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Trains and Meteors
An oddly placed piece of short fiction by Jimmy Gartner

When
the black hole opens,
I think I’ll dive right in. The silent
tear in the arterial smog I suckle will pull
me out like a speeding afterbirth, the
mechanical placenta following the wailing
earth itself. Fall asleep on the ship. Wake
up, find yourself drifting north. Follow it
till your days are over. Find the void.
Closed eyes find it too easy to forget,
the immortal amnesia, that even ashes
do not rust. The earth prays like a
cripple, falling like the hungry prey.
Mirrors watch the sky, or is it water
puddles in the sun?

Alone in the field I sit, rope in my
calloused hands. Every orbit of the
pigeon, I pull the threads tighter.

I do
not want to
turn the lights back on. May
the denizens learn to live nocturnally. But
then how their eyes expand and glow, like
well-salted eels. Fragile like the king, eternal
like dust; my senses sink like a shrinking
galaxy and I find myself at the landside’s
bottom, pushed forward by all before me. A
mud cage. A snow cell. Pallbearer ants carry
me home.

Her worm is unique, a deaf radar dish with
no reception. But how it blows pollen from
place to place, building cities for the bugs.

Few know the disappointment of spontaneous
combustion. The initial joy of burning as an
entirely alien cell, something with no past
and no future. But then the bitter realisation
of the silent and invisible comet that soared
the universe to meet you, touch you, into
the pregnancy-charred dirt below.

I thought I had erupted,
but everything just fell into
place. A burning house on ancient
traintracks.

I lay down on those traintracks
Bones pressed tight against the floor
The rumbling quaked my eyes wide
And above me shot a meteor
Frictioned sparks electrified me
As it hit a car left on the tracks
No different to its collision with the
earth
The riptide took me back

A pool cue thrusts like the glorious breed
spasm, the landslide roars above me.

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Australian National Academy of Music
Pilobolus

‘Pilobolus (crystallinus) is a phototropic zygomycete - a sun-loving fungus that grows in barnyards and pastures. It’s a feisty thing - only 1/4 inch tall - that can throw its spores nearly eight feet. Right over a cow. It is also a highly unusual dance company...’

When it comes to reviewing a dance production, I feel incredibly unqualified. Although probably equally unqualified to review film and theatre, the fact that I’ve briefly studied gives me both a false sense of knowledge and superiority. Your confidence in me having been completely dashed, I’d now like to share my musings about the recent performance given by US company Pilobolus.

The show of the same name received rave pre-reviews on several news programs (I say several, but I actually know of only one - one that I didn’t even see but was told about by my lovely mum) and thus my expectations for the show were high. Entering Her Majesty’s Theatre, breathless after running from the On Dit office, I quickly took my seat, managing to find a gap between the heads of the two people in front of me to peer through. A quick assessment of the program as the lights dimmed, allowed me to ascertain that there would be five dances split into two halves.

My enjoyment of the first dance was slightly ruined because of two things, both of which can be traced back to the positioning of my seat. Firstly, I was missing pretty much all of the action happening on the far left of the stage (the annoyances of Her Majesty’s). Secondly, I was sitting behind three of the most insipid, chatty high-schoolers I have ever overheard. And catching public transport, I’ve overheard a few. Still, the first dance was spectacular to my untrained eye and once I learnt to tune out the sound of the girls’ voices, I was able to thoroughly enjoy the performance.

Each dance had a different idea behind it as explained in the program. Although these ideas didn’t always quite communicate themselves to me, this didn’t make the dances any less wonderful. The dancers were paired or grouped differently for each dance and the minimal costuming, lighting and set for each one made the feats of physical strength more striking. The music got slightly irritating after awhile (with the inclusion of Brian Eno and Talking Heads in ‘Day Two’ an exception), but was appropriate for the dances and may not have bothered others so much. What was more irritating was the way the house lights came up between each of the dances. This ruined the mood, especially as it took some time for people to quiet down again for the beginning of each dance.

