Every so often, circle line trains rumbled past, the noise emerging from somewhere disconcertingly close to the cellar walls. All sounds from the PA were strangely muffled. The doors at the back creaked. You could hear footsteps overhead.

But mainly, it was over for me because Paul was so good.

I don't want to go into too much detail about the other mic-spots anyway, because you can read what they said at Beat the Dust - but I thought I ought to come clean and admit that my mind was wondering, and that's why everything from here on in will be sketchy. That's not to say the others weren't good. A person has to have something going for him if he can – for instance – introduce himself by saying "My name's Darren Anderson, apologies for the hair" and then tell a story about masturbating in front of traffic and how JG Ballard had put him up to such depravity. Will Ashon too managed an impressive rant about the way society views its current scapegoats Muslims and bankers. Jenni Fagan, meanwhile, was impressively sincere. It was worth watching.

The interval came quickly – and finished even faster – as I realised when I took the plunge back into the cellar and couldn't get in. The room was too full to get through the doors. Lee Rourke,

the last act of that segment, was already speaking. I couldn't hear what he was saying. I had, as the twitter parlance has it, engaged in a fail.

Sometimes I blame my lack of career advancement on the dirty nepotism in the journalism industry, the Bastards Who Have Screwed Me and – I don't know – the fact that I didn't go to a very posh school. At other times, however, I have to admit that I have this bad habit of messing shit up. Like, for instance, missing the first public reading from Lee Rourke's new novel *The Canal*, a book that might soon come to seem very important, if early notices and the way publisher Melville House snapped it up are anything to go by.

Oh well.

I had at least been formulating some general impressions from the night itself and the problems facing writers who want to push the boundaries. My idea was that it's now very hard to become an envelope pusher. The few last good taboos got knocked down in the 1960s. Sex, drugs, swearing and rock and roll, they don't really upset anyone anymore. Least of all the audience in the Betsey Trotwood. These poets, hipsters, drinkers, freaks, angry young men, angrier ageing men, angrier still women and even the confused people who had wandered in off the street, were not going to be bothered by the word "fuck". Shouting it at them seemed like a bit of a waste of energy on the part of the performers.

What could possibly upset this crowd?

Joe Ridgwell supplied the answer: overt and pointless racism. He dirtied the air with talk of "chinks" and absurd portrayals of national stereotypes and soon audience members were tutting and heading out for the cleaner atmosphere of the Farringdon Road. The slurs made his otherwise amusing story of genocidal mania and personal failure lose some of its fun – for me. His prejudice had at least made me confront my own – which I guess was the point. Yet it reinforced the idea that the last taboos remain for reasons that aren't half as silly as those that were dispensed with at the Lady Chatterley trial. I didn't know how much had been gained. Still – as Joe might say – at least it wasn't boring.

The night moved on. Tim Wells gave us an I-remember-the-1970s list to remind us of the three-day week, of kids cramming Fishermen's Friends into their mouths to prove they were hard, and of things that seemed terribly important in his teenage London. People that could remember and did care about such things shouted approval. But I was getting more obsessed about how much

my feet were hurting and couldn't share their nostalgia for a time and place I had never known. I shuffled away.

Soon, there was a lady on stage shaking ostrich feathers to old jazz. I went for a drink. When I came back down, Mark SaFranko's voice was piping eerily into the room through the PA, talking about screams ripping through the darkness in a deep American accent. I went to sit down with my girlfriend in a side room with seats that stuck and gripped my trousers whenever I changed position.

Beside us, two intense girls were talking about Robert Frost.

A man joined them. "Hi I'm Joanna ," said one, "and this is Susan. She's a writer as well." As if the fact of her being a writer was already a given.

Was I missing something?

Clearly.

"Sylvia Plath, she's only famous because she died," said the man and everyone agreed. I noticed that behind their heads on the wall, there was black mould. My feet ached. These people were silly.

Vic Templar took the microphone and they went to watch. I stayed where I was, amused by his introduction of himself as "Ernest Hemingway", but even more interested in the two very drunk women who had taken up the now empty seats. They had that angry look that extreme inebriation sometimes gives people. Like it's confusing them so much it makes them mad. And I came to realise one of them was about to be sick. So I grabbed my girlfriend and we left the corner too, Stewart Home, in turn, taking our place. He appeared to be fascinated by whatever he was imagining was about to happen.

I didn't see what that was. Sadly, I can't report on whether she blew chunks on Mr Home. To my surprise, I had suddenly left the building. When I'd stood up, my feet had hurt so much that I'd contracted an overpowering urge to go home. But, somehow, by the time I'd said my goodbyes and got outside, the chunder woman had overtaken me and caught a cab. This cab was now pulled over at the junction of Farringdon Road and Clerkenwell Road, flashing its hazard warning lights. She was leaning out of the door puking. The heightened metaphorical awareness-

induced by the Recession Session enabled me to see that this act too was an eloquent statement on The Way Things Are Going...

So was everything. The absurd expense of the tube. The pale faces of the returning pub-goers on the Victoria Line. The cruelty and chaos of Finsbury Park: evil looks on the street, BMWs racing along pedestrian-heavy roads and hurrying, menacing drunks. I nearly fell over one man, who was sitting in the middle of the pavement, head slumped forward, asleep. There was a slick of water leading up to where he snoozed, like a man-sized slug's trail. Clearly, he had wet his trousers, then sat down, and someone had dragged him along on his arse. A group of tramps – presumably, but not definitely his friends – were dancing to sounds that could only be heard in their heads in a doorway behind him. This was Blair and Brown's legacy, for sure.

We walked on.

And then I was near pushed off the pavement by Jesus. I refocused and saw it was a man with a big brown beard, braided hair and a faraway look in his eyes. He was naked from the waist up, apart from a pure white shawl draped over his shoulders.

"Did you see what he was holding?" my girlfriend asked.

"No."

"A big bag full of needles. A see-through bag, full of needles."

These things too, seemed loaded with significance.

As I limped home it was clear to me that the Recession Session had had some effect. What that was, was hard to pin point. To go back to the early stages of this scrawl – it certainly hadn't provided any answers. What had it taught me about sorry state of the nation? Perhaps something. Perhaps nothing. But at least it was fun. And in an increasingly grimy world that has to count.

The Recession Session Live! video

Available at Beat the Dust website is a compilation video of The Recession Session Live! from the cellar gig room of the Betsey Trotwood, Farringdon, London on Friday 24th April 2009. Big thanks to Erin Gilbert, who did most of the filming on the night. The video was edited by Joseph Ridgwell. Apologies to Darran Anderson and Will Ashon, who are both missing from the video. Some kind of technical hocus pocus to do with the video editing software. The photographs featured throughout this issue of Beat the Dust are stills taken from the video.

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