



Shabbigentile

by

Alan Morrison

SAMPLE

*Get a job! Go to work! Poor, stupid slaves... Small wonder the world
belonged to the strong. The slaves were obsessed by their own slavery.
A job was to them a golden fetish before which they fell down and worshipped.*

—Jack London, *Martin Eden*





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Introduction

By Peter Raynard

Associate Editor, Culture Matters

In novels and films, plays even, there are state-of-the-nation portrayals aplenty. From Dickens to Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem*, the rich and the poor are double acts on a political stage that is the United Kingdom. In poetry? Not so much. *The Waste Land* comes to mind of course, and the writing of such poets as Fran Lock, and performances by Luke Wright, tell of the political scene in different forms, historical and contemporary. So, in reading Alan Morrison's brilliantly titled *Shabbigentile*, you will be bowled over by the constant stream of anger-flecked images which properly reflect the ill-state-of-the-nation we find ourselves in today.

Titles such as *Viva Barista!*, 'The Battle of Threadneedle Street', 'Wood Panel Parliament', 'RU-RI-TANNIA!' and 'A Modest Proposal by the DWP', give you a clear idea of the mix of satire and political insight that much of the collection contains. His long poem towards the beginning of the collection, 'Not Paternoster Square' (i.m. Occupy London, St. Paul's 2011-12) is a good example of the slice and dice stream of consciousness description of this country as it stands on its wobbly plinth:

A Portcullis Corporation struts its peacock tribunes
In a coruscation of Ruritanian spectacle,
State-sponsored pomp that puts our Duchy
Of Grand Fenwick-cum-Camberwick Green
Back on the map of postprandial naps,
And travesties the need for cuts...

This is a collection about the lack of accountability and concentration of power in a country held up as a shining light of capitalism and liberal democracy — a country still struggling to fit into its shrunk-in-the-whitewash emperor's clothes. There are many declamatory poems which address this imperial struggle. In 'RU-RI-TANNIA!', this is given in the melodic refrain:

Ru-ri-tannia!
How can ya' now complain?
We'll make Great Britain Great all over again!





Such anaphora is put to good use in other poems, as in ‘Thirties Rut: Clocks Back Britain’ about austerity and Brexit:

Lies told for long enough become the truth they say;
Even a stopped clock shows the right time twice a day...

And the cultural references are as wide and deep as Alan’s imagination. We have characters from Baron Rees-Mogg, to Noggin the Nog, Baden Powell to Enoch Powell, and the mouse that roared to the lion that squeaked. The blurring of real/imagined lines is perfect for our times — postmodern or not, the poems smash the pallid news of stereotypical skinheads marching on Washington DC or Westminster. In the aptly named, ‘Drain the Swamp’ for example:

Now white supremacists doing Nazi-style salutes
To Donald Trump, sieg heil-ing in Washington DC
Openly for all to see on mobile phone footage—
Not blue collars or rust-belt rednecks but dapper
Men in sharp suits, Hugo Boss wardrobed
Businessmen —self-made plutocratic products
Of the globalization of capitalism

It is they who are to blame for fomenting the currency of hate —they have their central casting foot soldiers, but it is big money interests who hold the power—some things cannot change when in the framework of corporate capital. Workers are numbers to exploit and influence through ‘brand value’ and the fetishisation of commodities, and in a brilliant metaphor, the homeless are pigeons, treated like shit on the streets.

Alan sweeps history up in many of the poems and gives it a good dressing-down, with all its malcontents of privilege and the harm and influence they have had on working-class culture. He calls for a return of books that properly reflect the culture of struggle, and which give us the intellectual grounding to fight fascism and right-wing populism on all fronts.

Now once more books need to be mobilised
Against the oncoming monsoon of moral
Panic and scapegoating, in the face of a new
Gentrified fascism, a bespoke chauvinism





It is within this book that the richness and inventiveness of language is used to such great effect. Skewed words, new words, old words with new meaning, all are here —taking them back from the right-wing capitalist media demonization of the poor:

With cloven hooves and “workshy” horns,
Striking Right-twisted attitudes
On plateaus of pack commonality, spice up
Copy till it’s piquant with Scroungerphobic
Soupçon soaking up our lexicon

The state of the nation we are in, with all its uncertainty, chaos, pork barrel stomach-churning venal governance, is covered in this collection of searing poems. They are poems that will make you burn with anger but also with hope. Hope, that the richness of working-class culture, with its ability to get beyond conservative notions of a lost Olde Englande, has always had to adapt, so will always be revolutionary in ways the powerful will never be able to overcome.





*For Vanessa,
Love in adversity*





¡Viva Barista!

No one notices the poets muttering in mute
 Pentameters as they sip cappuccinos,
 Oval visages scooped up in coffee spoons,
 Like cameos —foam-moustachioed;
 Few of them have nerves for revolutionary views,
 The politics of Castro aren't accommodated
 At *Costa* (though Guevara's an Argentine blend
 Finely ground as a goodwill gesture) —
 Customers must choose between Trotsky and coffee,
 You cannot consume two masters,
 Bolshevik subscribers forfeit loyalty cards;
 Baristas and Corbynistas rub shoulders
 In café chains' centrally heated exchange...

Capitalism's spick and span in the polished
 Many-levered silver Hydra, a gleaming meme
 Machine, alembic altar-piece dispensing
 Potent sap in a mystifying Eucharist
 Of alchemy and cream, worshipful suffusions
 And strange occulting symbols embossed
 On froth tops from milky outpourings
 At the twirl of a wrist; *Precariat*
Of the world, unite! —and percolate!
 Have a cup of coffee on the welfare state
 Before it's finally dismantled into myth
 Or picked up by the slate out on the patio,
 Endorphins, serotonins, topped up while you wait,
 Consumerist prescriptions, snowflakes alfresco...

It's not religion but coffee that's the opium
 Of the people —French peasants sipped it for centuries
 Mistrusting tea as a noxious luxury
 Which turned the rich mad, so they stuck to their mud
 Under Republics; and still today
 Coffee is the tippie of the proletariat,
 Most popular poison of public opinion...





Whoever would have thought that a bitter brown brew,
Arabic ambrosia, could come to undermine
Democracy, make us accommodate complacency?
Could Karl Marx have predicted capitalism
Embracing the bean and stamping its triumph
Through coffee-fetishism...? The West expresses
Its freedom with coffee in all its dizzying
Varieties and soupy nuances —espresso,
Cappuccino, frappuccino, Americano,
Macchiato, flat white— and endorphin-
Percolating properties that grease anxieties...

Ah! Kierkegaardian granules! Existential
Demitasses! And the sweating barista
Is a living advert for individualistic
Service, for sacrifice of benefits in fellowship
For tariffs of the self —an embodiment
Of liberty in lubricated labour, Bartender
Of Arts, battery-acid libation bearer...





RU-RI-TANNIA!

(After James Thomson's 'Rule, Britannia!')

Now Britain first, at Farage's command,
Choo-oo-oo-oose out from the a-a-a-zure mainland,
Choose, O choose ou-ou-ou-out from the a-zure flag
Twelve-star studded: tag Magna Carta, no more "*Jam
Tomorrow*" promises, but Marmalade today!
Angels in marble trilling "*Britain's Great Again*":

*{Ru-ri-tannia!
How can ya' now complain?
Leavers ever, ever, ever shall re-main!}*

The mainland, no-o-o-o-ot so blest as we
With a Commonwealth (© the Queen):
Trade opportunities' bubble and squeak
In the wake of Empire's trumpeted poultry —
Brussels sprouts bureaucrats all mashed up,
Tipped out of the frying-pan into the camp fire,
And babes out with the bathwater,
No more Europe roped round our turkey neck,
We're taking our country back, *Cor blimey! By 'eck!*

*{Ru-ri-tannia!
How can ya' now complain?
We'll make the good old British banger grea-eat again!}*

While we get back our Liberty,
Our sausages and sovereignty,
Europe must in its turn, to ty-y-rants fall,
To a Bratwurst-supping Super-State
Of bureaucrats and social democrats —
A bunch of jumped-up Bonapartes,
Napoleons, Little Corporals, upstarts!
Well we may be a race of shopkeepers
But at least we'll be selling British produce
And once all the Polish hops-pickers





Are packed off back to Poland,
And the Latvians, Estonians and Lithuanians
Are uprooted from *Poundland*,
We'll put the Regis back in Bognor Riga,
We'll bid bon voyage to Johnny Foreigner,
To frogs' legs, bagels and Belgian lager,
We'll celebrate with cold pork pies and warm beer,
Morris Dancers on the village green, and good cheer!

*{Ru-ri-tannia!
How can ya' now complain?
We'll make Great Britain Great all over again!}*

We'll not miss the customs of the mainland,
We'll not miss their goulash of languages,
Newcomers from the Commonwealth will understand
Our lingo well enough to take down our orders,
We're going back to Tory-blue passports
(Even though they were actually black in the past!),
We're taking back control of our borders,
In part, by trying to plant one in France —
No we'll certainly not miss the mainland
Once we kick ourselves off from French shores,
Cast ourselves adrift —that is, liberate ourselves;
No more a mere vassal state of the Continent,
But an offshore fantasy island circus tent!
With any luck we'll drift across the Atlantic
And latch ourselves onto America's rump,
We're packing our trunk with a *trumpety-trump*
Trump-trump-trump...

