

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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. His first collection, *Mondeo Man*, was published in 2013.

## PRaise FOR WHAT I LEARNED FROM JOHNNY BEVAN

The Scotsman Fringe First Award, 2015

The Stage Awards for Acting Excellence 2015

'Pulsating, neatly handled piece of poetic storytelling ... the breakneck storytelling is clear and gives Wright's seething, dynamic poetry the room it needs to motor.'

★★★★ Lyn Gardner, *The Guardian*

'This is such a rich piece of writing. There's so much in it. It's resonant and timely and it tells a story compellingly. [...] It says so much about idealism and youth and maturity and compromise - and love - and the places life can take you, the incremental sneaky way that years have, of passing'

★★★★ Natasha Tripney, *Exeunt Magazine*

'Performed in verse that bounds and soars effortlessly ... Taking in issues of class, privilege and the death of Labour, *What I Learned from Johnny Bevan* is a compelling and relatable exploration of growing up and facing hard truths'

★★★★ Cat Acheson, *The Skinny*

ALSO BY LUKE WRIGHT

POETRY

*Mondeo Man* (Penned in the Margins, 2013)

*The Vile Ascent Of Lucien Gore And What The People Did* (Nasty Little Press, 2011)

*High Performance* (Nasty Little Press, 2009)

NON-FICTION

*Who Writes This Crap?* with Joel Stickley (Penguin, 2007)

What I Learned  
from Johnny Bevan  
Luke Wright

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*For P.*



# What I Learned from Johnny Bevan



**T**O LONDON THEN, that fatted beast  
on which the whole world comes to feast,  
all private woe and public farce;  
where money twerks its oiled arse  
in gorgeous, fenced-off Georgian squares  
and starchy oligarchical lairs;  
where soaring, steel-glass towers sit  
in ancient, ghoulish, plague-filled pits;  
where gap-toothed roads left by the Blitz  
are soaked in years of pigeon shit;  
where listless folk roam airless malls  
as slaves to airbrushed siren calls  
then, gobsmacked, flash their plastic cash  
and fill their hearts and lungs with ash;  
where policy is signed and sealed  
then forced upon the shires and fields;  
where money men spin even more  
from love of it and fear of war  
(like bookie blokes they will their stocks  
as food bank queues ring grotty blocks);  
where cut-glass vowels meet glottal stops;  
where half-cut kids in chicken shops  
dream dreams as false as talent shows,  
these rebels wrapped in branded clothes,  
this lunar race illuminated

by their screens but never sated,  
all within their reach at last  
but safe behind the steel-laced glass —  
it's oh so close but out of touch,  
*it's not for you, they know that much,*  
*it's not for you, it's not for you,*  
*it's not for you...*

to London then.

TO REGENT STREET, a throng of culture hacks:  
Those blokes, too old for Converse, wearing Converse,  
sucking vapes. All mid-life paunch, Fred Perrys  
bit too tight with branded record bags.  
And me. I'm Nick. I'm one of them. Oh yeah,  
despite the baby face it should be clear  
the sheen of youth has long since left my chops.  
Too many sea-eyed nights and almost-truths.  
We scan our phones: some distant Facebook friend,  
her profile pic a chubby, grinning kid,  
complains: *My little monster cried all night!*  
I don't have a monster. Something else,  
some other creeping thing, keeps me awake.  
I'm knackered and I don't want to be here.  
The launch of yet another festival,  
a playground for the bankers of tomorrow  
to drink their fill of glossy counter-culture  
like Tuborg from the branded plastic cup.

"Hello, hello, hello, right everyone."  
A woman, early twenties, megaphone.  
"Right, welcome everybody, in a moment  
the coaches will depart and take us to  
URBANIA..." A pause, she scans her notes.  
"The brand new urban festival for London!"

Urbania had built-up quite a buzz.  
The promise of a weekend festival  
without the mud. The latest edgy acts  
at a secret location in the city.  
Secret, that is, that *was*, until today.  
Today the secret venue is made public,  
the acts will be announced and tickets sold.  
Today the likes of me and all these guys  
will get to walk the site and hear the spin  
so we can start our routine work of flogging  
this brand new jewel in British culture's crown.  
We board the coach and start a slow shunt east.

§

The coach is abuzz with the gobshiting natter  
of fifty-five journos and not enough clues.  
Locations and line-ups proposed and then shot down;  
conjecture and wish lists served up like they're news.

And bang in the centre of all of the gossip,  
a brace of young publicists: Tilly and Milly.  
Yes, you know the type I mean, all posh and glossy,  
part pushy, part flirty and pleasantly silly.

From Pinner or somewhere where mum and dad keep them  
while Tilly or Milly intern in the sprawl  
for travel cards, samplers, guest lists and freebies.  
And maybe a job at the end of it all.

And this is their moment: fronting Urbania.  
They coax, hint and wink with some well-rehearsed titters.  
Peculiar choices for *edgy* and *urban*.  
Think Duchess of Cornwall, but better at Twitter.

## §

This used to be the sort thing I thrived on;  
in the know, the skinny on my lips.  
Affected nonchalance to hide the fact  
my heart was singing out to write reviews,  
to meet my heroes: bands and writers who'd  
reveal some erstwhile unreported fact  
to me; to help great novels find their readers;  
to shape the narratives of rock 'n' roll.  
It blew my socks off, claimed my aching heart.  
On junkets like this, I would feel so lucky.  
And then... it never happens in a moment.  
Love doesn't die in battlefield glory,  
just slinks away one evening through the tunnel