

THE CRAZY OIK

ISSUE 3 AUTUMN 2009



# **THE CRAZY OIK**

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AUTUMN 2009

THE CRAZY OIK  
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*Published October 2009 by  
The Crazy Oik 10 Albert Road  
Grappenhall Warrington*

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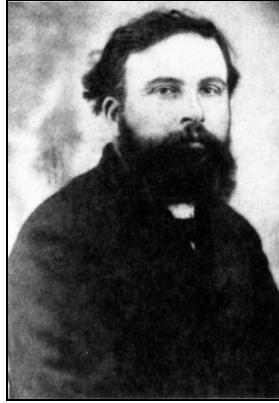
**Adventures of a Polish Plumber** appeared in a shorter version in ***The Pen-  
niless Press*** Issue 23 Summer 2006

**Dogs of War** and **The Photograph** are in Tom Kilcourse's collection ***The  
Human Circus*** ISBN 978-1-4092-9382-8

**Unstuck** is from John Royson's unpublished novel ***Worktime***



*Front Cover – Henri Rousseau: The Snake Charmer (detail) 1907*



*Henri Rousseau 1895*

Leger's own yearning for folk art — an art that was close to ordinary people — was fulfilled in the work of Rousseau. Although he rarely referred to it directly in his many speeches and writings, Leger loved this painter who could do nothing else but speak a language that for him, Leger, was program and postulate. If he frequently praised the "argot," the slang of the common people — their specific manner of expressing themselves, which he maintained corresponded to the artistic idiom of modern artists — this showed the closeness of the two painters. He once wrote:

"Poetic sensitivity is innate in the common people. Who except the man in the street creates and renews the spoken poetry of argot day after day? With their inexhaustible power of creation ordinary people transform the reality of their everyday life. And what do modern artists do? Exactly the same thing! Our pictures are our argot. In them we transform objects, forms and colours. Should it then be so difficult to understand them and get closer to them?"

*Henri Rousseau Dreams of the Jungle – Werner Schmalenbach*

*Back cover: Henri Rousseau: The Dream (detail) 1910*



## CONTENTS

EDITORIAL	8
THE GOOD LITTLE GOERS Bob Wild	11
ADVENTURES OF A POLISH PLUMBER Stefan Jaruzelski	22
SVEN Brett Wilson	30
OIKUS 1 - 3 Ron Horsefield	32
UNSTUCK John Royson	33
THE CARETAKER David Birtwistle	37
OIKUS 4 – 6 Ken Clay	44
THE DOGS OF WAR Tom Kilcourse	45
LOCUST LOVER Brett Wilson	51
RUCTIONS IN THE RUE BONAPARTE Ron Horsefield	55
MY LIFE IN PRINT CHAPTERS 6 & 7 Ray Blyde	59
OIKUS 7 – 10 Bob Wild, David Birtwistle	70
THE PHOTOGRAPH Tom Kilcourse	71
THE EXISTENTIALIST Rosemary Evans	74
LONDYNCZYZY Stefan Jaruzelski	79
THE CRAZY OIK COLLECTION	87
A DEFINITION BY THE O.E.D	93
SUBSCRIBE TO THE OIK	94

## EDITORIAL

### A TICKET IN A LOTTERY

Booker prize time again reminds us that there won't be any oiks in the running. So what? No true oik wants to be rich and famous (Er... 'ang on a minute Ken... I wouldn't mind...). No, the true oik writes because he has to – and not simply from a neurotic compulsion, but to engage in a satisfying wrestle with the language, to produce something that lasts, and to entertain a few friends.

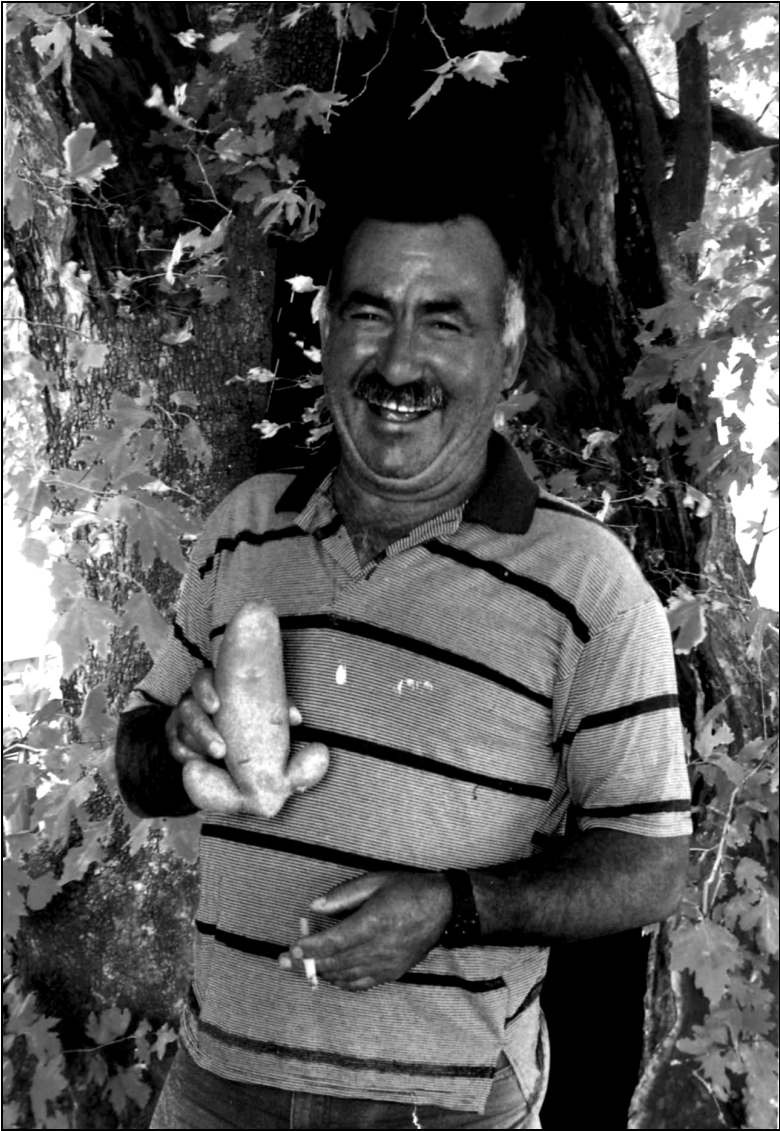
To get rich? Listen to this. Bob Wild, *Crazy Oik* contributor, had his collection *Dogs of War* given some coverage in the Manchester Evening News in a feature on World War 2 (thanks Adolf!). Then he's invited by Borders Bookshop in Stockport to sit at a table signing copies on a Saturday afternoon. Borders want 40% of the cover price. Bob's cut is 50P on an £10 book but he squeezes it up to a quid by selling the book at £11. (Yes, Borders also want 40% of the increase). After three hours he's made just enough to feed the parking meter outside the store. Eventually he sells 18 – a considerable success I'd say – and well deserved. But getting rich? You'd be better off selling pegs on the doorstep. Indeed it's significant that you rarely see gypsies offering their latest novels or short story collections. Poetry is perhaps a better bet since production costs are lower – William Blake sold his from a tray round his neck, and he never got rich either even though he printed them himself.

And celebrity? Who wants that? Think of poor old TS Eliot summoned to the palace to read *The Wasteland* to the queen and the two princesses. They yawned and tittered and found old TS something of a droning bore. Years later Alan Bennett is taking mum round the London sights. They bump into TSE in a street in Bloomsbury. Alan and Tom, acquaintances in the book business, chat briefly. Afterwards Alan asks mum what she thought of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's finest poet. "Oooo" said mum, seemingly properly overcome "what a wonderful overcoat!" So there you have it from both ends of the social scale – incomprehension, indifference.

But I'm sure Tom was encouraged by the admiration of Ezra Pound and James Joyce. That's the real endorsement – recognition by one's peers. The French novelist Henri Beyle (Stendhal) is a paradigm of the condition. Eclipsed by his famous contemporary Balzac he continued to write non-stop. Much of it in private journals never intended for publication. He thought of his novels as "tickets in a lottery" and predicted they'd be read in 1888 nearly fifty years after his death or even 1938. He called his small readership "the happy few". Eventually he did break through, thanks in some part to Balzac himself who raved over *The Charterhouse of Parma*. His private journals are now a 1900 page volume in the prestigious Pleiade series. But what an itinerary! – well typical I suppose, almost the norm.

So, fellow crazy oiks, here's your ticket in the lottery read, for now, only by the happy few.

*Ken Clay September 2009*



*Girlfriends never stayed long with our greengrocer. Strange really since all the lads in the pub thought he was a great bloke, a real diamond geezer. His collection of root veg had us booting till closing time. Makes you wonder if women have a sense of humour at all.*

## THE GOOD LITTLE GOERS

*Bob Willd*

I had begun to wonder if I was some kind of conjurer with a magic word hidden in my vocabulary that made Penny disappear. Or maybe I was some kind of computer with a virus in its speech mode which produced a magic word. We'd be having a drink in a pub, Penny and me, or be out for a meal at a restaurant and I would produce the word, like abracadabra, and the whole evening would suddenly disappear off the screen. I never discovered what the word was but it must be a fairly common one. Something associated with eating or drinking because it usually happened in pubs or restaurants. If I said the word, (or perhaps forgot to say the word - there's a thought!), Penny would simply vanish. If I'd used the word I only had to focus on the menu for a second or turn to catch the waiter's eye or rummage under the table for a dropped fork and she'd be gone. No cryptic message on the seat like "You bastard!" or "Stuff you!" like Maggie, Sandra or Sue would have left, or even screamed. Just gone. You could do as many spell checks or memory checks as you liked; let people search your top-hat or even saw the space in half to prove it but she would have disappeared. Vanished from the box where she'd been the moment before. Exited by some feat of legerdemain: the word's perfect: taken her mouse home. Of course you kidded yourself she had gone to the loo. By the time it dawned she'd done a runner it was too late.

Penny was not on her own though, Angie, Mary, Claire and a string of others had been and gone before her. Heard the word and run on ahead you might say.

Now you may be one of those nine hundred and ninety-nine in a thousand who don't use the word and don't have disappearing women at their table in restaurants but I'm the other one. I've seen you all enjoying yourselves: attentive with the chair, pensive with the menu, a bit formal but chatty over starters, seriously conversational with the main course, animated over the pudding, mellow and relaxed over the coffee and liqueurs, like on the telly, and discreet with *l'addition s'il vous plait*. If there's just the two of you, and it's somebody you fancy, you're chatting her up, touching her hand, plenty of mouth and lots of eye contact - straight from one of those interper-

sonal relations books, Michael Argyle or some-such - until the flattery works its magic and she becomes dreamy and relaxed, doe-eyed and pliant. People at the next table nudging each other saying "I bet he's on a promise".

Well, as I say, I'm the other one. The one with the word. The one with the woman with the tense white face; or the one with the woman sitting grim-lipped and silent; or blowing her nose and quietly crying into her handkerchief, seeking attention: a malicious form of public exhibitionism.

Or the one with that woman, rabbiting on, you can hear three tables away.

"Twenty-eight women! It's disgusting!" Where did she get that number from?

"Had I known before-hand I'd never have had anything to do with you! You don't have normal emotions. You don't! You give absolutely nothing back! Fiona has my sympathy!" Fiona was the woman I used to live with.

"You just won't let anyone get close to you! And you're always undermining me!"

When she has finished her rosary of clichés I say,

"Look, I thought we had just come out for a quiet meal. I don't remember volunteering for a course of psychoanalysis and you can spare me the aversion therapy. If I had known you were Anthony Clare in drag I'd have chosen a woman to eat out with." I could be nasty when I was riled.

She spits out expletives through her tense tight lips and the born again Christian at the next table gets up and has a word with the manager. Before I can say "shut your tits" I'm asked to leave for using bad language!

More often than not though Bill Giles is having a night off, there's no forecast, Penny or whoever just simply does a runner and I'm left sitting there with the growing realization that I must have said the word and she is not coming back. She'd have kept her coat on saying it was cold, or draughty, or it might be stolen, and taken her handbag with her to the loo. It was that which made me think it might be predestined or is the word premeditated? But whatever it was the word worked and it seemed to work with most other



## THE GOOD LITTLE GOERS

women too.

There was that time with Angie in the Crown at Whitley Green. The main meal was finished and she went to the loo between courses and didn't come back. I must have used the word. She took her coat, discreetly, and I sensed she was up for a runner. I went almost directly after her and posted outside the ladies' but she'd already gone. Never been in! I asked someone to check and double check. I searched the pub, ran out to the car park, nowhere! I went back, apologized, paid the bill and drove off to see if she was on the road home. Not a sign! I drove a good two of the five miles back to her place before turning round and going back to the pub. I re-searched the place so carefully I could have got a PhD on pub interiors, or played hide and seek for England. I asked the staff had anyone been asking for anyone so many times they looked at me as if I was some kind of escapee myself.

I was trusted with a key to Angie's house in those days but when I got there the door was locked on the inside. I kept my finger on the bell so long even I was worried about the neighbours. When her daughter opened it to say "my mam says she's not in" I rushed upstairs and found her in bed.

"How dare you come into my house after what you said!" she said. "What I said!", I said. "What have I said?"

"You know what you said!" It was the nearest I came to learning the word.

"Get out! Get out! Get out or I'll call the police!" she screamed. How the devil had she got home, I thought?

"Where did you put the broomstick?" I shouted back up the stairs. "And don't forget to feed the cat!" I could never resist gelding my own jokes.

More recently, though, I've adopted the strategy of making sure I have something vital left behind when the woman I'm with goes to the loo in case I have unwittingly said the word. Even so, it's no guarantee. I won't bore you with Jackie disappearing for two days on Ios, or Greta in Turkey for example, who felt she just had to get away on her own on a boat to an island for the day without having previously mentioned her Garbo syndrome. But last Easter, coming back from France with Mary, I had her overnight bag and her duty

frees. We were in the lounge. I was reading. The boat was docking in 15 minutes. I leant to one side to rearrange my things in the small travel bag we were sharing. I said something trivial into the bag about the tedium of the journey but it must have had the word in it. When I looked up she'd vanished.

I went immediately to the door and I thought I recognised her leg going into the loo. I wasn't too concerned. Ten minutes went by. People gathered up their belongings. My anxiety grew. The lounge emptied. She did not come back.

I asked a woman coming out of "C" deck toilet would she mind going back to see if there was anyone ill in there and to shout the name Mary. She said all the stalls were empty. As I looked through the door I saw there was another exit on the far side. Christ!, I thought, the donkey's done a runner. In a panic, thinking she would get off the boat and I'd be left anguishing all the way back to Manchester on my own, racking my brains for the word, I ran to the information desk and asked them to make an announcement.

"Will Mrs. Mary Walker please report to the information desk on B deck" boomed out over the Tannoy.

"That'll scupper her" I thought, but she didn't come. I went to the desk again. "I think she must have gone overboard" I said, with as much flippancy as I could muster. They announced again "Will Mrs. Walker please report to the nearest member of the ship's crew or come immediately to the information desk on B deck".

I was in the process of explaining about "the word" and where I had last seen her when she strolls nonchalantly up saying she had decided to have a shower and was going to join me on the car deck when the call came. But I knew damned well she'd taken her passport: she wouldn't admit it.

"What was it I said?", I said, but she said if I didn't know she wouldn't say.

"I could have been left at the docks all night, thinking about it", I said, "biting my lips off."

About a month ago I was in the Gay Dog with Penny. Lovely time, quiet chat, all was well in the metaphorical garden. She had duckling I remember and I had the rack of lamb. The home made bread pudding was superb. Her strawberry meringue looked good. When

the coffee came I said I fancied a Scotch. Now whether I had used the word or she had heard a woman with a Scottish accent somewhere in the pub or not I don't know, or whether she thought I was being cryptic about a Scottish professor from Pennicuick called Halfpenny who had made her blush about her name at a Summer School and whom she was "toutchy about". She had not spoken to me for a week when I said I'd do porridge for him if he ever came round. I am at a loss to guess, but when I got back from the bar she'd gone.

It was raining a fine drizzle outside (I think they call it a Scotch missed) and the visibility was not good. I collected the car and drove down the road as far as I thought she could have run. No sign. I drove back and noticed a 'phone box on a corner. It was out of order. I look to see if she's hiding near by. In a state of desperate rage I turn and drive back towards home which, incidentally, is a mere twenty-one miles from the Gay Dog, and catch her in the headlights dodging into a hedgerow.

"I'm walking home!" she shouts and stamps her foot in the grass. This is a forty-year-old woman.

"Tell me what it was I said," I shout back. I grab hold of her arm saying "Don't be so bloody stupid, it's raining cats and . . .!". She hits me full in the face with her free hand and pulls away weeping hysterically, shouting "Don't you come near me!"

A miserable looking dog with a huge man suddenly materialises out of the rain Another conjuring trick. In embarrassment I say

"Excuse me. Can I ask you to be a witness? This lady is with me in the car but she wants to walk home in the rain without a coat. If anything happens to her I want it known I did not desert her in the middle of Cheshire, in the wet, in the dark, on a dangerous lonely road without a coat." (I could hear her telling her friends). "If she gets attacked and killed or run over I want people to know that!" He looks at me as though I'm Woody Allen or some kind of maniac. I realise he's the landlord of the pub but he hurries on with his even more miserable looking dog.

