

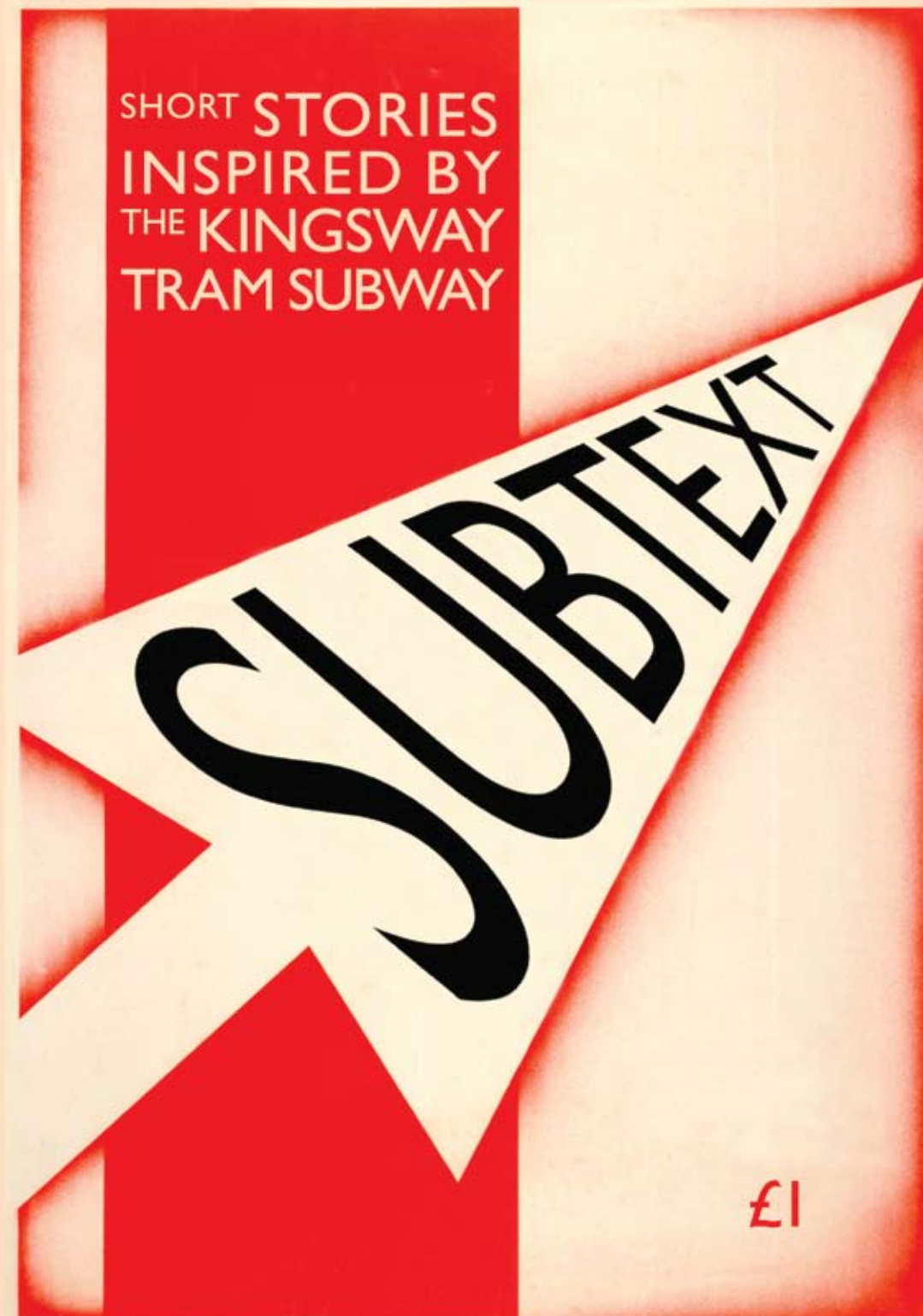


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Subtext commemorates the opening of Chord, an ambitious site-specific installation by artist Conrad Shawcross, created for the Kingsway Tram Subway in Holborn, London in 2009.

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M E A S U R E



Introduction

Subtext is published to commemorate the opening of Chord, an ambitious site-specific installation by artist Conrad Shawcross, created for the Kingsway Tram Subway in Holborn, London.

The works of nine upcoming writers have been compiled in the first short story anthology to be published by Measure. The stories for Subtext reflect each writer's individual response to the Kingsway Tram Subway and revolve around or are inspired by the space and its history. All nine stories are selected and edited by Creative Writing student Karen Holst Bundgaard as part of her third year placement at Middlesex University. Subtext is part of Measure's continuing education and outreach program.

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Cover design adapted from London Transport poster 'For Tram Travel North To South', by Ralph and Mott, 2009. © Transport For London Collection of London Transport Museum.

Stop! Yes, you. Hey! How's things? Look, just don't go anywhere ok? Hear me out? I know what you're thinking. Er, I'm not talking to you, am I? Cos this is like quite a big street isn't it and why would this leaflet/poster/whatever have anything to do with me? Tons of people, all ignoring each other on their way, getting peed off at the Pakistani newspaper guy cos he doesn't know where Lower Regent street is. He's getting a map out? Seriously?

No wait. I'm losing you, I can tell. You can spare five minutes. It's important. It's, well, it's me. Can you not tell? I like your new haircut, suits you. Always thought you had nice ears. Okay, so I never said the right thing in the past. And I'm not the mushy sort, although you're the one who said you'd take care of me – now that's mush. Anyway. Not important. I miss you.

