

PILOT

A Thriller in Modern Dramatic Verse

by S.D. Anugyan

Foreword for the Online Extract

‘Pilot’ was written in the early 1990s. It was performed once in a public theatre in Devon then forgotten about. It was highly experimental, an attempt to bring Elizabethan-style verse back into modern theatre. The production was put on mostly by some very brave young people, and entered into the National Theatre Challenge at the time. The latter’s report stated: ‘The feeling created was that of being allowed as an audience to experience a story, rather than being outrightly told one. I was drawn in by this, as were the rest of the audience, and we effectively became part of the mystery unfolding.’ As the writer-director, my work was done of course by the time the performance started and I snuck into the back row of the balcony. As the abstruse plot unfolded and I wondered if anyone could actually follow it, I overheard a man in the row in front of me turn to his companion and whisper, ‘This is just like Shakespeare.’ ‘That’s what I was thinking,’ was the reply.

While all this was extremely gratifying, I was well aware of where I had gone wrong.

It was my first play and – as most thespians informed me – heavily overwritten. A ‘bravura messiness’ perhaps, as someone once said of a Nicolas Roeg film. One director commented drily that I should have drawn a red pen across every third line. Sadly, I never got the chance to fine-tune as I discovered the zeitgeist was not at all interested in my approach, despite my much more honed ‘On the Edge’ performed a year later; and soon I was to depart from theatrical aspirations altogether as travel, screenplays and novels beckoned.

Yet the magic of that one night remains, for me and hopefully many of the other participants. Indeed, I returned to that same theatre quietly many years later, and a lady who worked there, in telling me of past events mentioned specifically two plays that had once been performed by teenagers in modern dramatic verse. Her eyes lit up as she told me this.

Essentially, after all this time, I believe something wonderful has been retained despite the ‘messiness’, and I hope readers will think so too with what is presented here.

S D Anugyan 2018

Prologue

Enter Carol with lipstick and a handmirror

CAROL: Oh to hold, to feel, to touch
The lion's skin, feel life resounding
Through my cold, exploring fingers, warming me,
Comforting me through all my Siberias,
All my places of enforced isolation.
I would have that which I would have.
I loved Ted, or thought I did. No, I did.
I do. But this new pilot, his friend,
Looks at me as through time, to my soul,
And I, Carol, feel I would have him if not for Ted.
Even the way Ted looks is not the same,
Not that clear mirror of myself anymore.
He has changed without changing,
And I am bored. I know him too well.

(She looks in the mirror)

For you, Carol, I recommend some excitement.
In fact, a little adventure is what we all need.

Exit

Act One Scene 1 – Hampstead Heath, London

Evening. Enter PC1 and PC2

PC1: You see that nouveau block over there, the one with spurs and
columns twisting in pairs, with shards of metal-framing bottle-
windows and caged corners?

PC2: Yeah that's a weird one. Bet it won a prize.

PC1: It looks just like that new station we got in the gym. You know...the one where you're lashed to the block, it bends your body down, then up, down, up, down...for about twenty minutes. 'Least that's how long old Adolf kept me at it.

PC2: Maybe that one there's for King Kong to keep in trim.

PC1: Ha ha. We have monsters enough where we are standing. Voila. Here is the border: one foot in green grass, dry, dead leaves of a finished summer, twigs, insects. Now, my other foot is resolutely framed by concrete, stale urine, empty crisp packets and fag ends. Two worlds, both with dog shit in 'em, mind you, yet vastly different. Order and chaos, ey? But which is which?

PC2: There's someone coming.

PC1: It's a perve, I tell you. He looks like one, walks like one, smells like one, probably tastes like one 'n' all. Thank God we didn't step in 'im. 'Ey, you!

Enter Charlie

CHARLIE: Shit. 'Ullo, lads. Fine night, innit?

PC1: All right, enough of that. We'll do the mouth-work. Up against the wall there, spread your legs...

CHARLIE: I know my rights.

PC1: And you ain't got any, while we do. Ain't you been reading the papers? We are enforced to detain and search anyone we deem necessary. And we deem necessary anyone who looks suspicious, and you certainly do. What you got?

PC2: Wallet, credit cards, some cash, not much. Oh. And a Liverpool Street ticket.

PC1: Where to?

PC2: From. It's from Colchester.

PC1: Colchester, ey? What were you up to there?

CHARLIE: Planning my next assassination attempt.

PC1: Oh yeah, and who was the lucky target?

CHARLIE: Our glorious leader was top of the list, but within the last few minutes she's dropped down two places.

PC2: Watch it!

CHARLIE: I don't know about you guys but all I'm getting from this is an exaggerated sense of self-importance. Can I go now?

PC1: No. We're still suspicious. Or, rather, you're still suspicious.

