

THE CRAZY OIK
ISSUE 20 WINTER 2014

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10 ALBERT ROAD GRAPPENHALL

WARRINGTON WA4 2PG

Website: www.crazyoik.co.uk

*Published January 2014 by
The Crazy Oik 10 Albert Road
Grappenhall Warrington*

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Garibaldi Rides Again is from Keith Howden's
Gospels of Saint Belgrano (PPP 2013)

To Work is from Tom Kilcourse's
autobiography **It's Only Me**

Auntie Rose's Funeral & Conservation Area are
from Ken Champion's **Cameo Metro** (PPP 2013)

Somethin' Bad is from S, Kadison's collection
Is That You Mr Clooney? (PPP 2008)

Front Cover – *The Last Judgement* (detail) 1535
Hans Schaufelein (1480-1540)
Musée des Beaux Arts - Nancy



Hank Smallshovel was an apprentice in Durer's workshop. He never quite got the hang of accurate drawing even under the tutelage of Germany's greatest draughtsman. What he did have, in common with most 15th century artists was a fascination with hell and its demons. Grunewald, an almost exact contemporary, created more terrifying satanic chimeras (see p29) but Hank stuck with images from the farmyard and the forest. The principal demon has feet like a chicken, arms like a bat and a head like a dog. But that floppy eared pooch wouldn't scare anyone today – we see much fiercer things on leads in the park. From its furry arse depends a yellow scrotal sac; repulsive but hardly scary. His pal, a thing of darkness, would be almost cuddly were it not for the withered dug. So not Janet Jackson with a wardrobe malfunction but it could be Little Richard cranking up to sing *Twist and Shout*.

Last Judgements usually depict naked sluts being carted off to the hellhole. Always a good selling point. I guess Aquinas had such pictures in his study, perhaps behind a curtain or in reproduction small enough to hold in one hand. But what horror of hell could be worse than being held upside down like the poor bloke over the demon's shoulder? It'd make you feel very odd.

Medieval cathedrals are full of such scenes – usually on the west front - but the age of the satanic chimera was coming to an end – there aren't any in the Sistine Chapel although that got redecorated about the same time.

Today we've progressed beyond all that. What do we fear most at death's door? The approach of Sir Jimmy fiddling with something in his tracksuit bottoms? Sir Cyril Smith proffering, at groin level, a small stick of Blackpool rock for a final comforting suck? The six o'clock news? Give me satanic chimeras every time.

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EDITORIAL

TWENTY NOT OUT

Five years, twenty issues, sixty six contributors, six hundred thousand words. What are we talking about? The Crazy Oik of course. It's already longer than the first half of *A la Recherche du temps perdu*. What would you rather read? Join in our phone poll – to vote “Yis! Give me the Crazy Oik anyday!” dial 0808 675812; calls are free. To vote “No! You filthy pornographer! I much prefer an evening with Marcel” ring 0845 689743 (calls will cost £6.30 a minute and you may have to listen to the first act of Rheingold before being connected to the poll.) The results will appear in our next issue.

Of course our typical subscriber reads both. Remember the Crazy Oik had the first ever English translation of a Proust pastiche by our distinguished French cultural correspondent Ron Horsefield. Ron actually knew someone who knew Marie Nordlinger – Proust's English girlfriend who lived in Didsbury. He also supplied the picture on the back cover which he came across exploring the literary quarter of Lyons earlier this year. Another Francophile, John Lee, lives in *la France profonde* and describes its strange denizens in almost Proustian fashion in *A Dordogne Idyll*. We learn that one train can hide another – very gnomic. It makes you think.

The Oik's international reach is confirmed by another instalment of the life of the exiled Count Ivan de Nemethy. This tale gets better and better as we follow the old Count (Ivan's dad) from the commie hell of Budapest 1956 to his last resting place in a lodging under a flyover in Blackpool. Where would *you* prefer to live? Do we need a phone poll on that? Perhaps the old Count liked candy floss.

Scandi is another odd place. Nigel Ford's *Inspection Day* tells all. Nigel lives on the west coast of Sweden. His Kafkaean account reveals that the locals ponce about utterly nekkid, even when prospective house-buyers turn up. There's none of this in *Borgen*, but that's Denmark, a much nicer place. I mean – who would *you* rather go on holiday with – Soren Kierkegaard or August Strindberg? Phone...er...well maybe not.

Ireland too is abroad I suppose: the west coast certainly so. Wittgenstein spent time there to get away from it all (*it* being the maelstrom of Trinity

college Cambridge). Martin Keaveney's piece *Last Order* is a fine, atmospheric evocation of the rain-sodden misery of an old pisshead's demise which recalls Flann O'Brien's *The Poor Mouth*. Some Irishness too in Bob Wild's story of a transvestite and his dog. Bob has Irish antecedents and the transvestite is Irish. Bob assures me it's all true.

The home team turn in as usual. Jim Burns writes about Bohemia. He'd probably like Bohemian as nationality on his passport, but then he'd probably never get back in. Dave Birtwistle describes a Pennine Bohemia while Keith Howden, another Lancs patriot, has a go at LS Lowry and the decline of metaphysical horror; an idea explored in our commentary on the cover. His mouthpiece James Bird Horobin speculates on God – and asks what has he ever done for us. Tanner, a modern Bosch, reports on the lurid landscape of Liverpool. Abroad? It's extra-terrestrial.

Tom Kilcourse goes to work in a narrative I relish, restricting myself to read only the episode published in the Oik – saving the rest like a cherry on a cake. Kadison's take on schoolboy oik culture fizzles with convincing demotic both anglo and paki. New contributor P.J. Fell acquaints us with the subculture of oik Cornwall. What rich git emerging from the Tate St Ives could possibly imagine the seething resentment and rage of the impoverished locals who can't even afford a lock-up garage. The place is as weird as Romania and the Tate itself, a mad folly, is about as much use as Ceausescu's palace in Bucharest.

So where would you rather be? At home reading the oik in an armchair or swanning round Cornwall in the middle of January looking for somewhere to park or even a decent chippy – somewhere you wouldn't have your lights kicked in. Phone....

Ken Clay January 2014

FROM BUDAPEST TO BLACKPOOL

Ivan de Nemethy

I was getting nowhere. I had run out of Record Offices and bureaucrats so I drove on to search in Tokaj, the credibility rating of Papal Bull no longer deterring me from scouring through dozens of village records, churches, synagogues, priests, rabbis, graveyards, wine bars and vineyards because this was all I had to go on. I didn't even find a male birth that tallied with my father's birth date, but I did find a few Némethys, tracked them down, spoke to some very old people, but eighty three years after my father was born was far too long a time. The earliest photograph I had of my father was when he was in his sixties, wasn't much help, even I didn't know what my father had looked like as a young man – he was thirty six when I was born – forty by the time I acquired any memory.

We thought we had found something in Tokaj itself when a very helpful guy called Ferenc took us out to his family vineyard in the hills to see his father in law, a Némethy, and he was in his eighties, the right age too. We drove for miles up winding hill roads, turned up at the entrance to the cave that was their wine cellar, hundreds of feet up from the valley floor below. When Ferenc called out, his father in law appeared further up the hill, ducking from vine to vine as if we couldn't see him and eventually joined us, insisted on standing behind a vine as we spoke. Turned out his name was just Németh and Ferenc had simply been keen to help, and to show off the family vineyard, which he did with style. Ferenc took us into the cave, hand hewn more than eighty yards into the hillside a hundred years earlier by an earlier grand father. Even my wife Lesley got drunk that day because we had to sample all the barrels and were given ten litres to take home with us.

Tokaj synagogue was still there, intact, boarded up, fifty years derelict, judging by the dust we could see through a missing board. Then, against all the odds, having run out of villages to scour and oldsters to interrogate and only because I was doubling as a tourist as well as a Hungarian son, I stumbled across my father's family home in Sárospatak (Muddy Stream), a sizeable town not far from Tokaj. My father's family home turned out to be...Rákóczi Castle, a very impressive sixteenth century pile named after one of Hungary's

biggest ever wigs of all time. As I looked at a plan of the castle my father's stories about one wing of his home being a hospital, one wing a library and the massive entrance courtyard rang in my ears so I went back again to some of the main rooms, looked more carefully at the portraits and names. The castle and grounds are a balls-on-dead accurate replica of my father's description of his family estate, right down to fixtures, fittings, ancestral pictures on the walls and there was even a Némethy or three that had lived there.

I had been there many times, I had seen all of it before, vividly portrayed by my father in his amazingly detailed stories. I recognised the sweeping entrance steps where my grandfather had died of a heart attack in front of my father's eyes in 1926. My father was just eighteen at the time and as the eldest son he took over the three thousand acre estate, the six villages and the onerous *droit du seigneur* which he felt obliged to honour because the husbands and brides to be would have taken it as a rejection if he hadn't, the wives being deemed to be inferior if they hadn't been deflowered by a de Némethy. There it all was, exactly as my father had described it, just one thing missing, there was no sign of my father, there was no visitors' book for him to have signed.

So the greater part of my father's stories about the de Némethy name and the ancestral home, both dating back to 1415, weren't a fabrication after all and I could tell that he was familiar with the area, his many stories of nearby Miskolc taking on an extra significance amongst the rest of his stories which spanned most of the larger towns and cities in Hungary. The date was only a couple of hundred years out giving my father 87% for the date, the home was spot on, 100% for the home, a few "de" free de Némethys had lived there, 77% accuracy for the name, leaving just the teensy detail about it being my father's that was totally wrong, so 0% for that bit. Overall, in today's climate with 96% of candidates passing at A level, most examining boards would surely rate my father's average of 66% as at least a C, maybe even a B grade, in spite of the absolute zero in just one out of the four papers. So by current A Level standards, Rákóczi Castle is MINE!

Where did the "de" come from? Wannabe Aristocratic Russian émigrés will readily know the answer because the Russians pioneered the system. Europe is stuffed full of "von", "de" and "Prince" prefixed ex Russians (Peter von Ustinov, for example –

born in England, he tossed the von away like a live grenade when England declared war on Germany). The “de” comes as part of the “I have fled to the West from oppressors in the East” Eastern European Refugee Pack, along with the alternative options, von, Count, Prince, the obligatory lost family estates, the imminent millions in compensation, the ubiquitous knife blunting accent, and of course, a snotty arrogance that you have to have been born with because it cannot be feigned.

When my father turned up in Britain he thought that the British, unfamiliar with the subtle superiority of his name, his Brylcreem free Tito hairstyle and Mussolini strut (only genuine East European Aristocrats can combine all these qualities without their hair falling down or tripping over the peasants) might fail to realise how important a man he had been in Hungary so he added the “de” to enlighten them, having first considered and then rejected the more prestigious “von” for reasons that will have been more obvious in 1948 than they are now, now that the Germans, having succeeded in letting Hitler have the lion’s share of the blame, have confessed to the remaining minor sins and paid the requisite indulgences with BMWs, and washing machines thus avoiding the repentance and penance bits, which history tells us do not sit at all well with the Teutonic character.

While we’re on national characteristics, it’s useful to know the following. First, in pre war Hungary the most prestigious local dignitary was the Mayor. Second, it is common courtesy in Hungary to address a person as one grade higher than their actual qualification or achievement – hence, someone with a degree is addressed as Doktor, someone with a doctorate is addressed as Doktor Doktor, and a member of the fee charging professions such as solicitors, accountants, et al, are promoted from crook to Shyster. It’s also worth noting that in Hungary the gulf between the names Némethy and Németh is at least twice as wide as that between Smythe and Smith in England. So much so that when my younger daughter Tors opted to live and work in Budapest for George Soros (known galaxy-wide as Big S since he almost broke the pound at Norman Lamont’s expense in 1992), she was refused a passport as Némethy because of the lack of supporting paperwork but could have had a passport as Németh for two and a half pages of Green Shield stamps (Hungary still lags behind the West but is catching up fast so it might be Nectar

points by now).

I am nothing if not my father's son! I leapt onto my high horse in a single bound, matters concerning my ancestry being one of the few areas in which I have had any authority since my wife produced zero sons and two daughters,

“NO WAY!” I thundered. “No way a daughter of mine is crawling round Eastern Europe on her hands and knees as a mere Németh, take my mother's maiden name instead!”

So Tors has a Hungarian passport as Lévai Viktoria and an English passport as Victoria de Némethy.

My father claimed to have a degree in History from Miskolc University, just forty miles down the cart track from Rákósz Castle. I have been to Miskolc and from the detail in his stories he did know Miskolc very well. I believe he may have grown up there and he certainly lived there for a while. No documentary proof, but as a scientist myself, I cannot imagine anyone falsely claiming a degree in history from Miskolc University when they could just as easily have claimed a false degree in a proper subject such as Physics from a more prestigious Hungarian University such as Budapest, so it follows that my father did have a degree in history and it was definitely from Miskolc. Thus, if my father's real name was just Németh, his finalising it as de Némethy would constitute a double promotion, making him the equivalent of, taking into account his degree, de Némethy Iván Doktor Doktor Doktor.

My father was already on the run in the last years of the Second World War when at the age of thirty five he met my mother, who was six years younger than him, in Subotica, some fifteen miles south of Szeged in what was then Yugoslavia and is now Serbia - stolen from Hungary by the Allies because Hungary was on the losing side in the First World War. This daylight robbery was dressed up as the Trianon Treaty of 1920, hastily cobbled together signatures from a handful of burnt out Western Leaders giving it the necessary gravitas and credibility to pass muster in Western History Books. Hungarians aren't fooled by these name changes, they write their own history books, they know Serbia belongs to Hungary, along with Rumania and the rest of the missing Austro-Hungarian empire and they all know the telephone, revolving doors and Rubik's cube were invented by Hungarians.

FROM BUDAPEST TO BLACKPOOL

In the Second World War Hungary had picked the losing side yet again (they had yet to accept that they had lost the first one) but that wasn't why my father was on the run. My father would have been on the run wherever he had lived in Europe because he was Jewish, and even worse for him, rich, circumcised Jewish. A fact that my father never admitted to me, the Jewish bit that is, even on his death bed. I never thought to ask my father because it never occurred to me that he might be Jewish, not once in the forty four years that I knew him, if you include the ten years when he disappeared in Margate and surfaced in Blackpool, having taken the land route via London. Surprising really, because I knew from a very young age that my father was circumcised and that Jews had their foreskins cut off on Jehovah's orders. I also knew that some non-Jews were circumcised but I never understood why non-Jews volunteered for such an operation since it wasn't a ticket to their brand of heaven – the circumcision requirement reminds me of the old bus and train tickets where the conductor clipped your ticket with a nasty looking pair of clippers to confirm that you were allowed to ride.

I am neither circumcised nor an expert in these matters but I have seen my own relevant organ in various stages of anger and I see no scope whatsoever for any spare bits that I could donate in the name of hygiene, religion or even hifi, so I deduce that since I cannot, to this day, reliably recognise another man's circumcision my father must have actually told me about his. I have racked my brain and cannot conjure up the conversation, and we surely must have had it, in which my father told me that he was circumcised.

Maybe my father had to tell me because his raising me as a Catholic was a cover for his being Jewish and he felt guilty for having sacrificed his own son to Catholicism, thus depriving me of a foreskin free utopia driving a sun bleached Volvo estate with impunity in London's bus lanes? I understand these are supremely important issues for Jewish fathers and my father must surely have been trying to give me a hint with his circumcision confession. What on earth must my father have thought when the hint passed me by every day for forty odd years? Anyway, my father was definitely circumcised, I am most definitely not.

In 1944, a man walking down a street in Hungary was quite likely to be confronted by armed men ordering him to drop his trousers and if they ascertained that he was circumcised he would be shot on the

spot and dumped in the nearest river. In this climate, Jewish or not, my father's circumcision was more than reason enough for him to be strutting around with his trousers belted up tight when he met my mother, but he didn't keep his trousers on for long, and that, is where I came in.

The importance of my father's being Jewish is not the fact that he was Jewish, I'm not at all fussed about that, he was my father and that's all that matters, whatever he was or did, even if, as my wife asks, "What if he turns out to be Martin Boorman?" The importance for me is in understanding my father, understanding why he never told me something so fundamentally important to his own life, why he actually hid it from me, right to the end.

How then, if he hid it to the end, did I find out that my father was Jewish? I found out as we drove to Blackpool for his funeral. We were talking about him and Tors queried the service being held at a Catholic church instead of a Synagogue. I asked Tors what she was talking about and she said that on my father's last visit when she had told him that she planned to learn Hebrew whilst in Israel during her gap year (she wanted to study Archaeology) my father had beamed and said, "Good. You will be accepted by my people." My father then spoke some sentences Tors didn't understand but recognised as fluent Hebrew. Tors hadn't mentioned it because my father's religion had never been discussed and she assumed that we knew he was Jewish because it was so obvious to her.

Imagine attending your father's funeral and finding another family claiming he was their father not yours, or in his case, it wasn't another family claiming him it was the Jewish religion telling me he was not my father, he was some other man whom I only thought I knew. I keep telling myself that it doesn't stop him being my father, nothing can change that, can it? Doesn't change a second of the life I shared with my father, my memories of him are just as valid and even more important than before because I want to hold my memories closer than I ever did before, but now I need to know more because now I know that I definitely didn't know my own father, yet he raised me and I thought I knew him well.

There was, in fact, someone else at my father's funeral claiming him as family, but not at my expense, and I was pleased to find that she existed. It was Pat. Pat was only a year older than me which made her thirty five years younger than my father. Pat had known about

FROM BUDAPEST TO BLACKPOOL

me all along but I hadn't heard of her until my father died and she rang me, although I had heard Pat's voice on the phone about thirteen years earlier when my father had explained her away as the cleaning woman. Pat had been living with my father for twenty years and I was glad that his stories about being all on his own in Blackpool, all those lonely Christmases when pressure of business and banquet dates with the Mayor prevented him from coming to stay with us, were just another set of stories.

I was about to say that I was also glad that my mother wasn't around to find out but that's not what I mean, I was glad that my mother hadn't found out while she was alive, she'd been hurt more than enough, by me, by my father, and by my sister. Pat was very sweet, commiserated at the loss of my mother, so early, when I was still a child, such a waste, a world famous surgeon like my mother dying of alcoholism because she couldn't cope with having lost her family in the war. I said yes it was, agreed that my father had done a sterling job raising my sister and me on his own, coaching us at home to get me into Oxford and my sister into Cambridge.

Pat had thoughtfully brought my father's famous French beret for me to keep and a couple of photographs, one a very strange, torn, seven inch by five inch black and white photograph of my father's face, the other, a smaller one, of my father sitting at a formica topped table with four of the world's weariest down and outs. Pat warned there might be an outstanding bill at the nursing home...there was.

ALEXIS LYKIARD

CONFUCIAN PRECEPTS FOR CHINESE TRAVELLERS

Desist from the limp handshake.
Nose-picking in public's a no-no,
So is soiling of the swimming pool.
Remember not to mention Pork.

[via *Guidebook for Civilised Tourism*,
64 pp., issued by the Party, 1st Oct 2013.]

FAKING WHOOPEE

We're on a mission to save you every penny!
Both premise and brash promise, like so many,
imply a simply breathtaking benevolence:
here one must thank The Morrisons Experience.
What lies behind those words, what truth, if any?
Revalue life, the best Free Gift, and save far more,
reward yourselves – avoid a big bluff Superstore.

AT MORRISONS

(Haiku For Heaven's Hake)

*Try our hand-battered
award-winning fish and chips!*
Their three-person'd Cod?



What about this small ad Corporal? "Young sailor soon to get shore leave, seeks snug berth for his purple-headed womb ferret" I've never heard of such a creature and I suspect that this descent into vulgar smut is a by-product of your own disgusting publication *The Khaki Oik* which you produce illegally using Fleet Air Arm equipment.

