

ROADWORK

He would come in a billowing cloud of wind swept dust —
He would go in a storm of dust choking and irritating
eyes and throats. Their owners would splutter and jump,
and snort and cough and curse, and turn about sharpish
but never quite sharpish enough to see blue tractor chug chug
chugging meandering up the fiery road bouncing trailer
in captive tow the air shimmering and vibrating around it
in the dry sun.

And that tractor — the fitterman's nightmare,
why did it always find the magnetic attraction of
large holes of stacks of the finest porcelain piping of exquisitely
arranged unloading-gang monuments of concrete slabbing —
inescapable?

It was always a challenge to surmount trivial obstacles
at the greatest cost to firm and machine more so firm ...

I talk of the power of the machine, the will, the determination
of the machine, as if it had a life, a mind of its own, independent
of its maker and maker. Like all obedient man made
mechanical monsters, this animal of smoke oil and steel,
true to its creator's whim — and the influence of Mr. Ford
is as widespread as the wealth rolling in and out of his
bank account (if deities do in fact have such things)
— had a driver, an operator, a master, a passenger, a victim —
pays yet money and takes yet choice as it were ... yet it
could never be said that this driver had anything to do with
the operation of this particular plant. He merely played with
the gear stick between his legs, exercised his footbones on the
clutch and brake pedals, jammed the accelerator at the most
inopportune moments, and gave the steering wheel a turn
everytime the animal wanted to navigate some corner or obstacle
such as obese and loud mouthed foremen who know everything
of nothing, who worked the hardest yet did the least who
tell you to do everything except that which is useful, important
and commonsensical. But even the machine held respect for
that superior sinecure pay packet and kept a watchful eye
on its guide who just wanted to ensure the continuation of his ...

And the driver? ... sure. he had a mind of his own — once
he had gotten down that is ... the engine roared would drown his
wits, and once his foot had risen from the clutch, he ...

was in no one's but the lord's tender care - Toad & Toad Hall was paling into insignificance as a motorised death trap...

...well, the driver, they thought him a weird, quite character, alien to the big bad world of the job, alien to the world of machines ... you see i had a sheltered childhood doctor... his license to kill was older than his experience ... was enigmatic to everybody, including to himself. Kept himself to himself. Never spoken he spoken to or at or through or past. Keep the mouth shut or you may have to extricate your foot. Bluff is sometimes better than truth. Anyway truth is such a poor substitute for reality, so you can't lose much that way... So he kept quite quiet. He hovered carefully in the background as they talked of boozing speers of horses and dogs, and all about the roads they made over the weekend.

The time had come the walrus said to talk of many things of shoes and string and sealing wax of cabbages and kings

..and this cabbage had little to offer anyway

"is he a virgin?" asked the pouring gangerman using third person singular

"he's better off that way" countered Stan happy from experience or the lack of it...

all they got was an embarrassed grin that gave it's own answer...

"Don't you bother with girls?" ensh stene would challenge ... again the self conscious grin...

"Sure i do but no luck .. i mean .. well .. they won't go so i don't go .. oh shut up."

"You'll better hurry up or you'll never get anywhere"

"your stomach will get fat without the exercise ..."

it's the best way to keep fit y'know ..."

"Better late than never (But suppose that it's never?)"

Every Monday morning, stene would greet him from a distance his arm flexed in phallic symbolism

"Get it in over the weekend?" he would inquire with his smug expression plastered over his bronxian gaelic features. Again and again, the answer was a shy negative ...

And so it went on. The papers talk of permissive societies of students and hippies with their wild chick-laying habits .. how the sexual antics were sending the country to the knacker's yard. And here was the student who had fucked nothing more than books and who was making a very poor attempt at remedying the situation. yet it didn't really hang him up.

