Enigma

Contents * Issue 3 * Autumn 2009

Editor’s Note
Harvest
Ultrasound/Out of Context
What You see is There
The Kerryman
Reflections
At Grandma Teri’s House
Rock Pools
Granite
I am Alone
Acquisition and Security
Paperdolls and other Themes
Eleven (playscript)
Faces
The Daily Saint
Nikodje’s Lap of Honour
Level Four (response to Writers of Tomorrow)
Writers of Tommorow
What’s Your Story?
Spoken from the Art Open Mic Review and Photos
Submission Guidelines
The Charity Behind the Magazine
Behind the Door
Welcome to the first full year of Enigma Magazine since it was published online on the 17th October! It’s evolved so much from a simple idea of a literary platform for everyone, a plan on paper by Duncan Mayall of CAARE from a fully fledged publication in both print and online. I’d like to thank Denis Vaughan and Rob Burlison from CAARE, Brandi Travis and Jo Cohen for editorial consultancy and distribution. I have felt so privileged to take this idea on board and to produce a true community effort of so many backgrounds, including our recent open mic event Spoken from the Art, which was held on the 2nd September. It was great to see such a variety of faces, voices and performances, and you can read the review by Michelle Johnson and see some of the pictures inside. I’d also like to thank Linda Ravenswood with her beautiful cover design for the annual issue’s cover. I like to think of it as that spark of inspiration we’re hit with, ideas that lie dormant and spring forth wherever we are, without warning or introduction. It can be love at first sight, the only way I can imagine that it’s possible!

This issue also deals with the Writers of Tomorrow; how they are seen and how they present themselves now with technology and self publishing on the rise amidst the fears of recession and slow economic growth. Andy Farmer provides us with a strong argument for Arts in Education and a reason for creativity to develop and flourish throughout life. As for Enigma Magazine, we hope to continue providing you all with a platform to write, read, perform and listen online and in print, and to extend our reach ever further. There has been amazing writing every issue and especially in this edition, as we have writers all over the world coming to celebrate and share work and with such bold and strong pieces from everyone. There’s a nice slice of experimental writing in response to our two features as well that I simply had to involve!

I feel so proud writing this now and would like to thank you all, from those who have read us from the very start, to those who have only started to hear about us now! Feel free to take our survey and to provide feedback when you can. It’s been a steep learning curve for me, and has produced stressful yet proud moments. I’d like to continue growing and growing, so this would be extremely useful!

Thank you for sticking with Enigma Magazine! The next issue will be released in Jan 2010, so get writing! Be sure to send us your New Writing Year’s Resolutions, and we’ll publish them in the magazine so that you can share your progress with everyone!

Please send submissions, suggestions and/or questions to editor@enigmacw.co.uk. Information is also available on the website at www.enigmacw.co.uk.

Kind regards,
Susan Gray
Editor of Enigma Magazine
www.enigmacw.co.uk
HARVEST

He’d stay up all night drying
And we’d visit, surprise him with treats,
Flasks of coffee; chocolate butterfly cakes
With hundreds and thousands littering the top.

He showed us the grain stored in the barn,
In piles taller than him.
They reminded me of stories
About pharaohs and brothers and famine.
I would push my arms into the golden heads,
Wave them back and forth; giggle as they tickled
The skin between my fingers.

After the coffee was cold and the moths
Were too tired to collect around the lamp
He’d kiss mum, promise to be home soon.
We always saw him in the morning
From the school bus window.

He sat inside that green monster
Marking rows in the field.
Steadily beheading the shaking grass.

SL/HT/01
ULTRASOUND

U ttering your name or

L ungs hurt from screaming it out loud

T ense while waiting. Overwhelmed

R ationality with esoteric bound

A m I to cross the ocean -

S adness and tears. I’m drowned

O ut of your favor, out of emotions,

U seless as a dolphin I lay down

... on the empty shore

N ot a call answered... Exposure,

D ying - Thrown at the sands and the sun.

EW/US/01
OUT OF THE CONTEXT

Oh, you who
Usually are so
Terrible in making decisions

Out of the blue
For the first time

Took one and I
Hope you stick to the
Echoing

Consequences.

On the other hand
Never dare

To compare me with that
emotionally unstable

Xerox-copy of me,

That wannabe;
that you call now your baby.

EW/OC/02
Minky loved buildings more than people. She claimed something grew between people and objects and Sid pictured this substance as a type of crud, like the crud the design champion said the builders reamed from the wrinkles in the oak block floors in the art college.

“This design champion,’ Minky said to Sid while the design champion was off sorting out the hard hats, “describe his looks.”

“Adequate,” Sid said.

“Describe, not measure. What’s his face like when he talks?”

“When he said crud, he pouted like Mick Jagger. He has pouty energy.”

A ripple of mockery or regret, he didn’t know which, passed across her face.

“Stop staring at my face.”

“I’m not,” said Sid. He was, though.

“Is he bleeding edge?” said Minky

“The bloodiest” Sid said.

The city council’s bleeding edge design champion was giving Sid and Minky a tour of the half-refurbished art college so that Minky could write an article, and Sid was being Minky’s eyes. He wasn’t doing very well. He described the high windows sunk into the walls, but couldn’t remember the term for the shape of the recesses. He told her about the wooden archways with carved leaves, but didn’t know what kind of leaf. He told her about the shiny bricks that looked like tiles.

‘Yes, yes, yes,’ she said. “Vitreous coated.”
A good description of masonry could make Minky’s face light up like love, but Sid could never find the words, and it was sad to watch her tire and retreat as she grew bored with his efforts. Since she lost her sight, she didn’t seem any longer to be able to disguise the feelings that passed across her face and patches of colour rippled under her skin like a squid.

They stopped in a narrow curving corridor with light streaming in from a door at the far end. Leprous paint was peeling off the walls like birch skin.

“This is my favourite space,” the design champion said. His voice was soft
and seemed to float like dandelion down. “Look at the way it curves. There are no straight lines in nature.”

Sid felt trapped in a broken-off vein of the building, going nowhere and connected to nothing, closing in on him like a Batman cliff-hanger.

“Buildings thwart us constantly” the design champion cooed, “they are at war with time and always lose. Yet some buildings, like this one, seem to flow with time, flow with us. Come out here.” They followed him into the corridor, “and feel this,” and he took Minky’s hands and pressed them against a wall cupboard. “To understand buildings, you must collide with them.”

Minky ran her fingers all over the cupboard - the locks, the knobs, the hinges, and her eyes went googly as she processed the shapes.

“That cupboard is listed,’ the design champion had explained. “It’s a listed cupboard.”

Sid wasn’t thinking about the listed cupboard. He was thinking about the book he’d been reading to Minky the night before. He read to her every night. Sometimes estoteric volumes about urban design: ‘Bodies are absent in architecture, but they remain architecture’s unspoken condition,’ with Minky sighing, ‘that’s so true, don’t you agree, Sid?’ But for relaxation it was chick lit - fat paperbacks with pink, embossed covers and script font titles as if it was a diary scribbled into an exercise book.

He had become interested in the adventures of Rosie, the heroine of Rosie Grows, and instead of noting the architectural points of interest in the art college, he was wondering whether the laconic carpenter Rosie met at the photography class would be at the end of term party. Rosie was funny and sad and made good jokes and got drunk and deserved that something good should happen to her. He couldn’t believe how the men in the book had lied and wondered whether he, Sid, was failing as a man in the way he devoted himself to making Minky happy.

A few weeks after she’d lost her sight, they went into the town centre and Minky asked Sid to describe everything. He told her about a woman in tight trousers moving naked manikins about, but she interrupted.

“Tell me about things I would have noticed.”

It wasn’t easy. Minky wanted to know about the clothes people wore, the hairstyles, the prices of things in windows, the colours of leaves, how
WHAT YOU SEE IS THERE

people looked at each other, what litter could be seen, the expressions on shopkeeper’s faces, whether people looked happy or not.

He had to read magazines to her too.


“Flip through the pages from the back. Give me headlines and pictures. For Christ’s sake Sid, all these years I have been your aerial, a sat-nav through the emotional world. I had no idea how lacking in receptors you were. Try harder, Sid, please. What I see is what you let me see.” Room followed room followed room and there were few features of interest. Here was the slate staircase, which bore the scoops, bevels, indentations of a thousand footsteps. Here the famous wrought iron stair gate that divided the art school from the rest of the building, the words School of Art, spelled out in the metal. ‘You don’t say,’ said Minky. She was ravenous for descriptions of every physical space but there were so many things in Sid’s field of vision he couldn’t decide what to say. There was no end to seeing. If we do nothing else, we see. Like in Clockwork Orange where they pin your eyelids back.

In the old art room was a set of lockable pigeon holes, long slim doors covering deep recesses into the wall where the art students used to store portfolios. “Trudy’s glass,” said one, “be careful.” Others things had been scribbled on the wall: Revolution is the festival of the oppressed and someone had drawn an arrow pointing to this saying rubbish, evolution is the engine of the hog. A dartboard had been drawn on one wall with life options written in the score areas - Dole, go to poly, heroin, married with kids, religious freak, insanity. On a cardboard box was scribbled a chart of the builder’s daily lives showing various mishaps.

“Are you reading, Sid? I can hear you reading.”

Having exhausted the interior of the building the design champion took the lift downstairs to fetch the key to the tasting garden and asked them to wait.

“Does he have nice clothes?” Minky asked, when he was out of earshot.

“He’s in a high viz jacket like us.”

“You like saying that word, don’t you? High viz. Makes you feel manly.”
“High viz. High viz.”

Two builders walked by carrying a roll of cable and one nodded hello at Sid.

“I didn’t know you had so little to say about buildings.” Minky said. “But I’ve noticed you do like to say that you’d like to rip it all out and start again. You often say that.”

“I like the idea.”

“You do, don’t you? Well it’s more subtle than that. It’s all about layers, these refurbishments. An old building is like a palimpsest. Say palimpsest, Sid.”

‘You know I won’t say that word. It’s a sissy word. Makes my lips purse up.’

“What would Rosie out of Rosie Grows do if she met the pouty, bleeding-edge design champion and he said crud to her?” Minky said, “with pouty energy?”

“She’d be struck by lust in the lift, no doubt.”

“If that happened, would you provide me with an audio description?”

“Sure.”

“What are his eyes like?”

“Kind of soulful. Well, not so much soulful as desperate to be soulful.”

“Do you like him?”

There was a leaping, lucky fire in the design champion that Sid envied. The way the man tamped it all down under a surface of cool, sleepy authority, speaking in a hissy whisper so you had to lean in; Sid felt like he was being gassed. He hated him.

“I’m starting to like him,” Sid said.

“I can’t tell whether you like people anymore. I can’t see if you are rolling your eyes. Could we agree on a sound? Like this…” she purred her tongue.

The lift returned, but stopped below them, between the floors, and they
heard the design champion’s dandelion down voice telling someone he was stuck and agreeing that twenty minutes would be fine.

“Hi there. We’ll wait with you,” Sid called down. “Don’t worry.”

“I’m fine,” the design champion said. “I’m not afraid of lifts. I’m not claustrophobic.”

The phrases sounded odd, like a doll repeating pre-recorded statements.

Sid peered down into the lift car. The design champion was lying in the corner folded up like an unborn animal, his thumb in his mouth, his body quivering. Sid called out to him again and the thumb came out of this mouth and he said in a confident tone, “I’m not afraid of lifts. I’m not claustrophobic,” then the thumb went back in again and he squeezed his eyes together tightly and rocked. The design champion stayed in that position until the engineer arrived and when the doors slid apart he was standing confident and erect with a big smile on his face, and he shook Minky’s hand and asked her, in his dandelion down voice, if she felt she had enough material for her article and she replied that she had, colours moving about in her face.

They walked down the road towards the town.

“I was thinking,’ Minky said, ‘that if we’d met after I’d become blind, I might not have fallen in love with you. It frightens me, Sid. I don’t know what goes on in your mind.”

