

CARNIVAL OF VOICES

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CARNIVAL OF VOICES

But I hear voices in everything and dialogic relations among them. Bakhtin

Carnival of Voices is a work of fiction. The voices in each of these tales are entirely fictional: the speakers and who they talk about are composite characters and creations of my imagination and have no individual reference to real persons living or dead. The locations of these tales are given to add a sense of reality and are composites of a number of towns and places I have known.

Historical

Setting people in broader history is important, isn't it?

Look, if you want I can give you chapter and verse in the economic history sense. It goes something like this: Baytown is a town built on the tenets of hard fact, a Gradgrind-formed industrial 19th century town connoting shipbuilding and heavy engineering, chemicals, paper making, iron and steel production. Class and competing social, financial, and regional powers co-evolved to form the town. What is pretty sure is that Baytown wasn't a spontaneous or an organic slowly-developing town - it was a carefully planned and developed as a town with one town's end in mind – profit. It was a town whipped into shape by a group of 'entrepreneurial' iron ore mine masters.

Who were they?

They were backed by capital that came from rich aristocratic Scottish landowners - the Bay area historically being penetrated by Jacobinism - their landholdings and estates dominating the area. In addition to these sources of capital, the argument is that Baytown rose as a result of the town's fathers' desire to compete with Liverpool docks for the Atlantic and Empire trade routes as well as competing with the Clyde in shipbuilding. Baytown drew, grew, because of the uncoordinated and individualistic limestone, slate, coal and iron mining ventures of the area, these industrious individuals were designated the 'Peninsular Pioneers' in one paper I read. And there are the geographical arguments: the situation of the town being a key factor in stimulating its development in the mid-19th century. It allowed it to avoid the drawbacks of other ports of the tidal bay, the town offering deep water access even

though its key channel requires regular dredging to keep boats plying the Irish Sea shipping lanes.

Hmm. Okay, economic history. But what about the people?

Class history? Well, say before 1820, Baytown and peninsular was principally made up of small farming and fishing communities, a population that I guess was so socially and politically undeveloped and isolated and unorganized, talking in Marxian terms, in comparison to, say, Liverpool's working-class. But, once the mineral and iron railway was established, its many tidal creeks and channels that flooded large expanses of the peninsular got drained and communications by road then improved. Although very scattered in numerous hamlets and small market towns like nearby Baymoor, added together there was *a considerable population of farm, estate, and village/town labourers*. Much of the work in the area was *agricultural and seasonal*, of course, and the 1820s saw generally high unemployment. Local history studies I've seen see this as creating a labour market which was *pliable, pious, patriotic* – I remember the phrase but not, now, the writer – but this made the area attractive to capital.

I guess Baytown has always been seen unproblematically as a traditional (white) male working-class town. A town moulded by landed Scottish aristos' spare cash derived from screwing agricultural labour, and that working-class masculine image of the town is the dominant one in press, TV news representations of Baytown. Its shipyard dock cranes, the iron works' furnaces, although that shut down some years back, those shiny towers of the chemical plants, all connote Baytown as a male working-class town. And its working-class cultural institutions, its countless pubs and at least a dozen working men's clubs are male spaces. And from these came

Smithy, Posser, Barry, Angus, Gordon, Ant', Coalie, Mortie, Dino. And Me, the humble recorder of their voices.

Chapter 1 R.I.P

...the unique speech experience of each individual is shaped and developed in continuous and constant interaction with others' individual utterances. Bakhtin: *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* The Problem of Speech Genres

-I come to disinter the dead not bury them. As Caesar said. And, anyway, speaking about all the dead and gone of our club is a way of keeping 'em alive, in a way. Don't you agree, Des?

-No. They're dead. But that's you, to a tee. And that's *why* we call you Dr Death, if there's a bright side in view you'll find a way to cloud it by going on about the dead.

-There's a lot of it about. So, go on, is he or isn't he amongst them, Des?

-I must admit, it's like looking at Baytown's Boot Hill. All of these pics of old club members. There's Billy Thompson playing darts. And who was that bloke?

-That? That's *whatdoyoumacallhim*? Pete, er, Walmsley. He was a fitter in central engineering, Navy dock. Did he die? No, just moved away to Leeds, back in '72. But *he is* dead – the one next to him, the one kneeling at the bowls – Don Wilson – heart attack and only 44. Worked with him once at GMK. Always worried by the doc about his blood pressure. Took the job far too seriously. So Don's a Goner.

-There's that Roger, you didn't like him, Reg. Don't know why, *two of a kind* I'd have thought. But he's one of the dead.

- I don't get on with Scots – even dead ones. All of 'em want driving back over the border. Give 'em independence, North Sea gas and oil or no *gas and air-oil*. He was always grinding on about the Yard *never havin' done anything for him*, all of the time. I used to tell him 'why don't you fuck off back to the Clyde with Jimmy Reid all of the other reds, you cunt!' His wife made his life a misery and then left him. Local girl. See her now and again in town, lives in Dawson Street. Merry bloody divorcee, ha! His post-humorous wife. Seen her, she goes upstairs at the Conservative club's *grab a granny nights* on Thursdays. Did his body go back to Bonnie Scotland?

-Dunno. How come there's no women in the black and white photos?

-None, Des. Only the barmaids. The first camera guy, bloke from the Evening News I think, but freelance, only came round in the daytime not at the weekends, over a couple of weeks. Anyway, in those days, if you remember – oh, no, you didn't bother with the club much back then, did you? Well the fair sex was only allowed in accompanied at nights, in the lounge only. In the 1960s. Then they had a follow up photographer a few years back. But the name's over the door: *WORKING MEN'S CLUB*. Established 1904, and no women allowed in at all then.

-Still can't find him, Reg. Why did they do it? Take all of these photos? Thank god I'm not in them. Who'd want to look back at their old selves anyway when they're having a drink, even if they're not dead?

-Dead right, Des. But the committee must have thought it was a good idea at the time. But just look, all of those gormless grins on their faces. All gone. All of us felt uncomfortable all the time with him the photographer, wore a dicky-bow as I remember, his wandering all over the club and bowling green with his flashy flashing cameras, changing his lenses, when we were trying to play cards or whatever. There's one of me playing don, not Don, don, somewhere amongst them all. Guy I'm dealing to is Alfie, remember him? The poor bastard's still working even though he's got heavy asbestos plaque.

-Oh, yeah.

-And Danny Price, Bob Thistlethwaite they should be there. I can see the one of Bob from here. He ended up in Doris Park Ward for a time, couldn't hack his retirement, sent him round the twist, poor fucker. It's amazing how many of the lads go down like flies once they hang up their steel toe-capped boots.

-It's being so cheerful that keeps you going all the time, Reggie! Anyway, what time's the *cortege* supposed to be passing?

-Cortege? Cortege? Oh, very posh, Des. Cortege! The cortege *proceeded* along the streets of Baytown and *ceremoniously* passed the *late lamented's* favourite hostelry. Oh, yes, very classy, very rites of the Roman, I don't think.

- I asked you a question, sarky bastard.

-Fred's been posted at the door and he'll give us a shout when he sees them coming over the low level bridge. Hey Jack! What time's the coffin due?

-Bloody hell, Reg! Show some respect, we are supposed to be keeping it down 'til it's over. It's four at the Church then back here to get the aluminium foil off of that lot. Then we can have the snooker table back.

-Why the quiet? He was a noisy bugger, he wouldn't have wanted all of this show.

-A long-term member of this club Harry was, he was club secretary at one time in the early 60s. They don't make 'em like him anymore. Started at the yard year before me, back in '46, over thirty years and now he won't even get his pension.

-Still riveting the boats then weren't we Jack?

-Near enough, still a few, Des.

-Tell you what, I'd rather be a riveter than be stuck under a welding screen all bloody day long burning-off rods, wouldn't you, Jack?

-No, I wouldn't, Des. More important things than that to worry about, anyway. It's voting today, don't forget. Hello, Geoff, bet you've voted?

-For the Lady. Thatcher is what this town needs, we need that yard and she'll make sure. Can't trust Sunny Jim as far as you can throw him. Give him an inch and he'll take the yard!

-Ha, Ha!

-Funny

-Think what he was like when he was Wilson's deputy. At least with old Georg Browne you knew where you were – liked a drink like a normal man and what do they do? Sack him and send him off to the Lords because he agreed with Enoch. And now Sunny Jim's hidebound with that Benn and Foot around him. And Healey. Since he called the IMF in they're cutting, cutting. Let the Ban the Bombers get us all made redundant.

-How can you do that? you a working man, voting for those lot? Baytown's always been Labour and don't forget it was Labour got us the boats anyway.

-Can't trust them, Jack, all of the silly ideas in the recession, what was it? The Lucas Plan? If the crazy Lefties had their way we'd be turning out junks for the Chinese navy.

-Hello, you lot! What're you having?

-Oh, hi Tommo, well, I'll have bitter.

-Geoff?

-Lager.

-Des?

-I'm alright.

-Mine's a bitter, Tommo, if you're buying. A rare treat this is.

-You miserable bastard. Bitter by mouth all round. Anyway, what do you mean? On a day like today? Putting old Harry into the oven, he deserves it.

-Earth.

-What?

-Earth, you twat. It's burial.

-Well, whatever, earth, fire, *dust to dust*. One of the Old School, got to give it to him, them, what they went through – 30s, Hitler, then austerity, what a generation he happened to be in!

-I was just saying that.

-He was a demon on the old 301, before he had to start wearing bins. We'll miss him.

-We've just been looking for him on the wailing wall. Des couldn't find him. Tommo, come on and have a look for him will you, or you, Geoff?

-Why don't you look for him yourself you lazy fucker?

-Language!

-Can't – too depressing. And I'd have to squat, with my arthritic back and neck.

-Any excuse! 'Ush up. I'll look in a minute. When's the hearse due by?

-Soon. Fred's on watch. Why aren't you going, you were mates?

-Too many, his missus'd rather just family, Labour Party, and the club committee goes, then all back here, so no problem. Only finished work at 12.30, had my lunch in the canteen and walked down. Denis wanted to go so they let him. Old fitters, eh? They never die, just fade away.

-Not looking at that mural, they don't. Plenty on Boot Hill in their prime. Harry too, only 56.

-God, you are a miserable sod, Reg! Life and soul of the party. They should give you the top hat and wreath and let you lead the cars. Handy having the time off for the voting as well, I intend nipping in on my way home, Island school's the polling station, as usual – given the sprogs the day off. Have you voted, done the deed, Reg, your democratic duty?

-I have not, Tommo. I wouldn't vote for any of them, all a bloody pack shower. Des's voting Thatcher, reckons she's the meal ticket for the town. The Iron – spit - Lady.

-Very wise Des. I'm inclined to as well. What, four months ago poor Harry would have had to wait in the morgue or the undertakers' lounge with all of them council workers out. Mortuary attendants wanting their 20% along with the bin men.

-Now, now. Your dad'd turn in his grave, Tommo, if he heard you talking like that.

-True, Jack, but times change. Even me – don't forget I was for backing the apprentices when they all went out, backed them lads all the way to the TUC. That Boilermakers' convenor didn't know how to stifle that one, did he, Des?

-Storm in a tea cup. But, yeah, apprentice welders. I supported them lads – but we didn't go out – management taking the piss then. Still are. Did you hear that a young lad in the coppersmith's shop got all his fingers crushed? Day before yesterday.

-Yep. Don't know who it was, though. Heard the ambulance take him to the General. Compensation be okay though, at least that is one thing the union's good for. Dunno why we pay our dues at all. I was talking to Colin Carmouth only this morning and he's dropped out – waste of money and I'm inclined to agree with him – who do you see going on from being yard convenor to area union officer these days? No one. All college boys and from London.

-Got to pay your dues, Tommo, only right. It's a closed shop, he won't get away with it if Murray finds out. *Unity is Strength*. Old Harry was union through and through and Labour Ward Councillor into the bargain since what was it? 1955.

-*I'm* not saying that, it's Colin, and a good few others – his mate Lenny the Pools for one, but you can see where they're coming from. They are too close to the bosses and they won't say boo to a goose at the moment cos they want that soft fucker Callaghan back in.

-Getting back to business. Go on Tommo, bestride yourself to the wall of death and see if there's one of Harry.

-I know where you are on it, Reg! You're turn next! Ha. Ha! There, sat with Alfie, Willie Brookes and Ted Thistlethwaite, all smoking your 'eads off! Is that actually a smile on your kisser, Reggie? Don't believe it! Dealing Alfie a bad hand.

-Very funny.

-I thought that photographer got one of the committee and some of the old timers together – pensioners' outing or something. Why did they have to go and stick em all one on top of the other like this? There's 'Dublo' Hornby with an empty pint in front of him, hoping the cameraman's going to buy him one, I expect. Lots of people I don't know, retirees must come in during the day when we're all in the yard. There's that lazy sod Terry, Tex, Tex with the bad case of narcolepsy, always asleep in the bogs. Bloody Hell! Have you seen this guy here? Who's he! Ha. Ha! Look Des, Reg, Geoff, Jack, look at this fucker – who is that?

-Who? What? Dunno. Why?

-Him? Never seen him before. Not seen him in the yard. Odd looking bod, though. Wants a shave. Dirty white mac.

-But look! Look at his pants! C'mon over, Reggie.

-No, no point, if you don't know him, I won't.

-Fucker's got a stalk on!

-What?

-Oh, yeah!

-Got a stiffy! Must have had the hots for the photographer!

-I tell you, guard your image. Who wants to be remembered like that!

-Probably a truss.

-Truss my arse.

-C'mon lads, show some respect please.

-Well, I can't see him, must have been missing that week – away.

-No, Tommo, not Harry. Most of his life never went away from the Island. And once him and Mary got that detached bungalow number on Westmoreland Terrace with that legacy from his missus' parents he said he had no need to go anywhere else. Called it Paradise Villa. Said he had nothing to go away for. Seen enough of that, the world, in the navy.

-He's got to be there somewhere.

-There's that fucker Joe Mossy Green playing cards. Looking like a rabbit caught in someone's headlights – flash put him off, I bet.

-My nephew, Roland, says that Warne lad always thought life had dealt him a bad hand.

-No, that's you Reggie, miserable sod. Always bust and never flush. Anyway, I give up. Jack, for God's sake, do you know if Harry is on here or not?

- ... THERE!

-...

-Why the fuck didn't you say in the first place! Keeping us all wondering?

-Enjoyed the spectacle, Reg. I always remember – he was drinking with Dexy, (another one who's dead. Cancer, poor sod), and Don, also dead, who worked with you, Reg, at Corvins's.

-And that other guy who was a regular then but dropped off – got God and became a bible-basher. Now he ups and looks!

-Well, not getting up for nothing. Oh, yeah. Well, we need to put a black spot on all those who have gone, put RIP and the date, save the trouble in the future.

-God, Reg, it's being so cheerful that keeps you going.

-Bible bashers. Hopeless pipefitters like now gone Don. Kept some right odd company did Harry.

-Don't start insulting Harry. You're like Mecca bingo to a Muslim you are – a double fucking insult. Anyway, now you can really have something to gripe about – your turn to get them in.

-He looks really young there, but it was what? Fifteen years ago? What happened to him?

-Stop changing the subject you tight bastard.

-Hang-on. I will tell you, it was this lot happened to him, Geoff, your generation aging us! Skinheads. That lover boy Bowie and all the other queers on the box these days. Punks!

-What is it, Fred?

-HE'S, THE HEARSE IS COMING!

*

-Nice touch, slowing down like that outside the club. What firm was it?

-Oster's and Nephew. People think Oster didn't have a son.

-What?

-Nephew, it's a surname not a relative...

-I bowed my head, a bit, why? Daft that, not a bloody parade. Shame no one wears hats any more, easy in the past to take it off to show respect. 'Doft your titfer'. Now what do we do?

-Nothing wrong with bowing your head, that's what's left of the old ways. Three cheers, I mean cars, for him. Council mucked in probably. Nice flowers – 'Granddad'.

And RIP done in violets. Poor fucker! No retirement for him. He should have took the redundancy, when was that last offer, Reg? '73?

-No, in the middle of the oil crisis, oh, yeah, '73-72. Thought the yard would close, no orders. Japs and Koreans getting everything. Ted Heath (and his band) ballsing about. Now *he was* a reason for voting Labour! Swanning around with his baton, yachting cap on

– That rhymes! You're a poet and you didn't know it.

-Hat and bat-on not on at the same time, Reg.

-Oh, no, look what the cat's dragged in!

-Afternoon, fellas! In the queue early for the wake buffet I see! Don't they feed you at home?

-Not wake, that's before – but...

-Hello, Darren. If you're here they'll need to double up on the grub.

-Darren.

-Athers.

-Darren, I hope you don't want any of it, with your gob! Still eating Yorkies in one go?

-Never fail. Lucky for you I'm not hungry. And I can't have much to drink. I drove behind them for a bit then came in and parked up when they went on to the church. Always intrigued me what you lot get up to in this place. Nev's here as well but just seeing a man about a dog. No point hanging about and going on to the service. I knew you lot'd be here. Any excuse for an afternoon off!

-You, you dope? You didn't know him? Bet you never said a word to him in your life.

-Well you are dead wrong there, Reg, so stuff that down your throat and eat it. My uncle John's known him since school, so there. John can't come, not in his condition – welder's lung. So I've come in his place. *And* I sat next to him once on the coach

all the way back from that trip to Lords, when Lowfield got to the final of the National League one day. 40 overs. Cup. He was always down at Lowfield, Harry was, on a Sunday.

-When was that trip, '74?

-'No. I'd just come out of my time, six years ago, '73. But we had a reet good time. They played a team of nobs from a village green club, Cobton. Surrey? Home counties, anyway. They won, by 25 runs, southern tossers. I brought back an ash tray from the Long Room.

-Ashes to ashes – get it?

-You don't smoke.

-What's that got to do with it? Might as well smoke, though, with you lot. When did they last open a window in here – 1910?

-We like it like this.

-Jack, you're not going are you?

-No, just going for a pee, be right back.

-So, Harry was on that trip was he? I used to go down to see Lowfield then, why didn't I go? I remember now, them getting there. Why didn't they ask me?

-Probably no one told you 'cos you are a miserable sod, that's why Reg. Nobody ever bring that to your attention?

-Oh, piss off, Darren. You were at the front of the queue when they were giving out mouths.

-And at the back of the one for brains!

-Yeah? Well, it's what you and us younger ones have in common, then. Here's Nevvy. Over here! That's yours there.

-Hy-up! What're you doing here?

-Don't mind him. My lad.

-So it is, your lad Des, at College aren't you?

-Yeah. I am.

-My Denny said.

-The brains of the family, eh, Des?

-Tells me about it but it's all a bloody mystery to me, a BA with honours, like it's a military cross with bar or something. He's got more bloody handles to his name than a hurdy gurdy. But that's the way it is, now. Certificates. All he ever did was read all the bloody time.

-Here's Frank! Frank, come and join us. Just having one for old Harry. You still on the sick?

-Hiya, Tommo, Darren, you idiot. Des. Nevvy. Reg. Geoff and one and fucking all. Who's this?

-Des' lad. You still off sick?

-Right. Er, that's me! Doc signed me off for another fortnight.

-What'sthemattah, plumber's dropsy? Ha. Ha!

-Shut up, Darren, you idiot. No, my old problem with my feet, bunions since a kid, bane of my life.

-Didn't help when that lorry ran over one of them, eh, Frank? Did you hear that one, Geoff? What was it, the right one, wasn't it? Frank pulls his moped up at the lights near the Curzon corner during the evening rush. When was it, Frank, '66? Feet flat on the tarmac and a great green whopping 10-ton lorry runs over his foot! Baytown Quarries' wagon, wasn't it?

-Green GMK caustic soda tanker. I can still feel the pain now, in my head, shudder runs through my spine. Always took my steel toeies off at work, wish I hadn't that night, never did after that.

-You were too big for that scooter, Frank. Your knees right up by your armpits!

-Honda 50. Good little runner!

-Oh, yeah, phutt-phutt-phutt!

-Less frivolity, men. Show some respect. They'll be here soon.

-Yeah, right, sorry Jack. But Frank's been telling us about his feet.

-No, Tommo's been telling us about his feet.

-Give me a light...There's a story about Harry that's to do with his feet, have you heard this Reg?

-If once a thousand times, Jack, but be my guest.

-What is it? I haven't heard it. You old timers - always got a tale to tell.

-If we have it'd be in one ear and out the other with you, Darren.

-Tommo, Des, Nevvy?

-I only knew his daughter, Sandra, class slag at school.

-That's not a nice thing to say, she's just lost her fucking dad.

-Well...

-Have you heard it or not?

-I don't recall, plenty of tales about old Harry, though.

-Only 56, not old at all these days. Anyway, he told me it direct, years ago. About when he was in the Navy. He was in it, before he came into the Yard. Actually, he'd wanted to go in the army. He had no choice and no one'd put him down for anything high falutin' like the RAF, coming from around here, either. It was 1939, he was just

17 and hadn't thought on about getting in the yard so he got called up. Then he finds out, after doing all his training, that there was an issue with his feet.

-I know – Veruccas.

-Why Veruccas? They wouldn't chuck him out of the navy, not for veruccas.

-Might do.

-Why?

-Er...risk of increased - crew - infection.

-Darren, shut up. He had flat feet.

-What's flat feet?

-Frank can tell you.

-Huh. Very funny, I don't think.

-He'd been passed by the Navy's quack at the recruiting centre, off by Baytown basin. It's still there, well, the signs. Anyway, they said you're all FIS - fit for service'. Had his training on one of those 'land ships', Invergordon, Rosyth or was it Tilbury? Just getting into it nicely, Harry actually thought the Navy was going to be a good career after war service, didn't fancy following his dad into the yard.

-Why did he, then?

-That's part of the story. So, he'd been packed off as ordinary seaman on a destroyer at Gib, the Quernmoor.

-Nope, Jack, it was the Antelope, sure it was. Then the Quernmoor. Antelope, little corvette out of Birkenhead yard. Sunk later, I think.

-Well, Reg, it's the Quernmoor that's the key, wherever he joined it. It was all a nice little first voyage to the Med': Malta and Alexandria, before things really got hot with Rommel and the Afrika Korps' Stukas bombing the convoys. He had been promised some radio job, sonar just coming in, something like that, and he was getting on fine.

Loved it. Then at Valletta this First Mate grabs him and marches him off to see the Ensign, I think, Harry said, but whatever and he's got the MO waiting there with him, all serious like. He's stood to attention. Then the Ensign orders him to at ease and take his shoes and socks off. 'Show us your feet, Mortison.' Does so, but the medico's old and doesn't want to squat down to give his feet the once over. 'Hold your feet up, Mortison!' comes the order. The doc paws his feet, making Harry stand on one foot, then the other, like he's doing the bleeding hornpipe for them. 'Will they do?' says this Ensign. 'No way!' says the medico. Harry's completely nonplussed. Treating him, his feet as if they were navy property, which they were in a way. Next thing he knows of it he's on the first boat that's going back to England, down the Suez and right round the long way via the Cape. Spent the rest of the war at Dartmouth. He'd had two weeks in the Med on two old buckets of a corvette and a destroyer, one of those that the Yanks gave Churchill. Keel-hauled by his own Navy – 'You'll never step foot on a Royal Naval vessel again, Mortison'. But they got that wrong. Guess why?

-No, go on, put us out of our misery.

-Soon as the war's over they kick him out of the Navy persona non-grata and he comes back to work with his dad in the yard. Then what turns up a couple of years after the war, for a refit? The Quernmoor. Indonesians want it as a island-hopping ferry or something. The yard gets the job, quick conversion. And there's Harry, back on board, flat feet or not, burning off its gun mounts.

-Very droll.

-Like I say, what comes around comes around.

-That makes me think, shouldn't the Legion have coughed up something for him?

VOTE CONSERVATIVE!
VOTE CROFTON-BOYD!
FOR BAYTOWN'S FUTURE!
FOR OUR COUNTRY'S FUTURE!

-How's that for respect, now, Jack! Tories giving the club a blast like that!

-Bloody cheek, venturing near this club – would have got lynched in the 1940s, getting cocky, they think they have it in the bag.

-I tell you, they've redrawn the constituency boundaries, they've got a good chance now Baymoor's and all the yokels are in with us. Sheep-cropping farmers and their wives all got rich on ECC subsidies, they'll go and vote for Thatcher, you can bet your bottom dollar.

-Anything to stop them closing the Yard. They will have us building junks for the Chinese.

-You've said that, Des.

-Who will?

-Callaghan and Foot.

-Feet again.

-Huh. Who else is there on the wailing wall? Derek Patterson, he built a raft using old oil barrels and tried to get to the Isle of Man on it, the idiot. There's that oddball fella, he only came to the club for a few weeks but got in on the act, Sun Electric finished him so he came to the yard. Short hair, some kind of Buddhist. Machinist, in the machine shop, Will Rushforth says he's a right plonker. There's yet another one of you, Reg. You must spend some time in here.

-Where? Thought I was only in the one.

-There, you sod, one of the colour photos, drinking with Terry the mate.

-Idle bleeder then and now. I don't like being up there with them all. Makes me feel vulnerable too.

-Tex? Is he still at Bowerham and Sprayne's?

- Sprayne's only – the other's deceased.

-Like Randal and Hopkirk.

-?

-Deceased. Like the TV prog. Anyway, you won't die, Reg, not unless someone hammers a wooden stake through your heart!

-Yeah! Your pasty-face! Look like Dracula in need of a blood transfusion.

-Shut it, Darren. Know your place - you are with the grown-ups now.

-You've got the look, though, Reg, and your nephew Posser, you're like...goths.

-Shut it, here's Rick.

-What are you lot going on about?

-Wailing Wall, Ricky – the club's own photographic obit, RIP, requiescat in photographs.

-I know! Don't know why they had that done – like an albatross hanging over the club room. Before my time, even the colour ones. I wouldn't have had it, committee or no. Anyway, they've just phoned. They're on their way so I'm getting this lot ready. I'm taking the foil off but don't start in on anything until they get here, yeah?

-As if we would!

-You're the club steward, steward.

-They'll be crumbs despite the covers, get everywhere, and I'll have to Hoover up the baize. And we've got ladies' darts tonight.

-Women in the club bar, not right.

-They let zombies like you in, so we can now let the women in.

-Big infusion of membership fees, married couples, that policy has brought cash in for the club, and it's all the better for it.

-It says working *men's* club.

-What are you doing in here then?

-Don't start going on. Things change. You don't know the half of it, anyway. Anyway, and I bet you didn't know this, did you? But this club was founded by Micks, working in the yard in 1899. I kid not. Didn't know that, did you?

-Never?

-Really?

-True as I'm standing here looking at you ugly lot. Recently got to see the original lease deed agreement. Covenant. 100 years. Irish names, all of them. Ulstermen, from Belfast. Two of them signed and underneath they'd added Order of the Orange Men.

-Wouldn't credit it.

-Must have come from Harland and Wolf's.

-Bloody Micks, killing our boys.

-That's the others, mainly, the Left Footers.

-Anyway, I don't see the link with not letting women in the club.

-I'm just saying, things change. Wasn't Harry a Left Footer? So, then, he couldn't have had his wake here, then, could he?

-They look good, Rick, did you and your misses put them up?

-No, Tommo, only the crisps and nuts. We got that Italian cafe, off of Dundas Street to do them. They've done us some nice pizzas as well - Ivy has just put into the

oven. And, if you hang about, there might be a little something special by way of liquid refreshments.

-Odd bloody name of that Italian, though. Malatesta's. What does that mean – bad taste in Italian?

-What's in a name?

-Dino's? That's Dino's.

-Dino? He turned up? I went all the way to Manchester after him?

-Yeah? Well, hard luck, he's here so you can hassle him like you did my Denny.

-Not worth it, not now.

-Hey, Jack, it's your round!

-Okay. Reg?

-Bitter.

-Tommo?

-Mild.

-Darren?

-No, can't, driving. Nevvy'll have one.

-Lager.

-Geoff?

-Lager as well.

-Des?

-Not for me, i'm in with my lad

-And...What is it?

-THEY'RE HERE!

*

-He was a good bloke.

-One of the best.

-Never got near his pension.

-Didn't regret not taking up the redundancy?

- What would he have done with himself?

-He'll be missed.

-Let me just say how sorry I am, Mary, for your loss.

-At least he left you and your Sandra and Celia secure - he was a good dad. A good bloke.

-One of the best. It won't be the same without him.

-Seems mad, he was sat there only two weeks ago, watching the darts with us. Can't believe it.

-Smoking, it's a killer.

-No, plenty smoke all their lives.

-*His will be done...*

-His dad went the same way, and his brother Cliff. Runs in the family – heart. Glad, now, not having a boy, I mean.

-Couldn't do anything for him? Mine's on the anti-coagulants.

-It was massive. Doctors couldn't believe he hung on for so long, they said.

-You are putting a brave face on, Mary love.

-It's so sad. How are the girls – they've gone home?

-Wanted to just be together. Gone with Joan, my sister. Family's rallied round.

-Lot of council people there. Who was the chap that said a word, at the end?

-Uncle Mac.

Your Sandra still working the boats, Mary?

-No, back home, for the time being. She was on the Heysham ferries for a time.

-Dodgy, all those IRAers coming over via Heysham. That's where they picked up the Birmingham six, arrested them at Morecambe station.

-I'm not sure they *were*, I mean, the ones. Those photos! Irish or not, no need for the police to, you could see they'd been beating them black and tan.

-Sandra still with that steward of hers?

-David? No, not any longer. He's in Holland somewhere.

-Probably for the best. Wasn't he a lot older than her?

-Not a lot, only a few years. Not as much as me and Harry - never thought about it, until now, our age difference. We didn't then...think anything of it.

-You're too young to be a widow. The coffin was nice, you did him proud.

-Teak. I feel like throwing myself in after him.

-Don't talk like that, love.

-No. You have to be strong.

-We're good at that, our generation, being strong.

-Stoic.

-That's it.

- And all the beautiful flowers! Lovely the lilies.

-And the collection. Such a generous one, shows how popular his was.

-Sandra's sorting out to get a memorial bench with it, for his old Ward.

-Least people could do, love.

-You know a lot of people in his ward also wanted to send flowers. We had to say, 'No, put it to the old folk's place', Tane House, in his ward.

-So sorry. When did you marry?

-1946. Christmas Day would you believe? It was so we could stretch out the Christmas grub. Things really tight in those days. And that winter, as well, just to top off the war! Ended up at one point burning the garden fence!

-One of the best fitters I worked with, I can tell you.

-Very sad.

-It was all well done. Elvis was his favourite was it?

-Heartbreak Hotel, really, but we couldn't play that. But it had to be Elvis, Can't Help Falling in Love, his version better than Andy Williams'.

-'Wise men say, only fools rush in...la, la...something...some thing's are meant to be'. Now it's all ABBA. Who would ever want to play them at a funeral!

- Wasn't Liverpool his team?

-His dad, Adam's. He was a scouser. Came here from Toxteth in the Thirties to work for Baytown Port and Docks Board. Then the yard. He's buried with Evie up at St Francis's near the Quay – Catholics, grave's full.

-Well, they'll win the league again – I'll bet – he'll be watching them, from 'Up There', Mary. Paisley'll polish it off this weekend. A tragedy, though.

-Life goes on.

-It must do.

*

-That's it, I'm off!

-You too? See you, Tommo.

-See you, Jack. Reg. Soon be okay for you to go home!

-Whadyemean?

-Nightfall, crawl back to your coffin once the sun's gone down.

-I don't intend going into my coffin for a long time, not at least 'til I see you stuck nailed down in yours.

-Back to it tomorrow. New government then! It'll be Thatcher, you bet!

-Sign of the times, woman prime minister.

-Good night, Tommo.

-Good night.

-See you tomorrow.

-Now, that's it, more or less. We remain. What you looking at, Mr Nevinson? When are you goner get married. Is your good lass and child, is she is she divorced now?

-Keep – that – out. None of your business.

-Be no good. You too much like your fishing.

-Yeah. But I can do both. And when I go on my dad's boat with our Colin, moored off of the stone jetty. I go off shore and look back at Baytown and say – 'stuff you!'

-Can't say I blame you.

-Very nice. But you fish in all of the wrong places.

-What's that supposed to mean?

-I'm not saying anything, touchy! But did you want a ready-made family?

-Not you yours to ask. Keep - that - out.

-Don't listen to him, Nevvy. In his element at a funeral. Chief mourner.

-I pride myself, nothing disappoints in life when you take the dim view.

-Expect that's right.

-Got to be going myself soon. Long day.

-Steward Tierney! What do we owe...

-You three can be officially dubbed Bottlemen. I mean these. From the Grave, you might say.

-What?

-Eh?

-Oh!

-Old Colonel Tom ale. I've been keeping them behind the bar. You didn't know?

-Know? No.

-Know what, Rick?

-Harry. Near the end. Sent a note and fifteen quid. A crate of Old Tom's for the lads. You all knew him, so these are for you. Have to be strategic who I give 'em out to, and when, people'll get the huff. Present from Harry. And Mary I suppose, really. Waiting for the right time, too many around before.

-Can't believe it. Who would have thought it?

-Makes you think. What a bloke!

-That's strong stuff.

-POK!

-Who would have thought it.

-POK!

-And I was just going to get you to stump up for the next round. See, Reg, someone up there likes you.

-POK!

-Am humbled. But I did I believe have one or two in with him – my claim on his estate.

-God, you are unbelievable! It wouldn't surprise me if you went around to Mary's for the reading of the will. Call in the bailiffs.

-There you are. Enjoy. Harry's last orders.

-Here's to Harry!

-Harry!

-Harry!

-Patrons of this place going down like flies, Ricky – be no one to call last orders to, soon.

-He's off again. Why don't you shoot yourself and be done?

-I'm only saying.

-It is strong stuff!

-8%!

-A mild. I prefer bitter.

-*As he is now so we will be.*

-I don't know, Reg! Pessimist could be your middle name.

-Instead of Postlethwaite he should be called Reggie Pessimist.

-Oh, now that's good stuff!

-Wait a minute...didn't you once say your middle name's Ivor?

-What of it?

-It is, isn't it?

-Yes. Had me a Welsh grandfather.

-This is a really good quaff!

-Reginald Ivor Postlethwaite? Oh boy, never figured it before now. Wait till I tell Tommo and Geoff.

-What are you going on about now, you cunt?

-RIP! Do you get it, Nevvy?

-?

-R-I-P. That's you to the ground, Reg.

-Shut it.

-Your initials, they sum you up!

-Yeah?

-Yeah.

-Well think on this: RIP's everyone's initials in the end, you twat. In your end as much as in my end.

Chapter 2 Posser Underground

The discourse of the Underground Man is entirely a discourse-address. To speak, for him, means to address someone; to speak about himself means to address his own self with his own discourse; to speak about another person means to address that other person; to speak about the world means to address the world. But while speaking with himself, with another, with the world, he simultaneously addresses a third party as well: he squints his eyes to the side, toward the listener, the witness, the judge. Bakhtin Problems in Doestoyevsky's Poetics Discourse in Doestoyevsky.

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Mrs G. S. Summers, Director

P.S. As a matter of course, our transcribers redact occurrences of any of the coarser forms of expletives.

