

‘THREE PIECE SUITE.

BY BERTIE MARSHALL

THREE PIECE SUITE. A fading Polaroid of the twilight world, of a London suburb. It's net curtains, privet hedges, Pebbledash, Fishmongers and draylon furniture.

A teenage boy invents a persona called ‘BERLIN’ and created from a realm of ‘magic and glamour’ in his tiny bedroom in a Victorian Terrace house, in the South London suburb of Bromley, in 1975.

The text is Part auto fiction, memoir, historical / cultural document.

‘Bromley High Street in the late 70’s was a hangover from the 50’s and 60’s, like an expanding village, with only a two narrow streets. It had a Little Theatre; a Tudor fronted building. Marianne Faithfull had played there once in The Three Sisters. And Cliff Richard in Panto. He played ‘Buttons’ to Lulu’s Prince Charming and Clodah Rodgers, Good Queen.’

Text as Jumble Sale, a jamboree of findings, ads for menthol cigarettes, swatches of Habitat wall paper, snap shots of sleeping pills, it will also feature photographs of ‘BERLIN ‘and BROMLEY and the THREE PIECE SUITE in 1975.

MARSHALL’S, first novel PSYCHOBOYS was published (codex books, U.K.) in 1997 to critical acclaim.

11 pgs =3,000 words.

Bertie Marshall. Biography.

Bertie Marshall, author and filmmaker was born in Greenwich, South London in 1960.

Attended various schools and colleges before dropping out to become known as one of the members of THE BROMLEY CONTINGENT, the first group of SEX PISTOLS fans - as recorded in Jon Savage's seminal book on Punk 'England's dreaming'. And 'Siouxsie and the Banshees' a biography, recently published by Sanctuary (2003) Marshall is also featured in the B.B.C.2 Arena documentary 'PUNK AND THE PISTOLS'.

He began writing in the late 1970's and during the 1980s found acclaim as a performance poet, reading across the U.K and Europe. In 1987 wrote and directed his first play CALL GRANDAD which premiered at London's I.C.A.

1993; C/o Founded spoken word club DO TONGUES in Brighton, host to such literary luminaries as Kathy Acker, Dennis Cooper, Lynne Tillman, Will Self, Gary Indiana and beat writer Herbet Huncke.

In 1994 awarded a writer's bursary by South East Arts Council to complete his first novel PSYCHOBOYS - published spring 1997 by Codex books, UK.

From 1997 - 2000.

Lived in NYC and wrote articles for N.Y. magazines -NIGHT, TIME OUT, CUPS, HONCHO, ZINGMAGAZINE and VERY. And gave a series of lectures on Punk to students at NYU.

2001- 2002. Lived in Berlin, Germany.

2004.

MARSHALL has completed his first short film 'PEEHOLE' a profile of U.S. cartoonist Mike Diana – shown @The Horse Hospital Gallery, London and The Museum of New Art in Detroit, U.S.A

He has written a memoir and several books to date. And is currently working on a new novel.

His web site is WWW.BERTIEMARSHALL.CO.UK Marshall has a monthly column "been there, done that" www.3ammagazine.com

BERLIN, BROMLEY.

**“ The morning will come when the world is mine
Tomorrow belongs to me”**

Ebb and Kander.

At the end of 1975, I was fifteen years old. I lived with my mother and step dad in their 3 up 3 down Victorian terrace house at 8, Plaistow grove, Sundrige Park, Bromley, Kent.

Behind net curtains lurked a mantelpiece with brass ornaments, doorknockers and horseshoes, porcelain bells, memento's from seaside resorts around England.

A brown dray Lon three-piece suite squatted the room like a black cloud, oil slick. Where I saw my black cat 'Dudie' while sleeping along back of it, his astral body, floated up, off him, like a negative print, hovered in the floral scented air then descended. And where my step – father riddled with cancer would kneel in front of the sofa, as though it were Buddha, his balding head resting on a cushion, slipping into Morphine dreams via a suppository.

In 1976 I named myself Berlin. Berlin, from Bromley.

My small bedroom was at the back of the house over looking the garden of patchy grass, a dying Victoria plum tree, plastic fishpond, that I kept an Eel in.

The one I bought for 35p at the supermarket called Caterers that had a live fish section. The fishmonger offered to kill and jelly it; I was standing there with my red plastic bucket and 35pence. Lugging the creature back to Plaistow grove in the bucket was a feat of skill and courage, the Eel like aquatic spaghetti, trying to leap out. Walking up the Grove with my bucket full of live Eel, coming towards me was a vision.

Two people, one old looking man in a pin stripe suit, the other a shining thing in light blue and primrose, red glitter boots. He stopped me, I didn't look at his face, shyness consumed me but not the Eel, who tried to leap out and introduce itself.

“What ya got there mate?” the thin shimmering thing said.

