

## Jewitt's Night Piece

Published somewhere, around 1970, in one of those badly printed (in those days before the ubiquity of personal computers) little magazines which spring into life in big cities from time to time, exhibit odd poetry and strange graphics, and disappear after an issue or three, never to be seen again. [I think the one in question *might* be the one I had been the editor of ... ]

We were on a train, which, had it been the same train two days later, would have stopped at the station. What's all this mean? No idea.

We stopped the train anyway. How? No idea. Confusion ensued. It was dark. There were no lights.

Unfortunately there were three tracks between the platforms. We were on the centre one. The darkness insulated us from a wider world.

Being hungry, we climbed out on to the right hand track, as a step towards the station buffet. Was there one? We knew there was. How? No idea. We didn't know which way to go on the track, though. We needed a sign.

One came.

A chain of American officers, all male, emerged out of the dark, coming along the track from the rear of the train. Each held behind him a small piece of cardboard, which was grasped between finger and thumb by the man following, to keep contact. Officers must preserve dignity by maintaining the proper distances. All were half crouched, all had the same expression of manic concentration. Like a line of advancing Groucho Marx's.

The last in the line was asleep, an automaton. We detached his fingers from the piece of cardboard held by the man in front, and turned him half round. He marched under the train and sent himself into a deeper sleep against various protuberances.

We attached ourselves to the end of the line in the approved manner, and went with them through the dark.

At the buffet, the fare was crude, indifferently cooked.

The American officers had foreseen this and had brought their own chutneys and sauces, each his own small portion on his own small piece of cardboard: the same pieces of cardboard.

All their fingers were stained.

Jewitt woke, pained with subterranean hysteria.