Everything wasn't coming up sexual roses, and other myths were not in bloom either. Behind the Pink Floyd, the incredible string band Brian and took behind the token optimism and mysticism everything was bright and beautiful. The absolute revolution in the way towards was fresh in the minds of men high and low. The Soviet general had hammered the Czechoslovak David who had the nerve and the conviction to do an olive and ask for more of what it hadn't got. Questions ran through the muddy unfinished roads in between the gutted shells of system built housing... What of Dubcek what of Svoboda, yes what of Czechoslovakia? ... What of Cohn-Bendit, of de Gaulle, of France? ... and what of Tangi Ali? Rudi Dutschke? Che Guevara? Who is he? - and the student ^{was asked} all this in the plain simplicity of the building site as contrasted to the refined tongue, the subtlety the cynicism of entres of diplomats of news headings and leading articles...

- "like yeh fucken' nazis them Russians. They're all the same, wanting to rule the world, bullying decent people"
- "Bleedin' fornets come out here to stir up trouble for us. If they'd done that back at home they'd be locked up or dead, so they come over here 'cos the government is fool enough to let 'em."
- "Fucken' students.. we pay for 'em to cause trouble and to look like nothing on earth and they don't have any idea about anything 'cept sex and violence"
- "So you're a fucken' communist eh? Do you hear that! This ones a communist. Fucken' communist well i never"
- "International Socialist? One of Jordan's lot are you?"
- "No. They're National Soc...."
- "Fucken' communist. Well i i thought you were a good kid!"
- "What do you think of Czechoslovakia eh? Them Russians are communists. What do you say to that?"
- "Were you in Grosvenor Square. Did good job the police. Teach em all a lesson."
- "You're a catholic? How can you be a communist and a catholic? Do you go to mass? What do you think of"

And the issues always seem to diverge after digression to the same universal and cosmopolitan subject.

And then and now as always as forever if God's a fascist, there was Simcox.

Gangsterman, foreman, industrial spy, jack of all trades, agent provocateur, scourge of bureaucrats, friend of the worker, champion of the oppressed, martinet, they bless his soul and blast his eyes with the same breath, the man an institution like prostitution ... big mouth big as his belly and man that's big.

"look at me. look at my tan. look at me carefully body beautiful .. all muscle .. eighteen stone and still as agile as an eighteen year old"

Ron Simcox the black angel washed in white tide ...

"Go to the other shop - not to the black man's .. you don't want filth he has in that place. Mind you his bird could do with a good ..."

"Bleedin wogs. We never should've let them in now. Enoch Powell's dead bloody right, m'ee! we should kick 'em all back to fuckin' India. If I had my way I'd shoot the bleedin lot of 'em. Filthy eunuchs. Coming over here and spreading their diseases ..."

- and no doubt shoving nasty excrement through the letter boxes of sweet old Wetherhampton ladies -

... and filling up all our hospitals and taking all the money and sending it all off back home and getting the fuck out of here when they get it ... we should offer to pay 'em a thousand quid each to go home then put them in a boat and send them all over to Jamaica & wherever the black monkeys come from. And when they're in the middle of the ocean, torpedo the lot of them buggers. Anybody who gets to Jamaica would deserve the thousand bloody quid I tell you ..."

Ron Simcox was forever the elegant, expressive, idyllic, articulate Englishman - the epitome of that fighting island race which was destined by God to rule the world until the Americans and Russians came and won our war, sawed our necks and split the cake .. and ruined everything.

Man! This guy has been in so many battles, so many campaigns, stuck his bayonet in so many bellies ...

"we stuck my bayonet in better men than you you ungrateful brat!"

it's a wonder we didn't win the war before everybody joined in ..

Yet most of the time he was savouring the luxuries of German and Japanese and British P.O.W. camps in Germany in the desert in Singapore in the Pays Bas ...

