

THE CRAZY OIK  
ISSUE 18 SUMMER 2013



# **THE CRAZY OIK**

ISSUE 18

SUMMER 2013

THE CRAZY OIK

10 ALBERT ROAD GRAPPENHALL

WARRINGTON WA4 2PG

Website: [www.crazyoik.co.uk](http://www.crazyoik.co.uk)

*Published July 2013 by  
The Crazy Oik 10 Albert Road  
Grappenhall Warrington*

© The contributors

The authors assert their moral right to be identified as the authors of the work All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers

**An Icelandic Saga** and **Origin of the Species** are from Keith Howden's **Gospels of Saint Belgrano** (PPP 2013)

**Jolly Roger** is published by Smoke Stack 2012

**This Person, Hardly Anything** and **Norm** are from Tanner's **The Ism Prison** (PPP 2012)

Front Cover – *At the Edge of the City* (detail) (1987)  
Ken Currie



Ken Currie's great picture takes up almost a whole wall in Manchester's City Art Gallery – it's big : 12 feet wide and 7 feet high. Ken (born 1960) was one of the New Glasgow Boys, a group which included Peter Howson, Adrian Wisniewski and the late Steven Campbell. The curator's note on the Manchester acquisition reads:

This painting is an image of social breakdown. Glaswegian painter, Ken Currie was inspired by the sight of a burnt-out car in the Gorbals district of Glasgow. The figure on the right may have been laid off by the factory in the background. He keeps a wary eye on the threatening environment where right-wing politicians and their thugs paste up Union Jacks and bellow propaganda through a megaphone. On the left a brutish businessman ignores the appeals of a sick and broken old man. Or perhaps he is indulging in a sexual favour. Currie's painting is inspired by the political satire of artists like William Hogarth and George Grosz.

*See back cover for the whole painting*

## Illustrations

James Bird Horobin ( <i>Keith Howden</i> ).....	10
Milk.....	34
The Corset.....	42
The Mendicant Friar ( <i>Holbein</i> ).....	67
The Young Woman ( <i>Holbein</i> ).....	68
Phlegm Bomb ( <i>Tanner</i> ).....	70
Fretful Children.....	80
Aussie Monks.....	91
Crap ( <i>Tanner</i> ).....	92
Doctor Scott.....	93

## CONTENTS

EDITORIAL - <i>Ken Clay</i> .....	8
AN ICELANDIC SAGA - <i>Keith Howden</i> .....	11
NOS AMIS FIDÈLES (2) – <i>S. Kadison</i> .....	13
EPITAPHS FOR THE BLESSED MARGARET– <i>Alexis Lykiard</i> .....	35
TWO HAIKU – <i>Alexis Lykiard</i> .....	36
INLAND BEACH HUT (V) <i>David Birtwistle</i> .....	37
OIKU: THE GREAT DIVIDE – <i>David Birtwistle</i> .....	41
THIS PERSON – <i>Tanner</i> .....	43
SPOOKED – <i>Jim Burns</i> .....	46
OIKU: BUTTONHOLED BEYOND BOREDOM – <i>Dave Birtwistle</i> .....	52
THE ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES – <i>Keith Howden</i> .....	53
OIKU: AUGUST BANK HOLIDAY – <i>Dave Birtwistle</i> .....	54
IT'S ONLY ME – <i>Tom Kilcourse</i> .....	55
THREE PIECES FROM JOLLY ROGER – <i>Keith Howden</i> .....	67
HARDLY ANYTHING – <i>Tanner</i> .....	70
DRIFTING – <i>John Lee</i> .....	71
M1 MOTORWAY HEADING SOUTH – <i>Jeff Bell</i> .....	81
ALWAYS HAVE AN ANSWER – <i>Bob Wild</i> .....	83
NORM – <i>Tanner</i> .....	92
THE TROUBLE WITH MOBILES – <i>Ron Horsefield</i> .....	94
THINGS – <i>Ken Champion</i> .....	96
THE CRAZY OIK COLLECTION .....	97

## EDITORIAL

### THE SPLENDOURS AND MISERIES OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Some writers turn their noses up at autobiography thinking it a cop-out from the rigours of imaginative fiction. Yet one modern novelist, Jonathan Franzen, insists that all great writing is autobiographical and, for example, there is no more autobiographical writer than Franz Kafka. We know Kafka never turned into an insect but he did devote the whole of his life to exploring his personal struggle. “What is fiction after all” asks Franzen “but a kind of purposeful dreaming?”

Perhaps celeb culture has given autobiography a bad name. The shelves at Waterstones groan under the heavy load – sometimes so many they pile up on pallets on the floor. But who are these spivs and shysters and why should we be giving them the time of day? Mostly they’re not even the author of the book they’re signing. Yes they can write their names – all joined up too, but have they been exploring their personal struggle or just nattering to some ghost?

This issue contains two overtly autobiographical pieces, and a few obliquely biographical ones. I know for a fact that Dave Birtwistle has a shed in the Pennines and Tanner’s excursions into Liverpool’s lower depths must be true – nobody could make that stuff up. But what’s David Beckham got that Tom Kilcourse and John Lee haven’t? (Answer using both sides of the A4 sheet provided and add extra pages if required). Becks could kick a ball about, but we’ve all done that. And he had a girlfriend who was caught on camera pleasuring a pig – yis, we’ve all had girlfriends like that too (ie horny sluts). So what great contribution to lit is he making? Answer: none.

So, my fellow oiks, treasure your life-story – it’s your hardcore, your building material, no matter how mundane it may appear. Proust, for instance, had a very boring life. To him the joyful camaraderie of the workplace was unknown. He only worked half a day in his whole life. He never married or even had a proper girlfriend. Mostly he stayed in gasping, reading and writing or occasionally, for light relief, sticking a hatpin into a rat. Yet from this unlikely material he created the greatest novel of the last century. Would it have been any better if he’d been a film star, a footballer, a detective or a politician? Of course not. It’s not what you’ve lived through that counts, it’s what you make of it. If you

## EDITORIAL

were good enough you could write a great novel even if you were deaf and blind and lived in an iron lung. At least you wouldn't be a cockroach – you'd be writer exploring your predicament. What more d'you want? A knighthood? A horny slut girlfriend? Loadsamoney? I don't think so. They'd be no help if you simply wanted to write a memorable sentence.

*Ken Clay July 2013*



**James Bird Horobin**

## AN ICELANDIC SAGA

*Keith Howden*

Birdy, these days my once-a-fortnight  
self-elected boozing companion,  
Thursdays from eight to ten (his time  
is limited) being, I think,  
the day they let him out, told me again  
his sufferings from trench foot  
contracted downing Stukas. I don't believe,  
white-haired and shaking a bit  
(*delirium tremens* is why he's there,  
I fancy) born about nineteen six,  
he saw much fighting. Birdy says  
he likes life's little ironies. Tonight  
he told me how his fat brother-in-law,  
once Headmaster of a University,  
signed on as trawlerman in some  
fish-smelling and mysterious port  
lurking his mind, his tub *Pea Green*  
or *Sea Green*, uncertain, her skipper  
bonkers who, two days out of port sets course  
for icebergs, telling a creaking tannoy  
his long-considered wish to bring  
penguins to true religion. Bonkers.  
Nobody bothered. At the first iceberg runs  
his boat alongside, dressed in black  
and white, arms flapping a crucifix  
and jumps onto the ice. Not much  
you can do for that sort, Birdy says,  
although they brought him quacking back  
in a strait-jacket. It's a story  
Birdy loves telling of this lunatic  
dressed up believing he's the first

to crack penguin vocabulary. And that's  
what education does. It's all a plot.  
How else explain some buggers  
get the good jobs when anyone  
can see they're loonies? And by now,  
it's time to go, his little freedom  
limited. **Time Gentlemen.** That Charge  
Nurse wants him. But at the door he winks  
life's little ironies. Does nobody  
in the whole trawler business tell them  
no penguins in the Arctic, only  
bloody great polar bears .....

## NOS AMIS FIDÈLES (2)

*S. Kadison*

The arrival of *les Anglais* was always keenly awaited in Clarville. Forty boys with a bit of money to spend and members of staff whose drinking and eating was funded by the parents, meant an annual boost to the petty economy of the sleepy village. Mme Pommier, *la patronne* of the *Voltaire*, (her husband had been killed in a tractor accident and *la veuve Pommier* had become the consolation of more than one *vieux garçon* who would otherwise have had to travel all the way to Tours and pay for relief) organised a welcoming party. Union Jack bunting was hung over the entrance to the Camping Municipal. A portrait of the Queen was nailed to the door of the gents in her café. When the coach appeared, big and white, filling the narrow lane to the campsite, the reception party began to applaud. Swallow seized the microphone:

“On est arrivé.”

But the boys were too exhausted to respond. They'd sung their throats dry, run themselves breathless on the night ferry, swigged unconscionable gallons of fizzy drink, chomped on exorbitant pounds of dentist-enriching sweets and finally, slumped and draped against one another, twisted, squeezed, fidgeting with discomfort or floppy as old teddy bears, sank into the oblivion of sleep dreaming of their comfortable beds and a good breakfast.

The coach squeaked to a halt. Swallow stepped onto the dry gravel, embraced Mme Pommier, shook hands with the Mayor and lit a cigarette. The presence of an unknown member of staff cause a bit of a sensation.

“Je vous présente, Mr Billings,” said Swallow.

“Enchanté,” said the music teacher, at once bemused at the stream of language which issued from the widow's tiny mouth.

The boys had to be prised out of their seats. They collapsed on the grass, held their heads and their stomachs, declared they were incapable of getting up; but Swallow chivvied them with spiked words, whacks to the head, little kicks in the legs, till they were all on their feet, milling and reluctant, moaning at the impossibility of rising to the effort of erecting the tents. Swallow whispered in Mme

Pommier's ear the innuendo he repeated every year: *dresser les tentes*; well, they were just boys, what did they know about *dresser*. He had a silly, crude little joke which he thought very funny and which he repeated time and again: *je ne suis pas pressé pour dîner mais je suis dressé pour piner*. Mme Pommier smirked appropriately whenever he let it fall and Swallow thought himself quite the seducer.

Slow as old carthorses, the pupils dragged themselves around the field, yawning, rubbing their eyes, lifting a wooden mallet as if it was as dense as a neutron star.

"Let's leave Billings to it," Swallow said to Underwood. "Mireille is opening up early."

"I might hang around," said Underwood.

Swallow noticed him eyeing Sylvester who was yanking a tent into shape with Seddon.

"Plenty of time for that," he said. "Come on, first round's on Madame."

Swallow told Billings he and Underwood were going to sign the necessary documents and pay the fees. They'd be in the *Voltaire* if they were needed.

"You won't be long, will you?" said Billings. "The boys need to be given their tasks for the day."

"Two shakes," said Swallow, and as he and Underwood headed for the gate turned to his friend, exhaled a plume of aromatic, grey smoke from his Gauloise, and added, "silly little pillock."

Once the tents were up, the boys took the opportunity: they threw down whatever they could grab first from their luggage to assemble makeshift beds, curled up and went to sleep. Billings turned to Burrows and Seddon:

"This can't be right," he said.

"We're going for a swim," said Seddon.

"Right," said Billings, then after a tiny pause, "but I'll be on my own."

"They'll sleep for hours," said Burrows.

The athletes went off with their rolled towels under their arms.

Billings heard the splashes as they dived into the open-air *piscine municipale*. He wandered through each of the tents, walked round the perimeter of the campsite and feeling lonely and *de trop* decided to sit on his suitcase and write a note to his mother to let her know he'd arrived safely.

It was late in the afternoon before the boys recovered and were once more chasing round, cawing like rooks, kicking footballs, throwing rugby balls and complaining of terminal hunger. Billings was still alone.

"Mr Swallow will be here in a minute," he said.

"No he won't," called Scorton, "he's in the café. He'll be sozzled by now."

"Don't be cheeky," said Billings, pointing his finger.

"We're hungry, sir," pleaded one of the lads and at once the chorus of protests rose. The boys gathered round him. Why couldn't they go to the café too? How long did they have to wait to eat?

Not knowing the protocol, Billings bluffed.

"Mr Swallow will have bought something. You'll have a barbecue when he gets back."

"We went to the café last year," whined Scorton.

The gaggle confirmed his assertion. Naïve enough to imagine that middle-class boys from a Church of England ex-grammar school don't lie like whores to get what they want, Billings made them line up in pairs, under strict orders to stay behind him and not to wander from the path. He marched them up the lane, across the square and stopped at the green door of the tiny *Voltaire*.

"Wait there a minute," he said.

Inside, Swallow and Underwood were on tall, wooden stools at the *zinc*. A couple of unshaven *vieillards*, caps on their heads and slow-burning cigarettes between their lips were playing desultory dominoes. *La veuve* was wiping glasses on a soggy tea-towel. An enormous Alsatian lay across the floor. It looked up at the stranger with a suspicious eye.

"Doucement, Rodolphe," said Mme Pommier.

Swallow turned. He looked at Billings over his glasses. His eyes were blood-shot and glazed as cherries.

“The boys are here,” said Billings.

“What?” said Swallow.

“They’re hungry,” said Billings. “They said they ate here last year.”

“For fuck’s sake,” said Swallow.

“I beg your pardon,” said Billings.

Underwood slid from his stool. He went sullenly through the door pursued by the disconcerted musician.

“Follow me,” he commanded.

The boys groaned. He yelled at them. They subsided. He set off at a strong pace, trying hard to walk straight.

“He’s pissed,” Billings heard whispered behind him.

Underwood led the little platoon of mocking boys; they staggered, giggled, imitated a drinker’s action, aped their teacher’s stalwart attempt to appear sober in spite of his unsteady gait. Billings brought up the rear, embarrassed and depressed at his humiliation and ineffectual attempts to get the pupils to behave sensibly. At the campsite, Underwood made them sit on the grass, divided them into groups and gave each its tasks for the evening. Finally, he called Sylvester to him, took his wallet from his back pocket, handed him two hundred franc notes and told him what to buy at the *boucherie* and *epicerie*.

“Take your group with you,” he said, “straight there and straight back.”

Off went the capable and reliable Sylvester with his troupe of comrades. Underwood turned to watch him go thinking what a fine figure he cut with his broad straight shoulders, his neat buttocks and his easy, powerful walk.

“Now,” he called to the rest, “footballers over here, swimmers over there. Go.”

The boys scrambled to their groups.

“What do you want to look after,” Underwood said to Sylvester, “football or swimming?”

“I’m not much good at football,” he said.

“Swimming then.”

“I can only doggy paddle.”

“Don’t get in the water. If anyone is in difficulties, throw ‘em a life-belt and call for me.”

With that Underwood strode to his caravan emerging with a football in his hand and whistle round his neck. He blew a shrill note curled his arm in the direction of the pitch and the unruly herd of players ran ahead of him. When Billings got the pool, he wondered what had happened to Burrows and Seddon. Why weren’t they here to help him? He was supposed to be second-in-command on this trip but he was being treated as a dogsbody. The boys were quickly in their trunks. They ran round the edge, dived, jumped, dragged one another under. He saw one lad holding another’s head beneath the surface. He ran to them.

“Stop that! You. Stop that now. Come here.”

But the lad swam away like a shark and disappeared in the deep end. Billings stood peering into the green water trying to make out his form. There was a huge splash, a great plume of chlorinated water rose from the pool and descended on him as if poured from a bucket. He stood, drenched, impotent and miserable as the adolescents whooped with delight.

When the barbecues were lit and Underwood was supervising the charring of the chops, sausages and burgers, there was still no sign of Swallow. Burrows and Seddon were preparing salad and Billings had been told to make sure the tents were tidy. They weren’t. There were clothes cast across the floor as if burglars had just left; suitcases that looked like they’d been ransacked by desperate heroin addicts; odd socks hanging from the poles; underpants of dubious cleanliness draped across makeshift pillows. It was terrible. Why had he agreed to come on this trip? He decided to *have it out* with Underwood.

The gorilla-chested rugby player was turning burgers with one hand and drinking beer with the other. He was immaculate as ever. His wiry black hair was brushed as diligently as a teenage girl’s.

“Ron?” said Billings.

“What?”

“Can I have a word?”

Underwood looked at the younger man. He couldn’t keep his mouth

from curling into an incipient sneer.

“Go ahead.”

“In private.”

“If you’ve something to say,” said Underwood, “spit it out.”

“Well, the point is, I’m supposed to be second-in-command on this trip.”

“Says who?”

“Mr Morgan.”

“He’s not here, is he?”

“But he asked me to be second-in-command and I think....”

“I think you should eat a burger and shut up,” said Underwood, slapping the burnt meat on a floppy bap and handing it to Billings.

“Ketchup?”

Billings took the food in his slender hand. He looked at it as if it might be about to bite his face. Underwood was holding the ketchup bottle aloft.

“No thanks,” said Billings and walked away, the steaming bread roll warming his fingers. He took a bite, spat into his palm and went to the nearest bin.

Meanwhile, Swallow was holding a conversation with Mme Pommier in the nearly empty café. He was explaining there was no problem with immigrants in his locality. They were concentrated in the towns, as they should be. God forbid they should be allowed to reduce property values in the semi-rural areas. Mme Pommier drew on her untipped and nodded in agreement. She was still drying glasses on the grey, soggy cloth. As the light began to fade and there being only two domino players in the corner, Mme Pommier, as was her wont, invited Swallow *en haut*. The old pair raised their eyes as he disappeared through the curtain behind the bar, then gave a clichéd Gallic shrug as they turned back to their game. Mme Pommier’s little flat was barely more comfortable than her establishment, but there was a sofa where Swallow could stretch out and a television which he watched while she reheated the morning’s coffee in her *coin cuisine*. Swallow was no lover of coffee, but when he’d been drinking all day and felt the need to sober up at least a little, he wasn’t averse to a strong *expres* prior to a few glasses of

liqueur. The widow put the cup and saucer on the stained little table next to him. He heaped two spoons of sugar and stirred. She sat opposite, smilingly complaisant. When he'd downed the strong drink in one mouthful, she brought the bottle of Izarra. He loved the green liquid with a quiet passion. She filled the slender, wide-mouthed glass. He swallowed it like a man taking an aspirin. She refilled. Soon, Swallow was in that condition between consciousness and unconsciousness in which what he said made no sense, his movements were as uncoordinated as leaves in an October storm and he farted and burped uncontrollably. Mme Pommier came and sat by him. She stroked his thin thigh. He lit a *Gauloise* and lay back. She unzipped his fly, unhooked his waistband, and fished for his *zizi* inside his Y-fronts. His flaccid manhood lay in her fingers as if modelled from child's clay. She employed her usual techniques. Her stubby fingers, dry and rough from extended daily washing up, kneaded the soft three inches of flesh. She exposed the head, ran her thumb back and forth across the snake's eye, but she might have been pumping air into a slashed inner tube. She would have gone further, but Swallow's head lolled like a daffodil with a broken stem, he began his irregular snoring, drawing in air through his open mouth, jerking with each loud exhalation, and the glass fell from his fingers onto the threadbare rug. She left him, unfastened and exposed, and went down to attend to her other clientele.

