

JOHN  
COOPER  
CLARKE  
TEN YEARS  
OPEN NECKED  
IN AN  
SHIRT



VINTAGE

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TEN YEARS IN  
AN OPEN NECKED  
SHIRT

Illustrated by Steve Maguire

VINTAGE BOOKS  
London

## About the Book

### **Punk. Poet. Pioneer.**

The Bard of Salford's seminal collection is as scabrous, wry & vivid now as it was when first published over 25 years ago.

## STEVE MAGUIRE

The marvellous illustrations herein  
Were rendered by my great friend, Steve Maguire.  
I shall always remain grateful for his undervalued genius.

John Cooper Clarke  
September 2012

to young macdonald  
(the one without the farm)



# ten years in an open necked shirt

Lenny Siberia was the bastard offspring of Captain Africa (the lard mogul) and Tracy. The captain disappeared without Tracy who perished alone with her diamond collection, the victim of a mau-mau hit squad, leaving Lenny alone with the one thing money can't buy poverty

He was discovered at one year old by a wayward nun; he had been living in the dumb waiter of the zambezi juice bar Sister James (for it was she) lost no time in mailing the child, by first-class parcel post, to a friend in Brussels. Fortunately he was erroneously delivered to the Eros Luxury Club, a converted charabang in the bowels of Manchester's la quatrième latin.

The proprietor, a swarthy ill-mannered character of Armenian origin, received the package with a bestial grunt. Taking a curved knife from a canteen of curved knives, he slashed it open Lenny gazed into the face of this his first stranger and what he saw was pure malevolence

He ran down flattened streets patrolled by aimless amputees through a world of refugees, out of the cold war into the deep freeze, he ran out of money, he ran into trouble

He was adopted by Sheba and Rex, a pair of alsatian dogs who regarded the boy with an uneasy ambivalence They lived in an Art Deco cocktail cabinet by the bicycle sheds of Salford Metropolitan Police compound They were devout Catholics.

It was arranged for Lenny to attend the School of Our Lady of the Seven Robes of Gold by the Garden of Sorrows in the Vale of Tears which was run with teutonic efficiency

by the little daughters of the sick under the iron rule of Mother Cyrene.

Mother Cyrene was everything rancid to Lenny her mouth a malignant slit in the murderous mask she called a face, her cheesy breath steaming up his spectacles, her eyes like mobile ball bearings - their colour left a mechanical taste in the mouth

Daily religious instruction furnished his vacant mind with tales of treachery, morbid betrayals, oceans pink with the blood of multitudes, saints looking to the sky their living bodies smashed by hammers before the alien idols of the heathen Incense filled his nostrils with the fatal breath of ghosts, hermaphrodite choirs droned in his ears.

Each student could elect to spend their free time in one of three ways sporting activities, visiting the sick or in the service of the Knights of the Sacred Orchid. The latter seemed the least demanding, the most hygienic and it also appealed to the lad's naive sense of chivalry.

The Knights of the Sacred Orchid held their thrice-weekly routines in the spacious open-plan lounge of the sinister Raoul, who affected the manner of the proto-fascist with psychotic attention to detail His navy blue hair sleeked with ancient grease, his meagre Don Ameche moustache waxed stiff like the legs of a dead fly. He went nowhere without the chums.

The chums were namely Horace and Boris, the brothers Morris, a titanic duet each in possession of a powder-blue safari suit and arms of anthropoidal length Their physical immensity fully emphasized the stiff angular grace of the nifty Raoul who now led the way into the lounge

The lounge was furnished by three rows of seven leatherette easy chairs faced by one formica table The curtains were the colour of mustard embellished with the bleeding heart motif The walls were hung with colourless daubs The carpet was monotonous, its pattern gave the impression of a small animal crapping at regular intervals

The whole scene was lit by a soundless colour TV and a row of six orange table lamps in which shifting globules of molten wax moved like specimens of rare snot

Enter Mother Cyrene, flanked by the chums and a hyper-reverent Raoul who wore the look of a man obsessed She stood on the table and began

‘Even as I speak a filthy tide of bolshevism issues from the dives of tin pan alley in short the world is a subterranean playground for lounge lizards from every sphere of idleness and crime who their pockets a-jingle with Moscow money go unchecked about their evil business take china cathedrals ransacked churches turned into judo schools I have seen the finest laundries in the world converted into bordellos for the gratification of the lumpenproletariat what with the drink trade on its last legs and the land running fallow for want of artificial manures I leave you with this thought’

