

Iain Sinclair is the author of *Downriver* (winner of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and the Encore Award); *Landor's Tower*, *White Chappell*, *Scarlet Tracings*; *Lights Out for the Territory*; *Lud Heat*; *Rodinsky's Room* (with Rachel Lichtenstein); *Radon Daughters*; *London Orbital*; and *Dining on Stones*. He lives in Hackney, East London.

Downriver

(Or, The Vessels of Wrath)
A Narrative in Twelve Tales

IAIN SINCLAIR



PENGUIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA

Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia

Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2

Penguin Books India (P) Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India

Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, Cnr Rosedale and Airborne Roads, Albany, Auckland, New Zealand

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

www.penguin.com

First published in Great Britain by Paladin 1991

First published in paperback by Vintage 1995

Published by Granta Books 2002

Published in Penguin Books 2004

1

Copyright © Iain Sinclair, 1991

All rights reserved

The moral right of the author has been asserted

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

EISBN: 978-0-141-90615-7

Offered to those contrary spirits,
Mike Goldmark and Patrick Wright

'As I walked, trying to understand this, filled with this as with some pure intelligible security,
I heard the first wraths of the guns at the Thames' mouth below Tilbury. The wraths so soon
to be answered by shrapnel screaming in the air...'

Mary Butts, *The Crystal Cabinet*

Contents

[1. He Walked Amongst the Trial Men](#)

[2. Riverside Opportunities](#)

[3. Horse Spittle \(*The Eros of Maps*\)](#)

[4. Living in Restaurants](#)

[5. The Solemn Mystery of the Disappearing Room](#)

[6. Eisenbahngst \(*into the Fourth Square*\)](#)

[7. Prima Donna \(*The Cleansing of Angels*\)](#)

[8. Art of the State \(*The Silvertown Memorial*\)](#)

[9. The Isle of Doges \(*Vat City plc*\)](#)

[10. The Guilty River](#)

[11. The Case of the Premature Mourners](#)

[12. The Sexing of Stones](#)

[Acknowledgements and Confessions](#)

He Walked Amongst the Trial Men

'He walked amongst the Trial Men

In a suit of shabby grey;

A cricket cap was on his head,

And his step seemed light and gay...'

Oscar Wilde,

The Ballad of Reading Gaol

'And what,' Sabella insisted, 'is the *opposite* of a dog?'

Her husband, Henry Milditch, continued to ignore her. This was not easy. Sabella had been painting all afternoon, and was now flagrantly drunk. She poked a pint-sized coffee mug into his midriff. The red wine splashed on to his shirt. He wheezed cigar smoke like a leaking radiator.

'You two are as boring as those old farts on "Test Match Special". Everything's finished and burnt out. Nothing is what it used to be. Every book you mention is "a dog", "a howling dog", "an absolute dog". I want to know what *else* there is in the world.'

Milditch, up to now, had kept his life in separate compartments. But, with the move out of Hackney, everything was coming to pieces. His wife was roaming free in his book room, wearing an old rugby shirt that she filled very adequately, even though she had put it on back to front. And her daughter was doing her best to climb into my lap and interest me in an obscure volume of nautical memoirs.

'You're a pair of rheum-eyed mongrels.' Sabella spun on me. 'You whine about dragging yourselves to Groucho's. Why don't you take us along? I don't mind male bimbos. Some of them are quite tasty. And all of them have more to say than you do. Who the hell wants to spend their life stuck out in a Suffolk fish dock, ploughing through reprints of Wilkie Collins and watching fat opera queens pull themselves out of taxis?'

Milditch compulsively reshelved his yellowbacks. He muttered something incoherent but decent-minded about inner-city schools and the rising tide of litter and urban violence.

'*Bollocks* to urban violence,' Sabella screamed. 'You'll dump me out in the sticks with your rotten kids, while you slide down the motorway. You'll only crawl back when you need a few quiet days to sleep off the excitement.'

Milditch picked her up, carried her out, and locked the door. She kicked against it steadily for ten minutes or so, until she damaged her naked foot. Then she sat in the corridor, and sobbed. Quite musically.

I turned my back on the small pile of books I was about, unenthusiastically, to carry away; I looked out of the bay window at the lovely green lung of Victoria Park. A tame prairie that kept me sane through a difficult winter. This was the house of some old sea captain. It was oddly proportioned, with each room decorated in a distinct style – as

warring tribes had camped there. When the park was finally butchered and buried under tarmac by the threatened road schemes, it would all be over. There would be nothing left. The Widow and her gang had decided that Hackney was bad news and the best option was simply to get rid of it, chop it into fragments, and choke it in the most offensive heap of civil engineering since the Berlin Wall.

Then Milditch dropped the hint. Which was, I suppose, why I let it lie fallow for so many months. He gave things away only when they were fatally tainted, or drained of all their vital fluids. He wouldn't pass on an infection, unless he could swop it for a superior one. He must have been unnerved by the weeping of his children, the curses and the threats of his wife. He looked, pacing his den, obsessively delousing his ginger beard, like a veteran footballer from the Katowice midfield, a slightly sandblasted Tommy Smith.

'Tilbury,' he mumbled. A confession that he instantly suppressed. 'Tell Dryfeld and I'll keep you. I don't want this surfacing in the guidebook. It's still too hot.'

Who was Milditch anyway? His birth name had dissolved, long since, into the borders of the River Lea, the industrial sumplands; out there among the thickets of intemperate abandoned motors, the odd shoes, the cat sacks, the dusty banks of albino nettles. *Milditch* fitted better at the foot of the credits. It went unnoticed. It sounded so damp and wormy an English. The obscure fogs of his Baltic destiny had been exchanged for a manic restlessness which partly masked his lifelong quest for revenge. He made deals. He shuffled telephone numbers. He haunted the dead zones of the city looking for connections that only he could activate.

He had another angle: he acted. And cornered the market in disposable villains, donkey jackets, and third policemen. He underacted to the point of being, clinically speaking, brain-dead. He once made base camp for a three-part Mini Series push-on-the-Pole; which was routed, for the convenience of the Money Men, through Angmagssalik, Greenland. He pocketed quite a provocative compensation cheque when a wind-machine, hurling polypropylene chips in a simulated blizzard, cut his face to ribbons. No matter how Convalescent, swathed in ice-crusting bandages, he turned up a stash of pornographic novels – dumped by a crew of drill-bit technicians, en route to the Gulf – and shuffled them, at modest profit, into the deep parka pockets of the Second Unit.

Milditch's survival depended upon his anonymity. If he became a 'face', he was redundant. He let his hair grow and went about unshaven, glowering; then reversed it, scalped himself, grinned like a monkey, and razored his jowls into the consistency of expectorated bubblegum.

