

THE CRAZY OIK
ISSUE 5 SPRING 2010

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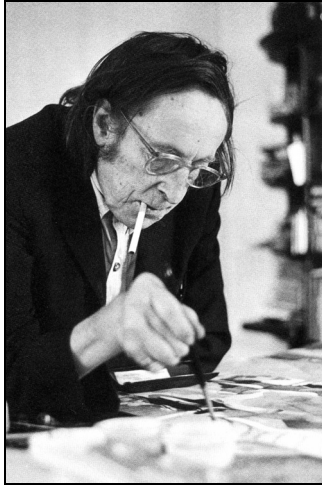
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In the Beginning is from Tom Kilcourse's collection ***The Human Circus***
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The Andersen Shelter is from is from Bob Wild's collection ***The Dogs of War*** ISBN 978-1445219813



Burra c 1970

The Royal Academy rang him up when I was staying with him at Chapel House . . . He was painting in his top-floor room that had yellowing pages of *The Times* pasted over the windows when the light was too strong. Frederick, the manservant, shouted from below: 'The Royal Academy on the phone, Mr Edward.' 'Tell them to fuck off, I'm busy,' Ed shouted back. They rang again next morning. The same reply was bowdlerised to them by Frederick. 'They want me to go and get my medal,' Ed said, 'and have lunch. I wouldn't mind being an ARA [Associate of the Royal Academy] if I didn't have to do that.' But they were adamant and so was Ed ... he only accepted a CBE when told it could be sent to him.

(Clover Pritchard) from *Edward Burra Twentieth Century Eye* – Jane Stevenson p342

He became a heavy drinker, wasting away weekends getting plastered in Soho. During the 1960s, he loved to stay in Islington in north London, which he described as "full of ladies pickled in years of Guinness & gin & very scruffy" (A Sunday Morning at the Agricultural Arms, his bustling watercolour from 1975, records this period). By then, he looked so dilapidated that he often had trouble getting a drink: "No wonder they wouldn't serve me - what I looked like - methylated spirit in person". When he accepted a CBE in 1971, it was partly on the grounds that this might help to prevent publicans throwing him out.

Alistair Sooke reviewing Jane Stevenson

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EDITORIAL

The Oik intends to make you laugh. We'd offer a money-back guarantee if it weren't for the fact that you might be a miserable sod who never laughs at anything and who just happened to be brooding over a pint when our Oik seller collared you. You might have thought it a charity rag, like the *Big Issue*, with the profits going to a leper colony in the Congo. Well there aren't any profits and although we can imagine what it's like being a leper, being unknown writers after all, we aren't inclined to give a hand to any lepers (pun intended).

Perhaps this trivial aspiration (to have a larf) is more widespread than you think. Small literary mags want to change the world or *épater les bourgeois* (yes, we can do that too) or push back the boundaries; but to have a larf as a main aim? Well let's hear it from Daisy Goodwin, Orange Prize judge:

"There's not been much wit and not much joy, there's a lot of grimness out there. There are a lot of books about Asian sisters. There are a lot of books that start with a rape. Pleasure seems to have become a rather neglected element in publishing."

Reading the 129 entries to this year's competition had sometimes driven Goodwin to despair, she said, as she revealed this year's longlist. "I think the misery memoir has had its day, but there are an awful lot of books out there which had not a shred of redemption in them. I'm more of a light and shade person and there does need to be some joy, not just misery. I was surprised at how little I laughed ... and the ones where there was humour were much appreciated I can tell you." She accused publishers of "lagging behind what the public want", of not getting that readers do want pleasure and do want enjoyment when they read. "There comes a point halfway through the process where you think: 'Is it me or them?' You just can't bear it anymore. And then you come across this joyful book."

And if we seem to be sidelining the serious business of perfecting the short story cop this from AS Byatt:

I am told by creative writing teachers that many would-be writers imitate that great short-story writer, Raymond Carver. This leads to an almost-rule — consider the fact that there are other ways of writing, besides Carver's. Read very widely, and all

kinds of different authors. The American writer Michael Chabon has made fierce fun of that other traditional piece of short-story wisdom — that a story should show a single emotion perfectly and end in an epiphany. Chabon said rightly that a piece of short fiction could tell a story, could set out to entertain, could contain a helter-skelter of disparate things and happenings, and still be a short story.

We now learn that even Raymond Carver couldn't write a Raymond Carver and that his iconic works had as much as 70% cut out of them by his editor Gordon Lish. It's all getting a bit scholastic – these latter day Thomas Aquinases are draining the life out of fiction. But hey! Who needs fiction? What boundaries? Just chuck anything in there so long as it works. David Shields explores this idea in his *Reality Hunger*. Blake Morrison reviews it in the Guardian:

Shields... loves cut-ups, mosaics, found objects, chance creations, assemblages, splicings, remixes, mash-ups, homages; the author as "a creative editor, presenting selections by other artists in a new context and adding notes of his own". The novel is dead; long live the anti-novel, built from scraps: "I am quite content to go down to posterity as a scissors-and-paste man," he says. Well, actually, he doesn't say it, James Joyce did. But there are no quotation marks to make that clear, and deliberately so: the book's premise is that "reality can't be copyrighted" and that we all have (or ought to have) ownership of each other's words.

Yep, it sounds like anarchy – and right up the Oik's street. So don't worry if you're not Joyce or Chekhov, or even Gordon Lish. Feel free – just make it interesting...or funny even.

Ken Clay April 2010

The full text of Blake Morrison's review of *Reality Hunger* is on the Oik website Workshop page.

**Appen it'll appen if it appens
an appen it won't appen if
it doesn't appen - appen**



Ena Sharples

**appen nowt'll appen, either that or owt.
If owt appens, appen I'll crack on nowt's
appened - an if nowt appens, appen I'll ask
"owt appened Ena luv?"**



Albert Tatlock

CORONATION STREET: THE TRUE STORY
BY NORA DRAYWORTH.

Brett Wilson

Part 1: The Return of Elsie Tanner.

Elsie Tanner was angry. Albert Tatlock had called to say he couldn't make their latest date, since he had forgotten about a previous arrangement to go ferret racing. In fact Albert was on his way to his latest assignation with Mini Caldwell. Elsie picked up her copy of "Being and Time". Martin Heidegger was one of her favourite philosophers but she had to keep her intellectual interests a secret. She lived in a world where men ran a club devoted to self congratulation, pomposity and fantasy. It was called society and women had no place in it. Carefully she made a few notes in her philosophical notebook. Heidegger had run into an ontological difficulty and used a simple linguistic slight of hand to get out of trouble. Writing under her pseudonym as Latvian philosophy fellow Dr Jorge Hertz, she would submit a paper to one of the several journals queuing up to publish her papers. She put the notebook down. She couldn't concentrate. She would have it out with Albert this evening. She put her coat on and wrapped a fur stole around her neck. On her way out she picked up the letter from world chess champion Tigran Petrosian. As she deftly applied a fresh layer of lippy in front of the hall mirror, the next move came to her in a flash. She picked up the eye shadow pencil and wrote in the space provided for the postal chess game, put the sheet in an envelope and popped it into her pocket. "Check mate in four" she said softly as she opened the front door.

