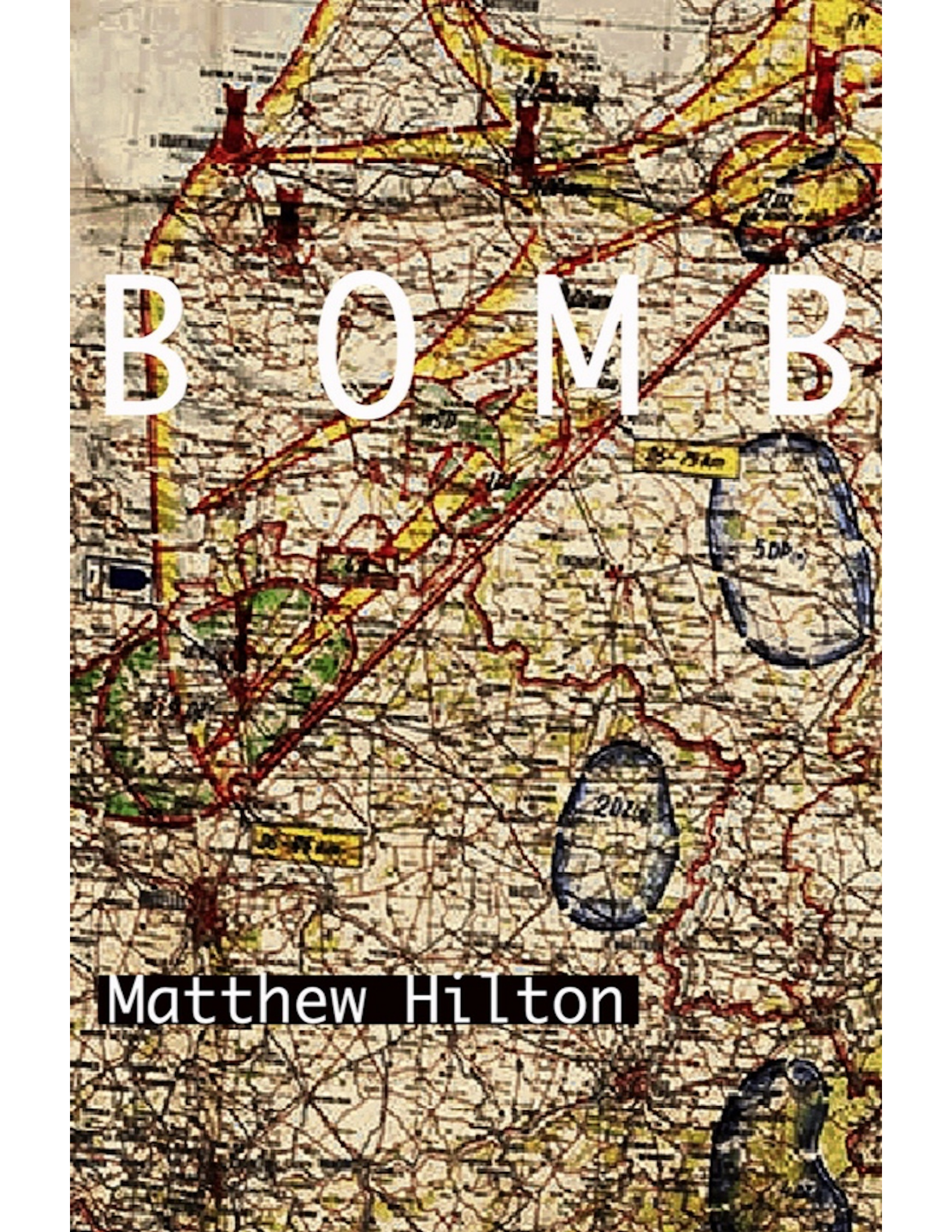


The background is a historical map of a coastal region, possibly in the Middle East, showing a network of roads and geographical features. Red and yellow lines delineate specific areas on the map. Handwritten in blue ink are several oval-shaped notes indicating bomb impacts, with labels such as '500 y', '200 y', and '25 km'.

