

()

Paul Buck has been writing and publishing since the late Sixties; key titles include *Violations*, *Lust*, *Walking into Myself...* His work is characterised by its sabotaging of the various forms in order to explore their overlaps and differences. Through the Seventies he also edited the seminal magazine *Curtains*, with its focus on threading French writing from Bataille, Blanchot, Jabès, Faye, Noël, Ronat, Collobert and a score of others into a weave with English and American writers and artists. While editing and translating are still a daily activity – in partnership with Catherine Petit, the Vauxhall&Company series of books at Cabinet Gallery is their responsibility – he also continues to cover new ground: *Spread Wide*, a fiction generated from his letters with Kathy Acker; *Performance*, a biography of the Cammell / Roeg film; *Lisbon*, a cultural view of a city; *A Public Intimacy*, strip-searching scrapbooks to expose autobiography; *Disappearing Curtains*, an exhibition catalogue that collides with a ‘journal’; *Library*, *a suitable case for treatment*, a collection of essays. In recent times he helped Laure Prouvost to write her film *Deep See Blue Surrounding You*, around which her Venice Biennale pavilion, representing France, was based. Further ventures through textual issues around transgression, perversity and intimacy to appear include: *Indiscretions (& Nakedness)*, a set of prose narratives; *Street of Dreams*, further essays, and *Without You*, a fiction that voyages through film essay.

Along the River Run
Paul Buck

quam scit amnis aurifer Tagus:

(which the gold-bearing Tagus knows)

from *Catullus XXIX*

*... A way a lone a last a loved a long the
riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve
of shore to bend of bay,*

from (finish to start of)

Finnegans Wake by James Joyce

Somewhere in his thoughts Lee was preying on him. He wasn't exactly in his dreams as a figure, but his presence was felt. He was trying to turn everything sour. Jake knew that was his game. Joanne was smiling at him, at Jake. He was kissing her, then retreating. Advancing, retreating, his arms holding her close, then stretching away. Why couldn't he hold her close? She wasn't withdrawing from him, and he wasn't withdrawing from her, but they were moving apart, then together. He couldn't understand it. It was a rocking motion. It felt almost like they were making love. But they weren't. Then suddenly she was lifted. He was lifting her. His arms were lifting her bodily. Her face was contorting, a look of terror spreading across it. She looked so scared she couldn't utter a sound. And then he dropped her. Dropped her hard. Dropped her on something. Her body jolted as it struck that something and he knew what it was. It was a meat hook. He knew it was a meat hook. He saw her eyes, they pierced him as the hook pierced her.

Jake awoke with a shudder. Joanne awoke next to him, grabbed him and tried to calm and steady him.

'You, okay? What's the matter?'

