

PEACE, LOVE & POTATOES

John Hegley

with drawings largely by the author



A complete catalogue record for this book can be obtained from the British Library on request

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An alien address

Do you have bendy buses
or are you jet-propelled?
Do you have those things on tube trains,
to be held onto when it's crowded,
I don't know what they're called?
How much is there in your world, that you haven't got
a name for?
Is it the stars you aim for?
Do you ever get appalled,
when your brand new central heating has been
shoddily installed
by a bunch of cowboys?
Are you green, are you translucent,
do you have any pets?
Do you have mental illness
or menthol cigarettes?
Do you ever feel you don't fit in with all the rest?
Do you feel like an outsider,
like a money spider in a nest
of penniless termites?
Do you ever say 'To be honest'?
Do you ever say 'For my sins'?

Or are truthfulness and repentance where another
world begins?
Do your bins get emptied on a Tuesday?
Do you have three-legged races
you can compete in on your own?
Do you have stripy deck chairs that get wind blown
when they're vacant?
Is there anybody out there?
Have you got ears for this?
Have you got liver tablets,
or the equivalent of Bristol?
Do you wear a pair of glasses, for maybe you
have eyes?
Do you start off as a baby and then increase in size,
but lose your sense of wonderment in the process?
Do you ever get on a crowded train
and have to put your luggage in the vestibule
and do you ever sit in the seat nearest the door
so you can keep an eye on it
and then more people get on
and you have to stand up and say
'Excuse me, but could you move out of the way, please,
I cannot see my luggage'?



Defoe and de friendly Finnish

My dad read me *Robinson Crusoe*.
The book cost a couple of bob,
and Bob was the name of my father,
in the home and the clerical job.
Crusoe – adventure's main crony,
the impression that alien made
making the most of the island
in his customised stockade.
Those nights of that bedroom retelling
Robinson Crusoe, the bold
with me and my dad, glad to know him
enthralled as we hauled up our gold
from the chest that my father would open:
the book he would look at and hold.

The Moomins, I share with my daughter.
We've room for their busy and joke.
They live in a world that is distant,
even the grumpier 'Groke'
has its endearing features.
The creatures are all co-existent.
They get on with separate lives.
And even when there is a conflict,

the pen of the author contrives
a reasonable resolution,
at least in the stories we've read:
a peaceable stand-off of some sort, a remembering that
the world is never short of incredible.

If the Moomins met Robinson Crusoe,
perhaps they could help him to see
that not every threat to your world picture
is an enemy.

Bob a job

My dad he was *Bob* in the office, René is the way he
began,
but René didn't stay, he got hidden away and England
knew a different man.

His French would have been so much busier,
if he'd spent his life in Tunisia.
It's not that my father was living a lie,
'*Bob*' made it easier for him getting by.

His mum being a dancer with the Folies Bergère
it was something he didn't disclose,
the only thing we had that was French in our pad,
apart from our dad,
was the windows.

Bob, he was so undercover he didn't even let himself
know.
My dad had a secret identity in the manner of a
Superhero.

Bob in the office and *Bob* in the tie.
It just made it easier for him getting by.

Bob said goodbye to the onions and brie,
the tongue of his mother, it wasn't to be.
He was fluent, but truant, eventually,
but I remember way back when he sang 'Frère Jacques'
to me.

My dad he was *Bob* in the office
but, earlier on in his life,
René is the name that he dug into the bench
in Paris, with his penknife.
And not Bob.

Many happy returns

On fifty years of Luton Central Library

Friday afternoon.
School holiday in the summer.
In town.
Mum in the shops,
my sister Angela and I
under the shelf-life spell of the spines.

Each of us, hunting down our permitted quartet of
titles.

Angie-Boo is a Doctor Doolittle fan
and we both want Billy Bunter.
Alongside the vitals, we'll take a punt on an unknown
to bolster our under-arm holdings.
I strike gold, as I add to my hoard
Marianne Dreams and Ian Serrailier's *Silver Sword*.

As we delve shelve-wise
we'll chance upon each other in an aisle
and then resume our searching.
in amongst the upright-tightly-lined-along-and-
clearly-indexed
perching.

And with our gathered-up pilings
we get sat at a Readers' table
and in amongst the low-slung voices,
we dive into our choices
until Mum bag-ladies in from the outside world,
smiling
and taking
us home

from home.



At a reading in Rotherham library

To the Wednesday night Rotherham Library audience,
I am describing myself back at ten years old.

I tell them how we climbed over an old garden wall
and went scrumping apples.

Then I ask

'Do you say "scrumping" up here,
or do you have a different word for it?'

A woman at the back answers,

'Aye, we do have another word for it:
Theft.'



An ending of the re-offending

For the prisoner paying the price
just a punishment may not suffice.
The best use of time
may be learning to rhyme,
making sure that it isn't too nice
a process of course.
You don't want people thinking a life of crime
leads to loads of free poetry workshops.