

Il Avilit

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Phil Brown



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Phil Brown was born in Surrey in 1987. He graduated from the University of Warwick in 2008 and now works as a secondary school English teacher in London. In 2009 he was shortlisted for the Crashaw Prize and won the Eric Gregory Award in 2010. He has had his work published in *Magma*, *Pomegranate*, *Dove Release: New Flights and Voices* (Worple Press, ed. David Morley), Dr. Rhian Williams' *The Poetry Toolkit* (2009, Continuum) *The Salt Book of Younger Poets* (ed. Roddy Lumsden) and the forthcoming *Lung Jazz: The Oxfam Book of Younger British Poets* (ed. Todd Swift) and *Coin Opera 2* (ed. Jon Stone). He is the Poetry Editor for the online magazine and chapbook publisher, Silkworms Ink.

‘Le monde moderne avilit.’

Charles Péguy

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TAUTOCHROME CURVES

*'A free people ought not only to be armed but disciplined;
to which end a uniform and well digested plan is requisite'*

George Washington, January 8th 1790

Seven years in love
a year in the third world
a one-hour exam
a long weekend
a ninety-minute movie
twenty minutes cardio-vascular
a two-hundred-and-ten-second song
a four-hour shift
a drained battery
a fixed-rate mortgage
a five-minute ad break
thirteen minutes charged at the local rate
two weeks at number one
twenty-four days in a leave-year
nine years of childhood
(fifteen for a fee)
seven years as a teen
sixty-six-point-twelve years of this
give or take.

‘il avilit la cité,’

SIR GAWAIN ON THE NORTHERN LINE

*'In god fayth,' quoth the goode knight, 'Gawan I hatte,
That bede the this buffet, quat—so bifalles after,
And at this tyme twelmonyth take at the another
Wyth what weppen so thou wylt, and with no wyy elles
on lyve.'*

And if fate should fling me onto
the electric rail of the tube's tracks
to be sliced open under steel wheels
let me be so mangled as to remain
unidentifiable and let the driver lose
no sleep.

Or if my end should be the slow sort
made more moral
with each cigarette I suck to the tip
allow me the time to close my accounts
and make good on old
promises.

Let death deal me the bravery to apologise
for piquant truths and pretty lies
and let my last words yield
more answers than questions
and the humility to acquiesce to
all suggestions.

Let my obituary eat up no more column
inches than those not born into old money
and should I be murdered on alighting
at Burnt Oak amid the fourth concentric
Zone let the artist of my death
escape.

The terms though not of my choice were agreed
and as I course viral underneath this metropolis
I leave my regrets at Embankment, Euston, Camden Town
a skin shed, baring my raw jelly.

No more words sir, my naked neck is
rightly yours.

The night deliquesces us all
under the looming street-lamp necks
to be human altrical
in the city's warp and weft.

A MINOR OFFENCE

It wasn't theft as such that night,
we tried to pay, had a train to catch.
No jobs were lost over the matter
I'm sure, just two coffees
and a slice of pie.

Worse crimes are committed
every second. Three murders
at least during the time it
took to read this poem.
At least.

Still, as I skim through
the underground, I offer
my seat to an elderly
or disabled woman
and hope that God was watching.

SOUTH BANK

Smoking in front of the Royal Festival Hall
adoring how strange we all are
on our private routes to
oh, just about everywhere there is to go.

The man with the thick black moustache
that intercepts some of his coffee,
the lady with dark purple lipstick
who does not look much like a lady,

the unslept man with his beautiful
greasy long hair who pokes
at his physics text-book whilst shivering
at the snidey breeze of the Thames,

young girls still hugging their new selves
made fresh for university with their proud
berets, and me hoping that someone
at this moment is finding me weird

for something I am doing or wearing.
Weird creatures of London, thank-you
for your efforts, I love you all.
I love you all, London eccentrics, I love you all.

SUTTON, MY SUTTON

a dusk-stained sky
darkens concrete paths
as two twelve year-old boys
park their bikes, and with twigs
interrogate a used condom.

POETRY LIBRARY

Unabashed scream of pre-teen paddlers in a fountain
wafts through the skylight
undermining the room's synthetic autumn.

A bronze bust of Dylan Thomas peers past me
to the pretty lady skim-reading Rilke
by the sliding shelves.

I am dwarfed by the nepotistic quarterlies lining the walls,
a paper network of favours
I will never be able to anything offer.

I replace the list of publishers in its plastic pocket,
bin my books
and go to splash my feet in the fountain.

TABA

Cut from the side of a mountain
in a world where the wind's a warm breath,

the transplant town under Israel's eyebrow
imports its own country's culture.

A pentagram of hotels photoshopped into the desert
like abaci hung in a jungle.

At sun-up the horizon's a grey forever
but Jordan's lights line the night's horizon.

I never think of you Kathryn,
but the buffet included a cauldron of hummus

and an inexhaustible pile of warm pittas.
I expect just reading those words makes you happy.

Friday's a faux-festival in the town
they parade a camel outside the sham shisha-bar

and a child does a short dance of sorts
before returning to his bracelet stall.

I got sun-stroke on the first day of Ramadan,
sweated it out under the hum of the air-con

eventually leaving into the warm roar of the evening,
perspiring in the breeze I broke fast.

Mumbling *shokran* at the waiter
as I pass him his tip in American dollars I realise

nothing. My hands are cut from coral, my arms
are unliftable and I realise nothing.

‘il avilit la nation,’

LOS AUSENTES

March 11th 2011

Being here, it is just impossible for us to imagine what it was like.