I remonstrate with her to get into the car but she won't.

"Penny!" I say, "I can't take any more of this! It's making me ill! What did I say for Christ's sake!?" She sets off to walk.

I drive along behind her at three miles an hour shouting through the window

"Why don't you just tell me what I said and let me take you to a 'phone booth, for God's sake!"

Then I remember a lay-by near by so I drive past her, park and walk back, barring her way. She runs past me and I grab at her arm but she struggles free as a car is passing. It stops and the door half opens on the driver's side. I feel embarrassed, but not Penny, she runs up to it and exchanges a few words, jumps in and the car speeds off.

"Christ!" I think "What is she doing! Does she know them!? It could be anybody! The Chelford rapist! the Romiley ripper!" I roar off after her. Round two bends and out onto a straight stretch. Two red lights in the distance. I increase speed. The bastard's clearly trying to lose me. We are on the outskirts of a town now and approaching a complex of roundabouts. He circuits them three times trying to interpose cars and speeds off towards the town centre. Who is this crazy fucker?

He stops in front of the Town Hall and lets Penny out. She slams the door and runs down a steep cobbled side street. I pull up as he drives off. It's a no parking area. I leave the engine running and stand with one foot out of the car screaming down the street "Penny! What in the name of fuck did I say?!" She continues running. I park the car on the pavement with the hazard lights flashing and run after her but she's disappeared. I'm no wiser.

When I get back to the car a police van is pulled up close behind it and a Copper is booking me.

"Penny for your thoughts?!" he says.

"I wish I had one!" I said.

When he's finished writing he looks up and says

"Would you like to follow me to the station for a breath test?"

"You mean I have a choice!"

In the police station I'm annoyed to see Penny standing at the desk holding a telephone and talking quite affably to the woman desk-sergeant. So much for that liberal anti-police attitude of hers I think as I walk up and interrupt saying:

## THE GOOD LITTLE GOERS

"Look Penny, this is ridiculous. Just tell me what I said".

"Is this the person?" the desk-sergeant asks, looking at Penny.

"Yes" she says.

"You hypocritical. . .!"

"I've had a complaint from Mrs. Pincher here that you are harassing her. I'd like you to leave".

"I'd love to" I say, "but your colleague here with the breathalyser might not be too happy about that".

"I have to caution you Sir, that if the test is positive you will be arrested".

I take a deep breath.

Fortunately the reading is just below the thin red line. I go over to Penny and say in my Laurel and Hardy voice, "Another fine mess you've gotten me into. . .".

"If you don't leave the station immediately you will be arrested", the desk-sergeant says.

"I'm only trying to see that she gets home safely!"

"Will you please leave".

As I turned to go I said with all the gravitas I could muster,

"I will, but watch she doesn't do a runner. She's got form this one and she'd outstrip you Bow Street cripples any day of the week".

I stand in the rain on the drive wondering if she will come home or go to her sister's. I can't believe so much "aggro" can turn on such an unspeakable word.

A taxi drives up and stops opposite. She sits inside talking to the driver. They both get out. He's a short man, fat and forty, with a bald head and barrel chest and wearing a luminous blue pullover. He looks like a moulting budgerigar but he's chirpy enough and they chatter away as they cross the road.

I start to say "Can I have my things please and I'll go" when he flits between Penny and me and puts his fist under my nose.

"If you give this lady any trouble mate I'll floor you!"

"Just try it, I say, "But remember the old punch line. Nothing succeeds like a beakless budgie!"

The remark's lost on him, and I must confess it was nearly lost on

me, but the diversion is long enough for Penny to insert her key and let herself in.

"I want my things" I shout and rap the door knocker.

The taxi drives off and I ring the door bell repeatedly. I am just about to go to the car to press the horn when a police car draws up. Christ! Has she called them or was it one of her neighbours?

I decide the best strategy is to lead with the cheek.

"I don't know who called you but I think I had better explain what's going on here".

"I think you had better go home and leave the lady alone!"

"But I need my things and I need to know what I said that's upset her. It's infuriating: I feel like Franz Kafka!"

"I think you had better go", he said again.

It was then that my anger got the better of me. If she wouldn't tell me what I'd said I'd mix things for her.

She had asked me earlier would I mind giving her brother a hand upending the trailer tent and hooking it onto the wall when he returned it. There was a stout hook fixed high on the inside garage wall and a rope attached for hauling it up and securing it.

Before I could say anything to the Copper Penny opens the door in response to his ring.

"Can I have my things please and I'll go", I say. "And by the way what..."

"They're in a black plastic bin liner in the garage. I've unlocked the door. Take them. I never want to see you again!"

"That's a bit heartless isn't it?"

"Heartless! You haven't got a heart: you've got a swinging brick!"

"Did I hear her correctly?!" The policeman went inside.

I put the black plastic sack in the car and then thought sod it! and went back to the door and rang the bell.

The policeman answered and said,

"If you don't leave immediately you'll be arrested for causing a breach of the peace."

"You mean a lull in the war don't you. . . O.K. I'm going but I want your number first. She threatened to commit suicide this afternoon.

## THE GOOD LITTLE GOERS

Look in the garage you'll see she's got a rope attached to a hook in there. I suggest you contact her mother" She'll not like that, I thought. "She's in no state to be left alone". The policeman frowned. "Just give me your number so I know who I've left her with in case anything happens". He shows me his left shoulder.

"Right", I said, "I'm going. She's your responsibility. But if she does anything stupid I wouldn't fancy your chances of becoming Chief Constable!"

A couple of weeks later Penny 'phoned me and said she wanted to talk. I put the 'phone down but relented and called her back. We agreed to meet.

The meal at the Crown went tolerably well, at least to begin with. I went meticulously through the standard pleasantries from my How to succeed with women check list:

'Penny you're looking (well/fit/better/beautiful/particularly attractive) tonight.'

I chose particularly attractive.

'Penny you've grown your hair/had your hair (Perm any one of the following, cut/dyed/styled/straightened/shortened) since I last saw you.'

I chose styled to be on the safe side.

'Penny you've got my favourite dress/frock/coat/jumper top/hat/stockings/bra/panties (on or off) on tonight.'

I chose jumper.

I said at one point, "How very perceptive you are!" You could hear her purr.

I even managed to do quite well in the obligatory examination I was required to sit whenever we met - the elevenses-plus. The test required me to remember precisely where I had told her, over the phone, I had been and with whom in the intervening days since we last met.

Unfortunately you can't teach an elephant to play the piano with its toes and I made one or two gaffes.

"But I thought you said you went out with John on. . ."

"Oh! yes! How silly of me!"

"You don't have to lie to me you know. I'm not checking up on you".

Oh No?! I thought

I turned the conversation to our fiasco at the Gay Dog hoping I would get some clue about the magic word. It was a mistake. She quickly went into earache mode. The "runner" had cost her a pretty penny and she was not pleased. The taxi fare had been £11 but the driver had no change and she had ended up giving him three fivers.

In return for the extravagant tip he must have thought he was doing her a favour by radioing his office to send the police round.

She couldn't understand why the policeman had thought her suicidal though.

"I was certainly murderous but definitely not suicidal!" she said. "It wasn't you who told him there was a rope hanging in the garage was it?".

"Rope! Me! No! of course not!" I said.

"My brother was not pleased to be got out of bed at two in the morning but the police wouldn't leave until someone came to look after me. I could kill that taxi driver!" she said.

Penny had got it into her head that we should go Dutch at the Crown so as to be on an equal footing.

"Don't think there is any sex on offer to-night", she said, "because there isn't. You think if you pay for my meal you've bought my body don't you. Well I'm paying for my own meal and keeping my body to myself tonight!"

"That's a very mean minded Thatcherite thought", I said. "A woman could make herself in to a whore thinking like that. Has it never occurred to you that someone might want you for your own sake, or may even be doing it though they don't feel like it, so as not to disappoint you. Or just doing it because it's enjoyable. But seeing that you've put the thought in my head I'll tell you what: why don't you pay for both our meals from now on and I'll let you have my body. If you want it it will be round at my place" and I disappeared to the Gent's.

I was surprised to see her still sitting there when I got back. I thought I had set the scene up for a women's marathon but it was



## THE GOOD LITTLE GOERS

Quiz Night and she couldn't resist a quiz. She liked the word games and the quiz gave her the opportunity to display her apparently limitless knowledge of popular culture.

She had been lacing up her trainers, so to speak, when they had come round with the quiz sheets and she'd taken them off again.

I called our team 'The Good Little Goers'.

"Very funny!" she said.

We came last which made us eligible for the booby prize. She pushed me towards Mike, the quiz master.

"Right" Mike boomed out. "For a pint. One question from a subject of your choice. Do you want music?"

"Can't face it".

"Do you want Art?"

"He hasn't got one!" Penny shouts.

"Do you want sport?"

"Yeah, I'll try sport", I said in my best Australian.

"Right. For a pint then. Name as many runners as you can in one minute beginning. . . NOW!"

"Owens, Wooderson, Brasher, Chataway, Christie, Modahl, Daley, Shergar, Red Rum, April, May, June, Scarlet, Angie, Susan, Claire, Joyce, Janice, Janet, Sarah, Anne, Fiona, Mandy, Margaret, Frances, Wendy, Lynda. . ."

"Twenty-seven! Time's nearly up!"

I looked to where Penny had been sitting. . . "Penny!" I said.

And Mike shouted: "Twenty-eight! One pint! Going for a Penny! Well done!"

When I got home I 'phoned her:

"One last question Penny. For the Quiz. What exactly was that magic word which made you all disappear?"

"It was not magic word" she said. "It was YOU!" But then I thought, 'she would say that wouldn't she'.

## ADVENTURES OF A POLISH PLUMBER

Stefan Jaruzelski here. I move from Vacueras to Chinon in search of work and to improve English. This is big success. My French competitor plumber he have van with his name "Emile Zola" and "J'acuzzi!" on it. French think this very droll but I much better plumber and fix Jacuzzi of rich English poet. He also teach me English. He own chateau in region. He Lord Mikhail Jagger. He say Zola plumbing is dog's breakfast but my plumbing is dog's bollocks. Many items of ladies clothing in nozzles and drains but I fix them pretty damn quick - then Lord Mick teach me English. He plumber too before becoming poet. We have long talk on soldering joints and bending springs. Then he play me his poems on gramophone. Mick he main poet in England. I tell him I like sonorities but find sense - how you say -elusive. Mick ask if I really poet too and suggest I better writing installation instructions for gas boilers. I much hurt by this.

Mick allow me to read his large library which come with chateau. I find *polonais-français* dictionary inscribed "*De George à mon cher Frédéric*" which big help to me learn English. Mick make me plumber-in-residence of Chateau Mick but sometimes I moved out when Mick has grand-daughter at chateau. Mick say she very ill and need peace and quiet and many meat injections.

I read English classics: Shakespeare, Milton, Dickens, Wordsworth etc Mick know all English poets alive - he friends with Queen and King Charles. I ask if he write for Crazy Oik but he say he not qualified for such an outlet - yet. He many friends who also poets. I meet Michael George who look very distinguished with goatee beard. He very friendly to me and say he plumber too before becoming poet. He insist we retire to Lord Mick's toilet to admire pipework. Pipework good (not by E. Zola) but Michael then say if I to be English poet/gentleman it important to know how to hold todger correctly in front of urinal. He much exasperated by my failure to learn proper hold and reach out to hold it for me. Then he ask me to hold his. He say this normal practice in Anglo-Saxon high society. I very glad when Lord Mick burst into toilet and shout "fucking shirt-lifter!" and drag Mr George out.

## ADVENTURES OF A POLISH PLUMBER

I work on long poem like Wordsworth's Prelude. Early books on Polish childhood will be in native language but later episodes will be in French and conclusion in English. This will be plumber-poet apotheosis and new genius (Stefan Jaruzelski) will appear in Crazy Oik holding todger correctly in front of perfectly installed self-flushing porcelain urinal MkIV with gleaming brass tubes. I search in bibliothèque Jagger for book on todger/ urinal etiquette? This may be important if I am to be knighted by King Charles.

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A month later I find myself (*je me trouve*) in Dordogne. Lord Mick had to go on world tour and felt uneasy about leaving me in Chateau with granddaughter on premises. I try to assure him that I too could give granddaughter meat injections if Lord Mick could teach me but he felt it best I should widen the circle of friends rather than that of Michael George (who offers me job plumbing in Los Angeles). After much discussion with Lord Mick (who also was plumber before fame embraced him) we decide that although Loire valley is popular with tourists I need clientele of established Englanders since they are more obsessed with washing, toilets and clean arse than French. Mick tells me that French don't even have a word for bidet. Consequently we decide I best move to Dordogne where in some villages there are more English than French.

I lodge at first in tent on camp site at Neuvic next to river L'Isle. Then locals tell me of strange English doctor who has many failures with Monsieur Bricolage plumbing in his house at Haut Planèze. I visit habitation up winding rue Paul Schmidt. There in old farmhouse with massive barn half underground in hillside I find Dr Lee up to ankles in sewage fixing turd macerator on kitchen table. This is common occurrence. He is grateful for help since tea will be served on table soon. Madame Lee prepares meal in kitchen and shouts often to aid Dr Lee's concentration. Dr Lee is not real doctor but teacher of sociology (ret'd) (I not sure if this is retired or retarded). Although he was plumber in Trafford originally he says he forgets all that shite now and regrets this since he finds nothing in Weber or Durkheim on the operation of turd macerators.



*Dr Lee's library, wine cellar and turd macerator spares dept.*

## ADVENTURES OF A POLISH PLUMBER

I fix macerator and clean shite off table with sleeve of jacket. Dr Lee brings me large glass of wine which he says is from 300 litre barrel in back of barn. I drink but don't complain since this is friendly gesture. Dr Lee's eyes not good; barrel room gloomy; he obviously filled glass from tank of creosote. Dr Lee, however, pronounces drink "a fine, robust expression of the St Emilion comparable with the great 96 vintage". I decide he is serious pisshead. In Poland too are many pissheads. I feel well at home here. Dr Lee takes me on tour of premises pointing out many problems of plumbing. I say I can fix all these tout de suite and he suggests I stay, sleeping in barn, till everything honkey dory.

Later Madame Lee serves tea but asks, seeing me at table "Not another spastic parasite John! Where do you find them? And how are we going to feed this idle bugger? Does he speak English?" But Dr Lee bridles and retorts "Stefan is top jockey plumber. He fix place up plenty good and quick. He also scholar and writer and told me very interesting tale of Chopin fixing garden tap for Flaubert. He friend of Lord Jagger. He fucked George Michael. He wine connoisseur of great sensitivity and detected notes of creosote in Arnauld's vrac. He opera buff. We will spend many evenings discussing Wagner and Verdi." We drink from bottle with no label which empties very quick. Another bottle appears, this time a white, also with no label which Dr Lee says is a 1990 Pouligny Montrachet but which I recognise as bat urine.

Next day, during wine breaks, of which there are many, we discuss philosophy. Dr Lee studied this at Hull where great English poet ran library. He met Ryle and took him to the pub. He remembers Ryle saying to him "I'll have half of mild please John". We discuss the mind/body problem and I say that Ryle is behaviourist. Dr Lee very offended by this and says that I am dumkopf and that Poland never produced any great thinkers. I mention Copperknickers and Kant. Dr Lee throws down blowlamp and runs up to library in front of barn. He produces favourable citations on Ryle from Wittgenstein and G.E. Moore but I say Wittgenstein was wrong too and should have stuck to his plumbing course at Manchester Poly rather than chasing after the egregious Bertrand Russell, and that Moore's concept of a commonsense philosophy was an oxymoron. I remarked

that all English philosophy was bankrupt and sterile and that I preferred the inspiring mysticism of Heidegger and Sartre. Dr Lee said it was all bollocks and that I was typical continental birdbrain. After many more wine breaks, towards the end of the afternoon, I have run fifteen feet of 10mm copper pipe, not particularly straight, and Dr Lee thinks there might be something to Sein und Zeit after all. We fall asleep on large couch and are awakened only by shouts from Madame Lee who wants spuds peeled.

Dr Lee has vast collection of recorded music on vinyl, CD and tape. Many nights we listen to Parsifal, Otello, Falstaff, the Ring cycle. Drawers and boxes overflow with a plethora from Montiverdi to Schoenberg. But is this commodity fetishism? I take the good Dr to task after familiarising myself with the sociologists vocab browsing his extensive library. I realise that some Marxist jargon would impress and I had much of this from my uncle who ran Poland. "John" I began one night after a particularly fine meal with many bottles of Chateau Leftfoot "commodity fetishism is a deformation of personality brought on by the capitalist mode of production. The superstructural, spiritual attributes of art objects are subsumed into their concrete encodings. Hence literary and musical works become hypostatised into their contingent physical manifestations – books and discs. Pseudo-connoisseurs, with no appreciation of the original artistic impulse, get locked into the fetishistic accumulation of representations. A recent development is the substrate variant which provides further stimulus for the addicted collector. Thus, although you have the whole 16 hours of Wagner's ring on CD, Vinyl, VHS tape and DVD you must, with the advent of the Minidisc, transpose this masterpiece into yet another encoding. Madness of course. We see in this endemic pursuit the successful subversion of the working class revolutionary spirit by a small secret clique of establishment autocrats. Compare this to the natural, life-enhancing approach of the Ituri pygmies who dropped everything – hunting, shagging, scooping out the brains of their enemies as a snack - on hearing Mozart's G minor Symphony No 40 - but had no inclination to buy a Dansette (the state of the art record player in 1958) even if they could have afforded one." I think John was chastened by this analysis.

