

MONDEO MAN

Luke Wright is a poet and broadcaster. His poetry stage shows have toured the world and played sold-out runs in London and Edinburgh. He is a regular contributor to BBC Radio and his verse documentary on Channel 4 was nominated for a Grierson Award. *Mondeo Man* is his first full collection.

ALSO BY LUKE WRIGHT

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Mondeo Man

Luke Wright

Penned in the Margins

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Mondeo Man

for Sally, Aidan & Sam

A Hornchurch Commuter

It's Winter and I leave my home in darkness
to schlep down Suttons Gardens, Stations Lane,
then past the rows of houses lost to commerce:
the florist, cabbies, bookies, café, train.

They call this game the rat race but it's not —
these sad and silty mornings pocked with sighs;
there's nothing fast about this way of life —
just deep ruts cut slow into the mind's eye.

I spend my Mondays living for the weekend —
who doesn't here, eh, that's the way it works;
that's why we brought our families to the suburbs
to live on London's green and pleasant skirt.

Inside this fizzing fence of motorway,
our tiny crumbs of Essex neatly mortgaged,
a low-rent Metroland for boys done good;
a place to deckchair doze in heavy August.

And for that right we clatter down these traintracks
through greyish sprawl from Dagenham to Bow
where London's mouth lies waiting. Grin and bear it:
inhale, exhale then underground you go.

The Drunk Train

Pull back the crimson curtain stained
with blood of dramas past,
on city clerks zigzagging home,
their Tie Rack ties half mast;

on London's horns, on suet air,
on gummy pavement slabs,
peroxide Oompa Loompa girls
who dribble their kebabs;

on unforgiving betting shops,
on endless Maccy Dees,
discarded right-wing newspapers,
on boozers slick with sleaze.

Britannia's on the sauce again;
she's drinking hard tonight:
a hip flask at the Cenotaph,
a dance in ginger light.

In panelled clubs on wingback chairs
chaps foster drinks and gout
as Bacchus swipes their credit cards,
and wide boys start to shout

in West End clubs where bass lines throb
and dirty sex bombs tick;
where chat-up lines are slaughtered and
the Red Bull flows like sick;

as gel-skulled lads in Topman checks
and Richard Hammond dreams
trash Allah, drinking Stella,
shouting shit at plasma screens;

till all the tiny insect folk
in Smirnoff Ice elation
escort their mates down Bishopsgate
to Liverpool Street Station.

Now the drunk train pulls through city streets,
a half-cut girly texts and tweets,
a baby-boomer guards his seat.
The air is dead, a fetid heat
begins to build, the carriage hums.

*Soon songs will come,
soon songs will come,
soon songs will come,
soon songs...*

At home, divorcees slurp from cans
and curse the years they gave;
they watch their vindaloos congeal
and *Mock The Week* on Dave.

While haggard working mothers stand
on icy kitchen floors
awaiting midnight kettles while
their feckless partners snore;

the young professional couples slob,
their sofas over-sized,
too tired to think or fuck or blink
their oyster-lidded eyes.

They used to be the students playing
Jenga with the bin
but who cares about tomorrow
when the Snakebite's kicking in.

The drunk train rolls through sleepy 'burbs;
on board the buzz of slurring words
is heard above the diesel's burr.
The edges of the evening blur.
It all begins to mean something
and soon they'll sing,
and soon they'll sing,
and soon they'll sing,
and soon...

They'll sing the words to tinny songs
they heard when they were young,
the words they scrawled on folder backs
or shouted at their mums;

the pop songs that were playing when
they kissed their teenage crush,
the empty couplet auto-tuned
until it's sonic mush.

They'll howl with aching arteries
devoid of tune or flair,
repeat the vapid chorus lines
as if they were a prayer.

They'll sing just as their ancestors
would make a fire and chant;
all legless croons and bludgeoned tunes,
they'll sing until they can't.

The drunk train trundles through our towns
that wear a silent eiderdown,
their wick turned up, their volume down,
a thousand snores, a thousand frowns.
But on the train they're singing now,
a fatalistic bloody row
of consonants mistreating vowels
that comes from lungs and mouths and bowels;
no stage nor mic nor interval,
just ballads blunt and cynical,
with Bacchanalian refrains
and all the pith of human pain,
their words of love and sex and strife
excoriating modern life:

*they sing tonight,
they sing tonight
they sing tonight,
they sing tonight...*

So, gentle folk, you second rowers,
Guardian readers, theatre-goers,
let's sing tonight, let's sing tonight.
Let's peer behind Britannia's grin,
let's shake her towns like money tins,
let's scour the malls and plummy clubs,
collecting folk from dingy pubs
until this tiny bedroom swells
with bullies, cads and ne'er-do-wells;
let's wind them up with iambic
until we see what makes them tick,
let's make them run a maze of words,
of banter crude and scenes absurd:

*let's sing tonight,
let's sing tonight,
let's sing tonight,
let's sing tonight,
till either them or us has cracked,
till either them or us has cracked.*