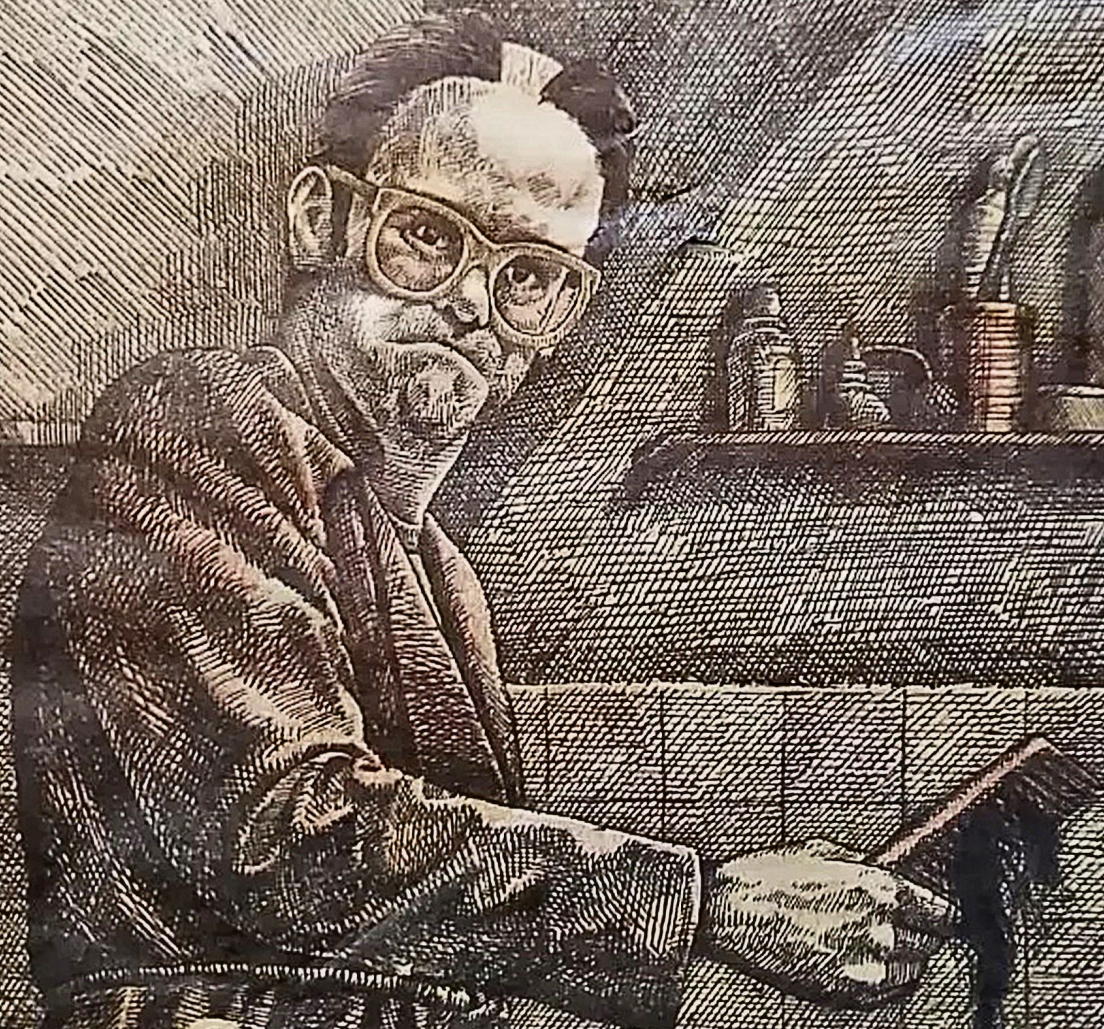


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put them down and walk out. Strummer and Jones laugh incredulously. Anything can happen.

Intensity

Onstage The Clash hypnotise me. I can't look away, look away from the unbelievable intensity, so limp in print, so astonishing for real.

Sputum and glasses fly. "If I wanna spit I spit on the floor," says Joe and when the spit starts hitting him, angrily, "If you're so tough, come up afterwards and wipe that off!"

This isn't any more a review than it is an interview but here's an appreciation: I haven't seen rock 'n' roll like it before, full stop. It tears you apart, it vibrates, it isn't angry so much as furious. It's real, I believe in it now.

