

Scars  
Publications

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chapbook

John D Robinson

**Cowboy Hats  
& Railways**

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I dedicate this book to my wife; Carmelina  
To my daughter; Bonita Rose  
To my 2 grandchildren; Grace and Ava

I would like to give grateful  
thanks to the hard working  
editors of the following  
publications where many of  
these poems first appeared;  
Rusty Truck; In Between  
Hangovers; Yellow Mama;  
Your One Phone Call; Bold  
Monkey; Degenerate  
Literature; Anti Heroin  
Chic; The Peeking Cat

## Lit Talk

Not often do I read fiction;  
my wife reads feverishly,  
crime and thrillers, murder  
mystery novels and  
often  
she will tell me of the  
plots and of the  
characters and I never  
feel impressed and will  
scratch behind my ears  
or tune into the radio;  
“Well, what are you reading?”  
she asked me one time;  
“Okay” I said “I’m  
reading some fiction right  
now. ‘Tropical Animal’ by  
Pedro Juan Gutierrez”  
“What’s it about?” she asks  
I tell her  
“It’s about fucking and  
poverty and filth and  
survival and censorship and  
desperation and fucking  
and rum and cigars and  
broken men and women  
and some more fucking  
and painting and poetry  
and the seedy sleazy world  
of Havana and then there’s  
even more fucking”  
“Oh!” she says “It’s  
starting to rain, I better go  
and get the washing in”

## Soup

Once, I pssed through a friend's  
letterbox because he had disappointed  
me in some way  
another time I broke into a newly  
abandoned apartment with two  
filthy street homeless drunks and  
cooked them a meal with what  
had been left behind; their first  
meal in three days; stale bread  
toast; baked beans and a few  
potatoes  
and another time I met the  
Californian poet  
Matthew H Lares  
In London; Covent Garden  
and bought a copy of  
'Beauty and the Beast; Poems'  
from him  
Lares was drunk,  
I wasn't;  
one time I discovered for  
myself the poetry of  
Doug Draime  
and from that initial  
experience of reading his  
work something woke  
within me and yet another  
mystery opened

and one time I came truly  
alive with life  
and we named her  
Bonita Rose  
and another time; a  
time ago; I walked alone,  
homeless and it was  
freezing and snowing  
hard and it was getting  
dark and all I could  
think of was a bowl of  
hot tomato soup and it  
was this thought that  
took me through that  
long and terrible night;  
an imaginary and a  
a beautiful bowl of  
hot aromatic  
tomato soup.

## It Sounded Good

Coming from the seeds of a  
sea-side drunk and a regular  
school cook I had a head start  
on some I guess,  
but it didn't always feel  
like it  
as when the tutor would ask  
each pupil on the  
occupation of his father;  
okay, I was spoilt with four  
choices;  
drinking; gambling; fighting  
and incompetent burglar  
and all around I heard;  
builder; shop-keeper; labourer;  
policeman; road sweeper;  
factory worker; taxi driver;  
school tutor; driving instructor  
and so on; now and then a  
boy would say  
"He's in prison"  
and there would be sniggers  
of hushed laughter and I  
knew how the boy was feeling;

not ashamed of his father but  
not knowing him like the other  
boys with regular and  
conventional parents, but  
loved him with the same passion  
and when asked my  
father's occupation, I would  
sometimes answer  
"My father's an anthropologist"  
it sounded good but I  
didn't know what an  
anthropologist did and neither  
did the other boys and the  
tutor would smile through a  
puzzled frown before  
moving on to the next boy.

## No Future

Even at the time it  
was happening it felt  
unreal; surreal and  
absurd;  
I was 15 years old  
and was standing in  
front of a small  
framed shitty photograph  
of Elizabeth II, Queen  
of England in a  
small recruitment  
office in the town  
centre;  
this was 1979,  
just 2 years earlier I  
had been screaming  
along to  
The Sex Pistols  
'God Save The Queen'

and now here I was  
promising to defend  
and kill and die for  
her honour and  
country and I had never  
met her and for  
some reason Her Majesty  
couldn't attend  
to witness as I pledged  
allegiance to the crown;  
afterwards, the uniformed  
lance corporal handed  
me a £5.00 note and  
told me that I was now  
an enlisted member of  
Her Majesty's Armed  
Forces; I took one  
last look at the photograph  
and walked away  
wondering what the  
fuck I had just done.

