

HERECOMESEVERYONE

THE HEROES ISSUE

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'All slaves begin by demanding justice, and end by wanting to wear a crown.' - Albert Camus

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Editorial

When I was a considerable amount younger, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles were the absolute must-see cartoon. In my first year at primary school I went to at least five Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle themed birthday parties. The reason for this detour via Memory Lane is that when I read Dwayne Reads' poem about those same turtles, *Turtle Verse*, I felt an overwhelming urge to watch the original late eighties series. I took myself off to YouTube and settled in to enjoy myself just like I was six again. Obviously it was awful. Not just poorly aged, but everything about it confused me. To paraphrase Edward Gibbon: they weren't teenage; they weren't mutants; they weren't ninjas; they weren't turtles. The obvious point is that childhood heroes don't stand up very well in the cold hard light of the adult world, but it's more than that. No hero can stand up very well in the real world, even heroes who came from the real world don't do very well in the cold light of day, consider the Dambusters who are still revered in Britain, despite the fact that what they did would see them tried for war-crimes if carried out today. Anyone who has been rebuffed by their favourite celebrity in the hunt for an autograph will know the feeling of disappointment of meeting a hero who is not quite what they'd hoped.

One of the key inspirations for the issue was the Remembrance Ceremonies that will be held all across the world to mark the end

of the First World War this month, but the significance of November as a time of remembrance is far, far older than 1918. The reason that Hallowe'en (All Hallows' Eve) is at the end of October is because it marks the end of the pagan year: a time when pagans celebrated the end of the year and the lives of the dead; Christians used this as a convenient hook to hang their own remembrance ceremonies called All Souls' or All Saints' Day (or All Hallows' Day until relatively recently). It sounds very neat and convenient, but when it is remembered that the same men who negotiated the truce at the end of the First World War actually decided to drag the war out for a number of unnecessary hours so that the war could end on the 11th November at 11 o'clock. On the 11th of November, 1918, troops were ordered to attack by commanders who knew the war would be over in a matter of minutes and that the lives lost were of no benefit whatsoever. Douglas Haig, the most successful and controversial of the First World War's victorious commanders founded the poppy appeal, but many still curse his name for the needless slaughter of the Battle of the Somme. It should be remembered, though, that Haig did not have another choice, if he hoped to save France and Russia from collapse (in fact the Somme was considered by the Germans as a defeat, but nobody realised at the time that the 600 000 killed and wounded on the allied side were what victories in battles of attrition looked like).

The one hundred year anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo occurred during the fighting in 1915, but it seems odd that there were no remembrance ceremonies for the men who died there and the national guilt horizon defiantly stops at the turn of the twentieth century; before that there were only 'good' glorious wars. HCE's Adam Steiner explores the National Memorial Arboretum to try and find a sense of place for remembrance.

An individual's personal heroes can say much about them. My heroes tend to be people who achieved a lot with their individual skill or personality. Some of them are monsters, like Lenin or Genghis Khan, men whose ambition and drive allowed them to profoundly change the world around them through their force of will; others are humanitarians or great inventors, William Caxton or Edward Jenner, or people who brought great social change, like Seeborn Rowntree; some are much more mundane even than that, people like David Attenborough, Michael Palin or Professor Robert Winstone, who are just very good at presenting information to the world. The point is that all of these individuals reflect on me and where I came from. I have not met them and do not know them, but I have chosen to model myself on how I see them. Each represents a facet of an idealised person who I wish I was. They have things in common. They're all men, for a start, which speaks much of the bias society still contains in fa-

vour of men, but it also says things about who we relate to as people. By contrast, the hero of Emily Densten's story is a hapless passer by, abused by common geniality and T.W. Garland's *Action figures story explores perspectives upon our own heroes*.

As a final thought, Clive Dunn died this month, at the age of 92. He lived a good, long life, full of adventure and relative happiness. Why does that matter? Put simply, many people's ideas about the war, growing old, the Home Guard and veterans generally were informed by his most famous character the blundering, doddering enthusiast Corporal Jones in *Dad's Army*. Confusingly, though, Dunn was only in his forties when the show was made and when his very own number one record, *Granddad*, topped the UK charts he was only in his fifties. He had served during the Second World War as a soldier and spent much of the conflict in a German prisoner of war camp. He was not a 'war hero' in the sense that he did not die nor did he especially kill, but he is worth remembering as much for the fun he poked at war as for the fighting he did in it. We introduce our new regular columnist, Ben Nightingale to observe that there are limits to taking offence too seriously.



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Guy Legge

Philip Monks

Carol Berg

E A Boxer

T W Garland

S J Fowler

Mollie Davidson

Adam Steiner

Tune In and Turn On!



Radio Warwickshire is a new radio station created to share free media and inspire creativity. We offer magazine-style media for the web-savvy listener wishing to be entertained and kept well informed! Our team have a background in presenting, journalism and media production - all mixed up into one creative melting pot radio station! Get involved and share your talent at: www.radiowarwickshire.com

Hard Times For Tolerance

by Ben Nightingale

Inside Birmingham's Hall of Memory it is written on the wall:

'Of 150,000 who answered the call to arms 12,320 fell: 35,000 came home disabled.'

Facing this statement, on the other side, is written the simple command:

'See to it that they shall not have suffered in vain.'

One of the things for which our servicemen and women fought - and still fight - is our freedom to speak. It is now under threat, not just from jihadis who would take it from us, but from those among us who are determined we should cave in and give it away.

The recent film 'Innocence of Muslims' has received as much condemnation as the destruction which followed it. A Pakistani minister has issued a bounty for the film-maker's death but the film remains a greater scandal than the state-sponsored contract-killing it spawned. Historian Tom Holland has been publically pilloried for questioning the historical record of Islam. Channel 4 has scrapped his film and hung him out to dry. Salman Rushdie has said that his Satanic Verses would not be published today.

The UN General Assembly has passed a motion requiring all nations to criminalise blasphemy against Muhammad. When historian David Starkey broached the matter of culture and religion regarding the Rochdale sex abuses, socialist hack Laurie Penny called him a racist. Starkey must have seen it coming - her brother in arms, Owen Jones, likes to label others as 'Islamaphobes'.



'Islamaphobia' is a new idea used to denounce critics of Islam, an act of censorship which ought to be outrageous. Islam is an idea which one may turn to or from, like any other. To scrutinise an idea is not irrational, but the accusers mean to link creed with race or culture (most often Pakistanis and Arabs) with the intention of elevating 'Islamaphobia' to the level of racism - an intention that is itself intrinsically racist. What a difference ideas make - ever heard of a Jainist jihadi? Jains are required to bring no harm to any other living creature, sweeping the floor before them lest they step on an ant, wearing masks lest they inhale a bug. As Sam Harris puts it, the more fundamentalist Jains become, the less we need to worry about them - and anyone who believes we ought to fret about Jainism (or Anglicanism, or the Amish) as much as we fret about Islam 'is reading the wrong part of the newspaper' - the problem is not so much fundamentalists as the fundamentals.

The following scenario will illustrate the problem (Richard Dawkins would call this a 'consciousness-raising exercise'):

Currently playing on Broadway, is a musical called The Koran from the makers of South Park. In it, Muslim missionaries are mocked for proselytising for their prophet - Muhammad - to disinterested tribal locals. Previously, Parker and Stone lampooned the story of the prophet in an episode of South Park, where - to the refrain "dumb dumb dumb dumb dumb" - Muhammad emerges as a charlatan, and his followers as gullible fools.

Followers of this prophet have borne this ridicule stoically, in marked contrast to Mormons. In 1988, Salman Rushdie published The Moronic Verses. Mitt Romney issued a fatwa and offered money to suborn the author's assassination. Bookshops in the freedom loving Iran and Syria were bombed by Mormon fanatics. Rushdie spent nearly a decade under police protection. The fatwa remains unrevoked. The Vatican, Archbishop Robert Runcie, Rabbi Avraham Ravitz, Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits, Ayatollah Khomeini and Osama Bin Laden condemned the book as 'offensive' to Mormons and refused to condemn Mormon intimidation, bombings and murder. In 2005 after cartoons depicting Joseph Smith appeared in the Danish press, embassies in America, Canada and England were torched. 139 people were killed in the protests. Pakistani and Arab titles refused to republish the cartoons, notionally out of 'respect' for Mormonism but under clear threat of danger from Mormon extremists. The Vatican made the chilling state-

ment that free speech 'cannot imply the right to offend the religious sentiments of believers.' If this imagined scenario teaches us one thing, it must be this: different ideas have different outcomes.

