



THE SALVATION ENGINE

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Haven't We Been Here Before?

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Deeply Sorry

Shining Brightly

Touching Distance

A Gleeful Leaving

Rap Messiah

Gnostic Dreamland

High Anxiety Evangelicism

Yeahyeahyeahyeahyeah

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Afterthought

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'I don't know how humanity stands it
with a painted paradise at the end of it
without a painted paradise at the end of it'
– Ezra Pound, 'Canto LXXIV'

'there is indeed a carefully constructed echo-chamber
of repetitions that resonate like the voices of a ghostly chorus.'
– James Riley, 'The Corpse and the Copse'

'The world outside has dissolved into synthesizer
and computer-generated mysticism.'
– Roland Howard, *The Rise and Fall of the Nine O'Clock Service*

HAVEN'T WE BEEN HERE BEFORE?

'For almost 40 years, since the abuse scandal surrounding the Nine O'Clock Service in Sheffield, the Church of England has attempted to ignore, minimise or deny the suffering caused by abuse in church settings.'

– Pam Walker, letter in *The Guardian*, 14 Nov 2024

Haven't we been here before,
people buying into a vision and colluding with it
whether they agree with culture at large or not?

Haven't we been here before,
with our common desire to latch onto personality,
seeking a timeless atmosphere as the lights go down?

Haven't we been here before,
a large altar adorned with several homemade crosses
and dozens of candles, a girl struggling to light incense?

Haven't we been here before,
smoke pluming upwards, changing colour from blue to purple,
softening a ghastly environment, talk compromised by echo?

Haven't we been here before,
taking eco-spirituality seriously, capturing something elusive,
deciding to bring the possibility of heaven to earth?

Haven't we been here before,
background music designed to instil expectancy and peace,
create a space out of time with electronic technology?

Haven't we been here before,
with teams of singers accompanying group activities,
everyone desperate to fully experience the event?

Haven't we been here before,
intense personal discovery accompanied by loud music
combined with elements of avant-garde art and rock?

Haven't we been here before,
abandoning the past in favour of coercive experiment,
shouting really loudly at vulnerable people?

Haven't we been here before,
aesthetically poverty stricken, easily manipulated,
constantly on edge, increasingly frightened?

Haven't we been here before,

really believing it was genuine, that we were guilty
of something, just couldn't get away from ourselves?

Haven't we been here before
on a journey to discover everybody else's idea of who we are,
part of power struggles and scandal whilst feeling ostracized?

Haven't we been here before,
redefining the boundaries of post-modern relationships,
trying to break free and face our darkest shadows?

Haven't we been here before,
using the proximity effect and hypnotic imagery,
pretending to be forward-looking, revolutionary?

Haven't we been here before,
picking intellectual fights and reeling under the strain,
trying out new ways of being in the centre of the room?

Haven't we been here before,
encouraging time lapse thinking and living double lives,
ignoring serious problems which happen as a result?

Haven't we been here before,
watching the embers of megalomania and reason blow away?
The spell is broken. Lucidity hits. We've been treated like dirt.

A few got nowhere before the music began again
but behind the headlines chaos reigns, even now.
Haven't we been here before?

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DEEPLY SORRY

The night mingles easily with throbbing beats;
young people are ready to embrace the idea
of a different sounding god.

This is an unholy situation, as conversations
about non-attachment, spiritual counterfeits,
myths, symbols and wackos,

visions of angels and spirits, encourage them
to drop their gaze from our fractious world
and keep within the playpen.

Triumphant metaphors of love undermine
issues of practice and culture, mute their
desperate cries for salvation.

The hypocritical devil out front remains
wickedly seductive; when people speak
only his questions matter.

Dance club vibes and celestial storms
are not enough, contorting into rapture
is required. Trauma turns

into neglect, fire-and-brimstone preaching
to very public failure, causing a storm of
church-related resignations.

Survivors of unnatural disasters hold their
feelings aloft. Collective empathy may be
a resurrection of sorts.

SHINING BRIGHTLY

You imagined God as a packet of razor blades,
useful for noble and honourable purposes
but using metaphors, parables and similes

to round us up and convince us. Not nice
being told we deserve punishment, even though
there is no hierarchy of wrongdoing, no good

or bad scores. Beyond the sun, only theories,
doubt as a useful way of understanding things,
a childlike adoption of the rhizome model:

networks with no rulers, everyone equally
part of the trouble. Buildings open to all
serve to facilitate ritual and community,

paranoia, suspicion and misunderstanding;
contradictions blow us into the place
where different versions of God involve

illiberal organisations and religious finance.
Dangerous views provoke difficult questions
but group members try to avoid the world,

fashionista preachers flee before you,
megachurches strive to keep you away from
the cliff edge of individual thought, ask you

to stay uninformed and disengaged, demand
high-risk contributions of money and time,
a dodgy prescription for desperate belief.

TOUCHING DISTANCE

An angel visits children in the night
to say there has been too much sorrow,
now is a time for joy, and that whether

possessed by the spirit or leaning into
outstretched arms, we are well within
touching distance of other victims.