I'm not angry or anything. Okay? Well, would have been nice not to get dumped on my birthday. And sending that present back? What was that about? You said you liked it. But yeah, like I said, I'm not mad.

And not that I'm obsessed either, but sometimes, yes, I do look at your Facebook. Only about two or three times a day now. Do you think that's weird? And don't get mad, but it was me who sent the email with that funny picture. Bit rude I suppose. I just wanted to see if you'd blocked me (changed my name on the email header). Did you work it out? Probably too busy, what with the new job and the move and stuff. Congrats, by the way. Would've been nice to say goodbye. Still.

I think about you. Do you think about me? Even just sometimes? And yeah I know I was the one who deleted you. It was a bad time, you know that, right? I look up your ex now and then too, just checking you're not back together. Not that I'd be gutted or anything, if you did. Just, I know you and me could be happier. You miss me too, don't you? I knew you'd be here. I knew I'd catch you at some point. This is the gate to Kingsway Tram Subway, right by your new company.

Turn round.

Joan paused for a moment, adjusting her hat. She avoided looking down at her legs, that stocking line Margaret had offered to draw had gone wonky over the ankle.

She did this every Friday, walking up to Holborn, rushing there some days more for him than the tram. If Ma were to find out she was chasing a fellow, she'd get a hiding. But there was a war on, a war that had already taken her brother and her cousin John, so what the Hell, they might be invaded by Germans next week, and then Lord be known, she wouldn't have the time for drawing stocking lines, there wouldn't be anybody worth doing it for.

She shivered a little as she walked cautiously down into the station, taking care that her skirt did not ride too much over her knees to be indecent. Perhaps she should have worn her slacks, though Ma tutted at the fashion. She paused, feeling that odd sensation of panic, 'what if he isn't here?' She'd had to wait another day then and you never knew if you'd see somebody again. The sound of a tram drawing away from the station startled her, she was later than usual, and she cursed Margaret and her unsteady hand. But he was there, nervously fingering a cigarette, still unlit, but he had a match poised ready. Both though were abandoned when he caught sight of her. Joan smiled coyly, he never quite managed to light it every time she saw him, she doubted he smoked all that much, if at all. A cousin of hers told her that men needed something to do with their hands when they were nervous, and a decent man should think better of it to have anything but a cigarette on his person.

"Morning Ned." Joan smiled, trying her best not to appear too pleased to see him standing there, even though she was very pleased he was. "Good morning." As usual Ned went to tip his cap, and as usual failed to realise until it was too late that he wasn't wearing one.

"Here we are again, it doesn't seem like yesterday since I saw you last." It was their little joke, she had said it the day after they had first met and she couldn't resist letting it slip out each time.

Ned smiled, like he'd heard it for the first time too, and as always there seemed an equally humorous comment that failed to emerge from his lips.

"You are looking lovely again, Joan." She heard him make the compliment before, but she didn't mind. She had realised many years ago that she was no great beauty, so this repeated line was enough to flatter her.

"Thank you Ned, and are you, well?" He nodded, nervously pushing a slightly shaking hand through his hair. She asked this every time too, he looked so pale. She hoped he wasn't too ill; but it must have been serious enough for him not to join up.

"I thought I'd miss the tram this morning, you always seem to be here on time though." Joan smiled, again seeing the sadness in his eyes.

"Always here, waiting for you." Ned winked, and not for the first time since they'd met she felt herself blush. It was at times like this that she wished her sister was around. Margaret was many things, but shy she wasn't, Ma was always worrying about her, fearing that one day she'd get herself into real trouble. Margaret would have got Ned talking; she'd know his whole life story by now.

"Did you hear about that accident the other day, right here at this very station, some fellow they said, slipped right onto the track, the tram killed him outright, awful" Joan gulped as Ned looked uncomfortably away. She bit her lip in frustration. Margaret wouldn't have said that, Margaret would have strayed away from anything morbid.

"It's coming" He suddenly exclaimed, looking in trepidation up the line. Joan followed his eyes, and then she could hear it too, the tram, the heavy click and then the air, warm and clammy, signaling the end of another unfinished union between the two of them. "This is me, then Ned; I shall see you tomorrow then?"

She looked back only once, and smiled as he again tipped his imaginary cap. Ned watched her go, unable to move any closer to the tram, unable to take her hand and kiss its pale skin gently, just as he often imagined he would. Damn that idiot rushing past him that day, not looking where he was going, the usual toff with no manners. His cap went flying and he reached down to get it. He suddenly remembered the dark shape of the tram, and crying out though nobody seemed to hear. After stumbling through the darkness, he had found himself here again, on his regular platform. But he couldn't leave Kingsway, or venture out into the sun with the rest of them. So he waited for Joan, every day, at the same time and watched her move through each week, whilst he stood still. Perhaps it was Joan that kept him here, a friendly face from the living world. A face that would grow old, perhaps disappear altogether once she got bored, or met somebody else, someone more flesh and blood than the mere ghost of a man he now was. He lifted the cigarette to his mouth, and wished he could smoke it.

*There is a dark, disused subway. A defunct vein that no longer pumps life into the heart of a great city, a blocked artery that has ceased to disperse people, busy as blood cells, around the outer limits. Letters cover the walls.

DV AS SH EH GK RR

It seems to the two decorators as though every known combination of the alphabet is scratched and scrawled somewhere on the chipped, paint-peeled tiles. The two men, who are the first to gaze upon the walls of the abandoned subway, are confused. "Seems a shame to paint over them." Says one. "Mmmm", murmurs his companion, his concentration fully consumed by the characters on the walls. Some are no more than mere squiggles, others are carved with more care.

