

*Bona Vada*

## *Selected Publications by Jeremy Reed*

### *Poetry*

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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)  
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Diamond Nebula (1995)  
Red Hot Lipstick (1996)  
Sister Midnight (1997)  
Dorian (1998)  
Boy Caesar (2004)  
The Grid (2008)

# **BONA VADA**

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Cooked me a spoonful of diamonds  
cooked me a spoonful of gold  
just one spoon of your precious love  
will satisfy my soul

Willie Dixon



**BABY'S GOT A GUN**



## Book Thieves

I never guessed at first, this man  
so quizzically attentive to Burroughs—  
he'd been in twice, casual knitwear,  
sober jeans, academic air,  
Boeing aluminium-  
coloured hair;

I never thought his slow reconnaissance  
of signed Burroughs, Ginsberg and Kerouac,  
more than a collector's internal debate  
over the price, dust-wrapper, state,  
his knowledge worn the way a silver ring  
gets eaten by the skin. The third time he  
left space where a Burroughs *Naked Lunch* first  
in its olive green Olympia imprint  
had faced outwards, as though he'd cut a tree  
from a familiar stand.

The fourth time, he lacked nerve, or I was quick,  
his adrenalin never fired the shot;  
the fifth time a signed Kerouac  
went missing like a pane of glass  
lifted clean from a window frame.

We preferred to live with the enigma  
and never questioned him, but I was curious  
about his method, as I might  
be of a disappearing act,  
or something incisive like a surgeon's cut,  
or how a chess player conceives  
a configurative strategy,  
and waited for him to return and show  
me how the signed John Fante *Ask The Dust*  
left with him, like he'd put on extra weight  
he never showed, slipping out casually.

## Tipping Points

Magnolias collapse like a pink trifle,  
a mashed dessert, get flattened underfoot  
in cold abrasive thunder showers. I feel  
the planet air-pocket in spin  
like a plane thrown about by wind  
somewhere above the China sea,  
the passengers starting to crawl with sweat.  
It's a race between tipping points,  
a switch to sustainable technology  
or collapse: a network blackout,  
all power crashed.

One school holiday, lost in blue mirage  
hazing the beach, right down on the green tide  
a friend grabbed a rubbery octopus  
out of its niche in a rock corridor,  
tentacles grabbing, and its black ink cap  
projected over his white shirt,  
the stain opening out like a continent,  
a sort of blackest Africa.

It's the shock I remember, the black squirt  
gunned like a missile launcher, and my friend's  
momentary shattering against a rock.  
It's my three-button black Jaeger blazer  
brings it all back, so too the planet's flip  
one side light and the other dark,  
but angry light-polluted and burnt-out,  
things getting rocky, as I track  
across a pink magnolia petal littered park.

## What's On

Disturbance in the city's hypothalamus—  
a new J G Ballard novel, a riff  
from a Rolling Stones rehearsal,  
a variant chord from the human riff's  
indestructible neurology;  
and somewhere in a lab, donor oocytes  
compounded into human clones,  
we'll never know the difference one day,  
except the eyes turned blank as cellulose  
on a Jaguar XK coupe—  
two of them standing by the underground car park  
entrance, warren'd beneath Bloomsbury Square?  
And then the underground UFO factory,  
donor organ traffickers, dealers cocktail'ing psychoactive  
additives, new drugs for a new body  
redesigned for the visionary present,  
the abdication of reality?  
A Delta II rocket blasts off from Cape Canaveral,  
delivering NASA Mars probes, its green casing  
logoed with blue and red NASA roundels  
bound for the red planet.  
The universe weighs in at 10 kilograms per cubic metre,  
and me I'm 50 kilograms, that light  
in volume, I'm just nerve and personality,  
no body mass, stripped-down for easy death  
and poetry? The gateway's there  
if we could see it—50 years from now,  
100, 200, no different from imagining  
its contents—a post-human colony,  
backs to the sun, waiting in a convoy  
to move on into clearer air  
after pollution warnings, dust-cloud hangovers,  
jeep-crawling into the 23rd century.

