TLC Showcase

TLC PEN FACTOR WINNER SPECIAL: ADAM SHARP

TLC The Literary Consultancy
Literary Values in a Digital Age

Introduction to Daddy Was a Punk Rocker

In the many years that I've been working on *Daddy Was a Punk Rocker* I have never been able to come up with a remotely enticing, or even concise, summary of it. I'd need the lift to get stuck between floors, trapping my bored listener inside, to have any chance of making it to the end of an elevator pitch.

My main hope for the live reading at the TLC Pen Factor competition was that the sheer terror of having to introduce the book to a room full of serious writers, and a panel of industry experts, would force me to find a way of describing it succinctly. Somehow it did, and for that alone attending the Writers' Day would have been worthwhile.

But the day gave me so much more than that. It gave me the chance to meet dozens of wonderful writers, including the other four contestants in the TLC Pen Factor final, who were all exceptionally talented; to get such detailed feedback from the agents and editor on the judging panel; and to receive, as part of the prize, a manuscript appraisal and ongoing support from The Literary Consultancy. I'm sure working with The Literary Consultancy will result in *Daddy Was a Punk Rocker* becoming a much better book.

And as for what the book is about: let me tell you in just one sentence (admittedly a long one). *Daddy Was a Punk Rocker* is a memoir about how music shaped my relationship with my dad – how he used his music to save my life and then to justify walking out, how I used my music to punish him, and how, just before his death, our music brought us together again.

Daddy Was a Punk Rocker by Adam Sharp

PROLOGUE

The front door has two panels with no glass. The panels are covered with blue tarpaulin. The tarpaulin has holes, which let in the cold. Inside, the air is stale and smells of sick.

The only rooms used regularly in this house are the living room, the toilet, and the bedroom upstairs. The fridge is empty. The oven doesn't work. Nor does the light switch. The cupboards contain two loaves of bread – both mouldy – two cracked glasses, a box of biscuits, and a tea cup. Behind the kitchen is the toilet. It has no seat.

The living room is completely dark except for a flickering red light in the corner. Next to the red light, several LPs – Iggy Pop, Velvet Underground, The Doors – are scattered around the record player. The carpet is brown and littered with used needles and burnt spoons. Near to where the living room becomes the kitchen is a mattress. There is a blanket and two pillows, but no sheet. There is a settee, a three-seater, with two cushions. The missing cushion has been replaced with another pillow. And alongside the wall furthest from the red light is a baby's cot. A tiny sleepsuit is draped over its wooden bars. The sleepsuit is caked in dried blood.

The carpet on the stairs is thin and tattered. A thousand shuffling footfalls have worn it bare. The bedroom upstairs has a bed and a chest of drawers, and nothing else. There are five drawers in the chest. The first contains new syringes, rubber tubing, and spoons. The second contains socks and underwear. The third contains jars of pills, none of them legal, and several piles of five and ten-pound notes, all crumpled. The fourth contains T-shirts, jumpers, and jeans. All other items of clothing – leather jackets, woolly hats, fingerless gloves – belong on the floor. The fifth drawer is for the shotgun.

♫

The house was on Lausanne Road in Manchester. It belonged to Colin and was the first and last house he ever owned. It hadn't always been in that condition. It had been, like Colin himself, clean and respectable once.

He bought the house with the inheritance left to him by his grandfather. It was in this house that he hoped to escape his unhappy memories of boarding school – the loneliness, the bullying, the sexual abuse. It was in this house that he wanted to escape from his parents, who had ignored the letters he sent from the boarding school, begging to come home. It was in this house that he planned to start anew. To forget.

He hoped to obliterate all unhappy thoughts with the sounds – turned up loud on his record player – of The Stooges, The Clash, and New York Dolls. It was in that house that he perfected his punk poses and dyed his hair purple, styling it into spikes. It was in that house that he got ready for his first audition, putting on his tight black pants, his skull and crossbones T-shirt, and his torn leather waistcoat. He practised his best sneering expression in the cracked mirror and jumped on a bus with his head full of dreams.

He passed his audition, and he celebrated, later that night, by himself. He was the new lead singer of The Durutti Column. His manager was Tony Wilson, the owner of Factory Records, the man who would soon shape Manchester's cultural landscape. His producer was Martin Hannett, a sound wizard, an innovator. Colin's first task was to write and record two songs for Factory Records' first release, *A Factory Sample*. His songs appeared alongside two tracks by Joy Division, a band who were to become modern music icons.