"What do you think they are then?"

"Transport stuff - official markings?"

"Nah."

"They only go up to a certain height, about 6 foot or so."

GH ON DF BR MJ JA

"You read about things like this all the time."

"Things like what?"

"Aliens."

"Don't be daft... You know what I think? I think it's art. Some experiment installation."

"Well, what does it mean then, if you think you're so clever?"

"That's the great thing about art. It's all about subjectivity, innit?"

KH FF EG IP SD LW

"It might be some sort of code. You know, in the war."

"What on Earth would they mean though?"

"Top secret."

His companion turns away, dismissive.

"What about people living in the tunnel?"

"No one's been down here for years, mate - except the odd tramp, a few officials and maybe a tour guide or two. Besides, they look old."

"Kids?"

"That's not your average 'tagging' nowadays, is it?"

"S'ppose not."

LR GT BW AA CK HN

"What are you doing?"

"I'm trying to see if they make more sense upside down..."

"They don't make sense this way up that's for sure. Well?"

PU AD TR CC QW KM

The two men become frustrated with their deciphering.

"This is going to be a long job. Fancy a brew up in the fresh air?"

"Thought you'd never ask, mate."

So, the two decorators, no closer to discovering the truth behind the code, vacate the subway in favour of a refreshing cup of char. For years the letters have been undisturbed, preserved in a cordoned off time capsule of a tomb. Until now, that is. A simple mathematical equation is all that lies behind the mystery of the wall graffiti.

$(DV+AS)+(SH+EH)+(GK+RR)+(GH+ON)+(DF+BR)+(MJ+JA)+(KH+FF)+(EG+IP)+(SD+LW)+(LR+GT)+(BW+AA)+(CK+HN)+(PU+AD)+(TR+CC)+(QW+KM)+(infinite\ numbers\ of\ similar\ pairs) = true\ love.$

Jane Roberts was born in 1985 in Guildford. She currently works as a freelance writer and lives in Clungunford, a village in South Shropshire.

It was an unreasonably fine afternoon as I picked my way through the ceaselessly bustling suits of Soho, desperate for the sanctuary of my favourite pub. Solace for old buggers like me is rare these days, and today was shaping up to be no exception. To make along story short I needed an ale, or two. Upon entering I was overjoyed to see Tim, the landlord, was in residence. I hailed him in my usual friendly manner, and, as usual by the time I'd settled myself on my favourite stool, he'd disappeared behind the scenes leaving one of his scuttling minions to tend me. I used to find his behaviour most odd, until I came to the inevitable conclusion that he must be the shy type and finds it hard to contain himself in my presence. Such are the machinations of the heart.

Oh well, where was I? Ah yes that was it: One thing ended up leading to another, which then led to another and another until, before I knew it, I'd had quite a lot more ales than the couple I'd intended. Suddenly realising how tired I was, I said my goodbyes and left.

Hardly had I put foot to pavement before the night air crowded in like a persistent spare-changer, prodding at me with such cold fingers I had to take a nip from my trusty-oldhip flask to help fend its advances off. That far the wrong side of closing time the streets seemed inscrutable, like they knew something I didn't. Shivering, I had another little nip, straightened my hat, pulled my coat and scarf tighter about me and set off towards my humble bijou in Bloomsbury. I must have been more tired than I realised because after some considerable time I still hadn't found my bijou, or, indeed, Bloomsbury. Confused and somewhat out of puff I decided to allow myself another dram, purely for its invigorating properties, you understand. Much refreshed I rejoined my quest and not long after turned a corner and came out on Kingsway. How I ended up there I don't know, but so pleased was I to find my bearings I immediately had another nip.

Once again tiredness must have gotten the better of me because the next thing I remember is opening my eyes to find myself spread-eagled across the pavement with no memory of how I'd come to be in such a position.

Feeling a little groggy I started raising my not inconsiderable bulk back upright. And it was around then I heard the sound. It was an odd little noise, a perky rattling and clanking that steadily increased in volume as though something approached. I immediately looked up the way to where it came and saw a tram coming a-trundling down the road. I was on my feet and sticking out my hand to hail it, before I remembered that trams had been taken off the road many decades before.

Surly this must be a hallucination born of my fatigued state, I thought, and closed my eyes and shook my head, but to little effect. On it still came, swaying and clunking along, giving the air around it a weird sepia cast, its prim cargo of passengers looking as though they were on their way to or from work. I watched it go, cutting a steady course towards the underpass at Theobald's Road, that since the fifties had become little more than a trap for leaves and rubbish and traffic smuts, but from which I now saw that odd sepia luminescence rising like mist.

And, like that, I was a lad again, scuffed of knee and smudgy faced, skipping along without a care as I did back then before the world came and kicked its cares into me. I broke into a run as I saw the tram had almost reached the ramp into the underpass. I wanted so much to catch it and let it take me back to those glorious carefree days. Digging deep I made a desperate leap, my fingers clawing through the air, closer and closer till I could smell it, taste it, that old air. And I almost made it, was almost there, but instead of landing on the footplate as expected, I crashed up against something hard and unyielding with such a clang everything went dark for a time. When my senses returned I was on my back again. The tram was gone and a hefty iron gate now barred access to the ramp.

Regaining my feet I stared forlornly through the bars into the underpass, giving my flask, which for that wonderful moment I'd forgotten, a hopeful shake. But it was no good; both the blasted things were now empty. The light was gone, and the tram also: gone, pissed off back to the past, leaving me stranded

on Kingsway, old, with naught for company but memories and not even the smallest nip for comfort.