*

huh it was great that when i got an idea like that the lads were always up for it it came to me like one of those capers you see at end of term students do at american colleges like happy days so baytown tech equivalent was the bump bouncing of chickenheads crappy little 2cv car along michael's road and natty barry tommy and gary were all onside even timid barry had been turned by the f***ing place that f***ing

tech out of the tech gates huh chickenheads motor was bumping along nice and easy french cheap engineering and there was only 450 or so yards to go to the town hall car park where we planned to leave the jalopy the trickiest bits was when we set off in the tech grounds if wed come across leeman or stout even chickenhead they would have stopped us in our tracks huh leeman and stoutys engineering workshop practicals were murder but i liked leeman the mr nice guy and his daft heavy bins like ronnie corbet always had a silly smile on his face however obnoxious we got but the hard cop was stout stout by name and nature huh he was only f***ing five foot six in his socks that 1940s type in charge all vaselined back combed wavy light hair a stickler someone says hes got the george cross and because his first name was george we called him cross george huh huh but i hated the practice pieces the tools we made like callipers dividers tee squares and him ordering me back always to the bench to file another 1/1000 inch down on a tee piece or even worse you better start that again huh no one cared its always only us lowly engineering apprentices in the car park at break times smoking and kicking a tennis ball in a battle against the tedium it was mini football games inside the building was another thing loads of different types of technical students all men all doing things like basic accountancy and bookkeeping salesmanship brickwork and joinery motor maintenance only women we ever got to see were just day release though all of em doing stuff like hair dressing huh and beauty therapy the only women at the college that were full time were that group of iranian business studies students some of them looking like oriental princesses nice coloured chiffon head scarves and all that but some of the others really f***ing knew how to dress for the cock huh shahs shagbags but all f***ing wealthy huh and the smarmy iranian blokes on the course with them wore good suits and didnt get their hands dirty like us but no way id take a half caste

home even a good looking one huh so it was all go on bump it onward bump and up bump it bump the f****r bump bump my mate natty who you dont know was looking back to check out if anyone was clocking us from the college windows huh the college that long low three storey spot with baytowns coat of arms above the main entrance so f***ing swampy that's what we called him nat says cos he sees mr marshs big head bobbing up on the stairwell windows probably going to the staff room but he was oblivious him and his metallurgy and it was swampy whod swallowed some sort of manual with big words like molybdenum and austenitic in but always easy to get the c*** talking about other things particularly his health and then he starts to go on make sure you sleep in a room with an open window huh take deep breaths of air for five minutes before turning in huh yeah right if you live somewhere up the peninsular like baymoor not bloody baytown get bleeding poisoned so its bump to the left bump now bump it bump bump thats it bump chickenheads traffic light air freshener hung from his rear view mirror was flying all over the place like a wailing banshee he must have had some tidying up to do cos the bouncing ejected his glove compartment then we got to a tricky bit across michael's road always bloody busy and the thing was bouncing up and down like a kangaroo only going at a snails pace 2cvs light and springy still had to put our backs into it tommy was the strongest tall f****r georgie best hair cut a slav dad came over in 1956 jugoslavia im saying tommy come to the back with me gary the light weights natty and barry the pufftah at the front sides im saying tommy back front manoeuvre it go on for gods sake now run it into the bus stop go on had to cross that f***ing bridge get ready lads a gaps opening up just after that shipyard lorry it was bump we go we go bump we go we bump we go bump bump bump nice then it was hairy crossing in front of the oncoming traffic loads of heavy lorries heading to and fro from

the shipyard but i knew wed get it across just twenty short sharp bumps and bounces up up up onto the pavement the turn in to the cricket ground directly opposite f***ing natty and baz needed to give it more wellie and im saying baz for fuck sake get your queer shoulder up against the wheel arch dope you come to the front then piss off i said huh youve got no real purchase at least nattys got his hand on the door handle and his right paw was at the side of the roof just above the windscreen his long lanky legs leaning like the hypoteneuse of a triangle huh i can see he was really trying nattys tall but stringy and i go bounce to the side to the side f***ing mullet he had made him look as though hed got a medieval helmet stuck on his head what a pair they were barry that pufftah and when i said out loud one week in the mechanical materials class baz you arent a puff no you may talk like one and walk like one but youre not really a puff huh didnt dare say anything back just sank his queer neck into his collar was he probably if he wasnt he shouldnt have looked like a pansy like charles the first with that moustache and collar length hair got to get real in baytown join the skins or at least suedeheads cromwellians versus hippie bleeding cavaliers kept in with me because he was scared that wed give him the treatment again like at belvedere you remember so you know we did it to at tech to two apprentices from oxen park light industrial estate huh they thought they were so good having the best paid apprenticeships in oxen park and getting nice laundered light blue boiler suits delivered for them to pick up at the college reception at the start of every two weeks huh cornered them with nat easy in the dark bays in the welding class and huh we give their faces a good chalking with the board duster like we did with puff barry in english that time at belvedere you remember ha but i didnt remind him but like him then we left them looking like a pair of greta garbos with white chalk dust faces and their blubbering lips all red i knew tyson wouldnt say anything worser bully than any

of us always showing off his charles atlas frame huh hefting acetylene bottles single handed on to his shoulder and walking like the green giant to the bottle store huh a couple of flying kicks from my toe capped doc martins could have brought him down to size huh the other friday at baytown reserves versus Carlisle the night before the league game on Saturday and real bover with those United fans couple of them thought they're so clever and huh they'd wandered over towards us in homecoat stand then we all dived at them my boots flying kicks you have to time it right a good run up but as he looks at my raised fists my boots out straight leg like a f***ing ramrod into his ballsbag and huh i hit the bastard who i didn't see had his arm in plaster huh right in his bollocks with the sole of my docs not the toe it'd let him get too close it's all in the timing anyway where was i it was still bump it your side Gary bump it bump again Tommy bump the fucker Baz bump bump i tell you that college that f***ing apprenticeship my mums always saying you're very lucky just think what me and your dad went through after the war but i tell you all the f***ing lot we've had to put up with she didn't know the half of it like Spellman the bloody storeman what a t**t he was you see we had these round dog tags with our identity number stamped across it 1006 was mine still know it even today the hacksaws files chisels hammers and centre punches no one was interested in nicking them but pricier micrometers slide rules electric hand tools and it's all present your discs to Mr Spellman in his shirt and f***ing tie and that brown lab coat starched and that neat row of pens and pencils in its top left pocket he never fails to take your disc and put it on the hook in the painted shadows on the board to show what's gone out with who huh Spellman was always losing track of one thing or another and it was always which one of you has been and pocketed it too easy for anyone to reach over the counter and get a tool out from behind his back when he was preoccupied and then we would all be

ready to go home after an afternoon workshop but of course theres the empty space on the board staring out the tools outline its like the police do in chalk around a body at a murder scene huh all of us there for half an hour searching for a measly set square making us go back and forth around and around the milling machines and lathes searching for the f***ing thing poking an iron bar around in the swarth bins and then its still a good five minutes for us to swarfega all the oil out of our hands after stouty calls end of search with a humph missing my f***ing bus home and hardly anything ever turned up but it was still bump nearly there bump bump more to the left bump tommy keep on the left bump bump why the fuck did baytown council set all its key offices and courts along the one road the town hall annex offices must have been built at the same time as the tech both buildings pretty much alike and the two muddled up especially on foggy mornings council workers coming over the bridge turning in at the gates when the councils annex is 200 yards further on then the main cop shop maybe more recent but yes they had to put it nice and handy near so i couldnt believe we hadnt got rumbled by a cop car coming along the road and they stable the horses there that marshal us on saturdays at the ground backing their f***ing nags hind quarters into us as we wait at the turnstiles huh natty saying all the time he intended bringing a bag of marbles one day all talk but all along we were going past the cop shop and it was bump lads bump bump bump bump thats it bump the bleeding thing and finally we got the cv into the town hall car park and tucked it nice and out of the way i felt sorry for chickenhead in a way hes dead now they say but it was his own fault looking like he did like tweety pie with those thin wisps of yellowy hair combed back over his bald head it all made him look a bit like a plucked chicken and that silly spivs moustache over his thin lip always looked like he was just on the edge going to break into tears or something huh it was because he and the

other teachers didnt know how to handle us like at the end of class when we were eager to get away and he wanted us to be bothered with straightening up wiggly lengths of 3 core wire wed used in electrical installation and it was please lads take the cable clips out carefully with the pliers but wed snap the f***ing things off huh his class was an open invitation to vandalism when the ingersoll twins pufftas so uppity did a really classy board nicely run cables stretched and clipped to perfection between the cathode cases and plug or relay boxes so natty gave it a good yank on a weak point in the wiring and the whole lot torn away chickenhead heard the rip and rumpus but couldnt see over the pin boards cos of the way they were mounted ha ha who did this who did this vertical back to back the boards were on the benches and natty innocently back at his own board tapping away at those fiddly cable clips glad im not a spark and those two from ingersoll rands didnt f***ing well dare say anything against me and nat and it was still bump bump more lads nearly there for fuck sake bump bump the jalopy bump bump bump chickenhead needed to get a grip but he couldnt ever because he was soft and if you showed any sign of weakness at work or college youre going to pay for it no one ever dared call me anything other than posssy a skinhead then ever on the f***ing offensive first day after leaving school when i got my head razored no 1 mum oh you havent roland and bought my ox bloods with my first weeks wages that saturday with baytown at home with the rest of us putting the fear of god into everyone and that time our K former classmate gary in the late session the bastards made us stay until 6pm for general studies they going oh you must stay its to get you to realize the fact that when you go on day release from work next year you will be here until 7 fuckin pm but we were doing at tech first year five bloody days a week and no one appreciated the fact that youre suddenly back into school after getting away from teachers p f***ing t and maths english and what not at

belvedere secondary which you scholarship boy signed on for more of huh tech general studies a complete waste of time mr strickland was the general studies tutor made us discuss things like vd and sex education always seemed f***ing amused by us like whatever we said seemed funny to him always some wry grin on his chops like once when he showed us a load of old black and white photos of cocks in various stages of decay that were put out by the royal navy medics to scare our sailors when they docked in gib malta or in cairo and other ports during the war huh and i remember him getting us talking about how many holes a woman has and tells us we have the same number it was always quirky with strickland always an odd angle on things of course gary came across all knowing just because hed got his bird up the plug and he was only just sixteen tommy teasing me because i hadnt got a girlfriend plenty of time for that i said its laughable strickland having to explain things to us early on like what a scrotum was cos when we started wed seen the factory act health and safety signs in the workshop warning of cancer of the scrotum coming from all the oil and workshop grease but nobody was really sure if it was your balls or your ringhole and no one liked to ask at the end of each session strickland set a f***ing conundrum for us to think about and discuss it the following week so one was it was like why mary rand died of cancer was it too much running rather than fags or what but where was i huh it was f***ing bump bump the f**ker bump it bump bump bump and it comes to me who was it had the evening mail and there was this picture of a girl whos emigrating to new zealand and cos she was a blue supporter she got to personally see the team before flying off for ever strickland going on about how we learn to belong to a place and call it home through modern forms of rituals like local teams and that photo and so jimmy you know him saw it and he comes out with like how he used to go out with her lying bastard tw*t i dont remember any slag at

belvedere looking like her do you didnt think so so hes making claims to fame i say the only supporter youve ever been out with is a truss jimmy maybe he was telling the truth cos she was no looker anyway so i guess chickenheads 2cv was just another link in the f***ing chain of misery called baytown tech he was just the one who had to suffer that was all not really personal like that last saturday open day and all year as i say we had been making stuff in the practicals started with s simple tee square and then milling and all of us made callipers clamps cast metal screw jack right angled square and the tool box i did with mr leemans sheet metal work class which had an inch and a half square piece of sheet aluminium for your name stamped on it like a f***ing dog tag on the lid

r.o.l.a.n.d. i.a.n. p.o.s.t.l.e.t.h.w.a.i.t.e. e.i.t.b. 1.9.7.1.

e i t b the engineering industry training board like they owned us we had to metal stamp it and all the lads who did go to the open day went with their dads i wasnt going to tell mum but for that f***ing postcard with the college invite on and she went on and on saying how proud she was of me and wanted to see what id been up to that year she was always trying to make up for the fact that dad f***ed off and left us and no way was I gonna have my uncle red come which was her idea so anyway we had to lay out our toolboxes in the main workshop the friday before open day so we see mr leeming okay but mums sucking up to him saying i wish id had training at college like this when i was a youngster i can tell you of course we have to see f***ing cross george stiff as shit gave me faint praise ive got to try harder to be a little more precise – rolandll know himself when hes back at defenders huh just ready for the off when she spotted the electrical installation boards and f***ass chickenhead in there all lonely odd seeing him for the first time without his brown labcoat on a casual

herringbone wool jacket instead and looked almost normal except for his beaky nose and tweety pie coxcomb which the poor sod was never able to do anything about i said come on mum and look at the cafeteria but she wouldnt f***ing have it so we go in and before long in a minute chickenhead came over to us and she started chatting to him about me and they f***ing got on like a f***ing house on f***ing fire started flirting it was embarrassing its the only time i miss a man well maybe not the only time when the leccies gone funny she says f***ing embarrassing even without natty and his dad just then coming in and seeing us that would be all chickenhead as my stepdad so yes it was a way of saying f**k you chickenhead we wanted him to think his car had got nicked and now where was i at last slow nicely bumptybumptybumptybumpbump stop we put it in the space allocated for the mayors car now you wont believe it but as we are returning to the tech across at the lights on michael road we see a nineteen seventy mexico world cup edition white cortina with transfers flags and all its one of those cars each of the england team players got gratis and the driver was would you believe it f***ing nobby stiles whats he doing in baytown of all places cant believe it and me nat and the others are all hey nobby nobby you alright nobby here nobby his side window down and his elbow stuck out tommy a rover fan shouting something then about what hed better watch it when hes playing at blackburn maybe after that crap england performance in mexico that summer before but stylesy ignored us maybe deaf as well as short sighted heavy bins like leeman but it was him alright with his always two or three days beard growth he had always for that swarthy hard look in matches and all of the forwards scared to death cos they really knew it when he slide tackled them from behind huh huh well the next week college was over and i had to go back to defenders natty at the yard whilst baz went to his high falutin marine welding company garys at sun

electric cos he never finished his apprenticeship and jimmys in the yard and is to this day still welding like with his dad des and after that we only got to see each other once a week on day release huh what was it like huh if you want to know what it was really like it was f***ing wearing me down all day in and out watching your f***ing flanks all the time all the smarmy iranians beefy boy tyson flexing his f***ing muscles all the lads going on about their stupid girlfriends i f***ing blame mr stackman if someone was really to blame stackman and belvedere secondary our f***ing metalwork teacher you remember him just fumbling doubling as final year careers advisor useless going to see him for advice about the defenders job after id made an application for the job there that appeared in the evening mail jobs section i loved doin art but of course no one there at belvedere ever gave me any ideas about jobs in that and you couldnt ask fat f***ing miss tripper too interested in herself and having it off with mike bart the school football captain who she seduced the fat cow and the other nonce teachers nonces or sadists at belvedere you know the teachers at belvedere but it was stackman who told me defenders was a very good job roland and why i just trusted him and took his word for it shouldnt have nonce dirty old buggler anyway so i got interviewed by a couple of personnel managers weighing up the psychometric tests then getting me to talk about the practical side of things at school what did you make in metalwork class and so on i was surprised they gave me the job there and then it was a formality when they asked me if i wanted to ask anything and i said gormless a bit like you what does the job entail they didn't even know just as vague as stackman oh turning components for sprinklers and work like that a lot of cast work for the domestic and fire prevention industries only managed to get a few impressions at last when they told an older apprentice to give me a quick tour around the works took me into the main workshop so blinking noisy with

about 50 capstan lathes going full pelt steel components piled up all over the place and the smell of hot oil and metal coolant like the tech but a thousand times worse operators all hunched over their lathes looking like spooks and others like the mates and riggers shouting at one another above all of the racket and the walls all horrible black dirty big brick huge rounded top windows the victorians they tell me put in for natural light so they could save on the lectric or gas whatever but half shuttered off and cobwebs and thick dust all over the glass panes so this apprentice takes me into the cast iron foundry with the forges flaring away like a hammer horror movie and i didn't know if he was pulling my leg then when he said that if i failed my city and guilds id have to work in the foundry f**k that no way was i going to end up in that part of the works the blokes looking like blacks sh*t up to the nines with all of the fume and billowing smoke rising up from the moulds like the hobs of hell just three weeks later i got sent with tommy nat and the others to that years off the job baytown college training so much for belvedere complete waste of time no f***ing real choice and i can tell you i bet it was the same for all of us others who didnt stay on like you at belvedere huh well come to think of it dino you remember him dont you dino dino stuck his stupid f***ing italian neck out didnt he and opted to take domestic science instead of metalwork or woodwork i couldnt work with a load of lasses but he liked doing his cooking we laughed at him but i bet it wouldve been okay making out with the waitresses hes working at a hotel now as a fully qualified chef in manchester what was it called someone told me it was called the wilmslow i think and to have that nice sweet baking smell on him like my mum smells when shes been in the kitchen making scones at the weekends when she gets in from work huh and youre still a f***ing student even now alright for some huh

Chapter 3 I Know You Right Enough

Any object of knowledge (including man) can be perceived and cognized as a thing. But a subject as such cannot be perceived and studied as a thing, for a subject cannot, while remaining a subject, become voiceless, and, consequently, cognition of it can only be dialogic. Bakhtin: Speech Genres and Other Late Essays: Methodology for the Human Sciences

It was a Wednesday late-afternoon in Baytown, in October 1977. I was on my way back to Baytown, bringing my abstract sociological concerns to a study of late 20th century working class life in the town. I'll be using 'open-ended' questions - get people to tell their stories in their own words. Record the interviews, transcribe them, then weave a study around their words – this study, this Carnival of Voices. The main question I needed to ask is one I know it is impossible to ask them directly – it has been ground into me that I mustn't lead – but the question of how they were experiencing life and labour after leaving school?

I was aware of more abstract issues: labour at the mercy of the international market, the IMF technocrats 'invited in' by Denis Healey, chancellor of the Exchequer. The Tories vying for power under a woman spouting an economic ideology in which working class people are no longer recognized as a significant political force. But Baytowners are just living – those sorts of questions may be debated in the clubs and pubs, sometimes at home between men and wives and children. But people just have to live. That age-old question that C. Wright Mills put about the 'sociological imagination' – could I move back and forth between everyday lives and the large structures that, in convoluted ways, condition those lives?

*

It was already threatening rain, the end of a winter's doleful day. I associate such days with Baytown, like it had to rain at funerals or be sunny at weddings, the

pathetic fallacy, and I wanted to be anywhere and somewhere else. It was Baytown past I'd spent my youth getting away from, not coming back to any sort of new beginning.

From the train window - tattered relics of the Silver Jubilee in Baytown: ragged plastic red, white and blue bunting hung forlorn on a garden shed, two rotting thread-bare Union Jacks on makeshift poles. And, daubed on the backyard wall of one of the long rows of Victorian workers' terraces, the happy malapropism of a royalist slogan rendered in off-white paint:

LONG MAY SHE REIN OVER US!

The Silver Jubilee had been six months ago, bread and circuses to stop us thinking about the recession, the stagflation. The passengers were starting to rise as the train entered Baytown railway station – it's a sort of half-terminus. It was over a year since I'd last been home to my mum and dad's, Martha and Des, for dad's retirement party. He and mum were getting ready to move to a bungalow in St Anne's, most of my uncles were dead, and as far as I knew my cousins were getting on with their own lives away from Baytown. All I'd wanted to do after A levels was to get away from Baytown - first to Liverpool University and then to Lancaster - to study but more than anything to make the break because I had little love for Baytown, little kinship with either kith, kin or strangers. I intended that it would be the next day that I'd make a start, bashing its streets for a few days, follow up leads to my old friends - do the research then get the hell back to Lancaster. Even my rotten Morecambe digs seemed preferable to Baytown, its piffling shops, its terraces, docks and the ever-presence of its 'yard.

In the ticket hall I spotted Denny Mossop, one of the girls who'd been in my K form at Belvedere secondary school some ten years ago.

'Hey Denise – remember me?' She grimaced, irritated, looked up at me and there followed a brief but significant enough pause that said to me that the recognition wasn't mutual. 'Denny, you know me! We were together in the K form at Belvedere C of E Secondary...'

Cautious, as if she was wringing that schoolboy image of me out from the past. 'God. Last time I saw you you had short hair, you were a skinhead, now look at you. This is my Madeleine, aren't you, Maddy.'

She thought I had changed, but she, also, had changed because at school she was sylph but was now obese and metamorphosed into a fat working-class girl. At Belvedere she had a type of ironic-teasing attitude towards everyone - always a little too quick with the put-downs, she was smart, too smart 'for a girl'. She was ever opinionated, liked the Stones and Jefferson Airplane when most of us boys liked the late Beatles' albums, and the other girls generally were still mad on Cliff Richard.

I waited until she was ready, and then we set off from Station Parade to take the short walk to the bus stop. As we walked together the long handle of Denny's bag kept slipping continually from her shoulder. I couldn't help noticing that though Denny'd got fat, had a bit of a double chin, she was still good looking, her bright blue-grey eyes, aquiline nose, her fine-lined eyebrows. She had, though, gothic-like white opalescent skin, a wanness starkly highlighted by her vibrantly red 'sticked lips. Her shoulder length tan hair was silky, but it was gathered severely in a ponytail.

‘I’ve been seeing my Gran, at Easton Lodge, it’s breast cancer. It’s gone too far, in her bones.’ ‘The hospice? I’m sorry. ‘Mum’s going out of her wits. And Maddy won’t have any memories of her great Gran.’ Then there was a pause, and we walked on together silently with just the noise from the pushchair’s small rickety wheels grinding against the gritty pavement. The bus stop was still where it had always been opposite the Curzon cinema, its row of shops built into its roadside flank – a confectioner’s, a music and record shop, and the side entrance to a school of dance that was located upstairs (in the 60s, some evenings or matinees in the cinema, depending on the movie, you could hear the stamp of dancers’ feet.)

I told her about Lancaster university, about Liverpool Uni before that, about studying for a Ph.D. But I could tell that a Ph.D. didn’t mean much to Denny - she said, ‘Get you!’ and then reflected, ‘But you did 6th form, didn’t you? Stayed on when we all left in ’69?’

‘Yeah, when I had to transfer later from Belvedere to the Grammar to do A Levels.’

Denny said, ‘I worked at Binns’s, straight from school. Ironical, Binns’s was where we all used to go to for our school blazers.’

Binns - a double-fronted outfitters shop and department store on Dundas Street, Baytown’s central shopping street. That three-storey red brick store was still very much a Victorian one when I last went to it. It was one of those places with antique mahogany veneered shelving, drawers of haberdashery with glass front panels, and one or two of the tills were still those like large silver office typewriters. ‘My mum got dad’s blue cotton boiler suits from there.’ The bus shelter was rusty but had been painted in Baytown Bus Corporation royal blue – Baytown was always this royal

blue-coloured kind of town, its municipal colour, its football team colours. 'What are you doing now? Do you have to be somewhere? Got time for a drink?'

Nevvy will be wondering where I am.' The name was of a boy at Belvedere, one of the K formers - Col Nevinson.

'You married then?'

'No, Nosey Parker! And he's not Maddy's dad, before you ask. Him you won't know – he wasn't at Belvedere. Good riddance. He's in the shipyard and shacked up with some slut, works at the bookies on Queen Street. He doesn't see Maddy and he can get lost.

'So, it's you and Colin, now?'

'Yeah, broke out of marriage and into living over the brush, much better, made a clean sweep of it, of me. Nevvy's dad's let us have one of his flats, you know, he rents out a few places. He'll probably give it to Colin, sometime, but the rent's low, anyway.'

Nev and his brother Jamie lived in a large Edwardian villa on Hindemath Avenue. It was a posh middle-class area, but his dad's coal wagon was usually parked up on the street. The coal yard itself was in one of the Island's streets of workers' terraced houses, islanded around by the Irish Sea, the docks and shipyard. Nev's dad parked his coal wagon overnight there just to make a class point, amongst all the jags and other nobs' cars. When you got into their house, the ground floor carpets were white shag-pile making the point 'Where's there's Muck there's Brass'.

'Our flat's over a launderette's in Hindle Street, on the Island, the entire top floor, two beds, nice bathroom, avocado.'

And my student digs, my shared house – a grim grotty holiday flatlet in Morecambe I shared with two other post-grads, neither of whom knew what the concept of house cleaning means.

A single-decker number 4 bus, blue (of course), pulled up. We sat together and whilst Denny settled the kid I took stock of Baytown as the bus whined slowly along the town's darkening autumnal streets. It was 5 pm, there was a rain clouded-gloomy and rapidly fading light as the bus turned into Arbroath Square - a key Baytown hub. The grey stucco Carnegie Library is not bad, a low two storey building with its neo-classical pediment surmounted above the portico entrance by two funerary urns adorned with laurel tracery. A statue of one of industrial Baytown's founders set on an alabaster plinth forms the centre point of this square. Just up from there is the docks area and the Island. The iron works had closed and demolished: one time its furnaces reddened Baytown's sky and being so close to the town library offered a perpetual threat of a literary auto-da-fe.

In the opposite direction, towards the town centre runs Princess Street – the broadest street in Baytown and the large red sandstone gothic-style town hall. Its clock-tower top-heavy - looking like a regional version of Big Ben, but ungainly in relation to its low two storey wings. Behind it lay Michaels Road where Baytown FE college, the 1940s town hall' annex offices, and the newer, court offices were located.

Whilst the bus paused, I noticed that the branches of a dozen or so pollarded trees at various points around the square were swarming with roosting starlings, their raucous cackling seeming to drown out any other sound. Denny said, 'Last few winters, they come for the warmth and light from the street lights and buildings, and

they shit all over the square. The Council is talking about chopping the trees down and planting another type or something. Shrubs and bushes.'

Miss Ansham, the biology teacher at Belvedere, telling us that the Victorians planted *paraheliotropic hybrid trees* around town to withstand the air pollution.

We came to the mechanically-raising road bridge, its steelwork painted like the bus in Baytown Corporation blue. Coming into view were the streets and yards of four-storey 19th century tenements, the centre of the Island. These were built in the prone-to-crumbling red sandstone of this area. Originally, these mainly one-bedroomed flats were built to house the first shipyard and docks workers. Smithy, one of the Belvedere K formers, had lived there. Tenants' washing was even at this hour still winched high up over the communal yards on lines strung between the tops of the blocks - domestic bunting.

She was speaking, 'I could have gone to St Winifred's', you know.' I assumed that she meant that after Belvedere secondary mod she could have gone on to Baytown's girls grammar, just as I went on to the boys. I said, 'But you decided not to stay on any longer...you wanted to get working, like the other girls.' 'No. I could have gone before, at *eleven* – I actually passed my 11-plus. But Carol Athersmith and Pat Jameson were my best friends and they failed it, and I wanted to go to Belvedere with them. Mum and dad weren't bothered either way.'

'But your mum, dad, didn't they even *try* to make you go to St Winifred's?'

'No, didn't say a word to me about it. My decision. In fact, I didn't even realize I was taking my 11-plus until *the* day, that week. No one talked about it at our junior as far as I remember. Anyways my older sister, Judy, was at Belvedere and I thought, well,

that's where everyone goes. It's like, do you remember Ruth Richardson? She went to Manchester Uni, I think, chemistry or some such. I remember she was showing off about how her parents had promised her a new bike, or something like, if she passed her 11-plus. Bribe or incentive, whatever.'

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The bus came to her stop and I got off as well. 'I'll walk to my parents'.'

The street lighting was now on, and they had the new yellow lamps that give-off a sulphuric glow. The lamp-light hardly penetrated the gathering gloom, a moderate mist swirling around the lamp heads. The usual bunch of gulls were scrawking, that raucous and depressing sound, flocking on the docks and shipyard cranes, night-roosting on the roofs of the modern industrial shanty town of tall shipyard hangers and warehouses. The moon was out somewhere but it was masked by heavy cloud.

We walked on past St Michael's Lodge – the old youth club, now closed. It was an interesting large Edwardian villa with a cupola tower in mock Tudor style, chevron-leaded windows. Until the 1920s it had been a local magnate's home until he went bust and the receivers sold it to St Michael's church who made it into a Christian mission. By the 1930s the council had acquired it for civic community purposes, It was said to have been a TB clinic and then for a short time in the 1960's it became the youth club that we used to go to on Friday and Saturday evenings.

Ironical - the first person I meet is from my old K form is a woman. I'd got these masculine-dominated ideas that working class jobs gave status to men, titles, identities really: fitter, turner, welder, pattern maker. Not just jobs but status

positions, urban equivalents of the old rural ones – peasant, farmer, labourer, forester. But I don't know half-enough about Baytown women.

We got to Hindle Street on the corner of which was Denny's flat. The laundrette was still open and arterial-like ripples of condensation warped the yellow electric light coming through its large plate glass window. The entrance to her flat was to the side, it had two steps on its threshold to accommodate for the slight rise of Carmel Street and the pavement.

We went upstairs and I sat on a small cottage-style settee. Denny put Maddy in a high chair and then sat on one of the two hard chairs at a gate-leg table. I took stock of the flat's furnishing – second-hand hand-me-downs most of it, I guessed. She frowned and said, 'I need to tidy up, yesterday I was all day at my Aunt Celia's, mum's sister-in-law, not an aunt really. Holyhead Terrace, nice view over the Bay. It's all chintzy. Lovely old sideboard, table, antimacassars, brown hide leather chairs, all from the 1940s, you can tell it's all been top notch.'

'I bet you are thinking us lot still eat missionaries for tea.' She took hold of my right wrist and roughly pulled my hand to her, twisting my palm up. 'Bit of a giveaway that. no work there, your hands are soft, I'd say like a woman's but really that's not right, more like a gent's.'

'It must be hard, in Baytown, to get on, I mean...'

'Who's wanting to? Going to put Baytown to rights are you?'

'What's eating you, Denny? I'm on your side. We were all K formers. You could have stayed on, like me.'

'But I have, I've stayed on'.

‘You remember Dawson’s newsagents?’

‘You are so out of date - old man Dawson and his wife died. Some Pakis have got it – it’s now called Rawalpindi Stores.’

‘Maybe. But what I want to tell you is how man Dawson got me to help out in the shop – I was just coming up to sixteen and still just the paperboy. It was July, ‘69 when they first landed the Apollo 11 mission on the moon. All the daily papers had special editions - the first landing reports, and there were colour photographs on the front of the *Daily Mail* and some of the other papers. And the yard workers, that day, as they were stopping to get their papers from me (I was feeling so pleased at being allowed to serve them for the first time) – you know I could see, see, what I want to say now, in this research. The moon landing excited them, I can see, now, it was that it put their world, Baytown, in a new light. On that very special morning when we all got a new perspective on ourselves, it was as if nothing, Baytown, football, fags, work mattered.’

‘Very poetical. A revelation. Close the door on your way out, Moon Man. That went well! I hope your other interviews go better than this one!’ I closed the door and she was baby-talking to Maddy, ‘You’re my girl, aren’t you? My little chick. Yes, mine!’

Chapter 4 Zoë

The popular tradition is in no way hostile to women and does not approach her negatively. In this tradition woman is essentially related to the material bodily lower stratum, she is the incarnation of this stratum that degrades and regenerates simultaneously. She is ambivalent. She debases, brings down to earth, lends a bodily substance to things, and destroys; but, first of all, she is the principle that gives birth. Bakhtin Rabelais and his World

She at first must have thought that I was just her usual type of afternoon punter: the shy type hoping for anonymity. First, a woman of about forty, slovenly, clearly a cleaner and Do For All, let me in and left me sat waiting in the front 'lounge', alone. The room had two black pvc vinyl three seater settees set at right angles to one-another, a few other chairs of mixed type and two cursorily-wiped coffee tables with large glass ashtrays on them which looked like they had been knock-offs from a pub. She came into the room wearing a white scrub-top and black skimpy knickers, a black suspender belt - its concertina-like straps snaking down to wide black garters on her upper, ruddy, thighs. These suspended nothing – she wore no stockings – her legs bare, her bare tiny feet in blue leather-strapped sandals - Scholls. She must have been half-way to getting stockinged-up or something and couldn't be bothered to rig the rest of herself.

I know her. On an impulse I'd entered, crept, into Eve and Adams' massage parlour. Zoë Cole from Belvedere secondary. She stared straight at me as if she was in a dream, but as if by automaton she slowly opened up the top four rubber buttons of her white nylon scrub top to let me see her tits from the get-go.

'What difference did it make, knowing one another? Let's get on with the what for.'

I considered. I'd come this far. Eve and Adams', a seedy Baytown knocking shop. I thought of the dirty massage parlours in Morecambe. The absurdity, the irony of this whim. And it's Zoë Cole, of all people.

All the time she was looking me up and down. Ironical. 'Want the 'Whole Hog?'. Play strict nurse for you – give your arse a really bloody good paddling? Nurse and nappy session?' Nursery games, the infantile-erotic business changing men in nappies. Freud and infant sexuality, but he missed the stern Mother-Sex-Figure. Freyja?

Last time I saw her with her friend Sandra. At Smithy's. We were still at school, Smithy, Zoë and me. Belvedere Secondary Mod (Sandra, though, was at the Catholic school). Zoë - the K class slag and object of our lust - biological alarm clocks going off. Smithy fucked the two of them first and then at the mini orgies we had at his flat we'd follow in. Black bruising love bites on pathetic necks. Belvedere's idea of the summer of love.

Smithy. Our fuck-father. *He's where he was always headed, serving a four-year stretch in a soft Utrecht gaol for the 'sexual corruption of a minor.* The three of them, Zoë, Sandra and Smithy and another girl *skinbag runaway coke-head called Ginny* running a pop-up brothel on the night ferries out of Hull to Rotterdam. *I sensed there was something up when the ship's tannoy announced as we came into Europort that there was to be a delay in disembarkation at Europort. Vice. There was a report in Rotterdam's Algemeen, but no one in Baytown has heard anything of it.*

Smithy arrested. Ginny, Sandra and Zoë *hot-footed* it out of Rotterdam. *A punter with a gripe - maybe a German bloke who paid but couldn't get it up. Smithy started pimping amongst the passengers of other ferries: to Ireland out of Liverpool and Morecambe. We raised the caretaker at the 392 Club in Rotterdam and got our stuff down in our cases from the dive we had upstairs. We legged it and flew into Manchester.*

I paid her, *upfront*. I'd not had a fuck for months, nearly a year since, even before, I got dumped by Ruth. Christmas gift, in the student halls at a party. *Merry Xmas and get stuffed along with the turkey*. I was drunk and wanted to know the reason. *That's the reason*. My boozing. Forever tossing myself off. Enervating...

The new term's research grant. And a bit from dad's retirement bung. I was flush and so I said to myself, got to, why not? Go for it. Prossies cheaper in the long run. Women and love. Norbert Elias' relativising the Courtly Love. Pay for madams and foreget mistresses: save time and, in the end, money. Romantic myth clogging-up the divorce courts. In Ruth's case, that was it. She started being 'tutored' by Peter Lord. Three years older than me. Social sciences whiz-kid. *Doctored* he joked. And, of course, referred to as *brilliant*.

Willowy, stringy, Ruth, with her long blonde hair and her eyes of brown. Her hair so thick and all luxurious, tumbling to her bony shoulders like Niagra Falls. Engulfed the thin straps of her tops and bony shoulders. *Tumbling* snaking down. No make-up - a feminist issue.

With Ruth it was just sex straight. *Use my belt to tie my wrists together behind my head and get on top*. Her irises went to pin holes. *Sorry, I'm not going to be your dominatrix*. Actually she was naturally dominating. She prompted me Lennon's line:

'Was she told when she was young that pain would lead to pleasure?'

Her room at her digs in Morecambe. She was reading *The Scum Manifesto*. Sat erect, straight backed at that dressing table made into a desk by cleverly turning its top-drawer bottom-side up. In that instant I recognized her eyes like Medusa's reflecting back at me from each of the dressing table's triptych of mirrors. And her

disdain. It would have pissed her off if she had an inkling that I *liked* it, it excited me. Go on bitch: despise me. Imagined her as a sadistic female SS guard wielding a bull whip. In suspenders and stocking legs jackbooted, straddling me and forcing me to 'service' her. But all the time she lay under me in strict missionary position. Mum always her that doled out the corporal punishment. Out of the blue short-tempered clouts inflicted on thin arms, smacks on my stalky legs. Always taking pleasure in spoiling what should have been pleasurable activities. Over-vigorous towel rubs and stabbing hairbrush. Snatched out of the high chair. Probably made breast-feeding a tease: Baudelaire's *roughing the teat that nourished me*. It's in the nursery that we first experience power and domination. My sadist mum now a blue-permed elderly woman festering in a retirement bungalow with dad in genteel St Annes.

Eves and Adams was in a backstreet behind Baytown's M & S, handy - a cock-stride for blokes from the town's docks and shipyard. Next-door to a poodle parlour. I remember both shops had once been a greengrocers' in the '60s, now split, but the large plate glass window bearing the sinage Eves and Adams and Massage was now fully blacked-out. The frontage sills and frames woodwork was wormed and rotten, the rot slapped over by lurid pink and black gloss paint.

'You're next door to a dog parlour.'

You've come to the right place then.

'I've been toing and froing back to town for months.'

If you'd have come in the Derby or The Shipwright's Arms you would have found us, me and Sandy. Go there when things are slack of Saturday afternoons. Hustling? Maybe. When likely punters were more interested in the football results or Aintree.

In the bedroom I popped the buttons of my shirt and dropped my jeans and Y-fronts: jiggling my pants-tied feet. Teased me by saying: *What would your dad say – you in a place like this?* Stopped me in my tracks. Implying she knew my dad, Des? ‘What’s my Old Man got to do with things? If we are doing it let’s get on if not give me back my fucking money.’ That phrase, though, unfortunate. It started her off about her dad, who’d recently died of cancer. It had metasized and the doctors had given him a penectomy. He said, *They can’t do anything for me and now they’ve taken away my Old Man.*

She took hold of a leather crop. It had to be real, a real sting – I wanted out from Ruth, the university, the world of stifled feelings, the world of words, essays, research papers, books. I knelt down spreadeagled. My wrists bound to the bedhead. Looking sideways at the side table, amongst all the usual S&M paraphernalia lying there was what looked like one of the novelty rock baby’s dummies found in Blackpool, and probably Morecambe’s rock shops.

You are closer than you think. It’s Dutch and it’s called Uiter-innerlijk Vrouw: Woman Inside and Out. A souvenir from my Rotterdam days.

She was skimming the crop back and forth over my arse. Then it started to get heavier. Then she went to town, beating my arse like it was a drum in a May Day parade. I was biting into my own shoulder. My legs shivering uncontrollably like a dog’s with distemper. I said, ‘Colee! Please, stop!’ but that got her riled. *This isn’t the K form. You are dealing with me now, Zoë.* My arse was smackhot. She had it in for me. A grudge from the time of Smithy’s K form’ afternoon kids orgies. Woodpecker cider, brown packs of Players No 6 plain. Not a Durex in sight. Under Smithy’s sleight of hand she and Sandra slipped from being his girlfriends to pros. Smithy

having the two of them together. Then his mate Enrique, a stevedore at Baytown docks. Coronet record player playing Pictures of Matchstick Men, the dropping arm slid back from the centre so it would repeat-play endlessly. *Whenever I hear that song.*

It was all about Smithy. Our Pied Piper of teenage sex. Biologically-advanced on us all. Someone in the school showers after games came out with the malapropism. *Look at all of Smithy's public hairs'. Zoë: My and Sandra's 'Fuck-Father'.* Belvedere situated stark looking out to the Irish Sea, a Sixties cheap modern-build slab of concrete and glass and asbestos sheeting, salt lashed by the Irish Sea. It must have been a hub in a northern paedophile network because at least four of the teachers, two men and two women, were openly 'dating' pupils in the fourth form at the time when we were in our third. Then, it was seen as having kudos being seduced and getting fucked by or fucking a teacher. Disarmed. *Cradle snatching.*

Smithy a funnel between nonce members of the staff and Sandy and Zoë . *During that final summer term of '69, when no one expected us in school, we were in Smithy's stinking Island flat when Smithy comes out with it that he'd got a nice surprise for us. You know what it was? Fucking Stackman, Embassy-breath stinking Stackman, that greasy-going-bald-bastard Belvedere woodwork tutor turns up. And nudging his way through the door after him, that, hot, games teacher Mr Royce. Fucked by them and then taken in the car for lunch in a countryside boozer along the coast road, Smithy sat in the middle. Coming along for the ride.*

So in her eyes I'm responsible as much as Stackman, Royce anyone she mentioned and probably a lot more punters over the following years. But it was innocents Garden of Eden. 'You and Mortie were up for it as much as any of us'.

You were in the line. Taking turns to climb on top of me. My tits smarted, like your arse now. I gagged on your pathetic French kissing. You didn't know why I always kept my eyes closed? Thought me and Sandra were whimpering with pleasure? 'You've got your eyes closed – you're enjoying it'. Pictures of Matchstick Men. Right enough.

She reached over for her Dutch relic and pushed it into my mouth. I resisted, tried to spit it out, shaking my head back and forth but she forced it back in despite my gritted teeth and tied the thing's thong at the back of my neck. I was gagging. *Here's to you, Daniska.* That Dutch dyke artist, made it in a feminist take on, or reverse of, what I knew Derrida called *phallogocentrism*. A scold's bridle made, intentionally? for slobbering male mouths. She'd met Daniska in an Amsterdam bar, Smithy and Sandra were off on some jaunt somewhere at the time. At her studio she gave it Zoë as a present. *Internal-cavity-body art.* A female condom inserted into her cunt with a chemical solution which expanded like foam in reaction to her body heat. She had to lie still for 30 minutes after which out birthing came this reverse dick, her very own *female lingam*. Later it was cast in red India rubber.

I was left gagging on that weird instrumentalized, externalized, cunt-dummy, cunt dentata for ten minutes. She drank coffee. At last she popped it out. She had the last word. *Motherfucker.*

Chapter 5 Baytown Normal

In Dostoyevsky's subsequent works, the characters no longer carry on a literary polemic with finalizing secondhand definitions of man [...] but they all do furious battle with such definitions of their personality in the mouths of other people. They all acutely sense their own unfinalizability, their capacity to outgrow, as it were, from within and to render untrue any externalizing and finalizing definition of them. As long as a person is alive he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized, that he has not yet uttered his ultimate word. Bakhtin *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* The Hero in Dostoyevsky's Art.

Strange you turning up out of the blue, after all these years.

I've got digs in Morecambe, the Battery.

Nice. Not really. But I'm honoured – the one and only, the Scholarship Boy. That's what we called you. Of course, you know that. When I met you last week, on the prom, you were as at first as stuck for my name as I was for yours. (Bit like Roger Daltrey going *I don't know if you remember me but I used to follow you back in '63.*) Although in our case it'd be '70. But I didn't follow you. And now you, here you are wanting to poking into my time in Baytown as an apprentice welder. Want to take me back? Not sure I want to go there. But, you are coming to little ol' me, Barry, puff Barry, from school but now a puff with a hotel. Yes, me and Will actually own this place, the entire Ambassador – we are the Morecambe Ambassadors. The first, in fact only, gay hotel in Morecambe. Been here since 1979, and it's a success, if it interests you.