– Connie Sellecca

Joe Buttafuoco

contemplates breaking his birthday tradition of visiting the birthplace of Dee Snyder. Joey's letterbox breaks even this morning between colourful cards and zealous death threats.

Nina Hagen

wakes; her manager has filled her room with exactly fifty-six red balloons. She no longer bothers counting them. Somebody has sent her a hand-knitted zeppelin.

Rupert

and Deng spend the day at home with beautiful Grace and delicate Chloe. The family, as one, work on a Hokusai jigsaw puzzle.

Frau Schill

spends the day away from the window television unplugged photographs coaxed from loft boxes telephone bleating upturned at the table.

Jesus Ramirez

counts every olive in the bosque del recuerdo stopping just short of two hundred, deaf to the troubled trickle of the memorial's moat.

I

arrive early the tang of cheap caffeine wincing through a protracted morning briefing and having missed breakfast I know this will be a bad day.

BLACKOUT

June 17th 1940

Charles de Gaulle enjoys a breakfast of Yorkshire puddings and beef slices whilst surveying a Westerham skyline. Winston receives a phone call in the next room, his only utterance is to say 'we shall say nothing', before returning to his annotation of Charles' speech.

Nelson Rockefeller picks up a piece of litter outside the New York Museum of Modern Art. Folding the sandwich wrapper into a neat square, he sniggers at the suggestion that his exhibition of Mexican Art could have been hosted in Paris.

Mae Clarke's apostrophe eyebrows are possessive and, once noticed, I cannot remove my attention from the sadness of her smile.

Joan Fontaine, dressed down for a dowdy role, irks her director by calling 'cut' whenever she feels a phantom sweat bead break under the blondes.

L.C. Johnston walks the Fal-mouth Foreside coastline yearning for the horizon to be broken by the dark dots of warships. He imagines, with a smile, the sight of Dorothy Thompson strapped to a torpedo, unable to beat her breast.

And the waterline of **The RMS Lancastria** licked upwards as Captain Sharp ushered them in by the hundred. And when the hull shuddered from the shell, Reg Brown was two floors below deck, gutting a grapefruit; he felt the crack of a friend's fingers under his feet as he bolted from the cargo hold canteen. Father McMenemy furiously grabs the heavy coats from those about to plunge. The Kampfgeschwader 30 growls in the clouds, diving and climbing, blind to the tissue of arms and gasps dotting the spastic

Bob McGuire downs a jug of jitter sauce and dances the shag, lindy and bug in The Savoy. One John Martin notes it to be an uncouth sight to behold.

George Morris is displeased to read an article in *Time Magazine* suggesting that nothing pleases him.

Sydney had the warmest June day since 1931.

Kārlis Ulmanis, tells the people of Latvia "The government has resigned. I shall remain in my place, you remain in yours".

W. Bentley Hitchcock II crams furiously for the army's intelligence examination, teasing out forgotten gobbets from lost lessons, he must manifest an apparent proficiency in US History, General History, Trigonometry and English Grammar.

James Cagney sits in a picture palace watching *Brother Orchid*, wondering when he will be free of the Warners

Judith Barrett finally gets around to taking her sister to see *Pinocchio*, and cannot quite understand her distrusting attraction towards Jiminy Cricket.

meniscus. Grattidge comes to on his knees, hands pressed on the deck slicked by a marbling of blood and oil, broken by splinters. Hirst calculates his chances of making the jump as the port-side sinks to meet the apple-bob of snapped-neck soldiers done in by their own momentum. Cunard swims past the body of a black Labrador as he fights his way from the ship's suction. Winston receives a phone call in the next room, his only utterance is to say 'we shall say nothing', before returning to his annotation of Charles' speech

ENJOY THIS IMMORTALITY

In the century that has passed since this city has become great, it has twice laid itself out in the shape of a wheel. The ghost of the older one still lies among the spokes of the new.

– Roy Fisher

I slice from the anthracitic
smoker's heart of the country
to the benign provinces like keyhole
surgery, some towns
are pelted with sleet,
battered by bloated cloud
others are lit
through the shifting monk's patch above.
Droplets cling to my window but at such speeds
are jettisoned. I enjoy this
immortality for a further hour before
alighting in Leamington, soaked
at the sky's discretion.

‘il avilit l’enfant.’

ON THE WAY TO TORRIANO

The adult swagger of an eight year-old lad, suited and booted, strutting
around the reception of a Kentish Town wedding
in the earthy dinge of The Gloucester Arms.

The guest roster is eight-strong
in white polo-shirts, mini-skirts and crucifix necklaces
(recently reduced at Topshop).

An orbit of infants, keen for their first sip of Guinness,
the reassuring clementine hue of painted ladies
mediterraneanised by tan in a can.

About half eight,
John Hegley walks past on his way to a reading,
(a wheeled suitcase of his own books in tow).

Hegley pauses for a second outside the pub to switch
his suitcase hand.

The eight year-old lad runs out and stares into the inches
of glass between Hegley's eyes and the real world.

Not entirely sure what to do, his way being blocked
by a three-foot boy with a Mafioso gait,
Hegley offers him a copy of *Wilfred Owen – The War Poems*.

The boy snatches the book, throws it in a puddle, and says
*'I am a poststructuralist, and as such find
Owen's work of no literary worth outside of its pathetic context.'*

Hegley missed his reading that night,
and stayed in The Gloucester Arms
arguing about poetry with an eight year-old.