

# TLC Showcase

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SAI MURRAY

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## Introduction to *Ad-Break*

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*Ad-Break* is a novel as memoir that follows Marcus' descent into madness and towards societal and self-revelation. Consumed by an obsession to make it in the fast-paced buzz of London ad-land Marcus suffers a rejection from his first choice agency. He still has belief in his ideas. Advertising was always just a stepping stone to work in TV or film, to bigger things. Marcus decides to cut out the middle men...

The manuscript for *Ad-Break* has gone through many guises. It began life intended as an illustrated coffee table book entitled *57 Creative Ways to Kill Yourself* (influenced by the comedian Bill Hicks' sketch: "if you work in advertising or marketing, kill yourself"). After attending writing workshops with Yorkshire Art Circus (2003-2005) then joining the Inscribe Writer Development programme (2005) the present form began to emerge as a semi-fictionalised account of my own experience in the advertising world. In 2008 I had enough words to publish an early version of the opening chapters, with Inscribe, as the novella *Kill Myself Now - The True Confessions of An Advertising Genius*.

Since that time I have attempted to evolve and complete the manuscript through Arts Council support and attending several courses and writers workshops; particularly Arvon residencies and travelling to London to attend workshops with Jacob Ross (2012-2014). Without the consistent feedback (as well as strict deadlines) that Jacob's classes enabled the manuscript has juggled for priority alongside other life, financial and artistic commitments (including publishing my first collection of poetry *Ad-Liberation*, Peepal Tree Press 2013; editing anthologies; mentoring; facilitating workshops; and co-writing theatre pieces with collectives such as *Voices That Shake!* and *Virtual Migrants*).

Being put forward for a Sable/ ACE Free Read was therefore a needed intervention to revisit and further prioritise the manuscript and I am grateful for the continued support from Inscribe via Kadija George and Dorothea Smartt. Having neglected the manuscript for a period, some doubts and questions about its merit had crept in and so to receive such a careful and insightful reading from TLC reader Jonathan McAloon has been a very welcome boost. Jonathan's report addressed all my concerns, was perceptive of my intentions and offered clear and constructive ways forward as well as gentle cautions on some of the narrative and stylistic traps to avoid. I now have renewed confidence and urgency to complete this work.

### **24. Return of the Jedi**

They pick me up from the police station in the early morning. I am not surprised to see them even though it is over a two hundred mile drive and they must have driven through the night. A friend shares the driving, father sits in the back with son.

All the way back home mother does not say a word to her prodigal prophesying son. She steals looks at the wild-haired wild-eyed young man in the mirror. Holding back waves of shock, she clasps her hand over her mouth, gulping gasping tears.

The first test as they pull off the motorway to fill up at a service station. The lights are off inside. The building appears empty. I want some fresh orange juice.

"It's closed Marcus. We can't go in" says father.

The doors to the service station open and a troop of boy scouts walk out.

"It is open" I say, "Everything is open if you want it to be"

Father, mother and friend all look at each other.

"That's not Marcus, that's not him. It's someone else" mother says.

She sounds like she may be on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

## 25. One Flew Over

I'm starring in my own TV show.

I realise this has been filming since the time I first met Posh Tramp. I didn't need to audition as Posh Tramp knew from observing me that I had the skills to be the co-producer, co-director and star. It would have been wrong to ask someone else to step into this role if I were not prepared to test the idea myself.

The show is an avant-garde super genius mix of reality, hyper-reality, documentary, social commentary, experiment and revolution. The Truman show meets A Clockwork Orange meets Brave New World meets 1984 meets Animal Farm meets Lord of the Flies meets Guantanamo Bay meets Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment meets the Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test. That's it in a nutshell. Big Brother in a nut house: A Big Brave Electric Orange True Millennium Man Clockwork Cuckoo Test. Live unedited nudity drug-taking masturbation sex vulgarity violence death birth and all the gambits of the real raw human experience and emotion on show 24 hours a day. The naked self. No restrictions. True reality TV, truly hidden cameras, truth.

I feel much better about my sacrifice knowing it has all been in preparation for this. The two years of abstinence training were no doubt orchestrated and overseen by Posh Tramp to ensure that my awareness and abilities are fully heightened. Like a virgin. A sacrifice. Buddha monk.