Two hours later he appeared, still drunk and groggy, trying to appear nonchalant and cheerful.

"*Je vous dois combien, Madame ?*" he said with exquisite politeness.

"*Comme d'habitude,*" she replied.

He slipped a hundred franc note into her damp palm, bade *Bonsoir* to the domino players, who stared and nodded perfunctorily, slipped out of the door, stubbed his cigarette underfoot and wondering what had happened between him and Mme Pommier, went unsteadily on his broken-drainpipe legs towards the campsite.

For the remainder of the evening he was in a terrible mood. He bawled at boys for the untidiness of their tents, whacked them round the head for being too noisy, kicked one up the backside for failing to move fast enough when told him move out of the way. He ate three lamb chops, two burgers piled with blackened onions and then dropped into a camping chair outside his tent with a box of *Pelforth*

beside him. It was two a.m. when Borrows and Seddon carried him inside and deposited him, fully clothed, on his sleeping bag.

The following day they were going by coach to a chateau. The dutiful *chou-fleur* who, unable to understand the simplest French, spent his time shadowing Underwood, chatting to whichever of the boys would accept him, drinking the beer he thought far inferior to Theakston's, sleeping and trying to tune his radio to English stations, had topped up the diesel and was revving the engine by nine. Swallow, as always, tried to pretend he felt no ill-effects, but two miles down the road he was snoring in the front seat. Too late to shower or change, he stank. Billings, who was in the seat behind him put his hand over his face. Burrows borrowed a deodorant from one of the boys and sprayed the sleeping master. The lads gave a great, mocking cheer. Swallow didn't flinch.

The ostensible reason for the visit was to raise the pupils' cultural level. The real purpose was to permit Swallow to meet up with M. Prideau, a businessman he'd got legless with on a ferry some years ago who inhabited a tumble-down, rambling house in five acres a short distance from the chateau and who obliged his English friend every year by filling a skip with bottles of beer and having it placed in his hallway as well as treating him to the full range of liqueurs he concocted in his cellar. Underwood dreaded the day. He disliked chateaux, remarking sullenly, *seen one you've seen 'em all*; but what irritated him most was that he would have to keep the boys in line while Swallow went off with Prideau, to return in time to get the coach or not, according to his level of inebriation. Being in charge of them at the campsite wasn't too bad; he could throw them in the pool, get them playing football or rugby, and away from disapproving eyes he could berate them, slap them, lose his temper, rant and threaten. Going around the chateau following a polite herd of Japanese and Germans with expensive cameras hanging round their necks like trophies won in the battle of international tourism, meant he had to smile, keep his voice down and try to control the youngsters by gentle persuasion and admonition. It drove him to the point of murder.

The guided visit was well under way, Swallow was underground with M. Prideau sipping a supposedly orange-flavoured, viscous liquid which burned his oesophagus like a hot poker, and Underwood was starting to feel capable of terrible violence, when he

found himself next to Sylvester.

“What do you think, Jon?” he said, smiling at the boy.

“Very interesting, sir.”

“Yes,” said Underwood, “the sense of history is wonderful.”

“It is, sir.”

“Must have been something to live in the age of François Premier, eh?”

“Yes, sir,” said the quiet boy, “but this one was built by Charles d’Amboise.”

“Was it?”

“Well, it was founded by Odo 1 of Blois, but it was Charles who rebuilt it.”

Underwood wanted to sarcastically remark: *No shit?* But he smiled and nodded.

“You take an interest in history then, Jon?”

“It’s my favourite subject, sir.”

“Good. Great intellectual discipline, history.”

“It is, sir.”

“What’s your period?”

“The English Civil War, sir.”

“Ah, yes, fascinating,” said Underwood who was struggling to recall the date of the conflict.

“I think so, sir.”

“And how did you get interested in that, Jon?”

“My sister’s doing a PhD about the Putney Debates, sir.”

“Is she now?” said Underwood at a loss to discover what the Putney Debates might be. “Well that’s excellent. Very worthwhile topic. Very worthwhile.”

He stayed at the boy’s side as long as he could. Each time he looked at him he noticed his extraordinary long eye-lashes and at the rare moments the lad turned and met his gaze, his wide, stunning blue eyes and his thick pink lips. Wary of being noticed by the other lads, he drew away and tried to make conversation with a little group

huddled in front of an imposing, aristocratic portrait.

“Who’s that?” said Underwood.

“Don’t know, sir,” one of them said.

They looked at one another and giggled.

“Well, aren’t you interested to find out?”

“Not really, sir.”

“This is culture. It improves the mind. You should take the opportunity.”

“Yes, sir.”

They giggled again.

Underwood walked on, trying to pretend he wasn’t as bored as them.

When the visit was over they assembled in the sunshine. Relieved to be out of the constricting, do-not-touch, keep-your-voice-down, this-way-please palace, the boys couldn’t help letting off steam. Like well-trained sheep-dogs, Burrows and Seddon tried to hem them in. Billings pleaded with them out of philosophical conviction that reason will always prevail if given a chance; they ignored him. Underwood, frustrated and in need of a drink, barked at them, grabbed a *chétif* run-around by the collar and hauled him off his feet. Swallow didn’t appear. Finally, Underwood decided to march them round the gardens in the hope of at least tiring them enough to make them settle.

“Where are we going, sir?”

“There and back to see how far it is.”

The sun beat down. The lads complained of hunger and thirst. Underwood set a competitive pace. Billings pulled his straw hat lower on his forehead. Seddon and Burrows, sauntered in the rear in their tracks suits, itching for a run. When they got back to the assembly point, Swallow was still nowhere in sight.

“For fuck’s sake,” said Underwood in a hushed aside.

“Do you think we should contact the police?” said Billings.

“The police?” repeated Underwood, creasing his face in disdain.

“Want us to go and look for him?” said Seddon.

“Prideau’s house is miles away.”

“We can run it.”

Underwood was mulling the idea (it might work after all if they arrived breathless and sweaty to collect him; Prideau could bring them all in his car) when a soprano cry rang out:

“There he is!”

A hundred and fifty yards away, on the gravel path, Swallow, his jacket slung over his shoulder, a cigarette between his lips, was staggering, his legs like bendy stilts folding at the knees, his shoulders dipping left and right, his free, long arm swinging like a branch split by a storm. The boys cheered. Swallow waved.

“Silly cunt,” said Underwood in a whisper.

As he got closer, they could see his shirt was adrift and his hairy, fat belly on show. He’d spilt something and there was a great, dark grey stain on his trousers.

“He’s pissed himself,” said one of the boys.

Underwood cuffed him.

“Phew,” said Swallow as he reached them, “too hot for walking. I need a drink.”

“The lads are hungry,” said Underwood.

“Right. Let’s get them to a café,” said Swallow. “Where’s the *chou-fleur*?”

As interested in chateaux as in French grammar, the driver had stretched out on a bench, his arms folded across his chest and was snoring with metronome regularity.

“Go and wake him up,” ordered Swallow and the lads charged as if they were re-enacting the Battle of Crécy.

They found a little village with a solitary café on the inevitable square. It was just the kind of place Swallow favoured: there’d be a few, inveterate customers, they’d be glad of the trade, he’d ingratiate himself by dropping a few less than subtle hints about immigrants and Parisian sophisticates, the boys could run around on the square and even, perhaps, have a game of *pétanque*, and he could drink the afternoon into oblivion.

“For fuck’s sake,” Underwood said to him as the pupils tumbled off the coach, “we were waiting for hours.”

“No harm done,” said Underwood, “come on, I’ll buy you a beer.”

By the time they were once more on the bus, Swallow was incapable of counting heads and Underwood wasn’t much better. Billings stepped in. Back at the campsite he took control. The barbecues were lit. He showed them how to ensure the meat didn’t burn. Burrows and Seddon were set to cutting baps and loading burgers. Swallow was unconscious in his tent. Underwood had retreated to his caravan.

For the first few years, he’d slept under canvas, but punctilious about his appearance and personal hygiene, he’d rebelled against the disorder of *mucking-in* and when Mme Pommier had offered rent of her caravan for a few francs a week, he’d seized the offer. The privacy was a great boon. For some years he’d got into the habit of inviting favoured boys inside. It had worked well. It was easy to find a pretext; usually getting the boy to do some little task for him. A good ruse was to send him to the shop and when he returned with the ground coffee or apples, to invite him in and give him a little reward. Once the two of them were inside, the curtains closed, most of the lads were too polite or intimidated to leave without permission. He lay on his bed, breathing heavily, his head spinning. The image of Sylvester drifted into his mind and he found himself getting hard. He wondered if he should masturbate and have done with it, but the thought of the lad’s lips tormented him. He got up, brushed his hair and wearing only a pair of shorts and a loose t-shirt went outside. The boys were scuttling here and there, busy helping make the food. It didn’t have to be Sylvester. Little Fenwick was an attractive wretch. Underwood had noticed his buttock when he climbed out of the pool. He stood beneath the clear blue of the early evening sky enjoying the warmth. He was still semi-erect and was aware that any boy coming near him might notice. But he was well away from them. He could enjoy the sensation. He was wondering if he should wander over and ask Fenwick to run an errand when he spotted Sylvester. He was wearing a singlet and shorts. His physique was already manly. Underwood took a few stride towards him and called. The boy didn’t hear. He moved closer.

“Jon! Jon!”

When Sylvester turned his head he beckoned him and without waiting to see if he obeyed, turned and went into the caravan. A few seconds later came a hesitant knock at the door.

“Come in.”

Underwood was sitting at his table, a magazine in front of him.

“Close the door, Jon. Come and sit down. I thought you might like to see this.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Sylvester sat down and looked at the page Underwood pushed towards him. It was a spatchcock, journalistic piece about the Chateau of Chambord.

“Nice photos don’t you think?”

“Yes, sir. Very good.”

Sylvester read. Underwood lay back on his bed his hands behind his head. After several minutes he said:

“Could you just do me a favour, Jon?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Down there, under the sink, there’s a cloth in a bowl. Could you get it for me, I just want to give the table a wipe.”

“Yes sir.”

The youngster got up and went to look. He bent double and pulled aside the little curtain that hid the space beneath the sink. His backside was in the air.

“I can’t see anything, sir.”

“Keep looking, Jon. It’s there.”

Underwood slid down his shorts and took his hard cock in his hand.

“There’s nothing here, sir.”

“Are you sure, Jon. Have a good look.”

Underwood fixed his eyes on the tight buttocks as the boy ferreted. At length he turned and stood up straight. Underwood lay, his hands once more behind his head, his cock pointing to his hairy belly, his knees apart. Sylvester stood as still as death. His eyes shifted from the man’s cock and balls to his face. Underwood smiled.

“Come here, Jon,” he said. “Give it a little kiss.”

“No.”

“Don’t be like that, Jon. No-one will know. This is our secret.”

For a second, Underwood thought he'd prevailed. He could see the fear in Sylvester's eyes. He didn't dare move. He had him in his power. All he had to do was to go on smiling, talk gently and the boy would give in. He'd be too terrified to do anything else. But with a movement so swift Underwood didn't have time to speak, Sylvester yanked open the door and jumped out. The bulky rugby player pulled himself up, grabbed some clothes, dressed as if the Queen was about to pop her head into his little, temporary home, and went quickly out and amongst the boys. His heart was thumping so he thought he would die. He approached Billings.

"Have you seen Jon Sylvester?"

"No. Why?"

"Just wanted him to do me a favour."

He wandered around the camp, smiling like a vicar at a church fete. He cracked strained little jokes with the boys, praised them, pretended to be as calm and easy-going as a sixties hippy on dope. There was no sign of Sylvester. What worried him was the thought the boy might have found a way of contacting his parents. He knew from experience once a boy had taken the first step it was easy to enforce silence. It was curious how the victim assumed the guilt but it was inevitable. He'd never been here before: no boy had ever refused and disappeared. He needed to get Sylvester back in his caravan. He could talk him round. What had happened? He was in the caravan. Underwood had invited him there to show him the article. He was responding to his interest in history. He'd needed to get changed before coming out to join in the barbecue. Sylvester had seen him with his trousers off. Nothing more than that. An unfortunate but innocent incident. Once he convinced Sylvester no-one would believe his story, that it was typical adolescent exaggeration, he'd been spooked and panicked then he'd be able to start working on him again. The crucial thing was to destroy the boy's confidence, to convince him the adults could do what they liked. Little by little he could confuse and dominate him. If the lad felt himself at his mercy, he would comply, and once any small act was fulfilled, it was collusion. Underwood was expert at insinuating into the minds of adolescents the sense that they had instigated and encouraged. Sylvester was no different. He'd escaped him temporarily, no more. If only he'd locked him in; he could have overpowered him, forced himself on him and the teenager would

have been so ashamed and humiliated he would have said nothing to anyone. Yet this was a perilous interregnum. Inviolable, Sylvester might have enough assurance and self-esteem to make a complaint. But to who? He was on trip. Who would believe him? Even if they did, what could they do?

He bumped into Billings and his heart nearly stopped.

“Seen young Sylvester?” he said with the insouciance of joiner looking for a stray screwdriver.

“He’s talking to Bill.”

“Is he? Where?”

“In the tent. I think there’s been some kind of incident.”

“Incident?” said Underwood, his face screwing into disdain.

“Jon seemed a bit upset.”

“Chaos in a coalbox,” said Underwood. “no need for a fuss.”

Billings stared at him.

“I’ll talk to him later,” he said. “I’m second in command. I’ll have to report back to Mr Morgan.”

“Ridiculous. No need to go tale-telling. What happens on trip stays on trip.”

“But I have the responsibility.....”

“Bollocks.”

“Excuse me.”

Underwood turned his back and headed for the tent. He was annoyed at himself for having lost his *sang-froid*. Did Billings suspect? What if he did? Underwood would accuse him of coming on to the boys. He’d keep his mouth shut. He was five yards from the tent when Sylvester emerged with Swallow behind him, a cigarette between his fingers and a severe expression on his face.

“Jon,” called Underwood, smiling.

Sylvester fired a glance at him without stopping.

“Jon,” called the teacher once more but the tall, resolute figure walked briskly away without turning.

“What’s bitten him?”

“He’s made a complaint.”

“About what?”

“You.”

“Me?”

“Stay away from him.”

“What did he say?”

“Have a guess?”

“What did you say?”

“What happens on trip stays on trip.”

“He gets the message, then?”

“Stay away from him, Ron. He’s bright, mature and confident.”

“What have I done?”

“Don’t invite him into your caravan.”

“The boy’s making it up. You know what they’re like.”

“I need a drink. I’m going to the *Voltaire*. Coming?”

Swallow went to tell Billings he was in charge. He spoke to Burrows and Seddon: keep an eye on Sylvester, he’s a bit homesick.

For the rest of the trip, Underwood took Swallow’s advice. He had little fear his friend might betray him but he worried: was Bill suggesting he might not be willing to lie to Morgan? Did he know something about Sylvester’s family? His instinct was to get the lad on his own, work on him till he cracked; but Bill had never been so direct and insistent. It tormented him to mad irritability. He lashed pupils with his tongue for doing no more than getting in his way. He flailed with his heavy hands when they didn’t do what he asked straight away. Alone in his caravan in the dark, he wondered if he should change tack. Maybe he should inveigle Fenwick into his caravan. He was nothing like as astute as Sylvester. Yet it might be best to write this trip off. He’d wait till next year. But the idea of being thwarted enraged him. Who had the right to stop him? What was *trip* without a boy in his caravan? It was little better than work. This was his annual opportunity. Inviting boys to his bungalow was perilous. The old days when the *boarders’ block* provided the chance to order a boy from bed and give him a talking to in the Housemasters’ study were long gone. Everything was moving in a

direction which didn't favour men like him. He'd resigned himself to these three weeks' abroad as his only real chance. Of course, there was always the possibility of following up with some particularly submissive boy; but there was never anything like *trip*: boys hundreds of miles from their parents; Bill as needful of his discretion as he of his; a caravan of his own; a culture of trust in authority.

In spite of his privation, Underwood enjoyed himself. There was plenty of time to drink with Swallow. He got to swim his powerful lengths before breakfast, the little waves lapping over the side as his arms forced the water away and his feet kicked to keep him balanced. There were impromptu games of rugby; he and Swallow got the *chou-fleur* to drive them to a country restaurant where they grazed through seven courses and glugged three bottles. When the time came to dismantle the tents and store them in the boot of the coach, he wore a healthy tan, even if he had put on a few pounds. There was a fulsome, sentimental send-off. The mayor presented them with yet another little commemorative plaque, shook Swallow's hand and expressed the sincere if not entirely disinterested wish of the community that they return the following July. Mme Pommier, wiping tears, insisted on hugging every boy and wetting each cheek with a slobbery kiss. Before the campsite was out of sight, Swallow had begun:

*Oh, the cow kicked Nelly....*

Arriving home was always an anti-climax for Underwood. Living alone, he found himself restless and curiously at odds with familiarity. It took him a week to adjust. His flattened mood slowly began to assume some shape. He went to *The Leaping Salmon* with Swallow, but it didn't match the *Voltaire*. Nothing could rise to the liberation of being distant from routine and recognition. The final weeks of the long holiday made him increasingly irritable: soon he would be back in his classroom; he would know what he would be doing every day for the next academic year; the nights would start to close in; the frustrations of the interminable winter would set him at odds with himself. At the back of his mind too was Sylvester. Normally, he was absolutely confident, but he hadn't managed to get Sylvester in his grip. Yet, nothing had happened. It was the lad's word against his. Everyone knew how prone to exaggeration adolescents were. All the same, he had a sickening feeling the youth would say something. The smoke would alert people to fire. He

might have to be careful in future. The idea enraged him.