## Blacks and Grays

The high-end 21st century look:  
William S Burroughs as its prototype,  
the mapping YSL, Richard James, Hugo Boss,  
like structural architecture  
got into clothes  
exec/casual black: exec/casual gray:  
the a note in gray deepening colour  
the black matte black stylistic gravity  
suggesting ship's black paint  
sans serif lettering done in spray bomb black,  
black runny hair dye, Mafia conference tables,  
the blackout in a gun barrel.  
Gray's neutral and attracts colours  
like purple, cerise, orange, red,  
but finds a complementary line with black:  
a locked in mood, a foggy quotient,  
an emphasis more than a style  
in composing attitude like menu  
to fit with grainy emotion.  
Take a black three-button blazer,  
a gray cashmere jumper and charcoal slacks,  
you have the 21st century future  
like airport skies smudged at vanishing point  
towards a global marker:  
a texture that's backgrounded as a base  
to building on like a Burroughs novel  
as a lab-experiment, black and gray  
by the canal today, the serious two,  
cutting a deal and studiously dodgy  
on the café patio in full view.

## Dusty Springfield's (blues) at 5am

The voice is mink. The scent Trésor.  
Dykes in the clandestine  
1960s at Aubrey Walk—  
she left her panda makeup on all night  
so Sandra wouldn't see her stripped,  
run-proof mascara like black dahlias  
leaving no traces on the black pillow.  
The ashtray's like a mortuary:  
the bottle-green Booth's gin bottle bottomed-out  
to a finger's width,  
the uncapped Schweppes tonic bottle gone flat.  
The room, (Anna Kavan's a street away),  
smokes bluely—whitely, light tweaking  
slatted Venetian blinds in mid-July,  
light that mixes with the sleeping tablet's fog  
into an opalescent 5am blur.  
She sashays in a black silk negligée  
into the bathroom's clinical sanctuary  
to do full makeup before Sandra wakes,  
the diva pop star lining eyeliner  
like immaculate Chinese calligraphy.  
She fires-up on the last clear lick of gin,  
eyes squeezed on its hot corridor  
into the gut, and then slinks back to bed.  
Sandra's curled in a caterpillar shape,  
black hair rayed out, the love bite on her neck  
the colour of a blueberry.  
Dusty feels flat, gravelly and wiped out.  
She sits cushion-propped waiting for the day,  
her mind configurating how she'll sing  
a certain phrase—she scans it word by word—  
lights up a fag for huskiness,  
repairs her toe polish, while Sandra shifts  
from dream to dream, face up, and stays that way.

## My Lives

Thin. Looks like a pop star ( high cheek bones  
at low cloud level ).

Owes all his poems to a pink jumper  
(cerise, more raspberry ),  
seen on a bony shouldered man  
at La Colette: popped juniper berries  
mixing a tangy frisson with the sea,  
one excerpted, truant, white-hazy afternoon,  
a Thursday, circa 1973?

Clothes. Mostly a Mod aficionado:  
the poems taking colour from a shirt  
seen at the time, high collar button-down  
blue gingham, (the tone unrepeatably  
an offbeat deep blue subtext to navy) :  
the wearer stepping into myth-making  
as lyric building blocks to poetry.

Education. Hanging round, filling in  
empty spaces with imagination.  
Outsider, from those two teeny sightings,  
a shirt and jumper obsessive  
linking the singularity of each  
to inspiration. Mods are detail-cute.

Occupation. Monitoring the crowd  
for image, mostly in London's West End,  
and working from it. Writing a poem's  
like compressing the shattered galaxy  
into a lively rectangle, 30 lines,  
8 x 5? Biography: still unmixed  
the unsettling secrets stored in the studio.  
Agenda: getting the two colours right  
a pink and blue that won't ever be matched,  
but keep pointing up possibilities  
of resolution on hazy Thursdays,  
staring at futures, and eating ice cream  
that's sharply, alertly dark raspberry.

## **It Takes Two Baby**

Your ash-stained black fedora's rake  
tilted back, slept-in, re-characterized,  
a Johnson's of St James' punched  
into a UFO shape, then the black shades  
concealing 52 hours without sleep,  
eye slants the colour of canned tomatoes  
when the shades slip—  
you hanging on the stairs  
beneath a Vivienne Westwood poster  
so large it hallucinates off the wall,  
Sex in its snarlish punk World's End heyday  
in 1976, SW3.

