

TLC Showcase

DAVID SHANNON

Introduction to the manuscript 2

Extract from *HOWUL: A Life's Journey* 3

About the Writer 7

Introduction to *HOWUL*

I began writing *HOWUL* many, many years ago - in 2006, to be precise. It is my second novel. The first one attracted some interest but was, I was told, too conventional, too "ordinary" to make publishing it worthwhile. So, with *HOWUL*, I tried to create something people in the industry would be surprised by and notice.

Though influenced by *Riddley Walker*, *Don Quixote*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Animal Farm* and other magnificent predecessors, *HOWUL* is still, I think, unlike anything else out there. Its language and setting are both unusual and it genre-hops so freely - satire, literary fiction, adventure story, sci-fi - that categorising it isn't at all straightforward. Howul is the book's eponymous hero. Times are hard in his world. Those in charge keep lying to everyone, promise changes that never come and only care about lining their own pockets. Remind you of anywhere? If this all sounds bleak and miserablist, it isn't. Humour is always there to keep it from being dry and earnest. "Moving, gripping, beautiful, batshit-crazy and profound," is how one Amazon reviewer describes it while the Reader's Digest calls it "Simply unmissable" and "Little short of a masterpiece".

I was lucky enough to have my book read by Sam Jordison for The Literary Consultancy. He understood exactly what I was trying to do in it and nudged me towards how I might improve it - while remaining, positive, encouraging and massively helpful throughout. My experience in all my dealings with TLC is that Sam and others haven't just gone the extra mile for me. They have run entire marathons. Without such support, my own journey would have been much, much harder and I remain hugely grateful to them. [HOWUL: A Life's Journey](#) was published by Elsewhen Press as an eBook in January 2021 and as a paperback in March 2021.

Extract from *HOWUL: A Life's Journey* by David Shannon

BEGIN

Simple time keep people simple. This, that, be happy, be sad. Take books away, heads have less clutter. Take food away, everyone do as they is ask.

Well, not everyone. Not alway.

All of next is only what Howul have tell me or write.

What is true? What is billy bully? I still have not the foggyrest.

#

BLANOW

Since he is knee high to a grasshop, everyone tell him books is dangerous. If you read them, they fill your head with dribble. You cannot eat them and when you throw them in the fire, they give bad heat.

The book he hold now smell like old mushrooms. On its bright pink front is two snotnoses of People Before. The pages is stick together with black glop and dead insects. As he peel them back, he see words write down on them. He close the book and look at it like it give him disease.

He hear a hiss and cough. This is how Gommel laugh.

'Today I start to learn you how to read and write,' he say.

Gommel is the most old man in Blanow. Hims legs is twigs of rosemary, hims face is bark of olive tree, hims hair is wood smoke. Hims house is so near the back cliffs that slates oft time crash onto its roof. Hims deaf ears never hear them.

Gommel sit now in a big People Before leather chair in the room he hardly ever leave. All hims furniture is People Before. Big wood table. Three hard wood chairs

for those who sit with him, make him dandelion tea, bring him tin foods. A bed with thick blankets and a cushion for his head. Candles and lamps on wood stands. Wood plates, dishes, spoons. Nothing brack nor botch. All good.

The heavy wood stick he walk with rest against his legs. He use both hands to hold it there because his stiff fingers do not full close. His green shirt is People Before and press tight against his fine plumpy stomach. His grey britches is also People Before and soft grip his thin legs like skin of catterpilly.

Most of what Howul have is brack and botch. His shirt is make from leafs, his britches from beech bark, his shoes from pine bark. All is itch and scratch and chafe. At thirty five year, he still run most fast and see most sharp of all in Blanow. His face is also most grumpscrut. Since he is snotnose, even when his thinkings is sweet and kind, everyone still think he wish them pain.

Since Jen die, he now leave sweet thinkings to others. All people annoy him. Them quiet is too quiet but more bad is when they speak. All things annoy him also. Sun is too hot or too shy, ground too hard or too mush, water too wet.