## 26. Hoop Dreams

Back home I cannot sleep so I jump out of the bedroom window. Father hears me opening the window and rushes in to stop me. I'm naked. This was no suicide bid but a remembrance from childhood when I wanted to play with my older brother and his friends but had been sent to bed early. I had jumped out of the window onto the garage roof with no clothes on so they would notice me.

Father locks the window and makes up a bed next to me for the rest of the night. I curl up like I used to do as a child and prod Dad's nose.

Around 4am I get up to shoot some hoops with my basketball in the back yard. Father had always promised to put up a basketball hoop – and build a tortoise hutch – but there is neither of those things in the back yard and so I shoot the ball against the bare wall and smash the outside security light. Had father built me a hoop I would have been playing in the NBA by now. Father did not build the hoop and he did not buy my brother and I the tortoise we were promised. Hence we are in the predicament we are in now. I explain this to father as he comes outside in his dressing gown and tries to shush me. He has brought this upon himself. Father smiles. Perhaps he is finally understanding.

## 27. Madiba Mandala

After breakfast they ask me if I am ready to go. I become tearful. Not for where I'm going but for leaving them. I really did want them to overstand and still thought there was a slight possibility they would.

My parents have given me up in Pontefract.

Ponte Pirates. No ho ho ho and no bottle of rum. No room at their inn.

No inn-er consciousness. Over to Pontius Pilate.

I go and sit in the car. My parents busy around getting their things. The production office doesn't open until 8am and it is still only 6ish. I have not been allowed the car keys so I burn a perfect brown circle in the seat with the cigarette lighter and meditate. Dad comes out to the car and sees the Mandala. For some reason he is angry and Mum regards me with pity. It is only a car. They should have realised I would do that. Another test failed.

I invite them to meditate with me. Mum pulls Dad back into the house. Dad must know he cannot hit me. Or if he does, that I am physically and other-worldly stronger than anything they can contemplate. They will only get me to the destination by my own submission.

If you love something, really love something then you must accept it fully, acknowledge and see all its flaws. True love and acceptance. This is not blind love. It is an all-seeing love, an embracing love. I want to help my parents. I want them to see what I see.

I move into the back seat and closes my eyes. My parents finish packing.

## 28. CAr(t)

There are some minutes wait in the car park before the production office opens. I try to explain a few things. Mum and Dad listen but they do not see so I rip the headrest from the front seat. I do this in one swift, calm motion before anyone has chance to stop me. Just like a magician. Ta daaaa. Grip, pull, rip. The steal struts that connect the headrest to the seat are bent, twisted. This is what I can do. I could use this object to smash, run, escape and fly the world if I so desired. This broken head rest symbolic of our confines with fake comfort revealing the steal reality beneath liberal middle class foam. It's a work of art really. If they were to open their minds they would see that this Marcus Richards original is worth a thousand times more than a complete brand new Vauxhall Astra.

"Here". I give Dad the sculpture. This is to show that I willingly choose to submit. Dad looks at Mum, gets out and puts the broken headrest in the boot.

I become bored of waiting so I place the producer in position and open the doors to the office. We leave the car. Mum holds and hugs me. Dad does the same. They seem afraid. Afraid that someone they know may see them? This reminds me of my fear that I would be seen by college and school friends on early Sunday mornings making my way down the side of the Church dressed in a long white robe in a parade of people I didn't relate to, or socialise with, carrying a candle on a stick ready to serve something and repeat words I didn't really believe in. I laugh at the irony. My parents now ashamed to have a real Lord, the King of the Mushroom people, as their son.

## 29. Knock Knock

For this scene I transform the producer into a doctor. It fits better with the whole narrative of Cuckoo's Test. This is the aptitude test – a final psychological examination to check that I am indeed a suitable candidate to undergo the rigours of The Nest. If I'm not suitable, then no one is.

The doctor looks haggard. More tired and more stressed than any of us.

"I diagnose that you need a holiday, doctor."

The doctor laughs and agrees with me. She gives little eye contact – maybe she thinks I will make her laugh again and she doesn't want to blow her role as a doctor but also, I think, because she is scared I will take her mind. I could. I could make her question everything she is, who she is, why she does what she does. Make her see how bizarre it is that one person is perceived as qualified to judge the content of another person's mind better than the person who owns the mind. The few billi-seconds I have her eye I pour these doubts and thoughts into her. She is broken and has to look away, preferring to tap at the computer and address my parents. She looks concerned. I am concerned for her. For them all.