It was two weeks into term when Swallow spoke to him.

“Jon Sylvester has complained to his form tutor.”

“Who’s that?”

“Greg Falkingham.”

Underwood snorted.

“What did you say?”

“I told him what happens on trip stays on trip.”

“End of story?”

“He says he’ll have to speak to Morgan.”

“What the fuck for?”

“Cover his back.”

“Pillock.”

“I’ll speak to Morgan.”

“Is that wise?”

“I’ll make him understand.”

“What about the parents?”

“Not involved. Yet.”

Underwood passed a terrible week. His mind was assailed by questions. Had Sylvester spoken to his mates? What if the parents did make a fuss? He cursed himself for his carelessness in not having locked the door. He’d got blasé because of his success. At his worst moments, four in the morning, alone, in the dark, imagining Morgan handing the lad’s statement to him, or seeing the parents sitting in the Head’s study, he thought through the best means of suicide. Yet at his best moments, in the staffroom having a laugh with his long-established colleagues, his reputation and that of the school, a reputation Morgan would surely never compromise, seemed to put him beyond accusation.

On a Wednesday evening he went to the *Salmon* with Swallow.

“So, you spoke to Morgan?”

“I did,” said Swallow picking up his pint and emptying three-quarters of it into his gut.

“And?”

“He wanted an investigation.”

Underwood stared at his friend who turned to look at him over his glasses. For the few seconds of silence he imagined he might have to take the overdose.

“I pointed out the disadvantages,” said Swallow.

“Meaning?”

“The scandal, the damage and the can of worms.”

“Yeah?”

“I raised the issue of Bert Bowring.”

“Christ.”

“In the most discreet and oblique way, of course.”

“What did you tell him about me?”

Swallow finished his pint and ordered two more.

“I said you’d invited the lad into your caravan and he’d got the wrong end of the stick. You’d just been for a swim and were still in your trunks.”

“Hook, line and sinker?”

“Didn’t believe a word.”

“He thinks Sylvester’s telling the truth?”

“Probably.”

“Christ.”

“Drink your beer. He won’t do anything.”

“You sure?”

“He wouldn’t risk the school’s reputation. In any case, he was educated privately. He knows what goes on.”

The weeks went by. Nothing happened. Underwood even went to talk to Morgan about rugby fixtures. He was politeness itself. Underwood’s anxiety began to recede. After a lunchtime turnout, he spotted Fenwick in the shower. He had extraordinarily round, tight buttocks. He wondered if he should find a pretext. The boy wasn’t very bright. He would be easy to domineer. Underwood began to experience the old assurance. But the following day he had to cover

a class. Walking through the door he saw Sylvester standing behind his front row desk. The boys went quiet; Underwood had status after all and was no slouch with his hands and the slipper. He set them a comprehension task, one of the older style exercises which were now being edged out. The boys had to read a passage. That would take ten minutes at least. There were twenty questions. They were told to read through them before they attempted any answers. Most of them would need to read the passage a second time. They'd have to search for the appropriate sections, work out what the question was asking and write a full answer for each. It was one of those lessons when they'd have to concentrate and not waste a minute if they were to be finished by the bell. Underwood favoured these sort of lessons. Things were moving towards a less didactic style. The recently appointed Head of Department had taught in ex-secondary comprehensives and was alert to the drift of policy. Underwood, on the other hand, wanted to stay in the old grammar-school world as long as possible: boys with their heads down quietly working while the teacher got on with some marking. Within minutes the class was silent and the pupils were diligently reading. Except for Sylvester. He sat back in his chair, stared at the wall in front of him or at the ceiling. The lad next to him cast glances at Underwood and then at his classmate. Around the class elbows were nudged. The odd inaudible whisper passed from mouth to ear. Underwood went on marking, apparently impassive. If he reprimanded Sylvester or punished him, he risked a protest that might be impossible to handle; if he did nothing, the class would know there was something very wrong. He ticked the books without attending to what was in them. He wondered if he should take Sylvester into the corridor, but he feared the lad would accuse him in front of the others. It was one of those impossible situations when we know our behaviour has trapped us and the only way out is honesty; but honesty means, shame, humiliation and defeat so out of cowardice we choose dishonesty and remain in the trap. The minutes ticked by impossibly slowly. Underwood knew the whole school would now about this by lunchtime. What would he say to his colleagues? Silly boy. Why should I care? Wants to waste his time I'll let him stew in his own juice. But he knew it wouldn't pass muster. There was nothing to do but face it down. There would be sly looks from the boys, maybe some nasty graffiti on the desks. He would ignore it all and wait for it to die down.

Eventually, the bell sounded. Sylvester grabbed his bag and walked out. The rest stood up at Underwood's command and waited to be dismissed, row by row. Underwood put his red pen back in his inside pocket, closed his briefcase, picked up the pile of exercise books and set off down the corridor. As he crossed the quad, he noticed a trio from the class he'd just taught, clenched in a corner, giggling, looking at him, eagerly chatting. He would have liked to go over and clip their ears. He walked on. In the staffroom, he sat in the seat which had been his for over a decade, picked up his flask from the table and poured a steaming, strong smelling cup. The odour reminded him of France, of croissants and a *grand crème* in the *Voltaire*. There would be next year, many more years. There was Fenwick. There would be others. Swallow sat beside him and lit a cigarette.

“Ça va?”

“Ça peut aller.”

Morgan passed through the staffroom, nodded at them and smiled. Underwood sat back and drank. There was nothing to worry about but how he regretted not locking that door.



*Fifty-five and*

*fit as ever!*

Since I renounced piss-headery I've bin completely transformed. In the pub I shout for "a pint o' sterilised barman!" – that's the stuff in the funny shaped bottles with a metal cap. Back home I gets it regular, straight from my cow Daisy. This spadeful of hay is for her. I bought her after the missus bugged off. She makes less of a racket than the missus too – just the occasional contented moo as I lower my trousers and stick her back legs in my wellies...

*It's not luck – it's*

**Milk**

PICTURE POST 3

*Picture Post 1938*

**ALEXIS LYKIARD**

**EPITAPHS FOR THE BLESSED MARGARET**

**GRAFFITO FOR A GRAVE**

Writ large on a wall  
somewhere in Brixton: IRON  
LADY? RUST IN PEACE

**SHOPPING FOR THE NATION**

Her greed-grocer mind  
spelled *Upward Mobility*  
whatever the price

**EARLY LEARNER IN THE CLASS STRUGGLE**

Young ‘Snobby Roberts’  
reinvented herself, moved  
on, waging worse wars

**OSBORNE AT HER OBSEQUIES**

A clown’s tears, facile:  
they’re all in this together,  
Tory crocodiles!

**TWO HAIKU (31 May 13)**

**HIGH STREET SUNSHINE**

Girls in crotch-creaser  
shorts – yet I forget my shades  
and must squint or frown

**SEASON OF CHANGE**

Shutters to adjust –  
sunlight seems quite various,  
new slants on old love

## INLAND BEACH HUT (V.)

Dave Birtwistle

On the southern coast beach huts cost a fortune; up north, Fleetwood or Knott End say, they were still pricey. Inland, however, they were far better value and you got so much more. They were miles away from it all and up here, on the Pennines, in the damp and drizzle and murk, it was possible to vanish from sight and into the wonderful privacy of one's own eco-system and lead a right old Life of Riley. That's what Chief Grey Cloud was doing right now. He surveyed the land he held in tutelage, for he had developed a powerful moral obligation for its safe-keeping. He did not regard himself as *the owner*, rather its Defender in the name of the Great Spirit, against the vandalism, consumerism and the blatant inhumanity that was emblematic of life these days.

Out on the land in his moccasins, far away from retail therapy and panic buying and must-get-away-holidays-in-hotels, there was a fresh sharpness to the light in the air and plants were adjusting to spring. The first potatoes were through, the broad beans were about six inches high and the garlic spears pointed up to the sky. He sat on a boulder and breathed in deeply. The people he'd known down south would only ask him what he was missing most. They assumed there was nothing worthwhile up north. They hadn't a clue. He was almost self-sufficient and self-reliant and the only real threat was environmental catastrophe but he had gained an inner strength and a faith which made him feel nature would re-assert herself and his job was to help her do so. Big Thunderer of the Algonquin had said "She nourishes us and that which we put into the ground she returns to us."

Darren, or *He Who Carries Rod for Fish*, had asked if he could bring his mother up to meet him. He said they would bring some fish and chips and then they could show her round. It began to rain so he moved to the taut, plastic sheeted poly-tunnel where he could just see the five barred gate and spot them the instant they arrived. He was slightly fearful of the meeting. It wasn't just the intrusion of yet someone else into his hidden retreat. His sanctuary was just that, a secret place where he could leave the rest of the world behind. He had to meet her of course. Darren's mum needed to know where her lad was spending his time and where he was learning so much. It was

just that he felt he already knew her somehow but he was blown if he knew where from. Perhaps it was way back. Anyway, he'd see. He sat there, watching. The atmosphere inside his transparent bubble was as far from the outside windswept, acid moorland as you could get and his hide-out was a weather-proof holiday home as well as a refuge and an incubator for plant life. Utter peace and contentment. A car engine broke the silence

He saw Darren open the gate, the car pull in and Darren close it behind. He saw him help his mother with the bags and as they came down the unmade drive something about her silhouette against the sky and the way she walked rang even more bells.

“Fish, chips and mushy peas just like the doctor ordered,” said Darren. Jim was taken aback. Under her rain hat was a flowing mane of honey-blond hair. He'd either seen that face before or dreamt about it. She had blue, laughing eyes, peachy cheeks, a pert nose and a smile that sent goose bumps through his whole nervous system.

“Jim. Chief. This is my mum. Mum, meet my friend Chief Grey Cloud.”

“Nice to meet you Mrs Speedwell.”

“It's Veronica. May I call you ‘Chief’, or do you prefer ‘Jim’?”

“Whatever you wish. Come on in.”

Over the food on the little table in the shed he couldn't take his eyes off her. She was something really special and somebody he felt he knew. She wore a pair of tight jeans and a tabard or smock under her anorak. She carried an air of sweet calmness and poise and as she ate her chips and looked up at him she had a profound effect on his emotional system.

“Can we show her round now, Grey Cloud? Before it chucks it down?” Darren and Jim took her out on a tour but to Jim's surprise she suddenly opened up and it was she who did all the talking. “That steep grassy rise would suit some tall flowers. You could have a foxglove bank!” Jim had never considered such a thing. “And over there, where it's almost terraced, you could have a mini wild flower meadow. That would bring in your pollinators for your vegetables.” He wondered where she got her knowledge from and how long it would be before she said ‘we’ or ‘our’ for ‘your’. But rather than it being intrusive it began to seem delightful.

## INLAND BEACH HUT (V)

“If we cleared those brambles that patch would make a grand sitting-out area for a sunny day.” This wasn’t presumption, her feminine touch chimed with Jim’s original vision of the place and added extra depths he couldn’t have foreseen. She was seeing new possibilities. His head swam.

“What’s yon doin’s?” Jim was enchanted by her voice and accent.

“Which doin’s is that?”

“That doin’s yonder. Dost see?”

The more she spoke the more she fascinated him. She was like a siren singing. He’d met her before, he was sure, but he could not put his finger on it. And here she was in her Wellington boots looking completely at home with the wet and the wind and the mud.

“I went to them festivals when I was younger. People spend a fortune to trudge through mud and camp out in slush and mire for their holidays. Our Darren says you have enough here for a slutch-patch of your own and you could spend the whole summer wallowing in it for nowt!”

She seemed to speak Old English via Greek via Circe. He was mesmerised.

“I’ve seen you somewhere.....”

“Were you in a band at th’Isle O Wight festival?”

“No I.....”

“Did you used to have a milk round?”

“Not that.....”

“Did you used to have a little van that you parked up back o’ that ginnel near Rozzerman Street.....?”

Darren had discreetly wandered off during the conversation and they found him potting up some brassicas on the poly-tunnel staging. He seemed to be *in the zone*, completely absorbed in nurturing plant life with a surety of touch that belied his age. He was holding a small plant pot in one hand and pushing a hole into the compost with a pencil then teasing in the small roots of a seedling and tamping it down like a granddad with pipe tobacco.

“We’ve got to go now. Say ‘Cheerio’ to Jim. You can come back next week and I’ll pop up after work with some slug pellets and them

seeds for that Cherokee ‘Trail of Tears’. And remind me to unfreeze one of my home made pies.” Jim was in a daze. Yet it was Veronica who had the last word. “That damp flat with the flaky wallpaper above the corner shop.....” Jim waved them goodbye with a trowel in one hand and a book on wild flowers in the other, his head and heart full of question marks.

He was still thinking about them long after they’d gone. Darren ... the similarity in his manner and attitude was striking. His mother..... a breath of fresh air and her spirit just fitted the place like she had been born into it. They were utterly unlike the people he’d known and left behind on the south coast.... Those dinner parties.... once you sat down you were locked in for two hours..... trapped! The same three conversations in a loop. Over and over again. Golf! The boredom of it. And the hypocrisy and petty snobbishness that went with it! The clubhouse where people of really dubious backgrounds pretended to be respectable for a few hours and dressed up in woolly jumpers! It did his head and his heart in. Then there were the holiday people. Six trips abroad a year and the same conversation after each one. Word for word! Aircraft. Upgrade. Cabin crew. Landing. Hotel. En suite. He knew it verbatim, backwards. He felt trapped here, out in the wild, just thinking about it. He went hot and cold. Then, the couple with *Compulsive Talking Disorder*! With the golfers and the holidaymakers blithely blathering away, the wife with *CDT* would proceed to prattle on and on talking solely about herself, completely ignoring anything anyone else in the room was saying. Her husband, not entirely reluctant to break the silence and take to lengthy utterance himself, had to shout to be heard over the top of her. It was a competitive blathering event of Olympic proportions. He felt, deep down, that one of the reasons he’d come up here was to unscramble his brains.

An hour or so later he walked slowly up to the five-barred gate and locked it. It was the highest point around here and when he’d locked the chain, the world was now shut out. He’d often climb up and sit on the top rung and stare out over that other world that was the moor itself. He could see for miles. The sky seemed to slow down overhead and the land rolled on and on and then seemed to stop abruptly as it came on the edge of the earth. The colours had haunting depths to them. Gradations of green like the leaves on ferns and earthy browns like the rich layers in a compost heap. The

## INLAND BEACH HUT (V)

contours rose and fell like a frozen, rough sea and the land seemed to suck the light inside itself and re-emit it, softened, at the very centre of attention on a stage without actors. The Moors were every bit the masterpiece Harry had described yet within this glowing sense of solidity, of permanence, the slow evolution over thousands of years, he detected a flickering of inner fragility.

Three days went by before he took himself up to the gate again. He had to be in a certain meditative state to do this view full justice. This time his emotional state of being was one of total shock. Out of the mist two gigantic machines on long legs were standing there, towering over the landscape, steaming like motionless breathing beasts. Their presence overpowered the moor itself. He hadn't sworn for some time but the sight blew him away.

“Fuck my boots! War of the Worlds! They're here!!!”

\* \* \*

**OIKUS** *Dave Birtwistle* (100 words exactly)

### **The Great Divide: Being High enough to get something extra.**

He had blackfly on his broad beans. (They do love those succulent light green bits at the tip of the stem) The trick is to pinch them out and then spray with soapy water. He wondered how aphids, especially onion fly who kept at eighteen inches above ground level managed to hit plants at this altitude. He looked up. He could see Pendle looming. A plan formed. From up there, occasionally, when the mist lifted, he could see that gaping chasm between those who own the means of production and those who have to sell their labour for a pittance.



Good heavens Eunice!  
Can't we do something about  
those two ugly lumps sticking  
out at the top?

Rupert maybe the owner's son but  
I don't think he should have come  
here straight from Harrow and Cambridge.

*"Up to Our Standard, Don't You Think?"*

*Every hundredth corset produced is fitted on a real model for a test. The factory manager checks it over before allowing it to go out. Rivalry is keen in this business: a good name all-important.*

*Picture Post 1938*

## THIS PERSON

*Tanner*

This man was walking down the street. Nothing unusual there, I know ... But some would argue that every man is special, so we will follow this particular citizen as he embarks down this particular street ...

His face is plain, he seems neither happy nor sad. His clothes are plain, just a brown T-shirt and blue jeans ... his walk is plain, he is neither in a hurry or dawdling ... he is just alive and walking down the street.

So ... what is he up to? A bit of shopping, perhaps? Does he have a favourite colour? What is his favourite sexual position? Does he believe in any of the gods?

Ooh, he's just turned into a supermarket. Let's follow him in there ... He browses the fruit and vegetable section ... he appears to be scrutinising over the choices, as a ruffle flickers across his big clean forehead ... his hand moves forward, and his fingers seem poised to grab that sweet yellow watermelon, but then his fingers retreat back into the hand, and it falls to his side once more ... what a considerate specimen this is – he clearly deems it unfair on his fellow shoppers to handle goods that he is uncertain of purchasing! If only there were more like him ...

Hey, maybe he is inflicted with some frightful skin disease, a highly contagious one, and is wary of spreading it? That would be exciting, no? But his skin is soft and well maintained, so it can't be that ...