Mantovani strings cascaded from the Queen Anne Dinatron stereo system Everyone crossed themselves and left The chums in their lilac Isetta bubble cars headed for the golden finger bowl where they were employed as part-time knuckle merchants

Upon arrival at the compound Lenny, to his horror, found the cocktail cabinet in flames and his devoted guardians, Sheba and Rex, their heads split by faceless vigilantes, slaughtered in the rabies scare of ‘62 ‘Christ! Where do I live?’ thought Lenny in genuine desperation and the heavy traffic seemed to whisper ‘Raoul, Raoul’

So for two weeks Lenny resided in Raoul’s broom cupboard which he shared with an upright vacuum cleaner and Doris the chums’ slender loris, a cute little number redolent of the lazoon of Fireball XL5 fame

Raoul imbued Lenny with the tactile beauty of the luger and the surly prose of Mickey Spillane. Finally, however, it was the prospect of nude fencing lessons that drove Lenny out. Leaving a bag of onions for Doris he left silently via the

laundry chute. That winter he got a job at Barmy Sid's Elephants Graveyard of up-to-the-minute accoutrements, during which time he moved into a bathroom with an all-girl cycle gang. On the back of a Woodbine packet in lipstick he wrote this his first poem:

The mopeds head for the seaside  
Yvonne  
Looked at the trees  
And her stomach turned

'That's arguably the greatest poem in the world today,' enthused a sudden voice Lenny turned round to see a tall, loose-limbed young man dressed in the beatnik anti-mode of the committed; his lank hair was hacked into a careless coup-sauvage style favoured by the existentialists who were A-1 credibilitywise in the flourishing capitals of the EEC Lenny noticed that although his lips moved his voice seemed to come from the side of his neck

His name was Reg Trademark, heir to a crumbling biscuit empire who, by virtue of his artistic endeavours, had secured a position of trust at the Marxist-Leninist ping-pong club He persuaded Lenny to declaim his work the following Thursday at the club's variety night.

Among those appearing were Harry, Barry, Garry and Larry, the Brothers McGarry, reading a three-hour concrete poem entitled 'The Yes No Interlude', a neo-functional mime troupe presenting a two-act play based on 'Stop the World I Wanna Get On'. a novel by Larry Dines concerning the Judaeo-Christian ethic of self as not self. Finally, however, it had to be agreed by all that the night belonged to Lenny, agreed by all but Larry Dines who had been poisoned

In a vain attempt at bourgeois credibility Lenny changed his name to John Cooper Clarke and under this title embarked on a polysyllabic excursion through Thrillsville,

UK. Yes, it was be there or be square as, clad in the slum  
chic of the hipster, he issued the slang anthems of the zip  
age in the desperate esperanto of the bop John Cooper  
Clarke the name behind the hairstyle, the words walk in the  
grooves hacking through the hi-fi paradise of true luxury

## euro communist/gucci socialist

for a modern home and cheap electricity  
streamlined functional neat simplicity  
put yourself on the slum clearance list  
dial a dialectical materialist  
find out what your net potential is  
get married to an existentialist  
don't doubt your own identity  
dress down to a cool anonymity  
the pierre cardin line to infinity  
clothes to climb in the meritocracy  
the new age of benevolent bureaucracy

i like to visit all the big cities  
museums and municipal facilities  
i strive for critical ability  
i thrive on political activity  
i'm alive in a new society  
i arrive quickly quietly  
the car that i drive is the family variety  
roman catholic marxist leninist  
happily married to an eloquent feminist  
a lapsed atheist all my memories  
measure the multitude's deafening density  
psycho citizens are my enemies  
crypto nazis and their remedies  
keep the city silent as the cemetery's  
architectural gothic immensity  
a new name on the less-than-kosher list  
the euro-communist/a gucci socialist

# the ghost of al capone

in a marble room i was alone  
somewhere in the heart of rome  
through gardens long since overgrown  
down old arcades of broken stone  
i met the ghost of al capone  
upon request for some ID  
he said the guardian angels are working for me

i call for a cop he said stop or i shoot  
one or two holes in your three-piece suit  
i say steady on old fruit  
he told me not to be so cute  
consider the river and the concrete boots  
the devil and the deep blue sea  
what you saw you didn't see  
the guardian angels are working for me

the arms the raving arms  
and the hustle and the bustle  
muscle in i get sandwiched  
between the palms  
the waving palms and the banknotes rustle  
like an international language