BOMB

Matthew Hilton

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Bomb

*An inconsequential history of BIND, the British Independent Nuclear
Deterrent.*

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"interesting read, packed full of information and well-told anecdotes, expect a quirky history text book tool which recounts the social history of the atomic bomb between 1943 & 1984 mashed with a sixties personal memoir" *adapted from a Faber Academy review*

o*o

1% to Wikimedia without which...

o*o

BOMB

An inconsequential history of BIND, the British Independent Nuclear Deterrent.

About this book

I began with the following passage,

He turns his head away from the wide was it a window? A screen? He has silver locks. He looks at me. He is called Gold Rod,

"... we're making a beautiful new world and you will not be part of it Johny. Far back, like grubs hardly distinguishable from the earth that they turned over endlessly and crawled loved died and fought over, your people got scared and backed off. This new age you can't swallow, everything works so well, sweeps along in wonder. Look outside now..."

He points at the screen,

"... in those days information was artificially constrained at different levels. If there were meta-narratives they were projected from the centre, or if you like, the top. Nowadays Johny, fictions are all the time emerging from everywhere, squeezing thru every possible technical channel, dressed in every variety of formal finery..."

I was advised that I risked confusing readers so I started again like this,

This book aims to imagine how it would be if we were privy to great doings as they passed the periphery of the tiny jelly bubble that is our lives. My adolescence was couched in opposition to the BOMB but what it was I hardly knew so I have flown thru the parallel universe of the info-sphere, bouncing from reference to reference, from planet to planet, with who knows what subtle forces operating to pull me into one factoid planet and spinning me off another. What were the grown-ups were doing while I was struggling with my trivial mysteries? I highlight people who touched me, or might have touched me in the hope that they will touch you. One larky day I called myself Johny Lightfoot after *luftmensch*. I leave it, as the omniscient narrator, at that.

Part One. Fission.

The natives on the Brittany coast of France, seeing a ship in distress would work to deceive the captain dithering his vessel thru the many passages between the islands. One of their techniques was to suspend a lantern high up on the horn of a cow who, mooching about on the meadows that ran to the sea and dipping her head for a late snack would seem to be a light saying *come here* and would thus bring ships onto the rocks.

The vessel beached, the natives would massacre the survivors, the women with tears of real pity since the survivors would seem to stand for their own drowned menfolk. In some curious way by taking their lives the women felt avenged in face of the dreadful sea.

In examining how it is we humans of the discovery age have power enough to utterly destroy ourselves, recall the upturned faces as the silver needle sped across the blue skies over Hiroshima. The power of the bomb was the death of those upturned faces. Should we not have wept for them as the fisherwives did for those they killed?

1.

Whereas before modernity had been stuffed with glitches and squeaks and unpainted cracks and dirty corners now everything was (according to the new definition) living tissue and there was a continuous **it** which stood in for nature overall.

You leant against a wall and it knew you were sleepy and unfolded itself tipping you over into your warm remembered snuggle shape - big lips kissing all over and the shade hood thrown.

Now, back in that previous century that *some* of you may remember I had to do with a man in a scowling great concrete hangar, the Earls Court Exhibition building down Warwick Road in London, England. I'd been let go from WH Smith & Son the newsagents at the British European Air ways terminal on Cromwell Road as soon as the three day week due to the coal miner's strike and the Oil Producing & Exporting Countries oil embargo was over.

In those work-by-candle weeks Lena the supervisor would take me down into the stock cupboard, well, a small room really, and let me feel her under her nylon work smock, stacks of new magazines smelling of glue and her cleft going all runny...

The man I had to do with that day long long ago had a little hutch let into the wall of a basement car park where he sat all day raking in copper and silver discs. I believe he was called Eddy. He was as still as a lizard. You could hear the District Line trains rumble behind the wall. We both worked for National Car Parks, I was the driver of a yellow Ford Transit stencilled Special Events Division and we were off to Brighton to do Kempton Park races,

"...alright mate?"

Out the side of his mouth - you wouldn't know he'd talked. His bumpy skull was white,

"...alright..."

He gave me his pass to the exhibition and told me to fool around upstairs for half an hour while he cashed up and handed the hutch over to someone he didn't identify.

I still had some pluck then, everything was just about dandy. Picture Old Britain the winter of 1973 stroke 1974. Prime Minister Edward Heath, the carpenter's son, a bright light for Britain, well I ask you, power cuts and candlelit dinners *de rigeur*. Politicians advice on the telly - brush your teeth in the dark.