## Domestic Violence

As far as I knew he'd never  
hit his 1<sup>st</sup> wife, my mother, before;  
with his 2<sup>nd</sup> wife things were  
disturbingly different;  
I recall one early evening,  
aged 7 or 8, my younger  
sister and I were sat in the  
lounge, the door closed to  
the kitchen and we listened  
to loud angry voices,  
screaming a hatred at each  
other and as it reached a  
crescendo, unable to take  
anymore, I pushed open  
the kitchen door and as  
my father moved in to  
strike my mother, I ran  
and kicked his shin, damn  
near breaking my foot  
and he looked down at me  
and I braced myself for  
a punch, but it didn't  
come and he stroked my  
head and said, 'Okay boy,  
it's okay'  
and I moved away to  
hug my mother,  
the safest place  
I knew.

## In Our 20's, A Drunken Early Evening

I would guess that  
she had her reasons  
for her actions;  
the heavy glass  
ashtray thrown in  
the semi-darkness  
was a quality throw  
and opened up a  
deep gash across the  
bridge of my nose;  
I picked up the  
nearest object,  
a cauliflower,  
and threw it towards  
the screaming and  
missed the target  
miserably and I felt  
the warm blood  
streaming onto my lips  
and down my chin  
and I began laughing;  
she moved and  
switched on a light  
and began crying and  
apologising as she  
looked at my face and  
then behind her at the  
shattered cauliflower  
upon the floor and  
then she knelt down  
and embraced me,  
kissing my bloodied  
face, diluting the  
red with her tears.

## The Bus-Shelter

Exactly what it was over I  
can no longer recall but he  
tugged at my arm and said  
'Drop it, don't push it'  
'Fuck you' I whispered  
'Look, I don't want to  
see you hurt' he said;  
I looked across at the  
asshole that was causing  
me concern; he didn't  
look dangerous to me  
and I felt good and ready;  
'Listen, just let it go' he  
said again and I looked  
into his rugged face and  
knew what I felt I should  
do rather than what I  
was going to do and I  
turned away from my  
drunken advisor and then  
over at 'Mad Bob' who  
was staring wildly;  
after a little verbal exchange  
'Mad Bob and I closed the  
matter with a resentful  
and cautious handshake;

there were 6 of us wino's  
in that bus shelter that  
morning and we'd all been  
waiting for something to  
happen, to change the  
scene for a while, no  
matter how brutal or  
senseless it may be  
and for a few heated  
moments it looked like  
the waiting was over;  
but it wasn't to be  
and all of us felt a little  
disappointed and the  
bus shelter became quiet  
and  
we continued with  
our drinking  
and waiting.

## Listen To Me Son

Back in the day there were regular  
poetry readings in the back-bar of  
'The Pig In Paradise'  
and I became a part of  
the junkies and drinkers  
and artists and poets and  
wasters and dreamers and  
burnt-out hippies and one  
night my proud drunken  
old man came to see his  
son read and he witnessed  
the obligatory and polite  
applause and the nods of  
the heads and whispers  
of bullshit  
and then he shuffled  
onto the stage and  
slurred a sexy dirty-ditty  
and I witnessed a reaction  
I had never seen or  
heard;

voices were raised in  
protest; boos and hisses were  
heavy; beer bottles were  
thrown: I ushered my father  
off stage to safety and we  
were both laughing hard and I  
realized that he's delivered  
something that was seen  
as unacceptable, a punch to  
the face of decency; seen to  
be way  
below the sterile stagnant  
standards  
and all without a sense  
of humour;  
and on this very rare  
occasion , my father  
became  
my teacher  
and  
my hero.

