

# The Soup Enigma

by  
james kelman

*setting* A lounge in the South London two bedroom flat shared by BILL and RORY. The room is reasonably dishevelled but not exaggerated. There are two doors; one is the outside door that is left unopened until the end of the play. The other leads into the lobby, kitchen, toilet etc.

*time* the wee hours of the morning, of the present

*props* Two guitar-cases stand against a wall. Two cans of beer. There is a clock on an upper shelf. The half bottle of brandy is near a wall and cannot be seen until eventually when COLIN discovers it past halfway into the play [p26]  
A bottle of water on the table.

*cast* COLIN 35, a sarcastic bastard  
VIK 39, laid back guy  
RORY 35, always on the edge, resents COLIN  
BILL 30, good natured, mild mannered

The four men are Scots who have lived and worked in England for a number of years. None makes a fuss about being Scottish and the predictable Scots v English issues never arise in the play. They were in a bar earlier that evening. RORY and BILL are musicians and it was business. They play in a pub band and have done for a long while. VIK used to play music for living. Tonight was the first in a while that he had come to see them. He brought along his friend and work-colleague COLIN. This is the first time COLIN has met RORY and BILL. After the pub the four returned to RORY and BILL's place with some booze. They drank most of it. RORY and BILL had bought most of it and if there is any left RORY isn't bringing it out. During the play he will open two cans of beer for himself. BILL appears to have prepared a pot of soup, it is not quite ready yet.

When the play opens, and until directed, VIK will lie on the floor sleeping. The play is in "real time", it takes place in one act and has no scene change.

## *the Soup Enigma*

by James Kelman

*Sound*      *clock ticks*

*Lights*      *COLIN is seated on a high stool, awkwardly. RORY sprawls on a two-seater sofa. VIK lies sleeping on the floor. There are two small kitchen chairs beside a small table. A larger chair is empty, this is BILL's chair; he is absent. During the play, except where directed otherwise, COLIN moves restlessly around the room, peers at objects occasionally. RORY watches him, suspiciously. COLIN is speaking:*

COLIN      These things always begin in a less than unexceptional manner. It's a case of grabbing the nettle. What else is there? What else could there be? And I stress the 'could'. One has to accept these things. If ye were to examine every last detail (*tailing off, wearily*). *He shifts his seated position*

COLIN      *gazes at VIK*) Listen to VIK breathing. Ye wonder if he's going to stop! He canna be too comfortable stretched out there, he's got bony joints... (*shifts on his chair*) Mind you I'm no too comfortable myself, what is this? it's more like a wean's high' chair than a stool? I'm fucking perched here... Nay wonder my back's sore!

RORY      *yawns*) So what ye saying?

COLIN      I'm saying a lot

RORY      Well say it

COLIN      It's a lot

RORY      I dont mind if it's a lot

*BILL enters through internal door, closes it; cheerily*) The soup'll be another ten minutes.

COLIN      Well well well, I knew somebody mentioned soup in the not too dim and

distant past. I thought ye had gone to plant the vegetables! Just as well it was nay a piece of flank mutton ye were looking for. London's never easy for sheep

BILL No at this time of night it is nay

RORY It's fucking morning man

COLIN What a stickler!

RORY Ye were making a point

COLIN I was making a point...mm...I wonder what point I was making

RORY Something ye said is niggling me

COLIN Right, aye, well, we're always subject to niggles, that's the nature of the endeavour. If ye look closely at anything niggles will emerge; factors that gnaw at ye, factors that take on a certain significance, a niggling significance... (*gets down from his chair*) That's the last time I sit up there... (*groans, rubs his back as he walks, restlessly*)

BILL But what if they are significant?

COLIN What if they are right enough. I find it best just to shrug and let go.. Life is difficult enough without all these needless proceedings beyond the present. Trails-in-the-pursuit-of-understanding! Such trails are not so much dangerous as a form of mental blue-herring, put forth by the powers-that-be. What was is sufficient and what is will become so. Let it be shouted from every rooftop. These other points of reference are all very well.

BILL Formulate them at your peril!

COLIN Well said sir

BILL (*relishing the sound of the words*) Formulate them at your peril.

COLIN Doubly well said sir

RORY (*irritated*) Ye were making a point and I want to hear it

BILL We all want to. Even VIK, and he's sleeping.

COLIN He's always sleeping, that's how he's the man ye see today.

RORY Make yer bloody point

COLIN Somebody mentioned soup, it's affected my concentration.

BILL Was it homemade soup or out a tin?

COLIN That depends on the gods my son, if they perchance are smiling favourably upon one. Mayhap they are. Unless one has offended them, willy nilly, or even in the scheme of things, as it were. [SIGHS] The chain of life's sweet mystereees.

BILL Say that again

RORY *irritated aside*) Dont encourage him.

COLIN Homemade soup or out a tin [*pondering*]...mmm

BILL It could be a cordon-bleu tin...

COLIN I assume ye're including the contents?

RORY Look ye made a statement

COLIN Did I... Christ, in my line of work that's an accusation. Ponder ponder. Maybe it was a proposition

RORY Whatever

COLIN Aha! Are yous guys religious?

RORY *heavily sarcastic*) Ha ha

COLIN A propensity towards the erstwhile supranateeraal? I like to know where one has landed so-to-speak, the precise location. Conceptually I'm talking about. Otherwise...realms of irrational discourse, know what I mean, religion's a second-order signifier, maist people think it's first-order

BILL I suppose it depends

RORY Christ gie us a break Bill!

BILL Naw but the guy's got a point

COLIN Of course certain arguments urnay even worth the refutation, especially in circumstances like the present where one is so-to-speak carpeted. Dont take it personally.

RORY Personally?

COLIN It's just we're having one of these discussions.

RORY What ye talking about?

COLIN The kind that take place in pubs at 7.20 pm on a wintry weekday evening towards the end of a very long afternoon drinking session. (*adopts the voice of a ham actor in a horror story*) These disjointed yet strangely coherent conversations, where meaningful matters of the spirit are raised from the long-dead data of base experience (*heightening the tension*) Outside it's all dark and dismal... But so too is the inside, except it's a bit less so, owing to the reflected mellow sheen from the dust-covered bottles of good auld whisky, lurking up there on the gantry, the water of life, barely reminding us of its doughty though deadly presence. Forget 7.20 pm on a wintry weekday what about now, deeply into the wee hours, that tricky period, when the end of the drink does approach,...drip drip... drip drip... like the slow seep of a body's life blood (*makes a plopping noise with his tongue on the roof of his mouth*)

BILL Whohh! (*shivers*)

RORY *sarcastic*) What've ye seen a ghost!

BILL That's the story of my life man!

COLIN Aye but you've got yer life under control. That's the difference. Or so it appears to me, a veritable stranger; one who has so to speak landed in yer midst. Honest. You've just made the soup! How affirmative can ye get!

RORY He'll probably burn it

BILL I never burn soup

COLIN *SURPRISED*] Neither do I

BILL D'ye burn other things?

COLIN Aye

BILL So do I

RORY Yeh well I never cook

COLIN Quite right. But I would've guessed it.

RORY What do you know?

COLIN My son it's not what ye know it's how ye know - the crux of the 21st century post-medieval intellectual position, as adopted by all religions and retail state-media outlets, let me tell ye boy that is the crux.

RORY *irritated*] It's what you were saying earlier, that is the fucking crux

COLIN Crux:, it's a funny word. [*sighs*] I was agreeing with you: no matter what one thinks about the politics of a certain white english rockband some of their early recordings might be instances of perfection in the singing of rhythm and blues: all its rawness and that kind of stupendous stuff. T was you that stated said.

RORY Me?

BILL It sounds like your kind of argument

RORY FROWNS AT HIM

COLIN [*intones*) Verily brother I say unto you that it is hardly an argument at all, not in the true sense of the term, its classical sense, the ways in which one may so to speak walk round an argument, nodding one's head at the bits that work, the bits that dont work... Heh what is that smell... fried onion and garlic?

BILL CHUCKLES

COLIN With the hint of tumeric, the merest twinkle of crushed cumin... A cordon-bleu tin of soup right enough. Bill Bill Bill, I lo'e ye dearly. Such a smell renders one helpless. I'm as a new-born babe.

RORY PRODUCES A CAN OF BEER AS IF FROM NOWHERE

RORY TO COLIN] Ye dont care for rock music then is that the point?

COLIN Amazing how cans of beer appear from nowhere

RORY Do ye consider rock music inferior?

COLIN Eh well...[*sudden movement, he stares at the clock ticking on the shelf*] Christ I was about to answer yer question there but my eye was arrested by the clock perched on that high shelf, its face obscured in a shadow of indeterminate extension, cause unknown... [*walks to examine the clock and its relation to the ceiling, he stares at the ceiling*] Unless...maybe there is a full-blooded human entity in the upstairs flat whose presence is powerful enough to cast itself spiritually through plaster board, joist beams and various other construction paraphernalia. [*to BILL*] Does such a supranateeral being exist, terra noviticus-a-um?

BILL There's nobody in the upstairs flat, it's a bare attic

COLIN Bare attic... Christ that's quite sexy (*shudders*)

BILL You shuddered!