Some of the men of a Fleet Air Arm Operational Station spend their precious leisure hours running a paper called "The Chronicle." The advertisement manager (above, right) "Flash" Godwin, well known in Fleet Street photographic circles, scans a new page. The sub-editor, Corporal Pitt-Pladdy, hammers in the "quoins" which keeps type in place

Illustrated 1942

INTERNATIONAL BOHEMIA

Jim Burns

Between 1840 and 1842 the French artist, Honoré Daumier, contributed a series of twenty-eight lithographs entitled "The Bohemians of Paris" to *Le Charivari*, a well-known publication of the time. What is especially interesting about them is the types that Daumier, obviously referring to the then-current idea of bohemians, chose to include. They portrayed a second-hand clothes dealer, a beggar, an actor, and a political refugee, just to mention a small selection. Later, around 1860, another artist, Gavarni, pictured "A Bohemian Menage," the central character of which appears to be some sort of strolling entertainer. And the historian Remi Gossez, when writing about the June 1848 insurrection, claimed that the rebel forces included "that confused, drifting mass known as la Bohème." I won't list all the misfits that Marx said came into that category, but he named vagabonds, tinkers, and porters, among others.

I've pointed out the above definitions of bohemians to show that, prior to what Daniel Cottom describes as "the modern sense of the word," bohemian could cover a much wider area of activity than that occupied by writers and artists. Cottom rightly says that the 1830s and 1840s saw the "invention" of the new version of the term, even if the older versions still sometimes influenced how some people viewed bohemians. The general in charge of the troops suppressing the Commune in 1871 scathingly suggested that its leaders were bohemians, and he didn't mean that they were writers and artists. They were, in his view, people without a stake in the established order of things.

But let's follow Cottom and accept that by the 1830s the bohemian tag was increasingly applied to writers, artists, students, and their friends and acquaintances. He proposes that, if later few people had any sense of its former meaning, earlier they were aware that the "new" bohemian was "an imitator defined through the appropriation of an exotic image." Was a bohemian therefore a poseur? Cottom investigates this notion and leads into the question of how and why bohemia always seems to have been better earlier. Were there ever any authentic bohemians, or were they always just a pale shadow of those who'd gone before? As Cottom says, "We learn that the fondly

remembered bohemians of yesteryear may be used as sticks with which to beat the youth of today over the head." And he neatly quotes Arthur Bartlett Maurice who said, "Whatever else Bohemia may be it is almost always yesterday." When Henry Murger wrote the sketches that were turned into a play and then his style-setting book, *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*, he more or less indicated that it was largely a male-dominated world he was describing. Women were present, but mostly to provide comfort, of varying kinds, for the men. In Paris grisettes, young working-class girls often from the provinces, attached themselves to the bohemians. Society generally looked down on grisettes, seeing them as loose women who could lead young men astray. After all, many of the male bohemians came from respectable families, or at least those which aspired to that status, and they would, in due course, return to the fold and settle down after their time in bohemia: "In art as in life, the grisette was subject to exploitation, liable to be treated as nothing more than a prop in a masculine drama." This is what comes across in Murger's book, and his own opinion was made clear: "One has creditors when young, just as one has mistresses, because it's necessary to live, and it's necessary to love, but the creditors do not prevent one from becoming a respectable man, just as the mistresses do not prevent one from being an excellent husband." Murger's friend Nadar reacted strongly when, in the stage version of, *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème* Rodolphe's response to the death of Mimi is, "Oh, my youth! It is you that we bury." The self-centred nature of Rodolphe's statement is obvious, but Murger, when challenged about it, merely said, "It's true to life." Cottom is of the opinion that a grisette, hearing the exchange between Nadar and Murger, would have agreed with the latter, being under no illusion about the substance of relationships between bohemians and working-class girls.

Cottom thinks that by the 1850s or so grisettes were disappearing, or more likely changing. And, as with the idea of bohemia always having been better earlier, writers began to lament that grisettes weren't what they used to be. They no longer wanted to cohabit with students and impoverished writers and artists. There were debates about when this happened, with varying dates offered as examples of last sightings of genuine grisettes. This didn't mean that shopgirls, seamstresses, and the like, had all left Paris, and the suggestion seemed to be that they'd become a little more ambitious and now aimed for something more than a precarious relationship with a

struggling and perhaps unreliable bohemian. We have to rely on written sources, provided by men, for evidence of how and why grisettes changed, if they did, and I'm often inclined to recall Arsène Houssaye's comment: "I don't believe in the good faith of the literary bohemian. His disordered life is only a journey in search of sensations, of the documents and observations he needs to produce his work."

Were bohemians "young men disabled by education," as Privat d'Anglemont claimed? Cottom points to the theory, advanced by more than one commentator, about "a disproportion between the numbers of degreed young men and the positions available under Louis Philippe, the Second Republic, and Napoleon III." Were there similar "disproportions" in other countries? Britain, for example, where there was never a real equivalent to the Latin Quarter or the broad experience of bohemianism, despite there being small pockets of writers and artists who might be described as bohemians. It could be that the earlier and faster expansion of industrialisation in Britain helped to soak up some of the young men who might otherwise have been at a loose end because the employment opportunities weren't sufficient to match their educations. And did the prospects offered by the Empire (Australia, Canada, India, South Africa, etc.) contribute towards occupying the energies and talents of the young? There are other theories about the question of why bohemia failed to develop in Britain. Joanna Richardson, in her *The Bohemians: La vie de Bohème in Paris, 1830-1914*, was of the opinion that, "The Frenchman is naturally more inclined than the Englishman to accept the Bohemian way of life, to countenance its idleness, frivolity, and passionate intensity.... The Frenchman by his nature, is more inclined to indulge in café life, to prolong intellectual conversation. He lacks the matter-of-factness of the Englishman."

A common complaint about bohemians was that they were work-shy. Cottom says that, although "work had always been a hard fact of life," in the nineteenth century "work became spirit" and "the driving force of culture." And "Like nineteenth century socialism and communism, bohemia was born as a repercussion of this event." Was it, he asks, pure coincidence that Murger's "childhood friend, Pettier, would go on to write the *Internationale* (1871), the famous communist anthem," and that "socialist-anarchist philosopher, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, was Murger's downstairs neighbour when

Scènes de la Vie de Bohème was written? Murger himself was something of a conservative when it came to politics, but he must have been aware of what was going on around him. His treatment of radicals, and especially of those like Fourier with advanced Utopian theories, was often satirical, but he didn't just ignore them.

I'm perhaps digressing somewhat, but it is worth drawing attention to parallel developments in the 19th Century. And maybe the bourgeoisie were right (from their point of view) to look askance at both radicals and bohemians if they suspected that elements in both groups derided the idea of finding "virtue in work." Paul Lafargue's manifesto, *The Right to Idleness*, attacked "proletarians for their submission to the gospel of work, mocking deluded notions about the nobility of labour, flailing away at anyone tempted to buy into mere piece-meal reforms (such as the pitiful 'right to work')." Lafargue thought that no-one should need to work more than three hours a day and that advancing technology would make such a situation not just desirable but possible. Cottom's assertion is that bohemians were, in their way, attempting to "get out from underneath" a culture which made a gospel out of work and condemned those who didn't agree. Bohemia was steeped in a longing for an earlier time, prior to industrialisation: "Murger's bohemia expressed a nostalgic desire for a progressive alternative to modern culture." That the bohemians managed to arouse the indignation of both Marx and the Goncourts may be to their credit. Marx saw bohemians as reactionaries and the Goncourts saw them as conspirators in a plot against their supposed betters. They didn't belong to either the revolutionary or the respectable camps.

In July, 1859, a funeral procession made its way towards a cemetery in Montmartre. Among the mourners, many of them members of the Paris bohemian community, was Henry Murger, himself ill and destined to die in a couple of years. The funeral was that of Alexandre Privat d'Anglemont, a man who might be said to have been the archetypal bohemian. But who was he? The details of his early years were vague, partly because, as other people noted, he tended to change his stories as he told them. He had been born in Guadeloupe in 1815 and his family owned a sugar plantation. He was sent to Paris to be educated and decided to stay there rather than returning to enter the family business. Despite what many people thought, and the impression given by the way he lived, he was never

completely destitute. He had a regular allowance from an older brother but tended to spend it quickly, often buying meals and drinks for his bohemian friends and others less fortunate than himself. I should add that some accounts dispute the facts of Privat's income. Cottom says that he "preferred to live by his wits, by his talk, by cadging meals - by whatever means or mercies came his way." This could still tie in with having an allowance, of course, if he did spend it on other people.

Privat did produce a fair amount of written work, though perhaps not in a systematic way. Cottom refers to articles in various publications, some theatre reviews, a booklet about a dance hall, an essay about the Encyclopedists of the Enlightenment, a few poems, and a scattering of other pieces. He was probably best known for a series of articles about what Cottom calls "the hidden lives, neighbourhoods, and corners of Paris." And he once did claim to be working on a book called *The Shady Life: The Story of Seven Bohemians who have no Castles*," but a contemporary dismissed this by saying, "This difficult enterprise remained worthy of bohemia, in the sense that the author has yet to write the first line of it." However, as Cottom has it, "the fact of Privat's legend is probably more important than any details that can be recovered about the facts of his life." Privat seems to have been liked by almost everyone, and most had a story to tell about him. The chapter on his years among the bohemians is, for me, one of the best things about Cottom's book. It isn't that Privat is unknown to those interested in bohemia (Jerrold Seigel wrote about him in his classic study, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930*) but Cottom comes up with some perceptive comments concerning how and why Privat made such an impression in his day and now seems to be representative of a certain period of bohemian life.

So far virtually everything has been about Paris, so it comes as a surprise when Cottom raises the possibility that "bohemia had its origin in the United States." He quotes a French writer, Barbey d'Aurevilly as naming Edgar Allan Poe "the King of the Bohemians," because "the greatest of all modern bohemians should have been born in the heart of America, the land in which the outcasts of all nations found refuge." He wasn't generally complimentary about America, though, and thought of Poe "as the first and the best, in his way, of that lawless and solitary literature, without tradition and

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without ancestors*prolem sine matre creatum*, which has stamped itself with the name of bohemia that will remain with it as its punishment."

Americans, in particular Walt Whitman, naturally responded to this accusation by stressing their apartness from polite European society: "Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos." Which isn't to suggest that Whitman thought of himself as a bohemian, even if others did. Murger's book had reached America within a couple of years of its 1851 publication in France. And at Pfaff's, a tavern in New York, Henry Clapp Jr., who owned the *New York Saturday Press*, gathered around him various newspapermen and others and began to push Whitman's poetry. Clapp himself had spent three years in Paris, so had direct experience of its bohemia, and had translated some of the writings of the Utopian philosopher Fourier, whose ideas had influenced members of the Brook Farm colony. Nathaniel Hawthorne satirised their efforts to establish a Utopian community in his novel, *The Blithedale Romance*. Cottom doesn't mention it, but it has always seemed to me that there are similarities to be noticed in certain of the oddballs and eccentrics drawn to Utopian settlements and those attracted to bohemian groups.

Cottom neatly analyses Whitman's verse to find lines that could be said to indicate a leaning towards bohemianism: "I lean and loaf at my ease," and "He going with me goes often with spare diet, poverty, angry enemies, contentions." And he says that "bohemianism suffuses his poetry," and points to the image that Whitman liked to project, at least in his early days when he had himself photographed "in his shirtsleeves, collar open, hat slouched across his forehead, with his left hand stuck in his pocket and his right hand cocked on his hip." Perhaps he was trying to look like a working-man, but the picture couldn't help but suggest a bohemian stance that more respectable writers would have eschewed.

Whitman later toned down his desire for notoriety, and Cottom indicates that bohemianism generally in America tended to aspire to being well-behaved. One American commentator said that New York's bohemia "differs from that of London or Paris by being more in earnest." Others, looking back on the days when Pfaff's was a meeting-place for boisterous bohemians, described them as "an outlawry," and stated that literary New York was "more decorous" for not being like Pfaff's. The best quotes come from Charles Astor

Bristed, who remarked that Murger's work had a "limited and inadequate conception of Bohemianism," and furthermore, "There are bohemians with houses and lands and rent-rolls and government stocks. Nay, there are bohemians who keep their accounts and their appointments with rarely deviating regularity."

The proposal that bohemianism arises from an over-production of educated young men crops up again when Cotton turns his attention to Italy, Germany, and elsewhere. He quotes a sociologist, Gerolamo Boccardo, who referred to "the structural misfit between the continuing production of university-educated young men and the weak demand in society for their services." And he added, "Woe to the society that knowingly and systematically produces an intellectual proletariat." Cotton's coverage of Italian bohemia is valuable, partly because so many other English-language accounts have tended to focus on France, America, and Britain. He's obviously read widely in minor 19th Century Italian literature, and makes the point that, specifically Italian features apart, the young bohemians of the 1860s and 1870s "reiterated themes of the French bohemia of the 1830s and 1840s." They "idealised youth and youthfulness, romantically understood as being at odds with the established social order. They placed a high value on friendship, conceived of as promoting social virtues outside of the domestic bounds of the family and free of the corrupting bonds of the nation's economic and political structures." There are, inevitably, stories of bohemian characters and escapades. The libretticist Fulvio Fulgano ran up such a large account at a café he frequented that he was refused service when he ordered a coffee. Fulgano thereupon nonchalantly asked the proprietor for twenty centesmi so he could buy one elsewhere. It's not an outrageous anecdote, but it's easy to imagine how, in circles in which Fulgano was viewed as a bohemian character, it would be recounted with relish.

I've got to admit that, approaching the end of Cotton's book, I was a little bemused by the idea of Dracula and Sherlock Holmes as bohemians. I suppose that Holmes had some bohemian habits (his drug use, his lassitude when not involved with an investigation, perhaps his violin playing), and Cotton mentions "A Scandal in Bohemia" (the real geographical place, not the mythical one), where Holmes is described as someone "who loathed every form of society with his whole Bohemian soul," and is "buried among his old books,

and alternating from week to week between cocaine and ambition."

Dracula I had to think about much more. Not having read Bram Stoker's book since I was on guard duty at an army camp in Germany in 1956, I tried hard to work out how and why Dracula fitted into a bohemian scheme of things. Cottom sums up his thesis in the following manner: "Karl Marx's radically divergent critique of bohemians as a counter-revolutionary lumpenproletariat - 'the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass, thrown hither and thither, which the French term, *la bohème*' — is also encompassed in the design of Dracula, which raises the spectre of an entirely new species taking over the earth, a species not only *declassé*, like bohemians, but unclassifiable in the conventional terms of humanity." It's an interesting idea, but not one I can accept as convincing. Were bohemians, of any kind, ever likely to take over the earth? They may have been seen as constituting a threat to property values or some other aspect of society that the middle-class hold dear, but I doubt that they ever aroused much more than a bout or two of indignation at their feckless ways. Still, I have to admit that I was reminded of Harry Kemp's plan for a "League of Bohemian Republics," which he touted around in the 1920s: "When the earth is salted with bohemianism and the army of bohemians is so strong that the world will recognise its power will come the real revolution which will overturn bolshevism and capitalism and shock the people into thinking and understanding." Or, moving to another bohemian character, Alexander Trocchi, and his 1960s plan for an "Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds," we find him saying that those minds should concentrate on "leisure," the Industrial Revolution having alienated man from himself with the result that he has forgotten how to play. A lot of 19th Century bohemians would have agreed with that. Sadly, not too many people took either Kemp or Trocchi seriously.

Cottom appears to propose that bohemia had exhausted itself by the end of the 19th Century, and he runs through a list of what the term had meant and come to mean. It's too long to repeat here, but its variety may be its virtue. If a definition is hazy and keeps shifting its flexibility can be a form of defence against those who want to dismiss it as worthless. Bohemia has had its poseurs but also its genuinely talented writers and artists. And, as Cottom himself admits, "the bohemian phenomenon did offer many people a way

forward that was better than any they could otherwise have dreamed." In his grand survey of bohemia Cottom refers to a review of Strindberg's novel, *The Red Room*, published in 1879, and quotes the reviewer as saying that bohemia is an "oasis in a world of humbug." That strikes me as a nice way of putting it, and I place it alongside Hippolyte Havel's response when asked to define the limits of Greenwich Village -"It has no limits, it's a state of mind" - as among my favourite definitions of bohemia.

International Bohemia is a fascinating and thought-provoking study of 19th Century bohemia. I can't say that I find myself in sympathy with everything that Daniel Cottom says - I'm still puzzling over Dracula, and I had doubts about the attempts to link the kind of working-class girls in novels by George Eliot and Thomas Hardy with the Parisian grisettes described by Murger - but I was never less than stimulated by his arguments. The range of his reading is impressive, and his book is a mine of information both in the main text and in the copious notes. He modestly states that he has not written "a survey or general history," nor does he make "any claims to comprehensiveness," but I think it will be acknowledged that he has made a valuable addition to the library of books on the subject of bohemia.

INTERNATIONAL BOHEMIA: SCENES OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY
LIFE by Daniel Cottom University of Pennsylvania Press. 353 pages.
\$59.95/£39. ISBN 978-0-8122-4488-5

OIKU: Bede: Spoilt for Choice! (Dave Birtwistle – 100 words)

He watched aged Brother Cædmon stirring the cauldron of pottage in the kitchen. The wind whistled past the cells and up the stone steps. The younger monks went out on the hamlet every third Monday and twice during Septuagessima. It looked like it was going to be an Old Scroats' night. He huddled closer to the fire. A dilemma. Should he go up to the Scriptorium and do some manuscript copying, or play rickers with a couple of spoons, or challenge elderly brother Cædmon to a game of Shuffle Cap or Dibs and win himself second helpings of barley briw?



St Anthony (251-356) became a little confused as he got older. When he couldn't name the emperor (Constantine) or count backwards in VIIs from CVI he was persuaded by his faithful Christian helpers to go into a care home – the Hospice of Our Merciful Lord Jesus. Some of the carers have since required re-training.

Picture by M. Grunwald of the Isenheim Photo Agency

KEITH HOWDEN

Lowry to Bosch

Hieronymus, the shapes of hell
don't change. Pain's architecture
wears fashion's facades but still.
suffering's long landscapes endure.

At least your anguished buggers knew
they were in hell. My shambling lot
traipse ignorantly through
its alleyways, believing that

they're somewhere else. Simple men
are daily eaten and shat out
in bubbles, though today's digestion
is more seemly, the commode discreet.

Greed's eternity prospers, strutting
under philanthropy's bowler
and your cancerous bagpipe of lung
is labelled *Made in Manchester*.

The same hunger and hopelessness
shrinks at the same beasts. Your kind
bared teeth. Now carnivorous
bankers mumble and grind

with cash. Horror's no longer *chic*.
But poverty's knock was always
poverty's knock, its metaphysic
never an instrument of grace.

Since allegory lost its merits
surface is all. That quizzical
age you limned coded the spirit's
lineament within the physical.

We don't. And yet the shapes endure.
Your tortured buggers knew they were
in hell. My lot would never wear
or comprehend the metaphor.

Hell's parable has sold its force
and secular times must compromise.
I painted it in Salford. Yours
was only Salford in disguise.

OIKU: Beda Venerabilis: Coping with the damp. (100 words
David Birtwistle)

He'd been up all night, huddled round the kitchen fire shivering as he translated the lives of the early church fathers from Latin into Anglo-Saxon. He wanted something that would warm the cockles of his heart and put new life back into his bones. A rabbit broth with barley was bubbling away. He wanted to liven it up. As the tallow flame flickered he added ginger, coriander, garlic and his piece de resistance, a special strain of strong, local mustard. This would blow the skyddmarkyinders out of Ælfric's nether pantaloons and might just score hundendieftig on the new Arserburnna scale.

**OIKU: The Vulnerable Bede: Isolation and Winter
Claustrophobia.** (100 words David Birtwistle)

Bad stir-craziness was in all around. Brother Ælfstan suffered from SAD so they moved him into a cabin. Brother Ælfselm started talking to himself so they gave him Health and Safety Duty. He began a Risk Assessment on the Lavatorium which ran to twenty scrolls. But when Brother Ælscwig got obsessive about pigs-bladder ball, Bede had to intervene. Ælscwig painted a No.9 in woad on the back of his cassock and chanted "C'mon Jarrer!" at the top of his voice. Bede countered by taking the cell next door and shouting "C'mon Monkwearmouth! Gi' me an 'M', Gi' me an 'O'.....