*{Ru-ri-tannia!
What if we now complain?
Once the immigrants are gone who do we blame?}*



Sticking Agincourt salutes up at Europe,
 And no matter what the Continentals throw at us
 We'll rise above it, rise still more maje-e-estic,
 More dre-e-e-e-eadful from each foreign stroke,
 More dreadful, dreadful from each foreign stroke,
 Bang go our employment and human rights,
 But we'll shout *Hoorah! Hoorah!* for each stroke
 Of the licking cat o' nine tails with which we
 Thrash our national back rapturously —
 Each poke of the Mote in the Beam-end serves
 But to further ro-o-o-ot thy Tory oak...

{Ru-ri-tannia!
Will UKIP up its game?
Once we've got our country back can we give it away?}

Here's to pomp and ceremony in our tin-pot kingdom,
 To unreconstructed monarchy,
 Bunting and punting and pageantry
 In this Land of Anthony Hope's old story,
The Prisoner of Zenda: yes, ironically
 Our country will more resemble Ruritania,
 That small Germanic realm set in a permanent
 Nineteenth century —Continental Uchronia;
 Or the even more backward aspic-
 Pickled Duchy of Grand Fenwick
 In Leonard Wibberley's *The Mouse That Roared*
 (Although we're more a Squeaking Lion
 When it comes to any influence abroad) —
 We might lose our rainbows but we'll keep our unicorns!
 O back to old boys, yobs, snobs, noblesse oblige,
 Sir Nigel, Boris Greenback, and Baron Rees Mogg,
 John Bull, Blimp, Bagpuss and Noggin the Nogg,
 Double barrel-land, and bally Baden-Powell,
 Rivers of blood, Toby jugs, Patron Saint Enoch (Powell),
 Let the wind rush through our ivory sails,
 We'll rule the waves again, well, at least as far as Wales!





*{Ru-ri-tannia!
 Our Pe-di-gree Re-gained:
 (In no par-tic-u-lar order:) Pict-
 Celt-Gael-Saxon-Norman-Dane...*

*Ru-ri-tannia!
 U-ni-ted once a-gain
 Under mongrel flags a-a-nd so many damn names...}*





Kipling Buildings

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are spy cameras, a deliberate delay
Of the appointment time in an attempt
To break your spirit, a protracted wait
In a claustrophobic, clinical-looking room,
A neutrally decorated purgatory
Silent except for the rumbling water cooler,
Being observed by unseen deciders
Prolonging your agony in a pot-plant garden...

If you can keep your head during a gruelling
Interrogation at Independent Assessment
Services (formerly Atos Solutions),
Being asked trick questions, being observed,
Recorded, monitored, not listened to,
Only heard, not being respected or
Empathised with, but being judged
In an unacknowledged kangaroo court
Of icy stares and sporadic mouse-clicks
For each of the ticks in the boxes on
The assessor's screen turned away from you
So you can't see —while being observed
Just as a troubled adolescent by
A cryptic psychiatrist's invisible observers
Behind two-way glass; these desk-perched
Harpies who prey on the sick and disabled
For sport, will pick off your weak points
And press all your buttons to get the most
Pool-muddying responses to cloud your claim...

If you can keep your PIP when all about you
Are losing theirs, it'll only be a pyrrhic
Victory, a temporary reprieve, just putting off
The inevitable sting of a future trap-sprung
Reassessment, opportunity for symptom-
Tampering and a spot of goalpost-changing
To ensure next time you're lower scoring...





If you can keep your nerve at Independent
Assessment Services nestled deep
In the grey, mauve and periwinkle plush
Of Kipling Buildings poorly disguised
As a clinic but whose commercial shape
And façade indicate that a bank once
Operated there, on the nondescript corner
Of a pigeon-grey street in an unexplored
Part of Portsmouth, then you will be damned,
My son, damned with a disability,
But worse, an invisible one, and the points
You'll score will be in binary numbers —
The price for their bounties, their thirty pieces...





The Bricks of Henrietta Street

Comrades don't despair in this red wilderness
For it's red for a reason, red stains permanently
As blood, blood of bold ideas congealing,
And this blood will solidify into earthy red,
Terracotta-red of the bricks of Henrietta Street,
Brick-red, brick-orange, burnt orange, red
Orange, blood orange, browning orange,
And stiffen into woven cloth covers that will
Bind boundless books in pockmarked gourds,
Leathery orange peels, hundreds on hundreds
Of truth-telling titles, social documents,
Commentaries, reportage perfect-bound
In blood-grubby bandages, poultices
Of polemic, exposés of contemporary
Poverties and injustices that red-tops portray
As taboo, the sin not of unemployment
But of simply being unemployed, in spite
Of capitalism's dependency on a surplus
Unemployed population to keep wages down
For those in employment, and tie their hands,
No room for negotiations when threatened
With umpteen replacements from an ever-
Replenishing pool of cheap labour —more
And more employers boycotting unions...

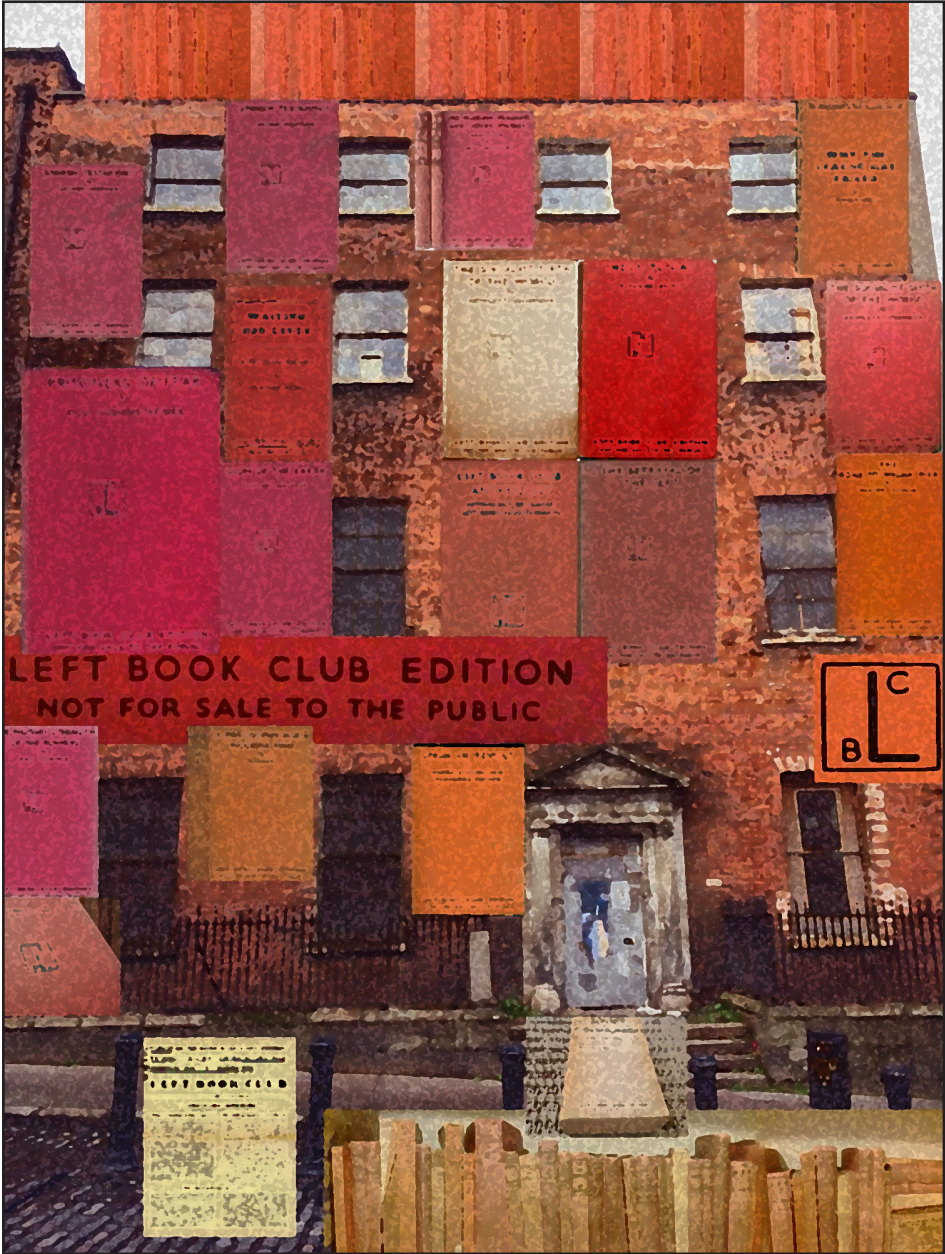
After eight years under austerity tsars,
Now, at last, in the Noughteens —retro-twinning
With the Nineteen Thirties— print-antidotes
To right-wing hegemonies are returning,
The writing of a new generation germinating
Red energies charging blood in biros and red
Ink in veins: the legendary Left Book Club
Is winging its way back onto shelves of red
Believers everywhere, subscribers to a new
Breed of red belles-lettres ringing red bells
Of rebellion, counter-narratives to tattered





