

HIP NOVEL

by

Gareth Stack & Andrew Booth

Manifesto, by way of an introduction

Hip Novel is a book for our time. A loosely structured homage to cult fiction, from Amis's *Money* to Nabokov's *Lolita*, the book follows the misadventures of Iago Coakes, an American television critic, as he reinvents literary theory, pillages womynkind, defiles the international space station and rampages across the continental United States, holding a mirror up to an increasingly un-sane society.

Coakes is a cartoon, a gluttonous and crazed man child. A messianic superfreak, sumptuously sketched and oversaturated, he illustrates our all too vivid hyper-reality. His excesses are our excesses, his confused infantile desperation, his attacks on love and beauty and on prostitutes, are our own. Fumbling in the post positivist dark, drawn to the flickering images on our haunted machines, anymore, we fuck and fight and feed, not from true visceral drives, but heightened accelerated filmic pseudo-motions. We melt under the naked flame of paranoia, apart even together, huddled in texting clods for warmth, skimming citations of synopses on aggregated feeds, fleeing the agonising realities of genocide, fanaticism and environmental self destruction in transnational corporate sponsored pseudo-culture. This book abounds with references, the lingua franca of the fictive fever dream we each and separately inhabit, meeting over antimony septic water coolers to exchange ever more fragmented glimpses of nothing.

To write a novel that ignores the contemporary dysphoria is to engage in the creation of a nostalgic anachronism. Hip Novel, like its protagonist, celebrates the hell of 21st century existence, throws a street party and at the stroke of midnight, stares a CCTV camera in the lens and smiling, spits. When they dragged Sid Vicious, blood stained and overdosing from the Chelsea hotel, we were complicit, we'd written the script of the soap opera that ended Nancy Spungen's life. When Sadie Mae brought Helter Skelter to the Tate mansion, we all got away with murder. Who killed the hippy, burning at the Panhandle? You killed the hippy. You and me and our GPS'd,

two hundred channel, oil guzzling SUV makes three.

We bleat into the matrices, endlessly serving the culture reconstituted versions of itself, an infinitely varied dust buffet of food-like edible substances. We beg the machine ‘Notice us, hear us, watch us as we dance naked for your billion phatic eyes, let us disappear’. We huddle in our fortress Europes and gated Americas, quivering as the fly eyed hordes shake the walls, crying ‘Oh dear’ as we toss crumbs from the barricades and play corporate rock, paper, scissors.

We are proto-Coakes, every one of us, hungry and growing ever more perverse, ominously shivering Krakatoa of andrenochrome, venom and bile. We are the rulers of the world, drunk and bloated from a thousand year feast, smug and certain of our course as we power down the highway, our children terrified and broken in the back, our ex-wife – a fresh bruise cresting her once beautiful cheek – riding silent shotgun. She knows what’s coming.

This is our story.

The authors, March 2009

Prelude - The native act and figure of my heart

Iago Coakes

The dominant psychological experience of all people is that of psychosis. The messages surrounding us are meaningful only in a persecutory sense, as capitalism grinds into its final gear. Everyone struggles to find their own place to stand in the maelstrom, their own imaginary self to stave off the deconstructing forces all around. Those that succeed relatively well stay 'sane'.

Gottschalk

The best lack all convictions, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.

Yeats

Iago Coakes woke from a most beautiful dream. In this hypnagogia, he and Doris Fray, a girl he'd known in high school, had been sailing. Coakes' first thought on waking was that the fresh mist of salt, and by inference, his whole phantasy, had come from ferrous iron, the gingivitic seep which caked in sticky horizontal ridges to his teeth.

Coakes had dozens of such minor physical impairments. He was morbidly obese. His eyes periodically leaked from chronic conjunctivitis. His wide mouth held the furred tongue of constipation, panting halitotic reeks. He had flat feet and atraumatic patellar instability. He sprouted thinning hair, and a short, fat and sharply curved penis. Coakes' body was a temple to chaotic Eris, a hefty yet weak, high machine, with angry bratwurst fingers.

Coakes suspected, deep down, that the infirmity which afflicted his cock was related somehow to a habit of frottage he had nurtured as an adolescent. This was one of five secrets about himself that he had never, and would never, tell anyone.