Overall, however, Pilobolus was an enjoyable show. The strength of the actors and their willingness to embrace semi-nudity were thoroughly impressive. Although, perhaps just as impressive for me was he way one dancer could spurt water out of his mouth - you know, the way fountains do? That was good. But maybe that’s my immaturity and lack of dance knowledge coming through...

Catty who conveyed nothing about the actual dance. Sorry.
FREE TICKETS!

We have two double passes to give away for *The Burlesque Hour...SIZZLES!* If you can make it to the Thursday night show (June 5), just write in to ondit@adelaide.edu.au, and in 25 words or less, tell us the sexiest thing you’ve ever heard.

Vibrant and eccentric, Moira Finucane is no doubt the ‘Queen of Cabaret Bizarre’.

Out of Melbourne but a tell-travelled performer, she’s here with an impressive troop to put on Adelaide Cabaret Festival burlesque show, *The Burlesque Hour... SIZZLES!*

Speaking enthusiastically of the baby she has co-written with cohort Jackie Smith, she expressed to me the most exciting acts that will grace the show. She divulges the risqué and fabled; in particular Maude Davey’s infamous ‘Strawberry Act’ - an act never before performed for the regular show-goer but may have been found previously in venues dank and rickety for a fortunate few. You may remember Azaria Universe from the 2006 Adelaide Fringe; a Moscow Circus trained performer, her strengths are physical theatre including striptease, drag and dance on the fringe of contemporary circus and burlesque. The other headlining act is she-clown, Clare Bartholomew. She is Pierre! Magician and Love Machine! Charmingly, she is also a Clown Doctor at the Royal Children’s Hospital. Finucane is also passionate about the show’s music that ranges from hardcore industrial to Opera which sounds like an eclectic, electrifying mix.

You can’t go past such an eccentric without prying a little into her personal life. Her show for the Adelaide Cabaret Festival is the first after the birth of her twin girls in March. I asked what she had planned for them; “twins are every showstopper’s dream, I think they’ll get tap lessons.” She performed burlesque right up until she was eight months pregnant; “I did this vampiric act with the pregnant stomach out; it was very gothic, very grotesque”.

The show has been given standing ovations all over the world with ten, on one night in particular in Trieste, Italy. *The Burlesque Hour... SIZZLES!* Provides and ignites ‘intimate theatrical spectacles where cabaret, fairy tale, the gothic, variety and burlesque are melded into indelible visions of gender, power, violence and desire.’

Catch *The Burlesque Hour...SIZZLES!* with the Adelaide Cabaret Festival @ The Space Theatre, 5 & 6 June, 7.15pm, 7 June, 7.15pm & 9pm and; 8 June, 6.45pm.

Natty xx
First things first Miss Steph, you used to be the editor of this stunning little publication... How did you find your year with *On Dit*?

I loved my year with *On Dit*, being an editor was great... I would recommend it to anyone because *On Dit* is just so good to get involved with. But when I wasn’t editor I think I enjoyed being a contributor, a regular columnist a little bit more. You didn’t have the responsibility and pressure to keep a struggling newspaper going. During my year it was struggling cause it was the first year of VUSI whereas when you could just contribute you’d just get to kick back, hang out with friends, do a bit of proof reading, write your articles and you basically had access to a whole group of people at uni that you never would have met if you just hung out at your lectures. So *On Dit* was the best thing that I ever got involved with at uni... and all the people that I met during my time writing for the paper, we’re still friends in some sort of capacity and we’ve all gone on to do separate things that are of interest to each other. A few started a short film company called Urtext and others are going off doing lots of exciting things interstate, overseas and we still keep in touch.

And you’re quite involved in Urtext Studios yourself aren’t you?

Yeah I am. I help run the studio space and I’m a costume designer and production designer for a lot of Urtext Films. Now we’re being contracted to work for other filmmakers around town making feature films, which is really cool.