Austerity mantras... Come, comrades,
Fill your shelves with news from nowhere
Travelling everywhere, social documents
Ricocheting round lean-tos, slums, bedsits,
Garrets, studios, grottos and doughnut-ghettos;
Pluto is publishing what promise to be
Social scriptures of our times, printed witness,
Once the special preserve of a certain type
Of bespectacled sophisticate, culture-steeped
Contradiction, most notably one Victor
Gollancz, Fabian publisher and anti-fascist
Activist, Guild socialist and entrepreneur,
Rabbi's son and Christian, Gentile and Jew,
Visionary of Maida Vale, along with fellow
Left-wing luminaries, Stafford Cripps,
Harold Laski, John Strachey, back in the austere
Thirties, which lit up every left-leaning
Library in Britain with volumes uniformed
In fervid liveries, singed orange paperbacks,
Red hardbacks, clothbound bricks of bristling
Literature of social witness —titles printed
Horizontally across the tops of their spines
And in plain bold capitals upon their covers
Blank but for the imprint's art deco logo,
And blazoned along the foot of each book,
The legend: NOT FOR SALE TO THE PUBLIC —
Ironic for such an iconic socialistic
Enterprise so all-encompassing— but LBC
Books were only purchasable by subscription,
And circulated exclusively among a progressive-
Minded membership, titles that thundered,
Demanded to be read, not slipped off the shelf
So much as slipped on as philanthropic aprons:
The Problem of the Distressed Areas;
Fallen Bastions; Our Threatened Values;
Can Capitalism Last?; The Acquisitive
Society; Savage Civilisation; A Catholic
In Republican Spain; A Short History
Of Unemployment; Penn'orth of Chips;







*These Poor Hands; The Town that was Murdered;
The Road to Wigan Pier; Barbarians
At the Gate; Rosa Luxembourg; The Betrayal
Of the Left; The Left Song Book; Left Wing
Democracy in the English Civil War;
Hammer or Anvil; In Darkest Hungary;
History has Tongues; Walls have Mouths;
Smouldering Freedom; The Darker the Night,
The Brighter the Stars; Spanish Testament;
Under the Axe of Fascism; Kaffirs are
Lively; Towards the Christian Revolution;
Rats!; Money; So Many Hungers; Waiting
For Lefty; Women Must Choose; The Scum
Of the Earth; Scorched Earth etcetera —so
Many striking titles with which to conjure
By assorted writers and thinkers of the Left:
Wilfred Wolfendale, Ella Lingens-Reiner,
André Malraux, Katharine Burdekin,
Clement Attlee, G. D. H. Cole, Edgar Snow,
Oliver Walker, Amber Blanco White,
Simon Haxey, Palme Dutt, J.B.S Haldane,
Nye Bevan, George Orwell, Arthur Koestler,
Leonard Woolf, David W. Petegorsky,
Clifford Odets, “Red” Ellen Wilkinson,
Alan Bush, Randall Swingler, Léon Blum,
R. H. Tawney, Gaetano Salvemini, Alan Beck,
Wilfred Macartney, Wal Hannington et al,
And spawned national LBC reading groups
Harnessing the knowledge-hungry eagerness
Of working-class autodidacts, the print
Turned into a movement... And now, once
More, time for those of social conscience
To compose more polemics on the symptoms
And pathologies of a decaying society
Which once more dumps on its poor, dispossessed,
Unemployed, homeless, incapacitated,
In this dawn of the welfare state’s dismantling,
Of social cleansing flimsily disguised as
“Gentrification” in new eugenics lexicon...*





Well, let's gentrify the coarse-grained elephantine
Hide of the thick, rough, rigid twenty-first
Century English skin, smooth out those wrinkles
With a bit of common sense and compassion,
With these paper salves of philanthropic prose,
Egalitarian writing, no mere cosmetics,
But more authentic cures to the callousness
Of our Thatcheritic culture, our wintry,
Treeless intellectual climate of counterfeit
Reality TV, property-worship, empty
Consumerism, conspicuous consumption,
Precariousness, scroungermongering —
Let's tell it like it is outside the tinted
Limousines and penthouse suites of MPs,
The privet hedges and private drives, let's
Throw each clothbound brick of compassionate
Polemic through portcullised windows...

Now once more books need to be mobilised
Against the oncoming monsoon of moral
Panic and scapegoating, in the face of a new
Gentrified fascism, a bespoke chauvinism,
Fitted out in chalk-striped suits with broad
Sharp lapels of dapper Rees-Moggs and flush
Farages and their xenophobic apostles
Poisoning the well of tolerant discourse
And spreading ugly rumours around immigrants
And refugees now Brexit has given tacit
Licence to a 'fascism of the shires' to surface
Through the rhetoric of Tories and Ukipers,
And the random acts of discrimination
And violence almost normalised now
In the mainstream through galumphing Trump
The blond toupee-topped populist strong man
Of America, and, on the Continent from
Which this shabby island is steadily cutting
Itself adrift, Marine le Penn's Front Nationale,
Geert Wilders' Dutch Freedom Party,
Hungary's Jobbik, Greece's Golden Dawn,





Italy's Five Star Movement, the Sweden
Democrats, and the Tommy Robinson-
Supporting stompers at home (and abroad),
All the rest of uncompromising patriotic
Factions, protectionists, nationalists, fascists,
And their hack apparatchiks in the cherry-
Picking red top press who weaponise
Polemical prose into rifle-cocking rhetoric,
Unfortunately, *FOR SALE TO THE PUBLIC...*

But those old LBC tomes still pack a punch,
Are ever-relevant as roseate revenants
On shelves of today's second-hand charity
Bookshops, spines warped, distressed, but still
Standing out in their blazing red, scarlet,
Crimson, tomato, orange, foxed and tanned
Pages musty with Thirties and Forties'
Tobacco-scent —our Uchronian chronicles...

*Either those red and orange bricks were made to build things
Or be thrown through windows of established buildings —
But those paper bricks built bridges across class divides,
So be it for their belated return, books are being mobilised...*



Zaghareet


A shaven-headed brick-orange man
Barges past a woman in a brown hijab
Outside *Sainsbury's*, and noticeably
Abjures an apology —but in any case
A “*Sorry*” in Bognorese sounds more
Like a verbal blow: a stroppy “*So-roi*”;
As he bursts out with shopping bags
Bulging from his fists like boxing gloves
Back onto the unlistening street,
The sliding doors closing behind him
Emit a high-pitched ululation
Like a greeting chorus of Arab women —
A half-strangled *zaghareet*...






Shabby Gentile

Shabby Gentile believes in bricks and mortar,
In football, pubs and the great British banger,
He has a bluebottle nose and a cauliflower ear,
Shaved head shaped like a potato, a bruiser,
Brain clenched in a fist —a neighbour
Who'll shop you to jobcentreplus if he spies
Telltale tan envelopes in your recycling,
Confirming suspicions you're not declaring
Your curtains shut during the day, white lies,
Topping up below-inflation benefits
With a spot of cash-in-hand moonlighting
In the small zero hours' whirligigging...



Shabby Gentile thinks benefits are too generous,
Agrees, in this regard, with the *Daily Express*,
The Sun, *Daily Mail*, *News of the World* (God rest
Its bacon roll —if not Full English breakfast) —
The red tops that spoon-feed him his opinions;
Newspaper ink fumes are his daily poisons;
Laughs like a drain at bigoted Alf Garnett,
A hectoring Cockney racist, Speight's target
For satirical mockery, but Shabby can't grasp it...



Shabby Gentile believes in honest hard work,
Has nothing but knuckles for those who shirk,
Sunday or Sabbath, so what, no day's so
Sacred to down tools, 'cos he's a *Shabbos*
Goy, *Shabbes Gentile*, his god gives no aggro;
He admires and aspires to the self-made man
Who's helped himself up with invisible hand
Then kicked away the ladder —legerdemain:
Pulling rabbits of profits out of upturned hats
Of others' robbed labour for his ill-gotten gain...



Shabby Gentile believes in British jobs
For British workers, hoists the St. George cross
On a flagpole outside his semi-detached,
Its mortgage paid off by skint tenants' rents,
Shortfalls stumped up with housing benefits
For his mould-infested Buy-to-Let flats:
No smokers, no DSS, no dogs, no cats —
Once bills are paid it's a trip up the foodbanks...

Shabby Gentile voted Brexit but has
No intention of staying, like the other ex-pats,
Off to brown off in his Union Jack
Boxer shorts once he's got his country back —
Only grey skies spike his patriotism
Otherwise he'd have spent his retirement
In his native privets, loves his country,
Thoughts of *'long shadows over county grounds,*
Warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog
Lovers and pools fillers' get his bottom lip
Wobbling, eyes misting to nostalgic fog,
But he can't stand the weather, wants a tan,
Not a natural one, that's too Taliban,
Something slapped on in a tanning salon
Along the fault-lines of Trump's Orangutan,
Though more likely he'll turn pink as the map
Of the old British Empire; he's patriotic
But can't pinpoint any actual reason for it:
His allegiances are visceral, primitive, tribal,
Expressed in cheap flags and facepaint at football...

Shabby Gentile has his head shaved weekly
To keep it cropped on top and stubbly
Round the back and sides, like a new recruit,
Or a Blackshirt to put it more bluntly,
And some of his views on refugees,
Roma and immigrants aren't so far removed...
Though he's only Ukip/ EDL/ Britain First
On a Saturday night when he's slaking his thirst —
All foreigners are infidels, all Muslims are Isis;
Lock up your passports when he's out on the piss!