That night, after midnight defecation, shit pump blocks again. Whole house is awakened by Dr Lee's wail of anguish. Madame Lee analyses situation and delivers her verdict.

"It's a plum stone John you greedy guzzling git! You're so busy nattering to that Polish pillock while listening to Don Carlos that you stuff plums in your mouth and forget to spit out the stones!" We gather round like students at an operation while macerator is dismantled once more. Madame Lee is right (as usual). She explodes:

"That's it John! You either give up plums or you go up the garden with a spade!" The rain begins to hammer on roof.

"Up the garden? I'll catch me death. And anyway there's snakes up there." I notice powerful foodmixer on kitchen table.

"I have answer in best tradition of Polish can-do plumbing solutions. We pipe food mixer with much stronger blades in parallel with existing shit pump. When plumfest is in progress we switch turds to new unit before retiring"

"Stefan" says Dr Lee beaming "You're a fuckin genius!" Madame Lee, however calls us both "crazy half-arsed fucks" and say no way her Magimix be used in this manner. But still I reckon razor sharp blades of 316 stainless mash up any plum stone no trouble. And, recalling my biology lectures at Lodz tech, I observe that turds contain up to 9% protein and would add new tangy zest to any home-made soup which would go well with John's 300 litre barrel of M Arnauld's St Emilion vrac.

Dr Lee will be moving to his other house in Spain soon. This is new apartment with excellent plumbing. Turds will flow unimpeded to a splendid sewage farm which is planned for next year after mayor is bribed.

A year later I visit new establishment at Estepona. The shit pump is a distant memory but now other anxieties arise. I witness a robust exchange of views on new situation.

J: "This weather's shite Diane. Hot sun every day. You find yourself crawling into the shade. And when the wind is from the south you can smell the camel dung, donkey piss and sizzling skunk in Tangiers. Town's full of black faces. I think we should go back to Man-

chester. I miss that fine caressing drizzle. I miss all me old mates. I miss Wes and Bob and Ken. I'd really like a long chinwag with Boris on the failings of New Labour and the contents of the average corner shop in 1943 and having him read me chapters 100 to 132 of Ernie's magnum opus on Boabdil. I like the fact that I'd be only a few hundred yards from the Theatre of Dreams and hear the roar as Wayne bangs one in, or that I could go and see a great Verdi opera at the Lowry. And if I dropped in on Ken for a discussion on the intricacies of the ontological argument we'd crack open a bottle of Vosne while he set his computer to copy me *Falstaff* or *Otello* for £0. In this god-forsaken hole I can't do any of these things. All I've got is a daily stroll to the port to discuss a mullet with Pedro in pidgin Spanish or a trawl round the charity shops to see if they've got the *Collected Papers of Gilbert Ryle* stuck among the Jilly Coopers and John Grisholms. I'm a Manchester lad Diane and I've had enough of this dago lifestyle. I want to get back to me roots."

D: "Have you been at that 300 litre barrel John? No wonder your arse is in such a state. You're having nostalgic delusions. Our project, let me remind you, is hot sun – lots of it. We're not heading north, we're heading south. I won't be happy till we're in Africa. I fancy a little mud hut in Marrakech. I want to get back to my roots John – remember my dad was an Arab. And no, before you say it, I don't want to be locked in a back room in a burqa watching videos of Dallas and Dynasty I want the lifestyle of an Arab bloke – on a camel trekking across the endless dunes eating dates and sheep's eyeballs and drinking orange juice round a camel-dung fire. And since you're a useless pieceashit who can't even pour his own milk on his own bran flakes you'll have to come with me. We could get 200K for this place. With that we could live like kings in Marrakech. We could have 200 goats, three donkeys and a saddle studded with emeralds. Think of it John."

J: "Yis Diane. Goats are fine, and in extremis could prove an acceptable physical companion what with the location and dimensions of their organs, but I need intellectual stimulation. Admittedly the mental distance between a goat and Bob or Ken is not greater than, say, the gap between myself and Wittgenstein but I'd still find the feats of anthropomorphism required to sustain an on-going argu-



ment with a goat on the contradictions of Kant's Antinomies are more than I can manage."

D: "Well why don't you get in touch with the faculty of Sociology at Estepona University? We'll write you an introduction. Spanish is one of his sixteen fluent languages and I believe his paper on Some Socially Determined Inconsistencies in Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle was originally in Spanish. Then there's the local Rotary Club. I overheard some retired double-glazing salesmen in the market the other day having a fascinating chat on golf and the shortcomings of the latest Mondeo. And another thing – if we did go back where would we live? We're off the UK property ladder now. All we could afford would be some shithole in Salford."

J: "Hey! Just a minute Diane! I don't know about shithole. I think we could get a nice big semi on that estate where Frank Gallagher lives in *Shameless*. I mean that place looks really interesting. There'd be never a dull moment there. And you could get anything you want in the pub, cheap fags an booze, steaks, ganja, satellite dishes, boxes and cards. Why I bet if you mentioned opera there'd be some geezer in the following night with the complete works of Wagner and the hardback *Diaries* of Cosima, signed by the author and wrapped up in a Nazi flag for less than a tenner. Charity shops? It'd be one big charity shop – with nobody on the till. Imagine it Diane. Me roots! I can feel the siren call! - like a horn sounding on a distant shore!! The plangent honk of the tram as it attempts to scare some staggering pisshead off the track, the warble of the police car speeding to a shooting in Moss Side, the strident braying of happy revellers as they wobble, half naked, down the vomit-spattered, piss-reeking streets of the centre. Strap me to the mast!! I can't help it! I've got to go back!"

D: "You mad fuck John! You *have* been at that barrel! Get your arse down to the fish market before I give it a good hiding. And call in at the bullring on the way back – see if they've got any ears and testicles for tonight's paella. If I don't make an early start on the tea I'll be late for the mosque"

Suddenly a winter back in Lodz seems an inviting prospect.

## SVEN

*Brett Wilson*

It had been a bad year and I felt in my urine that something untoward was going to happen. Mother had become increasingly erratic, and as her seventy-eighth year approached, I could only wait for her next move. She had been dropping hints that she expected me to move out soon, since the rent I paid her was ridiculously low (her phrase) and she could do lots of useful things with the space.

One day, when I had arrived home after a detour to the betting shop, I found that my clothes and other belongings had been removed to the closet under the stairs. I walked slowly up to my room. Inside was a very large blonde man applying grape oil to his half naked bronzed torso, while he sat on a rowing machine. He looked up and smiled.

"Hallow," he said. "Moy naime iz Sven."

Mother had installed a walking advert for steroids in my room while she had sent me to the pie shop for large custard.

"Fait accompli." she said, while eyeing a catalogue advertising the latest body sculpture equipment.

Still, I wouldn't leave. I began operating from my below stairs abode. A little cramped but bijou. I wanted to see what progress she would make with Sven.

Well, they started going on biking trips together. She would hang onto Sven's rippling stomach muscles, as hard as a washboard, while he took his bike from 0 to 60 mph on the abandoned car park behind the house. They did everything together for a while: hang-gliding, parachuting, sub-aqua. But Sven could not keep up. He would arrive home, totally exhausted, while mother would run in, slap Sven on the thigh and shout "Come on. Put some life into it!" and begin looking for her street hockey equipment. I left shortly afterwards, but I heard Sven had been replaced.

It was now that I began plotting my revenge. It took a long time to think up something suitable. I had managed to secretly enrol her in a subversive paramilitary organisation by forging her signature and imitating her voice on the telephone. I then let it be known to

the authorities that "activities" were planned, hinting that mother might be involved in some international caper.

One day, when she was leaving Tesco's with a bag of shopping in each hand, a large black van pulled up in front of her, making a loud screeching noise. Several men wearing black jump suits and helmets with tinted visors leapt out and grabbed her.

"Right, you're coming with us!" they shouted. They bundled her into the back of the van while several other men stood menacingly to one side brandishing machine guns. Then they all jumped back into the van before it raced away at breakneck speed.

Back at their top-secret underground headquarters, which doubled as a incineration plant, they kept her in an otherwise very dark room with two bright lights shining in her face. She sat in front of an empty rectangular table. There was an empty seat opposite.

"I promise you, I was going to pay for the walnuts." She said. A man with no emotion in his eyes stared at her. She gripped a large handbag that was resting on her lap. Just then, the chief came in, carrying a thick brown folder. The first man stepped to one side and whispered "She keeps ranting that she won't vote labour ever again. Either she is a very hardened terrorist or she's completely innocent."

"Given that if the latter premise were true, we would be in extremely deep shitski, I think we had better operate on the former premise." The leader said.

Thus it was that a whole echelon of the British Secret Service came to be removed. Mother never did find out who it was that got her into so much trouble. Mind you, she did once say that she enjoyed it. It was like an adventure holiday.

## OIKUS 1 – 3

*Prose Haiku of 100 words or less (no jokes allowed)*

### **Oiku 1: Oik Irony** *Ron Horsefield (100)*

Bernard left Harrow and did engineering at Cambridge. He liked its logic, precision and the satisfaction of solving problems in the real world. But there were also oiks who were less transpicuous. When he said “This meeting seems to have reached a state of hiatus” Scraggs rejoined “Is that in the Atlantic or the Pacific Mr Fortescue?” Next day he sported a red bow tie with white polka dots like his old prof wore. Scraggs found a matching cloth in the rag box and when Bernard returned they were all whistling at their benches wearing replicas of his natty accessory.

### **Oiku 2: Ratty Bert** *Ron Horsefield (100)*

Bert Plant, foreman of the Instrument workshop, got ratty easily. Each baggin break the lads would drag a bench into the middle of the amenities area and eat their sarnies off it. Afterwards Bert would savagely drag it back against the wall cursing loudly. One day they glued it to the floor with quick-setting epoxy. Bert grabbed it, failed to suspect its novel immobility and persisted, blood pressure rising, until finally a large chunk of floor tiling got ripped up. Engineer Fortescue gave Bert a good nobbin. Tiles weren’t cheap. “Some glue must’ve accidentally spilled on the feet” said Scraggs.

### **Oiku 3: Useless Gobshite** *Ron Horsefield (100)*

Charlie Scraggs and Bernard Fortescue tinkered all morning with an expensive 12 point Honeywell strip chart recorder, the Rolls Royce of instruments. Finally Bernard condemned it as beyond economic repair. Scraggs humping the object to the scrap skip, sees Bert coming into the shop. He staggers, groans, and as Bert approaches, drops the prize with a loud crash. Bert goes off like a bottle of pop. “Useless gobshite! Clumsy arsehole! Stupid pieceashit!” Scraggs apologises abjectly. Bert rushes into the office wanting Scraggy’s guts for garters. Bernard suspects some kind of elaborate wind-up. “Leave it with me Bert” he says guardedly.

## UNSTUCK

John Royson

The sole of my shoe came off whilst I was down on the third this morning. Stickasoles! I've shit em. The front sprang off and curled up like a roll of lino under my foot just as I was making a big impression on a tall blonde girl who works in Accounts. She probably thought I looked a right pillock when I suddenly pitched forward then hobbled past her trying to look casual. Back at the office we put Pestelenski's rural skills to use: me holding my foot up backwards like a horse whilst he banged the sole back on with a stapling machine.

"I'm very intrigued to know where you go on these perambulations of yours" he says. "A man like you must have rather interesting not to say mysterious designs, disappearing for half an hour every morning and afternoon. Are you going to reveal? No, I thought not. But you didn't mind me asking, did you? "

"I'm only skiving same as everybody else, you daft cunt. Just going for a walk round so I don't take root. "

"No. I realise now. It was indiscreet of me to ask."

He wouldn't believe I was only killing time. Anyway, his bright idea of the staples didn't work. I nearly went on my arse when we were walking across for dinner, so this afternoon saw the mounting of a major technological operation in the office as we searched everywhere for glue, fixed it for a ten minute test period with drawing pins, and even tried dissolving the rubber surface with typewriter cleaning fluid. In the end I decided Bostic was the only possible hope and went down to see the maintenance joiners in the basement.

The lift doors are kept locked down there so that they're forced to use the staircase. So down into the bowels of the establishment via the servants entrance, through a dusty corridor filled with heating pipes, ventilation ducts, and telephone boiler room with its four massive heat generators and the roar of the oil-fired fuel system, through a store room filled with lifting tackle, casting patterns, and old office furniture, and into the fairy grotto of the workshop with its foliage of working plans, football pin-ups, and wood shavings.

There's a wireless playing in the background and a kettle on the gas ring where they melt the glue. Three carpenters are working at their benches, sawing and planing away in their brown aprons. I approached the eldest, thinking that he would probably be the foreman.

"Yes, young man" he says. "What can we do for you?"

"Have you got any Evostic or Bostic?"

"We've got both. What's it for?"

"My shoe. The sole keeps coming off."

"Let's have a look then ... Sit yourself down a minute." ,

He drew an old office stool from under the bench and dusted the seat for me. Whilst I was taking the shoe off one of the other men came to join in.

"Leather to synthetic rubber" the older man said. "Have we got any of that white resin left Harry?"

"No. I put some on order yesterday. But Two-Forty-One's the stuff you want for that job."

"What - the epoxy compound?"

"Yeah. Stick like shit to a blanket with that stuff on it. You'll have to roughen the surface first though ... Pass it here."

Whilst he was rasping at the sole with a file the other man was stirring some evil looking compound in a tin - two of them tinkering away whilst I sat there with my foot in a sock. Then when it had been stuck and all the excess oozing out of the sides wiped off, the old boy says:

"You'll have to leave it to set for s few minutes at least."

"Well he's not in any hurry" the other man suggested. "You don't mind waiting a bit, do you?"

"No. Do I heck."

"Can't go yet anyway" the third man said, appearing from behind us with four mugs on a plastic tray, "cos here's the old Rosy Lee. Man- age one, can you? How many sugars?"

"Two please."

So there I am, sat supping tea waiting for my shoe to dry whilst these three natter about some new brand of high-speed steel chisel

blades and then carry on with their work, tapping and knocking at their benches like three of the seven bloody dwarfs. The room is dirty and crappy, it's lit with artificial strip lighting, there's junk lying round everywhere and bits of wood under your feet, yet I didn't want to go back to the D.O. where you could eat your dinner off the floor but the only thing any of us think about is getting out as fast as we can. We're probably on twice as much for a basic week, yet they're whistling while they work and we're as bored as arse-holes.

Maybe a discontented joiner can exist somewhere, but I subscribe to the notion of dignity in manual labour, Mao has got the right idea, sending his bourgeoisie back to work in the fields three months of every year. I was taken back to my days as an apprentice, working in the toolroom at Reynolds before the miracle of my metamorphosis from grease impregnated overalls into a 'white collar'. The workshop itself was grim: a glass roof, which meant we were freezing in winter and boiled alive in summer. An atmosphere drenched with the mist of oil and cutting fluids; no windows in the walls, and a continuous screaming of lathes, grinders, and milling machines. Yet I was never bored with the job. There is something fundamentally satisfying about feeling the texture, holding in your palm, and noting the weight of an object which you have just shaped from a solid bar of 18/8/Ti high quality stainless steel. To service the drive gear on a big engine or a two-hundred ton relay press means commandeering a block and tackle, using tons of elbow grease, chains, pulleys, ropes, and trestles, then manhandling a huge fifty horse power electric motor plus its clutch and reduction gear back to the bench to strip down. The whole operation is dealing with real, physical, concrete objects - not pissing about with squares and circles on bits of paper like I'm doing now. So even though I got fed up with broken fingernails, bleeding knuckles, sweaty overalls, and working up to the armpits in oil and shit I was engaging the real world and could see the product of my labour - even touch it!

Last week an apparently normal bloke down on the fourth had a mental blank out, stopped work completely, and quietly started flipping his lid. He would stare at his board for two or three hours at a times then race up the office scattering papers off people's desks and boards laughing hysterically. They all thought it was a great howl down there and nobody actually did anything about it until he

dragged his section leader across the desk then started banging his head against the wall. Five minutes later the security men were brought up and stood round looking heavy whilst McClean was dashing up and down the corridor like a wank in a thunderstorm. Eventually they cornered Geoff between the radiators and a filing cabinet and dragged him out, kicking and screaming. A salutary lesson to us all.



## THE CARETAKER

*David Birtwistle*

Both men looked up from the large, unfolded plan on the Head-teacher's desk. The architect's ruled lines were a very faded blue and the words were hand-written in careful copperplate. The caretaker had taken the new Head over every inch of the ground.

"What's that, behind the artroom, there?" asked the meticulous Mr. Martin.

"It's the kiln room, Mr. Martin. It's been passed by Health and Safety."

"Call me Mike, please" said the new Head. He was exercising all he had learnt about management and he knew that the relationship between a Head and a caretaker was crucial to the wellbeing of any school. It was one of those little nuts and bolts which, if left too slack or too tight, could grind any smooth organisation to its knees. Mike Martin was determined that anything he ran would run smoothly. He made a mental note to check Tom Deakin's birthday. Little things like that really oiled the wheels. Mike was a stickler for detail.

