

Bona Drag

Selected Publications by Jeremy Reed

Poetry

Isthmus of Samuel Greenberg (1976)
Bleecker Street (1980)
By The Fisheries (1984)
Nero (1985)
Selected Poems (1987)
Engaging Form (1988)
Nineties (1990)
Red Haired Android (1992)
Kicks (1994)
Pop Stars, with Mick Rock (1995)
Sweet Sister Lyric (1996)
Saint Billie (2000)
Patron Saint of Eyeliner (2000)
Heartbreak Hotel (2002)
Duck and Sally Inside (2006)
Orange Sunshine (2006)
This Is How You Disappear (2007)
West End Survival Kit (2009)

Novels

The Lipstick Boys (1984)
Blue Rock (1987)
Red Eclipse (1989)
Inhabiting Shadows (1990)
Isidore (1991)
When The Whip Comes Down (1992)
Chasing Black Rainbows (1994)
The Pleasure Chateau (1994)
Diamond Nebula (1995)
Red Hot Lipstick (1996)
Sister Midnight (1997)
Dorian (1998)
Boy Caesar (2004)
The Grid (2008)

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For Toyoko

COUPLE

Two girls, they're mutant Japanese,
cyberpunk hair, purple on black
like a snake headed fritillary:
one has a taupe coloured birth-mark
blotched like a coffee
stain under her right arm:
(the density
hidden under a T-shirt
like a generic tattoo
of the Hiroshima
mushroom):
her friend wears an Anna Lake leopardskin coat—
the label backflipped and showing
its brandname ID:
her hair's cloned like the other's,
as an arty, hybrid flower.
Her scarf streams anemones at the throat
like bright fish satelliting coral:
she's mini-skirted, thin gold ring
caught like a hollow sun in a pierced nostril:
21 or 22
displaced in the lemon West End sunlight,
alien, post-scripted to the end of time.
They're two together, hand in hand
linked like a bracelet
by the thinnest chain.
They're a same sex item, or simulate
love for each other in their cult of two?
I watch them by the Foyles bus stop—
the precinct's a miniature Tokyo—
the girls like punky modified manga cartoons
headed for St Martin's, and me
slowing it all like a real-time photo.

KITCHEN NOTICE BOARD

A pin spiked through a Posh cutting—
her features like a Japanese cartoon,
I litter green baize with her look
in Hervé Léger, Azzedine Alaïa,
squirted on skinny jeans,
the Karaoke gamine
in red-capped silver heels
giving flash architecture to her walk
sexy as tangoing with a chocolate
exchanged between two tongues: a morning rush
like the vitaminised sunlight,
orange and violet checking in today
like passengers at arrivals,
a day given the earth name Saturday,
my pin-ups, cut-outs, recipes,
punctured with voodoo pins, the cute track marks
holding them down. My oyster recipes,
(I'm vegan), but do food tourism in my head,
are mostly Normandy, the sieved rainbow
refreshed with local calvados
into a fried, deliquescent slither,
a kiss-taste, sea-taste: I make Oolong tea
like cooking China in a bright blue pot,
cut out quantum stuff from New Scientist,
music reviews, a Mac Russian red pout,
a jumbled collage, like peeled wallpaper,
to jab visuals into my need
to feel alive, packaged in the moment,
juiced-up and lively with big city speed.

THE FINAL CUT

A spoon glued to a honey jar,
a glazed gold-brown solid Manuka cone—
the banking stock of myrtle bees;
the beach I'd left atomized in my shoes,
quartz sparkles like molecular earrings:
the past stops anywhere you want it to
in beachy purple weather
1982? 2002?
His T-shirt read Prettiest Boy in The Morgue:
crimson gothic script blocked on pink.
He'd wait on the rubbled jetty,
bony arm angled
on a jutty knee,
his mind copying a tanker's slow crawl
in real time; the horizon's green lacquer
simmery with fins of heat haze.
We met like that, a week of afternoons
that didn't move, and talked music,
same-sex attraction, men on men.
Evenings I'd catch the sun in the kitchen,
anticipating its fire-red free fall
below the horizon, and trade it in my fist
like an orange tennis ball;
and sort out mini-deserts from salty gym shoes,
little mare's tails, stardust in silver trails
leaking their patterns, grainy zigzag tags
I'd sift like galactic pepper,
finger and thumb dusting the gritty pour
from somewhere in the universe
I'd look up to much later in the dark
cooking with star-belts seen from the back door.

PILLS

Lee Harwood's *The Man with Blue Eyes*
face up on a trunk for table
Joe Brainard cover (dead
from Aids)—a reminder
I bought this book in 1983
my chemistry
tampered with by benzodiazapines—
the need so coded in my cells
redeeming prescriptions seemed serial:
Boots after Boots, a High Street pharmacy,
lit by a green, like kamikaze suits.
3 doctors and I stockpiled pills
as molecular offensive
thinking their disconnect would do
me to the impossible end.
Today a blue book blue as valium
published by Angel Hair in NY (1967)
scares up bad associations,
tweaks deactivated receptor sites
no longer binding to a habit.
I'm clear, but miss the filter on reality,
the whiteout edits.
September. Blue aqueous skies turn grey
this afternoon, a small press book
for company, and blue again
remembering the pills I kept as scoop
inside my pocket should the lights go out
under the city in the mad rush hour.