COLIN *sheepishly*) I hang my head

RORY Listen, ye made a statement about perfection a minute ago

COLIN Okay, that it isn't possible to speak of perfection since the actual perception of it is filtered through the subject's knowledge that the black guy who composed and recorded the song originally was getting badly exploited by the white record companies. So a slight niggling doubt would remain with the subject, no matter how uninformed he was. Even if he was an ignoramus, somebody who played music all their life but never wanted to find out anything about art - even for them it would only exist as part of the actual perception, and the judgment as verbal effect of said deliberations, so that the very notion of 'perfection', the very notion, would itself be called into question. I should add that there are things that seem one thing whereas often they turn out to be another thing altogether.

RORY You're talking about ambiguity, like if I'm ambiguous, is that what ye're saying? You're calling me into question, because I only play music part-time? because I'm not a real artist in your terms, what is ye're talking about

COLIN *pause, he adopts Rodin's Thinker pose*] Yer use of the word 'ambiguous' is throwing me.

RORY Am big u us

COLIN Okay, but it's not necessarily a criticism. We have to accept different forms of ambiguity, as human beings, there's different ways we operate. Obviously it doesn't matter if I'm talking to a fool - a classified fool, restricting it to the clinical usage.

RORY Thanks

*VIK makes a snoring sort of rattling noise and shifts position.*

COLIN Listen to VIK. I think his nostrils are jammed [*then absently*] Well I suppose we all want to die...

RORY What!

*BILL (amused)*, I don't want to die, thank you very much

COLIN We all want to die BILL, when it comes down to it. Even christians

RORY I don't believe this guy!

COLIN I've tried to die for years, I used to lie down in streets, hoping to get run over by a gigantic big truck.

RORY Pity ye failed

COLIN I didnt fail, it was just a different kind of success. That's how me and VIK are pals.

*VIK snores very briefly*

COLIN Listen to him. He's developed the habit of falling asleep, yet he only does it in awkward company. But there IS ONLY awkward company, that's what I cannay get him to understand. If it wasnay for wine, women and song he would never wake up at all. It's the one thing that keeps him alive to the world.

RORY That's three things

COLIN *amused*) Of course it isnay

RORY What?

BILL Ever notice how women show a marked preference for guys like VIK

COLIN These big skinny fuckers, all elbows, thumbs and kneejoints

BILL Women collapse whenever they appear on the scene.

COLIN It's unforgiveable. It's a thing about women...especially beauteous women, especially bountiful women. There's a guy I know doing great analysis on the topic.

RORY *irritated aside*) Jesus christ...

COLIN Sorry, what I was saying there, before I interrupted myself... Bla bla bla, the subject, in order to make a judgment, must rely on his or herself, and the judgement must be filtered through this one person. So how can it be other than relative? And if that is the case then perfection just cannay come into it. We cannay entertain the notion since the very idea itself is reliant on the existence of reason. In other words more than one person is necessary, this being a prerequisite of reason, more than one person has to be there. Reason is a dialogue.

RORY What if the other person cannay talk?

COLIN Well what if it isnay a person at all? Of course a lot of people get turned off by mental highjinks, they have a fear of it. It's like a mass phobia nowadays. Matters of the intellect fatigue them, it makes them sleepy. *(pause)* Did you yawn there?

RORY Don't try yer games with me.

COLIN We deny these things at our peril.

RORY     Make yer point

COLIN     Verily I say unto you, meta-arguments are always unforgiveable, even in unrelaxed company.

BILL I agree with that...

COLIN     Mind you BILL, there's always something in around the root, a principle that might be cornered, if we put our minds to it, if we just dig around and expose the fucker. And whatever that underlying thing is, if we find it, it could save our bacon. Personally I know we're close but at the same time we shouldnay worry about failure. Naybody finds it easy following complex propositions at this time of night.

BILL It's morning.

RORY     *impatient*) Listen, earlier on you said musicians have smug attitudes.

COLIN     Surely no? Me!

RORY     You

*Sound*     *VIK's breathing again, then a choking sound in his nose*

BILL Ye feel like sticking a handkerchief over his nose and forcing him to blow.

COLIN     Ye'd wake him up.

RORY     What's wrong with that?

COLIN     He'll just want to know when the soup's ready

RORY     We all want to know when the soup's ready

BILL *sniffs*) 10 minutes

COLIN     D'ye mean ten minutes? Or else another ten minutes?

BILL I thought ye werenay hungry!

COLIN     I was just being polite, a good guest.

*BILL chuckles*

RORY     Yeh, ha ha

BILL Good guests are rare in this part of the world

RORY Unknown fucking entities.

COLIN What part of the world is this anyway? What kind of world I should say.

BILL It's an enclave of outskirts

COLIN Southern outskirts?

BILL Now ye've got it

COLIN *uneasily*) Dear god... It was all these buses and tubes we took to get here, a journey of labyrinthine proportions [*very warily*] so we're on the southern outskirts are we...

BILL Yeh it didnay occur to us before we moved in but it's right enough, once ye're here ye're here. Eh RORY!

RORY Seems to be, yeh, once ye're here ye're here

BILL *pause*) Yeh, it has to be said, there is no place farther south than them, these here outer reaches, where we are right now.

COLIN *shivers*) They urnay places ye want to visit in a hurry but eh! In a month of Sundays one would not wish to visit them, not freely, not by choice.

RORY Prattle fucking prattle.

BILL I know what he means but

RORY He's prattling

COLIN Mm, well, that's as maybe but I'm stating the general case all the same; the timeless discrepancy old chap, between it and the particular - take for example hunger, one could be hungry. There again one could be out on one's feet, so-to-speak, verging on extinction - take VIK as a for-instance (*touches VIK's boy with his foot*)

RORY *aside*) Look, he's poking the guy with his foot

COLIN ...half swazzled with the drink, not just dying in the sense that life amounts to a slow throe in that direction, but soon to be dead - his breathing, listen to his breathing.

RORY What's he on about now?

COLIN Wheesht a minute, just listen

VIK *snores briefly and stops, like a catch in his nose*

BILL A nostril pile-up, it isn't healthy

COLIN He needs a drink of water, warm water, crystal clear and pure water. Ever regarded an animal?

BILL I used to have an alsatian dog

COLIN Cats are better. Notice the way they stare at slow dripping taps, the intense concentration. It's a phenomenal occurrence... Drip drop, drip drop... Eh? What a world that must be, the world of cats. Never mind alsatian dogs, they might be big but so what, you're no big, I'm no big, but VIK, he's big (*whispered*) Poor big guy

RORY What, what ye saying?

COLIN Me?

RORY What ye saying about VIK?

COLIN *very puzzled*

RORY You fucking said something about VIK. What did ye say?

COLIN I wouldn't have said nothing. (*pause*) No when the guy's sleeping, he's my mucker

BILL Come on RORY, he's no gony talk behind the guy's back!

RORY I wasn't talking behind anybody's back. Don't get onto me for christ sake it's him! He's supposed to be VIK's mate. That's the only reason he's sitting here with us

COLIN Mmmm. I spoke out of turn, I admit that freely. (*sighs*) Mind you I was thinking aloud. See as far as I'm concerned it's psychological, ye think ye've got the reasoning power to defeat any bastard on any subject whatsoever - the origin of rhythm and blues, scholastic philosophy, the theory of hydraulics - whatever. It's just concentration, that damn concentration, it's the bane of one's existence (*sighs impatiently*).

BILL *laughs*

COLIN I know what you're thinking BILL but it's got nothing to do with intoxicants, although having said that, sometimes I meet people and their heads and shoulders seem to be rising and approaching ever closer, closer and closer. Ever get that?

BILL It's a common experience

RORY Speak for yerself

BILL Common enough

COLIN It strikes me that the drip drip syndrome might be appropriate there

BILL Yes

COLIN The dawning recognition!

BILL Peraventure!

COLIN *in a drawled, W C Fields' voice*) Exactimon my boy exactimon. I laid me down on the street one time and tried to fade away; to no avail, to no avail. *(BILL chuckles then continues in ordinary voice)* Imagine that but I couldnay even fade away. *(interrupted by RORY)*

RORY *exaggerated yawn*

COLIN Good man yerself. I take it ye've been listening to rock music since ye were knee-high to a grasshopper?

RORY Ye could say that

COLIN Same as myself. And my mother afore me, and hers. Ah but my grannie was a great wee lassie. In fact she wasnay wee at all, I'm just waxing lyrical. It's because it is so warm and comfortable in this room. I congratulate the pair of you. But the problem with warm rooms is ye have to leave them when they aren't yours. Sooner or later. It's the same with women

*Sound groan from VIK, he is coming awake*

RORY What do you know about women?

BILL It's the how-ye-know question. Hey, look!

*Sound VIK groans again*

VIK *groaning*) Ohhh my back

BILL Welcome to the land of the living

COLIN It's because of the word "women", that's what woke him up. The guy's a phenomenon

VIK *scratching*) Who's been jumping on me? *(turning onto his side; now sitting up)*

BILL That's what ye get for sleeping on the floor.

RORY *to COLIN*) What were you saying there?