So you left Baytown and things there. Why? Wherefore old buddy?

You've got your back to our big lounge window. It's our 'Wide Horizon' selling point. I like to watch the Isle of Man ferries slipping in and out of Heysham port on the high

tide, like Turner's ghostly Temeraire - you know that painting? The white ferries set off and they seem to hover on the horizon as they head for the Isle of Man - drifting out like white ghosts. That white wet-shimmering Irish Sea, I love it. And you know how it is when the tide's out - it's the only place I've ever seen in England so clearly delineatin' the Earth's curvature, so distant, and today, look at it, all white, gold, and wet, the shimmering quivering air waves rising on the horizon.

You are getting poetic!

Yes, I can get quite poetic about it. But I am not on any kind of mission, the Ambassador's not really an embassy, you know. That silly little ditty placed here and there on the prom railings left over from the 1930s heydays! 'Beauty Surrounds – Health Abounds!' Candyfloss and toffee apple sticks and litter everywhere. The rot set in at the Winter Gardens. But, for all that, it *is* beautiful.

What brought you here, though, most Baytowners went to Blackpool or north Wales, didn't we?

What brought you here brought me here. Look, I know what you are after. But I'm not some sort of representative, you know. When I met you on the prom the other dayt and what was it? you kept going on about you and the working-class, as if it were some type of club. Working-class is secondary, for me, and for you from the first, I reckon.

Look, I'm not after anything you don't want to say. I've got to be scientific. So, look, I've got what we call open questions, I let you lead, I haven't got an agenda. Open questions are like, What do you feel about...? Tell me your experience of...? What's your opinion of...? Who did you know who did...?

My open questions got closed – I've, haven't you?, got all the answers I've asked for, thanks very much. I now know what I am and what I am being. The way you go on about things, like you've got your certificate from University of Lancaster. You've got a new ID card, proud of your Education.

Honestly, it's not like that. I don't pretend to know it all. You are the expert, we believe in local studies, out of fashion but we still do it – we like to start from the bottom, I mean local, that way you get to real experience, real people.

Your voice, it's like I'm hearing someone else talking, I mean you've lost your old Baytown accent. Anyway, I'm not sure about being able to bang on about Baytown, or the local scene. In fact, if I am I am more in tune with international things like the Stonewall riot. I know what you are thinking. You think that just because I've never been to university, I wouldn't have heard of Stonewall. Just like you took it that, coming here, I must be Mr Morecambe, like Eric, as if a new life started when I bought this hotel, as if I'd been born to be here instead of why we needed to buy this place. Anyway - what do you know about it? You left Baytown soon after school, didn't you? What do you know about the queer bashing that went on alongside the Paki bashing – that's why I got out of Baytown. Had to get out of all of that – Baytown' normal.

Yeah, of course. But, like, you must have had strategies, to cope, I mean, as a... welder?

As a puff welder, you mean? Funny, actually pretty well populated sub sub-section of the trade. Remember the Union Vaults? Course you do, that one pub in Baytown with a labour name but was for the puffs and half-drag queens which we always shied away from when in the centre, didn't want to be seen anywhere near it? Only

union I wanted to be in then was the apprentices' section of the Boilermakers'. I can see you thinking I am going to be the font for your angle on a puff welder, not normal, just different.

OK, so you are not any type of rep, symbol. You are capital N normal. So, you didn't do it all alone, like Robinson Crusoe, break out, put up a stockade, find your Man Friday. But it's easier now, like that poem about Christ getting sucked off by a centurion that got printed. Couldn't have happened when we were at Belvedere. Don't tell me that if it wasn't for the way things are changing - John Hurt and the Naked Civil Servant – don't you believe that changed things?

Passed me by completely, that was on when I was away for a year at the Kiel shipyards. Only recently saw the repeat. I should, maybe, tell you about Kiel, working as a contractor in the shipyard there. Yes, because, if it was any one thing, and it wasn't but I bet you would like me to say I'm 'out' today 'due to', 'because', but it wasn't like that, not like what was happening in the papers, anyway.

You are right, I also believe that those words are always 'after' – they actually don't have any use in giving a sense of a thing in time – how we're just living.

Is my life is going to be some sort of grist to your university mill? I don't like the idea, what are you going to use this, me, for?

It's for a Ph.D. That's all, and I won't put your name in it.

I don't want you putting into it how I was treated, in the K form, when you lot, Smithy, Posser, you, board-dustered my face that time, leaving me looking like Greta Garbo. Why did you do that? Then I didn't understand, it was hell. The chalk dust got stained in my blazer, mum brushing it out and everything?

We were – twats. What can I say? It was the times, teenagers. Sorry.

You're sorry. It was the times. I've had to find my place in the world and I got it and now you come back reminding me of all that, of Baytown and Belvedere. I've got my place now, with Will, I've got my own personal reckoning. Finding at last where it was just okay to be me, help me be me. Sex was only part of it. You, though, and Posser, you lot were the pathetic ones, living up to be your dads. I may be working-class but first off I am homo. And I prefer homo any day to gay – Sing if you are glad to be gay - now that word's a hit. Homo keeps me in with the rest of humanity.

Humanity? Homo, I like it! Like it's the left-hand-side of sapiens? The board-dusting - we gave you a hard time. Sorry. We could tell though, even then, even when you didn't yourself.

Oh, yeah, you could tell but you didn't know. Not that it made any difference to you lot, Posser and that fat Scot-offcomer Gordon. That's Baytown – name calls but doesn't know anything. That town, that school. I was fucking befuddled all the time, not knowing whatever it was in me that made me your butt. You know, when I left Belvedere and I was doing my time I was in that men's outfitters in Dundas Street, *Les Modes*, as soon as I went in one of the assistants called to another 'Here's one for you, Jules' and before I knew it, I'd got Jules clamouring to measure my inside leg. Other times in department stores, too. Upstairs in Binns' and then once even in M&S. A Paki shopping - to be a Paki and be fucking queer in Baytown then, in 1971, oh boy! A big smile on his face as he gets me to give an opinion on a pair of off-the-peg jeans he's holding up to his waist, hipsters, 'Can you imagine me in them? Suit me? – Let's see what they look like against you.' Then he came at me again for my opinion on a mohair sweater – probably the only one, the mohair I mean, in Baytown.

Invited me to 'help him' in the fitting room. Yes, there's a lot of us about, you know, welcome to our world, won't you come on in.

Nothing happen like in the public lavs on the car park behind W.H. Smiths? I mean, it was notorious, you couldn't go near there after five of a night. It was not quite like the sordid pee-stinking public lavs sex in Joe Orton but close.

Joe Orton?

He's the one who wrote the Killing of Sister George. In a biography by a guy named Lair, he tells of homo orgies Orton was in, in amongst the glazed bricks of the stalls of London public lavs. And I read another guy, French, Jean Genet prisoners' shower and cell block sex. That was the 50s and 60s. But now, I say again, the Seventies, Eighties now, are better – don't you think? What about Bowie?

Oh, sure. Bowie playing at it, ground control fully on. Rocket man Elton John – some gay icon he's turning out to be. Bolan, Glitter. What are they? A whole glam sham pop music equivalent of Larry Grayson-type camp and Danny la Rue drag.

Okay, say if I asked you if you could sum up your view of Baytown and northern working-class experience in one word what would it be?

Capital N normal. Our town, like when no one demonstrated over Vietnam when that Yank destroyer came visiting goodwill to the shipyard. Baytown has no time, no logic, whatever, 'cept for the odd wage strike or when some shop steward gets sacked. It's Town Normal. We are still in our 20s, shouldn't everywhere at our age feel good? But it was no good if you weren't Normal. No one feels secure really – straights like you, actually, even more. You are all just as fucked up in your own

ways. But Normal rules – it's got a no in it. I knew it wasn't any good, just as I know now the Ambassador isn't Shangri-La.

So, it wasn't one thing...

...One thing? Maybe it was. Maybe I might tell you about Kiel, what it led to – all of this. But it was both the first and last moment of trying, being, living in Baytown Normal. I stopped pretending after that, stopped fooling myself. It was when I met Will. I should get Will to come here because you are, really, talking to the wrong bloke, Will is the one for plain speaking. I got my mum's stone-wall reticence. I never say anything, always store it all inside. Whatever I said in the early days, most of those old days, was a lie. Not a lie, really, I just never asked myself the questions I needed to, or those mum, no one, thought to ask me. *My* open questions. You know, we have this breakfast cook, Margaret, and one day she said, 'sex will out!' You'd like her – character, fag hanging on her lip, sometimes I even catch her smoking when she's in the kitchen frying up breakfasts. Now she *is* working-class. She said it the first time when Renee, our one char, went off with a black guy who stayed just three nights, a London store's rep-salesman. Sex will out. She, not Renee, Marge, looks like an elderly Marlene Dietrich thinking she still has it, sex appeal.

Was she here when you came?

Who, our Princess Marge? Yes. But not just from when we bought the place. I first came here in early '76 when we landed here, me and Will, contract welding at Heysham nuclear plant. We stayed as guests. It was long up for sale. So Margaret, she helped us into all of this, a guiding light, really. It was a right dump, this hotel, like most of the town. Colin Crompton was right – they could have been the dead stood up, the OAPs and people in line at the bus stops. And the run-down prom, and

the arthritic bones of Leeds' retirees, creaking as they shuffle along. But it was lively in the Ambassador. All sorts, like NF thug contractors at the nuclear plant lodging with us.

How did you get along with that type?'

Like at Belvedere, held my tongue. Never a question. We counted to ten and later, when we bought the place, give the bastards their post-hangover breakfasts with added spice, shall I say. We couldn't say fuck off – business too tight, then. That power plant one thing that keeps us going over the winter months. What do you think we could've done, offer to get our homo heads kicked in gratis? Arthur the owner of the Winsford got beat up by some contractors for just being bald. Got to be joking. Anyway, NFers less trouble than the stag parties, they in turn less trouble than the hen parties. In just three years at the Ambassador we've seen it all. We had a party of spiritualists - never saw through Will and me. But worse were the Christian evangelists, going to God-bother day trippers on the prom. It was when we tried running the hotel as a hostel at first, when we couldn't afford to start renovating, and that lot thought they had a God-given right to help themselves to other guests' food people had stored – easy to do because we had these open honesty shelves in the kitchen. We've had George Formby Association' ukulele players staying, and a load of Elvises. But then we got the builders in – all that dough from when I had been working on the gas pipelines came good, didn't know what to do with it – so, alterations and a cheap spruce-up. Now we've come on, look at the place, it's okay. Now we've got bog-standard pensioners on Shermans' coach tours – they're alright - and we'll soon have the money back on the downstairs' bedrooms we've fitted with accessible showers. Bloody pensioners eat more than the contractors from Heysham power station. But as you can see, we are getting a handle on things, now – getting

a network, we've a deal with Fishwicks Hotel in Cromer, Jerry and Colin, similar guys to us, they get a lot of homos up weekends from London. We are looking for select groups and couples, not just queers, I mean cyclists, ramblers, bridge and poker players, but maybe even start a murder mystery weekend. Will, of course, wants to do more with the back patio, barbeques.

You said, Kiel.

Not Kiel, that was the end. Hold your breath! I will reveal all. I guess you are making me see now how it was an end and a beginning. It was, I was. That night boat journey in the night of the North Sea, journeying of my young homo's soul. I can tell you; we were a right bunch! Going for Loman's? No, Longman's Engineering, based at Newcastle. What they call an agency, but actually a contracting company and their ad in the Daily Mirror, **Welders for German Shipyard. ASME 9**. Then the address to send your C.V. No problem getting the job, me one of, how many? – dozens, I guess. But very few on that ferry had actually got ASME 9. And I got it without knowing how valuable it was, going like a lamb from apprentice at Poulton's' Pressure Vessels in Baytown to a prime job welding 25" diameter pipe butts on Scottish gas grid lines. ASME 9 all the way from Aberdeen to Sunderland. Getting ready for when it started to flow from Piper. American engineers with all the know-how. £600 a week, in 1974.

That's some dough!

Crazy money. It was great how me and the other guys always had to be two together, like twins, teams that the foreman, a Yank named Guy, designated as Gemini's One Two Three etc., like we were teams of Moon astronauts. Got used to working with one guy, Eugene, a black from Arkansas, we were both arc-welding

pipe-butts at the same time, lying across the pipes opposite to one another. Had to do it like that, large butts take one man too long to do alone – cracks develop in the weld root before you could get all the way round. When we'd finish a root, the mates slagging it off for us first and then came the caulkers – but not like at Poulton's', more specialist - grinding down any risers. Middle runs the same again but, no, first they annealed it with oxy burners and then we went around it again with the capping runs. We had these special welding rods from Germany, BSAF. ASME 9. And always we were out in the middle of nowhere in a bloody muddy trench in the Borders. And testing, testing all the fucking time. Consultant metallurgists on our backs. Ghostly guys in white lab coats and yellow hard hats, using non-destructive-testing rings – X-rays and ultrasound. One slag hole and it all had to be ground completely out – not one flaw allowed in a 100 miles of pipe. We were the elite. All that American gear that came into Burmah Oil's stores. Quality calfskin steel toeies, and strapped leather arm protectors made us look like knights in armour. Those Yank welders' peaked caps, bright colours and patterns so we looked like jockeys except we had to turn them back to front, could only pull the peak round after we took our head-shields off. The older English guys still preferred wearing leather skull caps but they weren't fashionable enough for us. Then, where the cranes couldn't turn the pipes for us – every third. Fourth? No, on the third length the butt had to be done static, in position. Bending ourselves like coiled springs under the pipe, in the trench, over-head welding you would think was against the laws of gravity but for the grace of surface tension and our sheer fucking skill. Some of the Baytown lads at other jobs, even the shipyard's best lads when they had to do it – got 'bunches of grapes' – meant they never could control the weld from hanging down from the bottom of the pipe, looking like it'd got mild steel piles.

Pretty technical. I can tell you were proud of your skill.

ASME 9, 25-inch butts, surface tension, NDT, a bloody mystery to you – you look bewildered! No way are you going to really know about working life – you’ve gone too far away, from the start, when we left you to stay on – Scholarship Boy. You’ve never been out in the wind and rain, beating against the tarpaulins, the field kitchen, lousy digs, those yellow mammoth JCBs earth movers and pipe cranes. And it was funny but, yes, we were proud, especially the older welders were proud of being a part of all of it, the North Sea gas and oil gold rush. The married blokes could easily have sent their kids to Eton instead of secondary mods like they probably did. We were the Wild Bunch: Lechman, a German guy; Walt, a scrawny Yank, smoking shitty Camels looked about 70 but I don’t know he was only probably in his 50s; loads of Americans and Canadians and yes just the one black guy I worked with, ‘Gene. He had to be good, the best, with those Texan rednecks around. And it was drink, drink whether I wanted to or not - hard, long, deep drinking. When they bussed us back to the digs we were too knackered to do much else, we’d be in a village or small town for a month or so before moving on. So there was nothing else to do except smoke, drink and I bet all those cans and Budweiser bottles’ll be found by archaeologists one day, or when it’s another lot’s turn and they dig it all up again. But they’ve got coming new robotic machine welders. Losing all of our skill, the way we poured our souls into those welds. Each capping bead, despite all the regulations about penetration and amount of build-up of butts, idiosyncratic - each bead’ll be microscopically different, like welders’ handwriting.

You were proud, are proud.

Yeah, but you won't be able to understand it, that sort of pride was implicit, didn't spout, like you probably do when you get a good mark for your essays. But it was physical pride we had. We would lie with our groins into-against the curvature of that cold metal pipe: like we were having it off with each other. We'd have our feet up on duckboards in case of electric shocks. Me and Eugene and the other Geminis in tune with one-another so that at the same time we flipped our headshields up when we ejected the spent rod-ends. Never got arc-eye once despite 'Gene welding right across the pipe from me. That great feeling to see the weld flux cooling and curling off like a tarantula's tail, no need then for the mates to chip it. Showed you'd got the deposit rate just right. No undercutting at the butt' shoulder, no slagholes. Absolutely perfect.

You sound nostalgic.

Nope. I gave it up because of all the drinking, too heavy, and the hazards – there was, for one instance, Ray, a guy from Liverpool who got his hand crushed by a 6-inch bronze air release valve the riggers were slinging into position. And it was all the testing testing testing getting to me – so I said fuck it for the money and left. That was when I went to Kiel via Rotterdam and got a coach to the shipyards, after the night ferry from Hull. A whole gang of us, all new, except for two of the older hands who were already working there (they'd been home on leave in Dundee), all of the others except for me were just run-of-the-mill welders, at most all they had was City and Guilds. The Dundee lads had been there, been on leave, but I remember they were telling us, winding us up really, that we'd be weld-tested on arrival at the German yards. But Longman's had given us all a job no questions asked. Just a phone call *Can you get to Hull on Tuesday?* The rail travel warrant to pick up directly at Baytown station and just turn up at the ferry, on a group-party ticket to Rotterdam,

one way, terminal 10 pm sailing. Somehow, we all met up, identified one another – fifty hairy-arsed welders at least.

It was something, that North Sea ferry night crossing! Oh boy, how we raged and roistered about that boat. The dope smoke was enough you could smell it coming out of the portholes, out of the funnels almost. All our boozing, spew slopping over the decks, we were a total nightmare for the crew. A welders' mass-bacchanalia based on crappy Red Barrel and Carlsberg because it was a dime cheaper than on the mainland. All of the guys spewing and puking, and no one had a cabin, all you could get was just those easy-relax-back chairs and dimmed lights' area that you had to pay a bit more for – and all-around meek passengers trying to get away from our racket. Never heard of any passengers complaining but they must have, the ruck-noise we were making, particularly in the bar. Crew scared to death of us all, seeing us probably as just your stereotypically violent pack of drunken young northern English thugs. Which we were. Not aware of anyone, anywhere, the whole thing was in a blur, my head aching with the booze and the throb of the engines, it was mad. And, then there was the gang-bang.

Gang-Bang?

I forget who found out about it, the scrum, the gang-bang. I think it was Jed, the Aussie, working abroad and seeing the world. Or maybe Bobby the Scouser. Anyway, there were these two other blokes, the practiced Scots' hands I told you about, never saw them again after the coach picked us all up - they were making their own way back to the Hamburg yards - but they were filling us in on things. We hung on their every word. Warning us how if we failed the welding test we'd be reassigned to labouring. They went on about how the yard at Kiel was overrun by

Turkish workers – they were warning us to steer clear of the Muslims’ toilets. And they said, and they were right on this, that we would end up repairing old ferries. Shipwork on the new boats was just for Jerry workers only. So who needed ASME 9? When we got to the yard the next day, we found out you were allowed to drink on the job, all the lads cock-a-hoop being able to buy bottles of beer from vending machines. The Krauts don’t see the booze like we do, they don’t go mad. So, you had half-soaked scaffolders dropping poles and clamps down on you. And the Jerries all looking down on us. There was a crazy Polizist with his truncheon on traffic duty flailing it at us as we emerged from Gate Zwei like a stampede herd from the yard of of the nights.

The gang-bang?

I’m coming to that. Hold your horses. But afterwards, after the ferry. It was like going from the frying pan into the fire. Kiel was hell from the start, from when we got dropped off by the coach at Kiel fish market. Longman’s agents dispatching us off to a line of taxis to take us to our digs. Treating us like scum. Throngs of us waiting there with our cases like bloody refugees – this was in the historic fish market square. Local urchins saw us standing around and came taking running kicks at our cases, at us. We were seen as foreign scum. Foreign workers – they probably thought we were Turks. Then Jed, Bobby and me were the last to be assigned somewhere and no taxis so the agents themselves drove us out to the digs in their own Merc. Snarling at us from the front seats like we’d been rounded up by the SS. ‘Dirty English, spewing up in our taxis and *gasthauser*. You bad dirty bad people!’ Some glad-hand. Welcome to fucking Germany. And at the digs we got driven to we came across this highly depressed guy from Ellesmere Port having a breakdown just before he was due leave – looked like an old man at 30. At the digs there were these

two German sisters running the place, nice Dutch-roofed-mansard house, in the suburbs, everything so clean, inside and outside in the streets, not like Baytown, not like England. Not a word of English, the two tittering all the time, pointing at things and going 'Nein' or 'Ja' depending on what it was, their bathroom – 'Nein!' And that depressed guy, a pipefitter. Don? Woeful, missing his wife and kids, divorced, actually originally from Baytown – lost his home, a big court order for child maintenance. Totally worn-out. Poor fucker, and Jed had to share a room with him. You don't know the half of it.

My dad, you know, he worked at the yard all his life.

That means your dad's working-class not you.

Maybe but look at it like this. You know all those films, like A Taste of Honey. They are, on the whole, pretty good representations of working-class life in the 60s. Saturday Night and Sunday Morning. With Albert Finney – he was from Salford. Those are about being working class, aren't they?

Dunno, are they?

Precisely, you are right - they were actually made by middle class, upper middle-class directors – Tony Richardson – he did A Taste of Honey. So, what I am saying is that you don't have to be a card-carrying member of the working-class to understand its experience – you can listen, learn, then represent it. I just reckon I am in a better position than him and Woodfall films.

Yeah, that sad queer in *A Taste of Honey* says it all really – he couldn't be a puff and not be a nancy-boy, that film director you know about maybe knew about class but he couldn't make *him* a welder, a man, even. That's what they don't get.

True. You're right, it's all about sex and power between men and women and if they were about men, relations between men, then it was always straight. You are making me think – maybe if Albert Finney, the Raleigh turner had been bent? Or Hywel Bennett in The Family Way – instead of worrying about not getting it up Hayley Mills he just went off instead with John Mills her dad instead.

Ha, how to be a working-class bloke and be a homo: that is the 64000 dollar question. Your films don't answer that question, Baytown's own closed question. Not for me, anyhow.

You're right – now it's sort of allowed on the football field, Match of the Day. The celebratory hugs, but only alongside Nobby Styles' head-butts. Yeah? But, I bet before we all worked in factories homosexuality would have been, well, rife. You need sexual as well as other conformity for mass production. When Albert Finney got his head kicked in by those squaddies? It was like he was saying, 'I fucking hate women but I can't bring myself to kiss a man. So, you know what mate? instead of a kiss – I'll give you this nice bunch of fives on your kisser instead.

In a way that's what happened in the gang bang on that night crossing – it actually was male fucking male. It was a definite male group act of sexual-bonding - that group act of male violence against that whore. It was, you know, really, it was sex between men. I mean, a gang bang - isn't that about the only-permitted form of overt male-on-male sex, male-after-male sex, really? For raping soldiers and for horny drunken welders? That whore's hole at the end of it was just a male knob-end mixing pot. It all started I don't know but it was some type of buzz going around that ferry. And because we were all well gone, the booze oozing out of our skin by then, the duty-free flowing Bacardi. Nowhere to sleep. Couldn't concentrate on cards. The

dope making us relaxed and randy. And someone meets some slimeball swarthy pimp first mate or some such going around on the dog watch with Polaroids of two girls entirely starkers with shaved fannies – their cunts camera-lens-most – quims frozen in-out-of-focus. We got told there's a party and there's three girls who are Up For It and rampant. It was in one of the cabins, with loud music and partying voices. Smell of dope drifting along the gangway. When I got there with the others there's a group of welders in this bigger cabin and the three whores, Mortie, Colee and then the stringy one. Fucking Zoë Cole and Sandra Mortison were like ring-masters. They were the teasers, the warm up acts, and the other, well she was flat out starkers on a bottom bunk, the one we all went through. Surprised?

No, I know, at least, I mean, about Mortie and Colee. I heard they worked the Sea ferries.

Yeah? Well the two of them, Colee and Mortie, made out as if they didn't know me, and I obliged. But it was the thin whore, starkers and flat out either drunk or drugged up to the eyes, lying on a spunky bunk-bed at the porthole side of the cabin. She was the centre of attention. Zoë and Sandra were just in their bras and knickers pouring us out vodkas in plastic beakers and telling us to help ourselves to the coke. They'd got a cassette playing *Quadrophenia*. They were the warm-ups but the lads soon had them out of their knickers as they went round grinding their bare arses into our laps as we stood or slumped on the deck waiting for the end of whoever's turn was at it. It was like musical fucking chairs as we each jumped in turn onto the flat-out whore. A joint was passed around, adding to what we'd already had, far too much weed, my head was revolving. Colee, I could see was a poor warm-up act, she was still fat like at Belvedere. I'm sat at this rigid table with some of the others, a lot just stood around, voyeurs. But she comes to me for a second, eyes averted from

mine but grinds her flabby arse in my lap and snogs me so as not to leave me out. For all she cared my lap might have been a fireside chair she was settling into. All the time one after the other someone's at it in that bunk, one hairy butt up in the air after the other bucking and the flat-out whore's knees bent up. If she was groaning in pleasure or pain no one gave a fuck. We'd each coughed up ten quid so not one of us was going anywhere without payback.

Ten quid?

The going rate – for a gang-bang. I remember Jed getting on top of her. She was a poorly-looking skinny thing, a yellow-false-bleached-blond whore. Fucking so-dark rings under her eyes, darker than her smudged mascara. She had glassy eyes and I don't think she was seeing us, not seeing really, her eyes were dead. She was lay there with her skinny legs splayed out, totally stoned. In between each fuck she sort of played with her fanny, and all eyes were on her doing it. She was shameless, we thought, at first, the way she was unskirting her red raw gash for all to see. Bobby jumped in, before me. He was like a bull going at a heifer and his head hanging over the girl's face, his hands pulling her matted blonde hair, his butt going up and down like two half-moons. I tell you, my heart was drumming like the ship's engines. I remember, over The Who the noise of a fan in the cabin's ceiling clacking-clicking all the time. I remember Daltrey was singing, 'Is it me for a moment' which was how I was feeling.

You couldn't make it up...

No. so, it got to be my turn. I shuffled onto that bunk bed, I did and didn't want to. Her rickety legs is what I most remember. I hopped on her, pulling my pants and underpants down to my knees. She slurred something into my ear. I don't remember

what. But it was her bony legs I remember. No need to say my dick was as limp as fuck and no way on earth was I going to get it up. I just pretended to thrust into her gash. It was like you had your minutes in the spotlight, your turn to perform, show your arse to everyone. Lot of sniggering. Spunk sour.

Reminds me of William Burroughs. He describes spunk as smelling like compost.

Well, good for Mr Burroughs. But then I got it, why she was messing and splaying her cunt in between each of us. It wasn't shamelessness 'cos, you see, what it was was she had a female condom, all she was doing was keeping it in place. And that was where Jed's and the other fuckers ejected muck went, into the mixing pot.

Fucking hell.

Fucking hell, exactly. And I am not proud to say it, but like them (but for different reasons) then I didn't give a fuck about that anorexic whore. I got up off of her and no one was interested other than getting another turn or another vodka for their money. No one cared if I'd got it up or not, cum or not. An older, fat, hairy-arsed guy was already sinking on top of her, I remember he had blue varicose legs. No one cared about her. The welders' gang bang coming to an end – it was a tenner's worth of fucking hell. No one gave a fuck. If I couldn't get it up, it didn't fucking matter. So that, you know now, and make of it what you will, was almost religious, the conversion, like an act of immaculate contraception – I came out of between her legs at the end and it was the start of the end of it all: of worrying about being not up to the measure of Baytown Normal.

And then?

We docked and got a hire coach from Rotterdam to Hamburg. Along the way - booze and dope and bottles chucked out of the window onto the autobahn. Blokes pissing into empty bottles and beer cans. No one thought to bring an opener so Aussie 'Outback Jed' demonstrated his expertise in opening bottles of beer with his hind teeth. By Hamburg everyone's drooping, dead beat and asleep. A load of us got off to work at the yard there. The party over. At Kiel, I can still hear them, the two German sisters, fussing us, tittering together. The depressive Don going through his Tale of Woe Is Me. But into the living room steps Will and Kevin - the lad who he was with then. I remember the big grins on both their faces as they saw us new boys. They'd just had a shower together and both in the pink except for these ridiculous kids' dressing gowns they had on, winter-warm tartan ones with red rope-like brocading on their sleeves and lapels. Standing there grinning, the kid's gowns just long enough to cover their balls, their arms from the elbows down poking out of the sleeves. Given them when they first arrived in winter, by the old sisters – took pity on them and being mean with the heating they gave them the gowns from their childhood, from the war. The depressive Don, wall-eyed, looked up at Will and Kev because he no doubt thought they were main contributing factors to his oncoming psychosis. He went on warning us doleful-like that we better pass our welding tests or we'd end up with the scaffolders, painters or working with the Turks. But Will and Kevin just laughed and said '*don't listen to that sad fucker*'. Nah! They said, *Fail your fucking tests and come on the painting and work with us!*

Chapter 6 Bluebottles

Two juxtaposed utterances belonging to different people who know nothing about one another if they only slightly converge on one and the same subject (idea), inevitably enter into dialogic relations with one another. Bakhtin Speech Genres and Other Late Essays: The Problem of the Text

When?	September, 1975.
Where?	The Dingle, Liverpool, but we were sent by Corvin's, back in Baytown, they were the contractors, Esso's was the actual job.
Where is Corvin's?	It's off of Iron Mill Road. It's in the back road part – cul-de-sac - blind. It's an old Methodist church, the old apse sticks out into the back street. All the pews taken out and a roll steel garage door replaced the big wooden doors it must once have had. Someone said that the thing we hung up the long arc welding site cables on was a reredos, rood screen or whatever, someone like you might know.
I don't.	Anyway, being Methodist it wasn't very decorative, nice

mahogany wood though, hard as nails.

But you were working at Esso's? As I say, I was at Corvin's since I was an apprentice but Duke'd been driving up to Esso for six weeks. All autumn of 1975, rained most days, driving all the way around the Bay every morning at sodding seven a.m. to get there.

Did you drive? No, couldn't, not then. Duke drove. It was his own van, a battered old transit, ex-army one but hand-painted maroon gloss over the khaki. You've got to understand that Duke wasn't directly employed by Corvin, like the rest of us. He was a free agent. The other blokes referred to him as a Gyppo and on the Lump. I mean, he got some sort of wage, cash-in-hand payment from Corvin, but he was more on a right to roam and pillage basis. That's why I'm telling you this, it's interesting because Duke was different.

Because he had a right to roam? He was into scrap, dealing in old metal, only then came the pipefitting. When I'd been working with him for a few weeks he took me back to his place one night after we got back to Baytown - he lived in the old Saltside area, near the Ormond dock. I say 'place' because Duke didn't live in a house – it was a 4-berth static caravan

sited in what was, more or less, a medium sized scrap yard, pretty gothic black; in fact, it was bizarre – there was more than just scrap there, all sorts of junk, antique garden ironwork. It felt all pretty menacing. At its far end the yard was right up against a high stone gable-end of an old abandoned canal basin warehouse. Duke'd built a seven-foot-high brick wall, a heavy metal bar double gates set in it, all around the rest of the perimeter of the yard. But, odd, the gates were usually left open with just a rough hand-painted signboard saying, 'Private. Enter At Your Own Risk!'

Sounds like some place.

Yes. And there were also strange statuette figures set at regular intervals on top of the wall's supporting pillars: a pair of lions rampant, two griffins, a unicorn, an evil-looking gnome, a naked cherub Greek boy archer. All of them painted gloss white but they emitted a sinister feeling, like gargoyles. And there was a life-size fibreglass figure of John Wayne, in cowboy outfit and ten-gallon hat, holding a double-barrelled shotgun, set 'on guard' on the decking by the door of Duke's 'van. In a corner of the yard was this rough shed, made of railway sleepers, which stabled his pony, his 'mount' as he called it.

Very strange. Was he

Roma?

What?

A gypsy?

He said he was a Potter. But if you mean that, yeah, Roma. And there was his wife, Arabella who was there. She wasn't much older than me, half Duke's age. She was a bit coarse and not from Baytown, forget, now, where she was from but he told me he went a long way for her and he did mean distance. But some woman. And she was what he was, what he called himself, a Potter. So, in a way, a bit different from us Baytowners, the both of them. Potter sums them up, doesn't it? Sort of living by their wits, being fly. That's why I'm telling you this, he was interesting, they were, and the things he got up to and got me into at the Cast Iron Shore...

Isn't that from the Beatles? Is it?

Yes, Lennon sang about it, Oh, yeah. Didn't think about that. Was that on Sgt along with Lady Madonna Pepper? I'm more into the Stones. trying to make ends meet.

Glass Onion. It was on the Oh?

White Album, but

everyone forgets just

what's on that one.

The history is it was called That right? So, the Dingle's kind of famous. But, also, I that because of the mean, all of them storage tanks, for the crude oil, were, shipbuilding – cast iron well the older ones, I mean, were iron as well, I guess. boats, before Cammell So that was the cast iron shore as well, what we were Laird's got going. I know, I doing, on the contract, burning it all down. At least, was at Liverpool Uni. officially.

And unofficially? As I say, right to roam and ransack, pillage, for booty. Duke had this mate, a tank cleaner called Changay. Tank cleaners were the first in on the site, gangs of them dressed in oil skins and sometimes full air suits and hoods like spacemen, to protect them from the fume that came off when they sprayed out the old oil and gloop in the tanks. After they do the dirty work the shotblasters go in to blast more of the oil out that's still sunk deep into the skin of the tank, otherwise it would still have been too dangerous to burn with oxy-acetylene cutters.

And Changay? He was like Duke's scout or agent, another Potter and known him since who knows when. And because tank cleaners were the first on site, they got to see what's-what – metal-wise. And they don't just clean tanks, they

have to flush out pipes so that the naphtha gas and oils are dilute before we go in with the burners.

So, he was Duke's prospector. Exactly. Changay got around and made a note of where the expensive metals and other choice objects were.

Like? Like: copper-bronze valves, non-return valves, platinum and silver and gold in probes and instruments used to monitor oil flows and temperature and the like. There was also a lot of aluminium trunking that carried cables and whatnot – at the time although ali is light there was a good price for it.

So, Changay got a pay-off from Duke? I guess so. I never saw a dime myself and yet I was implicated – happy to be really, just trailing along. I was an innocent really, not long out of my time. The mornings were foggy, cold damp air off of the Mersey, giving us good cover. Not that we needed it – the site was mad - you'd fitters, sparks, pipefitters, instrument mechs all charging around. Crane crews, heavy goods lorries roaring in and out taking away the debris. The bosses couldn't keep an eye on us all of the time. It was like the gold rush, the Klondike. I mean, it wasn't just Duke. There had been licensed asset strippers coming in and taking away all of the good stuff before we even

got a look in...

Like?

Like the office furniture, lab instruments, the central workshop machinery. We were just gleaning what was left, like bottom-feeders.

But Duke made his living this way?

Yep. We got tons of stuff into his van, brass, bronze, aluminium, all covered by an old tarpaulin, took it right out under the gatemen's noses each night.

Never any risk?

Not really. There was one guy, elderly – as gatemen usually are – called Glissold, who would sometimes stop us and get Duke to open the back up. But it never came to anything. He was usually with a dog handler, alsatians were let loose at night to guard the site. We called him Corporal Snudge and Glissold Sgt Bootsie. But, no, they weren't really interested, probably getting backhanders from other contractors anyway.

Why Duke? I mean that wasn't his real name, was it?

Duke was just Duke and I never got to know if he was christened that or if it was a nickname – adopted. The men at Corvin's called him The Duke, like John Wayne, but Arabella called him Duke so I guess it was his name. And maybe the fibreglass statue was a clue, I mean the one outside his caravan.

Perhaps Duque? Spanish? Dunno. Marmaduke? Who's called that, these days?

Marmaduke? But Duke suited him – maybe archduke! And I said that once when we were having a drink in the Duke of Dundras, that he must have been related.

Perhaps they were. Maybe. But no way was Duke Scottish, that I do know.

What was it like on the site, at Esso? It was a madhouse, and a bloody powder keg. They had Liverpool fire brigade on standby and three Esso company tenders were on site and crewed. But we didn't think much about that, despite what had happened at Flixborough, but I guess to someone like you it might appear dangerous.

Why? Well, you don't know do you? What you, I mean us, get away with, what's normal. Stayer-on, weren't you?

I guess so. People keep reminding me. Yeah? Well. What do you expect? They, the bods in white coats thought it was dangerous. First off, before even starting at the Cast Iron Shore both me and Duke got sent to a clinic in Erlemeer Park to get a check-up. I was chuffed, getting a medical for nothing. But when we first got there, we were given a questionnaire by the receptionist. Long list of questions about our health. I

remember one question was, *Do you produce phlegm?* and I said to Duke, that's mad, everyone produces phlegm, don't they? Duke said the whole rigmarole was for their benefit, not ours – and to be careful to put down no because they'll, the bosses, only use it against you if you get an industrial disease and make a claim.

That use of bent doctors No. who's that when he's at home?
reminds me of a first world
war cartoon by Otto Dix.
Remember it?

He was an artist. We had it Yeah? Maybe I was off when we did that. Didn't like once, shown in history by history or Eaven. Well, I guess it was a rubber-stamping Mr Eaven. Remember, at job, the doc on their side. And like there were plenty of Belvedere? It showed a bods in white lab coats coming along with tubes and smarmy army medic, big sniffers and gauges to monitor the gas content of the grin on his face, pressing a lines we were burning out. Sometimes they stopped us stethoscope to a burning and made us use hacksaws to chop the pipe skeleton's chest and up, or spanners to undo the flanges. Slow and bloody saying 'KV' – 'fit for hard work. And we hated it because most of the bolts in service'. the flanges were rusted solid, we had to get cold chisels on them and could only use brass hammers so as to stop any sparking. But mostly we could use oxy-acetylene burning.

That like what you see The sparks fly like it's Bonfire Night but they don't really when you see criminals burn. Your boilersuits get pitted and pock marked by it, burning safes open...on but never any real burns. I did most of the burning, we TV, I mean? had areas of pipe on the gantry marked-off and we had to get that lot burned down, each day. All the time Duke would be itching for me to get on with it so we could get the gas bottles over to where he or Changay had found the prospected hoards, worried in case some other contracting outfit would get to it before us.

And you never got You couldn't get close to Duke. He was never my mate. anything from it, from He was a loner. Changay maybe was his mate and I Duke? guess others like him. Potters are like a closed shop – know what I mean?

You mean, racially? Different, anyway. Pretty earthy. Oil and steel seeped Culturally? well into Duke's skin so that his natural tan was kind of deepened. There was one time...I don't know if I should say...

What? It's just that - you won't understand. About his difference from people. But it sort of sums it up, him up, at least. I mean, I was still doing amateur boxing at that time. Given it all up now, but then I was pretty good, fit,

south paw, good hook, don't you remember how I trained at Saint Michael's youth club's gym? I can hold my own any time there's bother.

Yes...I remember.

But I couldn't handle myself in the way Duke, Arabella, Changay as well, I guess, did – not really physical, sort of – well just had a different way of doing things.

You mean culture? Life?

That's the word. Life. Yeah. Well, it was like this. We came on an abandoned vehicle maintenance garage on the site, all the grease monkeys long gone. But there were twenty 30-gallon drums of parafin, stamped with the Yank word **KEROSENE**. Despite the risk of taking them all the way back round to Baytown, Duke decided he was going to help himself to three of them. We waited till the next morning for the damp and mist, it was October and by then things were coming to an end at the Cast Iron Shore. So, we had cover and drove straight to the old garage and rolled three of the barrels into the van, used scaffolding planks as a ramp. So that night we drove them back to Baytown but the van's axels were straining under the weight and the wheel arches were knocking the tyres. We'd only got a little ways into Toxteth, you know where the riots were, not then, recent, I mean, and there's this shuddering noise.