I reeled, and for the third time that night was about to join the ground when, mercifully, a sudden screeching of tyres and the angry parping of a horn interrupted me. I turned and saw a cabbie half out the window of his vehicle, a face on him like a slapped arse. “Christ,” he gruffed, “I almost runned you right down there, Granddad. What the bloody ‘ell’re you doing staggering about in the road like th...?! ‘Ere, are you alright? You look like you just seen a ghost.”

“You are never going to believe this,” I said dusting myself down and, snapping back to my senses, climbing straight into the back of his wagon. “But first to Hampstead via Bloomsbury, my good man, and I shall tell you all about it on the way.”

“Right you are Guvner.”

I smiled, knowing I had a bottle, or two, salted away at home, and that there’d be plenty of punters still about on the Heath that’d be more than happy to share them in return for a little consolation.

“Now where shall I start?” I said as the cabbie pulled off into the dirty orange glow of the modern night. “Ah yes, that was it:

“It was an unreasonably fine afternoon as I picked my way through the ceaselessly bustling suits of Soho...”

Barry Sutton was born in 1966 in Paignton, South Devon. Barry currently lives in East London.

**Confidential Script Plan: 5 minutes 15 seconds*

Time 0

Visual Black screen

Audio *Voice over:* This is Astrid. She is one of the empathogen scarred. Her’s is the destructive face of society. Modern dissent is emotional connection, it has been fermenting in the squalor exposed during Financial Purification.

Astrid: I fronted up for the trial, otherwise they were going to strip me of Welfare Entrustment. There were lines and draggers heroic with their own steam. I was shot from the chemical wash. My head was roofie with forms and queues. That was our meeting, our remmy. For splits I took him as a shermann guy making believe about himself. He came dove for me, so I made special eyes at him. I seen him like none other could, special in all his flex.

Voice-over: For 2015 Future Purification Havar Concepts proposes sanitisation of empathogen scarred individuals. The empathogen scarred have been chemically emboldened to believe in the power of association. Any emotional community brings disenchantment and dissent. Astrid has revealed her potential for cleansing during the process of selection. Imagine her emotions, watch as they are purified, conceive the lessons to be conveyed. She is the mystery, Ralaa is the hero. Emotional purification is the answer to age old dissatisfaction.

Time 1 min

Visual *Montage:* Looting, rising chaos of post-crash London, New Puritas Banner, Ernest Manning making his Finsbury speech during the 2012 mayoral election, footage of Heathrow blockades, Trafalgar Public purification events, penitents in stocks.

Time *Voice-over:* Since 2012 Havar concepts has been in fruitful partnership with the Manning Governance. In this time we have designed and implemented the Arcade Project; turning the derelict Kingsway tunnel into the centrepiece of a renowned emotion cleansing program.

Visual Handicam footage in the tunnel prior to excavation and redevelopment.

Time 1 min 30 secs

Audio *Voice-over:* There were animals down there and rubbish, the bones and bodies of city life. The Kingsway was the miscreant essence of London, an artery clogged with the wasted emotions of impure life.

Visual White-suited technicians working in the tunnel. Shots of cable, computers, diagrams, plans, technicians walking the rails with headphones and microphones.

Visual Pure white light.

Audio *Voice-over:* Preliminary footage of Astrid and Ralaa was created using a prototype of the mobile visual unit Havar intends to develop with Future Purification Funding. The 2015 Purification will include visuals and public transmission of micro-messages following Astrid's progress through the tunnel. Her spectacle will cleanse a degraded segment of the population.

Time 2 mins

Visual Close up of Astrid's face. Followed by an exterior shot of the queue leading into the Welfare Entrustment Trials.

Time 2 mins 30 secs

Audio *Astrid:* We made a promise to meet after the trial. Remy comes from the fate of chance. We believed in each other. Neither of us wanted purity. We wanted to feel and sneak through the borders, out into the free world, beyond the New Puritas.

Visual The queue snakes toward barricades. Behind the barricades people muffled against the cold are staring blankly at reinforced barriers. Mounted Street Forces push into the impassive crowd, electroprods are used to stun the front row, unconscious bodies are removed and digitagged.

Audio *Voice-over:* The population of dissenters is saturated with emotional deviance. Havar Concepts will indentify and purify dissidents on behalf of the Manning Governance.

Visual Close up of Ralaa; he shakes his hair and sucks in his cheeks, rubs rings of white make up around his eyes, rises from his chair and moves out of picture. Long shot of background; clear blue water, a white beach spotted with people.

Audio *Voice-over:* Ralaa is the public face of Future Purification. His face and voice will carry the ideal of purification and emotional continence to our public.

Time Time 3 min 30 secs

Audio *Ralaa:* The Arcade be a place to deliver full wash. It will rasp you of all emotional impurities. Clear you of the naughty in this world that been eating ferret hungry at your soul. Come get clean cityboy, get clean chav mama, you all, you junk punks, you wet day smokers come taste the pure white and stony air. Purify in the Arcade.

Visual Camera swings to Astrid, beach in the background.

Audio *Voice-over:* The public wants a love story. We provide a simulacrum to drain illogical emotion. Astrid believes their relationship is real. The future they plan has absolute sincerity. Astrid's mind reverts to the trusting chemical pathways of her past. Her twinness and history of empathogen abuse make her the perfect representative of a disenchanting and deluded substratum.

Time 4 mins

Visual Footage of Astrid's Welfare Entrustment Trial. Astrid gazing at the surrounding white, eyes up and down, eventually settling on the camera.