TO WORK

Tom Kilcourse

Though I was given every consideration during my final year at school, the temptation to get a job and earn money on my own behalf overrode any second thoughts about staying on at Saint Gregory's. Why that should be is not clear. The only lad in the gang in paid employment at that time was Geoff, who had taken an apprenticeship with a large engineering company, Mather and Platt. Ron had disappeared into the Royal Navy, but all the rest remained in school.

Nevertheless, at fifteen I felt ready to take on the world of work, not realising that a great deal of learning lay ahead. The first problem was to identify an attractive job, the word career being simply not in my vocabulary. People in my circle went to work for money, not for any sense of social progression. None of the adults around me were able to give advice that was useful, though plenty was offered, and Elsie decided to turn to the professionals. In her company I went to see a youth employment officer, a gentle woman who did her best to spur a modicum of ambition in me. Each avenue she explored proved to be a cul-de-sac, until Elsie mentioned that I was fond of animals. With a sigh of relief the woman extracted a card from her files.

On reflection, I can only conclude that the 'gentle' woman was a closet sadist. She sent me to Monsal Hospital for an interview with the head of the Medical Research Council laboratory there. I got the job, feeding and generally looking after guinea pigs, mice and other small creatures. However, this alleged animal lover was also expected to incinerate the bodies of these creatures once they had served their experimental purpose. I stuck it out for nine months. Apart from the incineration though the job was enjoyable and I found the staff there generally friendly and helpful, giving the lie to the distinction implied by their wearing white overalls while I wore brown. One of the things I learned during my nine months there was how to play chess. My second lesson concerned the reality of my position in the workplace. When told that Dr. Harbour, the head of the service, wanted to see me about some misdemeanour I responded with the boast that I wanted to see him anyhow to resign. Later that day I met Dr. Harbour with the words "I believe you wanted to see me, sir." His reply, "I'm told you wanted to see me, Kilcourse"

caught me flat footed and I mumbled sheepishly that I wanted to leave the job.

Having resigned from the MRC I was faced with the need to find another job. I was expected to make a contribution to the household budget, and had become accustomed to having a couple of bob in my pocket. After poring over the job advertisements in the *Evening Chronicle* for a few nights I finally landed a position as an Improver Mechanic with Elenar Motors, a three-man repair shop on Waterloo Road close to Strangeways Prison, and in a big Jewish area of Manchester. I had much improving to do.

The garage comprised a cobbled yard with an outside toilet, a covered workshop large enough to hold two or three cars, a second smaller workshop that had once been a showroom, an area with a couple of work benches, and 'the office', a creaking desk lurking behind a plywood screen. The place was in a state that would cause it to be closed down by the authorities today, being filthy and non-too safe. Nonetheless, I loved it. My companions there were Monty Newman, the Jewish owner, and Tom, the mechanic. Most of the clients were Jewish, mainly market traders, who were happy to hang around the garage and chew the fat while their vehicle was being fixed. Their tolerance of my cack-handedness at times was amazing. One customer returned to the garage to say that a rear wheel I had put on his car had passed him on the main road. I wasn't fired for that, or even reprimanded.

Above the garage there existed a clothing manufacturing business entered via an iron fire escape that rose from the garage yard. That too was run by Jews who would often pop down to the garage for a chat with Monty or one of our clients. Everybody knew everybody else. The education those people gave me was less formal than that received at Saint Gregory's, but it proved invaluable in later life. For instance, the fire escape needed painting, having developed significant patches of rust, and the owner of the business asked me if I'd care to do the job. The thought of extra cash was attractive, so I accepted, at which point he asked me how much I would charge. Being totally green and embarrassed about asking for money I suggested that he give me a price. I remember his smile as he refused, insisting that I was tendering for the work, and I must therefore state the price. Lesson one, from a very nice bloke. I charged him a tenner.

About a year after I joined the garage, Monty sold the business to a man called Josh Cohen, who was not a trained mechanic, or much of a businessman, but a very gentle man without any edge. Though Josh was unmistakably Jewish he was far from religious, and used to send me out at lunch-time to buy bacon sandwiches from a little takeaway round the corner. Of all the bosses I have had in my working life Josh sticks in my mind as one of the most decent and easy going. I recall one afternoon when he used a word to describe me that was offensive, though probably merited, I blew my top and threatened to walk out. In truth, my departure might have been to his advantage as the garage was losing money by then, but he apologised in the mechanic's presence. Sadly, his own departure was inevitable. He put the business up for sale, and it was bought by Tom the mechanic, and a mate of his. Within weeks of that happening, I got the chop. It was Friday and I had spent the day stripping down the engine of a large van and decoking it. I worked late to finish the task and, pleased with myself for a job well done, I went into the garage to collect my weekly wage. They waited until I confirmed that the job was finished, before telling me that I was surplus to requirements.

I was only two weeks from my eighteenth birthday when given the sack, and it was possibly the prospect of having to give me a raise that earned me the push. Having come to enjoy the work I began applying for jobs with other garages, but there were two problems. Garages expected mechanics to have their own tools, which I didn't, and my impending eighteenth meant that I would soon be conscripted into the forces. Nobody was prepared to engage me for a few short months only, with or without my own tools. The dilemma was solved in conversation with my old mate Ron Capewell, who had left the Royal Navy and was looking for work. He was considering a job down the pits, which was exempt from conscription. I applied to the NCB and was accepted. Ron chickened out and joined British Rail as an engine cleaner.

Therefore, without Ron's companionship I alone went into the abyss, in the form of the Oak Colliery in Oldham. That is where I did my initial training to be a miner. On my first day I stepped through the heavy steel doors with two other trainees and Colin Orange, the training officer. Beyond those doors was a big, round hole protected by what appeared to be a totally inadequate fence. To be fair, having just been told that the hole was three hundred yards deep, a solid

brick wall would have seemed to me inadequate. Boyhood in Newton Heath had taught me never to show fear, but the sight of that inch thick steel rope disappearing into the hole tested my resolve to the limits. My life was about to depend on it. Had either of the other trainees backed away I would possibly have followed, but my upbringing forbade my being the first to break.

Within days however, I became blasé, stepping into the cage without hesitation to be lowered by the rope down the shaft. The tunnels too quickly became familiar and I was yet to discover how those fairly quiet, well lit runs differed from the ear shattering clatter and frantic activity of a working pit. There also, I encountered miners' humour for the first time. Squatting in a group with some old hands as we ate our 'snap', one seasoned veteran asked us what we had for dinner the day before, Sunday. One lad volunteered the information that he had roast pork, with apple sauce. For his pains, he was harangued for ten minutes, with the old miners laughing uproariously at the idea of someone eating his 'pudding' with his meat. 'You eat your apples with custard, not with your meat, lad'. Never having eaten roast pork with apple sauce, it took me a few minutes to get into the joke. In an odd echo of younger days when I had two identities, Tommy Brandwood and Tommy Kilcourse, Colin Orange introduced me by my second forename, Brian, and thereafter I was known in the pits as Brian, while remaining Tom elsewhere.

When the initial training was completed I was sent to Bradford Pit, in Manchester. The thousand yard deep shaft there made that of the Oak seem like a pothole. As well as being deeper, the drop was much faster at fifteen feet per second. Again, mineworkers' humour revealed itself. The down-shaft, that used to draw air into the mine, was served by a steam driven winder that was much quicker than the electrically driven engine for the up-shaft. The cage in the down-shaft had four decks, each carrying twenty men. The floor of each deck was made of perforated steel, so that anything spilled on the upper deck dripped through to the one below. Bradford being a big pit, employing two and a half thousand men, often received visits from VIPs.

One of the winders was of an irritable disposition and it was quite common during his shift for miners to give him a V-sign from the cage, which he could see from his seat. He rose to the bait every time, putting the cage into near free-fall as a way of punishing his

tormentors. When the drop exceeded the maximum permitted speed the automatic safety brake came on. By then, the cage could be on the end of two or three hundred yards of rope, which stretched. Having stretched, it then retracted so that the falling cage halted for an instant before shooting upwards. It would then bounce up and down for several seconds. To those in the know this was all good fun, but the experience could be terrifying to newcomers, or visitors. I remember one youth making the sign of the cross as he muttered a prayer. The most memorable event though was the visit of some dignitaries from Eastern Europe. These chaps were riding on the top deck when it happened, and the screams were apparently spine chilling to hear. One gentleman from East Germany had to go back to the surface to change his trousers. However, the blokes on the deck below him paid a penalty for their little joke, with shit splattered helmets.

If people in the descending cage found the experience unnerving, those in the ascending cage needed nerves of steel. In their case, the cage would continue to rise for a few feet under its momentum aided by the retracting rope, but then it fell. Many an innocent soul thought his end had come when that happened.

Less vigorous forms of humour were commonplace down the pit. I had worked underground for about three years when I started courting a girl who was to become my first wife. At the end of a nightshift I was in the midst of a group of men waiting for the trams to take us up the brow. With us was a Deputy (Foreman) named Tobin whose wife, rumour had it, was known to stray. Tobin was not a natural wit, but he thought that in me he had an easy target, asking me what my girl-friend did while I was on nightshift. I cannot recall my answer, but his next line was to re-assure me that I ‘wouldn’t miss a slice off a cut loaf’. His grin disappeared when one of the lads quipped back that ‘tha should know, there’s only fucking crust left at tha house’. They must have heard the laughter on the surface.

Some people were of course ready-made butts for the humour of others. One such was Albert, who started work in the pit about the same time as I did, and we worked in the same haulage gang. Many young newcomers were eager to learn the miners’ art of tobacco chewing, under the able direction of a gentleman named Jackie Mullins. Jackie taught us to tease the fresh cud gently between the teeth with just enough force to squeeze out sufficient tobacco juice to

spit. Delicacy was an alien concept to Albert, who chomped hard on an over sized cud as if it were chewing gum. This filled his mouth with a splurge of juice, much of which he swallowed. That day he was stretched up the pit, heaving mightily over the side.

That caper was nothing though when compared with a later trick played on Albert, who was very proud of his manly physique. This vanity led him to believe the flattery that came his way from a group of pranksters, who convinced him that such a powerful build would win him greatness in the boxing ring. He accepted from them a rigorous, some would say sadistic, training regime in readiness for the approaching preliminaries of the National Coal Board boxing tournament. He got hammered by a tall thin lad known to his known to his supporters as the Wigan Windmill because of the way his spindly arms flailed the air when in the ring. Albert stood in statuesque pose, looking puzzled as gloved mitts pummelled his head. Some watchers swore that the Wigan lad's eyes were closed and had Albert the sense to step back he would have escaped injury. As it was, the referee stopped the 'fight' when Albert went down for a second time, not having thrown a punch.

One of the men involved in that episode with Albert, a man we called Gotty, later went a practical joke too far. Working on nights at the Horizon, a level of the mine only two thirds of the way down the shaft, Gotty thought it would be a laugh to tip a tub of 'night soil' into the shaft to embarrass his mates working at the bottom. He thought that the stuff would simply fall past the bottom level and lie stinking in the sump. This failed to take account of the strength of wind in the down-shaft and the stuff broke up into a spray to be drawn into the tunnel itself. Unfortunately for Gotty the night overman was in the tunnel at the time and was not in the least amused to be covered in shit.

Another event provided me with an invaluable lesson in man management. The manager of Bradford pit was respected by everyone working there, not least because he was believed to be 'giving one' to the canteen manageress. Be that as it may, the men did not generally try to con the old boy. He had a black belt himself in bullshit. However, respect for him did not extend to a new Assistant Manager, Taylor, who arrived straight from mining college. He had much to learn.

It was common for those who smoked to enjoy a last cigarette before

going down the pit. Already dressed for the job, and carrying their lamps, they would hold back and wait for the last cage, many of them sitting on the hall floor with their backs against a wall. Such was the scene one night when Taylor appeared, smartly dressed in a suit and tie. He had been out for the evening and, being a keen type, called into the pit on his way home. Seeing men ‘idling’ rather than rushing to go underground, he began to order them to get on their feet and make their way to the shaft. Initial astonishment turned to humour and men began to laugh, though none made a move. His voice rising he began trying to lift men physically to their feet, shouting threats of ‘reports’ to the manager. The physical contact was a mistake. The rags that miners wear underground are always thick with dust from previous shifts. After several futile wrestling matches with laughing men, Taylor looked like he had worked a shift himself. God knows what his dry-cleaning bill came to. He had departed to pastures new within a few months.

My first two years down Bradford Pit were spent working with a haulage gang close to the shaft bottom. There, the tunnels were high and well lit. Midway through the shift someone would carry the brew-cans to the shaft and put them in the cage to be taken to the surface, where they would be filled and returned. The tunnels were whitewashed, safe and airy. After two years I volunteered to be trained for face work and was transferred to a special training face to learn the necessary skills. Mine work as a doddle was about to end.

GOOFY TEETH



Slips into your mouth over your own teeth. The effect is most startling, the teeth protrude, giving a most realistic “goofy” effect.

This prosthetic is particularly effective should you be interviewed for a place at Oxford where you will find many of the interviewers similarly blessed. They will instantly recognise you as one of their own. A scholarship to Balliol is guaranteed.

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Rover 1954

GONGFERMOUR

Tanner

In the bog there's this big yellow puddle *spreading* across the floor ... drops twinkle on the seat, run down the toilet base and *plop* into a puddle ... 'The fiends,' I mutter, tearing off a sheet of tissue, getting on my knees like an authentic beeatch and dabbing it up – I HAVE to, lest my fellow drones think it's me, being the last one in here .. but it happens again, this *stream* of piss dripping down, the kind you don't see until it's *swarmed* around the soles of your shoes 'The fiendish fiends,' I get down ... I catch Jim coming out, glazed in tubby smugness as he zips up, and dash in to inspect he's *hosed* the place you can just picture him with his little frustrated shimp sprinkler in his hands, whirling about as he chants 'I'M IN CHARGE, I'M IN CHARGE!' knowing his lowly staff have to clean it up. I peer into his yellow puddle, my rippled reflection grimaces at me ... 'This isn't *on*,' it tells me. I know And there's Simian Gordon, another licker of promotional sphincters, he's renowned for dumping great brown slops on us, like he's the birth mother of gravy-based alien foetuses ... never once flushing, like it's a *deliberate* comment on MY purpose. Oh and according to the checkout tarts, *Senior Checkout Gargoyle* Tanya always leaves a red bubbling bowl or two in the ladies karzie – proof her cunt's pro-lapsing trying to accommodate The Corporate Man's phallic wage packet; they've all got their own *internal* distress, it's graph chart rage, the profit margin panic. I.B.S.: Irritable Bowel Success they'll never be happy, it's their job to be tortured by figures which is fine, except they're throwing *their* despair down at *us*, haemorrhaging down the rungs of the old social rope ladder until it's too soggy, leaving us with *our* broken necks in *their* puddles beneath, waiting for the next drip in our mouths ...

RISIBLE IN RY

Ron Horsefield

Enid seemed doubtful about Ry.

“Look,” I said, “this isn’t ordinary kitsch, say, like a Thomas Hardy tea-towel showing a map of Wessex, or a tiny plaster bust of Dickens – this major, world scale crap which only the French provincials know how to do. It’s all because of their lousy TV and their remoteness from centres of civilization. They’re just intrinsically barmy – driven so by the boredom of *la France profonde*. Most of them can only exchange a few words with a pig or a chicken until it’s market day” I reminded her of the tableaux history of France we’d seen in a converted barn which some poor schmuck had devoted his life to. Five hundred manikins performing Madame Bovary couldn’t be missed. She grudgingly agreed but hoped nobody from the department would get to know about it.

So we schlepped out to Ry, pop 613. Flaubert was looking for the most boring town in the area and since his story was based on the newspaper account of the adultery and early death of Mme Delamare who is buried in the churchyard he might just as well use Ry as his model for Yonville. The village is pretty and lies in a hollow such that as you look up either end of the main street you see green hills. There’s a restaurant called Le Bovary next to the town hall and a large structure 100 yards further down which acts as an information centre with many maps identifying the houses of Homais and Bovary et al. The actual automat museum is just over the road but is closed till after lunch. Enid, already drowning under this blizzard of pamphlets and posters, looks relieved - but I’m not prepared to take “closed” for an answer and vow to come back after we’ve shot off (er - well schlepped off) to Michelet’s chateau just up the road at Vascoeuil. Not that this is without its bizarre vulgarity since, in spite of the fact that the grounds are immaculate and studded with great modern statues and the chateau itself has been recently renovated and looks superb in a monolithic, undecorated kind of way – there is, in a tower where the great man worked, an effigy with a yellowy wax head dressed in the garb of a 19th century writer – yis its old Michelet himself, quill pen poised over a page, looking up expectantly as you gasp up the final steps of the spiral stair as if to say “What the fuck time d’you call this?”

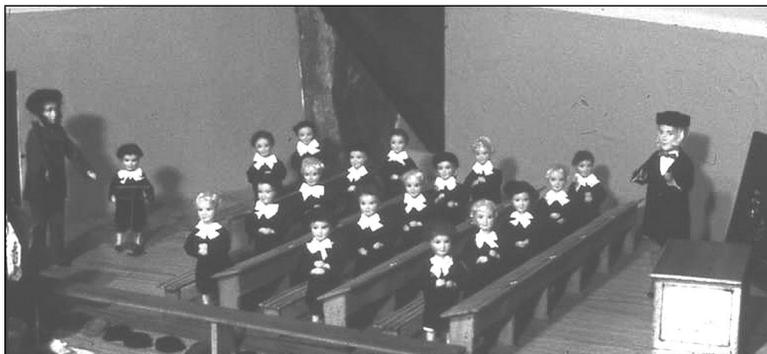
A DORDOGNE IDYLL

We dine outside alone in the grounds in the bright sun. What an idyll! The frogs certainly know how to make the most of a cultural asset. The waitress is possibly the ugliest woman we've seen so far but she does not eschew make-up and coquetry in an attempt to compensate for this deficit. Since things are slow, and only two other people turn up, a thick set middle aged geezer emerges from the back (the chef?) and they eat and elaborate lunch together complete with a bottle of nondescript rosé. We don't ask the obvious question but imagine the answer.

Back at Ry the automats are now operational. No daylight enters a barn-like building as this would detract from the realism of what we are about to see. We are led to the beginning of the tableaux by a young guide who, far from having difficulty keeping a straight face, seems positively serious. A brilliantly lit long table runs round three quarters of the room. Each tableau is about a yard square. In front is an extract from the novel describing the scene. The automats are figures about 3 inches high fixed to spindles which stick through the base. They do no more than wag from side to side – clock and anti-clock endlessly. Their bright little tunics and frocks glow against the background of papier maché streets and trees. We are gobsmacked. But it's all there - from Chas's first day at school with his crazy whalebone cap, to the meetings with Rodolphe and Leon (no! – congress is not simulated although I know, from my researches on the Golden Mile, that this is technically feasible), the botched operation on the clubbed foot and the final poisoning with arsenic. No need to read the book again after this.

Next on the tortuous route through the building from which no diversion is permitted is a life-sized reconstruction of the village pharmacy (made from the actual shop furnishings and bottles) – this is evocative and worth a look. Upstairs we have to pass through a modern section showing characters from the English TV show the *Magic Roundabout*. Then, with another odd aesthetic lurch, we arrive at the final room which has all four walls plastered with newspaper articles and xeroxes of documents relating to the village, the Delamare scandal and Flaubert's immortal novel. A scholar of the work and the period could spend a couple of hours in here and learn something. Outside once more I can't quite believe what I have seen and hurry back to the entrance kiosk to buy some slides of the place. The serious young guide seems to regard this request as

entirely proper and in no way an ironical piss-take. Anyway at 20FF for ten who's taking the piss out of whom?



