

# **A “Bit of a Blur”: An Analysis of English Slang in Music**

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## **ABSTRAKT**

Hlavní náplní této bakalářské práce je překlad čtyř kapitol hudební autobiografie *Bit of a Blur* od Alexe Jamese, člena kapely Blur, následně doprovázený analýzou slangových výrazů. Práce je rozdělena do teoretické a praktické části. Teoretická část začíná stručným obeznámením s autorem, knihou a kulturním pozadím dané doby. Dále popisuje obecné definice překladu a nabízí porovnání různých druhů překladu s důrazem na jejich formu a význam. Hlavní teoretická část se zaměřuje na lexikální ekvivalenci a slang samotný. Překlad a analýza slangových výrazů se nachází v praktické části práce. Jejím cílem je nahlédnout do průběhu překladatelského procesu.

Klíčová slova: překlad, překladatel, ekvivalence, analýza, slang, hudba, Alex James, Blur

## **ABSTRACT**

The main purpose of this bachelor thesis is the translation of four chapters of music autobiography *Bit of a Blur* by Alex James, the member of the band Blur, accompanied by the analysis of slang terms. The thesis is divided into two parts, the theoretical and the practical part. The theoretical part begins with a brief introduction of the book, the author, and cultural background. Furthermore, it introduces definitions of translation and offers a comparison of various translation types. The emphasis is put on a form and meaning of translation. The main part of the theory focuses on the problem of lexical equivalence and slang itself. The translation and analysis of slang terms is situated in the practical part of the thesis. The aim of this part is to offer a glimpse into the course of translation process.

Keywords: translation, translator, equivalence, analysis, slang, music, Alex James, Blur

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## INTRODUCTION

Musicians are complicated people. On one hand, the good ones possess a rare gift of brilliance, with which they are able to create something from nothing; to light a spark of familiarity and emotional connection within listeners' hearts. On the other hand, many of them have already demonstrated how easy it can be to fall to the absolute bottom full of shallowness and immorality.

However, this work does not want to judge the life paths of specific musicians. As much as it is challenging to grasp their essence, the same difficulties are to be found when trying to define their language. It is not represented by black and white extremes, when the first one is comprised of ingenious skilfulness of their verses, while the second offers only unintelligible professional jargon or slang together with vulgarisms of desperately drunken nights. In fact, their language shine with more colours as they are constantly absorbing influences from wide surroundings.

Therefore this bachelor thesis deals with the translation and analysis of a music autobiography called *Bit of a Blur* by English musician Alex James. Many of the most interesting music autobiographies have not been translated into Czech at all and *Bit of a Blur* is one of them. Hence the author of this thesis, a music enthusiast and also amateur musician, would like to present his own translation of four chapters of this book, which will be accompanied by the analysis and comments on the process of translation of slang terms. The aim of this thesis is not to offer a comprehensive list of slang terms, but rather to make the best possible translation, reveal the language used in the book through the translation process and discover and highlight some interesting slang terminology, whether connected to music or the musicians' ordinary life.

To provide the necessary knowledge for this task, the theoretical part will describe various types of translation and will further deal with the problem of lexical equivalence. The goal of the last part of the theory is to briefly examine the matters of the slang itself.

## **I. THEORETICAL PART**

## 1 THE AUTHOR, THE BOOK, THE BACKGROUND

*Bit of a Blur* is a two hundred and seventy four page long autobiography written by English rock musician Alex James and released in 2007 by London-based publishing house Little, Brown Book Group. As it is often common for autobiographies, the author is not a well-known writer, but rather someone who had achieved success in a different field instead. Alex James is a bass player of the famous Britpop band Blur, which, together with Oasis, ruled the British music scene during the nineteen nineties before disbanding in 2004. The band reunited in 2008 and after series of concerts released a comeback album in April 2015. Apart from playing in the band and touring around the world from time to time, Alex James is a cheesemaker at his Oxfordshire farm. However, it would be an understatement to claim that he has no writing experience at all, since he writes columns for *The Sun* and *The Sunday Telegraph* mainly about food, farming and family life. In addition to that, he has been contributing to other British newspapers such as *The Observer*, *The Times* or *The Independent*.

*Bit of a Blur* was received favourably amongst the British critics, with *The Guardian* calling it “the definitive guide to Britpop”. (*The Guardian* 2007) The book reaches as far as James’s childhood in a middleclass family in Bournemouth and continues to guide the reader through his formative teenage years and subsequent studies at Goldsmiths College in London, where he got acquainted with his future bandmate Graham Coxon as well as an artist Damien Hirst. With Coxon and his friends Damon Albarn and Dave Rowntree, the four started a band called Seymour, later to be renamed Blur. Throughout the chapters which deal with the period beginning at the end of the eighties, when the band were unpopular outsiders, and culminate in the second half of the nineties, which found them being well-known faces on top of the charts, the book discusses their musical life and their rise to fame. Due to the fact that the book is also rich on background and private information and stories, the longest part of the autobiography is focused on James’s life as a rock star and playboy of clubs in Soho, London. His relationships and sexual affairs are openly discussed in detail. The final chapters of the book finds Alex James as he quits his bad habits, alcohol and drug addictions and settles down with his wife in a farmhouse to lead a quiet family life.

## 2 DEFINITION AND TYPES OF TRANSLATION

Peter Newmark defines translation as “transferring the meaning of a stretch or a unit of language, the whole or a part of a text, from language to another.” (1991, 27) However, translation is not restricted only to a conversion of lexical units between two languages. According to the essay “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation” by Russian linguist Roman Jakobson (1959, 233), three types of translation can be distinguished:

**Intralingual translation**, sometimes also called rewording, “is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs in the same language.” The words are substituted by its synonyms, but even synonymy cannot guarantee full equivalence. (ibid.)

**Interlingual translation** or translation proper “is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language” and is labelled a reported speech by Jakobson, for the translator serves as a recoder and transmitter of a message from another source. The problem of equivalence is deepened and combined with cultural differences. (ibid.)

**Intersemiotic translation** (transmutation) represents “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems.” (ibid.)

Susan Bassnett (2002, 23) further comments on Jakobson that even “intralingual translation often has to resort to a combination of code units in order to fully interpret the meaning of a single unit. Hence a dictionary of so-called synonyms may give *perfect* as a synonym for *ideal* or *vehicle* as a synonym for *conveyance* but in neither case can there be said to be complete equivalence, since each unit contains within itself a set of non-transferable associations and connotations.”

In the following text, only the interlingual translation is discussed further in detail, since this bachelor thesis deals with this type of translation solely.

### 2.1 Form versus meaning

Translated text has two different aspects – its form and meaning – which influence overall orientation of the translation. If the priority is given to a form of the text rather than to its meaning, the translation can be marked as form-based. Vice versa it is a meaning-based translation. (Knittlová 2010, 16)

Knittlová (ibid.) distinguishes four types of translation, while Newmark is more detailed with his classification. (1988, 46-47) Apart from these same four categories, he adds four

more. All of them are described below together with characterizations by Knittlová when possible and suitable. The first four belong into the form-based and the other four into the meaning-based category. Some of them are undesirable extremes, although they can be of practical use under the right circumstances. They are arranged from the most typical form-based translations to the most typical meaning-based translations.

### 2.1.1 Interlineal translation

Interlineal translation is usually applicable only in the field of descriptive linguistics and generative grammar or on condition that the source (SL) and target languages (TL) are closely related and thus share similar or identical grammatical structures and rules. It is an extreme example of literal translation, which do not respect grammatical system of a target language. (Knittlová 2010, 16)

<i>I made records with Duffy...</i>	<i>Já dělal rekordy s Duffy...</i>
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### 2.1.2 Literal translation

Literal translation does not take account of context and even collocations and idioms. Nevertheless, it respects grammatical system of target language, although the choice of lexical units does not fit given context. (ibid., 16)

<i>I made records with Duffy...</i>	<i>Dělal jsem rekordy s Duffym...</i>
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### 2.1.3 Faithful translation

Faithful translation is still dogmatic and uncompromising to a certain degree. It tries to reproduce original contextual meaning with precision, but within target language grammatical structures constraints. (Newmark 1988, 46)

<i>I made records with Duffy...</i>	<i>Dělal jsem desky s Duffym...</i>
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#### 2.1.4 Semantic translation

The essence of semantic translation is that it offers a space for translator's intuition and empathy during the translation process. It is more flexible than faithful translation and it is more aesthetically oriented. (ibid., 47)

<i>I made records with Duffy...</i>	<i>Nahrával jsem desky s Duffym...</i>
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#### 2.1.5 Communicative translation

Communicative translation is linked to a pragmatic aspect of translation. It is necessary to respect it regarding translation of proverbs, sayings, greetings, idioms and other conversation clichés. (Knittlová 2010, 16-17) "Both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership." (Newmark 1988, 47)

<i>It's a boom-bust economy.</i>	<i>Je to jako na horské dráze.</i>
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#### 2.1.6 Idiomatic translation

This type of translation preserves the original message but the nuances of the meaning are frequently distorted due to the overuse of idioms and colloquialisms even though they are not presented in the original text. (ibid.)

#### 2.1.7 Free translation

Free translation does not make allowances for stylistic features and specific connotations. As a result, the translation lacks aesthetic qualities. (Knittlová 2010, 17) The content is reproduced, although the form of the original is lacking. This kind of translation usually occurs in a form of a paraphrase much longer than original. (Newmark 1988, 46) Concerning written translation, it is considered to be incorrect.

#### 2.1.8 Adaptation

Being the absolutely freest form of translation, its usage is limited only to plays and poetry. (ibid.) The source language text often serves as a mere template or source of a non-binding inspiration. The creativity of the translation is disproportional in comparison to its reproducing aspect. (Hrdlička 1997, 17)

## 2.2 Goals of translation

Newmark claims that the two main goals of a good translation are accuracy and economy, which are fulfilled only by semantic and communicative translation. (Newmark 1988, 47) Knittlová further comments that translator's aim should be to create a text that has an identical meaning as a source text, yet still respects the target language and its formal treatment is natural. A high-quality translation is not supposed to look like a translation, but rather like an original work. (Knittlová 2010, 17) Semantic and communicative translation meet these requirements, however semantic translation is more "personal and individual, follows the thought processes of the author, tends to over-translate, pursues nuances of meaning, yet aims at concision in order to reproduce pragmatic impact." (Newmark 1988, 47) On the other hand, communicative translation is "social, concentrates on the message and the main force of the text, tends to under-translate, to be simple, clear and brief, and is always written in a natural and resourceful style." (ibid.)

### 3 EQUIVALENCE

Equivalence is a condition when a meaning of specific lexical unit is similar to another to that extent that they can substitute each other well. Peter Newmark suggests that the so-called “equivalence effect” is desirable, however it is improbable to achieve it “if the purpose of SL text is to affect and the TL translation is to inform (or vice versa)” or “if there is a pronounced cultural gap between the SL and the TL text.” (Newmark 1988, 48) Otherwise, “in the communicative translation of vocative texts, equivalent effect is not only desirable, it is essential; it is the criterion by which the effectiveness, and therefore the value, of the translation of notices, instructions, publicity, propaganda, persuasive or eristic writing, and perhaps popular fiction, is to be assessed.” (ibid.)

From all the linguists who have studied equivalence, Eugene Nida is one of the most important. He coined the terms formal and dynamic equivalence. The former focuses on the most accurate correspondence between a form and content of the SL and the TL text. Formal equivalence is often required in diplomacy and business environment, where greater accuracy of grammatical structures is demanded. On the contrary, the goal of dynamic equivalence is to achieve the same effect on the reader of the target-language text. (Knittlová 2010, 16) As Nida clarifies (1969, 200), dynamic equivalence represents the “quality of a translation in which the message of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that the *response* of the *receptor* is essentially like that of the original receptors.” It favours readability at the expense of the original grammatical structure, thus it can be applicable when translating literature.

For this bachelor thesis is supposed to deal with slang terms, the attention is paid to the lexical equivalence as described mainly by Knittlová and Newmark.

#### 3.1 Lexical equivalence

There is a difference between lexical units of different languages regarding denotative and mainly connotative meaning, which superimpose the denotative elements and creates even more noticeable differences. The methodology used in a text analysis and description of lexical units has to differentiate standard language from non-standard language, ordinary vocabulary from professional and also make allowances for functional style orientation of described material. There are three levels of equivalence – absolute, partial and zero. (Knittlová 2003, 33) They will be theoretically explained in next chapter and also



supplemented with annotated practical examples taken from the translated chapters of the book.