So would you say your main job right now, if you had to pick one, is costume designer?

I would say costume design, purely because that’s what I’m getting paid for but I guess my spiritual jobs are... I still love writing and I contribute to *DB (Magazine)* doing music reviews and a couple of interviews... I think because once you start writing, in my case for *On Dit*, you kind of get used to it and if you don’t keep it up it’s like a muscle, you kind of lose the strength and it just feels rubbish... there’s that little thing that goes “must keep writing! Must keep getting review CDs!”

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How did you get involved in *DB*?

I got involved because the editor at *DB* at the moment I met through *On Dit*! He was the advertising manager during my year, a cool cat called Alexis, and now he’s editing *DB* so he’s used *On Dit* to launch his career in print media as well... so its all this kind of cool, sometimes nepotistic network where everyone helps each other out and all you have to do is ask, “hey, can I come write?”

What advice would you give to students wanting to get into the media/arts industry either now or once they graduate?

Anyone that wants to get a cool job, and basically if you’re doing an arts/media degree, everyone wants a cool job... No one wants to end up being the marketing executive at the Yellow Pages in the Adelaide office, you know. Well, I didn’t anyway; I had bigger dreams than that. But my advice would be, you’ve got to start young and you’ve really got to do extra curricular stuff other than your media internship and stuff that you have to do as part of your uni degree. You’ve got to meet the right people and be with a group that are similarly motivated and like-minded. I’m still young and I’m still not making mega bucks from what I do but I’m managing to creep into the industry, which is how it works. Those jobs are not advertised. You’ve totally just got to make your own way. If you love radio, go to Radio Adelaide and volunteer there, if you love film, come and talk to me at Urtext... practical experience is important... you have to work for free and do what you like in order to do what you like and get paid later on.

You also dabble in a bit of visual art as well... tell me about your involvement in The Fringe.

I had a SALA exhibition last year with my friend Anna, another *On Dit* connection. It’s really, really easy. All you have to do is pay $300 and you can have an art exhibition with your best friends. The art world is something that can be pretty hard to get into if you really want to take it seriously... my art is all about, you know, video art installations with people running around with hearts in their hands and doing fake DIY heart surgeries. So its not exactly the most user-friendly thing in the world. If you want to make money from art, draw pretty pictures, but if you want to be experimental, don’t expect to make any money. If you’re feeling arty, Fringe registrations are around September, SALA registrations are now. If you’ve got that inkling, go on the website, call Lisa Dunstall, say you want an exhibition and then do whatever you like. It’s really self-motivated work. Everything that I’ve done has been self-motivated, not because anyone’s told me to or I had any real contacts in the industry, it’s all because I just really wanted to make it. You do have to start from the bottom but that’s how you know you really like it because you enjoy the bottom... then once you start working, as I am now on a film with a budget, you’ve been to the bottom so anything more than that is fantastic! You can bowl them over with your amazing talent and your great work ethic because you’re not being a diva about your job, which is always nice.

So you’ve got your fingers shoved into a lot of proverbial pies shall we say, tell me a bit about some of your current projects.

I’m working on a feature film called *Road Man*, which I just started in pre-production, that’s a paid gig. I just finished work on Urtext Film’s first feature film, *Offside*. I’ve worked on an MRC Raw Nerve short film doing production design so that’s like sets as well as costumes. Besides the *DB* writing which I try to keep up, um... I’m in a communist Russian hip-hop band which is currently on hiatus because one of our group members is an astro-physicist, the other is a lawyer and the other is an international business man so we’re a little bit busy. Yeah I try and include music, print, writing, visual arts...

And banana splits?