## The Editor

‘One of my co-editors said to me, literally just before we were to go online, You know the word ‘fucking’ appears in the 1<sup>st</sup> line of this poem and then again along with 2 or 3 similar words; you still want to go ahead?’ and I said ‘Of course, no reason not to’  
He was older than I had expected and he was open and friendly and humorous and witty and intelligent; he’s the 1<sup>st</sup> editor I’ve met and he wasn’t a mean cross-eyed, egomaniacal, power-wielding, ignorant asshole son of a bitch like some poets claim that editors are; maybe he’s in the wrong job.

## **This Poetry Business**

“Okay, so what is it?  
that some poems of yours  
have appeared in a  
literary publication?  
what does that mean?  
who does it do for you?  
so fucking what!  
who gives a shit?  
blow it up my ass!  
the world doesn’t  
know or notice shit  
like that, it’s far too  
busy!  
and what’s the point  
of it all?”  
‘I don’t know’  
I answered.

## One From The Factory

Born in Havana in 1891 to farming  
labourer parents; he emigrated  
to Miami in about 1920;  
his livelihood was cigar rolling and  
tobacconist and then he  
moved to NYC and then  
finally to Philadelphia;  
he married and gained a son  
and everyday after a 10 hour  
shift of factory work he'd  
return to his small and  
humble apartment and  
create breath-taking; astounding  
works of art  
and he never showed another  
living soul these works;

never uttered a word to  
anyone; kept no correspondence  
with anyone; did not know  
or socialize with artists and  
he stole materials from the  
factory to make beautiful  
and astonishing collages of  
human condition and political  
absurdity and it is rumoured  
that his son assisted with some  
of these works and in  
1983 some 20  
years after his death,  
discovered in a garage-sale was  
nearly 800 works  
from the artist, the healer, the man  
who produced for the sake of  
beauty; pleasure; love;  
creating not for money; fame; ego;  
and now his works are  
analysed and priced far  
beyond the means of any  
factory worker and maybe  
Felipe Jesus Consalvos  
would feel really pissed-off  
with this bullshit.

## For A Week

My wife has gone away;  
it's only been a matter of  
hours and I'm thinking  
about masturbating and  
smoking joints and  
swallowing codeine and  
the dog doesn't want to  
know me; she lays by the  
front -door with wide  
watery eyes and a very  
heavy heart  
and it's only been a matter  
of hours and already  
I miss making you laugh  
and those moments of  
ordinariness that you  
make special in that  
instance with a smile or  
a touch or a softly  
spoken word  
and

now I sit alone with a  
glass of wine knowing  
I'll wake up alone and  
then later, after work  
come back home  
to an empty house and to  
those eyes of that sulking  
sad hound of yours,  
I don't know if she'll make  
it through the week and  
that'll cause a great deal of  
shit;  
it's only been a matter of  
hours  
and maybe by the end of  
the week I'll have a right  
arm like Popeye's right  
arm and maybe, I think,  
as I pour another glass,  
that she's not missing  
me, not really,  
but the hound; it's the hound  
she misses  
and I understand this  
for she has never hurt you  
as I have done.

## **A Hunchback In The Park**

From the early hours the  
rain fell hard and cold and  
relentless throughout the  
day; by 08.30 a.m.

I was soaked and  
pissed-off with holes  
in my shoes and on my way  
to a one bedroom  
drugs-den to  
meet a gentleman in need  
of my support and advice;  
a smashed guy in his 30's  
answered the door, he  
looked worried when he didn't  
recognise me and the  
rain fell furiously as he  
called out to my client  
who came and opened up  
the door and I stepped  
inside the damp, bug infested  
apartment; the original door  
answerer instantly  
disappeared into the bedroom  
closing the door behind him;  
a 50 something unkempt  
stoned woman stumbled around  
in the kitchen, pretending  
to wash dishes, in the small  
filthy lounge, a beautiful  
20 year old girl is wasted and  
turns away to avoid any  
eye contact and then  
comes a knock at the door;  
a scraggy tall thin youth  
bounces in and says