"What about the cellars, Tom? Where do you store all your stuff?"

"I've never seen a plan of the cellars, but I can take you round. It's a bit dark and a bit dingy. The previous head never bothered at all."

Mike Martin was a 'modern' manager. A neat, dark, pinstripe suit, white, crisp shirt and a floral silk tie. He was an office man, a meetings man. The head's room and that desk were his idea of an engine room, where all the man-management systems were created and carefully put into place. There were lots of new procedures to develop and for them to function properly he had to motivate his staff, make them take his ideas and believe in them as their own. He didn't want to bother with the cellars at all. At least he shared that in common with his predecessor. Nevertheless he felt he had it to do.

"Come on. A quick tour. I must see every inch of the ship."

Tom had a feeling that the new Head enjoyed nautical metaphors. The two men walked across the yard and round the side of the old annexe building. As they descended the stone steps Mr. Martin began to gain a clearer picture of the age of the buildings he had inher-

ited. The iron railings were an inch thick and though they were coated in maroon paint, he gauged from the chips and flakes underneath, that the ironwork dated from mid-Victorian times. The descent to the cellars seemed to take him through layers of time. He was sure that if he looked hard enough he could trace lots of evidence of the past.

Standing at the bottom of the steps he dismissed the idea. Far too fanciful for a new executive Head. But he valued imagination. He hoped one or two of his new team would be blessed with it. He could deploy it, bring it to bear on the new systems he would be imposing. Nonetheless, descending into the gloom did have the effect of going back in time. Everything was black, white or grey. A bit like the Sherlock Holmes films of his youth.

Tom pulled out a huge bunch of keys, selected a long, worn key, slid back a brass flap and turned the lock with a clunk.

"Wait a second," said the caretaker, "I don't want you hurting yourself." He disappeared into the empty darkness. There was the click of a switch and seconds later a harsh light filled the room. Mike Martin adjusted his eyes. Everything he saw suggested the caretaker knew the ropes. Piles of disinfectant in gallon jars were neatly stacked against the wall. A range of brushes with various heads and thicknesses of bristle hung from a straight row of hooks. Bags of grit for slippery ice were piled as neat as bales of hay in a barn. Shovels gleamed with cleaned steel. A bench with a vice and a swept top. Not a speck of sawdust in sight. Mike was a firm believer in the clean-desk principle of management. No clutter. Focus on the task. Do it. Then clear the decks ready for the next one. He was impressed with Tom's tidiness.

"Very ship-shape indeed." he said.

"The boilers are in the next room."

He opened the second door by depressing an old-fashioned latch. There was a discernible hum of electric motors and the sound of water gurgling through pipes. There was a waft of heat. He could well have been below decks on an old passenger ship. It began to get hot and stuffy. The boilers had obviously been replaced. There were bolts and plates still in the floor where something larger had been.

## THE CARETAKER

"Five years old," said Tom. "Not as temperamental as the ones we had before." Mike noticed a handwritten list of emergency phone numbers neatly taped to the side of some dials. "If there's any serious variation on these readings I phone them up. They're good. Usually here in an hour." Mike was very reassured. There was something about Tom which gave Mike added confidence. Mike turned round decisively and made a momentary lapse from his shipping metaphors.

"OK. Back to the drawing board. But let's have a coffee before we do anything else."

Next day Mike Martin was in at 7.30. Tom made him a coffee and took it to his room.

"Coffee Mike? White no sugar?"

"Thank you Tom. Sit down."

For ten minutes they discussed Tom's rota and his deployment of the cleaners on the second floor of the main building.

"Everything going according to plan?"

"Everything will be ready for the start of term," said Tom

"I've been thinking," said Mike, pulling out a folder from his drawer and shuffling through sheets of paper. "There are four places coming up on the Governing Body; two teacher representatives, one parent rep and a non-teaching rep. Would you think about putting yourself forward? For the board of governors, I mean? It would reflect on the importance of your job and you would bring a very special angle to bear on matters relating to the running of the school."

Tom was taken aback. The previous Head would never have thought like that. He would never have even considered a caretaker for the governing body!

"I don't know what to say," said Tom ,

"Well, think-about it for a day or two. I want to make several changes round here.

Get away from the past. Take us into the next century, if you like. The previous Head's gone now. That's a fact we must all face. South of France didn't somebody say?"

"I believe so," said Tom, his mind still reeling from this unexpected

proposal.

"Old Perkins never suggest anything like that then?" asked Mike, secretly pleased that upon the caretaker at least he had-made an impression. He was already putting his mark on the job.

"No no, he didn't," said Tom. "He never asked me about anything like that."

The next day the joiner arrived at seven o'clock. Tom had been there since six, the cleaners since half-past.

"There are three doors to plane and I want you to have a look at one of the locks," said Tom.

"It's a pleasure to work on wood like this," said the old joiner, stroking the solid pine on the corridor door. "In some of these modern buildings it's like matchwood. Once it goes, that's it. The whole door needs replacing. But this old wood; that's what I call joinery. They were real craftsmen in them days."

"Would you like a brew?" asked Tom.

"I'll do an hour's work and then I'll have a break, thank you," said the joiner, opening his box of tools.

There was a quiet hum of activity about the school when Mike arrived. He sensed a buzz of efficiency. The cleaners were polishing the upper floors and the surface gleamed. The joiner, with effortless swoops of his arms, was planing a door and sending a faint scent of pine along the corridor. Tom was up a ladder freeing the lock on an ancient window mechanism. Mike glowed with satisfaction.

"Morning everybody."

"Morning," echoed his staff. Did he detect an edge of respect in their voices?

"Old Perkins never greeted me like that," said the joiner over his mug of tea.

"No, he wouldn't" said Tom. "Have a biscuit."

The day before term began, Mike summoned Tom Deakin into his office.

"Two sugars?" asked Mike. Tom felt like putting his feet up on the desk as he settled in but refrained. Whilst he was in the captain's cabin he would behave like a.....well.....gentleman. He almost thought officer. He certainly no longer felt like a ship's hand or a

## THE CARETAKER

furnace stoker. He wiped a spot of dust from his overall and carefully inspected his fingernails.

"What can I do for you, Mike?" he asked.

"Everything seems to be ship-shape. Well done." said the Head.

"Bristol fashion, if I might say so." said the caretaker.

"Excellent trim. But I'm talking about taking every precaution."

"What can I do?"

"I've been planning for every contingency. Insurance if you like. Doing a bit of underwriting." He paused. They both sipped coffee.

"Drop of winter-warmer?" offered the Head. "I can't do this in term time but let's call it a toast. To a job well done."

"I don't mind if I do" said Tom, almost calling him skipper now. The Head poured a thumbful of *Famous Grouse* into either mug and both men drank contentedly.

"What if there's a sudden fall of snow?" asked the Head. "I mean, a really cold snap, ice in the rigging. That sort of thing. I've been at schools where the heating's failed and everyone's had to go home. For days. Is there anyway round it? So that we could keep on ploughing a straight course? Set an example. That sort of thing."

"There is an emergency generator. It hasn't been used for years. But it would keep the annexe building warm, even if the rest was off."

"That would mean I could keep the staff in school, and the ones doing exams. Even if I had to send the rest home. That would set just the right tone. Could you test it out? Give it a trial run?"

"It might take me half the afternoon," replied Tom.

"Fine." said Mike. "We're well ahead as it is."

"Would you leave it with me and I'll report back when I'm done?"

"I'm only too happy to leave it with you Tom. I have every confidence."

Tom descended the cellar steps for the third time that day. The strata of years seemed to unfold before him. He went straight into the boiler room and as the fluorescent light flickered into life, he pressed two buttons, walked over to another control panel and threw a small, sprung lever which clunked and echoed like a muffled car bonnet being slammed shut. The lights flickered, went out, then

came on again. This time there was an extra bee-hive background hum. The lights seemed yellower, dimmer, but were working nevertheless. Everything was running like he knew it would.

Then Tom squeezed his way round the back of the emergency generator and with arms outstretched, he held the large sheet of plasterboard leaning against the wall and moved it three feet to the left. A solid pine, windowless door stood before him looking as though a battering ram wouldn't split it from its joists. The caretaker fingered his keys, felt for the long flange and the two open wrench jaws at the end of its barrel. He slotted it in and turned the lock with practised ease. The piece of metal fitted his palm like the parts of a gun filed and smoothed for the individual hand of a marksman. Once inside this back room, he locked the door and pressed a switch. There was a trace of disinfectant in the air and an overtone of old-fashioned lavender polish.

Tom sat down as his eyes adjusted to the light. He was sitting at the back of a room filled with furniture. It was like a classroom from the past. Row upon row of old Victorian desks, cut from wood in a single piece with curved high-bench seats facing the front of the room. Each desk had an inkwell and a dipping pen and textbooks were open on every slanting top. On top of the teak side bench which ran the length of the wall, gleaming like silver, some of it brass-cased lay science equipment from a bygone age. On a large cloth poster an intricate anatomical diagram of the human body. A turn-of-the-century map hung exactly parallel to it; next to that butterflies in glass cases and chests of small apothecary's drawers.

At the front, raised on a platform two feet above the well of the room, was the teacher's desk. It was polished and bare, save for a long bamboo cane. Sitting on a beechwood chair, facing into the room, his back against the blackboard, sat a man, his wrists manacled, the chains bolted into the wall. There was a gag around his mouth.

"There are still some biscuits in this packet, Mr Perkins," said Tom. "Would you like one?"

The old Headteacher, his face grey, his eyes exhausted, looked up and nodded.

"You'll excuse me if I don't join you, but I've just been having a scotch with Mike."

## THE CARETAKER

He tried not to emphasise scotch or Mike. Taking off the gag he handed across the packet of biscuits and topped up the tumbler at his side with fresh water.

"This time next week I'll be a governor," said Tom

"I think we understand each other now," said Mr Perkins his voice coming in faint rasps.

"Good," said Tom. "And after school, when it's dark tonight, I'm going to let you go. I think we understand each other perfectly. By next week there'll be clear blue water between you and this school."

"Without a doubt," said the Head, nodding frantically.

"That's a good boy," said Tom. "Because we both know what happens to very naughty boys, don't we?" Perkins continued nodding.

Two weeks into term Mike Martin had everything in place. There had been no cold snap so far. The school had a distinctly new sense of life and purpose about it. Tom had attended his first governors' meeting. In the South of France Mr Perkins took to the Mediterranean sun and slowly, almost imperceptibly at first, his ashen pallor began to melt in the warming air.



## OIKUS 4 - 6

### **Oiku 4: Karzai the kleptocrat** *Ken Clay (100)*

Barry Prendergast saw an ad in the Kabul *Sunday Sport*. If you sent £100 to the kleptocrat Kazai he'd get the ultimate recipient to send a pic of herself, sans burqa, bollock naked with only the holy book covering her muffin. Baz did so but then Plod turned up, took away his PC and banged him up in Belmarsh. Charged with aiding terrorism, racism, disrespecting religion and paedophilia he had only the Koran, visits by Jonathan Aitken and the nocturnal ministrations of Miss Fist to sustain him in his ordeal. Kazai won the election. No girl ever got any money.

### **Oiku 5: Tank trap** *Ken Clay (100)*

I'm poking round the D-Day port of Arromanches. First I jumps on an artillery piece, in good nick saying it's fifty years old - then I crawls into this tank. It's dark but slowly my eyes adjust to the gloom. I notice in a back room (the amenities block I suppose) reclining on a camp bed Marlene Dietrich and Catherine Deneuve! Catherine is struggling to divest herself of this tight leotard (she'd been doing aerobics to a Jane Fonda record). They're beckoning me over! Marlene's opening and closing her legs suggestively - then I hear the tank door clang shut!!!

### **Oiku 6: Unholy Virgin** *Ken Clay (100)*

I go to Chartres. It's very gloomy inside; the stained glass really stands out. There's usually wall-to-wall Japs with tripods but today I'm alone admiring the carvings. Suddenly who should leap out from behind a statue of the Virgin but bleedin Simone Signoret. They say she's good on the clarinet. She starts pulling at my bike shorts and I look down and notice with horror that her lips are puckerin as though she's goin to play Mozart's concerto in B flat...or something. "Bugger me" I thought "She'd never have got to me if she hadn't been disguised as a nun".



## DOGS OF WAR

*Tom Kilcourse*

I am not a born warrior, and it was never my intention to go to war. Nonetheless, I found myself engaged in the thick of hostilities, a vicious, ongoing conflict in which no prisoners were taken. Why I didn't remain in the relative safety of a coalmine I shall never know. It is easy to be wise after the event though and six years underground seemed to be more than enough at the time. I was young, fit, and aching to travel, to see some of the world before I was too old to enjoy it. Then, of course, there was the attraction of the uniform. I was told that women could not resist a bloke in uniform, and as this was the sixties and the start of the sexual revolution, the prospects for a randy young sod were mouth watering. That was it then. The combination of uniform and travel drew me like a magnet. I considered several services: the army, navy and the air force, but all had their drawbacks. So, I joined Stockport Corporation buses as a conductor, and found myself amid a crack body of men and women fighting against grotesquely unequal odds on several fronts.

It would be easy now to play the hero, to pretend that I knew what I was letting myself in for, but that would be dishonest. In truth, I didn't have a clue, not the slightest premonition. Had I known what lay ahead, I cannot say, hand on heart, that courage would not have left me. I can recall my response to my best mate when he suggested that I might be making a mistake. 'Treat people right' I said 'they'll treat you right'. I blush still at the memory of my naiveté. I was still starry eyed at the end of my two weeks training, during which I travelled with old hands on the quieter routes. Consequently, I was totally unprepared for battle when the first assault came, on my third day as a solo conductor.

It happened on my fourth trip that morning from Brinnington, a large council estate, into Stockport town centre. The first three trips had passed uneventfully, most passengers being men or young women heading into work. These people were too cold and miserable to complain even when the bus was late, so relieved were they to get out of the chilling drizzle. Therefore, my defences were down on the fourth trip and I collected the fares like an automaton, thinking about the approaching meal break, a steaming mug of tea and

one of Betty's bacon butties. Ah, those butties, three rashers of sizzling delight coated with brown sauce and slapped between two thick slices of white bread.

My reverie was broken when the internal lights flashed on and off, a signal from my driver that attack was imminent. I knew what the signal meant, but its significance did not penetrate my un-blooded skull, and I continued collecting fares on the top deck. My driver had seen a milling swarm of women waiting at the next stop. As the bus slowed I descended to the open platform at the rear. I stood no chance. They were upon us before the vehicle had halted, pouring into the lower saloon until it was overfull. My cries of 'Upstairs only, please' were ignored as my foot was pierced by the stiletto heel of an eighteen stone housewife. At the same time a thin faced harridan bearing two shopping bags upended my money pouch. Coins, each deductible from my wages if lost, cascaded onto the platform and road. I fell to my knees, frantically trying to gather my morning's takings.

About a third of the money had been recovered when a nearly empty bus from the North Western Road Car Company pulled in behind us. North Western drivers always held back to tail corporation buses, letting them take the loads. The market bound hoard spotted the newcomer and, realising that they would be delayed by my selfish concern not to be out of pocket, they poured en masse back across the platform. My hands were crushed underfoot and the money pouch was again upended.. The North Western guard was fast on the bell, but not fast enough to prevent half the baying mob from boarding. Responding to the bell, his driver panicked through the gears as he swerved around our stationery vehicle. Those left behind re-boarded my bus, and spent the rest of the journey haranguing me for the North Westerners behaviour. I spent the journey trying to count my losses.

The lessons of that incident struck home and, thereafter, I worked always in a state of battle readiness, so much so that I became known as the fastest bell in Stockport. Such preparedness eventually led to a most unfortunate occurrence between the Hazel Grove terminus and Stockport's Mersey Square. This was on a meal-break trip, on which any guard worth his salt is fast on the bell. We had just left the terminus and I was on the upper deck when the bus

pulled into the kerb. As the vehicle rolled to a halt I looked down from a side window to see the top of someone's head. He was the only person at the stop so I watched the platform through the mirror on the stairs, my hand at the ready on the bell-push. I watched a foot tread firmly on the platform, a hand grip the rail, and I rang. All hell broke loose on the platform, with the new passenger screaming with lungs fit to burst. Unable to hear what he said above the noise of the accelerating engine, I shouted a direction to 'get inside the bus'. He remained on the platform. When he ignored the repeated instruction I raced down the stairs to give him a piece of my mind. Only then did his problem become apparent. A thick, leather dog lead was looped around his wrist, and on the other end was a Boxer running like the clappers with enough foam round its mouth to do a week's washing. I hit the bell four times, the signal for an emergency stop.

The brakes were so good that the dog owner was thrown forward against the waste ticket bin, his face pressing firmly against the little window into the saloon. The inertia was such that his face distorted into a reasonable copy of his pet's, with his nose flattened and lips twisting across the glass. A female passenger on the other side of the window turned away sharply from the sight. For its part, the dog was a better runner than a stopper. It came bouncing onto the platform to press against the back of its owners legs. The final jerk of the bus sent him tumbling backwards, with the weight of the boxer preventing him from stepping back for balance. He fell with a thump on his backside. My offered helping hand was testily waved away and his objectionable comments made it clear that he no longer wished to travel with us. When man and dog were safely on the pavement I hit the bell and we accelerated away. I glanced back in time to see him aim a kick at his cringing companion.

