

## RED

By Christopher O'Shaughnessy

*Darkness and shadows.*

*A bites into a shiny red apple. Slowly, with deliberation,  
enjoying the moment. B and C watching.*

**B:**

Do you think you should be doing that?

**A:**

What?

Are you still talking to me, still talking?

*A bites again into the apple.*

**B (contradicting):**

*Thinking.* I know what you're thinking.

**C:**

Always there,

She was always there.

**A:**

She was always there.

**C:**

It was the colour red, red for apple —

**A:**

She was always there.

**C:**

— red for blossom, dark

Red for blood.

**B:**

A little too *much* red.

A:

Yes.

*She puts the apple away.*

C:

But the underside was sweet, the soft heart

Vulnerable. Not that you'd ever know.

B:

Not that you'd ever know.

A (*brightly to C*):

Did you want?

C:

Want?

A:

Yes, I *can* go! Yes, I'd like that!

B:

She said,

Meeting him for the first time.

A:

I'd like that.

I'd like that very much.

B

She worshipped him.

He gave her a red scarf.

*C gives A a red silk scarf. A red glare of lighting.*

A (*holding and smelling the scarf*):

Red.

B:

Thai silk.

Sensuous lengthy silk. Like a pink tongue.

C:

So you'll come with me? You'll go out with me?

Yes? Yes?

A:

Yes!

B:

It was definitely Yes.

A *puts the scarf away.*

C:

Tomorrow, then.

A:

Tomorrow.

C:

Tomorrow.

A:

There were so *many* tomorrows. Yes. *Yes!*

And that kindness, that sudden kindness

And silk voice, wrapping around every word,

Each sentence like a gift. Did I —? Did I —?

C:

Will you go out with me?

A:

Of course. Yes, of course.

B:

And she went. But there was something —

A:

— something

C:

Something she did not know.

C and A (*simultaneously*):

Of course I will!

**B** (*slowly and deliberately*):

She did not know about *me*.

**A:**

About her.

Never knew about —

**C** (*cutting in*):

Do you like music?

**B:**

He asked one day, giving her a red rose.

**C** *gives her a red rose. She takes it, surprised.*

**B:**

Well, it was more *vermilion*.

**A:**

Magenta.

**B:**

Crimson.

**A:**

Scarlet.

**B:**

Burgundy.

Like the paint he used in her *puce* bedroom.

*She holds up a pot of red paint.*

Puce, it was all puce; I did see it *once*.

**A** *puts the rose away. B* *puts the pot of paint down.*

**C:**

Do you like music?

A:

You *do* mean Chopin?

B (*loathingly*):

She asked innocently, flirtatiously —  
For that was her way.

C:

Chopin is good.

B:

He said,

C:

But I — I — I —

B:

— circumspect, hopeful —

C:

I — I prefer — *honky tonk*.

B *strikes a sudden chord on the piano*.

A:

Honky tonk?!

*Pause. They look away.*

B (*scrolling an arpeggio*):

It had been played on the red piano.

C and B *move towards each other and embrace tenderly*.

But it was the music speaking, the music  
Dreaming their song. Dreaming their song.  
It was the music now dreaming their song.

*Slight pause.*

For it was me, was **me** he loved, not her.

**A** (*agonised to C*):

It can't be! That isn't so! It can't be!

It can't be! It can't be! It can't be!

Tell me you love me. Tell me you love me!

Why, *why*? **Why!** How long have you *known* this?

How long? How long?

**C:**

I thought you *liked* Bartok.

**B:**

Such incongruity was breathtaking.

*Slight pause.*

I should know. He *knew* she hated Bartok.

**A:** (*with gravity*):

I'm afraid. Afraid of what I might do.

**C:**

What's the problem?

**B:**

And *of course*, there was one.

**A:**

We still meeting for lunch?

**B:**

Lunch? Lunch? What lunch?

**A:**

We were — we were *all meeting for lunch*.

I'm afraid of what I might do. Afraid.

**C:**

We *can* meet for lunch.

**B:**

He said, eagerly.