So Duke has to pull up on some waste ground. There was a burger van parked there and it was still open even at that time of day and a group of Scousers were there hanging around and drinking tea and eating bacon buns, this is 4 o'clock of a rotten evening. Scousers! Well, we sorted the barrels, moved them around a bit. It was pretty dark and I needed a pee so I tells Duke and I shuffled off across towards a shady bit, near a wall, out of the way. Then Duke comes up next to me and also gets a slash. Then sort of directing his eyes down to his flies he says, see this? You can guess what it was?

His prick?

Well, yes and no. I mean I did see it and it was a right chopper, like he's got a bloody python in his pants.

I get it, so that's the physical difference?

No, not it, not really. Next, he says to me, he'd had 'em done at a place in New Brighton. And what he meant was the flies, bluebottles, he'd got tattooed around his pubic hair, all with comic book zizzes around them as if they were buzzing around a pile of dogshit in the road.

That is...different. A visual pun.

Pun?

Pun, actual flies in his It never occurred to me. Pun? Don't think Duke
flies? would've...That was just, that summed it up...Duke, I
mean.

Chapter 7 Folkloric

Folklore is in general saturated with time; all of its images are profoundly chronotopic. Time in folklore, the fullness of time in it, the folkloric future, the folkloric human yardsticks of time – all these are very important and fundamental problems. Bakhtin: Speech Genres and Other Late Essays: The Bildungsroman

We were all working, me, Gordon, Tony, Alec, Peter, Gary, Jake and Angus on the shift B at Sun Electrical. Except for Alec who was in his fifties we were (this is back in 1977-8, before the redundancies – only Gordon and Angus are actually still there, now). We were all young and recently married. Well, also, except for Angus, as well, I suppose, who was a bit older than us, although younger than Alec, a lot younger. What separated us, as a shift, was that we were all waiting to become dads for the first time. I remember all the waiting for our kids to arrive played on our minds. It was like we were observers, watching, waiting as our missus's stomachs swelled up. And then there was the missus's mood swings to deal with as well. We had plenty of time to think and ruminate because the work at Sun Electrical was tedious, really repetitious so as it didn't require any great deal of mental application so the missus's pregnancies was always on our minds. Most of the time, on our shift.

My job, and most of the others except for Alec and Angus, involved me bar-feeding thin round brass bars into these two long rows of automatic lathes that, remorselessly, churn out thousands of those small screws you find you know in plugs and electrical components. It's unskilled work and the pay poor by any standards, but once all the apprenticeships had gone in the large companies like the shipyard, there wasn't a great deal of choice for us in Baytown. That job at Sun was a grind, boring, and it was then a 'continental' shift system that meant we had at the end of each week to change-over from working days to the next week it was on to

the afternoons and the week after that it was on to the nights before then going back on days. You see, what I mean - circadian rhythms were all over the place.

Anyway, what happened was that once all our babies started arriving it gave us an opportunity to celebrate, break up the monotony. I remember Gordon was the one who started it, his kid came first. He told us that he guessed he must have *tubbed*, that's how he said it, *tubbed the missus* when it was raining when they were stuck in a caravan all day, on holiday at Rhyll that Easter.

It was odd, about Gordon I mean. He isn't from Baytown or even English, his folks are Scottish and the only religious rites he said about when he was a boy was family marriages and christenings in Calvinist churches. He went on about how hard it, he was, being brought up in 1950s' Glasgow at a time when it was considered a 'hard' town – still is, a bit. Going on about how he and his dad and brothers used to go and support Celtic at Hampden Park. He told us that he had no choice but to come to Baytown in his early teens - his dad got a job as a pattern-maker at British Shipbuilders North shipyard. We used to, in the K form at Belvedere, we used mimic his brogue - *grrrr*. I actually wondered if Gordon's being an off-comer might have something to do with his wanting to start the cigar ritual. I mean, now I come to think about it.

Being a Scot, Gordon always referred to his son as the *wee barra* although they had called him Andrew. Anyway, when he started this rigmarole I'm telling you about I remember it was in the first break - near midnight when we were all sitting with our legs sprayed out, like a football team because of the rest room having these low wall-mounted benches. That break room was only relatively sound-proofed against all of the racket of the auto-lathes outside. I remember it had this very basic worn-out

formica-topped table and the tea urn on it had tannin stains on it and the table. I for one never put my sandwiches down on it. Another thing, I never got mixed up with Smithy, not like you and Mortie and the others, and I'm not a prude but I didn't like all the old Whitehouse pin-ups of naked women on the walls in that rest room. Who wants to look at women's gashes when your eating – it's disgusting and demeaning.

Anyway, Gordon hands around his cigars and we all, except for Angus who's a very moody-sort of guy. Well, because he's a loner Angus always took his breaks alone, but all of us soon got down to smoking them together (well, as I remember it now, Alec pocketed his saying he'd smoke it later – I mean, I guess all this about babies wasn't new to him, being the oldest and so on.) Well, I admit that Gordon had lashed out, I could smell the aroma of the good tobacco. He told us he'd gone to that real tobacconists in Dundas Street to get them. Well, that restroom was pretty fuggy I can tell you with muggy blue cigar smoke when we came out. Now Gordon acted like a priest at high mass – like he was going around the Host, going around to each of us in turn offering to light our cigars with his Ronson table lighter he'd brought in specially, brought it in from home. Like a priest, I tell you.

*

I remember that next it was Tony's turn and he and his wife, Gaynor, had a boy whom they named John who's now at infants' with mine. His missus'd been fifteen hours in labour at the Baby Farm. This was once a workhouse they converted in 1924 and renamed to the Deasil Laying-In Hospital – my mum was born there - apparently Deasil was a midwife from London who came like a missionary to natally-backward Baytown in the mid-1800s. Anyway, I tell you, he had these really dark rings around his eyes like he was shell-shocked by the stress of it all listening

(despite all the gas and air they must have given to her) to his wife's screams behind that ward door. I even saw, when he was handing around his cigars, Hamlets, his hands shaking when he was telling us all about it.

*

Then Peter's boy came along just a few weeks after Tony's and his wife Christine had to be transferred rapid to the maternity ward of the district hospital because of blood pressure or something like that - over-hydration. The consultant advised, demanded really, that she get induced. But his missus fought them off, tooth and nail and she was right, because nearly always they use induction for convenience. Peter laughed, earlier on, when he told us all how he'd heard a regular *plopping sound coming from the missus' belly* during the last weeks of her pregnancy due to all the water or fluid. But that was bravado after all of the stress - the ambulance going to the hospital. But, anyway, Peter handed around some good half-panatelas although he didn't use a special lighter. But what I remember Peter also did was he also brought in photos of his wife and baby to show us, and this was expected of everyone afterwards. And I thought it was just like Peter, that really he'd picked ones that showed his missus as very attractive, like in one she was showing plenty of cleavage in her loose nightie. Later, when my kid came along they made an issue of why I hadn't brought in photos, but I was past caring by then.

And I could tell that Peter, Tony and Gordon were like so proud to have had sons. They didn't actually say 'Lucky me it's a boy', but it was like, I've got a boy, I've got a boy! I've confirmed my manhood! And they bragged about how they would be taking their lads to Baytown soccer, and what or how they would teach their lads to drive, and buy them their first cars.

Also, in the midst of all this going on, Gordon got the go-ahead to train as fully-skilled auto-lathe setter and become like Angus, who was only just about forty I guess but still was a lot older than us others, and old Alec who were only the other machine-setters. I mean, the main qualification for becoming a setter, really, is being able to endure at least two years of the boring and repetitive shift work and bar-feeding without too much absenteeism – there being a very high turnover in bar-feeders at Sun Electrical. Now I know that Gordon thought about marking this promotion with another celebration, saying he was going to bring in a bottle of Scotch. But in the end he didn't because, even if drinking at work's not actually a sackable offence, I guess he was worried that we would think he was being big headed. I wouldn't have, but the others would I bet you. Work like that, it twists you after a time.

Anyway, by then autumn had set in. It was colder, but it brought some relief for me because it meant that I could sleep more easily during the darker days, I mean when I came home off nights. And it was nice getting back tired home to bed in the chilly mornings and get in next to Becks my nice warm missus. We all hated the afternoon shift because it starts at two in the afternoon and so work just hangs over you all morning before starting off. I am not a drinker but all the others moaned about not having much time after finishing at 10 except for a quick drink in the pub before closing time. And when we got back we found our missuses harassed and irritable, knackered and going on about not *getting the baby to go down*. I got home once and there was colic, croup and all the dozens of all those other common torments of the baby which don't take stock of you being a shift-worker. But the care of my kid, washing nappies and all the rest of it, well at least I know I couldn't leave it just to the missus: Before the baby when I got home I used to have plenty of time to get a pin

and pick out all the brass splinters I'd got in my fingers from the lathes. Not any more! What do they say, about post-natal sympathy in the Dr Spocks'? about oxytocin in men and women when the baby arrives?

Now, most of the others, especially Peter and Gordon, liked overtime, the weekend work was days and you could do it as long as you hadn't been on nights. But I liked to be at home at the weekends so that my body clock could jerk back into natural circadian time. I needed time to recuperate and I would make a point of taking some of the responsibility from the missus. I enjoyed giving my kid a bath. I was a dab hand at dipping dirty nappies in the toilet to flush them off (once I lost grip of one and it went down the sewer.) Becky, my missus, used the old fashioned terry nappies rather than the paper ones, because the wife's mother gave them us in her layette, this was after she came around to the idea of me and Becky not being married with a kid on the way. And, you know, it's like one of the main features of the Island - the washing lines all of glowing white, freshly laundered nappies, hoisted high on the lines strung across the tenement courtyards, like flags or baby bunting.

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Then there was Gary, nosey, nosey Gary – another of our old K formers. I remember old Alec saying that *there must have been something in Baytown's air*, all of our lasses having kids at the same time. He actually called it *calving* – he's of farming stock, I think. So it was Gary's turn, and he had another boy. Now, Gary already had a kid, soon after leaving Belvedere. A girl. So this was his second kid and he and his wife Lillian felt confident enough to risk a home birth. They ended up, though, playing host for five hours to a growingly annoyed and irked midwife – Lillian's contractions proving to be what do they say - *Braxton Hicks* – you know, imaginary. Well, it was

hours and hours, if they were imaginary I doubt because it came, eventually. But in spite of all that, *de rigueur*, on his first shift back out comes a tin of half-panatellas.

Now, even though he's only the same age as you and me, oh, because he's the so and so experienced dad, Gary thought he could lecture us all about it. One night he demonstrated for us how to fold a nappy – he got one of the string mesh rags that we used for wiping oil and brass swarf from our hands for the purpose. Okay, maybe we were innocents to all of it at that time and we did watch his demo – I mean even old Alec did, seeing as his generation never troubled themselves much with women's work. So we all gathered around the rest-room table as he made this mini-nappy on the palm of his hand *like he was doing an origami puzzle*. And when he finished the demo he swept it up into the air and slams it down onto the table, making all of our lunch boxes jump! Anyway, what I mean to say about Gary is his nonchalance was, well, may have lain behind him infringing our cigar ritual. Well, at least it did for Gordon, I didn't myself didn't notice, but Gordon said he was *a little tight bastard at the best of times* and those panatelas of Gary's burned too quick, that they were too dry and a hot smoke. Gordon reckoned they must have been from last Christmas or something...

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Well, not long after came anti-social Angus's baby, this would have been in early December, I remember the corrugated asbestos sheeting of Sun's roof was covered in snow. He grudgingly told us that he'd called his son Ryan and I think he was sensitive about it because that name is an unusual one, at least in Baytown. Peter and Gordon thought that Angus had named him after Ryan O'Neil - Love Story was really popular with the women at that time, if you remember. Whatever, Angus outdid

us all by bringing in a box of top-quality King Edward's, full corona. Due to the size of these it was impossible for us to smoke them in the first break. Someone, I think it may have been Peter, said we should all get together at lunch time and smoke them out on the car park? But Angus just said he didn't like cigars all that much, and because it was *bloody cold out there* he told us to *smoke 'em when you bleeding well want or*, this was what his language was like, *up your misses twat*.

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Now, then it was my turn. And this is the point of why I am telling you all of this. And it would happen wouldn't it that when I returned to Sun it coincided with a large box of screws being returned to our shift after being rejected by quality control. A heavy metal box was there, outside the rest room, on the high steel table, and it had a cardboard sign: 'SORT – SHIFT 2'. This meant that we would all have to take turns sitting at the bench and tediously sift out the one or two in twenty dud screws – it was a big batch of three thousand or so. In the end it meant that I had to do it – but I am coming to that. So, the auto-lathes at Sun were old, regularly prone to failures like that and as a consequence you had to keep an eye-out for errant screws and shut down the lathe pronto. At that time, Sun had recently got in three highly-expensive new auto lathes that were fed by large heavy coils of brass rather than straight bars. Angus, as a lathe-setter, had been put in charge of these, and they didn't look like traditional lathes – they were more vertical than horizontal, took up much less floor space, and required little manual feeding as the fork lift truck delivered coiled brass bar right on to them. The bar slowly unspiralled from the turntables like it was a brass snake emerging from a snake charmer's basket. That's the type they have now, replaced the old ones completely.

Now, Angus arrogantly thought himself above us at the best of times, but this new job also gave him time to stroll along and pause at our clapped out auto-lathes and he would often push in and sample the screws, insinuating that us others weren't to be trusted. And I tell you he was always so pleased when he spotted a dud coming off and then magisterially hitting the emergency stop button. It was always dramatic, if there was a sudden stop of a motor's noise from a lathe, it always caused us to look for the cause. And, of course, Angus just loved it dragging the metal job box of screws out because of the scrawping noise it made on the concrete floor.

All that is by-the-by, but it added to the tension, what came out, I mean, when it was my turn, in the cigar ritual, I mean. And the night I came back to work the night shift after my kiddie arrived I was actually worried: they were a right lot of bullies, really. So I took myself off to the toilets, Peter gave me the nod that he would cover my autos. Well, when you go to the bogs you go through the moulding shop where Sun employs most of its women workers, part-timers working either mornings, afternoons and lates - until 8 pm as there was no night shift for women. They'd given it all seasonal and feminine touches, with concertinas of bright crepe paper decorations, little plastic figures of snowmen, Santas, elves and angels with wire halo headbands – they'd perched them on top of the presses. Anyway, they were notorious these women, most of them were oldish and earning pin-money, and they would give not just me but anyone a barracking if they were in the mood or you got their attention. They would come out with like, *going to give it an airing are you darling? Or, remember what your mum told you and you wash your mucky little hands afterwards...* They were well-practiced in that sort of banter, you know the type.

But the works' toilets were a real refuge for me and I'd eke out a little time away from the others – rarely did I actually need the toilet during night shifts. It's incredible,

really, because I got told that Sun Electric got transferred to Baytown in the midst of the Liverpool Blitz in 1940. But, despite this, they didn't spare any expense on the bogs: they were art deco with white and blue good quality glazed tiles and decorative bands of thinner strips of darker blue tile running at waist height. I used to sit in there for some peace and quite and grab a few pages of a thin mini-pamphlet I'd bought from the market bookstall – The Teachings of the Ancient Prophet Zarathustra. But you can be sure I let none of the others see *that* – they would have taken the piss, particularly Gordon or Angus. But I liked to memorize that Persian prophet's thoughts, and then chant them like mantras in my head, I mean, as I fed the autos. I particularly like the sections on Ahura Mazda – 'Eternal Light' - which I think means the symbolic role of the light in all human experience and culture. It's funny, the only time I'd seen the name 'Mazda' before was, funnily enough, stamped on light bulbs. That's why I always made it my business to be first in line when the cigars were lit, you know, because the idea that the initiating light is deemed sacred in Zarathustrianism. Not that I'm a signed-up member of it, but why not...like missing the sniper's bullet on the Western Front, *Go First!* Yes?

So, the crux of it was that I'd brought in two thin flat tins of Cafe Crème cigars. They're I guess cheap, they're cheroots, really, and I worried that they would be seen as something of an insult by the others who, from spring to winter had bought panatelas. Maybe Gary's cigars lacked quality – but not size, and I guess Tony's were just the expediency of getting a bunch of Hamlet cigars from the pub on his way to work after his wife had been through a difficult birth. It seemed, though, by the time it got to me, especially with Angus, that the ante had been upped. I mean, though, there something deliberately malicious and perhaps deliberately subversive in Angus's lavish Churchill-sized King Edward. I felt sick by the time I finally trod out

the large butt of mine, I had to spit out a black grotch thick as frog spawn into the coolant drain. Angus, it was like his cigars were like a black turn in the rite – typically demonic. When we were smoking them, I mean, our mouths ballooned around the coronas – they were too obviously phallic. It was like he was making us indulge in some deep, dark, fearsome taboo practice – like it was mutual male fellatio. You may laugh but it was like that, under it all I mean. The ritual.

Now, I don't know if you know it but I am Jewish, well, not any longer, but my folks are, and you, the K-formers, none of you knew that. I am actually called Jacob but I don't think I was ever called that by anyone, certainly not at Belvedere and when they called the register it was always by your second name. Well, at Sun only Mrs Sharp the personnel officer knew that my name was Jacob. And my wife Becky is originally from Marple, Cheshire, not local. She dropped out of 6th form and left and had no intention of returning to it. She worked live-in in hotels, generally as a chambermaid or cook assistant. I met her when she ended up here in Baytown and we got together and then she got pregnant. It wasn't easy at first and we found ourselves living in a bed and breakfast on Rameses Road. By the time I got the job as bar feeder at Sun we'd just moved into this fly-blown one-bedroomed council flat out at the Ormswell estate that we've got to this day. What I am saying is, that because I married an off-comer I'm not prejudiced, not with my background – I mean, there's only one synagogue in Baytown, and you wouldn't know it to look at it, either. What I am saying is, what I mean, that if I hadn't met Becky, well, I'd be just like them.

So, well, where was I? – Yes, I was in the bog. I pulled back the small tab of sticky-backed paper that sealed the tin and opened its lid. The cigars were each wrapped in cellophane, so, I thought at least the unwrapping palaver would be okay. But, I

admit, they smelt acrid, sharp and I just knew that the others were bound to go on and on about them, I really shouldn't have bothered. But something made me...I just thought, oh, get it over with. I mean, it was a joke, wasn't it? Old fashioned idea, really, more Alec's generation' thing. But it came to the first break and we were all fed up because we were sorting out turns to work through that reject batch. When I entered the rest room all of the others were there. Gordon slaps me on the back and says, *So, you've joined the club! What was it?* So I told him it was a girl – 6.8ozs. I remember Tony going, in a fruity-camp type voice, *Owee! – our first girl!* All the others laughed but I could tell they just wanted me to get on with doling-out the cigars – by my turn the whole thing was becoming a bore, like you say, a ritual. It was only old Alec, rubbing his hand across his white moustache as he always did when he was thinking, thought to ask me how's the missus? And when I said OK, he said, good to have a girl because he'd had two, and one boy. But then I remember him also saying that, about girls, did we know what *Margaret's Monument* was? Gordon says he'd *never bleedin' heard* of it but none of them knew what he was going on about. So, pleased as punch he went on about it being a nick-name for the monument in Baymoor, that can be seen from the train. Apparently, Alec being a yokel was originally from Baymoor. But, anyway, they still didn't get it and Gordon, annoyed because he was sensitive to not knowing things about the area like the locals went ironic with, *why, then, go on tell us Mr Local Historical Knowledge?* So, beaming, Alec says it was because all the local girls in the past, around the time the monument was built, all seemed at one time to be called Mary, Meg, or Margery and Margaret.

Even then some of them still didn't get it, I remember Ant saying, *what's the monument got to do with what the local women are called?* and Gordon called him

an idiot because Alec meant that the monument was like a *lady's joystick*. I didn't mind the delay, I admit, I was worried, as I say, those guys could be bullies when they got some bug in their head – as I say, Sun was like that – it sort of turned us into animals. Then Peter goes, where's the photos? And I knew that that was trouble 'cos I didn't have any photos because Becca was suspicious and wouldn't let me bring in any of the ones we'd got done at Boots, not any that she appeared in. She said to me not to take any of her into work because she wouldn't have blokes like them ogling her. So I had just one photo of my lass alone – but lovely smile. They say that Zarathustra was smiling at birth – that he didn't need to *learn* to smile, which we, humans, do.

So it was, 'nice kid' - all the usual. I remember Peter going, *bully for you, Daddy. Now it's your turn to enjoy colic days before coming in on ruddy nights!* Then Gordon finally comes out with it: *Anyway, come on, let's smoke-um cigars of peace*, like we were all red Indians. Of course, soon as he set his eyes on the Café Cremes he goes, *what the fuck!* And then Tony started going on about *pulling the other one, that there's the matches, now where's the fuckng cigars?* Gordon goes on about how us *Sassenachs say Scots are mean, who're supposed to be tight*. So, I said, look you can each take three. I mean, I told them, it was all they had in the shop when I thought on, didn't think on beforehand, did I? Gordon says, *you can stuff those stogies up your arse*. And, he starts going on about it being Christmas, as well.

Of course, after that, it was me who was left to sift the reject box on my own. And, I tell you, I didn't mind, really. And I remember that it was out of the lot of them it was only Alec who was kind enough to ask after what our baby lassie's name was going to be. When I said, Kali (we called her that because Becca likes Eastern names: It means Dark Mother) of course, because he's an old-timer Alec acts like he's

dumfounded, like he couldn't believe it, and I remember he said, *oh boy, so much for fucking Margarets and Marys!*

But I wish you hadn't reminded me about that time. To tell truth, I'm glad that my time at Sun is over, really. If you ask me - that cigar ritual like the rest of things that happened there – was a lot of old bull'.

Chapter 8 Bouncers

Such speech phenomena as orders, demands, precepts, prohibitions, promises (oaths), threats, praises, reprimands, abuse, curses, blessings, and so forth comprise a very important part of extracontextual reality. Bakhtin *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* Methodology for the Human Sciences

We was creepie-crawling climbing up Mrs Kennedy's digs' stairs like spiders and in front of me was old Reg Postletwaite - Posser's uncle – yes, that ugly-looking bugger. Got his greasy back-combed hair and all of those blackheads and warts growing on his nose. I was only then just out of my time. Then, I mean, and that contract, at the chemical plant in Baymoor was my first one away from Baytown. Anyway, it was because we'd were fed up of waiting in the breakfast room for our chargehand, Don (he's dead now, poor sod). We'd given-up on getting any breakfast but just wanted to get on, needed to get on our way to GMK Chemicals, where we'd been working on contract for two weeks of of the works' shut-down. Reg, I think you know, is but even then was pretty stooped because of his arthritis in his back he's always going on about and how it's in his hip. Well, that morning he sorts of pulls up sharpish when he reaches the landing and grunts in agony. I was half-way up the staircase but Reg's already going and puts his ear to the bedroom door and he's sort of loud whispering, *'Don? Don! You in there? Don? We need to get a move on. If you can't come give us the keys to the van?'* He's rapping then on the door and Mrs Kennedy's going 'who's there?' Well we were out there of course! So, Reg calls in *that it's well gone eight, that we're late and are you coming or not! -the K Suite awaits*, that was where we were working, as I said. You see, we wanted to be back in Baytown by one. Then the bedroom door sudden-like opens up and Don comes

out, hung-over, shagged-out, and he was quick in closing it behind him alright but we got a brief shuffy of Mrs Kennedy the landlady, worst in Baymoor, lying arse naked on a purple-coloured nylon bed-sheets (all the digs' bedsheets were nylon because the landladies like them cos they dry quick.)

Don was paunchy, big beer-belly, typically over-weight older guy, in his early forties I'd say and he had these bulbous eyes, and that morning he was well hung-over and his face was flushed and red. He was half-dressed, he always wore these very old Wrangler jeans and he'd left them open at the flies. I remember the tail of his check work shirt were always hanging out at the back but that morning his feet were bare and his socks and work boots were in his hands. So he says *stand back, for fuck's sake. And I bet you had your beady eyes in at the key hole.* So, Reg says *no way, but I bet your tongue was in her's last night.* Something like that. Don told us to *button it* and that we were both putting his nerves on edge and *let's bleedin' well go.*

The three of us bundled downstairs to our van on the street. We had no plans on returning, despite Don's *romantic involvement* with Mrs Kennedy, so we had our holdalls and loaded them into the back of us van along with all Corvin's clutter of tools and pipefitting gear. I said I was starvin' and I said I'd go straight to the contractors' canteen when we got to GMK, so what did the two of them want? Of course, Reg goes on that we *shouldn't have to buy us breakfasts* and that Don's shaggin' the landlady has robbed us of breakfast. Don goes on about him shutting his gob and says, *it's love. Remember that? These things happen.* Reg goes, *love? You'll get the clap.* And that *there's two types of women in Baymoor, the clean and the others – Mrs Kennedy's being one of the latter variety.* Don tells him to watch his gob and he's just this miserable bastard. So I remember I said that I thought those farmers' daughters in the town Saturday nights, though, were some right shaggable

lasses there. Of course Reg says that I've no chance they won't have out to do with my likes. I asked him why the fuck not and he says it was all because they are all interbred, that's why. Starts at gymkhanas and Young Farmer's dos. So for the likes of me it's the town shagbags or versions of Mrs Mona Kennedy or those two young hippos who served us those days in the contractors' canteen. He said they were the Baytown types with no standards – those that don't care much *about keeping the country stock thoroughbred*. That's the way he spoke about the locals. Don said that Reg needed to chat one of those two fatties up – despite being young they may take pity on him and help him prick out the blackheads out of his face and beer drinker's conk. He was a funny bloke Don. He said he felt guilty, he said, because he still loved and missed his missus – she'd given him the elbow - and that he missed his kid, who he called her his *Little Plum*, like in the Beano, his *Peach*, sometimes it was his *little Missy*. Reg was always saying for god's sake, get over it - *you'll have us in tears next thing*. No sympathy from a bloke like Reg. Like Posser.

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At GMK there're these Nissen huts all about the site. The one where we worked was pretty dilapidated – a right rot-box. The limpest wind would shake and rattle its rusted corrugated-iron roofing sheets that had worked loose from the retaining bolts. Inside you got just one or two fluorescent lights but it was bloody always gloomy, and loads of tiny rust holes let in pencil-thin shafts of light in, like bullet-holes. The welding benches as always are set out along the sides of the hut with the central area clear for pipe-bending and oxy burning. That day, that week, it was quiet because, even though shut down was a busy time, most of GMK's own maintenance workers were off on their holidays. I remember two MKNers were still working, though, that day. One was a bloke, local, called Arnold Carr, a welder, I'd say in his forties with a bald

head and a mean sly one he was. He had working with him a young labourer lad called Billy Daws who was alright really. He was this short, moon-faced lad, with a mop of dark hair, and he wore those black heavy-binns type of glasses like Tex at Belvedere always did, something wrong with his left eye because that lens was opaque. When we came in Carr, of course, starts barracking us because it's always the same if you have a 'Bouncer', by that I mean something we had to bring back to the workshop and that day it was this pipe-manifold that didn't fit the day before. So Carr's going to us that it was no use us hiding it. *Boing! Boing! Your boomerang won't stop coming back.* And Billy Daws asked if we *couldn't be parted from it in the end.* We told them to zip it. We had the technical work, you see, that's why they give us jobs like that instead of to them. We got all the new construction and left them the dirt, let them get shit up and have to wear airsuits and stuff. Of course they go on about GMK pensions being so good, wages best in the district. Lots of perks. So they go *sorry lads, to see us go* cos it's the end of shutdown *but not really.* I remember Reg cuts back at them by saying that half of them never got to draw their pensions due to being poisoned day in-day-out, cough cough. Bad chests'll finish them off. And what perks? GMK's club? Beer was rubbish. That General Hargreaves bitter made us spew. This urks Carr and he goes on *you've no right using their facilities* – that's the word he used. Then he says, *Oh well, got to take pity on you contractors.* And then he's saying we don't know the half of it – their free rail trips, Edinburgh Tattoo, Chester Zoo. And the allotments and the kids' dos at Christmas. So, Reg goes oh, yeah, we know all about them allotments, and you talk about *us* being tea-leafs, all those water butts and Winchesters, don't say you don't know where you get them from: Mr GMK, that's where. Sneek them out of the main gate under GMK's dozy gate guards' eyes - they did, still do, probably.

Anyway, so, we was there huddled around our work bench. Reg was sat down on the big green painted ex-army munitions box – our Corvin's site toolbox. In the bench's vice we'd got that piggin' last of the steel pipe manifolds and the bouncer we'd been fitting at GMK's K Area finishing suite during the shutdown. But before we could get altering it, and getting it out of the way, we had to start-up quick because Billy cried out a warning that their foreman Aitchie was coming. So we bolts down the last of our rolls and made to look like we were busy working. I started polishing a butt weld on the manifold, using a wire-brush. I think Don pretended to be getting ready to go off – putting on his hard hat, Reg pretended to be organizing the tools in the tool-bag. Aitchie was this guy, Ron Aitchinson, the foreman – the Flipper we called him. So he walks with this lope straight up to us, never bothering about the MKNers. Aitchie I hear is dead now but he was a thin, gaunt bloke, his mush looking a bit jaundiced and we said it was like that he's been sucking bitter lemons. So he's all about how the Suite K fumigation starts at 4PM and he hoped we wouldn't still be there by then. *Flippin' K Suite's important, one of the first to go back online*, end of shutdown, afternoon shift will be restarting the plant. Just like that, like he had a list in his head, his day planned out. But Don just said that we're just finishing off. Bit of adjustment that's all. But it's *flippin' eck!* And then, *how many is that?* Bouncers he meant, saying *there's limits to Sod's Law* and that we better be finished soon – that the painters were due in in the *flipping* afternoon. You see, now, why we all called Aitchie the Flipper - because he never said fuck or even bleedin' this or that. Of course Don and Reg said he was a dip-Shit. Baytown inbred – never get to make a foreman in the yard. We all knew that that Aitchie had told Arnie to keep his eyes on us and blatant-like he says in earshot to him to keep his eyes on us lot, *Arnie, you know all their tricks*. And that's because Corvin did have a reputation. It was from his

start in the 60s - a right Baytown tealeaf. He started up by knocking-off gear in the Sixties when GMK was just starting. Robbed loads of plant, plate, pipe. Pirates.

Well, as it happened it was just at that moment the tannoy relays this duet of two voices humming. It was like in a low sinister tone and it was the theme tune from the The Vikings film: **Da Dah DA! Da Dah DA! Da Dah Dah! Da Da Dah Da Dach! DAH DA!** You know it. It was every year, shutdown start and finish this Kirk Douglas' film theme that film with what's his name, Tony Curtis and Ernest Borgnine. It's like we contractors were raping and pillaging: the idea being that Corvin's and all the rest, contractors I mean, imagine they're Vikings. It's funny. Only a laugh. We liked to think we were raidin' GMK. And we sometimes did set Baymoor on fire, drunk, like that fire that time, in the Sun Inn that was in the *Evening News* about a contractor's bedroom - fag left smouldering, carelessly, smoking welder passed-out. And on the Wednesday morning that time when I spewed my ring and sicked the digs' bed. That was when we were in the Peel Inn. Landlady made me pay for the sheets to be done at the washerettes. They put us out there and then and so that's why we ended up with Don's Mrs Kennedy's grotty doss-house. So, anyway, Reg strikes-up in my defence then about the landlady being like a shagged sheep that all the sheepshaggers in Baymoor had got sick of and he was glad to be going. And he said that he knew that all our nylon sheets'll get by was of a wash would be a quick dip in cold water.

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There was this huge stainless-steel cyclone in the K Suite which I think GKN used for blending chemicals at high velocity. It was at least ten foot high and ten foot in diameter, it dominated that K suite. Loads of banks of pipes, valves and flow gauges

of various types and diameters hung on brackets from the ceiling. We were fitting these manifolds and valves to feed the raw chemicals into the cyclone. But, and this was it, the issue, with you asking about oaths and curses, I mean. Well, you see that when we got back there that morning with that adjusted manifold who were there but three industrial painters working at painting the ceiling. All we could see of them were their legs in paint-spattered white overalls on ladders and trestles – they were painting the ceiling... So, Reg goes, *Oh, no, fucking painters - they got to be havin a laugh. Fuckin Hell. And they're in our way.* They were ignoramuses and just ignored us. So Don raps one of the wooden trestles with a spanner and this painter comes part way down. He was an odd one, wore this brown paint-spattered Tour de France cyclist's cap and there was this plastic bag on his chin, a home-made beard protector. He squints at Don and us with one wild eye like he's Long John Silver like Robert Newton. Of course he says something *like look what the cat's dragged in, lads!* And what's eating us? Don says move the trestle and let us through. Of course they are oh, in a mo. We'll not be long and it's not just our show and they've got work to do. Reg goes on then about Geordies, how they're all the same. The painter is back up his steps singing some *enchanted evening you may see a stranger across some crowded room.* And the other two joined in singing da da da da da. Da dadda dad a. So, they gave themselves away – it was them that had done the Vikings over the Tannoy, must have been. Anyway Don gives me the nod and I knew what he meant and we got either side of the trestle and moved it a couple of feet out of the way. Yes, with that gory-eyed painter still stood on it and Don said sorry and all that but we can't fucking wait, the manifold's *priority Number One.* The painter goes on about us being bastards and how the flame retardant paint had gone and run down

his arm and that it's quick drying! Don told him to keep calm, that needs must – told him to use some turps.

So he's rubbing his arm with a rag and paint-stripper while me and Don got on, offered up the manifold and Reg readied himself to make up the flanges with gaskets and bolts. But, the pity of it, it, you see, wasn't long before we realized that once again it wasn't going to fit. Pain in the bleeding arse. The two-inch branch was now three inches short. We knew we'd never make that up, even with a long bolt. So, of course, they can't believe it, I mean when I say that to Reg and Don. Talking of oaths! They think I'm joking and they say *never say die! We're not bouncing this one back, no way it's going to go, got to go*. So I have to get that scaffolding pipe again, like the day before in the afternoon. They won't have it, that it won't fit. So I have to get the pole and then it, the struggle, starts. First we pivoted it against a big stainless-steel tundish bolted to the floor, we'd get good purchase off of it. And Don gave it welly from above and Don going on about getting the fuckin' bolt in, go on. And the orders are flying out at me, *Davie, rive it more to the left* and I'm sweating and go, there's or mine? And it was Don shouting, counting us in: *ONE, TWO, THREE – UPPAH! Ehhghrrnnahrhh-ahha! Fucking jam in that podger!* But it wasn't possible. I said to them that stainless steel 18/8 is too stiff, it's use-s to rive it - but that was getting too technical for those two. It's *oh Davie you and your City and Guilds in welding technology mumbo-jumbo. Fucking short, that's the b-and-fucking-end of it all*. Then that painter's finished cleaning his self up and says *why now, me bonnie lads. Do you wanna lift with that yon pole?* So, what does he do? He grabs the pole from me and lofts it out of the K suite onto the sea of limestone chippings outside. Claaangunk! Reg said something like oh all you smart-aleck Geordies make me sick. And then, this was interesting, that painter starts lecturing us that *there's*

laws in the universe, you pricks, you can't make up that type of space and didn't we'd see how we bent the pole, that proves it. He was right, it was a bouncer, no question.

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Later, I worked it out on our workbench in French chalk – our pipefitters' law of the universe:

$$\text{fit} = \frac{\text{space}}{\text{time} + \text{welly}}$$

That was how I formulated our law – at least of the pipefitters' universe. I said that he was right, though, that painter - there's limits even for pipefitters and we'd just met one. We can't always *bend space* by welly. Reg wouldn't have it and that anything will go with the right amount of welly. He told us about how once, in Stanlow, Cheshire, he and some other blokes rived a full length of 4 inch mild steel ammonia pipe over 6 inches. Did it with a block and tackle. It was back in the winter, 1959, in the snow, he said just before Christmas, all of them then wanting to get back home to Baytown. Of course Don goes that's nothing and that he'd rived over five-inch stuff in his time. Reg said that was crap, there's no five-inch pipe in *the U of K* only in USA, but then Reggie carries on about how he sometimes wondered if some poor cunt should ever come to unbolt that flange it would have sent him flying into next week and *serve the fucker right, whoever it was*. That was Reg, your complete and utter nasty type.

Anyway, we was back at the bench with the bouncer once again and getting-on fine, then who should appear but Aitchie, sticking his head around the flash protection

screens around our bench and *what's this? Thought you'd lot be flipping 'long gone'*. Don said what can we do? Law of Sod. The World was against us that day and it's all a fucking twat. Aitchie starts his type of cursing saying *I wish my regular lads weren't all off on their holidays to Benidorm* or wherever, Blackpool, Marbella (reminds me - one Baytown bloke I know had this caravan near Blackpool for a week and he showed off about getting the good weather so we all took the piss saying *Eric gets the weather - 98 degrees in Poulton!* Don't know why I'm telling you that. Anyway, by this time, anyway, the shutdown was starting to get to Aitchie you could tell, his face every day got more irritated and more yellow gastricy. I remember Reg hawks-up a large glob of grotch and spits it onto the floor in Aitchie's wake saying that if it doesn't fit this time he's going back to Baytown *come what may*. So Don goes Oh, yeah, right. You will as heck, you'll stay or they'll be Hell to pay. Corvin'd sack him right off.

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We managed to get hold of a flat-bed truck to save us carrying the manifold by hand all the way back to the K suite – we should have welded wheels on that last manifold! Anyway, by then GMK was getting nosier – there was odd loud bangs coming due to the main steam lines expanding letting us know that the boiler house' furnaces had struck up. And there was more noise coming from all the banks of electrical pumps starting up again and pumping around the plant chemicals and water and other stuff. And we was conscious, too, that there was a lot less contractors around because all of the scaffolders, painters, specialist technicians and instrument mechanics, sparks and even another of our gang of other Corvin's pipefitters had left after dinnertime. We was, especially Don, under pressure because we knew that they were waiting to fumigate and recommission the K suite.

We saw the first shift of process workers getting kitted-up ready for taking over from the skeleton shutdown staff and they'd be on our backs worse than Aitchie.

So, we get back to the K suite and of course, Don starts off all positive and its *right, good, the Geordies are gone*. But it was only for the moment because their gear was still there. So Reg made ready again like last time with the bolts and me and Don offered it up. So, again we got the bouncer loosely bolted up and gasketed. But, you guessed it, there was yet another problem - this time it was too long. Don's going *it can't be, no way. For fuck's sake I just want to get home, I can't stand it no more. What is this? A nightmare*. It was, really, like being in a comic opera. *Can't trust you Reg*, he says, with a tape measure he meant, *your half-fucking blind*. Reg goes straight back that with him in charge it was the *blind leading the blind*. So it's get that pole. *It's gonna go one way or another. I'll move this entire fucking building around it if necessary*. In the middle of this the painters decide to come back. *Look lads*, they go, *it's Fred Karno's Army still marching on!* We tell them to fuck off. Just get their gear and fuck off back to Newcastle or wherever. They warn us as if we didn't know that the place was about to be fumigated. Anyway, we were struggling on and Don sounded like he was racked in pain on the rack he's going arrrggHHRGH. Reg is calling it every name under the sun Bastard. Bitch. Cow. Cunt...Slaggin' Bitch!.