Audio *Astrid:* I'm a twin, I don't know if that was the remedy of my problem. I've tried chemical purification; it's map thirteen not home. That's why I'm here.

Visual Interior of the Arcade. White-suited technicians reconstructing a tram.

Time 4 mins 30 secs

Audio *Voice-over:* Penitents will ride the mobile visual unit through the tunnel, living the sounds and sights of their degraded future.

Visual Ralaa and Astrid in a two shot. White sand and blue water in the background.

Audio *Ralaa:* From the day in the queue we knew we were meant to be together. There's no more Ralaa for me, I'm dove-free.

Astrid: We escaped governance. The Arcade is a shermann myth Manning draggers play. No such as purity only greedy eyeballs and clawing. Away from the New Puritas we can speak truth about ways they been mistreating. They got to be stopped from the outside so's people can feel life genuine.

Visual The beach background flickers and is replaced by complete white.

Astrid and Ralaa against a background of pure white.

Time 5 mins 15 secs

Audio *Voice-over:* With funding Havar Concepts will be able to complete the Future Purification Project and use Astrid as our first symbolic penitent. The search for pre-emptive purification continues. Your past has been cleansed, purify your future.

Visual Roll credits, black on white.

Rico Craig was born in 1971 in Armidale, South Wales. He currently works as a teacher and lives in Sydney, Australia.

*So, it all starts on the street corner when I'm hanging with Heavy D. Heavy D is exactly the kind of guy who gives us our bad reputation. He's built like a tower, black as the night sky, covered in battle-wounds. One of his eyes is blind and milky white, burst in a fight at Trafalgar Square back in the bad old days. Despite his appearance, Heavy D is actually a pretty laid back dude. Someone told me it's cause he's so big, so intimidating that he don't have to fight no more, he's learned to appreciate peace.

I'm chewing on the end of a cigarette and Heavy's choking down the remains of a hotdog, just chilling out. Some kid walks past and Heavy gets in his face a little. The kid jumps out of his skin, makes this little 'woah' sound. A little girl points at Heavy and says something before her momma tells her to shut up. Just another day in London really. Then Smokey turns up and my whole little life comes crashing down.

Smokey is a relic of the bad old days. He's covered in scars that will never heal, but he can't carry them the way Heavy D does. He's real twitchy too, always looking about, moving in short little scurried bursts. Word is that one time he got caught on a street that we don't own and some Northern Cocks from Tottenham took him in. Peace settlement was clear enough, he shouldn't have been there, they could have killed him and we wouldn't have been able to say a word. They didn't though. Instead they took him to a warehouse and messed him up. They done stuff to him I'll never know but you can see one wound clear enough. They severed his foot at the ankle. His leg ends in a red, horrific stump. Anyway, Smokey turns up and because he's so messed up, so kind of grotesque, you never really look at him when you talk to him. He struts over and is just wheezing when Heavy D makes his own little 'woah!' noise and I look. Smokey is messed up, worse than ever. All the scars on his body are burst open. Blood pours from his skin and splatters the pavement. His eyes are distant and glazed over.

"Man, what the hell?!" I spit without thinking. Smokey's eyes come back a little. "Hey man... I... Oh man it hurts. You got to help me man."

"Who did this to you?" Heavy D says from behind me in a voice thick as thunder. Smokey starts crying. Suddenly, I realise that there ain't no people about, they've all crossed the road avoiding my friend dying at my feet. Cause they think he's dirty, they think we all are. Dirty and violent, just like rats. "Smokey man," I say, "who did it?"

Smokey's sobbing gets worse, he's shaking and wailing and I realise he ain't scared of dying, he's scared of answering the question.

"Smokey," Heavy repeats, "if this is bigger than you then you gotta tell us man." Smokey says nothing.

"Smokey man. Who did it!" I bark at him frantically. Smokey sniffs noisily, tears pouring from his eyes, joining the mass of torn flesh and blood.

"Northern Cocks." He whispers between deep sobs. My heart sinks.

"What the hell were you doing North Smokey?" I scream, tears slowly welling up in my eyes, "You know you shouldn't even show your face in central after last time! You should know to stay South! You should know man! Damn it man, what's wrong with you!"

Smokey coughs and splutters, then hocks up a lump of thick, red flesh. It hangs from his chin like a pendulum, swaying gently. It looks gross, but it looks important. It looks like something that belongs internally rather than externally.

"I weren't man. They came South... they came to war man."

I hear Heavy D emit a low-pitched growl behind me. Pure hatred vocalised as a sound. I doubt he's made the noise since the peace settlement. Smokey's eyes glaze over and he collapses. He's unconscious, but breathing.

“What we going to do Heavy?” I ask, the tears overflowing and burning tracks down my cheeks.

Heavy D takes a step forward, silently ducks down and with horrific speed and efficiency, ends Smokey’s life.

Word spreads fast. The Northern cocks broke the peace-settlement. Heavy and me break off in different directions and take to the winds to gather our allies and come together to form something much greater than individuals. An army. Fearless. Violent. Dirty. Disease-ridden. Noisy. Brothers.

The war is back on.

The cocks of the North wanted a war and we will give them a war. We take off in silence, knowing many will die, knowing that there will be violence and killing and that society will stand by, let it happen, then proclaim us a problem afterwards. We arrive at the Kingsway Tram Subway in Holborn. The killing field. The theatre of conflict. Our war zone.

The subway is closed off to the public, but for us it’s easy to squeeze through the locked gates. We gather on the South side, a sea of bodies wrapped in dark, baggy exteriors. There are hundreds of us, silent but for the occasional excited cooing of those too young to have been involved in the bad old days when war was last on. Heavy D stands beside me, right at the front.