### 3.1.1 Total equivalence

Total equivalence is primarily represented by appellative units of basic vocabulary fond. That includes people in surroundings, body parts, objects of the nearest or more distant surroundings, animals, time, and even abstractions directly related to human. Their denotative meaning is usually almost unambiguous.

Concerning the formal aspects, total equivalence is mostly symmetric, which means that one-word expression can be translated into target language as one word. The same concordance applies to the multi-word expressions as well.

It is important to take into account that various languages are typologically different. As for English-Czech translation, Slavonic verbs carry more information than English verbs. Unlike English, which is nominally oriented, Czech has a verbal character. It offers a wider range of possibilities for translations into Czech, however it also means that there are not many total equivalences in term of verbs, although it may not seem to be truth initially. The action verbs and verbs describing human activity and processes surrounding humans such as *be : být, have : mít, hear : slyšet* often bear more information within certain context, thus their Czech counterparts can be semantically richer. (ibid., 33-34)

### 3.1.2 Partial equivalence

Partial equivalence is the most frequent of them all. It is the result of the fact that Czech and English languages vary not only from the typological point of view, but they are also culturally, historically, socially and geographically distant. All of this leads to many formal, denotative, connotative and pragmatic differences and their combinations. (ibid., 35)

#### **Formal differences**

One of the formal differences is that English is isolating analytical language with more analytical, multi-word and at the same time more explicit expressions than Czech. The English phrasal verbs or idioms usually consist of verb and preposition. However, they can be translated into Czech as one word. (ibid., 36-37)

<i>The next thing you know you've lost all your friends and are <b>walking along</b> a dark Street with no shoes on.</i>	<i>Další věc, co si pamatujete, je, jak jste ztratili všechny své kámoše a <b>jdete</b> bosky temnou ulicí.</i>
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English multi-word language units are usually more explicit.

<i>There wasn't that much difference between the two bands and, when viewed from <b>a little old lady's</b> point of view...</i>	<i>Mezi oběma kapelami nebyl zase až takový rozdíl a ze <b>stařenčina</b> pohledu...</i>
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### Denotative differences

The most common semantical difference between English and Czech language units is that the latter usually contain some additional semantic information, therefore using such a translation is called particularization, or also substitution by hyponym. In this case, the original term is replaced by subordinate one. As was already mentioned, Czech and English are typologically different, because Slavonic verbs carry more information than English verbs. Unlike English, which is nominally oriented, Czech language has a verbal character. (41)

Generalization is the opposite of particularization when the semantic components of the source language term are reduced in the final translation. The word is substituted by hyperonym which means by superordinate term. Generalization usually takes place during the translation of nouns when given text specificity is not known to Czech language.

<i>...he couldn't buy <b>a bottle of beetroot juice</b> without causing a sensation.</i>	<i>...nemohl si ani koupit <b>řepnou šťávu</b>, aniž by způsobil pozdvižení.</i>
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### Connotative differences

Most of the words are connotatively neutral, although when used in text, they can gain connotative meaning, which can eventually even outweigh its denotative counterpart. To preserve original impact of the text, it is important to aptly depict correct connotation. (57) Expressive connotations are highlighting the statement either negatively or positively and the chosen language reflects given situation and the author's affect and temperament.

He'd been the original singer in Duran Duran and had written some good songs, mainly <b>about girls</b> .	Byl to původní zpěvák Duran Duran a napsal pár dobrých skladeb převážně <b>o ženských</b> .
<i>He was nursing an extra spiky <b>headache</b>...</i>	<i>Hýčkal si značně silný <b>bolehlav</b>...</i>

### Pragmatic differences

During the translation process, the attention should be paid to the lingual and non-lingual experience of the source and target-language readers. Provided that the original message could be unintelligible for the target readers, the translator can offer more information by adding a general classifier to specify the expression. This method is particularly common when translating unknown names.

<i>On the day of the <b>Brit Awards</b>...</i>	<i>V den <b>udílení cen Brit Awards</b>...</i>
<i>He had bought a farmhouse <b>on Exmoor</b>.</i>	<i>Koupil si statek v <b>národním parku Exmoor</b>.</i>

On the contrary, the information can be omitted in case of redundancy. If the two languages does not share similar background and the translated lexical unit carries information which is specific only for the source-language environment, it is often substituted by more general expression.

<i>He had a <b>black taxi account</b>...</i>	<i>Mike měl <b>účet u taxislužby</b>...</i>
<i>He had bought a <b>farmhouse on Exmoor</b>.</i>	<i>Koupil si <b>statek v národním parku Exmoor</b>.</i>

The most frequent solution is a use of an analogy which includes a substitution of social clichés, phatic expressions, phrases and salutations. Such an analogy should be in accordance with target language conventions, but only to the extent that it still preserves its original usage. Units of measurement are the typical example of the substitution by analogy.

Analogy is also applicable on phrases containing comparisons.

<i>It's a <b>boom-bust economy</b>.</i>	<i>Je to tam <b>jako na horské dráze</b>.</i>
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The main goal is to sufficiently inform the reader supposing the artistic qualities of the text will not be affected. Sometimes it is necessary to use an explanatory transcription. Nevertheless, it should be as concise as possible to avoid excessive broadening of the text. (81-83)

### 3.1.3 Zero equivalence

Zero equivalence or non-equivalence is a situation when the target-language equivalent does not exist. If the translator wants to avoid omitting such a word, it has to be substituted by adaptation, calque, generalization, or borrowing. (84-85)

Nonetheless, the omission can be justifiable as far as “the meaning conveyed by a particular item or expression is not vital enough to the development of the text to justify distracting the reader with lengthy explanations.” (Baker 1992, 40)

<i>He left it in <b>Freud's</b> so many times...</i>	<i><b>U Freuda</b> ji zapomněl už tolikrát...</i>
<i>Quite often it turned up <b>at the Bull and Gate, Kentish Town.</b></i>	<i>Docela často se našla v <b>Bull and Gate v Kentish Townu.</b></i>
<i>...and there was a picture of me on page three of <b>The Times.</b></i>	<i>...a v „<b>tajmesech</b>“ byla na třetí straně moje fotka.</i>
<i>When that happens that means it's <b>a single.</b></i>	<i>Když se něco podobného stane, znamená to, že máte <b>singl.</b></i>
<i>The <b>demo</b> version...</i>	<i><b>Demo</b> verze...</i>

## 4 SLANG

### 4.1 Definition of slang

As Anatoly Liberman claims in his *Analytic Dictionary of English Etymology* (2008, 189) the word *slang* has its ultimate origin in Scandinavia where it existed before the 18<sup>th</sup> century and from where it subsequently reached London underground. First English usage of the term dates back to 1756, when this word meant a “narrow piece of land running up between other and larger divisions of ground.” (ibid) Although the current definitions of slang by Czech and English linguistic sources differ slightly, there is a consensus concerning the basic definition. The Oxford English Dictionary defines slang as a “language of highly colloquial type, considered as below the level of standard educated speech, and consisting either of new words or of current words employed in some special sense.” It is an independent part of a national language used in ordinary, mostly semi-formal or informal environment. (Hubáček 1996, 24) This non-standard vocabulary is thematically connected to work or hobby environment and used rather in spoken than in written language. Some groups have wider and more developed slang vocabulary than others. This depends on the strength of the inner social bonds within the specific social group. The most common are miner, huntsman, student, sports, drug, actor, theatre or musician slang. (Hauser 1980, 23-24) However, the language of these groups is often at the intersection of slang, jargon and argot. These two terms are inseparably connected to slang, for Merriam-Webster or The American Heritage dictionaries define them as quasi-synonyms for slang. “They have been used interchangeably, not only in everyday speech, but also in thoughtful writing about language.” (Adams 2009, 8)

### 4.2 Jargon

From the etymological point of view, jargon is the oldest of the three connected terms because the origin of this formerly French word reaches as far as the fourteenth century during which it meant “unintelligible talk”. According to this definition, there are no clearly visible differences between slang and jargon. Adams describes both of them as “playful and irreverent and casual”. What is the distinction then? Slang is used by both smaller and bigger groups that have things in common, be it for example classmates or the whole English youth, therefore “they are bound to speak a common language that separates them in some fashion from the language of those who aren’t in the group.” (Adams 2009, 17) This means that the people within the group voluntarily share an interest, whereas jargon is language of a work

group or profession, within which the people do not share common interest as much as rather common purpose. Although jargon can fulfil a social role as well and support social structures, because “it identifies who is in the know, who deserves pro forma respect as a member of the team.” (ibid., 18)

### 4.3 Argot

The nineteenth century marked the first mention of the word *argot* as a synonym and later successor for *cant*, which was probably derived from Latin in the sixteenth century. It was a verbal expression for “beggar’s whine”. (Adams 2009, 8) Argot is described as a secret language used by people at the margins of the society, such as prostitutes, thieves, vagrants, smugglers or criminals in general. The purpose of these non-standard expressions is to deliberately hide described reality. (Hubáček 1996, 24) In other words, these social groups use argot to prevent people outside their surroundings to understand them, therefore it is very difficult for uninitiated to deduce meaning of such words.

### 4.4 Features of slang

Typical features of slang is its attempt to be bizarre and to expressively exaggerate. It wants to shock and provoke. (Knittlová 2003, 110) Slang can be viewed as a fresh and playful addition to standard language, however, as Coleman (2012, 9) claims, it has been often perceived negatively by many writers and, metaphorically speaking, it has been likened to weed, murderers or counterfeit currency. Slang words can be short-lived or too narrowly oriented, but some of them are able to gain wider acceptance. If the language is a father and words are his children, then “illegitimate words are a stain on the family crest. Slang terms are low-born: illegitimate or orphan children without parentage. Born in the linguistic slums, these freakish and shifty individuals live outside the brotherhood of words, always trying to creep into use. Some, but only the most deserving, will succeed and be adopted, but only when they have proved themselves useful.” (Coleman 2012, 10) Tony Thorne, the author of *Dictionary of Contemporary Slang*, claims that “slang has moved over the past three decades from being a taboo subject, or at least something virtually ignored by academics and the media, to becoming a popular topic for pop-culture discussion and more serious public debate.” (2014, 7)

## 4.5 Lifespan of slang terms

As American Heritage College Dictionary claims, slang can be characterized as “short-lived”. (Hellweg 2008) This was proven to be only a matter of certain terms though. Michael Adams presented a chart of slang equivalents for *drunk*, which indicates time periods during which those slang terms have or had been used. Out of twenty-five terms, twenty-two are still in use, whereas three of them, namely *loaded*, *bent* and *lit up*, were coined in nineteenth century. It is also visible that the vocabulary was altered approximately every decade when new words were added. The 1940s brought terms like *smashed* and *fucked up*, while *snoekered* and *messed up* emerged in the 1950s only to be supplemented with *trashed*, *hammered*, *wrecked* and *shit-faced* in the 1960s. The older terms did not disappear completely, they were just downplayed. This evolution illustrates a need of younger generations to distinguish themselves from their older siblings or parents. The clearest exception is the term *gone Borneo*, which was derived from the circus sideshow “The Wild Man of Borneo”. Its short-lived popularity during the 1980s indicates that slang words can be ephemeral because of a trend or context that is applicable only for a limited time. (Adams 2009, 13-15)

## 4.6 Musicians' slang

As definitions presented in slang dictionaries suggest, a lot of current music terminology is patterned on jazz slang. However, a musician in general by his very nature does not belong to a sole specific social or professional group, thus the language used by several musicians can differ greatly. Speaking of musical environment, there are many language distinctions amongst music genres. The biggest ones are between basic categories such as classical or popular music, followed by often similarly significant distinctions within popular genres and communities like rock, electronic music, pop, disco or folk and their subgenres. This situation can be illustrated on the examples of the term *PLUR*. It is a lifestyle concept of peace, love, unity and respect, nowadays considered as an undefined dogma of rave and electronic dance music scene. This word is well-known within rave or electronic dance music communities, nonetheless it can be an empty phrase for rock or classical musicians. On the other hand, *football*, a slang term for whole note based on a similarity between visual appearance of a football ball and a whole note sign, (“A Way with Words” 2012) is commonly used by classical musicians, but is unlikely to be known or frequently used by rock musicians who are usually not classically-trained. Similarly the word *rimshot*, which

means accented snare drum hit, when a head and a rim of a drum are hit simultaneously, (Miller 2003, 206) is familiar to rock musicians, however electronic music producers might not know it, since it is technique used by live performing musicians.

