

**Bourne**  
**toWrite...**  
creative writing  
workshops

## Reflections

by Joe Jackson

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It was the best of times being with long-known souls from greasy-haired school days, reminiscing, joking... knowing that we are tied up together in loyalty, security and love. It was the worst of times being with the same familiar faces doing the same familiar things; drinking, drinking, drinking. Telling the same story fifty different ways. Not knowing of the world outside Brighton, sometimes London, except on surface level holidays, with the same souls, doing the same things, unchanging.

Perhaps it's the me inside of me, calling out in contradiction, challenging what is there, in favour of what isn't. Why if it's the best, must it also be the worst? The walk along Western road can be an exploration of the Sahara, if one uses their imagination. The comfort obtained through the familiar can provide peace quelling desire.

I say these things to myself on the 5B bus into town. I say these things to the friends I have around the world, though I never say these things to their faces.

They are pleasant enough. They are considerate of my feelings. They are there. They don't know what it is to be pleasant; they buy houses with their parents' money, yet joke about unfaithfulness. They can't be considerate of my feelings—only their idea of my feelings. They aren't there. They aren't in the Sahara, never will be.

They have everything they will ever need right here in this pleasant coastal city. Why does this concern me? Who am I to exhort? And if I knew any better, why am I still here?

Like an anaphora, the 5B bus goes round in circles. I look out its window from the top deck, sitting away from the seats with rubbish on them, but not away from the smell. It's cold and sunny. All of the parking bays have cars in them. The houses are grand but my estimation of them quickly fades. When I enter the bar the dizzying heat of the Sahara transforms into something I can describe as just slightly unbearable, because I take off my coat. I am greeted by warm faces, hugs and handshakes. They know me and I know them. They offer to buy me a drink, and I accept. Again and again they offer me their friendship and I accept. Who am I to exhort? I don't. I am pleasant. I ask about their ventures, their girlfriends and boyfriends. I am genuinely curious, and I think they know that. We are having a good time—naturally we order more and more. I am dizzy with intoxication. I should've eaten more beforehand. Why aren't I drinking water? Don't I know of the Sahara? They don't mind, though. They are with me—in the real world. In the world filled with disillusion. In the pleasant coastal city, with its 5B buses, burnt pier and our little old school—how quaint.

It was the best of times.