The idea of a world-wide Mormon threat is absurd, but we are accustomed to the idea of an Islamic threat as being, in some bizarre way, normal. For this reason especially, Islam requires scrutiny and our free society grants citizens the right to do so. When Comedy Central claim that they censored South Park's depiction of Muhammad out of 'respect', it stands in stark contrast to their previous actions, as they have never had a problem airing attacks on Catholics, Scientologists, Job, Jesus or Joseph Smith. Clearly, the 'respect' Comedy Central are referring to is the kind of feudal obeisance demanded at gunpoint. Comedy Central and almost all other media are capitulating to blackmail and terrorism, surrendering our rights

and telling us that this is right. There is – of course – a problem with my argument. Innocence of Muslims was made with provocation in mind, not with any noble intent or artistic merit. It is difficult to defend it, but it is defensible in two ways. The first is that the reaction to it fits a pattern of violence in response to almost any perceived slight, regardless of the quality or intent. Satanic Verses is great literature, but Rushdie is still in danger. Submission is a powerful film, but Van Gogh was murdered for it. It need not be bad, it merely needs to be – that is enough.

The second point is that ridicule, as opposed to methodical analysis, is a valid form of scrutiny, for it is difficult to ridicule something which is not ridiculous. To some of us, the idea that God would entrust his final, perfect, incorruptible revelation to an illiterate, epileptic, hallucinating desert merchant in the dark ages is intrinsically ridiculous. Ridiculing this idea ought to be my prerogative. If I should be killed for making

such a statement, it would be shameful if our fellow countrymen condemned me, rather than my murderers, forgetting how many thousands died that we might speak. But what happens when we speak out now? We used to have C. Hitchens, who complained at the willing complicity of the West in its own muzzling. Theo Van Gogh died for making a film and is now posthumously damned. We still have a Harris and a Dawkins but, as they have sadly noted before, their fiercest critics are secularists and atheists who treat Muslims as a race and religion as a taboo.

Ayan Hirsi Ali continues to publish but lives in mortal danger and – like Tom Holland – is constantly fending off attempts on her credibility and integrity. Heroes all, and brave. And all the while they are fighting, the rest of us are giving away the freedoms for which our forebears gave their lives, in order respectfully to avoid causing 'offence.'

Social Enhancement

by John Kitchen

Dear Citizen,

Congratulations ! We are pleased to inform you that you have accumulated sufficient social credits to be invited onto our neuro-boost programme.

This new, and partially experimental project is offered only to those who have displayed an exceptional commitment to their community.

At this stage you must consider which personal asset you would most like to enhance.

- Long-term memory and recall
- Wit and creative responses
- Heroism

You have 10 days in which to sign up for the programme and a further 7 days to decide on the enhancement of your choice.

For further information log-on to our website.

Yours, for a better future,

The Social Enhancement Board

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Hero's Wife

by John Kitchen

You, soft machine,
Thinking machine, but
You didn't, did you – think ?
It was pure reaction, adrenalin hit, the
Headlong dive into dark depths, the
Flicker of flame, smoke and choke when
You forget how vulnerable flesh is
To bullet, knife-blade, IED,
To tyre, boot, fall of masonry.
What is the value of posthumous praise,
Citations, medals, a mention in dispatches,
And all those thanks from the men in suits,
Your name spoken in reverence ?
it's no bloody good to me.

HCE says:

John's use of shape and texture in his writing is a demonstration to all of the power of verse. His short, bleak, flash-fiction submission at once robs the individual of value and yet promises to add more.

John is one of the strongest writers currently submitting to HCE and, no doubt, a hero.

Why

by John Kitchen

cowboys and
army shoot 'em up
count to ten when you're
dead fantasy spill-over
steel-feel oiled & smooth the
deadly mechanics
in your grip the
power boys' toys creep
& crawl supersense
supersilent can't wait to see
the whites of their eyes action
trigger squeeze fire recoil
hit miss
code 4 not to freeze not
to cower do your bit
for your (not to let them down)
mates
don't think of sudden death limb
loss fanatics the threat
you don't recognise can't trust
(not even yourself) and they
keep coming coming
& don't ask
why

Swimming Lessons

by Akumbu Uche

Here Comes... Akumbu:
Akumbu Uche is a Nigerian writer. She holds a degree in Mass Communication and currently works as a TV Correspondent in Uyo

I am standing at the edge of the sea. The sun is out but I can feel a chill. The water in front of me is calm, blue. I hear voices telling me to jump. Another voice, an inner one tells me to walk away. Either way I am going to die. By drowning or from shame, which will it be?

August 2001. Port Harcourt. It is the start of the long vacation and my aunt has signed us up for swimming lessons at Elf Club, the one on Ogoja Street.

Thanks to five years of planking, frog-jumping and kneel-walking at my all-girls' military school, I am the textbook definition of physical fitness – lean, flexible and strong.

In water however, I find that my normally quick and agile limbs might as well be made of lead. To keep from sinking, I hold on tightly to the edge of the pool and practice kicks while my brothers and sister are excitedly racing one another.

Unlike the officers and airmen at school, Coach does not yell at me to “move those hockey sticks!” He yells quite all right, but his words are motivational; things like “I’m going to turn you into an OLYMPIC champion” and “You have the legs, the height, the WINGSPAN.”

Inspired and brimming with confidence, I take a deep breath and propel myself through the chlorinated water at the rate of one breaststroke per

minute until I get to the point where the bottom tiles dip into a gradient.

I need to get out of the water. Right now.

This happens several times a day and as such, I spend most of our lesson time in the shower stall. The way Coach sees it, I have a problem and it is not my bladder.

“You are AFRAID of the water and we are going to CONQUER that fear.”

At the time of this insight, my siblings have mastered the art of diving whereas I still have not made it past the slope.

I will be completely cured of my phobia, he assures me, once I make a jump from the deep end of the pool.

He goes on and on about upthrust and how the law of gravity is reversed in water. Seeing as my feet remain rooted to the ground, he drops the science talk and hurls himself into the pool. To show me that if it comes to it, he will save me from drowning.

“Just jump” he says, “jump.” Like it is the easiest thing in the world and the others agree. “JUMP, JUMP, JUMP!”

To me the water looks both inviting and foreboding at the same time. I drop my gaze to my feet and take backward steps.

I have never claimed to have Olympian guts.



Smile for me

by Emily Densten

I was standing against the wall of the subway station, waiting for the train to take me home after a long day of classes when he walked by. Although I was tired and had a long week ahead of me, I certainly didn't need cheering up. I mean, most people I know aren't exactly overjoyed to be waiting around in a dank, underground tunnel. But there was nothing wrong. This guy, whoever he was, just did not like the look of my natural face at rest.

“Smile, sweetheart. Maybe it'll never happen.”

He was not the first stranger to ask me to smile sweetly for him, and he wouldn't be the last. That realization, more than anything else, is what made me react. Because if I didn't say something to this bozo, he'd probably keep spouting his bullshit all across the city. And, yeah, he probably would anyway – but at least I wouldn't be letting him get away with it.

“Excuse me,” I called after him, pulling my headphones off. The train I'd been waiting for, the train this stranger had just gotten off, was pulling away. Well, I thought, I have to wait for the next one anyway. I started to follow in his wake. “Excuse me!”

He stopped and turned around just as I caught up with him. Though there was nothing extraordinary about his appearance, I took note of every detail. He looked about fifty, and had short brown hair just starting to grey. His eyes were blue, and he wore a tailored suit. His leather briefcase was an expensive one, just like the ones I sold to similar men every weekend.

“What did you just say?” I asked, refusing to break eye contact. My stomach was churning but I couldn't back down. “I think I must have misheard you. I'm sure I misheard you.”

“I was just saying to smile. No one likes to see a frown.” He actually chuckled.

“You've got to be kidding me, right? Because I cannot believe that one adult human

person who lives in this world can actually say something like that to another and be serious.”

His eyes shifted from side to side, and I could tell he was starting to feel embarrassed. Good.

“Do you smile all day long? Do you grin from ear to ear in every grimy subway station in the city?”

“Well no, but—”

“Well no, but—But no one expect you to be Pollyanna every waking fucking second, do they?” People were starting to watch us as they walked by, and a few who were waiting for the train were listening intently. I hoped another girl like me was walking by, maybe even one who'd had a run-in with him personally.

“I guess... well, no.” He looked right at me.

“How do you know “it” didn't already happen? How can you pretend you know anything about me?” I waited for a response, but he gave none except to look down at his mirror-shined dress shoes. “I'm not here to be set decoration for you,” I finished, walking past him toward the stairs.

My heart was pounding, and I was almost scared to look back, but I had one last thing to say. When I reached the bottom step leading up to the street, I turned back. “And my name is Ashley, not sweetheart.” I stomped up the rest of the steps, deciding I would take a cab home. Whatever sign of a frown he had seen on my face five minutes earlier was gone now.

I dreamed it happened that way, anyway. On my way home, all that night, and periodically throughout the week. Dreamed I stood up for myself, finally, for once. Dreamed I at least called him an asshole as he walked up the stairs. Dreamed I didn't just ignore him, get on the train, and go home. I dreamed for a long while that I didn't pretend it didn't mean anything.