Still, these genres and mainly subgenres frequently overlap into each other and their boundaries are increasingly difficult to define. Regarding the language of musicians belonging to various genres, the situation is similar. Unlike above mentioned words, others can occur regardless of music genres or communities. Therefore another classification suggests itself, namely classification according to instruments.



## **II. PRACTICAL PART**

## 5 TRANSLATION OF CHOSEN CHAPTERS OF *BIT OF A BLUR*

### Brit Awards

V den udílení cen Brit Awards jsem tak jako častokrát snídal s Mikem Smithem, mým vydavatelem. Hýčkal si značně silný bolehlav, přičemž se mě snažil nakreslit. Vždy měl u sebe v brašně skicák. Neustále tu kabelu ztrácel. U Freuda ji zapomněl už tolikrát, že pro ni měli speciální místo za barem. Podle toho, zda ji měl během snídaně s sebou, jste mohli poznat, jestli měl divokou noc. Pokaždé ji získal zpět nejpozději do tří odpoledne, ačkoliv někdy trvalo celé dopoledne jen zjistit, kde vůbec je, jako tehdy, když se namísto toho měl snažit podepsat Cranberries. Docela často se našla v Bull and Gate v Kentish Townu. To bylo vždy dobré místo, kde začít hledat. Mike měl účet u taxislužby, takže pokud ji zapomněl v taxíku, mohl ji vždy vystopovat. Někdy přenocovala v restauracích; v Astorii na Charing Cross Road oběhla celé kolo. Vždy nakonec doputovala zpět, až na jedinou výjimku. Na Brit Awards tu starou tašku ztratil nadobro. Vrátil se a prohledal celý Alexandra Palace, ale nikdy ji nenašel. Občas ho přepadl sentiment a oplakával ji. Stále to bylo téma k hovoru. V tu noc uvažoval, že by ji nechal doma.

Udílení cen Brit Awards byla nezřízená chlastačka. Naprosto pokaždé šlo o totální masakr. Pro hudební průmysl je to nejočekávanější noc roku. Celý ten byznys je vlastně sled podobných nocí: party, udílení cen, vydávání desek, různá výročí otevření, prezentace, velké koncerty a festivaly; a to mluvím jenom o práci. Brit Awards jsou pomyslným taťkou všech večírků. Všechna velká zvířata na ně stojí frontu. Madonna, Elton John, věčné stálice a nepotopitelné lodě průmyslu, bývá tam každý. Já jsem až do toho večera takové štěstí neměl. Pořadatelé nás patrně považovali za riziko; bylo vysoce pravděpodobné, že bychom blbnuli, a mimo to jsme ani nikdy nebyli na nic nominováni. Každoročně, když přišel čas udílení cen a my se nedostali mezi uchazeče, jsme se potýkali se zklamáním. Tentokrát jsme byli ve hře prakticky v každé kategorii a jen stěží zbýval čas uvědomit si, co vše to znamenalo. Hráli jsme pár písniček včetně „Parklife“ s Philem Danielsem, ze kterého se stal pátý člen kapely.

Byla to velkolepá podívaná, malichernost za několik milionů liber. Amerika má Oscary a my máme Brit Awards. Je to výroční party showbyznysu, na kterou se chce dostat každý; taková, která sahá za rámec hudebních či bulvárních rubrik a míří přímo na titulní stránky.

V moři přihlížejících, za hradbou mezinárodních médií, byl celý Alexandra Palace vyzdoben a rozzářen jako vánoční stromeček. Uvnitř to vypadalo jako na pouti plné kolotočů, autodromů a vyhlídkových kol. Stovky číšníků brázdily mezi akry bílých ubrusů.

Šampaňské teklo proudem, z nebe padaly kokainové vločky a nepřetržitý příval hvězd se za potlesku klaněl.

Jako svůj doprovod jsem pozval Justine, ta ale většinu času trávila na parketě s basákem z Pulp, a tak jsem skončil v parku na lavičce s Keithem Allenem. Jen tak se tam vedle mě nachomýtnul a od té doby to dělal dál a dál.

Když jsem se ráno probudil, bylo mi jasné, že se můj život navždy změnil. Všechny nominace jsme přetavili ve vítězství; byl to rekordní úlovek. Během večera se z Blur stal všeobecně známý pojem. Šel jsem si koupit The Times, abych měl křížovku k luštění. Mladá holka, která zrovna šla se svou matkou po ulici, propadla hysterii a v „tajmsech“ byla na třetí straně moje fotka. Když na vás vyskočí vlastní obličej v momentě, kdy to nečekáte, zamává to s vámi, obzvláště zezáčátku. Neexistuje víc šokující a děsivější pohled, než na sebe samého. Dokážu pochopit, proč si někteří z těch lidí žijících v džungli mysleli, že když je vyfotili, ukradli jim duši. Bylo to jako by se část mého já dostala mimo můj dosah. Každopádně, stejně si jsem jistý, že ani samotní křováci nevěřili těm povídkám o ukradených duších. Stejně jako mně jim ten mediální zájem akorát trochu zamotal hlavu.

Byli jsme ve všech novinách. Až do předešlé noci jsme plnili výhradně stránky hudebních magazínů. Vždy pro mě bylo krapet deprimující, když se taxikáři dozvěděli, že jsem muzikant, ale na jméno kapely řekli jenom: „To mi nic neříká, kámo.“ V taxících jsme vůbec trávili spoustu času. Je to jedna z výhod hraní v kapele. Když jste televizní moderátor, dostanete oblečení zdarma. Pokud pracujete v hotelu, dají vám najíst. Jen co jsme podepsali nahrávací smlouvu, zdálo se, že na nás neustále čeká připravený taxík. Nahrávací společnosti nedokážou zázraky, ale postarají se, aby se kapely dostaly všude včas.

Najednou o nás taxikáři slyšeli a to bylo podstatně horší. Být takřka neznámým je snesitelnější, než když jste hned z kraje rána bezmocně uvěznění v taxíku plahočícím se hustým provozem a v kocovině musíte podstupovat výslech nadšeného taxikáře. Obyčejně s nimi mluvím rád, jen ne o takovýchto věcech. Je to příliš monotónní. Začal jsem jim říkat, že jsem účetní, což obvykle stačilo na ukončení celého tyátru. Myslel jsem, že se účetní zřejmě tu a tam hrají na rockové hvězdy, ale neměl jsem ponětí, že by se členové kapel museli občas vydávat za účetní.

### The Great Escape

Naše životy se měnily. Graham se rozešel se svou přítelkyní a Dave si tu svoji vzal. Její bývalá spolubydlící chodila se zpěvákem a skladatelem Stephenem Duffym. Byl to původní zpěvák Duran Duran a napsal pár dobrých skladeb převážně o ženských. Potkal jsem ho na svatbě a hodně dlouho jsme spolu mluvili, převážně o ženských. Rozhodli jsme se, že spolu uděláme desku. Napsal jsem teda pár skladeb o ženských a o měsíc později jsme už vystupovali v *Top of the Pops*. Jedna z těch písniček, „Hanging Around“, se líbila Damieniu Hirstovi, a tak ji použil ve filmu, který zrovna natáčel. Tou dobou jsem se s ním vídal často. Přestěhoval se z Berlína zpět do Londýna, kde dělal docela povyk. Když jsme spolu chodili na výšku v Goldsmiths, byl fascinován úspěchem i Blur.

On a Keith Allen byli bavičské duo. Opravdu se dokázali navzájem rozesmát a euforie jejich humoru mezi nimi vytvořila silné pouto. Keitha jsem vídal rovněž často. Byl stálým inventářem londýnské noční scény. Znal naprosto každého a každý jej buď miloval, nebo nenáviděl. Jeho mladší bratr je hollywoodský filmový režisér, jeho ex-manželka Oscarem oceněná filmová producentka a jeho dcera popová hvězda. V každém z nich vidím malou část jeho podstaty, ačkoliv on byl nepochybně ten zničující velký třesk, z něhož se postupně vyvinuli, nezávislá duše; to na něm měl Damien opravdu rád. Vždy hrozilo nebezpečí, že Keith podpálí dům anebo udělá totální ostudu. Muselo mu být skoro padesát. Zrovna mu vypadaly vlasy a začal nosit nevkusné svetry.

Poslední člen osazenstva klubu Groucho byl šéfkuchař, Francouz jménem Charles Fontaine. Přisuzovali mu autorství receptu na rybí koláč, ale to nebyl důvod, proč jsem jej měl v oblibě. Jednoduše měl rád vaření a dobrou zábavu. Nebyl součástí celé té honby za slávou. S Duffym jsem dělal desky a s Keithem, Damienem a Charlesem veselky.

Během nahrávání alba *The Great Escape* bylo studio i všechny naše domy v obležení. Nahrávací proces přerušovala všemožná televizní vystoupení, udělování cen a ponocování. V režii studia byli novináři pozorující kapelu během práce a fotografové, zachycující jak nahráváme naše party a dlobeme se v nose. Všichni jsme měli vlastní okruh přátel – bylo by divné, kdyby ne – ale stále jsme spolu trávili víc času, než s kýmkoliv jiným.

Chodila nám spousta pošty od fanoušků. Devadesát procent bylo na jedno brdo. Většinu dopisů totiž píše pořád ta stejná malá skupina lidí. Nejenom, že psali nám, psali úplně každému a žádali o fotky, autogramy, lístky, laskavosti a podobně. Dalších deset procent je od lidí, kteří nám či jednomu z nás chtěli sdělit něco konkrétního, protože jsme je svým způsobem zasáhli. Některé z těch dopisů byly krásné a povznesly mě na duši. Jiné byly

opravdu, ale opravdu děsivé. Zdálo se, že nejvíc husí kůži nahánějící věci dostával Graham; ukazoval mi fotografie lidí, kteří se mrzčili a vyhrožovali tím nejhorším, pokud jim nepomůže. Zato podivné dopisy, které jsem dostával já, měly tendenci tíhnout k pornografii, což mi vyhovovalo mnohem víc.

Jedna z prvních věcí, kterou jsme pro album *The Great Escape* nahráli, byla píseň „Stereotypes“. Tou dobou jsme z ní byli všichni hodně nadšení. Mysleli jsme, že to bude první singl. Demo verze „The Universal“ zněla trochu jako kalypso. Byla to písnička a půl, používající suspendované akordy ve stylu Mozarta a modulaci šmrncnutou Bacharachem, ale nemohli jsme vymyslet odpovídající aranžmá. Bojovali jsme s ní dva dny pořád dokola a už jsme to chtěli vzdát, když v tom Damona napadla smyčcová pasáž, ze které se nakonec stalo intro. Pak už do sebe vše okamžitě zapadlo. Měli jsme tedy v rukávu dvě dobré věci. Byl tu ještě jeden barokně znějící „umcaca“ song o tom, jak Balfe prodává Food Ltd a utíká žít do velkého baráku na venkov, ale to byl jenom vtip.

Nacházeli jsme se zrovna v polovině natáčení *The Great Escape*, když jsme hráli jednorázovou štaci na stadionu Mile End ve východním Londýně. Byl to obrovský venkovní koncert. Dostali jsme se z obvyklého okruhu arén a rozjeli to ve velkém. Netuším, kolik lidí se tam vlezlo, možná pětadvacet tisíc. Jednoduše - byl to stadion. Už jsme si navykli hrát pro velké obecenstvo na festivalech, ale tohle bylo naše domácí publikum. V části města, která obvykle nemá s rock and rollem moc společného, byl deštivý den, avšak lístky šly na dračku a nezabránil by tomu ani sníh.

Zahráli jsme „Country House“. Zrovna jsme ji dokončili ve studiu, a i když to byl zvláštní kousek, Streetie naznačoval, že by mohl mít naživo dobrou odezvu. Musel jsem se koncentrovat víc než obvykle, jelikož jsme ji hráli prvně. Pamatuju si, jak jsem poté, co jsem v půlce prvního refrénu udělal chybu, zvednul hlavu, abych zjistil, jestli si toho někdo všimnul. Celé publikum jednotně skákalo, mávalo a smálo se, zatímco se na sebe bezmyšlenkovitě mačkalo. Poslední refrén si už zpívali všichni. Když se něco podobného stane, znamená to, že máte singl.