Jake was pouring sweat. 'S'okay, s'okay.' He was breathing hard. Lee would kill him. He knew it. He should have gone back.

~~~~~

Lee awoke to a bolt of excruciating pain that shot across his shoulders. He tensed and jammed his neck into a stiffness that lifted the top of his body from the bed. He launched himself to the right and fell flat on his stomach, heaving a sigh of relief as he relaxed, momentarily, for the burning at his shoulders was riveted to his brain. How could anyone survive such pain, he screamed within?

He started to curse his body for turning him over in his sleep. Once he had accepted the level of pain would drop no further, he took stock of his surroundings. He was alone in the hotel room, in the dark. He switched on the light and called Jake's name. He hoped he was within earshot. He wasn't. He could hear the jollities of the night outside drifting towards the open window.

He reached for the lotion and tried to spread some on himself. It was going everywhere but where he intended. It was no good in this awkward position, even though he persisted. He wondered if he'd have the energy to haul himself up. Of course he would. It wasn't until he did so and stabilised himself in a seated position with his feet firmly on the ground and started to apply the lotion afresh that he managed to appease the throbbing pain, and then to loosen his neck from the grip that something lurking within held him in, as if a being in a horror movie. *The Curse of Cascais*.

Not very inventive, but he wasn't up to thinking much, the pain was in charge of everything he thought or did.

Why hadn't Jake made sure he was covered in cream? Couldn't he see he wasn't used to such things? His skin was too pale to be tanned. He'd always known that, he'd always gone red too quickly, never gained a proper tan. But this was no joke. He was reduced to the edge of tears. He took some more paracetamols. He hadn't taken too many today, so he could take three this time. Better than the two you were supposed to take at a time. They were his favourite pills to cure all pains and headaches. He'd be okay.

He remained on the edge of the bed. He guessed he was hungry, but he wasn't sure if he could be bothered to go out and find food. The pain had ripped into his stomach and deflected all sensations back to itself. Only his shoulders and neck existed. That was the centre of his universe.

He should eat though. Couldn't he grab a pizza, or fish and chips somewhere? Couldn't it be brought to him? He wasn't tired. He couldn't just stay here, cooped up in this small room. And who knew how long Jake would be out. Not that he could imagine what Jake would be up to without him. How could he manage? Was he drinking? Where? Was he eating? He couldn't imagine him doing anything but drinking. He couldn't be far. He knew that if he could get himself together

enough he would find him in the bars, one of the bars where Brits hung out. And then it struck him: would Jake be careful? Would Jake be so relaxed he'd put his foot in it? He had encouraged him not to worry about the problem back home, as the problem was not a problem. That was the best thing to do. But Jake seemed to have accepted it too readily, as if that was in the past and now was holiday and in a few days they would fly home and resume life as before. He might be talking to people, being careless. He might have phoned home. How could he be so stupid as to fall asleep and let Jake out of his sight? How stupid could he get? He had no choice, he had to go out and find him and salvage whatever situation he had fallen into.

He felt like a zombie walking along the street. Not that he was the living dead or even in a half-asleep state, far from it. Not that he was staggering either, trying to control the effects of drink like others he passed. The constant pain that wracked his shoulders and neck stiffened him at every step and forced him to hold his breath and tense his muscles as he ventured down the street.

He couldn't imagine his mate going into new bars. They had frequented two or three in this seaside town and Jake would be in one of them. He poked his head into the first, but it seemed quiet this evening, at least at this late hour, and he could see no sign of Jake as he scanned the tables or the bar.

The next was just a few steps further along. Life sounded more raucous in there as he stepped in. He had to move through the people to check. He saw no Jake, though he did see a couple of blokes from Lisbon, from the place where they'd hung out with the Brits. He didn't know their names, just that they were among the general crowd whom they'd spoken with. Lee determined to keep a low profile. They hadn't seen him, and that was for the better. Jake wasn't there either, he'd be in the next place.

Suppose there were others from Lisbon around too. He hoped not. He wasn't sure where that other bar was. He thought it was a bit further along, or perhaps around the corner. He took a short cut through an alleyway. That was a wrong decision, he knew that almost instantly. But he felt sure he'd recognise where he was at the other end. The town wasn't big enough to lose one's bearings that easily. There was a bang behind him, a door being shut too heavily. He tried to glance round, but his neck told him that was not possible. He would have to turn his whole body round if he wanted to look. He'd ignore it. He couldn't. You don't go down dark alleyways and ignore things. Only lunatics did that. Lunatics in movies.

It required some effort, but he managed to turn. He needed to know what it was. Who it was. It was a woman. She was four metres away from him. How could it be her? But it was. She had

come out of a flat above a shop, she must be a local. But she wasn't. He was sure it was Di. She was looking at him. She didn't move. He was standing awkwardly, unbalanced. He put his hand to his neck to press and support it. They stood transfixed for ten seconds, perhaps more. Lee wondered why she didn't move. She was probably thinking the same about him. She looked so like Di. It wasn't, of course. It could be though. How could he be sure? Or not? He turned and started to walk faster than before. He could hear her start walking, her heels clicking. She was right behind him, her steps weren't going away from him. He tried to push himself to go faster. This was becoming a nightmare. Perhaps it wasn't for real. He pinched at his neck. He flinched. That was a silly thing to do. But it wasn't all a dream. It was all real. Real pain.

He turned to his left as soon as he emerged from the passage. He had lost all thought that he was looking for the other bar. He just wanted to get away, but all he could hear were the clicking heels behind him, methodically beating time, not getting closer, not getting louder, but not getting quieter either. Even if he speeded up it didn't change. And he couldn't turn any more. And he couldn't stop. He just had to keep going, to get away. How could he allow himself to be terrified by a woman? How could he allow himself to be stalked by a woman? He had to stop and confront her. Stop

this nightmare. This wasn't some stupid movie that he'd landed himself in.

And then it stopped. The sound was gone. He took a few more paces before he stopped, held his breath. And listened. He looked around to make sure she was not there. Again he had to turn himself bodily. She wasn't. She had seemingly vanished into thin air. He couldn't imagine where she could have gone. There was nowhere obvious.

He took his bearings. As he turned further he saw two policemen watching him making this odd manoeuvre. Instead of completing the rotation, which would've seemed even odder, as if he was some kind of wind-up toy, he turned back in a clockwise direction and set off again as fast as possible. He didn't look. He tried not to listen either. This was getting to him. He was letting it get to him. But he sensed they were there, not far behind, following him. He knew it. He mustn't walk quicker, that would draw their suspicion. He must be intent on going somewhere, but he could see nowhere he wanted to go. He had to keep moving forward. Up ahead there was a stage erected on the promenade for summer concerts with a bundle of stands selling food and drink, he imagined, but they seemed closed now, with just some stragglers hanging around the area. He could see a beach ahead, one he'd not known about. He wouldn't walk onto that now, it might be regarded as suspicious at this time of night.

He skirted around and climbed away from the centre, following the road wherever it led. At one point he stopped to lean across the railings and peer out to sea, allowing him a chance to turn slightly and glance behind. They were still coming. They were more than on patrol, they were following him, after him. Why? Did he look that suspicious? He resumed his walk, passing before some old building, a fort or something like that, and kept to the winding road as it aimed out of town. Cars passed him so he knew he was on some form of main route and not losing himself in dead-end streets.

There was nightlife further ahead. It looked like an exclusive club, flash cars were pulling out.

The road became a bridge as it traversed an inlet. He peered over at the water running beneath. He moved to the other side. It was a little cove that petered out no sooner had it appeared on the inner side. There was sand that seemed to belong to a big house, almost a castle, that he could make out some fifty metres away. He saw a stone staircase that came down from a side entrance. No-one was around. It was part of the grounds, but it looked more. There were steps running down from the road after the bridge, and nothing to stop anyone descending. He'd rest down there and hope the police would leave him alone. He daren't look back now. That would be far too suspicious.