JAFFA CAKES

It mattered outside—pink hydrangeas—
a lipstick pink bleeding to mauve and blue
pumped up by iron, like steroids,
and that your black iPod was branded Zen,
a compact Chinese alien
loaded with Turkish pop, and that the day
was Sunday in the rubber universe
and that we sat out back before the rain
banking ideas—I want to be
an image banker, selling corporates
access to colouring facts with imagery,
giving thought-patterns notes, contours,
an individual edge, a quantum leap
out of the grey room into the blue
oxygenated imaginative reality.
And Jaffa cakes, it mattered too
you chose the third and fifth selectively
by looking to negotiate
a symmetry, 38mm
chocolate layered over orange jelly,
54mm diameter,
1gm of flat—I need the specifics
of this McVitie's masterpiece,
a slim-line bite we crunch by scaffolding,
you telling me that the Black Sea's
a deep turquoise—I choose the first and last
as my endgaming do or die
three-layered tangy sponge finality.

RED TOE POLISH

The archetypal icon red,
red as a bindi's tilak dot
or a Fujifilm shot
of a close up red traffic light,
garnet, vermilion, scarlet,
ten high gloss oval sex ads on your toes
hissy as hex
shaped like miniature red coffins
twinkling through 10 denier mesh
or aired out loud
in toeless sandals, Russian red,
paprika, Ferrari-red,
samurai red:
and up the stairs down: I'm waiting for you there,
identifiable by your toes,
the red shock upgraded
to lacquered finish, not a chip
like car showroom cellulose,
a fashion moment deputed
by how you walk today,
as though your feet carried a waiter's tray
of ten whisked up bloody marys
supported by your frisky toes.

OH NO, NOT YOU AGAIN

Endemic thinness, it's a line
they share (28–30" waists)
the Rolling Stones in 2005:
a survivor's calorie count,
the liquidation of all fat
like Africa:
bodies like a measuring tape
held vertical
and belted into skinny jeans.
The thin gene subverting biology,
they're 140lbs max
defiant regeneracy:
the singer works out, eats spirulina gnocchi,
runs like he's orbiting the earth
inside his blood, and comes on stage
lean as the written column of a J
anorexic
or like the gap between centimetres
on a plastic ruler
squeezed in the gap.
The two guitarists are facially sagged,
wrinkled like corduroy,
stomachs flat as the surface of Route 66,
and liquid feed on toxins—sambucca,
Wild Turkey, Guinness, vodka +.
The drummer's like an opium paradigm,
a white-haired chinaman sat on a mat,
only he's normal diet, vintage wines.
I pin the Mojo clipping on my board—
a New York press conference at Juilliards,
attend to a full red begonia's
extravagant millinery,
(Oh no, not you again) in June,
the sameness reassuring, like the rain
come on in writing, filling in the yard
like numbers scored in a Sudoku box.

BIG CITY DILEMMA

We're mostly running scared. Contact's
spontaneous, or not at all—
I saw you on the Circle Line,
cerise jumper, oriental
30+, in from Tokyo?
lips held like a camellia

gunned open by the winter sun.
Unseasonable, blue January,
you jacketless, the slim ideal
of gay identity, gelled hair
brushed up like black alfalfa seeds,
dead-level, springy in their tray . . .

Our catchlights signalled, twinkled bright,
coding in their telepathy
across the reconfigured crush
of bodies mashed to telescope
into a stretched anatomy,
grabbing for air on Baron's Court . . .

I panicked my way out, the sky
over West London choked by clouds,
the free air, spacious like a Sahara,
and walked my loss into the day,
its pulse beating like a goldfish
rolling a red eye inside polythene,

and bussed my way to the West End,
high on the city's quango mix
of corporate and guerilla clash,
my mind upgrading imagery—
his triangular face, the hurt
trapped in his eyes like a scratched film,

his jumper's raspberry sorbet splash
toning itself in; and jumped out
at Leicester Square, hope against hope
searching the crowds for a pink flash,
letting illusion go, then chasing it
in complex puzzles down the street.

MORNING GLORY

Impacted purple:
a silent detonation, one then two,
exploding behind heart-shaped leaves,
spontaneous, like we never hear
supernovae ripping the galaxy,
the star imploding at its core

with radioactive energy.
A morning glory builds on light,
spectacularly in our Hampstead patch,
its tug at photosynthesis
placing it like a test pilot
nose up in vertical flight.

Day by day they proliferate:
my one in twenty popped open
like alien intelligence.
I write outside to refocus
their saucer formation, the fuel
sustaining them is solar power

and unpredictably intense
pollution-cleansing thunder showers
shimmery as a jellyfish.
I sit and watch a Boeing's fins
slice through feathery cirrus streaks,
directing words the way I might

attempt through try outs to explain
morning glories to a Martian
perplexed by blinding urban rain.
My successes score on the page
as imagery. The clouds collect
into a giant grey mushroom.

Two neighbouring radios conflict
as noise quotient. I sit back:
a sniff of thunder on the air;
and pour left hand another drink.
Mostly I notice slow tracking
the dominant in purple's pink—

each flower's marked by a cerise undertone.
I've got them now, or so I think
into a sighting. They're full-on;
but still my work's only half done,
my grabbing for a hat and shades
to match my craft against the sun.