I knew him as a book dealer. An acquaintance of mine met him selling cold fish on a beach. Others swore that he dabbled in property. Certainly, he was known to all the casting directors. He was always shooting down the M4 to Bristol; taping his two sentences from some repeatable radio classic; gathering the scripts from his fellow thespians for immediate resale; scouting the Clifton bookshops: only to return to his gloomy captain's cabin, to make the inevitable phonecalls, while he watched the shadows lengthen across the troubled ocean of the park.

'Tilbury,' said Milditch, reluctantly activating a light switch, 'looks well worth a visit. The floor was covered in books. That's good. Nothing in cupboards or on shelves. So they don't do the fairs. The place probably opens once a year, for an hour, while the owner airs his alsatians. I'd cane it myself – but I'm marooned in Uppingham in a duff production of

Calderon's *The Surgeon of Honour*, sponsored by some local nutter who's trying to revive rural England by importing Soviet chess champions. Just send me a nice sweetener, mate, he drops his trousers.'

I knew then that my days as a dealer were almost over. I didn't want to touch whatever lay on the floor of the Tilbury shop. But I had the queasy sensation there ought to be a story in it.

A swollen pink finger, like the thumb from an inflated rubber glove, rose above the London plane trees, and twisted in the evening air. I could still make out the slogan 'Celebrate JESUS!' The tent-show season was on us already. It was time to be out on the road.

II

The train out of Fenchurch Street has been salvaged from some condemned fairground. It shakes the boardwalk at Limehouse so fiercely that the station threatens to collapse into a heap of rotten timber. The guards, pouting with boredom, hands lost in pockets, twitching, surfeited on nipple-sheets, have been thoroughly schooled in circumlocution. They have no ambition beyond stranding any person misguided enough to commit themselves to the protection on the poisoned sands of Canvey Island: a gulag of sinking caravans, overlooked by decommissioned storage tanks.

'And this also has been one of the dark places of the earth,' I quoted, straining to catch the portentous ripeness of another Pole over the drowned fanns of Essex.

Thin winter light supplicated between towerblocks and shabby graveyards, picking out the glinting scabs of rusty water. A network of ditches offered to flood the low fields, to hide the disgraced enclosures of fast-breeding motors, that were herded, unlicensed, for conversion to paddocks of weed-choked scrap.

If there was an open *mesa* left, it was soon bunkered into a firing range. Red flags kicked in the breeze. The occasional lop-sided barn, a heritage token, had been preserved for the well-fancied combat of imported pit-bulls.

And always, beyond the pain – the river: black, costive, drawing me on; flaunting the posthumous brilliance of its history.

III

Tilbury Town is a single street, and it is shut. European rain brings down the dirt that flows so enticingly out from the massed pipes of the power station. The innocent sightseer abandons his guidebook to relish a haberdasher's grease-streaked window, which features underwear so outdated it has all the nostalgic allure of a fetishist's catalogue. There is a 'Financial Consultant' with a twenty-four-hour sideline in radio-controlled mini cabs. And yet more mini cabs. The chief industry of the place is providing the means to escape from it.

Cranes from the docks seal the set, and diminish it; preposterous as the Bureau de Change that is gratefully dying into its varnish.

After a couple of hundred yards the buildings simply give up. I am lost among the terminal hobs. Locked yards with sheeted secrets, contracts that lack a signature, consignments that were never collected: a killing ground for lorries, misdirected, with an inadequate cargo.

On the inshore edge, between the point where the speculators ran out of ideas and the storm's horizon, is a pisshouse, half-demolished; a municipal *jeu d'esprit*, with green tiles and a pagoda roof. The exterior walls are still favoured by local sentimentalist, staggering home with a skinful – and a singular method of celebrating the resonance of location. And here, on the very precipice of oblivion, propped by a flying buttress of ex-Laundrette washing machines, is a lit shopfront: a mirage that could almost pass for Milditch's legendary Antiquarian Haven.

There is a man inside, smoking, warming his hands over a two-bar electric fire. The CLOSED sign is nailed into place. The man looks at me, at my rain-plastered scalp, my dripping coat, my hungry red eyes. Turns back to the fire. Which has a more profitable animation: it throws out sparks. With luck it will burn the place down. He cleans his ear with a matchstick, and rolls the result between his fingers. I rap the window sharply with a coin. He lights another cigarette; rummages under the table, finds a second fire, a fan blower, and plugs that in.

The existential pathos of this mute Conversation Piece could have endured for a generation. The rain reconstituting my shirt as tie-dyed woodpulp. The junkman's thoughts set morbidly on poll-tax forms and the price of electricity. A sheet of dirty glass dividing me into Subject and Object, observer and observed. My eyes feverishly annotating the bedlam for a book that would justify this manic quest. Jugs, biscuit tins, trays of bent forks, cracked picture frames. None of it held any interest for him. He might have been hired to sit there. He probably couldn't escape. The washing machines, like an unrecorded ice age, blocked his exit. He had not chosen any of these things. He hated them. People died; he stored whatever they did not take on their journey. The dead dominated him. I was also a threat: I might want to force even more stock on to the premises.

The tremulous balance of the situation was ravished by a gunshot from the corner of the street. I rapped, with a little more force. The key holder surfaced, gasping, from his contrived experiment in suspended animation. More shots, skidding tyres, crashed gears... and Morris Traveller, lacking its side-windows, mounted the kerb. And drew up, a yard shy of my kneecaps.

In the world of junk shops and resurrectionist scavenging, there are no surprises. The unexpected is what we are most comfortable with. My old market colleague, Iddo Okoli, for whom Field Marshal Amin was the cadet version – stepped from his smoking wreck, and removed his bowler, to execute a formal bow. Lion-hearted; he gripped me to his chest, growling dangerously, like a flesh-eating king.

The excavated proprietor shuffled to the door. I followed Iddo inside.

IV

They lay under the pear tree: smeared with themselves, torn, sore, and thirsty. They lay

apart, panting. Their tongues lolled in the dirt. They dribbled, slippery with melting 'K
jelly. Then the fatter one, Bobby, crawled off, sick to his heart, unbalanced, and looking for
air that he could breathe. His creamy lace-trimmed basque pinched false breasts from his
abundant flesh. His varnished skin was marbled with a perplexity of contusions. His black silk
stockings were split; revealing spidery tufts of man-hair. He was dragging his insides after
him across the gravel: a dead dog. They were still trapped in the thatch of a barren orchard.

What could be more depressing than the interval between orgies? Bobby wondered if he
would ever summon up the enthusiasm to begin it all again. How could he avoid catching
sight of last night's partners? How could he avoid paying them? Always problems for the
creative mind.

