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Opening Extract from...

The Incomplete Tim Key

Written by Tim Key

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Fair play to the guy – never easy to write a book.

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Some people go through their whole life without writing a book.

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And even though it's just poems, it still counts as a book.

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SOCIOPOETRY[2]

[2] I have chosen to start my book with this, most relevant of themes. Sociopoetry. Sociopoetry has always fascinated me. In case you are ignorant I will briefly describe the concept of sociopoetry. It is – as you might expect – *poetry*, which concerns itself with *socio*. Things falling under the banner of socio would include guns and prisons, the state of hospitals, how much we should give to beggars, whether we should experiment on beggars/force them to become soldiers, her nibs the Queen, the plight of the ethnic and whether there should be a National Lottery – and, if there is, should it be easier to win. My father is a member of society so I have recently been bending his ear about what it is all about. I'll drive to his boathouse and we'll sit down, open a crate of Adnams and try and get to the bottom of things. He has some pretty extremist views, which only begin to make sense after about four Adnams. He believes that single people should be made to ring a heavy, town-crier-style bell when they walk into pubs and multi-millionaires should be forced to carry their first million with them in a large Karrimor rucksack at all times. In addition he doesn't agree with hoodies and he is unsettled by sign language. He thinks that a lot of the ills in society can be traced back to the fact that everyone wears jeans these days. He refuses to even use the word – calling them 'blue trousers' – and can quote some amazing statistics about convicted murderers since the turn of the twentieth century and the colour of their trousers. In addition, he thinks that it would be good to have a president in charge of the whole world (he suggested Michel Platini), he thinks that rock should be easier to buy outside of seaside towns and he believes that he himself should be knighted. I enjoy having these discussions with my (bearded) old man. Once we're good and stoked, and we've put the world to rights, he'll sling his bottle against the wall, trudge over to the rowing machine, take off his blazer and slacks and get down to business. There's no finer sight in sport than my old man, lashed off his skull, a blur of black swimming trunks and white vest, making that flywheel squeal. If I've got half of his appetite for giving a rowing machine a good seeing to when I hit his age I'll be delighted. In truth, I'll be delighted if I'm able to put away the amount of Adnams my old man does at that age, and discuss elements of socio the way he can. He is a very great man.

Chris darned his condom in front
of his electric fire.
Then he slung it in the tin,
Popped it closed
And set off for Clara's.

'While you're down there . . .'
Mike Bates said to Candy.
He'd vaguely thought people would laugh at this.
Unfortunately, the reason Candy was crouching
near his groin was precisely to pick up a glass
which Mike had broken.
And also she was his daughter-in-law.
So it didn't get a laugh at all.

Maria sat sobbing in her cell at the
all-women's prison.
Why had she stabbed the old man from her
drama club in Leicester?
And why wouldn't the prison governess let
her put on *Shakers* by John Godber?

The Queen took a normal job so the public would hate her less.
She became a lollipop lady.
Some hoodlums soon found out about this.
They started goading her; calling her posh and firing ducklings at her through a homemade bazooka made out of catering-size cans of beans fastened together with gaffer tape.
It started to get to Her Majesty.
She would get home, throw her lollipop stick onto the couch and be a right cow to the D. of E.
He'd say things like, 'If you don't tell me what's wrong I can't help.'
She'd just fart and eat her crisps and carry on watching *The Apprentice*.

Arnold was constantly unhappy
Because he was a maggot (the type of worm).
He knew he couldn't do anything about it.
That he should just get on with it.
But he couldn't help himself.
And so he dwelled on it.[3]

3 I expect this is also how people with glasses must feel.

Derreck dangled by the dunk-pot.
He caught me staring at his penis.
I quickly averted my stare and pretended
  I was interested in his hip.
And then I loped, awestruck, towards
  the Jacuzzi.[4]

4 This is based on bitter experience. There's a man at my gym without even the vaguest grasp on what it is to be English. After he's showered he just stands there for ages with his dick out. It's as if he finds the idea of covering himself up deeply offensive. I'm only human – I don't go out of my way to look at him but there's only so much of this a man can take before he gets sucked in. Even once he chooses to get dressed, his approach is quite remarkable. Whilst most normal Englishman will start with his grunds and work outwards, this creature opens with the socks and then moves on to his shirt. He's still swinging merrily as he puts his dog collar and crucifix on. There was an occasion last summer where he must have been going straight to a barbecue and actually had his deck shoes on and his rucksack over his shoulder before he put his pants and Bermuda shorts on. I hated this and was physically sick.

A website was developed.
Homeless guys and people who had mansions
they weren't using were hooked up.
Suddenly tramps were living in luxury.
They were exultant!
Some of them had staff!

I just found out
Someone's trying to kill me!
It's exciting, yes.
But also dangerous.
He's a professional.