It was in that house that Colin sat and reflected after his fleeting contribution to the post-punk movement was over. He looked on as The Durutti Column enjoyed sustained, if minor, success. And he looked on as Joy Division became the true superstars of the post-punk movement. Hannett, now a close friend, visited Colin in that house, excited about his work with Joy Division's singer, Ian Curtis, who he referred to as a genius. Nobody called Colin a genius, his time with The Durutti Column already forgotten, a footnote in the band's history.

Colin decided to form a new band, to try again for greatness. So he went to the Arndale Shopping Centre, which would one day be partly demolished by an IRA bomb. He planned to post an advert for musicians in Virgin. But before he got there he met a woman. She was called Martine and she took heroin and loved music, just like him. She was running from feelings of abandonment too. From that day onward, they ran together, escaping to places pain couldn't catch them with the help of a needle.

She moved into that house on Lausanne Road.

She got pregnant in that house.

And it was in that house that she decided to get rid of it.

She missed her chance though. It had already been hiding in her belly for over six months before she found out. Most expectant mothers find out when they miss their period. Not her. Years of shooting heroin had already stopped it. The other warning signs of being pregnant – tiredness, dizziness, throwing up – were simply a part of her everyday life. She was twenty-one.

Not until her belly began to bulge did she suspect something wasn't right. She visited her doctor and told him to remove the unwanted bulge at once. But her doctor said that she was too far gone – abortion now would be dangerous, and illegal.

She didn't let that put her off though. She knew of a man. In London. A man who did not care for the law, or danger. A man who would happily take care of her problem, for a price. She sat on the train from Manchester to London, with the baby inside her, hoping the man would be successful and swift.

The man was neither swift nor successful. He wasn't there. Martine arrived at his office to find it empty. She never discovered whether he had been shut down, or put in prison, or was just taking the day off, but when she got back on the train to Manchester that night the baby was still alive.

So she would do it herself.

She upped her daily heroin consumption, which was already considerable. By the end of her pregnancy she had to inject heroin into her groin. All her other veins had collapsed through overuse. In addition, she began punching herself in the stomach. When her arms grew tired, she ran belly-first into the unpainted walls of the house. When that didn't work, she threw herself down its stairs. Her belly became black with bruising, yet continued to expand.

Colin believed he was responsible for the baby's continued existence. He was comforting it, giving it strength to get through the daily attacks, by playing it music. Colin had always used music to give him solace and strength, to help him endure his time in boarding school. When he played the unborn baby his favourite records – Iggy Pop, David Bowie, The Rolling Stones – he was passing on a tool for survival.

And it worked. It was born healthy and strong. It shouldn't have been. It had shared its mother's poison blood for nine months and it should have been born addicted to heroin. It should have spent its first few weeks fighting for life – shaking, sweating, being sick – as it was weaned off its addiction with morphine or methadone. Martine may then have identified with its struggle and stayed in the hospital with it, giving up the heroin too. They might have bonded, mother and son, over their shared withdrawal experience. Their efforts may have inspired Colin to give up also and the three of them could have stayed together, happy and drug-free.

It wasn't born addicted though.

The baby had defied its mother once more. Martine brought it back from the hospital, plonked it in the cot, and refused to touch it again. She certainly wasn't about to give up heroin on its behalf and returned to her needle, wiping her veins on its sleepsuit when she was done.

Colin used his own needle, the one on his record player, to protect the baby, playing it album after album, resolving to care for it as best he could, swearing he would never abandon his son like his parents abandoned him.

It was in that house that heroin poisoned his promise.

Martine's friends, Roy and Angie, a drug dealing couple, moved into the house and took over the bedroom upstairs, where they slept, took heroin, and entertained their clients, threatening to take out their shotgun if payment wasn't forthcoming. Martine and Colin slept on the mattress in the living room from then on, with the baby in a cot on the other side of the room. Colin became increasingly frustrated with what his life was becoming – or wasn't becoming – and smashed the windows of the living room with a cricket bat. The glass was replaced with wooden boards, leaving the room in perpetual darkness. It was in that same room, in the dark, through needles and spoons, that the baby learnt to crawl, Colin watching it, aware of the desperation all around him, longing to run, to escape, but still loathed to abandon.