Shabby Gentile is allergic to change,
The mere word 'progressive' brings him out in a mangle;
He's tried to kick the fags but just can't get on
With vaping —he needs a light to lighten
Up the tip and singe it to a dog end...

Shabby Gentile is eternally grateful
To the Iron Lady, *Gord rest 'er soul*;
Good old Maggie brought the blue collar
Up some rungs on the property ladder
Even if she destroyed manufacturing and coal
And put 3 million or more on the dole
And turned Care in the Community
Into mass homelessness and Cardboard City —
She turned Shabby Gentile from an anxious corporal
Hungry for knowledge to a tabloid troll
Greedy for ignorance, prejudice and vitriol,
Hostile to study, militantly anti-cultural;
The smokeless local pub, his place of worship,
His epistolary, a scribbled *Ladbrokes* tip...

Blue collar, white collar, white van man,
All variables of Shabby Gentile and
If there's one thing they all believe in it ain't
The brotherhood of man but a new lick of paint,
Some vague Shangri-La in a newfangled car
Or a retail park's shop-potting utopia —
Shabby Gentiles are defined by their urge
To try and move over the shivering verge
Of privet-hedged bets to better themselves
Not in terms of books but in terms of shelves —
They're not concerned with what ifs but what is-es,
In getting things done *rand the hass*, you might
Term them "*jam tomorrow*" Benthamites,
They've no time for dreams or idealisms,
Only for eel pies and empiricisms,
Dropping their aitches and rhyming their slang,
Dupes of employment, no more red brethren,
They don't know their Robert Tressell but do





Know their trestle tables —precious few
Jack Londons among them, nor Frank Owens,
Lord Jims, Martin Edens or Obscure Judes...

Shabby Gentile instinctively envies
Those just above him, instinctively sneers
At those just beneath —a bit of a Humpty-
Numpty but without the riddles, just smutty
Jokes, wolfwhistles, double entendres
(Excuse his French), blue language for red ears,
An amateur stand-up comic in the old
Sweary and smoky working men's club mould;
Pronouncing things properly isn't his style:
Gabbles the name of his tribe: *Shabbigentile*...

Shabby Gentile keeps his inarticulate
Anti-Semitism under his belt but hate
Is the petrol that runs his engine —hate
Against anyone to whom he can't relate,
Anyone who doesn't fit his cramped template
Of employment, property, consumerist taste;
Shabby Gentile's a bottled-up Genie
Of judgemental memes, a mind-vigilante,
And he has access to an Aladdin's Cave
Of more acceptable prejudices against
The poor, unemployed, disabled, immigrants,
Refugees, gypsies, Roma, single mothers,
Hobos, bohos, homos, squatters, travellers,
Rough sleepers, soft dreamers, students, druggies,
Hasn't any time for the underclass or Chav,
Navigates his hates like a ranting Sat Nav...

Shabby Gentile's your jingoistic Cabbie,
Your xenophobic plumber, your cursing brickie,
Your wolf-whistling builder, your dog-whistle Bookie,
Your intransigent Bluetoothed bailiff, or bouncer,
Your obdurate jobsworth at the call centre,
But he can also be your tight-fisted landlord,
Your stropy debt-collector promoted to clipboard,
Your bespoke inspector of benefit fraud...





Just to think that not so long ago as
The Nineteen Seventies Shabby Gentile was
Union rep, shop steward, shipbuilder, miner,
And in most respects a paid-up Labour member;
But Thatcher's prime accomplishment, her coup
Was to turn the Red Gentile Shabby and Blue;
He's still a shopkeeper in many respects:
But the shop is now his home, heaped up
With products he's hypnotised to purchase
In spite of their built-in obsolescence,
Rather like pink-striped Bagpuss, his bay
Window doubles up as a shop display...

Shabby Gentile believes the only way to gauge
Someone's moral worth is if they earn a wage,
Believes as long as you have a job
You're a moral paragon, even if a job
In private, full of spite and resentment
Towards claimants of state entitlement;
Believes true democracy is rule by the mob,
Shows open contempt for the cosmopolitan,
Distrusts intellectuals, snubs bohemians,
Shabby chic cliques and trustafarians
(Who sniff at his kind as oafs, vulgarians,
Parvenus, arrivistes, ogres, what-have-yous),
His story steeped in proud philistinism
Turned to an art form, a supreme mission,
Ignorance is bliss, won't mess with the brand,
Peter Bazalgette is his Chateaubriand,
And, like Paul Dacre and his Scabrous Brand,
Demonises what he doesn't understand...

Shabby Gentile's allegiance to regina
Is the strangest thing in a stranger arena,
Against his own interests he's happy to pay
Taxes for the upkeep of empty palaces,
Supporting a superrich family
As it reproduces its dependency
On cash-strapped taxpayers it deigns to call
Its 'subjects' —while he resents every penny





Spent on benefits for the unemployed,
Sick, disabled, single mothers especially;
Shabby Gentile's a tangle of allegiances
And antagonisms, spite and prejudices;
Applauds his captors and claps his exploiters,
Is happily played for red-top Tory sport,
A baggy trousered misanthropist, self-taught
Pugilist, thuggish upgrade of *Ingerland's*
Ear-ringed and tattooed new middling sort...

Shabby Gentile's just doing his job —
Shabby Gentile's *Not being funny, but...*
He has an opinion on how people should be:
Work, consume, own their own property,
And other peoples', buy up the empties,
Do them up, rent them out or sell them on —
There's nothing one can't make a profit from —
Anyone who deviates from this type of lifestyle
Is suspect in the eyes of Shabby Gentile...

Shabby Gentile brings home the bacon
For his pigs in blankets —he's the gammon,
Something in his gut roots for Tommy Robinson
(Though less so for Stephen Yaxley-Lennon)...

From Pearly King to pie-crust Yorkshireman,
See all, hear all, say nowt, keep schtum
When it comes to homegrown discrimination
On the basis of race, faith or pheromone,
From matt-coated troll to gloss-daubed gnome
Shabby Gentile flies the ensign at home,
His brick castle turreted with rolled-up *Suns*,
Feels besieged by foreigners who speak in Tongues,
Baa-barbarians banging at the angry gates
Of Saturday stadiums, Brobdingnagian
Games played against ghosts and scapegoats
And whoever else fills the changing goalposts,
Shabby Gentile likes to keep a tidy garden,
Razor-short lawn, grass attitudes harden...





Shabby Gentile's just doing his job,
Shabby Gentile hopscotches the cross,
Sticking in thorns, driving in nails,
Every day delivers routine betrayals,
But it's himself he betrays most of all;
More than his job's worth to question his boss
(That shadowy figure who pulls his strings);
No angel in marble, more a thug in gloss,
The devil's in the detail of bluntest sculpting,
He's an incubus of emotional blunting...

Shabby Gentile has enough on his plate
Without washing other people's dishes,
He's no time for grassers or Judases,
And washes his hands of Pontius Pilates...

Shabby Gentile's just doing his job —
Shabby Gentile's *Not being funny, but...*





Salted Caramels

Garthwaite, K. (2014) 'Fear of the brown envelope: exploring welfare reform with long-term sickness benefits recipients.'

"Authorised Systematic Harassment has enormous potential. The slow and noiseless steamroller of the State. The daily brown envelope dropping on the mat"

—Wilfred Greatorex, 1990

"The Tories have weaponised welfare" —Jonathan Bartley, Green Party

The DWP —Department for Weapons and Poisons—
 Deploys a plethora of paper weapons against the unemployed,
 Origami games galore down at jobcentrepluses
 These days, administrative harassment of claimants,
"Disrupt and upset" is the protocolic sport,
 Managers cutting out cardboard sheriff badges
 To pin on employees' lapels for hitting targets
 Of sanctioning sundry jobseekers for missing
 Post-dated appointments too prompt for the post
 (Brownie points for brownouts) —but there's
 No excuse for poor clairvoyance among
 The *"scrounging"* classes, it's just another type
 Of avoidance of work or looking for work
 (Even if most vacancies advertised are fictitious!),
 Taking up unpaid placements or internships;
 There's Customer Compliance appointments
 Elliptically phrased in sterile letters that leave
 Much space for doubt and dread for recipients
 As to what to expect on attending 'tape-
 Recorded' interviews —lie detectors, thumbscrews,
 Piano wires (for the Caxton House Gestapo)...?
 Nothing so three-dimensional, for it's a game
 Of malignant origami the DWP plays,
 It prefers paper weapons —O, ink can kill as well:
 An average letter from this Department can work
 A pretty lethal spell of unsympathetic magic,
 Like black spots to Black Dogs! But of all