“Umma Eel!” I said, going as red as the plastic bucket.

“What ya gonna feed it on, then?” she/he/it asked.

I couldn't speak, so I shrugged.

“Well, you better find some slugs, snails, worms things like that” he said.

Then the man in the suit said.

“Come on David, we've got to go!”

“Bye Mate!” he said.

They walked off down the Grove and I stepped in dog shit.

David's second name was 'Bowie'
He was still living at home with his Mum.

My room was decorated in beige and brown latticework design by Habitat. I'd chosen this in 1974, another wall was painted navy blue and splattered with large gold stars stick on stars, I'd stolen from Biba- the department store on Kensington high street.

A small wooden bookcase and a bentwood chair (a'la Liza Minnelli in Cabaret), a horrible white painted wood chest of drawers on which sat my crappie Hi-Fi system.

My records an eclectic mix of, the soundtrack from Cabaret, Marilyn Monroe's greatest hits,

Nico's 'Desertshore,

Patti Smith's 'Horses'

And Yoko Ono's 'Approximately infinite universe'.

Ripped out from library books', a photo of Judy Garland's face, from the late 60s, close up, looking a thousand years old. Glitter in her hair like dandruff.

And Brett Smiley, the pretty blonde girl /boy discovery of Andrew Loog Oldham, his 1974 single "Va, va va voom" which sunk without trace, but the lyrics hit the head on the nail. "Hey you, with your hair all torn, va, va, va, voom".

The singles poster of Brett, all long blond pageboy hair, sitting on a black Bentwood chair in a black vest and tights with big black platform boots, white cotton gloves and red lips pouting a drooping cigarette, referencing Oldham's earlier discovery Marianne Faithfull, who at this time would have been sitting on a wall in Soho, fixing smack. And other American Blonde boys, butch queens with shaggy hair and hairless skin, like roast chickens.

Jean Cocteau smoking his opium pipe, I loved his hands, twisted, withered vines and they way he wore his jacket. Buttons on his cuff, undone. And Little Nell from Vogue, wearing a taffeta toreador jacket and pants designed by Miss Mouse.

I recall seeing Little Nell at the 70s nightclub – ‘Bangs’ which was opposite Centre Point in London. She was dancing on a raised dance floor that looked like a boxing ring with a group of shirtless queens, she took her top off and hands on hips was wiggling about. One of the security men went to ask her to put her top back on. She did. He went away. She took it off again.

On a light wood bookcase, I had a small tin with Players cigarette ad on it, inside was my stash of drugs...

A wrapper of amphetamine sulphate (I spent 6 pounds of my 9 pounds dole check on speed) a couple of blues, jaw breaking diet pills and several sleeping pills that I’d stolen from my Mother's bedside cabinet. The room hummed with stale make up and drugs and cigarette smoke.

One of the things to do in the nullifying boredom of Bromley was to go to jumble sales or roam the charity shops along the high street. 1976 being still less than a decade since the 60’s you’d still find wonderful garb to wear.

I bought a pair of knee high black leatherette, lace up boots. Black 60’s stirrup pants. White cotton shirt. Black tie, Black v. Neck sweater. Black tie with dark red splashes on it. This became my look, a sort of theatrical fascist.

Shoes were always my best find, my prize was a pair of Cuban heeled fake snake skin ankle boots in brown - swiftly dyed to blue black as was my hair.

Besides clothes, drugs, books were my other obsession. I’d often come home from Bromley public library having stolen various tomes, a favourite at the time was William Burroughs’s ‘Wild Boys’ which I read several times but didn’t really understand, also Jean Genet’s ‘The Thief’s Journal’ and Christopher Isherwood’s ‘Goodbye to Berlin’.

From Andy Warhol’s ‘A to B and back again’

“I’d prefer to remain a mystery. I never give my background away. And anyway I make it up every time I’m asked”

Those books basically informed or formed the persona; I created called ‘Berlin’...

At fifteen I was like a sponge soaking everything up, influenced by everything, no boundaries, my imagination ran riot, I literally slipped into the pages of those novels and lived my version of them.

Bromley became Berlin in the 1930’s, I wanted to worship and fall in love with a sailor, I eventually did, I was already thieving and drugs were a playground, a holiday in the head, from the horror of being an only child in the numbing isolation of the suburbs.

Bromley High Street in the late 70’s was a hangover from the 50’s and 60’s, like an expanding village, with only a two narrow streets. It had a Little Theatre; a Tudor fronted building that was stuck between Boots, the chemists and Dolcis, a cheap shoe shop. Marianne Faithfull had played there once in *The Three Sisters*. And Cliff Richard in Panto. He played ‘Buttons’ to Lulu’s Prince Charming and Clodah Rodgers, *Good Queen*.