“I’ve got you a treat  
man, got it right here”  
and he taps a breast pocket  
with his dirty hand.  
“I’ll write to you”  
I say taking my leave  
“We’ll meet soon”,  
I step back out into the  
pelting rain and curse  
loudly and wish that I  
was someplace else, warm  
and comfortable and I  
walk through the park  
onto my next visit and  
walking up ahead of me,  
I see an old guy doubled-over,  
a big hump on his back and  
the rain is smashing and  
splattering off the bump  
and he moves with  
determination, with a  
purpose; perhaps going  
home and I wonder how  
he can see where he’s  
going and the hateful  
rain cashing down and I  
watched him but I  
didn’t feel sorry for him,  
I felt in awe of this  
hunchback in the park;  
he became a hero, a muse  
and I walked on inspired  
in a way I understand  
and the hunchback  
unaware of his own  
beauty in the ceaseless rain; walked on.

## Step Mom

She had married once or  
twice before, had 3  
children as a  
memento and at  
some point she was  
deported from  
Australia for her  
involvement in a  
murder;  
she couldn't handle  
alcohol; prescription  
drugs were her  
forte and she married  
my alcoholic  
father and introduced  
him to her  
chemicals but her  
dyed blonde hair  
and heavy make-up  
did not hide the  
confusion and malice  
in her blurred eyes  
and although we never  
made it as step-mother  
and son,

we did share brief  
moments that meant  
something and  
one time, both of us  
drunk and travelling  
on some liquid  
codeine, she suggested  
that I read  
Kerouac's  
'On the Road'  
and I did and like  
countless others I  
felt liberated by the  
book's energy and  
the sense of life's  
spiritual quest and  
established a  
life-long love of  
Kerouac  
but I never thanked  
her for this and I  
wished I had;  
18 months after my  
father checked-out,  
she followed by way  
of a chemical overdose,  
following her road  
to it's unnatural  
conclusion;  
like Kerouac,  
like too many,  
too often and the  
road never ends.