He picks up a pound of bananas and moves on ... now, why bananas? Hmm? What does this imply? Perhaps he is a secret homosexual, too crippled by his own shyness or worse, his own self-inflicted shame, to align himself with the gay clubbing scene or even acquire a dildo from a saucy store, and so he is condemned to a life of buying phallic-shaped produce in what he prays is a rather casual manner, and returning hastily to his lowly shack, where he can draw the curtains and indulge in private pleasures, inserting these green, ripe bananas in all sorts of nooks and crannies about his person? Mind you, he doesn't appear to be in great haste, I must admit ... maybe he's just feeling a bit peckish and fancied a banana ...

Ah, now, our man has wandered over to the frozen food containers ... something has caught his eye. What can it be? Is it the chicken chow

mien? Or the smoked ham and cottage cheese pizza? Or was it the sight of his own reflection? Perhaps our subject is a conceited git, and cannot resist what he considers is the allure of his own appearance? Actually, he doesn't seem to be striking any kind of a pose, or attending to his hair, so he must be looking past his reflection ... But see him stare through the glass! Now I ask you: why doesn't he open the freezer door to have a better look? Maybe he is wary of the cold that will pull goose bumps from his arms, because as a child he was afflicted with terrible pneumonia, which rendered him delirious and incapable of functioning for a long period of time, causing his youth and education to pass him by, and ever since, the ever so slightest breeze has contained a daunting haunting for him? Then again, he is only wearing a T-shirt, and it is a tad nippy today. Maybe that isn't the case ...

Or, he is in love with ice. Yes, I mean, why not? He is madly in love with ice, he masturbates ferociously over his fridge freezer three or four times a day, he can't even visit other people's houses, lest he catches a glimpse of the host's kitchen, and his erection starts waving to all and sundry, so he is hesitant about opening the door, should the sight of clear, white ice consume him with lust and he starts playing his pleasure-trumpet right there and then in the isle ... Having said that, there doesn't appear to be a great deal going on between his legs, and he hasn't even blushed, so scratch that theory.

He turns into the beverages aisle ... he surveys the various bottles and cans for quite some time, debating ... so, he's thirsty, eh? And why is that? Has he been held captive by torturous aliens for the past two or three days, who, in their investigation of the human body and its limitations had refused him water, in the hope that they could document his slow death as entertainment for their wicked leader? ... No, that doesn't pan out, he's still alive.

He picks up a carton of apple juice. He looks at the picture on the cover a moment, before reading the back, most likely the ingredients. Seems innocent enough ... or maybe, just maybe, he is obsessed with apples, and he is checking the content because he wants to know just how appley this apple juice is, and then he will race home and draw lots of pictures of apples, and eat lots of apples, and dress up like an apple and pour the apple juice all over him, to give himself that apple aroma, then he'll climb a tree and hang from one of its' branches like an apple ... Wait, that doesn't make sense – he'd have filled a trolley full of apples back at the fruit and vegetable section, if he was truly

*that* preoccupied with apples ...

Maybe he just really hates doctors! No, I'm being silly now ... Our man puts down the carton of apple juice and turns into the next aisle ... Well now, what have we here? It's the snacks aisle, full of numerous shaped crisps in a whole spectrum of flavours. Nothing questionable about a young man choosing something nibbly for his lunch box, is there? Of course not. But hello, what's this he's noticed? Why, it's a nice little bag of salted peanuts ...

It's perfectly debatable that he is keeping a naked dwarf chained-up in his bath tub, who has a severe allergy to peanuts that causes his innards to implode and his skin to melt, and our fellow intends to video tape the whole gruesome death, as he forces the peanuts down the dwarf's crying little throat, and rubs them all over his searing skin, and then he'll make numerous copies of the video and sell them on the internet to a perverted sadist in Croydon ... oh, what am I thinking, he'd have selected a bigger bag for such a purpose, wouldn't he?

Anyway, he doesn't even buy the bag. He just puts it back down and goes to the counter. All he's purchasing is that pound of bananas – hardly gripping stuff, is it? The sour-faced teenage girl at the till rolls her eyes, blows a pink bubble and scans the bag of bananas.

'One pound-forty, please,' she murmurs, with all the conviction of a doorknob.

Our friend hands her the exact coinage, comprising one shiny pound coin and two silver twenty-pence pieces ...

'Thank you very much,' he smiles briefly, before exiting through the automatic door. The girl goes back to staring into space.

And that was that ...

I am so very sorry, dear reader. I thought I'd go out on a limb, follow the age-old maxim that everyone has a story to tell, but evidently I have proven myself wrong ... I have wasted my own time and, most unforgivably, yours, with this uneventful tripe. Believe me when I tell you that my intentions were good, and I was only doing my utmost to entertain you. In all sincerity, I beg your forgiveness, and assure you it will never happen again ...

Of course, when our protagonist returned home, he spent many hours doing something rather messy with an epileptic zebra, three transvestite nuns and a fishing rod. But I don't want to bore you with *those* details ...

## SPOOKED

*Jim Burns*

Some years ago I read a couple of books that dealt with the way in which the FBI carried out surveillance of various American writers. Those books, Herbert Mitgang's *Dangerous Dossiers: Exposing the Secret War against America's Greatest Authors*, and Natalie Robins' *Alien Ink: The FBI's War on Freedom of Expression*, provided extensive lists of authors, ranging from William Faulkner to Allen Ginsberg, and including Theodore Dreiser, Norman Mailer, and William Carlos Williams. I've just pulled a few names out of a large hat. At the time I was reading the books I did wonder how many British writers had been subjected to surveillance by our security services, but there didn't seem to be detailed information that would allow me to come to any kind of conclusion. It did seem obvious that the police and MI5 would have files on certain writers, but who were they?

James Smith's book offers some answers, though they're mainly about a handful of well-known writers. This is not said as a criticism, but instead to show that Smith has chosen to focus on a few specific names in an effort to demonstrate just how much surveillance took place.

The police and MI5 kept a close watch on what they thought of as "bohemian revolutionaries" or "intellectual communists," and Smith says that "Special Branch routinely monitored gatherings of 'Jewish and Intellectual type(s) of communists,' with the result that events ranging from small meetings to public festivals were attended by officers themselves or their details were relayed via a network of secret informants." There is ample evidence to indicate that mail was intercepted, telephones tapped, and premises bugged. Ralph Fox complained to the Post Office about irregularities in the delivery of his mail which he suspected, were due to it being intercepted. Nancy Cunard asked the police why her movements were monitored. And the novelist Ralph Bates had his manuscripts vetted by Special Branch as he passed through the port of Newhaven.

One group of writers of particular interest to the authorities included W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Christopher Isherwood, and Cecil

Day-Lewis, and Smith devotes a chapter to them. They were, in cultural terms, trend-setters, with their bias towards "poetry and drama deploying Marxist imagery and anti-fascist themes, political tracts such as *Forward from Liberalism* (Spender) and *The Mind in Chains* (edited by Day-Lewis), and contributions to Popular Front organs such as *Left Review*." All that, and their support for the Republican government in Spain, attracted the attention of the police and MI5. It does seem, though, that it wasn't necessarily their literary efforts which bothered the authorities, but rather their links to left-wing organisations or to individuals who were under suspicion. Spender and Day-Lewis had joined the Communist Party. Auden's friendship with Guy Burgess, later identified as one of the Cambridge spies, led MI5 to consider whether or not he had known about Burgess's activities and, in particular, his decision to flee to Russia to avoid being arrested. As for Isherwood, it was largely due to his knowing Gerald Hamilton that he became of interest to MI5. Hamilton, the model for Arthur Norris in Isherwood's *Mr Norris Changes Trains*, was in Smith's words, "a remarkably disruptive individual that even Isherwood's fictionalised representations seem to underplay." Hamilton was involved in criminal activity and suspicious political work, so was always under surveillance.

Smith notes that the members of the Auden group quickly moved away from radical politics and "made a rapprochement with the institutions they had seemingly previously rejected." This didn't mean that MI5 stopped keeping records of what they got up to. As mentioned earlier, Auden's links to Guy Burgess caused some concern. Day-Lewis experienced difficulties in the 1940s when he wanted to obtain work with the BBC and the Ministry of Information in order to avoid being conscripted into the armed forces. Like Spender, he was eventually cleared for employment, though with the suggestion that he be kept under some form of surveillance in case he tried to insert pro-communist propaganda into whatever he was doing. MI5 also wanted to know how Communist Party officials reacted to Day-Lewis's withdrawal from the Party. They obtained information about this from transcripts of conversations which were routinely bugged.

A somewhat different bunch of left-wingers who came to the notice of the police (particularly in the Manchester area) and MI5 included Ewan MacColl and Joan Littlewood. MacColl was known to local

police because of his membership of the Young Communist League and his involvements with left-wing street theatre. The police constantly harassed MacColl, who was still then using his real name, James Miller, though initially MI5 were not all that interested in him. It would appear that he first aroused attention through his work with the British Workers' Sports Federation (a communist front organisation) and his participation in the 1932 mass trespass at Kinder Scout in the Peak District. But even then, the MI5 investigator, Roger Hollis, wasn't concerned about MacColl's theatre work and remarked, "I think Miller may be left to his plays." This was to change when MacColl started to work for the BBC.

Joan Littlewood had moved to Manchester in 1934, looking for work in radio and with local repertory groups. She married MacColl in 1935, and co-operated with him in the Workers' Theatre Movement, Red Megaphones, and Theatre Union. The latter was a forerunner of the more-famous venture, Theatre Workshop, which was established in London in 1953. Smith cites a number of reports to MI5 by local police in which the various activities of MacColl ("communist cultural") and Littlewood (radio programmes) were noted. There was also a report which commented on their social lives: "at weekends, and more particularly when Miller's parents are away from home, a number of young men who have the appearance of Communist Jews are known to visit Oak Cottage." This was the Miller family home where MacColl and Littlewood were then living. The degree of surveillance carried out was quite significant, and another report stated that the detective concerned had been "able to listen to their conversations during the evenings at Oak Cottage," though he did say that he hadn't heard anything relating to communism and related political matters.

Police and MI5 surveillance continued through the war years, and Littlewood was still hired by the BBC, though not on a permanent basis. As for MacColl, who was still using his real name, he was briefly in the army, deserted, went into hiding, and survived until 1945 without being arrested. He then re-surfaced as Ewan MacColl. Both he and Joan Littlewood had, to a large degree, moved away from direct contact with the Communist Party, but Smith says that they functioned with a social framework that included many Party members. And in 1952 MI5 intercepted a letter containing an application from MacColl to rejoin the Communist Party. When

## SPOOKED

Theatre Workshop was set up in Stratford it immediately became the subject of surveillance, and Littlewood later recalled seeing plain-clothes policemen taking notes in the theatre. Smith also mentions that information about Theatre Workshop was passed to MI5 by contacts within the "broader theatre industry." Were suspicions about it really justified? It's worth drawing attention to an incident which perhaps indicated that Littlewood and company were independently minded. Carl Weber, a famous director based in East Berlin, came to England to supervise the Theatre Workshop production of Brecht's *Mother Courage*. But he proved to be "much too German, much too dogmatic, and even much too Communist," and was soon barred from the theatre during rehearsals.

Two political writers known to MI5 were George Orwell and Arthur Koestler, both with a record of involvement in the Spanish Civil War, among other things. Orwell had been watched by the Wigan police when he was in the town gathering material for *The Road to Wigan Pier*. He was suspected of "communist activities," and said to be associating with "undesirable elements," the latter presumably known communists and other left-wingers. He received "an unusual amount of correspondence" and was observed making notes about local industries, etc. The fact that Orwell was already a published novelist and journalist doesn't seem to have come to the attention of the police in Wigan. One of the things that can be seen in reports from police in the provinces is that it was forms of what they thought of as unconventional behaviour that often bothered them. References to casual ways of dressing occur, and interests that didn't fit into an accepted pattern are commented on. This isn't surprising, and anyone who grew up in the towns and cities of Britain in the 1940s and 1950s will easily recognise the kind of thinking behind many police assumptions.

Orwell remained a problem even after publishing his mistrust of communists in *Homage to Catalonia*. He worked for the BBC during the Second World War, and Special Branch officers claimed that he had tried to obtain employment for alleged subversives. A report states: "This man Orwell has advanced communist views, and several of his Indian friends say that they have seen him at communist meetings. He dresses in a bohemian fashion both at his office and in his leisure hours."

Fortunately for Orwell, some members of MI5 were a little more

sophisticated in their judgements, and James Smith says that the agent checking the police report "did little to hide the sense of scorn felt for the intellectual paucity of the police." Surveillance of Orwell continued but on a diminished scale, and mostly by Special Branch.

With Arthur Koestler the security services had a much more complex problem to deal with. Smith is of the opinion that compared to the "relatively sparse files on Orwell, Koestler's MI5 file narrates what, in many places, seems more like the plot of a spy-thriller than fact." And he adds that Koestler could be legitimately seen as a "plausible security concern." He had been a member of the Communist Party and had engaged in "underground" activities in Europe. He had been involved with the Party in Germany, worked with the propaganda networks of Willi Munzenberg and Otto Katz, two notorious communists, and was imprisoned in Spain when, using the cover of being a newspaper reporter, he tried to gather evidence about how Franco was being supported by Hitler and Mussolini. Further adventures took Koestler to the Middle East, internment in a French concentration camp, a short stint in the Foreign Legion, and a roundabout route to get into Britain. When he arrived he was arrested and almost deported. He had, by this time, severed his links to the Communist Party, and though he was viewed with suspicion by MI5 he managed to persuade enough people in positions of influence that he was genuinely anti-communist. During the Cold War years he could always be counted on to provide an attack on the tyranny that communism represented. He was, for example, one of the contributors to *The God that Failed*, an influential anthology in which Koestler, Stephen Spender, Richard Wright, Ignazio Silone, and others, told how they had lost their faith in communism.

James Smith claims that "Special Branch, and indeed the police forces in general, were manifestly (and sometimes comically) incapable of understanding controversial but legal left-wing political movements and had particular difficulty in judging the security threat posed by intellectuals who involved themselves with dissident causes." And he goes on to say that ordinary policemen were not intellectually equipped to assess the masses of information they gathered. Their response was to harass suspects, gather more information, and invoke security alerts that had little or no basis in reality. Even some MI5 officers were guilty of similar attitudes and behaviour.

Smith does stress that, whatever the nuisance aspect of the surveillance of British writers (and some may well have missed out on work due to MI5 reports on their suitability for employment), the security apparatus did not, on the whole, have the power "to decide what was or was not beyond the pale." What's more, "It is one of the strengths of Britain's political tradition, in an era when HUAC, McCarthyism, and J. Edgar Hoover's FBI were tearing America's cultural life apart, that MI5 and Special Branch remained marginal, and frequently contested, rather than decisive, voices." This is an accurate summing up, and anyone needing confirmation about the contrast with what happened in the USA ought to read the various histories, biographies, autobiographies, and other documents of what has been referred to as "The Great Fear." Writers went to prison for refusing to say whether or not they were communists, blacklists were established, and publishers leaned on to refuse to print work by left-wing authors. What happened in Britain in terms of harassment was minor by comparison.

However, Smith does ask if "the assumption of the presence of surveillance resulted in self-censorship. Did certain authors choose not to write on certain topics, to not publish in certain venues, or to not speak out on certain political causes because of the fear that this was being recorded and potentially held against them?" He thinks this may have been the case, at least with regard to some of the people he has looked at. Joan Littlewood broke off her connection to the Communist Party because she was worried that it was affecting her career with the BBC. Orwell deliberated about whether or not to write for a communist publication. And Koestler made a point of not associating with left-wing groups in Britain.

It's difficult to know about questions of self-censorship unless a writer admits to it, but I do wonder how many of them, not necessarily well-known or widely published, drew back from publishing work that might be looked on as politically questionable? The police probably had files on writers in their respective areas who were known left-wingers. Smith mentions Shelagh Delaney in this respect, and her file refers to her being a "communist sympathiser." The fact that her play, *A Taste of Honey*, was being produced by Theatre Workshop was also noted. We don't know how many other files existed locally, or if some writers backed away from political involvements when they worried that their jobs or their families

might be affected by police harassment.

James Smith acknowledges that many files have still not been released, and those that have were subject to "redaction," with many details blanked out. Working with the materials available to him he has written a valuable and well-documented book that will, one hopes, lead to further research into surveillance of writers by the police and MI5.

BRITISH WRITERS AND MI5 SURVEILLANCE, 1930-1960 by James Smith Cambridge University Press. 206 pages. £55 (US \$95). ISBN 978-1-107-03082-4

\* \* \*

*OIKU Dave Birtwistle*

**Button holed: Beyond Boredom.**

He was becoming mind-numbed and brain deadened at the same time. TV was bad enough but sitting here in somebody else's house, trapped at a table, having to listen to a hostess with *Compulsive Talking Disorder!* She'd married a footballer and wanted to talk about herself and her advantages. Her jaw was already working as she entered the room and she'd parrot and yak and tattle and rattle for the next hour and a half. He was losing the will to live when a question arose. Can football catapult an uncouth, rough-arsed Neanderthal straight over the Great Class Divide?

## ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES

*Keith Howden*

Birdy on his fortnightly jaunt (the loony bus picks him up at ten) coughs like a frog and tells me again how mustard gas destroyed him, maskless, guarding Biggin Hill. I don't believe. More likely fags. What bit I see of him, he's ten *Park Drive* an hour. Tonight, in confidence, was telling me how his fat brother-in-law - once Captain of a torpedo - works these days caddying, lugging sticks for stockbrokers and bankers. Only the other week was carting clubs for some half-blind Bank Manager needs pointing at the pin and has to play with a bright yellow ball. Birdy, busy these days demolishing the great philosophers spent yesterday, he says, debunking Plato. Tomorrow, Darwin. Birdy, no Christian, winks and says he's reconciled *The Origin of Species* with the *Book of Genesis*. Adam and Eve: no doubt *created*. Cain and Abel also: *begat*. It must be there the problem starts. Who could they marry? What creatures were there for their mates? Only monkeys. Birdy's sure of that. And that's man's starting point. Why else do we eat meat? That blind Bank Manager strayed into rough. They found him addressing a dandelion. It's a story

Birdy loves telling, of this bloated  
capitalist who can't distinguish  
a golf ball from a weed. And that's  
what education does for them. It's all  
a plot. How else explain a Cabinet  
of puffs from Public Schools who always get  
everything wrong ? Monkeys could do  
it better. **Ready now, Gentlemen -**  
that Neanderthal Charge Nurse  
is spoiling Thursday's anthropologies.  
The loony bus is here and time for him  
to go. Life's little ironies. Birdy  
winks at the door, confirming us  
the only two conspirators who know  
the secrets of Cabinet Government and  
humanity's simian origins.....