Celkově to byl zvláštní den. Očekával jsem, že pro mě bude vrcholným okamžikem, ale vybavuju si, jak jsem byl obklopen spoustou lidí, které jsem zrovna dvakrát vidět nechtěl. Blur se stali veřejným majetkem.

### Souboj kapel

Den po koncertě v Mile End jsme letěli do Ameriky, kde jsme pořád hráli v barech. Bylo požehnáním a úlevou být zase pro jednu inkognito a mít tu svobodu podnikat náhodná dobrodružství s děvčaty v červených autech, aniž by o tom poté psali na stránkách novin Sunday.

Všichni jsme trochu trpěli tou špínou v bulváru. Graham právě procházel obdobím, kdy ho srážela auta. Damonova bývalá přítelkyně, o které jednou napsal přeslazenou baladu, prodala svůj příběh jedněm z těch odpornějších novin. Na fotce působila obyčejně a male, ne tak jako v té písničce.

Další a další příběhy se valily ze všech stran. Jeden bulvár mě dával dohromady s Helenou Christensen. Podle titulní stránky *Daily Sport* jsem byl zapletený do milostného trojúhelníku s lesbickými courami. Další bulvární plátek mě spojoval s vizážistkou, která dělala pro všechny v Browns. *Star* otiskl fotku, kde jsem s hudební novinářkou Sylvii Patterson. Nic z toho nebyla pravda. Silvia se s *Daily Star* soudila a získala pět set liber. Byla z toho celá nadšená a pozvala mě na panáka.

Na Endell Street jsem objevil další bar, a to Mars Bar. Měli tam otevřeno o hodinu déle než U Freuda, takže jsme se tam po zavíračce přesunuli i s barbankami - všechny holky pracující U Freuda byly kočky. Mars Bar byl přesně ten typ místa, kde jsem se cítil vyloženě jako doma. Byla to pořádná budova, pětipodlažní řadový dům s restaurací v přízemí a v prvním patře a s potrhým šéfkuchařem ve sklepě. Majitel Freddy, původem z Holandska, nabídnul barbankám, které jsem s sebou přivedl, práci. Byl mi vděčný, že jsem je tam vzal, a jako poděkování mi dal svazek klíčů.

Vydání singlu „Country House“ bylo předběžně naplánováno na vrchol léta. Zdálo se, že jde o víc než jen další nahrávku. Vypadalo to, že se mění celý svět. Vliv kapely začal být tak pozoruhodný, že nás sledovala dokonce i Labouristická strana. Damon šel do Westminsterského paláce na schůzku s Tony Blairem a zpátky na byt se vrátil s pár lahvemi ginu z Dolní sněmovny. Dokážu si představit, jak se Damon dívá budoucímu premiérovi přímo do očí a uvádí jej do rozpaků: „Cože?“ Tony Blair na to: „Promiňte?“ A Damon znovu: „COŽE KÁMO?“ Šlo o jeden z těch případů, kdy měl Damon návrh a mohl si to dovolit. Lidé na něj na koncertech docela často křičeli „Je-žíš, Je-žíš“. Nepotřeboval ale, aby ho kdokoliv poplácával po ramenou. Mike Smith měl zničehonic velkou novou kancelář. Snažil se podepsat smlouvu s kapelou jménem Oasis. Byli z Manchesteru. Jejich prvnímu albu se dařilo a jejich přítelkyně byly nonstop v Browns. Měli smlouvu s Creation Records,

kde pracovala Daveova manželka. Když se jejich singl dostal na první místo, zavolala mi, jestli náhodou nevím, kde by mohli udělat party. Byl jsem totiž králem večírků. Zarezervovala místa v Mars Bar, kde jsme se zastavili i my. Byla to jenom jedna z dalších nocí v Mars Bar. Pokračoval jsem do klubu Groucho a oni šli do Browns. Víc jsem nad tím neuvažoval.

Jejich album šlo na dračku a hudební tisk je s námi začal srovnávat. Co se mě týká, neměl jsem na ně nijak vyhraněný názor. Zpěvák měl dobrý hlas, ale hudba zněla hospodsky. Bylo to poněkud jiné káva, než Blur. Zdálo se, že o nás mají hodně co říct. Vždycky jsem se chechtal, když hodili svůj ksicht naším směrem. Obě kapely byly v novinách docela často a novináři se nás ptali, co si o nich myslíme; není pochyb, že i oni museli zodpovědět spoustu otázek týkajících se nás. Vyhnali to celé do extrémů. Já jsem se otázkám na ostatní kapely vždycky vyhýbal.

Oasis se pořád chytali na lep a štěkali jako psi na kočky. Vypadalo to, že mluvili hlavně jenom o nás. Magazín NME zvláště rád rozdmýchával vášně a stavěl dvě strany proti sobě. Rozhodně chtěli vidět souboj. Nahrávací společnosti během vydávání významných desek obvykle spolupracují. Ne však tentokrát. Obě kapely měly naplánováno vydání prvních singlů na stejný den a nikdo nechtěl ustoupit.

Damien Hirst pro nás režíroval videoklip ke „Country House“. Vsadil v něm na výrazné ženské tvary. Grahamová nová přítelkyně pořádala proti podobným věcem hotové tažení. Byla do toho opravdu zapálená. Nesnášela jak ten videoklip, tak i nás. Tedy zejména mě, řekl bych. Graham začal poněkud klesat na mysli. Byl jedinou osobou v celé zemi, kterou tento souboj kapel nezajímal. Jakmile se blížilo datum vydání, vše se vystupňovalo v naprosté šílenství. Vše.

Kdybych se měl snažit vysvětlit velmi staré paní, čím se živím, což čas od času musím, asi bych jí řekl: „Jsem muzikant, nahrávám desky a chovám se otřesně. Je to super.“ Pokud by stařenka řekla: „Myslíte něco jako Oasis?“ musel bych odpovědět, „Ano, přesně.“ Mezi oběma kapelami nebyl zase až takový rozdíl a ze stařenčina pohledu byly prakticky jedna a ta samá věc. Když už o tom mluvím, myslím si, že všechny starší dámy upřednostňují Blur před Oasis. Ti pravděpodobně zabodovali mezi „chlapáky“ a „floutky“. Zatímco urážky dál kolovaly a stupňovaly se, z toho, co mohlo být materiálem na třetí, pátou či sedmou stranu, se stal celonárodní zájem a předmět titulních stran. V týdnu, kdy oba singly vyšly, jsem jel k Damienovi do Devonu. Koupil si statek v národním parku Exmoor. Telefony tam nefungovaly, ale i tak jsem se udržoval v obraze. Nebylo možné se tomu vyhnout.

V novinách o tom každý den něco psali. Bylo to v televizních zprávách, v rádiu. Dokonce si o tom cvrlikali i vrabci na střeše. Že jsme skončili na prvním místě jsem zjistil v autě cestou zpátky do Londýna, když jsme jako všichni ostatní poslouchali odpočítávání top čtyřicítky. V Soho byla party a Graham všechny překvapil tím, že chtěl vyskočit z okna.

Tak, a bylo to tady, obrovský celonárodní úspěch. Myslím si ale, že jsme byli akorát zmatení. Damon byl nejslavnější tváří v zemi a nemohl si ani koupit lahev řepné šťávy, aniž by způsobil pozdvižení. Graham si připadal, že sice získal svět, ale zároveň ztratil duši; že tíha úspěchu ho přiměla polevit ze svých zásad. Asi ztratil kontrolu nad tím, jak si kapelu představoval a jakou ji chtěl mít, a myslel si, že jsme udělali strašnou chybu. Podle mě jsme žádné kompromisy nedělali, ale ztratil jsem to, co jsem miloval nejvíc. Justine byla stále jedinou ženou, ke které jsem cítil něco, co by se blížilo hlubokému citovému poutu. Vše ostatní bylo povrchní a sobecké.

Kromě Belgie, kde nadšení nečekaně ochladlo, zachvátila hysterie celou Evropu. V Itálii se na nás vrhl dav, v Portugalsku jsme měli policejní doprovod. Zavírali kvůli nám obchody i silnice. Byli jsme uvězněni v budově madridského rádia a náš soukromý tryskáč musel čekat s nastartovanými motory, než nás odsud vyproští četníci. Dokonce i oni chtěli autogramy. Tisíce lidí venku křičelo. Řev na koncertech byl ohlušující. Od konce léta až po začátek Vánoc nikdy nepřestal. Pro vaše uši to není vůbec dobré. Grahamovi se to ani trochu nelíbilo. Jediné, co chtěl, bylo hrát na svou rozladěnou kytaru a kreslit příšery.

### **Manhattan**

Damien měl výstavu v New Yorku. Bylo to v Gagosianově galerii v SoHo. Její majitel Larry Gagosian je jednička na světovém trhu s uměním. Říká se, že ví, kde přesně se nachází každé dílo moderního umění o hodnotě vyšší než milion dolarů. Je to třída.

V bytě se objevil doslova celý vagon luxusní přehlídkové módy od Dolce & Gabbana. Vybral jsem si ten nejlepší oblek. Dokázal jsem si ho na sobě představit. K tomu ladila vesta a špičaté boty. Oblekl jsem se, mávnul na taxík a vydal se do New Yorku na Damienovu výstavu. Vzal jsem si jen pas a peněženku - neměl jsem moc kapes. Usoudil jsem, že dokážu být bez problémů vzhůru tři dny, takže bych si nemusel dělat starosti s hotelem. V New Yorku se stejně vždycky něco najde.

SoHo byla ta poslední část New Yorku, která by byla krásná. Zezačátku bylo skvělé nestarat se o žádnou tašku nebo hotel. Taxi mě zavezlo přímo ke galerii. Výstava začínala až další den. Přípravy podobných akcí jsou hotové vždy až na poslední chvíli. Byla tam



spousta hubených ženských s telefonem nonstop u ucha a hodně vousatých zelenáčů, kteří všechno chystali. Damien přestal mluvit sprostě a působil neochvějně. Všichni nejbohatší, nejobornější lidi, kteří kupují umění, žijí v Americe. A všichni měli přijít. Amerika má opravdové boháče, stejně jako celebrity a tlust'ochy. Jsou ale ještě bohatší, slavnější a tlustší než jinde.

Šel jsem do baru Toad Hall s chlápkem jménem Michael. Jen co dorazíte do New Yorku, hned se vydáte na nějaké nové místo s někým novým. Toad Hall byl správný americký bar. V mnoha směrech se podobal hospodě Good Mixer, do které chodil Graham. Díry na kulečnickovém stole byly větší a v jukeboxu měli jen jednu dobrou píseň, a to „Cool for Cats“ od Squeeze. Pokud jste v jedné hospodě jako doma, jste jako doma i ve všech ostatních. Koupil jsem barmanovi drink, hrál s Michaelem kulečnick a dumal, co se asi tak bude dít dál. V New Yorku člověk nikdy neví. Je to tam jako na horské dráze. V jednu chvíli jste uprostřed města v osmdvacátém patře luxusního bytového domu a sháníte čerstvé citrony. Další věc, co si pamatujete, je, jak jste ztratili všechny své kámoše a jdete bosky temnou ulicí. A to se taky následně stalo. Vyhodil jsem své boty z okna taxíku. Opravdu hodně mě tlačily. Nemám dost malé nohy na takové módní kousky. Z toho bytu mě vykopli, poněvadž jsem řekl, že Blind Melon stojí za hovno. Neuvědomil jsem si, že to tam patřilo jejich zpěvákovi. Později jsem je začal mít rád, on ale chvíli po mé návštěvě zemřel. Chtěl jsem mu říct, že jsem udělal chybu, ale už bylo pozdě. Tak to na Manhattanu chodí. Vše se děje strašně rychle. U každého, koho potkáte, máte jen jednu šanci. Dostal jsem se zpátky do Toad Hall, ale nebyl tam nikdo známý. Když ztratíte všechny své kámoše v New Yorku, je správný čas dát si suché martini.