“On three.” Heavy whispers to me.

As I count down the seconds, all I can think is how similar we must be. All that separates us is geography. Those Northern cocks and us Southern cocks. We look the same, sound the same, both shunned from society, living in gutters and abandoned warehouses. We feed off of discarded food and cigarette butts. We fight for no reason other than pride and boredom. Still. It happens. It will happen again.

“Give ‘em hell!” Heavy screams and then we all bark and howl in unison, spreading our wings and taking to the sky in a blur of grey and black, our beaks poised to tear and rip at feathers and flesh, our eyes narrowed in hatred. We squeeze through gaps in the gates and cracks in the roof and rain down upon them, a fluttering death from above. A terrifying roar of screams and violence fills the entrance and echoes down the abandoned tunnel.

We went to war.

03.

Say goodbye to the world.

Whether it be to the Thames (wet, grey, familiar; Old Man), or the backside of Southampton Row (long grey dither, straight to Euston), fill your pockets with sunlight and take your last breath.

Test the concrete's tenacity beneath your feet (1941 and the Waterloo Bridge still feels like an ungainly prosthetic), remember how tangibility feels, zip reality into your satchel and hold it close. Watch the Blackfriars span shiver in the semi-distance. Bring it to mind and lock it somewhere safe. The grey waves beneath you creep there now. When they report back, will your flaccid memory stand interrogation? Dare you place your trust in these transient waters? Be warned: The River knows all. You will soon near its very soul.

Sardinia Street swaddled in grey coats, umbrellas locked in frantic battle (in vain, as ever). Are the tepid clods scintillating your brogues? Does the wind drive your eyes to slit and water? Do your fingers scuttle the hands to pockets? These are the chain-links you will need to pull yourself back when the air runs thin. It's dark down there, and cold. We are soon to have a sabbatical from the gaze of God. It approaches now; the 35, trundling as if drunk on its own monotony. Even the sun has turned its back.

388 733.

We're in. Your umbilical stretches here. Stretches. Stretchhhhes. Stretchhhhes, and. Snaps, lean into the wall at the Aldwych right and apologise to the squashed man in the crumpled brown hat; mutter something along the lines of "Bloody old trams," and smile, or just smile and shrug: judge upon initial reaction. Try to ignore feeling of disembodiment. This is simply a side-effect of being submerged too quickly; ear pressure builds you see, down here, in the gloom; ask a sailor; also, you may find your sense of time, and possibly your sense of speed are momentarily skewed by this quick transition into the nether; this is to be expected. The swill in your gut is Aldwych snaking, soon to slither left towards waking. In the darkness the faces examine your lack.

The spot you no longer occupy closes warm around you. You have now slipped into the dead-centre of a city in sporadic flux. Slight right, slowly. Quick left, this may throw you ("bloody old trams eh?"), but do try to steel your legs accordingly. No one likes a sprawling Londoner. Impromptu below-ground ballet. Faces phasing back into view now; darkness changed, subterraneous. Colour creeps back into the cheeks of the car. Daylight filtering. Filtering. Prepare to dilate.

BREACH

Cones bleaching.

Fill your lungs with air, your eyes with sight.

This is the King's way. The day seems brighter now and the rain reflects the rays off the street like a scattering of downed angels. In illumination, the conductor's hat haloes, his shoe-shine blinds momentarily, your fellow passengers seem as dead revived. Who'll pace it up and pace it down, the noblest street in London town? The entirety of all envisioned life, or so it seems. Lock all antiquated rhymes under 'ephemera' and gape. The Trinity Church looming. The tattered ghosts of Vere Street and Little Queen's Street genuflect in rows, respectful. In the moist air the haze of future hangs heavy. Eleven more years and this conduit will be forever severed. The tram itself; all but packed up and smothered; a quaint oddity jettisoned into a Croydon orbit. The Thames runs eternal, its black depths washing history clean. We are all grand projects; we will devise new ways to connect North to South, and new ways to separate. Progress will claim that which is deemed obsolete, even if beauty and aesthetics be butchered into the bargain. The tram: cumbersome, laboured, gawky, inefficient, a great swaying clot of riveted metal, shuddering with the constant threat of impending accident. Brief candles. We will sanitise and motorise and futurise and update, overhaul, rebuild, aerodynamify, speed-up, miniaturise, rein-in, standardise, innovate, until we can hold this entire city in our hand like a washed pebble. When we are all alike, the submerged byways of this city will wither like limbs forgotten. But now, here, in history, pass a people in quiet celebration to a tramway that binds us inexorably to an ever-changing present.

The horses pull carriages and whinny knowingly; their role in history soon to draw to a close. The 35 trundles away happily: a great metal fad in complete denial. The Kingsway itself: solid, unmoving.

All we see is grey now. 2009: barely even the dead dare remember. Once, in a different London Town, there flowed here a way worth traveling; not this empty one-way conduit of blackening emission, cloud tainting, devoid of all but bare function. You are now just a stretch of industry recycled; an asphalted charlatan, shiftily eyed beneath your grey brow of railing and barrier. The smell of coffee hangs heavy around you, the clinical cafes at your flank sit over-priced and exclusive; history crushed between a million pairs of feet pushing a million bodies with eyes that no longer see.

The past is never more invisible than when subsumed within the present. The Kingsway is now simply the Kingsway. If we ever wish to see the tramway again, all we need do is close our eyes.