“Neither do I.”

“You should rip it all out and start again.”

“If it was an option, I would.”

They reached the shops. He saw a pair of sherbet-headed budgies bobbing about in a pet shop window, a dog wearing a Manchester United strip sitting in a special dog pram, a figure dressed as Bertie Bassett picking up flyers he’d spilled on the street and a tiny old wizened man in a baseball hat that read, I give guaranteed satisfaction. In the window of McDonalds, a woman stole a chip when a child’s back was turned.

“What can you see?”

“There’s a planning application tied to a lamppost. Want to know what it
WHAT YOU SEE IS THERE

says?”

“Not bothered,” she said. “I love you, Sid”

“Palimpsest,” he said.

DG/03/WS
The woman sat across from me
Reading a right-on book
With a tolerant face and liberal clothes
When the seat next to her shook

She looked with distaste
Out the corner of her eye
With barely concealed horror
She contemplated a dirty,
Beer-stained labourer
Reading his paper.

She moved in her seat
And shifted her legs
Unable to concentrate
She closed her book
And her eyes read the title
Of his offensive newspaper:
“The Kerryman.”

She almost seemed to faint
Or vomit or shift;
So great her distaste of this
Fat, beer-swilling Irishman.
Her shaky hands reopened
Her right-on book
And she shut him out of
Her clever world.
Oblivious he read his paper, alone.

Today, waiting for a tube at Archway
I saw a dirty mouse
Weave between the tracks
It looked desperately for human waste
Its eager eyes blind, but nose sensitive;
THE KERRYMAN

Ears listened for the hum of the train
Though I knew there was none
Until Morden: Via Bank: 12 Minutes.
The mouse had been there forever,
As alone as the Kerryman.

MP/KM/01
REFLECTIONS

Just for a little while
I shall sit here
Quite still.
I have shut off the radio and closed my book;
The words of others shall not distract me now.
I shall go to the still waters
That lie in the pit of my stomach
Right at the core,
Quite still and quite alone.
I shall observe the city from my window.

I become a businessman in a hurry
Too busy to notice the seagull he almost crashes into,
I become the seagull hungry for fish
Gliding over rooftops towards the river,
I become the river
Ever moving shape shifting
An artery pumping life giving blood to
The heart of the city.

When I sit here
Still and alone,
I can hear my own heart beating.
Ba dum. Ba Dum.
BA DUM.
It gets louder and louder
Until I become a beating drum
no more thoughts just a pulsing rhythm,

It seems we spend so much time making noise
So we do not have to listen to this sound,
Just for a little while longer
I shall sit here.

ND/R/01
AT GRANDMA TERI'S HOUSE

Grandma slowly steps down
The yellow stairs,
Her left hand on the banister,
Her right twitching to a silent beat.
Her fading red hair matches
The paint on her fingernails—
She is a sunset.

She takes me to the grocery store
Where I watch her inspect
A cluster of grapes,
Turning them over in her hands
As if they are jewels.

The four of us help her decorate
For Christmas, mounting garlands on
The figures of two white dogs which sit
On opposite sides of the fireplace. I perch
Little angels by the long vases filled with glass
Rocks, by the white figurines of ballet dancers,
And by the plastic fruit on the table
I always think is real.

While my parents talk
With her, my sister and I take out
The box of checkers which rattle
With pennies since there are not enough
Pieces inside. As we play,
I hear them laughing.

My sister and I are then hustled downstairs
For bed where I walk past the shelf
Of framed photographs and I stop
In front of one of my family and her —
AT GRANDMATERI’S HOUSE

My sister and I in our pyjamas,
Our hair still wet from the pool—
Standing in her front yard, ready for the ride home.

TG/GT/01
ROCK POOLS

There are holidays, of sorts,
(Never abroad)
That my mind will not dull in detail,

There is a muzzle and tongue coated in sand,
The sting of salt water
The pop-crack of seaweed under foot,

There is being upended by waves in a dingy,
A bottle of water (for feet only)
And a bag of bent sandwiches,

I want to watch us
Crafting castles again,
Guarding turrets with dead
And often limbless crabs,

I want to show myself the quick way out
Of a sea drenched t-shirt,
To tell the boy with the heavy head,
That it’s ok to doze in Church,

To trouble those waters,
To cast back into then,
Is to risk a hand in a rock pool...

JR/RP/02
GRANITE

This subterranean collaboration
Of minerals, where each accepted the other;
Together like trees in a forest
Since before time as a word,
Before words were strung to make stories.

A slab of it is revealed, given light
So we may ponder the writing
Of its long dark cooling, Sky and rain
Lodges colour in its pocks and runic etches
To say, this is what happened. Look, see.

Read this like a tree; rings of years,
Folds, knots, twists, tears, open wounds;
A page from a book of stresses;
Something of a mirror on a softer face,
That grasps it in the blip of its life, and dies.

GB/G/02
I AM ALONE

I, I am, I am alone...
Growth. “Me” and “not me”,
The paradox?

I am alone because of my ability
When you are there and
Not there.

I am alone because of my capacity
When you are not there and when
You are here.

I am alone because I wish to
Withdraw in a way that’s
Quite unsophisticated.

I am alone as an individual
When I realise
I am quite sophisticated.

I, I am, does not mean that I am alone.
I, I am... I am alone, it’s a process…
It could move forward or it could digress.

‘I am alone’ could mean that I am strong
Or actually weak; with or without
The Presence of that Someone.
But I am actually alone now, relaxing in elegance…

JH/IA/01
The only thing I hear is a buzz and whir
Of a minuscule fan cooling the heated electronics
Of the board in front of me. The screen is my magic
Mirror, it is my secret communication device. It
Glowss statically. Benign. My ears are deaf like
My eyes cannot see, but I never really relied
On that sense, never could tell who was
Messing with my reality, who tricked me
With illusions, who confused me with lies.
I never trusted them as much as my gut,
But everyone tells me I should ignore that
And base my decisions and the measure
Of my life on the actions of others. They
Tell me I have to measure the value of
My life and my happiness on the
Amount of objects I acquire, by the number
Of securities tied to my name.

MC/AS/01
And it started with the Word

Well, no, not really. It did, of course, start with me. Me, me, me. Well, isn't that now our world? Me, me, and me? Considering God and how he must know only you, the surrealism of the world working against a personality; dead melodies of celebrity shows spurting from the one-eyed monster, waking up needless concerns; posters hanging over narrow teenage shelves, dreams waiting to topple over; misplaced trust in half-hearted self-analysis; the overload of modern culture; each of us a victim, as no one else could possibly ever be so mistreated as you, could they? Because isn't that now our world? Isn't that how we will all die? Concerning ourselves with questions that are not worth asking, and watching life pass us by?

Call me Ishmael. (What? Why not? You are surprised? Why? Couldn't it be? Couldn't this be my name? (There is a pause and consternation). Fine, fine - my name is Hilmi.) Call me Hilmi. Hilmi Hera. And so it started with me, then, Hilmi Hera, and a tingling of excitement in my hands.

It was winter, a weekday, and the morning rush. The tube carriage teemed with pinstripes, bare legs, power suits, tight skirts, black brogues, dyed hair, leather satchels, stains on the ground, stains on the seats, advertisements for nothing in particular. Strangers failed to attract other strangers and the train moved through tunnels, wanting to feel relevant to them all, but really being nothing more than one train in many very long lifetimes. They were lost to the sexual ambiguity of all such journeys, filled with themselves and filled with potential conquests, potential validation, potential embarrassment and potential failure. The day carried a powdery chill to it, despite the smoky rain that had crumbled down that morning. It had indeed rained on A and on B and on C and on D (and perhaps even more people than that). All was damp in the carriage, damp souls and damp toes and they were funny, these people, these funny funny people.

I had, in fact, always believed in trains. Dragging excesses of ourselves each morning onto misty carriages, dove-grey extensions of our lives, to look at, dust, depressed, figures. Inside they were smelling of booze and stains and fights and loss. Veins fossilised, a portion of us deceased, bones and teeth layered and mineralised, fragile soft tissue ready to break away. When the carriages were swept away, residue of lives removed, crumbling leaves scattered from chairs and autumns of minds, grey smut wiped from windows and breaths forgotten. The violence of our interaction to be ignored, if only in the way that Hollywood violence now works; blood and violence and blows, but nobody ever, ever, getting hurt. Each image filled in only to dent the others, bent – husks of what they should have been – as adults, battered and ruined. Misery was punching at the skin.
Both God and I knew my immediate future – north and north again, the
vibrating through tunnels, the beeping of doors, the colic of escalator drafts.
Grey clouds were now passing by, lethargic and melancholy, fattened, the
heavy glide of whales or elephants heading to an ancestral graveyard, but
twenty feet above us, so we could not see them being so far underground.
A boringly hunched and slouched figure took up a significant portion of the
train’s central carriage doors by swinging against the upper rail, drinking
from a can of lager and carrying some large paperback masquerading as a
small hardback titled “The Bone Collector”. He seemed strangely agitated
or concerned that perhaps the impact or image he wanted to present by
carrying his book on the train and his rehearsed fumbling through carefully
creased pages was not having the desired effect. A woman to his left had
one of the holy books open on her lap, hung up on its words and words
that had been said to her when she was younger. The buttons fastened to
her overcoat were made from clear, brittle sea-shells, much to the obsession
of an ogling teenager with a faint moustache, who had pasted himself
into a corner of the standing sections, rubbing a cheap disposable lighter
in between the knuckles of his right hand. A heavy ashtray of atoms and
decay was the carriage, the white noise of cartoon mayhem.

I am remembering now the first time I had created them. I was nervous, yes
indeed, and the growing dark of nightfall did nothing but add to my fears.
Then suddenly I was grappling with them, with all the strength I could
muster, right in front of my face. Scared of their creator, they were silent,
silent wrestlers, holding me, face-to-face, in hostility. We were bound,
extined, in moments that were lifetimes and lifetimes which were things
and in those things what must be, you will no doubt agree, mere moments.
They left just before dawn, so I never saw their faces. But I knew it was
them. I knew what I had created. And I knew what power I must have.
The bruises were very hard to explain away.

I wiped my lips to wash away the saliva that was developing from my
excitement (an amateurish quality to my new found moods that I hoped
to control with practice) and slowly fingered a small pair of nail scissors
I carried in my pocket, especially for these moments. A couple sitting to
my side – boringly too tall and too small – precipitated by a shy beggar
groping at life as he walked down the carriage, his tears and breath drying
against the neon air, laughed and giggled, in barely disguised whispers and
playful jabs, joking how these hobos looked more and more like Jesus with
each passing day. A wayward beard and splintered clothes and splintered
lives justifying reducing another prophet to another throw away comment.
Newspaper followed by newspaper was covered with the panic of the
world; terrorism and famine and war and disaster. I listened as I had learnt
to with my new found sensations, as a doctor listens to a heartbeat, as I could now sense across the carriage: the whooshing and pounding of fluid, fluid against solid, and solid against solid. Blood coursing from chamber to chamber, squeezed by the contracting muscles behind, and then stretching the walls ahead. Fibrous valves snapping audibly against the backflow. Beating, the audible beating of fear. Half-breath, half-breath, quarter-breath, half. They are very funny these funny people. What they don't see is that there is nothing to fear, as it has already happened. The world is already ruined. Everyone who can afford it has gone; they don’t travel on these trains or these buses or these pavements. We are just the underclass, and those who can have gone; relocated; and we are an underclass, some dangerous loop back onto ourselves.