Two Marlboro Lites are sighting from your lips  
with variant deposits of drooped ash  
like flaky bullet heads,  
an incendiary's burnt out bronchia—  
40 a day, supplemented by cocaine.  
You offer me the bottle of Pinot rosé  
you're dragging on at 9.30 am:  
wine the colour of a pink carnation.  
I work the bookshop for you in a weird space-time,  
me with my head speedy with poetry—  
that's always my peculiar drug—  
the dopamine acceleration of words  
into such extravagant imagery.  
We're broke. I tell you words are hot sapphires  
if we could get an exchange rate—  
a conversion into gratuitous Euros?  
I've nothing in my coat but purple pens  
and valium and space substituting for money.  
A baguette's all I'll eat today  
to fill the hunger. We embrace and stay  
a minute folded in each other's loss  
so that the contact hurts—it's come to this  
a momentous event in which we bond  
outside of the brutally sunlit indifferent day.

## Going Down Slow

At first, I thought depression was like fog,  
dispersible over an office tower,  
a flaky vapour burnt off by pink sun  
the colour of a red grapefruit,  
but found its core was black and hard  
and sometimes irreducible

the way an avocado stone  
maintains obdurate guard  
inside an egg plant's slippery leather skin.  
I didn't know that it's interior  
was subterranean like a corridor—  
a mazy underpass with the lights blown

and menace graffiti-tagged on the walls.  
I curled up there and notched myself  
into a caterpillar's ball.  
I had incentive, but I couldn't act,  
and got so drunk glasses seemed redundant.  
I drank relief clean out of the bottle,

corks littering the floor like dead bullets  
a gutted war-zone in Baghdad.  
I occupied a shrinking radius,  
the TV on, and me reading it blank,  
afraid if it grew silent I'd go mad  
or end up drug-zonked in a hospital

orbiting pharmaceuticals  
like friends I've visited who shook all day.  
Letters accumulated in the hall—  
unopened snow-drifts littering the floor.  
I stayed inside and thought a black river  
was waiting outside to break down the door.

Months of it, going down there, terminally?  
No change of clothes, bunkered like the Führer,  
the loaded pistol aching on his desk.  
Half a stone dropped, not even poetry  
worrying me into hyper-alert.  
The blackness killed it in my chemistry.

No comfort, when the way up's the way down.  
I wore black mirrored glasses everywhere  
contactless as an alien  
with an indifferent wraparound stare.  
I scored some methadone by Centre Point  
and tried to unplug pain. Nothing seemed real.

The nights were worst, the days like a dead train  
derailed on a Siberian plateau.  
I sat ten hours and didn't move at all,  
convinced that losers win, got up at last  
and took a pencil and wrote on plaster  
like naming a new country on the wall.

## **We All Adore Johnny**

Elusive, out of town again,  
the blond-haired head-turner who stops our hearts  
networks our conversation underground  
in the 6pm Phoenix bar:  
comparisons with a taller James Dean  
or quiffed Billy Fury as prototype

brim on the tongue like strawberries  
soaked in his favourite brand: Stolichnaya vodka  
80 proof Russian bullet shot  
stripping the lining from the throat.  
I read us a Frank O'Hara poem  
about the way a first vodka

triggers acceptance of almost anything,  
like feeding emotions through a juicer.  
Johnny's a vodka tearaway,  
a dealer with a film-star's looks,  
and by some freaky synchronicity  
calls mid-conversation, so he's right there with us

as a connection in the bar  
sustained by my Nokia signal.  
He's heading north for three shape-shifting days,  
no destination ever named,  
he's somebody who perfects a dissolve  
like fog worked to a blue consistency

on smoky blue: a seacoast texturing.  
We order drinks and recreate his pull,  
the hypnotic charm he asserts, the style—  
his Valentino shades ledged in his hair,  
the smile that's coloured banana-yellow,  
his eyes the clear blue of a swimming pool.

We're like a fan club grouped into this bar  
talking up Johnny and Frank O'Hara,  
and how vodka is clear like poetry,  
only its side effects are slightly skewed  
and heady and hopefully off the wall  
and burn like Johnny as a ruined star.