Newyorské suché martini je tak trochu západní variantou voodoo. Je to dokonalý koktejl. Správně namíchaný dokáže protrhat mračna strachu a zaplavit nejtemnější zákoutí vaší mysli zářivými paprsky osvětlení. „Bombay Sapphire, straight up, s olivou!“ řekl jsem barmanovi. To je gin protřepaný s ledem a malinkatou kapičkou vermutu, podávaný v kuželovité skleničce na martini a doplněný olivou. Někdo má rád tenký proužek citronové kůry či dokonce malinu. Nejlepší je oliva. Kvalitu martini poznáte už od pohledu. Mělo by ho být málo, ne víc než hlt, pokud ho chcete kopnout na ex. Sklenice by měla být zamlžená, což naznačuje, že její obsah je ledový. Dobré martini je ryzí oslavou minimalismu. V některých barech nechávají gin v mrazáku, aby led neroztál během protřepávání; díky tomu není výsledný produkt skoro vůbec zředěný. Když se k přípravě použije velmi chladný

gin, pak se koktejl nazývá Gibson. Nicméně moc barmanů tohle neví a je zbytečné jim to vysvětlovat. Už jsem to zkoušel. Jednoduše musíte najít chlápka, který to zná, a držet se ho.

Martini v Toad Hall byly velké a odfláknuté, s děsně obrovskými olivami. Když už nic jiného, používali aspoň dobrý gin. Seděl jsem na barové židli, zapálil si camelku a popustil uzdu své fantazii. Zrovna tehdy mě napadlo, že musím sehnat nějaké magnety. Ta myšlenka mě zaměstnala po celou dobu, co jsem pil martini. Najednou se zdály být velmi zvláštní a zajímavé. Proč se přitahují a proč mají dva konce?

„Kde můžu sehnat nějaké magnety?“ pronesl jsem k chlápku, který seděl vedle mě u baru. „Na Canal Street, mají tam všechny různé druhy. No to mě podrž, jak odporné martini. Moc protřepané. Gin nebyl dost studený. Měli by ho nechat v ledničce.“

Vytáhl několik pohlednic z bundy se spoustou kapes a začal lovit pero. Jednu mi nabídl a já ji napsal pro Magneu. Vysvětlil jsem jí, že jsem v New Yorku a sháním magnety. Koupil jsem tomu chlápku pivo. Jmenoval se Robert, byl umělec a jeho otec byl vědec. O magnetech toho věděl hodně. Rozhodli jsme se, že si dáme nějaké dobré martini. Zavolał jsem Kellymu. Kelly řídil Spy. Když jste si chtěli vyrazit v Londýně, bylo to jednoduché. Groucho bylo to správné místo. Každý to věděl a každý tam chodil. V New Yorku se to pořád měnilo. V únoru byste někam šli a byla by tam Jasmine Guinness a Liberty Ross a odešli byste s Chloë Sevigny. Když byste se na stejné místo vrátili v dubnu, bylo by zavřené a celá čtvrť by už dávno vyšla z módy a nestála by ani za zmínku. Spy se udržel na výsluní dobrých osmnáct měsíců. Byla to obrovská jeskyně s velkými pohovkami a malými martini, s tlumeným osvětlením a se všemi nejdražšími a nejúžasnějšími ženami z New Yorku.

„Kelly, tady Alex James, zdarec, kámo. Jasně, super, podívej, jsem zrovna za rohem, ale ztratil jsem boty. Bude to v pohodě? Jsme dva. Jasně, že jsem opilý! Budu se chovat slušně, slibuju. Uvidíme se za minutku.“

Nejvíce potěšující je, když vám gorily u dveří řeknou, že rozhodně není možné, abyste šli dovnitř bosky, načež vy si necháte zavolat jejich šéfa a ten vás přivítá s otevřenou náručí a doprovodí vás ke stolu. Robert si vyzul boty a pověsil si je kolem krku. Měl umaštěné ruce, na hlavě vrabčí hnízdo a na sobě oblečení ze supermarketu. Přesto to byl fešák.

Dali jsme si pár skleniček martini a šli zpátky do Toad Hall. Byla tam Angela, Damienova bývalá přítelkyně. Taky se jí ostatní někde ztratili. Už se připozdívalo a všichni tři jsme šli hrát kulečnick. Docela jí to šlo. Zakotvil jsem v jejím pokoji v hotelu Gramercy Park, probudil se a sehnal si nové boty a zubní kartáček. V New Yorku se nakonec vždycky všechno nějak vyřeší.

Podařilo se mi být po zbytek víkendu vzhůru a chytit noční let zpátky na Heathrow s příletem v pondělí ráno. Bohužel mi ale nedovolili vzít si na palubu žádné magnety. Na letištní kontrole totiž spustily všechny bzučáky. Do studia jsem se dostal včas, ale byl jsem napadrt'. Sotva jsem mohl mluvit. Když jsem v těch neupravených šatech dorazil na nahrávací session, Damon se tvářil přísně, podobně jako Damien před výstavou. Všechno už bylo přichystáno a připraveno. Jen co Graham začal hrát na kytaru, cítil jsem se nadlidsky. Sebral jsem basu a hudba ze mě proudila. Melodie měla takovou intenzitu, jakou během mého všedního stavu mysli postrádala. Muzika shromáždila a propojila všechny zvláštní emoce, jimiž jsem překypoval. Během dopoledne jsme složili Beetlebum. Zněla naprosto odlišně.

Nicméně stále to nekončilo. Dave měl narozeniny a chtěl vyrazit ven. Londýn byl v plném proudu a nastupovalo hnutí Cool Britannia řízené ze svého ústředí v Groucho Clubu, který nabízel stále nové příběhy o neřízeném úspěchu a jehož jméno neustále získávalo na zvuku. Vzal jsem tam Davea. Nesnášel tam úplně všechno a opravdu si to užil. Chodící ranění se právě vraceli z New Yorku, a když dorazili nezvěstní opozdilci, vypukly ovace.

### **Mayfair**

Chyběl mi Island. Často jsem myslel na Magneu, která na tom odlehlém místě žila. Měli jsme podobné smýšlení. Byla plná požitkářské nevázanosti stejně jako já. Uvažoval jsem, jak by asi mohl vypadat život s ní. Byla bezstarostná, chytrá, hezká a nešlo odhadnout, kam ji osud zavane. Měla všechno; měla celý svět na dosah ruky a celý svět ji chtěl popadnout a pohltnout. Také Damon na Islandu něco našel. Ne ženu, ale útočiště. Veškeré své zpěvy chtěl nahrávat v Reykjavíku.

Oba jsme se nemohli dočkat, až se tam vrátíme. Grahamovi se ale Camden opouštět nechtělo. Všichni čtyři jsme nahráli další doprovodné stopy ve studiích Mayfair v Primrose Hill. Maison Rouge nám už moc nevonělo.

Primrose Hill je skvostná oblast plná krásných domů a lidí kousek severně od Regent's parku. Tiché a hezké útočiště. Když jste v poledne vyrazili koupit si ciabattu, často jste natrefili na pochybné celebrity.

Mayfair bylo nové studio a tudíž nový způsob práce. Do té doby se všechno nahrávalo na analogové pásky, ale Streetie měl nový počítačový nahrávací systém. Písně a jejich jednotlivé části bylo možné velmi jednoduše upravovat, zpomalovat, zrychlovat, navzájem prohazovat či vystřihávat a vkládat. Na „Essex Dogs“, poslední písnička z alba, bylo použito

hodně počítačových triků. Z hudebního hlediska je to pravděpodobně ta nejdotaženější věc, kterou jsme kdy udělali. Je plná poměrně propracovaných kontrastů a polyrytmů a je mistrovsky zahráná. Nicméně takové písničky si lidi nikdy nepamatují.

„Song 2“ byla naopak asi naše nejjednodušší a nejkratší věc vůbec. Dave přichystal dvě bicí soupravy, na které hráli společně s Grahamem oba najednou. Ta hlasitá kytara v refrénu je ve skutečnosti basa prohnaná podomácku vyrobeným distortion efektem. Celé to bylo hotové zhruba za patnáct minut. Měl jsem hroznou kocovinu a cítil jsem se strašně. Je to syrová nahrávka a nezněla by tak, kdybych předchozí noc šel brzo spát. Nahráli jsme ji, aniž bychom o ní nějak zvlášť přemýšleli, a ve výsledku jsme z ní měli lepší pocit.

„Beetlebum“ a „Song 2“, dva úspěšné singly z našeho pátého alba *Blur*, byly složeny v podstatě stejným způsobem, jako všechny předtím. Rozvíjeli jsme sled akordů nebo riff či melodii, s kterými přišel Damon; prostě čtyři chlápci zavření v místnosti bez oken, co všem nakopávali prdele. Některé další písničky z toho alba byly víc individuální. Všichni jsme dělali desky s jinými lidmi a navzájem jsme se už nepotřebovali tolik jako dřív. Nejlepší hudba ale vznikala tehdy, když jsme byli ve formě a spolupracovali jsme.

Jednoho pátečního rána jsme byli s Grahamem grogy. Skočili jsme do hospody Queen na rohu Regent's Parku. Z nějakého důvodu jsme s sebou měli naše ceny Ivor Novello. Hádám, že jsme chtěli zamachrovat. Doručili nám je do studia zrovna v tu chvíli, když jsme vyráželi do hospody. Mezi muzikanty jsou „Ivors“ pravděpodobně tím nejžádanějším vyznamenáním ze všech. Jsou udělovány za skladatelství. Vystavovat si doma zlaté a platinové desky je nevkusné. Ty jsem dal své mamce. Taky mi vždycky přijde zvláštní, když mají lidi na zdech svoje velké fotky. Není to zrovna v pořádku. Většina cen se ztratí, rozdá, anebo rozbije ještě v tu noc, kdy je dostanete. A i když ten večer přežijí, tak patří do kanceláří, ne domů. Tedy až na Ivor Novello. Můžete si je postavit na krbovou římsu a ti, co jsou v obraze, o vás díky nim budou mít lepší mínění. Graham a já jsme seděli v horní části hospody s cenami postavenými na baru před sebou. Jsou docela charakteristické - malá figurka Múzy.

Hospoda byla poměrně prázdná. Seděli jsme tam, oba uvolnění ve společnosti toho druhého. Tak často jsme spolu trávili čas v prázdných hospodách, ať už v té či oné. Tehdy jsem ho ale moc často nevídal, jelikož jsme byli s Damonem na Islandu a také proto, že měl novou přítelkyni. S Grahamem jsem mohl mluvit o čemkoliv. Obvykle toho věděl víc než já, ale potřeboval někoho, kdo by se o něj staral. Byla to součást jeho osobního kouzla. Byl naprosto k zulíbání. Nikdo nebyl víc cool než Graham. Vždycky věci posral víc a stylověji,

než bych kdy dokázal já, za což jsem ho svým způsobem respektoval. Když jsem byl opilý, postaral se o to, abych vypadal míň směšně, a to tím, že byl pokaždé trochu opilejší. Pokud jsem se trápil kvůli něčemu iracionálnímu, obvykle se ukázalo, že jeho obavy byly přitažené za vlasy ještě o trochu víc. Trápila mě spousta věcí. Ničím nepodložená úzkost byla běžná věc, zvláště ráno, když se hrubé přestupky předcházejících nocí začaly vracet ve vzpomínkách. Navzdory našim úspěchům a vítězstvím jsme měli obavy všichni a cítili jsme se stejně beznadějně a pošetile, jako kdokoliv jiný.

Občas jsme se navzájem doháněli k šílenství, ale obvykle jsme se snášeli dobře. Nicméně Graham mi byl bližší než ostatní. Byl to můj nejlepší přítel; nejenom v kapele, ale na celém světě. Ve škole bych s ním seděl v lavici. Nikdy nebylo nic, co bych před ním musel tajit bez ohledu na to, jak ohavné mi to připadalo. Byl naprosto pohlcený hudbou a měl tak zjevně oslňující hudební mysl, že podle mě nikdy neměl potřebu někomu něco dokazovat, pokud zrovna nebyl v náladě. Většina lidí se smíří s tou nesmyslnou dřinou, kterou je propagace desky. Pro něj to bylo utrpení. Zajímalo ho jen hraní na kytaru. Hudba je vrozený a trvalý dar a on jím překypoval.