A few doors down, Ena Sharples was cleaning her teeth with hot soot from the fire grate. She was brushing methodically, to remove bits of kipper from behind the palette. She blew once and then returned the dentures to her mouth. She looked down at the dead ginger tom on the hearth. The fur seemed to be shimmering in the firelight. They'll be no more caterwauling tonight, she thought. She just needed to place the corpse of Tinker under a barrel in the yard of the Rover's Return and then make a discreet call to the cat protection league. It was a small part of a long and intricate plan to unseat Annie Walker from her position of supreme control.

But there was a problem. Her catspaw Mini Caldwell had fallen for lothario Albert Tatlock and was proving increasingly difficult to manipulate. Ena had been a cryptographer at Bletchley Park during the war, operating out of hut 69. Without her help, that witless fool Alan Turing would never have managed to decode Enigma. But that was all in the past. Annie Walker had managed to get the feeble minded Ken Barlow through Salford University by writing all his essays and even turning up at the final exam dressed in a flat cap and a pair of dungarees. Now Ken had returned as enforcer for Annie and shifted the balance of power in Weatherfield. Without the full cooperation of Mini she would have her hands full. There was another problem. Elsie Tanner had returned. With Tanner in the game the outcome could not be certain. She sprang to her feet and quickly slipped on her coat. With the balance and strength of an Olympic gymnast she bent down and picked up Tinker with one hand while a leg reached back and pushed the coal scuttle a little further away from the crackling fire. She turned smartly and opened the back door. Emerging into the cold yard she suddenly slowed to geriatric speed, adopting a hunched shape to fit her public persona. She turned the key in the mortise lock. As the tumblers clicked over, so did the cogs in her brain....

Part 2: Showdown at the Rover's Return.

Mini Caldwell and Albert Tatlock were sitting in the snug of the Rover's Return. Albert was staring at the top of his half of mild. Mini had noticed that Albert's trousers were looking slightly more bulky than usual. Was he wearing his incontinence pants again thought Mini? That would mean trouble down below. There was definitely a hard bulge in the vicinity of his fly, but that could be his briar pipe. She had been fooled before. But no matter. Mini was a chemist on the quiet, and with Ena's help she had perfected a formula which cured Albert's little problem. Years ago she had developed the chemical as a pick me up for her withering celery, but now she was slipping it into Albert's tea if she needed him to perform. At the weekend Albert had inserted his eager member into her hot cinnamon ring after violently pushing her over the bun trolley and wrenching her legs apart. His shaft had thrust deep into her fundament over and over until she moaned like the local tom cat. She

CORONATION STREET THE TRUE STORY

would have to teach him that there was more to lovemaking than penetration. It wasn't half as good as she pretended. She would keep the formula to herself for a decade or so and then perhaps give it to a male acquaintance she knew at Pfizer pharmaceuticals.

Albert was about to ask Mini why the froth on his half always dissolved in the middle first, when an ominous shadow appeared on the snug window. At the same time, his nose detected the unmistakable aroma of sewing machine oil and canal water that Ena used in her hair. The internal door swung slowly open to reveal the distressing presence of Ena Sharples. Albert felt the slow trickle of urine make his incontinence pants warm and heavy.

"Hello Ena" said Mini.

Ena had been round the back of the Rovers, where she had placed the pathetic body of Tinker under a barrel of Jack Walker's finest. But that was not what concerned her. Out of the corner of one eye she had seen Annie Walker emerge from the parlour and move in the direction of the meat pie tray only a few feet away. In the hands of Annie Walker the adamantine crust and leaden filling of the Braithwaite's meat pie could be a lethal weapon. Just as Ena turned to meet this threat, in walked Elsie Tanner. The hyper acute hearing of Ena could detect the barely imperceptible words "Oh Christ!" uttered from Jack's lips as he put down the glass he was polishing before slinking into the back parlour.

Her left eye now fixed on Annie, her right eye tracked across the floor to where Elsie was sauntering towards her. Worryingly Annie was now moving closer to the pies. As Elsie stopped a yard from Ena, she realised that Annie could deliver a "double kiss" manoeuvre, bouncing a pie off Elsie's noggin before ricocheting straight on to hers. But Ena always had her speed, and Annie knew that. The tension in the bar was palpable, Ena's toes screwing up in her shoes, ready to pounce.

"Stout?" Annie said.

"I beg your pardon?" said Elsie, always conscious of her weight.

"I think she means a drink" interjected Albert from around the corner.

"Shutit Tatlock" crowed Ena. Her eyes had now come together in perfect unison. Albert had unwittingly broken the tension.

"And you can come out from behind that bar stool, Barlow!" belated Ena. With that, the previously unnoticed figure of Annie's enforcer appeared.

“You’re nothing but a toothless tiger, an’ all.” She said with contempt.

“You and me need to ‘ave words Albert” intoned Elsie. But Albert was already out of his seat and was pulling Mini through the back door and onto the street, away from the potential trouble. Albert’s survival instinct was honed to perfection. Perhaps the one good sense still in his possession.

“This seems to be a stand off” said Annie, her hands moving away from the pies.

“Aye,” said Elsie. “Besides, I’ve got other fish to fry. We’ll have this out another time.” With that, she turned on her stilettos and left. Ena said nothing. She simply walked away slowly, her back to Annie.

The next day, as the sun was rising above the smog and the effervescent glint of morning light could be seen glancing off the rain soaked cobbles, Elsie was making her way to the corner shop for a packet of fags. She still needed to speak to Albert, who clearly fancied more than ferrets. Barely had she turned the corner when she saw Ena walking towards her, less than ten feet away. As the two women passed each other, without looking up, Elsie said “Sharples.” With no break in her stride or a change in her expression the immobile face of Ena returned “Tanner” and they both continued on their way.

IT'S KIWI!

**OF COURSE
IT'S KIWI!**



"Bonza's the word—"

"Too right, it is!"

"Why, say—you speak Australian like a native. How about you and me—?"

"Stick to the point, cobber. We're talking about the way KIWI polish makes shoes and equipment sparkle on parade—"

"Sparkle! That's a good word. I've seen leather sparkling with KIWI in Sydney, Singapore, Suez—"

"—Sidi Barrani and Sollum?"

"You bet you! But KIWI does more than give the finest shine. It penetrates right down into the pores of

the leather, keeps it smooth and soft—makes shoes wear twice as long for every sprat you paid for 'em."

"Dinkum?"

And another thing—you can black your face up with it and crack on you're a darkie. Girls really go for them black GIs—I can't think why. And also it makes your teeth look whiter and you can dance, sing much better too. Don't get me wrong—I'm no racist—Al Jolson's my favourite singer and I bet if he wa'sn't a true darkie he'd be using Kiwi.

KIWI DARK TAN

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Service men and women are asked to buy KIWI in their Service Canteens whenever possible, to relieve pressure on civilian supplies. The general public are assured that all permitted supplies are being distributed to the shops with scrupulous fairness. If your shop is out of KIWI to-day—ask again tomorrow when new supplies may have arrived.