The inspired preacher sets his sights
on the stars: rebirth as a crucible
for deep compassion, radical doubt

transformed into a kind of rave worship,
urban prowling and punk sprint, something
of the devil about it. Existential dilemmas

were welcome in the cathedral, prompting
blinding displays of apocalyptic gospel,
tectonic shifts of techno-ambient hymns,

congregations high from dancing lights.
Institutional detours and cultural exchange
offer uplift that help invoke aberrant forces.

Others have been complacent: thundercrash
riffs trigger flashbacks tonight, along with
detailed disclosures of wild behaviour.

A cataclysm of murderous noise lubricates
conversations about emerging dark manias,
slow-burning psychosexual abuse.

A GLEEFUL LEAVING

The spiritual leader now a guru is dangerous,
a liberal preacher become amateur sexologist,
apologist, an abuser and spanker for Christ.

Anglican leaders were insufficiently curious
about deciphering damning reports of
glib mottos declaimed to upturned faces,

totemic objects of handclapping evolution,
the signs of toxic evangelical subcultures.
Stunning versions of heartbroken fracture

along with inscrutable mantric outpourings
helped the church create a sound investment
in troubled copy. The burden of safeguarding

was put aside, one ticket admitted you
to hurt children, young women and men,
archival footage and mixed media-collage.

Major qualms about liturgical experiments
mean many a head has exploded trying to
make sense of religious belief. Survivors

of abuse must endure many melancholic
moments, attempts to be rehabilitated,
conflicts between the secular and sacred.

Saints never retire, are only pushed aside
due to suspicion and doubtful questions.
It is easier to decide not to even ask.

RAP MESSIAH

Lyrical transcendent, rendered himself
the eternal jester for a religious clan
of unexpected dreamers and innate hype.

Egotistical and demanding of others
he wanted to be reinvented, invest in
the territory of bought and sold lives.

Sampling felt like privilege, a dark sign
of spiritual and psychic dominance.
Away from the lights, he created a

counterspell of ditch-mangled rhymes
against his unexpected time of death,
one last invocation of faith and doubt.

Therapeutic with rage, trapped between
ecstatic belief and cosmic expectation,
he embarked on a martyr's final journey,

a distressed ministry, to champion a litany
of grievances with familiar sermons. Said
he had only imagination and speculation

to navigate a lingering crisis of self,
the redundancy of assurances, spirited
promises of a future promised land.

Hell is being shut inside an alien heaven,
unable to even compose a goodbye note.
Today he will be all by himself in paradise.

GNOSTIC DREAMLAND

Ultimately saved but condemned to escape,
faint voices in the distance remind us
no-one is heading to paradise.

Our disembodied manifesto of suffering
imagines words coming from the ether
to a baffled or indifferent world.

It all goes back to spiritual electricity,
emanations of unchecked god-complexes,
glimpses of another world.

After several go-arounds we find ourselves
jaded or broken into bits, with futile and
token resignations looming.

Glimmers of sunlight from the inner child
cannot rehabilitate the oppressed; raised
in the city he plays the antihero,

always spying on dwindling congregations,
contaminated by indoctrination, his own
prophetic words. Visions haunt

his soul, ambivalence works on him like
the pursuit of immortality, prophesying
your own fall or re-enacting

your own death. No one cares if you walk
through fire into the cascading sound of
borrowed time. Goodbye.

HIGH ANXIETY EVANGELICISM

You may be flesh not spirit but spirituality
and the arts are central to debates about
the difference between wonder and glory.

I was pretty much unaware of mystical light
and open-armed shifts of misunderstanding
until everyone caved in. Abusive, bigoted

and declamatory bullying should be an alarm
to visitors and tourists. I know what I saw,
can not reframe the past or hide my shame.

Gas pedal off, they were driven by their own
salvation engine, the revved-up glorification
of lust and liberal freedoms, self-approval.

I am aghast at how injustice prospers,
my own involvement through seasons of
misdirection and pain. I was bewildered,

assimilated religious expectations as
cultural curiosity changed my thinking.
Nowadays, I prefer to be alone, focused

on taking prisoners and counting converts,
remembering friends once spiritually charged
by technonostalgia and obscure church bands.

I am in a dilemma with regard to narrative,
am alienated from my own story. Sometimes
I just sink into the day, numb and sobbing.

YEAHYEAHYEAHYEAHYEAH

I have given you all my doubt,
my unbelief, a broken melody,
misfortune, a discordant song,

the yoke of insecure heaviness,
some sad mixture of indwelling
and allegiance to the other side.

Speaking nonsense to myself,
I wait with nothing happening,
want to do something better,

to travel away from the insecure
ground that crumbles beneath me.
This document is a note to self,

a personal conversation unfolded
without purpose. Too deceitful and
disoriented to escape on my own,

I need time to search out my past
and imagine life beyond the state
of dubious theological exercise.

Storm clouds and strong winds prevail,
I expect to find misunderstanding,
befuddled glances and wary responses,

limited versions of ourselves, the dark
side of liturgy and religious process.
Come on. Across the border we go.

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AFTERTHOUGHT

Turns out it wasn't prophetic
after all, I was just confused.
Strange lights, looped films
and way too much emotional
preaching made it plausible,
perhaps believable, but it
was just my imagination,
no angel slept in my bed.

I hope religious experience
does not trip me up. I'm more
an observer or fly-on-the-wall
but my bona fides come from
time spent enduring fringe
charismatic events, observing
dark clouds of desire, rooted
in shared religious neurosis.