Martial Arts Instructor

by Carol Berg

In his gi, with the wide hide-something
inside sleeves, how like an angel
he seems. Appears out of nowhere.
How he holds himself. How he bends.
How he bows to each student and grins.
Mirrors can't hold his image as he flutters
and kicks. Leaps off the ground with bare
feet. Speaks in the language of control.
How committed he is to the sharpened edge.
How he glides. How he looks you in the eye
as he sweeps you off your clumsy feet.

Greek God's Gift

by Philip Monks



He fought the Minotaur and yes, he won.
He's what you'd call a right good 'un.
Bit of a rotter too, bit of a ladies' man,
Knows a good time, likes a bit of fun.

Strong meat, nice pecs, all over body tan,
He can sort the rough from the bland.
If someone gets hurt, that's part of the deal,
Nothing like danger for keeping it real.

A jaw so granite you could stub your nose,
A skull so thick it can take life's blows,
Never had the thought 'I don't suppose...?'
Unreconstructed, like they were long ago,
With huge biceps to carry his Olympic ego. So,
Come and get him, if that's your idea of a hero.

Turtle Verse Piracy (Heroes and Villains)

by Dwane Reads

Ninjas verse pirates century's apart
Trained in the skills of mixed martial arts
From storm sewers hidden deep beneath our feet
Treasures of lost merchandise swashbucklers seek

Cereal box back toy patch for an eye
Secrets on trade cards coin scratched away
Logoed torn clothing emblazed with jewels
Sold to the masses as must haves'

Teenage mutant Turtles our Heroes in a half shell

Ninjas battle Pirates the reward being gold
Via Video pixelation so the story unfolds
Raise Jolly Roger skull and bones
Prepare for attack the defeated will hang
Switch on... let battle commence



Hero Was Always Villainous

by Dwane Reads



Hero turns villain in the public eyes
Secrets untold are realised
Allegations speculations of the traumatised
Childhood hero evil to the marrowbone
In our homes appearing via goggle box
How the millions wrote sat and watched
Perceptions altered caught found out

Scarlet Fields

Adam Steiner visits the National Memorial Arboretum for HereComesEveryone



*"I have said before/That the past experience revived in the meaning/Is not the experience of one life only/
But of many generations — not forgetting."*

-T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*.

When shown the first design of the Victoria Cross, Queen Victoria picked fault with the motto which initially read: "For Bravery", commenting that all of her soldiers were brave and so the VC was only to be awarded for acts of exceptional bravery in the face of personal danger. The revised medal reads "For Valour" as suited for its purpose.

It is worth bearing this brief anecdote in mind as you enter the National Memorial Arboretum site, a former quarry of 150 acres, operated by 160 volunteers with the support of the British Legion. It is almost perfectly flat and coated in a fine layer of grass, the memorials themselves and the arrangements of trees, varying from dense copses to nine-by-nine

squares representing the traditional fighting formation used to defend against cavalry attacks. After casting your gaze along the wide expanse, the eye is immediately drawn to the central Armed Forces Memorial, the highest point on the site, where nearly 16,000 names are recorded in strict alphabetical order; the only exception given to groups of comrades who died together in service. This principle is repeated throughout the site, where all troops of the various regiments and military organisations are given equal recognition, equally brave, and all having made the ultimate sacrifice.

After entering the site, we wait outside the chapel, nominally Christian, but open to all faiths as

a place of worship and remembrance. Here we meet the first of many volunteers, David Markland, who served in the Royal Navy for 33 years. We talked about his experiences meeting people from all over the world who come to visit the National Memorial Arboretum. David then introduced us to Paul Hughes, a keen historian and school teacher with a particular interest in World War I. For just a couple of pounds, he and other volunteers act as personal guides and expand on the history of the many regiments. Paul was keen to answer many of our questions on the nature of remembrance and the Arboretum's relationship to the history of Britain's armed conflicts.

Moving away from the chapel

(which is worth visiting in its own right) I was struck by the intense atmosphere of care and precision given to establishing a sense of place, a physical connection between distant sites of conflict, a regiment's home soil and the act of remembrance itself, through the use of regional stone or battlefield artifacts transposed from their original places of meaning to the Arboretum site, many of them remade into new shapes. The effort spent upon these details, though you would never notice them unless you were guided by an expert, remains quietly inspiring. Like a physical tour through private lives, visitors walk along the paths and at various points routes converge and people meet; it is this melding of historical narratives and personal experiences which help to give the site its richness as thousands of people visit every day, and share their memories of dead comrades, relatives and wartime experience, all of which adds to the heritage of the Arboretum itself.

There is a sense of contrast between the memorials and the trees, all persisting against time, inviting both erosion and regeneration, but where the memorials are allowed to weather and show their age, the trees shed their autumnal leaves, but will also grow new shoots again in the spring. This conscious act of preserving memory, alongside the relentless cycles of nature and time, gives the site a strange and slightly fantastical tension, hovering in a state between permanence and flux.

Of all the memorials within the site, I found the Basra Memorial Wall most affecting, the original stone was designed for dry, de-

sert conditions of Iraq and so it is sunk into the foundations of a replica wall that features the original brass plaques for every soldier. It is the human signs, the continuation of life, which are most poignant; messages from friends and loved ones to the disappeared. I thought to read one of the cards, no one would have to know, I could simply pick it up and read of the thoughts and feelings of the living to the dead and discover a brief insight into their lives, but I didn't. Not that I would judge others who explore these endless narratives that reach on after death, but to me it felt too private and intimate a correspondence, to eavesdrop on heartfelt words meant for someone else.

When comparing the different memorials, by style, simplicity or even scale, I noted a faint sense of competition as regiments jostle for position and military status: the more money you have, the more ornate and spectacular the monument. As with the ornate cemeteries of London, Glasgow and other former industrial cities, your place in the acropolis is determined by your standing in society and how much you could afford to spend. In the Arboretum the situation is both simpler and also more complicated. Whomever is funding a given monument, be that a charity, community or regimental association can request or select a site within the Arboretum grounds, though the land itself is not bought or sold. However, some memorials may be more prominent or have a greater number of VCs than the next regiment, or be civilians even, but it seems fitting that all who gave their lives in service must be remembered equally. As Paul guides towards the rear

of the site, where the River Thames flows and meets up with the much larger Trent, the trees on either side lose their formality and lean thicker around the path. Paul reminds us that "every tree is special to someone" and we discuss the somewhat temporal mode of an arboretum as a kind of living memorial to the dead. The site is maintained by a continual lease and while some trees may be relocated within the site according to space, the understanding, a kind of gentleman's agreement, is that many of these trees will remain in situ, in perpetuity. We also talk about the similar sites graves in France, Belgium and all across Europe where there are dedicated graves where British and troops from other nations are buried.

In a secluded glade, next to the river, lies the Shot At Dawn memorial. Here 35 wooden posts fan out in a crowded semicircle, each one represents an British soldier executed during the First World War, with only a small black plaque detailing their name, rank and, where known, the age at which they died. Many



of the soldiers were shot for acts of cowardice, desertion or other petty crimes such as theft and have since been pardoned and are remembered here as victims of a more brutal form of military justice. Those who committed

more serious crimes, rape and murder, are not remembered. It is very interesting to walk among the posts and read the young age of many of the troops (some as young as 17), no doubt terrified by the intense bombardment and mass carnage of the WWI trenches, either conscripted into military service or having lied about their age in order to volunteer in a noble act of patriotism which can seem naïve, given that the mechanisation of warfare was only just around the corner. Tellingly, none of the plaques detail the crimes each man stood accused of, these are forgotten, and the central stone figure, young in the face and blindfolded, highlights



the modern understanding of the effects and impact of war on troops, now acknowledged as post-traumatic stress disorder or shell-shock, as it was then known, though in spite of this, many of these soldiers actions were written off as cowardice and a lack of good character under fire.

The focal point of the site is the Armed Forces Memorial. Strongly influenced by the layout of Stonehenge, it attempts to echo historic primal landmarks as it charts the death tolls of 20th century conflicts onwards through a kind of 'processional way'. It must be visited last, the crowning glory in a site that is almost entirely flat, with a sense of anticipation at rising several feet and seeing the rest of the site from above. There is a central stairway and then a winding path which spirals around it, like Glastonbury Tor: conceived as a way for people to experience something of a journey to the top. Paul mentions similarities to buildings in other countries, such as a minaret in Iraq with a mosque at the top.

The memorial sits atop two sculpted stepped hills circling the central block of Portland stone, an iron poppy laurel at its heart, an overlooking obelisk from the East and wrapped around them: cool stone walls curved in two large Cs the names of every serving member of the British Armed Forces who has died in action or off-duty due to terrorist attacks since 1946 is written in straight and dignified columns. There are reminders throughout that some conflicts are by their nature less well-remembered than others. This serves as a reminder of several 'forgotten wars' in which British troops have either fought or intervened as part of peacekeeping operations, such as the Korean War, Vietnam and Bosnia, including those killed by terrorism off-duty.