... yet Ron was a man Britain could be proud of - and no one knew that better and publicised it louder than his best friend, Ron Simcox who was his constant mentor and companion during the long hard hot working day when everybody else was either too busy working or else keeping out of his way - Ron couldn't brook the shirkers - and that was easy as he was always heard before seen, and even if you had the pleasure of gazing upon this adam, he would rarely see you as he was forever distracted by the exquisite body he was always admiring, by the local broads - "How would you like those thighs around you eh?" - "Get, I could take that one from behind ...!"

and by the constant and pressing need to urinate up against the wheels of every tractor, trailer, and rust over which he exercised authority just to let the world know they were his ...

Ron Simcox with his endearing quaver, his magnetic personality, his remarkable home-grown intellect ...

- "What are you doin' Evoc?" - "Come 'ere to rock chops"
"Fuddin' students - good for nottin' bastards"

- "if I had my way you know what I'd do to these students if they cause trouble - you know what I'd do? I'd turn the fuckin' sewer hoses on 'em. Cover 'em in shit. Then they'd have to wash to get rid of the smell. Turn the hoses on 'em. Cover 'em in all the shit and rubbish, and all the johnnies and jannies and slime. That'd really shake 'em up and give 'em some sense it would..."

He was always a one for words and expression was out Ron...

All this and the big blue tractor too. Nine hours a day six days a week to the tune of thirty quid. Men would look upon him in amazement, thank him in gratification for services rendered, and point at him in derision. Yet he would go just as he came in a eye searing nostril reeking billow of building site dust, and one day he never came back.

Paul Hemphill

January 12-14th. 1970

ENGINEERS...

LONDON JOHN
REVISITED...

Brain and Tony were technocrats....
Not only were they both good technocrats but they knew it to. That is they knew more about anything that was worth knowing about than anybody else on the job. Even Massey and Docherty of the steel head were snickered once upon a time ago and they still smelled of it and talked of it and classed everybody as either niggers or members of the jumped up managerial elite the men who maddened and the men they splattered with steel-headed saliva when they carried out their verbal decapitations...

Brain and Tony were clean cut kids. Had clean cut minds. Clean cut ambitions. Clean cut bank accounts. Clean cut ideas and practices. Drove clean cut cars, wore clean cut clothes laid clean cut chicks. In fact, everything they said, thought, and did, was clean cut. And anything which wasn't clean cut just wasn't normal and just couldn't be right. Just couldn't fit into any logical conventional normal order. If anything wasn't clean cut they would worry about it and try to clean cut it no matter what... Brain took off his shirt once in the sunshine when nobody was around. Tony went to wild folk clubs and sang cute little folk songs all day, with his eyes half closed, his hand over his ear and singing baritone through his arse. But everything they did was all tidy and compact, all neatly ordered and categorized, finalized and systematized.. they even washed their professional hands after using the double-u, and carried official little memo note books which they never used save for unchalant doodling shopping lists and emergency toilet paper, but they looked good and gave a favourable impression of efficiency.

They came from decent and respectable homes and they thought the queer fellow a puzzle on two legs in fact they seriously wondered whether he should in fact run about on all fours but they could never find an answer to their rhetorical questioning. But he would brighten their day and would make them thank the lord that they were born into good homes, clean cut, respectable, ambitious, normal kids...

He would make other to insubordination he would agitate. you know.. he actually refused point blank to obey an order.. we should show him the road really. He treats everybody as equals except for agents and foremen whom he refuses even to recognise as human beings. He is employed as a common labourer but makes himself at home in our offices as if it was his birthright. He sits on the floor and sings weird songs and says weird things.. you know, the other day he was playing music on a sledge hammer, by moving his hand upon and down the shaft which he was striking with a claw-hammer...

- "bad scene ... hung up ... happy" Tony would mimic mudge-mudge-wink-wink at friend Brian
- "and then there is all this drug business ..."
- "it's all needle work isn't it" grinned Brian..
- "Been on any good trips lately. Huh? Eh. Huh?"
- "Man, in on one now if only you could know"
- "i like a few drinks now and again" mused Tony but never that stuff.. haven't you got anything better to do than get stoned all the time? ... you came in yesterday and your eyes were dead in your head... and i don't think you have much brain left either.. your in a permanent dream.."