It was my mother who had introduced them to me, another simple invention of childhood which I had expected only to provide me with entertainment in the same manner as my cans linked by string across which I passed my thoughts and secret messages (as if on some frequency I could put my ideas onto the world), my tennis balls cut across the circumference with secret codes slotted inside their hub (hoping they might be lost in turf somewhere and turn biblical), the toy binoculars hung on yellow string around my neck to gaze into mysterious distances, thin tree branches stripped and sharpened for spears and bows and arrows (my own Boy’s Adventure, my own Alger, my own Moorcock, the timber bows releasing arrows which flew true in justice, last seen in the adventure of Hilmi Hera and the Mystery of the Metaphysical Messiah). But you see, my little avenging angels are so much more than this. Because terrorism is a miracle you must understand: Kropotkin was right, we need each other, if we are to survive the struggle. The intrusion of another’s vision of the world into ours, a reason to coexist, a spontaneous movement towards a common hate, the common enemy, commonality, communality. Terrorism is a miracle of life.

I always ensured that the paper was thick and coloured; I felt cleaner with it. My mother traditionally marked the black perforations on the paper, a sort of dolly DNA, as a line for me to cut around, but recently I have preferred using templates from the internet (the Culture and the Revolution, everyone now a Luddite and everything now the end of the Luddites, specialised knowledge now available to all). They have arms and they have legs, their hamstrings and their triceps running further up the back of their thighs and their arms then perhaps is strictly necessary, and often I imagine I can see their corollaries beating, which strikes me as quite philosophical. I have been cutting them neatly each morning and then letting them accompany me through the day. Seven days a week I perform these ablutions, seven days a week in my religious fervour, until I now have it reduced to a step-by-step of fine art, creating negative after negative of all the paper dolls I
have ever seen, that I have ever wanted. And then at the end of the day I eat them, chewy chewy paper, to remove the evidence.

The tingling of excitement that had begun in my hands had now shifted to a shiver across the ridge of my back. Not discernible to a stray eye, not yet enough to cause any sense of panic. I am not an obvious anarchist or crank, not a clear misfit or troublemaker, no loose cannon or fanatic. Not a half-baked idiot with a graceless close-range weapon. The air in the carriage was thick and heavy and I felt dirty with it; oh to be clean. At times before I had felt abandoned and undressed and had paused. But not now, not in this moment. The tricky bit had always been in choosing the targets, finding the time to wade through the grief. But today, he sat opposite, newspaper high on extended elbows, tufts of grey stubble sprouting across blotchy scalp, hanging painfully above dimmed prescription glasses, gold crucifix, grey mat vest and fleece, and somewhere in between eyes and nose, suggesting a memory. I could discern a slight discolouring of the newsprint, quietly perceptible, and where better to begin a life then at a discolouring?

Thinking, is there anything still worth dying for, air deepened by corruption, rapture and mutation of interaction, the freefall that accompanies consciousness, death embellishing me and Culture and Society and wronging the world, I leaned over, onto my knees, a genuflection to my implacable angels, a phenomenon within the general shape of people, scissors flashing in my hand, and slowly, I did it. Yes, I did it. I, Hilmi Hera, steadily and calmly, cut three paper dolls out of his open newspaper. I looked up at him as I did, through the light of their bodily forms, to see if I was still getting the kick, but he simply stared back at me in shock, not yet grasping what I was doing or what I was, not seeing that he was my victim, in the manner we are all victims. In a small, forgotten corner of the psyche, rarely thought upon, the irresistible charm of death. I was never really sure whether pieces of me left with them; real pieces I mean, ripped away from the bone, shards running across cobbled stones and cutting footprints. Cutting out part of my youth, something planted there in scorched earth, a youth that had never been aware of how it hurt me, youth that knew death and grief only as words.

*

Let there be light

Well, no, not really. On the third high-pitched, echoing shriek, panic had ensured, somebody had pulled the alarm, the train had screeched and pulled to a halt, a beating pulse hogging a frail body, and the scream of the carriage’s amber, dusty lights, had failed. Blind, the train’s inhabitants were
reduced to shadows, no contours, no longer surprised by the narrative that
is life, having lost all sense of tone, numbered by it, numbered by life.

These outlines of passengers looked down at the floor to make out three
paper dolls stepping from chair to chair, prowling over the carriage terrain,
and realised somehow through the hectic mornings of coffee drinking,
abandoned pots, slammed doors, crushed newspapers, barged walks,
lives had passed them by. A memory that had snapped in half, like brittle
rock. Passengers scattered across the carriage, looking stained, as if fear
had been crushed against their skin, falling down and cluttering the train,
a topological reduction of life. Some tried to hide their alarm, screaming at
Hilmi, screaming what was he doing, screaming then at each other, but the
alarm shook in their voices and Hilmi smiled in his majesty. None had the
courage of their fear to stand and fight and live not exist; unmanned, they
shamefully looked to protect themselves. Perhaps in a parallel world the
lady sensing the holy book, those final chapters that are always death, had
turned and asked the mocking couple whether they had found Jesus, did
they know of the Prophet, did they know the stars above them mapped the
course of angels (a celestial Cartesian harmony), loudly, for us all to hear,
so it was a question addressed to us all. So no one could escape, no one
could turn their head. Because there is something fascinating about what
the mention of religion can do to someone who appears – at first sight, or
from long experience – rational and reasoned. It is as if a pandemic has
been released into the air, to which the only known cure is to run round
and round, gesticulate emphatically and shout the loudest, to avoid a social
quarantine. A pandemic of paper dolls.

Perhaps Hilmi’s discovery had made him selfish, as we are all selfish,
tortured, the irresistible disillusionment of heaven, its discovery. Because
from the moment we knew it, we knew we did not want it for anyone else.
The invisibility of salvation, and the invisibility of our claim to its virtue.
As for virtue we would have to show there was something good once,
something deserving; but there wasn’t, and there isn’t, and discovery had
simply left us seething, as Hilmi seethed and shook. Perhaps he had lost
control. There he was, wet feet and wet soul, now crouched over in his
seat, the nervous excitement having drained his legs, cramped, looking
down at his creations. But he took hold of himself, as everybody wishes
they could, when they tell themselves to. He might be scared, our Hilmi.
Scared it wasn’t true, scared it was just a dream, just an existence, and he
had imagined it all. Just another of a thousand visions that occurred each
day, breaths outside a body, inside out. But no, he knew it was more, it was
clean, it was here amongst us you fools! It is no longer cartoon violence,
no assassination of villains, baddies, thugs and capitalists walking away
unhurt along with the lightly charred Disney cat, no longer good and evil,
black and white. We all wish ourselves strangers or complicated, living as echoes amongst half-truths and true lies, to be so long told that where they begin and end can no longer be deciphered.

Watching their dance, Hilmi took Wittgenstein’s ideas and mulled them over, playing with them, rolling them around his tongue and out again. “A man begins to grow younger. 50,40,20,10,1. He becomes a baby again. Real or not real? A man finds a jar of tablets. The tablets read ‘Super-Duper Lose Age Tablets.’ The man takes a tablet. He begins to grow younger. 50,40,20,10,1. He becomes a baby again. Real or not real?” Life as a game, Hilmi had become a ghost of himself, a split at reflection, a break, a crack, a broken loop, and reality had taken a turn. If this is not the world, then it is not far from it, and it was his world.

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The Paper-Dolls – A Metalogue (a conversation about a problematic subject)
It was the best of times and it was the worst of times, and the Paper Dolls considered the uncertainty of it all. Grainy reflections of panic-stricken passengers did little to alleviate our little dollies’ fears. Their eyes glared like a powerful lens designed to study butterfly tears or the trail of a childhood or the grain of an eroded canvas (Paperdolly 1, tweed-clad and squinting with imaginary monocle, Paperdollies 2 and 3 au fait with current gingerbread man chic). Ever since they had become aware of their existence – those early Hilmi thoughts, cutting across canals, broken shopping-trolleys, dry brown reeds, sketchy mud, raining such that the splash of raindrops against the water’s surface resembled the ripples of a thousand fish birching – they had had a passion to understand it, and their own understanding, their own thought, how they related to the world and how this related to them, how it was at the centre of it. We all want to see. A fly on the wall, teetering on the edge of overhead heaters and carriage soot, if it could distinguish the vibrations that assaulted it from all directions, if an explanation could be said to have been within reach, stretched to the religious, might have heard the following:

Paperdolly 2: Why are things so uncertain?

Paperdolly 1: What do you mean? Things? Uncertain?

Paperdolly 2: Well, we have spent a lot of time now being created. But then we just get removed. And we never know when it is going to happen. What’s the point? Things just seem so uncertain, such a muddle. As soon as we come long again, as soon as we touch something, touch the world, it’s
all a muddle, all uncertain.

Paperdolly 1(sternly): Yes, that’s why I keep trying to stop you both from touching anything when we do come along. We can’t do anything but muddle.

Paperdolly 3: But do we always muddle? Is it like this for them too, them outthere – do they always muddle the world? Paperdolly 1: Yes, because the world’s uncertain, so you can never know it, you can only muddle it. It’s all a reflection you see, changed ever so slightly when we touch it. Like throwing a stone into water and watching your reflection ripple.

Paperdolly 2: But why? Why does it have to change? I don’t want to have to change.

Paperdolly 1: Because life is made up of change, sadly. You just need to try and see it as a sort of loop: anytime there are thinking participants – like us, and like the world – then there is a participant thinking about the world and there is also the world he thinks upon. Now this all gets caught up together, because you have to think about the world to do something, but also you are trying to bring about something you are thinking about. You think you know your reality and then reality is changed, and it is all meshed together. You see?

Paperdolly 3: I think so. But then isn’t it all impossible, because that means when we act, we end up changing the very reality we are trying to understand?

Paperdolly 1: Yes, because we are stuck together: individuals and groups and society, our knowledge of the world, our understanding of it, is never at any one time fully complete.

Paperdolly 2: But that means even if we ever got this, if they ever got this, understanding our approach to our thoughts, the human uncertainty to it all, we would very well change our thinking and behaviour again?

Paperdolly 1: Yes, looping forever, back and forth, as we are created but then removed again, just always uncertain I guess. An uncertain existence.

Their conversation continued forward into time that could, one day, run backwards, religious voyeurs, their encounters with us never quite real, symbolism amongst life, in the rain of the day and the depth of the carriage and nothing more. Our dollies considering if there was a point to the
world if no-one can see you? Considering what had become of them, their heritage; mystery and innocence; what had become of the folk-history of the super-hero, or the cowboy, of cops and robbers, or of the paper-dolly itself? Did anybody wish they could fly anymore, or wish they could be invisible? Invisibility was no longer a worthwhile condition, no longer a pursuit of childhood. Science had moved past the Philosopher’s Stone, had moved past our base Alchemy desires. Art no longer discussed time-travel or melted infinite worlds. Art and Science had given over to being known. So could there ever be a point to the world if no-one can see you? If it is never me, me, and me?

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And God divided the light from the darkness.

Well, no, not quite. Because since the alarms had sounded, the train’s Driver, an ex-taxi driver, former carpet-fitter, retired paint-stripper named Dramatis Personae, had found himself sat and wedged into a grey felt covered seat with a single “go-faster” red stripe, lodged inside a plastic cabin with plastic buttons and plastic dials, considering how a city can still swelter when it is overcast. How breathing can be trapped.

Smut and dark hung all around his immediate distance and just past it; his future and theirs; caught in an odd, religious moment. Trying to believe who they were. Could Dramatis feel it, looking through the Perspex cabin window, at the message of the void? A message, a massage, greeted by holy men and holy priests and all who were faithful? Did he stare and could he believe it? Or without fainting crowds and spasms and fits and TV healings, was that darkness just a step too far?

The track fed into the distance of the tunnel where it gave way to the hypodermic needles of the city. Needles feeding the veins of a sick body, a body scarred by waste and riots, want and greed, the spill of poverty and the spill of wealth. And a mind, a mind of protests and a mind of submission, a mind unsaved. A violence to its condition. A selfish mind. But it did seem that all might be still.

OL/PD/01
ELEVEN (A PLAY)

Characters: CATHY, JAMIE

Cathy and Jamie sit on chairs centre stage.