5 The film *Leon* is superb. It's all about a trained killer who makes friends with a little girl and a plant. He is a Frenchman but you can't help but warm to him in spite of this and the fact that he carves out a living by shooting people dead. One Christmas my brother bought the DVD for his wife but the DVD wasn't in the case. She was furious, but ultimately calmed down and had three beautiful children by him.

'Can I have one more crumb please?'
Said the boy from the novel.
'No,'
Said the mean character.
Then the author described the dreadful carpets
and said how cold it was.

Neil Robertson (the snooker player)
Made eyes at Michaela Tabb
  (the handsome referee).
Ultimately he lost patience and groped her.
She resisted his advances, fending him off
  with a rest.
He sloped back to his chair and started chugging
  down Highland Spring like it was going out
  of fashion.
She tucked her blouse back into her skirt
And awarded Graham Dott the frame.

[6] I was chasing a girl and got us tickets to watch John Higgins vs Anthony Hamilton at the Crucible in 1997. Our tickets were for the evening session and Higgins had won the match in the afternoon with a session to spare so it was a bit of a letdown. In the end they wheeled out Willie Thorne and Dennis Taylor to do trick shots and tell anecdotes about their time in snooker so they wouldn't have to give refunds to us punters. It was all right. Willie Thorne used George Best's line about spending ninety per cent of his money on women and drink and wasting the rest. That went down pretty well. Lottie didn't know what to make of it. Watching these old-timers egging each other on and me in her ear making excuses for them. On the way home she was loath to speak to me. She said that she felt betrayed; that she was too nice a girl to be treated like this. She was walking quickly, clutching her programme to her chest in the drizzle. I could barely keep up. I kept on yelling after her that I hadn't planned on watching those guys. I kept on shouting 'I'm not a sicko!' She wouldn't listen though. 'The tickets were for John Higgins!' I kept yelling. By this stage I was on my knees and it was raining hard.

'What am I doing here?'
This was Margaret Lowe.
'We're imprisoning you.'
This was the captain.
'Please move your hand so I can shut the
cell door.'
This was the captain's assistant.

A pop star changed her hairstyle.
And everyone hated it.
Literally every single person in the country (UK)
Absolutely hated it.
It was long at the sides and on the top and short
at the front and back.
But – to reiterate – *everyone hated it*.
In fact, when she came out and did her first song
literally every single person in the O2 arena
whistled and threw shit at this pop star.
She got them back on side by singing a couple
of classics.
But then everyone remembered her hair and,
ultimately, she was lynched and eaten.

Michael put 50p in his piggy bank every day
for three years.
He smashed it open.
There was two pound fifty in there.
He frowned and looked up at his cellmate.

[7] In the end a decision was made not to print this one. It was decided that it was sexist and that, in the current climate, there's no sense in *seeking out* controversy. If you're good enough it will come to you. It was frustrating for me because, as I kept arguing with my editor, I don't think the lass in the poem is particularly degraded. Or at least you can argue that some girls would, actually, be pretty happy to get involved with this sort of thing. My editor (his name is Nick Davies) suggested that the feminists might not see it like that, and so I told him that, frankly, I couldn't give much of a shit about those guys. Truth be told, I've not got a great deal of time for feminism, and this in spite of the fact that, purely in terms of lineage, I am myself half female. In 2008 I was invited to do a recital at a conference about feminism in London and the whole experience left a sour taste. During a break between seminars I went for a dump in the ladies'. They didn't like that much. They were throwing perfume bottles into my cubicle, calling me every name under the sun. I was just standing there with my trousers round my ankles, yelling that I thought they were crazy. I said I was breaking down barriers and reasoned that they should be applauding me – not attacking me. One of them threw a Kenwood mixer over the door. I continued to claim, as articulately as I could, that they were only feminist when it suited them.

Shawn watched the two black belts[8]
demonstrating.
He frowned.
It would take him ages to get that bloody good.
Then he smiled.
But once he was . . .
Well – Benjamin, Glass Derreck and the other
one wouldn't know what had hit 'em.

[8] I tried karate once. I was living in Russia and putting on weight because of their food and culture. A friend was joining a karate class so I went along out of interest. I couldn't understand the instructions per se so I was drawing a lot on my recollections of kung fu films and those guys you'd sometimes get on *Record Breakers* who karate-chopped a pile of bricks to impress Roy Castle. I went to two classes but I found that the inside of my elbow hurt so I quit. On Saturdays we used to go on walks with a Russian family someone had found on the Tube. One time they invited us to their home for tea. They had nothing and yet gave everything. It was very humbling. After tea we watched *Octopussy* in Russian. I wasn't full but I didn't say anything because I was still feeling humbled. When we left we bought ice cream from an invalid. That stuff tasted *too good.*