

*The Queen's Head*  
*A 'Literary' Zine*





# EDITO ED RIAL ORIAL

→ A delicate solution to blunt trauma, coaptation is the process by which bones, once broken, can be aligned to knit themselves anew. It's a grisly business. But more broadly, it's any two things placed in close proximity that soon find themselves inextricably bound. Nature's an old pro – fungi on scallops, bark on skin, oh so many parasites – but there's a limit to the physical. Not so with imagination, if this issue of *The Queen's Head* is anything to go by.

Cross-contamination of form informs Tami Vibberstoff's script, so linked with the inner world of its author that to film it would be beside the point, and Arundati Dandapani poems, which spark off the page with all the frisson of spoken word. You can see obsessions, meanwhile, operating a strange coaptation on the mind, with R. A. Davis picking apart Belle and Sebastian's intimacy with trouble, while Steven Garrard teases at the interwoven twin worlds of cult comic *Love and Rockets*.

Elsewhere, while Andrew Blair's sucker-punch of a tale sets yooof and age at odds, Vivien Jones blends them together in a particularly unlovely and disconcerting fairytale. Stephen Devereux tickles the wilderness, Andrew Taylor fuses the everyday with abstraction, and Charlie Saben Fox, Mike Saunders and Dic Edwards all overload the senses to achieve a palpable synesthesia. And let's not forget the itchy chimera gracing this issue's cover, courtesy of Suky Goodfellow, nor Nadine Khatib's frankly surreal centrefold typographic illustration.

It's almost too much. Best get cracking.

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*Andrew Blair*

# THE WALK HOME →

It's a tricky thing, is living.  
Eric's retired now; has been for nineteen years. Brain isn't hooked up same as it used to be but it's only relatively blunt, you see? Only relative.

He's walked into town to see some friends, faithful stick gaining purchase on the damp pavement. None of that Ship of Theseus or Trigger's Broom nonsense: this one is going the distance; it's with him at all times, like a limb.

They meet in a quiet corner of the pub away from the bar and the dartboard, cushions worn thin on pew-like benches, thinking back to when the old décor was new old décor. They remember the days that contained it, and supped at their pints. The Backgammon, the Organ Grinder, the Lancashire Handstand...old tricks up new sleeves in the day. Suited and booted. Cash flowed their way.

It finds its way to them now, but by the time it's been sieved through Wattney's boys it's a trickle.

Bloody accountants.

Gotta remain strictly impartial, not get on anyone's turf. That's part of the arrangement. You can do all that with a

computer now. No need to practice the old ways. A man's going to get rusty then, and that's what Eric's worried about. He tells them. They agree. It's not safe for an elderly gentleman in the streets these nights. Who knows what might be done if push becomes shove becomes punch?

Don't bear thinking about, don't it?

Pints are made to last. One only, and then departure. Best not to hang about too long in the one place. A fell swoop might occur, and then the old ways wouldn't be ways no more.

Dregs are drained, different directions embarked upon. Goodbyes are brief, and to the point. It would be good to see you again, they wordlessly say, but we both know that isn't likely.

Eric shuffles away, tugging his cap down over his forehead, then adjusting it at the back. It's too small. Maybe tomorrow he will go down the market, try something new on. Bigger scarf might not go amiss either, but he can't afford both.

Small steps, Eric is taking. There's a chill in the air, thin white cracks appear on the pavement as the frost readies itself. He passes the shops they used to

rely on. They're all closed now, some boarded shut. The bakers is now a Greggs, the launderette has closed down, and the newsagent isn't owned by Charlie anymore. It's a good newsagent, if you like that sort of thing, but that's not the point. You can't buy the same things there now, can't get the essences and powders that you used to.

The phone box has been gutted. Wires jut from its interior like shattered ribs. A bike wheel's slumped against the metal rails outside. A padlock lies broken on the ground. Eric shakes his head. Past the shops is a metal rail fence enclosing some overgrown scrubland. From inside the tall grass he can hear music, some grimy bass line wub-wubbing over synthesised drum beats. Not for Eric, really. The faint smell of weed on the air, though, he wouldn't mind. Diminishes the aches and pains and all that.

There is a gate, locked with a padlock and chain, at the edge of the field. Three kids vault it clumsily, joints in mouths. Tracksuits, sweatshirts, quite sensible gear for this weather, Eric reckons, and not at all out of puff. He smiles at them



as he passes, and they regard him with disdain.

Oh well.

No harm done. Could be worse.

A small nip at Eric's neck. Hot ash falls down his shirt. One of them has flicked a stub at him. He hears laughter from behind him as he flicks away the grit.

"Oi, Grandad."

"Got any cash you could lend us?"

"Come on, Grandad, we know you've got your stash."

Eric does have his money, but they aren't getting any of it. He is heading on his way.

"Money, Grandad."

"Now."

They have walked around in front of him. One of them is holding something metallic, slid half-out of his pocket. They're mugging him, it seems. It's a shame, but there you go.

Eric smiles at them. His mind isn't as sharp as it used to be, but then it used to be so very sharp. Very sharp indeed. You would, as they say, cut yourself.

"You lads not got homes to go to?" asks Eric.

The tallest one - blue hoodie, bumfluff moustache, his waistband somewhere around his thighs - is more bone than skin. He sneers.

"Get him," he says, and slaps his cohorts forward. They advance slowly, knowing that their victim is going nowhere fast. One is wearing a baseball cap and shell suit. Manchester United. Interesting. The other is in heavy jogging bottoms and baggy sweater. It appears that the Nineties are back.

Ah well, thinks Eric.

Time to see if he still has it.

Time to see if sharpness hasn't been dulled.

"Eternity chamber," Eric says, and taps the ground twice with his stick.

A second passes. Then repetition. And then the ground around them shakes and trembles. Eric looks at the teenage boy nearest him. His hair says he wants to be in The Kinks or The Who or some nonsense. His hand is coming out of his pocket, fingers tightening, but his face says he doesn't want to do this. No matter. He won't. Not that he's too young, just that he's not ready. Eric has

seen better boys than him go to ground.

The ground ceases its movement.  
Another second passes.

A circle of perfunctory blackness appears beneath the boy's feet, and he disappears downwards before he can do any Wile. E. Coyote-style running on air. He cries out, but it is cut off as the pavement silently re-appears.

There is no trace of his presence anywhere anymore.

"What the fuck?"

The knives are out now. Fear will do that, Eric remembers.

"Eternity chamber," says Eric. He does feel quite bad about that, but needs must. "I am sorry. I would like to go home and sleep. Will you please let me past?"

"No fucking way."

They advance. Eric sighs.

"Second class. British Rail," he says, and jerks his stick across his body.

The two boys stop advancing.

The stick twitches again, and there is the sound of wrenching; of body and bone. The stick flicks, and spines buckle. Eric moves his stick in short,

straight movements. His face betrays no sign of guilt as in front of him twisted marionettes are snapped and folded into shape. Eric has an obstacle to remove, but he takes no pleasure from it.

In many ways it's like the old days. You never forget, it seems. Like riding a bicycle.

The screams are brief, and cut off. Echoes that don't echo.

Finished, Eric leans over on his stick to inspect his handywork. On the pavement in front of him are two shoulder bags, finished in blue and red respectively. One has a nice faux-leather finish to it, the other a polycotton weave. That'll catch on something and unravel, Eric imagines.

No matter.

Tomorrow he'll take them down to the market, see if he can get a good price for them.

Maybe swap them.

Eric adjusts his hat, tugging it forwards and then tipping it back.

A new hat, he thinks, and maybe a scarf.



*Andrew Taylor*

# *Outlines of Stacks*

By nine it's gone  
wait for a return  
to splinter  
through crystal

past the roses  
slowly decaying

Lights on by fourteen  
insufficient glow  
allows for tiredness  
to form

blinds of uselessness  
before orange sodium  
outlines of stacks

barely antenna  
barely real



# *Image Date May 2012*

So they clad in scaffold  
the terrace remains

full bloom of the square  
chestnut cooling shadow

Cognac companion  
chasing the coffee

back nine years to bracelets  
and boulevards

Blast of river sparkle of light  
and the wearing of hats

feeling season less irrelevant  
like a whispered verse

that leads into spoken chorus

R. A. Davis

# THE TROUBLE WITH BELLE AND SEBASTIAN

*On affliction, unrest,  
and heavy words,  
so lightly thrown.*

→In the blandly hetero-normative romcom *500 Days of Summer* (2009) the moralising narrator demonstrates the eponymous dreamgirl's indie credentials with the following quote from her high school yearbook:

"Color\* my life with the  
chaos of trouble"

\*(sic)

The screenwriters' wanton appropriation of The Smiths would have been criminal enough, but here they perpetrated a grosser negligence. In touching the chaos of Belle and Sebastian they meddled with forces they did not comprehend. As a result, though it went almost unnoticed, I am sure the world ended. For if there is one noun deployed with as much potency as consistency in the works of Belle and Sebastian, one word not to be conjured with, then that word is "trouble." That fatal lyric, from the song 'The Boy with the Arab Strap' and the album of the same name, is one of six lines across five songs on that record alone which mention trouble. While only eight of the album's twelve tracks can be firmly attributed to the band's chief songwriter, all those which speak of trouble are indeed written by Stuart Murdoch. The t-word, therefore, could be mistaken for his fondest motif.