As he crossed the path, he begged the single stones to pierce him. He relished the sluggish
ripples of discomfort. It could have been an hour, or a day, before he reached the concrete
steps of the redoubt, and hauled himself on to the river wall, the East Gun Line.

'Speer's Theatre', his friend the painter had called it; wistfully invoking the classic
pretensions of the Third Reich. The steps were all that was left. A meaningless piece of
something. The outer rim of a Temple of Atrocities. He wanted to lick bloodstains from the
cold stone. He wanted to touch the water. The morning light on the river was his salvation.

Wooden stumps in the mud. The ruin of a jetty. The tide was turning: a slime-cake
causeway, plastered in filth and sediment, pointed at Gravesend. He often boasted, without
much justification, that Magwitch faltered here, escaping from the hulks; and was brought to
shore. The last pub in the world, the World's End.

From beyond the curve of the power station, Bobby saw them coming up on the tide
from the Hope into the Reach. The familiar nightmare. The early light followed, like a
attendant; grey, crumbling, flaky. It broke them apart, into a flood of false lumber. The
floated in never-connecting circles; going under, dipping from sight. They were all dead.
They swam to fetch him. Wavelets, drowned angels; pale-green billows. There were women
in hats, holding their children above the waterline. Infants slipping from their arms, slipping
from sight. The river's net was churned; and the ropes were cut.

'Not again,' Bobby whimpered, 'I swear on my life. I'll never do it again.' Hot tea
bruised the kohl, blackened his eyes, inflicted damage.

More ropes than faces. He knew it would be the same. It could not change. The living
location imprisons incomplete instants of time. Sex acts release demons. But the morning
light would resolve it, sweep away the visible traces. Except the Indian woman. She was
always there. Walking across the water towards him, daintily stepping from wave crest to
wave crest: down from the church, court habit, throat hidden in a ruff of sea-bone, more
severe.

*'You called him father, being in his land a stranger. And by the same reason so must I you. For
you here I should call you father? I tell you then I will, and you shall call me child, and so I will
remain for ever and ever your countryman.'*

The mantic shine of fever. Sewage breath. Her voice in his mouth.

Then the howl; the compressed madhouse shriek of the power station. Steam alarm
Whistle. Dread. The unrinsable taste of sperm in the throat.

The curtains were drawn. The doors of the pub closed against the vulgar world. The inner circle of the Connoisseurs of Crime paddled yet again through the shallows of forensic legend, trading atrocities. They dominated, complacently, a log fire powered by gas jets. Errlund, his desert boots on Hywood's chair, was hogging the conversation.

"Sir" graciously took me along to the Beefsteak,' he droned. 'Too many flapping ears at the Athenaeum. The old pansy didn't want his posh pals to catch him hobnobbing with a scribbler. Yes, he'd try the fish – a palsied scrape of cod. Difficulties with his chopper. Nearly spat them on to the plate every time he opened his mouth. *Une belle horreur!*'

'Spare us the complete rollcall of domestic details this time, old boy,' Hywood yawned. He'd heard it all before. And it wasn't improving. Some fool had mentioned Errlund in the same breath as Marcel Proust, and it had gone, quite disastrously, to his head. The reviewer had, of course, been discussing types of morbid pathology, and not literary style.

'I followed him,' Errlund continued, impervious to cynicism, or any other form of moral censorship, short of an iron muzzle. 'I followed him into the dining room. Have you noticed how he walks these days? Waddles, I should say. He lurched between the tables, like a circus elephant with the squitters. Nodded seigneurial acknowledgement to complete strangers. They thought I was doing the decent thing – bringing him out for the afternoon from the nuthatch.'

'For God's sake, Errlund. Drop the Chips Channon routine, and get on to the serious killings. Are you going to publish the surgeon's papers in full, or are you going to "summarize" them, and bend whatever you find there to fit with your own theories?' Hywood tugged at his earlobe in annoyance. He'd given the advantage to Errlund. He'd betrayed *interest*. Now the bastard would pad it out until all the chaps forgot it was his turn to get in a round.

'When we finally eased him into his seat, he had the greatest difficulty remembering where he was,' Errlund sailed on, serenely. 'He stared up at me over his half-moons in perfect rictus of terror. He must have concluded I was his valet, or bumboy, and he simply couldn't imagine why I was sitting down with him at table. He was far too *gentil* to mention it, of course. All that shit flogged into him at Eton and Balliol. His fine grey eyes were watering slightly, and there was just a hint of rouge on his cortisone-puffy cheeks.'

Errlund paused. His timing was perfect. Hywood's eyes were shut. But he was faking. 'Go on with it, man,' he growled. 'Or do you want me to finish it for you? "If you do this thing..." Is that right?'

'Quite right,' Errlund conceded. 'He gazed at me for a few moments, in silence, to convince me of his seriousness. "If you do this thing," he croaked, "you'll be blackballed. No decent club will touch you. You'll never see your name in the Honours List. Your K will remain a pipedream." Then he excused himself; his "secret sorrow", problems with the waterworks. One of the waiters carried him back, trouser-cuffs steaming. He counted his cold sprouts and gave me a very significant look.'

A snort from Hywood, followed by a jaw-cracking yawn, indicated that he was crossing the borderland of sleep. Errlund's narrative was underwriting his nightmare. Hywood had joined them at the table.

‘His concentration was fading fast,’ said Errlund mercilessly, ‘but he managed to signal for the custard. “Make me a promise,” he trembled. “You will never again associate that noble name with those tedious crimes. They can never pay you enough blood-money. Leave it to the Penny Dreadfuls, old chap. What can it possibly matter to the civilized portion of society if a few whores are slit from nape to navel? I’ve never myself cared for sports, but these hulking and vigorous young blackguards must sow their wild oats. Let them keep it to the streets, and pray they do not frighten the horses.”’

Hywood sat up with a start. ‘Did he actually confirm that your man was the guilty party?’

‘Oh no,’ said Errlund, ‘he was much too far gone. He’d wandered off among the yolk-richness of Kentish brickwork, honey-coloured Cotswold stone, Winston, Guy, Jim Lee, and Milne. “Must say,” he drawled, *à propos de rien*, “quite surprised, glancing out of the jarve on the way over – the vast numbers of coloured people passing unmolested down the Haymarket.” Then, without warning, he shoved a bundle of letters towards me, under cover of the cheeseboard; coughing into his sleeve, and fluttering his eyelashes like a Venetian concubine. “You see, Errlund?” he broke out again. “You take my point? You have a contribution to make. Your name is often spoken aloud on the wireless. I can arrange for you to view all the private papers. I’ll give you another man altogether, a sick soul. A much better yarn. What can the “truth” matter now – when you set it against an advance from a reputable publisher? Your fame is assured. Take your time, go down to the country. It will be marked in the right places, I promise you. Drop in, any Thursday, at the Albany. My day, you know.” I had to lift his hand from my knee. When I walked out, he was still talking to the empty chair. The waiter was taking a brandy glass to his lips, then patting him dry with the folded edge of an Irish-linen napkin.’