JAMIE: Apparently, they’ve found brain cells in the heart. The tubes that carry the blood go direct from the heart to the brain and back again or something. That’s why when people have a heart attack they get depressed. Or someone has a heart transplant and gets a new heart that used to belong to someone else who wrote poems but died and so the person who gets the hand-me-down heart starts writing sonnets. That’s why you should do what your heart tells you – because it is linked to the mind.

CATHY: I know why sat down in the magazine aisle in ASDA that night. Saturday, 11th of August. I just knew that was what I had to do. It felt right.

JAMIE: Saturday nights are always bad. You get right weirdos in...

CATHY: When he came and asked me to move along, I thought that he seemed familiar.

JAMIE: ... people who think it’s a night out going to the ASDA.

CATHY: Later, I discovered that we’d been to the same school, five years apart and that I’d scraped the layers of Tippex off the module seven science book and that was where I had seen his name before.

JAMIE: She seemed really spaced out.

CATHY: He sat me in the security office...

JAMIE: I was due on my break.

CATHY: ... and asked me why I’d been crying over that week’s copy of OK! magazine. I said, “What’s your name?”, and he said,

JAMIE: Jamie.

CATHY: and I said, “Jamie Wallis?”

JAMIE: I found myself saying, “Yes”, which felt wrong, and yet also right. It was a work situation but it felt personal too.

CATHY: Class 9C, Mr Martin, The Living World, blue cover, page 42, you drew crude things on an alligator when you were 15. I had your text book.
(Pause) And he stared at me, proper freaked out, then left the room then came back with a cup of canteen tea for each of us and we split a twin pack of Twix.

JAMIE: I was going to pretend that there was a shoplifter downstairs and I had to deal with them and that she had to go and get on with her shopping, but I didn’t.

CATHY: (following immediately on from Jamie) and I knew why he hadn’t because he understood that coincidence happens for a reason.

Pause

JAMIE: I finished my shift early - pretended I’d been sick in the toilets - I was supposed to be on an all-nighter. She spooked me out. I had her on my mind. I had her phone number in my pocket. I cycled home and called her. She answered it before the first ring had finished.

CATHY: He only lived around the corner. I knew he would. Thirty-three miles from where we grew up, we ended up both living in roads off the same dual carriageway.

JAMIE: We arranged to meet the next day, at a vegetarian café in town. I was a meat eater until then. It was the first time I’d had a Sunday lunch without all the trimmings, or the meat. The first time I discovered a different way of looking at the world.

CATHY: I believe everything that happens is already planned and will happen, unless you refuse to follow your instincts because in your head you think you know better. I don’t know who plans it. I don’t think it’s God with a capital “G”. The God. It can’t just be one person. I wouldn’t call them gods though. And whoever they are, you can’t phone them up for help and speak to one of the many and they tell you to click x and x and y and it gets you by. They don’t use circuit boards or processors and they can’t fix problems. You have to do that yourself. And it’s not like in The Matrix, because I saw the film and I didn’t understand it but I understand this.

JAMIE: OK, I’ll tell you as much as I understand. It’s like this: you meet a person, someone you already expected to meet, but you didn’t know why. You thought of them on the bus, or last night while Eastenders was on or you dreamt of them. There they are in front of you. And you know you were meant to meet, because it feels strange but at the same time it just feels
right.

I thought that was a premonition, but Cathy said that is what’s called...

CATHY: A meaningful coincidence: I often look at my watch at 11 minutes past 11. More often than other times, I’m sure. Eleven: my birthday. It was the 11th when I met Jamie. We were meant to meet. We were destined to meet. Most people say that, but it’s only true for a few of us. Eleven. The number eleven. That’s why. That’s why I’m special. It’s because I was born on the eleventh. Look it up on the internet, the number eleven.

JAMIE: So the next day, I went online. Since ancient times the number eleven has been linked to mystery and power. In numerology, the bible, Kabbalah, all major beliefs give significant importance to eleven, and its derivatives - 22, 33, 44, 55, 66, 77, 88, and 99.

JAMIE: When we next met, I took her to the park and bought her a 99-er from the ice-cream van because I thought she would appreciate it.

CATHY: If you take the letters from my full name and then take their corresponding number in the alphabet, you know, so A is one and Z is twenty-six, then it adds up to 111.

JAMIE: I never mentioned the research I’d done.

CATHY: The Americans skipped sequence numbers on the Apollo moon missions to ensure it was Apollo 11 that landed on the moon.

JAMIE: We sat on a bench until it went dark.

CATHY: George Double-U understands. That’s why he wasn’t surprised when he found out about 9/11. Trade Center is 11 letters, and Skyscrapers is 11 letters. It’s obvious.

JAMIE: And after dark, when the park was empty, she told me...

CATHY: I think George Bush researched the patterns in Osama bin Laden’s life. Osama’s life changing events occur every 11 years, so Double-U knew something was coming. September 11th is the 254th day of the year: 2 plus 5 plus 4 equals 11. After September 11th there are 111 days left to the end of the year. Terrorism’s always linked to the number 11. (A beat) I worry that I might turn out to be a terrorist, and not know it yet, because of the numbers.
JAMIE: Once I accepted that we were destined to be together, it became much easier.

CATHY: We began to see things the same, he noticed patterns he'd never seen before, realised what part he had to play in the great scheme of things.

JAMIE: She was beautiful, stunning. I'd never met anyone like her. I wasn't going to lose her.

CATHY: He started pointing things out. Like when we went to his works do and he introduced me to Martin who worked in accounts and who had once lived in the flat above mine and who had moved out the week I moved in.

JAMIE: I discovered that it's not just numbers and thoughts, it's solid, like when you learn a new word and then it keeps cropping up, or you discover that your second cousin works in your local, or you say out loud, 'there hasn't been any trouble of late' and then there is. Well, all the numbers and the crossed paths and the repetition and the meetings,

JAMIE: /it's called synchronicity.
CATHY: /it's called synchronicity.

Pause.

JAMIE: I thought I loved her. It felt right, for the first time, here, but not here.

CATHY: I never loved him. I know he never loved me. He couldn't have.

JAMIE: I was deceiving both of us.

CATHY: There is no such thing as true love. We both understand that we are here to fulfil our place on the earth and that the things we do are already planned out for us.

JAMIE: I couldn't see the patterns, I made them up. I didn't have the heart to tell her.

Cathy stands and begins to walk off stage.

CATHY: It wasn't a big thing for me. I just feel like I am here, functioning. All you do is move from one coincidence to the next and the struggle is how you get there. I don't believe in fate, just that things are meant to be.
JAMIE: But since we split up, I see a number, the same number, everywhere. Eleven, eleven, eleven, eleven, everywhere eleven. Am I reading too much into it? (Looks at wrist watch) Eleven minutes past.

EL/EL/01
When you see me, when you pass by me, I don't want to be just another face in a sea of other faces, non-descript on a trip to nowhere quickly, pleasure seeking never finding oblivious to who’s in front of me unaware of who’s behind strolling blind wasting time that I’ll never get back, whilst in the middle of the black of night.

When you see me, as you pass by me, I don’t want you to see another soul lost and confused, not sure of who I am or how I’ll end and in-between not knowing what all this means! Don’t see me as just another person that walks in circles, bumping into walls, a bent over oppressed, depressed, burden laden, manacle wearing false interpretation of me, NO! See the one that’s changed me, He that now lives inside me, the real true authentic me. The me that knows the difference between the perfection God and the perfection of man, one who seeks his plans becoming self-sufficient in the sufficiency of Christ the man whose face I what you to see when you see me, as you pass by me on your way to somewhere quickly. See the one that taught me what love looks like in action, He that enables me to see the true real authentic you and love you as only authentic love can do with a Godly passion, that’s not dependant on our situation.

I want you to see the glow of the Lord on my face, His spirit that radiates from a deep place, my pain and tears erased replaced with God’s mercy, forgiveness, His grace divine, as I walk behind the one I used to stand in front of blocking my view to the very purpose I was put on this earth to do, which is to serve you, with God’s strength, power and might and reverently pray the the spirit of the Lord be with you in fight of the spiritual nature, that victory be yours as you endeavour to live your life.

When you see me, see me as I really am, redefined and aligned to His purpose, becoming of one mind with those who are like minded, no longer blind and stumbling in the darkness, reconnected to the Saviour whose favour I’m blessed with, the recipient of Christ’ free gift of salvation. You see I’m meant to be a beacon of light up in this nation, for such a time as this in this very moment, with boldness. Unafraid and not ashamed of the name of the King! His word cuts, but only for a while, all the time it purifies. He took the filthiest of rags and made me clean again, just as if I’d never sinned! Christ pulled me out from beneath the rubble and doubled what the enemy stole from me, exposed what lay inside this perishable shell now he’s the only one I’ll ever let use me!

So as I walk down these here streets of London Town, I’ll not be just another face in the crowd, I’ll be the one about ready to explode if I don’t get a chance to tell you about the joy of my salvation, free, chillin’ under the tree of life, all encompassed by the love of Christ!
FACES

The good news is this could be you with one simple confession!

CH/F/01

THE DAILY SAINT

Harold Rallup and Times Rallup, brothers,
One dead one almost dead, wore grey in the 1950’s,
But most times black and white. Times, because
He’s still a little alive, lately wears a swatch of colour
Round his creases. The Rallups loved to tell the tale
In their day but now, they’re one down, and the one
That’s lightly living’s almost too old to know what to call
A story or why he used to once care. S’like that gal I
dated and now I can’t remember how that worked
Or what her number was, even if I wanted to call her,
Which I don’t believe me. Sometimes the crawl
Gets Times down and he laments for the old ways
Of thrift, economy and the old man modesty. He still
Bites the pencil in the middle with his fakes in, and
Breathes on a wheeze oh, remembering the smell of the
News room and the boys of the press. Where’d all that
Erudition and guts go to, and another thing, I don’t
B’lieve much in generations because the way I see it they
Didn’t get much from us and they don’t even know
They’re missing something, like a granny what’s been
Robbed and she never will miss that pocketbook anyway.
Senile they’d call her, but what do you call it when the
Pinched ain’t old, just dumbed of spirit? I never did
Know where it come from, some said the 1960’s
But them kids was still good, and some say foreigners made
Us numb but ain’t people just want to be
True no matter where they from. They called me
A idealist but that’s just a word for someone who the
Ones doing wrong can look to and say he doing right so
We don’t have to. We use a have to, that was our
Business, to tell it the way it rightly was and to care.

LR/DS/01
NIKODJE’S LAP OF HONOUR

The psychologist Georg Groddeck once said that even breaking your leg was no accident. I’m going to tell you a story about my father and you can decide for yourselves.

My father was utterly transformed the day that he brought his Mercedes Benz home. He always called it by its full name, even long before it ever seemed possible that he’d actually own one. It stood there that first day, dazzling on the cobblestones, in shocking contrast to the shaky masonry and loose drainpipes of the buildings surrounding our yard.

Up to then, I’d always seen him as an apologetic man, slightly bent over - he even appeared to have a slight hump, although there was no deformity of any kind - as if he was constantly expecting a blow from somewhere. He was the sort of man who went around objects and avoided confrontation. One of those very large objects was my mother. She ran the show.

My mother is the sort of woman who takes up a lot of space. I am an only boy, with no sisters to compare with, but I sometimes imagine that I must resemble my father and that this displeases her. Yet we both always complied with her wishes, one of which was that I do my damnedest to try for a prestigious Grand Ecole. This looked extremely unlikely in those early days, given the quarter, the local schools teeming with immigrants like ourselves, the lack of French people and language. Yet it was an admirable goal too, and she followed, supervised and helped – in her supreme unknowingness - every step of the slog-hard way till I passed those very competitive entrance exams. I’m in. This autumn is my first year, and I’m enjoying it thoroughly, even if I miss my father. How he would have enjoyed all of it! He’d have been so proud of everything - from the kind of work we do, to sailing weekends on the coast with friends. The fact that I was more or less off their hands, with a good grant as well, was one of the reasons he was able to afford the new car. I comfort myself by thinking that he went out in a blaze of glory.