The paper weapons deployed none compare
To brown envelopes, brown envelopes everywhere,
Ubiquitous brown envelopes, lying in baiting
Wait on doormats of a morning like paper moths
Or flattened preying mantises to greet indigents'
Lockjawed yawning; and these tan envelopes
Paralyse on sight, as soon as claimants spy them
In hallways they get dreadful frights, muscles
Tighten, throats turn dry, palms go clammy,
Brows perspire, hearts start thumping, pulses pumping —
Such symptoms these simple shapes inspire,
No mere rectangular gestures of tan paper
With glaring white fangs for windows sitting on
Doormats of the lumpenproletariat,
Simply petrify, sealed and pressed with spite,
Vituperative envelopes, primed paper weapons,
Packets of seeds to excite nervous dispositions,
Itch hypersensitivities, trigger anxieties,
Spring traps of panic attacks, fight-or-flights,
Make grown men quake over cornflakes —there's no
Escape from brown envelopes for recipients
(Except, perhaps, suicide —and O how many more
Suicides to be swept under the carpet by
Tampered DWP statistics, while particular cases
Still come to light, like Reekie, Clapson, Salter...?),
As long as someone's unemployed or
Incapacitated, day and night they'll be stalked by
These vicious missives, razor-sharp verdicts,
Tan fiends, buff furies, beige besiegers, brown
Plebiscites, salted caramels, salted with spite —
Not as butterscotch-sweet as *Werther's Originals*,
Nor even Beveridge's "*Five Giant Evils*"
Lozenge variety and lacking the glucose
Shots of Lloyd-George's "*Four Spectres*" —
Interminable brown robins with stark black
And white insides of menacing nomenclature,
Kafkaesque Doublespeak and implicatures
Paving the way to disinfecting sunlight
Like shards of burnt glass, to snip at and grate away
Fragile minds; some choose to eat them, so pretend





They haven't received them, but those who do
Will taste manila gum on gluey tongues and the bite
Of sodium chloride, for these are spiked repasts,
Bitter sweetmeats, unjust desserts laced with darnels —
The Department for Work and Pensions slowly
Poisons its claimants with Salted Caramels...





Claimant Christ

You've been seen out healing people
 While your claim was still live
 And you didn't declare the fact
 Of raising Lazarus on the side —
 But it's evident you are clearly
 Capable of miracle-work...

So say you...

Don't obfuscate Mister Christ, it's clear
 You're more than capable of work...

I never denied it...

Yet you don't
 Declare your miracle-working!

*I cure the sick in return for bread,
 Man must make bread to keep alive...*

Exactly! This is undeclared earnings!

*No; it is a simple gift of sustenance,
 Not Caesar's coin palmed on the hand —
 See, my palm is empty but for a map
 Of lines; rivulets on the skin's surface;
 From many streams come rivers...*

Yes, rivers of undeclared earnings...

*The bird does not declare; it sings;
 The lamb does not declare; it bleats...*

OB-FU-SCA-TION Mister Christ —you have
 Declared yourself unfit for work
 And so receive sickness benefit





Yet your daytime miracles contradict this!

*I did not declare that I was sick,
My Doctor did...*

But you didn't deny it...?

How can I deny what I haven't said?

Don't get all Socratic with me Mr Christ!
You're being evasive —don't obfuscate...

*No; it is the system works
To obfuscate entitlements
Through loopholes, while the Government
Scapegoats the struggling while it shirks
Responsibility for the vulnerable —
The world is ruled by fiddled numbers
And prating loss adjusters...*

Let's see what your Doctor wrote about
Your contentious 'incapacity':

What he wrote was as dust on sand...

Well that's as maybe but it's in his hand —
And please, NO MORE APHORISMS! —
He's signed you off as chronically unfit
For manual tasks, arithmetic,
And all forms of office work...

I've never been good with numbers...

No, you couldn't correctly count up
The food bank coupons you conjured up
Apparently from thin air for that mob
Of homeless beggars...

It was a fair few...





FIVE THOUSAND, Mister Christ! ...But to
Return to the psychiatrist's report:
He writes you might be schizophrenic,
He recommends you to a clinic —
And did you take up the appointment?

Yes...

Don't be evasive, Mister Christ...

I say yes...

And what was the psychiatrist's verdict?

That I suffered from a psychotic delusion...

Ah, which is?

That I'm the Son of God...

Is that what you said?

No; HE said so, or implied it...

But why? You must have given him
A reason to make that diagnosis...?

I give no reasons to others' verdicts...

No more aphorisms or apothegms!
No more gnomic utterances!

*I simply sat there and when he asked me
If I was the Son of God I remained
Silent...*

A TACIT admission then?
You didn't deny it...? Interesting...





Why should I deny what I haven't said?

Did he mention other delusions?

Yes: that I have conquered death...

Well, good for you, Mister Christ...
Because he writes here that you claim
To have risen from your own tomb..?

I claimed no such thing...

Ok, then:
He PUT IT TO YOU that you thought you had?

Yes; but I didn't claim it...

But you didn't deny it..? Ok, Mister Christ,
As long as you can get a chit
From this trick-cyclist
Every three months you'll still receive
Your incapacity benefit...

I did not ask for it...

And yet you need to eat... to live...

I do not take, I only give...

So say you, but you're quite content
To take your weekly benefit...

*I receive it, it is YOU who gives it;
I do not ask for it...*

So if we sanctioned
You how would you survive do you think?

Consider the ravens...



I already have,
None of them have ever done a decent day's
Work in their lives, the lazy scavengers...

*Now I shall depart, but will return,
And you may keep my claim alive...*

(Sighs) Don't worry, you'll get your dole...

I worry more for your immortal soul...

And what pray tell will you be up to
While you're away...?

I will atone for you...

Sign here Mister Christ...

I forgive you...

...and date it...

For you know not what you do...





Waiting for Giro

Wragdole: What we have here is a pale suggestion and we are trapped by this piece of franked paper. And yet, in this intense privation, one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Giro to come.

Escrogurn: I don't seem to be able... (*long hesitation*) to budget.

Wragdole: That's hardly surprising, since this paper affords us nothing. Worse than nothing: something. But not enough something. It's just a token to acknowledge we ought to exist, in some form or other. As ghosts.

Escrogurn: Worse. Ghosts don't need money.

Wragdole: It's perpetuity's stipend. It stretches our bones on the rack of waiting.

Escrogurn: How depressing.

Wragdole: To every doley his little cross. (*He sighs.*) Till he signs. (*Afterthought.*) And is forgotten. Until the next time.

That little cross to point us to our Post Office. We wait.

We are bored. (*He throws up his hand.*) No, don't protest...

Escrogurn: (*Indignant*) I wasn't about to...

Wragdole: ...we are bored to death, there's no denying it. Good. Giro comes along and what do we do?

We squander it. . . In an instant a fortnight's budget will vanish and we'll be broke once more, in the midst of nothingness!

Escrogurn: I was only going to say... I'm beyond it.

Wragdole: Beyond what?

Escrogurn: Boredom. (*Afterthought*). By now.

Wragdole: You and me both. Both you and me.

Under this fruitless tree.

Escrogurn: How long now do you think? How long?

Wragdole: How long is a piece of string?

Escrogurn: As long as that? It seems ages since...

Wragdole: I know...

Escrogurn: ...the last one...

Wragdole: Mmmm?...

Escrogurn:came.

Wragdole: (*Holding hand up as if halting a protest*).

No, there's nothing to be done...

Escrogurn: I know... I'm doing nothing...

Wragdole: ...until Giro comes...





Another Five Giants

'...the true object of the Welfare State... is to teach people how to do without it'
—Alan Peacock, *The Welfare Society* (1961)

'Whatever temporary benefits may have accrued from welfare interventions may now, it seems, flow from the workings of unimpeded market forces, and the Welfare State should be allowed to wither away as speedily as possible. ... This particular point of view is... naively convinced of the primary importance of material incentives as a stimulus to activity, and fearful of the effects of welfare policies upon their recipient's moral fibre (with particular reference to his will to work)'

—Ken Coates and Richard Silburn,
'The Decline of the Welfare State', *Poverty: The Forgotten Englishmen*
(Pelican, 1970/ rev.1973)

'We have helped change the debate on welfare ... no frontbench politician is now using disgraceful, divisive terms like 'scrounger', 'shirker' or 'skiver'. They have been shamed by the reality of life ... for millions of our people in left-behind Britain. ...The injustices that scar society today are not those of 1945... Want, Squalor, Idleness, Disease and Ignorance ...they have changed since I first entered Parliament in 1983... Today what is holding people back above all are ... Inequality ... Neglect ... Insecurity ... Prejudice ... and Discrimination...'

—Jeremy Corbyn, 2016

1.
In the hard-fought Forties, armchair reformer,
Fabian-influenced Liberal economist
And social hygienist, W.H. Beveridge,
Compiled a Report on the state of the Have-
Not nation, the unemployed and incapacitated,
Those minion millions whom in spite of Liberal
Interventions earlier in the century —
Of social insurance schemes and compensation
For spells of unemployment— still battled
Social diseases of under-consumption,
Malnourishment, rickets and consumption
Due to slum conditions, vitamin-deficient
Diets and poor sanitation, identifying
What he termed the “Five Giant Evils” —
Want, Ignorance, Disease, Squalor & Idleness—
That stalked the land; *and the greatest of these...*





2.