Bobby, the publican and sinner, the gold-maned ‘television personality’, posed for a moment in the doorway, then tottered to the bar and shot a very large gin into a dirty glass. ‘Cunts,’ he whispered, superstitiously. And pressed his glass against the tiny shoulders of the dispenser.

A Romanesque docker, head slicked with sump oil, sleeves rolled threateningly above the elbow, kept his back to the fireside cabal of Crime Connoisseurs, while he indulged in some serious drinking. He was being talked to, whined at, flattered, flirted with, and altogether patronized by Conlin, the notorious Lowlife photographer. An evil-smelling dwarf who had lost his christian name, thirty years before, in a strict discipline Naval Training Establishment for delinquent boys. His Leica was on the stool beside him. The great Conlin. The man who had shot, and later destroyed, the definitive portrait of John Minton. Beads of salt-sweat rolled down the contours of his coarse-grained skin. Smirking, then sniffing, he began to excavate the docker’s ear with his tongue. Without hurrying, or spilling a drop, the docker finished his drink. He stood up, rolled his shoulders, and clamped his vast hands around the back of Conlin’s neck. He looked for a long moment into the photographer’s eyes: then he nutted him. And watched him drop, screaming, on to the floor.

Gamely, Bobby rushed forward to hook Conlin’s elbows back on to the bar. Blood was dripping from the photographer’s broken nose into his vodka. Bobby teased a cigarette between Conlin’s trembling lips, and lit it with his own.

The board behind the line of inverted spirit bottles was decorated with exotic postcards from Bobby’s collection: jungles, ivory poachers, whips, balconies. Bobby tried to take h

mind off things by constructing a fiction that would animate these static images.

Recklessly inspired, he groped for Conlin's camera. He propped the wilting photograph between the docker and his mate; then fidgeted the group, until the sign, BUOYS, could be clearly read on the left of the composition. He carefully framed out the corresponding dock marked GULLS.

The dockers were rigid, severe; breathless. One of them mimed danger, by fingering a kiss curl; while the other excited a detumescent bicep.

Bobby, the artist, was not quite satisfied. After prolonged meditation, and a final check through the viewfinder of his fingers, he darted forward to unzip Conlin, fumble him, shake him out. The earwig! Now satisfied, he snapped the shutter on another fragment of his on-day-to-be-published tribute to a lost generation: the Tilbury Group. He might give his agent a tinkle.

VI

Iddo Okoli, savage in Middle Temple mufti – pin-striped, wing-collared, with soup-stained trousers – progressed benevolently through the collapsed markets, smiling on chaos. His wife, broad-dignified, sheet-wrapped, followed in his slipstream. His children, in a file, struggled with suitcases of outdated textbooks. How his optimism survived, nobody knew. He bellowed at back-counters. He shook the plaster from damp ceilings. He beat on tables. There had been good days when he almost covered his bus fare.

His prospects changed with a small piece of theatre that became apocryphal in the tradition. A literary graveyard, lurking between the Royal Academy and the Museum of Mankind, was 'rationalizing' its stock, and adjusting to market forces (prior to becoming an airline office) by reshelving directly into a builder's skip. Iddo watched, hands on hips, as the nocturnal assistants blinked into the brilliance of the street, carrying as many as three books each, which they dropped, with great precision, on to the growing heap.

Iddo removed his bowler, and mopped his brow. He examined a few items in this reserve collection. He nominated a dozen or so, on the grounds of weight and size; bounced the hernia-dodging juniors, like so many jackals, and made for the shop, three steps at a time. He attacked the counter and gavelled it ferociously with his fist, until the buyer appeared yawning and pale with anguish. Iddo was not the most sought-after of 'runners'. The buyer, fretful, and slightly hungover, inspected the current selection.

'Um, yes. Better, Iddo.' He could hardly believe it. 'Quite presentable. The best book you've ever located.' He prised open the jaws of the till, slipped Iddo the customary paper receipt, and let him get away with a fiver and three singles. Iddo was in the big time.

By now the skip was attracting the attention of a few lesser carrion; 'outpatients' on bicycles, shuffling dead stock between Shepherd's Bush Green and the Charing Cross Road. Iddo palmed them aside and waded, waist-deep, into the unreconstructed dreck. A dredge armful and back to the counter. *Three* blue ones!

At the close of trade, Iddo staked himself to a lethally trashed set of wheels. His horizon detonated. No longer was he trapped within the confines of a fifty-pence bus ride. He could risk Penn, Brackley, Colchester, Guildford. He was one of us.

And here was I, once his patron, staggering into a docklands junk-shop, under a washing machine that was leaking what I hoped was water down the front of my trousers. There were two more machines waiting outside in the Traveller. And a brace of spin dryers on the roof-rack.

While the junkman and Iddo debated this lump of cargo-cult plunder, I subsided into the books. I rapidly cast aside the usual trenchfoot volumes of First War photographs. These are loved only by antique dealers, sternly refusing to sell them to bookmen, who wouldn't give them house room if the dustwrappers were woven out of dollar bills. I spurned the damaged glitz of Edwardian decorative covers: the unreadable in the process of becoming the unsaleable. I was left with five hardcore targets to consider.

The Tilbury Catalogue. Spring, 1988. Codeword: Hopeless.

(1) A defective first edition of Joseph Conrad's *Youth*, Blackwood, 1902. Pale green linen-grain cloth, with marginal traces of cigarette burns (Craven A, c.1952). Endpapers somewhat nicotine-tanned. 'The End of the Tether', pp. 313 – 17, torn away and used as spills. A distressed copy that has not quite given up the ghost.

(Verdict? Better have it. My friend Joblard, the sculptor, wants to sample *Heart of Darkness*.)

(2) *In Tropical Lands: Recent Travels to the Sources of the Amazon, the West Indian Islands, and Ceylon*. Published by Wylie & Robertson of Aberdeen in partnership with Ferguson of Ceylon, 1895. Despite a trivial dusting of mushroom mulch, a nice copy. Author's name suppressed under the imploded corpse of a potentially uncommon spider. The creature in question might have posed for the illustration on p. 103, giving this item the additional interest of being an association copy. We make no surcharge on this account.