There were to be other skirmishes that, like any battle hardened veteran, I prefer not to talk about. Eventually, I decided that being a conductor left me too vulnerable to attack from an unforgiving public. Ultimately, it was drivers who decided who caught the bus and who didn't. A thirst for power led me to join the driving school, and endure three months of abuse from Sam, the mad inspector in charge of driver training. Lessons were taken in one's own time, and Sam's motivational strategy was to stand behind the driver and deliver swift clouts around the head with a rolled up *Daily Telegraph*.

Not being a placid person by nature I found it difficult not to retaliate. Had he used the *Mirror* or the *Morning Star* it would not have been so bad, but the *Telegraph* on a self respecting, working-class bloke like myself was pushing it. Still, every cloud has a silver lining as they say, and the driving school led to friendship with a fellow pupil, Brian. This was forged from a shared hatred of Sam, but it endured beyond us getting our 'wings'. Ah, power at last!

Brian and I looked forward to working together as ace drivers, terrorising motorists and pedestrians alike as we sped wing to wing along Wellington Road. Alas, it was not to be. Within ten weeks of getting his Public Service Vehicle licence Brian was back on the platform, working as a guard. My fellow ace had a slight bump on his first day as a qualified driver, then an average of one a week after that. All were tiny knocks, broken mirrors, and that sort of thing, but they earned him a reputation. The final crunch, no pun intended, came late one evening when Brian was taking a number 81 from Mersey Square to Brinnington. As he drove along Portwood, a long, drab street traversed by 81s to the council estate and 33s to middle-class Romily, Brian spotted a woman at the bus stop, her arm extended. It was a gloomy evening with a light drizzle further reducing visibility, but Brian saw the extended arm and dutifully pulled his Leyland into the kerbside. Sadly, this lady, who would not have been seen dead in Brinnington, was waiting for a 33 to Romily. Her arm was extended only because her black poodle had indicated a desire to defecate and, not wishing to let him foul the pavement she pushed the pooch into the gutter. Her elegant hand still held the rhinestone encrusted dog-lead when the Leyland's front wheel spread her pet over Portwood tarmac. The woman's quite unreasonable hysterics caused such a commotion that an inspector was despatched to Portwood to sort things out. Brian was demoted the next morning.

I carried on the good fight without Brian's assistance for another two years before deciding that enough was enough. In a sense, the decision was taken for me by the driver of an eight wheeled lorry loaded with metal pipes. The combined weight of vehicle and load was over twenty-one tons and he inconsiderately ran the lot into my bus, head on. His brakes failed as he descended Woodley Hill just as I was ascending. My cab was flattened by the impact, but I suffered no more than a splinter of glass in a finger. Nevertheless, I decided

## THE DOGS OF WAR

there and then that if the enemy were going to play that rough, I was off. I got a job at the local bakery, delivering bread to shops. Less exciting perhaps, but loaves do not complain about one's driving.





## LOCUST LOVER.

*Brett Wilson*

She noticed early on in their relationship that he liked to eat more food than was considered normal. She had observed that he was invariably more animated when their meeting happened to be at a restaurant or some other eatery. Somehow she had become the recipient of the heat of his digestion, the pleasant afterglow of the absorption process, and she seemed to like it.

He had a way of stripping everything. Meat right down to the gristle and cartilage, no problem. Mutton chops picked so clean that the bone would glisten like polished ivory in his greasy fingers. Plates cleaned in world record times. Pasta, doing the ski-run down his gullet. Carafes of wine. Creamed vegetables. Frothing ale, fry-ups, bread by the loaf, mixed grills, continentals, curry and chips, Cumberland sausages, ox-heart, veal, whole Oxo-cubes, cream cakes, pies, pasties. Had she exhausted the list? Surely not.

There were other things he liked to eat too. His lovemaking was a gastronome's delight. His mouth would search with relentless pleasure, for every new flavour she had to offer. When he moved himself into her house, she told herself that relationships require compromise. She had soon realised that she could never expect to see a full refrigerator again. Nevertheless, she always strove to keep it reasonably well stocked, because it helped her maintain a feeling of affluence. Her lover continued to chomp through her prosperity, the eating ritual beginning for him, shortly before she left for work in the morning. Cereal, one box. Milk, full cream, one bottle. Follow with hot buttered toast, grilled tomatoes, bacon, half-back, three eggs, pancakes with golden syrup, large organic bio-yoghurt, three mugs of tea.

To keep her stocks from dwindling down to pauper status, she found it necessary to shop each evening after finishing work. Kidney beans? Good, I can use them. A six-egg omelette, with beans, field mushrooms, English onions and a pound of cheddar cheese. Terrific. Water-cress salad sounds nice, stoned black olives, cucumber, cashews, mustard, cider vinegar and mayonnaise. What about some French-fries on the side?

Every day became more an eating fest. Some kind of celebration

for the capacity of human assimilation. Each week-end she would join him at his table, its groaning top piled high with victuals. She tried hard to match this machine that would remorselessly keep up its rhythmic sound of crunching and chewing, but there was no release in imitation, and nor was there any respite.

She had been a reasonably wealthy woman before the relationship began. She had had tens of thousands of pounds in ISAs, Gilts and the like. But now she was watching the slow ruin of all that, as her various accounts began to shrink like a column of biscuits that are being munched through, one by one. It must be said that here was a woman blessed with the virtue of patience developed to the holy degree, for her comments were never angry or complaining, but always qualified and understanding. But something else was changing beside her bank balance, although at first she did not fully realise what. When arriving home from work she would seem to sense a slight variation or difference in the appearance of the house, like a strange dream that brings forth some question that can never be expressed in words. It was not long before this strangeness altered into comprehension. Where was that flower-patterned vase and where was that authentic batik? Could he be selling things to buy more food? One morning she had been lying in bed, bereft of pillows, when she happened to notice a trail of stuffing leading to a small pile behind the back of the headboard. Sage and onion? No. Just plain old fire retarded foam.

It was now that she began to notice the teeth marks on the plainly gnawed legs of the card table, or the chewed edges of curtain, still damp with fresh spittle. She had let the situation go on for far too long. One cold evening, when she arrived home with no food, she found him in a corner, stripping and eating wallpaper. The house, by now, echoed like a newly bought empty dwelling, where feet resound on bare wooden boards, and the dialogue bounces crisply off unadorned walls.

"There's no more food." she said.

"Yes." he said, looking directly at her. He looked around for a moment and then stooped down to pick up a piece of floorboard which he had pulled up from the corner, in search of beetles. Remarkably light build, considering, she thought, as he raised the piece of wood above his head and bounded towards her. He clonked her



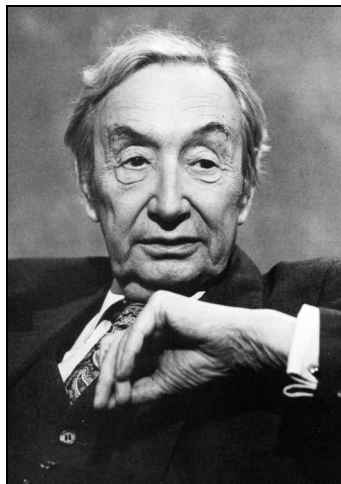
## LOCUST LOVER

with it, and then had her in a pot, dress and all, high heeled shoes bobbing on the oily surface.

After he had finished her, and he had sucked all the remaining nutrition out of the timbers of the house, he did the only thing possible. He began work on his arms and legs, and then his body. Soon all that was left was a convoluted and gnarled alimentary canal with a pair of teeth at one end and an anus at the other. Then it noticed that it had left a trail of excrement. The tongue began to scoop up the detritus in ever closing circles, until faced with its own anus, it penetrated and crawled within. It had now become a doughnut shape, wriggling and writhing, sometimes flipping over, as it became smaller and fatter. The skin on the surface became smooth and then shiny as it stretched to accommodate its own inner spiral, the central hole of the doughnut becoming closed-out as the devouring affair became ever tighter. Then the movement stopped, and what was left, just lay there motionless and inert, and finally dead.



L' Être (JPS)



Le Néant (AJA)



The Beaver

## RUCTIONS IN THE RUE BONAPARTE

*Ron Horsefield*

A.J. Ayer famously rubbished Sartre as someone who didn't know how to conjugate the verb to be. Sartre's response was the lapidary "Ayer est un con" Ron Horsefield reconstructs this important crux based on a great find in the archive of the *Université de Eurodisney*. Using some detached pages from the journal of Simone de Beauvoir Ron brings to life the scene when Ayer confronted Sartre in his Paris flat.

Ron tells me he had trouble with the word "con" which couldn't be found in his Collins Schoolgirl's Pocket Dictionary. We guess it's a *gross mot* and therefore leave it in the decent obscurity of a language few now bother to learn.

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*A quiet morning in the 6th Arrondissement. Jean Paul Sartre, writing furiously, is interrupted by a knock at the door. In barges AJ Ayer.*

AJA: "There you are you little boss-eyed git!"

JPS: "Wha..?"

AJA: "You called me a con, you con. Well it's you what's the con"

JPS: "But you *are* a con you con and I'll say it again *con!*"

AJA: "You cheeky con!!"

*They struggle and bash against a bookcase. A terracotta bust of Heidegger, inscribed Willkommen aus Schwarzwald, falls to the floor and shatters. On the table a bottle of black Quink spills over a manuscript.*

JPS: "Fuckin twat!! That's a whole page of the Critique of Dialectical Reason ruined"

AJA: "What would you know about reason you four-eyed gobshite!! You wouldn't know reason if it jumped up and bit you on the arse!"

JPS "Name of a pipe! I'm getting pretty ratty now."

*Lunges at AJA. They fall to the floor in a roiling heap. The door opens. It's Simone de Beauvoir.*

SB: “Jesus Christ on a bike!! What the fuck’s going on? It’s pander-fucking-monium!!”

JPS: “It’s that mad con Ayer!! He heard I’d called him a con. Get help! Call Albert on the dog an bone. No, not Albert, he’s dead. Get Malraux – he’s got influence”

SB (*phoning*): “Elysée Palace? Get me the minister for culture. Tell him it’s the beaver..”

AM: “Ah my little beaver. I’m not sure I can get out tonight - de Gaulle...”

SM: “Andre! it’s Simone”

AM: “Oh..*that* beaver. What is it now?”

SM: “France’s greatest philosopher since Descartes is being attacked by a mad Englishman who thinks he’s been called a con. Several pages of the Critique of Dialectical Reason have been lost for ever”

AM: “It’s not that mad bastard Beckett is it?”

SM. “No, course not he’s a good Francophile and besides he lives in the fifteenth. Get somebody over here quick”

*AJA Grabs JPS by the throat and bangs his head on the floor.*

AJA “You must learn how to conjugate the verb to be you ignorant wop. That’s the root of all your troubles – and look at me when I’m talking to you”

*In burst two men in long black leather coats. They wear crash helmets. It’s the dreaded CRS riot police.*

CRS1. “Sacred blue! It is a shit-in-the-bed! Quick Francois! Whack Sartre while I restrain Simone”

*CRS2 hits JPS with his truncheon.*

SB “What the!?!..It’s the English con who’s causing all the trouble.”

CRS1 “We have orders to whack JPS whenever we catch him off the street with no cameras around.”

*A door opens and a bedraggled old trout in a dressing gown enters. It's Madame Sartre the philosopher's mother.*

MS "Jean Paul! For fuckssake! I'm trying to have a kip. It's not another barney with that crackpot Merleau-Ponty is it?"

JPS "No no Mum! Get back to bed. Here, take my Gitanes – watch the TV – there's a Godard movie on soon - that'll put you to sleep"

CRS1: "Just a minute Madame Sartre. We must check your mental state under the Senility and Madness of Philosophers and Their relatives Act, also known as the Althusser regulations. Now - please name ten fruits, ten creatures beginning with B and count backwards from a hundred in sevens."

MS "Wha..?"

JPS "This is an outrage! Can't you see my mother is merely playing the part of a scatterbrained crone? Surely you've read L'Etre et le Neant?"

SB "Apple, orange...er..beaver...93..Go on mum you can do it"

MS "Apple, lemon, mango, blackbird...er...brontosaurus... 86...79...apple"

CRS1 "Just as I thought. And who is the prime minister?"

MS. "Er...Leon Blum?"

CRS1 "Take her down to the wagon Francois...and give Jean Paul another whack before you go."

*Turns to Ayer.*

CRS1 "And you too are Maoist troublemaker?"

AJA "I, sir, am the Wykeham Professor of Logic at the University of Oxford"

CRS1 "Ah! My apologies Lord Wykeham. Francois when you return you will escort Milord Wykeham to the Tour d'Argent for a long lunch. We will arrange more congenial dining companions for your lordship. Raymond Aron and Dr. Destouches are free I think. The bill will go to the Elysée. Meanwhile I will collect all this rubbish off the desk"

*Sweeps up an armful of pages and books. Madame Sartre is dragged out.*

MS “Kiwi fruit...79...72....bull...bollocks...baloney....  
....blackberry.”

JPS “Fuck me! Prostitute! It’s like a Stalin purge! Er...No! I retract that! – No intellectual would be so interfered with in the Soviet Union! It’s like a Renault production line worker being denied his two hour lunch break! I feel a Temps Moderne article coming on. De Gaulle’s not heard the last of this! Any Quink left in that bottle Simone?”

This extract is from Ron’s forthcoming *The Secret Lives of the Great Philosophers* – Routledge £25

## MY LIFE IN PRINT

*Ray Blyde*

### CHAPTER SIX

Sed was informed by the boss that as an apprentice he would be expected to attend night school twice a week at the Liverpool college of art to learn "Stereotyping". Ralph was already attending, but was not very communicative about the course except to say that it was boring. The teacher was Clifford. T Cowling from Bolton, a small immaculately dressed man with a black single breasted jacket, pinstripe trousers and bowler hat. The students called him "Squeaky," one because he had a high pitched voice, and two, "Squeaky clean," he never got his hands dirty. He would tell you what to do but he wouldn't show you, so quite often confusion reigned. Some of the students did their own thing, while others acted thick, so that Clifford had to keep repeating himself, which he did without realizing that they were taking the mickey out of him. One extremely cold night on his way to the college he was accosted by a prostitute on Lime street. She stepped out of a shop doorway and said that she had no knickers on and did he want a good time. Clifford stopped, looked hard at her, prodded her with his rolled up brolly and said, "Go home this minute young lady before you catch your death of cold." Sed did his best to show some enthusiasm for the first few weeks, but it was a losing battle against too many students and too little equipment. He couldn't finish any of his projects because most of the time he was queuing up for the use of the tools. He got so frustrated that he and a lad called Alan from a newspaper in Warrington started going to the pictures instead of college. They got away with it for about three weeks then he was called into the office by King, and asked to account for his absences. He tried to explain why he was losing interest, but King cut him short and told him in no uncertain terms that the firm were paying his fees and he would have to go, or else, and pointed out that Ralph hadn't missed a session and that Sed should learn by example. Sed knew for certain that Ralph wasn't there for every session and felt that he was being made a scapegoat. When he saw the opportunity he brought the subject up with Slater,

"You're not there for every session Ralph?"

"Course I am," he smirked.

"I might be a bit wet behind the ears, but I'm not blind."

"OK, sometimes I'm not there, what I do is this, I turn in at seven thirty, I make sure he sees me then I sidle off after the register been read out. The nights I'm not there someone else answers my name, I do the same thing for him the next week. Squeaky hasn't clue, in any case you know what it's like you can't get anything done, we're not learning anything, the company's just wasting its money!" For once he and Ralph agreed on something. "Anyway Sed while you're here put your name down on this?" He thrust the usual piece of paper under his nose.

"What is it?"

"It's the sweepstake for the "Oaks, three fifteen on Saturday!"

Lloyd had been home from sea for nearly four months, he'd run out of money and everyone else had run out of patience. He signed on a cargo liner sailing from Birkenhead docks. As was customary on these occasions Lloyd went out boozing with money he got from God knows where, and his father took his seabag aboard the ship for him, so all Lloyd had to do was get a taxi down to St James street station, then straight onto the boat. There was a sigh of relief all round when George arrived home sober.

"You put it on board for him all right?"

"Aye, I got the key off the master at arms and locked the cabin up."

"What time does the ship sail George?" enquired Elsie holding back the tears.

"Come on now girl don't upset yourself, he's not worth it, he's a pain in the backside when he's been home a couple of months. She repeated the question.

"I'm not sure, but it could sail on the first tide tomorrow, why?" .

"I thought I might go over tomorrow and wave him off."

"Don't bother woman, he won't appreciate it, anyway, why d'you want to do it, you've never done it before?"

"He didn't kiss me before he went." George laughed.

"When did he last kiss you?"



"When he first came home." Sed put his arm around her.

"Don't worry mam, he'll be home again in three months unfortunately." She smiled.

"You love him really don't you Sed?" Sed knew he'd say anything to keep her happy.

"Ah, well," said his father stifling a yawn, "What about an early night mother?" They were all in bed by eleven thirty. Sed read a few chapters of his library book, then just lay there listening to his father snoring and thinking earnestly about how much he loved Debbie, then he must have dozed off because the next thing he was awakened by an urgent knocking on the front door. It was repeated louder two or more times, then he heard his father get up, run down and open the door.