The producer, Hannett, continued to visit that house, his career now spiralling downwards as he struggled to recover from losing his main source of inspiration – the genius, Ian Curtis, who had hanged himself. It was in that house that Hannett, along with Colin, and Martine, became ever more reliant on heroin. It was in that house that Hannett gazed with longing at Martine, now

Colin's wife. And it was in that house that Hannett, soon to be dead, would wink at the baby, his godson, and say, "A'right, kidda."

Martine's dad also visited that house, calling the baby "young man" and showing it the funny faces he had been working on that week. Social workers and probation officers visited too, often finding Martine and Colin passed out on the settee, needles still in arms. The social workers threatened to take the baby away if things did not improve. Colin swore he wouldn't let that happen, that he would take better care of his son, that he would never leave him. He would stay in that house, despite the darkness, despite the decay, because he had promised not to forsake.

And he might have kept his word too, if not for the music.

But he told himself the music would keep his baby safe, or alive at least.

So he packed his things and went to the record player. He put the needle into the groove. As soon as David Bowie started singing he picked up his bag. He walked past the cot, his face averted, his eyes closed and, for the first time, but not the last, he left me behind.

About the Writer

Adam is originally from Manchester but has also lived in London, Melbourne, Sydney, Queensland, the Channel Islands, the Canary Islands, Nashville, and Newcastle-upon-Tyne (he's not very good at staying still).

Adam has had over thirty jobs (he's not a very loyal employee either). Some of the things he's been paid to do are as follows: teaching sport in kindergartens, serving sandwiches in casinos, catching footballs, juggling bottles, washing dishes, reviewing music, changing nappies, and walking on stilts.

He now spends his time working on books and has written four so far. One of his short pieces of memoir, "Play," will appear in Kit de Waal's *Common People* anthology, which will be published in May 2019.

MEET THE TLC PEN FACTOR 2018 FINALISTS

Kirsty Capes – Hatchling

Biography

Kirsty Capes is currently a mentee on the Penguin Random House WriteNow scheme for under-represented writers, and was recently awarded the H W Fisher scholarship by Curtis Brown Creative. She tweets at @kirstycapes, and blogs at femalefriendshipinfiction. Her fiction and poetry have appeared or will soon appear in Mslexia, Thrice Fiction, Rising, Astronaut Magazine, Roulade and the Storygraph journal. She lives in London.

Hatchling

The summer of 1999 is too hot. In a kebab shop toilet in a stifling Middlesex commuter town, fifteen-year-old foster kid Bess pees on a pregnancy test, and it comes up positive. With the prospect of motherhood impending, Bess has big choices to make - and fast - about what is most important to her, and what she is willing to sacrifice to fulfil her dreams.

Kirsty Says

"I had a brilliant (if nerve wracking!) experience pitching my novel at the TLC Pen Factor final. Even though it was scary, it felt like a real achievement to be able to stand up in front of a room full of writers and be able to summarise my novel in three minutes! The whole process made me think completely differently about how I pitch my novel and what different audiences might find most interesting about it. The feedback I got on the day from the judges was really valuable - a good mix of praise and constructive criticism. I will definitely

be taking their comments on board as I continue working on the novel. The whole experience has made me feel more confident about taking my novel out into the world."

Extract

JUNE, 1999

The long and short of it is this: the day is the kind of hot that sticks plimsoll soles to tarmac if you stand still for too long. In the Golden Grill, Shepperton High Street, there is a public toilet, not a cubicle, but a single room with dirty magnolia tiles that need re-grouting and oily lipstick smears on the mirror, and the metallic smell of periods clogging the air. I am waiting for Eshal, my slimy forehead pressed against the cool tiles on the wall. My hands, damp with sweat, even after running them and my wrists under lukewarm tap water for several minutes. My face in the mirror, distorted by those cherry-coloured imprints of puckered lips, with my skin the colour of the tiles and too much eyeliner, the sheen coating my upper lip. The pregnancy test in my backpack, slung in the corner. My eyes glassy. The sense of being stuck inside a womb overwhelming.