Nous étions a l'étude quand le Proviseur entra



Emma and Rodolphe in the arbour

A DORDOGNE IDYLL

John Lee

Eyes bunged up – 5.34am. Got to get up. Bursting for a piss. Last one about 2.30 bloody prostrate. Leg down carefully, lever off the other, keep it straight. Sciatica from the back. It's fucked - lifting beams, tiles, cement etc. My fault - not my metier-never was. Better - but not good - can't piss properly. Don't pull chain. Turd grinder wakens the missus. It's hot already - sleeping in the bedroom - made it in top of the old barn - extended the cottage tiles keep the heat and the dust -Jesus! Worms eating the beams - little pyramids of sawdust. See me out though. The bats have gone. They shat everywhere - flying shit bags, but then so has the barn owl - I miss him - nothing left for him now - the price of modernity - I know how he felt.

Go back to bed - won't sleep though. Soon Mick starts his high pitched screaming. He was drunk again last night. "Where am I?" Farmhouse and barn on little cart track up a hill, on the edge of a forest - Dordogne France. "The Dordogne! Wow! Posh that! Very English!" Southern accountants in sandals, blue socks and khaki shorts looking bemused, avoiding the aborigines in the markets. Their women do the talking in faded Laura Ashley Middle-Class Flower Power- "Garçon! Garçon! can we have a pot of tea?- S'il vous plait"

Oh No! No No. This is the other Dordogne, Neuvic-Sur-L'Isle - Marbot's shoe factory - closed now - three thousand redundancies - three-thousand stitched-up leather workers - fifteen years ago. Bata took it over and locked em out. Battered by Bata. Big strike; fathers and sons divided, still don't speak. Used to bus em in - now no buses - no trains either - they closed the station. So what did they do? Most of them did nothing. Cubis of cheap wine - *La France Profonde?* No! the Back Country. *Le Pays Arrière*. Oh yes, in Neuvic there's a middle class, but not shop keepers any more - commuters - for them, a place to sleep. School teachers still tell the kids - You don't need education to work in the fields, the woodyard or the forge. Waken up you dozy bastards -They're going, going, gone.

Did I say Neuvic-Sur L'Isle? Oh No No! - Haut Planèze . Where's that? Well if Neuvic is nothing much then Planèze, its suburb, is

nowhere from nothing. Over the river, across the tracks, up the hill, in the woods, where the peasants live. Alongside the sign reading 'Planèze - Canton of Neuvic,' the local priest put up his own sign - 'Who lives beyond here? - The Chinese.' He'd never seen them at church - they had the last laugh - he was found living in a *ménage à trois* in a village five miles away. Now no priest at all, soon a sign on the church - For Sale - just like the station. Other sign on level crossing, dates from the thirties, warns of the danger of crossing the tracks - '*Attention. Un train peut cacher un autre*' and for those who couldn't read - a picture of a schoolboy having his head crushed by a flying steam engine .

Back to 5.30 - Well six o'clock. Mick - first stirrings - little bloke, never worked - officially retarded, lives with old mother - Marie. Told me one day - "I have a hole in me brain - Where the moon gets in." told him it was impossible. "No-no it's true John - my dad told me - that's why I've got to be careful when there's a full moon." Since his dad died he stinks and his red hair's all gone - also he's gone lazy. His dad made him work. Used to do a bit of this and that. Dad took the money - but no good now - nearly took Pascal's head off with a chain saw - handled it like he's casting his fishing rod. His little 50 cc car's gone too - drove it into a gitane's white van - pissed. Sold it cos he thought the cops were coming to take it off him - thought "license confiscated" was same thing as, 'car confiscated', so sold it quick - along with his garage and garden to a crook from Bordeaux - for bugger all. Spent the last seven years of school life with the eight year olds - couldn't make the grades - it's how they used to do it in rural France. "Me sister farts like a Jay, but listen John, I'm smart like a fox. Cousin and me breaks into Marie Claude's garden, when they were away, and nicks a goose - killed the other and splattered it about so they'd think it was a fox. See what I mean-me - smart as a fox". Marie-Claude told it different, "Mick's cousin and he stole the goose and killed the other but it wasn't him really, he's too simple, it was his cousin-the gaol-bird. Could never prove it though."

Their house bought with Mick's handicap benefit money - a one up one down farm labourer's cottage circa 1750 - one of three forming a courtyard just behind my bedroom. If you want you can hear everything they, and the neighbours say just lying here, but the neighbours won't speak to the Mounets ever since old man Mounet

A DORDOGNE IDYLL

called them "strangers"- well they were born five kilometres away. None of them speak to each other anyway - just turn their heads away - been like that for years-spend their lives 25 yards away and never speak a word. They'll have forgotten why.

Mick's dad. I miss him, just like the owl. Both dead now.

"Where did you work and what did you do Jean?"

"Worked under the soil for food ." Eh!? - I know my French is bad but Christ! What's this guy saying? Trouble is he thinks I'm calling him a liar. Starts crying and beating himself with his fists on his bald head. Drunk? Maybe – Usually. Then I found out – he worked in the killer chalk mines - St Astier digging chalk after the war- fifteen years -10 hours a day - paid in food - no money. Died of given-up-heart

"It was tired - all used up" - Marie says "That's what the doctor said. I asked him, he said it had been going 100 kilometres an hour for many years. That's true John, that's what he said" this according to Mick. I reckon it must have been true - after the mines he worked for the builder Faure. They called him Cement Mixer - Bettonier - not because he worked with one - because he could beat them. They used to take bets on it - I've seen it - he beat mine - little stringy arms flailing like a kid's windmill - burning Gaulois stuck on his lip, another behind his ear - to be lit in relay. Same with a scythe - like a bloody machine. Hard work never killed anybody - "Good for the health" the French say, but it bent Jean double and then it killed him.

He lived off his garden - dug it from 5.30 and then-one day he didn't work - he went down to the field near the railway to watch a combined harvester - still rare - still new fangled in his eyes –

"It was wonderful John and I think I know how it works." Life was full of wonders for him. "How did you get across the water?" he asked me one day.

"I came through the tunnel Jean."

"What's that?" I explained the channel tunnel to him. He didn't believe me - so Columbo, who was there, told him,

"It's true –it's like a cave that goes all the way under the sea from England to France." Sudden enlightenment - slams hand on brown walnut shaped bronzed pate –

“I’ve seen it!-I’ve seen it!-it comes out of the ground at Mussidan down the road.”

“I think that’s a different tunnel,” said Columbo. Mounet mystified and disappointed, asked me why cars don’t roll off the ferry as the boat goes up and down on the waves. “Because they tie them down Jean.” I said.

“I thought they must do something like that,” He had been thinking.

Not an idiot though - not like his son - just from a different age - and a different place - brains in his hands and broken back. “I once had a friend like you,” he clamped his hands together - is he going to cry? “They put me in the army, took me in a lorry to camp in Alsace - never bothered with leave - and then they brought me back.” After that for fifty years he never went beyond Perigueux - 15 miles. Used to buy a paper-Could he read it? Mick and Marie can’t - he sat in courtyard reading but sometimes held it upside down. More interesting that way. Did he try and rape the countess - the old woman - some say he did. Or did he expose himself to her - some say he did. Probably he just pissed up against her wall and she didn’t like it. He didn’t like them- “Count and Countess - huh!- you must be joking - they’re nothing - nothing at all - you could buy them. I’m a Communist. Karl Marx? - never heard of him.”

“And the resistance Jean?” –

“There were two kinds of resistance the *faux* and the *vrai*.” but then there were two kinds of cheese - the *faux* and the *vrai*, and two kinds of lamb chops - the *faux* and the *vrai*, and even two kinds of army jeep - the *faux* and the *vrai*. His mind organised by opposites - very French - a rural Galen or Roland Barthes, Levi-Strauss - but born to blush unseen. So treat him with respect -who did? Well Columbo for one.

“I found him paralytic - unconscious in the woods with empty five litre bon-bon. Had to get him down - he could have died there. He’s a bit crude and nasty (*méchant*) - but God! how he could work - and he’s a friend of little old André Bonnet- so you must always call him monsieur.”

Columbo was my friend - sits now in the front garden - over eighty - advanced Parkinsons - no words left. In time gone by - *dans les temps*, he used to say, his word was respected - Shop Steward at Marbots - led the strike. Not exactly respectable though - wine and

women did for that. Having it off in the woods under a tarpaulin sheet. Popo found him - thought it was a dead body - found it was two bodies, very much alive - arse going up and down like a steam hammer - beat a quick retreat. Never spoken about of course - "Bonjour Monsieur Meddard.", "Bonjour Monsieur Cabernard." But Popo never knew he was having it off with his wife as well. He is really called Monsieur Meddard - Columbo, was his pen name - did photographs and recorded births and deaths for the *South West* - little bits of news. We used to call his note book in which he recorded these things his Book of the Dead. "He's in the book" we used to say. Now his wife's in it too. Who'll put his name in - and mine?

Yeah - he led the strike - was once very respected - not by his son until much later. Bata made the son into factory manager - big Chief Blackleg. They lived next door to each other, round the corner, top of the slope, just under the trees. Never spoke to each other for years until Bata made him redundant too. Columbo bought him a little restaurant but - '*il a mangé les grenouilles*' eaten the frogs legs - blown away the profits - wine and women, but not much song - and he had to sell it, eventually they knocked it down for the motorway. He reimbursed his father in an interesting fashion - got girl friend to strip off, lie on the bed, legs wide open - told Columbo- "a present for you in there." Even Columbo thought that unusual. But he was more surprised by next door's wife, respectable neighbours for thirty-five years. "She leans over the fence and says 'Monsieur Meddard - I am not happy with you.' I was taken aback, and said I'm sorry Madame Ravaud - is there a problem? 'Yes,' she says, 'There is. You've had all these women from round here - and you never asked me'. I didn't know what to say-it was all too late."

Used to keep me up to date - the mayor - Conservative - "no good," - smashed his friend the *conseiller-général* in the face - row about benefits - politics - always on the left. Told him of a friend of mine - "real left-winger," "Then I'm sorry for him." he said - "it's all shot to hell. Everything shot to hell. Cameras stolen from back seat of car in Neuvic - Of course I leave the doors open - it's my town - if I can't do that in my town what's it coming to? Strangers coming in - used to know everybody - trust everybody - all that's gone - everyone used to talk - seven bistros in Planèze alone -now there's none - just television." Memories of a dead culture.

"The resistance. Yeah, what Monsieur Mounet says is true - look at

the Dordogne Prefect - he was on the other side - he could have been hung like we hung Meurs from the other side of the valley - that's him that gave away the resisters that held up the Nazi train. The Prefect got away with things - cos when it was nearly all over and De Gaulle was taking Bordeaux - he tells the resistance about that train - full of gold. Then he claims he was a resister."

"You won't know about all that - my dad and granddad were in it. They went out that night and came back with a huge double hand saw for sawing down trees - to wreck the train - here in Planèze just by the level crossing - I've still got it - and here it is," Goes in garage and comes back with huge rusty saw. "They were lucky though - when Meurs informed, fifteen of them holed up in a farm in the woods just behind your house. He told them where they were. They were all gunned down by the SS on their way to Oradour. They killed twenty from Neuvic as a reprisal - kids and all - you can see their graves in the cemetery - you can see the memorial to those that died at the farm just behind your house."

But the gold bullion, what happened to that? "Never found it, but lots of folk know-you don't have to look much further than some very wealthy people in Neuvic. De Gaulle called the end to all those enquiries - so they got away with it. Meurs' widow's ninety now, still lives over the other side of the valley." All forgotten now though? "Not by me it isn't - Germans!" Rater-tat-tat-gesture of holding a machine gun. "Lived on Jerusalem artichokes - make you fart like a gas works - and one loaf of bread a week - I had to walk to Mussidan for that - 10 kilometres - don't give me Germans."

Seven o'clock now - another piss - better this time. Bread man's come - sounds horn-can hear chattering - but who speaks to whom? He'll stop coming soon - when this lot die - for the young ones now it's the supermarket.

So at least I'm doing better than Columbo. But not everyone agrees with him. Monsieur Riboulet, a bit younger, lives in the courtyard between us and the Mounets - it was him that came running to me crying when Jean Mounet called him a stranger. He says- "The resistance? Just a bunch of juvenile delinquents - did it for fun - a diversion - but they managed to get a lot of people killed". Riboulet's dying of prostrate cancer. He was a commando-paratrooper in Algeria "I'll never forgive de Gaulle. He gave in to the wogs in Algeria, so my mates died for nothing." Don't know if he was a

strike breaker at Marbots, but a bit cold about Columbo. When he and his wife got redundancy he drank like a fish. "I'm finished, just finished." He used to say.

First met Colombo when stayed on the campsite - had the roof off the house - had a bit to drink and backed car into tree. Bloody hell! - there was bike there - now a twisted wreck. Stood looking and heard and saw young black lady - Dorothy Dandridge - laughing like a drain - "Ha -Ha- ha- ha- thing is it's my husband's - just bought it so he can take the kids cycling." I don't know what to make of this but-hells' bells. Then sound of thunder - two feet - size fifteens - I looks up...and up... and up-- six feet five -19 stone of muscle - Schevchek - front row forward - played for young France. "*Ah quand même!*" a bass voice that made Chaliapin sound like Kiri-Te Kanawa.

"Erm sorry about that - of course must buy you a new one - insurance (lie)"

"That one made special for me - look at me - I'm different." Christ! are you kidding. So takes him to best bike shop in town - send special bike much better from Paris - friend for life. Our end of camp site - kids and friends then at university - celebrate - Bon-bons of the Bergerac - all night parties - other campers call the gendarmes - Pascal and Columbo - never known to miss a drink come to celebrate with us.

So who is Pascal? Well he was Columbo's friend - even though he's National Front - "Not his fault - just ignorant of politics but he's not a true Frenchman - he's half Polish"- said Columbo - also he's Schevchek's brother. Jean-Pierre and Pascal Schevchek. Pascal the photographer had just opened shop at Neuvic - father, another giant, lived at shop - escapee from wife - she lives on the Loire as does Jean- Pierre. Polish French - but doesn't like immigrants. "Wops and Gitanes - put em on a boat with no bottom and send em home."-says Pascal. "What the Gitanes do is borrow each other's babies and take em to the social and say these are mine - give me some money or I'll leave em on the counter"

"Gitanes!- what can you say?- hundreds of em round here." 'Gentlemen of the road-honest as the day is long - France is proud of them'" That's what the mayor said when commune installed a brass-drinking fountain in their camp near Planèze. I suppose it was to try and keep em clean - though it's probably authority trying to work off

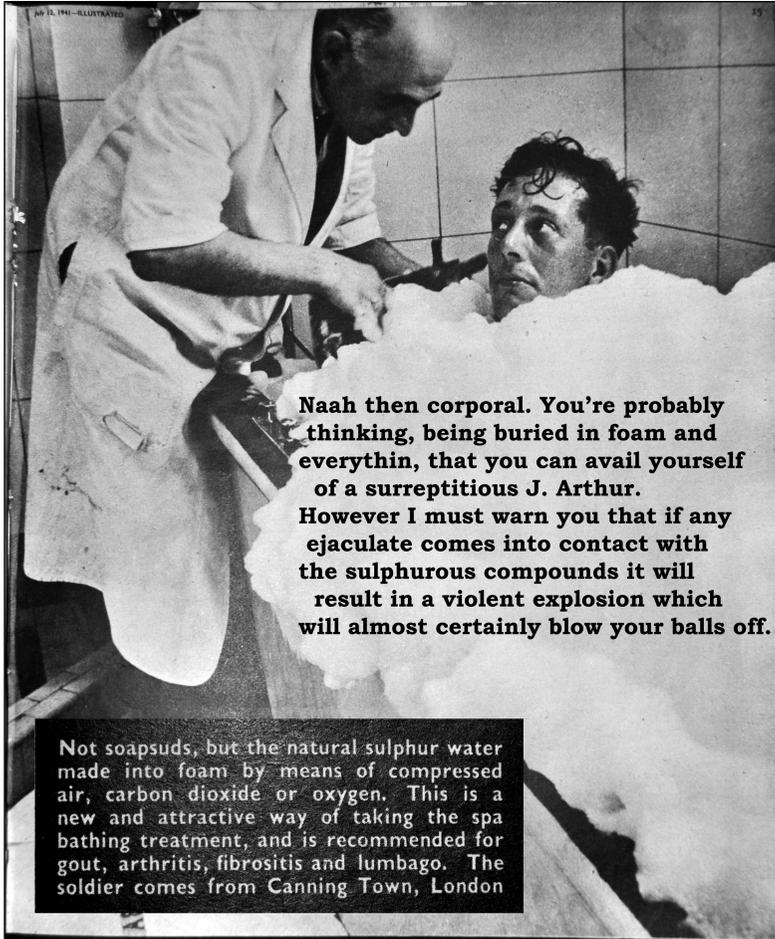
its guilt for sending them to Belsen and stealing their children in the good old days. They cut the fountain off and sold it next day - the fireman had to drain away the flood. Cops won't go in there. Honest as the day is long? What happened to the big brass lions in Perigueux? And they weren't that honest the night they stripped the furniture from the big house near the railway - bloke came home to empty house - really empty. Found half his furniture at Gypo auction in Toulouse. Gramm the plumer – Pascal's NF comrade - decided to sort em out - took em on – big fight at bar - Planèze Bistro. Shut the bar to keep em out – and to keep out Gram and Mick.

Pascal king of the Pastis - never seems drunk - it all goes down his big right arm. Out to make it commercially-photography - still works, after a fashion, down here. Never a book in his house. "I slept by the stove at school" but energy! And a bottle of Pastis - no problem - takes it fifty-fifty water and pastis - would take your tongue out. Finds brother a problem - Jean Pierre, the gentle giant - Mr Disorganisation arrives out of the blue-says he'll come for lunch - arrives after tea - sits on a chair - smashes it to matchwood - borrows something - breaks it - thinks it's very funny - what can you do? For God's sake you have him? Pastis at Pascal's place - *C'est l'heure-* his place - I take Mick. Pascal has great idea get him pissed as a fart-keep filling his glass with massive Pastis - glass empty - fill it up again - many glasses - Christ he's going to out-drink Pascal. In car on way home – "Bloody hell Mick you drank a lot." "Didn't drink any - waited till his back turned-poured it on the Begonia - "*Maligne comme un renaud.*" Begonia dies next day.

Much too hot now - have to get up - Mrs down there - must have a cup of tea – first thirty minutes dead rough - until pain-killers work - get sock on foot of bad leg – won't bend - use sock machine - careful on stairs - fell down em when this lot started but got up again. Diane couldn't when she fell down - had to call the fire brigade - she liked that handsome young fireman who came - picked her up and took her to hospital in Perigueux. That's where they're going to ream out my dick - make me piss better. But can't do anything today - too bloody hot. Like when I made this concrete pad and laid the tiles. Must have been fucking barmy - 41 degrees - couldn't see for the flow of sweat - went dizzy. That was the summer when all those rural oldies died in France - *La France profonde* - old people whose kids went to the towns to work.

A DORDOGNE IDYLL

Night again - back in bed - disordered thoughts - seeing characters - many now gone- as though in a film, but no order to it?"- course there's order - the order it comes out must be the way it's in my brain - the way it surfaces - but different each time. Maybe I need the smell of coffee but I can't stand madeleines.



Naah then corporal. You're probably thinking, being buried in foam and everythin, that you can avail yourself of a surreptitious J. Arthur. However I must warn you that if any ejaculate comes into contact with the sulphurous compounds it will result in a violent explosion which will almost certainly blow your balls off.

Not soapsuds, but the natural sulphur water made into foam by means of compressed air, carbon dioxide or oxygen. This is a new and attractive way of taking the spa bathing treatment, and is recommended for gout, arthritis, fibrositis and lumbago. The soldier comes from Canning Town, London

Illustrated 1942

KEN CHAMPION

Aunt Rose's Funeral

The copy of *Saga* on a sill in the chapel,
plate glass views of pylons, your greying
cousins, the Benfleet bungalow, the pampas

grass she would pick to spray with lacquer
for the vase, the disappointments, George
not understanding ethnomethodological

phenomenology, Ernie suddenly seeming
likeable, the surprises, Bill the shop steward's
reluctant Marxism, a granddaughter's mini

skirt and high heels, the clichés, *nice spread*
Vera, she 'ad a good innins, lovely service,
and centre circle, Stan nodding, joking, and

you can't join in, and the screaming
imperative to intellectualize, and still
hearing her calling you *Kenny*.