But there seemed something judgemental
In Beveridge's message: ambiguousness
In *Ignorance* which might have been signposting
Poor schooling or that some simply opted
To be ignorant; while *Idleness* seemed less
Ambiguous in its emphasis on behaviour,
As if to signal this particular 'evil' was elective,
A voluntary vice, even a deviancy —
There'd been no such aura of judgement in
David Lloyd George's evangelical message
On alleviating poverty and unemployment,
Expressed as much by the poet in him as
The politician, with a spicing of the pulpit-
Rhetoric of the Baptist Minister: "*Four
Spectres haunt the Poor —Old Age, Accident,
Sickness and Unemployment. We are going
To exorcise them. We are going to drive
Hunger from the hearth. We mean to banish
The workhouse from the horizon of every
Workman in the land*" —thus roared the Welshman
From Llanystumdwy, laying four foundation
Stones for future efforts towards relief
Of proletarian distress, anti-totems
To be toppled and thence emancipate
And empower the poor; and here the emphasis
Was on things that *happened* to the poor,
Not on anything happening as repercussions
Of choices *made by* them —prescription as
Opposed to proscription; so the fundamental
Template for a state safety net to catch
And support the poorest, funded by taxes
On the better-off, was formulated and put
In place in spite of frothing opposition from
The entire British Establishment (the hoary
Goliath this David slew with his sling
Of oratorical stones); inevitably this 'net'
Had teething troubles, and would partially
Function in an underdeveloped, improvised



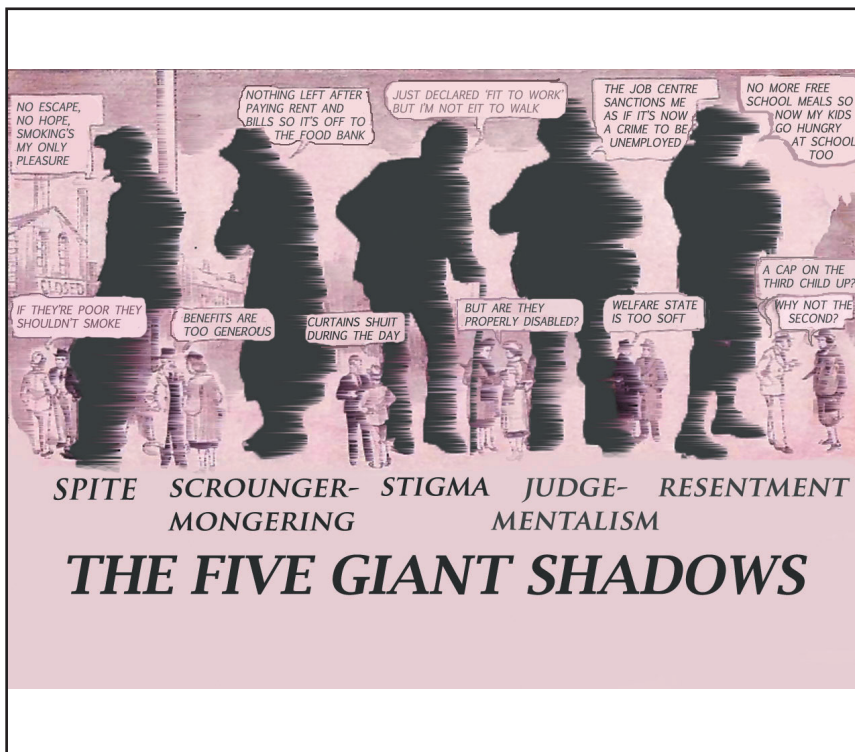


Fashion in its novice field of welfare relief,
Government-dealt dole under aims of eudemonia,
To be a long-term legacy of subsequently
Labelled '*bleeding hearted*' Liberals,
Those of a radical timbre almost singular
To the unrewarded dawn of the Edwardian era:
Campbell-Bannerman, Asquith, Lloyd George...

3.
Thirty years later, the rudimentary architecture
Of a future Welfare State still in scaffolding
Hard-fought for on behalf of the "*Four Spectres*"-
Haunted poor in 'The People's Budget'
Of 1909 that brought in private rent
Controls and dole for the unemployed
(Promptly stigmatised as "*going on the Lloyd
George*", a signature that degenerated later,
Mutated into administrative hatred
And the punitive Means Test most notorious
In the Nineteen Thirties for humiliating
The disadvantaged forced to go caps-in-
Hands up against judgmental panels under
Stanley Baldwin's '*Two Nations*' Tories)
Was ripe for further development, for flesh
To be stretched over its sketched skeleton,
Some gristle on the bones; and homburged
Beveridge, then a high-ranking civil servant,
Was the man tasked to compile a report
Making recommendations towards this:
He proposed a more comprehensive system
Of social security to tackle the Five
Evils he'd identified in his retrospectively
Eponymous Report —a system which was
Eventually built by the post-war Labour
Government under Prime Minister Clement
'*Little mouse*' Attlee (a veritable mouse
That roared) —once a small 'c' Conservative,
Who'd converted to Socialism lightning-
Struck during his Damascene-time as manager



Of Haileybury House, a charitable club
 For working-class boys deep in the slums
 Of Stepney... So was summoned in
 Social security for periods of unemployment;
 State pensions and national insurance
 To compensate industrial injuries and other
 Occupation-stopping incapacities;
 A mass programme of council house building;
 Nationalisation of major industries,
 Utilities and public services; a Landlord
 And Tenant Act to cement private rent controls,
 And protect tenancies; and a National Health
 Service free at the point of delivery —
 All packaged together under the banner
 “From cradle to grave”, collectively termed
 The Welfare State or Attlee Settlement...





4.
But this beneficent safety net has been steadily
Unthreaded through the decades post-'79,
The Welfare State gradually undermined
By successive governments leaning Right,
Under subterfuge of “*reforms*” slowly but
Surely letting in the wolf that welfare kept
From the door, amounting more to sabotage...
By the beginning of the 21st century,
Neo-liberalism had dealt its recumbentibus
To the British Left, Labour bowdlerised
And blued by Blair under banner of ‘*New*’,
And under his Government policies geared
Towards social engineering and ‘*nudging*’
Germinated, ministers instructed to “*Think
The unthinkable*” —and they’d be backed
Up by private sector trouble shooters,
‘*Problem-solvers*’, medical insurance bods
And psychiatric bounty-hunters, thus all
Parties’ mutually beneficial agendas
Were legitimised; a covert induction
Of a new Occupational Health Doublespeak,
A semiotic corruption of therapeutic ethics,
To be taken up by medical and psychiatric
Practitioners, took place at a psychosocial
Conference in Woodstock, Oxfordshire,
2001, on the judgementally titled theme,
‘*Malingering and illness deception*’ —
All participants were linked to UnumProvident,
A US insurance company represented by
One John LoCascio, and supported by one
Mansel Aylward, author of ‘*Worklessness
And Health: A Symposium*’ (amongst other
Atomistic documents), then chief medical
Officer for the DWP, who kept its shadowy
Workings ticking over quietly, tick-tocking
Toxically —the shadowy Aylward was key
To this politico-corporate conspiracy
Against the sick and disabled, helping





Politicians find ways of *'weeding out
The workshy'* —or, at least, those depicted
Thus in order to fit his hypothesis;
And sifted out entitlements to benefits
For the mentally ill whose invisible
Symptoms were the easiest to invalidate,
Perceived physical wellness weighted against
Psychical incapacity, and through calculated
Misappropriation of occupational
Health theory, found ways of coercing
The psychiatrically afflicted —through
'Psycho-compulsion'— back to work,
Some mythical work, tasking *'basket cases'*
To make wicker baskets (throw thy crutches
Away and walk on towards the *'work cure'*!),
Welfare-to-work, like clockwork, unpaid
Work placements, *not* exploitation because
The rewards were towards *'wellness'* (even
If penniless), work now caricatured as
A miracle cure for all ills including mental;
The other part of this putsch: a conspiracy
Hatched between politicians and the red
Top press to spread propagandist copy
Mythologizing an *"overgenerous"*
Welfare State greedily wrung dry by
A ubiquitous breed of gurney-malingering
"Scroungers", cripples *"on the fiddle"*,
"Spongers" in bandages *'swinging the lead'...*

5.
The so-called *'Waddell and Aylward Report'*
Was published in 2005, its actual title,
*The Scientific and Conceptual Basis
Of Incapacity Benefit*: it recommended
The disregarding of medical opinions
From claimants' GPs and consultants —
Sickness chits flipped paradoxically
To *'fit notes'* in the new Dee-Double-U-speak
Poisoning the phrasal pool of occupational





Health —and the use of a new “*functional Assessment*” using the bio-psychosocial Model; by 2007, ex-City banker David Freud was appointed by the Government To compile a report on welfare reform, Duplicitously titled, *Reducing Dependency, Increasing Opportunity: Options for The Future of Welfare To Work* that claimed It was possible and desirable to kick A million sick and disabled claimants Into indiscriminate ‘work’ —a twisted Notion of a ‘work cure’; forced off benefits For any job on offer; a different approach To the Diaspora of the incapacitated, Mass asylum-exodus that marble Margaret Imposed, psychiatric closures and clearances — Euphemised as ‘*Care in the Community*’, Which saw the mushrooming of street Homelessness, an epidemic of rough sleeping Particularly amongst the mentally ill, Cut-out citizens of cardboard cities, in The brutalising Eighties... Freud recommended The Aylward-watered-down, medically re-Circuited new work capability assessments Of the sick and disabled be conducted By publicly unaccountable private Companies specialising in medical charlatantry In return for bounties; in 2008, The Government contracted French IT firm, Atos Solutions, who rebranded the bogus Unregulated wing of their enterprise as Atos Healthcare (up until their brand became So toxic that they had to opt for the more Nondescript-sounding name, Independent Assessment Services) —and the rest is, Tragically, history of bureaucratic Atrocity; Freud switched party allegiances And was promoted to Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Welfare Reform





Under the new Tory-led administration
During which tenure he made such discriminatory
Recommendations as the disabled being
Put to work for £2 per hour for projected
Lower productivity —he made the perfect
Pinstriped quips to complement red-top
Tropes and spice the more spiteful and charmless
Dictums of truculent martinet Iain
Duncan Smith, menace of the nation's
Underclass and mythical curtain-shutters...