\* \* \*

**OIKU: August Bank Holiday.** (Dave Birtwistle)

He could sense the storm system in the air. Electricity crackled about his head and the rain started to pelt it down. This English summer! His potatoes had blight, the peas had thripps, his broccoli had club root, his tomatoes had verticillium wilt and his onions were rotting in the ground. Many people would become disheartened but he wasn't going to give in. As he pulled himself up by his boot-straps he heard the wind sigh in the trees like the cry of the dispossessed then it took up and puffed and roared in his ears like songs of solidarity.

## IT'S ONLY ME

*Tom Kilcourse*

### 5. Nan

I can only guess at what dreams filled the head of young Annie Liddel Grey Douglas when she left her birthplace, Lennoxton in Scotland, and travelled with her sister to Manchester in search of employment. Born in 1876 she would have been in her late teens at the time. I wonder what drove her from the Scottish town. There was industry there, and by the time she left she would already have been employed. Perhaps she lost her job, and in an age when working-class families could not afford to carry ‘passengers’ she would have had to find work quickly. Was she driven by impoverishment or family problems, or attracted by the excitement of the bustling English city? Whatever the spur, it is unlikely that she foresaw the life of drudgery that I witnessed nearly a half-century later, when she rescued me from the gutters of Harpurhey.

Arriving in Manchester, sometime in the early 1890s, she found a job as a packer with Clayton Aniline chemical factory. It was hardly an occupation for a young woman seeking a glamorous life, but Nan was ever the pragmatist. Early photographs suggest that she was not a girl to attract an army of suitors, with her thin, bony face bearing a slightly aquiline nose. Nevertheless, she clearly appealed to handsome Edward Brandwood, two years her junior, who lived with his parents and numerous siblings in North Road, Clayton. In my study I still have a photograph of Ted’s family, showing a stern looking patriarch and his wife surrounded by their fourteen offspring. From anecdotes that old Ted shared with me, it would appear that his courtship of his ‘Scottish lady’, as he often referred to Nan, was a lengthy affair. Ted also talked of spending time working in Scotland, and it is possible this happened before Annie moved to Manchester. Indeed, it is possible that they met in Scotland and Annie moved to Manchester to be near him. The town of Lockerbie was often mentioned and I suspect that they somehow met there. However, wherever they first met the couple married in 1906, and rented the newly built terraced house in Richmond Street, Newton Heath which was to be their home for the rest of their lives.

Ted often spoke to me of the past, perhaps because the present gave him little to feel proud of. He talked with pride of Sunday afternoons in the park when he and Nan were the ‘best dressed couple there’, turning envious heads to watch them pass. That was probably pure fantasy, but he repeated the boast on several occasions over the years. If true, their life did not remain enviable for long.

The couple’s first child, Nell, died in infancy, but they went on to produce two more children, my uncle George in 1909 and my mother in December 1911. Life was very hard for Nan, raising two children with little money and no modern aids in the house. On Mondays, the whole day was devoted every week to washing bedding and the family’s clothes, using a gas fired boiler, a zinc dolly tub and a wooden dolly, or ‘posser’, to agitate the clothes in the tub. The clothes would then be run between the wooden rollers of a large mangle driven by a hand-turned wheel. The water thus squeezed out ran onto the concrete floor of the scullery. I well remember the steely clatter of Nan’s clogs on the concrete as she moved from boiler to tub to mangle repeatedly until all was done. On a fine day the washing would be hung on a line to dry in the back yard. At other times they would be hung before the kitchen fireplace on a wooden ‘maiden’, or on a rack hung from the ceiling which could be raised and lowered by cords running through pulleys.

Somehow, in the midst of this activity Nan had to find time to prepare a meal for the children and her self at lunchtime, and again in the late afternoon. Later still food had to be cooked for Ted’s return from work. Most of the cooking was done on the cast-iron gas stove that occupied a corner of the scullery, next to the mangle, but stews or broths would be placed over the fire in an iron range in the kitchen. The washing remained to be ironed later in the week, this done with two flat irons heated on the stove. The house had no refrigerator, so she was forced to shop for food on most days, roughly a mile to Church Street, then back while carrying a heavy basket. All food had to be prepared and cooked from scratch, ready meals or takeaways being unheard of, apart from chip shops of which there were many by the time I arrived on the scene. The ‘chippy’ offered a very narrow range of foods in those days, confined mainly to a couple of types of fish, typically cod or haddock in batter, with chips and peas, and some sold hot meat pies. Keeping the house clean was also a gruelling physical task for Nan.

There was no vacuum cleaner for the floors, and doorsteps and window sills were kept clean by rubbing with wet 'donkey stones', blocks of yellow or white pumice.

Given such a routine it must have been a relief when George and Elsie grew up and eventually left home. Nan had reason to expect a less hectic life as old age approached. It was not to be. Within three years of Elsie leaving to marry, Nan accepted responsibility for Elsie's infant son: me. At the age of sixty-three she took in a disturbed child who had no inkling of how fortunate he was to be adopted unofficially by this simple woman. I can only have been a burden, but throughout my time in that old lady's care I was never made to feel unwanted. My happiest memories are of the times when Ted worked on night-shifts. Nan would darn our socks or do some other chore that enabled her to sit while listening to Tommy Handley or Wilfred Pickles on the radio. Later in the evening she would put a hot-water bottle in her bed and tuck me in with it. I was usually well away by the time she joined me there. When Ted was on day-work I had my own bedroom, but it never felt as comfortable as when I shared with Gran.

It is only now, as an old man, that I begin to fully appreciate what Nan did for me. I wonder how she felt when I took for granted her attention to me, and coped with the pull on my affections that Elsie continued to have. Elsie's pull made itself felt in several ways, none of which were helpful to Nan and Ted. Her lover's concern for my soul ensured that I was sent to a Roman Catholic school. My grandparents were not strongly religious, but any vestigial attachment they had was certainly not to Rome. Nan had been raised in the traditions of the Church of Scotland, and Ted's instincts were strictly C of E. So the old couple did not relate closely to my school or the priest.

The second maternal influence was more insidious. My mother had agreed to visit us every weekend and take some of the responsibility for my upbringing, as well as giving her impecunious parents a few shillings towards the cost of my upkeep. This happened for a while, but it did not take long for my mother to find more interesting ways in which to spend her weekends. Visits became increasingly rare, usually coinciding with her need to borrow money from Nan. As I was in the habit of squatting on the doorstep each Saturday morning, eyes straining for sight of Elsie turning into the street, her haphazard

arrangements led to frequent disappointment and a fractious child needing consolation. Oddly, this never diminished my attachment to my mother, which must at times have been irksome for Nan and Ted with their adult appreciation of irresponsibility. Yet I cannot remember a single occasion when criticism of Elsie was voiced in my presence. Nor did I ever hear hints that the financial burden was too great.

Money always seemed to be a problem for Elsie. Part of the difficulty may have been due my father's cavalier attitude to maintenance payments awarded by the Courts. I remember many occasions when Elsie met me in Manchester and asked me to wait on the Court steps while she went in to get her money. More often than not she would re-emerge cursing.

Lack of funds meant that my grandparents had to make do and mend, with Nan darning my socks and patching my pants and jacket etc. Ted had a small cobbler's last that he would use to repair my shoes. Despite his best efforts I was excused football at school because my boots were in a poor state. One kick of a ball and the boot would have disintegrated. Looking back, I find it remarkable that Nan tolerated my mother's behaviour, as did Ted, without any sign of irritation, or word of criticism in my presence. Though Nan was a fairly taciturn woman she was not afraid to make her views known when necessary. I recall overhearing her criticising Ted for the time and money he spent in the Friendship Inn. They did not realise that I was nearby, and she was forceful in expressing her displeasure to him. It is probable then that she did try to sort Elsie out, in private.

That wiry little woman nurtured me, washed me, and protected me from the world as best she could right into her seventies. I had noticed the increasing bend in her back for some time, but saw it as no more than normal in an old woman. I had never heard of osteoporosis, the disease that in time confined her more or less to the house. The bed had eventually to be moved downstairs to the front parlour, her bedroom for the next two years. In that time her condition deteriorated to the point where she could barely move from her bed to the fireside chair in which she spent the day. Housework had to be left to a neighbour who was paid to look after Nan. To Elsie's credit her visits became more frequent and reliable, and she would attend to some of the chores that the neighbour, Geoff's mother, overlooked. Ted too did his best, though he was still

working full time at the wireworks, and I was roped in to do the shopping. I made myself useful in part from perceived self interest. Helping around the house and running errands meant that Nan did not insist on my going to school. Missing school became a habit that would carry a penalty later.

Her last trip away from the house was at Christmas 1949, when she and Ted took me to visit Uncle George's rather grand home in Prestwich. For reasons that I shall touch upon later, that visit caused irreparable damage to her health. Following it, Nan became much weaker. I was fourteen, when she was finally taken into Crumpsall Hospital. The last time I saw her was during a visit there. I remember her last words to me, and my response with a pain that still inflicts at times.

Nan lay in the hospital bed, propped up by extra pillows. She weighed no more than six stone. "Kiss me, Tommy" she said in a weak, asthmatic voice. Her lined face was yellowish and waxy looking. Sweat beaded her forehead, and the thin, grey hair was moist on the scalp. Nan was dying. She knew it, as did the adults assembled around the bed: her husband Ted, my mother, and Uncle George. Only I endured in ignorance. I held back, perched on the edge of the bed, looking to Uncle George for guidance. At his nod I leant forward quickly, my lips barely touching her cheek before I pulled back. The adults no doubt put this down to boyish embarrassment, to pre-pubescent reluctance to show affection openly. If so, they were wrong. My motives were baser. Though death was alien to me, I did know that my Grandma was ill. I feared some terrible contagion. Thankfully, only I knew the truth of that. Minutes later we left the ward and I never saw her again. It was August, 1951.

People speak of children's sensitivity, of the need to shield them from cruel realities, or to break gently to them news that adults find painful. If they are right, then I was a most unusual child. What protected me from the cruel reality of my grandmother's death was a juvenile obsession with self. At fourteen I judged events by their impact on me, *my* pleasure and *my* freedom. As adults muttered sombrely of their loss, I heard the words, but did not feel myself deprived. For twelve years I had lived under the same roof as Nan and Ted, and returned to that house after seeing her for the last time, yet her absence did not register with me. Perhaps it was because she

had been away for some weeks before her death, her life waning in a hospital bed. So untouched was I by these events that as the cortege passed slowly along Church Street, I caught sight of a classmate outside the baker's shop, and tapped on the car window to attract his attention. My concern was that he should see me riding in the posh car, a unique experience for me. He did not, and the opportunity passed when mother took my wrist to prevent further window banging.

Self absorption continued to obscure actuality for some time after Nan died. I was an ATC cadet at the time, and the day following her funeral I was sent away for a week to an Air Training Corps camp to join my mates, who had travelled the day before. This was an effort by adults to allay a grief that lived in their imagination only. I had a wonderful time in Warwickshire, utterly innocent of any thought for either grandparent. Upon my return I picked up life where I had left it, going to school, playing cricket, flying on hedonistic wings. It took a while, and the sight of an old man crying to bring me to ground. Ted was not readily given to tears. It is not healthy for adults to feel guilt ridden for the misdeeds of childhood, but for as long as I live I shall regret the brevity of that final kiss.

## 6 Ted

Edward Brandwood, Ted to everyone who knew him, was born in 1878 to 26 year-old James Brandwood and 25 year-old Kate, née Robinson. He was the fifth child of the marriage, but more were to come. The Brandwood family is historically associated with Bolton in Lancashire and I remember being taken there as a little boy to visit 'Uncle Jim'. However, Ted's parents were people of Warrington, where James worked as a wire weaver. By the time Ted was born the family had settled in North Road, Clayton, an unfashionable district of Manchester. They were not wealthy and Ted, having benefited from a minimal formal education, followed his father into wire weaving at a very early age. As the new, twentieth century dawned Ted met the woman with whom he was to share his life, Annie Douglas, my grandmother.

Having married in 1906, they spent the next forty-five years together

in their rented unpretentious, two bed-roomed dwelling, with its outside toilet in the backyard, a kitchen that they called the scullery, a living room they called a kitchen, and a parlour they used only for visitors. It was there that their first born, Nell, entered the world, and left it within months. The death of his first born left a deep scar on Ted and forty years later, he still spoke of 'poor little Nell' in uncharacteristically melancholic tones. His two surviving children, George and Elsie could not have been more different from each other. George's studious, sombre seriousness contrasted sharply with his hedonistic sister's irresponsible promiscuity. He married Louise, a slightly built, quiet woman in a union that was childless. Young George followed Ted into wire weaving, under protest. He never forgave his father for pressing him into the trade.

When I came under Ted's roof late in 1939, some two years after my birth, there commenced a peculiar symbiosis in which a mid-twentieth century child depended for his development on a couple still anchored in Victorian values and habits. What they gained from the arrangement is unclear. Nan and Ted never once indicated that my presence was anything but beneficial, though a couple in their sixties must have found a disturbed child a burden at times. I sometimes hear the term 'Victorian' used negatively, suggesting bigotry and authoritarianism. Such use might have some general validity, but I cannot associate it with the tolerance and loving care that I received as a boy. In particular, the typical caricature of the Victorian male, a distant disciplinarian, bears little resemblance to the man who acted as my surrogate father.

Certainly, as someone born ten years before Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and whose first twenty-three years of life were spent under her reign, it would be surprising if Ted's values were not largely 'Victorian'. He was a nationalist, proud to be British, and proud of the Empire and monarchy. He loved King George and was saddened when I, with all the maturity of a thirteen year old, announced my republican sentiments. His attitude to women was 'patronising' by today's standards. He saw it as the role of the man to put bread on the table, and the woman's role to run the house. He lived by that rule, working a six day week for many years, and putting in a twelve hour day. Men who did not work earned his contempt, as did any man who struck a woman. He once returned

from work with scratches on his face. Seeing a man hitting a woman in the street he had intervened, only to find himself under attack from the woman. He was masculine in physical stature, and mentality. Genuinely hard, but not what we today would call macho. If Ted had a loose tooth he would remove it himself. Being a wire weaver he always had some of the stuff in the house, wire thinner than cotton thread, but very strong. He would cut a piece about eighteen inches long, tie one end round the offending molar and the other end round a poker. Taking the poker in both hands with the wire slack, he would suddenly push the thing away, so snatching the tooth out. I saw him perform this bit of dentistry more than once. Ted obeyed the law of the land, and felt strongly that others should do likewise. In such ways he was Victorian, yet in other respects he was more enlightened than a later generation of fathers.

Many of my contemporaries received little attention from their fathers, except perhaps in a disciplinary encounter. I cannot remember a single parent who gave any of his time to us as a group, but Ted frequently did. When I was about eleven or twelve the gang would go to a nearby croft in summer to play cricket. Ted often turned up to act as umpire and coach, showing us how to hold a bat, how to put spin on the ball, and so on. Thanks to his coaching I could bowl a mean leg-break when only eleven. If we were low on numbers he would sometimes bowl the odd over, despite having hands crippled by his work at the loom. He was already in his seventies, and still working full-time as a wire weaver. Ted was cricket mad, and often told me that as a young man he had been close to county standard. I was taken frequently to Old Trafford to see Lancashire play. Ted would sit with me until lunch time then slide off to the bar while I ate my corned beef sandwiches. On the way home he would call in a pub for a couple of pints, leaving me to wait in the outside porch with my lemonade.

Looking back now, I am amazed at how much of his time old Ted devoted to my development. As well as cricket he taught me how to play draughts, dominoes and various card games. He devised quizzes for me on history and geography, himself acting as the quiz master. He would talk to me for hours, pouring out experiences and incidents from his life. I learned of the cricketing skills of W.G. Grace, of the Boer war, he spoke of the relief of Mafeking as if it had just

happened, and of Kitchener, the Titanic, the arrest of Dr. Crippen and so much more. He had actually been to see Buffalo Bill Cody perform in a circus, and talked of the Indians riding round the ring. Though short on formal education he was knowledgeable, and would bring events to life for me.

Old Ted was no saint. I have already mentioned his love of a pint or three, and that was his Achilles heel. He invariably called into the Friendship Inn on his way home from a twelve hour stint at the loom, and would be there again at the weekend, lunch-time and evening. He got drunk occasionally, though never when I was in his charge, and he never had a day off work because of drink. Indeed, I cannot remember him having time off work from any cause, though I suppose he must have had. He always gave Nan her housekeeping money, but his habit ensured that there was little to spare. They never went on holiday, and Nan's 'best frock' remained the same for as long as I can remember. There was tension between them over his drinking, but they never argued in my presence. Because of his investing so much of his earnings in the welfare of Rothwell's Brewery Ted had to continue working into his eighties, acting as a works cleaner when he could no longer manage the weaving.

My admiration and affection for Ted was not shared by everyone. His son remained bitter all his life. Until Nan died in 1951 George visited us every month with his wife, but after his mother's death I never saw him again until Ted's funeral in 1968. Ted died peacefully in his sleep, aged ninety. As the funeral car left the crematorium George's only comment was 'Well, that's the end of Ted, then'. His voice lacked remorse or sadness. Ironically, though George clearly loved his mother, he inadvertently contributed to her death. By the end of the forties George Brandwood had done well for himself, being one of the very few people I knew who owned a car, and having bought a large, detached house in Prestwich, a prestigious area of Manchester. Ted, Nan and I were invited to have Christmas dinner there in 1949. Louise's brother was there also, with his wife. At the end of the evening a thick fog descended on the area: a real pea-souper. Louise's brother was invited to stay the night while George's parents and their twelve year-old charge set out to walk towards Manchester centre, a good few miles away. Eventually, a bus appeared and we climbed aboard, but Nan was coughing

seriously by then. She never regained her health.