I was born I was already dead. I exited the womb with my umbilical cord wrapped around my neck. The first thing I ever learned about my biological mother is that she was very into astrology. Zodiacs. I wonder if she hoped I stayed dead. I have a pattern of freckles on my lower back, which, if you look at in a certain way, resembles the Big Dipper. I wonder whether she has the same constellation on her own body.

The town where I live is cut up by the M3 and circumvented by the Thames. Shepperton is famous for its film studios and Indian ringneck parakeets. I've lived here since I was seven years old and I've never seen a film star. My house is on a council estate close to the Studios on the edge of town. When I first arrived here, the social worker driving me to my new home pointed out the stone gargoyles on the roof of Stage H. My fingernails scratched at the seatbelt as I watched them. Six of them along each side of the building, black silhouettes against the clouds, teetering on the lip of the roof so that a nudge might push them to their deaths. I don't remember the day the gargoyles disappeared, I just remember them one day being there, and one day not, and that was that.

From my bedroom window on Studios Estate, I can see the following: the park, with two big horse chestnut trees on the green where the parakeets roost. The parakeets have dark orange beaks the colour of dried blood. I can also see Stage H. And the long sloping sides of the reservoir, just beyond the farmer's field, but none of the water inside it. If I climb out of the window and sit on the porch roof facing in the opposite direction, I can see the River Ash Woods where everyone goes to fly tip and inject heroine. And then there's the Pits, near the tin houses, where the kids who are too poor for the Studies Estate live, about half a mile south of my house, and visible from my porch roof. We call them the Pits because they used to be gravel pits once upon a time but I guess whoever owned them didn't need the gravel anymore because they're all filled up with water and shopping trollies now.

My foster mother is called Lisa, and she tells me that the parakeets escaped from the film studios when they were filming *The African Queen* in the late 40s. I don't know whether that's true but I like to take photographs of them and imagine the escape. The whole world stretching out beneath them, a huge new openness in their stomachs.

Abi Dare – The Girl with the Louding Voice

Biography

Abímbola (Abí) Daré was born in Lagos, Nigeria. She has a Law degree from the University of Wolverhampton and an MSc. in Project Management from Glasgow Caledonian University. After self-publishing three novels to good reviews, Abí is now completing her MA in Creative Writing at Birkbeck University of London. The Girl with The Louding Voice formed part of her dissertation for her MA and was longlisted for the Bath Novel Award in 2018.

The Girl with the Louding Voice

When her co-wife ends up dead, 14- year old Adunni is forced to flee her village to the city of Lagos where she lands a job as a housemaid for the sinister Big Madam. Hope comes in form of an unlikely friendship with Ms Tia, a British-returnee neighbour who becomes Adunni's secret English teacher and closest confidante.

On the night Adunni accompanies Ms Tia to a mandatory baby-making ritual, three things lead to a transformation in the lives of all concerned: a shocking discovery, a secret confession, and a confrontation that irrevocably alters the balance of power between master and slave.

Abi Says

When I decided to apply for the TLC Pen Factor Competition, I wasn't sure what to expect. I knew I had written a novel in a unique voice which my supportive MA workshop group and supervisor loved, but like all writers, I had nagging doubts. I was beyond thrilled to have gotten the email and phone call from Aki to congratulate me on making the shortlist. The event itself was amazing. The venue for the day was impressive; turnout was great, the room buzzed with literary enthusiasts like myself and everyone was very approachable and

friendly. The panel of speakers for the day were knowledgeable and interesting, and I particularly enjoyed the insightful and fun session with Guy Gunaratne and his editor, Mary-Anne Harrington. I was slightly nervous ahead of my pitch but Aki's talk and prep were helpful in putting me at ease. It felt surreal to hear industry experts give encouraging feedback, and I have taken on some of the points to rework the manuscript. Making the shortlist and pitching my work has given me a much-needed dash of confidence in my work and my abilities as a writer. I am very grateful for the opportunity.

Extract

Chapter 1

This morning, Papa call me inside the parlour.

He was sitting inside the sofa with no cushion and looking me. Papa have this way of looking me one kind. As if he wants to be flogging me for no reason, as if I am carrying shit inside my cheeks and when I open mouth to talk, the whole place be smelling of it.

"Sah?" I say, kneeling down and putting my hand in my back. "You call me?"

"Come close," Papa say.