COLIN Ah. The female of the species. Just how ye can see that something in her, the security she has in the fact of one's temporariness

VIK Ahh... [*rises and stretches, eventually sits on a small chair at the small table*]

COLIN See that fellows, the deeply-natured structure of the psyche's darker recesses: this guy's a walking wonderland.

RORY What do you know?

COLIN *sighs*) He sighed wearily.

VIK Can I enter the proceedings?

BILL Ye can.

COLIN It's about women.

VIK In respect of the vagaries thereof?

COLIN Precisely

VIK Are these vagaries eternal?

COLIN I hope that isnay a syllogism. Sorry, ye've been sleeping.

VIK I was in a deep mental crevice

COLIN Ye've aye had mighty fingertips

VIK Clinging on by the skin of my whatever-ye-call- them. I had entered a cave wherein shadows lurked

COLIN We've all been in that selfsame fucking cave man, seen the selfsame fucking shadows, come on!

VIK Naw but this time COLIN, this time it was really something. Seriously, ye want to have been there

COLIN *horror*) How do I know I wasnay! Were these shadows fiery?

VIK They were

COLIN Jesus christ! The auld fiery shadows of passion

RORY *irritated*] Make yer fucking point

COLIN What point?

RORY About women

COLIN Women. Mercy me. I wonder what I was saying

VIK Dont look at me

RORY Ye've forgotten what ye were talking about!

COLIN Mm

BILL *pause*) Just about like eh it's just because the woman, she knows ye've got to be going...sooner or later. [*hesitant*] You as male I'm talking about...the woman...she knows you have to be going soon...you...that ye urnay a permanent fixture... Us as males, we urnay a permanent fixture, we're never...we're just... It's that kind of thingwy, it's that, it's that that makes her the eh...that gives her the eh...somehow ye know it's eh...the one thing, that one thing, it gives her...

COLIN The spring in her step? The bounce in her being?

BILL *excited*) Yeh. Yeh, as she studies her reflection in the mirror; critically, objectively...

COLIN Or subjectively eh? who knows with women... That smile at the edge of her mouth. Even when ye lay yer hand upon her shoulder, the very act... the selfsame, the very selfsame

VIK *Yawns then makes a smacking sound with his lips*) I'm in a squelchy condition; where's the booze?

BILL *amused*) There's nothing left, except for a drop of crystal pure straight-from-the-gods water, citrus water

COLIN *drawls*) My boy!

RORY *testily*) Dont you start - matey here's been doing my brains in.

COLIN Matey! [*sings a popular sailor's tune*] Di di di di dih di di dididi dididi di ( *and meanwhile he dances a few steps, one hand under his belly, the other behind his back*)

RORY Shut up for fuck sake ye'll wake the neighbours

COLIN I am chastened

VIK *gets to his feet, moans*) Christ my back... it's killing me! [*indicates high stool*] Can I have your chair?

COLIN Ye're welcome

VIK Thanks (*sits*)

COLIN Hey man it's incredible how red are the veins in your peepers I've never seen a pair of peepers like that in my entire life?

RORY *interested in spite of himself*) What's up with them?

COLIN He's led a shifty existence, that's what up with them. The eyes is where it always comes out, ye cannay hide it from them, the auld peepers. And we all look into them, that's the beauty of it - so ye cannay hide it from us either. Our eyes I mean. His eyes cannay hide it from our eyes (*pause*) just like ours cannay hide it from his. A complete conundrum

RORY What the hell's he talking about?

VIK *chuckles*] Oh I've got to tell ye my dream.

COLIN Aw naw

VIK I've got tell ye.

COLIN *aside*) His dreams BILL, there's a certain lassie haunts them

BILL A lassie?

COLIN Well a woman, she's fully fledged.

VIK *as in a reverie*) Her blouse was open as usual. And she wasna wearing a bra. She's got a habit of doing that. Her breasts hung out, a slight swing to them, the nipples low and to the sides, and the outline of her ribs, she being quite thin not counting her breasts of which there were two, there were two. I stared at them

RORY Aye ye've got to (*nervous chuckle, then a pause*)

VIK It was like an absurd extension of myself.

COLIN What else could it be!

VIK *awed*) What else could I be?

COLIN *a WC Fields voice again*] You! You could be anything my boy, anything at all, that's the beauty of the entire kit and caboodle, the entire bounteous nature of this limitless and infinite universe, this home from home for the living breathing free spirit, the unshackled agent.

VIK *awed whisper*) I was anything, at the same time I was nothing

COLIN *quietly*) An old story

VIK But that was the amazing thing about it, because at the same time I was aware of just how old a story it was. And there was me, an integral part of the continuum, in toto, I was as an instrument

COLIN *sighs*) Ach, forget women's bodies, we're no gony get one and that's that.

RORY What did you say?

COLIN Forget it, I was being metaphysical. Ye're wanting to talk about rock music and a certain white english upper-middle class band who apparently are or were perfection in that medium

RORY You're a cheeky bastard...

VIK He is that

COLIN You all go on about voice, all you part time artists,

RORY Cheeky bastard...

COLIN Even you VIK

VIK Why ye dragging me into it?

BILL *amused*) He's dragging us all into it!

COLIN Dont say ye dont because ye do, yez all do, yez're all musicians. Even you VIK, you go on about it all the time.

VIK Crap!

COLIN Ye did it earlier on, just after that wee session ye had doon the pub, I heard ye

RORY Big ears

COLIN You were the worst culprit

RORY *aggressively*] Me

COLIN Was it their actual voice ye were referring to?

RORY No

COLIN So what was it?

VIK *ironic*] It was his individual existent being.

COLIN Ah, so then it becomes pertinent to inquire what it is ye're applauding I mean to say what the fuck are ye actually applauding, if it's the white english rock band ye're applauding like I mean it was Joe Turner or somebody christ if that's what ye're trying to say about them, the perfection of technique or whatever, the argument doesnt hold, we're back to the animal world and Shakespeare and making a case for an infinite number of interesting monkeys all sitting down to write a play. A computer will create a masterpiece. All we need is the right programme. Naive shite. A genuine artist would back me up on that one, at least intuitively. Come on VIK, even part-time musicians would agree with me there. Even if it does succeed actual voice is eliminated.

RORY Some voices should be eliminated altogether.

COLIN Of course, although it usually gets explained by extraneous stuff

BILL *slowly, seriously*] Time and the movement of matter.

COLIN Exactimon herr BILL. Time and the movement of matter, what else. But the use of the term 'extraneous' needs to be clarified, and where clarification is a major concern you'll find that time itself is being exploited.

BILL *slowly, seriously*] Yeh...I see that

COLIN There is always something nauseating and maybe sad - and I'm talking about on a good day - when ye hear young singers from these ordinary working-class communities, European, African, Asian, it doesnay matter, they assume that American singing voice which is really just as bad as these upper-class English voices of the 1950s

VIK The fucking BBC world service.

BILL Sir Alec whatisname, the royal family, Lords and Ladies one and all

COLIN Hey RORY, I dont know if you sang as well as played that lead guitar all night long christ it would drive ye nuts when the PA's askew, not that it was the night as far as I

know, it's only a for instance and I'm no expert, I'm just saying if it had been, as a hypothesis, but if ye did sing then surely ye'd agree that there's nothing worse than hearing singers use the language of an alien culture to sing their boy-meets-girl songs, linguistic locations like Oklahoma or Tulsa, Tuscon or Montana, reference to home-home-on-the-range, highheel sneakers, hotdog stands, drive-in movies and James Dean, Hank and old Lefty, Muddy and Bo, all that kind of crap.

RORY     Ye're making a point matey so make it.

COLIN    He called me matey again, can I dance?

RORY     Just make yer point.

BILL He's made the point already

RORY     well he can make it again then can't he

VIK *laughs*

RORY     Why are you laughing VIK?

VIK *intones, genuflects*) Blessed be the peacemakers my son

RORY     It's not something that interests me, that's all I'm saying

VIK    That's plenty

RORY     It's him that's saying plenty, matey here.

COLIN    *sings and does a brief sailor's jig again*] Di di di di dih di di dididi dididi di

RORY     It's all he's done since ye fell asleep. I'm sitting here have to listen

COLIN    In a very comfy chair

RORY     It's my fucking chair

COLIN    Some of us arenay in it, that's all I'm saying

RORY     It's no all ye're saying

COLIN    Aye it is

RORY     Ye say something but it sounds like something else

COLIN    Magical

RORY Fuck off.

VIK Mm

RORY He's getting on my fucking nerves

VIK Mm. Council for the Defence?

COLIN Well yer lordship it's just art is art and perfection's perfection; it's not a measure of things that some art is more easily perfected than another.

VIK Proceed

RORY Ye want to get at me so just do it. Is it my playing annoys ye?

COLIN It's no me that's annoyed it's you. Yer face reminds me of a strange moonscape, the pitted pockmarks are the craters. [*moves closer as though to examine RORY's face*]

*RORY stares hostilely, as though daring him to come closer*

COLIN [*stops and moves off*] One requires a magnifying glass in order to conduct a fuller examination.

VIK Said apparatus is absent

RORY Who's side are you on?