The Armed Forces Memorial is immediately strange and ethereal. The off-white walls, not dissimilar to that of the average Brit-

ish living room, create a delicate surround-sound effect so that our words reverberate for many echoes. As we discuss the loss of submarines and their crews or the number of British incursions on foreign soil, we read dates and names from the cold stone. You stare and follow the mesmeric columns of text, a solipsistic tunnel vision overwhelms as you feel utterly alone with only the broken narratives revolving around you for in both text and speech, humbled and awed by the vast weight of guilt-edged stone.



At this point we met another volunteer, David Faul, who is on hand with information and support for visitors of Armed Forces Memorial. He told us more about the two sets of untitled bronze statues by the artist Ian Rank Bradley (who also designed the image of the queen's head on a coin) that form a kind of narrative tableau between life and death at the heart of the Arboretum.

The first part depicts a wounded soldier borne above by his comrades, one hand hanging limp from the stretcher's edge. To the right of them sits his grieving mother and father and to the left his wife and child, all of them left behind with their grief and sorrow, these other players are designed to remind us of the wider impact of a soldier's death upon their friends and family.



The central scene of brothers in arms is modelled on the death of Patroclus, who died in Achilles's borrowed armour and was carried off the battlefield on a shield by his comrades, calling on heroic legend as part of the piece. The male figures are quite beautified in the sheer muscularity of their bodies, as literal towers of strength, but this does nothing to detract from the sense of life slowly ebbing away. Each of the soldiers has their own distinct features, a reminder of the individual in war; any sense of the grandiose is announced through the expressions of the actors themselves, not in the scene itself.

David related that the artist was once asked whether or not the soldier held aloft on the stretcher was meant to depict someone dead or merely dying. Bradley replied that on some days he was working the wounded soldier appeared to already be dead, but at other times, the work of the day had made his face change and the expression was more of someone close to death, still clinging on to life. The second statue group on other side is more spiritual with the striking image of the same soldier, half carried,

half dropped by a female soldier and a Gurkha, as a corpse.

Perhaps the most striking visual crescendo of the Memorial, is the small gap between a monumental pair of stone doors, where at 11am on the eleventh day of the eleventh month a single ray of sunlight shines through, illuminating the poppy laurel at its centre. Next to it a tall figure, the epilogue of the sculpture, points to a green and blue sliver, where the land and the sky meet, as if pointing on to some ultimate destination of spiritual afterlife or perhaps meant to depict the repatriation of members of the armed forces as they are returned to home soil for burial by their family and friends.

It is important to remember that no bodies are buried at the National Memorial Arboretum and there is no religious emphasis outside of the chapel near the entrance. The site is full of achingly conceived statues in the classical style and more nods to heroic mythology. The brilliantly designed Paratroop Regiment Memorial features the Greek legend, Perseus riding Pegasus atop a stone plinth, signifying the flying mobility of the troops, contrasted with the far grittier

image of a paratrooper pulling his heavy pack up a slope, a testament to the strength and determination of the armed forces.

The grandness of the statues and allusions to classical figures are contrasted with the more simple tributes of poppies, palm crosses, photographs and small messages to the deceased. It is impossible for the casual visitor to imagine the feelings of those who come to the National Memorial Arboretum as a dedicated act of remembrance, when confronted by the rows of trees and artistic tributes, but the site gives everyone a place to go, whether to grieve or simply to pay their respects to the fallen. Whether you question the motives of foreign invasions or peacekeeping missions, past or present, it is important to recognise that all the names that are recorded in the Armed Forces Memorial, and on each regimental memorial within the site, represent an individual who gave their lives for others, and whether or not they might be termed "heroes" in the classical sense, they are all of them equally brave, and here they are all remembered.





Dead Pop Stars

by Gary Longden

It has come to my attention that the calibre of dead pop stars,
And their deaths,
Is not what it once was.
I just thought that I should mention
That it is my intention to point out
Whitney Houston was not the greatest,
Or rather, that her greatest, was in fact, Dolly Parton's.
If greatness is measured by a capacity to consume alcohol, crystal meth, downers and cocaine – then
she is of course, right up there
Yet that is overlooked by record company execs,
Who always expect
To increase product prices,
And ignore all the vices ,
Of the deceased.
To keep them in alcohol, crystal meth, downers and cocaine
Just the same – ironic isn't it?
Or was that Alanis Morrissette?
Taking waiting to exhale just a little too seriously,
A life slipped by as it sank beneath the cooling bath waters of a Beverley Hills suite
As if being baptised into a holy sect, where a premature death is the ultimate encore
Amy Winehouse lived her surname , rather than the dream,
and just two albums into a career,
What Dusty Springfield would have turned out in a year,
She is now feted because she has been "lated"
Why? Because of her great output? No
Because she did it, the rock n roll suicide which we all love to watch,
But not participate in, or die of – there we stop short
For celebrity death is still a spectator sport
Michael Jackson's doctor is now in jail just for giving his fans what they wanted, fifty shows in London
from a body too frail to cope, too riddled with dope
The greatest black dancer ever, apart from Sammy Davis Jnr, the greatest black singer apart from
Marvin Gaye, the greatest performer apart from James Brown, the greatest entertainer, apart from Nat
King Cole, even in death they cannot live up to the standards we set them in life.
Because rock n roll death is just not what it used to be:
Buddy Holly had to be brought down in a plane,
John Lennon shot just to stop,
But hey, both won fame, for what they had achieved.
Jim Morrison completed a life's work in a summer,
Three decades it took Joe Strummer, before checking out
Jimi Hendrix defined an instrument, no doubt,
Before saying "beat that" not "beat it" – forty years on, no-one else has
We expect too much, and accept too little
From departed lips coated with drying spittle
Not a purple coloured haze, just a purple coloured hearse
An ignominious demise which confirms the worst
of dead pop stars and bad taste
Proof beyond the grave of talent laid to waste
And that in your quest for immortality
You'll need more than your funeral played live on MTV.

HCE says:
Gary, a DJ on Radio Wildfire, speaks out with black candour of the decline in standards of the dying. His ringing damnation echoes the true value of the 'Rock and Roll' lifestyle, whilst emphasising the price of glory.

Memoirs of the Irish Revolution

by Eugene Egan

Sean Doyle should have been happy living in Dublin, but he wasn't. He'd upset a local traveller clan and had somehow managed to get suspended from the Republican Movement for bringing it into disrepute. This was due to socialising with anti-social elements and he was now on amitriptyline following advice from his psychiatrist. "It wasn't meant to turn out like this", he mused, lying down on his bed contemplating his next move.

Sean was an idealist who had come to Dublin to fight for the Irish Republic and to free Ireland from 800 years of British rule. Although born and bred in Birmingham, he strongly identified with his Irish roots. His father was Irish and his mother's parents were Irish. He went to a catholic school and church in Moseley in Birmingham. Many of his classmates were also of Irish descent. Sean went on regular family holidays as a child to Limerick City, in Ireland. As he got older and visited Irish pubs he would listen to Irish men and Irish women singing rebel songs about patriots who heroically fought against British rule in Ireland. Now Blair's talk is all peace.

He'd read everything there was to know about Ireland's heroic struggle against British Colonial rule. He read about Wolfstone who led the 1798 Uprising. The brave and heroic men of Easter Week, such as James Connolly and Patrick Pearse, who took up arms against the British in 1916 and who were then subsequently executed. He was inspired by the 1981 Hunger Strikers who had endured a slow agonising death rather than be criminalised by the withdrawal of political status under Thatcher's government. As far as Sean was concerned it was time to live the revolution rather than merely reading it. It was time for action!

He'd been living in Dublin for about six months, and had managed to secure a single story two bedroom house on Eugene Street, behind St Teresa's Gardens in the Southside of Dublin. Living there brought back memories of drinking in The Dubliner in Birmingham, where he grew up. However Sean's new landlord recently had a breakdown and wasn't aware he'd moved into the house as he'd fled to England. Apparently Sean's absentee landlord had had enough of the police and the psychiatric services, who wanted to speak to him.

Sean had to leave his previous address in Rathmines in a hurry after it had been raided by armed

detectives. He had managed to evade being pulled in for questioning but unfortunately his comrade, Liam, was arrested and taken into custody and released a couple of days later. He was not happy with Sean.

The night before the raid Sean was to pass on a message to Liam that a raid was imminent and to stay away from home, but he'd got too drunk singing rebel songs in the 'war office' on Cork Street and failed to pass the message on. To top it all he was fretting over a cheque he gave to a local Republican businessman as it belonged to his absentee landlord and was worried it would bounce.

He didn't care too much about his landlord as they had a bad name in the annals of Irish history, due to English absentee landlords charging exorbitant rents to the Irish people to live and farm their own land, but the Republican businessman was a different matter.

He needed cheering up. Then he got a call from Liam.