I know he want to tell me something bad. I can see it inside his eyes; his eyesballs have the dull of a brown stone that been sitting inside hot sun for too long. He have the same eyes when he was telling me, three years ago, that I must stop my educations. That time, I was oldest of all in my class and all the childrens was always calling me "Aunty."

Jimoh, one foolish boy in the class was laughing me one day as I was walking to sit on my table. "Aunty Adunni," Jimoh was saying, "Why are you still in primary school when all your mates are in secondary school?" I know Jimoh was wanting me to cry and be feeling bad, but I look the devil-child inside his eyes and he look me back. I look his upside- down triangle shape head, and he look me back. Then I sticked my out my tongue and pull my two ears and say, "Why are you not inside bicycle shop when your head is like bicycle seat?"

The class, that day, it was shaking with all the laughters from the childrens, and I was feeling very clever with myself until Teacher Shola slap her ruler on the table three times and say: "Quiet!"

It was when I was getting more better in my Plus, Minus and English that Papa say I must to stop because he didn't have moneys for school fees.

I tell you true, the day I stop school, and the day my Mama was dead is worst day of my life.

When Papa ask me to move closer, I didn't answer him because our parlour is the small of a Mazda car. Did he want me to move closer and be kneeling inside his mouth? So, I kneeled in the same place and wait for him to be talking his mind.

Papa make noise with his throat and lean on the wood back of the sofa with no cushion. The cushion have spoil because our last born Kayus, he have done too many piss inside it. Since the boy was a baby, he been pissing as if it is a curse. The piss mess the cushion, so Mama make Kayus to be sleeping on it for pillow.

We have a Tee-Vee in our parlour; it didn't work. Born-boy, our first born have find the Tee-Vee inside dustbin last year when he gets job as dustbin collector officer in the next village. We only putting it there for fashion. It looking good, sitting like handsome prince inside our parlour, in the corner beside of the front door. We even putting small flower vase on top it, a crown on the prince head. When we have visitor, Papa will be doing as if it is working and be saying, "Adunni, come and put evening news for Mr Bada to watch." And me, I will be responding, "Papa, the remote controlling, it have missing." Then Papa will shake his head and say to Mr Bada, "Those useless children, they have lost the remote control again. Come, let us sit outside, drink and forget the sorrows of our country, Nigeria."

Mr Bada must be big fool if he didn't know that it is a lie.

We have one standing fan too, two of the fan-blade have miss so it is always blowing air which is making the whole parlour to hot. Papa like to be sitting in front of the fan in the evening, crossing his feets at his ankles and drinking from the bottle that have become his wife since Mama have dead.

"Adunni, your Mama have dead." Papa say after a moment.

I can smell the drink on his body as he is talking. Even when Papa didn't drink, his skin and sweat still smell.

Jay Gee – Scrounger of Ambit Edge

Biography

Jay is a queer, genderqueer, disabled and uneducated writer, who is autistic with Multiple Sclerosis. They live alone in East Yorkshire. Self-taught, they started out in fanfiction, and have been shortlisted for the Pen Factor Prize, Aesthetica, Creative Future, and WriteNow by Penguin Random House. They have things to say, stories to tell, and hope to continue to learn and advance their career as a professional author. They are grateful for the opportunities given to them by The Literary Consultancy and hope to build upon that. Jag cannot work due to their disabilities, however they can write. They write adult and young adult short stories, and novels. The genres they cover are contemporary fiction, queer lit, horror, science fiction, fantasy, crime/mystery, drama, action/adventure, and social commentary. Please contact them through the Literary Consultancy with any further opportunities or advice.

Scrounger of Ambit Edge

Scrounger of Ambit Edge is a young adult novel, set on a council estate in working-class Yorkshire. It is about a fifteen-year-old boy named Billy Lyons, nicknamed Scrounger, and the murder of a boy named Mac. Beyond that, it's about class, poverty, mental illness, race, and being trapped in an insular world with little chance of escape; but there's always hope.