*On dreary roads in London town
The sick and poor sink sadly down in gloom:
But grace and pity meet
When King and Queen stretch hands and greet
The weary ones;
This, they say,
Our King's way, and our Queen's way.
There is a path across the deep, -
The King's Way, the King's Way*

Caroline Alice Elgar (1848–1920)

Chris Warren was born in 1978 in Essex. He currently works in a bookshop in Holborn and lives in Hackney, London.

The fog is out.

I have an urge to tell you something, Eoin. Nothing in particular, just some of what is on my mind. One misses someone to talk to now and again I guess. I do not have much to say anyway.

It is early afternoon, Eoin, but Lincoln's Inn Fields are covered in mist and outside your window it seems to be darkening already. Alone in your room you sit down at the desk, but barely have you put pen to paper before you have to get up and turn on the reading lamp. That is how dark it is.

Outside, people rush past with their coats up. Women carry umbrellas, men wear hats. You stand at the window for a while, observing flakes of black crushing to the ground from above, because that is what you do, Eoin. You observe. Then you return to the desk and to your grand novel for which the words are not coming, and a blue spot spreads where your pen touches the paper repeatedly.

The fog makes you restless. You get up to fetch the bottle of wine and drain two glasses before returning to the window. What are you thinking about Eoin? Are your thoughts still with the wanderers, or are they drifting further afield, to your family across the channel perhaps. How proud they are of you Eoin, in the big city. How they have cherished every single letter you have written, every single word of promise and success, never have they doubted any of those words to be true. But soon the ship will return to Cork and then what will she do, the young Aven? Because she made a promise to you, did she not Eoin? She will have a lot to do, the young Aven.

The dog in the corner turns his head and glares. Ah well, one must have been talking to himself again, eh Eoin? You sit down to read, but your concentration fails. One wonders what is with the books these days. The poor wine you so desired now disgusts you, and the air seems stale and dry in your throat. You have to go outside to think or maybe smoke a little.

You grab your coat from the rail, open the door, and then it begins.

Outside, you struggle three attempts before the umbrella erects when heavy drops start falling from the sky. Roofed, you turn right down Sardinia Street where a black cab thunders past you and empties the wet gutter onto your loafers. How is it, Eoin that this is happening to you? But do stay strong, one must not lose one's calm. Keep walking. Keep thinking about your novel, the grand novel that you promised young Aven to write. Young Aven, who will soon have a lot to do, because rumours spread fast, even in the big city, even in London.

The rain comes down still harder as you reach Kingsway and start walking towards Southhampton Row. Watch out for the passers by, Eoin. They are not strolling as you. They are hurrying through the rain, eager to get home, to reach shelter or to catch the tram, which is turning the corner from Theobald's Road just now. The rain blurs the driver's view and the bell rings alarmingly, but you do not hear it, Eoin, because your head is bent and you are buried in thoughts.

Descending the steep slope into the darkness of the underpass, thoughts keep passing through your mind. One must be terribly unmindful when one does not remember boarding the tram, eh Eoin? But engulfed by the darkness underground your thoughts finally slow down and you are once again able to observe your surroundings, because that is what great writers do, Eoin. They observe. Soon your watchful eyes spot two pale faces close together behind you on the tram's upper deck. Who does that young girl remind you of, Eoin? I understand why you cannot take your eyes off her because you have seen it, right Eoin? You, the observer, have already seen her belly. Young Aven will have so much to do when you return, Eoin, with nothing but sketches for your novel because it did not permit itself to be written, not even in London where rumours travel faster than letters.

So hard were you observing you failed to notice the tram has come to a complete halt and the driver has begun ascending the stairs from below. There he is on the stairs. He is not dressed in his uniform, but in a cape and on his head balances a large dusty wig. He walks slowly, Eoin because of his limp, and for one terrifying second you think you see a dark, horny stump where his foot ought to be.

"Witnesses, please rise for the Judge," announces the ruddy driver as he mounts the last step and your heart pounds harder, Eoin as the young girl stands up.

"The verdict has been made and I hereby declare Eoin Molony guilty as charged," huffs the gnarled driver, looking not towards you, but towards the young couple.

You seem surprised, Eoin to hear your own name, but that is not all for I am sure you have noticed the happiness on the young girl's face. How long she embraces her friend, and now he touches her belly. He knows. But she is making a mistake. You, the observer, the great author, you of all people know that she is making a mistake. You call her name, but no one hears you. Then the driver clears his throat:

"Where as the law is passionless, passion must ever sway the heart of man," he says and from his pocket he withdraws a stack of yellowing paper, covered in blue writing. Do you recognise it, Eoin? Do you recognise your writing? I know you urge to launch yourself at the driver as he strikes a match and holds it to the dry pages. But there is nothing you can do now, Eoin you must stay here with me. In the warm light of the burning paper Aven smiles and strokes her belly.