INSPECTION DAY

Nigel Ford

During my approach across the lawn the light is bright white but there is no sun visible. The sky looks as if it has been coated with a sheet of gladpack. The lawn is weedless, mowed two millimetres short, colour polished and faded emerald green. There is no path across it to the house. The surface is hard without bounce. My stride is long and brisk, but it took me two minutes to cross from the polished gate set in the burnished hedge to the smooth egg-shell finish front door.

A woman opens the door. Her hair is tidy, her clothing quietly elegant and displays the trademarks of brands that most people in this community affect. Her make-up is discreet, her dress size 14 (UK). Her bare feet are lightly tanned. In this country, people do not wear shoes indoors. I take mine off and enter.

Her handshake is limp. Her husband stands behind her. His handshake is firm. We exchange the normal phrases of welcome and I am shown into the spacious combination kitchen- living room. I am offered both coffee and tea - an aberration. In this community people only offer coffee. Two children enter the room. They are clean with perfect feet. The little boy's handshake is firm. The little girl's limp.

'Would you like to see the home now or after your coffee?' the woman asks.

'Now please.'

We start at the garage. This is purpose built and the concrete floor is highly polished. There are four bicycles, one for each member of the family, in tip-top condition and arranged in a bicycle rack. There is one car. A good quality estate car about two years old. It shines with care. Four winter tyres hang along one wall. A range of commonly used tools are fitted to a hole board along the back wall.

The cellar contains a well-fitted laundry room, a sauna and shower, a wine cupboard, a gleaming boiler room and a spacious area filled neatly with objects and materials that might come in use some day. There is no dust. The air is fresh down here, there are no spiders or other insects in sight, the concrete floor freshly painted.

The first floor living area, where I would consequently enjoy an excellent cup of coffee made in an expensive coffee machine, is furnished comfortably and pleasingly in subdued and matching colour tones. Light pours through the expansive windows, soft wool monotone travel rugs are casually draped on the white sofa, cut-glass glitters here and there, lamp shades are unobtrusive. A separate lavatory advertises its presence with a small white enamel plate with plate text “Here it is”.

Upstairs the boy’s room is blue, the girl’s pink, the parents’ pale lilac. The spacious bathroom gleams with modern, efficient austerity, a large general activity room features exercise equipment, leather settees, throw rugs on the floor and a huge television set.

Later, we make small conversation over coffee as I take down notes on my smart phone. The ambience is relaxed, cheerful. I leave my phone on the hall table and make use of the downstairs lavatory. This is my usual tactic when making inspections. Downstairs lavatories being a place where, if there is a flaw, this might be uncovered.

There was nothing.

Each family member shook my hand in turn and bade me farewell with polite effusion.

Halfway across the perfect lawn I realised I had left my smart phone on the hall table.

I return. The front door is open. The hall is empty, apart from the coat stand. There is no hall table. The husband walks down the stairs naked. I am embarrassed. I should have knocked. He smiles and holds out my smart phone.

‘I see you forgot your smart phone and returned to collect it.’

‘Yes. I apologise for not knocking. I should have knocked before entering. I...’

‘There is no need to apologise. You have caught us with our pants down, so to speak.’ He chuckled, one hand gripped the banister, one foot on a lower step, frozen in the descending position. ‘This is how we are in real life.’

‘Of course. I could hardly expect...’

A clear young voice clove the air lightly. The words floated and spun down the stairwell and surrounded me.

INSPECTION DAY

‘Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life. While poverty persists, there is no true freedom...’

The husband jerked a thumb back over his shoulder. ‘My son is reciting Nelson Mandela. You probably recognise the speech. From Trafalgar Square*. Homework.’

‘Beautiful.’

‘I’m sure he will be pleased to hear it.’ The husband half turned away from me, beckoned. ‘Come on up.’ He walked back up the stairs.

I am neither churlish nor ill-mannered. Therefore I followed obediently.

He stops.

I stop.

He turns. ‘Sorry. Forget,’ he says. ‘Please take off your clothes. You can hang them on the banister.’

‘Well...’

‘When in Rome,’ he chuckles again.

‘If you put it like that.’ I undress and hang my clothing on the banister. As I do so I look down. The kitchen and living area is bare. I hang over the banister and look at the lavatory door. The small white plate has gone.

Upstairs the large general activity room is empty apart from a laptop on the floor. The husband sits down cross-legged before it and the two naked children climb onto his lap.

The naked woman rises from the spot where she has been sitting and indicates I should take her place. There is a small damp patch there. It feels cold on my skin. She climbs onto my lap. When she is seated comfortably I look down. I can see the bulbs of her shaven, perfectly shaped vagina. I would like to insert my penis into it, but the atmosphere in the room, in this company, is not conducive to such action and my penis refuses to grow, so this opportunity, I realise with regret, will be lost. However, I find it interesting to observe a small fleck of faeces at the bottom of her spine.

There is laughter from the husband’s direction as the children play a

computer game.

The woman turns and looks into my face. ‘We are so looking forward to being free. We are so beholden and grateful to you.’

The husband placed each child gently on the floor in front of the computer and turned towards us. ‘Excuse me for being so rude. Children demand such attention.’

‘That’s quite all right.’

‘We are looking forward tremendously to our new life.’ The husband said. ‘The children too.’

‘It will be so nice to be able to do exactly as we please without feeling privileged,’ the woman said.

‘Such a relief,’ the husband said. ‘Burden-free. To live as we choose.’

‘Heaven,’ the woman agreed.

‘I’m very pleased for you,’ I say. ‘I have enjoyed my visit. The coffee was excellent. You have been most kind.’

‘The debt is all ours,’ the husband said.

From behind him the sound of excited laughter from the children rose.

‘O yes,’ the woman said.

‘Well,’ I said. ‘Thank you for your hospitality and the conversation. Unfortunately I will have to go now. I have an appointment to keep.’

‘I’m sure you must be a very busy man,’ the woman said, arm placed her arms around my neck and smiled into my face.’

‘I’ll see you out,’ the husband said.

‘Please don’t trouble,’ I said. ‘I can see myself out. It’s been delightful.’

The woman rose and held out her hand. I grasped it and she pulled me to my feet.

‘It will be no trouble,’ the husband said.

‘We’ll both see you out,’ the woman said.

She preceded us downstairs.

I dressed and walked out of the door into the white light.

INSPECTION DAY

‘Goodbye,’ the woman said behind me. ‘It was so nice to meet you.’
‘Goodbye,’ the husband said. ‘This is where it ends.’

**London 2005.*



Illustrated 1942

KEITH HOWDEN

Garibaldi Rides Again

This Thursday, revolution's
burning Birdy's mind. He likes it.
Better than always being banged
home on the loony bus by that fascist
of a Charge Nurse. Head full
of buzzing bees these days, he's shaking
more than before. He says it's shell-shock.
Came on over Dortmund. They offered him
a blighty. He refused. I don't believe.
Probably DT's the way he puts
it back two hours a fortnight.
But revolution's on his mind.
Why is wet quicker than dry? Why did
his mother stop him from swimming
because his costume was wet?
Birdy says it's natural politics,
the built-in fascism of things.
That fat brother-in-law
(once stumper for Everton) went on
a holiday in Italy and saw
a million statues. Birdy
reads anthropology and it's
a tale he loves to tell of these
misguided missionaries approaching
a bunch of Maoris. *We bring you
a bargain, they said. The only true
and absolute God. Performs miracles:
can raise the dead. Turns water
into best quality wine.*
Sounds pretty good. Maoris would like him.

GARIBALDI RIDES AGAIN

Sounds just the sort of God
we've waited for, they said. Who is he?
Is he with you? Where do we meet him?
Not here at the moment. When did
he do these things? *Not recently.*
Which of you saw them done? *It's not
as simple as that ...*Aha, we've got
a few like that ourselves.
That fat brother-in-law
saw Garibaldi's statue central
on a lawn bestriding the horse
of LIBERTY. Birdy likes liberty
There was another notice underneath:
DO NOT TRAMPLE THE GRASS. Birdy
says that's what education does.
Maoris know better. Liberty
always loses. Nurture always gets shat on
by nature. The house of order
sits on shallow foundations. That's why wet
is quicker than dry. **Come on,
Gentlemen. Your armoured car
awaits you.** The Charge Nurse wants him,
rightly suspecting revolution's
bestriding his brain. Birdy's
not stopping now though. That's why
newsagents cram cruise liners,
why butchers drip cash, why grocers
leave millions, why bonused bankers
vote Tory. That's how we got Hitler
and Thatcher

INLAND BEACH HUT 7.

David Birtwistle

Veronica, the long-lost sister, sat there in a deck chair on the small patch of sand surrounding the inland beach hut, deep in thought. The sun peered through the high cloud for the first time in ages and fell onto this oasis of green cultivation in the midst of the desolate wilderness like a blessing from above. She felt relaxed and this helped shift her brain into intuitive mode. She had done some sustained deductive thinking and what she now needed was an inspired breakthrough. At her feet was a large OS map of this derelict, woe-begone, empty stretch of moor and she'd scoured every contour line and every nook and cranny. She was trying to discover where a person, or persons, perhaps with some training in survival, could hide out for months without being spotted. She'd scrutinised the heart of the moor where it was at its bleakest and most exposed and least likely to attract any visitors. Then she'd searched the eastern rim nearest the most rugged hills. Although not exactly the Pakistan/Afghan border it was the area where anyone on the run could go to ground and be least likely to be visible.

Suddenly she sat up with a start. All those outlying, obscure, remote regions where the land buckled and twisted and points of reference were lost to sight and the world seemed upside down and off the map! That's not it at all! Something in the air up here had helped her liberate her inner self. She could think and deduce and intuit. She was no longer Veronica Speedwell, single mother, but Mia Croft, Sherlock's smarter younger sister! She quite simply and slowly asked herself, 'If I were hiding out up here, where would I go?' And she answered herself, 'Out of the way but as near to civilisation as I could manage. I'd have to cope with getting all the necessities and for that I'd need help. Who would do this and not attract attention? Answer, someone local and someone hard up. There were a few of them in an area like this. Logistics? They'd need a convincing disguise possibly, and transport, a car at least, for regular supplies and that would have to pull in off the road!! Most farm tracks belonged to farmers. They were proverbially tight-fisted and sharp-eyed and patrolled protectively up and down them all the time. Farm tracks were too exposed anyway. What was needed was somewhere

just off the road and easily overlooked. That piece of paper with the smudged writing and the ‘SSB’. Septimus Shuttleworth Bickerstaff??? Nonsense! It was *Shopping - Slack Brow!*!... that old ruined barn across from the wood in the dip with just enough space under that wall! It was all about location, location, location and food, food, food!’

Veronica’s mental activity had increased three or fourfold since she’d been a regular up here, with her son and Jim, or Grey Cloud and ‘He who Hunts Fish with Stick’ as they called themselves. The work they did required awareness and sensitivity as well as beef and brawn. The eco-project they had embarked upon became a physical work-out and a mental gym. Her interest in local history, geography and dialect words had become an obsession. *Brow* was the Brow of a hill; *slack* described a cleft between higher land or else a boggy place. She thought that in this case both applied. Over by the collapsed stone wall was a dilapidated dove-cote and behind it the roofless ruin of a tumbledown barn with a slight ramp up to it off the road. It would be where the farmer once pulled his tractor or his horse and cart in to load the hay. The boys had left her to her own devices today. They knew she had gone through quite a lot recently and although she was no wallflower to start with her self belief had rocketed and they let her to do most of the serious thinking. They trusted her.

She called them over.

“Yes, mum?”

“What is it?”

“Anybody searching for missing persons up here would look out onto that moor, into the far spaces and beyond. Whoever’s here knows that. He knows how to throw ‘em off the scent. I can feel it in my bones that whoever it is, he’s closer at hand.” The other two simply accepted her conclusions as read and clambered over their own wall and onto the land beyond. Jim realised he’d only done this a couple of times before. He’d been so preoccupied with creating his own eco-retreat that he’d built up a mono-centric view of the place. From over here it looked very different. The polytunnel was completely obscured from view and the trees were coming on so well your eye was taken upward, away from the raised beds and the shed. Jim scanned the land he had acquired from Harry only a short time

ago and the shift in perspective was so strong he had a desire to see it from above, a microlight flight perhaps.

“I’ll get you one for your big birthday,” said Veronica with uncanny intuition. “Everything around here shifts and changes within yards.”

“Relativity,” said Darren enigmatically.

The dove cote was as dead as a rusty crushed can. Darren kicked a thick plank and got a hollow muffled thump – lifeless! Behind it the collapsed barn stood out starkly against a glowering sky split by yellow rays of smothered sunlight – the classic ‘dark light’ of the Pennines loved by a few canny northern landscape painters. Stones had fallen into clumps, roof beams were exposed and a thick post propped up a door lintel. Darren was up the broken wall like a Herdwick ram up a rock face. From on top he had a fantastic view. He could see everything that was hidden at ground level – the tepee, the polytunnel, the beach hut, the wood shed, water glittering on the surface of the pond. He called to his mum and Jim.

“I thought we were camouflaged! From up here you can see everything we’ve got!”

As Darren scrambled down his mother surveyed the ground below.

“Look. The grass and those weeds, there, flattened. That’s tyre tracks!”

In silence the three of them scoured the ground for clues. There was very little else. No entrances, trapdoors, or crawl size shafts leading off to somewhere else. No-one was using this place to live in. What caught her eye though, was a large stone over by the back wall. It was covered with a rich armour-plating of turquoise and sulphur lichens and stood out like a jewel in a pig trough. She looked at it for a long time and then put her hand round the back and felt gently where it touched the earth. She pulled out a stubby pencil with ‘2B’ indented into it. Without hesitating she pulled out a piece of paper from her back pocket. On it she printed the letters ‘SSB’ and after that ‘Spinach, Sprouts and Beans. Ours are organic and tasty. You’re most welcome – Mai Croft, Sherlock and Watson.’ Then she smudged it slightly and placed it under the rock.

“Lichens are an indicator species,” she said to the two open-mouthed Iroquois warriors. “They’re sensitive to atmospheric pollution. This rock here indicates the purest air there is and someone’s using it as a

dead letter box which points to something much more human and sinister!”

His mother had told Darren that now it was just a matter of time and that was the hardest thing of all – just hanging on in there. Up here had given him a sense of what survival could mean. Jim had begun to show him what trying to live and grow your own food on the craggy, wind-swept waste really entailed. He’d begun to understand the ‘survival of the fittest’ and what natural selection might entail. He knew that he had begun to develop all sorts of forms of understanding and awareness far beyond simple physical skills and this had caused him to want to test himself in extreme conditions. He knew what had inspired him to want to be a Met Office weatherman when he grew up and now he wanted to go further.

“I’ve changed my mind, mum.”

“What about?”

“Living up here with this micro-climate in the middle of the emptiness has altered things. I want to be a BBC News Cameraman in a war zone.”

During this ‘Great Waiting’ as it became known, for Chief Grey Cloud, ‘He who carries Rod for Fish’ and his mother, who were now Mai Croft, Sherlock and Watson, life carried on in almost the same ritualistic way as the plains Indians. Whilst they were waiting for a reply to the note the boys got on with the jobs that the season demanded. Potting up, planting out, weeding, mulching, catching slugs, composting, earthing up and protecting. They needed to do just about everything except watering, the rain saw to that. Inside the polytunnel, the large, plastic sheeted wigwam greenhouse which not only gave protection but allowed you to work up here even in the most inhospitable weather, water *was* necessary. Each day they humped buckets from the well and poured them on the tomatoes, peppers, chillies, cucumbers, sweet corn, salad crops and flowers. This was an oasis within an oasis and a place where you could take a break, have a cup of tea and a chocolate digestive, breathe the fresh air and listen to the wind and the birdsong just feet away as the insects, pulled in by the flowers pollinated the crops.

On the third day of waiting a figure appeared out of the blue on this side of the five-barred gate. He was tall and gaunt, wearing battered tweeds, a woollen bucket hat, and strong leather boots. As he

approached they could see that his face was bony and angular and bristly and his eyes glistened a dark mossy green. He quickened his pace, strode forward and held out his hand to Grey Cloud.

“Hello there. The name’s Hughes. I got the message from Ms Croft.”

“Hughes? *The* Hughes.....?”

“So they say.” He had the sort of rich voice that sounded as though he spoke through a throat full of water melon and chocolate.

“The *great* Harwood Hughes?”

“No, no, no. I’m Hughes all right but I’m *from* Great Harwood. It’s a small town near Clitheroe. It has the most wonderful fish and chip shop.”

Darren couldn’t help himself:

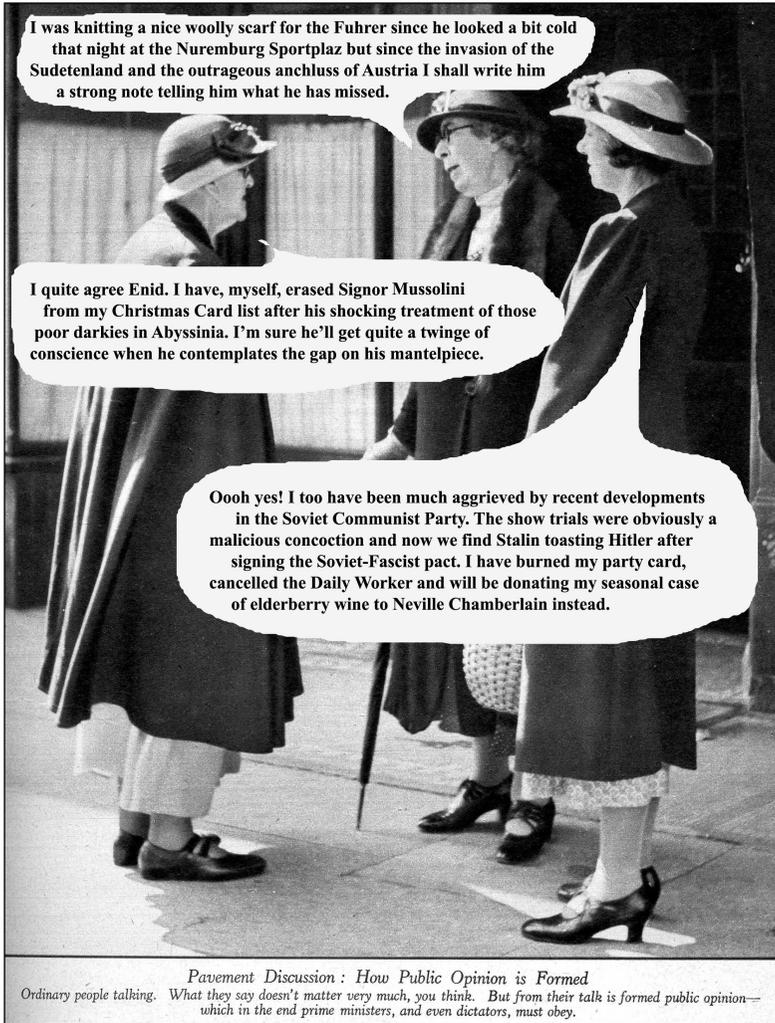
“You’re a secluse! You’re famous!!”

“You must be *He Who Carries Rod for Fish*, or Watson as I believe your mother now calls you.” And he turned and bowed. “How do you do Maam. I’m a secluse and not a recluse because you can’t be recluded!! The word is that bit more ...*apposite* and words, as your mother knows, are direct pointers at inner reality.” He spoke with a sort of relish as though he polished each word in his mouth before he emitted it.

“I think we ought to sit down and chat. There’s a spot of catching up to do.”

They sat together in the tepee and listened to him mesmerised, or rather enraptured in the way the ancient story-teller round the camp fire weaved his magic spell and transported the listener to places far away. And the words spoken into the chilly air on a damp day like this, up here in the hills among the mist and cloud, took on a life of their own.

“...So it stands to reason that if you want to avoid being swamped by panic-buying and push-button materialistic greediness you simply have to seclude yourself.....” They nodded in unison. “And I do rather admire this beach hut of yours. They’re fetching a fortune now in Fleetwood and even Knott End. I have a proposal I’d like to put to you...”