Let us start at the beginning.

There is no sign of “trouble” on *Tigermilk*. On *If You’re Feeling Sinister* only one song names it: ‘Dylan in the Movies’, “you’re worth the trouble.” Even though the printed lyrics to ‘Seeing Other People’ say “we won’t get into trouble” the vocals on the record say “we won’t get in a muddle,” as though someone were keeping the word out. Troubles emerge as a distinct theme in the early, one might say quintessential, Belle & Sebastian song, ‘Belle & Sebastian’, from the first EP, *Dog On Wheels*. The song is a sugary lament for the love and innocence lost betwixt “Belle” (obviously) “and the boy, Sebastian.” It begins in the first person: “When I was young, you were the only fun in town,” and climaxes in the third. Our heroes are christened in the chorus. The storyteller is the after-school Sebastian addressing the wise Belle, reviewing the misadventures of the schoolboy he was, warning his younger self of his inevitable destiny and urging the boy within him, then and now, to behave himself: “Sebastian, for once, just leave your troubles home.”

If the music of Belle and Sebastian is a religion (some still maintain that it is not) trouble is karma, the fates, the gods. More practically, it is the intrusion of private emotions into the public realm: what we might share only with our closest friends, what we cannot help but impose, inflict, on

those we love.

No sense of proportion can diminish it. Across Murdoch’s lyrical canon every species of calamity is captured within the term. Relationships (“all the trouble we’ve had”), a blind girl’s mental health (“two hundred troubled teenagers to sit with her”), violence (“if there’s trouble, she’s got the moves”), even warfare. In the poignant tour-de-force ‘I Fought in a War’, a trench comrade seems to say, “keep your head down pal, there’s trouble plenty.” How can the same expression serve for teenage angst as well as armed conflict? In its first verse ‘I Fought in a War’ asks just that. If the songwriter were transported from his bedsit to the front line, would he still moan for his fickle sweetheart “making shells back home, for a steady boy to wear”? And of course he would, for the heart has no scale.

This ubiquitous word is what poets might call a template. We don’t have to go into the details. A vagueness persists, into which the listener may project their own concerns, a place to invest the hope that what is breaking their heart has broken the hearts of others, souls who survived and fashioned beauty and entertainment from the experience. In these verse formulae, the unknown quantity is t, signifying anything. Popular music is an elegant algebra.

In an older music trouble was

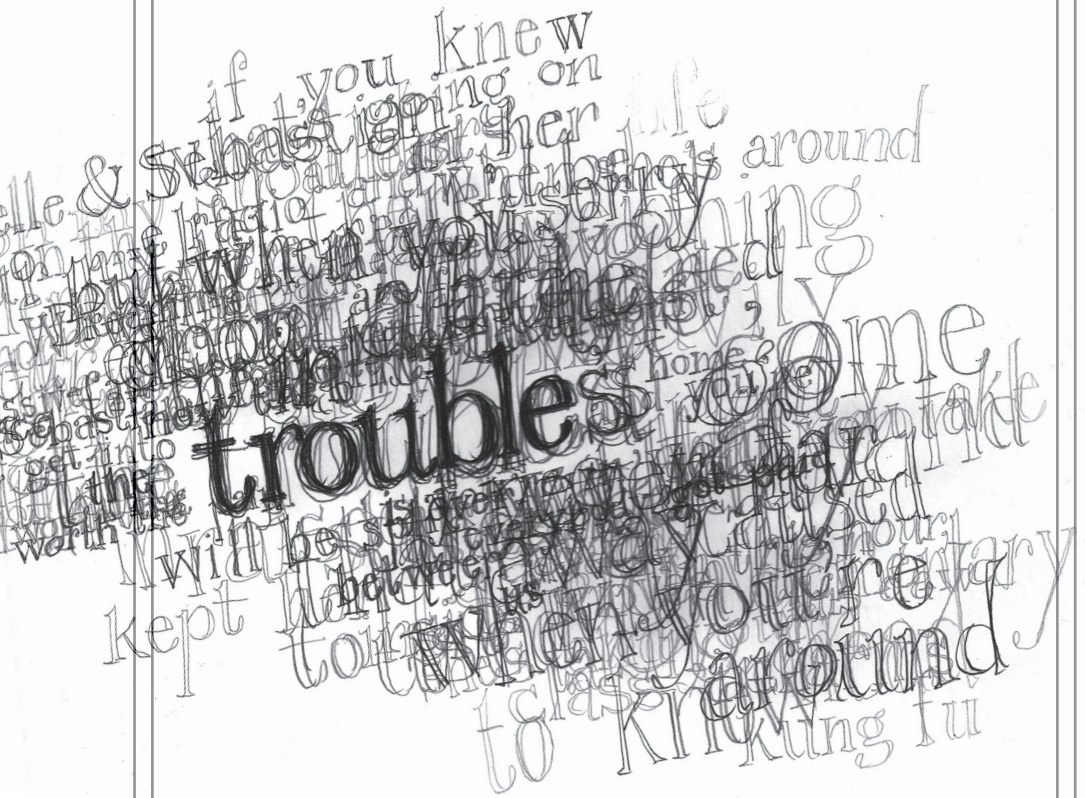
called tragedy. Another word for it, almost as old: blues. This is the ancient heartbeat of all modern music, an admission that no art exists without conflict, however subtle. With blues, the music is the trouble. It is the sound of the knowledge of good and evil. In the refrain that draws *The Boy With The Arab Strap* to its close, Stuart Murdoch calls it “The rollercoaster ride of all the trouble.” Liting on two chords, the cryptic verses of the ‘The Rollercoaster Ride’ are addressed to “people looking out the window at the city below”

(Stevie Jackson’s songs on the same album already have you thinking of planes, but flight is implied). We may presume that the city is Glasgow. The passengers “full of fun and sorrow” experience a dichotomy, while the singer down on earth delivers the story of a girl whom trouble chased indoors. Judy, recurring here from her “Dream of Horses” on the previous album, is described only in glimpses: she has mental health problems, as do most girls in Belle and Sebastian songs. “With her bow and arrow she’s a mastermind,” they say. The bow and arrow are symbols, Shakespeare’s “Slings and Arrows of outrageous Fortune.” It is a feature of life itself, even the jaggy line dashing across the heart

monitor shows life as a wave, peaks and troughs, the ups and downs of a rollercoaster.

Trouble kept Judy inside. In the printed lyrics to the ‘The Boy with the Arab Strap’, one will notice a line or two once again unvoiced in the recording. After “the odour of old prison food takes a long time to pass you by” follows the unsung phrase, “when you’ve been inside.” Murdoch also seems to have dropped the awkward addendum to the second verse “She accepts my confession.” Incarceration and freedom, silence and expression are the running themes of the album. To quote the desecrated verse in full:

What did you learn from your  
time in the solitary cell  
of your mind?



There was noises,  
distractions from  
anything good  
And the old prison food  
Colour my life with the chaos  
of trouble  
Cause anything's better than  
posh isolation

To the imagination under  
house arrest, a song is the signal  
for a jailbreak. Most of us form  
our preferences for music and  
literature in the bedroom of

young adulthood. Stories are the  
escape route out of the private  
world of adolescence into the  
public sphere. They carry with  
them a promise and a curse. The  
song, as Milan Kundera put it, is  
"a beautiful lie." It always will be.  
The music we live by betrays us  
most completely. It only releases  
us from innocence at a price: we  
must always live beyond the song  
while some ageless dream-self  
stays trapped in its amber.