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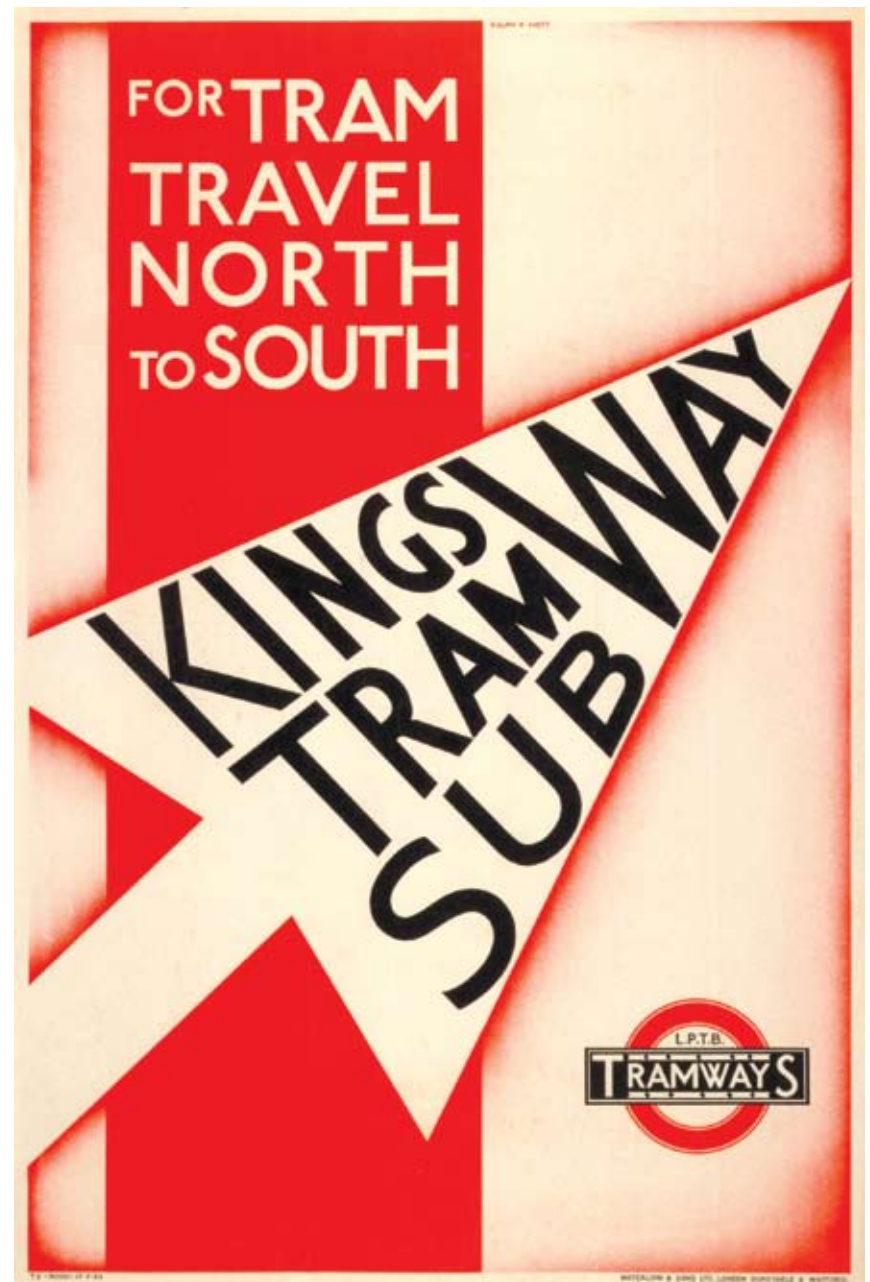
-a word about methodology

Kingsway tram subway has been re-conceived as a cryptic literary space, a terminus for forgotten authors. This metaphor allows for the re-awakening of such spectral literature, excavated via the British Library's integrated catalogue, discrete sentences cemented together into a narrative bricolage, or an example of what American cyber-lawyer Larry Lessig calls 'remix culture'.

The text, shorn of punctuation, derives from numerous "found" sources, including Richard Worth's **The Murder in the Fog** (1927) in the Dixon Brett Detective Library, the crime anthology **Thrills** (1936), Baroness Orczy's **The Old Man in the Corner** tales, **Strand Magazine** plus empirical material from Albert Greatorex's **Electric Tramway Traction** (1900), **The Electric Railway, Bus & Tram Journal** (1928), Dunbar & Price **London Tramway Subway** (1975) and **The Daily Mirror** (UK Press online); so an OuLiPean experiment written without any actual writing.

A heavy fog like a great blanket wrapped London in its stifling folds | the conductor stood on the platform stamping his feet to keep the cold out of them | we made Kingsway a hollow street and passed our tram lines pipes & wires and mains through its basement | his hand clutched nervously a copy of the St.James Gazette | the subway was lit at 110 volts ac | fifty thousand pounds in bearer bonds | the stranger's body lurched forward | Lister's Moquettes beat Father Time | car No.1931 | he straightened up and held out a little album of snapshots for the detective's inspection | far off flashes of moony electricity | in the trolley-wire system the current is conveyed from the generators in the power house by feeder cables | Messrs.Foster & Turnbull the well known pawnbrokers of Oxford Street | inside an ABC shop sipping cold coffee | the strange sensation of riding a tram through the echoing blackness | cerebral congestion | he sat down and began to puff away at his pipe

once more | a few idlers realised that something unusual had occurred | the end of the platform | Radiovision a firm making films for television are proposing a plan for the conversion of the Kingsway Tram Subway into a studio | the silver-handled dagger with its ruby hilt | the ghastly atmosphere was real enough | Aldwych Bend | the approach from Theobalds Road was by an open cutting 170ft. long | a bloodstained hat | there was a sort of blind alley | close by a revolver had been picked up | the island platforms of Holborn and Bloomsbury | the man in the corner had been silent for some little while | Duratex | assaulted drugged then gagged | Scotland Yard was keeping an eye on him | Strand Bend | with clockwork regularity | he walked to the Regent Palace and sat in the lounge reading an evening paper over a mixed vermouth and a cigarette | he carried the bowler in his hand | there was a good deal of fog that night as well as the drizzle | Detective Inspector Jones.



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