"Yes!"

"Does Lloyd Kirk live here?" Sed got out of bed and stood at the top of the stairs and listened.

"Yes he does live here, when he's home, he joined his ship last night, why what's up constable?"

"It's nothing serious, he's all right sir, unfortunately we had to arrest him last night for being drunk and disorderly. He's in the bridewell at Dale street police station. He'll be up before the magistrate in the morning."

"Typical, that's just typical. In the jug, no money and just the clothes he stands up in. The rest of his clobber on the way to Timbuctoo. I'll swing for 'im!" They let him rant on until he'd got most of the resentment out of his system. Then Elsie said,

"You could have been with him, then we would have had to bail both of you out."

"Oh no I'm not having that, If I'd been with 'im he wouldn't have got into trouble!"

"Well why didn't you stay with him?"

"Great, now it's my fault. Look, he's a grown man, we can't keep picking him up and dusting him down every time he goes into a public place, I took his bag onto the boat to help 'im out."

"If you hadn't done that he'd have more than the clothes he's stood up in!" George very seldom won an argument against Elsie when it

came to specifics. She rarely argued with him about most things, but when it came to the children she took him to the wire.

"You do what you want, but I'm going back to bed, and another thing when he comes out he can find somewhere else to live." Elsie muttered something under her breath. George missed his footing, tripped and fell up the stairs. "What was that?"

"Nothing...I'm not coming back to bed with you in that mood, I'll go in the spare room." Sed sighed and wished with all his heart that he'd been an only child. Lloyd was bound over to keep the piece, Elsie gave him some money for clothes out of the housekeeping which she set aside for emergencies, and in her opinion this constituted an emergency. However George had refused to speak to his errant offspring after bringing the family name into disrepute, as he put it, but no more was said about Lloyd having to find somewhere else to live. He was advised by Elsie to find some employment ashore until he could get another ship, this plan of action would appease George. Then hopefully no one would need to lose face. Lloyd, however, showed no remorse for his conduct, and no thanks to his mother for paying his fine. He even tried to borrow money off Sed, but Sed recalled the times Lloyd used to raid his piggy bank years before.

"How about a sub young 'un?"

"Get a job Lloyd!"

"Hey, you won't miss a couple of quid kid, I'll pay you back when I get my unemployment pay."

"No joy Loy. You owe me a few quid already."

"Hey, I've more than made up for that kiddo."

"In what way?" enquired Sed.

"Well what about all those presents I brought you home?"

"I paid for them out of my money box."

"All right, just loan me enough for a bus fare."

"Walk, It'll do you good!" Sed stepped aside as Lloyd lunged towards him trying to pin him against the bedroom door, and bounded down the stairs four at a time.

Sed tried to ring Debbie several times, either the phone was engaged or her mother said she was out. At work he didn't have much luck

## MY LIFE IN PRINT

either. The penny dropped after a while - he realised that she was deliberately avoiding him, and that his first love affair was over. He couldn't accept it and he couldn't stop thinking about her. He was so troubled that he mentioned it to his friend Alan after night school.

"Have you ever been in love Alan."

"Yeah, I used to go out with a girl called Beryl, she had the biggest pair of tits in the school. Everyone fancied her, anyway I asked her out and there was no one more surprised than me when she said yes. We went to the pictures, then we bought some fish and chips, and went to our local park to eat them. Then we started to snog, and I'm not joking Sed it was a freezing night, it was so cold I had to keep my hands in my pocket."

"While you were snogging?" prompted Sed

"Yeah, anyway she said put your hands inside here and opened her coat and lifted up her jumper. Bloody 'ell Sed they were bigger than Jane Mansfield's"

"What did you do?" queried Sed all of a lather by now. Alan looked a bit shamefaced.

"I took fright didn't I. I put my hands back in my pockets"

"Then what happened?"

"She chucked me, anyway the next bird I went out with I didn't waste any time, up her jumper right away."

"Then?" said Sed expectantly.

"You would not believe it, she slapped my face. Funny creatures women, we're better off without them." Sed felt a bit better when he got home, he liked Alan and the laugh had done him good.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

George had been a heavy smoker all his adult life, and as far back as Sed could remember he suffered from a hacking cough first thing in the morning, "getting the phlegm up put him right for the rest of the day," as he put it. However, of late the cough seemed to be get-

ting worse. The discomfort didn't stop him from smoking his forty Capstan full strength a day. Eventually, he found great difficulty lying flat when he went to bed, because he couldn't get his breath and was experiencing some pain. Elsie and Sed became very concerned.

"Call the doctor mam."

"He hates doctors, he's not been near one for ten years or more."

"I know that, but I've never seen him like this before."

"I'd better go and tell him." She went upstairs and he heard her ask him, then his reply of dissent.

"Don't bring any doctor to me woman, I'll be all right in a couple of days, get me a couple of aspirins." she came down looking worried to death,

"He won't have one, and he's in a lot of pain." Sed picked up the receiver and handed it to his mother.

"Ring him mam!" When the doctor arrived it was Benson and old army doctor, Elsie liked him because he had a good bedside manner. Sed remembered him from the time he had a severe attack of mumps. Elsie explained the problem before he went upstairs. Benson listened and nodded his head.

"All right, let's have a look at him shall we. He doesn't like us very much you say?"

"He's not keen doctor, nothing personal you understand."

"Well let's see if we can change his mind shall we?" Benson followed Elsie up the stairs, and being an exceptionally tall man he had to duck his head to negotiate the doorway. "Hello Mr Kirk, now what seems to be the problem?" George cast a jaundiced eye at the doctor and Elsie thought he was going to have an apoplectic fit.

"I told you woma...." then he went into a fit of coughing.

"Don't get upset Mr Kirk, just undo your pyjama top and let me sound your chest. How long have you been like this?" George made an attempt to reply but no words came out.

"He's had a cough for years doctor," said Elsie.

"Does he smoke?" George glared up at him. Elsie nodded.

"Forty a day doctor." George glared at her. The doctor examined

him thoroughly, checked his blood-pressure and temperature.

"I think" said the doctor eventually. "We'd better get you into hospital Mr Kirk." George responded more in more in annoyance than anything else,

"Can't you give me some treatment, I've never been in bloody hospital doctor?"

"Well," said the doctor I could give you some antibiotics, but to be honest I'd like to have some tests done to be on the safe, Anyway you've nothing to worry about they'll take very good care of you in hospital, now have you got a phone Mrs Kirk?"

"This way doctor." Within the hour George was in ward 2C in Brengreen hospital. That evening Sed and Elsie went into visit him. The first thing said noticed was that practically everyone in the ward was coughing and spitting into cups with lids on them, except George who lay there looking waxen and frightened to death. "Where's Lloyd?" he whispered. Elsie looked at Sed for support. She didn't know what to say since Lloyd had been on one of his all night stints.

"He'll be in tomorrow dad," replied Sed hoping he sounded convincing. When they got back home it was about eight o'clock and obvious even to a casual observer that Lloyd had arrived home. The place was like a tip. His shoes were lying behind the front door, and his overcoat was hung up on the floor. Sed was furious.

"I'll go and get him up mam!"

"No, leave him, let him sleep it off."

"You're too soft with him mam." Elsie nodded her head in agreement.

"I know, I've been too soft with Lloyd. I just don't know what goes on inside that lad's head." Her eyes filled up, "I'm desperately worried about your father Sed, I can't think of anything else at the moment." Sed put his arm around her shoulder and gave her a comforting hug. "What d'you think's wrong with him Sed?"

"I don't know mam, the doctor said they should have the results of the tests tomorrow. He said they also want to do a tracheotomy under a general anaesthetic."

"What's that?" said Elsie anxiously, visualizing a major operation.

"I'm not sure, but it's something do with having a look at the state of his lungs. We'll know by tomorrow." Sed suddenly felt a heavy burden of responsibility for his mother, and had a strong feeling of foreboding concerning his father's condition. Lloyd got up just as they were making supper. He had a couple of day's stubble, and dark rings under his eyes.

"Jesus, I'm starving!" No one spoke. He looked at them. "What's up, where's dad?"

"Sit down," said Elsie. Lloyd did as he was bid. "Where've you been?" Lloyd had never seen his mother so angry.

"I stayed with a friend, why what's up..... will somebody tell me?" he pleaded.

"I'll tell you, while you were shackled up with some tart, your father's been rushed into hospital seriously ill."

"When was this?"

"Yesterday!" Lloyd looked at Sed for some semblance of brotherly support. Sed turned away in disgust. Elsie continued. "He's not been well for a long time, but you're too preoccupied with yourself to notice. Lloyd shrugged his shoulders.

"What's wrong with him?"

"It's his chest." Lloyd smirked,

"Go on you're having me on."

"Dad's in hospital, make no mistake about it, and it's serious," insisted Sed. "The first thing he said when we went tonight was "Where's Lloyd? Christ knows why?"

"You'd better come in with us tomorrow," said Elsie in a somewhat moderated tone.

"Well," said Lloyd I've got to go to the pool tomorrow morning, I think I've got a ship lined up."

"We're going tomorrow afternoon. Can you get day off tomorrow Sed?"

Sed rang King, who told him to take whatever time off that was necessary, but to keep him posted. As they were preparing to go to the hospital Lloyd rang to say that he'd got a ship and would be sailing from Southampton at the weekend. In a way Sed was relieved to hear this, Lloyd being Lloyd would only be a liability to his mother.

Elsie was far from happy with the news, she wanted Lloyd at home, and began to get upset.

"Come on mam, it's for the best, Lloyd won't be any help."

"I know, but if anything happens to your father?"

"Nothings going to happen to dad, he's as tough as old boots." When they arrived at the hospital the sister said that the doctor would like to have a word before they went in to see George.

"Where's Lloyd?" said Elsie fidgeting with the clasp of her handbag. Sed looked up at the clock, it was almost one thirty.

"He'll be here shortly," but wouldn't have put a fiver on it. Eventually the doctor arrived, and ushered them into the sister's office. He was only young, and was obviously having some difficulty saying what he had to say.

"Mrs Kirk, I'm doctor Ellison....er we've done all the tests on your husband, which included a tracheotomy, which is a method we use to look inside the lungs. Your husband was a smoker wasn't he?" Elsie's yes was hardly audible. "Well... I'm afraid there's not a lot we can do for him!" Get on with it, thought Sed. "In fact there's nothing we can do for him."

"What's the matter with him," said Elsie looking more exasperated by the minute. The doctor avoided eye contact.

"Lung cancer." He looked momentarily relieved having got it off his chest. Elsie's handbag fell open on her lap, Sed, for some unknown reason looked down at it, an inanimate object reacting to the shock of revelation. No one spoke for a moment, then Elsie said,

"How long has he got doctor?"

"About three months on the outside I would think. He's got it in both lungs which makes it inoperable...I'm sorry." He turned and left the room. His exit was followed almost immediately by the entrance of the sister.

"Would you both like a cup of tea?"

"No thank you. Does he know?" she asked the sister.

"No, he hasn't asked and we haven't told him."

"D'you think that's best?" queried Elsie looking lost. The sister put her arm around Elsie's shoulder.

"It's very difficult to know what to do for the best my dear, you know your husband better than we do."

"He once said if he thought he had cancer he'd kill himself."

"Well there's your answer my dear!" There was still no sign of Lloyd, he was running true to form. George was sitting up in bed when they reached the ward. Elsie kissed him, and Sed held his hand.

"How are you love?" said Elsie hoping that he hadn't noticed that she had been crying.

"I'm not so bad. I'm a bit sore here," he pointed to the plaster over the base of his neck.

"Have you had anything to eat?"

"I had a bit of breakfast this morning." His voice was little more than a hoarse whisper. .

"Where's Lloyd, not up to his tricks again is 'e?"

"He promised to be here, he's got a ship, said he sails at the weekend." George looked relieved.

"Any idea when I can come home?" Elsie was caught on the hop.

"The doctor didn't say, when you're feeling much better I expect."

"They're not giving me any treatment, only pain killers, no one's said what's wrong with me?"

"Well" said Elsie panicking. "It's probably acute bronchitis."

Sed noticed the yellow waxy tinge to his father's face and the considerable weight loss in the last seven days.

"He'll pull through mam, you wait and see," assured Sed on the way home. Elsie's face was distorted with a mixture of annoyance and anxiety. When they got in they found Lloyd sitting looking vacantly into the electric fire. Elsie was furious.

"Why weren't you at the hospital?"

"I couldn't face it mam."

"What d'you mean you couldn't face it?"

"What I said, I was scared, he's going to die isn't he?"

"No he's not going to die, so stop thinking of yourself you selfish boy." Sed suddenly had compassion for his brother for the first time in his life. He felt the same dread about going to the hospital. No one, if they were honest liked hospitals, but as one of his aunts once



said, "It's a good job there are such places."

"You'd better go in and see him before you go away."

"I don't know mam."

"If you don't go to see your father, don't bother to come home after this trip!" Later Sed knocked on Lloyd's bedroom door and found his brother lying face down on the bed.

"What's up brud?"

"Go away kid."

"Look. I understand."

"Do you, you understand why a son won't go and see his own father?"

"Well you're scared, scared of what you'll see, I appreciate that, but it's still dad."

"I used to think dad was indestructible, sort of immortal, this cancer's going to kill him." Sed was well aware of this possibility, but reasoned that were there's life, there's hope,

"Make the effort brud, for both their sakes."

## OIKUS 7 - 10

### **Oiku 7: Quid pro quo** *Bob Wild* (100)

Each week the secretive, sybaritic miser surreptitiously tore a coupon from one of his wife's discarded newspapers. Annually he took his wife for a free off-season weekend break. His wife, a penniless spendthrift, bought him a £26 birthday bottle of Chassagne Montrachet. The miser marvelled at his wife's thrift adding "1989 at £52 is better value" His wife marvelled at the miser's generosity adding "a longer holiday would have been nicer." On their return the miser started tearing coupons from two of his wife's newspapers. Instead of 50Ps his wife began taking £1 coins from the loose change in the sleeping miser's trouser pocket.

### **Oiku 8: Forced Entry** *David Birtwistle* (75)

He stood in the shadows and surveyed the house. No lights downstairs, one light upstairs. He moved silently to the downpipe and pulled. It held firm. Quickly and easily he moved upwards until he reached the window-sill. With one hand round the bracket, he felt the frame with his other. He slid his fingers under the bar and tapped it hard. In six seconds he was inside. There, on the bedside table, were his keys.

### **Oiku 9: Restaurant** *David Birtwistle* (100)

The chef had got to the top the hard way and wasn't giving up now. He concentrated on the pesto. The roasted pine nuts went into the blender, then the finest olive oil. Fresh basil and garlic, the squeeze of a lemon and finally the freshly grated parmesan. On the stove a pan was boiling furiously and he kept one eye on it as he ground the sauce to a rich paste. She was sitting there waiting. He drained the pasta, a touch of salt, the black pepper. This was it. He hadn't seen his daughter for over a year.

### **Oiku 10: Away From the Bright Lights.** *David Birtwistle* (25)

Gripping the cast-iron frying pan tightly in her fist, his mother-in-law waited quietly and patiently behind the kitchen door for the comedian to come home.

## THE PHOTOGRAPH

*Tom Kilcourse*

It is common now for boys to grow up without a father present, but in my day it was a rarity, and one of the factors that set me apart from the other kids. I had no personal relationship with my father, who inhabits my memory only as a blurred figure. What I knew of him was largely hearsay, most of it negative. My grandparents, who raised me from the age of two, always remarked on my likeness to him, in behaviour as well as appearance. That was disconcerting as my mother, when she visited us, spoke of 'the bastard's' violence. Her reports made me frightened of the man, so much so that should I see him coming towards me in the street, we each lived in the same district of Manchester, I would dive down any convenient alleyway to avoid him. I knew that he had been a boxer in the army and thought that he might beat me up. Also, the last I remembered of him from my infancy was his hitting my mother, having justifiably accused her of infidelity.

As I matured thoughts of him became rarer. I knew roughly where he lived with his elderly mother, but our lives took separate paths and I did not seek him out. Having left school I worked for a while in a garage before going down the pit for six years. After the pit I became a bus driver with Stockport Corporation. In a sense our paths were running parallel at that point as my father was a bus driver with Manchester Corporation. While working in Stockport I became active in the union, the T&GWU, and eventually won a union scholarship to Ruskin College, Oxford. A few weeks before I had won a book prize in a competition run by the union. The book was presented to me by my branch secretary, an event photographed for the 'Record', the union's journal. The 'Record's' report mentioned my scholarship.

After two years at Ruskin I gained a 'State Mature Scholarship' that enabled me to take a place at Hull University. In Oxford I had met my wife, a fellow student, who also got a place at Hull. While there we received news of my father's death some months earlier, following an accident. Upon graduating we moved to the part of Manchester in which I had spent my childhood, finding a place to live over a shop in the main street. Further along that street was the Friendship

Inn, the pub that my grandfather had frequented. Where else would I go to drink other than his old stamping ground?

Shortly after we started using the pub I noticed two older men staring at us across the lounge. I vaguely recognised one of them, but couldn't place him. After a while they approached our table and stood looking at us in silence for a few moments. Then the man I thought I might know spoke, a little hesitantly.