Hah, yeah! Banana splits. I work at the Elephant Walk as well, so you get to pay the rent some how and making waffles in North Adelaide sounds like a pretty good way to do that. Basically I just want to do as much as I can and take over the world because that’s just something that I have to do... In a totally non-megalomaniac-take-over-the-world-and-just-make-sure-it’s-full-of-some-good-vibes-again kind of way.
Music television is a sector that is generally considered to be pretty darn awful. Even with the eight extra cable music channels there’s about... two hours of decent programming across them all. Throughout my wasted nights at 3am in my underwear, I’ve managed to discover these couple of hours and would like to share them with you all. Firstly we’ll start with the channels on offer.

On pay-tv we have Channel [V]1 and Channel [V]2. They specialise in youth orientated programming with mostly the pop charts playing all day. They even go as far as to break it down into genres, with an Urban hour, a Metal hour, a Rock hour and something called ‘left field’ which is generally very good. So aside from that, stay away unless you’re into really obnoxious promos, twenty-something-year-old presenters that try way too hard, and the most enormous picture-on-picture song titles (they actually take up about a third of the screen.) Also, tune in to a show called MXC if you see it come up in your guide: hilarious.

Also on Foxtel there’s MTV which is equally insufferable. MTV tries to tune into pop culture and has a bunch of wacky shows they hope the kids will talk about at school the next day. Unfortunately it succeeds and has blasted many unknowns into the spotlight, with Pimp My Ride, Cribs, The Osbournes and My Super Sweet Sixteen being the most popular American shows we have crammed down our throats. And speaking of cramming things down your throat, both the aforementioned channels have an overkill of Jamster ads running 24/7. Steer clear unless you see Rob & Big come up in your guide as that show is great.

Vh1 is the last remaining ultra-pop-culture music channel, but has far more to offer than the previous two. It has many, many stupid things running this year, but can also provide a quality hour or two with entertainment every now and then. In the ‘stupid’ column we have Flavour of Love (Flava Flav from Public Enemy wants a wife; hilarity ensues) and Hogan Knows Best (Hulk Hogan is wrestler. Raises children. Is great.) In the ‘quality’ column we have Classic Albums. This show is amazing because it is basically a huge series of documentaries about the making of some of the great albums in history. It interviews entire bands and producers and shows the technical, musical, and emotional side of making a blockbuster record. Watch out for Nirvana - Nevermind, Fleetwood Mac - Rumours and Metallica - Metallica for a particularly interesting hour.

Last up in the subscription-stakes is MAX. MAX is basically the AM radio of music TV. It’s safe to have on when your grandmother is in the room, and has very little controversial or obnoxious content. The trouble is, it’s not very interesting. Anyways, obviously we all know about Rage on ABC. Rage is badass and is in no danger of being usurped by any of the shows on the previously mentioned commercial TV networks. It’s watchable at almost any hour that it is on (unless a metal band is programming on Saturday night), and the Friday play lists are always fresh and not heaps lame like all the other indie shows. Everyone should watch Rage. Let’s party.

Sammy Boy

I wonder how much Garth was paid to be in that piece of shit Master of Disguise? Can’t wait for the Oscar nominations to come through when The Love Guru comes out...
Things get difficult in winter. Cold fingers make writing impossible. Thoughts are frozen; creativity slips lazily into a deep hibernation. Everything goes quiet - the streets, the birds, the warm buzz of summer; all are gone. Budget living bemoans a spectacle of blankets and dreams of household heating only our parents can seem to afford. And so we resign ourselves to the warmth of a pot of tea or mug of coffee, clasped fingers extracting whatever heat they can from the cheap ceramic.

In these times art appreciation passes through its own quiet solstice. And the best way to celebrate is to be immersed in the clatter of whatever heat they can from the cheap ceramic.

Only minutes away on East Terrace, the newly established Tapedeck Razorblade glows in all its neon glory. The new spot for the cool kids in town, Tapedeck hosts two levels of designer fashion, art and coffee. The current exhibition features work by Kara Gillet, Adele Ouslinis and Adriana Salegio, studded around racks of designer hoodies, shelves of shoes and a spattering of retro token tape decks. The artists, working in aerosol, photography and illustration respectively, bring together a combination of punchy and playful styles that work well in the space. And for those that feel like following suit with the inherently playful attitude, a tabletop chessboard, comfy couches and arcade machine brings Tapedeck Razorblade into full fashion swing.