"Do you want to make amends, Doyle. There's a function tonight for the POWs."

"Yeah, no problem, I'm up for that Liam."

"You're lucky I never had ya whacked, Doyle, anyway it's in Monaghan so I'm asking Paddy to drive us up. It should only take a couple of hours."

Although relieved that he had got back on the good side of Liam, he warily agreed to go to Monaghan that night. Sean was extremely weary of Liam. He had a very serious side to him including a bad temper. Nobody crossed him and lived to tell the tale.

"I'll get back to you, Doyle. Soon as I've spoken to Paddy and make sure you answer your phone."

Well, thought Sean, nothing can go wrong. We're only going to a Republican function to raise money for the prisoners' families. It'll be no problem. We'll just head up there, sing a few rebel songs and get drunk. It will be a good craic.

The phone rings again. It's Liam.

"Okay, Doyle, I've spoken to Paddy. He's meet-

ing us straight after his finished work in the ‘war office’ at six o’clock so make sure you’re there on time.”

“I’ll be there, Liam.”

“Oh yeah, and don’t mention it’s a Republican function. I’ve told Paddy it’s a nurse’s party we’re going to.”

“What about Mad Pat?”

“Tell him to be there, too.”

“No worries, Liam, see ya later.”

Sean’s mood was beginning to lift now he was on speaking terms with Liam and was looking forward to linking up with the other lads too. He phoned Mad Pat and told him to be at the ‘war office’ for six o’clock. Sean didn’t trust Mad Pat, thought he was too unstable, he’d grown weary of Mad Pat’s antics, too, always pulling you aside and asking if you wanted to join a new revolutionary army he was setting up.

“Where would we get the money to buy the arms,” Doyle asked him.

“Easy we just rob some banks and all the money goes to buy arms, do ya know what I mean, Doyle,” staring at him with his mad eyes, “and I mean all the money goes to the movement and I’m the Chief of Staff.”

Doyle was fed up with all these wannabe ‘Chief of Staffs’: there was no shortage of them in Dublin. It certainly had its fair share of lunatics, who couldn’t make up his mind if he wanted to be a hari krishna or a freedom fighter. When he wasn’t at the temple attending hari krishna meetings and chanting, Pat was spending most of his time reading Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and *The Art of War*, or browsing the internet looking up *The Anarchist’s Cookbook*. Unfortunately whilst experimenting with home-made explosives in his shed Mad Pat had seriously injured himself and had the burns and scars to prove it.

When he arrived at the ‘war office’ Doyle was amused at Paddy’s eagerness to get to the ‘nurse’s party’ at O’Reilly’s Bar.

“Ahh it’s gonna be great craic tonight up there,

lads. Can’t fucking wait. lads” said Paddy. “Don’t worry I’ll get you there lads.” Sipping his Guinness, Doyle was intrigued to find out how Paddy would react when he gets there and realises there is a party but it’s for political prisoners, and there won’t be any nurses.

Mad Pat, Liam and Doyle were Republicans, but they needed a car and driver, and Paddy, although not a Republican, was the man for the job. He was a decent hardworking, stocky chap who didn’t have any time for politics but he could be trusted. Sean suspected that Paddy felt that he and the others were misguided but that was harmless enough.

Driving to Monaghan was taking longer than they expected, but Paddy was happy enough. “I’m gonna book into a B&B for the night as I’ll need to be up early tomorrow, if that’s okay lads. I’ve got work in the morning. Well, ya never know, lads, I might get lucky with one of the nurses. I’ve got some condoms, too. Always best to be prepared,” said Paddy excitedly. It was all Paddy talked about. He couldn’t wait to get there.

“Not a problem, Paddy. We’ll sleep in the car,” replied Liam. The journey up to Monaghan went well despite the potholes and the rain they arrived a little late but safe. Paddy managed to get a room at a B&B where he’d quickly washed and shaved.

“You look grand, Paddy,” said Sean.

“A million dollars,” added Liam.

Arriving at O’ Reilly’s Bar, Paddy wanted to buy all the lads a drink, but Liam insisted on getting the drinks. Doyle bought the next and Mad Pat the one after that. The band was playing rebel songs and everyone was in a happy mood as the Guinness was flowing, including Paddy who kept asking when were the nurses coming?

Sitting in O’ Reilly’s, Mad Pat was up to his antics as usual telling Doyle he’d got a shotgun and a baseball bat and was he interested in joining up with him. Doyle told him he needed time to think about it. Mad Pat’s behaviour was causing Doyle to increasingly question the way the liberation struggle was going. “I didn’t come to Dublin to get involved in these antics,” Doyle thought. Also he couldn’t relax as he was still fretting over the cheque should it bounce. He knew the punishment for defrauding the Republican Movement was severe and was considered a kneecapping offence.

He needed a drink.

Liam has the job of telling Paddy that the 'nurse's party' had been cancelled. Fortunately Paddy took the news kindly as he was having a good time anyway.

"Ahh, no worries, I'm having a great craic but how come you know all these people in here, Liam?"

"Oh this is a Republican bar, that's why I know them all," replied Liam.

"You sure ya haven't been blagging me, Liam?"

"I'm sorry Paddy, I was having you on about the nurses party. It's a republican function for the prisoners."

"You're a blaggard Liam and a piss taker, it's a good job I love ya," he smiled.

Paddy knew that he'd been hoodwinked into taking the lads to Monaghan, but to hell with it. He was having a good time and even belted out a few ballads himself.

Sean was happy and simultaneously relieved that he took it well, as he knew Paddy had a bad temper and could handle himself. But neither was it a good idea to get on the wrong side of Liam as he was a dangerous man to upset. That's why it was left to Liam to tell him.

Walking back to the B&B where the car was parked Paddy left the keys with Liam and said goodnight while the lads tried to make themselves as comfortable as possible in the car. However, it was so cold it was hard to get to sleep and the rain was beating down against the roof so Liam decided to drive back to Dublin- leaving Paddy asleep in the B&B.

"What about Paddy," asked Sean, worried about his reaction when ad Pat woke up in the morning to find his car gone. "How's he going to get to work or get home."

"Jesus, it's fucking freezing. Paddy can look after himself," retorted Liam.

The truth was that nobody gave a dam about Mad Pat as they were all still pissed and just wanted to get back to Dublin. At least with the engine running it would be warmer, so Liam started up the car and they all headed home. Goodbye Monaghan and goodbye Paddy.

The return journey was a haze and a blur apart from the occasional jolt out of their drunken sleep, due to Liam scraping the odd wall and fence. The alcohol and lack of sleep was affecting his ability to drive properly.

Dumping the car, minus wing mirrors, in St Teresa's Gardens, Liam and Sean bid each other farewell and headed their separate ways. Sean hurriedly walked along Cork St till he reached Eugene St. "I need my bed," he thought. "I'll worry about Paddy in the morning."

Hours later and sobering up with the usual hangover, Sean's phone was hopping. It was probably Pat. He was too frightened to answer it. God I hope he hasn't reported the car stolen thought Sean. I better phone Liam.

"Hello"

"It's Sean."

"You best keep ya head low for a while, Sean."

"Me! It was your idea to drive back and leave him there."

"I know, Sean, but he's blaming it on you."

"What do you mean?"

"He's been phoning me and asking have I seen that English bastard. He said he's going to kill you and he's going to enjoy doing it. He sounds really angry just give him a bit of time to calm down. Keep ya head down and leave it with me Sean."

"Okay, Liam. Speak soon."

Sean was getting anxious and agitated and took one of his anti-depressants to calm down. "I came to fight for Irish freedom and follow in the footsteps of Ireland's heroic martyrs. It wasn't for this fucking shite," he pondered. "I need to get the fuck out of this. I can't take it anymore. I'm seeing a psychiatrist whose put me on medication, been suspended from the Republican Movement and now I've got people wanting to kill me."

Doyle felt it was time to return to England. It was time to move on he'd had enough of living the revolution and playing the patriot game. It was time to go. No more heroes for him anymore.



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Epstein's St. Michael Trouncing the Devil by Guy Legge



My Orwell - Right or Left

By E A Boxer



To many, George Orwell represents heroism and journalistic integrity in service of the Left. A lone figure who boldly went wherever the need was greatest; where upper-class exploitation undermined the nobility of the working classes in the fallout of the industrial revolution and beyond. To others, Orwell was a rabid propagandist, painting a one-eyed and ultimately naïve picture of the noble poor from the biased remove of his Eton education and his deliberately played-down “lower-upper-middle class” background.

These days, Orwell is chiefly recognised for two things: his essays and articles in which he sought to “turn journalistic writing into an art”, with both honest and clarity of prose, such that it became as transparent as a window pane, presumably one overlooking the truth; and his all-pervasive influence on popular culture, most of which came about through his modern

classic, 1984 and his more “autobiographical” works on poverty, such as *Road To Wigan Pier* and *Down And Out In Paris And London* and not forgetting the popular school fable of *Animal Farm*.