'Slow Graffiti', perhaps Stuart

Murdoch's masterpiece, tells the tale of a doting Dorian Gray, interrogating the aging picture: "How about it? Show me please, how I will look in twenty years." Time's graffiti is written in the portrait, offering a key to the future "in every line and scar." The destiny painted in the song is rather mundane, domestic: "I stay in to defrost the fridge, now the kid has gone to bed," the drama about this girl is a comfort: "at least when she's around, the trouble's there." In its own way, this is a prophecy of the life beyond song, where we choose the trouble we deserve.

As much is guaranteed in 'Ease Your Feet In The Sea' (where once again we see variation between lyrics printed and sung): "The trouble that we used to know (we've come to know) will stay with us till we get old." Despite the song's title, paddling on the beach offers only a moment's respite in an otherwise angsty song.

One lyric promises an end. In another highlight from *The Boy With The Arab Strap*, relief comes to a dreaming writer in the form of recognition and success:

Now the trouble is over,  
everybody got paid  
Everybody is happy, they are  
glad that they came  
Then you go the place where  
you've finally found  
You can look at yourself,

sleep the clock around

To the artist at work, the chance to 'Sleep the Clock Around', to take twelve hours' deserved rest, would be the ultimate reward. Ultimate it would be, for the dead also sleep the clock around. The reward for all that dreaming is sleep.

If not music makers we are all at least dreamers of dreams. We make ourselves, as much as we can, out of music, out of words and pictures. And we are betrayed. We fashion ourselves in the image of our heroes, inheriting their memetic predisposition for the same trouble. You have a choice: get out as early as you can and don't have any ideas yourself, or forgive the liars the beauty of their lies.

The only hidden or bonus track to have featured on a Belle and Sebastian release is an odd little refrain, a fragment of a song, known to fans simply as, 'Songs for Children':

Belle & Sebastian on the  
radio  
Playing songs for children...  
And we're really sorry  
for all the trouble we've  
caused



# THE SPARKLE HORSE

Making most people  
happy since 2012



*Dic Edwards*

# *athens 2015*

icepoem #1

my wife left could no longer stand the smell of destitution/they  
have dogs patrolling and men with guns she got drunk on ouzo  
and's crossing the city (for a boat she said)/the austerity has  
produced a cholera you wake up guts ravaged and fine thoughts  
banished though I'd dreamed

of Melina Mercouri the *Never on a Sunday* star and minister  
in front of the Parthenon in white trench coat and rollneck  
sweater left arm saluting yellow flowers crushed in her right  
hand diva of the city a kind of substitute for missing Athena/  
culture is Greece's heavy industry she said

well that's the past now I can't write this cholera the bankers  
brought has de-industrialised me/cats scavenge from the lips  
of a litter bin polished in sad gesture for stasis brightly piebald  
creatures leaning back using their fat tails for balance as they  
sniff the refuse they're everywhere

halfway to heaven blanketing roofs like the corrugated iron  
of Monastiraki Station the skeleton of a wrecked café on the  
limestone plug of Lycabettus Hill/watching human beings  
challenge gravity is not a new sport/I pick an orange from a  
street tree bitter beyond words too far for me

anyway damaged wine-fried poet playing with Utopian  
blueprints constructing fabulous lands on long lost over-  
scribed sheets of paper/the comfortable people (there are still



some) of Kolonaki plant their own trees and hate these unclean  
fruit of the town and occasionally one of

the wealthy matrons caught in the rain without dark glasses  
can be singled out with their Chanel No.5 with its impression of  
a sleepy panther its rose jasmine and aldehydes perfect in the  
way a perfect body contains legs and arms and how bold they  
are even now in the endgame just like

those on the coast where impoverished families cluster in  
beach front bars before panoramas replete with the yachts of  
oligarchs and hedge fund insurance brokers/I wonder if she's  
dead/Greece is killed quartered by the short sellers anything  
can happen Athens is crying

howling the bombs have returned 17N born on the day in  
73 when Papodopoulos murdered the students and on the  
walls and hoardings tags slogans territorial claims for Mao  
Panathnaikos AEK Athens graffiti in Arabic calligraphy/cops  
screech around tight bends on the Acropolis

ascent and the peddlers with cheap guidebooks and concertinas  
of photographs scatter in the bushes to regroup and hope for  
another coach/I won't find her but somewhere in a gutter of the  
city I'll find a picture of her somewhere on the route she took  
though the streets that now

signal despair there is nothing else to walk there for except to  
feel at least the traces of that  
lost  
life

*Dic Edwards*

# paris

icepoem #9

i've become the illustration of all I'm not all that matters  
not makes the illustration of me and so i have come to Paris  
inchoate Paris the imagined illustrated city as in Toulouse  
Lautrec's millboard in pastel and dilute oil of Jane Avril in the  
entrance of The Moulin Rouge the substance lost

in the falling rain of the brush strokes and i am become rain  
and the picture behind the rain insubstantial erasable to be  
imagined like last night with the imagined comedienne from  
the Grand Guignol and the half mad pederast from the Russian  
ballet in porno-daze/ imagining the

first Roman banging his palisade stake into the ground the  
Lutetian air popping with the seeding of tomorrow i am  
imagined in these things/ London's clubs of the cultural  
aristocrats like a French revolution in reverse in which the  
artists and writers acquiesce in the face of the hedge

funders and short sellers who sustain them alienated me placed  
me outside/i want to be free imaginable to look out on La  
Chapelle end of the world before my beginning lost between  
the overhead Metro and the tracks of the Nord and Est railways  
and the big warehouses on

boulevard Ney along which the black whores and girls from  
Eastern Europe enchant the hard-cocked lorry drivers parked in  
side streets proletarian gauche Don Juans/ i want to be

impossible incomplete to be certain who i am to imagine Sartre  
at The Deux Magots and taste

the cheeses all the fucking cheeses the soupy eblochon and  
gamey Epoisses Brie slaverling over the edge of the marble slab  
innumerable varieties of goat cheeses blue with hard crusts or  
crowned with fresh herbs tiny pyramids of sharp flavoured logs  
of creaminess rich with the

democratic vice of complacency/ that's me imagined arm in arm  
with a carnal sweetheart with booze glow and woody odour of  
chestnuts the languid accordions long tongued exploring the  
over-ripe fig of the concupiscent Spanish girl my nervous hand  
sweating ice into hers who has

prepared for our marriage a trunk filled with sprigs of artificial  
cherries stalks of all the felt flowers she can find branches of  
ostrich plumes crests of peacock tailfeathers of Asiatic roosters  
and to complete the illustration entire pheasants hummingbirds  
and countless exotic birds

preserved in mid-flight/ and falling to lassitude and maybe  
despair in the Luxembourg gardens where the ghostly echoes  
of the afternoon children and nurses signal the incorporeality of  
illustration i recall forlornly Leonardo's twice painted Virgin of  
the Rocks one kept in London one

in the Louvre i saw that one yesterday and in a fever of  
insecurity imagine that while the Paris one offers shelter and  
protection for the kids and inhibited old it is only an illustration  
of what will come in the harsh light of the London where all is  
cold and certain and Leonardo's little

naked boys become tomb sculpture their nudity an illustration  
not of freedom but death the blue of the Virgin's cape carrying  
the invading age of ice

*Vivien Jones*

# ***SILENT VILLAGE***

## **Before the tale begins**

→ It had been a year. A year that started with little games of Hide and Seek, then stretched into anxiety, only made worse by discovering the children next door, across the lane, on the farms, were all playing too. And were all still hidden. And as the parents grew frantic, pacing the lanes and fields, looking in sheds and stables, their sleeping babies and toddlers joined their brothers and sisters in some inexplicable way. The minute the parents turned their backs a sudden chill fingered their spines and they knew when they looked, the cot would be empty. Only the fact that all the children were gone stopped an explosion of suspicion among the villagers. As it was, dark looks and thoughts focussed on the woodcutter and his wife who, alone in their world at the edge of the sprawling forest a mile from the stricken village, had their children safe.

As the days turned into weeks and the weeks into months, some villagers sought comfort in the church, others in the tavern, but all glared at the woodcutter's wife when she brought firewood to the market, and refused to buy from her.

What started with muttering amongst themselves moved to shouting as she passed, then barging her into the mud, scattering her load, and finally they threw stones. When she got back to her cottage, grazed and bloody, the woodcutter shouted at her for selling no wood and the children cried because they were hungry. The woodcutter cut huge bundles of firewood so his wife's back was bent under her load when she set off for the market, but the villagers were merciless. They beat her, scattered her load, called her 'witch' and 'devil', and drove her home to where her husband shouted and her children cried. In her misery she turned her face to the wall, faded away to a scrap of despair and, in a month, died. The children cried even louder.