"Is your name Kilcourse by any chance, son?" I nodded. "Tommy Kilcourse?"

"Aye, why are you asking?"

"We were friends of your dad's, love. Good friends! Do you mind if we join you?"

Without waiting for a reply they sat down and introduced themselves as Billy Dixon and John Wilde. As soon as he told me his name I knew where I had seen Billy before, he had owned a green-grocer's shop near the street I grew up in. I had not previously met John. Straight away they brought the conversation round to the subject of my father, confirming that he had been a boxer, "...and a bloody good one". They also confirmed that he could be violent outside the ring, "...but not from choice." They claimed that his reputation drew 'nutters' to challenge him, and told me of an occasion when he had been with them, drinking quietly in a pub. Someone had "asked him outside" without provocation. With a resigned sigh he had put his beer down and followed the man from the pub, to return some minutes later, taking his seat without comment, but shaking his head.

Wanting to change the subject, I asked them how they had recognised me. Billy replied,

"You're the spitting image of him son. A double. Also, he showed us the photograph".

"What photograph?"

"The one of you getting that book; your dad saw it in the union magazine. He cut it out and carried it around. He showed it everyone, 'That's my lad', he used to say, 'he's at university' ". The pair were silent for a moment, then John piped up.

"He was dead proud of you, son. He wanted to contact you, but feared you'd reject him".



**Bro. T. Kilcourse,  
6/48 Passenger  
Branch, winner  
of the Union's  
Leaflet  
Competition (as  
reported in our  
June issue),  
receiving his  
prize from Bro.  
W. Chambers,  
Branch Secretary  
(right)**

**Since his success  
in the  
competition  
Bro. Kilcourse  
has been awarded  
a Union  
Scholarship to  
Ruskin College**

## THE EXISTENTIALIST

*Rosemary Evans*

If you were part of our sixth-form in 1960 you had to be an Existentialist or you were nothing. The other choices were 'swot' or 'sissy', neither of which had much of a ring in my opinion. To avoid confusion I'd better say that this was a girls' school, so the sissy was what would now be called a domestic goddess rather than a homosexual.

So, Existentialism - no we didn't know what it was except as illustrated by de Beauvoir and Sartre as unmarried lovers who were also cool enough to have affairs with other people without betraying jealousy. That was their main business and in spare moments they would sit in cafes smoking, chatting and writing masterpieces. I was doing French A level so I felt a bit French already and was sure that I would soon be living in Paris, leading the perfect life; smoking a Gauloise and looking moody while drinking black coffee and wearing black clothes. My group of intellectuals would be talking about the state of the world and standing up now and then to declaim their latest abstract poem.

Admittedly I did have a bit of an image problem here. It was hard to become an Existentialist because I lived in a village where everyone knew exactly who I was. My mother had some sort of Mafia clique keeping her informed of all my movements so that I wouldn't go completely off the rails and disgrace the family. On Sunday afternoons I would put on a nice dress or coat and skirt (sometimes with gloves) and go for a walk or watch the cricket with a well-behaved friend. For kicks we caught a bus to the nearest market town and sat in a café which now had a juke box and some Formica tables so it thought it was modern and could call itself the 'Milk-bar'. The Milk-bar was ruled by the local rockers who didn't like it when we recited our abstract poems and invited us to bloody shut up and piss off. We knew that these persons were only fulfilling their destiny as stupid, illiterate louts so we put on our Existentialist sunglasses and left with quiet dignity and a minor tussle in the doorway.

Imagining you were a Parisian intellectual was just about possible but the sex part was more problematic. Nice girls didn't do it until they were married, or engaged, or had a steady boyfriend or any

boyfriend really if he looked a bit French. I thought Anthony Perkins would have been ideal, not knowing that he didn't like girls much so he really was a sissy. The farmer's sons my mother favoured seemed to lack a certain edge. Maybe they were too much part of nature for me to feel that they had a separate and mutable existence.

We shared a film society with the local boys' Grammar School but I hadn't met anyone I liked there either. Actually it was the film society that changed my life in a way because it was there that I saw '*A Bout de Souffle*' with Jean Paul Belmondo and Jean Seberg. The film was a poor copy and the room was so crowded it was difficult to see but I knew immediately that Belmondo was my man (he's still alive so it's not too late) so, with perfect logic, I set about turning myself into Jean Seberg, so that when I met my English Belmondo he would recognise me immediately as his soulmate.

On the Saturday after film club some of us were going to see Kenny Ball at a jazz club in Chester and on the Saturday afternoon, while Dad was snoozing and Mother was mowing the lawn, I shut myself in my bedroom and made my transformation. I cut my hair into a ragged urchin cut with nail scissors and took in the seams of my black trousers until they were skin tight. My dad's work jumper, loose and floppy with holes in and a pair of flat pumps and I was ready to meet my destiny.

Looking out of the window to check that Mum was still mowing I tiptoed downstairs. I didn't have a Saturday job or any other way of making money so I always had to ask and my parents would only cough up if they thought the enterprise was respectable; and after Mum had checked the lineage of every member of the party.

I stuck my head round the door of the sitting room, where Dad was reading the paper and I knew he wouldn't even look up.

'I need some money to go to Chester?'

He carried on reading. 'In the biscuit barrel. I've got no change so take ten bob and make it last.'

It was all going smoothly and I was heading for the door when I realized that the lawn mower was quiet and I could hear my mother taking off her gardening shoes at the back door. Slipping quickly into the hall I thought I'd get away through the front door but the

safety chain was on and as I was fiddling with it, she came up behind me.

‘Where d’you think you’re going dressed like that?’

‘Just round to Val’s,’ I lied

‘Val who?’ This was one of her affectations. She would pretend she didn’t know anyone whose family hadn’t lived in the village for a hundred years.

‘You know Val’ she’s in my year at school. She lives at Holly Cottage. Sometimes saying the name of the house worked since it meant that the person ‘belonged’ and I think it would have been fine if I hadn’t been so impatient and opened the front door at this point, giving her a clear sighting of my shorn hair in the bright light. She screeched in horror and I knew the game was up. I had to return the pocket money and wasn’t allowed out for a month except to school where the headmistress gave me a good telling off for looking ‘hideous’.

My attempts at self-expression were strangled at birth but I was determined to get some autonomy somehow. Because my parents wanted it, and I couldn’t think of anything else I had said I wanted to teach juniors and already had a place at Leeds training college. I decided I wasn’t going to take it up and quietly sent in an application form for a job at the local chemical factory. I didn’t need to get good A levels so I stopped working and spent the time reading *Bonjour Tristesse*, sulking and perfecting my tan. We took the French oral exam at Manchester University where a dismal little French bloke, sucking on Camels, tried to get some conversation going. In desperation he finally asked what I particularly liked about the French.

‘L’Existentialisme’ I replied

‘Ah, bon! Peut-être vous voudriez l’expliquer pour moi Mademoiselle’ he said, leaning back and lighting another fag.

I knew I couldn’t explain the essence of human existence but I wanted to tell him I felt that Sartre was very convincing on the subject and so I stumbled on, searching in vain for the right words.

‘J’aime beaucoup Simone de Beauvoir, Monsieur mais, à mon avis, Sartre est un con....’

I struggled to remember *incontestablement* or was it *uncontestablement*



## THE EXISTENTIALIST

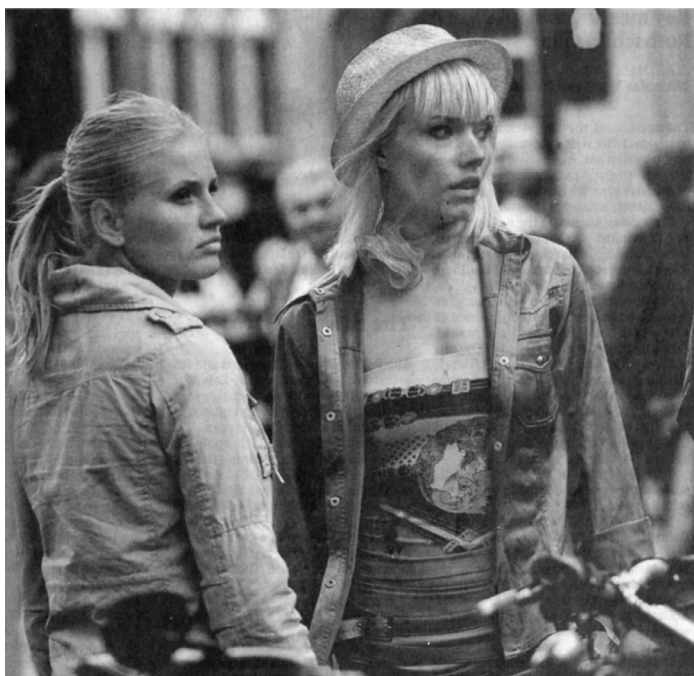
and was there such a word anyway ? Perhaps I was just busking it, talking français. His face darkened as if recalling an insult.

‘Sarte, pour moi, est un con....’ I tried again. No, I couldn’t be sure. ‘Mademoiselle’ he interrupted ‘peut-être vous préférez la philosophie anglaise mais utiliser un tel gros mot contre Sartre...c’est monstrueux !’ And with that he got up and left. It was some years before I found out why.



*Simone closes her eyes and pulls the trigger while Jean Paul talks her through the aiming process.*

*From Zen and the Art of Sniping – A Handbook for Resistants – JP Sartre  
et Simone de Beauvoir – Paris 1942*



Natalia Rybicka as Annie and Roma Gasiorowska as Kitty in *Londynczy* (Londoners).

## Much hyped series on emigrants to Britain tackles racism and exploitation

Helen Pidd

Due to start tomorrow in a primetime slot on TVP1, Poland's answer to BBC1, it is perhaps the most hyped TV show in recent memory in Poland. Billboards featuring the legend "Wielka Brytania, wielkie nadzieje" (Great Britain, Great Expectations) have been plastered all around the country, featuring four of the lead characters against the backdrop of the union flag. Polish radio stations in the UK and Poland have run wildly successful competitions offering listeners the chance to be extras – quite a prospect, given the pedigree of the cast.

Robert Wiśniewski, is well known in Poland for playing hardmen, but here he takes the role of downtrodden Marcin, a 40-something history teacher who follows his wife and son to London, but can't get a job, and ends up drinking cans of Lech on the capital's benches. Another star name is Grżyna Barszcze-

wska, Poland's answer to Helen Mirren, who plays Nina, who arrived in London during the second world war and now helps the new wave of Poles by renting them cheap rooms.

Most Poles will admit that until now, most of their indigenous TV drama has been pretty tawdry-looking stuff churned out for very little money. But with a budget of 13.5m zloty (£3m), *Londoners* has been able to up the ante, filming its interior shots in Poland, where studio space is still very cheap, and splurging on flashy exteriors shot on location in London. There are scenes at Wembley stadium, on the London Eye, at the South Bank Centre and at other less postcard-familiar spots around the capital including Victoria bus station, a Polish deli and a Western Union money transfer outlet.

Another stroke of luck was recruiting the well-known plumber-poet Stefan Jaruzelski as script consultant. Stefan, published in the *Crazy Oik* also has a daughter Wislawa who lives in Greek Street Soho where she works as an escort for politicians and businessmen. It would seem all aspects of the London experience have been covered. Stefan's synopsis of the first series will appear soon in the *Crazy Oik*.

The Guardian | Wednesday October 22 2008

# LONDYNCZYZY

Stefan Jaruzelski

## Episode 1

### Act 1 Scene 1:

*A large house in Islington. The owner, Sir Ken, a high ranking civil servant, is hunched over a huge desk scribbling on a government report. The door bursts open. Enter Annie, his wife, a statuesque thirty odd year old with a fine embon-point visible through her low-cut see-through blouse.*

*Annie:* I'm well-pissed off Ken. This marriage is goin nowhere fast. You are a miserable old git, your ears are too big and you smell. We never go out anywhere coz you're always working and I'm not sure I'd want to anyway. I've had enough I tell you. I'm out of here – and I'm taking little Kenny with me.

*Sir Ken:* Wot's come over you then you stroppey slag? Aven't I give you everythin you've asked for – a platinum credit card and a chauffeur driven car to Bluewater every week? Is there some fucker else on the scene then?

*Annie:* Yis, now you mention it. I've bin avin it off with my new geezer Count Ron. In fact I'm up the duff. We're settin ourselves up in a nice little gaff in Notting Hill if you must know – and little Kenny will be going to Harrow where Count Ron was educated.

*Sir Ken:* Ang on a minute you cheeky c\*\*t. Little Kenny int going nowhere – and neither are you you bleedin whore. I'm not givin you a divorce an if you do set up with that Count Ron I'll have the pair of you blackballed out of every club an boozer in the Smoke. I've got influence remember – I'm on good terms with Lord Mandelson.

*Annie:* Who are you calling a clot, you pointy eared bastard! After all I've done! I was just a twelve year old when you came sniffin round. You was fifty then you decrepit old git! All that bollocks about a hidden lollipop in your pants. I could have you banged up even now I reckon. I've got a right to a bit of happiness with Count Ron before I die.

*Sir Ken:* You've got no right to nuffink you cow. Remember I'm top dog in the Home Office so no-one's goin to bang me up. Now piss off and come back in wearin your nurse's uniform an bring me a G&T.

## Act 1 Scene 2

*A cornfield in the middle of Manchester, a small village just north of Watford. A couple are prancing through the golden stalks. She, a gorgeous young nymphet in a very short skirt what rides up whenever the wind blows; he is a somewhat older bloke with a serious beard and sandals.*

*Len:* Gosh Kitty, wot a great day. It's lovely out here in the country away from that filthy Londyn. An good of you to see me. I knew, when our hands touched as we stubbed out our fags outside the Frog an Firkin that you wasn't indifferent to me. I know you was keen on that toerag Count Ron but now I sense you've given him the elbow.

*Kitty:* More like he elbowed me Len. But it's true I am goin short of a bit of the old pork sword. Even though you are a much older bloke I think you're well fit. Is it all that bikin you do back an to from Manchester?

*Len:* No Kitty – not just bikin – I'm nuts about farmin an all. I like nowt better than reapin an stookin an muckin out t'pigs. If you marry me Kit it'll be like a paradise here just off Deansgate – better than that dirty hellhole Londyn an your disgustin brother-in-law Steve an his slut sister Annie. Wot d'you say? I've got loadsamoney and a few hundred acres just down the road. You could be in the Trafford Centre every weekend – an there's a Harvey Nicks round the corner from our cottage apartment at No1 Deansgate floor 15. Wot d'you say?

*Kitty:* Oooo yis Len! Let's do it now! Right here in the cornfield among the golden stalks! I'm hoochin me skirt up. I'm gaggin for it.

*Len:* Er...ang on a mo Kit. We don't want to flatten the crop – be vandalism that would. Let's go back to the motor an have a bunk up on the back seat.

## Act 2 Scene 1

*A sea-side apartment in Marbella. Annie is listlessly flicking through the shopping channels on satellite TV while Count Ron is immersed in a two day old Daily Mail.*

*Annie:* Christ this is borin Ron! I miss Londyn an all me old mates at the Frog an Firkin. I miss little Kenny too. I don't even know what school he's at. Couldn't we sneak back incognito like?

*Count Ron:* No we couldn't Annie. That gobshite husband of yours would have us bang to rights as soon as we stepped off the plane an nobody in the Frog would speak to us coz we're disgraced. Adultery is a serious crime in Londyn. Why don't you watch them Eastenders videos I sent for while I just nip out to the racetrack? Oh..an get that drippin tap fixed too. There's the number of one of them Polish plumbers in the local rag.

*Annie:* >sigh< Yis Ron.

## Act 2 Scene 2

*Later - the same apartment. The doorbell rings. Annie opens the door to reveal Stefan the plumber. He is tanned and fit and wears nothing under his blue denim bib overall. He has a Saddam Hussein moustache and an afro hair do. His hairy chest sprouts out over the top of his overall. Music from a Bee Gees' album begins to play – first softly and then louder.*

*Stefan:* I am Stefan the plumber at your service ma'am. You very sexy lady if I may say. I like blouse with buttons missing. I much better plumber than local Panchos from the Manana Plumb Shop. You made right choice. As fellow northern European I more at home with Tolstoy and Dostoevski than that Cervantes shite that local plumbers go on about, so perhaps we have chat later on Russian 19C novel. Now what is problem? Perhaps your drain hole is running hot.

*Annie:* Ooo Stefan you've proper swept me off me feet. Yis praps we could have a chat later on the complete works of Gogol wot I got from the Oxfam shop last week. But first it's the tap. Count Ron, my partner, sez it's driving him mad and distracts him from giving me a good seeing to.

*They move over to the sink. As Annie reaches over to the tap Stefan also reaches out and places his hand on hers. The Bee Gees music swells. Stefan bends Annie over the units then carries her into the bedroom. In the now empty lounge the 42" plasma TV clicks on.*

*Voice on TV:* This is channel Britchav. Here is a newflash. Exiled Britchav Count Ron today tried to shoot himself at the Marbella racetrack. The bullet glanced off his head and hit a Moroccan bookmaker in the leg. The bookmaker had no papers and was put down immediately by track security. We now go over to the General Franco Gunshots Unit at the city hospital.