Then it dawns on me, what the problem was. I said: Look at that. Up there! They're going what? where? what's up with you? So I point and there it was, the *tell-tale* hole in the ceiling and below it an angle-iron pipe bracket broken loose from its Rawlbolt. So, that sets off Don at the painters, have they done it? *Wot?* This! That. Loosed that ceiling bracket – there, that one up there! *Wot?* They go, playing dumb. *That?* Yes, that! *No. Don't go blaming us* and it was like they were in a competition to sound who was dumbest. Don goes on and on about it wasn't like that before. *Before? Before*

when? they go. And Don's saying *when? to-fucking-day, that's when. Lunch.* And it's lunch? Don't think so. They make an excuse like *look, paint's gone in it, hasn't it* they say – meaning the hole, as if that proves something. Then it's *Robbie, was it you over there?* And playing dumb it's, *Wot? Where?* Don's going, *look, mate, did you paint the ceiling over here?* Still playing dumb he goes, *where, there? Maybe. Any rate, what if I did?* Don's going on and on, *Did you fucking pull that ceiling Rawlbolt out, mate? No I fucking didn't. No. Didn't move a fucking thing. What are you talking about?* Don's *I give up just fuck off to Newcastle.* So the first painter says snide-like, *you believe what you like bonny-me-wee lad. Makes no difference. We're havin' none of it. We're off. Like everyone else – we know when it's time to go home.* And that they're from Sunderland, - *we don't like the N' word.* They started singing:

We've gone and won the Cup!

We've gone and won the Cup!

And now you got to believe us!

And now you've got to believe us!

And now you've got to beeeelieeeeeve us...

We've gone and won the Cup!

Heway the Black Cats!

And with that they were off. *Enjoy your stay!* Sarky bastards. So Don says what the fuck do we do now? And Reg goes, *I know: Stanlow, 1959, part two.* He meant - get a block and tackle. So off they go to the riggers' store telling me to stand guard. I was worried if Aitchie came. *Say we're on the phone back to Corvin's.* And Reg goes *but don't for fuck's sake say about the bracket or he'll get us to fix that as well.*

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They went off to the riggers' store and all I could do was keep guard and I just sat down on the tundish and waited. After a while I got up because I could hear like these murmuring-like voices. It was a group of plant engineers in white lab coats and yellow hard hats coming in with Aitchie. Aitchie sees me but doesn't waste any breath on me. They were on inspection, going around that K suite murmuring like Trappist monks. One of them was checking off items on his clipboard: *Steam service? And the other engineer's going Complete, check. Four new solvent service valves? Check. Hydrochloric acid sight valve? Check. Flow gauges – should be seven, one two three four five six. Where's seven?* And so they are wondering around with their eyes up and down the pipework, draughtsman's drawings in their hands like a map up the Amazon and finally it's, *Check*. But there was something about them: they made me think that they wasn't like me, us. Couldn't put my finger on it. Something not quite right. For one thing their voices, mummering, toneless. But them, what was it? Going around like they was just down on a visit. It was making me think, what was it? I still don't really know. But one thing was their hard hats, for some reason they was all askew: one got his hiked back, another had it tipped back sideways. It was like they was wearing them for fun - like they were party hats. Like they was saying wearin' a hard hat isn't really us. We're Staff *capital S*. We don't get our hands mucky. We do the brain work around here – see?

Aitchie said, *That's it. But the paint retardant's still wet*. And the engineer saying but *by five it'll be dry?* Then it's about us: *Right, manifolds 1 to 12 all done?* Aitchie looks at me with disdain and goes, *Looks like we are still awaiting the last one*. The engineers are going, *tut tut best tell process to hang-back with the formaldehyde*. Just as they were leaving Don and Reg come in, clattering into the K suite with the block and tackle and it's rattling like a chain snake on the bed truck. Don'd wrapped

a heavy-duty rope lifting sling over his shoulder and chest like it was a Sam Brown belt. The racket made Aitchie pull up and look at the two of them sharp-like, and I could see him taking in the block and tackle. I could see the question forming on his lips and yellow mug. But he must have thought it better not to ask and carried on out after the murmurers. Reg goes *Stick that where the sun doesn't shine* with his stiff finger at his back. But we did it, with the tackle and chain, slung from a six-inch pipe up above. That Bouncer! Reg was going, *Hooray, won't be long now, Baytown here we come!* And then Don, poor old dead Don goes, *A-bloody-men to that!*

Chapter 9 The Black and the Red

The speaker ends his utterance in order to relinquish the floor to the other or to make room for the other's active responsive understanding. The utterance is not a conventional unit, but a real unit, clearly delimited by the change of speaking subjects, which ends by relinquishing the floor to the other, as if with a silent dixi, perceived by the listeners (as a sign) that the speaker has finished. Bakhtin: *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* The Problem of Speech Genres

The kitchen of the Wilmslow Hotel, Manchester. A number of large gas ranges not spotlessly clean. Quite orderly, a pile of aluminium cooking pots and pans on the sink drainer. A hot steaming crockery dip which no one thinks to switch off. Little natural light in the kitchen, its one window occluded by the lean-to which, although its roof was corrugated Perspex, was too highly stacked with catering boxes and tins. A large Pennine gritstone arch set in one wall where the house, originally a Victorian vicarage, must once have had a range, Now bricked up, but carved in capital letters in its gritstone arch the Biblical quotation, THOU SHALT EAT BREAD a phrase charitable in intent but perhaps not its preface, Old Testament punitivity and Adam's curse: BY THE SWEAT OF THY FACE. At a central large table sat the staff.

Meg: We thought Dino was great, didn't we Jen?

Jen (pensive): Dino was okay – it was him who made service much easier, I'll say that. At least before it all got out of hand.

Meg: Of course, old Spraggy just couldn't get his head around it, at first, but even he came around, for a while. Dino's first innovation was altering the seating arrangements in the Galleon. It's called the Galleon' dining room because it's got this stage for artistes and DJs with its balustrade of little columns like a sailing ship's poop deck. So it was Dino who said rearrange the tables into two long rows.

Meg: It even fitted the name better, like we were all crew together.

Jen: Like *bier keller* style, Dino called it. Even Mr Wheale liked the idea.

Meg: He liked better organization, at least in the dining room. Me and Jen weren't running around half as much, were we, Jen? He reduced the choices on the menu, got us to concentrate more on quality, he said. So then we could serve up to six at a time, sometimes, 'cos he got Mr Wheale to get these bigger trays, special from the suppliers in Salford, and special fold-up stands for them, when we served at table.

Jen: We got time to stand at the till and just watch the guests eating instead of that constant in and out of the kitchen double doors, like figures in an *over-wound Swiss clock*!

Meg: You got that off of Mrs Bale. That's one of her sayings. She'll be along in a minute. She's the afternoons' pastry chef and, oh, she's such a one. You'll like her – She'll give you the low-down.

Jen: I remember one thing in particular about your Dino was that he was always going on about an Italian called Malatesta an Italian anarchist.

Meg: Dino got his ideas about unions and workers' rights and things, get the workers to run things – factories, farms, workshops and hotel kitchens. But Dino said he got most of it all from his granddad, who'd run away from Mussolini and all the poverty, came over from Tuscany, so Dino said. Like all of those ice-cream vans you get around Manchester – Lucretti's I remember was one but there were loads and they had ice-cream parlours. No restaurants though – odd that. But Dino's dad was just a young boy. Anyhow, Dino's granddad had met this Enrico in London.

Jen: He was a redpublican.

Hearing Jen's malapropism Gareth, the young trainee sous-chef entered the discussion.

Gareth: But it was more about the red food.

Meg: *I'm* telling him, but the communism first, food and rearranging things, all joined up. Isn't that right Mr Spragg?

Mr Spragg: It's all theoretical, that fellow left ages ago. He was too young, too many ideas above his station. Not up to the job. Have you heard of the Escoffier System? Chefs de partie? No? Great man, a great chef, in London, he established the chain of command system that must be followed in hotel kitchens, like a brigade in the army. Now, the Wilmslow is a small hotel and I can't say we've ever really had a system, we've only Gareth who will soon be fully qualified. Oh, and Bernie there, our present kitchen porter. There's the breakfast chef, O'Sullivan, but he's his own boss and spirits away around nine – but he's in at six in the mornings. Oh, and Mrs Bale, but she a loner and won't take orders from anyone. But Escoffier said that it must be top down, initially driven by the chef but I and my like head waiters stand in front of him, so to speak. But this Dino, he just wouldn't have it, would he girls? When he arrives he refuses to wear a toque, saying it was a 'matter of principle' that he preferred a skull cap, to be on par with the sous and kitchen porters. Not a good sign - an indication that he was just shrugging responsibility, not really about equality. Of course, when I start planning the menus with him it's *We have got to bring in Gareth and the kitchen porter in*. Even wanted to ask the chars, I ask you! He wanted you two involved and I also drew the line there, you'd only been here a few weeks.

Meg: He still talked to us, though – we had an influence. And it was me who suggested paper table cloths, saving time and saved the hotel laundry money, as well.

Spragg: One has to retain standards. Good napery is one aspect of this as far as I am concerned. But the fact is the kitchen, any kitchen needs *order* from the menu right up to the way the cutlery is polished. It was inevitable that Dino was going to get sacked, letting things go the way he did. All of his pally *Who's up for doing a combustible steak*. Yes, that's just it, always had some odd expressions – he meant a steak Diane flambé. He got that phrase, he said, from some Irish chef. Typical, over-turning the language, confusing the staff, far too quirky. You can't run a kitchen like that, you must speak plainly, use the Queen's English – that's democratic – people need to know where they stand, what they have to do and when. Well, I mean, I'd come down to see what was happening to an order and he'd be at the wash-up and once, even, I found he'd let the kitchen porter have a go at doing the dish, not the dishes! Ridiculous! It was laissez faire, communism gone mad. There's too much of that type of thinking these days, *no wonder the country's in the state it's in, bins un-emptied, can't bury the dead*.

Meg: That kitchen here doesn't help. It's not big enough to swing a cat around. This hotel's got 23 bedrooms but the kitchen's a hang-over from when the hotel was a vicarage, which is this bit we're in, the old Victorian building with reception. Never expanded the kitchen, Mrs Bale says, they just put up the lean-to at the back.

Jen: No light, no air, you can feel the grease in the air when you go in there.

Meg: Well, it was terrible at that time, in the drought. It was funny, now you look back, when they got those red Indians over from America, who was it got them to do a rain dance?

Mr Spragg: Denis Howell, the noble Minister for Drought - typical Labour muddle. But don't come into the kitchen – as they say - if you can't stand the heat...

Meg: It's a constant time bomb, waiting to go off, is all I'll say, one chef after the other can't stand it. They nearly all leave in summer. Admit it Mr Spragg, it was devilishly hot that night Dino got sacked. Worse than I've ever seen it.

Mr Spragg: I admit we were under stress that night. Sounds contradictory, but the longer the heat wave went on the busier the Galleon seemed to get. There were a number of flight cancellations at Ringway, due one way or another to the heat. Sticky tarmac. Baggage handlers' sit-down because they wanted more time off not just more free cold drinks. I remember a sinkhole opening up in the concrete runway and we got inundated that night at the last minute at dinner by delayed tourists. Very irritable, they didn't like it that they'd left cool airport waiting lounges to come here – sadly we lack air-conditioning. We were very busy – Mancunians, as always, too idle to cook for themselves, jumping into their cars, rolling down the side windows to bathe in the slipstream and pulling up at the Wilmslow and the like and ordering bar meals. Knocking back the Skol, drink driving laws or no.

Mrs Bale (entering): Oh, there you go blaming Mancunians and the customers. The thing is you think the Wilmslow, and Manchester, everyone is beneath you.

Mr Spragg: I don't think any such thing. But I do believe we have raised the standard here, since Mr Wheale came and, of course before that when Mr Pollock first bought the hotel and extended it.

Mrs Bale: And I say that is when the rot set in. Pollock getting rid of Miss Forshaw – *too old, not up to running a modern hotel*. He said. What a travesty. I don't mince my words. All Wheale does is take whoever happens to be his latest receptionist out 'to lunch', the hotel left to run itself, gets no direction. It was Wheale's own fault, employing that Leftie nutter. I've been here the longest and although I might not be in the kitchen most evenings I've seen enough, mark my words. We've had oddball chefs of Heinz 57 varieties here before: religious maniacs, rabid vegetarians, closet and bold nancy boys, even a woman, once. Communist chef's neither here nor there, it's Standards I'm talking about. That car park used to be lovely - a garden, lawn, kitchen garden. Miss Forshaw put on lovely functions for the Ladies' Inner Wheel – galas, fetes, Churchill's funeral, the World Cup celebrations. All gone for a Burton. Now there's just cars and that row of skips that we keep feeding with cardboard boxes and catering tins.

Mr Spragg: Mrs Bale, you've only just come in and are missing the point. What's this got to do with anything? Car parks and *all our yesterdays*.

Mrs Bale: I'm talking about Standards. In my day the plates came back licked clean. The rubbish we serve up now – inedible.

Mr Spragg: Tastes change, Mrs Bale. No one wants boiled spuds, cabbage and cauliflower cheese anymore.

Mrs Bale: I'm just saying...

Gareth: Look, can't we, I mean, we were talking about Dino, how he wanted to make changes, what he called red food changes.

Mrs Bale: Oh, that. His, what was it? That foreign soup.

Gareth: *Ribolitta soup, sugo finito, red beans rosso nostrale*. Those at the start, when he first came, before we got all the hot weather. He really spiced things up. I did them at tech, for my practical exams. He called it his *Red and Black Bean politics. Change what people eat and you change society*. He was good with salads, too: hard convincing Mancs to eat salad but he started a self-service salad bar - during the heat wave that was. First time I'd seen olives that didn't come out of a pickle jar.

Mrs Bale: A flash in the pan, that's what his salads were, wouldn't have lasted.

Meg: Since he got sacked, we'll never know.

Gareth: Dino went on about his granddad's origins, in Tuscany, not Baytown. How the Tuscan's were one of the first civilizations. He said they weren't military-mad like the Romans and he put it down to their preference for staples: legumes - simple, plentiful, pulses and beans. He showed me how to do panforte, Devil's cake, used honey in baking, never seen anything other than granular sugar or caster on the shelf in here.

Mrs Bale: I rest my case. What's the busiest day in the Galleon? Sunday lunch and roast beef and Yorkshire pud, followed by my apple pie and custard or ice cream.

Mr Spragg: Yes! It's not true that to eat well in England you have to eat breakfast three times a day – the *Roast Beef of Old England* shows that.

Gareth: Not a matter of his food: he got sacked 'cos of the heat, bad tempers all round. That night I felt like Alec Guinness in Bridge on the River Kwai. You know, when the Japs baked him in that tiny tin shed to punish him. It was the dead centre of the heat wave in Manchester and we couldn't get a breath of air into the kitchen, the extractor hopeless, the plate dip broiling away, all the stoves burning because we were so busy and T-bones were on as well. No wonder Dino exploded.

Mr Spragg: It was hot, I'll give you that. But that's no excuse for Dino's behaviour. It wasn't the drought, it was class war and it started because Mr Pollock's party arrived. Anyone else and Dino would have let it pass.

Meg: He told Mr Pollock to get stuffed, didn't he Mr Spragg?

Mr Spragg: Not just him, first Charles, our gentleman bar manager. Then he's the same with me, and then Mr Wheale and then Mr Pollock, to his face. I mean, that isn't on, not at all.

Meg: Told him, Fuck Off, Pollock, didn't he Mr Spragg?

Mr Spragg: He swore, yes, I think we've established that, Meg, thank you. And it was all because I'd sent Charles down as alert as soon as I saw Mr Pollock's Jaguar turn into the car park, couldn't mistake it – an XJ VI, maroon convertible with white-rimmed sport's tyres – very unusual even without the plates JOE P1. I don't know what Dino said to Charles.

Meg: Told him to fuck off.

Mr Spragg: Yes, thank you. When Charles came back out he shrugged his shoulders to me and said Dino's not interested, and got back to serving them their drinks. Mrs Pollock...

Mrs Bale: Trudy-Tits-First Pollock and ex-‘dancer’ from his club.

Meg: And as usual he was with that awful Mike Borstall, manager of the *Talk of Manchester* at that time, always leering at us, wasn’t he Jen? Wanted Jan to do ‘late night duty’ at the club. We know what that means.

Mr Spragg: Mr Pollock’s the owner. He can turn up any time it pleases him. Always dropping in on Mr Wheale. So, I’m busy seeing to them and Charles comes over because Mr Pollock likes Charles, one of the first people he took on here – he transferred him from waiting-on at the *Talk*, always immaculately presented, waistcoats brushed, not a spec of dust on him well, they order their drinks and I take their starters and mains – no trouble there. But I know I will have to go personally to see Dino with the order – couldn’t take any risk. I distinctly remember telling him that Mr Pollock and Bostall both wanted steak Diane flambé and Mrs Pollock wanted after her prawn cocktail a fresh ham salad. Of course, Dino makes a fuss, won’t have it, no special treatment, strictly, order of service and *no Dianes*. You know what’s on the menu tonight. I protested, for God’s sake it was for *Mr Pollock, Dino, it’s the owner!*

Gareth: He said he *didn’t care if he was the Emperor Haile Salassie* and he called you Gordon, which you don’t like people, especially chefs getting familiar.

Mr Spragg: He was always one for using Christian names, about the only thing Christian about him, Roman Catholic though he must have been, originally. But I didn’t object to his use of my Christian name, Gareth, it’s the way he said it, *Gord-on*, ironically. But the point is, it’s rank insubordination – the chef takes orders from me – what or how he does it, that is his domain, but the customer must get what he’s ordered.

Gareth: Dino told me that when the chef's in the kitchen, the kitchen's the chef's. Dino said that *was the Devil's original bargain with the first-ever chef - Adam.*

Mr Spragg: I suppose he liked to talk a lot of mythic nonsense like that behind my back. And I'd had a run in with him before, don't forget that Gareth, - he'd had a first warning from Mr Wheale. You don't get two warnings in this business, I'm afraid. On that earlier occasion we'd a party of councillors and managers in who were on the Board of the airport and it was to be silver service and I told him their orders had to take precedence. It was just before all the malarkey with his idea of communal tables. He, Dino - well, again, it was a straightforward case of insubordination. And, of course, he comes out with *strict order of service only, and the only good thing about silver service is it's served from the left.* Clap trap. And I set him back, that time, when he said that the council was suspiciously hobnobbing with airport executives - know why? Because the council owns the airport! Good entrepreneurial venture on their part. All the town councils got their heads together in the 1940s. Manchester Men, free traders, like the John Bright statue – know it? It's in Albert Square - pride of place in front of the town hall. Of course, Dino didn't know about that, not Karl Marx is it?

Mrs Bale: The thing is. You went running to Wheale and reported him. But Wheale was being fooled then by what he thought were them cost-cutting measures, didn't realise how Dino was chipping away at things, the Set Up.

Mr Spragg: Mrs Bale, there isn't any *set up* at the Wilmslow. Thanks to Mr Wheale it's simply, now, a modern hotel.

Mrs Bale: He'll get rid of you! He will, like he did Miss Forshaw, when Pollock thinks you're past it. She took pity on you, Miss Forshaw did, in '61. When you'd been living

on your savings in that Didsbury hotel, *on your uppers*. And you wouldn't stick up for her when Pollock pulled the plug on her and brought Wheale in.

Mr Spragg: That's simply untrue. And it's beside the point. Why do you keep going on about Miss Forshaw? She was seventy! She's happy, you say, retired, on her small holding in the Lakes.

Mrs Bale: He pensioned her off in '67, when the building work was finished, the new wing. When Wheale came in. You only came in '61 and Miss Forshaw took pity on him, she did. You were the first male dint in the Church House. We were all women here then. Miss Forshaw ran the place, lived for the hotel and the elderly owners, brothers, left all the management to her. All the post war years she held the reins, didn't need managing people like Wheale to come in upsetting things. I was cook and we had two others helping out in the kitchen and waitressing, breakfast and dinner. And they were older women, Miss Forshaw always liked to help out older ones, widows and such, Jeanie and Doris I remember, took them on as chars and chambermaids. We all respected Miss Forshaw. Liked to wear *Dior*, I used to go with her, now and then, getting the train from Droylsden to Chester and a particular outfitters she liked. She had taste, liked her *Jaeger* cardigans. After she was finished the rot set in.

Mr Spragg: Preposterous! What happened was the Wheeldons, the two elderly brothers, more or less died intestate one soon after the other: a drawback of the old boys solely trusting in an accountant and not a solicitor. Only one had an heir and he'd been killed at Dunkirk, a boy of 18 - tragedy. So the Church House was sold off for the sake of the Inland Revenue and Mr Pollock bought it – his father, a solicitor in Altrincham, backed him.

Meg: It's true Mrs Bale. You keep going on about the Good Old Days. But we're now, the Wilmslow has got a lot more bedrooms, not half a dozen like the old Church House. You keep going on about Mrs Forshaw...

Mrs Bale: Miss - she wasn't the marrying type – didn't need a man in her life.

Gareth: All I know for sure is that Mr Wheale comes in to give Dino a right ticking off and at the same time ordered old Donald, the then kitchen porter, to go and do fresh veg out in the lean-to. This was like a red rag to a bull to Dino because everyone else was being given tinned veg as usual. And he didn't like Mr Wheale telling me to get on with the Dianas and get the best steak out of the fridge to do for Mr Pollock and Mr Bostall.

Meg: And before that Mr Spragg got poor Charlie, not an ice-cube in the place, to first phone up the road to The Cumbrian to beg some ice off them. Of course he couldn't get any – ice was like gold dust, so he ended up scraping the ice off the sides of the fridge's freezer compartment, all just for Mrs Pollock's Babyham.

Mr Spragg: Yes. I admit that Charles was under a lot of pressure by those very thirsty narky and delayed airport over-nighters, but it wasn't due to me. We did our utmost for him. Only that afternoon Mr Wheale had ordered that every other bar light bulb to be screwed out of its socket – just to help cool the Galleon and bar down.

Meg: It was like a pressure cooker. It was so hot. Me and Jen were down to just knickers and bras under our black pinafores. We couldn't blinking well breathe.

Gareth: It was Hell and to top it all they wanted steak Dianas, and, Mr Spragg, you've got to admit, you insisted it was to be flambé!

Mr Spragg: I didn't insist on that, Gareth, but it's about style, food, presentation, theatre if you like. And it was for Mr Pollock, after all.

Mrs Bale: When I started Miss Forshaw always said, *I don't want waste, Miss Lewis*, Lewis as I was then. The Church House was on a tight budget, touch-and-go through the 50s, with the rationing and the old boys owners going senile but we still had their nit-picking accounting agent on our backs. And I tell you we always served local produce, didn't think about it, and there was a good butcher's just down the road, all long gone now of course – now you have to go to the Tesco's. And I remember we had Alec, a Cheshire market gardener, he would come fresh each day with his van. All gone now, of course. No good talking to the converted. And, it's funny, because you might think she would have had no time for it, him and his communism. But you'd be wrong, strong Labour Party woman: she told me she went everywhere in the '45 election, canvassing, the rallies in Albert Square. And later, in '51 I could see she was a very active party worker. Dino's interfering with who does what and how and when wouldn't have worried her – she always talked to us, we had *our* discussions. She left all of the meals to me, I only did the breakfasts and teatime, no lunches then. But plain food, as I say, not the slop that they put out now. It was BC – before the cans. But she wouldn't have wanted any of that exotic Italian stuff that Dino kept squeezing into the menu, puzzling the guests. Jen gets every other word of the English language wrong so she certainly couldn't get her tongue around pronouncing his specials. And Dino made a fuss about using his own Sabatier knives, called the ones we had a *lousy knivery*. He said once to all and sundry the *kitchen knife's mightier than the sword!* But he was part of it, the letting things go.

Chapter 10 Great Days of Steam

The author constructs the hero not out of words foreign to the hero, not out of neutral definitions; he constructs not a character, nor a type, nor a temperament, in fact he constructs no objectified image of the hero at all, but rather the hero's discourse about himself and his world. Bakhtin Problems of Doestoyevski's Poetics The Hero in Doestoyevsky's Art

It all happened that week Lord Lucan scarpered. I said to the copper that it's unusual for me to be in the thick of things. It's like I only get noticed when I've gone and forgotten to do something or when someone needs me. I say, 'I'm a mate, you see', 'I follow orders most of the time – I'm not paid to think'. But it doesn't matter if it's an owner, manager, foreman, chargehand or whomsoever, I never stick my neck out. I hold my tongue - it's second nature. In this matter as in all else I've little to say. The bosses take it for granted that I don't count and so they can shove it when they do want me to chime up. That's what I said to him, the copper.

I'd only been at Bowerham and Sprayne's light engineering on Ramilles Road for two weeks prior to all of it. But the thing with the police and Bowerham got confused because it was only a week before that the cops had been called in at the works. That was due to that morning we'd found the locker room had been broken into. The vending machines got wrenched open and the cash taken along with all the confectionery – Mars Bars, Opal Fruits, you know. They couldn't get through the iron door which separates the main workshop from the staff's offices. And, of course, the burglars left a calling card - two black stools which the police didn't feel inclined to take forensics from and I as dogsbody had the task of cleaning up. Thanks very much. But it's all grist to the mill, I've done worse and to be honest I'd forgotten it until I got talking to you.

At Bowerham and Sprayne's most of the time I just carry this and that from here to there and back again. That's about it. They think, because I've got these bottle-bottom glasses on that I have to wear these days due to my astigmatism that I'm thick. Well they can think what they like. I have this chargehand, Bill Burden, who gives me most of my orders – such as unloading deliveries for the stores or to stack the steel skips with components for the Vauxhall car works at Ellesmere Port. But often as not I feel like a type of human clamp or stand, at anyone's beck and call to 'hold this!' 'support that!' while they fly-press this, drill that, spot-weld, bend, form, saw or whatever it is. You don't know the half of it. When blokes are on piece work it's murder – stand back!

Well, that day was the first time that Gerry Slack – the manager - actually spoke to me since the agency sent me. Before, I'd only ever seen him at his office window which looks out over the workshop floor. I didn't see Slack and I certainly didn't hear him when he shouted down to me. Bowerham's is bloody noisy, you see, what with all the grinding machines, lathes and planers and drills, the fork lift engine whining and pumping out diesel fumes all over the place. It's all I can do to keep up with the men as I sweep up oily steel swarth from around their feet as they roll off components twenty-to-the-dozen. So Slack gets my attention and says, 'Job off out this afternoon. Mr Sprayne'll pick you up at 1pm sharp in the car park.' And it's like that was it, not a by your leave.

So it gets to lunch and we've no canteen but we go to the locker room with our flasks and butties. We all stared at the damaged vending machines. But we only have half an hour and we're knackered and sit sprawled about. But we get having a crack and I remember I said about if any of them had seen a film about William Tell that was on the tele the night before. And I remember Mossy said, *Yes, so don't go on about it*

cos I can't stand repeats. He was clever-clever sometimes. Then I went about Gestler beng a double of Slack, which he was. Then he goes that they were blood brothers or bloody brothers. So I remember I came back with, yes, Brothers *cos* he's a bloody Mason.

Anyway, that's by-the-by, you're not here for TV and film reviews. So, I met up with Mossy - Brian Stirling, really – got nicknamed after the racing driver. Mossy's a fitter whose main claim to fame is that he'd had every girl on the staff at Woolworth's on Dunne Street. I'm telling you. When he was young he went through them all, apparently. Young ones, I guess he meant. Course since then all the other blokes have ribbed him something rotten after coming out with that gem. It's like you've got to watch what you say - *mum's* the word. Anyway, that's neither here nor there. What is important is that Sprayne drove us over to Bowerham's house, out along the coast road towards Baymoor. Sprayne is the only one who's the 'hands on' boss, in his late 50s, gut over his belt and low-built like Napoleon. I reckon he's also a Mason, and well-in at the town hall, and he always has this self-satisfied smirk on his face. A bit of a squirt like, like, as I say Napoleon but, unlike old Bowerham, he's still to meet his Waterloo. Ha ha. You can have that one gratis.

But Sprayne's got taste, got one of those nice racing green Rover 3500s V8s, all leather seats and pretty rosewood dashboard. I will say this for him, though, he didn't make any fuss about us getting in with our dirty boilersuits on. Ignoring me, of course, Sprayne explained to Mossy that 'Alec' needed some help at his place and that we'd know more when we got there. We drove first on the main drag out of Baytown and we were soon passing all those large hotels on the way out. Then down the posher area with the little row of shops with silly names like 'Chish and Fips', 'Bay Bay Leaf Greengrocers', 'Hair Dos and Don'ts'. How do they come up with

them? I prefer the ones from our parents' time: you know, those with the traditional twee names like 'Friar's Pantry Cafe'? Got to be. Anyway, it seemed odd – I mean why are so many people to be seen loafing about of an afternoon, *men* as well as women? You tell me? Idle bloody middle-classes – that's why.

Well, I was enjoying the aroma of the leather of the Rover's seats and its quiet tuned engine humming lovely. I did worry if Sprayne would be picking us up afterwards or if we had to make our own way back. I kept mum. Soon we were going through those hamlets I can never remember the names of - where we cycled on good days as kids, after the wildlife, birds' eggs, apples – woodcocks. Lots of wild ducks flew up from the drainage channels as Sprayne drove us along. You know, we are surrounded by nice countryside but never bother with it, do we? Shame really. If I had kids then...

Now, I heard Sprayne'd teamed up with Bowerham in the late '60s and I noticed Bowerham had had some pretty high level board positions at the NCB and British Steel. We had to wait in the hall of his house when we arrived, see, and there were these framed black and white 10x8 press photos of him and other bods in penguin suits at dinners and I remember one had the article with it, '1973 British Steel Industrial Managers Awards'. It's the betting he'd got some nice fat 'Thank You' Golden Handshake from that outfit and used the money to back Sprayne. Something like that.

A shy cute young Chinese maid'd opened the door to us and we were left waiting there in the hall for quite a time when Sprayne followed her off somewhere. Then he beckoned us through into the garden. Old Bowerham was out the back wearing a 'Casey Jones' type denim engineman's gear, quite grimy, but it was like sort of

greasy and oil stained almost decoratively, if you know what I mean. Not the result of real work – a bit like those Wranglers you can buy now. What is it? Distressed, that's it. And the house, I should say, it was one of what do you call them? Mock. Old mock Tudor villa, with Gothic leaded windows. And a blinking huge garden - you could hardly see to the end of it – it sort of fizzled out to open farmland.

Well, there was this large circuit of small-guage railway track going around the garden. It'd got like all pre-British Rail memorabilia from the old steam days: signals, bells, and other paraphernalia. There was a large rhododendron and some other shrubs I don't know the names of and then, a good hundred yards or so on, was the shed where Bowerham stored his small-guage steam engines, one scarlet red, one racing green and another - what do you call it...something...blue. They were real steam engines of the type like, you know, the small ones you find at stately homes or theme parks but still like able to pull a lot of weight, three or so open carriages for passengers as well as the driver. Royal Blue, that's it. I wonder what happened to them engines, now, after I mean. Anyhow, it felt like we'd been taken into a big boy's Thomas the Tank Engine land. Mossy nudged me when he saw one of the engines' name plates – 'Maid of Bradford'. 'Shouldn't that be made in?' he said. Like I say, he's sometimes sharp is Mossy.

Sprayne introduced us without much ceremony saying, 'Alec, these are the lads I promised you to help with that bit of track.' Lads. It's always the same whenever the boss, foreman or whatnot wants something it's always pally and 'lads'. Patronizing. They want something, but when you want something it's different, I mean like when you go into a shop and your wallet's thick then it's like 'Yes Sir, No Sir' all the assistants kowtowing. But when they think they own you it's *you, lad, get over here!* Like how we got treated by teachers like Stockman at Belvedere.

So, Bowerham goes into the ins-and-outs of the job with Mossy and I happened to look back to the house and I could see Bowerham's missus upstairs in a room painting by the natural light of the window, not house painting – just arty-dabbing at some large canvas. Later she came down and told the maid to give us some of her home-made lemonade – fizz-less with pips floating about in it. Classy woman, though, and a lot younger than old Bowerham. The maid was more my type, but Mossy said in his coarse way he'd *shag it* – Bowerham's missus. But he'd shag anyone in a dress. Bowerham's missus was wearing a thin flowery summer dress, silk, and she had this nice brown tan. Of course, she left the maid to pour out our drinks, no way was she seeing herself serving the likes of us.

The crux of it all was that Bowerham needed the cambering of one bend in the track resettling, and so that's why we got to moonlight the afternoon off – to bloody dig out old ballast and repack it. Cheers! There were bags of fresh limestone chippings, as well as spades and pickaxes and a bloody great heavy plunger for tampering it down. Mossy said to me that he didn't have a bloody clue what he was supposed to be doing and was going on *I'm not a British Rail plate-layer*. I said nothing. We were at it three hours digging the track out and filling it in. me pushing the barrow with the bloody heavy chippings. No more drinks, I really wanted a cuppa, and we couldn't relax other than smoke. I wanted a piss but didn't like to ask so I had to go behind the rhododendron. I think Mossy had his doubts about his efforts at cambering and said, of course afterwards, that he was worried if the large coach bolts we'd knocked through the sleepers were deep enough into the ground. But we thought best to be careful because we didn't know if the house services, gas or water whatever might've been below.

It was getting on for 5 o'clock and I wondered if we would get overtime and how we'd get home. Of course, Bowerham was so wrapped up in his tinkering that it didn't occur to him, all the time we sweated he was playing with his engines, the racing green one. He was enjoying himself, adjusting this and that brass valve handle, looking at the pressure gauges, stoking his firebox while we were hard at it. The idle friggin' rich.

When we finished Bowerham came over to us, kicked the track, stands on it, sways his hips and it's like, *Hmm, OK I'll bring her round slowly*. Because of the warm afternoon, he's taken off that engine driver's denim jacket of his and he was bare-chested except for his trousers' bib braces over each of his white-hairy old man's shoulders. He was breathing heavy, and I couldn't help noticing how his old furry goat's chest hair bristled as he spoke - felt sorry for his missus (or the maid) when he climbed on top of her.

So, he comes round on the 'Maid of Bradford'. Sprayne told us, later, that Bowerham had the name plate specially cast as Bradford was his wife's maiden name, nothing really to do with the town. So, Bowerham straddles the seat at the rear of the engine and was pulling back and forward the levers and valves that control the steam input. He slowly set off towards us, black-white smoke mixed in steam and spraying boiling water all going up into the air. I couldn't help thinking like how steam engines are so evocative of the old days, before nationalization and diesel and electric, the shunting old days of pistons and steam whistles like when we were kids going on our holidays. You remember?

So Bowerham smiles as he passes us and put up his leathery old thumb, and then he takes the 'Maid' around for a second run. Mossy's like, *Berk! Big schoolboy!* Then

Bowerham and his engine emerges again from behind the rhododendron and I don't know why, instinctively I guess since the engine was moving much more quickly now, but only about 15mph really, we both moved back. I said to the copper that the last live expression I saw on Bowerham's face was bafflement - then wide-eyed bloody fear, as if he couldn't fucking believe, 'scuse my French, that it was leaving the track at that bend we'd done. But I could see by his face that he knew what was coming to him. As the Evening Mail said, he was unlucky to get his chest crushed underneath the weight of the engine: thought it would have thrown him off, not under. The noise, I tell you it was like an old rusty iron bucket being kicked along the road but Bowerham's scream was worse and his last words for this world were *F'IN HELLLLLL!* Just like that, long and drawn out but short, if you know what I mean. It did for him, that engine, he was stoney-cold dead. When the doctor or forensic whatever examined him, I overheard him say to the inspector that Bowerham's pants were *heavily micturated*. Didn't know what that meant but I looked it up in the dictionary we have at work for crosswords – pissed himself is what it means. But like he was an awful mess all over. What with the steam shooting out everywhere, and hot red coking coals splayed around, and with bits of fire setting dry bits of the lawn it took us a time to lever the 'Maid' off him. When we did we could see he was a goner. The copper asked me about where his missus was and I said that I looked back at the house and I could see Mrs Bowerham was oblivious, still upstairs painting. But the maid had come out to see what all the racket was about. When she came over she stared, wide-eyed. I couldn't tell if she was smiling or sad. She was, what is it? Inscrutable, that's what they call them, don't they? The Chinese maid, I mean. Yes, inscrutable that's the word.

Chapter 11 Fucking Pulmonary

Even in the earliest 'Gogolian period' of his literary career, Dostoevsky is already depicting not the 'poor government clerk' but the self-consciousness of the poor clerk...Bakhtin Problems of Doestoyevsky's Poetics The Hero in Doestoyevsky's Art

IT'S THE GENERATION GAME!

There wasn't much fucking sympathy between me and fucking Sol Jenkins, or fucking George Thompson for that matter. Jenkins was a fucking little rat and my supervisor at British Shipbuilders North and he saw me as a fucking trouble-maker, a unionist, a militant – he thought I was a fucking nightmare to manage. He may have been fucking right about that, at least in that I'm no fucking sheep. George Thompson's also a fucking shit, deck supervisor on the Ocean Queen, on the day in fucking day in question I'm telling you about. Thompson is a fucking coppersmith by trade and fucking inclination, so he doesn't like the fucking hassle of us fucking boilermaker-welders working in 'his' deck areas because our fucking work raises issues of fire precautions and other fucking safety considerations. That fucking day we were in Thompson's office, which would have been the fucking ship engineer's when the boat was at sea instead of, as it was then, in fucking dry dock. You know how the fucking Queen is 'loved' by the town, you know, one of the first fucking liners launched after the fucking war when 'things were fucking looking up again' for Baytown? So fucking everyone has a fucking misplaced affection for the brig, they fucking think on it as if it was fucking part of Baytown that's floating on the fucking ocean wave. So, I was part of the job when the Queen came into Lindrosse dock for a fucking refit, and the Mail made a fucking big thing of it so half the town came out with fucking little union jacks to wave it in.

Both Thompson and Jenkins fucking love British Shipbuilders North down to the hairs on its fucking arsehole. In particular Jenkins was always fucking going on about the depression, war and fucking rations – how they were fucking stoical and he always and his fucking ilk like to go on about how fucking hard life was in the 1930s before the fucking NHS and television. It was always fucking ‘the war’, rationing, and, you know, fucking back when plummy fucking voices dominated the fucking airwaves and there was big band music on the fucking wireless like my old fella and ma likes still on the Sunday afternoon radio. So of fucking course, they considered British Shipbuilders North as a nice fucking sinecure, with a good fucking pension to look forward to. In contrast, those lot saw us youth as a fucking threat to the social scraps they’d been ever so grateful to fucking Clement Atlee and Harold fucking Mac-fuckin-millan for. Okay, I admit it, in the yard I’m seen as being a fucking militant and fucking Leftie and a fucking Discontent – a lot of that arising from the fucking fact I was active in organizing the apprentices during the fucking strike in ‘72. So he had cause, and like a lot of them Jenkins fucking thought that ever fucking since when the union got the apprenticeships down to five fucking years the rot set in as they fucking see it.

