
Nightfall starts with the death of the main character. Or rather, the reawakening of Aden in a picture frame, in a bathtub, in a world that existed in his grandfather’s imagination. His arrival heralds the fulfilment of a prophecy for the inhabitants of this strange land, none too soon, as the obliterating Forgetting threatens to engulf the entirety of Nightfall. Elliott’s in familiar territory with this story of fantastical horror, grotesque characters and other worlds. His debut novel *The Pilo Family Circus* was short-listed for the International Horror Guild award for best novel, and, irrespective of genre, won the ABC Fiction Award. The Stephen King-like subject matter allows his work to be comfortably classified as horror, but unlike King there is a constant comic thread that runs through *Nightfall*. The distinctive Australian voice of Aden clashes with the cockney/soldierly/Middle-English dialogue of the characters he encounters, forcing the reader to visualise the action through Aden, laughing when he does and being repulsed when he is. Considering his post-life existence his only-mild curiosity is understandable, so the characters he encounters are the ones who are amazed and fearful of his appearance. The unfortunate owners of the bathtub, the hideous Gorr family are stunned as he strolls into the kitchen, sets the scene and says ‘Yo’:  

> The young Gorr stared at him, half-chewed meat lumps slopping from his gaping mouth to his head in a stream very slow to end. Aden cleared his throat again and said, louder, ‘Yo. Hi. Um, greetings from Earth. Hi. (18)’

The balancing between the wacky and the macabre is handled deftly, best typified by a chapter seven titled ‘Corbert and Mr Gorr’. The patriarch of this family eats his breakfast with the stiff and proper Corbert, before they both proceed to the shed where Corbert willingly restrains himself and Gorr goes to work torturing him with all manner of instruments. They both play their roles efficiently, extracting blood for the victim’s employer, and the cheeriness they exhibit as they go about this happy little task is enjoyably quirky. During their ‘morning tea break’ they discuss the recent events of their village, Days Past, the implications of the appearance of the boy in the bath and, gossip and torture over, Colbert leaves, brushing away the shortbread crumbs. (Then he thanks his tormenter and announces to the reader his first name: Alfred. The sincere gratitude and then the ridiculous ordinariiness of that name, after knowing only the very fitting Gorr, made me burst into giggles. That, and the fact that that means his name is Al Gorr, although definitely not the environmentalist/politician type.)

Elliott’s diagnosis with schizophrenia at nineteen potentially provides some interesting insight with which to view *Nightfall*. The construction of a mythical shadowy world places Aden as the only relatable character, one that we can make sense of and who (it is hoped) will make sense of this world for us. In a way, those afflicted with mental disease embody this viewpoint, of the whole world and its people not making sense, and being completely alien in society. That is a scary notion, and perhaps is the idea the Elliott tries to convey. Aden is not without humour or sympathies or reason, but his memory and concept of his former life is (almost) lost.

---


Book reviews: *Nightfall* by Will Elliott. Adam Quinilvan.  
*Transnational Literature* Vol. 5 no. 2, May 2013.  
I am a fan of the genre in general … but I couldn’t say I was a fan eagerly awaiting Elliott’s next publication (as I might for Stephen King). Having work compared to King is a double-edged sword for the successful horror writer. On one hand, it indicates potential for a wide readership, but it is also reductive, and creates an expectation of the reader for a certain type of novel. It is perhaps unfair in Elliott’s case, as his aesthetic is less towards the descriptive, and the tone is much lighter – there’s a lot of laughter in this book, from the moment we meet the grotesque Gorrs. Inevitable comparisons will be made when trying to forge one’s own identity in genre fiction, whether apt or not. For me, this book is more reminiscent of Shadowlands by Peter Straub; dark humour resides in the nihilistic protagonist finding his way in a strange, neo-Gothic landscape. That was also a book I struggled to get through. When the omniscient narrator moves to focus on secondary characters, the effect is jarring and not altogether necessary. This is where the novel falls down; having closely aligned the reader with Aden, Elliott’s attempt at providing a context for his adventure is not always successful and, rather than being explanatory, the motivations of other characters are somewhat muddled. The problem lies in the creation of a fantastical new world, where cause and effect have a tenuous relationship at best and the main character lurches from scene to scene with no apparent direction. To hold the interest of a reader who may not be interested in the genre and when there is precious little to hold on to is hard work indeed, and it is questionable if Elliott achieves that. Although the clichés of the genre are admirably avoided here, perhaps it would have benefitted from some cliff-hanger chapter endings, some supernatural thread that could narrow the reader’s focus and maintain suspense.

Adam Quinlivan