I have tried often to understand George's antipathy towards his father. Perhaps George and I knew different Teds. From my perspective Ted's only imperfection was his addiction to booze, but maybe I was seeing a character from whom the stains of a younger Ted had been expunged by time. George might have experienced a stricter, less tolerant Ted, a younger patriarch who dominated his son, insisting that he follow him into the trade.

The old photograph of Ted's family that I still possess shows his father as a central figure staring proudly into the camera. Ted often spoke to me of his mother and it was clear from what he said that she was a dutiful wife to her dominant husband. Therefore, Ted's model was of a patriarchal family. He had followed his father into wire weaving and probably saw it as natural for George to follow. He would possibly have seen George's protest as the foolishness of youth.

If he did 'improve' with age Ted was far from being uncommon. Many of us have mellowed by the time we become grandparents, being wiser perhaps, more tolerant, more at peace with others. We treat our grandchildren differently from how we behaved towards their parents when young. So, to my son's children, grandpa Tom is OK, yet my own daughter has not contacted me for over twenty years, even when, in 2004, we thought that I was about to die in hospital. Perhaps that is why I feel so close to the old man, and why George was wrong when he said 'that's the end'. Ted is alive today, in me, and certainly influenced my attitudes to society and my expectations of what family life would be like.

It is possible that Ted privately recognised mistakes in his treatment of George and that his devotion to me reflected a determination to seize a second chance. I was perhaps the beneficiary of some sense of guilt in the old man. As well as showing me how to play games and talking about the history he had lived through, he involved me in much of what he did in the house. When mending shoes he would have me watch him work, explaining in detail what he was doing, and why. I remember him showing me how to dress a crab, and how to toast bread on a toasting fork before the fire. Though it is difficult

for young people today to consider toast as a treat, in the days of rationing it was considered a luxury because it absorbed so much butter. I would pester Ted to let me make some toast, and he usually gave ground with good grace. The only time he showed the tensions he must have felt was one morning when he returned from a night shift and placed a copy of the Beano comic on the table where I was having breakfast. Ted had always used the word 'beano' to mean a feast. He clearly expected me to be excited by his gift of the comic, but I carried on eating, telling him that I already had a beano (my breakfast). He snatched up the comic and threw it on the fire.

A well known broadcaster once remarked that old people should not be so hard on themselves for the mistakes they have made during life. It is good advice. However, if we believe in free will, one cannot escape the sense of culpability for past errors. Yet while acknowledging our accountability, self-flagellation is an unhealthy response. We must learn to accept and live with ourselves. Ted was not a religious man, but perhaps he prayed to God for strength to bear his imperfections. I know that I do. It gives me hope to remember that, while George kept his distance, it was the morally imperfect Elsie who cared for Ted, cleaning his house, doing his shopping and slipping him the odd fiver from her wages in the last decade of his life. Perhaps having imperfections makes it easier to understand those of others.

By the mid-sixties my mother was living alone within a short walking distance of Richmond Street. Now well into her fifties she had at last no man in her life, other than her father who she saw each day, and me, a fairly frequent visitor. The terraced house she rented was even smaller than Ted's, with an outside toilet in the yard and a front door that let directly onto the pavement. She was independent, having a job as a cleaner in the canteen of a large company in Trafford Park, and happy not to have some bloke criticising her choice of wallpaper, or telling her generally what to do.

Whatever else I remember about my mother, the most outstanding feature was her act of generosity to old Ted when he agreed to go into a home that cared for the elderly. She would visit him there at least a couple of times a week, and after about three months in the home Ted confessed to being very unhappy there. The staff insisted

that he be in by nine at night and in bed by ten. His opportunity to enjoy a pint was limited to the evenings when Elsie visited and took him to the pub across the road. When the old man revealed his unhappiness, Elsie asked him why he didn't leave. "Where could I go now?" He asked. "I gave my home up ages ago." It was then that my mother told him that she had kept the house on for him, paying the rent out of her wages. She told me later that Ted was on his feet and heading for his wardrobe before she had finished speaking.

Thanks to Elsie, Ted enjoyed his independence in that house until he quietly passed away in the night, his slippers under his bed and his pipe and tobacco on a nearby table. It gives me pleasure to know that he lived long enough to see me make it into university, and to meet my second wife with whom I have spent the rest of my life. He died knowing that his devotion to my welfare had not been entirely wasted, and that his sacrifices on my behalf were appreciated and understood. I cannot know where I would have been today without his intervention, but I believe that it would have been a far less comfortable space than I now occupy.

I do not belong to any organised religion, but a belief that our existence has purpose keeps atheism at bay. What that purpose may be I have no idea, but if there is a life hereafter I can wish for no more than a reunion with Ted, Nan and Elsie.

**KEITH HOWDEN**

**THREE PIECES FROM JOLLY ROGER**

*Based on Holbein's woodcuts  
The Dance of Death*



**The Mendicant Friar**

'Hold on, Sunshine. I'm with Cleansing. My Boss  
hates beggars - doesn't like dirty doleys  
fouling his patch, giving nice folk distress  
with cold and homeless tales. We know they're lies.  
Is it snorting or pills? Cocaine or cannabis?  
Don't try the old no jobs routine. I've heard all that.  
Don't spiel about your rights, call me officious  
or tell me you're collecting for the guy. It's not  
bloody November. Pull the other one.  
Collection tins are out. The gaffer  
has a great place for lads in your condition.  
We'll find some space for you beside the fire.'



### **The Young Woman**

'Come with me. *Let us go then you and I.....!*  
No, I'm not Eliot, just some Prufrock fraud  
and blagger. Don't you reckon this evening sky  
might have been etherised by Lucien Freud?  
Your father won't approve of me. He's been  
wasting his loot on silks and private tutors.  
Some frugal Breughel lacking cash and skin  
will not have figured in his cast of suitors.  
He'd have preferred that strumming gigolo  
to have you, but in rivalry, I'd piss it.  
(*I wish I could.*) Chat me some Michael Angelo  
and *let us go and make our visit....!*

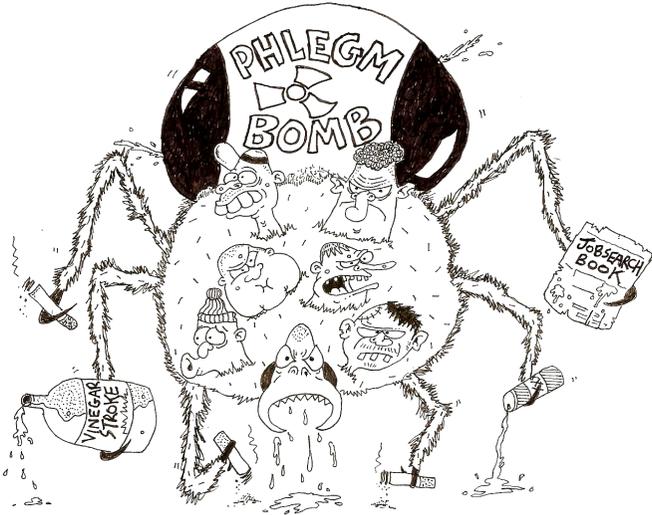
**Memento Mori**

Not many like my voice, but everyone hears  
Roger in the end. For you it might be  
my sales chat on your mobile touting time-shares  
you can't resist in some uncharted country.  
I hide in machines that speak your weight just as  
your Mass assumes its capital. I inhabit  
the lift's robot lips, the monotone that says  
*'Your door is closing.'* You will hear my dialect,  
waiting alone in some darkened station,  
that blur from another platform's tannoy broaching  
your ears with its message that 'the last train  
to nowhere you can imagine is now approaching.'

## HARDLY ANYTHING

*Tanner*

‘Ay, you!’ some charming bell-headed ape, pentangle of bum fluff scattered upon his challenged mug doth challenge me, ‘Got a spare ciggie?’ and I tell him no, which is the truth by god, been broke for weeks, but ‘ARRR, FUCK’S SAKE! he implodes, fat hairy mitts jiggling his curry paunch, ‘DOESN’T NO-ONE SMOKE NO MORE?!’ before hoarding snot in his minced beef accordion neck, squeezes the subsequent lump out of his upper body with heroic hocking like forcing the very last of the toothpaste out of the tube and blasts it out in a most yellow missile, what whizzes a gnat’s pube away from my shoe, twatting a nosy pigeon and sways off into the market, leaving me free to watch his phlegm fester betwixt said pigeon’s eyes, stumbling it into a charred splat of chewing gum, a can of Special Brew filled with dirty rain and twirling its mangled claw around one of them floppy weeds that shoot out among wonky pavements slabs like nature’s stubborn fingers pointing up at us in accusation ... The fucker had reminded me I was broke and I had nowhere to go, you know?



## DRIFTING

*John Lee*

After a life dominated by a tendency to indulge in romantic dreams which was turning me into a cross between Baron Munchausen and Don Quixote I cry "Enough! - I've had it with all that shit!" Oh yes! Like a drunken school boy I've been impressed by them. I've believed them, I've even acted on them, but no more. If it means I have to acquire a new personality then so be it, but I'm no fool. If my personality is determined by my genes then it will be difficult, but if my determination is also so determined then it might be possible. Even logical contradictions might be overcome with sufficient effort. Isn't that the message of our times?

So what am I banging on about? Well I'll tell you. Romantic stories-that's what. Take the pub for instance. I've been told of ducks with two heads that quack at each other and of a fish that pulled a cat into the pond and drowned it. They know it's all crap but they tell you: "I was there, I've seen it with my own eyes. It's the honest truth," and all that stuff. It's addled brains submerged with drink that's doing the talking. Pete told me that there are Japanese wrestlers that can kill each other at a hundred yards just by flexing their stomach muscles. "It takes a lot of practice though." He said. Yes sure! It would.

I know what's going on here. It's an ego-trip, a self-serving sluttish self-contentment which has nothing to do with aiding or informing others. It's the same sort of bullshit that you get from the pub conspiracy theorists who see hidden plots and cabals everywhere. And of course D.I.Yers with their "Well what I would have done is..." and "Well I wouldn't have done it that way in the first place." Well thank you very much for your contribution to the richness of my life. It should all be outlawed. Vanity, vanity all is vanity. It's even worse in literature from writers whose self-indulgent self-glorification is embedded in reflections on their childhood. Where does it get you? Into a world of nonsense - Joyce with his "moo-cow coming down the road" and that Froggie wufta-wanker Proust, smelling biscuits and sticking pins in rats. "Just get a life!" I say - you're better off digging the garden.

On the other hand it is the case that just occasionally an examination of something that happens in the past might illuminate the present

and provide for an interpretation of our spiritual world so as to properly guide our footsteps into the future. Such is the case of the dog that sang Agnus Dei.

I suppose it's my disgust with that sort of exhibitionist nonsense that has prevented me until now from ever telling you about the dog that sang Agnus Dei. But he not only did it, in the Bach/Gounod version, but he did it every Saturday night for two whole years whilst my friend Eric and I were experiencing the woes of our early teen-age years. He did it without fail as an accompaniment to a record of Beniamino Gigli singing that same religious ditty, and it is important to note that this was the only song he ever sang. It was so regular and predictable that each time the disc was played we raised the question as to whether Chum was accompanying Gigli or Gigli accompanying Chum. But I must explain.

In those days there was bugger-all to do and Eric and I had not yet reached the stage of taking down girls' knickers so instead we listened to records and when we'd exhausted George Formby and Glen Miller we turned to operatic tenors and this became an obsession. The question was who was the best, Gigli or Bjorling. The competition was rerun every Saturday night at his house where we would be drink the hard stuff, dandelion and burdock, and eat mushrooms and tomatoes on toast whilst the great tenors and sometimes the dog competed, serenading us with unknown words in unknown languages. Now this might be thought an effete pleasure for young healthy lads to indulge in, but the background to it was Victorian style singing round the piano that occurred most Sunday evenings at our house after the Conservative Club had closed and the throats of my father and his friends had been well-oiled with pints of Hydes bitter. I had lain in bed listening to classical singing with important sounding words

*Where my caravan has rested flowers I leave you in the grass*

*But if other lips ha-ave loved you - shed no tear and pass them by.*

They don't write lyrics like that nowadays but I remember as even more meaningful my father's light tenor voice expressing with the deep feeling his longing for the return of the Raj and the British Empire upon which the sun was setting fast

*On the road to Mandalay where the flying fishes play*

*Come you back you British soldier-come you back to Mandalay*

My chest swelled with pride and I vowed to become a tenor and to recapture the USA. I made strangulated noises in an effort to fulfil the first ambition but have not as yet made a serious attempt at the latter. This pride in being British was reinforced at school, that was the job of school in those days, that's before they became obsessed with what they call education. Our teacher rolled down a map of the world and addressed the class made up of boys who had just failed their eleven plus.

"Now boys do you see this map-what do you notice that's special about it?"

"Yes miss it's got all ink stains on it where Lee spilled his inkwell."

She ignored O Malley, who didn't like me, and who was thick as a wall, even by Secondary Modern standards, but who couldn't help it because he was a Catholic. We knew this because he had permission not to attend assembly in the morning to hear the headmaster say prayers and extol the superiority of England and its nationalised church. Geoff Ashcroft who was a boy scout said it was because Catholics didn't believe in God but Brian Hulse said "No! It was because they'd put Jesus to death." We couldn't ask O'Malley about this because he was very big and Catholics beat the shit out of you. Everybody knew that. They lived in the dirty houses near the gas works alongside the Bridgewater canal and my father said they all voted Labour so it was best not to go around there.

Geoff Ashcroft who was unashamed to say the bloody obvious in his efforts to get more house points answered her.

"Please Miss it's nearly all in red."

"Yes Geoffrey, well done. I'm awarding you a house point. It's nearly all in red and that's because it's British, and it's British because we the British conquered most of the world. So you should be proud of your English blood and of your English king."

I was very proud of him, though he was soon to kick the bucket. I was so proud of him that there and then I vowed to work hard at school and even give up wanking so that I could marry the one remaining princess. Phil the Greek had nabbed the other.

But during the following years worms began to eat away at the apple.

"Bless this house" and "God made thee mine" were all right for Dads around the piano but they were in English not Italian and therefore they couldn't be that serious after all, and anyway God hadn't helped me get to the Grammar School. My dad said it wasn't God's fault, it was mine because I'd got a lazy mind. But if that was genetic it was his fault and he hadn't helped by sending me to a private school in posh Chorlton because he heard me swearing, something he said I'd learned from the council house boys who attended the junior school. My new school which was called a college and had a uniform was staffed by three witches straight out of Macbeth and they made us copy real writing into an exercise book day after day until I got bored and just stopped going, instead spending most of the days being sick on the swings in Longford Park. It was ages before they told my parents I hardly ever attended, but then you couldn't blame them as when they finally did do I was withdrawn along with a slab of their income. I heard that they all died of bubonic plague shortly after I was taken away.

But parents were different in those days. Just imagine:

"What did you do at school today son?"

"Copy."

"And was the teacher pleased with what you did?"

"Yes."

"Oh Good. That's all right then."

I realise now of course that the educational motive for the bitches' curriculum was based on the knowledge that the key to academic success was plagiarism, a key that has opened many doors in my lifetime, and of course the key to plagiarism is *copy*. The idea must have been to implant this *geist* along with its concomitant motivations deep into the psyche of the growing child. Had I known this at the time I would have reproduced those letters written in real writing with enthusiasm.

As for God's part in all of this he was on thin ice for two to three years. Then he went through the ice altogether. It was Saturday night play on the radio that finally did it. Some awkward sod in the play referred to religion as: "a self-satisfying, sluttish self-contentment." I liked that and I still do. Perhaps you've noticed. Throughout my life

this phrase along with 'copy' has served me well, in examinations, discussions and arguments.

"So you think Wittgenstein was a sort of mystic do you? Well that's just a self-satisfying, sluttish self-contentment...."

You can make it up from there. You're already on track to win the argument. You can use it in most discussions, even over questions as to which city is the capital of India. However in the past I didn't always use it judiciously. One day Dad said:

"The Germans are a cruel race." and I responded:

"Purported racial explanations of cultural characteristics are just a sluttish, a self-satisfying self-contentment, not an explanation at all."

Whatever else my father may have had he did have a temper and he was strong. He belted twelve bells of shit out of me. Perhaps I should have taken into consideration that he had served at Gallipoli, had been gassed in the Somme and had been blown up whilst driving an ambulance in the second world war. I suppose that gave him the right to talk rubbish. I knew that I was right but I learned the lesson that just sometimes being right and winning arguments don't add up to the same thing.

My parents did not appear religious in any serious sense though in her last years mother did turn Catholic and took it upon herself to educate her young priest in the fundamentals of morality. She told him Bible stories that neither he, nor anyone else, had ever heard before and she interpreted his own less colourful renditions in a manner which would have astonished the Pope, but to which the good father readily gave his assent. He hadn't the balls to do otherwise though I have to admit that she could be pretty convincing. Whatever story he told she told a better one usually drawing on her own experiences, some of which were exotic and unusual. For example there was the time she lured a cow that had crashed through our fence into the garden into the back kitchen of our semi. Apparently she was trying to give it a drink of milk. I came home from school to see a bewildered farmer trying to extract it and a floor carpeted in cow flop. Moocow coming in the backdoor, as Joyce would have put it.

Then there was practical mechanics. She strapped her vacuum cleaner motor to her manual sewing machine to turn it into an

automatic. A large part of it flew through the window on to our back lawn. Further she continued to insist, even in the face of my father's anger, that it was not her fault that Albert the twenty-four pound turkey we raised for Christmas, but which was too big to go in the oven, was to be found preening itself on the chimneypots when he came home from work one evening. All the kids in the neighbourhood sang and danced in the street as they witnessed this event. It got rid of the pigeons. She said that it was cramped up in the chicken run and needed a good airing. All of this, and much more, she said pontifically was "A sign of God's grace." Again the good father was unsure; he looked into the sky for confirmation.