But they fail to understand. They didn't even try to understand. Anything which didn't slip into the in-fray of their little world was of no use to them and of no interest

- "it does you no harm.. in no addict or anything... it's all experience, it's valuable, it's freedom. it's something i can never regret. Perhaps i even pity you in your ignorance your petty mindedness your short sightedness. I'd even say you don't know what you are missing. i don't take anything for kicks believe me. It's a social and psychological thing you see.. the awareness you experience, the people you are with the music you are listening to, the things you see all about you. You are where you are you are what you do what you feel you are everybody and they are you ..."

Yet the tumble trains would leap into their dance of mimicry depending the morals of a society they accepted unconsciously hypocritically expounding the doctored reality of conformity, the conformity which for them would reap its financial bounty in its natural and determined drive for continuity and perpetuation

— "psychedelic! psychedelic! hippy! happy! psychedelic!"
ranted and laughed in wild reverberations loud and clear to bring everybody in on the new joke to set everybody hit the new scapegoat set set everybody say yes say yes forever holding his peace. Here was the chance to defend your existence by attacking. And the assailed has no will to hit back. Like Christ he will take the scorn and the spitting he will turn the other cheek, and shut his eyes whilst you hammer him with your meaningless and regurgitated tomfoolery rooted in hypocrisy, complacency, and contented apathy. Here was your chance to put down the rebel, the raker, the haines, the hippies, the junkies, and the juvenile delinquents, the great unwashed who want to shi up trouble, damage property and beat poor policemen aimed only with punches and curses.

— "did you have a love in last weekend?"

— "you must take me to one of your love ins with all them flower children and toonies..."

— "it's all them drugs that does it, all them drugs and all that sex. like bloomin animals... dont know what the world is coming to..."

Come on. Throw the bean-bag knock down the cans... laugh at the noise and the clatter. Win your prize for defending your way of life of which you are so proud. Defend your ambition. Defend your intolerance. Defend your freedom and your old fashioned patriotism. Defend all you fought and killed for. For the new comers want to bring your good world screaming down about your feet. They want to trample the debris underfoot. They want to smash everything down and build anew with their own tainted and anti-christic designs for future anarchy and tyranny. They want to straight-jacket your life, enslave your children. Give them the...

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... sniff of the grape suit .. let them feel the bite of the cat ..
let them meet your roat for there is life and majesty in
the old man yet. You won't be pushed around. You won't
get dictated to by jumped up revolutionaries who should
be grateful for their daily bread.

No. They just couldn't understand. They wouldn't even
try. It was all too alien to their clean-cut scene their optical
collar and tie drinks at the club Rugby football on Sunday
mornings scene. It was alright to talk generally, to pass the
wasted time. To alleviate the boredom of working, when
not drinking tea incessantly or sitting by polluted river
banks throwing stones into the black swimming waters
or drinking about around, here there and almost everywhere
in the bright orange motor car which nobby-brain had
taken to his materialistic heart. When deprived of his toy
he would enter into the sphere of envy and when once again
in possession engineer Toad would gatecrash the sphere of
advance. And the day was reduced to running around in
circles pursuing vague goals which meant little more, but a
lot to some phantom with a large bank account and an
equally large headache viewing the whole show from some
worn tower between Heaven and Brentford. He looks at his
programmes and his draining resources and we sit out of
of his investment looking at the sky...

... and we sit and stare in the sunshine looking at
the clouds and their sky. And we remark just how big the
sky is. And it knows no boundaries and it has no
horizons and it is so much bigger and so much more
powerful than you or I, stranded here by gravity and a
self possessed complacency and immobility, in terrestrial
bondage. We make our own sides and we creep inside and
curl up into a fetal ball