My mother’s apparent domination of him and all around her is partly due to her job. It was she who found the job in France as concierge in the first place, probably she who pushed the plans forward and got them out of that infernal hole - “down home”, as they still call it. She put us on the map, you might say. She took over the job from a Portuguese couple who were heading home to realise their dream and live on a mountain up near Galicia, in a house they’d built themselves. Apart from my father’s dream of one day owning a Mercedes, I don’t know what other goals my parents had, back then.

It is unusual to have a Yugoslav guardian, most of them are Portuguese.
NIKODJE’S LAP OF HONOUR

Even though everyone now calls them gardiennes, the old enamel plaque on the wall, blue on white, still announces “Concierge” proudly, an echo of a past when it was something to be proud of, before those old Parisian busybodies drove it into disrepute by snooping and spying on all and sundry. There is the occasional one like that left, but they get short shrift these days. They have to behave themselves or their Christmas box gets reduced - and it’s not negligible, a tenth of a month’s rent. Not that a name-change was necessary in our quarter: there is little enough prejudice against us, the inhabitants are poorer than we are, and in any case my mother meets all derision head-on. I doubt there’s anyone in the whole cube of buildings who would dare take her on.

Not that she didn’t have plenty of natural curiosity. I often saw her peer around people into the apartment when she delivered the mail, and she had a way of asking the simplest of questions. One day I realised that all she really sought was someone to tell her story to. She wasn’t sneaky either: she told people about all the apartments she and Father had bought and done up. The house in Brittany really impressed people, although you could see it was almost too much - farting higher than your arse, as the French say. Whenever someone called to our caretaker’s lodge near the old carriage doors, I was reminded of the contrast between the smallness and darkness of this, their lifelong abode, and the various other ones they owned and rented.

Everyone was coming to France when my parents made their way up here, back in the 1970s. France needed workers, Tito let them go. I must have been the product of those early years of euphoria, and they obviously weren’t tempted twice. My mother ran the show, had the steady salary, delivered the mail to each door, kept residents in order and squalor to a minimum, cleaning stairs and sluicing out smelly communal toilets once a week, wheeling out heavy green bins at night. During all this, my father brought up the slack behind a sewing machine in whatever sweatshop had work going, sometimes all night if an order had to be produced quickly. He sewed sleeves for fancy suits for famous designer X, ribbons onto fur bobbles for famous designer Y. He came home with his clothes covered in and coughing up the fluff of whatever fabric he’d been working on. He kept a machine at home too, on which he did jobs for neighbours and friends. He brought home bags of offcuts which he made into scarves for children and zippered bags for sale in the markets.

The butt end of the rag trade has been changing recently. The ground floor workshops used to lie open, radio going full blast while foreign conversation, laughter and tears batted about. Nowadays machines continue to hum but behind closed doors, and things are often run by the
NIKODJE’S LAP OF HONOUR

latest arrivals, the Chinese, whose workshops smell of rice and who never open doors, especially not to anyone carrying a briefcase. Inscrutability and language incomprehension. At the post office, clerks spend half their time cashing refugee checks and helping the same people fill out postal orders for the folks back home. Just before the changeover to the Euro, the same post office was swamped by adolescents coming in relays to cleanse dirty money. There are rumours about the Triads, and trafficking in children. Who knows?

My mother at least learned to speak French, with an accent, while Father never took to either the people or the language, and hardly spoke a word of it at his death, 20 years later. His free time was spent in the Yugoslav cafes and restaurants round the quarter, places that stand out in their cleanliness and tidiness, and where the food and the television are focused on a greater Serbia, and where every shot of the wars in Bosnia and Kossovo was studiously followed, discussed, analysed. It can't have been easy for him to hang around with other second-class citizens like himself, but then it can’t have been easy for my mother either. She comes from proud peasant stock, people who always owned their own land and beasts, controlled their sources of income, people who kept themselves to themselves. My father was a townie. But whatever drew them together was stronger than what divided them, and they arrived in France together and never went back home once, in all the 20 years.

Until my father decided to drive his new Mercedes down there this summer.

It was early summer when he drove it into the yard. The sun glinted hotly off its dark sheen, and most of us circled it several times to get used to the feel of being near its greatness, before we examined the details or dreamed of sitting in it.

Father was in a frenzy of activity. He made his way time after time, over and back to the house for cushions, gewgaws to hang on the mirror, a bead thing for sitting on. Each time he made the journey he moved like a man in his own world, oblivious of us all, steering a wide breach around my large mother. She hung back, watching him with an amused smile on her face, pleased for him, but not really involved. In all the years they had bought, restored and rented apartments she had never seen him so satisfied. All of that, and the house in Brittany, had been her pleasure. He’d gone along with it, humped bags of rubble up and down stairs, tiled and plastered and hammered in his spare time. They’d kept me away from all that, sure that I would never need to get my hands dirty. And throughout it all my father had talked and dreamed of one thing only: the day he would own a
NIKODJE’S LAP OF HONOUR

Mercedes Benz.

It smelt factory-new. Most of the hangers-on in the quarter had a sit in it before my mother and I were finally invited to hit the road for a jaunt. It struck me how youthful my mother looked when she was happy. She wears big skirts and has kept her hair long, and when the invitation finally came, I was surprised to notice her hesitantly finger her apron strings like a girl, unsure of herself. For the first time in my life I saw her confidence thrown, yet I think even this pleased her. I had the impression that my father got as much of a kick out of people’s reactions to it as he would from actually driving the car, until I saw him behind the wheel.

Behind the wheel he began to unfold, like a morning flower. His shoulders straightened, he held his chin higher. The humpback disappeared. His hands on the controls were those of a confident multi-millionaire, someone who had this in his blood. From time to time he looked at us, smiling, as if to ask, “What do you think?” or “Not bad, eh?” But he didn’t utter a word. Words might have choked him. He slipped in and out of the traffic like a man who did it every day. Years of driving the old van around workshops and handyman stores helped, but nothing had prepared us for this style, this panache.

I had a new father, and she had a new man.

It wasn’t long before he announced that he intended to drive down home, to their home place near the border with Kossovo. They had a month’s holidays every summer, during which they usually faithfully headed off for Brittany, imitating the French. I could take or leave Brittany with its sunburnt tourists and its changeable weather, but I never dared complain of course, for they were doing everything for me. If I were to fail, I sometimes reminded myself, they would probably consider their lives to have been in vain.

It was then that I realised why they had never gone home, in all that time. Of course they were curious now to see how things really were, “down home”, after all the bombing. There had been increasing talk of depleted uranium and how much of it had been spread about. But the real reason they had never ventured back, I realised now, was that they never felt themselves quite rich or presentable enough. By not getting involved with “down home”, they had also avoided the cargo-ing back and forth of big plastic bags full of the produce needed down there or missed up here. They had escaped the shared concerns of sending money home, getting a lift home, finding a new and cheap way of phoning home (a phone booth on the rue de Belleville functions without money, its location a precious well-known
NIKODJE’S LAP OF HONOUR

secret). Most of the immigrants, when the farm down home was completely equipped, went on to finance the restoration of the old house, then the new house. Since their own lives were sacrificed anyway, the emigrants were even beginning to finance a whole new generation coming along at home, in a variety of jobs from bakeries to more sweatshops.

My parents avoided all that, the endless yelling phone calls, the bitching, the whining, the discussions about how much it cost to repatriate the body. They never went home for holidays, never talked about home, and had gone for French nationality as soon as they were able. They seemed to take pleasure in the restoration work they did, and nothing pleased Mother more than showing people the work they had learned to do from scratch, pointing out details of tiling and wallpapering. You could see it wasn’t everyone’s taste, but it was neat and clean. They just grafted ahead with another apartment purchase, another renovation, all their money and energy tied up in that, and in me. When they started they couldn’t stop, for they had never decided what the limits were to be.

The Mercedes, however, suddenly seemed to do the trick. I could see them becoming more and more enthusiastic about the idea of going home. They got out the maps and planned the journey and phoned people and arranged an itinerary. They would go via Austria and drop in on family there. Very soon the Mercedes was choc-a-block with stuff going to this one and that, including a dismantled sewing machine for a niece in Austria who was about to be set up on the path of the sewing life.

What had possibly set the Mercedes purchase in motion was a relatively harmless incident which had annoyed Father severely. One day he was sent across town to deliver a microscopic skirt to one of the big name designers. The van broke down, so he took the metro. Most people would have been glad of the excuse to take it easy for an hour or two. Not my father. He liked to work, at all times. One of his biggest criticisms of Albanians is that they just don’t work: he called them Sheptar, a nasty down-home word for them that I knew he heard used often in the cafes roundabout. Mother disapproved of it, and every time he used it she would glance at me quickly and hiss “Nikodje!” at him reprovingly, in a shocked voice.

What made the designer skirt episode worse was the insult when he arrived at the designer’s place on the other side - the rich side - of town. His boss had forgotten to give him the pattern that went with it. They were furious, probably suspecting his workshop of making a hasty copy. And maybe they had, although my father and mother severely disapproved of anything dishonest. It probably goes on all the time. Whatever the case, he then had to turn around and come back across town again, pick up the minuscule
pattern and humbly make his way back with it. His boss refused to pay for a
taxi, and for some reason my father never dreamed of rising up and paying
for one with his own money. It was a dull wet Parisian day. The metro was
sluggish. He just shunted over and back across town seething inwardly at
the way he’d been treated: the implication of dishonesty, the lack of reliable
transport, the rôle of go-between.

Or it could have been the incident with the Chinaman at the dentist’s, early
that same morning. Mother had a tendency to underline the nationality of
the people she talked about. Father simply grunted: “Même pas français”
(They aren’t even French) was a frequent refrain of his. Sometimes it seemed
the only phrase in French that he knew.

Earlier that morning, a Chinese man - or a man Father assumed to be
Chinese and who could in fact have been from anywhere between Mongolia
and Japan and was most likely Vietnamese - had closed the door in his face,
the door into the dentist’s building. “Can’t let you in,” the man said, “ring
the bell of the apartment you want.” Father had to ring the bell again and
wait till the dentist’s secretary pressed the button to release the catch. By
that time Father was furious. It wasn’t so much the door, as the fact that it
had been a “foreigner” that had refused him entry. “Même pas français,”
Father said dejectedly at dinner that evening. I didn’t point out that many
Vietnamese had probably been “French” long before Father.

He must have ordered the new car straight away, because it arrived a month
later. After the initial preparations and a couple of shorter jaunts, they were
ready to try the Périphérique, the Paris ring-road, and head for home. My
mother arranged for a neighbouring concierge to take over her chores, and
they dressed up and set off, complete with maps and picnic, abstemious to
the last. They had refused extra passengers, so as not to make enemies.

It was a fine July morning. I didn’t anticipate trouble. Rejoicing at having
the place to myself for the first time ever and doing all the things normally
forbidden, I was spreading myself around the kitchen. I hadn’t washed the
breakfast dishes. I was reading at table.

Suddenly the phone rang.

Mother sounded a bit shaky, but unhurt. She was calling from the main
halls of a hospital. Father had had a major coronary at the wheel, and had
hit the side barrier going fairly fast. Mother had been saved by airbags and
comfort, but Father was gone. The car was a twisted write-off. “Your father
had his lap of honour, Christian,” she kept saying, “Nikodje had his lap of
honour. He died happy. We did a tour of the Périphérique before his heart
NIKODJE’S LAP OF HONOUR

exploded.”

Then she cried.

I told her to wait for me in the lobby of the hospital, and grabbed my coat.

MB/NL/01
Level Four - Physicality

She watched him, inert behind the bar, staring at the still air, doing his best to avoid contact with the targets. The live stream was broadcast from a collection of static cameras. Her vision was a repeated sequence: bar, pool table, entrance, bar, pool table, entrance. Techs had used the brackets for security cameras; no one thought to question their presence anymore. The emotionless voice of his internal audio feed played through her ear pods. She listened to the digital manifestation of his voice. Her brain began segmented processing of the conflicting audio and visual information.