For those willing to brace the cold to save the pocket, a multitude of markets cropping up across Adelaide offer a variety of champagne art for those on a beer budget. Whilst in the general direction, the East End Markets continue to draw crowds despite the drizzle and frost. Miss Pixie came out in style with computer keys, Lego blocks and retro toys transformed into affordable hand-made jewellery. Vintage Kid also picked up the proverbial fun ball and ran with it, boasting an eclectic mix of vintage-look fabrics and prints for the fashion-toting toddler. The hand-made bibs, blankets, toys and trinkets are beautifully made and will abate the most demanding retro addict. And if the weather is just too much for your fickle little fingers, take the couch cruiser’s option and check out the online store at www.vintagekid.com.au.

On the other side of town, the Gilles Street Market is quickly becoming a coveted jaunt for local designers and fashionistas alike. Although most stalls specialize in vintage fashion and clearance jewellery and shoes, there are a number of home- and hand-made spoils for any taste or budget. Make & Do specialise in screen printed tea towels and decorative sewn objects, using natural fibres and environmentally friendly inks. Miss Polly brings hand-stitched charm to the world of children’s accessories, whilst m i e u’s limited edition hoodies and tees relish in rock star style. Never fear if you missed them at the Market, though; they also keep stock in Miss Gladys’s Sym Choon. But don’t go to the Gilles Street Market just for the art – an abundance of sweet and savoury treats are sure to warm even the most frosted of hearts.

To finish off the day, Higher Ground Inc.’s Art Café on Light Square is worth stopping off at. With an easy atmosphere and a regular exhibition schedule that often supports student or emerging artists, the Art Café brings art and food together into a glorious winter-friendly bundle. The not-for-profit incorporated association also supports theatre initiatives and runs a rehearsal space and theatre within the complex.

So as we ease into Ugg boots and slip seamlessly into heater heaven, have a thought for our struggling artists who are, most likely, slaving away in freezing studios or knitting well into the night. Unless, of course, they are like me and have given up on creativity entirely in exchange for an online and television-saturated existence. Should you too choose to forego outdoor outings, for a stroll down Ebay lane, make some time to check out the latest offerings at www.etsy.com. The Ebay for art and craft practitioners, Ebay is a cheap and innovative alternative to studio door sales and gloating gallery conglomerates. At the very least, it is a convenient hub for inspiration should you decide to pull out Grandma’s knitting needles this winter and try your hand at home-spun crafts. But really, you can’t stay under that blanket all day so make the most of it - go get a coffee, warm your hands and exercise your eyes with some old fashioned art appreciation!
Priceless?

When I was in Paris a few years ago, I spent an entire afternoon trawling through the seemingly endless rooms (about 60 000 square metres worth) of The Louvre. Housing nearly 35 000 works of art The Louvre is one of the most visited art museums in the world. To be honest, I found it all a bit overwhelming and by the thousandth painting of some Duke from the 16th century, it all began to blur. Luckily for me I was accompanied by the lovely Bianca (your trusted On Dit music sub-editor) and as my eyes glazed over, my ears burned as she dished out another hot piece of London gossip. But I was surprised when I finally came upon the gem of the museum, Leonardo Da Vinci’s Mona Lisa. Firstly, it was small and somewhat unimpressive. And if it hadn’t been roped off about three metres back (only making it appear smaller!) I don’t think I really would have given it a second glance.