My father's interest in religion appeared to be confined to the sort of public events in which as mayor of the town he could ponce around in his pantomime robes and imitation gold chain. Memorial day, Harvest festival and a public Christmas service, and that was it. Though he was from a Catholic background he had lapsed which may be a result of the first world war but may be a result of his own father who, according to him, was a "drunken Irish Catholic layabout" with whom he had often fought and who eventually simply disappeared leaving the family to fend for itself. Whilst he was still alive Catholicism was a banned subject in our house. On the other hand, father did strike up some sort of relationship with the C of E vicar, presumably because the very reverend was officially the mayor's chaplain and so father sought to use this acquaintanceship to improve my moral well-being.

I was sent to the rectory for moral tuition. It was that swearing again that did it. Apparently I now did it in my sleep. A huge carbuncle grew on my left eyelid and the doctor came and lanced it. I was apparently delirious the following night and let forth a stream of Chaucerian English.

"You should be ashamed of yourself. Even the troopers in the trenches didn't come out with language like that. And as for that being painful, it was nothing at all, "in the trenches we had lumps twice that size and we took it in turn to lance each others with old bean cans that we sterilized in the fire." This was long before Monty Python.

So I was in trouble for my behaviour even while fast asleep. But what irritated him above all was the way I followed others into

trouble. With Michael Grove I'd set the Mersey Bridge on fire. He'd lit the fire which he said was helping the farmer. What was daft is that we'd just about stamped it out when he said "Run!" I ran all the way home across the fields to my back bedroom. I watched it burn brightly until the firemen put it out. Father didn't make too big an issue of that, best to keep it quiet. He was after all a local councillor and member of the watch committee. On the other hand he had made a big issue of the fact that as a younger child I'd been caught stealing chocolate from Mr Watson's front room cupboard. After he told my father I never liked Mr Watson again and so when Michael suggested we put a stink-bomb through his letterbox I didn't object. He made it out of old cinema film and it set fire to Watson's carpet. This might have encouraged him to chase us across the cemetery field behind the houses. Michael, a big lad by this time, did some thinking during the pursuit and suddenly stopped running and turned to face Watson quite aggressively saying:

"What do you want?"

"You've just put something burning through my letterbox."

"No we haven't!"

"Then why were you running?"

"Because you were chasing us."

I so admired this resourcefulness that I was persuaded by him to put a banger in a car petrol tank which I did but it went out, which I suppose is why I'm here today. So not all my luck has been bad luck. Dad never knew about that one nor about the street lamp outside our house which we did effectively blow to smithereens with a banger that did work.

Why was I attracted to him? Well apart from his being four years older than me there was something to admire about him, psycho though he may have been, he'd stumped Watson who turned round and went back home. Father never appreciated his fertile imagination and said I was to keep away from him because I was too dopey not to follow him in to trouble. Michael was later to invent the game of catching cats by the tail, whilst riding a bike, and flinging them at the nearest wall. It was a sort of medieval jousting and not without its risks, as Brian Thomas found when he road his bike into an alley wall, fell off injured and got caught by the cops. Though I was too

gentle to indulge in this new sport, I had to admire the courage it took. Those alley cats were ferocious.

Grove later joined the army as an apprentice and father gave him a reference just to get rid of him. It didn't work though. He was cashiered in the course of basic training. As he later told me, having been ceremonially stripped of his badges, he passed through the gates to be assailed by a group of Irish road workers who took him to a pub to get him pissed on the grounds that there couldn't be that much wrong with anyone who had managed to get thrown out of the British army after only three weeks.

I never considered myself a naughty child though my first memory was of hitting grandad on the head with a poker, a rare spurt of energy on my part, an energy which I seemed to lose round about the age of five. Perhaps this was the doctor's fault. Even though grandad recovered, at least partially, my parents took the extreme step of consulting him about my rapidly developing sick personality. He assured mother that "a destructive child is a sure sign of a constructive adult" but he noticed I was greasy and sweaty and covered in spots. My mother confessed she smothered me with goose-grease regularly "to keep the rain out" and to protect me from disease. He dismissed this folk medicine as "an old wives' tale" and asked her if she wanted me to grow goose feathers which I'd shown no sign of doing though I still look under my armpits. "And that's the reason for the spots." He said this with great conviction.

So he injected me with what he called "Spirit" which I thought must be the Holy Spirit, but was probably only rhubarb juice as I never developed the urge to go to Sunday School. Never that is until much later when Mary Vest started going. She became of great interest because she used to take her knickers down at the slightest provocation. That was before she went mad. The doctor's diagnosis was however quite wrong as I had drunk a flagon of cider the night before. I remember it as having been the best pop I'd ever tasted and as distinctly superior to the dandelion and burdock which was to accompany Bjorling, Gigli and Chum some years later. My career as a drunkard had begun even before my school years.

Also continuous was my parents' tendency to refer me to professional moralists in an effort to cure the original sin that was born within me. I was in my teens when they sent me to the vicar.

## DRIFTING

My father's desire that I receive moral tuition hardly seemed merited when all he knew about up to then was a history that included the swearing and little things like the dog shit I put in the neighbours' milk-churn, setting fire to the Mersey bridge and the frequent letting out of Farmer Woods pigs from the pig sty. On one occasion father said he'd seen them running down the main road towards Urmston. I told him that if that's where they wanted to go they could have caught the bus. He said I was being cheeky. Pigs are stupid, though sometimes pretty big, so when you let them out it's best to run if they come in your direction. There were things he didn't know about, some of which were a bit more serious, but he was particularly upset by little things like my "refusal" to learn the piano. For this he said I'd beaten him and that I would pay for it. But it wasn't like that at all; and I didn't refuse.

Mr Drinkwater didn't like me because he kept saying that I hadn't done any practice. I said I had. How could he say I hadn't? He wasn't there. He couldn't have been because I was down the fields on my bike with Brian Bowler. What really stuffed me was just plain bad luck. My bike chain came off on the way to a lesson and because I was already fifteen minutes late, I knew he was going to be annoyed. He told me to play what I'd practiced and, as I did so, it became apparent that I'd just put my bike chain on. The white notes turned black giving the keyboard a monotonous hue. He jumped back like a big soft girl and squeaked in his shrill falsetto.

"John Lee go home and don't come back. I'll write to your father about this."

And that's what the bastard did.

## WHY CHILDREN ARE FRETFUL

Just think how harmful it is for a child to carry about a lot of poisonous waste matter in his bowels! No wonder children sometimes are "little devils" for no apparent reason! The safest way to give your child a thorough internal cleansing is 'California Syrup of Figs.' It sets up a natural movement that carries away all the clogging, hard waste-matter and leaves the little inside sweetened and clean.

And, just to make sure, get your nose down there and have a good sniff. Dogs do it all the time - they know a healthy fundament when they smell one.

A dose of delicious 'California Syrup of Figs' once a week keeps kiddies regular, happy and well. Get a bottle to-day, but be sure to ask for 'California Syrup of Figs' brand. Of all chemists, 1/3 and 2/6.

*Picture Post 1938*

## **M1 MOTORWAY, HEADING SOUTH**

*Jeff Bell*

M1 motorway, heading south,  
from north east of England.  
Near Wetherby,  
to my left, as I over take a cattle truck,  
I see cows with heads bowed down low,  
looking out sideways onto road,  
hopefully they were off to a field somewhere,  
but I doubted it.  
Further south, parked on north bound side of motorway,  
outside of car, a child was being sick,  
hopefully just car sickness.

Later, listening to a Josh T Pearson's  
soulful lament,  
I see a young couple who've broke down,  
their car left on hard shoulder,  
they, waiting for help, on grass embankment,  
huddled together under umbrella,  
with their backs turned to the torrential  
December storm.  
They should have worked out  
the odds, and stayed in their car,  
no matter what anyone says,  
sometimes it's just better to die.

Dead pheasant in fast lane,  
looks like car not bullet this time.  
And workers walking in fast lane,  
reason for 50 mile per hour restriction.  
Removing cones and playing the odds  
everyday, wearing waterproofs too!  
"Be careful!" I imagined them being told,  
constantly by loved ones.

I remember breaking down myself,  
in heavy traffic, heading north the previous year,

just managed to get car off road and onto grass verge,  
near Peterborough around 11 am.  
Gear box had blown , car was going so well I recall.  
Called Automobile Association, told I would be  
recovered within one hour because of dangerous  
position I was in, told to wait outside of vehicle,  
but didn't bother, slept in car, it was raining that day too.  
Even police rang me, said they would remove me  
if AA didn't come soon, they also told me to wait outside vehicle,  
don't know to this day how they got my phone number?  
AA finally arrived at 9 pm, was dark by then,  
with no food or drink in car, was forced to eat chocolates  
and drink from bottle of rum, presents for my parents,  
well it's the thought that counts.  
Because of lack of staff, AA recovery service  
dumped me and my car at nearby services,  
told me taxi would come soon and take me home,  
my car to be returned the following day.  
Drunk by the time I was picked up,  
poor driver from Afghanistan was no doubt glad  
to see the back of me, finally reaching home  
around 1 am, fair to say, not one of my better days.

Nearing Nottingham, the rain forced my wipers speed to max,  
to my right, the weeds that grew in abundance  
between cracks in the concrete on central reservation flew by.  
Clinging to life, sprayed constantly by endless traffic  
from the rain soaked salted tarmac,  
in the summer I wonder how many insects  
never completed the hazardous journey to their pollination?

At around 4 pm, with seat belt on and air bag at the ready,  
the oncoming nights darkness started to make its move.  
As I drove on, with 70 miles still to go until home it occurred to me,  
everywhere and everything I'd seen today had reeked of suffering.  
With spring and summer too far away even to contemplate,  
never before had I felt this connected to winter in my life.

## ALWAYS HAVE AN ANSWER

*Bob Wild*

If I'd known beforehand Joe'd been a copper I'd have switched pubs: gone to *The Royal Oak* instead of *The Albert*. I was glad I didn't. I'd never liked Coppers, you just couldn't trust them. Even as a kid I'd never liked them. They came to school to tell you how to cross the road. Then they'd pick you out for pinching coal or throwing stones or writing rude words on shop windows. The only coppers I liked as a kid were those you got for taking jam jars back to the shop, or those the Gas Man left after emptying the meter. My dad used to say "Coppers 'uld nick their own grandmother given half a chance". But Joe wouldn't: Joe was different. I hadn't realised he'd been a Copper until after I'd got to like him. It just goes to show: you think you can spot 'em.

Joe didn't do well in the Coppers: sidelined to Manchester airport for insubordination - the usual dumping ground. They just couldn't handle him. Too much of a character; and being a piss-head didn't help. They took their time getting rid of him but they managed it eventually. A Mafia choice. Health grounds: leave whilst you're fit or we fit you up to leave. Good pension though. Helps his dad run a drinking club now, in Coventry of all places. I miss him. He used to tell us stories about his time in the Coppers, He comes back to *The Albert* on a bender now and again, when he's had a win on the GeeGees. Generous chap. Buys everyone a pint. Life and soul of the party. Imitates Monty Python and Blackadder sketches, very funny. But he has his weakness: talks louder and louder as the evening wears on then, after fifteen pints, glazes over and goes quiet.

Despite having been a copper Joe fits in perfectly with the group of trainee alcoholics who frequent our local. A lively, shifting, motley crew comprised at any one time six or seven people revolving round Bertha an intelligent, witty, and larger than life, eighteen stone crossword addict journalist invariably shrouded in a voluminous black dress the size and shape of a carelessly pitched, wind-blown Bedouin tent and Danny her partner, a diminutive, thoughtful, creative, amusing ex-deputy headmaster, who could pass for Picasso: permanent fixtures who use *The Albert* as an extension of their living room. One Monday evening - a quiet night at *The Albert* - I

was on my own in the snug. Out of nowhere Joe appeared, pint in hand.

"Ah it's Bob!" he roared, "mind if I join you?" He'd been in since lunch time and between trips to the Bookie's downed ten or twelve pints, which accounted for the slippage on his volume control. He would have sat down anyway so there was no point in trying to dissuade him.

"Good to see you Joe!"

"Just a quick word before I go to the quiz in the back room", he said. Amongst his many talents Joe was a quiz freak possessed of a ragbag of useless information such as the name of the fourth American president or the height of Everest, or the distance of the moon from the sun or how many people *The Guinness Book of Records* said you could fit into a telephone box. The kind of clutter quiz freaks study into the early hours of the morning to impress their less well-informed friends. But he could tell a good story.

As he flopped onto the bench beside me the air squeezed out of the foam furnishing. "Excuse me!" he shouted, which made the tall blonde, just entering the pub, swivel on her high heels and look in our direction. I held her eye for a second. She lowered her gaze, and walked towards the bar.

"Give over Bob!" Joe shouted. Then in a lower, more conversational voice said. "You can't go chasing after classy stuff like that. It would be like a dog chasing after a car. What would you do if you caught it?"

"There's no answer to that, Joe", I said.

"Oh Oh! Always have an answer Bob. I learnt that in the Bobbies". Joe looked at me across the top of his pint, tilted it and ate down half the content of the glass in four great mouthfuls. As he came up for air he said: "That blonde, she reminds me of a woman I once knew. It was when I was on night duty in Withington, I used to collect the 'rent' from the pubs. Donations for the police benevolent fund. The Sergeant and the Inspector weren't in on it but they'd been in the ranks. They knew what went on. They didn't like us getting free pints. We had to be careful. There was a lot of after hours drinking in those days. One night after the briefing parade one of my mates in CID asked me to do him a favour. Phone a woman who lived in Ladybarn, the beat next to mine, and arrange to interview her

informally. 'Try and find out what she knows about a burglary at the shop below her flat', he said. Apparently she had phoned in to say she might be able to shed some light on the matter but she didn't want to get officially involved."

"I phoned early next day but got no reply. Later her answer machine. If that's her voice on the recorded message, I thought, she's seriously sexy. When she finally picked up the voice sounded sleepy not sexy. 'Did you phone earlier', she asked. 'I work evenings and sleep late'. 'I know the problem', I said. We arranged to meet in a pub in Heaton Moor which was on her way to work. 'How will I know you?', I said. 'Oh you'll easily recognise me. There aren't many six feet one inch blondes about. Not wearing mink coats'. I thought she was having me on but it was straight up. She worked as a croupier in a Stockport casino. Rich boyfriend. Nowt doing there, I thought. But I didn't get chance to find out. Well, not for some time that is. There was a suspicious death in Withington and I got stuck guarding the perimeter tape. I passed the assignment with the blonde back to my mate in CID. He got someone else to go and I forgot all about it"

"A month or so later I was in *The Grapes* in Stockport. I was off for a couple of nights and catching up on my mates. I was on a stool facing the bar. Dave, my oppo, was facing outwards, leaning back on his elbows like you do. We were quietly disagreeing as to whether or not Sergeant Kiljoy was a real bastard or just a nasty bastard when I noticed Dave straighten up. 'Bloody hell Joe, get an eye-ful of that!', he said, through the side of his mouth. I looked in the mirror and saw a couple of strikingly well dressed women in their late twenties. One was exceptionally tall, good looking, and Nordically blonde. I thought: 'that must be the Ladybarn blonde', but I didn't let on. I racked my brain for her name, but it wouldn't come. 'Fucking hell Joe', Dave said. 'Just look at those tits'. 'Totally unsupported!', I said. 'They stand up a bloody sight better than what you've just been arguing: unless it's a trick of perspective'. He could be funny could Dave. The blonde went straight to the loo while the other woman went to the end of the bar and ordered drinks. I said: 'I think I'll chat 'em up Dave. 'No bloody chance. Premier league those two. You'd never make the second division. And I don't mean her cleavage'. 'I'm just going to powder my nose', I said. 'You watch this!'. I stopped beside the one ordering the

drinks. I'd learnt a thing or two from a spell in plain clothes. 'I hope you don't mind me intruding. I think I know your friend but I can't recall her name'. She looked up at me with a half-frightened, quizzical expression. 'Who, Jean?' 'Yes, I know it's Jean, I mean her surname'. 'Cleaveley', she said. Is she having me on, I thought, as I carried on into the Gents.

"By the time I came out the blonde had rejoined her friend and the two were sitting in the window seat. I could see in the mirror they were watching me. Dave said to me: 'Fucking hell Joe what did you say to her?'. 'Oh, I just asked her for a fuck. You know, the usual question'. 'Oh yeah. What did she say: you wouldn't be able to afford it or join the queue?'. Later, the friend went to the loo and Dave followed, to weigh up her arse. The blonde, Jean, walked over to the bar and ordered more gin and Martini. After picking up the drinks she half turned towards me. 'I know you', I said. 'Try something original, I've heard that one before' she said, but she put the drinks back on the bar. A good sign, I thought. 'How about: If those buns aren't for sale they shouldn't be on display'. She picked up the drinks again and turned to walk away. 'Piss off", I thought I heard her say, but then I caught her trying to hide a smile. 'I'm not saying I've met you, but I have spoken to you. We were supposed to meet in *The Anvil* in Heaton Moor for a chat about a burglary', I said. She turned back and put the drinks down again. 'Oh are you that policeman. I'm terribly sorry. I couldn't make it. I tried to get through on the CID number but no one answered and I didn't have yours. Oh! I really am sorry'. She seemed genuinely embarrassed but I didn't let on it wasn't me she'd stood up. 'Well not to worry: it got sorted', I said.