K.343

THE KIWI POLISH CO. PTY., LTD., BRUMWILL RD., EALING, LONDON, W.5

Our Finest Hour – Adverts from *Illustrated* 1941

JOGGER

David Birtwistle

Pump.Pump.Pump.Pump.Bump..... Pump. Pump... The softly resonant but persistent, dampened footfall seeped into his unconscious psyche and brought him into that mysterious half world of waking-sleepfulness. The sound of rubberised grip-soled shoes rhythmically slapping the stone pavement entered his bedroom via the top opened window and hovered on the edges of his perception. At the back of his brain were memories of being a paper-boy up and about, whatever the weather, before the rest of the world was awake. When his bag was down to a quarter full he would take off and sprint the last lap and make it home in time for an extra slice of buttered toast. Now, every morning in spring and summer, he was accompanied by this gently muted thumping.

It began with his whole body at rest, his back and neck at ease and at one with the mattress he lay upon, his right leg touching the warm softness of his wife's thigh and his breathing slow and steady. The soft footfall would fade as the early morning runner padded down the street and headed round the block. As this became a familiar motif to his introduction to the day he began to count. It usually happened six or seven times after he first stirred around 5.30am. The only other early sound, except when it rained, was a single magpie's football-rattle squawk and the gentle breathing beside him.

He now had the routine and the timing off to a tee. Four minutes later he was up and peering through a crack in the curtains. Pad. Pad. Pad. Dum Dum. Dum. He opened the curtain slightly to get a clearer view. That lovely young girl from down the road, her short blonde pony-tail bobbing from side to side, wearing blue tracksuit bottoms, a T-shirt and white trainers, pounded along the pavement, arms pumping like Paula Radcliffe. She looked young and innocent, alone in an empty world. On the surface everything seemed peaceful, serene. She had no idea how vulnerable she was, how appearances could be deceptive, what could be lurking in wait.

The idea came to him out of thin air although it must have been on his mind in some sort of subliminal way, and then triggered by that

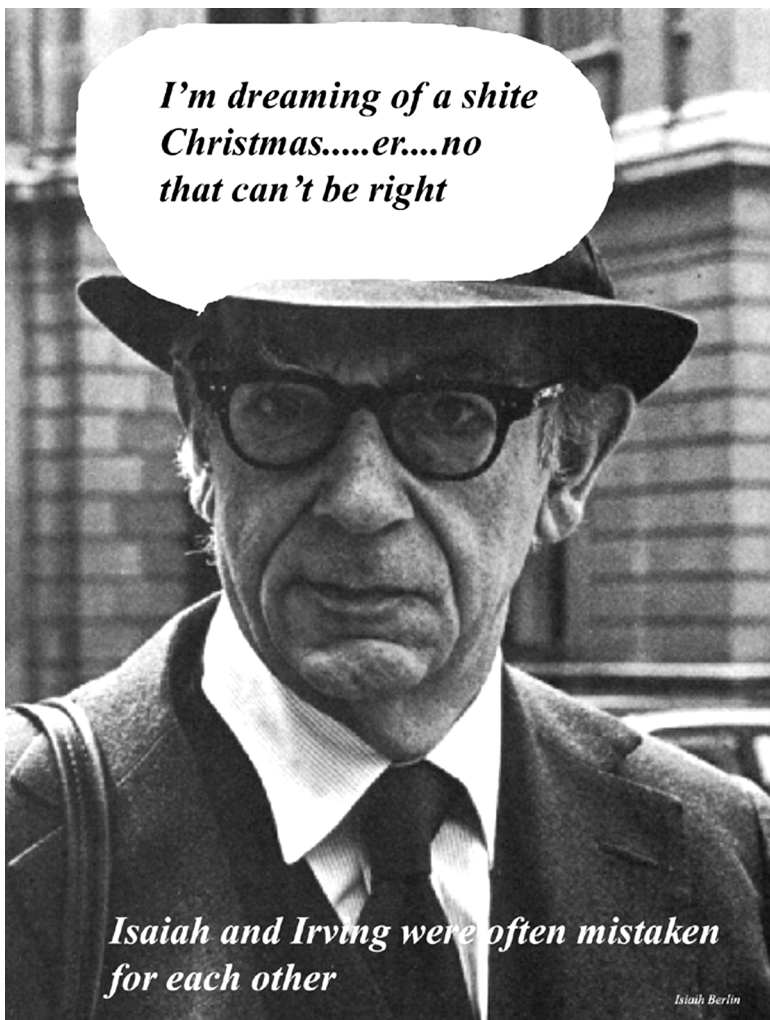
JOGGER

gentle, daily rhythm. All week he'd been reading about Philip and Nancy somebody and the woman who was abducted as a child in California, the sex-offender and his wife who'd kept her in tents and a shed in a secret garden, an encampment behind their house in San Francisco. Hidden from view, without giving the neighbours a clue or an inkling, she spent 18 years there bearing the captor two children. He discussed with his wife how on earth this could have happened and she was as intrigued as he was. It chimed with other cases they had read about and half forgotten. There was that little girl, happily on her way to school, about ten years ago in Austria. This Wolfgang Whatsimacalled grabbed her and kept her in a cellar for eight years, no school, no friends, no nothing. All that time on her own with just him checking on her. Then there was that Joseph Schnitzel or Fritter or Fritzell who had actually put his own daughter in a dungeon for twenty four years and fathered seven children by her. No-one had paid a blind bit of notice.

His wife had been the inspiration. They discussed it at length. They wouldn't dream of being nasty. They would be very nice to her, They'd treat her like the daughter they'd never had. They'd feed her well, keep her warm, buy her nice clothes, play cards with her, sit and discuss the things they read in the papers, eat together like an old-fashioned family.

The next day they waited behind the gatepost. It was duller than usual so they weren't unduly worried about being hidden or camouflaged and they let her run round four or five times so she'd be tiring when they stopped her. The footsteps came near. Pump. Pump. Pump. Bump. Bump. Bump. They stood up together abruptly. The jogger hit him so hard he went straight through the hedge. Then she broke his wife's collar-bone with one downward chop, effortlessly regained her stride and was off.

It changed their lives in ways they could not have foreseen. His wife got a job at the John Lewis partnership with shares, flexitime and long-term benefits whilst he got a job in the wine section at Tesco's, stacking shelves and putting sell-by date stickers on the Chateau Mouton-Rothschild.



Isaiah Berlin

PHILOSOPHERS' BRAINS – HALF FULL OR HALF EMPTY?

Ron Horsefield

Do philosophers' brains get full? Well, nobody these days thinks of a brain as a collection of pigeon holes or even a large bucket – but anyone who's tried to load new software into an old computer knows that often the geriatric apparatus won't take it or just slows down to a crawl. Here's three examples:

No Tea for Bertie

Russell was a monstrously clever sod who wrote on many topics not just philosophy. His magnum opus, *Principia Mathematica*, read, he reckoned by only three people none of whom understood it, must have filled his brain almost to bursting point. What an irony then that the author of *Human Knowledge Its Scope and Its Limits* should run into his own "full brain" limits when asked to make a brew:

"Bertie was, in fact, almost a caricature of the unpractical philosopher, and the idea that he should actually know what to do in a domestic/mechanical emergency was laughable. Once, when he was staying with us on his own, Elizabeth and I both had to be out at four o'clock. And four o'clock was the time that Bertie simply had to have his tea; without it he was miserable. Elizabeth tried to explain to him exactly what to do. But he said he would never be able to remember any instructions. So she prepared everything very carefully: the tea in the tea-pot, cup and saucer ready, the kettle filled. Then she wrote out the instructions in chalk on the slate table in the kitchen:

Lift up the bolster of the Esse (cooker); move kettle on to hot-plate; wait for it to boil; pour water from kettle into tea-pot; . . . and so on.