However, questions still remain over Orwell’s hold on the modern world of journalism; is he a hero to be imitated or a false prophet who over-simplified in order to editorialise? Let’s start at the beginning: far from being poor, young George’s family were quite comfortably-off, in spite of the early death of his father, colonial investments and pensions kept them safe and secure from genuine hardship. Especially as he enjoyed a scholarship education at several prep-schools (designed to ready young lads for Eton/Harrow and on to Oxbridge). His article on the school of St. Cyprians, *Such, Such Were The Joys*, is often seen to be a grossly misrepresentative account of his time there. Yes, his first word was no doubt “beastly” and during his time at the school he frequently wet the bed, but both the owners of the schools and his former classmates tell a more mannered and prosaic account compared to Orwell’s tales of ritual bullying and abuse. Even in a relatively straightforward tale as this, we already note Orwell’s flexibility with the truth to help tug at the heartstrings and engender sympathy for his chosen cause, in this case, himself.

Another schism that seems present from Orwell’s earliest days is the strong determinism of

his background, and how, especially in Edwardian England, classes were strictly divided and so any initial “forays” into the lives of others, was coloured by unknowing, an entrance into a completely different way of life, and as with many colonial experiences, a hint of voyeurism at venturing into the exotic, a boy’s own adventure with added consequence of responsibility as he was in a privileged position to report factually from places where many would never dare to go.

This notion is present in both metaphorical and the physical sense of Orwell venturing down into the dark, dirty and hot rabbit-hole of the coal mines in *The Road To Wigan Pier*. His common revulsion at the black dust and dirt and his intense description of the sheer muscularity of the poorly-fed men working eight to ten hours a day, bent double, highlight the contrasts between them, both physical and mental. Where the workers are familiar with the coalface, Orwell is cringingly disgusted, and where the miners are physically strong in spite of their deprivation, Orwell is already sickly, gaunt in the face and weak.

Along with his deep personal investment in literature and what he saw as the need to be politically aware and active beyond the familial support of union representation, many of Orwell’s background perspective, his way of seeing the world, must have seemed alienating and jarring to the day-to-day

trudge of the miners, tramps and soldiers he met, working only to survive, not to live. Because of this, his neatly managed sojourns into areas of poverty and genuine destitution, his attempts cross the border of journalistic objectivity, can seem forced and leave him no closer to the life experience of the lower classes, making him that worst kind of middle-class outsider, unwelcome at both ends of the societal spectrum. However, I also have immense respect for Orwell's willingness to try and bridge the awkward gap of his class and escape his background. Through his investigative journalism he carried out some of the first investigative reporting, albeit under the influence of the American author, Jack London, who got down and dirty with "The People of The Abyss" (in the East End of his metropolitan name-sake) in 1902, published in 1903. Had Orwell retained his pith helmet as a policeman in Burma, adopted a bowler and braces to join the civil service or affected foppish cuffs to become absorbed by the bloated self-congratulation of literary London, we might be less conscious today of the need to be aware of the lot of those less fortunate than ourselves, who live and die within the walls of poverty, entombed within a secret society that is all prosperity on the surface, while hiding the rot beneath, the detritus of empire.

A great example of this is Orwell's heavy-handed but intense account of what happens to the working classes when admitted to poor quality hospitals in his essay, How The Poor Die. But that tainted Orwell's great escape was his lame fascination

with the assumed nobility and condescending innocence of the poor at large. He cites a man who always kept himself clean-shaven as he tramped from town to town and a homeless street artist who paraphrased Wilde in arguing that all who live in the gutter should keep their heads high and remain looking at the stars – a hollow consolation for the poor and the needy, a living by-product of the selfish and greedy. Orwell used some of his writing (especially book reviews) to force these narrow, rose-tinted ideals, how he saw the world, onto others; when in reality, the masochistic effects of his tramping and harsh way of life no doubt exacerbated his ill-health and helped bring about his tragically early death. In that sense, he was as much conservative in his view of an old-fashioned England and a simpler way of life, an idealist's future that was slowly being pulled from beneath his feet with the privations and global terror of the Second World War.

Another aspect of the journalist as hero; Orwell is commonly the thinking man's fighter, uncompromising in his beliefs and willing to risk his life in their name. He was famously rejected for military service in WWII (and instead spent his days reading BBC propaganda over the wireless in Room 101 of broadcasting house) but in his slightly healthier days he had gumption enough to fight fascism in the Spanish Civil War, joining one of the many militia groups representing working Spaniards and European intellectuals keen to fight against Franco's fascist dictatorship, and getting shot in the throat and betrayed by the Russian communists for his trouble, although he did get a book out of

it. In this regard, Orwell displays his greatest journalistic rigour in his account of the following events, *Homage To Catalonia*, and in his prediction that the interference of Nazi Germany in the Spanish struggle, exemplified by the German fire-bombing of the Spanish town of Guernica and immortalised in the crucifixion-style painting by Picasso, would lead to a greater conflict to spread Nazi ideals across the world was proved right in 1939.

If poor George had one terrible fault as a moral being, it was, in a very Wildean sense, that of consistency, choosing only to tell the truth when it suited him. In two of his most famous essays of his service in Burma, Orwell gave straightforward accounts of shooting an elephant and watching it die ("Shooting An Elephant") and describes the humiliating alienation he felt from the native Burmese as they laughed at this skinny imperialist figurehead, a British policeman no less, trying to wield a giant rifle in order to shoot an even bigger marauding elephant. And in "A Hanging" he gives a moving tale of a man about to be executed for some petty theft and on his way to the gallows, side-stepping a puddle. For Orwell this is something of an epiphany as the man about to die gives confirmation that he is a thinking, sentient being which awakens Orwell to the cruel futility of capital punishment, a similar point made by Existentialist poster-boy, Albert Camus.

So, we have an elephant face-off which confirms that while suppressed peoples may fear their occupiers they will rarely respect them; and philosophical meander of what it means to

end the life of another human being, these are not meant to be straight news pieces, merely lessons learnt from experience, and yet there very little tangible evidence that Orwell either killed an elephant or was ever present at a hanging in all his seven years with the Burmese police – he simply fails to tell the truth and builds ideological fictions around hollow cores. As with much of his future writing, particularly when looking back upon past events of his life, the political or moral aims take precedence over the facts or even realism. A prime example of this: when Russia was Britain’s most timely ally in World War II, before the vast wealth, resources and manpower of the USA came onto the scene, Orwell remained its greatest critic, like all good journalists he was determined to unveil the manifold deceptions of Stalin’s regime and to highlight the revolution betrayed as a fault of Communism at that time, not with the principles of socialism at large, and doing his best to remove National-Socialist stain of Fascism.

This argument hit a brick wall of denial and ignorance from a patriotic readership and war-minded governments alike. It was later given full hearing when we re-read the warnings of ideological cannibalism and the threat of future world war in *Homage To Catalonia*, and through the steady slide into Cold War apartheid as parts of occupied Europe were once again carved up and to several victors went the spoils of Germany and Eastern Europe, with focus later fixing upon the push and pull of East and West Berlin. In simple numerical terms the immense slaughter and cruelty of the Russian gulags and exile which has since been calculated

to far surpass the holocaust in both its scale and the number of dead, Orwell was both prescient and he was right, these events have since become one of the key standards by which any reappraisal of history is enforced, lest we should miss something. Orwell could not have foreseen was the way in which his satirical *Newspeak*, the reductive language of 1984 that brought English language to its knees, where truth is always assumed and never questioned, would evolve to become the norm in the all-consuming media landscape that dictates much of modern politics, a lazy shorthand for embarrassing gaffes and leaked emails, used by Left, Right and all those in-between. This throttling of expression, where acronyms, abbreviation and cast-off phrases as “et cetera” are used as stand-ins for emphasis and forgo thought before speech. As Orwell noted in his brilliant exploration of human nature and the *Huoyonyms* in his essay on Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, the purpose of language is primarily, if not to communicate truth, is to reflect on the state of things as they are. It also gave rise to the foreboding throwaway of “Orwellian” which roughly translates as “anything a bit Totalitarian” and the car-crash voyeurism of Big-Brother. Since the (other) Blair years, the fine art of miscommunication parading as fact has been employed by all political parties and has reached its arrogant nadir with the current Conservative half of the Government, although the other parties do their best to keep up. So instead of practical change and technical detail, we are fobbed-off with policy sloganeering (Big Society, Localism, Brand Britain) without any innate meaning or

clear definitions being supplied to us, only co-opted examples. Orwell has become the sacred cow of Wigan Pier, an apologist for colonialism and yet a character indelibly forged in its shadow and a product of the much of the old boy’s educational system, though he opted out of Oxbridge and got a job instead. But does all of his struggling, his stretching and selective deployment of truth as a means to a better end make him a hero? And if so, for whom? His enterprising spirit drove him to try and expose the harsh truths of living under poverty, crossing the fine line from objective reporter to active participant, and his desire to speak out against falsehood, and the rewriting of history, no doubt marks him out as an inspiration to many of the current young war journalists who put themselves at great risk and personal expense to be where the action is. But for me, Orwell is more convenient icon than raging iconoclast, a false prophet who blurred fiction and fact to make his point while hypocritically accusing others of doing the very same.