VIK I'm neutral

RORY Neutral!

VIK When it comes to the eternal verities you have to be

BILL Right enough, that's what the guy's talking about

RORY [*angrily*] He's conning ye BILL

COLIN Treasure yer anger my son, yea though it's gunsmoke at dawn, duels to the bitter death

VIK Anger is to be treasured and rage is to be let loose only in meaningful spurts.

COLIN Take the art of driving a train, given it doesn't compare with the art of the lead guitar. Although, mind you VIK, the art of the big bass drum

VIK *seriously*) Yeh...

RORY I thought you were supposed to be neutral!

BILL He is, that's a neutral point

RORY Jesus christ. Heh, what do you actually fucking work at?

COLIN I'm in the Armed Forces

VIK *laughs then yawn, begins stretching but stops with a sudden grunt*

COLIN Have ye snapped a tendon in yer chest?

BILL Ye alright man?

COLIN A bowl of soup would sort him out

VIK *groans*) Did we come straight here from the pub?

RORY Yeh [*sarcastically*], yous have been here ever since

BILL *amused*) We're throwing ye out once the soup's been served.

COLIN The soup's been served. Already he's placed it in the past tense. I'm no sure if I believe in the existence of this soup.

BILL *amused*) I wouldnt lie to ye COLIN, the finest vegetable soup ye've ever tasted

COLIN Oh for the days of flank mutton!

VIK Soup like yer grannie made

COLIN The good old dead sheep.

RORY *aside*) Fucking hell

VIK What ever happened to the good old dead sheep?

COLIN Even if one existed we wouldnay find it

VIK How come?

COLIN Ye realise where we are? (*pause*) Tell him BILL

Bil In the deepest south of this city, the outer outskirts

VIK *suspiciously*) What...?

COLIN We're in suburbia; all these wonderful wee redbrick houses with their wonderful wee doors and brass knockers. Great place to stay for musicians, especially rock musicians. What a place to die. As soon as I looked out the window that was the thought that sprang to mind

VIK That isnay funny, how did we get here?

COLIN A journey of labyrinthine proportions

BILL He's right though.

COLIN It's snowing outside too, whenever I see snow I feel like lying down and going to sleep

BILL Christ ye're wearing sandals

RORY *laughs*] Hey VIK, yer mate's wearing sandals

VIK He always wears sandals, he's known for it, snow or muddy swamps, it makes nay difference.

COLIN I like sandals

VIK He's a bit of a legend in the old shoe department

BILL Is that right COLIN

COLIN It certainly is, which is why soup is the great temptress, being a vital component to life's centrality, especially when ye've a long walk home and ye're smack bang in the middle of the elementals.

VIK *stretches*) Hell of a wee chair this, what is it made for midgets. If I dont get to bed soon I'll collapse.

COLIN Ye did collapse; that's why you ended up on the floor.

VIK How the do we get home but COLIN that's the question...*(rises, walks to the window)* Luck and planning I hear you say

COLIN Ye've read my mind as usual.

VIK *pulls back the curtain, opens window*] Verily brother, it is lying deep, it is lying

deep...

RORY Fuck sake VIK shut that window

VIK Fresh air's good for the corpuscles. (*breathes deeply*)

COLIN The corpuscles are haring through yer brains already, the electrical tensions twanging through the ether, I can feel them I can feel them

RORY It's freezing man shut the fucking thing

VIK *sighs*) God's murmur...

COLIN *awed shudder*) Oohhhh

VIK *pause, whispers*) Just like the good bishop said

COLIN The man from Derry

VIK The very boy

RORY *irritated aside*) Nobody has to walk home, there's a taxi place a couple of streets away.

COLIN Are the clouds faintly visible in the night sky?

VIK intones with a ministerial movement of his right hand, as though blessing the room] Yea and verily brother, we have arrived at that dark dark blue stage; soon the watery sun will be on the horizon, the snow might freeze, there again it might not

COLIN *whispers*) Who can tell with snow...

RORY *irritated*) Come on man shut the fucking window

COLIN *whispers*) Then ye've got the vapours, their viscousness, it aye destroys the damn calculations

RORY *impatient*) Come on VIK shut the bloody window

BILL It's true enough, snow does go it's own way

RORY *annoyed*] Fuck sake

COLIN *quietly*) Are there cracks in the sky but BILL, that's the real question, the one that never gets asked, not by the academics, not by naybody - too fucking feart so they are.

VIK There are cracks in the sky

COLIN *shivers*) Cracks in the sky... Ohhhhhh (*shivers again*) Christ VIK you really know the ones that count. (*pause, and as though thinking aloud*) I wish I knew an apt comment, one of these weighty epigrams, preferably in the Latin...( *pause; sets off strolling, continues in reverie*) It's just ye get used to life...ye get used to it, marvilehus- a-um...

RORY *to VIK, quietly*) Maybe we should shut the window...

COLIN *still in reverie*) ...the entire kit and caboodle; what an astonishing thing it is, astoniensus

VIK *matter-of-factly*) This take me back. Listen to that fresh air

BILL *quietly*) It is like a breath

RORY *quietly to BILL, in spite of himself*) What ye talking about?

COLIN *whispers*) Sshh

RORY *irritated*) Come on

BILL *pause*) Life...how one wishes there were other places to go...other places...instead of here...wherever that is, where ye happen to be...it's never enough...and no wonder...

RORY He knows where we are

BILL *quietly*) I know he does

VIK *pause. He shuts the window, then matter-of-factly*) So...COLIN, ye didnay contact a certain party? Eh?

COLIN What?

VIK You heard

COLIN Direct questions, what a life force...

VIK So ye didnay?

COLIN Didnay what?

VIK Dont play games.

COLIN Christ ye're a hard man

VIK Ye lacked the necessary spark.

COLIN I did

RORY If ye ask me there's a lot of things he lacks

COLIN *sighs*) There was a chore to be accomplished, I failed in that accomplishment; twas ever thus

VIK Perhaps a certain party wouldnay have wanted yer phone call.

COLIN *sighs*) It's true, on occasion she dislikes me with a fervent passion.

RORY Sounds like a lady with taste

COLIN I hang my head

VIK He says things he shouldnay.

COLIN I do.

VIK Ye deserve everything ye get

COLIN Punish me punish me

VIK Ye're naive

BILL Tell us a joke. That's yer punishment

VIK Naw BILL he's in disgrace, let him find his own way out

COLIN That means I'll be here forever

VIK So be it.

BILL Unless ye tell us a joke

COLIN What about?

BILL *pause*) Charles Dickens

COLIN *chuckling*) christ BILL you're some man right enough, ye're too good for the likes of show biz. Charles Dickens eh! *(to RORY)* What a mate you've got son I hope ye cherish him

RORY *astonished*] Charles Dickens?

BILL Naw ye see I was thinking about the absence of flank mutton and then I was thinking about how far we are from where I used to live, which was near Smithfield Market, and if there was flank mutton to be had there, could ye just walk into a butcher and ask for two pound of flank mutton, I dont know, maybe the whole thing's died out, no like back when auld Charles Dickens was alive

COLIN Yeh BILL, and if the thing has nay died out, what then...?

BILL Yeh, exactly

COLIN At one time ye could nay get moving for dead sheep.

RORY *to BILL*) What's it got to do with Charles Dickens?

BILL Smithfield's Market

VIK I'm getting the picture

COLIN It's straightforward, all these wee higgledy-piggledy buildings with the staircases outside

VIK That's it man yeh, ye see them stretching to the moon like in the movie with auld Fagin creeping up the stairs

BILL *nodding*) Aye, right, that's it

COLIN Leading the merry band of youthful vagabonds across the heaving morass of human jetsom and slimesum, like one of those fairy-tale castles in the sky, Spanish ones I'm talking about, and then too with yer man...

VIK The good Mister Sanchez?

COLIN Exactimon

BILL Windmills flailing!

COLIN Well done BILL

VIK *sighs*) In the name of all that's holy, Smithfields Market, they'll be serving foamy pints of guinness accompanied by sizzling bacon and eggs any minute. COLIN ma boy, if we had the poppy, we could walk it from here and maybe purchase a slap-up breakfast.

COLIN I'd walk a million miles for that

RORY No in these sandals ye would nay

COLIN When the future exists these sandals move like a pair of hovercraft, these sandals are built for hazardous journeys. Pints of luscious guinness and full plated fry-ups jees, imagine the scene. Maybe the porters would do us a deal and chip in a few pounds of best rump steak, a score of beef link sausages.

VIK Foamy pints and sizzling bacon

COLIN Aye!

VIK *slowly*) But without the dough...

COLIN Without the dough...

VIK *slowly*) No man's land

COLIN *slowly*) No man's land it is

VIK Maybe if we grabbed the grub and ran like fuck!

COLIN I tried it once and failed miserably

VIK We can but dream

COLIN *sighs*

BILL Peraventure...

COLIN I had a neighbour worked the market all his days, a real auld hand at the game. Aye and his grandmother before him, a genuine Bow Bells cockney, the sprightly article - it's even possible she knew Charles Dickens

RORY Bullshit

COLIN I'm only repeating what my neighbour said, as far as he said it, given it's difficult not to believe genuine auld guys like him, the salt of the earth and so on, he drank in the Dirty Duck or whatever ye call that pub just down from that bend in the river, what do you call it again?

