

*Chocolate Che*

*Also by Damian Furniss*

The Duchess of Kalighat

**DAMIAN FURNISS**

# **Chocolate Che**

Shearsman Books  
Exeter

Published in the United Kingdom in 2010 by  
Shearsman Books Ltd  
58 Velwell Road  
Exeter EX4 4LD

ISBN 978-1-84861-106-1  
First Edition

Copyright © Damian Furniss, 2010.

The right of Damian Furniss to be identified as the author of these poems has  
been asserted by him in accordance with  
the Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.  
All rights reserved.

### **Acknowledgements**

are due to the editors of the following publications:

*Aesthetica, City Lighthouse, Dog, Fire River, Flying Post, Headlock, The Journal,  
Odyssey, Orbis, Ore, Popshot, Shearsman, Smith's Knoll, South, Spectrum, Stand,  
Staple, Tears in the Fence, Terrible Work, Tremblestone.*

Versions of some of these poems first appeared in the chapbook *The Duchess  
of Kalighat*, published by Tears in the Fence, after winning their pamphlet  
competition.

Thanks also to the Fire River Poets, the Mincing Poets, Uncut Poets and Phil  
Bowen for their support and encouragement.

The following artists feature in, are the inspiration for, or the voices of,  
some of the poems in 'My White Ghosts': Jackson Pollock, Henri Matisse, Pablo  
Picasso, Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, Francis Bacon, Amedeo Modigliani,  
Jeanne Hébuterne, Lucian Freud, Balthus, Marc Chagall, Egon Schiele,  
Salvador and Gala Dalí, James McNeill Whistler, Edward Hopper, Andy Warhol,  
Tracey Emin, Damien Hirst, Gilbert and George, Alfred Wallis  
and Mark Rothko.

## CONTENTS

### **Chocolate Che**

Chocolate Che	9
Three Buckets for Love	10
The Existentialist Sandwich	11
My Daddy Was a Studebaker	12
(This Sonnet Is Sponsored By) Sonneti	14
Goodfella	15
Che in Disguise	16
Fidel's Beard	17
Havana's the Woman	18
Woodpecker Blues	19
See That My Bones Are Kept Clean	20
Semana Santa	21
Playing Bones	22
A Time for Gifts	23
Pisco Sour	24
Arequipa Rain	25
Bee Movie	26
Hot Water	28
Dog Town	29
Yungay	30
Mummies	32
Third Hand	33
The Cola War	34
The Orchid Collector	35
A Dormitory Between Us	36
The Art Hotel	37
Che's Hands	38

### **My White Ghosts**

My White Ghosts	41
If Art Was a Car	42
My Odalisque	43
9 + 1 = Picasso	44
The Empty Chair	49
Bacon Dust	50
Unmarked Exit	52

Easel Hawk	53
An Artist of Whom Nothing Is Known	54
Bella, Bella	56
Nip the Bud	57
House of the Genius	58
The Cookbook Bible	60
Gas, 1940	61
Warhol Triptych	62
Found Lost Sign	66
The Man Who Ate Himself	67
The Larkin Lads	68
Old Iron	69
The Rothko Room	70

### **Return to Kalighat**

Darshan with Dalai Lama	73
Everest	74
High Water Down	75
Fishing in Orissa	76
Grey, Languorous	77
The Snow Leopard	78
Tusker	79
Keena of Nandankanan	80
A Cow Is Dying	81
The Indian Museum	82
Relics	83
The Great British Cemetery	84
The Shambler	86
The Duchess of Kalighat	88
Holi at Nirmal Hriday	90
This Little Piggy Has None	92
One Irish Rover	94
New Life in Hospice	95
Duncan	96
Ward 9	97
Delta Blues	98
Close Shave	99
Time and a Place	100
Before Poetry	101

# **Chocolate Che**



## Chocolate Che

To celebrate Thanksgiving Day  
The Yankees baked a chocolate Che  
With buttermilk from Camaguey  
And cacao from the factory  
He founded in the heady days  
When cocoa was revolutionary.