When we came back at five o'clock Bertie was miserable and the tea was still unmade.

Russell Remembered Rupert Crawshay-Williams OUP 1970 p33

Kant's Suspenders

Kant was another great thinker who lived a very regulated lifestyle in the Prussian backwater of Königsberg which he never left. Stendhal called him “clockwork Kant” and the well-known jibe was that the neighbours could set their clocks when they saw him head out for a walk every day at four. Only once, when he was reading Rousseau, was this routine interrupted. Russell wrote: “he is generally considered the greatest of modern philosophers” although he added later that he considered Kant a catastrophe for philosophy. Kant had a few weird quirks: he breathed only through his nose outdoors to avoid catching a cold and would not let anyone go with him since there’d be a dangerous temptation to talk. He never married and described that bond as a contract guaranteeing two people the exclusive use of each other’s sexual organs. But how did he keep his socks up?

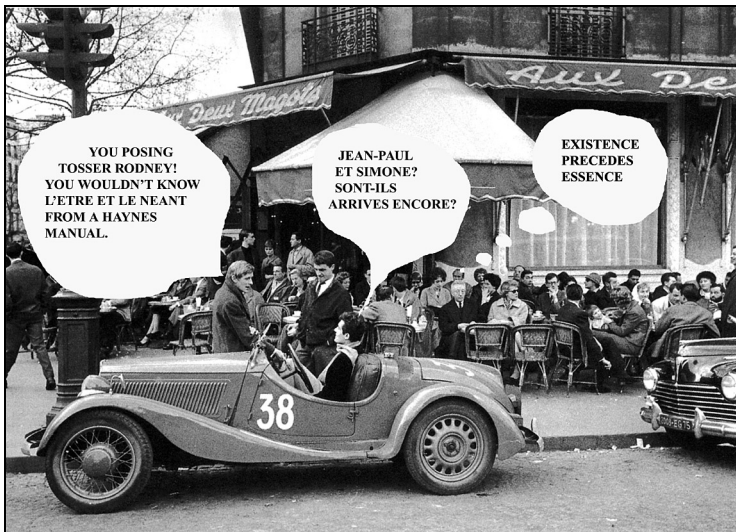
“On this occasion, whilst illustrating Kant's notions of the animal economy, it may be as well to add one other particular, which is, that, for fear of obstructing the circulation of the blood, he never would wear garters; yet, as he found it difficult to keep up his stockings without them, he had invented for himself a most elaborate substitute, which I will describe. In a little pocket, somewhat smaller than a watch-pocket, but occupying pretty nearly the same situation as a watch-pocket on each thigh, there was placed a small box, something like a watch-case, but smaller; into this box was introduced a watch-spring in a wheel, round about which wheel was wound an elastic cord, for regulating the force of which there was a separate contrivance. To the two ends of this cord were attached hooks, which hooks were carried through a small aperture in the pockets, and so, passing down the inner and the outer side of the thigh, caught hold of two loops which were fixed on the off side and the near side of each stocking. As might be expected, so complex an apparatus was liable, like the Ptolemaic system of the heavens, to occasional derangements; however, by good luck, I was able to apply an easy remedy to these disorders, which otherwise threatened to disturb the comfort, and even serenity, of the great man.”

The Last Days of Immanuel Kant – Thomas de Quincey

An Absence of Reality or the Reality of Absence?

Both Heidegger and Sartre thought a lot about nothing. Martin famously pronounced “the nothing itself noths” (maybe this loses something in translation). Of which Ray Monk remarked: “for a whole generation, the stock example of the kind of metaphysical nonsense from which the analytic method sought to free us, a warning to philosophers of the kind of rubbish they could end up talking if they strayed too far from the analytic fold.” But Sartre, Heidegger’s most famous epigone, wasn’t taking any of that shit and responded by saying: “*Ayer est un con*” (this *doesn’t* lose much in translation). For Sartre, nothingness, *le néant* became a very important something. It had an independent reality. It defined beingness. This was demonstrated by this exchange in *Les Deux Magots* (from the unpublished scraps of de Beauvoir’s journal in the archive of the Université de Eurodisney).

“The waiter approached our table at which Jean-Paul was furiously scribbling. Asked what he wanted JPS replied ‘a coffee, one sugar, no milk’. The waiter returned a few minutes later ‘I’m sorry Monsieur Sartre but we don’t have any milk – we do, however, have cream.’ Sartre thought for a moment and then replied “OK then, one sugar and no cream.”





“Listen to this, Jill . . . !”

Here's the manager of an Arms Factory saying there are many jobs in munitions women actually do better than the men — their hands are nimbler. . . . You know, there must be something really useful we can do.”

“Perhaps there is, but I can't think what.”

“Nor can I. But what we're doing now isn't helping to shorten the war, is it? Anyhow, look at Margaret — a mannequin, didn't know one end of a screwdriver from the other. She went to a Government Training Centre for three months and now she's in the Inspection Department of an aeroplane works — and well paid.”

“You realise we may have to leave home?”

“Yes Jill, but think of the benefits — you'd be able to wear your boiler-suit all the time instead of just weekends — and smoke your pipe. You'd be foreman in no time with lots of young girls under you. And you could spit and curse just like a bloke. It'd be “fuck this” and “bastard that” non-stop.

“Hmm — but what about my...er...accoutrements”

“Of course you could take it with you Jill. Why if we got sent to a leathergoods factory you could make a new one much longer”

CALL at the nearest office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service. You will be advised as to how, where and when your services can best be used. Any Post Office will direct you.

(THIS SPACE IS PRESENTED BY WHITBREAD AND CO. LTD.)

Our Finest Hour — Adverts from *Illustrated* 1941

TURKISH TICKET

Marie Feargrieve

Ismail needed to slaughter a goat. He couldn't stomach it. He didn't even like goat. Too greasy. Ismail had sensibilities. But his mother, wife and his brothers insisted. He plunged the knife into the prescribed place. It didn't end well. Supposed to be humane. Hallal. The goat squirmed. A lot. Died. The family feasted and celebrated. Then Ismail was off onto the plane bound for England, where goats come in neat slices wrapped in plastic; a place full of eager women, opportunity and money. It was just a question of which to go for first.

Day one as general skivvy and dogsbody at a large hotel, and somebody called him a tit. Day two the line manager hit him on the back of the head with a clipboard. Not half as bad as Turkey he thought. He looked at himself in the mirror. Good looking. Great teeth. Slim hippped and sexy. He thought. But he might be a loser magnet. Everybody liked to tell him what to do. His brothers told him to discipline his wife. He made sure he spoke sternly to his spouse when his brothers were present. His wife told him to be a man and stand up to his bothers. He rubbed some dirt into his face and presented himself to his wife. There had been a dustup he said, looking at his toes. "Loser" said his wife, in Turkish.