Jay Says

I am grateful for the opportunity that The Literary Consultancy gave me to enter the TLC Pen Factor competition and showcase my writing. It means a lot to me that I was shortlisted. It makes me feel like a proper writer. And it makes me feel that I'm capable of hitting deadlines and of having the confidence to put myself out there to be judged. It's hard for me to believe that I was chosen amongst regular people. It's amazing that I even went to London, and talked to people in the publishing industry, and went on stage. Everyone was supportive and helpful. Afterwards, people gave me positive feedback. It's surreal. I literally didn't used to be able to speak to people or go anywhere. And the audience laughed at a line in my story, that was unexpected and good. I think it touched people. And a lot of the audience told me about autistic people in their lives.

I wish I'd done a better job talking to the judges, but it was all overwhelming. It made me feel like I can do things though. That I can be chosen and follow through. I'd do it again, given the chance. I would enter next year if it's held again, and if I've written another book. I hope I hear from the agents. Aki stood

on the stage with me, that meant a lot. Thank you. The published writers were interesting; I didn't really feel like that will happen for me, but we'll see. I bought some signed books. It was also London Pride, and I went to some events. It was all massive for me, but I did it, and I consider it a success.

Extract

They've found Mac's body in canal. I saw it, just for a few seconds. He looked like any other rubbish floating in the dark, scum-topped water. They was dragging him out, wearing wet suits like deep-sea explorers, and I caught a glimpse of his face. I wish I an't. It was all bloated and blotchy, pasty as skinned plaice. And his eyes was open, milk-glass marbles staring at nowt. Then the filth forced us back, tense and barking into their walkie-talkies, and we all went back inside our houses.

I'm watching out me bedroom window now, watching the bustle below. We live beside the canal. Well, it's not a canal really, it's Scimit drain, deep and open with a sloping bank at each side. It runs the length of the estate, cuts through it like a knife. I've never been to end of it. I'm not sure it even has an end. I reckon there in't really a world outside Ambit Edge: London, America, Hogwarts, they're just summat made up for films. All CGI and special effects.

I pull back the yellowed net curtain and lean me forehead against the ice-cold glass.

Someone I knew is dead. He were my age, fifteen, sixteen maybe, wearing the same ugly grey schoolboy uniform I'm wearing, but his sodden black with water. I din't know him well, din't like him much, but still: I knew him. It's weird, I never knew anyone what died before. I guess I thought life, like this shitty council estate, went on forever. But it dun't, does it?

But I was right that it dun't look real, the outside world forcing its way in. The police and paramedics and, shit, the press arriving with lights and cameras, trudging through the damp, knee-high grass.

Me breath fogs the glass and I pull me jumper over me fist, scrub it clean.

A woman holding a microphone, her heels sinking into the mud, glances up at my window with a look of disgust on her face. I pull away, let the torn net fall back into place.

‘They still out there, Scrounge?’ Sal asks, coming into me room.

The mattress dips as she sits down next to me on the bed. It’s tiny in here and there in’t nowhere else to sit, just a wardrobe with no doors and a plastic chest of drawers.

‘Course, nowt interesting ever ‘appens ‘round here, what else’d they do?’

I feel her shrug. ‘Thought they might’ve taken him away by now, it’s been hours. Where do dead bodies go, anyways?’

There’s summat lost in her voice and I turn to look at her. ‘I dunno. The hospital probs. You din’t see him, did ya?’

She shakes her head, scraggly, dirty blonde hair covering half her face, gets up and moves towards the window.

Rushing up I reach past her, snatch the curtains closed. ‘You don’t wanna look out there. An’t you got summat better to do?’

‘Nah.’

‘You must have.’

‘I an’t.’

Sighing, I push her out onto the landing, guide her past piles of boxes and into her room.

We may be twins, but it looks nowt like mine: every inch of the walls is covered in posters ripped from magazines; glittering mobiles and windchimes I got from charity shops fill the ceiling; piles of books litter the floor. It’s like a fancy bird cage I saw once in a pet shop. But, still, it has a musty stink of mould and damp like rest of house.

‘I can’t believe you an’t taken your Ride or Die posters down yet, they’re so over,’ I say to distract her.

‘Fuck off, no they’re not.’

‘Aziz in’t going back.’

‘Fuck off, you don’t know that, he might.’

'He dun't give a shit how much ya cried when he left. In't there some other band you could get inta, summat less naff?'