One day a stranger came by the cottage, limping a little, asking to rest a while. The woodcutter was at work so only the children were there. Though they had been told not to leave the cottage they were intrigued by their visitor, who smiled and beckoned to them. She carried a purse-string bag which she opened and reached into, opening her palm to show a handful of bright sweets and barley sugars. So the children crept nearer, eyes wide open at the prospect of eating something other than bread and nettle soup. The stranger smiled and they went to her. When the woodcutter came home he found them all a chatter in the garden and though he tried to feel angry, he felt glad to see his children smile after so long, so he smiled too and bent to look at the stranger's ankle. Whilst he bound it she said softly, "What lovely children you have - I just love children."

Soon, a little crazy for lack of love and

a mother for the children, he married the stranger. These were happy days, there was cheese as well as bread and shining apples to eat and the excitement of the purse-string bag. On the wedding day the children stayed at home for fear of inflaming the villagers, happy to eat gingerbread from the purse-string bag which never seemed empty of sweet things. Those who came to the church to hurl insults and stones froze in their tracks when the woodcutter's new wife turned her gaze upon them. She said nothing, pushing her husband's protective arm away. She walked among them unmolested. One by one the villagers came to the woodcutter and asked if he had any firewood to sell them, all the while staring into her eyes. They even asked after the children. "The children are quite well, getting fat even," she answered for him.

So the months passed. In the village, work and domestic life went on minus the treble thrill of children's voices. The small acts of play, scratching the pigs' backs, jumping the puddles after rain, making flower chains, all were absent from the daily round. Work seemed heavier with no child to teach, no songs to pass on. Even the fertile women faded and the young men wrestled each other instead of buffing up their appearance for a chat with the young ladies. The priest told them they must be a wicked crowd to have drawn this curse upon themselves, but his child was gone too, so all he could do was offer up increasingly desperate prayers.

Some of the villagers began to play a private game, just a few at first, and those who did feeling a little guilty.



They persuaded a small woman among them to wear a missing child's clothes and to speak in a high voice, to appear suddenly among them, to play and sing and be welcomed with tears and hugs. They called her by the missing child's name and though the evening ended in tears - collapse almost for the child's mother - when she went home, they looked among themselves for other small people to persuade. Soon there were six substitutes shared among an increasing crowd of participants and the gatherings were happening every night. The priest was not happy with what he heard of these happenings but the sight of children, even at a distance, skipping and chasing in the lanes touched his heart also. One of the substitutes, a very tiny man who could seem about nine years old if you didn't look at his face too closely, decided he liked the attention and community he was having as a child much better than he liked his work as a lone rabbit-catcher. So he asked if any of the families would like to have him as their permanent child. Perhaps for a small sum, to compensate for the strain of perpetual pretence. He was the first. A month later, all six of the substitute

children were attached to the better-off families. They took to their new roles with enthusiasm, being loved and fed, so much better than they had as inconspicuous adults, so much so, that the tall, fat and less well-off villagers were roused to jealousy. They, who had to stick at their hard, repetitive tasks all the harder since the labour of the six was no longer available, ceased to see their lost children in the substitutes and saw only parasitical cheats and privileged owners. The priest didn't know which way to turn - his head told him the fakery was foolish but his

heart was warmed by the children's'

presence. He did not like division in the village.

In the forest, things also changed. The new step-mother seemed to stiffen and grow cool as the days passed. There were whole days when the purse-string bag did not appear and instead, tasks were allocated to the children as soon as the woodcutter left for work. The little girl was made to carry buckets of water from the spring to the cottage and scrub the stone floor. More than once the bucket somehow up-ended itself before she started, so she would have to make another trip to the spring. The little boy was made to stack wood on the dry side of the cottage,



hour after hour. Sometimes the stacks inexplicably fell down. His step-mother drew close from time to time and pinched his arm. "My, you are plump," she whispered. "Lovely!" The children did not smile so often. They were so tired they went to their beds before their father came home and were often too sleepy to hear what their stepmother whispered to him over supper.

Very soon, cheese and apples disappeared from the mealtimes, the bread was smaller, the soup weaker. When the woodcutter complained the stepmother pointed at the children's plates and rubbed her own stomach in hunger. Although the little girl collected nuts from the forest to share with her brother, and he raided the bird's nests for eggs, these things only lasted a short while and they knew not to go further into the forest for fear of being lost.

Then one morning, bored by bullying the children, their stepmother decided to go to market and torment the villagers instead. As she approached she could not believe her eyes, and she felt black acid in her stomach as she watched. Lined all along the bank of the stream were laughing children, playing with toy boats made with twigs and feathers whilst their smiling parents stood in a loose curve around them. Then she noticed a second slightly furtive curve of people a little further off. The evil in her sensed the envy in them. She moved closer and listened to their mutterings, measuring their potential for trouble. Now that she was closer she could see that they were not children. Weeks of pretending had turned some of them into compelling actors but close scrutiny revealed the

adult features, close listening reveal the strained falsetto voices, and unless they were careful, their movements took on the weight of the adults they were. She smiled. Then she whispered to one of the outer group. He whispered to the person nearest to him and she to the person next to her. At a nod from the stepmother the whole line raised its voice and began to run towards the children, running through the startled parents and reaching the children who had started to look around at the noise. They shrieked in oddly adult voices as they were seized and thrown into the stream. The parents, seeing what was happening, ran forward too, howling in outrage. Some leapt into the water to rescue a child, others grabbed the attackers, and there began a fearful struggle between the haves and have-nots that left them bloody and exhausted on the bank. The stepmother kept her distance and laughed, most of all enjoying the sight of the wet and miserable children who now no longer looked remotely like children, trying to drag themselves out of the mud.

She laughed all the way back to the cottage and, that night, whispered long and persuasively to the woodcutter. She showed him the larder whose shelves were empty but for a half a dry loaf and a smear of butter. He could see there was not enough for a meal for four people. He wept, but he agreed with his wife's suggestion. "They are delicious children - dear husband - someone will take them in." And because he could think of no other way to feed his children, he agreed to take them into the forest next day.



*Stephen Devereux*

# *Dounreay*

There's that blueness of water and air  
that knows the next stop is the arctic,  
a ruined castle that's just a few feet  
from the white surf, a derelict croft not far off  
and the bladderwrack and the ancient  
lichens and the din of seabirds that have  
been here since creation.

And when the castle has long fallen in  
and the rocks have washed away and the  
people gone and Scotland only a vague myth,  
the silent ticking will still be under the rocks,  
the alpha particles shooting at the waves,  
the windswept grass still counting  
down its half-life.



# *Tyre Dump*

Some are stacked up neatly in two piles as if  
someone tried to be tidy but had given up  
since no one would pay them more for it  
so the rest have been chucked all over the place

and some burst out from under worn tarpaulins  
where someone's tried to keep them out of  
the sun and the rain but god knows why.  
I try to count them- three, four hundred maybe.

I think of the roads they've travelled, the nights  
parked outside suburban villas, journeys to work,  
holidays abroad, jaunts through muddy lanes,  
squeezed by couples having sex on the back seat.

I climb up the two neat piles. Top of the world.  
Spray the petrol from there, flick the match.



tram

SIDELIGHTS

lights



*Mike Saunders*

# Family Self Portrait after Egon Schiele

When I smell basil I taste chocolate. I like the idea of water but not water itself. I sometimes confuse skin with things that aren't skin like coconut milk or semen or porcelain. When I say open I often mean closed. All my fridays are tuesdays. I like the idea of numbers but not numbers themselves. I like the shape of the number seven and of the number nine. I dislike the shape of eight but that is the only one apart from zero. I don't think it is natural to have a bodyful of bones I think they are like broken tent poles in the body.

Zero is attractive in other ways. Zero. Zero. I think arms look like the beams of a ship tortured and older and heavier than the thing that carries them. When I say open I often mean closed. I believe in suits. I believe suits are easier than bones. All my half nines are ten fifteens. You are covered from head to toe in skin. My mother told me what the world had told her. My mother gave me a mirror and said it was all there.

When I say open I often mean closed. Bodies are like food they always leave crumbs. Everything in light can be hidden if it needs to be. My arms hang like door handles. Skin is thinner than you think. If you knew how fragile and thin it was you would be scared most of the time I am sure of it. You would not hang so many things on your body. The hearts of people are more tender than the hearts of dogs or mice. I try to see the crumbs before they leave the body.