So it got me thinking about what makes art work “priceless” and perhaps more than that, what makes it ridiculously expensive? If you listened to any of the a.m. radio stations a few weeks ago you will have heard that Chelsea football club owner and Russian oil magnate Roman Abramovich purchased $119.9m dollars worth of art. Now some of you may be thinking, ‘Wow the walls of his house must be choccas!’, and those of you would be wrong. Abramovich purchased Francis Bacon’s Triptych for $86.3m (a record price for a piece of post-war art) followed by Lucian Freud’s painting, Benefits Supervisor Sleeping for a cool $33.6 (a record price for work by a living artist). Both Bacon and Freud are particularly important in the art world for revitalizing how the human figure is depicted in painting in the late 20th century.

So what exactly are you paying for? Is it size? If so then Andreas Gursky’s 99 cent II, Diptych might have been a bargain $3.3m. The photograph (pictured) is approximately 22 metres long and was sold in early 2007 at this record price. Then again perhaps maybe it is the materials that an art work is made of that determines its value. In 2007 Damien Hirst (yet another YBA) exhibited For the Love of God at White Cube gallery in London. Costing approximately £14m to create, it consists of a platinum cast of a human skull encrusted with over 8 000 flawless diamonds. Perhaps not a work nearly as influential, Hirst’s work (priced at around £50m) seems much more practical.

This article could very easily turn into some kind of essay on the sheer subjectivity of art. But for the sake of you that have read this far, I think it is safe to say that like so many things in this world, art is worth what someone is willing to pay for it. Although I still maintain that one of my favourite works is by local artist Jungle and it only cost me ten bucks. Bargain!

Clara Sankey

WHAT'S GOING ON?

The Greenaway Gallery in Kent Town is currently showing work by local artist Sally Smart. The exhibition titled The Exquisite Pirate (Oceania) [2008] is a spectacularly colourful set of paintings combining elements of surrealism and collage. Also showing, is young Argentinian artist Ariel Hassan with his collection, A Few People Laughed, A Few People Cried, Most People Were Silent [2008].

The gang at FELT space will be lighting up Compton Street again on June 11th when they celebrate the opening of James Marshall’s Dead by Dawn and Bianca Barling’s All the Lonely Things my Hands Have Done. Finally, pop into the Light Square Gallery to catch the last few days of Métaphysique D’éphémère, a mesmerizing collection of lost and found objects by local artists Evangeline Feary and Gregory Amber.
Book Shop Speak: Fleeing Oprah

Working in a book store, you have a lot of people coming in and out asking for books they’ve heard about on the radio or seen on television. Today Tonight, A Current Affair and even morning shows like Mornings with Kerri-Anne have influence on book sales such as 4 Ingredients or The Cauliflower Conspiracy after they have been featured on these shows. However none have the impact that Oprah has on international audiences. What is it that causes Oprah Winfrey to have such an impact on the literary world (and I’m using the term here very lightly)? I guess she does choose books that have mass appeal to audiences around the world, she also features star biographies quite a bit, but the main reason she is so influential on book sales is because she seems to have read the books herself which makes the audience think, if she can do it...so can I.

I must say I don’t normally watch Oprah, I’m more of an Ellen girl myself, but really, I’m not normally ever at home during the time that Oprah screens on Channel 10. However, I always know when Oprah has featured a new or old book on her show because all the at-home mothers come streaming in demanding (and I mean demanding) the book that was on Oprah yesterday. It usually makes me want to scream. Admittedly, yes, Oprah does pick some good ones, for example Pillars of the Earth by Ken Follett, but she also chooses some stinkers - He’s Just Not That Into You by Greg Berlanti is a case in point. One thing which makes me want to laugh is when these busy, harassed looking mothers come in and they want John Steinbeck’s novels as Oprah featured them on her show as light reading... she has obviously misrepresented these books as I have never heard Steinbeck described as a writer of light fiction.