CHARLIE: I was born that way. Ow! Christ, no wonder they don't let you boys play with guns.

PC1: Keep him occupied while I note down his details.

PC2: What are you doing here at this time? Hey...

Charlie, breathing heavily, turns around

PC2: Get back!

PC1: What's going on?

PC2: I don't know. Aghhh, my stomach...

CHARLIE: It's perfectly all right, it's all okay, everything's just great, going just as it should. You feel calm and relaxed, you just want to lie down and go to sleep. I am going to go away, and you want to take it easy, as if you are having a nice warm bath on a beautiful summer's day. I am going to walk away and you will just relax and allow me to do so, because that is what you want.

(Exit Charlie)

PC1: What happened?

PC2: I don't know. My stomach hurts like hell though. It was so quick, I hardly remember...

PC1: Get up, you wimp. Nothing really important. Let's get on with our job.

PC2: Yeah. Let's go and sit on that bench. We can keep a look out from there. Only another hour...

Exeunt

Act One Scene 2 – Siobhan's house, Vale of Health, Hampstead

Enter Siobhan, Pauline, Philip, Paul and Katy

PHILIP: Have you read 'War and Peace'?

SIOBHAN: Yes, a long time ago.

PHILIP: I really understand Andrei somehow. He...

SIOBHAN: Pauline, is Katy ready yet?

PAULINE: She's resisting a little! Says she wants to watch the movie.

SIOBHAN: What movie?

PAULINE: I don't know. She says it's on late.

SIOBHAN: How does she know? Did someone tell you about a film, Katy? Did Philip tell you about a film?

PHILIP: You know I don't watch television.

SIOBHAN: Well, don't just stand there grinning, you naughty girl, it's time for bed. Pauline will be in a bad mood tomorrow if she has to work too hard; she wanted to go to bed the same time as you and Paul tonight. Any film on late is not for little girls.

PAUL: I'm already going!

KATY: I'm going too.

Pauline, Katy and Paul exit

SIOBHAN: I'll come and kiss you goodnight. (*Doorbell rings*) Who can that be at this time? (*Exit then enter with Charlie*) Goodness gracious. Who would have thought...

CHARLIE: Yeah, well, an odd social call from me would be all right, I thought.

SIOBHAN: Odd social call indeed, it must be years! Give me your coat, Charlie. How's Susan?

CHARLIE: Probably as awful as ever. We split up six months ago.

SIOBHAN: Oh no, really. I'm sorry.

CHARLIE: I'm not.

SIOBHAN: Come in, make yourself at home. Or is this where you say, 'I tried home once and it didn't work out' or something like that. I have a friend here. He's going through my books.

CHARLIE: I don't think it's your books he's interested in.

SIOBHAN: I'm grappling with a divorce at the moment, Charlie. And you know I have principles. Philip, this is Charlie, an old old friend of mine. Charlie, Philip.

PHILIP: Hi.

CHARLIE: Hi.

SIOBHAN: It must have been an absolute millenium since I saw you last, Charlie. How is it coming back to London?

CHARLIE: Revolting. It's like a nightmare.

SIOBHAN: Well, you are a bit of an expert at nightmares. I'll get you a cup of tea. Do you want anything to eat?

CHARLIE: Yeah. When I'm like this I need to pull at the follicle

of my doubts, sit down with a cuppa and chat. Like old times. It's like reading Sanskrit.

SIOBHAN: What? Charlie, you've got worse. Ignore this fool, Philip. Would you like anything?

PHILIP: No, I've got to go now. I want to see that late performance I told you about.

SIOBHAN: Oh yes, of course. I'm sorry I can't go, but you know how it is, the incidence of the time...

PHILIP: Yes, it's fine. Bye.

SIOBHAN: I'll see you out.

PHILIP: No, it's okay, I know the direction by now. Goodnight.

Exit Philip

CHARLIE: He reminds me of a barracuda. Don't know why. He seems as harmless a milksop as you can find.

SIOBHAN: He is a fish, a Pisces. He does astrology. You should like him, you have a lot in common. I'll get you that tea.
(*Enter Katy*) Katy, what are you doing down here?

CHARLIE: I didn't know about this one.

SIOBHAN: This is Katy. She's not mine. I'm looking after her while her parents are doing lectures in France. If you look, she's older than Paul and: those eyelashes! Are they anything like mine? Or George's?

CHARLIE: I wasn't thinking of George.

SIOBHAN: I'll ignore that. Katy, this is an old friend of mine, Charlie. Say hello to Charlie.

Charlie and Katy both hesitate as they look at each other. It is almost as if they are in shock momentarily.

KATY: Hello.

CHARLIE: Hello.

SIOBHAN: Now you go back to bed and I'll be along shortly to tuck you in.