'Din't I tell ya to fuck right off?' She pushes the corner of a poster back into place, squidging the blu-tack into the woodchip with her thumb. Five boys grin down at us like there in't nowt bad in world. They're too pretty and I turn away to look out window into the back yard. I can barely make out the paving stones and dandelions beneath the piles of crap. There's a broken wooden clothes airer balanced on top of a rusty old wheelbarrow, but the rest is such a jumble I can't even tell what it all is.

Behind our yard is another row of terrace houses, and behind that another, and another, and another, stretching away forever. The sky bleeds red as the sun sinks below the tiles of the roofs. Clouds float in it like islands in an alien sea. It looks like another of those fantasy worlds, and I turn back to Sal.

Sonia Lambert – While You Are in England

Biography

Sonia Lambert has an MA in Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia. Her first novel "Three Mothers" was published in 2006. She is working on a PhD at Goldsmiths, where she teaches Creative Writing. She has also written for BBC Radio 4 and the Guardian.

While You Are in England

It's the early days of the Second World War. Britain interns thousands of "Enemy Aliens", most of them Jewish refugees, in prisons, former holiday camps, and seaside hotels. My novel follows one couple on an extraordinary journey - based on first-hand accounts from the time - exploring themes of love, loyalty, and what it takes to find a new home.

Sonia Says

I really enjoyed TLC Pen Factor. It was scary, but also exhilarating to read in front of a sympathetic audience and to get feedback from such a friendly and helpful panel. I'd recommend the experience.

Extract

The light was fading as they reached their destination. It was a very small seaside town. The tiny station was deserted - its delicate wrought ironwork might almost have been spun by fairies.

The train doors were unlocked, and the four internees – Ludwig, Kurt, Herbert, and Mr Gutmann - climbed down with their bags. They stood on the platform, beneath the pretty Victorian awning, stretching their limbs after their long journey. The soldiers shouldered their guns, feeling perhaps that the time had come to make more of a show of guarding their charges.

Over a meadow, in the dusk, Ludwig could see a large sign: "Warner's Holiday

Camp". He could also see a long, imposing, barbed-wire fence.

The temperature was falling fast. The four men turned up their collars and buttoned their coats. "Right, you lot, let's make a move," the sergeant barked. The soldiers marched them round to the entrance via the road. Ludwig became aware of their inefficient civilian walking styles - Kurt's lolloping stroll, Mr Gutmann scurrying to keep up.

A wire gate was unbolted and opened up by the guards, and Ludwig entered his first internment camp.

By now, it was nearly dark. Mist rolled in from the sea, in a low-lying cloud, which gave the place an added strangeness. Ludwig could make out orderly rows of tiny wooden chalets, quaint and almost Germanic with their overhanging peaked roofs. There was a huge, ghostly swimming pool, and tennis courts, and some additional army tents, all being swallowed up by the fast-moving wisps of white. A children's play area stood deserted, iron swings and a roundabout moving slightly in the wind. Ludwig could feel, rather than see, the sea. There was a large, white, modern building at one end, which contained the dining hall and camp offices.

Inside this building, an Intelligence Officer looked the new arrivals up and down disdainfully, and scrutinised their documents. He gave them internee numbers, and searched their luggage again. They were issued with some equipment: a tin plate, cutlery, two blankets. Ludwig learned new words – a pannikin was a round tin container with a handle, a cross between a bowl and a cup, and a palliasse (which the British pronounced "pally-asser"), was a canvas sack.

The Officer pointed them towards a half-demolished bale of straw in a shed, and told them that they should stuff the sack, in order to use it as a mattress. They made a bad job of doing this, tearing off wads of straw with their hands, by the light of a single lantern, with the grass seeds and the debris floating in the beam.

Struggling to carry all this, they went out again into the dark and the fog, led by a Private. By now, they couldn't see more than a few feet ahead. Their thin city shoes slid and squelched on the muddy grass. They could hear the guards – a mournful, disembodied cry, from the perimeter wire. "Number one post, all's well."

“Number two post, all’s well.”

They could also hear a distant music, broken up by the wind. Ludwig’s stomach turned over. He and Kurt looked at each other, and then looked away quickly, too full of emotion to trust themselves with a reaction. It was a sound he’d hoped never to hear again: deep German voices, melodious and beautiful, singing the Horst Wessel song. He recognised the melody well enough, and knew the words, even if they were not close enough to hear well.

“Hitler’s banner flies over the streets. The time of our bondage will soon be over.”