Snažil jsem se Grahamovi nakreslit, jaký nos má Magnea. Byl to hezký nos. Postarší džentlmen přišel k baru objednat si pití. Řekl: „Jeden takový mám taky“. Já na to: „Co? Takový nos jako Magnea?“ „Ne, takového ‚Ivora‘.“ Vůbec jsme mu nevěřili, a tak pro něj šel domů a položil ho na stůl vedle našeho. Jmenoval se Sandy a svou cenu Ivor získal za ústřední znělku k seriálu *Upstairs, Downstairs*. Shodou okolností to byla Grahamova nejoblíbenější písnička vůbec. Dost se potom zapovídali a tak jsem se pomalu vydal zpátky do studia. Damon položil svou cenu na jeden z reproduktorů za mixážním pultem. Já jsem tu moji postavil na druhý, aby tvořily stereo pár. O spoustu hodin později dorazil Graham i se Sandym. Damon je spatřil skrze průmyslovou kameru, jak se potácejí hlavním vchodem dovnitř. „Koho to sem teď KURVA zase dotáhl?“ „Neboj, je to skladatel, potkal ho v hospodě.“ „Skladatel?“ zeptal se Damon. „Skladatel! Takže je to skladatel, jo? Má zkurvenou cenu Ivor Novello? Ne. To si teda nemyslím.“ V ten moment proletěl dveřmi Sandy třímající sošku v natažené ruce.

## 5.1 Analysis of slang terms

<i>a home-made distortion box</i>	<i>podomácku vyrobené kreslívko</i>
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*Distortion box* is a term for distortion effect pedal which amplifies guitar signal to that extent that the produced sound is distorted and sounds “warm” and “dirty”. (Ross 1998, 39) This definition implies the literality of the term. Czech equivalent for *distortion* is simply *zkreslení*, but the whole noun phrase is usually translated by borrowing as *distortion efekt*, rather than by word-for-word translation *zkreslovací efektový pedál*. However, in this case the writer used a less common term *box* as the head of the noun phrase, which suggests it would be appropriate to use more expressive translation. The unspecified effect pedal in general can be translated by slang term *krabička* which is in compliance with the word *box*. Nevertheless the translation *podomácku vyrobená zkreslovací krabička* is clumsier than *podomácku vyrobené kreslívko*, which is still as expressive. Moreover, it evokes playfulness.

<i>Oasis probably had the edge with 'geezers' and 'lads'.</i>	<i>Ti pravděpodobně zabodovali u „chlapáků“ a „floutků“.</i>
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These two terms proved to be misleading since they seem to be quite straightforward at first glance. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, Geezer stands for a queer, odd, or eccentric person, especially elderly men in American English, or it could be the British slang variant of the American *dude*. The word *lad* in its general and the most frequently used meaning is a male person of any age between early boyhood and maturity. It can be translated as *hoch*, *chlapec*, *mladík*, *mládenec*.

In spite of this, it is crucial to take notice of the context, which can direct the meaning quite different way. Unlike Blur, the art school Londoners writing lyrics about problems of British middle-class, Oasis were a “working-class Manchester band who liked to drink and get in fights.” (Spin 2011) They represented ordinary young men from working class environment who had been dreaming about escaping their town and having the time of their lives. All of this was reflected in their lyrics which resonated with people from similar surroundings.

In view of the above mentioned facts, the alternative definitions provided by The Concise New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English seem to be much more suitable. It defines *geezer* as a young manual worker who spends his disposable income

on leisure and pleasure. Other descriptions assign this term with masculinity, self-assurance and “cockiness”. A *lad* is a young man who is full of self-confidence with which he pursues sensual ambitions. It is visible that these two terms are partially overlapping, therefore the final translations *chlapák* and *floutek* refers to the masculinity, self-confidence, and the youth and the “show-off” quality respectively.

<i>riff</i>	<i>riff</i>
<i>single</i>	<i>singl</i>
<i>indie</i>	<i>indie</i>

According to Knittlovás’s definition (2003, 84-85), these terms are examples of zero equivalence. All of them are borrowings from English. They could be translated by paraphrasing, but such a translation would be too extensive. Regarding a definition of *riff*, which is repeatedly played rhythmic musical phrase used in jazz and rock, the paraphrase could be *opakující se rytmický motiv*. Similarly, *single* as a separately released song would be clumsy to paraphrase. Unlike these two terms, *indie*, a short form of *independent*, may seem to call for Czech equivalent *nezávislý*. That would not be incorrect, but on the other hand, the term gained different connotations during the 1990s. Since then, it is rather a vague label for differently sounding rock music than an epitome of independence. Indie music is often marketed as independent and non-commercial in its bid for commercial success. (The Concise New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English 2008) This is why it is more suitable to keep the term in its original form. Moreover, not only were these terms adopted long time ago by music journalists, but considering the target audience, which recruits from people interested in music, it is possible or even demanded to use borrowings when translating these terms.

<i>tune</i>	<i>song</i>
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*Tune* is usually a synonym for a melody or harmony. Meriam-Webster dictionary defines it as series of musical notes that produce a pleasing sound when played or sung. In addition to that, the last couple of decades saw an occurrence of the word *tune* as a generalized slang expression described by The Concise New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English. It is a whole recorded song. The Czech equivalents for song

includes *píseň*, *písnička*, and *popěvek*. The first two are too ordinary and general, and the latter is inappropriate, because it implies only a vocal part of the song and excludes the instrumentation. Ironically, a loanword *song* seems to be a suitable translation of *tune*. It has the same meaning and contrary to the original English expression, it represents slang since it is a borrowing from foreign language used within a community of music fans or young people in general.

...a baroque <i>oompah</i> tune...	...barokně znějící „ <i>umcaca</i> “ song...
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As much as it is only an onomatopoeia for "the sound of a repeated, rhythmic bass figure played as by a tuba in a marching band" (Webster's New World College Dictionary), it can also be a slang expression which can easily describe a characteristic of music. Other variations such as *oom-pah* or *oom-pah-pah* can occur. Based on the phonetics and musical theory, *oom-pah-pah* evokes a triple metre signature common for classical music or folk brass music, when each syllable stands for a drum beat. From the point of view of a dance like waltz, it stands for the "one-two-three-one-two-three" rhythm counting. It remains a question whether the shorter form *oompah* was used deliberately as a sign of the 4/4 time signature instead of the 3/4, or it is just a simple shortening of a longer word, but the fact is that the described song "Country House" by Blur is in 4/4 signature. The reason why all of this was mentioned is that if the translator wants to preserve the onomatopoeic nature of the expression, it is better to notice that the Czech language uses particularly *umcaca*, not *umca*. This would attribute a wrong time signature to the song. Nonetheless, it is justifiable to assume that this will cross reader's mind at all and the only impression will be that it is a song with brass instrumentation.

<i>cab</i>	<i>box</i>
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Probably the first thing that comes to mind regarding the word *cab* is a taxi. Despite the fact that the author refers to a taxi as a *cab* several times, the translator cannot automatically presupposed that this case is similar. The original word from which it was derived is not a *taxicab*, but a (*speaker*) *cabinet* – a wooden enclosure for a loudspeaker. *Box* as a Czech fore-clipping of *reprobox* seems to be the only appropriate translation.



...a one-off <i>gig</i> ...	...jednorázová <i>štace</i> ...
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This shortening for the word “engagement” which refers to a concert or musical performance was coined by jazz musicians in the 1920s. It is heavily used within music environment nowadays. The ideal translation should bear a resemblance to the original word “engagement”, which can be translated as “závazek“, “angažmá“, “povinnost“ or “účast“. Taking this into account, some more neutral proposals like *koncert* or *akce* can be excluded. To translate it as *koncík* seems to be more appropriate since this term is part of colloquial speech or slang. Yet it is still derived from general *koncert* (*concert*) and the similarities are too obvious. Another Czech equivalent *štace* is literally a stopover, a place of activity, which corresponds with the etymology of *gig* and the meaning of the original term “engagement” to a certain extent. Last but not least, it is also frequently used in musician’s and theatre slang.

<i>He’s a mustard.</i>	<i>Je to třída.</i>
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It was immediately clear that the author was not likening someone to a plant with yellow flowers or spicy brownish-yellow sauce in this sentence. Both The Routledge Dictionary of Modern American Slang and Unconventional English and The Concise New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English depict *mustard* as a slang word for AIDS disease. Even though the definition has been verified by two sources, the translator’s work should not end here since the resulting translation in the vein of *On je AIDS* or *Je to AIDS* would be senseless – even more if the preceding sentences describe person’s qualities. In this case it is necessary to find another hidden meaning. As an adjective, *mustard* also means *excellent, best, skilled, and keen*. Taking this into account, it can be translated as *třída, klasa, or kapacita*.

<i>It was a no-holds-barred piss-up.</i>	<i>Byla to nezřízená chlastačka.</i>
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*Piss-up* is mainly British slang word for a drinking session. The applicable Czech equivalents could be *chlastačka, pařba, or spářka*. The first one better evokes the slang form of the word *pissed* (drunk, intoxicated) from which *piss-up* is derived. Actually, the word

*chlstačka* contains the stem *chlast* which stands for *booze*, therefore this kind of translation may fit better. In contrast, *no-holds-barred* is of American origin and it means “completely without restrictions”. (American Slang: Cultural Language Guide to Living in the USA 2004) The origin of this expression can be found in wrestling, where certain holds are illegal, or *barred*. It has been figuratively used since the 1940s and it has paved its way into British English as well. Being part of this phrase, it becomes connected with deliberately lost control without any moral supervision and restrictions, thus the translation *nezřízená*.

Another translation that suggests itself is *jako utržená z řetězu*. Although it may give a fresh impression, it is unnecessary long when compared to the previous options, and additionally it happens to relate primarily to animate lexical units. Someone at the party can be *jako utržený z řetězu*, but the party itself cannot. For these reasons, *nezřízená chlstačka* was chosen as the final translation.

...took the <b>redeye</b> back to Heathrow...	...chytíl <b>noční let</b> zpátky na Heathrow...
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The presence of London Heathrow Airport in the text indicates that out of eight definitions offered by The Concise New Partridge Dictionary, only one which describes *redeye* as “an overnight aeroplane flight, arriving at its destination early in the morning” could be right. The metaphorical expressiveness of the term points out the discomfort and stressfulness of night flights. Unfortunately, no suitable Czech equivalent which would capture this is to be found, hence the translator have to do without the expressiveness. In spite of this, the unambiguity and simplicity of *noční let* suitably depicts the straightforward meaning of *redeye*.

## CONCLUSION

This bachelor thesis was dealing with the translation of four chosen chapters of the music autobiography *Bit of a Blur* followed by the analysis of slang terms. The translation process proved to be a difficult and time consuming task, during which the key factor was to understand the meaning and the context of the source text perfectly. The biggest challenge was to transfer the connotations and expressiveness from the source language text into the target language.

To make this possible, the theoretical part provided the essential knowledge regarding different types of translation and their suitability. Above all, it discussed the problems of lexical equivalence and slang. All of this made the decision-making process during the translation easier.

The translated text showed that the language of musicians absorbs diverse influences. Apart from musical terminology, it included slang terms connected with youth culture or everyday life. The analysis pointed out that there is usually more than one way of how to translate particular lexical units. The process itself proved to be as important as the final result, for without the frequent turnings along the road, no end would be in sight.

Although it is important to follow certain rules, the final and the most significant element in the translation process is the translator himself. The uniqueness of stylistic style and the choices made can leave an indelible fingerprint on the translation, for better, or for worse.

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## APPENDICES

P I    Original of the translated text

## **APPENDIX P I: ORIGINAL OF THE TRANSLATED TEXT**

### **The Brits**

On the day of the Brit Awards I had breakfast with Mike Smith, my publisher, as I often did. He was nursing an extra spiky headache and trying to draw me. He always had a sketchbook with him, in his satchel. He was perpetually losing that bag. He left it in Freud's so many times they had a special place behind the bar for it. You could tell if he'd had a big night by whether he had his bag with him at breakfast time. He always got it back by mid-afternoon, although sometimes it took all morning to locate, when he should really have been trying to sign the Cranberries. Quite often it turned up at the Bull and Gate, Kentish Town. That was always a good place to start looking. He had a black taxi account so he could always trace it when he left it in his cab. It sometimes spent the night in restaurants and it did a whole run at the Astoria, Charing Cross Road. It always came back in the end, apart from once. He completely lost his old bag at the Brit Awards. He went back and checked the whole of Alexandra Palace, but he never found it. Sometimes he would become maudlin, and mourn for that bag. It was still a talking point. He was wondering whether to leave it at home altogether tonight.