KATY: Bye!

CHARLIE: Goodnight! *(Exit Katy)*

SIOBHAN: So, Charlie! Are you up to the usual things?

CHARLIE: Yeah, but they're not very usual. I know you say such surgery corrupts its own skill, but up till now I've been very careful.

SIOBHAN: Till now?

CHARLIE *(hesitating)*: There's been an error, Siobhan. I need to lie low for a bit.

SIOBHAN: Of course. You can have your usual room, it's hardly ever used. But I don't want any of your cronies around, and I certainly don't want any of your other, inhuman, homeless delinquents of nightmares from previous acquaintance. No visitors in other worlds.

CHARLIE: I promise.

SIOBHAN: This is only a place for you to sleep and feed, okay?

CHARLIE: That is the chief purpose of my visit.

SIOBHAN: You've given me a nasty taste once already of excursions into the 'black arts' as you dub them – though I see only black and no art.

CHARLIE: Art is perhaps but divine fire, us as volcanoes – solid on the out, fire within.

SIOBHAN: But some remain dormant or dead, alive with wildlife and scenery on which one can build. I'll make you that tea.

CHARLIE: What about the kids?

SIOBHAN: Oh goodness, yes.

CHARLIE: I can make the tea.

SIOBHAN: Oh would you? I'm so sorry. I'll come down and see you in a moment.

Exit Siobhan. Charlie goes to the phone and dials

CHARLIE: Frank, that you? Good. Charlie here. We need to meet. John too. I don't know, do I. She's your girlfriend. Keep mum. I'm at Sanctuary. Remember? Near Graffiti Corner. You go past the 'They put some men on the moon, why don't they put them all there?' wall, then turn left at 'War is menstruation envy'. You've got it. You'll remember the house. There's a huge teddy bear on the first floor, watching the street from a window. Give it a wave if you like, you should understand each other. Pronto, ey?

(He puts phone down)

The tortured mosaic of this infernal city
Runs its sewers of screams and pain through
My veins. Nothing is heard, yet I hear
Unnatural tendencies, the whispering of prostitutes,
The trembling of moonspiders scuttling
Down the alleys, sheer violence of the legal right,
All commented upon so elegantly by striving
Electric guitars, sweat-filled nightclubs,
Writhing of the stage, a fashion of grossness,
Fiery flesh, parted lips and far-off drums
In the night. I need space to breathe,
To clear up my own mess, but everything, everything
Crowds in, insisting, on something.

Enter Siobhan

SIOBHAN: Who are you talking to?

CHARLIE: A madman and a fool.

SIOBHAN: It seems quite a crowd.

CHARLIE: It is. I'd better make tea for everybody. *(Exit Charlie)*

SIOBHAN: The malicious, unnoticed death of every teenager
Haunts us all on the one path we can never take:
Our life. Whatever we do, wherever we go, we stay here,
And yet barely disguise our sensual grief
Whether businessman, housewife or prophet,
It is all a cover for our dead, wounded skin.
I have happily manacled myself with soft belief
And the best convictions to my present life
In order that a child may live where I would not.
And this man, this man emerges like an elfin song
That once touched my heart till forgotten, left
Living in some old plastic Taiwanese
Transistor. Between fallen, worm-riddled fruit
And that sweet, simple bitterness long since lost,
I seek my way, sticking carefully to the main-trodden
Avenue, gliding half-dazed down an orchard of dreams.

(Doorbell rings)

Who on earth can that be?

Exit Siobhan. Enter Charlie

Enter Frank, John and Siobhan

CHARLIE: John! Frank! What a surprise! How lovely to see you!
However did you know I was here?

SIOBHAN: Charlie, I am going to kill you.

CHARLIE: Whattya mean? Two old, wonderful friends chance to drop
by, and you're angry? Have a heart!

SIOBHAN: I had a heart! Do you ever question your silicon nature and
the guided circuitry of your blood, and learn to care?

CHARLIE: Siobhan, we're only meeting here briefly. This is an
emergency. But we can go outside.

FRANK: You can't, mate. Not easily.

CHARLIE: What do you mean?

JOHN: I was in the cop-shop tonight, Charlie. You know, on business. They have an APB out on your face, your clothes, right down to your underwear. Nothing the beard coming off won't do, with a wash and a change, but they know you're in this area.

SIOBHAN: What have you done?

CHARLIE: It was an accident, not my fault at all,
But would be tricky enough to explain
Within four staid walls of a legal mind.
We wished to go deeper, rip the layers
Of our world, to reach the faceless beyond form.
It was all the usual pedantic procedure:
Incense, candles, drawings like a magical
Hopscotch on the floor, and chants, laced with
Strings of power-words I am one of few
To know. And then, as the room gave way
To the unknown shiftings of the moon,
Wild, invisible sea of true night,
One man lost hold and a syllable of protection,
Stepped into the circle, and was dead.