(Verdict? Forget it. Anything with a map costs too much money. And Dryfeld is always saying that you can't sell America.)

(3–5) The final three volumes constitute an incomplete collection of the works of Patrick Hanbury, Director, Department of Medical Entomology, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. We can offer a yard of research on *The Natural History of Tsetse Flies*; and a slim octavo volume, complete with the uncommon ash-grey dustwrapper, produced in the version of the Fortune Press house style, and emphatically titled, *The Louse*.

This last item, a cornerstone in any library, is illustrated, in line, with an exceptionally delicate study of *Phthirus Pubis* (female), from above. An alarmingly vivid section throws a new light on 'Methods of Rearing' – by means of little boxes attached to the skin, in a garter beneath the sock. '*The louse feeds only on man, and must do so frequently; it has to be reared on human beings and it should be kept on the skin for long periods every day. The most convenient method of rearing the insect was developed by Nuttall...*'

Increased costs of publication do not allow us to do justice to the ultimate volume: *Researches in Polynesia and Melanesia, An Account of Investigations in Samoa, Tonga, the Ellice Group and the New Hebrides*. The author's sensitive use of the plate-camera presents extreme forms of physical deformity in the guise of decorative art. Disease-ripe flesh bursts and fruits, escaping from the stunned dignity of gracious native specimens. Never before, in our opinion, has Surrealism courted the analytical eye of Science to such effect. Disbelief wrestles with pathos. The gross excitements of the Freak Show are enclosed within the discretion of the ethnologist's cabinet.

(Verdict? Irresistible!)

Iddo and the junkman had not wasted their time. While I have been browsing among the beached detritus of the Imperial Dream, they have slapped hands to celebrate the resolution of their infamous deal. Iddo alternately squeezed and pommelled the junkman, until he swallowed his still-burning fag. The junkman, in revenge, pelted Iddo with banknotes, and

worried him in the general direction of the river.

Any offer for my fancied books is redundant to the thrust of the moment. Iddo's motor with fresh detonations, smoke clouds, the singe of chicken feathers – buffets him back to his self-inflicted Apocalypse. Normality creeps awkwardly on to the set. The junkman resumes his brave attempt to cook himself between two fires. Money does not interest him. A hi flask does. He brews up; growing weary of the exercise long before the water boils. Condensed milk, Camp coffee, sewage water, whisky. We achieve a kind of bleak, post-bellum fellowship. And he is happy to elucidate the nature of the scam.

He has cornered the market in the unloved. The streets are awash with non-functioning electrical hardware. He gives it shelter. He operates an unsung Battersea Dogs' Home for Zanussi, Hoover, Indesit, Electra, Hotpoint, Bosch, Bendix, Creda, Electrolux, Philips. All the tribes of brutalized and deserted dishwashers, vacuum cleaners, and tumble dryers. They were never turned from his door. He has a backer, a deal-maker; some local publican with media connections, contacts on the Ivory Coast. They wait until they can cram a dozen containers, then set keel from what's left of the docks, to Lagos. Top dollar!

'We're webbed up, squire,' the junkman smirked. 'All the way to the Generals. There's a nobbled Russian geezer with the Third World Aid delegation who loves to bilk the "sooties". We sweetened him with a nicked Harrods charge card and enough small change to play the slot-machines for a fortnight.'

Apparently, the dosh has to be laundered through a government-funded education programme: heavyweight Industrial Training Films. A category that has fallen into sad disfavour since the days of Lindsay Anderson and 'Free Cinema'. Now a few bearded Dutchmen, cut off in their prime by the Civil War, rush around with U-boat cameras and outdated stock trying to incite their students, who are interested only in wearing bow ties and driving around in air-conditioned Cadillacs, to recapture the fire of John Grierson's social visionaries. They project, in furtive cellars, romantic images of steel furnaces, backward assembly lines, and naked sweating workers. But the students want only to be Game Show anchormen, with travel allowances to Bangkok. The Dutch instructors have to deal in black market primitive art to survive. They are almost always caught. The police are tipped off by the traders, who buy back their own goods at a 'special' price. The film-makers pay the way out of prison, or die in chains.

None of this concerns the junkman. A few modest currency fiddles on the side, and he's a clover. A detached residence that backs on to the railway track at East Tilbury; heated swimming pool, cocktail lounge, pebble-dash portico, closed-circuit security system, Mercedes: and a panoramic view across the biggest rubbish dump in Essex to the Roman and British settlements now tactfully concealed beneath river mud. As Glyn H. Morgan remarks in his seminal work, *Forgotten Thameside* (sic), Letchworth, 1966: 'In spite of the recent disappearance of the hut circles the scene is still well worth a visit.'

Wade in, traveller, and stick fast. Try to imagine, as you go under, Claudius bringing his legions over from the Kent shore. This is where it happened. This was the place.

Look on these new men: Princes of Ruin, Lords of Squalor.

A few weeks later I was back. It wasn't going to be easy to shake free of this place. I needed to investigate without the frenzied rush of hunting for negotiable books. I walked from Tilbury to Tilbury Riverside. I wanted to take a longer look at the station concourse, the Custom House, the Fort, the Gravesend Ferry – and I invited Joblard to accompany me. We would identify the stretch of water where the *Princess Alice* went down with the loss of six hundred and forty lives: salvaged bodies exhibited on three piers. Our motives were, as always, opaque and spiritually unsound.

Pensioned trading hulks rusted in the docks: fantastic voyages that would never be consummated. The cranes had become another forest to be culled for their scrap value at another location for 'Dempsey and Makepeace'. The rampant dereliction of the present site was as much an open invitation to the manipulators of venture capital as the original marshlands had been to the speculators and promoters who dug out the deepwater basin and laid thirty miles of railway track in 1886. When artists walk through a wilderness of epiphanous 'bliss-out', fiddling with polaroids, grim estate agents dog their footsteps. And when the first gay squatters arrive, bearing futons... the agents smile, and reach for their chequebooks. The visionary reclaims the ground of his nightmares only to present it, framed in perspex, to the Docklands Development Board.

Cowboy hauliers, chancers with transport, trade the freight that is still worth bringing as a cover story: tractors that metamorphose into rocket launchers, heroin-impregnated madonnas, all the miraculous shape-shifting cargoes.

We broke into a ghost-hut masquerading as a Seaman's Hostel; a spectacular and previously unrecorded brochure of photo opportunities. The roof had been bombed. Curtains of red dust fell through the chilled air. Voices of departed voyagers. Quarrels, drink. Tall tales, unfinished reminiscences. Shards of mirror glass sanded the stone floor: a lake of dangerous powder, from which you might reassemble a version of the past – by sweeping this snowstorm backwards into the projector.