Parts of the report were auto-composing on her second screen. The Havar-sequenced parts of her brain were feeding objective answers into the Transparency Template. Her unsequenced mind examined the sounds and vision streaming from 181 Long St, Randomised Education facility B5.

She knew the name; his appearance had been altered by five years of lackey jobs, screen addiction and deep fried cheese. He was a soft version of the knife edge she’d recruited. Ralaa sat behind the bar, surrounded by bottled stock, a SIM transaction unit, a couple of remotes for the TV screens and music noise. There was football on the screen closest, but he wasn’t watching. If Merrlin had been able to trace his line of sight she would have documented the unerring attention he paid a blinking light located below the plasma screen.

The digital manifestation of his voice filled her ears; internal audio feed, the most intrusive part of Education Officer Training. Thoughts turned to waves, turned into code, turned into words. Internal interface was ubiquitous in high order administrative tasks. Ralaa was drifting as he held the bar. The active constituent of empathogenic gas was moving quickly from breath to lungs to blood to brain. The ingrained defences of all in the facility were being lowered.

The visual feed showed target clients grouping and involved in preliminary interaction. Ralaa watched the entrance of targets Toby and Kendra. His internal feed registered a change in the prototype education spectacle. Merrlin’s computer instantly logged SIM recognition on her Transparency Template. She watched the girl pick up a pool cue and watched her hang lazily over the baize. It was familiar. Ralaa’s immobility concealed the rapid shifts in the audio of his internal feed. Merrlin listened as he slipped deeper into the vernacular of his character. Ralaa’s internal feed moved quickly from the assessment of education opportunity to contemplation of his past.

Merrlin followed the shift, noted the appearance of her name in his internal
feed. Her unsequenced brain space was counting the years since their break up. She watched him perched fearfully behind the bar, hiding himself from attention when he should have been directing the scene and controlling the interaction of the target clients. Her Havar-sequenced brain space logged comments in the Transparency Template and live stream assessment of Ralaa’s internal stream. She opened the template for an Emotional Turbulence Report. This would be her first incident of self-reporting.

~

Transparency Document for Education Proposal
Subsection 6 - Education Officer Training
Promotion Panel Supervisor: Merrlin Chinyaka
Education Officer: Ralaa Inface - Grade Naïve, 0 terms experience with non-compliant education.
Objective: Assess suitability of Education Officer for Spectacle Education Program.

Target Clients: Toby, Kendra, Tendeka, Ashraf.

Departmental Outcomes: Insurrection Susceptibility Buffering; Conflict Administration and Involvement; Controlled Emotional Response to Technical Conglomeration.

Location/ Infrastructure: Randomised Education Facility B5 - Stones Pool Hall, 181 Long Street. Facility is fitted with live streaming visual and audio equipment. Concealed gas ducts are available for the dispersion of empathogenic gas.

Delivery Company/Operator: Havar Concepts –Randomised Education Program. Havar Concepts is an advanced provider of education systems; utilising imaging, empathogen gassing and a unique tiered corporal discipline system. Modules and/or individual lessons can be randomised and delivered on a rolling basis or targeted to fit specific socio-groups, geographic or network locations.

Company Statement: Havar Concepts, aware of the uncertain position of education in this age of transient and fluid identity parameters, is continually realigning the space in which the education dialogue occurs. Innovative education options are offered in the non-compulsory third phase of education. The success of Havar’s Randomised Education Program has shown that third phase education provides essential development and consolidation of the Education/Socialisation targets initiated in second phase education. The high percentage of students who do not complete institutional third phase education represent an estimated five billion
dollars per annum negative impact on national spending. Continued third phase education minimises the drain on public finances and reduces the rate of incipient ado-generational unrest.


Post-Training Redevelopment Opportunity: Increased screening of Education Officers. Compulsory reporting of emotional turbulence from all education officers. To be implemented immediately.

~

Live stream: Education Officer Training - Ralaa Inface

Promotion Panel AF134

Supervisor live stream: Covert Recruitment Officer Merrlin Chinyaka

EOT: Career advancement statement. This will be my first Randomised Education Program training. I have observed various phases and understand that my training will involve the live internal stream. Third phase education is about the utilisation of potential relationships. It's an optimal node at which education can occur. In house research has shown that the offer of a relationship is always taken seriously. Brain imaging has revealed the truth of emotional interconnectedness in our race, most particularly in the ado-generation. I’m not here to teach letters and numbers, that’s the job of the phase one and two teachers. I’m the director of a drama and a player in the drama, I control the flows and capture people in a situation where socialisation can be maximised.

Supervisor: Acceptable advancement statement. Empathogenic gas has been released. Measurement gauge unavailable, Instinctive awareness to be used. Education Officer has assumed default position of power relationship with potential target group. Targets Tendeka and Ashraf involved in preliminary physical gaming. Entry of target Toby. Group interaction and stabilisation. Empathogenic gas at education facilitation level 2.

EOT: A society needs all types, we need variety and predictability in
abundance. My decision is based on the interaction between my clients, I have to make swift decisions about how the process of education will be maximised.

Supervisor: Entry of Target Kendra.
EOT: You beautiful clients when they comes wandering in, two then one then one. There always be the stragglers the late starters who come into class and be causing a raw upset. They also be the crucial situation at which the feat of socialisation comes to grief or success.


EOT: How this raw upset to be dealt on when it comes? Target Kendra be the wacked up girl, she’s the centrepiece to this event, she the real south in a gathering that lacks coraz. The event going nowheres until she take a stride through the door. I trim smile when I see long sleeve girl cause I knows the situation is about to become the more realistic.

Supervisor: Identity and vernacular shift has been achieved. Education Officer is in emotional drift. Moderate empathogenic gas in area two. Education Officer must remain in area two. Seek face-to-face with Targets Kendra and Toby. Negative response from Target Tendeka re. technical conglomeration of Target Kendra.

EOT: I’m feeling the empathy zone left by Merrlin. Uploading too many personals into the education spectacle. Swap you cool points my new sister, they don’t mean a speck to anyone but you. See if I can actually teach these lagging kids some knowledge. You think school stops at 15, you think school stops at 17, this is the new school, the place of total learning. This be a real freedom situation. Situation untethered, dream of untethered where the reals of feeling get manifest. Fleeting chances in life; pass me by. To this watcher, border guard manqué. Uploads continue. Losing mastery of empathic reaction. Merrlin memory, her dove finger tip in bar, window light, daytime. True dove, her voice, true dove. Same dirty boots, long boots, ancient Gordon memory. Music in the bar, juke box, before days of complete service. Untethered. Where has she gone?

Supervisor: Education Officer approaching minimal output. Adjunct Observation – Targets Kendra and Toby reacting well to empathogen gas. Request physical intervention to complete separation of target group. Target Tendeka continues negative reaction; suggest corporal intervention and separation.
Level Four

EOT: Find her, here she is, what goes add with olden time. Present, real time, inevitable disappointment, life complete distraction. What has brought me to this place? Her inclination and dissatisfaction. The entire of my recent life. An eternal in the sound chunks and electro haze. Here, always wanting to be here in the true experience. Now it all goes untoward.

Supervisor: Education Officer remains in a state of accelerated emotional drift. Arrival of physical intervention. Aggressive termination of Target group completed.

~

Havar Concepts – Corporate Memory Unit

Scripthouse - Character based writing prompt program.
A pre-programmed sequence of stimuli (visual/audio/text) used to promote the production of character based narrative. Developed by Havar Concepts. Superseded with the redistribution of third phase education funding.

Clients: Predominately upper second phase. Also used by numerous second phase providers as a segue unit to third phase education.
Unsupervised use by second phase providers allowed the program to be combined with client use of Adderall (a pharmaceutical psychostimulant composed of mixed amphetamine salts).

Manning Government discontinued the program for second phase education in 2010. Under an agreement based on radical sub-culture provision Havar Concepts began limited use of Scripthouse as a Covert Recruitment Module.
From 2011, Scripthouse cafes were allowed to proliferate in designated zones (Berlin and Joe Slovo). Allocation of Adderall prescriptions was increased to clients within the target profile. Adderall allocation was jointly funded by Havar Concepts and Manning government.

The ‘underground’ status of Scripthouse cafes attracted a non-conformist, post-second phase cliental. Scripthouse Radical Sub-Culture Module has been a successful source of covert recruitment.

~

1 week later

“Merrlin, this is Ralaa.”

“Ralaa?”

“You know how long it took me to find you?”
“…”

“Forever and yesterday.”

“You think of me now?”

“…”

“Don’t say it.”

“I wouldn’t.”

“Good.”

“It’s been a long time.’

“That’s weak.”

“I am now.”

“I know.”

“…”

“How’d you find me?”

“They still know you around the cafes.”

“Not much pride in that. People stay there forever.”

“You?”

“I’m not there too much. I’m not a habit girl anymore. In those days it worked, I’m different today.”

“They were good times.”

“Where have you been?”

“Employment stasis, six years with Havar. Put me on vision. Look what they did to me! They turned me into a bartender look alike.”

“We said it wouldn’t happen.”
“They made me sign a solitary clause.”

“Why?”

“Company integrity.”

“Was it worth it?”

“No.”

“How’d you get out?”

“They fired me.”

“Might be lucky.”

“I thought I’d get to work on something like Scripthouse.”

“…”

“You still there?”

“Yeah.”

“It’s an illusion. Every event is an illusion.”

“Even this?”

“You don’t know half until you work for them.”

“…”

“Do you want to meet?”

“Yeah.”

~ 6 years earlier

The clack of pool balls. Merrlin, lines all lose over a shot. Pinpricks of Adderall beginning to liven her mind.

“Will you get me another drink after I win?”

“I’ve still got a chance.”
“That’s the Adderall. Focus on the impossible.” She laughs.

The white skids from the chalked nub of her cue, skews the two straight and clean into the corner pocket. Ralaa watches her rise from the shot, recalls every touch of the body beneath her clothes. The Adderall is starting to work on him. The clarity of his focus is intensifying. His focus shoots in three directions; Merrlin, the pool ball and his desire to get back to the cafe and start writing on Scripthouse.

“You’re in, aren’t you?”

Merrlin smiles with stiff-faced concentration. “Don’t off-plot me.”

“We’ve got six hours.”

“I can see you thinking about Scripthouse.” She tries to look away, tries to come over all disgusted but control of her facial muscles is starting to drift as the Adderall takes hold, all she can do is purse her lips.

Ralaa gets into the swing. “One day I’m going to work for the company that made Scripthouse. They’re the only company that really understand where our brains are at.”

“Truthly?” Merrlin looks up from the table. “You got the employment epiphany.”

“Never would have known if you didn’t show me.”

“Should never have outlawed Scripthouse.”

“Hardly outlawed for us. Imagine if they didn’t,” she taps the cue on the floor, “every house playing.”

“Gets me thoughtful.”

“You’re good, thoughtful.”

“I wish.”

“Let’s immerse tonight.”

Emotional Turbulence Report – Merrlin Chinyaka
LEVEL FOUR

Since signing on a trainee educator with Havar Concepts I have progressed from security clearance 12 to security clearance 3. I have played a significant role in the shift from our reliance on Scripthouse education (conclusion of second phase education) to our market leading position in third phase education. The development and implementation of Randomised Education has formed the basis of much of my work for Havar Concepts. During this time, even in my role as Covert Recruitment Manager, I have never felt doubt about the work of Havar Concepts or my position within the company. The failure of recent promotions to the role of Education Officer has forced me to question the recent changes in the corporate structure of Havar Concepts. Concentration of company resources on the development of Spectacle Education has left the Randomised Education unit under-resourced. The lack of resources has led to situations in which the emotional integrity of Covert Recruitment Subjects has been undermined. This in turn has created emotional turbulence among the recruitment officers who worked at a covert level during the development of the Randomised Education Program. This is an ongoing structural problem with Havar Concepts which will continue to undermine the actions of middle level staff in the Randomised Education Program/Project.