The fucking thing is from leaving fucking Belvedere before you I knew fucking things had to fucking change. I was fucking 15 in 68 when I started my apprenticeship at British Shipbuilders North when what do I see but in the fucking Mail a report with the fucking headline RETIREMENT TRAGEDY. It was about this fucking fitter who’d collapsed and fucking died of a heart attack at his own retirement fucking party in the upstairs concert room of the Island Working Men’s Club. For me that sums it all fucking up, what kind of life I was heading fucking for and the waste and what you and your like got out of. And I bet his bad heart was due to British Shipbuilders North

somewhere fucking down the line, all that towing the line and what do you get – an early fucking coffin. So, yes, I admit I'm a bit fucking critical, edgy, fucking looking for a way to get back at the fucking System. But right is right and wrong is fucking wrong whichever way you fucking look at things.

CLEARED OFF!

The crux of it was that Jenkins gave me this job of oxy-acetylene burning a fucking hole in the top of a large mild steel tank that collected condensation from the fucking Ocean Queen's boilers. I had to breech the tank and then weld in a new pipe branch and flange. Any oxy-burning in fucking enclosed areas of the Queen or any brig requires an individual clearance, even if fucking dozens of other fucking welders in that area of the boat are fucking also using burners. So Thompson made out the usual form, which is always in triplicate, and all three of us fucking signed, my signature being last in line. It's just a fucking rigmarole that no one really thinks about. The page gets folded over and left on the pad in Thompson's fucking office. I remember fucking Thompson saying to me, all jovial fucking good guy: 'Job like this should be a breeze for a lad like you, Jimmy.' It was fucking Jenkins who replied instead of me because I just fucking gave him a look because I don't like being patronized by the fucking likes of Thompson. Fucking Jenkins, who's got a blinking odd way of fucking talking, came out with something like, 'I fucking hop iso!' That was what he spoke like, I fucking kid you not.

SAFETY LAST!

It was early morning and the boat was fucking busy and hundreds of us were fanning out onto the deck areas, all trailing off like a colony of fucking ants. The noise of hard graft, hammering, grinding, oxy-cutting, gets to you as it reverberates through the

entire fucking hull and gets into your head so you can't sleep at nights. Working on the fucking boats is de facto noisy and dangerous and it's taken for granted that you just have to fucking look out for yourself all of the fucking fucking time. We're always ducking, shinning aside, dodging, anything from metal sparks, ejected fucking hot ends of arc welding fucking rods, nuts and bolts, spanners, hammers and a dozen fucking other types of dropped tools, strip steel, pipe - you name it. And, of course, ultimately, rarely but regularly fucking enough to get in the Mail's inside headlines, some unlucky fucker falling. 'Industrial Tragedy', in the Mail, like it's a play at the local fucking rep'. There's no parachutes issued and all we get is fucking safety helmets, welders' ones with eye-shield visors attached to them when we are working on the boats. We don't really bother much wearing other safety gear like fucking harnesses, ear muffs, goggles or heavy fucking leather aprons even if they are available – it's all too much fucking trouble and gets in the way of the fucking job.

I had, guess who? Fucking Tex-Terry Weight with me, that fucking thicko. He's left and now works at Bower and Sprayne's. You know that do you? Well, when he left Belvedere he had his fucking eyes tested and since then he's worn bottle-bottomed glasses. The specs made no fucking difference – he's as fucking pig shit thick as ever. And he's gone bald and fat and if you want to know how he turned out he's fucking renowned for being bloody stupid, lazy and a fucking narcoleptic. Weighty takes any fucking opportunity he can to lie down on any fucking rough bed of sacking in a corner of the main workshop, constantly saying 'I'll just nip and get some kip while you do that weld'. He got away with it because he didn't have any fucking responsibility, too easy. It'll be the same at Bower's even if he fucking says the fucking other. And often all Weighty did was fucking foot ladders, and that was what he did for me on that fucking condensate tank job.

That fucking tank – the cause of all that followed - was mounted on four long mild steel channel-iron legs that pushed it up 6 fucking foot from the engine room's grid decking. I had to climb this short wooden ladder to the top of the tank and all fucking Weighty had to do was to put his idle fucking foot on the bottom fucking rung. I was wearing my welders' gauntlet gloves and started stripping back the fucking galvanized tin sheet cladding which protects the tank's lagging. I should have known, I mean that fucking cladding looked like it hadn't been fucking touched since the Queen was built, it was fucking well-rusted, corroded by years of fucking condensation in the engine room and leaking gaskets dripping from the bank of oil, steam and water pipes fucking running above. I was using a fucking podger-bar about 10inches long, which I usually use to jemmy flanges into position ready for the fucking fixing bolts but that morning it was doing for a fucking lagging stripper. As I was stabbing it into the fucking lagging a plume of fucking dust spewed up and thousands of fibres started fucking shimmering in the engine room's electric lighting, looking a bit like a desert fucking mirage. I didn't think at first and just continued fucking hacking merrily away and the fucking dust's wicking fucking wildly in the lousy engine room air. But it then fucking dawned on me what I was fucking hacking blithely away at and I fucking shouted to fucking thick Terry to get out of the way because it dawned on me it was fucking asbestos. Fuck.

SHED LIFE

So I strides back fucking fuming to the fucking engineering shed. The shed? What is there to say about it? It's I don't fucking know, fucking Victorian, longer than two fucking jumbo jets' in length, there are roof lights but not many wall windows, so most of the fucking light comes from banks of fluorescent tubes mounted on hanging brackets. There are arches off at various points to other areas that got added onto

the main fucking building as British Shipbuilders North grew. There are the engineers like turners and millers, technicians, electricians and riggers but in the main part where I fucking work it's also sectioned off into different departments - but mainly for platers, coppersmiths, fitters, us fucking welders and plumbers. The place is always fucking chocka, even if there's no fucking boat in dock.

And it's very, very, fucking noisy due to the hundreds of us fucking hammering, grinding and burning. In the welding area there must be two fucking dozen workbenches arrayed in two long ranks. We have these canvas welding flash-protection screens on movable fucking frames (a bit like those you see in hospital wards but ours're fucking deep green coloured and heavy canvas), we use them to demarcate each of our fucking work areas. All our arc welding cables and oxy-acetylene gas fucking hoses snake everywhere along the concrete fucking floor so you are forever fucking tripping. Long lengths of fucking steel pipe's come out from the benches as we fucking rotate them when we are butt welding 90 degree bends or fucking T-pieces onto them. It's always fucking good to get out of the shed but fucking not when you find yourself covered in fucking asbestos.

YOU DON'T SAY, JENKINS!

It's said that Sol (his first name's fucking would you believe it is Solomon but not even his missus ever called him that) got his fucking quirky voice due to hearing loss, fucking tinnitus, the result of fucking years of fucking listening to iron fucking rivets getting mashed into ship hull-plate in the old fucking days. His voice, though, you have to hear it, fucking like a noise-scar and fucking as a fucking result, he...how can I fucking describe it, it's like his vowels were like fucking chickens being strangled at a slaughterfuckinghouse, and he slurred ever other fucking word. I

wonder, now, perhaps if the fucker was fucking tongued-tied from fucking childhood. You might fucking say his voice was the result of industrial noise or his childhood fucking whatever but it bloody scrambled the Queens' fucking English no fucking mistake – more or less he'd got a fucking lingo of his own. In fact, it was said that the only time anyone heard him speak fucking proper English was after he'd had a few pints at the fucking Cross Keys, alcohol having the fucking reverse effect on him than in most people. So, anyway, we were fucking constantly fucking puzzled by the orders his fucking mashed mouth dished out to us on the boats – it was like fucking verbal anagrams. We always had to fucking wait for him to clear off to his office and then we worked it fucking out for ourselves from the drawings what actually had to be done on the fucking job.

Anyway, when we got back Weighty, of course, just peels off to light up and sit down on my ex-army munitions toolbox. He said he wasn't worried when I said the fucking situation was serious and we needed to get the fucking union in. He just shrugged, saying 'Stop your worrying Jimmy.' He was just the same in the Ks, abstracted, blind and bloody dumb. So, I could see it was going to be me alone and I thought fuck it sod him and pushed my way into Sol Jenkins's Office. Office! - there was hardly enough room in there for his fucking standard-issue British Shipbuilders North green metal desk with three drawers, his swivel armchair with its worn-out arm rests and his one battered filing cabinet which he kept his going-home clobber in. I remember saying in Jenkinese, *asbloodybestos!* And that the fucking job shouldn't have been bleeding cleared. And before he could fucking stop me I said I was off to get Willis in on it – he's the union guy. Jenkins garbles something of the like, *Holdona-minute-willyou!* at my back or some such, that's what he was like – *willy-yoo*. I just ignored the throat-bent cunt, giving him a parting shot, saying no fucking way. Thanks to his

fucking carelessness me and Tex'd got asbestos in our lungs. Jenkins was shouting after me something like, 'Youcant jus gooff-like hat!'

I ignored him because you can, you see, in the yard you just go off, it's like that all the fucking time, really. But as I was going out I remember Harry Mortison, that slag Mortie's dad, who you know kicked it last week when I saw you with your notepad under the table in the club at his wake. And he was looking astonished and, because he thought himself the welders' star fucking comedian, he hinged up his right leg at the hip and let off a right-ripping fart. *PRRrappfF!* It was a habit of his, thought it was a right fucking scream, and he always said, 'That was an angel speaking!' in his stupid old fucking Baytownian voice. But that fucker didn't and wouldn't ever say boo to boss or ghost or give that slag daughter of his the low-down any time, come to fucking think of it. But, anyway, I went on out to get hold of fucking Willis.

GEDITDON!

Now, I know that meanwhile behind my fucking back, of course, Jenkins called Weighty into his office and asked him what the fuck had happened. He told Weighty to stay put while he fucking phoned Peter White, one of British Shipbuilders North's safety officers, and arranged to meet him at that fucking condensation tank on the Ocean Queen's turbine deck. He fucking dragged Weighty along with him like a lamb to fucking slaughter.

So, Fucking Weighty told me that White was waiting for them, along with Thompson who Jenkins also dragged in. White's this tall, in his 40s, tanned and lean guy - I've seen him jogging around the Island during staff lunch hours – very safety conscious, I don't think. His face's like an eagle's, got a hooked beaky nose. He'd told us once, during a fucking safety lecture rigmarole, that he'd got a M.S.c degree in marine

engineering when he fucking worked at the Royal Naval yard in fucking Portsmouth. Well, Weighty said that Jenkins outlined, fucking one-sidedly, of course, the situation and I bet that was the only reason why he had dragged Weighty along as stooge. So, White goes up the fucking ladder to look at that fucking lagging. After a while, this according to Weighty, he goes that it looks like brown fucking asbestos and, what's more, it should have been labelled in the ship's fucking audit. But that was the problem, see, it's impossible to keep track or locate all of the fucking stuff on an old boat like the Queen. And, I mean, he fucking admitted it! but Weighty didn't deign to tell me this until after the fucking fact. The fact is no one fucking worries much about asbestos and in the 1950s when the Queen was built it was worse, so you can bet your life there'd be no record, any fucking way.

Now, I don't know but I reckon fucking Jenkins sensed that White probably looked upon him as at fault even though White's own fucking job would be impossible if every unmapped hazard of work in the fucking yard was brought to his fucking attention. I also know that Jenkins' first law of man management was to never to fucking take the blame for anything unless he had to. He never trusted us and blathered on about how we never paid fucking attention to safety only as an excuse so he didn't have to take fucking responsibility. So, of course he was fucking blaming me and said I shouldn't have fucking hacked into the lagging like that. White went off to call in Corman's, the licensed asbestos strippers, and get an official report. I can imagine Jenkins fucking wincing at this, the word fucking Official with a capital O in his fucking mind, like his other important fucking words like his fucking BSN and Pension.

CANTEEN CONFLAB!

Where the fuck was I? Oh, yeah. Well, of course, I couldn't find Willis on the Queen. Inevitably you get to one deck or other area where someone or fucking other was supposed to be at and they fucking won't be there, gone off to the fucking bogs or smoking, playing fucking cards, or gassing with someone in some fucking corner or another. So I had to go back to the fucking shed. But I knew that Willis was bound to be in the yard canteen at lunchtime. Even though the yard's canteen's fucking big, got enough seats, and old worn-out fucking Formica-topped tables for, I guess, fucking 300 blokes I knew I'd find the fucker, first in and last out. So of course at first I couldn't see fucking Willis. I looks along the long fucking line of food and drink vending machines and microwave ovens ranged along one side of the canteen. There was the fucking usual long queue of blokes taking their trays of food and edging from the servery to the till so it took me a while scanning all the heads at the tables until I fucking sees him. What put me off, though, was he was fucking sat with a couple of his fucking cronies, Colin Carmouth and Lenny fucking Brown. Just what I fucking needed.

Frigging Willis's this very fucking thin bloke, his fucking boilersuit hangs on him like I don't know what, a fucking half-erected tent or something. I tell you, he's all skin and fucking bone and whatever he was eating that day was clearly not doing the scrawny fucker any good. Willis is, fucking nominally, employed by British Shipbuilders North as a plater, but as Shop Steward he's given fucking free range. He's always fucking cocky, and it's a joke because we all know that he only pretends concern whenever a real fucking union issue like mine, anything fucking awkward, crops up. Everyone fucking knows that Willis is the type of shop steward who first and fucking foremost is in for what he can fucking get out of it – the annual trip to the National Wage negotiations at the fucking Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool, a fucking discount against his

hours for union work and admin. He fucking goes on about the pensions fucking committee saying that *you need to have the fucking brains of a Philadelphia fucking lawyer* for that which in a way he has because he can argue his way out of a paper bag when he fucking wants to. He's always away somewhere from real fucking work - routine meetings with the managers and the Safety Committee – which is a fucking joke. As shop steward his one rule of fucking thumb is always stifle any enthusiasm for fucking union matters. There hasn't been a fucking shop steward's election in fucking years because he keeps fostering the general apathy – his fucking life depends on the idea that no one is interested. He has a fucking string of buddies like Carmouth and Lenny and all fucking totally loyal to British Shipbuilders North - it's written through them like Blackpool rock. They all, through back-biting and other forms of fucking calumny work to fucking sideline true unionists like me as fucking Troublemakers.

Willis could see straight off that I was in a right fucking huff so he comes over all placatory saying in his patronizing way, *Young Jimmy, what can I do for you, brother? No problem is too big or fucking small when it's for you, son.* That's what he said, verbatim. But he wasn't fucking fooling me with that pretend fraternal fucking buddyism - typical of him. Always a very dubious brotherliness fucking coming from someone who probably voted fucking Tory and believes in do-the-man-down if he's on his knees. I knew straight off that that patronizing 'son' was designed to put me on the defensive, he liked fucking goading me, reminding me that he still considered me a fucking apprentice, even if I was out of my fucking time. And then he goes, *No need for ceremony, we're all friends here* but really that fucking meant him and these two fucking dopes sat there with him sat like fly-away Peter and fucking fly-away Paul either side of him.

Even before I'd come out of my fucking time and joined the Boilermakers Union as a skilled fucking member (British Shipbuilders North is a fucking 'closed shop' – union membership is fucking mandatory unless you are a fucking Jehovah's Witness or something) I instantly saw through Willis as a tame-dog union fucking man. But we're fucking lumbered with him: he's part of that generation forever winning the fucking war but losing the fucking peace. So, I said about how fucking Tex and me'd been exposed to fucking asbestos and that it should have been fucking labelled or cleaned up beforehand and that I wanted him to fucking get an official grievance in to B fucking SN. I had it in mind that we should go all the way up to fucking Morgan, the general manager. I was out to get an official fucking record of the incident and, even if fucking Tex wouldn't back me fucking up, I intended getting the fucking union to take bastard British Shipbuilders North to court and get me some justice.

Of course, fucking Willis looks fucking aghast and of course it was, fucking *Phew, you sure it's asbestos? Did you agree anything with Sol? I mean...* So I could see in his eyes that his head's going twenty to the dozen to think of a way to get out of it, i.e. to do fuck all, as usual. So I said, you're fucking joking. He's not going to fucking put his fucking head on the fucking block, is he? Look, forget fucking Morgan, I said, forget everyone: get the fucking union in on this. It's a fucking outrage. Of course Willis starts laughing 'cos, of fucking course, - no one calls the union in on British Shipbuilders North on safety issues. No one fucking believes, on the other hand, that British Shipbuilders North is really fucking 'safety conscious', even if it's got a blue and white Health and Safety Executive fucking Award flag flying at the fucking yard' gates. But as I say no one ever takes them to fucking task over fucking safety, either, because, as I fucking said, most of the men don't give a toss about fucking safety.

Asbestos? Fuck's sake, yes, all of us know about the dangers of fucking asbestos, but its not like when you hit your hand with a fucking hammer or cut your thumb off with a hacksaw, no one really is fucking sure, not even the fucking docs, about how many fibres can cause fucking asbestosis. It's like when you get a high intensity flash from an electrical welding arc – either due to some other sod's carelessness or you catch yourself out sparking-up before you realize you forgot to put your fucking headscreen down. You end up with the UV rays from the arc burning your eye's protective membrane so it's fucking absolute agony every time you fucking blink. Flashes fucking always come on at fucking night after fucking work and wake you just after you've fucking just got off to sleep. But, even with something like that, no one fucking bothers making an injury claim for it. Fuck, we just bandage cold damp tea-bags onto our eyelids and that's it. No one fucking worries about it. If you start getting fucking Bolshie about fucking safety you're very likely to fucking get hoisted by your own petard for something fucking trivial like carelessly ejecting hot welding rod' ends. The fucking problem with fucking asbestosis, though, is that it's result is in the fucking far future. So you fucking have to get them on duty of fucking care because there's no discernable fucking injury and that makes it fucking difficult pinning 'em down.

So fucking Willis went on, fucking pronounced really, about he's not being able to do fuck all and it's *you need to report it to the fucking medical centre and that would give me a fucking record*. Fucking typical, but I insisted and said again that it was a fucking Union matter – company fucking neglect of full safety procedures, duty of fucking care. Any fucking boat built at that fucking time or even fucking later must have been fucking suspect. I told him how I was fucking ordered to strip back that

fucking lagging by fucking Jenkins. So I said, again, fuck it go on, get Murray, the fucking area fucking official in.

CHORUS OF OLD CRONIES

All this fucking time those two fucking old cronies of his were looking at me ironically as they sat eating their lunches, Lenny Brown fucking eating fucking bangers and mash. You fucking couldn't trust him an inch because he's a fucking dilutee – fucking made up to fitter by British Shipbuilders North in the fucking 1950s when there was a national fucking shortage of skilled labour, so he won't say fucking goose to anything because he's fucking beholden to British Shipbuilders North. He's your typical old fucking teddy boy with a Tony Curtis' style quiff hanging over his fucking brow like a fucking pelmet and he's forever back-combing it with a fucking greasy plastic comb he keeps in his overall's top pocket. His real fucking job at British Shipbuilders North, though, is selling fucking football pools and, of fucking course, when I'd first approached them Brown starts up thinking I was only after the Littlewoods, asking me *coupons*? how many did I fucking want.

I just ignored the fucker. The other fucking one, Colin Carmouth, everyone fucking hates – even his mother I don't doubt, a fucking really mean and fucking tricky fucker. He was fucking tucking into his fucking home-made boiled ham and fucking tomato tucker. Carmouth's, like fucking Tex, a fucking mate but some years ago he fucking usurped control of the fucking large electric drill in the main fucking engineering workshop. This was always fucking free and fucking open to all and sundry to use before he fucking assumes the job of fucking 'Driller', and from then on we, time-served fucking fitter-welders, have to fucking watch the bastard and wait,

for fucking god's sake, as he fucking ceremoniously switches the drill fucking on and off. And, like fucking Brown the Pools, not a fucker to be fucking trusted.

I could see Willis was irritated by my backchat so he goes, *Do as I fucking tell you first, see the fucking quack, and then we'll see about calling in fucking Murray, mate.* By this time I was getting really fucking fucking mad. The way Willis said fucking 'mate' was annoying, more like fucking checkmate – saying that it was game fucking over and he didn't have any more fucking time for me as far as he was fucking concerned. I was about to give him the what fucking for but then the fucking Tannoy fucking rescued him when that fucking bored women's whiney nasal fucking voice in charge of the fucking thing announces, *Harry Willis – 246.*

Looking at me, that tosser fucking Carmouth says, *That'll be about you and your asbestos.* And then fucking Brown joins in the fucking half-wits' chorus, laughing and saying, *Yeah, sounds like you're fucking for it!*

FOUR HEADS – HALF A MIND

246's Hindle's telephone number, the engineering general supervisor, effectively Jenkins' fucking boss. Hindle has overall responsibility for the Hall welders, and a type of fucking silence occurs if the Tannoy announces any fucking welder's name followed by 246, ominous, like you're being summoned to Room 101. But Willis didn't need to fucking phone - Hindle's office was close by so he just fucking ambles over to it from the canteen. Fuck it, I thought, I am going wiith him. Of fucking course, he didn't fucking like that one bit but I fucking knew that Carmouth was fucking probably right and I wanted to see what the fuck was going on.

Fucking Willis, always makes a fucking point of walking slowly, and he has a way of appearing fucking nonchalant, as if he's all in fucking control, like keeping his fucking hands in his boilersuit's side pockets. But actually he is any-fucking-thing but, a right plodding type without a fucking idea in his head and just follows all the fucking boss's rules as if they were his religion. His fucking dictum is that all decisions made by those above him are fucking right and fucking proper – it saves him from fucking thinking. He's always fucking saying, *it's just commonsense*. He hates fucking new and difficult fucking situations or being put into fucking positions where he might have to fucking think, especially by fucking younger blokes like me.

Now, Hindle's office's a fucking plywood and glass fucking cube and half of its fucking front wall is made up of a fucking picture window for fucking monitoring the clocking-in point. Hindle was then a recent appointment at British Shipbuilders North, coming from Swan fucking Hunters' Tyneside yard where he'd worked as some type of technician and then pulled himself up by his fucking boot-straps to be a supervisor. You could fucking tell, a new fucking broom, so that the job's seen by him as a fucking step up the greasy fucking pole to higher management and a then a proper, fucking brick-walled, office – still not got one. He's diminutive – i.e. a short fucking arse, and going fucking bald. Maybe to make up for it on his fucking upper lip he sports a fucking thin pencil-moustache which I bet he fucking decided to grow just after starting at British Shipbuilders North. That fucking office picture window made him fucking look like he was in a fucking fish tank but he fancies himself like he's Mr Fucking Big Fish. Most of all he enjoys seeing us suddenly strike up a pose of fucking working when he makes it his business to come in to the fucking Hall or onto the fucking boats – he loves it, you can tell, when he hears someone or other stage-whisper *fucking Hindle's Coming!*

Well, much of his fucking time is taken up with planning fucking work with fucking Morgan, the senior fucking engineering manager, and like two fucking colonels they apportion and schedule all our work, the fuckers, for the fucking squads in the workshops or on the fucking boats. When fucking Willis and me came into the office Morgan was already there, along with Jenkins and they give me short fucking shrift. It's *What do you want?* says Hindle, and of course Willis fucking laughs. So I say, this is about me isn't it? But it's all, *Why the fuck hell do you think that? Did we call your fucking name or fucking something? We've things to fucking discuss that don't concern you. Your break's almost over, go on tiddley bye.* That's what they are like, fucking patronizing bastards. So I started to say that if it was about me I should have my say but fucking Hindle just lied in his fucking teeth and said it fucking wasn't. But before long all fucking four of them must have been scheming on how to fucking rein me in.

And if anyone did it would have been fucking Morgan who was the brains of the outfit in on any fucking discussion about union and other fucking issues' hassle. He was in his late 30s (fucker died of cancer a couple of years back – that's what you get for lying for a fucking living) and he had this cutely curled fucking hair that gave him the fucking choirboy look of Leo Sayer or Art fucking Garfunkel. Of course, he was so fucking cocky, done well at Glendale boys' grammar school. Fucker came directly into British Shipbuilders North as an apprentice draughtsman, got an HNC in engineering drawing and the fucking tale is that he was soon marked out by British Shipbuilders North's fucking personnel office as promising (i.e. a lying Quisling) managerial fucking material. He was always found at the fucking *forefront of negotiations* with the area district union fucking full-time reps, such as with Murray of the fucking Boilermakers. And it was fucking meat and drink to him to come in on

any fucking issue like mine if it was going to be too tricky for Hindle to handle. Morgan was the one authorized to sign a fucking FTA pro-forma that said there had been a fucking Failure to Agree' between British Shipbuilders North and one or other of the fucking unions. Of course, because we've got someone like fucking Willis as steward I am pretty sure that fucking Morgan've or his successor, Entwistle, never been fucking called upon to sign a FTA with the Boilermakers come what may. Fuckers, I tell you.

So I had to fucking push off. But I bet Morgan wouldn't speak directly about reining me in, not whilst fucking Willis was there, even though he knew that he could depend on that fucker doing the right thing by British Shipbuilders North. He said to Willis, cos afterwards, at some point, he said to me - to put me down - that Morgan said that he thought I was fucking *worried*. Patronizing, again. All part of their box of tricks. Nope, fuck that. I was just totally fucked off with fucking British Shipbuilders North and him. At this point, still trying to put my fucking mind at rest, Willis fucking said to me, all fucking pally like, that *in the old days they'd be fucking covered in the stuff, asbestos floating down on them* from the ladders whilst they were still fucking running pipes on the boats. As if that fucking made it all alright. That fucking blind-ass stoicism cobblers fucking again.

I'm not fucking sure but I bet it was all, *That fucking Warne, he's one of the fucking ones in the apprentices' strike a couple of years ago* et-fucking-cetra. I mean, it was well known, I mean fuck it, I mean I had a reputation in that fucking skirmish, out for the summer we were, all off fucking 72, all of us fucking playing long games of street fucking football in the Island yards. So, of fucking course, it's not that *they* were in the fucking wrong but that it must be *me* looking for trouble and I've got a fucking axe to grind.

And the devious fuckers must have been thinking about fucking witnesses even at that stage of the proceedings because Jenkins must have mentioned Weighty being with me. So what fucking happens? That very day he gets him fucking transferred to another squad, not that I could trust light-Weighty, any fucking way. But to have made that fucking decision it would have been Hindle, devious fucking little devious fucker.

UNION? GET ON IN!

Back at the shed I see my mate Mac. We started at British Shipbuilders North as apprentices together, following in our dad's fucking footsteps in the yard. But on starting that day I remember we were in the personnel office waiting room together with two dozen or so other fucking lads also being inducted with us that day. Well we were together in that apprentices strike but what separates fucking Mac and me is that, when I'm always calling for fucking action for this or that issue in the yard, Mac is more of a fucking realist. To tell the truth, I'm still get fucking surprised by the daily double-dealing of British Shipbuilders North, of yard fucking life in general. But fucking Mac always says like *so what's fucking new?* I remember him saying, about at the time that I *shouldn't act so fucking surprised* 'cos Willis was always *fucking gassing* with Hindle and personnel. So Mac's says to me that I'd have my fucking work cut out getting fucking Murray in. That's Mac, fucking blunter than me and always sees things clear-like when I worry too fucking much about the double dark side of the goings on I can't fucking see. And it's true it's fucking paralysing fucking thinking of all of the double-dealing which goes on. So, fucking anyway, I was fucking stood there wondering what the fuck to do and Mac shrugs, flips his welding visor down and gets a weld struck up. I'm fucking stood there like a spare part so he could sense me so above his fucking sizzling welding rod he goes on with his voice

fucking muffled under his screen, *get onto the fucking blower and speak to the union* myself.

FLOS BUT NO NIGHTINGALES

I did, but surprise fucking surprise I get told by the union office secretary there that he's not available. Probably on a union jamboree somewhere. Now, I fucking wasn't sure about directly phoning Murray at the area office, anyway. So, I thought, first, I had better fucking follow Willis' idea and go to the Medical Centre and get it put on record there. The centre's right by the works' canteen and administration blocks and there's always a couple of fucking nurses on duty there for minor First Aid - for anything serious they'd just go fuck it and fucking ring for Baytown ambulance service. You can just turn up at the centre and get fucking sticking plaster treatment, and they enter your fucking name and the nature of the fucking injury in the day log. That centre's like a fucking capsule of hygiene amidst all of the shit, dust and oil and other fucking muck that goes by the name British Shipbuilders North. The fucking nurses in there are patronizing, and only fucking got St John's fucking First Aid certificates. Some fucking Florence Nightingales.

So of course I fucking ring the bell-push at the counter and a fucking nurse opens up the glass sliding window. The one I got is the one in her in her early fifties, tall and iron-backed like as if she was fucking nurse Ratchit. Fucking actually called Valerie. She could tell that I was fucking het-up and with a false appearance of fucking concern she makes like she's concerned. Her fucking tone was really narking, really fucking patronizing and superior, so I goes abruptly that I'd had a dust injury and she's just got to note it in the fucking log then I'd get out of her hair. She fucking blinked then and fucking-like a kind of fucking spasm passed across her mush, as if

suddenly she's smelt a fucking disagreeable odour wafting into the room. So she says *what injury is that dear?* That *dear* really got my fucking back up. So I goes fucking exposure to fucking asbestos dust, darling. That really got her and she goes, what's that? Don't call me darling. So I said, then don't fucking call me dear. She says, dismissive like, *oh that's just fucking speaking.*

We were fucking getting nowhere fast so I gets to the point about being fucking exposed to asbestos. Needs fucking reporting. Noting fucking down in the day log, black book or what fucking ever. She's fucking looking at me as if I'm a fucking Martian, so I go on and say fucking do that and you can go back to what you were doing *doll*. She gets fucking haughty of course and its *stop giving fucking cheek*. So I say, I'm fucking not, doll, I said, to get my own back, *it's just fucking speaking.*

Then it dawns on her that I'm fucking serious and it's fucking shock-horror, what the fuck? Put me down in the fucking treatment log How? She says, I can't put I treated you, can I? I goes, that's your fucking problem, and fuck it do you blinking want to stick your eyes down my fucking throat, take a fucking X-ray? and I opens my mouth fucking wide. Of fucking course she doesn't like that and I could see like fucking ugg!h passing across her fucking mush. So she goes *on look, please don't be funny.* But then she's fucking unsure of herself and asks *are you fucking serious?*

I said, fucking deadly fucking serious. So with an acid look on her face she went *Oh, wait there!* picks up the blower and at last fucking rings through to the fucking doc.

DUST UP AT THE DOC'S

Fucking Dr Burman has left now, another one British Shipbuilders North nicely pensioned off. He's in his late fifties and, I could fucking tell, he just hated the fucking

job. It was common knowledge that he did his final medical training in the fucking army and the rumour was he was all set up to inherit a fucking small private practice in Erlmeer Park whose top doc was close to retirement, but then the fucking NHS came in so he lost out, didn't he. I expect it effectively made him, along with countless other bad fucking doctors at the time, a fucking state employee which he is the type who wouldn't fucking like it. Mac told me that when he was having his medical when he started as an apprentice he told him about how he'd been a fucking army medico and having a fucking close shave out in a field hospital in fucking Korea. If the fucking Chinese could have finished the fucker off then and there they would have done us all a fucking favour.

He was a fat twat with a bull fucking neck, and his fucking arms bulged too tight in the sleeves of his fucking sports jacket. He was no fucking model of health, breathing heavily, really out of fucking condition and his face was red like he had blood fucking pressure. When I saw him for that fucking medical, when I was taken on as an apprentice, I could tell then by his fucking attitude that he looked upon me and anyone on the tools as fucking low lifes, not worth his fucking time. So, anyway, when I goes in of course he looks up as if he's concerned, but not about me you can be fucking sure about that. But anyone with a fucking gripe about fucking work conditions's a threat. Him and his ilk have got no fucking idea about the shit that we have to put up with in the yard.

Like our teachers at Belvedere I instinctively fucking distrust docs – remember that fucking nonce Stackman? Get away with murder. Fucking doctors, fucking foremen, managers, fucking bent shop stewards and, even, area fucking Union Officers. The entire fucking demarcation of work in British Shipbuilders North, the general separation of fucking trades and skills, fucking hides what you can know – it's like

that to make it fucking difficult to get a handle on what's really going fucking on. It's about fucking Control, like Henry Ford saying efficiency and you can have any car colour as long as it's fucking black. Everyone knows that company medicos are fucking rejects and have to go to places like fucking British Shipbuilders North when they get cashiered from the NHS and the fucking army. In a fucking word – you can't trust such types. Of course, he keeps me waiting for fucking ten minutes at that fucking counter and I was fucking fuming when the nurse eventually shepherded me into his fucking consulting room.

Burman's fucking eyes were blinking like traffic lights together slowly, fucking malicious, a bit like a fucking bullfrog. He fucking adopts, at first, his best fucking bedside manner. But he goes on how he needs to *hear from my supervisor directly*. *What are you so fucking worried about? And how much fucking dust do you think you've been exposed to?* I said, fucking enough. It doesn't take fucking much, as he should fucking know, did fucking know.

When I said I could see plenty he fucking goes, *So you could see it? Then it won't fucking have harmed you. It's only when it's in fucking microscopic particles that asbestos is fucking dangerous*. But I said fuck that, that if I could see large particles of the stuff, don't you think there was likely fucking thousands of fucking smaller ones the naked fucking eye can't see? Of course he's losing the fucking argument, so he gets fucking narked and goes on about it not being fucking proved, and we *can't just put your every fucking word into the book*. And then he goes on about the only way they could tell any exposure is by electron fucking microscope, which, he goes, pompously *I can assure you, the nearest microscope of that nature is all the way over at the Royal fucking Liverpool*.

So he then fucking goes that he's *been told* that I shouldn't be fucking roaming around the yard, at fucking will. He was trying to put me on the back foot but I fucking saw through that and said, Oh, who fucking by? He realized that he'd fucking let the cat out of the fucking bag, let me see that he'd been talking behind my back on the phone to fucking Jenkins, personnel or someone before he let me fucking in. That was why he kept me fucking waiting.

I go and the fucking nurse sees me and wants to put her nose in when I come out and says, *Alright?* All fucking wrong I said.

DIS-UNION

At afternoon break I got hold of fucking Willis on the internal blower and asked him again to get Murray. But again its *Murray won't come in on anything like that*. Fucking ask him, but it's, *Oh, I don't need to, it's not fucking union, it's a your personal incident*. So I say fucking depersonalise it, register a fucking FTA, make it a general issue, - do some fucking good for once in his fucking life. Getting uppity he's *I don't need you to tell me what's good or not. It's not a thing to bring Murray in, it's not pay, it's not procedure, it's not about job timing – it's my fucking personal gripe*. So I said I'll get fucking Murray in myself. He takes a sharp fucking breath at his end of the blower, worried, and says *I wouldn't do that*. Yeah, I said, that's the fucking problem.

BEER AND SANDWICHES

Anyway, most of the fucking full-time union officers are in the fucking *Beer and Sandwiches at Downing Street* cosy fucking attitude in with government and no way

bothered about the conditions. It is usually unofficial grass roots action that get things fucking going. You can't trust the fucking union.

ANONYMOUS? NOT ME!

I realized I needed that clearance certificate so hot-footed it over to the fucking Queen and George Thompson's office on the fucking bark. But the fucking clearance book was a brand fucking new one and the original nowhere to be seen. That's when it fucking struck me about getting back at them. Fuck it, I thought, remembering when there are official visits by fucking executives from some fucking foreign shipbuilding company or when there are the launches when the great and good, fucking royals, come to the yard. We get fucking admiralty types attending meetings with engineers at Royal Navy launches and only a few weeks back fucking Baytown's new Mayor and the Town Council had been in on a good will visit. These official visits, always get British Shipbuilders North to get hoards of fucking contractors in to spruce up the place – blowing out the dust and fucking cleaning and painting wherever the fucking shithole might be beyond the pale - or might be seen. It's like the yard's like a great big dirty mat that needs a fucking beating and vacuuming before the public get a fucking look in. So I'll give them something, someone to think about – I'll bring in the factory inspectorate.

I dialled the fucking operator from one of the canteen payphones and asked for the number of the Bay area Health and Safety Executive office which, I was told, was a Liverpool fucking number. When I got through the first fucking person I spoke to was a receptionist who tried to put me off. But she eventually gave up fucking fencing and put me through to someone who grudgingly accepted my report. He asked *Did I want*

to remain fucking *anonymous* as people do reporting their own employer for health and safety infringements. I said that that was the last fucking thing I wanted.

I can tell you, in the days after reporting BSN it was great: fucking shock and horror. Hindle's fucking eyes boring into my back when I was at the clocking point. Jenkins hopping fucking mad. Mac was on my side but most of the fucking others couldn't believe I'd dared to get the inspectors in Willis, Lenny Brown and fucking Carmouth were all chiming that now I was fucking *for it*.

AN INSPECTOR CRAWLS

That fucking inspector came in, carrying a fucking double-lock box black leather document case – looking like he'd got the nuclear codes with him. In his fucking thirties - polished, a nice clean pressed white shirt and dark tie, a good fucking worsted wool sports jacket, probably Daks. I took one look and I just knew I just knew it he'd never been taken onto the fucking Ocean Queen or any other fucking working area of the yard. And, of course, he'd already met Hindle, Morgan and Williams and didn't *deign* to go into much detail with me other than that BSN had *undertaken* a full ship survey.

I could tell that he saw me as a fucking trouble maker, and his eyes kept going back and forth on me, looking at my fucking boiler suit as if he'd never seen one before, which he probably fucking hadn't.

NATAL DEATH!

He went on about technical issues and he asks me if I knew what the type of asbestos on the tank was? I shook my head but I could tell I was about to get a fucking lecture and he goes into how there's three main fucking types - *crocidolite*,

amosite, and chrysotile, - blue, brown and white, and it was amosite on the Ocean Queen. I said I thought amosite was a type of fucking fossil and he laughs and goes that in a way it was 'cos it's a prehistoric plant that went mineral. Anyway, he says then that he should have fucking said amosite, which he said was another fucking acronym meaning Asbestos Mines of South Africa. In the fucking Natal province, to be specific. After he'd gone I fucking wondered, and still do, how many of those poor fucking sods of Apartheid blacks they've killed in making them fucking dig out the stuff? So, anyway, that was fucking it. I said, Fuck It.

Chapter 12 Matrimonial Causes

Judicial language intrinsically assumes a clear-cut discrepancy between the verbal subjectivism of the parties to a case and the objectivity of the court between the ruling from the bench and the entire apparatus of the legal system. Volosinov Marxism and the Philosophy of Language

Colleen was the receptionist at Gordon's dentist and she was the first woman he'd attracted since marrying Greta. He'd made this, rare, visit to the dentist's after being referred by his doctor owing to incessant mouth ulcers. He'd been kept waiting due to complications with the patient in front of him so he was chatting to Colleen for something like thirty minutes. But once the affair got out to Greta the solicitors and courts soon got to work, and he was now paying near-half his wages in maintenance and child support. Now, his every other living thought was of the iniquity of maintenance and weighing if Greta might ever get married again and so *get off his wallet*.

Gordon was a foreman at Sun Electrical, an electrical accessories factory. After his divorce he'd go on at tiresome length to whoever would hear him out about the injustice of 'Justice' (Gordon's adopting an ironic tone to belittle the good Justice's honorific) Lord Denning's reforms of family law and divorce in the Matrimonial Causes Acts of (1973)

'That fucking Denning. What's he on? 60K? More? So aye, 'Oh, give the wives a third of the husband's pay. I'll still have 40K which is fair dos!' But for the likes of us on 10K it's a fucking financial nightmare.'