The station itself is a mausoleum built to house the absence of Empire; Empire as a way of escape, of plundering the exotic, defrauding our impossible dream of some remote garden of paradise. A cantilevered shed, epic in scale, runs away to piers, Custom Houses, platforms that might once have connected with the city. But now you will have to conjure from your grandfather's memory the oak-panelled saloons, upholstered in tapestry, the floors covered with Turkey felt.

The place is shrill with the traffic of the dead: furs, cabin trunks, porters. There are mesmerizing patches of sunlight on the bald stone flags that it is impossible not to acknowledge. We move slowly, talk in whispers: a cathedral of evictions.

We followed the tunnel down to the Gravesend Ferry, the TSS *Edith*. Everybody wants to get away. The officers from Tilbury Fort chose to live on the other side, among the decayed Regency splendour, where there was some remnant of life and society. Their 'pressed' men were either invalid, or had to be locked at night into their barracks to prevent them from deserting.

No time, on this excursion, for the World's End; a low tumble-down weather-boarded building, once the baggage store where troops crossing the river left their equipment. Tables for stripping the drowned. We skirt the pub and its stunted orchard, reluctantly; passing on to enter the Fort by the ashlar-faced Water Gate.

Immediately the shades press on you. The lack of any ordinary human presence makes the survival of this enclosure remarkable, and daunting. The tourist feels responsible for the silence. The cobbles of the parade are beaten fears. Bone faces crowd the upper windows of the Officers' Quarters. Sand spills from the water pump. Someone has placed a dead bird in the mouth of the ceremonial cannon. In the chapel the caretaker inscribes the names of the Jacobite prisoners who died at the Fort, hidden from sight in the tunnels of the powder magazine. Spent weapons, hostages. Highlanders brought by sea from Inverness, for eventual transportation. A museum of madness and suffering set into a vicious – but disguised – pentagon. Redoubts and ravelins spike the surrounding swamplands: the Water Gate cannot empty the moat and inundate these outlying paddy fields.

There is a scratching mockery in the movement of the caretaker's quill, as he columns his pastiche ledger with real names. *Cameron, Macfie, MacGillivray, MacGregor*. The east wind courses through brick-work passageways, caponiers, and ramps; outflanking the petrified weaponry.

Among the cabinets of gas masks, mortars, knives, and bandage boxes is a map that illustrates the lines of fire between Tilbury and Gravesend, as proposed by Thomas Hynde Page in 1778. The river at its narrowest point, eight hundred yards, shore to shore, is tightly laced by invisible threads: a stitched vulva. The only entrance to the heat of the city is denied. A pattern is woven over the waters; which remains unactivated to this day. And therefore, most hazardous.

The only blood shed in anger was during a cricket match. An Essex batsman, his wicket flattened, held petulantly to his ground, demanding that the strength of the breeze be taken into account. The incensed Kentish outfielders sprinted to the guardroom: most of them moving for the first time that afternoon. The skipper snatched up a rifle, and shot the defaulter where he stood. An elderly invalid, intervening with the garrulous wisdom of his years, was bayoneted through the throat. The sergeant in temporary charge of the Fort, while his officer promenaded the terrace of the Clarendon, was butchered in his nightshirt on the balcony of the Sutler's House: prefiguring that famous icon of General Gordon waiting on the steps of the Governor's Palace at Khartoum for the spears of the fanatic children of the Mahdi, redeemer at the end of time. (In an earlier incarnation, as Captain Charles Gordon, the stern Bible-puncher had commanded the Royal Engineers at Gravesend where a small plaque honours him for his devotion to 'the poor and sick' of the town.)

The men of Kent escaped from this horror across the river. The Essex ten, claiming moral – if pyrrhic – victory, ran off over the drawbridge into the sunken levels.

A photograph, promoting the glories of the station concourse at Tilbury, before the reconstruction, features a newspaper kiosk, with the day's headlines clearly visible: BIRTHDAY HONOURS. BATTLE IN THE SUDAN. Six massively moustached porters stand at ease, barring a bogus claimants from the Third Class Waiting Room.

Joblard and I, subdued, retreated; by bulwark and counter-scarp, through *fausse-braye* and *cunette*, to the Dead House. We passed out by the Landport Gate and turned towards the hope of the World's End. On the far shore of the outer moat was the dark tangle of a wild orchard: the gentle flicker of candlelight behind shaded windows. Shrill laughter on the evening air.

When does a victim realize that he is the chosen one? When does a 'fall guy' receive the first intimations of vertigo?

Arthur Singleton, his whites held in place by a knotted Kingston Park tie, stood queasy and distempered, leaning breathless against the brass line of zero longitude. A pale stripe of virtue ran away from his navel and down Maze Hill, between the twin domes of Greenwich Hospital, across the river, and far around the red-splashed globe: to pierce, on its return, his psychic body. A shocking, but unremarked, jolt in the lower spine. He had completed his preparation. He did not salute the bullet-pocked plinth of General James Wolfe, absentee extraordinary, and exporter of 'high degree' Freemasonry to the North American continent. He walked, head bowed, along the broad avenue towards the heath. He was bent to his fate, tapping his bat on the ground at every third stride.

Singleton felt a tingling in his palms; the sympathy pains of martyrdom that presaged a heroic contest. He could sense the stigmata sweating blood into his white gloves. Today would be exceptional. He rested and fed all his doubts into a giant oak. The tree was metaphor for the innings he would play. The roots were laid in the vision of the city, seen from the hill. The trunk was the slow build-up of confidence: 'seeing' the ball, before it left the bowler's hand. And then the branching out, the flowering. The strokes all round the wicket, sketching the tree's shape into the ground for ever. He had only a necessary fear of the opposition, coupled with the still greater fear of losing 'face' among his fellows; the cramming masters, curates, and medical men of Blackheath who would this afternoon meet Lord Harris's eleven in a charity match, for the benefit of the dependants of the drowned, the tragedy of the sinking of the paddle-steamer, the *Princess Alice*. The sky was bruised and purple, racing, livid with threat and prophecy.

Dr Grace, the Hon. Alfred Lyttleton, Lockwood: names set into the earth like pillars of a temple. Arthur was at the wicket and taking guard with no memory of the preliminary courtesies; the introductions, the toss, the early collapse of the local men. He was wholly detached from the scene, which could have been an engraving in the *London Illustrated News*. His foot moved towards the first delivery – short on the leg side – and the spectators were applauding a boundary.