Funny thing tho, productivity never went down, does you good a three day week, time for crime or like Heath said,

"...just sit under a banyan tree and contemplate your tummy if you want to and if you can pay for it..."

I went up two flights of concrete stairs and came out into the Great Hall where the Boat Show was on. I got thru the gate with the pass Eddy had given me and straightaway a girl in blue with bare arms came up and gave me a paper sack with a dolphin motif. I didn't have time to take her up on it because of being sucked along with the crowd down an avenue of nautical fittings, steel shod levers, cowed winches, sea faring bits and bobs all longing for an owner. Overhead glossy coated fibre-glass prows went by. You could climb up stepladders and have a look if you liked. Climb up and look in on the girls in bikinis the papers always had a photo of. They looked smaller than I thought they ought to be and the soles of their bare feet were dusty. Up close you could see the make-up line. Not a whiff...

I was just crossing the forecastle of a spanking motor cruiser when an arm came down in front of me like one of those mechanical signals the railways had. We were within reach of the days of steam,

"...just hold back a moment sir..."

A copper no doubt of some variety or another and then you could have knocked me down with a feather I told Eddy later if it wasn't old Heath pulling himself up out of the poop. I saw him myself not ten foot away. He had a bloody healthy tan and silver hair and a swish pale blue mod type suit like a high ranking Criminal Investigation Department man might wear.

They say Prime Minister Heath went in for politics because he was an idealist. Well, in the end England didn't want him and his ideas. In the election later that year they chucked him back into the duck pond razor sharp mind and all. He would have done better over there I would tell Eddy. He wanted to take us over there - the *continong*, europe all that, Brussels. He was a seaside man waving lamps, castles in the air. No thanks. We didn't like it. Steer clear. As Edward Heath with his tan and his blue suit went by me it slipped out,

"...Ban the Bomb..."

The copper squeezed on me and Heath flexed his lips, there wasn't a sound except the copper asked my name,

"...do I have to give it?"

"...no sir..."

That was it then. I went back down those back stairs full of it. Eddy shrugged

on his coat and said,

"...right, we'll get off to Brighton. Not a lunatic behind the wheel I hope?"

I brought the Transit round. In the back were the giant balls of string and the white and rust coloured metal rods we used to mark out car parks wherever we went. Virgin fields. Eddy didn't say a word all the way down that bloody A23 that I'd walked the length of with Smiffy and a pram ten years before, except to ask for a piss somewhere. More about Smiffy later.

In fact Eddy oozed jail bird silence until at the end of the crummy valley that leads to the seafront we found four or five sharp looking layabouts in a Hotel Bar. Eddy introduced me and they had a little chuckle and a nod to each other. Their suits looked they'd all been bought at once. There was some sort of caper going on, maybe local hoods Eddie had to pay off to be allowed to string the park up in the holy Sussex Downs at Kempton. I know we'd dragged big bags of sixpences into the back of the Transit.

But wait, what I really wanted to tell you was that Heath had his own racing yacht. The papers said, first Prime Minister to be a world class sportsman. Named Morning Cleoud. (he bent his vowels). Just remember that. People started to warm to him when he won those races but then came tragedy. His yacht sank in a vicious English Channel storm, the kind that keeps foreigners away.

He wasn't aboard but two crewmen drowned, one of whom the godson over whom he was meant to watch - the son of George Chadd his commanding officer during the late war as it happens. And then, blow me down if there wasn't a bomb at the Boat Show soon after. Irish Republicans. Ho, what a shambles that was, bits of boat everywhere, a right flapdoodle in formica and plywood but no one killed.

Elsewhere in London that year civilians did get shredded, a big Mark Ten Jaguar flipped over like a coin near Ladbroke Grove, my stamping ground. A neighbour of the target set it off peering under to find his dog.

Boats? Sage and seasoned heads spent quality time in the nineteen fifties worrying about nuclear bombs being smuggled into ports in small boats. (the Israelis had them as part of their armoury tk).

Heath's mum Edith was a Pantony, a Kentish artisan bloodline re-gilded from time to time by being dipped in gypsy kettles. The girl Edith had spiritual not to say magic properties and she was the best looker in her village. Local carpenter William Heath spent three years courting her but I ask who was it that squeezed one into her shapely purse in November 1915.