



TLC SHOWCASE

Hugh Hayes

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Introduction to *The Whitchurch Papers*

The Whitchurch Papers is a dystopian novel, telling the story of an England sliding into chaos at a time of huge unrest in the 2070's. It is told through the testimonials of seven characters who live through these difficult years, collected by Professor Caroline Whitchurch for her research project. Now, in a more oppressive time, her work is suppressed and censored. It is being distributed underground, in an attempt to keep the true history of the past alive.

I have always written down ideas, thoughts, dreams, poems, short stories, and I finally managed to finish a semi-autobiographical novel, which still sits in my files. From that experience, I wanted to write a novel from different perspectives, influenced by "As I Lay Dying" by William Faulkner. I have always loved science fiction, and I began by bringing together a number of my ideas, stimulated by my fears for the UK, which turned into a first draft. With no confidence in continuing, I was recommended to have my manuscript assessed by TLC by Sarah Bower, a friend of a friend. Jonathan Barnes gave me brilliant feedback, both positive and full of suggestions for making it a better novel. I then booked a submission assessment with Tom Whitcomb, which gave me further insights into how to create a query letter. Following that, I joined the "Being a writer" group and have learnt a huge amount about all aspects of the publishing world from the many fascinating talks in a supportive environment. I would recommend it to anyone.

I attempted to get an agent for *The Whitchurch Papers*, but finally I felt Time's winged chariot on my back. I have now self-published on Kindle Direct Publishing, which has been another steep learning curve, but generally empowering. After initial doubts, I have found it suits me. I have also joined Substack, where I can upload poems and extracts. My book has garnered some lovely feedback and sold more copies than I expected. It has all been a very positive process, and still ongoing. I am entering the book for indie and self-publishing competitions.

I would like to thank Aki and TLC for everything they have provided. If anyone is interested, my Linktree is linktr.ee/hughhayes, which leads you to my online presence.

Extract from *The Whitchurch Papers*

Jane Hamid's account

It all changed when Alan came along. Well, not immediately. I didn't notice him at first. There was always a big turnover. Those who couldn't hack it—they'd turn up late, and that would be it. Then there were those lucky few who got other work and moved on. The regulars were terrible gossips, chatting about who was or wasn't with whom. I just didn't want to get involved. Still, you couldn't help but get to know the regulars who didn't move on for whatever reason and were given the key roles, and you had to play off them, so you had to have some kind of a relationship with them.

Alan wasn't a performer. He was just an ordinary guy who'd been working abroad but had lost his job out there and come home. Like all of us, he was looking for work. At first, he'd go on as a peasant, get humiliated by Michael, hang out at the back, and then go home. Like me, he'd make his own sandwiches and sit in the changing room. He didn't seem to make many friends. One day, he came over to me on a break.

"Hi," he said.

"Hi," I said, my heart sinking. Here goes with the chat me up.

"I think you're amazing," he said.

Not bad as a chat-up line. If I were interested.

"Oh, thanks." I hoped that a tepid response would put him off.

"You can just turn it on out there and then switch off from it."

That wasn't the expected follow-up line. Usually, it's "Would you like to have a coffee/meal/fuck?"

"What do you mean?" I said.

"I mean, well," he searched for words, "I'm finding it hard to survive here. I'm not, like, interested or good at performing, but I couldn't find any other kind of voluntary work to get my CL money, so here I am. But you, you just sit there quietly getting on with your life, but then, when the time comes, you get out there and turn it on. The tourists love it. There's no threat to your volunteering position, the boss won't put in a

bad word for you, and you can be sure you'll get your money at the end of the week.

"Well, thanks for the compliment, but it isn't quite as easy as that."

"You make it look so easy."

"Thanks." I resisted the urge to tell it how it was. I didn't dare have a moan about how I hated it all because Alan might be a nark and then I'd lose the position I had fought so hard for.

"I'm sorry, I haven't introduced myself. I'm Alan."

"I know."

He finally got it.

"Well, I just wanted to say that. Sorry to disturb your lunch."

"No worries."

And with that, he was gone. To be honest, I was relieved that I had fended him off without too many complications. That's what I did at that time. Like I said, I wasn't looking for a relationship. It was difficult enough to survive on your own. I had to get out of the volunteer world and get a proper job, and only then could I let someone else into my life. To give Alan his due, he didn't bother me again and didn't talk to me at all except when it involved work. After a while, and on reflection, I thought I had been a bit tough on him, and in the end, I was the one who made it personal. One tea break, I asked, "How's it going?"

"Surviving," he said.

"You'll get used to it," I said and left it at that.

About the Writer

Hugh Hayes studied English and American Literature at Warwick University, then attended the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He has been an actor all his life, appearing in Dr Who, Eastenders, Goodnight Mister Tom, Holby City, amongst many other TV and theatre productions. Over the years, he has written two plays on the London fringe, adapted a BBC Book at Bedtime novel, adapted Nabil Shaban's Hamlet where he played Horatio, written sketches for a children's programme "You and Me", adapted and performed Arthur Schnitzler's Lieutenant Gustl as a one man show at Edinburgh Festival which was taken up by Radio 4, and researched and written a history of Finsbury Park in 2000 followed by a recent update for the Friends of Finsbury Park which was privately published. *The Whitchurch Papers* is his debut novel.