I, personally, have been forced to file my first emotional turbulence report. A young Education Officer who I recruited using a combination of the Relationship and Scripthouse Sub-culture modules was recently awarded a non-completion award and issued with subsequent termination because of emotional turbulence encountered during Randomised Education training. The subject (Naïve Education Officer Ralaa Inface) appears to have suffered from over-attachment during the recruitment process. His over-attachment had been concealed during training and manifested as empathic confusion during his final phase of Education Officer training. Such empathic confusion will begin to undermine the Randomised Education Program if financial backing is not approved for an investigation of recent covert recruitment procedures. Following the investigation of said procedures it is highly likely that funding will also be required for emotional stabilisation of Education Officers who have been recruited using Relationship and/or Scripthouse Sub-culture Modules.

As a result of this emotional turbulence report I request an unsurveilled interface with Education Officer (former) Ralaa Inface. Interaction will include level four physicality; allocation of confidential material will remain within the security 8 clearance range. Location and longevity of interface is uncertain.

RC/LF/01
“Education is what remains after you have forgotten everything you have been taught,” as a wise man once said. In England, despite starting school earlier than in most parts of the world, children are not taught to love literature nearly as much as they should be. Most people remember the books they were read as a child, and such memories shape us throughout life.

Creativity in literature is a rare feature of school education, and this needs to change. Imagination is undoubtedly strong in children, and a resource that is just begging to be tapped. Learning through fun and active use of the mind is amongst the most effective methods of teaching, and if more schools capitalised on this then a whole generation of writers is ready to be spawned.

But is the market ready to receive them? Post-recession, people are clinging to their jobs like never before and in the notoriously competitive creative industry there would appear to be precious little room for new talent. Traditional routes into professional writing, such as magazine internships and posts in publishing houses may be substituted for more modern alternatives.

Growing up in the internet age, young up-and-coming writers have more platforms for their work than ever before. Online writing communities and E-zines spring up everyday, and “user-generated content” is a regularly-occurring buzz term. the writers of tomorrow will have to rely on equal measures of initiative, talent, and hard work to get by in an increasingly crowded marketplace.

AF/WT/01
RESPONSE TO WHAT’S YOUR STORY? ALPHA RED

Alpha Red.

That’s my name: Alpha Red.

Not really; I made it up. You see, I’m an alien: not much more than a bundle of photons vibrating in harmony and contained within an electromagnetic force field. Photons are just little packets of light, little stubby light-waves if you like. And the force field is a barrier to prevent them from escaping, otherwise they’d be off at the speed of light and I’d be no more. If you need an analogy, and I think you do, then think of the photons as my body’s cells and the force field as my skin.

Strange though it may seem, given that I’m basically just light, I’m almost invisible. Of course, you understand that you see an object when photons either bounce off it or are emitted by it and then enter your eye. Well, my photons are securely confined within my body by the force field. The same force field also prevents photons from bouncing off me; the force field bends them around my body. So you can’t see me directly. However, if you were looking at some other object and I moved between it and your eyes then you’d notice an effect rather like looking at the object through a large magnifying glass.

My photons come in many different colours, but most are what you earthlings call ‘red’. Now red has a relaxed wavelength and an unhurried frequency, which means I have a pretty laid-back disposition. Just so you can put a face to a photon, as it were, here’s a picture of my disposition.

And so you’ve got a name to put to the face: I’m the first of the line of Red, so Alpha Red seems appropriate. But I don’t really have a name: we don’t use them. In fact, we don’t use words or language at all; we just think to each other.

Lying Lessons

You earthlings are so good at lying that we assumed you must all have lessons, so I thought I’d start by observing one or two. I’d landed in a place called Nottingham and I started by having a look around at the local schools. After a dozen or more schools, I finally gave up: not a single lesson in lying, fibbing, dissembling, inveigling, being disingenuous—not even ‘being economical with the truth’.

I was nonplussed and more than a little dispirited; I needed somewhere quiet to rest and then think through my tactics in response to this unexpected failure. I remembered a building I mistook on first sight for a school earlier in
the day: West Bridgford Library (I realised my error as soon as I entered and found earthlings reading, writing and working at computers—quietly).

A quiet, calming fifteen minutes of looking over shoulders saw my spirits restored.
But what next?


Without realising it, I’d drifted over to a large notice board on the wall. One thing we aliens have in common with you earthlings is that we find thinking hard and getting nowhere viscerally unpleasant—so much so that, after first convincing ourselves with the flimsiest and most fatuous of justifications, we’ll seize almost any opportunity to engage in some alternative activity.

And so it was with me then. With a gorgeous gut feeling of relief I convinced myself that reading every notice on the notice board was much more important than thinking about a solution to my problem: church fete, school open day, a threat of financial extortion for the late return of books to the library, bicycle for sale, earn £500 without even trying, double glazing, Writing Fiction, lost dog, lost cat... what was that?
I retraced. There!

Writing Fiction: a course of ten evening classes at the Nottingham University Centre for Adult Education on Shakespeare Street. Starting—this evening!
In ten minutes!

Bingo!

Fire!

Five minutes later there I was floating just above the tutor’s head. Looking around, there were thirteen students: all ages and both genders.
As you earthlings do when first meeting, the tutor mumbled some pointless pleasantries and clichéd comments about the weather before introducing himself as Dave. Meaningless pleasantries and clichéd comments are benevolent subsets of lies, and are again unique to you earthlings.

Then, apologising first, Dave read out detailed instructions on what to do in the event of a fire. I assumed that this was another pointless pleasantry—until Dave, apologising again, proceeded to hand out huge volumes of highly flammable paper to each of the students.
Speaking Is Easy—For Some

Then Dave said, “Right, let’s start.”

I sensed real fear.

But Dave just talked about writing in a casual sort of way. After a time, some of the students joined in. Some of the students didn’t. Everybody seemed happy, and the room was soon full of the hubbub of interested and interesting conversation.

Then Dave suddenly clapped his hands and said, “Right, let’s do some writing!”

The silence was sullied only by the reverberation of the clap.

Writing Is Torture—For Most

I twigged: the students were afraid of writing fiction— writing lies.

Dave knew this too; he produced a carrier bag full of little objects, placed one in front of each of the students and said, “Don’t worry, you don’t have to write War and Peace—just two sentences about your object.”

It worked! The students were a lot happier writing truths; after an awkward few seconds the room was full of the sound of the easy scribbling of many ballpoints, the nervous scratching of a fountain pen, the regular breaking and sharpening of a pencil—and the smug clicking of a laptop keyboard.

I thought that the students were a curious sort: they wanted very, very much to write fiction, but found it very, very difficult to write any words of fiction at all. I now know that this is a curious feature of most earthlings: the more they want to write fiction, the more difficult they find it. Yet most of them speak fiction quite freely every day.

So Dave was nudging them towards writing fiction step-by-step: a lot of little steps that would hopefully add up to a giant literary leap for some of his fellow earthlings.

What a nice earthling Dave is.

Really.

If earthlings organised their affairs sensibly then Dave would be fabulously rewarded for his work. And the earthlings who designed, made and sold
machines cunningly designed to kill and maim other earthlings would be paid a pittance. But, curiously, earthlings organise their affairs in precisely the opposite fashion. Silly. And because of this many, many earthlings suffer the unpleasant experience of being blasted or burned or both—and for them there's no safe escape route or congregation point.

IT/AR/01
Spoken from the Art: A night out with Enigma

Michelle Johnson

With an ambitious mission to provide anyone and everyone with the opportunity to tell a story, it is no surprise that fledgling publication Enigma Magazine did not take long to hit the streets with its first successful fundraising event.

September’s Spoken from the Art open mic night was organised by Enigma editor Susan Gray, 22, and featured twelve artists of diverse backgrounds and experiences. The event included familiar faces to London’s poetry circuit, including Ant Smith and Alan Wolfson, as well as welcoming the debut performances of several writers.

The event was held in the stylish Jester Room at the Cross Kings Bar and Restaurant (Kings Cross). The subterranean room, decorated with lavishly provocative cartoons, lent the night the feel of a well-lit writers’ workshop, bright and intimate and occasionally broody – a well-chosen setting for the controversial scope of subjects explored by Spoken from the Art’s performers.

Culture and class were eloquently examined by poets such as Sheema Huq, whose beautiful ‘Sari Sanctuary’ examined the poet’s treasured personal memories through various methods of preserving her carefully hoarded saris, combining the practical and emotional throughout. Robert Monk, in contrast, presented an indulgent look at middle class youth, as he spoke dryly about his love of alcohol and making “a career out of whining”.

The event also featured the surprising sketches of Bertram Trotar, a performance poet and professional comedy caricature, who recently performed at an Oxfam charity show as ‘Britain Finest Young Poet’ and is writing material for a pilot television comedy (nice one, Bertram!).

There was an obvious contrast between the brilliantly funny, atheist punk poetry of Alan Wolfson, a former radio writer of quick wit and nippy rhythms, and the debut performance of Cynthia Huber. Huber’s poem ‘Faces’ was a lyrical celebration of the author’s spiritual awakening, the rhythms of which were reminiscent of the most uplifting funk and gospel. Hers was one of the more subtle references to music during the event, an unofficial theme that proved to be one of the biggest treats of the night.

Paul Taylor played the tenor trombone between poems, while Maria
Slovakova’s moody jazz band accompaniment gave the Dutch poet’s performance the atmosphere of a film noir jazz bar. Slovakova effortlessly mixed language, tone and movement throughout each piece; her poem ‘Regen-Achtig’ jumped from Dutch to Slovakian to English from verse to verse, woven together with Bjork-like half melodies and expert intonation.

Ant Smith, professional photographer by trade, fused elements of folk songs, rock and roll and choral music in his a capella renditions of his poetry. He explained that he believes “…the distinction between performance poetry and printed poetry is that, although you might read hundreds of lines on a page, performance has a better capacity to communicate with people, with rhythms and music to drive it on.”

This driving force of performance and creativity is something that Enigma seems to understand clearly, and each performer was received enthusiastically, and with great warmth on the night. Despite Gray’s decision to introduce no obvious theme or common cause to tie the acts together, there was a great sense of cohesion and symmetry on the whole, as the audience experienced love and loss, Twitter and academia, youth and wisdom.

Cynthia Huber said she was delighted by the enthusiastic reception of the night’s performances, adding: “Enigma is a lovely organization and I hope they go from strength to strength. I’ve become a fan of many new poets here tonight!”

Michelle Johnson
Freelance Writer
I would just like to extend my thanks for all of those who came, who performed and who helped at the venue! Event organising is not normally my forte, and it’s been a great learning curve for me in terms of planning, arranging the venue and of course spreading the word.

Since Enigma Magazine made its debut online and in print, I wished to see the level of interaction turned up a notch – to hear the writer’s voice, to see the audience and for both to collide and interact with each other, and this was certainly accomplished on the night.

We had all sorts of subject matter, from cynicism to hope in our modern world, to playful shenanigans for the audience, punk poetry, gospel to sultry jazz rhythms. Different levels of experience did not matter here at all as every performance was beautiful and lively, exactly what I wanted to emphasise with Spoken from the Art.

Performance Poetry is an amazing art and it is something that I’d like to pursue myself after seeing all of these wonderful acts as well as to help provide a platform for. We aim to organise a New Year’s event – brush up on those creative New Year resolutions and hope to see you there!

Susan Gray
Editor of Enigma Magazine

Thank you to the performers: Ant Smith, Alan Wolfson, Sheema Huq, Bertram Trotar, Robert Monk, Cynthia Huber, Paul Taylor, Maria Slovakova, David Mansell, Gareth Storey, Alex Clements, Jennifer Hooper and Michelle Johnson, who helped with the PR/Marketing and taking quotes on the night.
Enigma aims to make the creative writing world accessible to all as part of the arts programme for the charity CAARE (The Council for the Advancement of Arts and Recreation in Education). Its ethos is for all people of all ages and backgrounds to have the opportunity to have their work published and shared with others.