One hand, hooked like a naked muppet, had jammed in its sleep between Coakes' arse and the seat back. He held it still, aware that when moved, it would

realise a grim premonition of arthritis. He had passed out in front of the TV again. Coakes' television, his muse, was no ordinary seventeen inch cathode ray tube. It was a behemoth. Wide and grotesque as Coakes himself, eighty inches from one sleek, injection moulded corner to the next, it boasted two hundred channels and a built in hard drive. It projected 1080p and absorbed HDMI. It could connect remotely to Coakes' infamously expensive Macintosh computer, and played music and high definition films he had had stolen from the internets. When Coakes switched it on each morning, virtual curtains swept elegantly across its reflection absorbent surface. When he left it on at night, as he had done again, drooling to sleep in his Target suede lounge, an intelligent motion sensor recognised the difference in his squirming, and gradually eased the sleek machine to dark and silence.

To Coakes, the television was not an entertainer. It was not a window to the world. It was not a rainy day companion. To Coakes, the television was a great hideous Cuthulu, emerging from some non space behind his wall – no, inside it – to drain him, to leave him puffy and sated, a reluctant organ donor drunk on morphine in an ice bath with a purple scar and cellphone glued to one wrinkled white hand. Iago Coakes was a television critic.

This morning he ignored its allure, brushing his crooked teeth over the broken dishes sprawled indolently in his kitchen sink. As he engaged in his toilet, Coakes wondered idly if he were a character in a clever literary novel. Characters in clever literary novels often had litanies of physical decrepitudes. They tended to have alienated adolescent offspring, and malicious ex wives who luxuriated in their unearned alimony. Ridiculous, thought Coakes, as he fruitlessly attempted to masturbate in the shower. Protagonists of clever literary novels he told himself, slipping a shampoo cacked finger into his arse to find the prostate, were never television critics. Not enough potential for action, too little Joie de Vivre.

As he breakfasted on steak and cheese hot pockets and tossed back nicotine infused espresso, Coakes' slow and bitter thoughts turned to his daughter Melody. The girl's little league game was later that afternoon, or had it been earlier? Coakes' mental clock had been replaced almost entirely by the subtly anti-aliased Helvetica chronometer, conjured by remote control from his television's screen. In its absence his time sense had muddied to a vague fugue. Coakes' awareness of the weather was similarly blurred. He maintained a persistent delusion that the slick coiffured man in his television could sense directly, looking through him, and through the walls of his

house, into the road beyond. Could see what Coakes himself could not be bothered to, and then refocusing, stare down at him with a smirk, a cheeky mid-afternoon, mid-Atlantic grin, and declaim with smug certainty that it was raining.

Coakes hoped earnestly that Melody's team, a repugnantly successful group of gender liberated tweens, who all attended soccer, swimming, and yes baseball, would lose, had lost, whatever. He was unsettled by her braided, laced, braced, and well postured composure. His daughter was a bi-lingual honour roll student, whose class projects won prizes like 'most innovative use of renewable energy', or 'best critique of non parametric statistics'.

When he was eight years old, Coakes' knee had popped its socket and he'd spent a season in the dugout, 'learning strategy'. Coakes yearned for a similarly 'educative experience' to befall his daughter.

As he dressed, unenthusiastically observing the process in his bedroom wardrobe's full length mirror, Coakes experienced one of those monstrous moments of self recognition. A moment in which the disconnect between the blanched untuned features in the mirror and the self he felt himself to be, led him to recognise with unholy certainty, that he was alive, and real, and had *this* face, and lived *this* life. He paused, examined his features with disapproval, smacked his flat thin lips together in self mockery, and looked away, finishing his dress in the existential dark.

While he watched Oprah and waited for Ricky, Coakes worked on his novel, jotting his soft curlicued notation in an unlined Moleskine notebook. The central character in his work in progress, Oakley, was also a divorcee, with an unfulfilling life and a impressive but incomplete collection of nineteen eighties action TV. He was not however, a television critic.

Coakes' residence was a large, flat-roofed, ranch bungalow, with plenty of natural light, and a long shallow swimming pool in back. It had been his wife's choice, and he disliked all of it, save the den, where his television hung. But there was no space in there for a massage table, so when Margarita arrived for his rubdown, they moved into the rec room. Here his only window to the Elysian Fields of TV land was a meagre fourteen inch CRT he was forced to watch side on, craning and twisting his neck.

