

## SHADE AND HONEY - MIKE DUFF

Poet of Miles Platting, Bard of Blackley and Chronicler of Collyhurst, writer Mike Duff is one of Manchester's greatest literary treasures. Giving voice to the often unheard and telling tales not often told, he weaves Mancunian folk-stories like men of old in a voice as richly Mancunian as the sediment at the bottom of the lost river Irk

In an ideal world this article would be redundant because anyone reading this who hadn't read his words would recognise him from his statue in town (Any such statue would be the second piece of Duff public art. His winning 'Poem for Manchester' is engraved into the Manchester curve bridge near Piccadilly station). Its far from an ideal world though and anyway the man himself would bat away talk of any such adulation but as a word-smith of rare talent Duff deserves wider recognition within his city.

The author of two acclaimed Manchester-set novels, 'Low Life' and 'Hat Check Boy' (both published by Crocus) Mike's is a voice hewn from the concrete playgrounds and battlegrounds of North Manchester. 'Low Life' is a tour-de-force of Mancunian mayhem, mirth and melancholy and should be required reading for anyone living in the city. A tale of thievery, drunken-ness, cheating, glory and failure laced with love and laugh-out-loud humour that is uniquely Mancunian, it's a book that captivates and confounds in equal measure. The screenplay of Low Life was recently completed and the film version is in pre-production. If nothing else it'll be worth a trip to the cinema to hear actors on a big screen talking about Monsall, Moston and Middleton.

The novels defy categorisation, which is not necessarily a bad thing but it means I can't really describe what they're about. You'll just have to read them. And enjoy them. Mike has a gift that can lift even the saddest of tales from complete despair. Subversive and celebratory, where others see broken glass Mike sees glitter (He could rhyme glitter with 'hit her' and still leave the reader smiling).

Mike's latest work is an anthology of his poetry titled 'Of A Mancunian' (available from [www.mikeduff.co.uk](http://www.mikeduff.co.uk)). The poems are about lives lived, loves lost and the hard but beautiful labour of life. And about sex, death, violence, poverty, beauty, hope, more sex, more violence and Miles Platting. The titles alone are worthy of attention; including 'Newton Heath an That', 'Taliban of Love', 'Adidas Miles Plattin' or his ode to bin men 'Lazy Idle F\*\*kin W\*\*kers'. In places it's laugh-out-loud funny and in others it's "I've got something in me eye" heartbreaking. Mostly the poems never manage to be anything except uplifting.

A small(ish) but select(ish) group of United fans have long been treated to the thoughts, poems and opinions of Mike's alter-egos Herbert Prefabs and Henry Porter as he, sorry 'they' post 'their' musings on the internet message-boards at [www.thesoulisone.co.uk](http://www.thesoulisone.co.uk) and [www.uwsonline.co.uk](http://www.uwsonline.co.uk). Reading them is always an education even when you learn something you don't want to. Most frequently though they are a joy.

I've been fortunate to see Mike perform his poems live on a number of occasions around Manchester. The man himself claims not to enjoy public performance, yet when they are performed by their author they take on a new resonance, power and force that can often skew the view the reader has drawn from the page, challenging perceptions and meaning. For someone who is not a natural performer he offers up a

force of character that captivates an audience. It can only be hoped that he can be persuaded to give more readings in future.

If there's any justice in this world Mikes legacy will see the North Manchester heartlands take their place above Stratford-upon-Avon as the U.K's premier literary tourist destination (though god help the visitors from Ohio, Osaka and Oslo when they step off their coach in Monsall.

'Low Life' and 'Hat Check Boy' are available from all good Manchester book shops and as Mike himself would no doubt remind you, you can get it from the library, of which this fine city has it's fair share. Libraries give us power.

**Stan Smith.**