6.

But even from the very beginning there was
A red shadow emitted from the seemingly
Angelic architecture of the Welfare State,
A bruising underbelly to Beveridge's
Evergetism, which might make some of his
Disciples since —even the most devout—
Question his unquestioned secular
Canonisation, and chill them: earlier
In his career, Beveridge was a member
Of the Eugenics Society, and, in 1909 —
Ironically the same year that his party
In government introduced the radical
“People's Budget” (hailing which Chancellor
David Lloyd George wistfully prophesied
A time when poverty would be as distant
A memory as *“the wolves which once infested
Our forests”*) —he proposed that those who
Could not work should be supported by
The state *“but with complete and permanent
Loss of all citizen rights —including
Not only the franchise but civil freedom
And fatherhood”* —proposals to stop
The lumpenproletariat reproducing
In an attempt to —somewhat brutally— stamp
Out poverty and associated ills rather than
“Patching” up the problem with compassion
And supplementary benefits, an approach





Which, a century later, the political
 Persecutor of the sick, poor and unemployed,
 One-time Work and Pensions Secretary,
 Iain Duncan Smith, transposed into capping
 Child benefits after the third child, and wiping
 Out tens of thousands of disabled citizens
 Through rigged work capability assessments —
 Actually covert invalidity vetting—
 Carried out by bounties-incentivised
 Pontius Pilate companies that found tens
 Of thousands falsely “*fit for work*”, many
 Of whom subsequently died within six
 Weeks of the decision (inclusive of suicides),
 Or were financially and psychically
 Crippled under the scrimping auspices
 Of the Department for Work and Pensions...

7.
 Did the “*great*” Beveridge have an ulterior
 Motive in his blueprint for bettering the lot
 Of the unemployed and lumpenproletariat?
 Was he compromised by a conflict of interest
 Undeclared in his eugenics connections?
 On the day the House of Commons met
 To debate what later became known as
 ‘*The Beveridge Report*’, in 1943,
 Its author ‘*slipped out of the gallery early*
In the evening to address a meeting
Of the Eugenics Society’ where he was
 Especially keen to ‘*reassure*’ members
 That his Report ‘*was eugenic in intent*
And would prove so in effect... The idea
Of child allowances had been developed
Within the society with the twin aims
Of encouraging the educated professional
Classes to have more children than they
Currently did and, at the same time, to limit
The number of children born to poor households’ —
 Something taken up just under seventy





Years later by DWP hatchet-man
Duncan Smith; *For both effects to be properly
Stimulated, the allowance needed to be
Graded: middle-class parents receiving
More generous payments than working-
Class parents'...* From the outset, then,
The template of the Welfare State was self-
Gentrifying in terms of social-engineering,
Its fundamental trajectory not so much
Towards eliminating poverty — O to solve
Insolvency! — as covertly sieving out
The poorest and the long-term unemployed —
“Weeding out the workshy” as Duncan Smith
Would phrase it at a far flung future date —
Pulling the lumpenproletariat up by their roots
And bootstraps, imposing a type of dampness
Through pecuniary means to cultivate
An atmospheric impotence in an attempt
To stop them reproducing, at least,
At then-current rates, capped benefits
Having the effect of fiscal contraceptives,
Reduced household budgets to reduce
Libidos by reducing energies through
Insubstantial diets, giros transfigured
As castrating agents of the state, copper
Pennies heaped in tins, sperms permanently
Arrested as tadpoles in frogspawn scooped
Up in jam jars from green-slimed ponds,
Reduced spending power, the ultimate
Passion-dampener, anti-aphrodisiac,
While precautions against reproduction
Became more cheaply priced, choicest
Bespoke options marketed by word-of-mouth
Under numerous European euphemisms —
Dutch Caps, French Letters, English Overcoats;
Eugenics incognito; pecuniary cull
Of the impecunious; material
Sterilisation of the underclass, Dutch-capping
Of the lumpenproletariat by stealth:



'The Home Secretary had that very day Signalled... the government planned a flat Rate of child allowance. But Beveridge Alluding to the problem of an overall Declining birth rate, argued that even The flat rate would be eugenic.... (to reassure His private audience) ...He held out hope for The purists. 'Sir William made it clear That it was in his view not only possible But desirable that graded family Allowance schemes, applicable to families In the higher income brackets, be Administered concurrently with his flat Rate scheme'', thus was it reported raptly In the Eugenics Review at the time...





8.

Only sociologists in tortoise-shell glasses
Have been willing to interrogate Beveridge's
Regime of tough-loving paternalism,
See deeper through its compassionate camouflage
Of gradualism that besotted
The bourgeoisie of an entire generation
Who'd entrusted him as fiduciary
With the allocation of their tax contributions
To best alleviate the distress of the poor,
Unemployed, depressed; but these forensic
Ethical criticisms took time to mature
And articulate, until by the early Sixties
Intellectual disillusionment was damply
Setting in with the Welfare State's self-
Immolating atomisation of its claimants,
Its inbuilt abuse of its own beneficiaries,
Policing and depletion of its dependents,
Aphorised by economist Alan Peacock in
The Welfare Society published 1961:
*'...the true object of the Welfare State... is
To teach people how to do without it'* —
Indeed, by the early Seventies, corduroyed
Social scientists, Ken Coates & Richard
Silburn, had diagnosed a faulty navigation
At the helm of the social security system:
That it was more on course towards charting
Maps of demographic damage-limitation
Than fundamentally alleviating
Material distress and levelling uneven
Grounds of intergenerational indigence,
Not so much about eliminating poverty
As ploughing through the poor —this was
The tall price of insisting on universalism
From the outset, projected to be the very
Thing that would galvanise public support
Across all classes, forge a consensus,
For a fledgling Welfare State and safeguard
Against its being attitudinally ghettoised





And subsequently stigmatised as something
 Put in place purely for the benefit
 Of the poorest (and thus most 'suspect');
 And yet, paradoxically, it was precisely
 This universalism which effected a sifting
 Out through the safety net of those very
 Families most in need of it, or, at best,
 Keeping them in their place, for it in turn
 Necessitated gentrifying welfare rates
 And apportioning benefits pegged to station,
 Rising in amount as one crept up the social
 Scale, thus giving more to those with something
 To spare, least to those with next to nothing,
 And thereby expertly perpetuating
 Material inequality: simply lifting up
 The social edifice complete and intact...

9.

In 1970, Coates & Silburn already sighted —
 And cited as a chapter heading— *'The Decline
 Of the Welfare State'*, the withering
 Of the benefits shrub in its fight to push up
 Through the impermeable topsoil
 Of capitalism: *'Whatever temporary
 Benefits may have accrued from welfare
 Interventions may now...flow from
 The workings of unimpeded market forces,
 And the Welfare State should be allowed
 To wither away as speedily as possible'* —
 This is how they expressed the impatient
 Capitalist point of view which they said
 Was *'naively convinced of the primary
 Importance of material incentives
 As a stimulus to activity, and fearful
 Of the effects of welfare policies upon
 Their recipient's moral fibre (with
 Particular reference to his will to work)'*;
 Coates & Silburn argued that Beveridge's
 Template for the Welfare State —soon after





Built by Attlee's administration— was
Perversely averse to alleviating
Material distress of the poorest during
Periods of unemployment or incapacity,
From the outset, perceiving financial
Generosity as potentially vitiating
Moral vitality, thus emphasis from the very
Start was on cast-iron conditionality,
And disincentives for perceived avoidance
Of the duty of earning one's living if able,
Or of conscientiously seeking work
When redundant, by dishing out sub-standard
Doles to the underlings of the social order,
Thereby also stripping the unemployed poor
Of any sense of self-respect whilst out
Of the employment market, in turn curtailing
Any temptation to state-dependence
(But also, paradoxically, shrinking the self-
Confidence of jobseekers crucial to successful
Re-procuring of employment): *'From the outset,
The rates of benefit were too low to guarantee,
Even by Beveridge's own declared standards,
Security from want. ...Precisely in order
To avoid the situation where a family
Might receive more in welfare payments
Than it would in earnings, the Ministry
Operates a 'wage-stop'; ...Whatever level
Of benefits a family may be eligible
To receive according to the Ministry's scales,
The actual sum paid out shall not exceed
The amount that was being earned before
The interruption occurred'...* So while the middle
Classes were incentivised to cultivate
Virility, have sex, and save (the state's key
Investments), the working and workless classes
Were besieged by ever more persuasive
Advertisements for contraceptives, taboo-
Lifted booms in abortions, and a state-
Generated indigence for which they were





Expected to show gratitude and a means-
Tested aggregate of guilt, and wear invisible
Badges of stigma, all for the grittiest privilege
Of being enabled to just about obviate
Absolute destitution: '*...the low wage-earner
Can find relief neither as of right nor on
Demonstration of need, but must reconcile
Himself and his family to living at
Whatever standard his low wage permits.
This large group, who cannot escape poverty
While at work, can expect no improvement
In their circumstances in the event
Of a period of sickness or unemployment,
Which would make them eligible for both
Social-security and Supplementary Benefits.
...In the event of such low earnings being
Interrupted, the Ministry will fastidiously
Maintain such a family in its accustomed
Poverty: in no event can authority
Allow its resources to be used actually
To raise anyone's living standards, even
As far as the level of the Ministry's own
Estimate of minimum requirements*' —This,
The apocryphal Pelican Gospel of Coates
& Silburn, immune to the most wool-pulling
Optimism of the post-war consensus:
Poverty: The Forgotten Englishmen —but
Not forgotten by them or their kinder ilk...