## Having A Drink With The Old Man

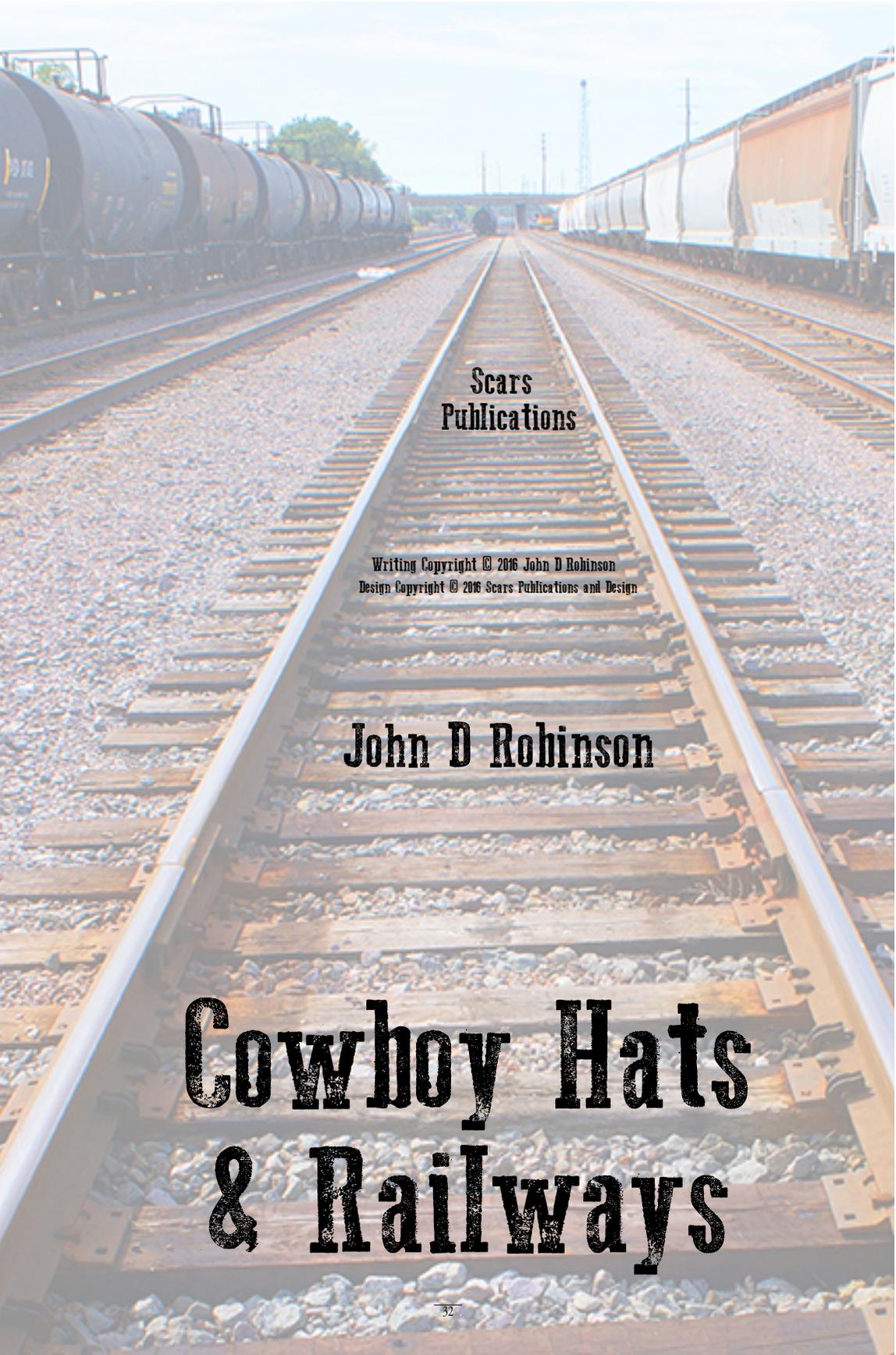
I had left her in bed  
it was early morning  
and we needed  
a loaf of bread;  
by chance or fate  
or bad luck  
we met  
and he asked  
“Do you fancy a drink?”  
“Of course” I said  
“Where?” he asked  
“Your choice” I answered;  
we ended up on a  
ferry crossing the  
channel to Belgium  
and for three days  
and nights we stayed  
drunk and crazy and  
slept a few hours in  
a bus depot and we  
staggered into carnivals  
and danced with  
nuns and kissed the  
hands of fat barmaids

and then  
3 days later  
returned home,  
weak and fragile and  
vulnerable  
but my lady was angry  
very angry;  
“You bastard! I’ve  
been phoning hospitals  
and police stations for  
3 fucking days, I didn’t  
know if you were  
dead or alive!”  
she screamed  
“You’re a lousy  
thoughtless beast  
and you didn’t even  
bring back a fucking  
loaf of bread!”.

## Cowboy Hats And Railways

Another time, drunk on wine  
and beer and high on hash  
and both of us wearing  
these ridiculous oversized  
Stetsons; he dared me to  
climb onto the railway  
bridge and swing above the  
railway tracks and it didn't  
seem to be a bad suggestion  
so I did just that and as I  
dangled from the iron bridge  
above the tracks, I thought  
of a time when I was 8 or 9  
when he had passed out  
drunk and I didn't know  
where we were and I  
couldn't wake him up and I  
shouted and kicked and  
punched him with tears in  
my eyes and he wouldn't  
wake up and I walked  
away leaving him laying  
in an alcoholic black-out  
and somehow, I can't  
remember how, I made it  
home and my mother hugged  
me like she had never done  
before or since

and my father returned  
a couple days later;  
and I hung from the bridge  
above the railway tracks  
and he joined me and we  
sang a few songs and our  
arms tired and we decided  
to climb back onto the  
bridge  
and then we threw our  
Stetsons onto the  
tracks and went in search  
of another bar.



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# **Cowboy Hats & Railways**