Picture Post 1939

KEITH HOWDEN

A Swastika Lullaby

*Mother, who is the swastika man
raging his moustache evil,
the apocalyptic Chaplin
of Nuremburg's vaudeville?*

Hush child, say nothing,
stifle your question.
The monster is speaking
our state's constitution.

*Mother, who is the fat man,
the Reichstag's debauched cherub,
Stukaland's Bacchus blown
to blitzkrieg's Beelzebub?*

Hush child, take cover,
lie snug in your shelter.
When the black planes drum over
it is you they search for.

*Mother, who is the staring man,
skin stripped to gargoyles, who
crows the inferno's dominion
in a Gothic Esperanto?*

Hush child, lie close and still
or his truth's lying refrain
like an invisible sootfall
will blacken your brain.

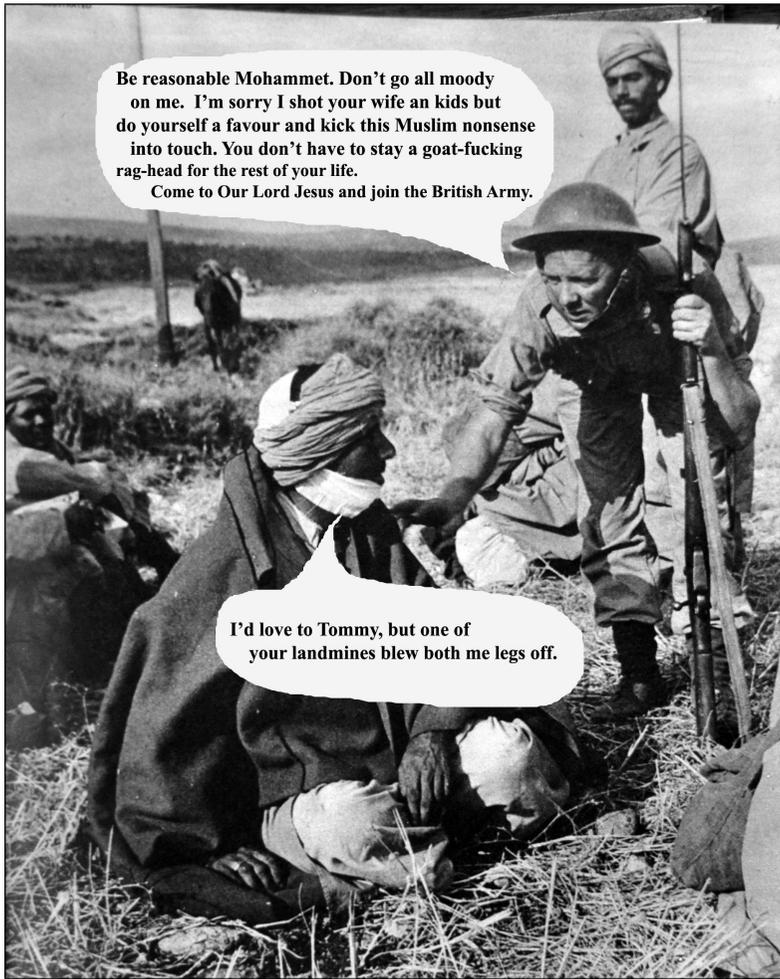
*Mother, who is the leaning man
Hell burning his eyes,
whose Judas posture screams in
Treblinka's atrocities?*

A SWASTIKA LULLABY

Hushchild. It is a spook
baring a truth that underlies
our being. You must not look
into such honest eyes.

*Mother, who are the cyanide pair
consumed by a leaping passion
of petrol in a bunker?
Where has the swastika gone?*

Hush child, say a prayer.
It lives in the minds of men.
Someone has hidden the swastika.
It will turn up again.



Be reasonable Mohammed. Don't go all moody on me. I'm sorry I shot your wife and kids but do yourself a favour and kick this Muslim nonsense into touch. You don't have to stay a goat-fucking rag-head for the rest of your life. Come to Our Lord Jesus and join the British Army.

I'd love to Tommy, but one of your landmines blew both me legs off.

Illustrated 1942

FARTED-OUT TAINTED SOULS DISCO

Tanner

Shops, they short-circuit people, money bullies everyone, even the unseen, almost *mythical* corporate heads so they bully the bosses so the bosses bully the workers and the workers, they've got no one lower than themselves, so they bully each other. You've got everyone across the spectrum *seething* at their own place in it, a microcosm of a sociopathic society.

Hence here's moi, sniffing for solitude on me lunch, airing the soul out. I finally find a bench on the outskirts of the town, I collapse into it.

Then a fat bitch with three warring kids dumps her squid of an arse against me, the kids are climbing on her, they're climbing on *me* with their vicious subnormal energy ... one of them gets on my knees and *dive bombs* onto his sister, flattening her on the pavement

'MUM!' she screams, 'AVE URT ME HEAD! MUM!'

'*Amf, amf* – don't be givin me a ed ache,' the maternal beast carries on gobbling into her sausage roll 'Amf – ah'll take yer the shop in a bit an get yers all some crisp if yer bee-ave! *Amf, amf,*' she's getting all these gobby flakes of pastry on me ... 'Ay!' she clocks my *uniform*, picking the gristle out her eyes, 'You werk up at the shop, you, don't yer lad?' the gristles pour back down into her drawbridge gob, '*Amf* – wha crisp can ah get fer deese, ay?'

And vamoose.

I really have to do a shit but it's too effing cold to take my jeans down and put my blue buttocks on the icy seat. No heating? Fucking inflation's gonna kill me, leave a constipated frozen corpse, because United Utilities is fucking the landlady, so she's fucking me ... and it's especially uncomfortable to be fucked when you're clogged full of cold shit.

'STOP IM!'

Little angular man be scurrying out the doors, his coat bulging ...

his legs don't quite bend, he's zigzagging like a crab, soft claws clutching his rain mac shell so nowt falls out ...

Two of the lads grab him ... they chuck him against the wall and a pack of bacon falls out onto the pavement

'GOT ya, yer little sod!'

'Ay, *ay* boys, am innocent,' he slurs painfully

'DON'T give us all tha shite!' they rattle him, and another few packs of bacon fall out.

'Ah ain't, a *swear* like ...' his lips strain. *It hurts him to talk.* Another thieving old smack head. 'Leave me be!' He starts ducking and weaving, trying to squirm free – he's flung by his collar back on the wall face first – there's a small *crimson* explosion and his eye's imploded at the corner of a jagged brick 'Me eye! Me fuckin EYE!' he bends over, blood gugging out the socket, 'OH GOD AM BLIND!' he *screams* down at the street, 'ELP ME, ME EYE! AM BLIND!' dripping into the vertical kerb.

'Jesus, am gonna puke,' one of the lads sneers

'Give us a hand ere will yer, YOU!' one of them demands of me.

'Erm ...' I pull my face into a mock squint, thinking it through 'Nah. I'm on his side.'

'But ee's robbin of US!' he implores, this guy mangling himself about in the head lock as he lectures 'Do yer WANT the shop ter go broke, lad?' yeah, *that* old chestnut

'Greedy companies are partly responsible fer his place in the world. Defendin companies will only abet the problem further, like.'

'EH?'

They drag him into the shop, this trail of bacon and eye mucus plopping out behind them.

'SOMEONE! STOP DEESE EVIL BASTAAADS! *Umf!*' the muscular thread sways his dead peeper across his mouth 'ELP, *umf* uh!' he laps up his own head blood.

The customers gather in horror, or boredom, horrific boredom or bored horror

'What *are* you doin ter tha man?' an old biddy insists, biddy-like.

'THEY'RE GONNA KILL ME!' he screams, 'LOOK WHA DE DID TER ME FUCKIN EYE!' and the woman *flinches*, sickened.

‘Leave im alone!’ someone declares. ‘What’s wrong with nickin a bit a bacon now an then? Don’t urt yer profits tha much, yer cunt bullies!’

He has a point there, what can be done? Society fucks the bloke, and the bloke fucks the fucked up society to fuck himself up even more. So what can be done? Everything/nowt. The problem and the solution be as bad as each other all this screaming and taking sides, why, everything’s ticking along *nicely*: segregation. Nice and political, like.

‘You wanted ter see me?’

‘Yeah, come in please,’ Jim be fatter and deader than ever, slumped at his dick-extension of a desk with papers in his hands. I sit down and pull at a loose thread sticking out my work shirt as his babble commences: ‘You’re ere because of yer attitude. It’s *got* to change, ok? You can’t keep *snappin* at customers. If they make a complaint about you, yer done for. So I’m givin you an *official warnin*. This will go on your file fer six months. Is there anythin yer’d like to say?’

‘It’s only me job ter take *so much* shit off em. Am not their therapist.’

‘Well that’s *retail* for yer. You get abuse off people, it appens in every shop, everywhere.’

‘It doesn’t *ave* to. You could break the mould. You could allow us to talk BACK ter customers, you could give the workers the power ter chuck anyone who is threatening or abusive out ...’

‘Don’t be absurd! All customers are annoyin. It’s a FACT of the job.’

‘But by *lettin* them, right, you’re sayin supermarket werkers are punchbags, an that’s a terrible lack of respect fer one of the most *important*, most *common* jobs on earth.’

‘Yer not ere to improve society, ok?’ he has the blessed handbook out before him, he jabs a sausagey shit-tinted digit at the open page: “THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS” They openly acknowledge people are cannibals, and that they just want to PROFIT off it by employing me as a punchbag, they ensure the vicious customer will come back for more jibes and digs, as well as all those fantastic offers ‘Yer ere ter do yer JOB, ok? End of!’

‘I DO me job an you know it. But there’s somethin else at werk ere. We’re lowerin human respect for a quick buck, yer know?’

‘Let ME tell YOU,’ suddenly he throws his precious papers aside I clock a film of sweat springing up on his sieve head ‘I didn’t appreciate the way you spoke ter me the other week.’ Why’s he sweating? Isn’t he blessed with authority? Could it be that power is, *gasp*, bad for one’s health?

‘Me shift was done, an YOU kept me locked in the buildin!’

‘I’d ad a hard day, I just wanted ter get some beers ’

‘Nothin ter do with ME! I get paid HALF of wha you do, yer think I give a shit about YOUR hard day?’ That’s a lame angle to play. I don’t *want* his nasty sterling paper, I mean, look where it’s got him ‘You ever consider you need ale cos you’re unhappy doin this too?’

‘*Don’t* analyse me,’ he picks up the pen, waiting for something else to write, best not to rise to it. The more you try to help save the bastard’s soul, the closer you get to what withering moral slither he’s harbouring, the louder he’ll bark.

Back on the shop floor, I see something stuck to the bottom of my shoe. I lean against the wall and turn it to me: it’s a tampon lodged in between the grips, how long’s that been there? My place of work is now a used toiletries bin? I kick at the wall until it falls onto the floor

A kid runs over and picks it up, *delighted*.

‘I can’t get me pound back!’ she splutters ... her mouth’s this rabid fin she’s rattling the shopping trolley around, making a cheap metal *clanking* ‘Your trolley’s taken me pound!’ she yells at me over her own din squatting down, pressing that sloppy worried head into the bars ‘I want my pound back! MY pound! You’ve stolen it!’ and she starts punching at the bars. People gather; they flock far and wide to witness the flustered bitch. ‘My pound! My pound! My pound!’ A school girl’s holding her mobile phone up to us, watching the action while chewing ... It’ll make YouTube by tea time ...

‘Let us ave a look at it,’ Terry takes the trolley off her ...

He chains it up to another trolley, but the coin don’t pop out

‘I’ve tried THA!’ she reels, ‘I’m not Ah idiot, you idiot! Do you think AM Ah idiot?’ the toothy fin foaming down her chin, ‘I’ve

tried THA, but it won't give me my pound back!'

'Erm ...' so then he raises it above his head and smashes it down on the floor:

DER-KISH!

... he picks it up and does it again:

DER-KISH!

This is madness.

DER-KISH!

This is the contagious spread of insanity ...

DER-KISH!

All it takes is a knackered shopping trolley.

DER-KISH!

The school girl pops a bubble with her chewie.

DER-KISH!

'FUCKIN STOP IT!' I grab the trolley off him and dig into the coin slot, *squash* my fingers into it till my hand swells white, 'ARGH!' and I pull the coin out ... I look at it between my crippled fingers. 'This isn't even a pound, it's a fuckin twenty cent *euro!*'

'It's mine!' she snatches it. 'It's MY money!'

'No wonder it got *stuck*, it's not the right coin for it, you dozy quaffed mare!'

'Calm down, lad,' Terry puts a hand on my shoulder ...

'I've just disabled meself fer a fuckin *euro!*' I wave my mangled hand at him. 'She wants lockin up! You ALL do!'

This tramp wafts in he's got a big green anorak on, and starts shoving stuff into it ... supervisors soon corner him he looks in every direction before shrugging to himself: 'Yer've got me,' he concludes. Still, they have to make it *look* dramatic. A bunch of them go for him, grabbing his arms and neck and stomach ...

'Ay, ee's goin quietly yer cowards!' I implore.

'Quiet, you!' one of them spits down his chin, primal little men ... they shake him about, so everything falls out his coat and onto the floor around him.

‘Ah, what’s all *this* then, ay?’ one smugly smiles smugly.

‘Ow’d you explain *that*, then?’ says another, jutting his chin out to affect a brute profile, because he thinks it made him look hard. He’s *striving* for the unevolved look, for that totally base appeal, it’s *easier* than *reason* paradoxically, he’s conceding that *intelligence* is far more frightening, innit?

‘I just TOLD you,’ he sighs. ‘Yer’ve rumbled me.’

And they all stand there a minute, not knowing what to do they wanted him to put up a fight They don’t get laid enough, their wives are ugly, they’ve had kids too soon, they can’t afford a decent car despite practically living here, they haven’t had a holiday in years, been stuck working in the same shop since they left school ... every step on the ladder of so-called success gets more and more slippy, but they keep hopping up – maybe the NEXT promotion will make me happy, maybe the NEXT bonus will sort me out – on they hoist, without questioning the direction so they have tension to release, ego to feed, they want a FIGHT ...

But this tramp of ours, he just sniffs into his beard. ‘Am admittin it. Yer’ve got me, boys.’

‘Right, come on then, let’s be avin yer!’ and they march him towards the office, all three of them keeping their grip on him, six payroll hands holding one destitute man, who is calmly plodding along within their panting lower-upper-middle class scrum ...

When I come back from the bog, the filth are escorting him out ‘I only did it,’ the tramp states in a low gravelly tone, ‘so’s I’d ave a lovely snug cell fer the night!’ goading the bastards. ‘Bless you all for turnin me in!’ he tries to bow for us, but one of the pigs pulls his arm, and his back snaps upright.

DANNY AND BENNY (2)

Bob Wild

I bumped into Danny in Tesco's car park where he was admiring his new car: stroking it. "Twelve years old bejaysus with only 80,000 on the clock!" His stubby fingers, tipped with nibbled, red-painted nails, making snail trails across the bonnet. No small dog in his arms to-day. Flat shoes, lisle stockings! Where the fuck do you find those in this day and age; trench-mac, chiffon scarf, pony-tail, badly smudged lipstick and looking blowsy but with those classy sun glasses, like flat black eyeshades, you can buy in The Pound Shop, bound tight round his pale powdered face.

I noticed the dog on the front seat, lying in a pile, like a skein of wool.

"How's Benny the doggy Danny? . . . err Angie?" I struggle with this gender realignment. I can never get it right, even though I know he's going to go ahead with the operation.

"Bejaysus I nearly lost him".

"Wandered off did he?"

"No, I mean lost him".

"Oh, lost him!"

"Yes lost him. He nearly died, can't wander off these days. He's almost fourteen; he's got cataracts; he's almost blind. He bumps into things. I have to carry him. He pretends he's taking me out for a walk: pulls my leg when he wants to go. The other day he took me for a walk down the Mersey. Off he went for a pee, sniffing around in the grass at the edge of the path, enjoying himself, then he let out an almighty scream! He'd found a bumble bee and it stung him right there on the nose. He collapsed on the path! I thought bejaysus he'll be after playing dead so he will! I'd taught him loads of tricks and that was his favourite. He can shake hands you know. Sings like an Irish linnet when I play the tin whistle for him. Dances upright on two feet when I'm on the accordion. I've bought him a bow tie and a little evening suit: he loves it. We'd have made a small fortune, Benny and me, if I'd got him when he was just a pup. We could have been on TV with a Dogs Come Dancing show. He could have sung Often Bark for them: they'd have loved it. Anyway, he wasn't

playing dead. I just couldn't rouse him, or get him to stand up. Luckily I'd bought a mobile at Tesco's the day before. I dialled 999 and told them me friend Benny had collapsed and would they send an ambulance to get him to A&E double quick. I was just so frantic. I tried palpating him and I gave him mouth to mouth but wouldn't come round. I even played me tin whistle to him. He was still alive 'cos he bit my lip. There was blood all over my coat. It took them 20 minutes to get here - 20 very long minutes! They rushed from the road with a pile of gear and a police escort shouting: Where is he!? Where is he!? They were not best pleased when they saw that Benny was a dog. Said I was wasting their time. The Copper took my name and address; told me to take the dog to a vet. I says to him: Benny's just as important as any person you could name on this earth but they wouldn't have it: the bastards! The medics said I should go to A&E meself, after I'd got the dog sorted out, for a tetanus injection. One of 'em said maybe it was perhaps a rabies injection I needed - fucking cheek! Anyway, I phoned the vet and he told me to bring him in right away. Benny was still unconscious when I got there. The vet said he'd gone into shock and given his age may not come out of it. He gave him an injection and told me to leave him over night. He was very kind. He held Benny in his arms but said if he was no better in the morning he would put him down. I was in a terrible state. I signed the form and went home to have a good cry.

The following morning the vet rang to say Benny had recovered -me prayers had been answered! I collected him just now and there he is, but he's still very sleepy. Cost me £180 but I didn't mind paying and every cloud has a silver lining: the vet told me it might be possible to operate on Benny's cataracts when he'd got over the shock of the bee sting. It wouldn't be cheap: getting on for £2,000 including the three nights' stay, but what can you do? I'd give me last brass penny for Benny to see me again. But I've only got £1,000. It's money left from the compensation I got from Hyde's brewery. You remember, I told you, they threw me out of two of the pubs I used to go to despite me telling them I was waiting for me gender realignment op. They didn't refuse me money for a pint though, the bastards, but they wouldn't let me go to the Ladies for a pee. I'd got me women's clothes on so I couldn't have gone into the Gents. I'll have to think of some way of raising the money".

"Why don't you get the Evening News onto it", I suggested.

“Great idea - thanks for that. I’ll think about it”.

I heard quite a lot about Danny over the next month or two from occasional conversations with mutual acquaintances. I’d been told he’d moved into a flat in a terraced house in a somewhat seedy area quite near to where I lived. I was told he now dressed exclusively in women’s clothing, albeit second hand stuff that did nothing to enhance his appearance. Despite many counselling sessions and deportment training, opinion was that he would never pass as a woman. Apparently his gait and stride were very much the same as they had always been and much more suited to clumping over ploughed land or treading bogs of rural Ireland than trying to trip daintily down the urban streets of the city. His voice had deepened with age and become gruff from drink: he was reportedly hitting the bottle quite regularly and hard.

The hormone treatment had fattened him. The bosom pads had been replaced by genuine flesh but had also thickened his torso. The extra weight made him look like a middle age woman. His hair, now swept back in a pony-tail had turned to grey. His beautiful eye lashes had disappeared. His makeup skills were minimal. All in all he had translated himself from a good looking man to a frumpish matron. “You wouldn’t recognise him”, friends said.

Danny’s major sex change operation had been successful but despite a couple of extra minor ops the voice remained as gruff as ever as I discovered when I came across her in a local newsagent’s. At first I didn’t take much notice of the tall, full-bodied lady in front of me. My mind was on other things, but the reek of cheap perfume turned my attention. I remember glancing down and thinking those feet in the brown brogue shoes are a bit large for a lady. After being served she turned and I saw a small white poodle dog clutched to her bosom. Full-face I realised it must be Danny.