**A:**

I'm afraid, afraid of what I might do.

**B:**

And he gave her a box, a bright shiny box.

*C gives A a red enamelled box.*

**B:**

It gave such pleasure. She hung on to it.

*A looks imploringly at C.*

**A sings:**

'I've never been in love, no, never, not at all...'

**B:**

I think this was true.

*(singing):*

'No, never not at all.... la la la la la....'

*C picks out the tune on the piano. They all hum the tune together.*

*A suddenly picks up the pot of red paint and throws it at the white wall. Red liquid runs down in streams.*

*Pause.*

*C and B both turn away, frozen.*

*A gets out the apple and takes another bite.*

**C and B (softly):**

Do you think you should be doing that?

**A:**

What?

Are you still talking, still talking?

*A puts the apple away.*

**C and B (softly):**

*Thinking.* We know what you're thinking.

*A gets out the box. She opens the lid. Her face in a red glare.*

*She listens to the tinkling tune now emanating from the musical box.*

**C and B (softly):**

We are always there. We are always there.

*She listens to the tinkling tune until it winds down to silence.*

*Blackout.*



## I've Never Been In Love

Score

Music & Lyrics by Christopher O'Shaughnessy  
Arranged by Timothy West

The musical score is written on three staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The lyrics are: "I've ne-ver been in love. No, ne-ver not at all. I've ne-ver been in love. La,". The second staff starts with a measure rest of 4 measures, then continues the melody. The lyrics are: "la, la, la, la... I've ne-ver been in love. No, ne-ver not at all. I've ne-ver been in love. La,". The third staff begins with a measure rest of 5 measures, followed by five eighth notes on a single pitch. The lyrics are: "la, la, la, la, la,".



Josh Lyttleton, Roshni Nagaria, and Rachel James in rehearsal, 16 Mar. 2014, Amersham Arms performance space. Photo: Tom Powell. Used with permission.

## **Writing Red: The Politics of Creativity**

---

By Christopher O'Shaughnessy

---

A student, Tom Powell, studying for an M.A. in Writing for Performance at Goldsmiths, appealed via *Facebook* for other students to join him in an experiment: to write and perform six short plays in twenty-four hours. There were, as I came to realise, more than enough actors and directors for this particular enterprise but few writers. I contacted Tom and was warmly welcomed on board the project. We would meet at Goldsmiths in Studio 3 at 8.00pm on Saturday, March 15, 2014, assemble into (by now) four random groups of actors with one writer and one director and, after an initial brain-storming session, write the plays and have them ready for performance the next evening at 8.00pm on Sunday, March 16.

Not having met any of the participants before, my mind montaged with unsettling images of tense Foucauldian power-play, fraught Bourdieuesque psychic games of quirky personal capital being suddenly withheld and bartered for, even a sense of an oppressively bizarre Bakhtinian emotional carnivalesque as creative relationships became strained, dark and twisted. I suspect we may have all feared this because, to begin with, at our initial meeting, having fallen kaleidoscopically into an interesting arrangement of genders, races, ages, interests and aptitudes—I was old enough to be everybody's grandfather—we sat in silence looking at each other for some time.

---

We were: Tim Vest (M.A., Musical Theatre, Goldsmiths), Roshni Nagaria (B.A., Education, Culture and Society, Goldsmiths), Rachel James (B.A., Anthropology, Goldsmiths), myself (PhD., Theatre and Performance, Goldsmiths) and Josh Lyttleton (B.A., History, Cambridge), a friend of Tom. Roshni broke the silence. 'I see a colour,' she said suddenly, almost as if channelling at

a séance. ‘What colour?’ I said. ‘Red’. ‘Well, we have a beginning! Let’s call the play *Red*.’ I think we sat for a further five minutes or so contemplating the significance of what we’d just agreed upon. Long listening silences figured prominently in the politics of our creative relationships.