"Dave came back and I introduced him: 'Why don't you join us?' Jean said, when her friend came back. We had a bubbly half hour with the two women but they had to go to work. Dave didn't get anywhere with the friend. I was getting the come on from the blonde all the time. She said she liked big men, and uniforms. 'Especially copper's helmets'. I told her I was on nights in Withington next week, not far from her flat in Ladybarn. I wasn't too surprised when she suggested I pop in for a nightcap: gave me her phone number and told me to give her a ring after twelve-thirty on Monday. When they'd gone Dave said to me: 'You jammy bugger, Joe! You jammy bugger!' Monday had been a bad day. I'd been on Holts at *The Griffin* all day

Sunday. I woke up with a blinder. Bloody brass band playing inside my skull. Four o'clock it was. I'd lost most of the day and I got rid of another hour getting used to the daylight. I bucked up a bit after a pint at *The Crown* but I couldn't have more than one, Kiljoy's nose was like a bloody ferret's and I was on duty later. I called at a Chippy on the way back. I'd had nothing to eat since Sunday lunch-time. I ate the chips out of the paper. I'd had a bad day: Anyway I got to the Station by ten o'clock, in time for the briefing parade. Kiljoy gave us some car numbers to watch out for. He mentioned a few trouble spots, premises to check and stressed the importance of keeping the two-way radio on. Then gave us his usual homily on the importance of meeting punctually at the rendezvous points. Before dismissal he puts his face into mine and said. 'Is that alcohol I can smell McAdam?' I said, 'Yes Sarge, I'm afraid it is - my new aftershave'. 'Don't try taking the Mickey out of me McAdam'. 'No Sarge. I was simply stating a fact'. 'You always have an answer don't you McAdam. I don't have to remind you that it's a serious disciplinary matter to drink whilst on duty. And that goes for the lot of you. Parade, dismiss'. 'That bastard's out to get you Joe', Dave said, as we left the Station. 'Tell me about it', I said.

"The early part of the Beat took me over towards Didsbury and Chorlton: nowhere near Ladybarn until about 2.00 a.m. I was to meet Kiljoy in Withington, at the corner of Firs Avenue and Barlow Moor Road, at 2.15. If something cropped up he would contact me by radio. This posed a problem. I wanted to visit Jean shortly after 12.30 a.m. The problem was not meeting up with Kiljoy and not skipping part of the Beat, but how to get from the Chorlton side of Withington over to Ladybarn without using up precious shagging time. Clearly, I would need a car and I hadn't got one. A taxi was out, too conspicuous. Besides, taxi drivers are curious; they ask questions. They'd remember a cop in uniform. I needed to cover my back. Time to call in a favour, Bob. I phoned Pete in the Panda on his mobile. After a bit of umming and arrhing he agreed to meet me at 12.20 and run me over to Ladybarn. If anything came up and he couldn't make it I would have to cancel with Jean. Fortunately nothing did and Jean answered the phone promptly too. My lucky night, I said to myself.

"I had no trouble finding Jean's flat. I pressed the buzzer three times as arranged. Two short and one long. I was about to press

again when a voice through the speaker said ‘Come on up Joe’. She sounded nervous rather than sexy. Understandable, I thought. After all we had only met the once. By the time I reached the top of the stairs I was gasping like a mountaineer with an attack of altitude sickness. I remember thinking I must cut down on the booze, or do a lot more horizontal jogging: a difficult choice. Jean was framed in the doorway, silhouetted by the subdued lighting. She was holding a cocktail glass, affecting an Art Deco stance. I thought: ‘she has class this girl: certainly not the Bimbo Dave said she was’ If there's no inner soul in a woman she's just a Bimbo. And even then, if she's young enough it might develop and she may grow interesting. In an older woman, I'll grant you, if she hasn't got it she can only deteriorate.’

“She gave me a mmwa on the cheek, then looked searchingly into my eyes before leading me into the sitting room. ‘Let me get you a glass of bubbly, Joe’, she said. I could have murdered a pint but Kiljoy was on duty. ‘Just a small one’, I said. She pouted her lips in mock disappointment. She handed me the glass and said: ‘I won't be a minute. I'll just slip into something more comfortable.’ It gave me time to relax and look round the apartment. It was expensively furnished in a very elegant neo-Art Deco style. I thought: ‘she's either on the game or spreading her legs for a very rich sugar daddy this one’. The settee and chairs had a square 1930s’ look about them but were upholstered in a fashionable, modern silver-grey, striped, silk material. There were four or five Tiffany lights dotted about the room. I tapped one with my finger. Definitely not plastic. Her mink coat had been thrown carelessly onto the back of a chair. At the side of the fireplace was an elegant chrome vase with four or five tall Bird of Paradise blooms. The green pointed beaks and spiky orange crests looked slightly menacing. I thought they were artificial but they were not. There were a couple of very good Pre-Raphaelite reproductions of long-haired women, on the hearth wall. On a side wall was a picture which looked original. Two women, one head cradled against the neck and chest of the other. Expressive eyes and red lips. One wore a green cloche-shaped headscarf, the other had chestnut hair. The lines of the faces were sharp. I read the name of the artist: Tamara de Lempicka. I smelt Jean's perfume as she came into the room. ‘You like Art Deco do you Joe?’ ‘Art Deco? Oh, yeah! I love Art Deco. Bloody good group’. She smiled and fingered the lapel of my tunic again.

“She was dressed in a silk kimono and looked available as she descended onto the settee and draped her arm languidly over the back. She curled her legs up and raised her glass. I perched rather awkwardly on a chair next to the Birds of Paradise. She seemed relaxed but untouchable. We chatted about this and that. I was thinking: ‘there'll be no nooky to night if we don't do something about this soon’. Suddenly she got up and said: ‘Well I'm going to bed Joe: you can let yourself out when you've finished your drink’, and with that she disappeared into the bedroom. But she left the door half open. Was that on purpose? I sat for two or three minutes puzzling what to do. I decided my only hope was to go into the bedroom, thank her for the drink, and give her a good night kiss. I would slip my hand between the sheets and if she had nothing on take that as signal. I downed the dregs of champagne and put the plan into operation. I thought she was asleep but I was wrong. As soon as my hand went between the sheets she grabbed it and before I knew what was happening she'd handcuffed it to a ring on the side of the bed. ‘I've got you now policeman haven't I. Let's have a look at that truncheon and that helmet of yours’ she said, as she unzipped my trousers. When I woke from my post coital doze I didn't know where the hell I was. I lay for a few seconds until I remembered. Bloody hell, I thought, I'm supposed to be on fucking night duty!

“I fumbled for the light but my hand wouldn't reach. By the time I got my other hand from under Jean's leg and switched on the light I was wide awake and panicking. I looked at my watch. Five past bloody two. ‘Christ!’, I shouted, ‘I'm in the shit!’ Jean fumbled for the key and mumbled: ‘You're a big boy. You'll be all right’. I bloody near jumped down the stairs to let myself out. ‘Oh no!’, I shouted. While I had been in the flat there must have been a huge downpour. Everywhere was sopping wet. There were enormous puddles stretching across the road, flooding over the pavement. ‘Just my fucking luck!’ Then the radio came on. ‘Where the devil are you McAdam? It's two-fifteen!?’ I had to think quick. Remember Bob. Always have an answer. ‘I was just wondering the same thing about you Sarge’, I said. ‘What do you mean?’ he said. ‘Well, I'm here waiting for you at the corner of Furze road Sarge’. ‘No you're not McAdam, I'm on the corner of Firs Road and if I stand here much longer they'll be shedding their bloody cones’. ‘There must be some mistake Sarge, I'm at the corner of Furze road’. ‘Well I'm standing

by the road sign McAdam. F.I.R.S. R.O.A.D.’ ‘Oh dear’, I said. ‘That explains it. I thought I was to meet you at the corner of F.U.R.Z.E. road’. ‘Furze Road! Furze Road! Where the blazes is Furze Road?’. He sounded apoplectic. ‘It’s on the edge of Ladybarn’. ‘Ladybarn! What the bloody hell are you doing in Ladybarn! Get your arse over here immediately McAdam it’s due for a kicking’. ‘Right Sarge”, I said, and switched him off.

“Sex seemed to have sharpened my wits in proportion to it having blunted my pencil. As I hurried along Barlow Moor Road I thought: ‘that bastard Kiljoy will notice I’m dry and suspect I’ve been in the pub. If he starts sniffing my breath I’m done for. I dabbed on some aftershave from the bottle I always carry with me and popped a couple of peppermints into my mouth. Then I stopped at the first tree I came to and gave it a good shake. Unfortunately it hadn’t many leaves so I had to spend time looking for an evergreen. I eventually found a *Leylandii* hedge and rolled myself along it. I overdid it a bit but that was all to the good. ‘Took your time getting here, didn’t you McAdam’”. ‘Yes Sarge’, I said. (It’s always best to agree, Bob) ‘I saw a couple of parked cars that hadn’t been there earlier so I thought I would just check them out while I was passing. You never know what might turn up Sarge. You never know your luck!’ ‘You didn’t pop in to see a lady friend or nip into a pub then, while it was raining, did you Joe?’ Christ, I thought, the bastard knows! ‘No Sergeant, I did not’. He put his face near to mine. Then he noticed I was sopping wet. ‘You’re all wet McAdam.’ ‘Yes Sarge’. ‘Been Swimming?’ ‘No Sergeant’, I said. It was then that I noticed he was completely dry. Got you, you bastard” I thought. ‘You ought to have sheltered’, he said. ‘Oh no Sarge, I wanted to get round the beat in time to meet you at 2.15’. Then I added: ‘I see you kept nice and dry Sarge’. Before he had time to collect his thoughts he said: ‘I took shelter in *The Dog and Partridge*’. Then he realised what he’d said. ‘Well, *you* occasionally nip into a pub when it’s raining, don’t you Joe?’

‘Oh no Serge’, I said, and I stuck my face into his and sniffed. ‘I never go into pubs while I’m on duty. It’s a very serious offence’. He tried to stare me out. ‘You’ve always got an answer haven’t you McAdam? Always got an answer.’ ‘Yes Sergeant’, I said, ‘I have. But I’m not sure I’ll need one in future’. Just then an aeroplane flew overhead towards Manchester airport. As he turned away he

ALWAYS HAVE AN ANSWER

looked up into the dark night sky and said: ‘You may well be right there McAdam. You may very well be right’.

\* \* \* \*



*Picture Post 1938*

**NORM**  
*Tanner*

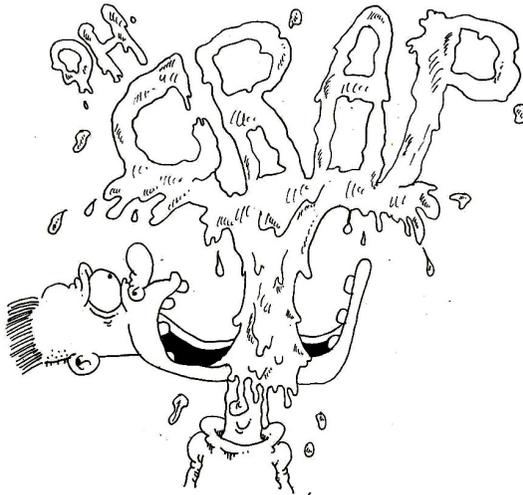
It was the usual set up: me at the bus stop in the rain, gagging and then swallowing the same mound of slippery lager puke that kept bouncing back and forth between the back of my eyes and the roof of my mouth, a right sinus sizzler, trying to sit still on the soggy bench and go unnoticed. And then one appears before me. The man says,

‘Yer know, this bus stop is renowned for it’s psychos, I’m tellin yer.’  
... I tell him I know ...

‘Was standin ere the other night with me missus, yeah, an this bird comes up to us, er hands covered in blood! Yeah! No joke, mate! An the blood was on er face, fuckin hell, it was drippin off er ciggy! An we asked er, yer know, what’s up love, an she was absolutely wasted, an she saw the blood down er dress an she goes “Ow the fuck did all tha get there?” an then puked on erself! So she was covered in blood an her own sick! Can yer believe tha, mate?’

I told him I could and then finally deposited that lager spew ...

He looked away ... he thought I was different.



**YOU can Remedy**

**CONSTIPATION**      **FLATULENCE**

**HEADACHE**      **INDIGESTION**

These ailments are specially prevalent in days of strain. Fitness is essential for the Home Front and it is a national duty to keep well. Dr. Scott's Pills—the century famed vegetable remedy—act gently and harmlessly eliminate all impurities. They will give you buoyant health. Controlled farting and belching can also be a social asset. Imagine the admiration of your companions in the cinema as you rise to render the National Anthem. Experts like Doctor Scott himself can fart the main tune while simultaneously belching the descant. Form a Dr Scott group in your town to provide a backup should the air raid siren fail. Our Royal Family are a particularly gifted ensemble while Winston has made some quite memorable performances in the House clearing most of the front benches instantly.

**Dr Scott's** Bilious & Liver **Pills**  
BRAND

**7d., 1/5 and 3/5 (treble quantity).**  
 Including Purchase Tax.

If unobtainable from your Chemist, send order with cash to W. LAMBERT & Co., LTD., 258, Euston Road, N.W.1.

*Illustrated 1942*

## THE TROUBLE WITH MOBILES

*Ron Horsefield*

Had a strange call from Samantha on Saturday. It sounded like:

“Ixcxcx on mcmdfgdhd rain”

“What?” I yelled. “Speak up Samantha you’re very faint”

“I’m xbsdete the djnsgs78 tr ...”

“Samantha, you’ll have to speak louder”

“I’M ON THE FUCKIN TRAIN!!!”

O yis, I thought. That old gag. She’s probably half pissed in some Didsbury synagogue... Then bugger me if I don’t hear the voice of a geezer who seemed to be speaking from under a peaked cap – authoritatively as it were:

“Pardon me madam – may I see your ticket. And may I also ask you to keep your voice down there is a party of nuns in the next carriage”

“I’m pissed off” she went on “and plan to spend two nights in Claridges with an old Arab friend Mustapha.”

I recalled that she’d formerly been a whore in the West End and met many rich Arabs.

“Sort of a sentimental journey as it were?” I suggested.

“Exactly” she went on “I’ve had enough of all that rantin an shoutin up there. You’re all fuckin barmy. My Arab friend is v rich and also I find myself yearning for a nice...sxvsgs....mmn....ck”

“I didn’t catch that last bit Samantha. You’re breaking up again. Speak louder.”

“year...cbbdann...bit,..ldnakjsd..ck”

“Louder Samantha! Louder!”

“I SAID I’M GAGGIN FOR A NICE LENGTH OF WOG COCK!!”

This didn’t sound like Samantha who is, after all, a lady with lesbian tendencies and an heiress rich in her own right. Some tart had obviously pinched her mobile. But when she correctly identified the current goalkeeper of Manchester City and their place in the Premier League I realised it *was* her. Then peaked cap butted in again:

”Please madam, moderate your tone. There’s a lady further down the carriage who is getting quite overheated by your remarks. She may have to take off her burkha”

“Does Barry know about this excursion?” I asked referring to her long-suffering consort.

“No. And don’t you go blabbin you nasty pieceashit. I’m already thinking of reporting you to the RSPCB.”

“B?”

“Yis, you know what that stands for – and it isn’t the great crested shitehawk”

I’d done Barry the great favour of itemising several of his deficiencies, thus saving him the expense of a psychiatrist, but the ingrate had turned nasty and left in a huff, with Samantha in tow.

“Well have a nice time” I went on “By the way wog cocks aren’t noticeably big – unlike say coon cocks. I suppose you know this from your former line of work”

“Course I know that Ron. I know all about international cocks. The thing about Arabs is that because of the constraints of Islam the blokes have to make do with goats, donkeys and camels until they’re about 40. This makes them very versatile.”

Then I hear:

”Madame I’m taking you into custody in the guard’s van. You’ll be put off the train at Rugby”

And it went quiet. I felt I had to report this infidelity to Barry and trusted him to deal with it in his usual tactful manner. He could, for instance, introduce the subject obliquely saying he’d read a piece in the *Guardian* on wog cocks and did she have anything to add to the report that a wog cock isn’t brown like the rest of the wog but pink with a purple bell end on it. I’m sure this clever trope would ensnare and thus expose her disgusting metropolitan interlude.

## **KEN CHAMPION**

### **THINGS**

Gaps in wardrobes  
spaces in cupboards  
sitting on the stair  
he knows she's gone.

The ornaments remain,  
Wedgwood, Lladro Figurines,  
Regency beaux, flower sellers  
a girl with a cake teasing a dog  
two children in a nursery fight  
one holding a pillow above her head  
like a murderous leg of lamb.

He places them on the floor,  
a sheep standing in a saucer  
an owl upside down in a bowl  
lovers in an armless embrace  
the new stumps strangely aged  
gathers handfuls, armfuls, sackfuls  
lays them in line in the hall,  
treads on the protruding spout  
of an elephant teapot

## THE CRAZY OIK COLLECTION

**Back issues** of the first 17 **Crazy Oiks** are available at £3.50 each +P&P

See the website for details.

### ALSO BY OUR CONTRIBUTORS

**Tom Kilcourse's** published works include *The Human Circus*, *Who Killed Clarissa*, *The Great Collapse*, and *More Short Stories* available on Amazon His autobiography *It's Only Me* has been published this year

**Paul Tanner's** poetry collection *Dole Anthems* was published in May 2011 His latest collection of prose, poetry and cartoons *The Ism Prison* is published by Penniless Press Publications.

Several pages would be needed to list the published works of **Jim Burns** but we mention his poetry collection *Street Singer* (Shoestring Press 2010) and his essays *Beats, Bohemians and Intellectuals* (Trent Books 2000), *Radicals, Beats and Beboppers* (2011) and *Brits, Beats and Outsiders* (2012) are published by Penniless Press Publications

**Alexis Lykiard** is a poet, novelist and critic. His latest collection *Getting On* is published by Shoestring Press. A complete listing of his many publications is on his website [www.alexislykiard.com](http://www.alexislykiard.com)

**S.Kadison's** stories appear in *Is That You Mr Clooney?* (2008) and recently *God's Laboratories* and *Let's Kill the Teacher* – Penniless Press Publications 2012. The first volume of a projected eight volume *roman fleuve* : *Entirely Avoidable Insanity* is published by Penniless Press Publications June 2013

**Keith Howden** has published poetry collections *Marches of Familiar Landscapes* (Peterloo 1978) *Onkonkay* (Peterloo 1984) *The Matter of Britain* (2009) and *Barley Top* (2011) both by PRE (Rome). *Jolly Roger* (2012) is published by Smokestack. His prose works include *The Creators* (Non-Side Press 2013) and most recently *Self-Dissolve* (Penniless Press Publications 2013)