I loved walking down the high street on days when I felt full of confidence and adopted my ‘star’ persona. I could saunter down the quaint pavements and everyone would turn and stare, I was projecting ‘look at me!’ If I thought exactly that, then most people would. If I shuffled down the street, my face hidden behind my hair and scarf, staring at the ground, people wouldn’t take a blind bit of notice of me.

The place I liked was a tearoom inside of a shop called Importers, which sold, imported coffees.

There you could sit amongst the blue rinse set of old ladies, some would pretend that I didn’t exist, others I mused, were old actresses and smiled, at this boy in make up.

The tearoom was very haute bourgeois with a waitress service, they wore little b / w uniforms, and looked like old actresses. What a grope at sophistication, at 15, sitting in a posh tearoom, drinking Earl Grey - but perhaps it was in my genes somewhere.

My Granddad had been a Captain in the Army in India in the 1920's; he'd started off as a private and within seven years ascended through the ranks, to Captain.

My Granny was a Lady's maid then married my Grandfather and became a lady of leisure. My mother was born in Bangalore. They had 'chai Waller's' - tea waiters working for them. So I was part Grandson of a colonial and part South London trash.

In the Army and Navy department store, on the top floor was the Skyline restaurant that over looked adjoining suburbs of Beckenham and Shortlands.

A terrace that sat above the treetops. I imagined I was in Los Angeles, meeting Liza for coffee. I 'd sit and drink at least 6 cups of black coffee, as if the daily lines of speed weren't enough and scribble very Burroughs esque rants in my notebook....

“Stars crashing orchids shit out green jelly boy with blond hair and green eyes door through which he went they came spurted out gasp choking on twins in vomit”

It was at the Skyline that I first encountered Simone, a black girl with platinum blonde hair, wearing a plastic Mac and smoking multi- coloured Russian cigarettes. Actually I followed her down the high street into the Skyline. I went to her table to ask for a light for my white Kent Deluxe cigarette. She looked so original, all black and gold, a huge painted red smile that cracked her face, as she delighted in telling me about her 'boyfriend's boyfriend'.

Simone and I had several things in common, love of David Bowie being one of them and dressing up another. Simone decided I should meet her boyfriend, Simon.

“He’ll think you’re very pretty” she said grinning away.

I met Simon, my parents were away for the weekend and I’d invited them over.

Simon was small and square shouldered Bowie clone, blond hair at the front and red at the back, wore a 50’s bum freezer jacket and baggy pants.

I found him unnerving, he wouldn’t look at you directly, but sideways and every now and then lick his lips like a lizard, and actually aping a mannerism Bowie did in ‘The Man Who Fell to Earth’ movie. He had this pervy interest in other people’s neurosis, fuck ups, he liked to observe me turn into a nervous wreck, fall apart. He was Bromley Common’s answer to Andy Warhol.

For some reason Simon and I decided to write to each other even though he only lived a bus ride away, his pen name was ‘Compact’ later changed to ‘Boy’ we sent notes back and forth.

“Dear Compact, I’m feeling divinely decadent today, I spent the whole day deciding whether to paint my nails green or black, oh well, Berlin”

“Hi Berlin, I’d like to be a robot, I think each day is like a day of television,
See ya, Compact”.

Clothes, records, drugs and books, not necessarily in that order were the essential accoutrements of my adolescence.

Days, hours were spent searching through the charity shops and jumble sales, getting the right outfit together.

There I’d sit in my bedroom in front of an old scratched mirror, my box of tricks before me. Nico or Patti or New York Dolls -

‘Jet boy’ being a favourite blaring way on my crappie stereo system, my mother calling up to “turn it down”.

I’d start to get ready at least five hours before I’d have to leave the house.

Take a bath, put Max Factor ‘ivory’ pan stick on in thick strips across my face and neck and blend it in, then dust it down with Leichner’s translucent face powder, and violently bash my face with the powder, using a theatrical pink puff, huge clouds of powder exploding off my cheekbones, dusting off the excess with a brush, then pencil in my plucked eyebrows in black, ring my eyes in black, it accentuated their darkness, they looked like two currents in very white dough, add mascara, thick, but without getting the little black bobbles on the ends, then the difficult bit, Biba’s rhubarb and custard blusher, rhubarb along the cheeks and Custard high lighting them, giving a bruised look. My lips painted in either Mary Quant lip-gloss that resembled drool or for one phase purple / black lipstick.

Somewhere in the midst of all this conjuring, I’d pause for a line of sulphate, a rolled pound note up my nostrils.

And the result? Perfect, porcelain, narcotic Panda. My hair at this point would have been a blue / black wedge = parted on the side and floppy fringe over one eye,
A thatch of black cotton wool.

And then my entrance down the stairs and through the living room passed my parents watching T.V. My stepfather with boggled eyes, would just stare to the inevitable bleating of my mother’s “what on EARTH! Do you look like?”. Sometimes I would swish right passed them without saying a word or other times, I’d stop and ask for a fiver.