Now he was standing in the area manager's office.

"He called me a 'grass hole'" said Ismail.

"I wouldn't worry about that" said Tony, winking. Tony had decided that a charm offensive would work best. He didn't want any accusations of racism reaching head office. He was trying to think of things Turkish, so that he could evoke a convivial atmosphere. Turkish bath. Turkish delight. No, you daft sod, he thought.

"He not treat me with respect."

"Au contraire. I suspect an unalloyed fondness for golf" said Tony.

Ismail had realised that the area manager was obviously an idiot with a surprisingly poor grasp of the English language.

"I go now" said Ismail.

"Delightful" replied Tony, smiling.

Ismail realised that Britain was not quite the land piled with goat steaks that he first thought. Still, every Friday he sauntered over to

the local club where he bought his single pint of orange squash and flashed his devastating teeth at the pretties.

The barman saw a large thickset man with a blank face in the crack of the door. The waiter was new, but was gifted with enough feral perception to know to avoid the stranger's gaze. And he recognised something in the man's ritual motions that marked him out as a regular. It was midnight and the barman wanted to go home, but the card school with its attendees of two young bobbies and landlord was hitting its second phase of concentration and sweaty risk. Marty sat down.

"Get the sergeant a pint and a scotch" murmured landlord Mackie.

"You're up" said bobby one. Marty blew him a kiss.

"Fold" said two.

Marty counted out some notes, noticing that his hand was trembling.

"Don't forget you owe me two fifty" said Mackie, putting his cards down and looking at Marty.

"Not after tonight" Marty smiled. First time today. Calm down meat-head he thought. His chest felt tight. The whisky helped.

"Another one." He nodded towards the barman.

'Wipe your arse sir?' thought the barman. The urine coloured liquor that the landlord liked to purvey filled the shot glass like so much scum. Consolation and relief from the pain. Tomorrow, Marty planned to do his shopping run as usual. All the old ladies knew him. Went shopping for them he did. Heart of gold. Not all gold though. More like gold plated. There was the lead and the cheap tinfoil too.

It had been a good night for Marty. Debts cancelled with Mackie and the two nobheads back in his pocket. He was speeding through Levenshulme in his Lotus Elise. His knees stuck out either side of the steering wheel making him look like Goofy. Californication by the Red Hot Chilli Peppers was blasting out from the speakers.

"All around the world we could make time,
Rompin' and a-stompin' 'cause I'm in my prime...."

He stopped at a light looking smug.

"I try not to whine but I must warn ya

'Bout the motherfuckin' girls from California...."

He turned into Tesco's and smartly spun his pride and joy into a free space. He motored the trolley down an aisle smelling of baguette. The trolley was packed high with Vim, mackerel in olive oil, con-

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densed soup, copies of Puzzler and various sundries. He grabbed half a dozen packs of kippers and tossed them onto the top of the pile. He had made up with his wife. Just deliver this lot. Guardian Angel he was. A kind man.

“Are you going out tonight Ada?” the stock question from the bored eighteen year old hairdresser, stopping momentarily to pull a bit of raggy nail off her thumb.

“Too true I am Lisa,”

They were always a Lisa, or a Stacey, or a Nicky, rarely a classy name. Still none of this bothered Ada, inspecting her newly bobbed barnet.

“Right, Ada, you’re done, shall I get your coat?”

The seventy five year old tottered to the cash desk in heels four inches too high for her and fifty years too young in the fashion stakes.

“I’m going to a club on the A6, first time tonight. It’s supposed to be alright. Plenty of fellas. That’s what we want girl”, she added asthmatically.

“I think me mam’s been there” said Lisa, standing arms crossed, bored now. “I’m going out for a sausage roll, before we get busy. See you Ada”.

“Ta ra ra love”.

Ada staggered out, patting her platinum cotton woolly hair, checking herself out every now and then in a mirrored shop window. Whether she clocked the stares from male and female alike as admiration or disbelief is neither here nor there. She didn’t give a damn.

On reaching home she picked up the phone to her friend of thirty years, Reese.

“Hiya doll. I’m all glammed up and raring to go. How about you?”

“I’ve had me nails done. Not bothering with the hair. It was coloured last week. It’ll do. I’m wearing the black halter top though”.

“Blimey, let it all hang out Rene.”

Reese and Ada were a couple of walking museum exhibits. But no one had told *them* that. They had retained an appetite for life and expressed it in a relentless desire for cut-price smokes and booze. Half an hour in their company, really did put lead in your pencil. A great tonic. The monotony of life blown away on a puff of cheap scent. You couldn’t beat it.

“Well if it isn’t Beyonce Knowles and Lady Ga Ga!” Simon the black doorman tried not to smile when he saw the two old girls coming through the door. “Evenin’ ladies”

Well they were certainly over the thirty year age limit for entry and they weren’t wearing denim in any shape or form, so hey, they qualified in every way!

They sauntered through to the faux cowboy themed bar. Happy hour was in full swing and there were plenty of men, Reese was glad to note. Within ten minutes Ada was filling somebody’s ear already. He wasn’t bad looking either in a small Araby sort of way. Probably Turkish or Iranian. Definitely not English.

The music was booming from a small room off the bar. Lights flashed intermittently, lighting up faces, giving them a strange lime green glow. It was early so people sat in twos and threes around the dance floor. A lot of men propped up the rear wall surveying the talent, or lack of it. Reese had been trying to flash her backside by leaning slightly over the bar, but sensing that she was having little effect she decided it was time to change approach. She turned back around to speak to Ada.

“Blimey it’s a bit dead Ade. Let’s have a bop.”

Wriggling, gyrating and bouncing to the beat, they were the first up, but were soon joined by others, glad that the two oldies had led the advance. The little dark guy with the cute ass soon got between Reese and Ada, an arm around each, swinging them this way and that.

“What’s your name sonny?”

“I’m Ismail.”

“Well Ismail, you’re a good mover. Where’re you from?”

“From here!”

“Where?”

“Here at hotel. I am waiter. I born in Turkey. I Turkish.”

They perked up at this info. These foreign guys were exotic and racy weren’t they? Not as shy as English men. More forward. At their age Reese and Ada couldn’t afford to wait could they?

They danced and drank until midnight, when red in the face, dishevelled, hair all over the place, Reese with a broken heel, Ada with laddered tights, they had a last dance with Ismail and Ali, his co-worker and friend. Out in the foyer Ismail announced to Reese.

“I come home with you.”

“*Ooh do you now?*” said Reese all coy and panting. “Well alright Issie. As long as you pay the taxi fair.”

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"I hope you're joking Reese" says Ada looking thoroughly put out and frankly green with envy. She was sure it was *her* Issie fancied. Reese was stealing her thunder and her Turk!

"Joking I am not!" says Reese "Come on tiger!" With that she hooked her arm through Ismail's and made to propel him past the bouncer and into the night.

"No way Jose" shouts Ada, launching a kick at Ismail's neat little butt, at the same time, propelling her bag over her head and into Reese's silvery bonce, knocking her sideways into Simon's iron hard black thigh.