To succeed in the world of books (sales-wise anyway), all you need is to have your book on Oprah. Once that happens, you’re guaranteed at least another book deal. However, this can all go wrong, as in the case with James Frey and his ‘memoir’ A Million Little Pieces. For those of you who don’t know, James Frey was featured on Oprah with Oprah raving about how brave and strong Frey was to have written about his time in rehab, etc. However Frey was exposed as a fraud, or at least stretching the truth which Oprah was quite put out about, so a few weeks after people found out, Oprah had Frey back on the show and it was pretty much an entire show dedicated to telling Frey off on international television. What I find hilarious, though, is that when repeats of the first show about A Million Little Pieces are on television in Australia, we get people coming in wanting to read the fantastic book Oprah was promoting... I can’t ever bring myself to tell them that it’s actually not what Oprah represents it to be in that original show. I actually had a customer come back in to try and return the book, even though it was obviously read, because she found out Oprah had been wrong for once in her life. If I hadn’t been annoyed with the customer, I would have found it highly amusing.

Unfortunately, as long as I’m a student and need money, I’m never going to fully be free of Oprah’s influence, but as soon as I’m done, I’m going to run as far and as fast from Oprah as I can. Hopefully it will be soon.

Alicia Moraw
When it’s cold, a book is a remedy. Joining the throng amid the rumble and bustle of the local is also a remedy but not one for which continuous application is advisable!

I like private detectives from literature. And I know what their appeal is and I know who they are. I prefer the hard nosed types, not the smooth ones who befuddle us with spectacular reasoning and disclosure.

Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe emerged in the 1930s, and is the archetype of his successors, including two Australian creations, the ‘multi-adventured’ Cliff Hardy, creation of Peter Corris and the relatively recent Jack Irish, creation of Golden Dagger winner, Peter Temple.

Their appeal centres on their independence, and capacity to hover above but engage successfully at and with the underbelly of society, mimicking and matching the coarse behaviours of those around them. They habitually and perhaps understandably resort to alcohol to ease the stress of their work and their histories of failed and tragic relationships with women. They enjoy the solace of like-minded women also working at the edge of society.

They best describe themselves:

Jack Irish observes, “She knew a bit about kissing, knew a bit about things beside kissing too,” and he adds, “I took her hand and led her into the bedroom. We undressed with the urgency of people shedding burning clothes”. Philip Marlowe meets a secretary who quips, “With a little practice I might get to like you. You’re kind of cute in a low-down sort of way”. Marlowe offers a quirky and almost poetic offering with, “She smelled the way the Taj Mahal looks by moonlight”, and adds, “Hold me close you beast,” she said. “I put my arms around her loosely at first...Her eyes were flickering rapidly like moth wings”. But to return to alcohol. Cliff Hardy muses, “I think best when walking towards somewhere to have a drink’, and observes of a meeting with a client, ‘The first round (of drinks) disappeared like a shower of rain in the desert’. Marlowe succinctly describes his role in terms of drink: ‘I’m half full of good Scotch and ready to go places and get things done.”

It’s also their earthy, quirky descriptions and their capacity for repartee that enchant and warm me on a winter’s night. Hardy notes, “She always wore red clothes and if her throat got cut some day, it would be a while before anyone noticed”, and adds, “My bowels were agitating fitfully like an off-balance washing machine.”

The characters they encounter are bizarre and threatening. Marlowe observes “He had two expressions-hard and harder”, and notes, “Blackstone’s voice sounded like someone pouring sand out of a funnel”. Irish challenges with, “Put your life on it. On second thoughts put something of value on it”. They challenge and are challenged. Marlowe says, “I have a suggestion for you. Why don’t you go kiss a duck?” and adds, “Go fry a stale egg”. Elsewhere he is countered by, “I’ve got friends who could cut you down so small you’d need a step-ladder to put your shoes on.”

Comfortingly, they’re all essentially decent. Marlowe sums it up: “If I wasn’t hard I wouldn’t be alive. If I couldn’t ever be gentle, I wouldn’t deserve to be alive”. He has a simple role description: “There are things I can do. I can shoot, I can keep my word, I can walk into dark narrow places. So I do them.”

It’s cold and I have a pile of detective novels. The door bell is ringing and I won’t be answering it.

Bob Sutherland