*[k j zero one]*

Rain water bath again.  
How many this week. This month.  
So much like the city; the taste, the colour.  
The bristle of glass over tarmac. I will one day  
clean the potholed streets as thoroughly  
as my blue dirt neck.  
Under lake water  
I can honestly say that my own voice  
betrays me.  
I go after you with measured trust -  
some days I don't even see it coming.

Steven Garrard

# ~~SEX AND GENDER, LOVE AND ROCKETS~~

*(or: choice and action  
in Hoppers and  
Palomar)*

→ It's perhaps a good thing that it is now a well-known cliché within comics writing to start an article by pointing out that comics are no longer just for children.

Yet, even though they have same cultural worth as the Holden Caulfield's, Jay Gatsby's or Dean Moriarty's of the world, only a minority have heard of Cerebus the Aardvark, Harvey Pekar, Jimmy Corrigan, Enid Coleslaw or Hopey Glass. Despite the fact that underground 'comix' were being produced over fifty years ago, that the alternative comics market has been going since the late seventies, and even that superhero books are no longer exclusively for children or the intellectually subnormal, many people misunderstand comics, regarding them as a genre rather than a medium.

It's perhaps nothing short of extraordinary, then, that the work of 'Los Bros Hernandez' is known at all, that it is so hugely influential in the alternative comics world, and that it has had enough of a dedicated readership to carry it across such a broad range of subjects, and over thirty years of publication.

Produced under the collective title *Love and Rockets* since 1981 (self published at first, later taken up by Fantagraphics), the original magazine was a collection of stories with two main continuous Worlds: Palomar and Hoppers.

Palomar, a fictional Central American hamlet, is the work of Gilbert Hernandez, while Hoppers is his brother Jaime's creation, based on Oxnard, California, the brothers' hometown, chronicling the adventures of two punks growing up on the West Coast during the exploding hardcore scene.

The comics defy genre, but generally speaking Hoppers started as a sci-fi comic with a backdrop of punks and gangbangers, while the Palomar stories could be described as epic-romantic-soap opera – hence, love and rockets. Both, however, quickly began to shed their genre beginnings, and became an exercise in character study, in creating a believable universe of 'real life' with a very occasional sprinkling of sci-fi or magical realism, although in the case of Hoppers this pretty much died out completely after the first few stories. Apart from writing about realistic and relatable characters, a simple but fairly revolutionary concept in comics during this period<sup>1</sup>, *Love and Rockets* tended to always

go one further, writing about things that other comic writers didn't dare touch; homosexuals, sexually abusive childhoods, pregnancy outside of marriage, strong female characters who weren't superheroes or over-the-top fetishistic totems of a supposed ideal of femininity. These characters challenged and continue to challenge preconceived notions about sexuality and gender, particularly in the context of the generally rather repressive comics world and against the background of the AIDs scare of 80s America.

The narrative structure of the work of both brothers is such that there are frequent flashbacks or cutaways to different time periods to explore and explain the origins of certain aspects of different characters, possible background on the reason behind the behaviour they display in the 'present,' and general context and exposition for the ongoing stories. These stories are in themselves extremely non-linear, jumping backwards and forwards in time to explain circumstances, or in some instances to avoid explaining them too explicitly.

This technique is of course fairly common to narrative fiction, but in the instance of *Love and Rockets* it provides a constant and vital fleshing out of the characters – something we seldom find in mainstream comics, besides from the constantly repeated and

1 *Underground comix, especially Harvey Pekar and Robert Crumb, had been doing so for a long time, but in the form of slice-of-life autobiographical stories, and in the case of Crumb these were often fairly outrageous depictions of drug trips, sex, racial parodies etc. – all over the top, in their own way, and not 'realistic.'*

revised origin stories of many superheroes. This may derive in part from the publication history of these comics; now collected in graphic novel format, they were originally published as part of magazines featuring all manner of other short stories or skits, and were never a simple continuation of two storylines split into two parts of the magazine. The collected editions attempt to put these stories back into some sort of order, in terms of chronological development of the character rather than the order that things would have happened in the characters lives, meaning that some aspect of this non-linearity is still maintained.

One such instance appears in *The Girl From H.O.P.P.E.R.S.* where Jaime shows us a flashback to a period in Maggie's life when she was the assistant of a "pro-solar mechanic", an extremely skilled technician-cum-celebrity figure who fixes robots, rockets and other spacecraft. Across twelve panels Jaime fits in a huge amount of action, using sharp, dynamic lines, an explosion, a giant lizard ("Aw look. It was just a baby one."), over the top sound effects ("FOOF!") and reminds the reader of the archetypal characters the main protagonists used to be – Duke, the angry boss; Rand Race, the extremely handsome love interest of Maggie, and Maggie herself – not, by any means, the figure of the stereotypical

woman-in-comics but still pictured as rather clumsy, ditzy, very much enamoured by Race. The last panel is the payoff, and a metafictional masterstroke, as present day Maggie is seen sitting on the bus and throwing the comic over her shoulder, exclaiming "Oh, yeah, right! I'm sure! RAZZZZ!"<sup>2</sup> This short story sums up in a very neat way the extremely fast progression of Jaime's Hopper stories, from sci-fi tinged with realism to realism where sci-fi elements exist but are very rarely mentioned until, by the time of much later collections like *Locas II*, they are almost completely absent as Jaime's focus changes to presenting real human characters.

However, it is not just the trappings of sci-fi genre fiction that Maggie is rejecting here, it is also the idea of herself as

2 *Hernandez, Jaime. The Girl From H.O.P.P.E.R.S.: A Love and Rockets Book. London: Titan Books, 2007. P. 207-208.*



a victim, or as any less capable than Rand Race, the celebrity mechanic she was in love with in the early stories. As another character, Izzy, puts it in the collection *Perla la Loca*, “Maggie is an excellent mechanic, but she continues to fuck up at any mechanic job because the back of her mind keeps telling her a young woman is not supposed to fix cars for a living.”<sup>3</sup> It’s an anxiety not without basis, as shown when her friend Penny Century convinces her to begin looking for a job again in *Perla la Loca*, telling her, “Damn it, Perla! You’re Maggie the Mechanic, remember?”<sup>4</sup> Subsequently turned down for two jobs, although she is not explicitly told that it is because she is a woman, Jamie reveals this to the reader. At one garage

3 *Hernandez, Jaime.* *Perla La Loca: A Love and Rockets Book.* London: Titan Books, 2008. P. 211.

4 *Hernandez, Jaime.* *Perla La Loca.* P. 168.

the boss is shown in his office, shouting at the assistant who brings him Maggie’s resume, “What the fucking hell is this god damn bullshit? You tell this fucking broad to go back to her god damn kitchen! This ain’t no god damn mother fucking tea party!”<sup>5</sup> while at another garage it is explained to her that she is “overqualified”, having worked with mechanic superstar Rand Race. Whether Maggie suspects that it is gender that has prevented her from securing these jobs is unclear; she simply repeats on both occasions that, had Rand Race been hiring, she would have got the job easily.

This is a recurring theme in *Love and Rockets*, and is one of its primary strengths: the ability of the central female characters to survive and thrive despite the opposition they face to their political, social or sexual choices and attitudes. The history of women in mainstream comics, and even in alternative and underground comix, has often been one of fetishisation of victimhood, particularly in the hands of male writers – just look at the S&M subtext of *Wonder Woman* who, comparatively speaking, is actually one of the stronger female figures in the mainstream. Women have often either been around to be kidnapped, or to be large-bosomed sexual fantasy figures

5 *Hernandez, Jaime.* *Perla La Loca.* P. 169.

rather than to be heroes in their own right.<sup>6</sup>

The work of Jaime Hernandez is different in that, for the most part, the women he portrays are not only at the centre of the story, they are also not simple sex-figures, nor are they even heroes in the traditional sense. They are simply humans, with all the flaws and psychological complexities that this implies.