The heath was enclosed in a bell jar of wild light, high clouds chased and harried. He was standing on the world's curve – and he stood erect, shaping each drive, timing each cut, chipping wide of the stolidly planted fielders. Dr Grace was shaking him by the hand. His voice was unexpectedly high in pitch. Arthur could not understand what he was saying. He walked off. The fever-drained grass stretched into an endless plain. The dark houses slipped from his sight. 'Singleton, well done! Capital display, sir! Fine knock, Arthur!'

He forced a passage through the press of friends and strangers: the ladies, their parasols and their billowing dresses. Soaked. Dripping on to the ground. Shadows that could drown him. Uncovered bodies. Did they need to bring them here? Hair shapeless and obscuring the faces. No eyes. Tongues like slaughtered animals. White mud. *Don't touch*. Their cold hands scorch his arm. The dead ones block him. Their fingers twist around his heart. 'I felt I was going to be like Mother and the best thing for me was to die.'

Mother was waiting. She offered me her cheek. She had come back, to watch. 'Arthur, m

boy, what has disturbed you? And where is your wig? Surely, you cannot intend to enter court in this undress?’

The boundary ring has been posted with the unfortunates. They are laid out – a catch, pale harvest – upon wrinkled black tarpaulin sheets. They shine in pitch. They have been hooked and drawn from the river. The heaped poor. They are swollen with death. They do not learn to swim. We have scraped the water from them like a caul of skin.

Now they are calling for the doctors. ‘Doctor, a moment. Your signature, sir. For my godson. Would you oblige me... your name...’ *Bury me! Blind me! Cut out my tongue!* No. The umpires, the white coats, are at my elbows. ‘He must rest.’ Clear him; carry him to a secure place. A place in history. Justice will be done in *Wisden’s Almanac*. Arthur Singleton, stout innings on a sticky wicket against the established men of England. An obituary tribute to a fine cricketer, and a gentleman; a Wykehamist, a scholar of New College, Oxford.

Leaning on his bat, Arthur is led from the field. He passes through a narrow gate in the wall, and into a private garden. He taps his willow, with every third stride, on the gravel.

IX

We stood outside the World’s End, reluctant to enter, to break the spell of silence. Shadow blades of the pear tree thrash the sailcloth windows. Tapping marionettes. Remote voices. Wood smoke. ‘*The dead are dancing with the dead.*’ This clapboard shanty has been sifted from the spoils of the river; nailed together out of drowned timber – spar set to mast, pegleg to oar – ramped out of chaos. World’s End, *fin du globe*.

The door was not locked. We pushed through to the bar. And backed our drinks into a remote corner. Uninvited guests at the requiem for an orgy that was still waiting to happen.

I put the photocopies I had made from Patrick Hanbury’s *Researches in Polynesia and Melanesia* on to the table, to show them to Joblard – who had a taste for the impossible. He liked to stretch the boundaries of disbelief until he achieved a frisson of naked panic. He used his fear to kick-start a slumbering consciousness.

‘Certain spots,’ wrote Hanbury, ‘particularly those associated with death, are haunted. I can recollect that two members of the hospital staff met a devil... and were so terrified that they dropped most of their clothes, but would not return to find them.’

Hanbury’s photographs are a metaphor for the story of tribal contact with Europe, and the cruel refinements of European light. They demonstrate, in growths of outlandish tissue, our need to capture the extraordinary: to analyse, convert, *to put a price on*. The amusement subjects stand willingly before the hooded stranger and his tripod. They accept the presence of the black box that will reduce them; shift them to a generality, an illustration of a definable tendency. Delicate ritual markings become ‘deformities’. Pattern succumbs to elephantiasis; a vast strawberry richness. The scrotum sagging from the warrior to the ground beneath him. Clusters of enlarged follicles. The truly monstrous is calmed by its context. Ulcers, yaws, lesions.

We are ashamed. We turn away. The calm acceptance in the face of the natives forces us to close the book, and drop it into my bag. But that is not enough. We search for something, anything, to carry us into a safer narrative.

Then we recognize, with distaste, both the turtle-necked figure sprawled at the fireside and the fleshy publican; his eyelids stroked with kingfisher blue *ultima*, his lips violet, above small rabbit-sharp teeth. They are the recorders and violators of the myth of the unsolved serial murders. They convert that slaughter into a brotherhood of remembrance. They honour the imagined (and nicknamed) psychopath who brought the four of them together as the 'Connoisseurs of Crime'. Errlund, Bobby Younger, Nick Hywood, Sgt Roughdew: the philosopher, the publican, the journalist, and the keeper of the Black Museum.

Errlund was boring his friends with the latest anecdote dug out by his researchers from the Bishopsgate Institute. He had the reputation of never having actually to write a single word of any of his books. 'He was doing cut-ups when William Burroughs was still getting his kicks from dropping aspirin into Coca-Cola,' Hywood said of him. 'He's the first of the Post Moderns. The ultimate technician of disinterested commercialism.'

'One of the pleasure-seekers on the *Princess Alice* – or so she claimed – was "Long Liz", the Ripper's third victim,' Errlund began. 'She was perfectly respectable then, dolled up for the excursion; three layers of petticoat, and no drawers. *Petite bourgeoisie*. Sheerness, North Woolwich. Can you hear the band out there, midstream, hacking away at "Nancy Lee"? Cockney hordes packed into the saloon; bawling, shoving, belching stout, dressed to the nines. Nothing changes. A few "commercials", tradesmen with their popsies, fathers feeding misinformation to their brats on the upper foredeck. Beneath them, the great wheels were churning, bringing her about. On the bridge a seaman screams, "My God, Captain, that man is starboarding his helm!" And the *Bywell Castle*, an iron-screw steamer, comes straight on to them. "Thin as eggshell", the *Alice* breaks up directly. Singing becomes screaming. They were in the water. The idlers on the river wall could see the light die in their eyes. They were only yards from the shore. Their fingers clawing without purchase at the cold tide. Layers of muslin belling into strange shapes, getting heavier, wrapping them in cement.'

'And you suggest,' said Roughdew, hoping to edit a wearisome exposition, 'that this experience launched "Long Liz" on the fatal phase of her career? She felt somehow that she did not deserve to survive? She was looking, ever after, for a second chance to die?'

'She had been escorted.' Errlund was not so easily diverted. 'Her husband, and her two dear ones. She would not give them up. She snatched at a rope trailed from a small craft. It was already full and low in the water. The baby was dragged from her arms by the undertow. A man climbed on to her back, using her like a ladder, kicking for dear life. She lost her front teeth. But she held to the rope. Ropes were threaded all over the river, a great net of holes. Ropes and lanterns. A grim trawl. She was two hours in the water. They brought her off, finally; got her ashore. Greenwich. Horse-blanket, brandy, a complimentary ticket from the London and Blackwall Railway. Before the stars were out, she was back at her lodgings. It might never have happened.'