The Brits was a no-holds-barred piss-up. It was a night of complete carnage every single time. It's the music industry's biggest night of the year. The music business is a succession of big nights: parties, awards and launches, openings anniversaries, presentations, big gigs and festivals, and that's just work. The Brits is the daddy of all parties. All the big guns line up for the Brit Awards. Madonna, Elton John, all the evergreens, the unsinkable battleships in the business, would be there. I'd never been before. We were probably considered a risk by the organisers, too likely to act up, and, besides that, the band had never been nominated for anything. Every year as the awards came around and we didn't feature in the line-up, there had always been time to dwell on our disappointment. This time we were up for something in practically every category and there had hardly been a moment to consider what it all meant. We were performing a couple of songs, including 'Parklife' with Phil Daniels who'd become a fifth member of the band.

It was a vast glittering spectacle, a multimillion pound trifle. America has the Oscars and we have the Brits. It's the annual showbiz party that everybody wants to go to, the one that reaches beyond the music and gossip pages and into the headlines.

In a sea of onlookers, beyond a moat of international media, the whole of Alexandra Palace was bedecked, jewelled and lit up like a Christmas tree. Inside there was a full-sized fair-ground with carousels, bumper cars and a big wheel. Hundreds of waiters tended to acres of white tablecloth. Champagne flowed, cocaine snowed and a steady rain of superstars took a bow.

I invited Justine but she was too busy dancing with the bass player from Pulp and I ended up on a park bench with Keith Allen. He'd just kind of appeared and he just kept appearing from then on.

When I woke up in the morning, I knew my life had changed forever. We'd won everything going; it was a record-breaking haul. Blur had become a household name over the course of the evening. I went out to get The Times for the crossword. A young girl walking along the street with her mother went into hysterics and there was a picture of me on page three of The Times. It's always a jolt to be confronted by your own image when you're not expecting it, especially the first few times it happens. There is no image more shocking or scary than your own. I can see why some of those people who lived in the jungle thought their souls were being stolen when they had their photograph taken. It was like there was a bit of me that had gone beyond my reach. I'm sure the jungle-dwellers didn't think it was their souls being stolen anyway. It was just a bit of media vertigo as far as they were concerned, too.

We were in all the newspapers. Until the night before we'd been strictly music magazine fodder. I'd always found it slightly depressing when taxi drivers, having established that I was a musician, would ask the name of the band and then say, 'Nah, mate.' A lot of time was spent in taxis. They're one of the perks of being in a band. If you're a TV presenter, you get free clothes. If you work in a hotel, you get fed. As soon as we signed our record deal there seemed to be a taxi waiting constantly. Record companies don't perform miracles, but they do make sure bands turn up to things.

Suddenly taxi drivers had heard of us. It was much worse. Being grilled by a thrilled taxi driver trapped inside a hangover trapped inside a taxi trapped in thick traffic, first thing in the morning, was harder to bear than being obscure. I do like talking to taxi drivers, just not about those kinds of things. It's too repetitive. I started to say I was an accountant, which was usually good enough to kill it. I thought accountants probably needed to pretend they were rock stars occasionally, but I had no idea people in bands sometimes had to pretend they were accountants.



## **The Great Escape**

Our lives were changing. Graham split up with his girlfriend and Dave married his. Dave's new wife's ex-flatmate was going out with a singer-songwriter person called Stephen Duffy. He'd been the original singer in Duran Duran and had written some good songs, mainly about girls. I met him at the wedding and we talked for a long time, mainly about girls. We decided to make a record together. I wrote some songs about girls and a month later we were on *Top of the Pops*. Damien Hirst liked one of the songs, 'Hanging Around', and used it in a film he was making. I was seeing a lot of Damien by this time. He'd moved back from Berlin to London where he was making quite a noise. He was intrigued by success and by Blur as we'd been at Goldsmiths together.

He and Keith Allen were a double act. They could really make each other laugh and the euphoria of their humour created a strong bond between them. I saw a lot of Keith, too. He was a permanent fixture in London's nightscape. He knew absolutely everybody and everybody either loved him or hated him. His younger brother is a Hollywood film director; his ex-wife is an Oscar-winning film producer; his daughter is a pop star. I can see a small part of his essence in all of them, but he was the devastating big bang from which they all evolved, a free spirit; that's what Damien really liked about him. There was always a danger that Keith might set the house on fire or be absolutely disgraceful in some way. He must have been nearly fifty. He'd just lost his hair and started wearing bad jumpers.

The final member of the Groucho squad was a chef, a Frenchman named Charles Fontaine. He was credited with inventing the fishcake, but that wasn't why I liked him. He just liked cooking and enjoying himself. He wasn't part of the fame rat race. I made records with Duffy and I made merry with Keith and Damien and Charles.

During the making of *The Great Escape* there were people outside the studio, outside all our houses. The recording process was interrupted by TV appearances, awards shows and late nights. There were journalists in the studio control room, observing the band at work, photographers taking pictures of us recording our parts and picking our noses. We all had our own circles of friends — it would have been weird if we hadn't — but we still spent more time together than with anybody else.

We got a lot of fan mail. Ninety per cent of fan mail says the same thing. The majority of letters are written by a small number of people who write lots of fan mail. They didn't just write to us, they wrote to everybody, asking for photographs, autographs, tickets, favours and so on. Then there's the other 10 per cent, from people who had something particular to

say to all of us, or one of us, because we'd moved them in some peculiar way. Some of it was beautiful and lifted my heart. Some of it was very, very scary. Graham seemed to get the hairiest stuff; he showed me photographs of people maiming themselves and threatening the worst if he wouldn't help them. My weird ones tended to veer towards pornography, which I was much more comfortable with.

One of the first things we recorded for *The Great Escape* was 'Stereotypes', which we were all very excited about at the time. We thought that it would be the first single. The demo version of 'The Universal' had a calypso feel. It was a tune and a half, using Mozart-style chord suspensions and Bacharach-flavour modulation, but we couldn't get the arrangement quite right. We battled with it for two days, on and off, and were just about to give up when Damon hit upon the string figure that ultimately became the intro. After that, everything clicked into place at once. That was two good ones in the bag. There was a baroque oompah song about Balfe selling Food Ltd and running away to live in a big house in the country, but that was just a joke.

We were halfway through recording *The Great Escape* when we played a one-off gig at Mile End Stadium in east London. It was a huge outdoor show. We'd broken out of the usual circuit of arenas into the big time. I don't know how many people it held, maybe twenty-five thousand. It was a stadium. We were used to playing to large audiences at festivals, but this was a home crowd. It was a rainy day in a part of town not normally associated with rock and roll, but it was a hot ticket and it wouldn't have mattered if it had snowed.

We played 'Country House'. We'd just finished recording it and although it was an odd one, Streetie suggested it might go down well live. I had to concentrate harder than usual on what I was doing as it was the first time we'd played it. I remember looking up after making a mistake halfway through the first chorus to see if anyone had noticed and the whole crowd was bouncing as one, waving their arms in time and smiling as they squashed each other senseless. By the last chorus they were all singing it. When that happens that means it's a single.

It was a strange day overall. I was expecting it to feel like a crowning moment, but I remember being surrounded by a lot of people I didn't particularly want to see. Blur had become public property.

## **Battle of the Bands**

The day after the show at Mile End we flew to America, where we were still playing in bars. It was a blessed relief to be incognito, free again to have random adventures with girls in red cars without it turning up in the Sunday newspapers.

We'd all suffered a bit from tabloid shame. Graham was going through a phase of getting run over by cars. Damon's ex-girlfriend, who he'd once written a sickly, sentimental ballad about, sold her story to one of the more ghastly newspapers. She looked small and plain in the photograph, not like in the song.

The stories came thick and fast. One tabloid had me dating Helena Christensen. According to the front page of the *Daily Sport* I was involved in a lesbo-slut triangle. Another tabloid had me down for a make-up artist who was servicing the whole of Browns. The *Star* printed a photo of me with a music journalist called Sylvia Patterson. None of it was true. Sylvia sued the *Daily Star* and got five hundred quid. She was thrilled about that and bought me a drink.

I discovered another bar in Endell Street: the Mars Bar. It was open for an hour longer than Freud's. I went there with the barmaids from Freud's after that shut. All the girls who worked in Freud's were pretty. It was that kind of a place. I was very at home in the Mars. It was a good building, a five-storey town house with a restaurant on the ground and first, and a mad chef in the cellar. Freddy, the Dutch owner, offered jobs to the barmaids I brought with me. He was grateful to me for bringing them round there and gave me a set of keys to say thank you.

'Country House' was pencilled in for high-summer release. It seemed like more than just another record. It felt like the world was changing. The band's influence had become so noteworthy that even the Labour Party had their eye on us. Damon went to the Houses of Parliament to see Tony Blair and came to the flat with a couple of bottles of House of Commons gin afterwards. I could imagine Damon looking the future Prime Minister right in the eyes and saying, 'What?' and Tony Blair saying, 'Excuse me?' and Damon saying, 'WHAT MATE?' and making him feel uncomfortable. This was one of the times when Damon had the gun and the other guy had the little stick. People were shouting, 'Je-sus, Je-sus' at Damon, quite a lot at gigs. He didn't need a pat on the back from anybody. Mike Smith had a big new office all of a sudden. He had been trying to sign a band called Oasis. They were from Manchester. Their first album was doing well and their girlfriends were always in Browns. They were signed to Creation Records where Dave's wife worked. She called me

when their single went to number one and asked if I knew where they could have a party. I was the party guy. She booked the Mars Bar and we all went along. It was just another night in the Mars Bar. I went to the Groucho and they went to Browns and I thought no more about it.

Their album was selling fast and the music press started to draw comparisons between the two acts. I didn't really have any strong feelings about them. The singer had a good voice, but the music was honky. They were quite a different thing from Blur. They seemed to have a lot to say about us. I always sniggered when they slung their muck in our direction. Both bands were in the papers quite a lot and journalists would ask us what we thought about them and no doubt they had to answer lots of questions about us. They worked themselves up into quite a froth. I always dodged questions about other bands.

Oasis kept rising to the bait, like dogs barking at cats. We seemed to be the main thing they talked about. The NME particularly liked to stir things up and antagonise them. They definitely wanted to see a fight. Record companies usually cooperate with each other with big releases. Not this time. Both bands were pencilled in to release the lead singles from their new albums on the same day and nobody wanted to budge.

Damien Hirst directed the video for 'Country House'. It used the language of breasts and bottoms. Graham's new girlfriend was on a crusade against that kind of thing. She had a real zeal for it. She hated the video, and us. Particularly me, I think. Graham became quite despondent. He was the only person in the whole country who wasn't interested in the record war. As the release date drew nearer, everything escalated to a full-on frenzy. Everything.

I suppose if I was trying to explain to a very old lady what I did for a living, which I do have to from time to time, I would have said, 'I'm a musician, I make records and behave appallingly. It's great.' If the old lady said, 'Do you mean like Oasis?' I would have to say, 'Yes, exactly.' There wasn't that much difference between the two bands and, when viewed from a little old lady's point of view, they were pretty much the same thing. That said, I think on the whole old ladies prefer Blur to Oasis. Oasis probably had the edge with 'geezers' and 'lads'. As the insults flew and grew, what might have been a page three, five or seven story became a matter of national interest and a front-page news item. The week the records came out I went to stay with Damien in Devon. He had bought a farmhouse on Exmoor. Phones didn't work there, but I kept up with what was happening. It was impossible to avoid. There was something in the papers every day. It was on the television news, on the radio. It was on the breeze, even. I found out we were number one in a car on the way back to London,

listening to the top forty countdown like everyone else. There was a party in Soho and Graham surprised everyone by trying to jump out of the window.

Here it was, the great national success story, but I think we were all confused. Damon was trapped inside the most famous face in the country and he couldn't buy a bottle of beetroot juice without causing a sensation. Graham felt he'd gained the world and lost his soul, that the juggernaut of attainment had compromised his principles. I think he felt he'd lost control of what he wanted the band to be, and that we'd made a terrible mistake. I didn't think we'd compromised, but I had lost the thing I loved the most. Justine was still the only woman I'd had anything approaching a sophisticated emotional connection with. Everything else had been skin-deep and selfish.