*Count Ron:* No it wasn't the bet. I'm used to losing after years of following the tips in the Mail. It's her indoors. We're both getting pissed off here in the constant sunshine and occasionally we yearn for something other than egg and chips and a pint of Watneys when we go out for a nosh. In short we miss Londyn. And I think she's aving it off with a local plumber Sancho. I comes in last week to find a copy of Don Quixote on the table with a marker in Chapter 36. Fishy innit? It's a fact that no-one born north of Barcelona ever got past Chapter 4. I should have married that tasty hornbag Kitty Sherbertdip – she was well up for it. But now she's hooked up with some northern yokel. Bigger innit?

### **Act 3 Scene 1**

*The cottage at No1 Deansgate floor 15.*

*Len:* Well I'm off now Kit. Have you made me snap tin up? I want a ploughman's and a flagon of mead – not that Londyn shite you did last week. I was a laughing stock in the big meadow when I gets out a prawn and avocado ciabattia wrap with a Harvey Wallbanger to wash it down.

*Kitty:* Where exactly is this big meadow Len? I've bin walkin round and lookin out the window and I can't see nothing like a cornfield. I sometimes wonder if you're not snappin a bit off with some darkie peasant floosie from Moss Side. Last week for instance you came home with your pants on back to front.

*Len:* Don't be daft Kit. Look on the map. You'll find Castlefield just

at the other end of Deansgate. What d'you want me to do – bring back some horseshit? Well I'll be off. Oh and try an get that bath outlet fixed – it takes half an hour to go down. I've written down the number of a Polish plumber on the pad.

### Act 3 Scene 2

*The cottage later the same day. The door bell rings. Kitty opens to find Jorge the Polish Plumber. He is dressed in a surgeon's white coat emblazoned with the words ROD-U-LIKE. He carries a doctor's style leather bag with a Louis Vuitton logo. He is tall, lithe with thick black hair brushed back like George Clooney.*

*Jorge:* I plumber Jorge from Polski Plumbo high class pipe repairs for the Manc elite – we have many exalted clients like Lord Rooney and Sir Ferguson. That very nice frock madam – or is it belt? Suits your lovely legs – do they meet at top? Your drain hole it needs rodding?

*Kitty:* Do come in Jorge. You look well fit for an oik plumber – and such clean nails.

*Jorge:* I take up plumbing on advice of friend Stefan who says there are many perks of job. Before this I was concert pianist in Lodz.

*Kitty:* Right. I'll just put on this CD of Murray Perahia playing Chopins Etudes Op 25 then while I fill the bath to show you how it blocks.

*Jorge:* Ah! The divine Frederic AND Murray! This music excites me greatly! It always gives me, how you say? – the horn.

*They retire to the bathroom.*

*Jorge:* I think proper test is if we both strip bollock naked and plunge in water together to raise level above overflow.

*Kitty:* Oooo yis Jorge! Whatever you say.

*They get into bath. The sound of Chopin's Etudes gets louder.*

*Jorge:* I now will rod your drain hole and rapidly stick plunger in and out to make it fine.

## Act 4 Scene 1

*Greek Street Sobo Londyn. Annie, disguised as an ugly person meets her son little Kenny (now 18) and his friend Cedric*

*Annie:* Kenny! It's you!!

*Kenny:* Bugger off you old slag – and no I don't want a Big Issue.

*Annie:* It's me Kenny! Your mum!

*She whips off the grey wig and chucks the old mac in litter bin to reveal her fine embonpoint.*

*Kenny:* God! It *is* you mum! Wot you doin here in Greek street? Dad'd have you banged up if he knew. He's well in with the Home Sec Jackie Collins – she'll do anything he says. He's still mad about you runnin off with Count Ron. And what happened to the other sprog you were havin?

*Annie:* It died. You're all I've got left Kenny. But what you doin poncin about in Greek street when you should be in school. Didn't we have you down for Harrow?

*Kenny:* Harrow?! Oooo no! I'm being privately educated at Lord Mandelson's mansion in South Ken. I'm taking PPE.

*Annie:* PPE?

*Kenny:* Politics, Philosophy and Eroticism. In the mornings a dry old turd from Cambridge comes in and lectures on the life and works of Herbert Morrison. Then in the afternoon Alistair Campbell speaks on Machiavelli – or to give the course its full title – 'That Fucking Crafty Twat Machiavelli. In the evening Lord Mandelson arrives and after an excellent dinner all three of us, me, Cedric and Pete strip off, smear ourselves with goosing grease and wrestle on the rug. The winner is the one who finishes up wedged between the other two like the ham in a sandwich. It's all very Greek – his lordship is very good at it.

*Annie:* But what about girls Kenny? Cedric an Pete don't sound like suitable company for a young lad.

*Kenny:* Girls!!? Wash your mouth out mum! Pete says sleeping with one is like going to bed with a porpoise. I'd never get a distinction



in eroticism if I tried that.

*Annie:* Praps you'd like to come and stay with us at Marbella Kenny. There's girls down there might change your mind. I've got a fine embonpoint but these days, with implants, some of them are out here. (holds her cupped hands out)

*Kenny:* I've told you mum I'm not interested in embonpoint and neither is Cedric or Pete. So I suggest you bugger off back to Marbella quick before dad or Jackie Collins sees you.

*Annie:* Oooooo Kenny luv!!! You ungrateful gobshite!!

## Act 4 Scene 2

*Greek street. The flat of Stefan's daughter Wislawa. Annie, distraught, puts down a Biggles book and speaks to Stefan who is polishing a 22mm copper solder ring bend.*

*Annie:* Me whole life's a fuck-up Stefan! I'm a failure. I've lost everything. Kenny won't see me and Count Ron is distant and always in the boozer or at the racetrack. My old mates in the Frog an Firkin treat me like shit.

*Stefan:* You still have very fine embonpoint Annie. I buy video camera and we make plenty money on internet. You will be star like Marilyn Monroe, Paris Hilton or Edith Evans.

*Annie:* No Stef. It's no good. I'm going to top myself. I think I'll chuck myself under a train.

*Stefan:* No not train Annie. Think of trauma for poor driver. I have better idea. You take out big life insurance favouring Kenny and me then you run into Stockwell tube station dressed as Muslim shouting Allah Akbar! Police shoot you in head. You escape stigma of suicide which is crime for Catholics and me and Kenny get lots of money. Good eh?

*Annie:* Hmmm..it might work.

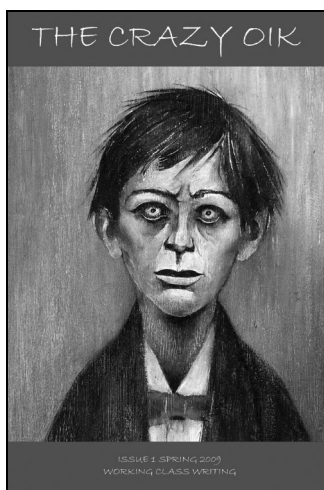
*Stefan:* Tomorrow I take you to Burqa Bargains next to Finsbury Mosque. Then across to the Bomb Exchange for explosive belt. Because of your fine embonpoint it will be invisible.

*Fade Out – End of Episode 1*

*Will Kitty and Jorge become an item? Next week Count Ron joins the Marbella Town Council and bans Don Quixote from the library. Will Kenny stop shirt lifting after he spends half an hour on the trampoline with Jordan? Will Annie really get shot now that Commissioner Blair has been sacked? Or will she become Bin Laden's new squeeze in a cave in Pakistan? Tune in next week to Channel Polski (47) and find out.*

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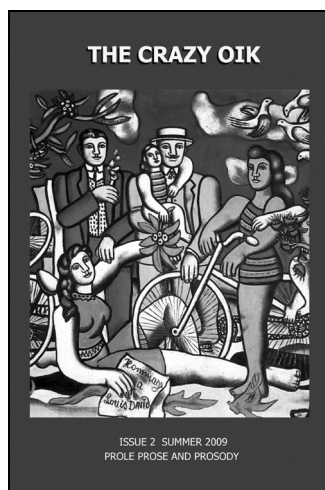
### Contributors

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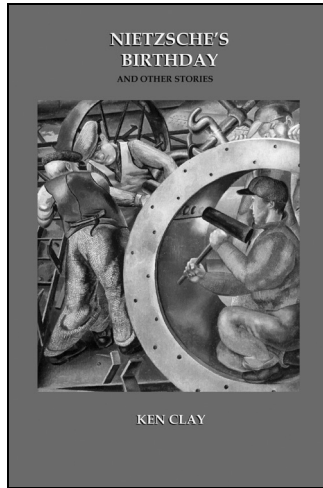
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### NIETZSCHE'S BIRTHDAY



**Nietzsche's Birthday** – Ken Clay *140pp*  
ISBN 978-1-4092-9536-5

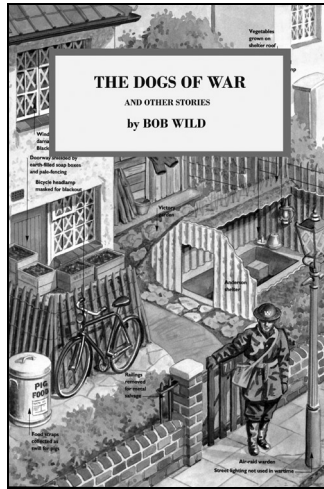
When the title story appeared in *Voices* in 1977 people wrote in saying it was disgusting. Ken wondered whether to write back saying that was exactly how blokes in workshops spoke – but then decide he couldn't be arsed. This story probably ruined his chances of writing for the parish magazine.

Maybe the Communist Party of Great Britain thought it was libelled too but it collapsed before a complaint could be lodged.

Feminists will also find Ken's difficulties with girls hard to read – as will women of a nervous disposition. Well, let's not put too fine a point on it -if you are middle class, a woman or a prude best give this one a miss.

Available directly from Amazon

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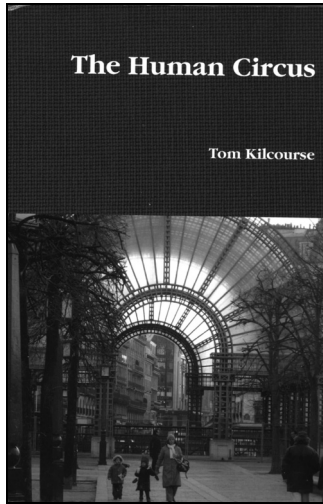
**The Dogs of War – Bob Wild** - 260pp  
ISBN 978-1-4092-8890-9

Bob Wild was born in the 30s in Prestwich Manchester. He became a printer who later went to University where he took a doctorate in Sociology. Back in printing he became Acting Head of the Printing Department at the Metropolitan University. He taught sociology at the Open University. He finished his National Service as a sergeant in the RAMC. This gave him an encyclopaedic knowledge of body parts. Bob's extraordinary powers of recall vivify these tales of oik life in the years of dearth. Many readers compare him to Proust. Putting down a story they usually say, with a sigh, "Well it's not Proust is it?" But if Bob had been born in Paris sixty years earlier and had a rich dad and cultivated Jewish mother (rather than the impoverished inadequates described here) and been ten times more intelligent he might well have written *a la recherche du temps perdu*. He wasn't and he didn't but this is as close as you get in Prestwich. The style is classic oik-anecdotal and has some of the mannerisms of the great French master; the narrative suspended as we stand entranced before a butterfly or a bottle of Bovril, the catalogue of working class grotesques, the struggle for mother's affection, the gastronomic delights of the fish and chip shop. Just as Proust's great novel revealed treasures of cultivated sophistication to a country of philistines so Bob's account shows modern readers a society as odd and barbaric as that of the Ituri pygmies. Recommended (by Bob)

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THE HUMAN CIRCUS



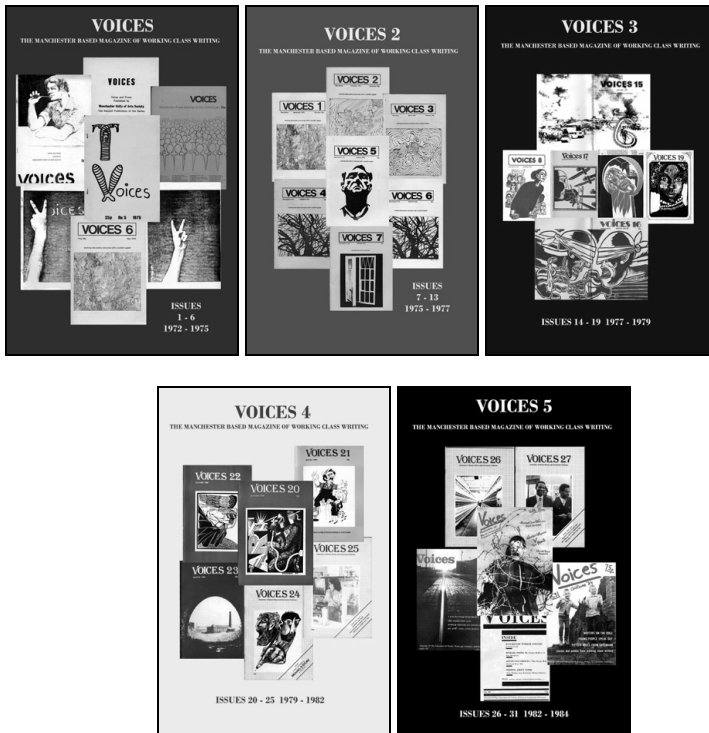
**The Human Circus** – Tom Kilcourse 277pp  
ISBN 978-1-4092-9382-8

Forty great stories in which Tom, now retired to Jumieges in the Seine Valley, recalls the funny and sometimes sad events of his time in Manchester - down the pit, on the buses and in the streets and pubs of the North West. These range from autobiographical episodes, bizarre speculations on science and philosophy to satirical observations on the rural *nouveaux riches* in the backwater of Bogsville which, in the best traditions of the English caste system, divides into Lower Bogsville and Bogsville-up-Market.

Five of these stories have appeared in the first three issues of *The Crazy Oik*.

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### VOICES 1972 – 1984

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Edited by Ben Ainley & Rick Gwilt

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## THE CRAZY OIK COLLECTION

### A Definition From The Oxford English Dictionary

**oick, oik** (oik). slang.

[Etym. obscure.]

Depreciatory schoolboy word for a member of another school; an unpopular or disliked fellow-pupil. Also gen., an obnoxious or unpleasant person; in weakened senses, a 'nit-wit', a 'clot'. Hence

**oikish** a., unpleasant, crude;

**oickman** (see quot. 1925).

1925 Dict. Bootham Slang, Hoick,\_spit. Oick,\_to spit; abbreviated form of 'oick-man'. Oickman,\_labourer, shopkeeper, etc.; also a disparaging term.

1933 A. G. Macdonell *England, their England* vi. 95 Those privately educated oicks are a pretty grisly set of oicks. Grocers' sons and oicks and what not.

1935 \_N. Blake' *Question of Proof* x. 189 Smithers is such an oick.

1940 M. Marples *Public School Slang* 31 Oik, hoik: very widely used and of some age; at Cheltenham (1897) it meant simply a working man, but at Christ's Hospital (1885) it implied someone who spoke Cockney, and at Bootham (1925) someone who spoke with a Yorkshire accent.

1940 M. Dickens *Mariana* iv. 109 The old Oik mentioned it over a couple of whiskeys.

1946 G. Hackforth-Jones *Sixteen Bells* 260 Come to think of it he must have been a bit of an oik when he worked at Bullingham & Messer. That crack about long hair was well merited.

1957 F. King *Widow* i. v. 63 He and Cooper had fought a battle with three 'oiks' - this was apparently school slang for the boys of the town.

1958 B. Goolden *Ships of Youth* vii. 162, I only need my cap on back to front to look the complete oick.

1959 W. Camp *Ruling Passion* xvi. 126 Who's that incredibly uncouth and oikish man?

1966 \_K. Nicholson' *Hook, Line & Sinker* viii. 95 So glad you got here before the oicks.

1968 *Melody Maker* 30 Nov. 24/5 Old Stinks from the third stream said: 'I say you oik, the Beach Boys latest is fab gear.'

1975 *Listener* 16 Jan. 83/1 The rigmarole about the flat was patent set-dressing, just to impress us oiks.

1975 *Times* 7 Aug. 7/7 His [sc. Oswald Mosley's] angels, a gang of gullible and bloodthirsty oiks would come pretty far down the roster of hell's legions.

2009 *The Crazy Oik Issue 1 Spring 2009* Crafty oiks, like Lord Sillitoe, learn to jump through the Ministry's hoops but there's also the crazy oik who just feels the urge to write. He doesn't sign up for Professor Amis's writing course at Manchester University (and he probably wouldn't get in if he tried) but he just has to get that stuff on the page even if it finishes up in a shoebox in the wardrobe.

## THE CRAZY OIK COLLECTION

**The Crazy Oik** is available from 10 Albert Rd, Grappenhall, Warrington WA4 2PG or from our South Manchester representative Bob Wild at 6 Rushford Ave Levenshulme Manchester (yes – he lodges with Ron and Enid Horsefield).

Price £3 + £1 P & P

Are you a crazy oik? Submissions are invited by post or email to the editor at [crazyoik@googlemail.com](mailto:crazyoik@googlemail.com)

A website is under construction at [www.crazyoik.co.uk](http://www.crazyoik.co.uk)

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