Enigma reflects the wide variety of today’s creative writing, from works by published authors to poetry from school children. We want to show that anyone with a pen and paper can write and improve by seeing their work alongside others.

Why “Enigma”?

All work is identified by a code, rather than a name. The code can be referenced simply with the alphabet, but our aim is that all work should be read without prejudice on its first read, and can be traced now to the back of the publication to find out more about the writer.

Submission guidelines

Up to three poems/short stories/short scripts (up to 3,000 words max.). The rough deadline for the Autumn Issue will be the 16th October. Submissions should be sent to editor@enigmacw.co.uk or by post to Enigma Magazine, 41 Floral Street, Covent Garden, London WC2E 9DG.

Features

What’s your story?

No matter what background, aspirations or goals in the literary world, Enigma Magazine would be delighted to hear your story for this quarterly feature. The limit is 300 to 500 words.

Submissions should be sent to editor@enigmacw.co.uk or by post to Enigma Magazine, 41 Floral Street, Covent Garden, London WC2E 9DG entitled “What’s your story?”

Enigma is published by CAARE (The Council for the Advancement of Arts, Recreation and Education), a registered charity that promotes the benefits of participation in the arts and physical activity.

We are always accepting throughout the year and even if your work is not immediately published, there is always the option of keeping your work on record for any future issue.
SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Online Submissions – NEW

We may choose to have some of the work you submitted online instead of in the magazine, but we will always ask you first. Feel free to submit work purely for online, but please make sure you mark it so! We are now accepting poetry recordings as well to put on the site. MP3 recordings or WAV files are accepted.

Enigma’s Birthday Book - NEW

Enigma will be an energetic little one year old on the 17th October! Send in your birthday wishes or birthday themed pieces/illustrations to editor@enigmacw.co.uk.
Enigma Creative Writing magazine is currently being published by the London charity CAARE (The Council for the Advancement of Arts, Recreation and Education), who have now acted as a guardian for arts and sports in Britain for over 10 years. Protecting Britain’s cultural interest, they often undergo political campaigns, archive and research information regarding the mental and physical wellbeing of the nation.

The founder, operatic conductor Denis Vaughan, the initial driving force and founding father of the National Lottery in Britain, set up to provide a funding foundation for Arts and Sports. He has also been mentioned as ‘the man who brought more money to sport than anyone else in the 20th Century.’ CAARE is the only charity to fully monitor Lottery spending on good causes, and over time the priorities over the use of Lottery funds have changed and used for other purposes. CAARE’s main ethos is to widen access and participation in arts and sports to the Lottery’s full potential, and must be protected to serve its paying public personally.

In the past year, articles about CAARE and Denis Vaughan has had quite a wide range of media coverage including, The Times, The Daily Mail, The Scotsman and Time Out magazine.

Enigma Creative Writing Magazine is only one of their projects to spread awareness of arts and sports for the public, and all proceeds from purchasing this magazine in print in the future will go towards this cause. To find out more about current and past projects, visit www.caare.co.uk.
**SL/H/01**  
**Samatha Lister - Harvest**  
I am currently in the process of completing an MA in Creative and Critical Writing at the University of Gloucestershire. I am also on the editorial team of Bombast Poetry Magazine (bombastpoetry.blogspot.com. We hope to have the first issue out Jan 2010).

**EW/US/OC/01/02**  
**Eliza Witte - Ultrasound/Out of Context**  
TBA

**DG/03/WS**  
**David Gaffney - What you see is There**  
David Gaffney is from Manchester. He is the author of Sawn Off Tales (Salt 2006), Aromabingo (Salt 2007), Never Never (Tindal Street 2008), Buildings Crying Out a story using lost cat posters (Lancaster litfest 2009), 23 Stops To Hull stories about junctions on the M62 (Humbermouth festival 2009) Rivers Take Them a set of short operas with composer Ailis Ni Riain (BBC Radio Three 2008,) and Destroy PowerPoint, stories in PowerPoint format (Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2009) and In 2010 The Poole Confessions, short stories based on the confessions of people form Poole and delivered in a mobile confessional box at Poole Literature Festival, and The Half Life of Songs, a new collection of shorts on SALT press. David became interested in writing fiction after being in bands and writing lyrics for songs.

**MP/TK/01**  
**Mark Piggot - The Kerryman**  
Hi, I’m an author and journalist. My first novel, “Fire Horses”, was published in 2008 by Legend Press and is in the shops now. My second novel, “Out of Office”, is out in March 2010. I’ve had short stories and poems published at various places including Aesthetica, Pulp Books, 3am and buzzwords, write for Private Eye, satirical websites and blogs, and as a journalist I’ve had many features published in the Times, Guardian, Independent, Telegraph, and more.

**ND/R/01**  
**Naomi Davidson - Reflections**  
I am a 25 year old from Liverpool. I think that an interest in watching and recording has been part of my makeup since childhood. In writing poetry i feel i am still just observing and recording different moments. I am interested in expressing the complexities within a given moment in the
simplest way, I like to strip it back as much as possible. I find the position of observer is one I adopt often in my writing as it allows for a sense of objectivity as opposed to sentimentality.

**JR/RP/02**

**Jonathan Rodgers - Rock Pools**

Jonathan David Rodgers is a writer of poetry and short fiction. He is a postgraduate of English Literature at the University of Manchester and is currently studying an MA focusing on 20th Century writers and poets. Through his work Jonathan attempts to expose and explore that crust of familiarity that so often covers the stranger aspects of everyday life. Issues such as ingrained prejudices, dogmatic belief systems and veiled social pretensions are often explored in his poetry and these are frequently tied to an ambivalent relationship with the Northwest of England. Jonathan's poetic influences include Hardy, Auden and Larkin, and he wishes to bring the work of Mervyn Peake to greater critical and public attention.

**GB/G/02**

**Graham Burchell - Granite**

Graham Burchell was born in Canterbury. He is the winner of the first Chapter One Promotions Open Poetry Competition in 2005 and 2nd place winner in 2009. He was also winner of the 2006 Hazel Street Productions Poetry Contest, 3rd place winner in the 2009 Torriano Poetry Competition and specially commended in the Ware Open Poetry Competition 2006, the Welsh Poetry Competition 2008 and 2009 and in the July 2009 Sentinel Literary Quarterly Poetry Competition. Graham was also nominated for a 2006 Pushcart Prize. His poetry has appeared in many print and online literary magazines around the world. His first poetry collection ‘Vermeer’s Corner’ (Foothills Publishing) and his chapbook ‘Ladies of Divided Twins’ ((Erbacce Press) were both published in 2008 along with his children’s novel ‘Chester and the Green Pig’ (Calderwood Books). He is also the editor of the online poetry journal, Words-Myth, voted online poetry magazine of 2007 by Poetry Kit. He is a former member of Houston based “Poets Northwest”, and currently a member of the Moor Poets in Devon, England. For more details visit Graham’s website.

**TG/GT/01**

**Tawnysha Greene- At Grandma Teri’s House**

Tawnysha Greene is a PhD student at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. Her work has appeared in The 2River View, The Wild Goose Poetry Review, The Tonopah Review, The Arava Review, The Orange Room Review, The
BEHIND THE DOOR

Houston Literary Review, and The Chaffey Review.

JH/IA/01
Jennifer Hooper - I am Alone
Aged 6, I remember my keen desire to learn to read and write and my personal drive to learn how to do, which was quite wearisome, but the only way to overcome this obstacle was to put pen to paper and struggle to read my nursery books. Looking back my earliest recollection of writing was around 7-8 years. Not so long ago I completed a communications course that helped me to learn more about the actual mind, its functions and coping mechanisms. Somehow I believe this was the royal road to find Me again. As my power, was gradually restored and my creative theme leaned to the concept of empowerment which effected a certain kind of positive refinement in my personality. It was obviously doing me some good so I resumed writing poetry on a weekly basis. Although I have had a love of poetry from quite a young age, it is really now that I have a much clearer understanding about this talent. The love of poetry has developed in me because of its ability to invoke triggers to write about themes that are wish, desire, love or hate and helped me to express my true feelings about a person or a thing. Writing in any form including poetry, especially if aspects of the self are in the words, can be a kind of catharsis – a way of working through thoughts. Somehow, I truly believe that writing for all those years when I was a child has enabled me to move forward from a dependent to an independent state, in a kind of elegant way. I encourage all to join me in this form of archaic but contemporary activity for personal pleasure and the reader’s interpretation.

MC/AS/01
Michael Casares - Acquisition and Security
Michael Aaron Casares has always wanted to be a writer, a passion that began verbally in the school yards and lunch rooms where he would entertain friends with stories, continued in the drawing room where he would draw out long and immense story archs and comics, and eventually translated to poetry and fiction. Poetry has been his passion since the age of 11 and he has seen his love for the written word expand to his own independent press, a goal he has long had to help others realize their dreams of being published and read. Above all the things expressionionism is paramount to Michael because it is a unique facet of communicating and sharing our knowledge, thoughts and feelings and enriching our human experience.
OL/PD/01

Owen Lysak - Paperdolls and other Themes

“For what it is worth, I work in the legal sphere, but have been writing, in some form or another, forever. I have trouble writing simply and naturally. For that reason, I feel I shall write short stories forever, and never manage a novel. My greatest fear is that one day I will read a book that I feel I was supposed to write.”

EH/E/01

Emma Hardy - Eleven

Emma Hardy is currently studying on the Creative Writing PhD programme at the University of Glasgow. Emma has an MA in Creative Writing (Leeds) and a BA Hons in Imaginative Writing (Liverpool John Moores). Emma teaches creative writing for the Open University, in adult and community education and in schools. She previously worked as a part-time lecturer at the University of Salford. Emma writes because it is the only thing in the world that brings her unconditional happiness.

CH/F/01

Cynthia Huber - Faces

I’m a NY City girl living in and loving Camden with my Mister. More than 12 years ago I worked in the bar and nightclub business in the city (Manhattan) where men have the tendency to open up after a few drinks telling me all of their most erotic thoughts and actions, I took these confessions and penned what is known as material of the triple x variety. Shortly after being published in an underground zine I changed drastically became a personal trainer and put down the pen, it wasn’t until we’d moved to London nearly one and a half years ago that I began writing again. To say that my present pieces are completely opposite my first work is putting it mildly!

MB/NL/01

Mary Byrne - Nikodje’s Lap of Honour

LR/DS/01
Linda Ravenswood - The Daily Saint
Linda Ravenswood (BFA, MA) has been published in Flaming Arrows (Ireland), The Wilshire Review (Los Angeles) and is forthcoming in Audemus (Los Angeles). Her music has appeared on PBS. She holds a BFA (Music Theatre, Art) from CalArts and an MA (Humanities; Emphasis in Creative Writing) from Mount Saint Mary’s College. She has lived extensively in the US, Ireland and the UK.

RC/LF/01
Rico Craig - Level Four (response to Writers of Tomorrow)
I’m another person waiting for the magic afternoon when his/her unfinished novel falls into the right collection of pieces. Other recent work can be seen in the short story collection Subtext, published to accompany the installation Chord at the Kingsway Tram Subway Oct-Nov 2009.

IT/AR/01
Ian Taylor - Alpha Red (Response to What’s your Story?)
I’m Ian Taylor: 55 years old, male, father of three, ex-husband to one woman, current boyfriend to another, systems analyst. My job involves a lot of technical writing, and I’ve always hankered to have a go at something more creative. I’ve attended four courses on creative writing at Nottingham University’s Centre for Adult Education. This is the first time I’ve submitted a piece of work for publication. I’ve entered three short story competitions, and had one short story shortlisted: Superraythundersting Man.