By this point in the afternoon Coakes had usually mustered the sustenance to mount a worthy campaign of flatulence. He feasted vampiracally on Margarita's pause and whimper, as she felt him stiffen and realised what was to come. Once, still a little

drunk on the previous evenings hostage Merlot, Coakes had offered the woman an extra forty bucks to give him head as he lay in state on the padded table. He had particularly enjoyed the malodorous combination of suck and blow. On that occasion, Coakes had combined his flatulence with a technique he'd pioneered, which involved administering swift, hard, slaps to the back of the head at crucial moments. He spoke of this innovation, when bantering good naturedly with pump attendants and other minimum wagemen, as 'The Humbler'. A malady for Melody, Coakes thought, resuming his earlier schadenfreude, and farted once again.

Dusk approaching, Coakes drove down from the hills, past the houses of his well-to-do neighbours, down Mullholland drive, past Beverly Hills and UCLA, and into the city. He avoided downtown LA as much as possible. With its human detritus, its chaos of bums, hustlers, tourists and gurning androgynous hips, it was a bipolar prison. Too many bright lights, too much big city. This evening however, Coakes needed a release. Something richer and darker and stronger than the television.



Coakes nestled the veined wooden pipe between his knees and filled it from a small plastic vial. He set the vial down carefully on the coffee table and pushed the mouth piece through a melted hole in the part-full water bottle. As he settled back into a leather Buddha bag, somewhere someone set a Doors cover playing. Coakes brought the bottle to his lips and flamed the bowl, filling the empty volume with slow twists of smoke. As he inhaled, keeping the flame steady, the black coals of Salvia glowed a crisp orange and settled to ash. He shakily laid down his lighter and the still full bottle bong, holding the hot toke in, salivating. He felt nothing yet but a sudden torpid stone. The record player hit a peak, and he relaxed back into the bag, shutting his eyes. He gradually became aware of a stuttering dizziness, a tug of motion, a merry-go-round whip twirl. Coakes was here, now, in this gritty nowhere club, but a part of him, no all of him, was elsewhere; a twirling kaleidoscope of which this world was just one frame in a film reel, one string in a vibration, one page in a thin leafed book. A lollipop hedgerow landscape, where afro'd evergreen spectators watched, and shook their heads as he held his feet square in the frame, as he stuck, terrified, to the amber

of the real.

“Coakes! Coakes, baby how are you?”

Coakes swung his blood shot eyes wildly round the room, over red and gold drapes, incense burners, murals in the impressionist style, cushioned sofas stuffed with Arabs, till they crashed speeding into the familiar face before him.

“Coakes sweetie, are you there?”, she asked, her hand snaking towards his pocket, fingers hungry. At the last moment her glance caught those eyes, cold and vicious if still unfocused, and changed her fingers path down to his groin.

Perhaps, Coakes thought, he should punch the whore. There was nothing like being blown by a winded bitch. Instead he pushed her away, and rose shakily. He padded across the thick, dirty carpet and settled himself on a low leather sofa, lighting up one of the fat foul European cigarettes he favoured at moments like these. The ceiling seemed lower from this seat, the basement a cavern, its whitewashed walls dripping with dried and reliquified sweat. He breathed the smoke in deep, down to the bottom of his lungs, revelling in the saliva bittering on his tongue. When he blew out through his nose, it billowed fatly, fleshy as an arse. It was, of course illegal to smoke here, but then much of the long bleak history of McDowell's took lady justice by her infirm old shoulders and grinning, forced her to her knees.

Coakes was suddenly very tired of the place. How many years had he been coming here since De Niro had introduced him to it? How much coke had he snorted? How much cum had he weakly leaked onto the sofas and into the mouths of Eastern European and Mexican girls? Girls who were always older than they claimed. McDowell's was tired, its decadence hiding a greater malignant cancer. Bobby Dylan had told him once that money didn't talk, it swore, but in this legendary basement, hidden and exposed, here it gave and took, and broke, without a word.