Hopey Glass, Maggie's on-off lover and life-partner, is perhaps the closest the Hoppers timeline comes to a "heroic" character, a larger-than-life punk who never compromises on being an individual and living her own existence, even at times at the selfish expense of her loved ones and friends. The daughter of a Scotsman and a Colombian, Hopey and her brother are pushed by her overbearing and somewhat hysterical mother into becoming child stars. When this falls through Hopey develops an insularity and near crippling shyness as a child, which is further exacerbated by her body issues (she is sexually attracted to her curvaceous mother, admitting to keeping a

picture of her in her underwear as a child – she, by contrast, is very small and skinny), her sexuality and her lack of friends. Hopey is finally 'saved' by Terry Downe, an older punk lesbian who takes her under her wing and turns her into an extremely strong, extremely individualistic and occasionally monstrously unsympathetic individual. The pair begin a sexual relationship which is extremely open, seemingly without outward displays of jealousy (particularly on the part of Hopey) as the pair of them engage in different relationships with several different partners: Hopey with Terry Downe, Maggie with numerous male characters and later with the obnoxious Frogmouth, a loud and brash female stripper. Maggie also appears to have been neglected as a child, often being left to wander the streets alone whenever her father returned from working away from home, then left in the custody of her Aunt – who

6 *For more on women as victims used to push forward the development of male characters or enhance a storyline, see the popular critical 'Women in Refrigerators' phenomenon, so named by comic creator and critic Gail Simone after Green Lantern's returns home to find his girlfriend stuffed into a refrigerator.*

is a female wrestler – after her parents split up and move apart.

Jaime Hernandez's characters then can often be considered feminist portrayals in the strongest sense of feminism as the concept and assertion that females are equal; we are subjected to the mistakes and whims and triumphs of Maggie and Hopey and their supporting actors, and we believe in them because they seem real, and our equals, and not a fantasist's wet dream or victims to be saved by the male characters. All this against the backdrop of a medium where this sort of portrayal is far from the norm, and in the context of very male-dominated subcultures which are portrayed very vibrantly; lowrider Chicano vatos and hardcore punk. While punk is certainly a culture of subversion and rebellion, it is often male dominated (a simple survey of hardcore punk bands of the eighties, and even first wave

punk bands of the seventies will attest to this – there are very few female punk figures, outside of Patti Smith, Poly Styrene, Debbie Harry et al, and comparatively speaking these figures are not nearly as well known as The Ramones, Johnny Rotten, Sid Vicious etc.). In Jaime's stories Hopey and Maggie constantly come up against opposition for not looking feminine, for supposedly being lesbians (in Hopey's case this is largely accurate, although she sleeps with a few men in the course of the stories), for transgressing against their set roles in Mexican/American society, and indeed they suffer for it – often living in slum-like housing, working low grade jobs, being physically and verbally threatened. And yet they also come across as extremely strong, inspirational characters, who often use those people who are trying to use them, even when those people seem to be friends. Hopey lives with a number of different people in throughout the series, but usually leaves when she begins to feel too tied down, or when she begins to think there is a price for her host's hospitality, even when it is with another sympathetic character, like Izzy Ortiz or Terry Downe.

These characteristics seem to carry over to characters in the work of Gilbert. In an interview with Scion magazine he talks about growing up surrounded

by women (with the exception of his other brothers), and being inspired by his strong single mother. This perhaps partially explains the presence of so many positive female characters in *Love and Rockets* – however, and this is quite telling, Gilbert also explains that they wanted to have such characters because no one else seemed interested in portraying strong females in comics, saying:

The subject of using women in comic books wasn't that big a thing. Guys just weren't interested in developing women characters. Our dad died when we were young so it was just mom and six kids, so we pretty much saw how she dealt with the world, how she dealt with taking care of kids.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Hernandez, Gilbert. Interview by Scion Magazine. Youtube, 14 Nov. 2011. Web. 22 Sept. 2013.*

It was part of the punk attitude and aesthetic to do things differently; for Los Bros Hernandez at least, this seemed to entail portraying a diversity of sexuality and gender. In Gilbert's Palomar this really shines through, with several homosexual characters, as well as characters who have a more fluid approach to sexuality, who are willing to bend the rules with regards with whom they wish to have a relationship. For Luba, the matriarch of the village, to take lots of different sexual partners, only really get married late in life, and be completely averse to the stereotypical "mother" role – at periods abandoning her children, lamenting that their existence puts limits on her own life, and leaving a lot of the parenting to her rather put-upon cousin Ophelia – even this was fairly revolutionary. But considering that finding gay, lesbian and transgender characters in mainstream

comics is even harder than finding strong, non-stereotyped females – homosexuality was effectively banned under the Comics Code up until the end of the eighties – Gilbert goes one step further. In the context of a small Central American village the message almost seems to be that, outside of the trappings and politics of mainstream 80s and 90s America, this type of sexuality is completely natural and understandable. The only time these characters seem to face any type of prejudice is when they step into more mainstream society – for example Israel, an openly bisexual character who sometimes lives off the generosity of rich older men, is almost struck by a bottle from a passing car, the occupants of which shout out “Hey faggots! Suck on this!”<sup>8</sup> It is a running theme that there

8 *Hernandez, Gilbert.*

*Heartbreak Soup: A Love and Rockets Book. London: Titan Books, 2007. P. 275.*

are no cars in Palomar, and this is only a symptom of modern society, along with slowly fading Victorian Christian sensibilities and the looming threat of the spectre of AIDS. Israel is out at the time with Marcos, a transvestite character who has also had a relationship with (perhaps even more controversially) a character named Jesus, Israel’s school friend, who is at the time of the bottle throwing in an island prison where the prisoners openly engage in sexual acts with each other (stark contrast to the stereotype of homosexual activity in North American prisons, which is often portrayed as violently non-consensual).

Despite being such a huge issue in gay American society in the 80s, AIDS never seems to really effect the characters of Palomar who are gay, or otherwise engage in homosexual sex; it comes up when Jesus is released from prison, and begins

visiting (and screwing, in many cases) all of the people he left on the outside, as well as some who he knew inside who had been released before him, including Marco. Marco is now dressing as a man, the implication being that he was previously a transvestite prostitute when he states, "I had to get a regular job, Jesus. AIDS has changed everything."<sup>9</sup> The two have sex, seemingly without fear, again portraying a naturalistic slant to what would otherwise be portrayed as deviant, dangerous, or even in positive depictions as a 'big deal' in other mediums. It is a well worn cliché of soap operas that everyone sleeps with everyone else, that with a small cast where the impetus is to provide titillation this is almost inevitable – in his soap opera comic Gilbert simply

9 *Hernandez, Gilbert.*  
*Human Disastrophism: A Love and*  
*Rockets Book. London: Titan Books,*  
*2007. P. 125.*

takes this to its logical extreme, with everyone sleeping with literally everyone else, regardless of gender or apparent sexual affiliation. In many ways there are no gay characters in Palomar, because all of the characters seem to find it perfectly natural to engage in sex with whoever they feel like. This makes it, in some ways, more revolutionary than some of the exclusively gay comix of the counterrevolutionary underground of the sixties, or even of the few gay characters now featured in mainstream superhero magazines. In the first instance such publications were a protest and very much hinged on making a huge deal out of being gay, in the latter they were examples of damage limitation and positive PR – an attempt to whitewash the outrageous homophobia of completely banning homosexuality under the Comics Code, as such themes were deemed a negative

influence on children. In *Love and Rockets*, homosexuality is almost incidental; Gilbert's writing is so strong that these characters seem like real people, and as such they simply carry out whatever real acts impulse carries them towards. There is no grandstand moment where someone comes out, no earth-shattering scene where two men kiss, it is just part of healthy life, and is only portrayed as problematic in the world outside the village.

One of the greatest things about *Love and Rockets* is the relationship between the two main storylines of the two brothers, and the parallels that can be drawn between them. Gilbert's stories help us to see the necessity and vitality involved in protest, in questioning the role played by women and sexual minorities in mainstream society, and by showing that, in Palomar, such things are natural, Gilbert makes Jaime's characters all

the more heroic for standing up to the prejudices they face in a supposedly liberal democratic society. While the inhabitants of Palomar face material hardship they are much more obviously naturalistic, and this underscores the importance of standing up to oppression, even in the face of arguments which would dismiss gender and sexuality issues as trivial in the face of bigger issues of world poverty; while the world's poor are certainly worse off in some ways, Gilbert shows the beauty and simplicity of Central American life with such poetry that the reader can't help sometimes envying their lives over the lives of (relatively) material rich North Americans like Hopey and Maggie. The real message, if there is one, is that there is always injustice worth fighting, no matter what it is and how you choose to fight it.



*Charlie Saben Fox*

# ARTEMISIA

→ I started collecting secrets when I was just six years old. Now I have one for each of the heavenly virtues.