VIK The thingwy

COLIN The thingwy, precisely. He tried to help out when these racist bastards behind the bar put the block on me because I wasnay English, saying I wasnay a market worker and wasnay to get served - no just that, I wasnay even talking properly, they accused me of unintelligibility, linguistic unintelligibility. Cheeky bastards! I mean what the hell would they know anyway? poncing about bowing and scraping to all these city-gents, big fat

fuckers, all in for a curer, topping up the brandy & port before hitting the stock exchange, transforming thriving communities into wasted outposts of dereliction. Smithfields was the right place for them

BILL Bloodstained overalls?

COLIN That's what they carry in their briefcases; they wouldna get served down Smithfields without them. That old neighbour had one too, but it suited him, he cut a dash.

VIK Some parties have got style

COLIN *A WC Fields voice*] He was one such party. I'll never forget him, that butcher neighbour of mine, his kindness to a peripatetic, an itinerant, a foreign stranger, friendless and alone in the world. What a sight for sore eyes, the same man. A veritable Wackford Squeers of a fellow.

BILL *laughs*) That's exactly it!

COLIN *makes an exaggerated bow to BILL*] Thank ee kindly guv

VIK I didnt think ye would pull it off

COLIN *sighs*] The applause of one's fellow, what more could a chap ask. But BILL, well done with the punishment. Eh VIK, what a man!

VIK Yeh, jokes are hard in this life. BILLY boy ye're some guy! *winks*] So away and get the soup

BILL Later

RORY What the fuck are yez on about?

COLIN Truly, there can be many effects and only the one cause. Very many effects from these singular mysterious causes, blatantly obvious causes, none of which is admitted into the scheme of things, none at all

VIK And that by design. Yea unto the very valley.

COLIN Let me tell ye about peculiar penomena chaps, and I include you in this given ye remain sensible to verbal percepts.

RORY Me?

COLIN To be specific it was one year ago to this selfsame very day, give or take a month

VIK When ye were hitching?

COLIN Just returned from

RORY *sarcastic*) You were hitching?

COLIN Traversing a continent adjacent to this yin

RORY What in these sandals

COLIN Hey, you're improving

BILL On with the yarn

COLIN Ye see everywhere I landed there was this confrontation with the CNN news.

RORY *aside to BILL*) Dont fall for that one

VIK You tell them COLIN boy

COLIN No kidding ye lads, the people living there, the indigenous populace, they had all these honeycomb wee dwellings in the mountains wherein they've eked their living for nigh on three millennia, their ancestors before them. So I'm standing there marvelling at the spectacle when all of a sudden this guy in a cool suit starts chasing me up and down mountains, no kidding ye, forty days and forty nights we were at it

VIK Were the biblical associations lost on you?

COLIN Certainly not, that was why I ran so fucking fast - up and down these mountains I was chased, they trailed me over dusty offbeat paths and highrise peaks, all in the offchance I would inform of my activities for the folks back home, and this guy bringing up the rear, a technician chappie, with this big fucking gigantic huge fucking arch boomer in his hands.

*BILL excited laugh*

COLIN Yeh BILL, a fucking great big arch boomer [*also laughs*] Ye wouldnay believe it! Mental highjinks right enough

RORY *interested in spite of himself*) Where was it?

COLIN Beg pardon?

RORY Where was it ye were?

COLIN Distant, very distant.

VIK Thousands of miles distant.

COLIN See these very sandals I'm wearing, I was wearing them then - in fact that was where I burst the damn buckle - going up a mountainous path with layer upon layer of crumbling larva larvae feminine, stones so-called. But I knew it wasn't stones.

BILL *awed*] Yeh...

COLIN It was the crust-infested last resting place of tribilliorum generations of reptilious wee hideous insects. Crustaceous yins BILL. Fucking millions of them man no kidding ye!

BILL *slowly*) I know what ye're saying COLIN, it's like how we're brought up as children... If people stuck to their own location; Scotland, Wales, the Caribbean, Africa, the Indian sub-continent, regional Europe, Ireland, South East Asia, the Hebrides, Bute, instead of coming to this land of the free

RORY *amazed*) He's no saying that at all

BILL *slowly*) If they just stuck closer to home, if they could just stick to that...then, then their fights and struggles, they would be shared; they would have their topics in common; bad housing and the lack of recreational activities

COLIN Spot on BILLY my boy, coffins that fit rather than the other way about .  
BILL We know about coffins.

RORY Shut up BILL christ almighty

BILL We used to work in hospitals

COLIN I know

RORY *aside*) Sssh

VIK It's okay RORY, he's Armed Forces as well

BILL See what we discovered: bodies, they're being mysteriously drained of life's fluid

RORY Shut up man

BILL We did but honest, they were being drained of life's very fluid

VIK *quiet authority*] Flu-ids, correction Flu-ids

BILL Flu-ids?

VIK Plural, yeh.

COLIN Tell them VIK

VIK In a recent dental health journal there was up-to-date terrorist research indicating there may be several varieties. Even in people's teeth; this is also where they're discovering fluids, all these bright young research assistants in their private sector think-tanks. They get grants from capitol hill, for a lot of exciting new work: is political dissent genetic? Should the IMF fund the faith-based science for third world countries.

RORY Fluids in teeth?

VIK Yeh. When I read about the findings in question I couldnay believe my fucking peepers.

COLIN That was how he dragged me into it, to verify if said peepers were playing up

VIK But they werenay

COLIN They certainly werenay

VIK COLIN's good at medical findings

COLIN It's a pastime

VIK Naw but ye do put things to the test, that was how ye got a start in beside me

COLIN True. See lads I thought I had failed the interview. How wrong can ye be. Mind you I had made the age-old error, I based my inference on the subjective

VIK Some people never learn

COLIN I hang my head

BILL What ye were saying about plural fluids but, it's the first I heard anything about it, is it classified?

COLIN I dare say it will be. It's a fact of dental record all the same.

RORY *sarcastic*] Not much you dont know eh!

VIK On the subject of hospitals and private sector think-tanks he's good, hospitals and state-security, mine's music and women

COLIN Heh as a matter of interest, an elderly lady was telling me she was down the medical centre just the other afternoon and the place was hoaching with poor creatures, most of them dying, out on their feet. Rude health has become a luxury, not just for the rude masses, that was what she said to me.

VIK I know that selfsame elderly lady, she's alive and kicking this very minute, she was this morning anyway, I saw her down the Old Kent Road. Her daughter is extra-special by the way. Linda's her name. She wears seamless garments

COLIN The beautiful Linda. *(walks restlessly)* I need to exercise my sandals *[his foot kicks into a bottle on the floor]* Heh what's this? *[lifts up the bottle and displays it to VIK]* A bottle of brandy

RORY *muttered aside*] Oh christ

COLIN I wonder where that came from?

VIK Excellento senior

COLIN Any glasses?

BILL *exchanges glances with RORY*] Yeh...

RORY *mutters*] Fuck...

*BILL goes to cupboard and gets glasses. COLIN hands him the bottle and BILL pours the brandy.*

COLIN *watches intently*] Glug glug glug

BILL Here *[hands each man a glass of brandy, and a bottle of water, and they add some to the brandy]*

VIK A little water. Excellento senior excellento

COLIN What a wonderful life, one can find bottles of brandy at all hours of the morning, one stumbles upon liquid cargoes perchance willy-nilly

VIK Things is looking up for the ordinary card-carrying member *[aside]* If a certain guy would just pass the other stuff occasionally

COLIN *WC Fields voice*] Precisely ma boy, we'd be well away

RORY *suspiciously*) What?

COLIN Nothing

BILL I thought we had finished the beer

RORY What?

VIK *amused*) Have you been hiding the beer

RORY Naw

BILL *chuckles*) Aye ye have

VIK Maybe he hid it beside the brandy!

COLIN Or else beside the soup, the mysterious soup

BILL *laughs*] The soup's coming

RORY Aye is it!

BILL *amused*) Of course it is

COLIN Some things last forever if naybody uses it.

BILL Cheers [*sips*]

COLIN Slainte [*sips*]

VIK Yea and verily. (*sips brandy with relish*) Ever wonder about how incredible alcohol is?

COLINb It's its absence worries me. How would we get about on the planet without it? Yer energy would get sapped until finally one is tossed into the cold blue yonder

VIK And ye might be starving never mind gasping for a drink man I'm talking about really starving.

COLIN Well ye are starving, you are so very very starving. So exceedingly starving: so exceedingly starving ye havent a square ounce of thermal opposition left, not to face these damn elements, they're all over the place.

VIK Then the knowledge hitting ye, there is no respite, not from the icy needles. And nor after that the icy blanket which is set to fall about one's shoulders

COLIN Folding itself round ye in the tightest most snugly secure wrap one could imagine, way beyond the strange cosiness of a run-of-the-mill straitjacket.

RORY Now ye're talking - straitjacket - ever wore one?

COLIN Often.

RORY What a surprise.