'Amen!' muttered Hywood.

Errlund plunged on, intoxicated by his own rhetoric. 'But that was her story, the drowning; that was her justification. Small ghosts accompanied her into every public house in Whitechapel. They did for Michael Kidney, a dockside labourer she was living with. "I couldn't share a pillow," he said, "with two dead angels." The lies that Liz told became the truth of it. Her single encounter with the crush and weight of water, the overwhelming force of the river, carried her away. Spindrift. She drank in revenge. Diluted the Thames with gin.'

Until that night when, at last, she went with a “wrong-un”; up from Cable Street, factory gateway. She was split open, severed from the phantoms she could not bring to term. The victim of a monster she could exploit, neither for gain nor sympathy.’

‘Very pretty,’ said Hywood, ‘but what was the fate of the surrogate Ripper, the *Bywater Castle*?’

Errlund made a show of checking his papers. ‘She left Alexandria,’ he said, ‘with a cargo of linen, bound for Tilbury – and was never seen again. There were rumours that she rounded Cape Corvoeris. And then, nothing. Off the map, lost, gone to Atlantis. She’d served her purpose. You go downstream with impunity only once. If you get safely past Blythe Sands, you’re in a different story.’

X

The hill was smoking: it seemed to have been shelled by some infernal ordnance. ‘I am walking into hell,’ thought Arthur Singleton. The trees were a sham. Elizabethan veteran hollow, dry as chalk, held upright by ties and staves. There had been some unimportant tragedy. A mistake, an accident. Pieces of smouldering black cloth were caught on the bushes. The air was burnt and sour. Fragments of bone were trodden into the earth.

Arthur walked between the umpires. As they walked, they dropped pebbles into his pockets. One pebble, he surmised, for each run scored; for every stroke of his life.

They cut directly through the contours of the maze, did not meander, or pace out the mystery. They snapped the invisible strings, plunging down towards the dance of light that flickered so transiently on the water. They were reading his confession to him. They told him the things he had done. The letter was placed next to his heart.

Now Arthur saw the raised spear of a white church between the twin domes of the hospital. There were masts and ladders. Courtyards, narrow passageways. Stone steps, green with algae.

He paddled carefully out from the dark and narrow beach, until he was moving freely. And without effort. The mud did not settle on his white trousers. He slid. The steep gradient went away from him. He drifted. He opened his arms. The water flowed into his veins. He crossed over.

XI

Bobby Younger sat in the back of the curtained limousine between two officials. The keeper of the Black Museum had tapped him, sliced his reverie, asked him to step outside: some gentlemen wanted a word. Then Bobby was squeezed. He was sweated, cold. Photographs confronted him that might once have provoked a private pleasure, but were now contextualized into raw fear. Rough, shirtless boys pouted: he was accused by every man that he could identify. Old letters, written in heat, without thought, were sealed in pouches of plastic – like rare literary holographs. There were documents, typed in blue ink, defaced with official stamps. There were reports from West Africa; facts and fictions. Duplicate

invoices, VAT returns, sworn statements. The junkman had rambled like a speed-freak. Bobby's unwritten autobiography had been violently sub-edited, ghosted by professionals: was offered to the world in instalments of lurid sensation. The Tilbury Group was defaced into the Wild Bunch. Bobby had been nominated, and would now oblige. Always. And forever.

He had been shadowed and eavesdropped – as we are all eavesdropped – and now he was put to use. He would serve. Or he would cease to be. His London days were a scrapbook of barter; but Bobby himself was no longer credible. His parking space at the studios had already been requisitioned. He would take the offered advance and step westwards. The bungalow on the edge of a golf course. He would speak only in quotations. He would disappear from view. Confessions would be supplied; private papers, forgeries. The Black Museum was at his disposal. He would shape an account of the murders that would point the finger where the finger should be pointed. He was 'on the firm'.

Arthur Singleton's name had been promoted to the head of the list. The seals were broken on all the files. Arthur Singleton should therefore bear the solitary brand of guilt. His was the honour. He was the 'madman', the 'invert', the 'suicide'. He was the Judas Goat, by appointment.

'We'll make it easy for you,' the thin one said, offering Bobby a cigarette, and dropping without embarrassment, into the parrot-speak of his trade. 'We'll supply you with the opening paragraph.'

Bobby was trembling. He had to move a finger slowly along the line of words to make any sense of them. '*When does a victim realize he is the chosen one? When does a "fall guy" receive the first intimations of vertigo?*'

XII

I stayed in my corner, doing nothing; swirling the liquid yellow stain in an almost empty glass. Joblard's thirst was painful to watch. He drummed his fingers, waiting doggedly at the bar for Bobby Younger's return. The shifty rump of the Connoisseurs of Crime had tumbled out of a side-door, like an audience fleeing from the National Anthem. We were alone.

Joblard used this suspended interval of time in arranging the twelve postcards, on the board behind the spirit bottles, into a coherent tale: a fiction that would carry him out of the tide, and away from the sullen gravity of Tilbury Riverside. The postcards were our only hope of escape.

Joblard's HEART OF DARKNESS. A Narrative in Twelve Postcards.

- (1) Sepia filter: the tanned light of dead time. Heat haze. A three-master rides at anchor. Two small islands float unfocused, like derelict submarines, covered in vegetation. The photographer has been unable to describe the point at which the sea melts into the sky.
- (2) A rivermouth, obliquely approached. A slave fort, or another island, shimmering in mid-channel. A tall bare tree lifting from the scrub that runs down to the water's edge. The sharp black gradient of an infected beach.
- (3) Five native 'boys' rowing a longboat through the shallows. Perhaps to oblige the photographer? He would not be able

- [*Developing and Evaluating Educational Programs for Students with Autism pdf*](#)
- [Louisiana: A History pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub, doc, mobi](#)
- **[Wall Street, Banks, and American Foreign Policy \(2nd Edition\) online](#)**
- [click Sex and War: How Biology Explains Warfare and Terrorism and Offers a Path to a Safer World book](#)

- <http://nautickim.es/books/Basics-Animation--Volume-2--Digital-Animation.pdf>
- <http://www.freightunlocked.co.uk/lib/Louisiana--A-History.pdf>
- <http://aneventshop.com/ebooks/Wall-Street--Banks--and-American-Foreign-Policy--2nd-Edition-.pdf>
- <http://yachtwebsitedemo.com/books/Sex-and-War--How-Biology-Explains-Warfare-and-Terrorism-and-Offers-a-Path-to-a-Safer-World.pdf>