True is, again since snotnose, everything want to kill him. Snake bites, rat bites, stiffneck disease, newmonia, typho and thick throat have all try to finish him and he have piss on all of them. Diseases he fight. People he do not. He prefer to hear than speak. Watch. Wait. Avoid.

Gommel he cannot avoid. Gommel he cannot offend, cannot say No to. Gommel is high up.

'You think books is bad?' he say.

'Perhap,' say Howul.

'Why?'

'Perhap not then.'

Howul soft mumble so perhap Gommel wont hear. It is no matter. Gommel already know what he will say.

"Everyone here say books kill People Before, isnit?" he say. "Everyone say they is dangerous. Idiots. What people think and say soon go. What is write down stay."

Howul nod like so much clever impress him. Gommel use hims stick to lift him out of chair and stand up. Howul go to help him but Gommel tcha him away, hobble two step forward then point back at the chair with stick.

"Move it," he say.

Howul put the glop and insects book down and try to lift the chair. He cannot. It is heavy as wet sand. As per the usual, he think. Nothing ever easy. He press hims shoulder against it and push. It slow slide across the wood floor and reveal a black mark under it like this –

+

Gommel lean forward and press on the mark with hims stick. A plank lift up. He point at a space under it. Howul kneel down and do as ask even though smell tell him not to. He reach in and touch soft mess. He pull hand out. Gommel hiss and cough. Howul put hims hand back in and this time touch something cold and metal. A red box of People Before about the size of two bricks. He take it out. In its lock is a teeny grey key.

"Open it," say Gommel.

Howul can hear something inside shake and shuffle. He turn the key. It stick, need oil. Howul know it but still give Gommel stupid look. In Blanow, stay stupid is stay safe.

Gommel point at a sea shell lamp that rest on a wood stand.

"Pour in some oil, isnit?" he say.

The oil make the box open easy. Inside is a leather pouch the size of Howuls hand. He take it out. All leather is of People Before, brown or black, hard as oak. Alway it smell like stale pattycakes. But this is light blue, soft as baby skin and smell strong of lavender. A metal band seal it. He pull to undo it then stop and look stupid at Gommel again.

'Yes,' say Gommel. 'Open it. It is yours.'

Howul pour what is inside pouch onto hims hand. A sprig of dry lavender, four teeny blood red pencils with black points sharp as needles and four teeny books. He open the page of one book then hold it up so Gommel can see.

'Whats the matter?' Gommel ask him.

'It is blank,' he say loud enough for Gommel to hear easy.

Deep creases run across Gommels face as he hiss cough.

'I learn you to read and write so you can fill it with your words,' Gommel say. 'What hap to you in Blanow. What people say and tell you. Do this and I will make sure things is more good for you here. Books is not dangerous, Howul. People is dangerous.'

Why he choose me? think Howul. Nothing hap to him except avoid everyone.

Gommel point at the lift up plank. Howul push it back in place. Gommel then point at the glop and insects book. As Howul open it, the stink of old mushrooms hit him again.

A boy snotnose sit on soft neat green grass. Hims plumpy face is spit clean. He wave one hand and smile.

Gommel wipe dribble from hims chin and point at the words.

"My name is Jack," it say.'

Stay stupid, stay safe.

'It is wrong. My name is Howul.'

Hiss. Cough.

#

About the Writer

David grew up in Bristol, the youngest of 3 children. Yes, he was the spoilt one. After stints as a TEFL teacher in Italy and croupier in London, he had a first writing career as a journalist working for (among others) Cosmopolitan, the Sunday Times, the Radio Times, Good Housekeeping, Country Living and Best. He wrote a lot about showbiz, interviewing and profiling many celebrities.



Even though any actors he met kept telling him what a difficult career theirs is, he then abandoned journalism for acting. Many years later he's still doing it, using the name David France. How successful has he been at this? Judge for yourself. Have you ever heard of him? He's done plenty of low-budget feature films (including Werewolves of the Third Reich) but makes most of his living by writing, running and acting in murder mystery events.

Chronic shyness afflicted him for many years but he is now painfully opinionated about almost everything. And he loves pigs. Despite this, he remains happily married to a writer slightly more famous than him – the 2019 Booker Prize winner, Bernardine Evaristo. They live in London.