COLIN Ye know what's a surprise to me? it's like every time ye hear a part-time artiste in a part-time band of players a whole world is taken for granted, an entire world; similar to a closed entry system but not quite, because it's more than that, and the only person that doesn't know it is the artiste himself, especially when he doubles up as lead guitar. It's like a subtext.

VIK Exactly. That's it exactly, a subtext. Shake, I'm VIK

COLIN I'm COLIN, pleased to meet ye (*they shake hands*). Boy meets girl BILL ye see, it's fundamental to rock music. And to most art, it's one of the paradoxes.

RORY Here we go with the bullshit claptrap

VIK The paradoxes central to rock music RORY, that's what COLIN's talking about; boy meets girl

BILL Boy loses girl

VIK Correct - girl finds boy

COLIN Boy goes in the huff

VIK Girl apologises, her guilt increases

BILL *laughs*] he lives happily ever after

COLIN Exactimon mein herr, we dont find out what happens to her; the kind of everyday sentimental shite ye find in hollywood movies. The problem is, for all you musicians, you have to keep playing these boy meets girl songs for the rest of yer lives and then for fuck sake ye wake up one morning and ye're a fucking grandpapa... fifty years of age, jesus christ sixty years of age.

VIK That's how I packed it in

RORY So ye wound up getting a job in the Armed Forces!

VIK Well it happens to a lot of folk, ye want to sing adult songs about adult experience but it's too late and ye find ye canna. COLIN's quite right about that, I go along with him every inch of the route, though that selfsame route be cracked and dry

COLIN Life's eternal highjinks, they're always there

RORY Crap, ye dont know what ye're talking about

COLIN Rock music: a force for radical change.

RORY *angrily*] Aye it can be

VIK Bless me brother

BILL Ah now VIK, have you forgotten about the blues?

VIK Rock music aint the blues

RORY *angrily*] This argument is shite, I'm no getting involved in it

VIK Where's the brandy?

RORY It isnay even an argument

COLIN What is an argument, said jesting Pilate

VIK Verily brother

BILL Maybe ye'll rediscover yer enthusiasm in the not so dim and distant future [*chuckles*]

COLIN Aye VIK, maybe ye've a life still to come, maybe this is all a rehearsal, like the good book says.

VIK The last person that says that to me was a History teacher, I remember her well - some apparition - she wore a brightly coloured cardigan with two buttons missing, but my my my could she mark an essay. I dont think she even knew what a seamless garment looked like

BILL *grins*) Never mind wore one. [*passes the brandy*] Here's a brandy

VIK Slainte

COLIN Thanks BILL [*toasting*] Here's to the eternal verities: peace, wealth and security

RORY *amused* ) Where does he get them eh?

VIK It's the time of night, plus the fact he's only stating the obvious

COLIN And we should treasure the obvious; in fact the obvious requires treasuring.

RORY Does it?

COLIN *breathless whistle, like the sound of the wind*

RORY So what is it ye do in the Armed Forces matey?

COLIN *chuckles*) Matey! [*sings*] Di di di di di di di di dididi dididi di (*while doing a sailor's jig*) Hey BILL, I feel like giving yer pal here a wee pat on the muzzle. I'll rephrase that, I feel like giving him a kiss

RORY What is it you actually do?

COLIN My best.

RORY I knew ye'd say that.

COLIN I knew ye knew. Ye see there's a lot of interesting phenomena about if ye want to behold them; and then if ye want to express yer thoughts about them, yer beliefs relative to them, whatever, if ye dont then good luck, who wants to set down laws, especially about phenomena

VIK He used to listen to rock music all the time

COLIN That's right, when I was a student, it was a thing we done. A couple of the folk we listened to were dead, except if they were white, if we listened to them, they had to be not dead. That includes Elvis Presley.

RORY Elvis Presley, I find that interesting.

COLIN I knew ye would.

RORY He would have been dead

VIK Yeh, but not to them, this is the fascinating point about it, that's what COLIN's talking about, these students all thought he was alive and kicking ass somewhere in Atlanta, Georgia, leading some remote bunch of christian fascists on behalf of a covert arm of state, in some sweet-smelling field training camp, doing his direct representative of the people's champion here on earth, hallelujah.

COLIN It was a major discovery, I'm talking about art and students and how it relates

to existence, not yer own existence but somebody else's, somebody far away.

VIK The farther away the better

BILL Ye talking about the generality?

VIK I'm talking about the farther away the better

BILL *awed*] Yeh...yeh...

RORY Bullshit. Hey COLIN - is that yer name?

COLIN Bullshit, yeh. Har har har. RORY...?

RORY *guarded*) What?

COLIN Hallelujah

RORY Fuck off

COLIN Naw seriously but it's politics; a perfect example of the exploitation that goes on throughout the entire art industry and that includes the so-called artistes; all upfront blatant as well, and yous musico guys...well, one hesitates to continue but I mean seriously RORY...

RORY *guarded*] What?

COLIN Hallelujah.

RORY Fuck off

VIK *chuckles*] Good man yerself

COLIN Slainte!

VIK Slainte! (*swallows the lot*)

BILL He swallowed the lot

COLIN That's because of his feet [*points to VIK's feet*]

BILL I know, I can never believe the size of them.

COLIN They may defy the known world but they certainly exist. Also he's a grape-lover, a grape-lover from way back.

VIK *relishing the brandy*] Aaahh, a glow has entered one's being... strange how one drink is never enough

COLIN *flurried movement, shielding his drink from VIK*) Yeh well restrain yerself ye're not getting mine

BILL There might be a couple of drops left in the bottle

RORY *annoyed*] Christ there was half a bottle there

BILL *chuckles*] Here VIK give me yer glass

VIK No, never let it be said, I wouldnay stoop so low

COLIN Fucking limbo-dancer

BILL Heh VIK I thought ye had got off with that woman earlier on

RORY The red-headed babe

COLIN *sighs, and aside*) Red headed babe, this is humiliating.

VIK Her boyfriend was in the bar, he came back.

RORY Did ye know he was there?

VIK I did not, no

BILL She drinks in *The Rose & Crown*, I've seen her a lot.

RORY Ye're mixing her up with that other lassie, her that wears the sunglasses.

BILL Naw I'm no

RORY Aye ye are

COLIN He's no

RORY What you talking about, you dont fucking know

COLIN *shrugs to VIK*) In fact she's a Kerry woman, that self same red headed babe, or is she from Barra? What does it matter if it's soup ye're talking about, she could soon tell you a thing or two, that selfsame woman. If ye knew coastal cliffs ye would know that immediately.

RORY What?

BILL She's a social worker.

VIK She isnay a social worker she works in Barclay's Bank.

COLIN Now she does, she didnay used to.

RORY How come you know her then?

VIK Yeh COLIN...?

BILL You dont know her. (*chuckles*) You're just rabbiting.

RORY His rabbiting gets on my nerves. A woman like that, ye think he would know her!

VIK Answer the man

COLIN (*sighs*) Okay but it's lengthy. Ye see there was this old grandfather of mine, he was from the islands. I'm talking about the old islands, way back before the forced dispersals. As a boy he not only went out with the herring-fishers, he also went out with the what-dye-call-them, these birds that squirt ink at ye when ye try to save their fucking life, they live down the face of these sheer rock cliffs. And then if they fall to the ground, kaput - they can't get up again, ye've got to fling them into the air, poor wee fuckers, they cannay fly off the ground, they need their ayn wee air eddies. So ye grab them up and try to hold them without squashing them to death, then they turn round and squirt ink at ye, and ye're just trying to save their life! There's a parable in that.

VIK Ye see RORY it was boys like COLIN's old grandfather that made the soup on these boats for all the old sailors.

COLIN He had to catch the ink and cook it, that was the only available sustenance, that and fishheads and innards, then they crunched out the eyes, icicles hanging from their beard, they wrung them out and added pepper.

RORY What ye talking about?

COLIN It's obvious.

BILL (*quite excited*) COLIN you want to visit Hull

COLIN Pardon?

BILL Where the whalers come from. You'll see it all down there.

COLIN All what?

BILL All the stuff, they've got it all there, all ye want to know about fishing, especially if it's seals. Six boats a day, that's how many they had in there once upon a time, and the women came down from Scotland, they followed the fleet.

COLIN Is that right?

BILL Yeh.

RORY Ye mean ye didnay know that?

BILL Hull, that's where the whalers went as well. Ye want to go and see their museum ye'd discover things of great interest.

COLIN Mm.

RORY So, that's us found something you dont know then eh?

COLIN Mm

BILL *chuckles*) Dont take it bad

COLIN You're a good guy BILL

RORY So you went to college with old VIK here did you?

VIK He did. Worst days of our life. The dichotomy took off from the very instand we entered the portals, I went in body and he went in soul. Even then it was only for a trial period

COLIN A probationary spell. But we gave it every chance

RORY So what did ye do when ye were there?

COLIN Our theses ye mean?

VIK Tell the man

COLIN We presented them with the physicality of the One. It baffled the professors. Thus we became the men ye see today, he was somewhere and I was somewhere

VIK If he was in one spot then I was in the one next to it

COLIN If not the exact adjacent. Identity was our substance

BILL Yeh...