---

Roshni’s initiating statement alerted us to the vast emptiness not only in the room and in the spaces between us (despite the fact that there were, at that time, three other groups present) but also to a kind of cosmic plangency which asserted itself between each spoken act of creativity, as if the universe was fully aware and holding us lovingly in the palm of its hand. With an undoubted sense of the fragility of this fecund cradling, we moved forward, physically out of the room into another space, a dance studio, but also into the deeper spaces of our own listening selves. We took off our shoes in respectful anticipation. Over the next two hours, thinking collectively but privately, the play emerged, line by line, image by image, bearing out Walter Benjamin’s notion that ‘the image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation’ (Benjamin, 463). I think we decided early on that, hopefully, this constellated flashpoint might emit some music and explode in verse. That the red of the title suggested a degree of intensity, aliveness, passion, and unseeing (that legendary ‘red mist’) spelled out the unspoken message to proceed cautiously, listening, waiting, acting out carefully. A protocol of slow-dancing dialogic subjectivities.

---

The actors performed the dialogue line by line, moment by moment, reflecting on its meaning, its rhythm — as it came out, as it was written. The physical performances transmitted the emotion in the language. Tim, directing, watched and observed this process of embodiment, making notes, moving an actor here, there, filling the space. But the iambic pentameter was having trouble behaving

itself: emerging fractured, customised, colloquial, contemporary, and downright rude from the behaviour of three fraught and troubled characters. An underlying power—a spirituality?—nascent in the imagery, carried in the prosody, in the gaps between the words, ensured the language was ‘all glued together, fused, glowing’ in Virginia Woolf’s phrase (Woolf 65). Julia Kristeva goes a little further, implying that poetic language discharges a presence within a theatrical space which challenges the symbolic, especially if that language is dramatic (Kristeva 81). After two hours of reflective rehearsal—who is A? who is B? who is C? what do they want?—eight minutes of the play had been written and I, exhausted, decided that I now needed to make my way home, catch the midnight train, and find a further fecund emptiness where I could let what needed to happen happen, valuing the vacancy. Tim, Roshni, Rachel and Josh went home too. I worked throughout the night and e-mailed the completed ten minute script to them by four o’clock the next morning.

---

By the time I arrived much later at 1.00pm they had already rehearsed the play twice in the dark, cavernous performance spaces of the Amersham Arms. [Three plays only survived this concentrated creative experience, one never reaching the rehearsal stage. But the pressure worked for us: focusing, bonding, clarifying, galvanised by the collective endeavour.] Now, they were rehearsing it again, for me, in the bright, newly-refurbished, equally spacious, empty Goldsmiths dining hall. I brought along the music of the song, recorded on tape from my tapping it out on an old battered electronic keyboard. Transferring the recording to his iPhone, Tim decided to use this as the tinkling musical box noise we needed at the denouement. (He also added a chord and an arpeggio in appropriate places.) Roshni, as the circumspect character A, picked up the melody symbiotically and, astonishingly, we had a perfect

run-through, song included. A, B, and C articulated those small replicating human battles of power, control, betrayal and longing which exist in all societies on a daily basis, minute by minute. I think all three actors relished the intensity of this curious ménage-à-trois and the unusual chance to articulate it in verse. They also relished, as did we all, the absorption in an ongoing theatrical journey of surprises.

---

Andrew Lloyd Webber said nothing is wasted in creativity. I believe that, through a dialogic process of enforced listening, in such a limited time and in a safe environment, each participant was able to draw on, reclaim, upload, process and transform some very obscure material. The benign politics of creativity experienced in this intense compact marathon of sharing, offering, listening and performing had a further benign effect: Tim became music arranger and pianist for a longer practice-as-research piece in July. Roshni, Rachel and Josh all gave deeply-felt, finely-attuned, engaging, wonderfully vivid performances. At the end Tom said: 'That was beautiful'. A surprised voice in the audience exclaimed: 'That was *good!*'

---

---

### **Works Cited**

---

Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge: Belnap Harvard UP, 1993.

---

Kristeva, Julia. *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Trans. Margaret Waller. New York: Columbia UP, 1984.

---

Woolf, Virginia. *A Writer's Diary*. London: Hogarth Press, 1953.