He wore a marzipan beret,  
Its insignia that rarity—  
A perfect star-shaped strawberry—  
To strip the comandante  
Who took the I from industry  
Of the badge that gave him dignity.

They gagged him with a Cadbury's flake  
Imported by the C.I.A.  
And stretched him on a rack of cane  
Lashed onto a Chevrolet,  
Carved him up at Gitmo Bay  
With harvest blunt machetes—

Took his head to the Admiralty  
As their cut of the bounty  
That is *La Isla Grande*,  
Then toasted him with rum flambé  
In memory of Hemingway—  
Red flames, like the blues, they fade away

## Three Buckets for Love

*Welcome to my home. I do not live here.*  
*This is the bathroom, it has no bath.*  
Three buckets for love, a dripping tap.

Frames without doors, the curtains part—  
Mama launders bread in her chamber pot.  
*Welcome to my home, she does not live here.*

Her vest bares a rash of day-glo hearts.  
Under the arc of a hung bulb stand  
Three buckets for love. A dripping tap

Ticks stage left of our netted bed.  
Brothers call cues from the room next door.  
*Welcome to my home, they do not live here.*

Papa stirs the pot, tucks in with his spoon—  
A black bean soup with bones, twice stewed—  
Three buckets for love. A dripping tap

Salutes the dawn. Stool pigeons perch behind  
The moon. Two parrots rap on the washing line.  
*Welcome to my home. You do not live here.*  
Three buckets for love. A dripping tap.

## The Existentialist Sandwich

I order a sandwich—  
A dairy-free sandwich  
A meatless, vegless sandwich  
Plain as a Ukrainian  
Sliced bread naked  
As the day it was baked

My waiter, the doctor  
The doctor, my waiter  
Pleads to authority  
The rule of ledgers  
Dictates equal measures  
Of ham and cheese

A Spaniard intervenes  
Declares an open sandwich  
Curdled milk and meat  
Untainted by wheat  
Gherkins on the side—  
A Spaniard's dream

We split the sandwich  
Like a breast man, a leg man  
Might share a striptease  
Order Daiquiris  
To celebrate the victory  
Of west over east

While the waiter dreams of sandwiches—  
The imaginary sandwich  
The sandwich that makes itself  
The sandwich that eats other sandwiches  
For breakfast, lunch and dinner  
The sandwich that just wants to be.

## **My Daddy Was a Studebaker**

In the era of General Motors, on a day in late September, we left Detroit: headed due south, chrome noses sniffing at the moon.

We were of twelve marques. There were the Cadillacs and the Chevrolets; the Plymouths, the Buicks and the Pontiacs. But my Daddy was a Studebaker. Built like an airplane, he yearned to fly.

We travelled in convoy, followed the migration routes from the Windy City down to Miami. We had sitting rooms inside us and ate at roadside diners. Gas was cheaper than water then—we just stuck a long straw into the earth and sucked up its blood.

At the ocean's edge we greased our trunks with pomade and primed our fins for the sea. By the power of Henry Ford, the waves parted. We sounded our horns as we passed the Florida Keys, said goodbye to the Land of the Free.

Havana was just a short cruise away. Life was good those first days of be-bop, mojitos, and cabaret. We were always well lubricated. Our parts replaced themselves. On rest days, a valet rubbed us down.

But then, without warning, we were abandoned on the runway. Horses descended from the mountains. Beards sprouted from pencil thin moustaches. From that day on, time was a cinema reel.

Only rumours from our homeland kept us going, our tyres bald but unbroken. New marques had crossed the ocean, invading the ports of our kin. All signs pointed east and we followed them, eight lanes of asphalt ending in a field.

Not used to hard labour, we drank sugar cane, spluttered and grew weak. In the city, our cousins married Russians, had their hearts transplanted for Ladas.

Now we're rented out for weddings or made to escort tourists.  
Hitchers show us their onions. When strangers stroke our bonnets, we  
blow smoke into their faces.

But my Daddy was a Studebaker. I was made an American, with  
American dreams. There are roles in the movies for cars like me.