VIK If I had got there before him, and if I was in front, and if the first and also the second, then he was nay far behind. Is that a fair statement?

COLIN It certainly is, one can say many things, very many things, very very many things

BILL Yeh. (*slowly*) I see it... Ye know when I was a boy...I used to hear my uncles and aunties talking about Elvis and the Beatles and the Rolling Stones and all that malarkey... In some ways ye know I reckon that's how I got into sex, through rock and roll...

COLIN There's a talking point

RORY So what like is it sleeping with a man?

COLIN Ye asking me uniquely?

RORY What else

COLIN Well now, okay. I take it ye must know it's sexual, that it would be the same thing with your brother, for him as well as me, that that would be sexual.

RORY I've only got a sister.

COLIN That would be sexual too.

RORY What would?

COLIN Sleeping with yer sister.

RORY Naw it would nay.

COLIN Well it should be. Nobody should shy away from experience.

RORY What is he on about now, apart from evading the point!

VIK Belief, what else

COLIN Let me tell you about belief. Ye see I formed an opinion when I was a boy.

RORY I dont want to hear it.

BILL Dont listen to him COLIN, tales of childhood are always interesting.

COLIN Ah ye're the broth of the boy yerself now BILLY boy listen and I'll tell ye: see there was a house across the back from me up where I lived in Glasgow. Like Rome it was

built on seven hills, they've aye disguised the fact because it clues ye into their beelzebubian origins.

BILL *pause*) On with the story!

COLIN I've lost my drift

VIK *laughs*

COLIN Yeh...so in that house lived a family who were enemies of my family. The two sides feuded, it went on for years. I steered clear as best I could. A lot of people prefer an easy life, I never have, which is not to say that myself and suicide have been like peas in a pod. There's no need to discuss self loathing, I found that out at an early age. But the feud itself seemed childish, incredibly naive. And also boring I have to say, even if it sounds like a criticism of my family. So I steered clear, I let them get on with it.

RORY Yeh?

COLIN Yeh, you're a perceptive chap Rupert, considering ye take nothing to do with politics, no offence, a lot of folk prefer the easy life.

RORY Rupert?

BILL RORY

COLIN RORY, sorry. Yeh but ye're quite right, fuck improvisation, the lust for perfection, and so on. If I was an artiste I'd be exactly the same. Like I say, I was a great disappointment to my old man who was a bigotted protestant whereas I rejected the ideology appropriate to that particular prejudice. I just wasn't interested. There was an additional factor, the wee boy of the family we feuded with, I was in love with him, although that came later. What is that post hoc procter quote from the latin?.

VIK Post hoc procter

COLIN Spot on ya elitist bastard. Seriously but chaps, this was a classic romeo and juliet situation, given our comparative youth, we were about 11 or 12 at the time. His name was BILLY as well by the way, so there's an unusual coincidence. Life's full of coincidences for some folk. No for me but, my life is different, there's scarcely a coincidence from one day to the next, it's a constant exploration, a navigation of never-before charted waters, a continuing trial by mental ordeal. [*pause*] I've flummoxed myself. What was I saying?

RORY A boy you loved.

BILL A romeo and juliet situation.

COLIN Yeh, classical, except of course being only about 11 or 12 years old at the time pledging-the-troth was an unknown concept. Also, I'm embarrassed to say, it was an Eastern Star situation and that makes a difference, I don't know whether you know that or not, being middle class, but after one of the reformations of the Christian church matters of lust and nature were more outlawed than ever for the working classes back home in dear old Bonny Scotland

BILL Bunny Scotland?

COLIN No Bunny Scotland Bonny Scotland, I'm talking about the Calvinist workers BILL, from wee boys to auld men, sexual innuendo reigned supreme and burnings were a commonplace, veritabilis.

VIK I'm finding this unbearable, it's like a horrific crescendo to my ears. It's gony end in scholastic philosophy

COLIN Aw VIK

VIK Time we were leaving.

BILL What about the story?

VIK Fuck the story I canna cope with it

BILL Finish it

COLIN Ach

BILL There's time yet

COLIN Time... (*sighs*)

BILL Just till the soup appears

COLIN The soup the soup, the enigma of the soup

VIK How long is this soup gony be?

BILL Ten minutes

COLIN Even I don't believe that one

BILL There's still some drops of brandy

VIK (*with relish*) Drops of brandy...

BILL Well, drop of brandy, there's at least one of them

VIK Do yer best. But let me warn yez all, I find the story suffocating

RORY It's a pity ye've stopped playing music VIK.

COLIN He's not stopped playing music. He's just stopped doing it for purposes of bread and pudding. Oftimes of an evening, when we're away on military manoeuvres, he takes out the old geetar and strums us a ditty. They're usually quite sad and melancholic, they remind the rest of us platoon-members about bygone times, when we were riding the range and the lonesome coyote was yowling

RORY *sarcastic grunt*

COLIN Aye we've all got to go...

RORY Give us a break!

COLIN It's just for some of us we'd prefer it later rather than sooner, that's if we're got the option. Mind you I'm not really caring, I just kid on I am, there's only so much a man can do and it's no more than his best.

VIK He's spent his life lurching under severe burdens. That's the main reason he joined the armoured wing of the overseas security industry, he got sick to death collecting waifs and strays. For a guy like him formalised forms of violence can be healthy

BILL Is that right COLIN?

COLIN If the circumstances are given

RORY Sounds like fucking fascism that

COLIN It's just diplomacy

VIK Everything ye think ye need as a responsible moral unit remains that bit out of reach, never quite within hailing distance.

COLIN That's the beauty of it.

VIK If ever you're looking for such factors there's one of them

COLIN Take later this morning, us two, we'll be out there wielding the heavy truncheon.

VIK And even to get to our strategic onslaught we're forced to walk, the entire platoon of us, we're down to the last coin. Mind you but that's the way we like it

COLIN Plus it's miles away so when one says walk, that's what one means, we canna even hail a taxi. One of these fine days we'll find a field of action less than a stone's throw from one's place of domicility, but presently one always seem to do the exact opposite. I dont know how we manage it but we always do. So chaps, ye're definitely better leading your kind of life rather than ours because ours is open to question, I make no bones about it.

VIK So we better make a start

COLIN Groan

VIK You're trouble is ye're half snazzled with the booze.

COLIN *assumes an american accent*) I aint half snazzled with no booze.

VIK Ye're disgruntled but

COLIN It's you that's disgruntled

VIK Let's move

COLIN Naw, I'm cold. I'm cold, I'm hungry and I'm rooked. And the thread's bust on my buckles.

VIK That happened on another continent

COLIN So what

VIK The elements are there to be braved

COLIN Five merr minutes on his comfy chair, that's all I'm asking.

VIK *sighs loudly*

COLIN Please daddy

VIK Away back to sleep and gie us peace ya naughty boy.

COLIN But I dont want to go to sleep

VIK That's what they all say

RORY He says the soup'll be ready soon

VIK Now ye're talking.

COLIN Let me tell ye about talking. But first I'll finish my story

RORY *aside*) Which fucking one!

COLIN Christ you're a killer. Int he a killer, eh BILL, this mate of yours

BILL *chuckles*) On with the story. Not just for our sake but for that of our children. And our children's children

COLIN You love stories dont ye

BILL I do

VIK So do I, I just demand the right to fall asleep now and again. The right not to listen, I demand that tae

COLIN Bastard...

BILL Come on COLIN, Romeo and Juliet

COLIN BILL BILL BILL ye're a fucking gem and I loe ye dearly. Okay then, where was I

BILL I think it was one cold night in December, the depth of deep midwinter

VIK Bleak bleak was the hour and chilled the tumbler

COLIN It was, precisely, it was the christmas party. And all the family had to wear dressing-up clothes. Maybe we didnay but I seem to remember we all had these paper hats on jees oh, and there was all these kinds of what-d'ye-call-them - french cakes - they had fancy icing on them, confectionery. The auld girl, my maw, she was a dab hand at the cake-baking. Whereas the auld man, he was the exact fucking opposite. But, paradoxically or not, he still insisted all us weans got involved in all these crazy social events.

BILL *chuckles*) I know the scene

COLIN I think it eased his social conscience in regard to political activities, he scabbed during a couple of strikes at the factory where he worked; he was known for it. That was what I had to put up with when I was a boy, having a known scab for an auld man. He had nay shame whatsoever. Never happier than when he was forcing us to enrol for some civic cultural occasion, where we had to dress up in nice white clothes for a visiting member of the royal family, the upper echelons of the regional constabulary, whatever, that was his scene and he was neither proud nor ashamed of it.

I mind at one christian sort of action forum we were all dressed up as wee supermen and robin hoods and florence nightingales. A whole team of us weans; boys and girls, lads and

lassies; maybe fifty of us, astonishingly bizarre. The lord provost of Glasgow was there as well, with his chains of state and full regalia, an ace socialist from the council labour party, on leave from the P2 order of the Knights of Columba. And they had this 70s music blasting out, that tuh twang tuh twang stuff that goes on forever and hardly ever changes; that kind of crappy sameness all the time

BILL Yeh yeh...yeh...!