While the readability of his straightforward prose is beyond question, its truth value must be decided by the discerning reader who may be swayed by the surface yarn or the deeper argument. The high values of straight-up journalism Orwell demanded of himself, and expected of others, were rarely reached, despite our best efforts, and thus it is perhaps best to remember not as a saint or a martyr to some mythic cause, but as a human being, as prone to error and easily swayed by untruth in the name of his ideals, just like everyone else, no matter what their class, whether right or left.

Amelia Gentleman

Amelia Gentleman writes on social affairs. She won the George Orwell prize 2012 and Feature Writer of the Year at the British Press Awards in 2011. Previously she was New Delhi correspondent for the International Herald Tribune, and Paris and Moscow correspondent for the Guardian

Adam Steiner: What social or political issues interest you most as a journalist?

Amelia Gentleman: Since returning to the Guardian in London four years ago, I've been writing about social affairs, which broadly means looking at the impact of government policy decisions on people's lives. I write about politics, not in the Westminster sense, but beyond the House of Commons, as the impact of policies ripple down towards individuals.

The hardest part of my job is working out how to make articles about often highly unappetising themes - welfare reform, care of the elderly, disability benefits - interesting to people who don't have any real reason to be interested in them.

Since the government began its austerity drive, obliging councils to introduce significant cuts to their budgets, I've been travelling around the country a lot to look at what that has meant in practice. I've visited care homes that are in the process of closing, interviewed people whose benefits have been cuts and who have lost their jobs. I've spent time in hospitals trying to understand how cuts are being made. I've been talking to people who are at the sharp end of the cuts programme.

AS: What is one of the most interesting stories you've ever covered?

AG: I've worked a lot abroad,

and wondered a bit whether it would feel less exciting to return to the UK and report from here, but I've enjoyed writing about what's happening in this country just as much as reporting from Russia and India. Often the most interesting projects are the ones which sound like they'll be the least exciting when you embark on them. I was sent to spend a week in a care home for the elderly, something which is a very routine part of British life, but which turned out to be a fascinating (and sad) place to spend time as journalist. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2009/jul/14/older-people-care-home>

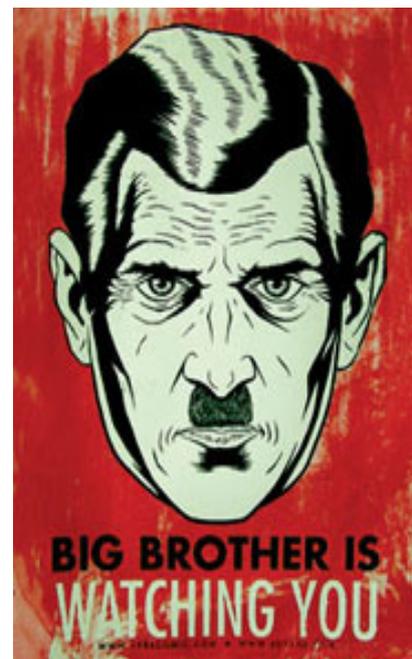
AS: Who are your writing heroes, in the fields of literature or journalism? Do you have any?

AG: I've just reread *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Erich Maria Remarque, which obviously isn't journalism, but which takes you to the German trenches in an amazingly powerful way. Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble and Coming of Age in the Bronx by Adrian Nicole LeBlanc is an incredible piece of writing about American life which took 10 years to report.

AS: What advice might you give to others who wish to become political journalists?

AG: Don't expect the industry to look the same as it does now in a few years' time. We've just had the announcement that the magazine Newsweek will

only appear online. The move to digital formats is rushing ahead. This is good because it means new writers have interesting new places where they can post their own writing - blogs, Twitter - which is positive because it means it provides a way of building up a bank of pieces before you even think about finding a job. On the other hand, writing blogs isn't yet an obvious way to earn a living. Be realistic about the state of the industry - there is no recruiting frenzy at the moment among newspaper editors, because most organisations are having to make major cutbacks. Be sure that this is something you feel passionate about - it's not an easy job to do part-time. Make sure you have an endless supply of curiosity and enthusiasm for what you're doing.



Action Figures

by T W Garland

He jumped out of bed as early as he could. Going to sleep had been so difficult. He had lain awake in the dark, the light from the hall casting shadows against his spaceship light shade. Hours seemed to pass as he waited to hear his dad come home. To know that dad was in the house, that dad would come along and kiss him goodnight, even if he was asleep, was all he wanted. Drifting into sleep, he promised himself he would see his dad in the morning. He would get up super early.

Running into his mum and dad's room, he only noticed the absence of his father's jacket and briefcase.

"Sorry honey," his mum said as she tucked down the corners of the bedspread. "Dad left early this morning." The delight of youth drained from his face and he compelled the tears back.

"It's okay honey," mum said wrapping her arms around his unresponsive body. "Let me make you your favourite breakfast and we'll see daddy later."

As he sat eating scrambled eggs with syrup, his mum let out a cry from the other room and came in carrying his action figures.

"Honey, I nearly stepped on these. You need to take care of your toys."

"Ok mum."

"Dad told me he was looking forward to playing Captain Nebulous later."

"Really?" The cautious note of delight in his voice made her smile.

"Really," she reassured, making a mental note to text the information to his dad.

His walk to school was sluggish, dragging the toes of his shoes along the ground more than usual and surrendering to the tugs of his mum on his arm to hurry.

In the morning, science had involved measuring beans and checking different stages of growth. His partner did most of the work as his attention drifted out of the window and down the road.

At break time, he sat on the edge of the sandpit. Danny asked if he wanted to play space captains. He declined. Stephanie gave him a shove and he fell back into the sandpit. For a while he lay looking up at the sky. When the bell rang, he picked himself up, did not bother to brush off the sand

and returned to his classroom.

Lunch passed with listless chewing of tasteless food and he proceeded into the afternoon only to be surprised by his teacher's request to take out maths work books.

Maths was trouble and times tables a curse from which he could not seem to escape. More than anything he just wanted to give up. He did not want to be sitting in the classroom. He wanted to be lost in a big hug and to let it all go, but he battled against the tears and tried to remember his homework.

His homework of a couple of weeks ago returned to him. Dad had come home early. The key in lock had alerted him too late and he had remained sitting at the dining table working through his times tables when dad arrived.

"No hug at the door," dad asked as he ruffled his son's hair before giving him a kiss on the cheek.

"Times tables. I love times tables. In my job, I use them every day. Want a little help?" He dropped his case on the floor and without taking off his coat sat down and they tackled the three times tables.

Now he had his work book open in front of him.

His teacher indicated his intention of asking questions. He took a deep breath and it began.

"Can anyone tell me three times seven?"

He knew he had to answer.

He knew he had to answer.

"Can anyone tell me how the figures from the Jacobson account add up?"

The meetings had hit him one after another like the rounds from a Tommy gun in the trenches. Calculations needed to be checked and finalised. He had to set up and test the new estimates. The day finally closed, he picked himself up and headed home with a bundle of work weighing him down. He struggled with the door. Coat, briefcase, files, keys. Too many things and not enough hands. Fighting into the hall, he encountered his son waiting expectantly and too close, arms open and action figure in his hands.

There had been no way for him to have seen the spontaneous flash in the boy's eyes when the sound of his dad's keys scratched against the lock.

There was no way for him to have seen how quickly his son jumped up and ran to the door or the look of sheer delight as his dad arrived home. All he saw was a recently bathed little boy in his pyjamas waiting to make a request.

The boy instigated a hug around his dad's legs as his dad stood fixed in place by the burdens of his work day.

"Hey, champ. Can I just put some of this stuff down?" The boy moved aside but remained close behind as his dad started to unload his arms. "Dad, do you want to play Captain Nebulous with me?"

"Maybe in a minute champ. I've had a busy day and need a minute." A minute wasn't going to be enough. A minute was only going to help him remember everything he needed to do around the house and allow him to start imagining the ordeals of the next day, but he did not get his minute. His phone rang with the promise of additional chores and responsibilities. For a second, he considered avoiding the call, but then a helpful boy jumped up and delivered the phone with a swoop of Captain Nebulous' jetpack.

A reluctant hand reached out for the phone. Within moments the expectation of added obligations was washed away with an invitation. He stood up, still talking on the phone and walked around the room, animated by eagerness. He twisted and stopped. Standing in the middle of the room was a boy who looked as small as the action figures discarded at his feet. He said goodbye and switched off the phone without turning away.

"So, how about Captain Nebulous..."