He smiled as quivering lips closed around his fat, short, purpled cock, dead eyes fixed on his bale of pubic hair. The girl balked at his taste and made to move away but he clamped a thick paw on her auburn wig and pushed the small soft mouth back down. Coakes had neglected the cleanliness of his cock of late. Why touch the dread little thing in the shower, feeling it out under those mounds of gut, when a woman's lips were so much more thorough? Dead American cheese had built up under his foreskin. A sheath, he thought with pride, which had survived two attempts at circumcision – one gentle under a doctor's knife, another less so, at the teeth of a disgruntled whore. Coakes felt a large flat fart crawl unwillingly from underneath,

mingling dangerously with a sweat pool to produce the a wet thick shitblow. He smiled wildly, with too many teeth, and let it out.

Holding his breath and building another guff for later, Coakes thought of the column that had gone to press that morning, syndicated across the Americas and the Far East, a retouched photo from his college days in its upper left hand corner. He'd looked thin. Suck suck, gag, lick, suck. It had been a good article, decrying the lack of blacks in principle roles on mainstream television, and the lack of talent coming from the South. He'd peppered it with quotes from William Blake and salted it with Aerosmith lyrics. He'd written its later half in a deconstructionist style cribbed from 'The Pooh Perplex'. Superficially it was about the latest episode of Oprah, another all coon cast of minor celebrities who had been badly sexually abused. Not badly as in excessively, but badly as in poorly, to judge by their teary reminiscences. If you're going to do something, do it right, he thought, taking another deep drag of his smoke, flicking ash on the back of the girls neck, making her flinch.

When he finished the girl spat his filth out onto the thickly carpeted floor and stalked off. She still had some spirit, that was heart warming, it was what he wanted to bring out in them. What a good job they could do, when pushed. When he could make them real.



Iago Coakes was buying meat. He would have liked to go to a butcher and chat with a fat jolly expert about meat, but there wasn't one in LA. So he fondled lumps of flesh through plastic and tried to sniff blood through cellophane. It was important to get the right cuts, the right bits of the right animals. Today he was after venison. He liked the idea of a once proud and free animal like the stag being killed for his plate, the removal of consciousness for the sake of taste. Of course the venison he bought came from a farm, where the deer were grown intensively, and pumped full of pig hormones to make them grow faster; but then Coakes liked that idea too.

Coakes walked along the corridors between cold cabinets. He watched florescent light, near grey, fall flat from humming strip lamps, to fuse with the bass low of refrigeration units. But what oppressed the grand, safari suited writer, as he pondered

through ranks of beef, pig, bird and lamb, waiting to be recognised, was the sweat that coated his back; a greasy slick from where the fake leather seats in his SUV met the California sun, growing colder in the air-conditioning, making him shiver.

He paused by a freezer packed with TV dinners. Once, when he had been young-ish and at college, he had laughed at the idea of food specifically marketed to be eaten in front of the screen. Of course, he thought, even then an addict, all meals were to be eaten-in, whilst watching television.

He reached the freezer that held the great 10lb bags of bacon, smoked and cured. Despite a part Semitic ancestry, or perhaps because of it, Coakes loved pork. As he ran his hands slowly over the thick ice-cold plastic, feeling the bone hard lumps of frozen bacon, he groaned, and furrowed another chin against his chest. Coakes weighed the pigs by feel, selecting the heaviest pack. He could almost smell it cooking. Tossing the yard of meat into his cart, he thundered off, rich and cured. Later, as he sat in traffic a few blocks from the market, Coakes saw the girl again. Today, she wore a strapless top in some eye watering green, cream shorts to the middle of white thighs, pop socks and gym pumps. She looked younger than he remembered.

The pursuit was difficult for Coakes, not because the girl moved quickly, but because of the difficulty of stealthily following a pedestrian from the wheel of a bright red Range Rover the size of a Brontosaurus. He half considered walking – dismissed the heresy. Too much, the thigh rubbing rash and chafe of belly roll; the fearful toll trickling sweat could have upon the open sore of his arse, where he scratched and dug at haemorrhoids with long, dirty fingernails.

She bent to inspect something in a shop window, arching her back, sticking her butt out, and by Christ, the air caught in his throat. So soft, so... unfinished. Coakes shivered. But it was all right, the girl was legal, almost certainly. He soothed the anxious jolt with a stroke at his hardening lump. He had watched every episode of OZ, and developed a desperate fear of prison, of becoming some Neo-Nazi's cum dumpster, of gaining an internal swastika tattoo, burnt in Biro ink with a red hot AIDS needle. On nights when he had those nightmares, Coakes invariably awoke in the foetal position, his soft tummy slick with velvet ropes. Velvet ropes of semen.