## *Temperantia*

On the Feast of Our Redeemer, Gesu Cristo, Falconetti the Torturer took me across the darkening Lido past Malamocco. Before we landed at Poveglia he covered my mouth with silk in case my childish cries awoke the souls of the departed, then lifted me onto the pale, fragmented shore of oyster shells and grasped my hand. We walked along a narrow thread of track between the fields of pestilence, our way lit by the distant fireworks at Saint Marks. Once we reached the abandoned graveyard Falconetti found the sepulchre amongst the tangled vines and prised away the lid. Then he gave me the box of glass, stabbed with a frenzy of rubies. I held the stone cold heart of





Veronese against my own

The Duke of Mantua, my husband, insists the Island must be haunted but I doubt it. I smile and acquiesce so he will never know I've been there. I did not encounter any ghosts, there were no revenants. The dead shall sleep 'til there is time no longer. They cannot see us and they do not judge.

### *Industria*

When Falconetti asked me about the pigments I told him to pray for guidance from the Blessed Virgin. And so the room is blue and white and black and gold. Blue is for Our Lady, Queen of Angels, Star of Infinite Seas. White is for the Rose of Mysteries, immaculate, inviolate, without sin. Black is for Our Lady of Perpetual Sorrows, Consoler of the Poor. Gold is for the Mediatrix of Salvation.

Above us the ceiling is a cerement of the heavens. The lapis lazuli came all the way from Eskazir in far off Persia. I watched as Falconetti mixed it with fresh blood and powdered copper to catch a cool intensity of blue. The walls are white with alabaster and ground opals, smooth

as milk. Beneath our feet the floor is black marquina, flecked with tiny jewels, more secret than Africa. The Stations of the Cross are framed within the purity of gold.

### *Patientia*

On this side of the palazzo there are seven deep set windows. All are draped with velvet, covert as midnight and brushed with constellations of golden stars. At Vespers the servants arrive unbidden to close the gilded shutters and light candles. We overlook San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti but we seldom go there. The Duke prefers to hear me say my Aves in the dark.

I have made a shrine to the statue of Santa Maria, Flower of Carmel. Falconetti carved her from the finest pavanazzo, then inflicted diamonds upon her until she almost wept real tears. He has taught me the power of line, the tyranny of perspective. Every day at Nones I kiss her mouth and ask for intercession. She has sapphires for September in her eyes. She loves me for my piety and my devotion. She loves me for my frailties and my



imperfections. My sacred book of hours lies forever open at her feet.

### *Humilitas*

When the bells of San Lazzaro chime for Matins I kneel in sweet atonement and say a Mea Culpa for my sins. I pray to Mary, Fountain of All Mercies, that my worldly pride and vanity may be subjugated. That she will protect me and be my armour against the desolation of hell. That I may be granted absolution. That I shall be given all I desire from the recitation of the rosary. That I shall have victory over my enemies.

She knows I keep the vows in my own fashion. The Duke is my confessor and I, the penitent. It is of my own volition that I display obedience and submit to the divine fervour of eternal grace.

### *Caritas*

The cabinet is ebony, inlaid with tracteries of gold. A bowl of turquoise glass, swooning with hyacinths and gentians, stands upon it. In the first drawer is a present from the Duke, an icon of the Assumption of the Virgin into Paradise. In the second is a reliquary of pearl, concealing the collarbone of Santa Sophia of Byzantium. The third is locked. It holds the instruments of my instruction. I am the keeper of the key to heaven and always keep it close against my skin. It is a sacrament of adoration.

The Duke says this is very civilised whenever he tears the glitter of fabric from my back. He'd tiger stripe and flay me. Impale me before laying bare my heart. It's wicked, wicked. There's no doubt of that. But who's the captive when I raise my hand?

### *Humanitas*

And the bed. Ah, the bed is a tower of ivory, carved and intricate and half concealed under a confusion of brocade. The mutinous coverlets are damask, embroidered to distraction and edged with champagne lace and crystals from Chantilly. The comforter is a golden shimmer of insurrection crushed with cream. White petals and a score of pillowshams run riot over the soft gleam of the unruly counterpane.

But draw back the disorder of the pale merino and the sheets are a chaste Alaska of glistening, untouched snow. Molten flesh is mortified upon them. Loose tongues transfixed into an ecstasy of supplication.

### *Castitas*

The Mirror of Justice hangs upon the furthest wall, burnished with shadows in the candlelight where I am seen and unseen. A rope of rosary, carnelian and pearl, caught round my neck reflects the brilliance of my pallor. A pattern of white roses decorates my hair. Shall I confess my numerous heresies? A catechism of transgressions to amuse the Duke?

I am a lily that thrives amongst the sharpest thorns. My eyes are liquid bright with foxglove. My flesh is scented with the perfume of the faithful. My lips are bloodied passion, crimson with the carmine I keep hidden in my ruby box. I am the Madonna of the Rose Garden. Falconetti told me and I believe it to be true.



*Tami Harmony Panik Vibberstoft*

# A QUESTION OF HONESTY →

EXT. EMPTY UNCULTIVATED FIELD – DAY

An empty, uncultivated field with low, dry wild vegetation without any sign of civilization in the background. Two almost identical figures appear from opposite sides of the field, walking steadily, slightly hunched, towards each other. The sun is shining from a clear blue sky, casting hard shadows in their faces. They keep walking at the same pace until there are only a few centimeters between their noses. They stop abruptly, seemingly startled by the sudden obstacle. A penetrating stare follows for several minutes. They hold their breaths together with THE READER. M.O.S.

ALAN SMITHEE, 20s, a skeletal man in a cheap suit with a thin dark tie, suddenly appears a few meters from the girls. He grabs an alcowipe from his inner pocket and cleanses his hands thoroughly and routinely. When finished, he picks his cigarettes from the pocket in his pants and lights one. From his other trouser

pocket he finds a small book, which he starts reading.

**ALAN SMITHEE**

*(Turning his attention to the girls, mumbling)*

Welcome.

When THE READER finally gives up and resumes breathing, TAMI, 20s, tall, skinny, with an intimidating stare, takes the word.

**TAMI**

*(Determined)*

Welcome.

ALAN SMITHEE disappears. Tami is still short of breath. The other girl, CECILIE, 20s, tall, skinny, with tired eyes and always slightly open mouth, looks expectantly back at her. TAMI breaks eye contact and stares directly back at the Reader to acknowledge his presence, and feed his own awareness of it.

**TAMI**

*(Addressing both the Reader and Cecilie)*

You came here voluntarily. These are the rules. Don't expect anything. Only experience. Experiment. This is no prison and you are free to leave at any desired moment, but I request you to leave in silence and stay in your role until you are off-stage. Curiosity is a completely accepted motivation for your participation, but it won't keep you busy for long. I sincerely hope you will soon be activating yourself as an essential part of the play.

**INT. INSTITUTIONAL MEETING ROOM – DAY**

In a small, squared room without windows TAMI and ALAN SMITHEE are seated at a round table. The table, complete with at least 6 chairs, fills the whole room. The floor is roughly carpeted. A red lamp above the table is the only light source, and the smoke from Alan Smithee's continuous smoking slowly hovers towards the inside of the lamp.

**ALAN SMITHEE**

*(While blowing out smoke)*

Why are you here alone?

**TAMI**

I had a feeling this was only concerning us. *(Stares at the wall for a moment before she continues)* I'm sometimes afraid to come across too vague. That it's too easy to manipulate the direction of my answers and suddenly I find myself saying things I don't even agree with, because I realize I'm lured into a dead end.

**ALAN SMITHEE**

*(Addressing the Reader)*

Would you mind leaving us alone for a moment? I don't think this concerns you to be honest. *(Returning to Tami)* I recommend you forget your feelings for a moment. I left you with a great responsibility, and yes, I promised you I wouldn't have any expectations so that you wouldn't be able to disappoint me. I'm not disappointed. Of course I am going to stick to this. But your responsibility is however just as important. You have to nourish and



cultivate what you have launched.

Leaving it now I would classify as destruction. You can't let them know the extent of this experiment. I trusted you when you promised me to win their trust.

If you don't have the guts to do this, I don't know who has.

The door opens discretely from the outside as THE READER lets CECILIE in. ALAN SMITHEE looks suspiciously at her, but eventually he offers her his hand.

**ALAN SMITHEE**

I'm Alan Smithee.

**CECILIE**

*(Grabbing and shaking Alan Smithee's hand)*

I'm Cecilie.

**ALAN SMITHEE**

Please take a seat.

CECILIE takes a seat across from TAMI. CECILIE seems confident but she moves silently and speaks with an almost whispering voice. TAMI stares at the door, which THE READER left ajar. A vague strip of light cuts through the room from the opening and the subtle sound of mumbling voices and restless footsteps is slightly heard in the background. ALAN SMITHEE cleanses his hands with an alcowipe from his inner pocket, and lights a new cigarette. He seems unaffected by the tension between the girls and the sound from outside.