At this point I become a Clash zombie, a tribal supporter.

Mick Jones doesn't know this of course. As I walk in after the set Jones grabs hold of me and pushes me, orders me to sit down. He asks what I thought and, dazed, I try to tell him. He gets the wrong end of the stick. Incredulity.

"You didn't like it?" But I did, I craved it and fell for it. He changes, he sits down, the tension evaporates easily. If I'd been lying he would have known.

Ten minutes and... "Let the animals in," says Strummer and the girls, shy and stupid, pour in. Mick disappears to one corner and Joe sits getting his photograph taken by and with the worshippers.

Joe says later: "A lot of these girls, they're just a pain. I find it embarrassing. They don't really care and I don't know what to say to them, it's just embarrassing."

Following

And it is. The Clash haven't got a large female following in their audience, only in their dressing room. Joe and Paul just want to get away. It's pouring with rain outside and cold but they want to run back to the hotel.

Walking out to the Top Rank lobby, about 20 girls tag on. Joe and Mick make a dash into the freezing wet, and a few limpets follow. In a masterly escape stroke they head out to the central reservation of the road, and suddenly vault over the barrier, leaving all stranded. Legs pumping, singing a crazy song.

"I don't wanna be an apple..." They stride towards the hotel. Pacing with them, it occurs that The Clash aren't at all what I thought them, i.e. dour politics mongers, inflicting their so-intense social opinions on whoever would listen. They're trying to have fun too, some enjoyment, despite Strummer's comments in Sniffin' Glue.

I find no dislike in me for them at all yet I felt certain I would, hating intellectuals and poseurs alike. The Clash are neither, just honest and sometimes serious, not philosophising machines.

Parasites

At the hotel the girls soon catch up. Joe talks to a fanzine writer "somebody always wants something off you." Paul holds court to an array of boring women. Topper plays with a plastic gun and Mick disappears.

Feeling like a parasite among all the other hateful parasites, I finally go to bed.

About three o'clock in the morning there's an unbelievably loud hammering at my door for about five seconds. A lynch mob? When I answer there's nobody there.

THE GIG at Bradford has been cancelled - backlash still rools in 1977 - so it's off to Birmingham today. Joe

comes down to the bar with a girl who looks about 14.

"I have them in my room sometimes," he said the night before, "but I never sleep with them."

Did someone cough? After hanging around the bar for about two hours we just manage to fit into the tour bus. Suddenly promoter Dave Cork comes running out. "Put your foot down."

Unfinished

Confusion as a besuited man comes running out of the hotel looking furious.

"Put your + + + + + foot down," he urges again and we screech out backwards, then forwards and away, leaving the man white-faced and helpless.

Some "unfinished business" is apparently the reason for the Bonnie and Clyde antics but when I ring the hotel later in the week they say they have no record of any unpaid bills and won't even admit that The Clash stayed in the hotel. Discreet, that's Trust House Forte.

Topper and Paul have gone back to

'A lot of these girls, they're just a pain. I find it embarrassing. They don't really care and I don't know what to say to them, it's just embarrassing'—
Joe Strummer

London and Mick and Joe sleep on the bus, though Mick wakes up for a chat about murder, poisoning, junkies and monster babies. One occupant of the coach says he's seen a baby in a jar at a hospital, half-human half-dog.

"Nah, s'impossible," says Mick. "They can't... what is it... cross fertilise."

Mick is a Bowie freak and wants to know if Bowie said anything more about John Glenn, the astronaut who told Bowie, "Earth is not alone." I have to disappoint him.

The tape player churns out Kraftwerk, The Kinks, Bob Marley and a tape of last night's Clash gig.

The Central Hotel, Birmingham, is blacked out, as is the whole city centre. In Mick's room, as it gets darker and darker, Dylan plays on a tiny tape player - Mick loves Dylan - as it gets blacker and blacker. No room service. Joe wanders in, attracted by the sound and promptly falls asleep. They smoke a few joints - how untrendy! - and the completely static air makes a noise in our ears and nothing moves.

Eventually Joe is gone and Mick is gone and the chapter's finished.

There is no closed ending, no snap conclusions. This is a tape recording, this is fax. Don't fall into the trap I did and guess wrong. The Clash are more - or rather less - than they seem.



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