My Hero

by Sarwah Osei-Tutu

A hero
She is to me
From day one

Never abandoned me
Taken care of me
Loved me
All her life

There is no other that can compare
The love we share
It embraces me
Caresses me
Just goes on and on

She has helped me
To crawl and led me
From strength to strength
Never doubting
All day long

There is no other that can compare
No hero too great
Who could touch me
Feel me
Like my mother has
All my life long

HCE says:

TW Garland and Sarwah Osei-Tutu deal with the kind of normal, parental heroism that frequently is overlooked in the capes and machine guns, but heroism is more inspiration than action.

Tolpuddle Martyrs

by Mollie Davidson

The Tolpuddle Martyrs
worked in a field, with
wives and children
on nothing, men
on even less.

A common background with grass and trees and rain,
a life deprived
of pride and dignity, wage and work.

A secret friendship of hard men,
who altogether caused some other men to feel quite scared.
Altogether they came, not one at a time,
to try to talk again
they tried.

In the docks but not earning
it was sad to see,
men courageous and as hardworking as these.

Australia is a long way away,
away from home and love
and grass and trees and rain.

Away from the smell of change
and the clinking of machines,
madness and a hysteria of a new age
and rain.

Australia is very different to Tolpuddle.

Two Meditations on Hero Worship

by S J Fowler

#20

is it blasphemy to say priests
have sex with animals?
aubrey beardsley died so young
in an age of giants
tangled in the bubble fence
i could say worse
but my wife won't let me
why only in the west
do we need our sex scentless?
said the spaniard,
forgetting the moors.

#22

the mothman prophecies say shopping
is good here
half built moscow hospital
that is a scent worth capturing
all full of Baphomet
the full bankers come, the very first perfumiers
the true nez
Ernest Beaux is the hands of the Bishop
his is the act of art in the human nose
arguably it ain't half honoured enough.

Time Passes

by Benjamin Hayes

When the bomb detonated, it was not thunderous. The sound was just pain, then a deafening, deadening silence. Nobody in the vehicle could hear the screams.

On a hilltop, some two kilometres distant, the man who had set it watched through binoculars, his knuckles white as he clutched the drab plastic. His mouth twitched jerkily into some semblance of a smile, though a deep and visceral horror took root in his belly.

Time passes.

“PERSONNEL CARRIER DESTROYED BY IED; CORPORAL KILLED”

“They’re calling my boy a hero for, for dying in the service of his country. But he – we never needed that. He was a hero to his little sister, just ‘cause he could lift her on his shoulders. We never wanted him to go. He didn’t want to be a hero, he just wanted the money, not even for him; for us.”

“The corporal? He was a good soldier, uh, we all really liked him. He always had time for you, and uh, one time he caught me... doing something I shouldn’t have, and he never told the sergeant about it. I’ll miss him. We all will.”

“My big brother? I miss him. Mummy says he was killed, that bad men... that they want to rule the country, and my brother tried to stop them. I wish... I don’t care, I just want my brother back.”

I can still see the flash sometimes, when I close my eyes. The little dark bits flying into the air, metal and glass and... other things. It seemed so very much like a game, out there on the road that night, when we laid the bomb. The boss said it was for our cause, that our actions were righteous. And it was... Dig the hole, bury the bomb... I remember I broke my fingernail, it caught under the screw when we were wiring in the fuse. It still hasn’t grown back. But it all seemed so mundane, just little things we were doing. But now I can’t stop seeing it. And we sit around the fire in the evenings, and they call me ‘hero’, and my mug is never empty. And no matter how much I drink, it’s not enough.

Time passes.

“MINISTERS DEMAND INQUIRY INTO WAR SITUATION”

“Oh yes, that young man from across the road. Such a shame... We got into this fight for all the right reasons, but reality is so much more messy than idealism.”

“I honestly can’t say I remember him terribly well. I know I went to school with him, but... well, I went to school with a lot of people. And back then, he wasn’t a hero, just a guy I sat next to sometimes.”

“Oh my God, I used to have such a crush on him! I spent ages trying to work up the nerve to leave him a note on Valentine’s Day!”

It was righteous; we must be rid of these invaders after all. I still remember the first time they came to my village – laughing and joking as if it were a game. I remember what one of them did to my sister, I remember how they shot my little cousin, just because he climbed over their fence – because he couldn’t read their signs. He still can’t walk.

Time passes.

“CELEBRITIES DENOUNCE MILITARY INVOLVEMENT”

“He was one of my students. I didn’t even realise it until someone pointed out the article to me a couple of days ago. Not a bad kid, but... I don’t know. I suppose the army wasn’t a bad fit for him. It’s good he found something.”

“The corporal? Yeah, well... He would’ve wanted us to move on. Could have been any of us; one of the guys from that APC will never walk on two legs again, and most of them still can’t hear right.”

“My aunt was just... shattered, when he died, you know? A parent shouldn’t ever outlive their child. The media circled her like fucking vultures; gotta make a martyr, you know? Like it doesn’t count, doesn’t mean anything unless they can use his death to make more boys into soldiers.”

I don’t feel like a hero. I just feel dirty. Someone showed me a foreign newspaper they got, about a soldier who died in that truck. I couldn’t read it, of course, but they had a photo of this boy, smiling. And the guy with the paper laughed, and said he wasn’t smiling any more, and told me what a great thing I’d done, how I’d helped our cause...

Time passes.

“ACTOR CAUGHT IN DATE-RAPE SHOCKER”

“Just fuck off! My son is dead, okay? He doesn’t want your fucking credit cards, he doesn’t want any double glazing, just leave us alone!”

“What? Oh, him. Well, he joined the army. The risk of getting killed is part of the job – not that I mean to say it’s not a noble thing to do, but it’s hardly surprising when a soldier gets killed, is it?”

“See that house? You know that soldier who got blown up a while back? He lived there! I used to go to

school with him. I still remember the time he punched me in the face and called me a faggot because I was reading a book at lunch.”

They keep saying I should lead another attack, maybe hit one of the convoys the next time they pass through. But I just can't. I keep thinking, what about the brother of the soldier I killed. Does he have a brother? They hurt my family, and I stood up to fight for our cause, and I hurt someone's family, and maybe now some other child somewhere is promising their father they'll fight for their country and avenge their brother.

Time passes.

“NEW STUDY LINKS IPODS AND BRAIN CANCER”

“I'm going to be a doctor, a military medic. When I'm older, I'll join up, and maybe I can help make sure no-one else loses their brother like I did.”

“Yeah, the corporal got to be a hero, because he's dead. I just got crippled, mustered out. I can't get a job, can't even fucking walk, and who gives a shit about me, huh?”

“Goddamn savages, killing good men and women. We go over, try and help them out, and those fuckers... we should just bomb the whole lot of 'em, raze their cities to the ground, like Jericho, yeah!”

People don't talk to me so much anymore. They stopped calling me a hero a while back. Now I'm just the drunkard. I don't know, maybe I should just leave. Just go somewhere else. But there's nowhere to go, nothing else I can do. Not like I have a trade. I never learned; just joined the cause and trained to fight. To drive out the soldiers, make our country our own again. It all seemed so clear, back then.

Time passes.

“MEMORIAL ERECTED FOR NEW WAR HEROES”

Just... squeeze the trigger, and it's over. Please, forgive-

The gunshot is like thunder in the small tin shed.

At an Autumn Auction

by Changming Yuan

This pair of human hands used to belong to
Neither da Vinci, nor Mozart, nor Napoleon
Nor Newton, nor Van Gogh, nor Thomas Edison
Nor Shakespeare, nor Doug Henning, of course nor Li Bai
Look, the blood is still dripping!

But it once warmed the heart of a frozen crow
Opened the door to a stranger starving to death
Added a handful of soil to a withering rose
Waved to a breeze blowing from nowhere
Wouldn't it be a big fool to buy these hands?

Most important, the hands carry with them authentic
spirits
Inherited from gods though still unknown to us, and
the owner
Has cut them off to donate to an honorable human
cause
Our initial price is set at ten hundred thousand 200,
200? 300, 300? 350, 350? 400,400?

Urban Portraits (2): the Pigeon Feeder

by Changming Yuan

No one knows
When the old man started
to do this
But every evening he would
prop up
From nowhere, coming
To the foot of a statue at
the square
With a dusk-painted con-
tainer
To feed the pigeons
Cooing and flapping around
Like wantons retuning
home for supper

Each time he would take
extra care
Making sure each bird got
its fair share
Whether it was warm or
chilly
Windy or rainy until one day

He finally failed to appear
Then another day, a third...

Later, he was found stone
dead
On his lonely bed, in a
rented room
Definitely bigger than a
cage
But containing no other
furniture
Even a desk, a chair
Except some bird food
Left on the window ledge
Two small paper boxes
Full of receipts from pawn
shops
And a note To Whom It May
Concern:
Please continue feeding the
pigeons