"You old cow" Reese recovered herself and sprang up, clawing at Ada's lurex top, exposing her scrawny chesty and push up bra.

At this, Ada set up a high-pitched screeching but still managing to spit a huge gob of saliva into Reese's face.

"I no like this" announced Ismail, disappearing through a service door into the safety of the inner regions of the hotel.

"Right you two, cut it out! That's enough! Out you go! You're barred!!"

Simon got hold of Ada around the waist with one hand, and with Reese in the other, he ejected them roughly into the car park, banging the door behind them.

In the cold night air and the electric glare of the security lights, the two old ladies stood slightly bent, panting. Bloody and bowed they looked at each other. They saw their own image in each other's eyes.

"We're bloody old fools", said Ada.

"You're right Ada. Scrapping over a man! What were we thinking?"

"Come on, let's go get some chips. What a night though. Wonder if they'll have us back next week?" They glanced ruefully back at Simon, who was looking at them through the plate glass door.

"Christ", he thought, they must have clocked up over a hundred and fifty years between them, and they were the only ones he'd had to throw out all week!

"Wouldn't have minded knowing them thirty years ago." He threw back his head and roared a huge belly laugh. That was a first this week too. Thanks Reese and Ada.

Still, Reese had taken a strong fancy to Ismail and had kept on seeing him. She liked his smooth olive skin, firm little booty and sexy mouth. He whispered things into her ear, things her old man had

never whispered in over fifty years of marriage. She had fallen, hook, line and sinker for Ismail's charm.

"I like you very much. I want to take you home to family in Turkey."

"Your family Issie? Blimey lad your ma will be years younger than me! No Issie. Not a chance...."

"Hey Ade, you're never gonna guess where I'm going?"

"Go on surprise me." Ada pulled on her fag, blowing smoke slowly into the air, watching it swirl with the dust motes in her living room.

"I'm going with Issie to meet his Ma. To Turkey I mean!"

"Bloody hell! You lucky bleeder. I knew you were cooking up something. But this! It's like Torremolinos these days. You're sittin pretty girl."

Reene laughed raucously. "It'll be sex sex sex and more sex. Them Turkish men don't know when to stop."

Ada blew out smoke slowly as the thoughts turned in her head. What more could a woman want?

Six weeks later saw Reene and Ismail queuing in departures for a flight to Istanbul. They made an odd couple. Reene decked out in red velvet pants and bright yellow top. Ismail, handsome in tight white trousers and black vest. Ada had come to see them off. She hugged Reene.

"Phone, let me know how it's going. Remember to bring plenty of fags back with you when you visit." She sidled up to Ismail, whispering in his ear. "You treat her good you crafty Turkish bastard."

"I treat her like real lady." He said and smiled greasily. Taking Reene's arm, he ushered her away.

Five hours later, they had landed in Istanbul and taken a clapped out old mini bus away and up into the mountains. Reene was hot and bothered. She just wanted to get to where ever it was they were heading. Ismail's mood had changed too. He was brusque and less attentive to Reene. He must be tired too, poor love, she thought. The scenery wasn't a bit like Torremolinos though. Animals roamed around freely.

"I'm glad Ada can't see this." Thought Reene, looking at the scrubby, dust drenched hillsides and sinking into her seat until only her platinum barnet could be seen from outside the bus. They were pulling up now in what appeared to be a village.

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A small curious crowd had gathered, shouting to Ismail and clapping him on the shoulders. The houses looked like small, white, flat topped boxes. Still it was hot and sunny and it beat the hell out of the terraced rows in the rain, back home.

Reene had raised her head slightly and now a couple of wild worried eyes could be seen lodged in a face frantically puffing on a cigarette. She awkwardly exited the rusting vehicle.

"Come", said Ismail, striding off, leaving her to walk behind, struggling with the suitcases. He disappeared into one of the houses. Reene followed ducking her head through the low doorway. Inside was pitch black after the dazzling sunshine. She was aware of voices speaking Turkish all around her. As her eyes grew accustomed, she saw several females greeting Issie, a desiccated old woman running her hands through his hair. He beckoned Reene forward.

"Say hello. This my mother."

The small wizened woman of perhaps eighty stared with slitty lizard eyes at Reene.

"How do", Reene stuck out her hand to the old woman, but to no response.

"This Fatima," Ismail pulled forward a plump, sullen looking woman of around thirty five.

"How do," again tried Reene, hoping for something this time... Fatima scowled at her and turned aside to fiddle with pots and pans on a table.

"Christ Issie, not very friendly are they?"

Ismail glanced at his mother momentarily. "Go with Fatima. Unpack!" came back the stern voice. Reene was about to fire off a broadside to the cheeky bugger, when his mother grabbed her by the arm with surprising strength and began to gabble vociferously at her.

"Mother says hurry up. There is meal to prepare."

"Hells bells, give me a chance honey!"

Forty-eight hours later Reene was seriously perturbed. Yes, she knew it was Turkey, not Manchester, but there were more than a few things she was definitely not happy with. For starters she had envisaged night after night of passion with Issie in a nice cosy bed, not the bloody hard lumpy straw palette on the sanded floor of a separate room, shared with the old woman, four kids and the very hostile Fatima. It wasn't good enough. She was used to better. When she

spotted him outside talking to a group of men smoking that hubba bubba pipe thing she made up her mind to confront him.

“Issie come here! I want a word.”

Ismail looked sheepish at first. But then his brothers spoke sharply to him in Turkish, whereupon he turned, glaring at Reese.

“Get inside woman! Know your place! I talking with my brothers. Do not interrupt. Show respect.”

Reese flushed up furious. She went inside shaken and upset. Fatima smiled slyly and thrust a dead chicken at her, indicating with a hand across the throat motion that Reese must chop its head off.

“Sod off you fat cow!” She threw the floppy poultry across the room where it hit the wall with a wet smack. At this the old woman who had been sitting in the corner flew off her stool, took up a big wooden spoon and began raining blows across Reese’s hands and arms.

“You effin old bitch!” screamed Reese grabbing the spoon and throwing it into the fire. Ismail, hearing the commotion, ran in at the door. He grabbed Reese around the waist and manhandled her into the bedroom.

“What the fuck’s going on, you bastard? What with your mother and effin sister, I’m pissed off with the cows.”

Ismail looked back at his brothers who were stood in the doorway and let out an exasperated sigh. “Not my sister, my wife Fatima. You help Fatima with children and mother. You show respect or you not be second wife. I beat you daily.” Ismail coughed and looked at his feet.

Reese stared open mouthed, shaken to her core. “You crafty Turkish pig. You never said you were married. You can kiss my fat arse. I aint being your bloody slave or theirs. I should have known what you were up to. And I paid for your bloody flight home, you conniving bastard.”

Reese charged at him, clawing and scratching his face. She tore at his shirt. Before she knew it two men had entered. Each held an arm, restraining her

“You dishonour me and family.” Issie looked anxiously at her as they frog-marched her into a small room, pushing her to the floor. They drew a wooden bar across the door. Reese collapsed sobbing, her heart beating erratically. “Christ almighty, what now? Please God help me. If only Ada were here.”

