



## My Most Treasured Moments as a Writer

---

Charlie Hill

**W**HAT WITH THE REJECTIONS, the fretting over sales, and the relentlessness of the Amazon axe-grinders – really, ‘John Tebutt’? really?? – it’s easy to forget that writing books is one of life’s more enjoyable experiences.

Over the course of my writing career, I’ve been fortunate enough to have banked a number of treasured moments. Shortly after my first novel was published I told a work colleague about it, quite possibly in an attempt to explain away my increasing disinterest in work. About a week later I was greeted with the news that they had seen someone reading my book on a train. ‘What do you think?’ they’d asked, and been told ‘This is exactly how it was.’

At that moment, I couldn’t have been happier. Since then, I have veered into writing that is experimental in nature, and would be astonished – even perturbed – if anyone described my work in that way. But this book was set in a very particular sub-culture of the recent-ish past, and as such I was delighted by the reference – presumably from someone who was there – to its representational veracity.

Sometime later, I was on the receiving end of an entirely different observation about the same novel. Wandering around a music festival, a fella pointed a camera at me. ‘You wrote that book, didn’t you?’ he said.

‘I did!’ I said, thrilled, ‘did you like it?’



'I'm not sure,' he said and although he convincingly hid any fanboy excess behind a look that might be described as unnerving, it was another memorable encounter.

However. For all that these incidents were, on one level at least, deeply gratifying, I don't think they are my *most* treasured. Although it's a source of satisfaction when I write something that chimes with an individual's perspective – or *might* go on to – it's when my work goes beyond the straightforward dynamics of the writer/reader relationship that the experience of being a writer becomes most pleasurable.

There is, for example, little better than securing a testimonial from a peer you admire. I've been fortunate enough to receive endorsements from several near-heroes of mine and each time it has resulted in a week of springing about the place. Appearing on Radio 4's Open Book was another heartening distraction, while reviews in the national press have been a cause of morning fizz.

Then there are those singular occurrences that, even in isolation, make it all worthwhile. I once had a story reprinted by an art gallery to complement their summer show – Vanley Burke! – but for me, the pick of the lot was hearing a song that had been written about my work.

The song is called 'The Birmingham Poets'. It's the title track of an album by a consummately literate band called Matthew Edwards and the Unfortunates. It's very good. I sometimes play it. It suggests my books have found a place in the culture at large, however transient or ephemeral this may be. And it means – at least with regard to my writing – I'll die a happy man.