Tony, a much milder man, and also recently divorced, said, But we still get the lion's share.'

‘That’s dobber! The thing is, you see, they get their rent and rates paid by the Social, got the family allowance and all of the other perks like free dental treatment as well. And they just sit at home and live the life of Mother Riley while the kids are at school all day and we are at fucking work to get them their maintenance!’

‘One way or another we’ll be okay. Got the overtime to make things up, and they don’t get a look in on any bonuses we might get when the time and motion people sort the new rates.’

Gordon was derisive, ‘Some hopes!’, and climbed back on his hobby horse: ‘Fucking Law Lords! What do they know? They say to their buddies in the Home Office, “I know! This’ll be a good way to keep the working-classes ground down – get them fighting amongst themselves! A third versus two thirds, yeah, that should breed enough rancour amongst the lower orders!’ It gets our women off the social and keeps us blokes with our noses to the grindstone. And, oh aye, then their buddies the bleeding solicitors can draw in all the fees whilst we fight it out, on *their* prompting most of the time. They can then go off and paper their loos with the wads of cash we’ve handed over to them. Thanks very much, Mr ‘Justice’ fucking Denning.’

*

Tony had more than enough to think about with his own divorce – a divorce coming to a head (indirectly) as the result of national economic factors. Due to the downturn small national electrical components companies like Sun became embattled by cheap Asian electricals flooding into the home market. The Sun board invited interest from rival larger manufacturers in the field - the electronics industry was, as a whole, expanding. Instead, in 1977 at the time of the Silver Jubilee, a large Leeds-based

insurance company, Star Life, bought out the old Board, floated the company, renamed it Star Electrical, and began a process of severe rationalization. New auto lathes were installed and shift work ended because overall productivity increased. There were redundancies. Women working part-time in the moulding shop were the first to 'be let go' – moulding and finishing being sub-contracted to another factory in Spain. More than 60% of the shift workers were fired including many of the auto-lathe brass 'bar feeders' like Peter, Gary and Jake who had worked alongside Tony, Gordon and Angus. But this restructuring and the imposition of regular day work brought the issue of the sexual void in Tony's marriage to a head.

Tony put his divorce down to his wife's going off sex, the result of postpartum depression consequent on five traumatic hours of labour in giving birth to their son, John. Gaynor's mother called the birth *difficult*, but women of her generation have a propensity for litotes, their experience of life in Baytown being as a whole understated. As is not unusual these days, Gaynor had been induced, but far too early by an incompetent doctor, all for prompting a birth that just wasn't happening conveniently enough for the nursing staff. Gaynor's bare legs were, 'strung up for hours over the bed on supporting stirrups', Tony likening this vision to 'sides of pork hanging in a butcher's window'. She'd been, as was also common practice, left on her own to face up to it – Tony and her mother unnecessarily made to wait in the corridor outside the birth room. All Gaynor had for company was a dull, bored, stoical nurse who 'looked as though she'd been at the maternity hospital since it was built' (it was once a workhouse) and who told Gaynor at one point 'Now give over you with all of that wailing'.

Afterwards it became obvious to Tony that Gaynor avoided going to bed at the same time, making excuses such as 'needing an early night' or 'I'll follow you up, just nice

getting into a book'. When their doctor was consulted he diagnosed post-natal depression. Valium was, off-handedly, prescribed, then Mogodon. There followed a number of rudimentary counselling sessions by an NHS behaviourist psychiatrist. That did no good and they then went to a marriage guidance councillor's draughty office over a dry cleaners' shop in Baytown. But the counsellor seemed more interested in recording the sessions and forever moving the tape microphone here and there on the desk before them. Her mum said off-handedly to go and see her local Catholic priest but he was an elderly man and Old School. Gaynor was scared of him so much so that the religious counselling became regular and turned Gaynor into a pious shadow of her former self. It became a ritual from then on for her to push John in his pram the two miles to St Patrick's [charmless, modern] church to attend morning and evening masses.

Everything to do with their infant-stage family life – cooking, looking after the baby became too much for Gaynor - she became passive, neglectful, distracted, agoraphobic. It became impossible for Tony to live with Gaynor's strange silences and depression, it giving him an unsettling feeling of guilt and worrying sense of some indefinite crime.

When Tony went on regular days after the end of shift work at Star this made Gaynor seek refuge at to her mother's because he was home every evening making demands on her: the rows disturbed their boy. So, finally, it was Tony who left, going back his parent's house where in the mornings his father, a gaunt ex-iron miner forced by 'bronchitis into premature retirement', irked at finding him on the settee, said, 'Get theself back to that wife and kiddie of yon' in a dialect common to his generation of Baytown working-class men - occasionally assumed although its everyday currency generally redundant.

Tony enjoyed being back home, at first, but he soon felt it was a mistake. He was in a state of prolonged denial, his (at that time upcoming) divorce a deep psychological wound. He couldn't speak to his family about what he was actually feeling, certainly not to his parents and his older bachelor boy brother. Phil's emotional life extended as far as football, cricket, bowls and the pub. Tony ached with a feeling of deep loss and longing for Gaynor, as he sat watching telly with Phil and his parents. When his aunt Elsie came around she would badger him about his family being broken and how it wouldn't have happened in her day and he and Gaynor needed their *heads knocking together*. Tony had little hop in getting his own place – it was impossible finding anywhere to rent due to the assured tenancies regulations which tend to put potential landlords off. There were lots of static caravans on the Baymoor coast road site, but Gordon put him off saying, 'You've only got two minutes to get out of a 'van before it's all ashes if it catches fire and what with all of your drinking and smoking just lately...'

*

Then Angus, moody, violent and angry Angus also got divorced. Angus was well-built and tall, with dark bulbous eyes and a generally constant threatening glare, above a walrus moustache like Nietzsche's. His wife, Maureen, left him and fled to her mother in Edinburgh, sick to death of his hot temper, violent moods and bullying nature. Angus' moods grew increasingly violent as the summer went on, angered by what he saw as his wife's growing 'insolence' and 'minging' attitude. Their rows were loud and outraged their neighbours. On one particular morning he was setting off to work when he grabbed Maureen by the throat and threatened to throttle her if she didn't 'shut the fuck up'. He was, after this, still bewildered when he returned home to find the house empty. 'That fucking bitch quine! I knew she must have gone to her

bloody mam's, even though there was no note left for me.' His mother-in-law phoned two days later, triumphant, saying that if he wanted to see his kids he'd have to drive up to Edinburgh and give them plenty of notice.

It was ironic that Angus's marriage had fallen apart because, at least in economic terms they'd never been so well off. He'd recently landed a cushy office job in Star Electrical's sales and materials purchasing department, giving him a 15% pay rise, along with bonuses and incentives for going out on the road on electricals' sales trips. Against the tide of redundancies that came to Sun he'd been lucky, particularly set in light of the million plus national unemployed. Angus and Maureen were over the worst early days of their marriage, nappies and mumps and measles, and the continual hikes in mortgage interest rates throughout the decade had been a burden. But their equity was growing and – recession or not, Baytown's housing market was buoyant, the marital home had become a substantial asset.

But a chain of minute yet differential quirks of Angus and Maureen's developing and mutually-diverging characters – 'moods', 'irritation', baleful 'routine', stultification, 'cussedness', the tincture of 'the grass being greener', were like growing moths in their eyes. Baytowners rarely question their way of life, the regular patterns and ways of living. But 1960s liberal ideas of sexual freedom were sprouting even in Baytown, the everyday currency in the problem pages of women's magazines and television talk shows. But Angus reduced it all to two issues: 'death and yoga'. First, Maureen came into a good-size legacy from her maternal granny Lacy who had a Morningside flat which she left lock-stock-and-barrel to Maureen as the 'only beloved' grandchild'. Angus from the start in his courtship and marriage to Maureen didn't get on with her parents or nan and, although he never knew her granddad who died when she was only seven, he wouldn't have got on with him, either. Angus

knew they didn't like him – seeing him coming, from a West Pilton's prefab, the wrong side of the tracks in Edinburgh. Maureen's mum and dad were Edinburgh Presbyterians who didn't like it from the start that he was divorced. Maureen would always take the children to see their maternal grandparents without Angus. Angus actually enjoyed the quietude of these times in Baytown but it nevertheless rankled with him that he wasn't welcome. The flat legacy intervened in their failing marriage and, although things were not good between them, Angus still expected Maureen to sell it and put the money into the house or, at least, rent it [the flat] out. She did neither.

The second thing was that over the past year Maureen had started going out more in the evenings and leaving Angus to babysit. At first she went to 'steps' and then it was a yoga class that extended to going for a quick drink *with one or two of the lasses* afterwards. Angus did not really believe anyone in the class might be cuckolding him: he took it for granted that yoga classes were a women's thing. Angus actually thought of himself as above the *common herd* of men like Tony and Gordon at Sun Electrical and didn't believe in getting jealous. But he still found himself checking out if the yoga class really was on when she said it was. But, anyway, she'd be regularly late and he'd complain, 'That's not going for a quick drink after - it going for a booze up'. Maureen would defend herself saying, 'Oh, I can't talk to you when you're like this'.

Maureen's new friend Penny clearly irked Angus. Maureen and Angus didn't have many mutual friends because Angus was always a loner and, because both he and Maureen were off-comers, their social networks in Baytown were circumscribed – they actually had more shared friends in Edinburgh. Their Grandparents being in Edinburgh made finding baby-sitters locally a drag and they never really wanted to

go out together. Just when Maureen was starting to build a network in Baytown Angus took an immediate dislike to it, and in particular 'single mum' Penny who was representative of the rising number of men-less women making up Maureen's new set. Angus called them a 'coven' bent on turning Maureen's head and telling her how much better off she would be without him. He feared Maureen getting the best solicitor in town and taking him *to the cleaners*.

Penny and Maureen had only recently become friends after Penny landed in Baytown with Rainer ('Bloody stupid name', - Angus), her infant son. Angus first met Penny when he'd come home early from a sales trip to an engineering supplies company in Manchester. The kids were playing upstairs and Rainer was being breast-fed by Penny. When the two of them saw him come in it was as if it was a Martian landing in a women-only Earth. Penny was one of the type recently trickling into Baytown, romantically-drawn to its scenic coastal and relatively rural location. Although at least 20 Penny still dressed like a schoolgirl wearing Aertex-gym short-sleeved shirts, knee socks and sensible but expensive shoes.

Angus felt threatened by single-mum Penny because she represented to Maureen how to get a new life without him. Angus made a pass at her when he dropped her home once. 'Thought I was doing the bitch a favour, she must have been going short, looking like she did.' It hit Angus's pride vitally for Maureen to be hanging around with such a strange young woman and her 'ambivalent sexuality' slighted his manhood. There were rumours about Penny and Maureen's friendship, and if they were true, it must have been worse for him than if she'd gone off with a man.

In Baytown it can be hard for men to replace absconding wives, and not just for an instinctual misogynists like Angus. Angus envied Gordon for landing a good looking

and young woman like Colleen. Perhaps down to the peculiar biology of Baytown's immediate pre-war generation, there is something of an imbalance between the sexes: according to the 1971 Census there were far fewer women than men in the town. High rates of economic male in-migration to Baytown due to large industrial concerns like Sun/Star Electrical relocating to the town, and the relentless expansion of British Shipbuilders North brought more young men than women into Baytown. Although always a 'male town' the fact is that Baytown's numerous working men's clubs, pubs and betting shops, which might at first sight to appear to be too many for a town of its size, prosper because they provide refuges for sad single aging men. If you asked these bachelors why they haunted these male spaces they would never have thought their resort to male company was the result of the hard fact of female spousal drought. The common Baytown view was that they were simply 'men's men'. But divorce meant it was the likely fate of Angus and Tony (and maybe, also, Gordon) to enter the ranks of lonely single men.

*

Divorce brought these three men closer together and with their shared and developing misogyny they had taken up DIY work together. The immediacy of this work - seeing what you're doing and what you'd done offered them a sense of achievement and compensation. With most of their weekends free, unless there was overtime (now rare amidst the ongoing recession) or they had an access arrangement, the three men worked together on a succession of jobs. First, Gordon asked Angus and Tony to help him knock-through a dividing wall between the living and sitting rooms of Colleen's place – she'd got a fancy for an open plan arrangement with an archway joining the two rooms. This entailed them acropropping the ceiling and sledge-hammering the brick dividing wall. A RSJ was raised

to retain the ceiling and everything was made good by covering the damaged plasterwork with hardboard and thick swirls of Artex. Another time, Tony got them to help him renew his parents' garden fence, his mother asking him for the favour because his father's lungs weren't up to it whilst his brother Phil was useless when it came to practical jobs. They spent a weekend knocking in new posts and lap-panels and then painting it all with brown creosote.

*

The next job involved concreting a new patio base at the rear of Angus' house. It was carried out on what happened to be the start of the very hot days of September 1978 - an Indian summer. Angus, on his own, had previously shuttered and dug out the ground ready for the work and took delivery of limestone chippings and sand, and several brown heavy bags of *Blue Circle* cement in preparation for the concrete mix. He'd also hired an electrically-powered cement mixer, which he connected to an extension cord run out into the garden from the back door. Angus felt good that in the wake of Maureen's departure he still had his own place and could undertake jobs like this for his own sake, unlike Gordon whom he saw as a lodger, really, in Colleen's place, or Tony, effectively homeless and living back with his mum and dad.

On the day they had designated for completing the work, Tony was late and Angus thought that maybe he'd stopped off at the bookies' because it was Ayr racing that day. It meant that Angus and Gordon had to get started without him making the work of going back and forwards to the concrete mixer hard for just two. The mixer was cumbersome and when revolving its heavy mixing barrel made a loud metallic noise, the weight of the limestone chippings making its motor whine and labour. The two men took turns wheeling loads of concrete in Angus' garden barrow which wasn't

really sturdy enough for this type of heavy building work, it having one puny wheel with a thin band of rubber around it instead of a properly inflated tyre.

The two men continued the hard work of mixing, watering, wheeling and laying the mix into the base, all the time Angus was berating the late-coming Tony. Angus had a transistor radio on for the racing and football commentary and briefly they stopped work so he could phone the bookies and put a bet on the Gold Cup at Ayr. Despite the short-comings of mixer and barrow they were making progress and laid three inches deep of concrete into the shuttered base area. Angus was moaning all the time about *bawbag* Tony. He squinted up at the sun with one eye and worried about the hot conditions making the concrete go off too quickly.

*

Tony arrived when Gordon and Angus had stopped work for lunch. Tony had had trouble with his car. He'd, however, brought along a shovel because Angus said he didn't have enough tools for the job. However, Angus moaned about it being a garden spade, not a shovel and that a dustpan'd be more use. Gordon trying to be funny said, 'That's your trouble, Tony, you can't call a spade a spade.' They were all sat down on garden 'director's chairs' that Angus had bought with his first wife, Arinith. When he was cheating on her with Maureen, which led to his first divorce, he said that he would take two of the chairs on what he referred to as his 'Highland flings' with Maureen, surreptitiously stowing them in the boot of his Ford Capri. Maureen then used to refer to herself as Angus' *Other Woman*, gloating on his infidelity and calling Arinith a 'bone-bag anorexic'. That remark, he said, 'showed she has always had a fucking mean streak in her.'

Obviously, his memories of such cheating weekends to places like Fort William, Rannoch Moor, the car ferry to Skye, now irked him. But at least his split with Arinith had been relatively painless, the gavel coming unquestionably down on that marriage, as it must have done on many others, in the musty chambers of Edinburgh Sheriffs' Court. It was clear that Angus had intimations that Maureen as 'a bleeding spiteful bitch', was going to make his divorce from her a lot more disagreeable than from Arinith and as his mother kept going on, *there's the wee bairns this time*. It was to become an *acrimonious* and *Dagger's Drawn* divorce.

Tony asked Angus why he was doing the concreting – was it to get the place sorted so he could get a better price when they settle up? But Angus said that he'd be a fool to do that, that if that was the case He'd do it up *after* he settled up with her: 'we're not all signed up to the National Ex-Wives Aid and Relief. There's no fucking way she's getting this house.'

Gordon said, 'Everyone knows that if you as the man go to keep the house you'll have to pay the ex' maintenance and it's best to give the ex' the house and be done with it, Clean Break.' Of course, Angus sneered at all that because he calculated that if you don't pay them maintenance then you end up paying more of your wages in child support. Gordon persisted, 'I still say that they only come back at you and your pension, then in the future whatever rises you get you'll be summoned back in court to keep the ex' topped up. Best give her the house, get rid – Clean Break. She's a right to it anyway, if she got custody of the kids. Angus answered, 'Yeah? And what, maybe, that she'll never make pension age, anyway?'

Angus hated solicitors and wouldn't, at first, consult one, even though he'd received an initial official letter from Maureen's solicitors requesting he retain one. The

morning before they broke up Angus said, in defence, that he'd 'only threatened to throttle' Maureen because she'd goaded him by saying that her solicitor had instructed her to stop sleeping with him and that she'd be sleeping in the box room from then on. It maddened Angus that her solicitor was acting like a divorce coach, tempting in her ear like a Judas, and this intrusion showed that their private life, along with the neighbours' complaints, was increasingly now becoming a public spectacle. For Angus, all solicitors were middle-class creeps pimping on other people's problems, on a gravy train and making money from ordinary people's misery. 'They do fuck all other than shuffling and rearranging letters and forms that *wing their way* between one firm to the other.' Angus called his solicitor, Gerald Furze of *Prachett* (Angus put the emphasis on the first and second syllables of this name) *Furze and Rabb, Caledonian*) who had dealt with his divorce from Arinith, a 'smug little twat' who 'liked wearing loud dickey-bow ties. Right little creep like Uriah Heep'. When Angus received his heavy bill along with the *Decree Nisi* he saw red and went straight round to the office and threatened to do him in (*put the little puff's head in*). A weedy clerk outside heard the rumpus and came in and threatened to call the police.

Angus's short temper, his dark moods and his violent rows with Maureen suggested to the others he might well have 'done her in', upping the ante after arguments, anger, rancour, spite, hate. Gordon joked about if the patio they were concreting was actually for the topstone of Maureen's grave. It didn't seem far-fetched with a man like Angus to imagine him climbing to the top step of the grizzly ladder of divorce-fed misogyny – uxoricide. Gordon, even on the scant evidence that Angus had told him about his break up reckoned that Maureen could have easily get a divorce on grounds of domestic violence. And he knew that her solicitors would be saddling the

legal carousel horse of ‘Unreasonable Behaviour’, that still relatively new addition to the grounds for divorce, a catch-all indictment for taking husbands to the financial ‘cleaners’. Gordon, knowing it was little good appealing to Angus to keep his cool appealed to his bad nature by saying, ‘Why not make her jealous and start going out with one of her mates? Or to send her flowers and chocolates – that’d mystify her and really get her goat! Gordon said he knew of one man working at Sun who raised a second mortgage on the house behind his wife’s back. Or Angus could apply for a building society loan for a new kitchen extension then, either, Maureen wouldn’t be able to pay it back, or he could *drive around in it*.

Angus was a bully more than a wife-beater in the physical sense and there were always two sides to any divorce and that there was a case for no-fault divorce even in cases like Angus’. At the end of the day the whole legal rigmarole of divorce remains based on an underlying idea of one or other of the couple as ultimately baring responsibility. In Gordon’s divorce which, despite his infidelity, occurred after two years’ separation and was therefore classed as ‘No Fault’, he was still named as the respondent, the responsible one, the ‘Cause’. It’s hard in Baytown to keep anything like a divorce private, even if Gordon hadn’t been married to a ‘Blabber like Greta.’ Although it has a population of around 60,000 people, Baytown is a peninsular town with a close identity and community. And, there is never much copy for its evening paper, so along with photographs of ‘new arrivals’ of babies at the maternity hospital there is always plenty of room for listing Baytown County Court divorces under the headline:

DECREES NISI AWARDED

Because Gordon was listed there as 'Respondent' he knew that this signalled to all and sundry that he was the 'guilty partner'. So Greta got the sympathy vote, she was the abandoned wife 'pushing poor little Andy in his trolley around town', the two of them 'like babes in the fucking Baytown wood.' Peter, a bar-feeder at Sun at the time, seeing that Gordon's divorce was in the paper and Greta listed as Petitioner asked him, 'Your fault, was it then?' Gordon told him to piss off. But Gordon felt like the fall guy, the man who had to *take the rap* – that being the system, even if you separate for two years. Peter said, 'I didn't think about it like that.'

Peter's 'it' indicated something of the taken-for-granted nature of Baytown life, of the routine in which courtship often starts at school soon after followed by marriage. 'It' in the sense of not really having to think about 'IT', making choices about the nature of things. 'IT' in the sense of there not being a lot more to IT than the limit horizon of the housing ladder, the pay-scale, the annual holiday booking, getting the kids through school.

*

This particular DIY afternoon, however, closed with a violent incident. The three men had fallen into a natural rhythm with one another, the rhythm of mates and team work. Gordon and Tony willingly took an occasional turn in pushing the barrow's sludgy-grey loads of concrete, enjoying seeing the mix slide like a gravelly mud avalanche as they turfed it into the shuttered patio base. By the time of the final referees' whistles at the football, they were at last ready to completely level the mix. Tony and Gordon squatted on their heels on opposite sides of the base and used a long heavy beam of 4X3 inch wood for the tampering which produced a satisfying rippled effect on the concrete's glimmering skim-wet surface.

The three men were contemplating the shimmering concrete with mutual satisfaction. Gordon glanced sideways at Angus and saw that he was relaxed, leaning on the handle of Tony's spade. Gordon said, 'Maureen's hand's not going to come up sticking out of that lot is it? Like the Lady in the Lake's but shouting Matrimonial Causes instead of Excalibur!' But Angus wasn't listening because the racing results were being announced on the radio and he'd just heard that his horse in the Gold Cup had come nowhere. Then the doorbell rang. Angus cursed, 'Who the fuck's that now?' and strode rapidly around the side of the house to see.

At the front door he found a short bald black-suited man of about 38. Angus must have surprised him, coming from the side of the house and he was wielding Tony's spade in one hand. Angus's walrus moustache made it difficult for the man to judge either his expression or his mood. Angus thought at first it was a Jehovah Witness or market researcher and was going to send him away with a flea in his ear. But then the man said in a somewhat irksome voice, as if he was asking Angus the time of day, 'Are you Mr Angus Selkirk?' He then indicated briskly that he was a county court officer and before Angus knew it he stuck a black-monogrammed envelope into his left hand. It was a summons from Baytown County Court for a hearing on the 29th September. The court summoner added, 'Mrs Maureen Selkirk has applied to have you de-admitted from this address'. He retreated slowly backwards towards the street saying sheepishly, 'I think, Mr Selkirk, it will be in your best interests, sir, to get legal representation.'

Whilst this was going on Tony took the opportunity to tell Gordon that Maureen was not under the concrete, or in Scotland and that she was back in Baytown, his mum had seen her with that strange-looking young woman called Penny. Next thing, they heard Angus bellowing, 'YOU FUCKING LITTLE KIKE!' and when the two of them

bolted to the front they saw the court officer ducking around the waste skip and scuppering off towards his car. Angus ran after him, suddenly came to a halt and gave him a parting shot with Tony's shovel. I mean, spade.

Chapter 13 Penelope

Intimate genres and styles are based on a maximum internal proximity of the speaker and addressee (in extreme instances, as if they had merged). Intimate speech is imbued with deep confidence in the addressee, in his sympathy, in the sensitivity and goodwill of his responsive understanding. Bakhtin: The Problem of Speech Genres

No. My life didn't all unravel when I met David Black (I never called him 'Smithy' like you.) If you must know, maybe after when I got away from – after your Smithy – that I was able to get the threads of my life together again, now. But if you really want to know it all started before Mr Black, he wasn't instrumental like he likes to think he is of himself. But before him there was Nick, at my school, who fancied me and my mum and dad didn't want me to have anything to do with him, when I brought him round so we could revise our O Levels together out in the spring in our back garden. I was fifteen. My mum didn't like him because he spoke roughly. *He's uncouth, Penny!* So she and dad made me stop seeing him. That's the root of it. That's it. That's why I ended up here, if you really want to know, ending up in Baytown, and this flat, in this dump, in the Island this worst bit of Baytown which you seem so interested in. In between, I'd run away and got a job, zimmermädchen in Germany. I just couldn't stand them, my mum and dad, any longer. They wouldn't let me see Nick, and so I thought, that's it, I'll run my own life now thank you very much. I ran off to Germany, town in the Black Forest where we'd holidayed as kids, but they sent someone on my tail, a privatdetektiv and they threatened me so much and to avoid the embarrassment I came back. Then I hopped it again, to chambermaid at Keswick. Then soon after that's when I got picked up by Mr Black. Your Smithy, old school mate, you say? Some mate. My bad luck I ran into him when I was working at the Packet Hotel, Bowness on Windermere, where I met Mr Black.

He got me because I was vulnerable at the time. Seduced me. I admit I had something to prove: there at that hotel. I admit it, I had an attitude, I suppose, but I always did my bedding properly. Not like the other girls at the Packet who rushed their rooms - they just wanted to be off smoking so get finished. Amy was one, and she was only just seventeen but treated me like her junior. Of course, we never had much time – beds had to be done, kitchen pots, hall and stairs cleaning, polishing. But, no excuses, I did my work properly. The afternoons we usually got off and Amy, Becky and sometimes Mrs Galbraith, the manageress herself, were off to Lancaster, Preston and sometimes Carlisle shopping all the time. Windermere no good to them – not interested in Edinburgh Wool over-60s gear or cagouls. But they thought I was backward. It was all, *Come on Penny, at least put on a bit of mascara. We'll show you how.* No. Always thinking about dolling up. Dolls, exactly. No. I have more things to think about thank you very much. Mrs Galbraith put me in the large dorm up at the top eaves of the hotel, with all of them. They told me, the others, that it got bloody hot up there in the summer but that autumn it was coolish. One thing going for it – great views of the lake and Belle Island. But it was my bad luck that my bed happened to be the one right by the door so when they came in after being out at the pub at nights I got woken up. But when they saw me with him, David Black, Sinbad the Sailor, all of their teasing stopped. *Thought you were a good girl Penny. You're a one after all.* Silly smirks at breakfast. Mrs Galbraith, *thought you were a loner, love.* Should've told her to shut her mouth.

And I bet she knew all about him. He was a regular. Later I found out he'd picked up a girl called Virginia, before I came. I never knew her, she left before I started. Of course, he couldn't keep his mouth shut. A regular, your Smithy was, apparently, summers he'd worked the Lake ferries going back and forth between Lakeside and

Ambleside, but then he was on the Irish Sea, Isle of Man, just liked to come back. But, so he lets it all out before anything. That did it. Next thing Mrs Galbraith, so amused, organizes it when she can so that I get my day off to coincide when he's back between tides, or do they call it leave for someone on some tinpot Irish Sea ferry? *Do anything for young love*. Then old Eve, one of the cleaners starts going on about us, *young Penny's soon to be going off to sea with her sailorman*. Sailor Black. Sinbad. They were all laughing behind my back. Of course, it passed over him what I was going through. Cocky. Like a cock, crowing about himself all the time. Always his cock, first and last. No. Of course there was no hiding it – that's living in for you – no personal space. But his eyes on me – and I admit it I said, 'Really? you can't fancy me?' You see, my self-esteem was rock bottom. As I say, I was vulnerable, I'd run away. No man ever taken an interest in me like that. Nick didn't, not really, I know that now. Before, I mean, and now, I guess. I was naïve romantic. Then. Thinking Mr Black might be like Tom Brangwen or even one or other of the wretched men in Lawrence's novels. Not that they were very much romantic, really, I suppose. So I was a fool, too romantic. Misread Mr D.H. – sex, yes, love - myth. But it was like that maybe the once when we were in the moonlight and by a newly cut field of grass, after walking out of Windermere. As if Lawrence had written the script. I asked him if he's ever read *The Rainbow*. Course not, he was too busy with his hands all over me and his weight *so I could hardly breathe* with him all over me. No. Later he had the idea to have it off with him at the high altar of Low Green church. *I like a bit of sacrilege when am back on land*. Sinister, your Mr David Black. It was then he started going on about the ferries and me going with him. I'm supposed to like being his *acolyte*. One time he tore the buttons off my blouse. Violent, your mate, on top of it all. He'd be *like a father for me*, he said. But that was the last thing I needed,

another father. He got all excited by a Rilkean poem I'd wrote on the back of the map I had of the Black Forest that he nosed into. It was after when he came back to the dorm - all the other girls off shopping again somewhere - we had it off in the dorm. I'd forgotten all about it, that poem, but trust him to find it on the back of that map, straight off. Like he was wired to expose all I wanted to keep private. Then once we had it off down hard in the short grass on a footpath, right by a stile. No. We did a lot of shagging. 'Bout all he knew about, if you ask me. But, ha! what do you know, but a party of Buddhists in red robes comes along. Never'd believe it for god's sake and they laughed and left us to get on with it. He's fucking this and fucking that at their backs. Ha! The hills seemed to be alive with Buddhists about that time because before that I once met another Buddhist walking bare footed after being up on the Calf of Coniston Old Man. We walked together for a bit and I asked him when we were on the Walna Scar road for a mantra, he said I'll give you a motto - *Do not try to stop the sun rising tomorrow*. I wouldn't credit a Buddhist for that. Why should he say that to me? But I said,

we only exist

We pass away, till at last,

our passing is so immense.

I could tell that impressed him. He asked me who wrote that? Big wondrous smile on his face when I said Rilke – I could tell he'd not credited me, a 'girl' knowing Rilke. But maybe it was he'd not heard of him. Walked down to Coniston with me after that, saw I wasn't some girl. Got nothing on his feet. Then an aide with a rucksack was waiting for him outside the pub Donald Campbell stayed at. All red robes like his. I was reading at that time *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, in the Penguin classics edition

with a sort of sketch portrait picture of Nietzsche on the cover, his eyes looking glaucous, did he have glaucoma? Maybe syphilis, then. And if you want to know what I think that I get from Nietzsche was, even then I knew before David Black that it's that's It, capital S Sex, is at the end and beginning of nearly everything. It's simply another arena of power. You get that from Nietzsche better than Lawrence or Freud. And Rilke, what he said, I think I understand him when he says that *no woman adds anything to the sum of Women*. We all have to do it on our own – you don't need a movement – just take control yourself. I've learned that, now. You only have to look at things, what's what - it's, society, is a grand conspiracy of deeply sexually-motivated laws. Like him, your Smithy, in little things like taking it upon himself to tell me to stop clenching my fists all the time. *You look like you're getting ready for fifteen rounds*. It's this world, this Nowoman's land, that makes me like that, tense, making me grind my teeth. It's a constant war. I've got reasons to clench my own fists if I want to. No. But, you see, my parents' dogs were even then still on my trail. So, when he said, something of the like: *I'll get you out of it, Penny. Look, come with me and cabin girl on the Ferries*. I know now what that really meant. And I think now that it was a give-away that he was always looking at his watch. Maybe due to being on the dog watch. Time is like TV. I won't wear a watch. Watch – it's in the word. But it's like TV. Like it was in the staff room of the Packet, all of them eating the 'free' biscuits, which were only blooming Ryvita's and watching the box. Lambs to the slaughter. No. No way. At least my dad had that right. One hour a night from 8-9. Didn't matter what was on we all had to sit together. But don't get me on about family. Family viewing. Some family. My brothers Laurence and Zac on the cottage two-seater. Mum and him always on separate chairs and me on the pouffe. Grit stones on the drive to put the burglars off. Mum's idea. Not that anyone ever coming

around. The windows, all those small panes of leaded glass. Just like a prison. Was a prison. Mum's home-made wholemeal. Mum's peanut butter. Mums' clothes. Her bras. Shoes. Hand-me-downs, from mum like she was my older sister. So, mean. My mum's milk of human unkindness – *Don't weep or fret, dear mother mine! What matter that the cupboard's bare...* That's Rilke. That's what I mean, families. I've read Laing in Penguin. He knows about these things. At the time I was intimidated by him, your Smithy, the self-appointed Daddy to all the girls, long as they are underage, that is. Father Fucker, you say? Cradle snatcher, I think's more like it. I admit I was a bit scared – of him. I couldn't risk it telling him I intended leaving the Packet. To say, *I'm not staying around here for your convenience next when you get back from Dublin*. No. Alone. Me and my little Rainer. You can see, I am well over all of it. Well, he's my baby.

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I'm not into that. It makes me physically sick. Sick. Physically sick to even think of it. No. Does it to me first. I pulled his head up. I don't want anyone down there. For me that's not sex, it's perversity. That's what the Packet and him was doing to me. Turning me into a whore. Mrs Galbraith mine hostess, maybe he was into it with her, like that. It's not *it's just sex*. It's perversion. No. At first when once or twice I got him to walk with me out to Borrins on my afternoon break. But always wanting to stop. Like a burr snagging me. I like to walk alone, really. No. He was chain-smoking, ranking the air - too much. He told me he *was class Third Officer*, that's about right for him, your first mate. I was into Böll and Brecht and Grass, he was into *The Perfumed Garden* by *Mayfair* their illustrated edition. You know German lit'? No, and he didn't. He was only interested in his 'travels' and 'voyages'. Yeah, stuck on the Isle of Man steam packet, Hull to Rotterdam, lakes and Seaking and Dublin ferries? I

mean... At least I've my German language and lit. And I will go back to it. Take it as a resit this October. I wonder, now, at that time my gums were sometimes bleeding, gingivitis, then. Is that what made him want me to...? Bleeding in all the wrong places. I could have asked a boy called Günter to put me up 'til I got somewhere – I mean if I went back to the Black Forest. If I'd gone back to the Pension Schultz. They knew I was a runaway when I first went. Sheltered me. Günter said I was on lousy pay, though. But that view clear down the valley. The Neckar surging through, snow on the tops. The mountains so fresh after Greenwich. In the Black Forest. Don't know how but my parents got the address. Maybe that card's postmark I sent to reassure them, 'I'm okay.' Next thing, after the private dick, they are both on to me on the Lindemann's phone, COME HOME NOW! No. I should have said no. I mean, getting a German detective agency, of all things. The Lindemann's weren't sure when some odd-looking mensch appeared, pretending to inquire about a room. He looked oddly at me and then made his excuse mes and left. And when I did come back - what good it did me? So, I ran off again and that's how I ended up in Keswick and Bowness and now Baytown. And I tell you I was alright until he turned up sitting in the lounge and smoking his fags. It was late season when he turned up with his cockiness and that holdall. A red Lancashire rose with the small rose spurring off it. With that always that infuriating that half-smile on his swarthy face. Talking himself so big. Tall and broad chest. Slicked back Elvis hair. Mrs Galbraith going, *A fine figure of a young man. Looks so dashing in his dark nice navy uniform and peaked cap.* She can have him. I bet she enjoys that. Doing that with him. The nature of him. It was shortly afterwards that I found out afterwards that I wasn't the first - young Ginny, who he'd picked up, shanghiad, and she left with him. Old Evelyn, was right, even though she was a scold, when she said, because the Packet's rarely gets

young men staying or working at the place, she said – *No competition* – a fox in the Packet hen house. He first got me when I was alone in the lounge and suddenly he was on me, had me before I knew what had happened. That's rape. That's how he operates, your *Fuck Father*. For a while I fell for it, his *I really think you're so smashing, Penny*. Bluster. He tried to impress me with like, *I work all the Sealinks Penny, I'm not just at Heysham, you know*. Sure. Later I find out his voyaging included the world beyond the Isle of Man - Liverpool-Dublin. You say, he was arrested at Rotterdam? I hope he rots, in Rotter-dam. A pimp – that's about him, sums him up, now it's clear. No. That was rape, the first time, the way he grabbed me like a snake, a constrictor, squeezing all my blood from me. Perve. Pushed me down. He's got swarthy bloody strong hands has your mate – Sinbad the sailor – skunk. His 'courting' I see now was arriving to stuff me a day here day there night there for a couple of months. He was always pretending to be sticking up for me. Sticking it up me, more like. Bellah, Mrs Galbraith, they were on first name terms, *stop making Penny keep scrubbing out the insides of the teapots!* He'd stood by me at the bar after evening wash-up a few days before he first got me and it's the old Adam, *You're the most beautiful girl I've ever seen*. Got me when I was at my lowest ebb and vulnerable. He arrives and of course I remember because next day it was 8th September, my birthday. And I'm feeling guilty, low. I know that at home they are waiting for me to call. I'm fingering the chrysolite mum gave me around my neck – the one he would soon after always be sucking and drooling it in his mouth. At first how could I be so stupid thinking everything was romantic. That it was real passion, he had for me, when he had me, not really rape. Like a fool I fell for it, imagine significance, but I was reversing reality. Only significance for him is capital F fucking. Now I know there is no point in thinking like that. I thought like a romantic - he can

save me, from the Packet, from home, from Mum and Dad. And all the time he was nothing but a preying perve and rapist. But it was all, *You're so beautiful*. When you are low those words you want to believe. But I knew I had got to leave. I couldn't bare it any longer. Not after that. No. Not when I more or less knew I was pregnant. I wasn't at that moment really able to believe it. It wasn't running just because of Rainer. I was after my own centre of gravity, like Rilke's panther. It had nothing to do with him, with that. No. He was always loitering there in the hotel lounge that first time when I played the piano in the afternoons. It had old yellowed ivory keys. Never been played since the 1950s, probably. Out of tune. But the only time I'd get some peace for practice before the dinners started. We had a coach party but they were out of the way on a coach tour of the 'Four, five, six' or god knows how many lakes you can do in a day. It's then he got me from behind and then down on my neck and his hands crushing my tits.

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That next day, my birthday, I had the afternoon off and I let him walk out of town with me. When we took the path off towards Rusland, couldn't believe how ignorant he was not knowing about glow worms. Nature a complete mystery to him. Like Dad, not like dad, really, but like him when he dragged us all off to Quebec. In his own way as weak as dad. When we were in Canada when we were confronted by two black bears and a couple of cubs, in the Smokey Mountains, and we all had to back off. *Throw your backpacks on the ground!* Mum said. But Dad was trembling at the steering wheel of our estate car for a good half an hour afterwards. Ha! ha! It all comes from him. The dislocation in my life, I mean. Nothing to do with Nick. Wrenching us all out there to Canada. Judy, Jane, Lucy all my friends left back at Winchester. Only thing I got out of it was better Canadian-accented French. That

long school bus journey through those boring suburbs of snow buffering clap-board white houses all just like the one we had. First time the school bus put me off near home I got lost. Nothing to get a trig point on. No culture. Piano lessons with Canadian French, fussy Madam Clairmont. *Non! Non! Penelope. Vous devez être tre doux! Il est pas un glockenspiel!* No. Mum always going on about her loyalty following Dad's career. Him always going on about how she's given up everything for him. As if he believed it. It was great when we had to come back for Zac's college and dad stayed. Laurence and Zac didn't want to come back. But Dad thought I would be the one to want to stay. With him? No chance. All of the girls at Winchester well into 6th form by the time we came back. Then I find Judy's with Nick all the time and they're both laughing because I'm still wearing aertex shirts. *Why don't you wear a blouse, Penny, for Pete's sake.* They're practical - aertexs. But it was all they thought - they were sophisticated, moved on, still thought of me as a 5th former. All of them thinking themselves sophisticated. The girls all making up. They'd left me behind. Only good thing was dad staying in Quebec. Then I stopped going in. That did it. Calling me a Drop Out. When mum and him start going on. Unbearable. Then he comes back and goes to work at a hospital in Greenwich. Sick of moving. His career. It's always *We need a new start. Don't worry you can always make new friends and take your A Levels.* After he's already got himself the job at Greenwich Hospital, anyway. So straight into 6th form at Avery girls' grammar and they all think I'm Canadian. Rootless. Everyone is from somewhere there. Eltham. Blackfen. Bexleyheath. Crayford. But it's like nowhere: the train station platforms all 1940s pre-cast concrete section like they've been made out of Betta Bricks. One suburbia after another. All those rows of semis backing onto the railway. Nature tamed. Petrified in those strips of back garden. No. To be specific, I'd say I'm from South Acton,

Turnham Green. No good, it was still, *You don't sound like you're from London*. And I can't say that's because he dragged us away from there when I was seven. Some new job somewhere else, Exeter, and a bigger house. No.