I hand the doctor the tramp clock that I took from the windowsill.

The clock was given to Mum by one of her social work clients. A monstrosity of chintz that Mum would never have purchased herself – a cheap painted plaster-cast tramp figure reclining around a lamp-post with a battery operated clock at the top.

The doctor takes the tramp from me, thanks me and this time holds back her laughter. She places the tramp-clock on her desk and looks to my parents.

"No" I say "you should look at that. That is all you need to know. That explains everything".



### 30. Drop Off

We drive to the studios.

There are no screaming fans and all appears normal. Just a quiet lazy mid-week sunny day in West Yorkshire. You can smell the dust, stagnation. In the middle of middle class suburbia and new builds and show homes. It's a relief not to be in all that matching furniture death grind.

The filming of Cuckoo's Test will be gruelling and may even be fatal but if my parents will not care for me in this hour of need and will not show the patience to overstand my ideas then I have no option but to go on the show and show them and the whole world what is truth, what is reality.

If I had stayed I would have destroyed their minds.

It would have been good for them.

I am disappointed but I forgive them. I forgive everyone.

I forgive you my father, my mother, my children for you have sinned...

This is my destiny.

All my life has been building to this and all their lives have led to this pinnacle.

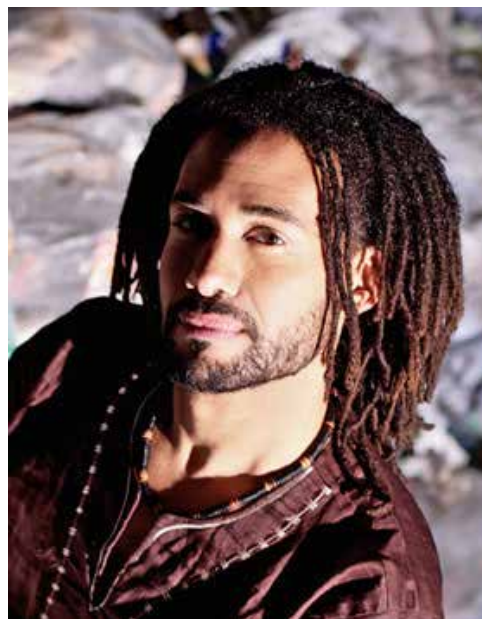
This is the culmination.

I imagine they must feel a bit like how Joseph and Mary and Judas must have felt.

## About the Writer

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Sai Murray is a writer, poet, performance and graphic artist of Bajan/Afrikan/English heritage. His first poetry collection, *Ad-liberation*, was published in 2013 by Peepal Tree Press and was described as: "Social commentary at its best... wry, witty and biting... traverses standard poetry and prose" (*The Jamaica Gleaner*). His novella, [Kill Myself Now: The True Confessions of An Advertising Genius](#) was published in 2008. Long-listed for a Jerwood Compton Poetry Fellowship in 2017 and 2019 his poetry and short stories feature in anthologies including: *Closure*; *Filigree*; *Red*; *Creative Freedom*; *Tangled Roots* and *Dance The Guns to Silence*.



Sai is a founding poet facilitator/mentor of the youth arts and campaigning organisation: [Voices that Shake!](#) and one of the UK's leading youth poet coaches, with his team winning the largest ever UK national slam, Shake the Dust in 2012. As part of Shake!, Sai was recently commissioned as a live artist for the inaugural [Black Cultural Activism Map](#) project by The Stuart Hall Foundation (2018).

Sai has performed his 'seriously playful and playfully serious' poetry throughout the UK, across the US, Africa and in the Caribbean. In 2015 Sai was the lead writer on Virtual Migrants' touring production [Continent Chop Chop](#), and he currently holds positions as: resident poet at [Numbi Arts](#); arts and politics editor of [Sable LitMag](#); artistic director of Scarf magazine; board member of [Remember Oluwale](#); a trustee of [The Racial Justice Network](#); and a co-director of [Chapeltown Arts](#). He runs his own art/activist promotions agency [Liquorice Fish](#).

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