**CECILIE**

*(Taking a deep breath)*

I can help you. But you need to let me. I

know how to win the trust. I know exactly how to make them comfortable. You know what they say about Libras. I'm a pleaser. They give me everything at once, no need to ask for it. They feel invited. Non verbally. And I let them fill me up. I'm bursting!

THE READER furrows his brows. TAMI leans back and crosses her arms.

**TAMI**

You have to be ready to play a role in a play that you are never going to watch. Do you realize this?

**CECILIE**

I do. I am. I need a system to handle their openness. I need to get rid of my responsibility.

#### **INT. BASEMENT APARTMENT – EVENING**

TAMI and CECILIE are seated in the window frame in a messy room with a low ceiling and too much furniture. They are too tall to sit upright, bending their necks to fit their heads under the ceiling. The sun is setting behind the light blue concrete blocks, bathing the room in orange light.

**CECILIE**

*(After having repeated and shaped the question endlessly in her mind)*

Can you feel any difference or is it a symbol of a fantasy you have?

**TAMI**

There are at least six combination options of my name. You, on the other hand, exist only in one defined version.

Almost unnoticeable and secretly proudly, a small smile appears on CECILIE'S mouth, only to disappear immediately as TAMI continues.

**TAMI**

This leaves my existence in constant transformation and yours in a confined state.

**CECILIE**

*(Squinting demonstratively)*

The letters in our passports can't possibly define the difference between us.

The sun disappears and leaves the room in almost complete darkness. Outside the sky is deep blue with black intersectioning lines. Inside the room the shining eyes are the only visible sign of their presence.

**INT. INSTITUTIONAL MEETING ROOM – DAY**

TAMI, CECILIE and ALAN SMITHEE are seated around the table.

**CECILIE**

I would like you to meet someone.

ALAN SMITHEE nods to THE READER, who is peeking in from outside. THE READER opens the door and another two young, tall, skinny girls step inside. The first one, PANIK, who is dressed in a full body suit and whose eyes are beautifully painted with hard, black make-up takes a seat next to ALAN SMITHEE. She turns her head towards him and uses her eyes to give him a hint of a smile, while her mouth stays unchanged.

**PANIK**

(As she reaches out to Tami across the table)  
Panik.

HARMONY, who is dressed in pajama-like clothes and has her long, untidy hair hanging loose, takes a seat next to PANIK. PANIK nods towards HARMONY and looks back at TAMI.

**PANIK**

And Harmony. And you are Tami.

**TAMI**

*(Addressing Alan Smithee)*

What is this? I thought we had an agreement, and yes, I was looking for help, but I believe I have enough in Cecilie...

THE READER quickly closes the door. The slam interrupts Tami, and makes it possible for Panik to gain back the voice.

**PANIK**

I understand your frustration and confusion. But you should know better. We are only a creation of your own and will act accordingly. We are conditions, described by you.

**HARMONY**

*(Slowly and monotonously)*  
The different phases of your roller coasters.

**EXT. THE ROOF OF A SHOPPING MALL – EVENING**

The city is covered with blue light as the sun is about to set on a normal shopping

day in a medium sized city. The roof is a big, black square with scattered puddles of water, and the city below is flickering with colorful signs and lamps. TAMI and PANIK exit the building and step onto the roof terrace. PANIK puts one of her shoes in the door opening behind them, to prevent the door from locking. They walk towards the rail in silence. They seem joyful, maybe even in love.

**PANIK**

You know perfectly well what's going to happen, right?

THE READER peeks in from the door to the shopping mall.

**PANIK**

I've got something to tell you.

PANIK looks long and intensively at TAMI, who responds with an even more breathtakingly determinative glance. THE READER moves an inch in order to sit more comfortably, but TAMI hears this, breaks the stare and turns towards him. THE READER timidly pulls himself back into the darkness of the building, letting the door smack behind him. TAMI gasps slightly, but turns her attention back to PANIK with a questioning look in her face.

**PANIK**

Do you really care about me? It's a question of honesty.

**INT. INSTITUTIONAL MEETING ROOM – DAY**

ALAN SMITHEE, TAMI, CECILIE, HARMONY and PANIK are all seated around the table

in the meeting room, which is completely filled with smoke. Time seems to freeze and the smoke that flows between the ashtray and the lamp solidifies and becomes a hard, opaque, grey sculpture. No one blinks nor breathes. TAMI leans slowly forward and blows the sculpture into thick, white smoke that covers everything in the room. Everything becomes white. Only a tiny strip of light, which streams in from the door, gives a feeling of three-dimensionality to the space.

**ALAN SMITHEE**

*(Calls loudly towards the Reader from somewhere in the smoke)*

Wouldn't it be equitable of you to contribute with some visibility for once?



*Arundati Dandapani*

# *Hey Fatboy*

although you weigh little—and you really do weigh little I am told

I am not a muscular man  
but boys are weak and lovely.  
cos babe  
if you're not the cook,  
you can't give me permission to eat!  
Every diet has its day –  
goodnight love  
I hate menu cards  
and drumming nails the width of your waist on people's doors  
seeking friendship –  
and nutrition.  
Men hate will, and  
girls hate ill-will.  
And beasts look better than your mother.  
Oh baby, oh baby,  
better to live with longing  
than die with disgust  
if elegance is dead,  
don't bring me ghosts.

When i want chowmein.



# *Relieving Orders at Mealtimes:*

Relieving orders at mealtimes:

Barf! but do not bite.

Sunk in the crook of his L bow, I waddled in his cures,  
tilting up to

that lazy smile, meandering gloves,

The hook of whose lazer bright tools reconstructed my  
O with acid washes, plush new flooring, grazing past  
wisdom, molars, premolars, all 33, one extra deformity  
since birth. The future is scarce, he warns

treading old ground, even as he rollicks in the seventh  
wonder of my body, the origin of every good morning.  
Sometimes the world atlas swims in it.

There is nothing more artificial than a nano composite  
for breakfast and

Slicing apples with a butterknife.

## contri- butors

→ Arundati Dandapani is editor at an international academic publisher by day, and under-the-wheels in love with the written, spoken or eaten word, forever groping new fiction and soul.

→ Stephen Devereux is a poet, essayist, artist and short story writer. He grew up in the country but lives in cities. The contrast between these landscapes is evident in his work.

→ Tawny Kerr: mistress of pop, purveyor of fine doodles, erstwhile ukulelist

→ Vivien Jones loves digging under fairy tales. [www.vivienjones.info](http://www.vivienjones.info)

→ Sophie Casimira Kromholz: art historian and storyteller. Especially likes bats, self-destructive art, and motown. Makes killer guacamole.

→ Steven Garrard likes comics, video games, film, music, art, theatre, 'serious' literature and ephemeralia. He was raised by these things, and his personage is a composite of the best and worst of them.

→ Charlie Saben Fox lives in Edinburgh. She is the Programme Director for Disability History Scotland and is currently studying for an MA in Creative Writing at Napier University.

→ Tami Vibberstoft is a Danish fine art student, singer, globetrotter, composer, poet, performance artist, video artist and photographer living in the Netherlands.

→ Suky Goodfellow is puzzled as to why they don't make an own brand version of Maltesers. They could be called Faltsetesers and the tag line would be: "The cheaper way to enjoy chocolate". She is currently hunting the perfect teapot in the charity shops of Edinburgh.

→ Nadine Khatib is a cross-border graphic designer/illustrator, with a home in Scotland, The Netherlands, Lebanon and Canada. Not always in that order.

→ Andrew Taylor is a Liverpool poet and co-editor of *erbacce* and *M58* and the small press *erbacce-press*. Poems have recently appeared in *Poetry Wales*, *The Red Ceilings* and *Push*. He lectures at Nottingham Trent University. [www.andrewtaylorpoetry.com](http://www.andrewtaylorpoetry.com)

→ Mike Saunders has been published in several magazines, including *Lighthouse* and *Poetry Review*. He has recently moved to Edinburgh. So far it is not as cold as everyone said it would be. The sun shines after midnight in the summer.

→ Dic Edwards has been primarily a playwright, librettist and published poet – his collection *Walt Whitman and other poems* appeared in 2008 (Oberon Books Ltd, London & New York).

→ Andrew Blair is a freelance liar. His writing can be found in *New Writing Dundee*, *Blind Poetics* and Edinburgh open mic nights. He also writes about Doctor Who for Den of Geek.