## **(This Sonnet Is Sponsored By) Sonneti**

Dig the dirt, Henry. Sift for dead men's teeth.  
Yank steak and kidney from that big cat's jaw.  
Pluck blood fruit, Henry, from the citrus trees,  
Snatch back your heart, a beat between the claws  
Of feline Fidel, with his snake-hipped grin  
Spitting pips of morse, launching nicotine  
From the face that launched a thousand cigars  
With a mundungus broadcast of catarrh.

My time is yours, Henry—our time, not his.  
His time is through now, worn like faded fatigues.  
No one told you, Henry, there'd be days like this—  
Pulling Che poses in your Sonneti jeans.  
Tug your cap down, Henry. If the dead could speak  
They'd take the long knives to your radical chic.

## Goodfella

Spain is fine this time of year  
But a deckchair is no place  
For such a great buffoon.  
Why, he said grace with men  
Cut from every cloth, hung  
Their hats and heads from hooks.

Now he goes to bed at dawn  
To drink a case of sun, dreaming  
Of the night the stage was his—  
A balcony of stars twinkled  
With applause, wise guys roared  
For blood, rained down the fizz.

But old man moon will rise again  
In spats, a cane and monocle,  
Barking through the curtains like a loon.  
Red cheeked and open mouthed  
He bore his glorious behind  
For the glad eyes in the crowd—

They say the songs he sung  
Cast sequins on the hides  
Of each diva in the chorus line  
As he climbed the spiral stairway,  
His top hat and a bren gun  
All we have to remember him by.

## **Che in Disguise**

Plucked bald as a yam,  
Grey streaked in the minge  
That remains of his mane,  
Che snipes off two frames,  
Puffs in the desk-weight  
That strains at his waist.  
Fat cat that ran a bank  
Wants to play at mouse  
In a mask of Bakelite  
He buffs up, checks twice—  
Fails to recognise himself.

His wife herds in the kids,  
Geese who poke and hiss  
At each other, then notice  
The silver fox, thoughtful  
In the corner. He takes each  
To his gurning mouth,  
Shoos them squealing out.  
His daughter pouts bye-byes,  
Tells her anxious mother  
That Uncle she'd not met  
Just fell in love with her.

## **Fidel's Beard**

Fidel's beard is a little explored region beneath Fidel's nose. A jungle once exposed to Agent Orange, Napalm and carpet-bombing, reports the area is still subject to a secret war have been confirmed by satellite photographs that show its coverage is less lustrous than before, although some claim it is merely a victim of climate change, being much ravaged by hurricanes.

Fidel's beard has been serenaded by barbershop quartets in the pay of the CIA. Long admired by mothers with combs and handkerchiefs, all the double agents sent to massage its host with DDT switched their defoliant for talcum powder and joined the beard's secret harem. But now, insiders say, the beard of our former enemy is little more than a flea circus, its tick acrobats turning tricks for visiting dignitaries.

Fidel's beard has tickled more muchachas than the sproutings of Marx or Lenin. Scrapbooks of its cuttings fill several miles of library shelving. Over fifty years in the growing, it has received more decorations than any other beard in history. It has outlasted nine beardless American presidents. Not so much as a single moustache has been grown against it. But all these words say no more than the stroking of a chin conveys.

## Havana's the Woman

Havana's the woman I long for:  
Her gap-toothed smile an open door  
From my world into hers, clothes hung  
From her balcony, flags of welcoming  
As I rumba up the Malecon  
A suitcase of shoes under my arm  
Just to hear the cha-cha-cha  
Of her heels as she greets me  
With an invitation to *bailar*.  
Kick off your crocodile shoes, she'll say,  
And mambo like Benny Moré.

And though she is no longer young  
The trill song of her laugh will fill  
Our garden with the tra-la-la  
Of a lovebird, still an old fifteen.  
And when we marry, her family  
Will deck our Cadillac with lilies,  
Then pelt me with rice and beans.  
And when I leave her, forms in hand,  
She'll rock her chair against the sea  
As waves crash over the harbour wall  
And then retreat into history.