Coakes stopped the car, started it, parked and loitered the whole length of Vermont Avenue, watching her gaze at clothes she could not afford; hungrily, as if she were starving from a lack of stuff. She wasn't well off, perhaps an orphan – he hadn't been

able find out. She couldn't afford to look after herself, couldn't even dress herself it seemed.

Coakes sat staring at her, eyes drifting in and out of focus. As he pulled off to follow once more, he glimpsed something: An LA crone, all sports leisure wear and carcinogenically orange skin. She stepped in front of the metal bull-bar, made him slam the breaks, jerk his head in the artless dance of whiplash. Inches from his bumper the hag croaked at him, some sort of primitive Hispanic hunting language, utterly incomprehensible. As Coakes rolled down his window to roar the golem spat and turned to hobble away.

Her phlegm rolled down Coakes' thin lips and mouth. Aghast, almost breathless, he wiped the lazy white spit from his face with a man sized Kleenex. A particularly absorbent brand of tissue Coakes always carried for such incidents. He spotted the girl heading up another street and pulled off after her. As he passed the ageing trailer trash, Coakes kicked open his driver side door and knocked the bitch down, skinning her knees and green-stem snapping her left hip. She barked again, this time in agony; and as he lazily turned off Vermont he watched her begin to cry. Likely, Coakes thought, the dread virago wouldn't qualify for medicare, and would not walk again.



Not for the first time, Iago Coakes considered suicide. Lying drunk and naked on his deck, looking down over the pit of South Central Los Angeles, tearfully and with gentle strokes, as one might give an old companion animal, maintaining a weak stiff, Coakes weighed the sum of his life and found it wanting. Sure, he was successful – an award winning TV critic with a column syndicated in twenty three states and occasional punditry on Fox News and Christian Rock Television. True, he was wealthy – even by the standards of Hollywood, where the mysterious source of his fortune was a topic of frequent speculation amongst his far left neighbours: Celebrities who considered Coakes a festering sore on the face of the city.

Coakes was envied, if not admired, as he strode into McDowell's with a stumbling

busty escort on each arm. Not too bad, he thought, for a man of his age and singular appearance. But something was lacking, he thought, as he sat up, considering how a rope might feel, slunk about his chubby neck and cast over the side of the deck; thinking how he could leap and hang suspended in the air a moment, free and remembering nothing, till the slack snapped, and popped his throat. Almost painless. An end to the constant fear. Pussy, muff, slit, poon, vaj, gee, beef, gash, twat, minge, cunt, cunt, cunt, cunt. The slobbering tortoise, the Gulf of Mexico. Christ, would it ever end, this terror, this all consuming fear of quim?

Coakes had tried analysis, baring his soul in a sulphurous stupor. But he wasn't a Catholic, and in any case, there was too much to confess. Too much that could not be forgiven. As he stood, watching over the grid work of neighbourhoods, low buildings, orange in the rusty sunset; Coakes felt a slug of bile rise in his throat, a sudden burning rush that left his lips involuntarily, fanning out in a raw acidic flame. For a moment all of Los Angeles was hidden, consumed by a grey wave of sick.

As Coakes leaned on his hand rail, gasping, something smashed against the screen door behind him, then ricocheted out into the gulf. A narrow miss. He turned, observing in the foggy distance a dance of vehement irritation. On a deck parallel to his own, three hundred feet away across the rolling hills, a neighbour waved a furious nine iron.

“Coakes, you dirty fuck,” Nicholson yelled, voice tiny with distance. “Get your ugly naked ass out of my night!”

As the ageing actor lined up another shot, Coakes, maudlin self pity forgotten, stood and faced his antagonist, arms outstretched; flopping his short but heavy penis back and forth in a defiant imitation of a helicopters blades. He turned and bent double, poking his arse out through the bars of the railing, and squeezed, face redder than the sundown sky. A turd, firm and coiling, loosed itself and leaped out over the drop, as Iago Coakes from his angelic perch, shat on celebrity, and the greater Los Angeles area.

This novel is currently seeking a publisher. To learn more, contact hipnovelist@hipnovel.com