COLIN That's the music they liked and that's the music they played. In fact it was a need and their needs is another man's freedom

VIK Rousseau's second principle

COLIN A twisted version granted but enacted nevertheless

BILL Now ye're talking

COLIN Honest to god and I'm no kidding ye, it's songs from an aulder generations: I Dont Have A Wooden Heart, Blue Rain in Acapulco, She Loves You Yeh Yeh Yeh, Stand By Your Man.

RORY That's 60s!

COLIN 60s yeh, what'd I say?

BILL *pause*) 70s

COLIN Yeh, 70s, so there ye are, the Eastern Star old fellow that's what I'm talking about, it was their christmas party. And when one looks back on it it was funny how come they were playing this kind of music, the crappiest music ye can imagine, birdy birdy cheep cheep or something, the kind of thing british politicians like to dance tae at the end of their annual conference, the one before god save the queen, or maybe it is god save the queen.

VIK It depends

COLIN True. Us weans didnay know where to look but. Honest to jesus this was weird with a capital w. And it was gieing us a right showing up in front of the royal family, no to mention the chief of police christ almighty I mean we were expecting a protestant hymn if we couldnay get The Sash, and personally I was hoping for the dambusters' march like they play on the 12th in memory of whatever it is

VIK The death of the whales in the polar arctic

COLIN Right

VIK I think that was what the composer intended it for anyway, I'm talking about in the first place, when he sat down and wrote the original. No mind? It was just after that guy walked out from the tent to do the honourable thing.

BILL The doctor

COLIN Oh aye, aye. A never-forgotten moment.

RORY So there yez were all huddled together eh, wee boys and lassies!

COLIN That's right - on massont - in our wee red, white and pinky-blue costumery, blushing our wee faces off; and in some ways that's exactly it between these white rock singers and the impact they had on the music industry

RORY Hoh!

VIK *chuckles*

COLIN Naw, honest, I'm no kidding ye, never mind the auld blues' players, the auld delta team.

RORY Come off it

COLIN It's as true as I'm standing here

*pause*

RORY Yeh I mean if ye're gony start eh...eh...

VIK *raises the glass*) Slainte companero

*pause*

COLIN It's as true as I'm standing here

*pause*

RORY Shit, I've only forgot what I was about to say.

COLIN Well keep trying, it might be a nugget.

RORY *irritation*) Yeh, you are a comedian.

COLIN It's interesting ye should say that because my old man had a habit of saying exactly the opposite, a straight splice down the middle; in many ways you remind me of

him. Do you wear button-hole braces by the way, I know it's a personal question but one of the factors about personal questions is how so often when ye dismantle them, I mean bit by bit, what ye're left with - or rather, what ye might discover - re niggling factors, once ye examine what's left is, that on the whole folk are disappointing,

VIK Having said that, it's a mistake to have high ideals, a grave mistake, dreamers and artistes are prone to that, so they say.

RORY What about actors and musicians?

COLIN Ye're no that naive

RORY You definitely are a cheeky chappy.

COLIN (*chuckles*) Here we go, another example of how folk let personal issues highjack a dialogue. How come people dont just enter into the rationalist position, forget the subjective, let's talk and explore, begin from first principles. After all...

VIK It takes two to tangle.

COLIN Exactimon m'sieur

BILL (*pause and slowly*) Yeh COLIN, I know what ye're talking about... back in the old days...and not so long ago when it comes down to it...the christians, they had this incredible grip on the world...the parts of the world they had access to...it was an amazing time in the existence of humanity, we were fucked for a thousand years

COLIN (*in W C Fields mode*) Fucked for a thousand years young fellow

BILL (*pause*) The honest thinkers

COLIN Good and true my boy good and true

BILL And we're still no out of it, we're still unable to communicate without this breakdown happening...this lapse...it's a lapse

VIK The irrationality of half-baked schemes and analogues, metaphorical positions and a variety of animus, animi, neuter. Verily I say unto you, in order that we may not be moving.

COLIN Sit still and ye're dead

VIK (*pause*) My glass is now empty

BILL (*slowly*) That's what happens in this world

COLIN Ye might want to stop for a five minute rest but if ye do ye better watch it

BILL There's always these dirty bastards waiting to spring the trap.

VIK What's a synonym for dirty bastard?

BILL Yeh...trust nobody...nobody.

RORY Ye dont mean that

COLIN It's preemptive strikes we're talking about, you should know that better than anybody I mean to say that old fucker with the long black coat, he's round every corner, all set to cut swathes out yer ankles with that mammoth scythe he carries. That's how ye're always better off taking transport if ye can afford it, public transport I'm talking about, less chance of waking up on a cloud.

VIK *quietly, amused*) COLIN COLIN COLIN

RORY How long you known him VIK?

VIK Who? (*yawning*)

COLIN He's forgotten my name, that's what happens to intimate relationships. It's one of our only saving graces, as human beings I mean, it's the exact same thing when ye hang onto a joint.

VIK Theoretically

COLIN Aye but theoretically's something.

BILL What's up?

COLIN Nothing, just the world, it's full of non sequiturs, and that was nay one of them, as per fucking usual

VIK *intones and genuflects*) Yea and verily I say unto you, non non sequitu - a - um; where in negation the second part of the statement bears not no relation to the first, yet in answering the second yea let the first be assumed as the case, even where this second part is left unsaid, as in the foregoing example which fits in with an emerging overall pattern, while at the same time the internal structure is becoming apparent, is becoming apparent, slowly and seepily...

RORY *puzzled*) Seepily?

COLIN Indeedy do, ye have to invent words if not concepts

VIK And in that there exists an obvious coherence.

COLIN Which ye dont often find in good craft or even honest art, although that's a prejudice on my part, given it's based on direct experience and that's always indisputable. My advice is find yerself a good woman and settle down; forget all this actors and musicians' malarkey.

BILL *chuckling*) It take ye into bad company

COLIN *moves to him and proffers his hand*) BILL, let me grasp ye by the hand. Ye've had many a position reinforced this night I'll warrant.

BILL Ye not waiting for the soup?

COLIN Seize us yer hand. *(they shake)* Peace and security brother, pass the message onto yer mate; on second thoughts I'll do it myself. RORY of the Two-Face

VIK *aside*) It's a translation from the gaelic

COLIN Here's my hand for an enjoyable evening.

RORY *attempted jocularity*) You still looking for a battle matey.

COLIN *begins a jig and sings*) Di di di di di di di di di. *(stops)* Not at all. Let us shake off the coils and cobwebs of infratricide, har har har, give me yer hand. *(pause)* Naw, seriously

VIK Aint he a one

COLIN Ye're a caution yerself mucker. Mind you it's a precarious time for the armoured division of the overseas security industry, it's all yoicks and tally-ho

VIK The profession's gone to the dogs

COLIN I remember the good old days when continents were ten a penny. RORY, are ye shaking hands with me? a forlorn stranger, an itinerant peripatetic

RORY *irritation*) What ye talking about?

VIK Just shake the guy's hand

RORY *sighs, pause, sniffs*) Aye okay

*Just as they meet COLIN abruptly withdraws his hand*

RORY *angrily*] Fuck sake!

COLIN On third thoughts (*smacking his hands together*) It's best not to shake. I'm talking about for the two of us, our mutual self esteem.

RORY Jesus Christ

VIK Dont get angry, it's a test of will

COLIN Honest, ye'll thank me later. (*pause*) You coming VIK? (*COLIN steps to the outside door and opens it*) Christ it's cold, dark and scary outside

BILL *whispers*) Bleak bleak was the hour, and chilled the tumbler

COLIN I thought it was a figment of the imagined murmuring. (*He continues to stand there at the open door*)

VIK *quietly*) Breathe in. (*pause*) Set to with a will

BILL Oxygenus

COLIN Mmm... (*takes a deep breath then steps out of room; pause; he returns in immediately, and shivers*) I didn't disappear after all, what would the good Bishop say to that...

VIK Ye might be a masochist but ye quite like yerself.

COLIN Yeh... It's these open doors VIK, they numb one's very vertebrae

VIK *sighs*) I know. (*quietly*) Strange how that first step is always so damn fucking impossebleh. Where's my coat?

COLIN Ye dont have one

VIK Dear oh dear, I might have known

BILL Yez dont have to go. What about finishing yer story?

COLIN *quietly*) It wasn't a story BILL more a sad musing

BILL I guarantee the soup is coming

VIK We've had such guarantees before.

*suddenly the outside door creaks and opens wider*

*All stare at it*

COLIN *whispers*) Oh jesus, is that damn door opening of its own accord?

VIK *slowly, stares at door*] Yeh...

COLIN *mild surprise*) Well well...

VIK Ye're no surprised are ye?

COLIN *slowly*) No really, I dont suppose. It's that time after all

VIK My eyes have dimmed they cannot see

*door creaks again*

*All stare at it*

COLIN *matter-of-factly*) Oh well...

VIK These niggling factors... *(clears his throat)*

COLIN They're niggles but, just niggles

VIK True, true... *(chuckles)*

VIK *clears his throat. The door creaks again*

COLIN Forward

*COLIN and VIK take one step towards the door*

Lights out.

END