SIOBHAN: That's horrible!

CHARLIE: It's good I don't tell the exact leaving
of his body. We quickly dowsed the spell and fled.
Besides, in the tip-toe nether regions
Of my brain I could detect a manipulation
Of day-to-day, ordinary events by
Darker forces. The police were coming.
The graceful pointers of existence
Whether in the cry of a bird, a glimpse
Of a British Rail timetable, the vagaries of a song,
All led here. I don't know why.

FRANK: I feel like spanking a few demons' bottoms
Again, Charlie. Nice to have you back.

JOHN: Unacceptable! We need to be more precise.
Frank, you got me here so fast

We could have casually overtaken
A bat fresh from subterranean hell.
If you don't stop jesting with that
Salted loin-cloth you call a brain
We'll not be able to organise
A Hampstead Ladies Tea Party.

CHARLIE: Before you decide between chocolate and marzipan, I think we'd better return to our burrows and bury any ideas of action for tonight at least. Siobhan, I'll keep it cool, I promise. Boys, tomorrow I'll call you, beardless and new.

FRANK: Yeah, goodnight, Charlie. Don't leave the shaving froth sticking to your chin. Dead giveaway.

JOHN: Goodnight, Charlie. Siobhan.

CHARLIE: 'Night, lads. I'll phone you.

Exit Frank and John

SIOBHAN: Charlie, I can't believe you've done this to me. I'm immersed in one of your blancmange bloodbaths without stirring a foot.

CHARLIE: What bloodbaths? This is the first disaster you've known.

SIOBHAN: I've always known your stranglehold on madness and the bizarre. It doesn't need a university degree to work out the rest. I'm grateful I have the structure and form of knowledge to hold everything together. You reject your good roots and survive barely in the horrific winds of chance.

CHARLIE: I know my dismay. I recognise
My own hot bewilderment but not in the sky
Of my thoughts, clumsiness and stumbling errors,
Rather in the very earth of earlier years
And a distraught childhood. Contention, no content.
Listen, you and I once had a song to share.
Maybe, if our fathers knew their own love,
Recognised the vulnerable green of new life,
Then children would have the chance to be
Together like birds in a tree engaged by trust

Under all weathers and seasons of alteration.
Instead, we're granted stable cages of archaic law.

SIOBHAN: Let's stick to the moment. I'm exhausted. If you keep your word and never involve this house in your antics, you can have the spare room. But if the police even show a whisker here I'll profess total ignorance and turn you in.

CHARLIE: I'll be as a mouse. Goodnight, Siobhan.

SIOBHAN: Goodnight, Charlie. Pleasant dreams.

Exeunt

Act 1 Scene 3 - Hampstead Police Station

Enter the Chief Inspector, PC1 and PC2

INSP: Is this the man you saw?

PC2: Yes, sir, that's him. This report gives the exact description of our encounter.

INSP.: It seems straightforward enough. And you just let him go?

PC1: There was no reason for detainment, sir, to our knowledge. The alert had not yet reached us.

INSP.: Yes, I know. That he was on his way from Liverpool Street station fits the report of his getting on the train in Colchester. Forensics are still working to discover the absolute method of that unfortunate man's death and our friend here is the only lead we have.

PC2: What state was the body in, sir?

INSP.: The entrapments of Satanism found on site
You already know. The body itself is a mystery.
Here are the photographs. Yes, it is a sight

Best forgotten. The thousand ruptures of skin
And torn flesh you see from every angle
Mirror the internal explosions and the searing
Hot blast between the eyes, behind the skull,
That finally did for him. To further the surprise,
The tiny two millimetre lashes of the corpse,
As with the ruptures, showed no signs of bruising,
Whereas the most delicate instrument of steel
Would provoke slight onrushing of the pigment melanin.
That there is no bruising leads to the conclusion
That the flesh burst outwardly in minuscule, cold
Explosions, with no burning.

PC1: Could it really be magic, sir?

INSP.: You know as well as I do, constable,
There is no magic in this day and age,
And all there ever was was superstition.
Powers greater than us wish, as I deep in my heart
Do, for a new time of science and comfort,
For every living creature to live as God wishes,
Not as in the barbaric emptiness of this death,
And they, like me, want the reason behind this insanity,
And to have that we must find this man first.
You two will be in plain clothes from now on
Concentrate on Hampstead High Street. Watch the tube,
I doubt he always walks. There are others,
Unknown to this area, scattered around,
But your memory may be vital as you have actually
Met him, so I'll risk having you there.
Sergeant Wilkins will give you your full instructions.

Exeunt