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But after Pension Schutz I thought doing hotel work had saved me. All found - but I never much ate much of the hotel food. It was the roof I needed, refuge. At that first job at Keswick the girls showed me ways to cut corners. Fluff under their beds like old man's beard. It was only me who really cleaned. Finding knickers and underpants, socks and bras. Bracelets. A man's gold watch. Single earrings, of course. Pair of white leather wrinkle picker shoes, consciously abandoned no doubt. And a ridiculous French basque with scarlet silk lining. Never a wallet. A dirty mag someone had secreted between the boards at Schultz. Danish. Men making women do it with animals. Hogs. And that. Oral sex, oral but you can't say a word. No. And at the Packet they laughed when I said, if it's not clean it's not right. Mrs Galbraith so back-handed ironic, *Penny's my best girl. A bit slow, but my cleanest girl*. I was just losing myself in the cleaning. Hiding myself. But it was for me not her, not The Packet Hotel. No. No way back. *I told you you would regret it. Come home immediately*. That was all Mum could say. Always laying down her life for us all. No. Guilt-peddling. Hates herself so much she's forgotten how to be herself. And no grandparents. Dad's dead in the camps in Germany. Won't speak about it. Doesn't know anything about it, really. Some kindly school teachers in Norfolk who took him in. We went one time when we were little, just the once. A grey flat Norfolk day. That hamlet school and cluster of council houses. Sort of dad's foster parents. They never adopted him. No wonder. The old man, his guardian, was half-blind. A head teacher. On his knees in the kitchen garden, feeling his way along the beds with a trowel in

his hand. Can't say they were best pleased to see him and us turn up. Of course, mum fell out with hers long ago, so that side of the family was always a mystery. *I don't want to talk about you seeing your grandmother any more, Penelope.* When they turned up once and mum drew all the curtains and slammed the door in her mum's face. Their car turned into the driveway. *We're not going to go away, Concepta!* No. But they did.

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I met those two, Sandy and Zoe off Smithy's ferries. We met up with them and he drove us all in a hire car to Keswick. They were telling me on the way how they were working with David on the SeaLink Heysham at the time when the police arrested the Birmingham bombers. Of course, they are the type of women who think Bowness is the Lake District. Ice cream shops and a SeaLink lake steamer rides. Passing was the lake boat on its way towards Ambleside. *Sailors' holiday!* they laughed. You know women like that. Sandy was wearing these outrageous knee-length black leather jack boots. And they were, *Come and work on the ferries with us. Doing the cabins, better paid – you'll earn a packet. We'll look after you.* I'm not a fool. Rilke was right, again, when he said that, what I said, *No woman adds anything to the sum of Women*, in their case, better believe it. No. I thought well, better that than going home to mum and her ordinances. A Catholic without a savour, I wrote in my diary - I thought that summed her up. And so she got married to a German Jew refugee. Anything goes wrong in her life she always thought it was my fault all the time not his, not dad's. Always taking his side. No. They can all go to hell. Don't think I am anything like Rita Tushingham in *A Taste of Honey*. No. I knew I was up the tub, thank you very much due to a bastard, not a nice bloke like the black guy in that film. It's not rocket science. The only time I went to see a doctor was back in Reutlingen

and he had me going back every other day so he could draw the puss from a boil I had on my bum: probably just wanted to look at my arse every other day. But I couldn't do it myself and I had no-one then. Couldn't have asked Mrs Lindemann or Günter. We were never like that. Günter? I met him when I had a day off. He was in Reutlingen library and we went for a coffee. His English so good. He asked me what was my accent – he was that good. Again it's, Where are you from? I wasn't prepared to say – it was just when my parents were on my trail. Nowhere. Anywhere. Daddy Henry's land which was once Heinrich's land. But I say I'm from London or Henry's latest career stop-over. Dad. Never getting over being a refugee. So, once me and Günter were given a holiday lodge annexed to the Schultz: the Lindeman's let us have it– it was one weekend when they were quiet. Lovely lime boards. But Günter's so hopeless he goes and puts the electric kettle on the gas hob. He didn't know - never lifted a finger like that. Always ate out or cold stuff. Strudel. Sauerkraut and dumplings. Not interested in food. He was botanizing all the time we were hiking. Wayside flowers. *You know why we call dandelions lowenzhan in German, Penny? – the lion must have its teeth!* But no poetry in him. So not even him, even if he wanted me, which he didn't. No. And already now he's working as a bureaucrat. In Dortmund. His letters. So abstract. So rational. *When I want a book, Penelope, I'll go to a bookshop.* What I mean is, he didn't understand the idea of browsing – he was always so directed. Liked Goethe's poetry, of course. And, typical, once when I mentioned Günter, Sinbad goes mad, your jealous mate does, mad even though he had never met him. Jealous. Then he saw my old school scarf with *Do not give in too much to feelings* that I embroidered in German. What's that? What does that mean? Like a dog he could smell a rival. Demanding, *Who's this Günter?* Why did he want so much to know? So insistent. I won't let anyone own me. No. I won't answer to

anyone like that. My life. I'm me. Me and Rainer, now. But I won't be owned. He's would have screwed me in all senses. That first time. I didn't know what was happening. On the eve of my birthday. The floor of the Packet's lounge. After it's all *Was it my first time?* To spite him I wouldn't answer. And same again during following times lying there usually in his or my cold September unaired Packet bedroom. He was insistant but I wouldn't answer. Wouldn't take no for an answer. Not his business who is or isn't my first. And he was always going on about my past. What do your parents do? Where do they live? How long since you've seen them? He couldn't get anything out of me. No. There was no way I was going to put up with that. Do you know Strindberg? *Miss Julie*? He knew about men and women, the power struggle. But he thought of women as little more than constituted by the line of her previous men. He was a Swedish chauvinist perve. No. I had me before any man. That must be true for all of us – as if women can't 'break' themselves in. Going on about my secretiveness. *You're a puzzle Penny*, Mrs Galbraith back-handed saying all the time, *but not ever a crossword!* If he knew how I really felt, what I was going through. I'd told him plain, Look, I don't want to get pregnant! Then it started. The pushing my face down. Pushing my head down on to him. No. I Will Not Do That. After that first time, for my birthday, he took me after wash-up to the Lord Napier– and the others turned up later as well. Amy must have had ten vodkas and oranges. No glass collector so he built a high tower of empty glasses and gets into an argument with the landlord. Then back at the hotel we wake some of the guests. Mrs Galbraith lets it go. *Oh, but David's a one isn't he Penny? Surprised at you Penny. You've bitten off something with that one! Wouldn't credit you. But plenty would!* Then another time, weeks later, we go and sleep in and she's rattling at his door. *David! Have you Penelope in there!* She knew he had. It was like being in a

bedroom farce. I was late for the staff breakfast. Tittering from old Eve. He said then that I'd best to leave then and I'd got to go with him. No way. Even before that, doing that to me. But definitely after it. No.

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I manage. Carly the girl I knew at the Grasmere Hostel managed. Got a council house in Kendal, now. With Gerry. Motor mechanic. I considered going back on the bus to the Willows in Keswick. Old Arthur, the day man. He referred to me as his *princess*, daughter he never had. Different from his lips than dad's. He might have helped, listened. Not ironic. Gritty honesty. I guess I may have been looking for a new dad. I'd like to walk again with Arthur to Alcock tarn. No asking whys and wherefores about me. Talked about the old days. There, that's work for you – Arthur being sent to hiring fairs when he was fifteen. That stampede of bullocks he saw go through the streets when he was a young boy. I can imagine that. Always saying *I've been lucky, Penny*. Gentleman. The horny coarseness of his hands -when he helped me along by Lodore's waterfall, after we went to see Hugh Walpole's house. *You're a runaway, princess, but I won't give you away*. Princess, he called me. No one ever called me that. Anyone else - but in his old man's voice. And Sinbad getting jealous when I mentioned I'd wanted to get the bus to go and see Arthur. An old man, still made him jealous. No. He wanted to own me. I couldn't have breathed without his permission. No. I'm not such a fool. I had to be rational. Did the decision like my dad would do his lists, when they dragged me back from Reutlingen. Item: A levels. Item: college applications. Item: crammer. So, item: one baby; item: one clinic. Item: tell no one. Arthur called me his 'lyle princess'. A lovely local word. Not much of a dialect in Keswick. Sometimes, *deeed* instead of died. But he knew so many locals, people. Never moved away, stayed put, endured, not like dad, or Sinbad. No. I knew I had to

do it myself. It was me alone. Can't let other people get into your head, mum, dad, anyone. Couldn't bear the thought of going back to Greenwich. Me and it's only me. I'm a single mum. Be Mrs Black? I rename this woman Penny Black - to be forever stamped on. I'd considered taking up dad's old German name, Bruchmann. Or Mum's, Brennen. If I'd gone with him? I can only imagine what hell that would have been like, life on the waves or in the wake of a SeaKing. I'm here in this dump of a flat here in the Island. *Get rid of it!* That's what he said. What mum would have said. But no. I said No.

Chapter 14 Viva

Small time (*the present day, the recent past, and the foreseeable [desired] future*) and great time – *infinite and unfinalized dialogue in which no meaning dies*. Bakhtin *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays: Methodology for the Human Sciences*

Do you consider your viva today an end or ... perhaps...a beginning?

An ending. Well, at least I hope today will prove an end point - of all of my plodding the streets of Baytown with my research tape recorder in hand – to finish all, to stem all that I've spoken to you on the topic, as far as that is possible, to say anything to the end. But, I mean, I have my doubts – I have experienced so much, re-entering the life there that, now, after being reluctant about returning to the town it seems as though it is a world I have learned too much about, er, to be ever really ended with.

All explanations have to end somewhere, even if they are not final. But it's as if you...you sound poignant. Is this poignant? My question, really, was one of your academic career.

I wasn't being poignant. I just mean I am not sure where the start and the end of the process of my becoming an accredited academic, and for what I've given up in the process, actually *is*. It's a question, really, of being, isn't it? What you lose and what you gain when you put your all, your life, into a place for four years, always with a motivation that isn't really *of* the place. I mean, I have taken this place, Lancaster Uni, to Baytown and its interests are not *of* the place or the people.

You have a problem with Lancaster? After four years?

Look, look at that Lancashire rain drumming down on the corrugated plastic roofing of the 'Spine's' walkway. That feature says a lot about the difference between Baytown and uni - doesn't it? What it numbly states, I mean, that lean-to construction

that protects you staff and us students from our inevitable northern English rain. It was designed, wasn't it, so that we can all traipse dryly from one end of the campus to the other? So, it says something about the easy-privilege that is taken-for-granted and built into universities – even ones built in the 60's and instigated by a vaguely socialist, Labour Government. I wonder how far I can penetrate into all the other coverings, social, linguistic, that produce privilege in something that produces privilege like a, this, university.

Is that what's bothering you? The class thing, again? That you are on the doorstep getting ready to go into Privilege and you've got class-sensitive' knocking knees? If it is, you are late in the day! Four years of Ph.D. research late in the day. It's too late to talk about beginnings or endings. Do you think now is the time to buck against privilege?

I've bucked all along really. Not just now. It's not that I'm nervous!

You will pass. There is no need for any major corrections.

Thanks. No, it isn't viva nerves. It's the state of it being built so to speak on my beginnings – at Baytown, I mean. It's the Viconian irony of the thing – of going back – you can't go home. And now the burden of going off to do other things, but they will be always informed by the form of my research in Baytown.

No one ever goes back in life: Vico got that wrong – I'm with Heraclitus on this: Baytown/anytown. What goes around doesn't necessarily come around. In that sense, there can never be a reconciling of nostalgia – we are all forever homeless. You get a degree and you make a break, inevitable, have to, break with common sense, with commonality.

But, don't forget, I didn't want to go back, anyway. At the start of all of this I said to you that I didn't want to go back to Baytown: my life there had ended when I went to my first Uni – Liverpool. My 'home' town? I didn't want it to be the focus for my research. Even my parental home is gone, my parents moved away to their retirement in St Annes. I had little doubt that that old world would reject me – I was the scholarship boy, an outsider, in self-imposed exile. To paraphrase Joyce, Baytown was a nightmare from which I had awoken.

Joyce never returned home – well, perhaps fleetingly - but he thought and wrote about Dublin for the rest of his life. And I must say that most candidates, before their vivas are usually worried by the task at hand, not questions of beginnings and endings. I mean, really, Vico or Heraclitus, Joyce? But you did right, to locate your ideas, and your illustrious Soviet theoretical mentor's Bakhtin's ideas, in a real place, where you know the lifeworld. For you that was, is, Baytown, and it – that thesis, that thick A4 bundle of typed sheets proves it. Doesn't it? Lots of research students don't make it this far. This ending or beginning. They get marooned in the middle or fade away and leave wishing they'd gone for an M.A.

Mm. But usually they run out of dough. I was lucky, getting that grant. But, you know, Bakhtin was never an issue, you know that, I mean I could've located his ideas in Morecambe, in Lancaster, at the University itself if it came to it. But I was no longer a part of Baytown - I'd left my *lifeworld*, as you call it, long before I'd physically left. Decisions to start someplace or end somewhere else don't always lie with what you decide, you, me or what we arbitrarily decide.

Your work has a form – Bakhtin or ‘dialogism’, such terms! – I wonder what the original Russian was! – you had a form that needed a content. Baytown provided you with that, didn’t it?

I am a theory-firster, and I suppose that isn’t really what Community Studies at Lancaster is about.

It comes through, here and there, but you never really told me about your early life in Baytown...

My first break with Baytown began when I was seventeen when I took A levels which meant I had to leave Belvedere Secondary Mod’ - C of E, of sorts - New English Bible - to transfer in the autumn of 1970 to the 6th form at Glendale, Baytown’s grammar school which was strictly C of E - King James’. My old Belvedere ‘school’. Huh. A 1950s architectural *mash-up* of prefabricated sections of asbestos panels and cheap softwood-already-rotting window frames. It gets salt-lashed by the Irish Sea, sited as it is at the very bay edge of Baytown, built by the council’s planners to *poorly educate poor children* from a large 1950s poorly-constructed council house estate. It was a secondary modern: second-rate with second rate teachers, its primary purpose to prepare us its pupils for manual work, either via the woodworking and metal work classes or the domestic science kitchen. There was football but no rugger, athletics but no cricket.

You choose to go on into 6th form?

Yes. It’s funny, now, but when I opted to go to the grammar I could sense the panel of teachers I had to see there, first, were pretty reluctant to admit me. I didn’t fit the bill. Those black curtain-gowned teachers who, I said to my mum when I got back,

looked like Batmen. They were all dusky late middle-aged blokes, like beadies, holding the keys to all sixth-form study - the town's tech only dealt, then and probably still now, with hairdressing, business studies, and, of course, hordes of the shipbuilding engineering apprentices. I felt that, if they could have, they'd have given me an armband to mark me out. They were openly dismissive of my five grade 1 CSEs (including woodwork, and no science – I was, as my Belvedere chemistry teacher said, 'chemically, now documented a failure'), although they couldn't ignore my good O' Levels in history, geography, and English (the O Levels, by-the-way, my dad had to pay registration fees for) That very stressful process – I mean in breaking with the town – it's hard to get across to someone like you – I imagine you are an 11-plus passer?

Southern Regional School Certs. 1935, if you want to know. No 11-plus then.

Well, it set me out on this grinding, this brain-and-being process of de-socialization, de-classification: that's how you pay when you start out working class and get a working-class education but then break rank and get yourself a 'proper' middle-class education. That's why I can't be nostalgic, being a scholarship boy – you are *nowhere at home*.

My parents were country folk, dad was a market town solicitor, but my mum a farm labourer's daughter. Class, home, you should know by now, are never simple and fixed categories. Maybe we have to think dialogically about that, as well.

Dialogically, class gets established. And your inception sounds pretty middle-class to me. Social being remains with you, it is the formation, the social constitution of the body that counts – of how one is. Not everything is voice, I admit, not everything is speech, is words. I mean, I must have sounded pretty uncouth in the Grendale

grammar 'masters' eyes. I don't think they had any difficulties socially-categorizing me. It wasn't just that I had failed my 11-plus, I'd also side-stepped four years of the educational grooming (in demeanour, attitude, confidence, arrogance, hauteur – but particularly in *speech*) associated with being at a grammar. The grooming process for inclusion in the lower-reaches of the middle class – your lab technicians, school teachers, draughtsmen, local government clerks. Back at Belvedere we had a teacher, Stackman, he was Belvedere's woodwork tutor and doubled as careers advisor and once I said I wanted to go on to A levels he said to me, bluntly: *It's generally, you know, just a few of the J formers of the top stream who tend to go on to Glendale. Tend* says a lot, tender, to offer for sale, or the bending of one's being in a certain, class, way. He said this to me despite the fact that I'd stayed on, took my O Levels with the top of the streams' J formers and my mocks had been good. But, you see, he just took me to be unproblematically as one of the Lads, one of the school's annual output of factory-fodder (and, actually, I was good at woodwork) – one of the K Formers of Belvedere. He thought I should just have left like the others at 15. And why? That something about me, a *tendency*, a class thing.

This sounds, reminds me, of the boys in Willis' book Learning to Labour – how they prepared themselves for becoming workers – that they brought their own curriculum into the school class-room – class room. But your interviewees – you got back to them, your old schoolmates? So, in some ways you are right, that the old ties of class, not just class in the idea of the K form, are never really fully-severed, cannot be.

But it was only by chance I ran into Barry in Morecambe. He was the K form class' puff and I found him living happily with a guy - running a hotel on the seafront. Then, next, was Jimmy, always a bit of a pain in the neck, a complainer, who became the

Baytown ship-yard socialist. Then Gordon was a, still is, a fat Scots' 'off-comer' who works as a lathe-setter – I met him one evening in the Shipyard Arms pub – he was set up with a new girlfriend, but he was the source for the divorce chapter. And I think I told you that the real 'Posser' was the class' bully and now is an over-age/outdated boot boy. The other lathe-operative Gary was the first of us to fall off the shelf by getting his girlfriend pregnant soon after leaving Belvedere. There was another bar-feeder who worked with him, Tony, 'Ant', and he too was a K former. But I didn't speak directly to either of them. Jake, Buddhist or Zarathustrian, one or the other; it was him who told me most (more than Gordon, anyway) about folkloric practices at Sun Electrical and, *snowballing*, he put me on to the young woman, Penelope, who got seduced by Smithy, and just recently had had Smithy's bastard kid. A body-less voice speaking through many of the K formers was Smithy who was the K form class's ruling *knob-hound*. Even in our 3rd year he was going out with much older women and out nights drinking in the town's pubs whilst we were doing homework or tucked-up in our beds. He's now serving time in a Dutch prison for vice. Last but not least, Dino, who I thought, was told, was working at a hotel in Manchester, but by the time I got there he'd gone, been.

And Baytown women?

First it was Denise - Denny. She was the first I interviewed: the representative homely type - but with side to her. Oh, yeah, plenty of side. Then another girl who once was the K-form class' *slag* – Zoë. She and another girl, Sandra, later on, well after leaving school, were pimped by Smithy. Sandra had gone to school at St Winifred's, not our school, Belvedere, but the catholic school. Both these two were well-fucked before they were fifteen by Smithy and, bar Barry, by most of the K formers - including me.

Your interview with Morecambe homosexual hotelier whom you call 'Barry in the text – that's a hint at an alternative way of being in Baytown, in working class culture. There's sympathy there, and when you start to talk, it is clear that you actually don't feel alienated by your return to the town. Do you still want me to believe you regret going back to Baytown?

As I said, I am not sure I can ever be finished with it. But look at it this way: when the K formers were leaving after fourth form, I got the ones I'd been closest to to sign the green card cover of my school report. I remember Dino wrote, *Good Luck Duck!* and it seemed like he was signing me off from the working-class adult life he and the others were getting to before me, me being the only 'Stayer On'. That was the summer of '69, and they'd received those business-sponsored leavers' goody-bags of shaving soap, you know: *Wilkinson* razors, deodorants, *Brylcreem*, and Boots vouchers, those first miniaturized incitements to forty-odd years of adult consumerism. They were going to their first jobs, most of them like Barry and Jimmy – you know, the guy with the asbestos issue - to be apprentices in engineering in either medium-sized factories or at British Shipbuilders North, the shipyard, where my dad worked, where it was expected I would follow him. I was alienated, by myself and by them. When I went on to the grammar I was actually referred to as the Scholarship Boy, like in Hoggart. I, then, didn't know about Richard Hoggart, but they instinctively knew that I had become a kind of alien to being a working class being, a working-class lad drawn into an alien life-form - advanced education. I was left out of Baytown life, sat upstairs in my bedroom revising and writing essays and thinking of A levels whilst they'd got engaged or were *going strong, scrimping and saving*, readying to be parents themselves.

You talk of going to grammar as if you'd been sent to borstal!

It felt it! At Belvedere, at least, it had been co-educational, but Glendale was an all-boys and all the masters were men. Most of them, also, had a perverse affinity for the crude methods and means of 'Old School' teaching. Permissive 1960s, Dr Spock or child-centeredness meant nothing to them.

Oh, yes, one of your themes about that generation, my generation, I suppose, as examples of capital A austerity - as if stoicism was a capital crime!

I can't help it if my research made me sensitive to the more onerous aspects of that, your, generation, the 'old ways' due to hearing so many comments on them by the K-formers during my research. Your generation – that won the war but lost the peace. Anyway, it goes without saying that the key mode of teaching at Glendale was overwhelmingly boring, the teachers active in promoting a repressive atmosphere. The atmosphere was always hanging so heavy on us as we did a lot of tedious 'copying out' from A Level textbooks. We sat ranked at mean old upright iron and dark wood Victorian school desks never meant for boys seventeen years old. And the beatings regularly, frequently, doled out by those autocratic war and austerity-era brutes. I mean, so often the corporeal punishment was arbitrary – but generally dished out only to the younger boys – the teachers were too much the bullies to hit us older boys – if we were caught smoking, even though it was legal for us, we got sanctions. But it was a matter of bad luck rather than bad behaviour that resulted in it. But violence pervaded the school 'regime'. For instance, as we all filed in to morning assembly there was this Mr Tarr, porcine Mr Tarr, the deputy head, with his beer-belly pushing apart his sports jacket and his gorilla shoulders spreading the wings of his gown. He'd stand at the front of the hall enjoying intimidating long-cowed pupils by standing there with a cane balanced perfectly erect on the flat of his fat hand.

We all have those sorts of tales to tell, grammar schoolboys or comprehensive...

I guess so. But you would have gone with a cohort. For me it was different, I had to form new friends at Glendale. So, it was very strange coming across (the not many) one or two boys who passed their 11 Plus at my old Island junior school - five years' separation made it impossible to pick things up with them again. But I sensed their smugness at entering grammar long before me, they were already different, better (no – differently – cricket and *rugger*) educated, beings. At the end of two lonely years, I didn't return with the other 6th formers to get my results and prattle about which university or career I intended going into. I was satisfied with the Northern Examination Board's blotchy computer print-out paper to arrive in the post – a skimpy-thin educational certificate visa out of Baytown, out of unknowing belonging.

But, I guess, going to university a release from all of that?

Yes! By the time I'd got to Liverpool as an undergraduate I'd lost contact with nearly everyone. The time and tide of my life was so different to those who remained in Baytown – I rarely met any K formers. Any commonality I'd had with the 'lads' was well over. My mum and dad felt more comfortable saying to friends when I'd gone to university that 'he's at college'. I think the word university sounded to their ears too posh and alien, denoting a totally alien world – a college was a more local-sounding sort of thing. My father, Des, has worked all his life at British Shipbuilders North and he wasn't sure what a BA was, and just understanding a Ph.D., what it involved, well, it's totally beyond him. Only the other day he says to me, *What does it give you, then, a Ph.D.?* What he meant was why isn't a Ph.D. clear about what work it leads to, why it wasn't firm in its meaning like his City and Guilds in Mechanical Industrial Studies. To him there seems something shady about a Ph.D. And, after I moved into

humanities, I remember him saying, *What's that when it's at home, humanities?* But that's the point, isn't it? That it couldn't be clear even if he 'got' what it meant - because Ph.Ds are predicated on being esoteric, at least in contrast to, say, a being a joiner, fitter, turner and so on.

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We have a few more minutes. So Liverpool?

In 1974, when I started my Social Science degree there I discovered that the sociology 'strand' was looked at as a relatively new area, or at least it was changing its spots from American Parsonian functionalism, and the area was being rejuvenated by lecturers influenced by '60s critical theory and neo-Marxism. You know all this – it's your era, but I know that was what you reacted against. The tutors there were pretty enthusiastic, energized by those new publications, the popular Penguin English paperbacks of *Grundrisse*, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts 1844*, and of course Althusser's *For Marx*. Then there was also much talk about Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. But they didn't teach or think much of Bakhtin's idea of voice. I stumbled on his ideas via his other more Marxist identity - Volosinov. It was Bakhtin's ideas on meaning in language being constituted by past class conflict, but in the present continually figuring in our everyday talk, that inspired me. Volosinov understood that linguistic meaning is constantly being contested over by different classes, different voices, past and present. Any manifestation of meaning is constantly, potentially, conflictual. Writing as 'Volosinov' he went on to analyse conflict at the level of the sentence, phrase, word, syllable - to the very minutiae of linguistic symbolization.

They didn't get it, the Liverpool lot, the Bakhtin stuff. They thought that Bakhtin was literature – because he'd famously studied Dostoyevsky's novels. But it was a sociological approach to literature – Dostoyevsky's novels were polyvocal – the narrative voice and dialogue between characters, and thought, even, was dialogical in constitution. I couldn't help myself – I wanted to study how meaning is negotiated, in dialogue, in voices of different classes. My sympathies were with the language practices of the 'repressed' even though I was all the time moving ever away from the working class, and joining the band of its repressors – the manipulators of language and meaning and who got certified at universities.

But Liverpool – they're good on class, surely?

It was, *Look at the country - the evidence is right before your eyes at Halewood Fords, at that photo-processing place at Grunwick!* The implication being that by focusing on language meant I was being ideological, losing my grip on the hard economic and conflictual nature of politics, of thought. The point was, for them, class conflict was real, the country is wracked by national recession and international capitalism, Maoism, Ulster, the National Front and, er, sub-nationalism, feminism – you name it. These were the forces that they felt were more real, tangible, not linguistic, not just words! They seemed to be putting scare quotes around speech and experience, they said that they were *epiphenomena* and that was the first time I'd heard the word, although I knew it was one of opprobrium.

So that made you leave and come here...

They didn't want to lose me, the 'good' student, so they tried coaxing me to stay, *perhaps you could look at the language of trade union negotiation*, what they saw as an inherently dialogical factor, the strikes in reaction to the *rapidly disintegrating*

post-war corporativist settlement. But by 1977, as I took my finals, Liverpool gave up on me and reluctantly my tutor suggested I come and speak to you – what they called *the people in sociology at Lancaster*, that (scornfully) *up the M6* newish *campus university*. So here I am, with you and this little island of community studies, our sub-section of Sociology. You know what Prof Bryan, our so ‘loveable’ Dean of post-graduate studies, called it? ‘*A twiglet rather than branch*’ of the department.

Did he! Yes, he would...

It wasn’t too disparaging, more a quip when he suggested I go and speak to you. At first, I thought I’d found Trotsky, you with your goatee and round specs. But I could hardly see Trotsky interested in your specialisms!

Life and Labour in 19th century north Lancashire Mill Towns: I think not.

Yes. Your clog makers in Galgate. The Independent Cooperative Movement in Blackburn.

Don’t forget the Victorian Dock Workers of the Lune Ports; Early 20th century Music Hall Comedians of the Lancashire Coastal resorts – Southport, Blackpool and Morecambe. I know I am looked on patronizingly by the younger lecturers here, they think I’ve missed the boat of continental structuralism. Community studies is referred to as ‘The Cloggies’, you know that Private Eye strip cartoon of clog dancing northerners satirizing those ‘gritty’ film dramas of 1960’s working-class life? But I treated seriously the counter-cultural role of community-generated folk and popular culture. But, like Theodor Adorno, I still hold to distinction – to the aesthetic idea of culture which begins with a capital C. I associate culture with ‘value’ because it’s one

way of getting critical distance from television soaps like Coronation Street and British 'New Wave' films.

You despise those 1960's films like *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*!

Yes.

I remember, in a seminar once you told us that you'd been at Oxford at the same time as Tony Richardson, and how he was privately educated and has this perfect Oxbridge English accent. But you do, don't you, I mean you don't like 'Theory Firsters'.

But I was doing something like Gramsci when I published a critical essay on the New Wave in The British Journal of Historical Culture way back in 1969 and seeing them as part of a much longer process of Gracie Fields, George Formby and the like, of winning consent (as Gramsci puts it). I prefer to call it recuperating – I like using that verb because it conjures up associations of coup – or of 'patriotizing' the more solid, local, cultural, religious and political identities of working-class people?

Yes. And because of you I steered away from the media and press, natural areas to explore speech genres. But you let me, I was able to develop my ideas of locality and of language as key concepts for exploring being working-class. I am grateful, you were the only one I found remotely interested in the role of language in social identity – its role in constituting social consciousness and of obscuring it in the service of social domination.

I was never a dedicated sociologist - when issues of methodology come up I always say, if someone asks me what's your methodology? I say I ain't got one.

Yes. You are more at home with ideas from the humanities, literary theory, cultural Marxists like Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson. I know you are not instinctively aware of the cultural alienation of my K formers, of the realities of working-class alienation and anti-intellectualism. But it was you who got me onto Hoggart who showed the self-immolating act of working-class alienation that is the Scholarship Boy. What I am.

There is that essay by Raymond Williams, about his self-consciousness of wearing boots when he was at Cambridge. He was also Welsh. There you really would have experienced alienation.

But for you it's E.P. Thompson's *Making of the English Working-class's* cultural brand of history and Marxism, rather than Williams'. Anyway, it was really your status as an outlier, what that means, how you attract 'odd' students, like me, and Jeremy, who's my Morecambe digs' housemate, he's researching homosexual bars for you.

Yes. Jeremy. Post-war 'gay subworld' bars and clubs of North Western resorts on the Lancashire and Cheshire littoral: New Brighton, Morecambe, Blackpool and Southport. He's doing okay, still to finish, though. That geographical locale is similar to my own: my study of 19th century north-west' music hall comedians; fish and chip shops; and the development of what became seaside resort' slot machine palaces. At least the people at Liverpool have covered the Dagenham machinists' strike of 1969, and more recently that photo-processing Asian women's strike at Grunwick you mentioned.

The dominant mode, though, there is still male labour studies, like Benyon's *Working for Ford* at Halewood. This seems radical, Marxian, but he and others like are over-concerned with trade unions and the growing breakdown in the post-war corporatist

settlement. 'Labour', generally, tends to mean the politics of industrial labour, unions and managerial relations, the usual newspaper headlines of official and unofficial strikes. For us, I think, labour is much more comprehensive, cultural, heterogeneous.

I agree. You won't have seen many of them, one or two maybe in my seminars, but I've published other papers that you might be interested in. one is an examination of 19th century disputes in the workshops and factories of Lancashire and women 'pioneers' in the Cooperative movement in Rochdale. There's a monograph of mine on the role of women in the 1860s in a run of hunger mill wage disputes in North Lancashire. I looked at the Assize and Court press reports where these women were referred to as stirring the pot, witches with broom handles, and because of the locality of the strikes to Pendle, the title was Malkin's Factory Maids.

I admit it's the local that you made me aware of – its importance, and I do, sort of, appreciate the project you set for me of going back to Baytown. For my Liverpool tutors it was a matter of course to break me and the other students of their local knowledge – of what I guess they saw as naive commonsensicality. At the time I was glad about that. But when I came to you you ordered the reverse...to evoke the implicit knowledge I had of Baytown and its people... And it just happened to be that Baytown docks was to become one of the Special Economic Zones being set up by the Tories...

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But, wouldn't you agree, the longue duree of history is also relevant, and is missing in your research?

I guess where we part company is that I don't like that type of local history guff that takes, say, that takes for granted the influence of geography on, say, Baytown's coastal location of the Irish Sea, that that accounts for its key industries of shipbuilding and chemical products. I wanted to say something very different. If the image, the history, of Baytown is dominated by its dependence on heavy engineering and its trades, then so much to the good. But I was after the *experience* of Baytown's workers, the shapes and shapings and form of perspectives and feelings of their lives. I find that so much of local historical work refers to 'working people', as a euphemism for class. But what of the experience of being working class in terms of its inner sanctums of *felt experience*, its cultural codes, its language? There is no 'people' for me – only class subjects produced in and through language.

Don't you think that that term, subjects, objectifies people?

But that's what they become – subjects. Subjects to the bosses' gaze, or under our gaze however benevolent we might make it.

*The strength of your writing lies in the voices, the vocal testimony of the interviews.
But the facts...*

I'm with Pilate – what is Truth or, indeed, fact? I am the intuitive type, I followed my feelings. I think class experience is found in the voices that arise in the settings of work (the town's college of apprentice education, key factories, workshops, those flourishing working men's clubs.), voices embodied in everyday practices, rituals, procedures - the work settings of interaction between the men, and sometimes women, and bosses. Take my father. Sometimes his natural rectitude occasionally breaks down and he refers to his work in the shipyard as the *never of ever seeing an ending to it*. This is the condition of boredom and repetition - my father's working life

– his soul - infused by regularity, repetitiveness, the humdrum. His shipyard holidays limited to just three weeks a year plus bank holidays. My dad and thousands of others like him worked all their life at British Shipbuilders North and other factories and live in a radically time-marked work-day existence of clocking in and clocking out. But working-class occupations are also ‘occupied’, energized, flexed, and given voice. But it’s the ruling ideas I got from Bakhtin, from who I learned that this everyday process of negotiation can be traced in patterns of voice, talking and turn-taking, in the workplace or at leisure.

Your father gets a look in – in the first chapter, that’s your ‘Des’ isn’t it?

Yes. Recorded but anonymized for posterity – will anyone ever read this except for my external, I wonder? But, yes, I admire my father’s stoicism in the face of all those forms of ‘everyday’ exposure to industrial noise, pollution, injuries and industrial diseases he and even militant Jimmy faced.

That club, that was early in your research?

Quite early. So, well, I listened and, even then, was I making a mental note of the role of black humour amongst the men, which I now see as a mode of displacing their powerlessness. What they couldn’t control became the butt of their derision, sarcasm, disdain and ridicule.

That sounds like a type of Keatsian negative capability, a transitory sovereignty attained in conversation – a symbolic repossession of control, of working conditions.

I like that. The ‘Crack’ is voice being created, communally-constituted voice, a genre arising in the work place in word-play, spontaneous coinings of neologisms. Working-class men tend not to speak at length, seen in the opening chapter in which

a wake is taking place, the club Crack there is marked by short, declamatory sentences, sometimes by just a short phrase or a single word.

Is voice, speech genre, a 'language game', as Wittgenstein has it?

Sort of. But Ludwig had no sociology. But as a speech genre, as Bakhtin has it, in the Crack each speaker in turn effectively elaborates the spark from the preceding speaker's words: it's something that is defined by being polyvocal. The Crack is a speech genre that's utterly-communal, team-work, polyvocal speech - where meaning is rarely principally denotative, but connotative of deeper underlying codes – I mean of class experience and identity.

Like Willis' Learning to Labour? It's good on how schooling at comprehensives and socialization practices at home, prepare working-class 'lads' for working-class jobs.

Yes. But I am also concerned with the process of nick-naming, I mean, that was part of the Crack. I remember we would instinctually constantly abbreviate and nick-name one another. These are often the names I use: popular boys, like Smithy, or unpopular ones like Posser. In the case of Posser, it was a simple verbalization of his second name – Postlethwaite, then adjectivized as 'Possy'. David Black became Smithy because one day someone or other of the class had commented on his heavy build, that he was built 'like a blacksmith'. First names were nearly always abbreviated: Donald, of course, simply became Don, Anthony became 'Ant', but I suspect that this, although universal, cross-class, is more prevalent in working class situations (I mean, think of all those novels by writers like Waugh and Powell where boys at public school are referred to almost always by their surnames names.) Sometimes the nicknames I found in the transcripts I could tell had taken more tangled derivations from second names: Joe Green was Mossy to Terry, whilst

another boy surnamed Moss got called Stirling (after the racing driver). There was also re-nomination - our geography teacher, Mr Deeds, got a new name - Boardman - after Gary described how he was, 'so bored, man' in his classes. Strangely, for some reason that maybe a linguist might explain, except for simple adjectivization like Denny and Sandy, I cannot think of anyone's given name being subject to this process.

And, again, pretty masculinist, though, your focus?

Mm. There's the prostitutes, Mortie and Coalie. Yeah, it's not the same for everyone, how people of the same economic class experience it. In Baytown, women are excluded from clubs and pubs, I guess working class Baytown women rely on more informal networks of support - baby care clubs, gingerbread groups, or commercialized forms of this impulse in postal-shopping catalogues and Tupperware parties. They are subordinated more by structure – they have to build their own structures.

Do you still have reservations, ethics, have you, still, about this project?

It's funny, I was reading Rimbaud a couple of days ago, you know his *Illuminations*? He has a line in there:

*Let us return to our studies, despite the clamour of it all – consuming work that
collects—mounts in the masses.*

I thought, that's us, isn't it? it's a sort of motto for us, our endeavours? We study the masses' work, it provides us with data, and they have no control over what we say about them. We deliver the masses up, even when we think we might be writing about the local. I went back to Baytown to instrumentalize my forgotten background,

to forge the K formers' voices into material for my academic venture. I sought out Smithy, Posser, Barry, Ant', Jimmy, Dino, Sandra and Zoë. I console myself with the thought that by going back in that way, objectifying the people of my past, I did also sort of put it back in its place.

You probably found more about yourself from Baytown than what Baytown will ever find from you!

That's about right. My particular form of working-class voice is the Scholarship Boy inevitably homeless, exiled. But I went back to the Island and the town at first thinking that I was holding up a mirror to it all.

Novalis likens the novel to a mirror walking backwards along a road.

Yes, it's a cracked mirror, a bit like that image described by the exiled James Joyce – the one of an *insubordinate Irish servant's mirror*. Yes, my mirror was walking *backwards* but I never got a feeling of being home again in Baytown: my voice was so different from the voices I heard.