“Hello Bob”, a gruff, gravelly voice croaked as a big horny hand was thrust out to shake mine. I hardly recognised him, no, her - will I ever get the hang of this? It wasn’t just that he was now wearing glasses: his hair had lost its colour and his powdered face was flabby, the skin coarsened.

“Ah! you’ve caught me on a bad day: I’m not usually after looking like this. Hold the dog a minute”, he said, thrusting the little poodle

into my arms. “I’ll show you what I really look like” and he produced from his mac pocket a glossy photograph. I saw a person I didn’t recognise perched on a tall stool clad in a low-cut sequined top displaying a considerable cleavage. A very short skirt, in fact almost no skirt, displayed exceptionally long legs in black fishnet stockings, crossed provocatively and twined in a sexy pose. She looked professionally made-up, manicured, plucked eyebrows, full glossy lips and long red nails. The blonde wig with curls made her into the style of a once beautiful but much faded film star.

Apart from the curved false eyelashes which echoed those of the former Danny, there was no resemblance to the middle aged frump standing in front of me.

“Oh! very nice Danny”, I spluttered.

“Don’t call me Danny, I’m Angie: Angela O’Toole. I’ve changed me name to what me mother was called”. She took the photo from out of my hand saying she had to be at the doctors at 8.30 a.m. “I’ll catch up with you some other time”, she said as she left the shop.

I didn’t run into Danny, err. . . Angie, again for some time: it must have been at least a month. I had to see the nurse at the local group practice for my annual M.O.T., as they now ridiculously call a check-up. I didn’t use the ramp but chose the steps. As I climbed them I saw a large pair of feet clumping down. I panned my eyes up from the shoes to the coarse brown stockings and on up to the trench-mac, belted today. It was Angie. The dog was there on her chest. A chiffon scarf concealed her throat. Her face was bespectacled, raddled and un-made-up: a far cry from the dishy blonde model of the photograph.

“Hello err. . . Angie”, I said, “How are you?”

“Terrible!”

“Why what’s the matter?”

“Women’s problems, but I don’t want to talk about it. I’ve got to go to the Chemist’s straight away”, she said, clutching her crotch. “There is something I want to talk to you about though. Can I phone you later in the day? I’m having trouble with the neighbours”, and with that she hobbled away still clutching her woman’s parts.

Later in the day she phoned and asked me to phone her back as she was on the pay-phone in the hallway of the house where she lived

and hadn't any change. She said she was depressed about her health and also having trouble with her bedsit neighbours. The operations to feminise her voice had not been successful: if anything they had made matters worse. When people heard her speak they treated her like she was a man in drag, a transvestite, rather than a bona fide woman. Her GP feared she had early signs of throat cancer, she'd always been a heavy whiskey drinker, and she was worried if that turned out to be so and she had to go into hospital what would happen to Benny?

"He won't be able to live without me and I'm not sure I'd be able to live without him", she said.

The problem with Angie's neighbours turned out to be that though they didn't mind music they didn't like her friends, especially the transvestites. There was one particular neighbour who liked neither music, her friends, nor Angie. Angie explained she often invited pals from the band round for drinks and rehearsal when the pubs closed. Some of them were transvestites. When they'd had a few they went crazy playing Irish music: the drummer banged away she said: "like a bull in a brothel!"

The neighbour who didn't like Angie, a protestant woman from Belfast, shouted up the stairs while they were celebrating trans-dressing day on the 14th of August.

"If you want to play Irish folk music take yer fucking frocks off and fuck off back to Dublin, the lot of you!" She'd reported Angie for noise to the council so Angie, thinking this must be racial discrimination, had sent letters in retaliation to her MP, the Race Relations Board and The Equal Opportunity's Commission together with a tape, "of her protestant obscenities".

What do I do . . .

if I am writing to friends overseas?

I write very clearly, and am careful not to mention anything which may be of use to the enemy, such as air raid damage, munition factories, or troop movements.

I write my name and address on the back of the envelope.

I use a *new envelope*, and not an economy label, otherwise my letter may be returned to me.

I try not to praise the works of Beethoven, Wagner and Nietzsche but I do go on at length about some problems I have with the works of Heidegger, particularly his concept of *dasein*. Since I am a lecturer in Sociology for the WEA I can parrot interminably on such topics. I'm sure my correspondent Hans Scheisskopf of Schweinfurt must be quite exhausted by these missives such that he often fails to turn up the following day at his machine in the ball-bearing factory. My experiments in the pub and in the homes of friends and colleagues convince me of the hypnogogic effect of these monologues. Also I propose to learn Japanese since I feel sure I could bore the arse of those slit-eyed little shits with an exploration of the phenomenology of Zen Buddhism. They'd soon pack in after a few long letters from me. This would save all the expense of that new Yank U235 bomb which a penpal in Los Alamos, New Mexico tells me is costing a fortune, and won't be ready anyway until 1945.

Cut this out—and keep it !

*Issued by the Ministry of Information
Space presented to the Nation
by the Brewers' Society*

SOMETHIN' BAD

S. Kadison

Two hundred yards from the school gate, the crowd, mostly white but dotted with Asian faces, hustled and elbowed to form a disorderly queue for Twix, Minstrels, cola bottles and Walkers crisps. Pushing, thumping and threatening his way to the front was Awais Pali, small, scrawny, thin-voiced and heedless. He shoved in front of a boy a foot taller and three stone heavier who jostled him roughly aside.

“Fuck you, motherfucker!” spat the little Asian, stretching his face into an ugly sneer, throwing back his shoulders in a show of fierceness like a fox terrier in front of a rottweiler.

“You’re a twat, Pali,” scoffed the older the boy with a laugh.

“I’ll get you! I’ll bring my gang on you!”

The big lad and his companions jeered and shook their heads.

“You’re nuts, Pali.”

“You won’t fuckin’ say that when I bring my gang. They’ll fuckin’ knife you.”

The older boy turned away and talked to his mates. Everyone was accustomed to Pali, who threatened five pupils with death every break-time, had tried to raise a gang to terrorise the quad and had succeeded in mustering four timid fellow Asians who hung a metre back as their leader insisted they were about to inflict terrible damage. In his first year he was dutiful to a fault, fierce in his attempt to win teachers’ approval and virulently eager to excel, but by the beginning of year nine he had switched to his thug persona, disrupted lessons with loud and violent interjections, talked endlessly of gangs and knives. What saved him from beatings was the mildness of his compatriots. Middle-class for the most part, remote from the rough tongues and ready fists of the back streets, the worst of them might strut and brag but physical violence was alien to the culture. Pali, aware of this, provoked his classmates remorselessly and swaggered like a drunken sailor as they turned away or scoffed. He came from a poor area the Asians had made their own: uniform lines of terrace houses with little back yards, corner shops packed high with cheap spices, vegetables and ten kilogram bags of rice and

close by, two high rise blocks, a legacy of the misplaced optimism of the 1960s. Prostitutes offered their services behind the take-aways and lock-ups. Drug dealers cruised in Mercedes and BMWs. Along the streets passed trios or quartets of girls in Muslim dress, hurrying to the mosque or home from school. On the corners, in the evenings, loitered the teenagers who school couldn't engage, who saw little future, whose raucous voices and exaggerated gestures were meant to frighten. When he was allowed out for a few hours before bedtime, Pali hung around with the big lads.

“Hey, wanna hear what I did in school today? Yeah? This fuckin’ teacher says ‘Do that work!’ so I pulls me knife and goes ‘Fuckin’ make me, punk!’”

One of the older boys swung round laughing and grabbed Pali’s ear.

“You talk shit, man! You didn’t pull no fuckin’ knife. You ain’t got no fuckin’ knife. You should be in bed, little boy.”

The gang gathered around the skinny victim, pushed and kicked him, laughing.

“Yeah, how old are you, seven!”

A vicious laughter arose. They knocked the younger boy to the ground and regrouped, excluding him.

“I’ve got a fuckin’ knife! You think I don’t ‘ave a fuckin’ knife? I’ve got knives this long.”

“I’ve got a dick this long and I fucked your mum with it!”

“Yeah, up the arse!”

“And your sister.”

“She gives good head your sister, man.”

“We gang-banged her.”

“She’s got Aids, man!”

They barked with unhappy laughter and slunk away going slowly up the hill towards town, waving as a sleek Merc glided by, the music of its tyres on the tarmac sweet to their ears.

Pali found his father doing the washing-up. He was thin, restive and eager.

“You done your homework, innit?”

“Ain’t got none.”

“Show me.”

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"I ain't got none!" snapped the boy.

"You get homework every night, innit?"

"I done it!"

"You said you got none now you say you done it!"

The boy stamped up the stairs and slammed his door. His mother, coming through from the living-room where her three daughters were watching Big Brother, raised her brows and stared at her husband.

"Somethin' bad in that boy," said the father.

"Keep him in," said the mother. "No good on the streets with those naughty boys."

The father hurried in his task, dipping his thin wrists in the hot, soapy water, his brows furrowing.

"Somethin' bad got in that boy," he said, shaking his head.

The next day, Pali was isolated for calling out "I fucked your mum up the arse!" in an R.E. lesson. He sat at a desk next to the Head's study and when boys passed with messages for the office or returning registers, he looked up at them with a smile that was half a sneer as he stretched his legs beneath the small, square desk, shoved his hands in both pockets and rocked back on his chair.

"You appreciate such comments are taken very seriously, don't you?" said Mr Wrennall, Learning Co-ordinator.

"Yeah," said the boy dismissively.

"We won't have sexual remarks of any kind made in the classroom."

Pali sneered and his head wobbled lightly from side to side.

"Don't pull that face at me!" bellowed the young teacher getting to his feet. "This isn't funny. You're in serious trouble, boy. You could face exclusion for this kind of behaviour."

"Am I bovvered?" said the boy.

"You will be bothered, lad. I'm bringing your parents in."

"Whatever!"

Mr Pali had to take time off from his call-centre job. He and his wife arrived in their seven-year-old Honda Civic which they parked next to a gleaming, black, four-wheel drive sitting high on its suspension. Looking around the car park at the many new, expensive vehicles,

Mr Pali felt his shame and anxiety increase. He straightened his tie. They had to sit in reception for five minutes. Teachers passed and Mrs Pali lowered her eyes while Mr Pali nodded and smiled politely. The headteacher, Mr Hesletine, was very courteous. They were served tea and engaged in small talk.

“We’ve had to ask you to come in, Mr and Mrs Pali, because of Awais’s behaviour. There have been several incidents that have caused us concern and Mr Wrennall has had to speak to him and discipline him more than once. The most recent event involved a rather nasty sexual comment in a class being taken by a female teacher.”

Mrs Pali looked at her feet and her husband did his best to retain his dignified posture. Behind Mr Hesletine’s politeness he heard the cold language of office and it was made clear to him the school would begin the process to exclude his son permanently if his behaviour didn’t improve.

“It’s also of great concern to us that Awais is frequently heard to speak of knives and gangs. He makes a habit of threatening other boys.”

Aware of the paucity of his English, Mr Pali did his best to assure the Head that his son would change, but he was so overcome by confusion, dismay and shame that he hardly knew what he was saying. Mr Hesletine and Mr Wrennall shook the parents’ hands, smiled generously and thanked them for coming. In the car park, Mrs Pali began crying. Her spouse put his arm round her and hustled her into the car. His heart was beating furiously, he felt the sweat trickle down his sides.

“Somethin’ bad got in that boy,” he said, shaking his head. “Somethin’ very bad.”

They took their worry to the Imam who listened gravely, comforted the distressed mother and agreed to speak to the boy. In front of the elder, Pali was more subdued, but he turned away his face, refused to look him in the eye. The priest spoke in Urdu but the boy answered in English. For the most part, he uttered only a word or two. The weeks went by. Mr Pali kept him in the house and when he walked past the youths congregated on the corner or in front of the shops, big, gangling lads with eyes full of readiness, whose joyless barks and yelps filled the air with menace and who showed no deference so he had to step into the road to go by, he wished he had the courage to

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turn on the them, to face down their bravado and tell them to leave his son alone. He recalled reading in the paper of a man kicked to death outside his house after confronting a gang and he bowed his head and hurried on.

One Sunday afternoon, Pali took a carving knife from the kitchen drawer, slipped it under his jacket and headed for the park where the most feared gang of the area met to drive the young kids off the swings, smoke dope and steal bikes. As he approached, seeing the older lads hoisting the seats of the swings over the upper bar or doing wheelies on a BMX taken from some terrified youngster, the fear of rejection made him pull himself upright and swagger. He took out the knife and gripped its handle so the point of the tapering blade pointed directly before him. When he went through the little gate into the play-area, no-one noticed.

"Hey!" he called "Look what I got!"

"It's Pali."

"He's got a knife."

"What's that for, Pali? Gonna slice some bread?"

A pair of them came over to him.

"Give it us."

The lad took the knife, ran his finger along its blade, twisted it between his thumb and middle-finger.

"It isn't even sharp, Pali. You wanna stick somebody, you need a sharp knife, go right between the ribs," and he swiftly jabbed the point into Pali's flank.

His mate laughed as the chetif lad grabbed his side with both hands.

"That 'urt, you cunt!"

"Call me a cunt, Pali," said the other grabbing him, pulling him close and setting the long blade against his throat, "I'll cut your fuckin' 'ead off, see?"

The rest gathered round. Pali was always good sport.

"Slit 'is throat!"

"He's brought his mummy's kitchen knife!"

"You should be choppin' vegetables, Pali!"

Afraid to struggle or protest because of the press of the sharp steel

against his flesh, Pali waited to be released. At length, his assailant took the knife by its blade and flicked it so it penetrated the soft grass and rocked on the flexible blade.

“S only good for playin’ splits. This is a real knife.”

From his pocket he pulled a palm size bone handle, snapped his thumb against its chrome button so a three-inch, curving blade flicked out instantaneously.

“That’s sharp, Pali. I already stuck three guys with it.”

“Yeah, how many you stuck with your mum’s carving knife, Pali?”

“Show ‘im what a real knife can do.”

They grabbed his feet and arms and swung him violently from side to side. He kicked and struggled and called out that they were cunts and if they didn’t let go he’d bring his cousins who were drug dealers and carried guns and then they’d shit themselves.

“You ain’t got no fuckin’ cousin drug dealers, Pali!”

While four of them held him by the limbs, a fifth unfastened and yanked down his jeans. They dropped him and pinned him to the ground as the lad with the knife tugged on his sparse pubic hair and sawed the blade through it.

“You’re getting’ a haircut, Pali!”

“Yeah, you can go ‘ome and show your mum!”

“Cut his balls off, he’ll never need ‘em!”

Pali began to cry with distress.

“What you cryin’ for, gangster? Go get your cousins, Pali. I’ll cut their cocks off.”

Bored, now their victim no longer struggled, they left him and trotted down the steps towards the river calling insults that he heard becoming less and less distinct as he ran his fingers over his sore groin and pulled up his trousers. At home, he sneaked the knife back into its drawer, went up to his room and sobbed on the bed until he fell asleep. When he woke, his mind was blank for a few seconds and he was aware of an odd contentment till the memory of his humiliation rushed in like sewage through an opened sluice.

The next day he was isolated for hitting a younger boy across the head with a steel ruler, but when he was allowed back into classes on Tuesday morning, tore up his exercise book and scattered the pieces

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on the floor telling the teacher who asked him to pick them up that the cleaners were paid to do that. At lunchtime, he kicked a year seven in the groin and was isolated for the rest of the week. During this time, as he sat alone by the Head's room making little effort at the work set for him, he let his musings run free and, in the best of them, saw himself at the head of a big gang of older boys chasing some cry-baby little kid who he cornered and knifed in the ribs so he fell in a pitiful, bloody heap, calling out for his mum, while he, admired, elevated, beyond consequence, led his troops in search of more victims and greater glory. This fancy calmed his anxiety, brought to life the old feeling of belonging which, he didn't know how, he'd lost. He was happy.

On the coach home he sat in the corner of the back seat. He was quiet amidst the usual din and ignored the bullies and loudmouths; only when the chance came to boast about his isolation did he stir:

"Yeah, I'm gonna get Wrennall outside school. I'm gonna fuckin' knife 'im."

The other boys looked at him obliquely, meditated a few seconds and laughed.

In the evening, while his parents were watching *How Clean Is Your House?* with his sisters, he searched out the key to the padlock which secured the shed in the yard. He wasn't allowed in because of dangerous tools and chemicals. Quietly he opened the back-door lock, stepped out in stockinged feet, clicked free the padlock, swung carefully the creaking door and stepped into the half-light. His father's neatness was everywhere. His chisels and screwdrivers in ascending order of length were slotted through a horizontal beam. He knew he kept a Stanley knife of exorbitant sharpness. Beneath the bench he found a small, red, metal toolbox, also cautiously padlocked. His brain swam at the impossibility of access but all at once he remembered his father cutting and laying carpet, the toolbox open beside him, and a little, jangling fob which he slipped into the pocket of his overall. Paint-smearred and unwashed it hung on a nail on the back of the door. He curved his tiny hand into the pocket and his heart raced as his fingers felt the small, cold trove nestling in the pit. The diminutive bit of silver flicked the lock adrift and opening the lid he saw the knife, its blade fitted, lying as if in anticipation. It felt friendly in his palm, heavy and appropriate. He tried the edge

along the bench and it shaved a curling strip from the timber with no effort. He manipulated it carefully into his pocket, set the toolbox as he'd found it and went back indoors. In his bedroom he lay running his fingers over the cool metal. It was so beautifully keen, so perfectly honed for damage, no-one dare say he was ill-equipped, no-one could mock him when he flashed this before them.

The next day he went to school in a mood of supreme confidence. When the big lads jostled him in the queue he told them he'd got a blade in his pocket and he'd slash their faces if they didn't fuck off. But when they challenged and mocked him, something held him back. He wanted to choose his victim. The temptation to show his weapon to his mates was intense, but he feared a teacher finding out and confiscation.

"I've 'ad enough o' this shitty place," he said to one of his pals, "I'm gonna knife someone today."

His friend looked at him with wide, innocent eyes and tried to smile.

"Nobody fuckin' messes with me!"

Everything seemed to shrink. The teachers became weak and insignificant. The buildings themselves appeared small. As he sat at the back of the maths lesson, paying no attention to Mr Pickup's words, he felt himself grow bigger, as if nothing in the world were outside him, as if all being began and ended with the limits of himself. His relaxation was complete. There was nothing to fear, nothing to accomplish. He could do anything. There could be no consequence as there was no reality beyond his body, his thoughts, his feelings, his desires. In this mood he went into the quad at break. A self-satisfied little smile played on his lips. Between himself and the rest of the world there was an endless distance yet he and the universe were coterminous. He spotted little Wolstonecroft playing football. He was chasing the small, red, plastic perforated ball for all he was worth. He was a swat and Pali hated him. He hung around on the edge of the game till the ball came his way and he picked it up. Wolstonecroft, panting, was in front of him:

"Give us the ball."

"Fuck off, punk."

"Just give us the ball," said the younger lad, holding out his hand, a hint of weariness in his voice.

"Make my day, cunt!" said Pali.

SOMETHIN' BAD

Wolstonecroft drew back a little in surprise, then laughed, his face opening in a sunny smile. Pali had a sudden sensation of shrinkage, whipped the knife from his pocket and shaping an arc with his arm, flicking his wrist at the same time, drew it across the boy's cheek which opened like a ripe fig, the blood hesitating an instant before streaming. Wolstonecroft put his hand to his face, pulled it away and in horror at the warm, red liquid running between his fingers, screamed and dropped to the floor. Boys swarmed like drones . Teachers came running. Pali stood with the knife in his hand, still, quiet, smiling, feeling that at last he had attained fame, glory and power.