10.

Seventy-four years after the Beveridge
Report, seventy-one years after the start
Of the Welfare State, and thirty-seven years
After the advent of its gradual long-term
Dismantlement by administrations leaning
Right, two socialist pilots unexpectedly
Swept up into the cockpit of the Labour
Party tilting on its long-neglected left wing,
Corbyn & McDonnell, have defined another





Five Giant Evils for our time, marker-buoys
Of “left-behind Britain”: *Inequality...
Neglect ...Insecurity ...Prejudice... and
Discrimination: Inequality* in education,
Income, housing, life chances; *Neglect*
Of the elderly, the young, disabled, children,
Homeless, mentally ill; *Insecurity*
Of employment, renting, housing and health;
Prejudice against the poor, unemployed,
Disabled, mentally ill, homeless, immigrants,
Foreigners and refugees; *Discrimination*
Against the poor, unemployed, disabled,
Mentally ill, homeless, immigrants,
Foreigners, refugees and single mothers...
Everything progressive achieved between
The Forties and Seventies, during
The Attleean hiatus of the post-war
Social-democratic consensus —social security,
The cementing of private rent controls,
Nationalisation of industries and public
Services, greater worker and union rights —
Has been steadily eroded by destabilising
Rollerblades of banks-based economy,
The traumatic contractions of manufacture-
Crushing Thatcherism and its afterbirth,
The neoliberal incubus, the abolition
Of private rent controls and the privatisation
Of utilities and once-public services, boom
And bust, Buy-to-Let and sub-prime mortgages
Sent into tailspin on roulette-wheels
Of casino capitalism which collapsed
Into the banking crash of 2008
And eight years of fanatical austerity
Afterwards as an excuse to dismantle
The Welfare State and the last asthmatic
Gasps of the Attlee Settlement, strip it all
Down to scrap for private sector outsourcing
And subcontracting —all made acceptable
To an indoctrinated public on the back



Of blue torch-and-red top promulgated
Scroungermongering, and folkloric Rough
Musickings of prime cuts from a back-
Catalogue of gnomonic numbers, vindictive
Non-movers, stigmatisation's Greatest Hits:
"Something for Nothing", *"Curtains Shut During
The Day"*, *"Culture of Entitlement"*, *"Culture
Of Dependency"*, *"Culture of Idleness"* —time
To change the records? Spin a plate and see...

11.

Sprouting in the Welfare State's uprooted
Foundations, the pop-up post-society
Furnished with food banks, poor doors, homeless spikes,
Unpaid apprenticeships, zero-hours contracts,
Underemployment, corporate exploitation
Of the unemployed, discrimination against
All and any in need of state assistance,
Unaffordable spiralling private rents,
Diminished social housing, and from such ruptured
Ground sprang the new Five Giants, *fee-fi-fo-fum*,
Smelling the blood of forgotten Englishmen,
Congealing Englishmen... Now that Jeremy
And John have identified them we might
Eventually get to do something about them,
These evils deserving our attention, these
Deserving evils, before their planted feet
Root too deep into the lower stratum,
But in order to get into power to slay them,
Corbyn, labelled "*unelectable*" by everyone
Bar those who twice elected him as leader
Must get his heel-dragging party into government...
But —another *But*, and the most obdurate:
The balance of the ballot box depends upon
Opinions spoon-fed to the people by red tops
And purple supplements, the Tory and/or
Ukip-supporting newspaper opinion-shapers,
For it's not politicians who decide elections
But the popular press, prop of the powerful,



Opium of the newsprint-doped proles who are
Happily complicit in their own oppression
As long as they can have a few carrots thrown
At them now and then; the blue-rinse
Establishment's dyed-in-the-wool to its roots,
Roots that can't be moved, nor even shaken...

12.

The new Five Giants are formidable foes
Camouflaged against the intransigent glares
Of St. George flags in council house windows
Of forgotten Englishmen, empty-pocketed
Patriots who think they'll be spoilt for
Opportunities —once all the Polish fruit-
Pickers are packed off back to Poland— and
Not just for unpaid placements in *Poundland*;
And those soon-to-be-obsolete Butcher's
Aprons draped against sun-bashed glass
Of working-class amalgamates, angry glad
Englanders hoisting Agincourt salutes
At a Continent the British Isles turns
Its prickly backs to; Britain will be "*Great*"
Again according to jingoists Nigel and Boris,
Both notably absent during the mopping up
Of the diplomatic catastrophe once the plug
Had been pulled on our nation's forty-three-year
European experiment; the most monumental
Decision since entering the Second World War
Passed like the port by Pontius Pilate politicians,
Our appointed parliamentary representatives,
An invertebrate breed who chucked the bones
Of an incomprehensible debate out to
An information-deprived public through
A plebiscite, a public whose pool
Of opinions on Europe were poisoned by
Drip-fed red-top tropes and blue torch
Obfuscation, a Ukip-whipped "*People's*
Army" press-ganged by xenophobic pundits
And empurpled tub-thumpers, brainwashed





By immigrant-bashing tabloids, a nation's
Future put up for ransom because a mulish
Cabal of euro-sceptic Tories blackmailed
A spineless prime minister into holding
A referendum on a deeply complicated
Question with only the options of "A simple
Yes or No answer: *Out or In*" —and who,
Having lost, promptly tripped into the sunset
Of other enterprises, lucrative after-dinner
Speeches mopping up all the trimmings
And expenses, leaving behind a Britain well
And truly "*left behind*", and rapidly sinking...

13.

The New Five Giant Evils have arrived,
And have been identified, but then they've
Been here for quite some time, just very
Well-disguised as lengthening shadows
Of Beveridge's original Five banished long ago,
As go bogus-progressive narratives,
But actually just scattered, still very much
Alive in spite of handpicked tsars' cherry-
Picking reports —woven into the worsted
Fabric of our culture, and sub-cultures,
Even "*Chav*"-adaptive fashionable label,
Burberry, a range from Selfridges, gets
'*That Five Evils Vibe*', patents and spins it
Into patterns of its five-tone synthetic
Tartan of the disadvantaged, checked skirt
Of the 'McChavish' Clan— too late to hack
The beanstalk back and catch the hatchlings,
The giants arrived some time ago and know
How many beans make five, those Ogmagogs
Gobbled up the golden eggs long ago,
And mythologized the state that lay them
As a profligate goose, its goslings as
"*Scroungers*" —but still kindling nostalgias
Regale the gullible round camp fires
Of self-sufficient futures where moral fibres





Are inextinguishable in the face of hardship
And have the foresight of squirrels to forage
And store for winter, and the stamina
To withstand the itch of indigence's
Stinging nettles without taking the swift
Relief of the dole cheque's dock leaf, since
Having one's benefits stopped and going
Hungry "isn't real suffering" in the silver-
Spooned opinions of minted Tory MPs (now
The wolves are infesting the forests again...);
They'll regale of the legend of gallant Sir
Beveridge chivalrously vanquishing
The Five Evil Giants from the land, even if,
Outside of fairy tales, he only marked them
Out, recommended some alms to armour
Their victims and the protection of a turret-less
Castle-keep tilting in on its own built-in
Contradictions, the keep that expects
Its inhabitants to venture outside it and find
A more permanent refuge in self-help through
Personal enterprise, to fend for themselves,
No more beholden to spiky taxpayers
For unsympathetic support, begrudged
Contributions, hard-earned dog-ends for giros,
For there are far worse foes to face than
The Five Giant Evils, there are five ferocious
Fiends affiliated to their relief, five
Shadow evils vented by the devils
Of involuntary giving levied by governments
For meeting magnified targets of evergetism,
Exceedingly well-advertised altruism,
Penny-pinching arcade coin-pusher philanthropy,
Five evil reverbs with which every benefit
Recipient —in spite of evidence of deservingness —
Must learn to live, while trying to keep
Their self-respect intact; evils which are
Givens with receiving sieved victuals
We're forever told are diverted revenues:
Spite... Resentment... Stigma... Judgmentalism...



*Scroungermongering... These are the five giant
Shadows thrown by the new Five Evils:
Irrespective of how “deserving” one’s poverty,
Welfare is a flogging stool, benefits: taboos...*

*

*

*

*What have we achieved after the Attleean
Slaying of the Five Giant Evils of England?
After the lasting triumph of Thatcherism,
The neoliberal bribe, uncapped capitalism,
And the start of the dismantling of the Welfare State?*

*Another five giants have sprung up in place
Of Beveridge’s originals, another five giants
Stalking the land and its stigmatised claimants —*

*Another five giants —fee-fi-fo-fum—
Smell the obsolete blood of forgotten Englishmen...*