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Ada! If anybody could help her Ade would. Think straight. She whipped her mobile out of her pocket, praying it had power and a signal. Hallelujah! It did. With trembling fingers she tapped out. HELP ME. BAD TROUBLE. ISSIE A BASTARD. TURKEY HELL. GET ME HOME ASAP. She gave the name of the village and sent it.

The village was quiet now, except for the occasional sound of a yapping dog. Reese lay in the pitch dark. How many nights? Reese clutched her mobile with a trembling hand in the sweltering gloom. It was no use! No message and completely out of power. Nothing could save her now.

Ada, drinking stout in the Dog and Ferret on the Saturday night heard her mobile bleep. When she read the text, her heart somersaulted.

“Bloody hell! Marty come here. Read this.” A thick-necked powerful looking man of around thirty five came over.

“What’s up Ade” He read the text. He glowered. He had known the two old women since he was a raggy arsed kid. They had both been like mothers to him. Nobody was going to take the piss out of either of them, let alone an effin Turk. That Turkish bleeder had something coming to him.

“Calm down Ade. We will have a whip round. Raise enough for air fares. We’ll get her back no problem. Who’s coming with me?” Two burly men built like brick outhouses stepped forward. Nobody takes Reese for a ride and lives to tell the tale.

A week went by. A hellish week in this pig hole. A never ending round of making meals, sweeping floors, listening to gibberish, washing clothes at a communal sink in the hot, dust sprinkled village square. A week of hostile stares, of stench of goat, chicken and dog, and the torturing heat. All these things were Reese’s arch enemies. She suddenly hated this place with a strong northern passion. Ismail hadn’t spoken to her. Not a word. Well she didn’t give a damn. She was an old fool. No fool like an old fool. God forgive her.

It was approaching noon and she was gutting a smelly fish that looked like the cat had had it first. The bloody skin stuck to her sweaty face and in her hair. She was weary and defeated. It was then that she noticed a commotion had started outside. Dogs barked.

Children shouting. Was that a familiar voice she could hear, or was it her imagination?

Marty stood, bullnecked, solid in the village street, flanked by his heavies. Everybody answers to their name. Marty knew this. An English voice rang out and intoned a single word: “Ismail?!”

“Here!” said Ismail, rising from the corner, where he had been tending a new goat while his brothers were out of town. Reese ran out like the clappers on hearing all this. The sight that greeted her was finer than a fish supper on a Saturday night in Scunthorpe. God be praised! Marty had his arms around Ismail’s neck and had lifted him off the ground. The other two men seized Reese.

“Grab your handbag and passport” one of them said “Don’t pack. Leave the rest.”

Reese ran back into the house, pushing Fatima arse over tit and throwing the half gutted fish at the old woman. She snatched her bag and was sat in the car between the two men in less than three minutes.

Meanwhile Marty was powering his fist into Ismail’s face and ribs. Both Ismail’s front teeth caved in as his top lip burst open

“That’s from Reese. This is from me. Think you can hurt a woman like that? Think again arse hole.” A sharp pain was followed by a dull one as Marty’s fist cracked off a cheek bone and then again as it glanced off the swelling cheek and into the ear. “If I ever see your face in Manchester again I’ll kill you.” Marty kicked Ismail in the side as he went down. A booted toe went deep into Ismail’s thigh which was rendered immediately dead before Marty joined Reese and the men in the car.

“Oh Marty. Thank you lad. I can never repay you.”

“Reese, you’re a silly old bugger. You were taken-in real and proper, but nobody pulls a fast one on you and gets away with it. Come here.” He pulled Reese into his chest. She sobbed uncontrollably. She had never felt safer she thought, than in the powerful arms of this good, simple man.

Ada and Reese had always been close, but on Reese’s return, their relationship became tighter than one of Ade’s skintight tops. They still got dolled up and had nights on the town, but it was very much girl’s night out. Men were off the menu. A Turkish menu at any rate.

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Reene tottered on her drunken heels, in front of Ada who was trying to grasp a fish nestled neatly amongst a warm pile of chips. It broke in two as Ada grabbed at it, but she managed to get a sizable portion into her mouth. Reene looked at the kebab she had just bought in the local Turkish Takeaway. A hot vinegary smell assuaged her senses for the briefest moment, then she deftly flicked the kebab from atop the pile of chips and into the street, before staggering on.



Anzac Ballerina From Illustrated Dec 27 1941



Peter Cropper
Robin Ireland

Ronnie Birks
Bernard Gregor-Smith

GOODBYE DENMARK ROAD

Ken Clay

Most Mancunians think Old Trafford is the theatre of dreams, but there was another candidate for pointy headed music lovers – a converted cinema in Denmark Road where the University Faculty of Music put on its concerts up to 2003. It was here I watched the Lindsays for ten years. Odd verb I agree but that's what one says, and, in Denmark road there was always as much to see as to hear, and dream of too since nothing provokes reverie like the public performance of music.

The last Lindsay concert at Denmark road was April 4 2003. At the same time the Lindsays announced their retirement in 2005. Perhaps they are getting a bit past it. They will be around sixty in 2005. Pete Cropper does look a bit shagged out these days and a few years earlier he had a heart attack after much to-ing and fro-ing down to Michael Tippet's place to practice his last quartet which they premiered. But he always did throw himself about – writhing and reeling, face contorted, mouth agape. Christ! one thought occasionally, if he's like this playing the K464 what the hell's he like on the nest! Perhaps Pete should remember he's a violinist and not a violin. CD reviewers used to say his snorting and stamping were a distraction (but they put up with Glenn Gould singing along to Bach's Goldberg Variations). Recently the racket has quietened down but maybe so has the passion. The same reviewers agreed the late 80s Beethoven cycle was among the best available but criticised Pete for his wiry tone. He does play a Strad but he can make it whine. The Lindsays were taught by Sandor Vegh – the leader of the legendary Vegh Quartet who probably did produce the finest Beethoven ever. My friend Malcolm never rated the Lindsays and only turned up a few times, once with Beryl, his married girlfriend. But then he also thinks Brendel is a self-propagandising charlatan who has somehow managed to bamboozle the critics, and that all French music is shite. Pete now has a much creased face but also a thick thatch. There are contradictory signs of age and youth. When he opens his mouth a surprisingly mellow sonority comes forth; it could be Paul Schofield playing Lear. Normally they don't say anything but one night when their usual gesture to formality, colour co-ordinated shirts, came awry with

Pete's appearance in off-white, he announced "Who forgot to pack his shirt?" How we larfed!

Ronnie Birks, the second violin, had a brain tumour. But the band played on doing trios and duets. Ron, who resembles Solzhenitsyn with his black beard and baldness, reappeared after several anxious bulletins with a visible ding in his head. Ghouls had their curiosity assuaged by Ronnie's deferential bows to their applause. I expected some excitable clappers to shout, as Ron bowed once more, "Hold it Ronnie! Keep your head up! Watch your brains don't fall out!" One is reminded of another member of University staff Ted Dawson who claimed to have seen his own brain. They took the top of his head off with a local anaesthetic to monitor his responses to probing. He asked for a mirror. A few years later he shot himself after his young girlfriend gave him up. Malcolm thinks he too has brain problems but these fears are blurred by the difficulty of diagnosis. Assuming a brain tumour can mimic any mental or physical disability could there be a specific tumour which prevents one having the idea "I have a brain tumour"? And therefore wouldn't the anxious speculation that I might have just that tumour be proof positive that I haven't? Yes, the self-referential paradox can be fun; ask Russell and Frege.