RAIN, TARMAC AND DEATH : A GUIDE TO CORNWALL

P.J. Fell

I realised I'd earned enough to buy my first pair of Doc Marten boots, the unfamiliar sensation of independent adulthood. Friday as you know is Poets Day (Piss Off Early Tomorrows Saturday) and I made it to the shoe shop before it closed and I bought them. No decision to make, I knew exactly which ones I wanted. They were an exquisite joy to behold. Fourteen hole boots in the ultimate colour - Ox Blood, with the lovely yellow stitches so bright and new. Saturday afternoon saw me walking around Bodmin with an unusually long stride and my jeans turned up to display the length of the boots. Fourteen holes, that means the laces go halfway to the knee!

When the chip shop opened, I was sat nearby on a wall with Skid. We were waiting for the first batch of chips to be sold, they'd be old ones reheated. When we saw a bucket of fresh tipped in we went to queue up. Some older lads were lurking at a table in the alcove behind the jukebox. "Oi!" shouted one of them, "Oi mate." I ignored him. "Oi mate, I'm talking to you, you fucking deaf or what?" Reluctantly, I looked at the boy. I knew of him but didn't know him, he was two years older than me, a big hardnut called Pete, one of those people it's best to avoid. "Nice DMs mate. You christened 'em yet?"

His fat friend got up and waddled over, sneering, "Yeah, if you ain't christened yer Docs you ain't allowed to wear 'em. You ain't man enough. We'll have to confiscate 'em." This fat lad was called Kyle, I didn't know him and I didn't want to. He'd been at the school when I was a junior, but now we were equal height. I'd had a few scraps at school, as you do, though I wasn't a fighter like some are, I preferred to dodge conflict not seek it out. The four other lads were watching from the alcove, faces blank. If it got nasty I was near the door, I could get away, my exit strategy. To be honest I didn't know what to say or do, I just stood there with this Kyle humiliating me, looking me up and down, flicking my denim jacket with his pudgy fingers. "Nice pink Docs mate, bit shiny though." he said and trod on my toecap twisting his foot to scratch the leather.

"Fuck Off!" I said, shoving him away. He swung a punch that smacked the side of my head forward of the ear. I went fuzzy and knew the next punch would finish me so I moved forward, somehow my elbow caught him in the face, knocked him back, he stumbled and fell on his arse. He had to be finished so I kicked him in the head. He rolled and caught my left foot but my right kept booting till he gave up. There was a noise like seagulls squawking far away, it was the chip shop ladies screeching at me but I didn't care. Everything sounded far away and someone was tugging my arm. The four lads in the alcove were laughing like drains, which confused me but I was glad they weren't joining in.

The chip shop bloke had appeared from the back in his white coat, flipping a dishcloth at us like we were annoying spiders. "Get out," he kept saying, "get out before I call the Police." We obligingly vacated the premises. "You too, get out of my shop." he was saying to Kyle who crawled out after us. He had no fight left in him, he sat on the pavement feeling sorry for himself. I stood over him but he was pathetic, beaten. His mates all stayed where they were, I guess their opinion of Kyle was no better than mine. As we walked away, the chip shop bloke's head stuck out of the door and shouted, "You're banned." Fine with me, there's other chip shops.

So that was it - I'd formally christened my Docs. An undignified scuffle in a chippy but my DMs had met the criteria for their christening - they'd kicked someone's head in. I was innocently celebrating this happy fact with a silly walk based on the goose step, when some rude git driving past beeped at me. It looked like a tourist's car which really got my back up, English posh cunts having the temerity to beep at us in our own town. I shouted the usual range of comments but they were out of range. I got the next car though. A beautiful side swipe with the boot took the back light lens right off. Red plastic pieces skidding around in the road. The car slowed down but didn't stop, they never do, gutless Emmets. You need to appreciate the skill required to achieve such a result. I have seen lads swinging their boots at holidaymaker cars, clumsy and ineffective, often with a can of beer in one hand. They'll miss completely, spinning ass over tit, falling in the gutter and endangering themselves. Or the tip of the boot digs in and yanks the foot sideways giving a nasty sprain. There's no dignity limping off while some angry Emmet is stood hands on hip bitching at you. No,

you must time your strike to perfection and be accurate as a hawk, subtle too. Ideally the Emmet doesn't know your plan till he hears the bang. You have the option to lie on the pavement playing the victim which is great fun. I got a camper van once, not a back light job, just booted the side and lay down. Silly sod stopped and apologised for all he was worth, even gave me £20 not to take it further. English lawyer type, total loser, with his bitch wife sat there with a lemon up her arse, judging by the face.

The evening was turning out quite well after all, but we were still hungry. After a wander in town looking in car mirrors to assess how bad my black eye might become, we ended up at a tiny chip shop, I mean it was micro, standing room for three customers at a time and nowhere to sit. It was run by Chinese people, probably all one family and they all had painful looking acne, young and old alike. I felt sorry for them, they seemed so unhappy, not enjoying life. We ordered chips, needless to say, plus their speciality dish which we called 'Battered Alsatian Penis' though it was probably some sort of sausage. Partly it was the whitish goo between meat product and batter that gave rise to the rumours, plus the inclusion of what looked like urethra but was probably bits of vein. Also the chips were the shape and slipperiness of slugs.

My jaw hurt as I chewed, up by the temple where the swelling was... well, swelling. Kyle had only landed one punch but it had caught me square on, and I was hurting, headache, toothache, eye-ache, ringing in the ear, the lot. I should've ducked back or to the side but wasn't quick enough, didn't see it coming. He'd swung from low down, a proper haymaker. Skid was saying how cool my 'forearm smash' had been, how it had caught the bastard off guard etc. I didn't like to admit it was a total accident, I'd gone in close to stop another wide swing finding me and I just got lucky. We sat on a bench to finish our chips and watch the traffic. I'd say in the town centre but Bodmin has no centre as such, a sort of middle zone inside an inner ring road is as near as you get. Anyway, we sat there with that familiar mixture of contentment and nausea that is normal to British people after chips. It amazes me how many foreigners actually vomit during, after or merely thinking about chips, our beloved national dish. Maybe foreigners just don't get as hungry as us Brits, I don't know.

Watching traffic in Bodmin is a popular pastime. Cars full of lads

RAIN, TARMAC AND DEATH

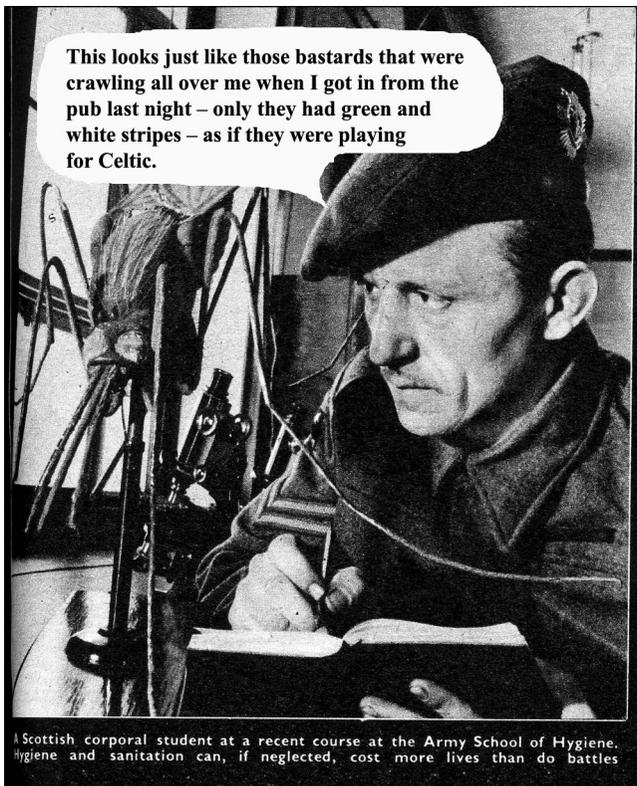
start cruising as the evening gets under way. You recognise different cars that may be friendly or hostile. If its mates you jeer and flick the Vs and they throw stuff and it's all cool. If it's a hostile group, they drive past staring at you and you stare back. If you give too much attitude, that's when it can get feisty so you tend to find the perfect balance of blankness and aggression. If you look away, that's showing weakness which is never a good thing, unless you do it with sufficient contempt, but it's a fine line, easily crossed.

Most dangerous is a car full of lads from another town, or even a pair of cars. Say it's Wadebridge, Liskeard or Snozzel lads or whatever, there's only one reason they're driving around Bodmin. Well two actually, either cruising for girls which is unlikely if the car is already full, or more likely hunting any Bodmin lad to kick the shit out of. They cruise about till they spot a likely victim, often an innocent holidaymaker, stop the car, do the dirty, then drive off back to the safety of their own town. Pathetic cowards, but it's fair enough because Bodmin lads cruise around Wadebridge for the same purpose.

The daft thing is Wadebridge and Bodmin will happily team up to fight a menace from some other town, especially Indian Queens whose hardness and relish of conflict is legendary. Indian Queens is a small place, bigger if you include Fraddon, but it produces uniquely unpleasant male citizens prone to extreme violence and riding around on large motorbikes. These bulky young men tend to sport untrimmed full beards from the age of fourteen and are always clad in black biker leathers, grimy, oily and slung about with lengths of chain and other fighting equipment. Their lack of personal hygiene is the stuff of legend. A group of Indian Queens can stench out any pub or disco they enter. Their distinctive smell is an unsubtle blend of fish, sweat, urine, old black engine oil and unwashed arse crack. It is believed they have communal rutting pits, as used by stags in the mating season, in which they twist and heave until coated head to toe in their pungent rutting paste, only then are they ready to swing a heavy leg over their overly powerful bike and roar off to another town. They will sit in a huddle drinking beer, their broad embroidered backs defying anyone to comment on the stench. If a disrespectful remark is loud enough, they'll slowly turn and rise up, wrapping a chain around their fist.

Yet Indian Queens, Wadebridge and Bodmin will happily team up to

fight a larger menace like Plymouth. And in the event of war, all these towns will merrily form a regiment to fight the Germans. And doubtless all humans, even the Germans, would unite to fight the Martians.



Illustrated 1942

LAST ORDER
Martin Keaveney

There was one more call to make on the back road, a long and hilly trail through a remote townland in the south-east corner of the parish. The home of Walter Reilly, yet another of the village's numerous elderly bachelors. Reilly was unusual from the others in that he did not own a bicycle and walked everywhere, particularly to the local pub, where he was to be found most nights. The boy pondered on the evening's sales as he cycled the final ascent.

Since he was nine, his father had annually entrusted him with the village door-to-door sales of the Christmas Club raffle, selling them at 50p each and three tickets for a pound. The most exciting part was the club's allowance of the seller to keep the extra 50p from each book individually sold. In this route, bachelors, widows, characters whose marital status was questionable, the single ticket purchase was popular. It meant the boy's inside pocket rattled with £4.50 of commission. He looked forward to visiting Sweeney's travelling shop on Friday where he would convert it into Macaroon bars, a bag of Chickatees and a small bottle of fizzy cola.

Reilly's house was hidden beneath a thick veneer of gorse and long, jungle-like grass. Years of failure to cut what had probably once been a proud front garden had resulted in wild plants, joining together and mutating higher than the first slate on the roof. The house had also suffered years of neglect; ivy crawled messily across one whole gable and now threatened the front window. Numerous plants hung from the roof gutter, making its original function an impossibility. A rusty stain down the corner served as a reminder of its futility.

The boy parked his bicycle against the gatepost. It was a gatepost which bore no gate, and there was barely enough room to pass. He could not know that Reilly had abandoned the treacherous late night struggle through his thorn infested pathway many years ago. Nowadays, he crawled through a gap in his back fence and awkwardly scaled his neighbour's galvanized gate whenever he came or went.

The boy, book of tickets in one hand and blue biro in the other, struggled through the swamp of greenery in front of him, until he

arrived at a mahogany front door, its base black with damp. A saucer once used for cat's milk sat motionless under the fractured windowsill, a spider presiding over its centre.

He knocked on the door, his fingers feeling the hardness of the wood which sent a small signal of pain to his brain. There was no answer. However, the boy knew Reilly was at home, he was never anywhere else except the pub and that didn't open until half seven. It was only just after four. He stood, looking around the site, wondering what it would have been like in its heyday, when Reilly was a young man and his mother was still alive. The boy's father had told him that Reilly was once an excellent tradesman. One of the finest in the county. He had built the house himself, only employing some labourers. He had made a great living as a local builder in the fifties and sixties. But like many, Reilly had succumbed to the 'aul' drink'. 'Too fond of it,' the boy's father had said. Reilly had progressed from a few relaxing pints of stout on a Friday evening to becoming an ever present fixture at McGovern's Public House. He had become messy.

A common scene was Reilly in a confrontation over an alleged unpaid bill. He was often to be found in the centre of the front lounge, holding his own kangaroo court. His voice raised toward a bemused local; stubbled, half-smoked *Major* in one hand, tightly held pint glass in another, a mouldy shirt hanging outside loose trousers. The dripping beer creating a small pool near Reilly's untied boot on the wooden floor.

By the seventies, Reilly, then in middle-age, had lost most of his clients, mainly due to rows in the pub. The locals murmured Reilly couldn't hold his drink anymore. He began raving, talking in riddles. People who had known him in his prime shook their heads slowly and moved away when they saw him coming. Others just laughed, and used Reilly as a light-hearted conversation topic of a Saturday night.

Reilly became less interested in his appearance. Grime and unmentionable stains became a regular feature of his attire, and he gravitated toward the small snug at the far end of the pub where he drank alone. There, in wonder as a child, Reilly had watched his father and friends thirstily slurp stout and half-ones. It was where Reilly had made the torn leather-topped stool with metal arm-rests in the corner his own. It was where he had sat every night of the past

twenty years, since long before the boy was born.

Yet to his credit, Reilly had bought a ticket last year, and the boy had sold two of this current book, so he knew a sale was likely here, if he could find him. The previous meeting had been amicable. The boy recalled a light hearted grin of Reilly's, while a ball of saliva drooped from the old pensioner's lower lip. He pictured the large woollen sock Reilly had conjured from beneath the tattered sofa in his kitchen and the pile of coppers he had spilled out onto the table. He was, indeed, more forthcoming with his purchase than some of his neighbours, only once inquiring if there were 'fair good prizes'. A good deal easier to deal with than Mrs. Rainsworth who wanted to give the boy six free-range eggs in lieu of the 50p or Joe Craddock who told him that the club committee, of which the boy's father was the chairman, were 'a bunch of aul' gangsters'.

There was a noise somewhere within. A scraping, banging noise. The boy peered through the dusty front window. He rubbed the glass but could see only a dirty lace. He tried again to make a satisfactorily loud knock on the old door, but the result was merely an insignificant thud. He moved to the glass and rapped it as loud as he could.

The light breeze died away. It seemed the world had gone asleep. The boy looked around as a hush seemed to roll across the winter landscape. The crows perched silently on the telegraph lines, defining the horizon. Maybe Reilly was getting dressed, he wondered. Perhaps that was the noise he had heard. Reilly falling out of bed. It was said that he fell into the drain that ran along the boreen most nights on his way home. The boy imagined Reilly struggling to put on his old musty clothes and looking out the window to see who the unexpected caller was.

It was strange how the world looked different when a person had to wait. A circular pool of water in a field of bog rushes lay like an enormous pound coin, one of those which had only come into circulation in the last year. The line of telegraph poles along the boreen overlooked Reilly's cottage. Their small galvanize rungs attached for maintenance men, two each side and one below, created a sly, smiling expression.

He walked along the cracked footpath. At the side was a windowless gable. Behind the cottage was a mish-mash of bread crusts, old potato skins and tea-bags. The boy thought about abandoning Reilly.

It had been a good day. Still, another sale here could bring his earnings to five pounds. He looked in the back window. The kitchen table, where twelve months before Reilly had offered the boy a mug of tea from a questionable looking teapot and a ‘few bishkits,’ occupied the middle. A worn flowery tablecloth covered it. Above, a box of tea bags was half open. A brown wrapper clung half on and half off a sliced brown loaf. A yellow *Harp Lager* emblazoned ashtray spilled with crushed cigarette butts. A tall fridge was in a corner, a worn sticker on one side read ‘*Montreal 1976*’. The boy could hear it hum.

But there was no sign of Reilly. He looked at the sofa behind the table for a clue. Two cushions lay at one end, some foam spilling out of one. Beside them, the familiar woollen sock that Reilly had used last year. Coppers were around it, he could see more within. Reilly had been getting the change ready, he guessed. He knocked on the window.

‘Hello? Walter?’ he said. His voice seemed strange against the backdrop of the silent landscape. The boy walked toward the back door which faced him as part of a small built-on scullery. He pushed it and it opened slowly. It stopped less than half way and the boy quickly found that it was jammed by numerous bags of rubbish. He walked inside. The kitchen seemed more neglected in the sharper definition on the other side of the glass. Something crackled under his feet. His eyes quickly followed a trail to a broken whiskey bottle near the peeling wall. He looked again at the sock. Perhaps Reilly was unwell and wanted him to collect the 50p. Reilly had been friendly and more accommodating than most. Indeed, now he thought about it, Reilly had given the boy 20p for himself. He doubted the old man would accuse him of theft, not if he left the ticket on the table.

He walked over and looking around once more, picked up the coppers, counting them as he did so. To his surprise he reached 50 without the need for them all. He slotted them into his jacket pocket and sitting on the hard chair wrote out Reilly’s name in the blue biro. He tore off the ticket, which bore details of the New Year’s Eve draw and dance in the Community Centre and placed it on the table, even though it was highly unlikely Reilly would attend.

‘Just leaving your ticket here, Walter,’ the boy said. He got up and walked toward the back door again, eager to leave the dead quiet of

the house. As he reached the scullery, he looked down the hall, toward the front door. The bedroom door was half open. A smell of old clothes wafted through the air.

‘Left your ticket on the table, Walter.’ The boy found himself hoping for an answer. ‘For the raffle.’

He walked on the creaking floorboards, passing the converted toilet, the former bedroom of Reilly’s sister, emigrated to foreign lands many years earlier. He reached the bedroom and looked in. On the floor Reilly lay, unmoving. His eyes were open but they were still. The boy dropped his biro. It made a loud ‘clack’ when it hit the linoleum floor. A small stream of blood had trailed along Reilly’s jaw and was drying quickly.

‘He’s dead,’ the boy said aloud. For what seemed a long time he could not move. He eventually turned to the front door and noticed his fingers shaking as he twisted the latch. The cold air offered relief as it hit his lungs.

The boy decided to submit Reilly’s ticket to the draw in spite of his passing. His mother said if the old builder won the top prize of £250 it could be donated to a mental health charity or an Alzheimer’s disease support group. His father mused it would be fitting if Reilly won the spot prize of a bottle of *Jameson*. The Committee might have a drink in his memory, he added jovially.

But Reilly’s ticket didn’t win anything. On the night, the boy, sipping a coke, stared at the hundreds of stubs in the base of the drum. He wondered then if some tickets like Reilly’s were always destined to remain unpicked.

Conservation Area

The pavement trees weren't there then, nor the
leaded glass in the Brown's cricket-balled fanlight
and the rugby pitch in place of the sandpit, swings,

the see-saw escape from god-fearing Gothic that pressed
us all flat, booted, open collars over sports jackets, and
high skirted Jeannie dancing past Fat Freddy's to the

sweet shop, footballer-owned *Alma Arms*, *Dellmura's*
ice cream, public baths, Sykesy and me smashing
a window, ripped hand still scarred, nor the slatted

blinds, matt front doors, the awninged Latvian deli
comfortable as a Paris street corner, but the City
Corporation sign at the park entrance proudly black

in the sun remains, with the genitals I chiselled on its
edge when I was ten.

Ken Champion

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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) *Brits, Beats and Outsiders* (2012) and *Bohemians, Beats and Blues People* (2013) 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

S.Kadison's stories appear in *Is That You Mr Clooney?* (2008) and recently *God's Laboratories* and *Let's Kill the Teacher* and *The Diplomat's Daughter*—Penniless Press Publications 2012/13. 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 *Self-Dissolve* (Penniless Press Publications 2013) and most recently a trilogy comprising *Godsman*, *New Found Lands* and *Hornyhorse* (PPP 2013)

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