Apart from Belgium, where things had inexplicably cooled off, there was hysteria across the whole of Europe. In Italy we were mobbed, we had police escorts in Portugal. Shops were closed for us. Roads were closed. We were trapped inside a radio station in Madrid and our private jet had to wait with its engines running while the Guardia Civil extricated us. Even they all wanted our autographs. There were thousands of screaming people outside. The screaming at gigs was deafening. From the end of summer to the start of Christmas, the screaming never stopped. It's really bad for your ears. Graham didn't like it at all. He wanted to play his guitar out of tune and draw monsters.

### **Manhattan**

Damien had a show in New York. It was at the Gagosian Gallery in SoHo. Larry Gagosian, the proprietor, is the number one art dealer in the world. He's said to know the whereabouts in the world of every piece of modern art worth more than a million dollars. He's mustard.

A whole lorryload of Dolce & Gabbana catwalk couture turned up at the flat. I picked the best suit. I could see my face in it. There was a matching bodice and pointy shoes. I got dressed up, hailed a taxi and went to New York for the weekend for Damien's show. I just took my passport and my wallet. There weren't many pockets. I figured I could stay awake for three days, no problem, so I wouldn't need to worry about a hotel. Something always turns up in New York, anyway.

SoHo was the latest bit of New York to be beautiful. Initially it was great not having a bag or a hotel to worry about. I got a taxi straight to the gallery. The show was opening the next day. Art shows are never ready until the last minute and there were lots of skinny women

on mobiles and beardy kids building things. Damien had stopped swearing and had a steely kind of a vibe. All the most rich, most ghastly people who buy art live in America, and they were all coming. America has proper rich people, like it has proper famous people, and fatties. They're just richer and famouser and fatter in America.

I went to a bar called Toad Hall with a guy called Michael. As soon as you arrive in New York, you're off to some new place with some new face. Toad Hall was a proper American bar. In many ways it was similar to the Good Mixer, Graham's pub. The pockets on the pool table were bigger. The jukebox had one good song on it, 'Cool for Cats' by Squeeze. If you're at home in one bar, you're at home in them all. I bought the barman a drink, played pool with Michael and wondered what was about to happen. You can never tell in New York. It's a boom-bust economy. One minute you can be on the twenty-eighth floor of a portered apartment block in mid-town asking for fresh lemons, the next thing you know you've lost all your friends and are walking along a dark Street with no shoes on. That is what happened next. I'd thrown my shoes out of the taxi window. They were really hurting. My feet aren't catwalk size. I was ejected from the apartment for saying that Blind Melon were crap. I didn't realise it was the singer's apartment. I've since come to like them, but he died shortly after my visit. I wanted to tell him I'd made a mistake, but it was too late. That's how it is in Manhattan. It all happens so fast. You just get the one shot in all your encounters. I made it back to Toad Hall but there was no one I recognised. When you've lost all your friends in New York, it's time to have a dry martini.

The New York dry martini is a bit of Western voodoo. It's the ultimate cocktail. Administered correctly, it parts the clouds of fear and the brilliant sunshine of resolve floods the darkest corners of the mind. 'Bombay Sapphire, up, with an olive!' I said to the barman. That's gin, shaken with ice and the tiniest dash of vermouth, served in a conical martini glass, with an olive. Some people like a lemon twist, or even a raspberry. Olive is best. You can tell how good a martini is by looking at it. It should be tiny, not more than a gulp, if you want to knock it straight down. There should be a mist of condensation on the glass, indicating that the contents are ice-cold. A good martini is a pure concentrated triumph of minimalism. Some bars keep their gin in the freezer so that the ice doesn't melt during the shaking; that keeps the final product as undiluted as possible. When made with very cold gin, it's called a Gibson. Not many barmen know this, though, and it's pointless trying to explain. I've tried. You just have to find a man who knows and stick with him.

The Toad Hall martinis were big and sloppy with whopping great olives. At least they were made with good gin. I sat on the barstool, sparked up a Camel and cast my clearing thoughts wide. That was when I knew I had to get some magnets. I had a really good chew over the properties of magnets, a whole martini's worth. They suddenly seemed very strange and interesting. Why did they want to stick to each Other, and why did they have two ends?

I said, 'Where can I get some magnets?' to the next guy at the bar. He said, 'Canal Street, they've got all kinds. Yikes, what a nasty martini. It's too long. The gin wasn't cold enough. They should keep it in the refrigerator.'

He took some postcards out of a jacket that had a lot of pockets and began to hunt for a pen. He offered me a postcard, which I wrote to Magnea. I explained to her that I was in New York, looking for magnets. I bought the guy a beer. His name was Robert, he was an artist and his father was a scientist, and he knew a lot about magnets. We decided to get some good martinis. I called Kelly. Kelly ran Spy. In London, going out was straightforward. The Groucho was the best place to go. Everybody knew that and everybody went there. In New York, the best place to go was always changing. You'd go somewhere in February and Jasmine Guinness and Liberty Ross would be there and you'd leave with Chloë Sevigny, and then if you went back to the same spot in April it would have closed and the whole neighbourhood become completely passé and unmentionable. Spy had a good eighteen months at the top. It was a huge cave with big sofas and small martinis, low lighting, and all the most expensive and impossible women in New York.

'Kelly, it's Alex James, cheers, mate. Yeah, great, look, I'm round the corner, but I've lost my shoes. Is that going to be all right? Two of us. Of course I'm drunk! Best behaviour, promise. See you in a mo, then.'

It's most pleasing to be told by a door gorilla that there is absolutely no way you can come in without any shoes, asking for the boss and being greeted by him with open arms and escorted to a table. Robert had taken his shoes off and hung them around his neck. His hands were covered in oil, his hair was a mad frizz and he was wearing supermarket clothes. He was good-looking though.

We had a couple of martinis and went back to Toad Hall. Angela was there. She was Damien's ex-girlfriend. She'd lost everyone, too. It was getting late and the three of us went to play snooker. She was quite good at it. I crashed in her room at The Gramercy park Hotel, woke up, got some new shoes and a toothbrush. Things always work out eventually in New York.

I managed to stay up for the rest of the weekend and took the redeye back to Heathrow, arriving Monday morning. I wasn't allowed to take any of the magnets on to the plane, though. They set off every buzzer in the airport. I got to the studio in time, but I was in pieces. I could hardly speak. Damon's face was as tightly set as Damien's had been before his show when I arrived at the session, in my ragged couture. Everything was set up and ready to go. As soon as Graham started playing the guitar I felt superhuman. I picked up the bass and music was pouring out of me. Melody had an intensity that it lacked in my everyday state of mind. The music collected and connected all the strange emotions I was brimming with. By midday we'd written 'Beetlebum'. It was a completely new sound.

Still, it was relentless. It was Dave's birthday and he wanted to go out. London was in full swing, Cool Britannia was in business and governed from its headquarters, the Groucho Club, which was getting bigger and more packed with out-of-control success stories. I took Dave there. He hated everything about it and had a really good time. The walking wounded were returning from New York and there were cheers as unaccounted-for stragglers arrived.

### **Mayfair**

I was missing Iceland. I thought about Magnea sometimes, living in that faraway place. We had similar minds. She was as full of hedonistic abandon as I was. I wondered what life with her would be like. She was carefree, clever and pretty and it was impossible to say where life would whisk her. She had everything; she had the whole world at her fingertips and the whole world wanted to grab her and swallow her. Damon had found something in Iceland, too, not a woman but a place of sanctuary. He wanted to record all his vocals in Reykjavik.

We both couldn't wait to get back there. Graham wasn't keen on leaving Camden. The four of us laid down more backing tracks at Mayfair Studios in Primrose Hill. Maison Rouge had become too smelly.

Primrose Hill is a precious enclave of beautiful houses and beautiful people just to the north of Regent's Park, a quiet and pretty haven. A trip to the ciabatta man at lunchtime would often yield a minor celebrity encounter.

Mayfair was a new studio and a new way of working. Until then, everything had been recorded on to tape but Streetie had a new computer-recording system. Songs and parts could be edited, slowed down, speeded up, reversed, quantised and cut and pasted together very easily. 'Essex Dogs', the last track on the album, used a lot of computer trickery. Musically,



it's probably the most accomplished thing the band have done, with quite sophisticated counterpoint and cross rhythms, virtuoso playing. Those are never the ones people remember, though.

'Song 2' was about the simplest thing we've ever done, and the quickest. Dave set up two drumkits and he and Graham played them both at the same time. The loud guitar in the chorus is actually a bass going through a home-made distortion box. The whole thing was done in about fifteen minutes. I had a bad hangover and I felt horrible. It's a nasty record and it wouldn't have sounded so nasty if I'd gone to bed early the night before. We did it without thinking too much about it and felt better afterwards.

'Beetlebum' and 'Song 2', the two big singles on the *Blur* album, our fifth, were written much the same way as we'd written everything, around a chord sequence or riff or melody initiated by Damon, four guys in a room with no windows, kicking arse. Some of the other songs on that record were more individual efforts. We were all making records with other people and we didn't need each other so much as we had, but when the four of us were all on form, collaborating, was when the best music was made.

Graham and I were both the worse for wear one Friday morning and popped into the Queen, a pub on the corner of Regent's Park. For some reason we had our Ivor Novello awards with us. I guess we were showing off. They'd just been delivered to the studio as we were leaving for the pub. Among musicians, 'Ivors' are probably the most coveted of all the industry gongs. They are awarded for songwriting. Having gold and platinum discs on display at home is in bad taste. I gave those to my mum. I always find it peculiar when people have big pictures of themselves on the walls, too. It's not quite right. Most awards get lost, given away or broken on the night they are received. Even if they survive the evening, awards belong in offices, not in the home. Apart from Ivor Novellos. You can put those on your mantelpiece and people in the know will think all the better of you for it. Graham and I were sitting on stools in 'the top Queen' with the awards sitting on the bar in front of us. They are quite distinctive, a small figurine of a Muse.

The pub was quite empty. We sat there, easy in each other's company. Graham and I so often spent time in an empty pub, somewhere or other. I hadn't really seen much of him lately, because I'd been in Iceland with Damon and also because he had a new girlfriend. I could talk to Graham about anything, and he usually knew more than I did, but he needed looking after. That was part of his charm. He was very lovable. There was no one cooler than Graham. He always fucked things up more fantastically than I could ever manage,

which, somehow, I respected him for. If I was drunk, he managed to make me look less ridiculous by being always a little bit drunker. If I was worried about something irrational, it usually turned out that he was slightly more worried about something slightly further fetched. I worried about a lot of things. Unsupportable anxiety was commonplace, especially in the mornings, when the gross misconduct of the night before came flooding back. Despite all our triumphs and conquests we all worried and felt just as hopeless and stupid as everybody else.

All four of us drove each other into rages occasionally but we all wore each other's company well, usually. I felt closer to Graham than anybody, though. He was my best friend; not just in the band: in the world. I would have sat next to him at school. There was nothing I ever had to hide from him, no matter how heinous it seemed. He was totally absorbed by music and had such an obviously brilliant musical mind that I don't think he ever felt the need to demonstrate anything to anybody, unless he was in the mood. Most people accept the mindless drudgery of record promotion. It was painful for him. He was only interested in playing the guitar. Music is a natural, continuous quality and it flowed from him.

I was trying to draw Magnea's nose, to show Graham exactly what it looked like. It was a good nose. An elderly gentleman came to the bar to order a drink. He said, 'I've got one of those.' I said, 'What? One of Magnea's noses?' He said, 'No, one of those — an Ivor.' We didn't believe him at all, so he went home and got it. Then he put it on the bar next to ours. His name was Sandy, and he'd got his Ivor for writing the theme music to Upstairs, Downstairs. It happened to be Graham's favourite song ever. They became very involved after that, and I wandered back to the studio. Damon had put his award on one of the speakers behind the mixing desk. I put mine on the other one, to make a stereo pair. Many hours later, Graham arrived back at the studio with Sandy. Damon saw them stumbling through the front door on the CCTV. He said, 'Who the FUCK has Graham dragged in now?' I said, 'Don't worry, it's a songwriter he met in the pub.' 'Songwriter?' said Damon. 'Songwriter! He's a songwriter, is he? Has he got a fucking Ivor Novello award? No. I don't think so.' At which point Sandy fell through the door clutching a figurine in an outstretched hand.