It was the crabby kraut critic Hans Keller, the man who said Mendelssohn died too late, who claimed there was no such thing as a viola player. Up to the twentieth century they were simply violinists who happened to play the viola. Robin Ireland does nothing to support the notion that the violist is a specialist. The Lindsays started out with another viola player and then Robin was imported. Up to then he'd played with a group called Domus who produced some very fine recordings of Faure's piano quartets. Robin looks younger than the others, his complexion is rubicund and his hair is long blond and thick. Wrinkles have not yet got a significant hold on his chubby face with its jutting round chin and cheekbones. But towards the end his hair became thinner, slightly greyer, and, most ageingly, tied in a pony tail. Pete, Ron and Bernard (cello) could be normal geezers, plumbers or electricians, but Robin? He'd have to be a fiddle player. What a time he'd have in some strange barber's chair. "You're next Paganini. Want a bow on it? And what do you do for a livin'?"

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Bernard Gregor-Smith is portly. His hair is a thin scrape-back with lots of head showing through. He wears steel-framed specs. His chair is propped up at the back on two blocks so he can engage his instrument more effectively. Naturally one never mistakes the cello but one of the advantages of seeing a live performance is to note how a theme might be distributed. Mozart and Haydn used to play viola when they played their own quartets and this is generally considered the best place to sit. Bernard sweats more than the others and this produces a visible blotch on his chest. Also when they troop on and off he has to lug his heavy instrument. Couldn't some beefy student save him the bother? They usually take two bows at the end of each piece and four at the end of the performance.

Once or twice each season the quartet is joined by the pianist Dudley Fanbelt. Dud works at the faculty too and is Dr Dudley Fanbelt with his name on a board in the foyer indicating whether he's in or out. He's a Russian expert, especially Shostakovich, and has a picture of Arnold Schoenberg in his office. He is a very neat geezer with short curly hair and finely chiselled features. His lips are thin and usually compressed in a tight smile. One might think him a bender but then again he always chooses young nymphets to turn over his scores. They have to lean across and brush their tits against his nose. He has broadcast on the BBC and reviews piano records for the *Gramophone* magazine. His funniest crack concerned a recording of Hindemith which he said even Richter couldn't make sound like music.

In pole position, not ten feet from Peter Cropper the first violin, sat professor Heinz Klunkert and his wife on the front row. He was a tall, rangy bloke with thick hair and horn-rims who usually wore something tweedy and brown perhaps even leather patched. We were two rows further back. I learned he lived at Lymm. One night during a somnolent slow movement by Bax he turned round and said "Ken, could you do me a favour? I note from the subscribers list you live near me. Any chance of a lift back? Some black bastard has nicked all the wheels off my car. I tell you it's the Heart of Darkness out there". On the way home he reminisced fascinatingly about the contemporary music scene. "Ben advertised in the *Snape Chronicle* for a catamite and as I was living in the area at the time and had just come across the word in my adolescent exploration of the novels of Ronald Firbank I applied. He was collaborating with EM Forster and, since

Peter Pears was temporarily indisposed on account of an anal fissure, I was recruited immediately in the office of bum boy. I shuttled from one to another as they worked on Billy Budd. Morgan said I was much nicer than that old slag Virginia Woolf but the strangest thing was Ben's todger! Well, in complete confidence, *entre nous*, I can tell you..." As we drew up the drive of his enormous dam-side gaff he said "Do come in for a snifter Ken. I've got a bottle of Cheval Blanc 1947 I've been meaning to crack open." In the music room there was a Steinway grand. He pulled out an old manuscript from the stool and plonked it on the piano. "Found this in a dingy bookshop in Vienna last year. It's Schubert's last sonata in F minor. It'll be published soon as D999. I think it's much better than the other three late works in A, C and B flat. You'll be the second person to hear it since 1828. I'd like your opinion before I invite Brendel over tomorrow to have a go at it."

The arrangement at Denmark road places 20 members of the audience, mostly long standing fans, on a raised section of the stage behind the quartet itself. Hence, as if the Lindsays weren't spectacle enough, we have an array of time-warped freaks, a typical sample of departmental drones (one imagines) to distract us as well. One in particular always caught my eye. Indeed our eyes often met on a diagonal over the bizarrely tonsured head of viola player Robin Ireland. She was always well got up but in 1950s style in a pleated A line dress. She couldn't have remembered this period since I guessed she was probably in her thirties. She looked like a compound of my mum, Rita Hayworth and Wonder Woman. Her chestnut hair was shoulder length and wavy, she wore pale rimmed specs with huge lenses which magnified her brown eyes; these seemed to stare ecstatically in my direction but, not pausing rather passing through to some more ethereal realm. Her mouth was a luscious red and permanently curved in a happy grin. What a vision! Then one night I realise she *is* looking at me! Yes! We've both vegged out during the dreary adagio of the Brahms Op 51 No 1 and are, instead, imagining our tryst later that night! I take her back to her flat in Mauldeth Road. It is very neat and girly. A large teddy bear the size of a young teenager occupies one of the armchairs. The room is crowded with figurines. She asks if I like Ladro. I say "Oh yes! Surely a better second violin than his predecessor Boscovich" After some passionate grappling on the settee during which I manage to get my hand on the out-

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side of her corset we find ourselves heading for the bedroom. In an access of passion she sweeps a life sized panda off one side of the double bed and watches me take my keks off. "My God Ken!" she says "It's enormous! But I must have you, so here's what you must do. I'm tying this string round your todger just two inches from the end. Under no circs must you push it in further than that. Now promise me" "Yis Brenda" I say. She lies back and stares at the ceiling. I whip the string off and chuck it under the bed. Then I plunge in right up to the maker's name. After a bit of grunting and groaning she opens her eyes and says, rather critically, "I think we can dispense with the string now Ken"

Godfrey Wheelwright, northern poet, friend of Tony Harrison, theatre critic for the *Independent* and lately leader of a creative writing course at the Metro, turns up occasionally with his wife. I remember one night at Roy's when Godfrey announced his forthcoming *Collected Poems*. How Roy hooted! "What's to collect?" he sneered. Well poets are precious creatures hoarding over years a few scraps you could read in an hour while novelists, like Roy, produced huge wodges of prose you could never get to the end of if you lived to be a hundred. That was twenty years ago so Godfrey must have enough now for a more substantial volume. But I'm not inclined to find out. He doesn't recognise me as he strolls past my aisle seat during his interval constitutional. His face is flat like a cat's and is fringed with tight ginger curls which seem to be scratched on his bony skull. He wears thick, wire rimmed glasses, of a type made popular by Himmler and the concentric white reflections on these ferocious lenses make his pale button eyes reduce to dots. They could be globes of frog spawn. He is preternaturally erect, as if he had a drain rod up his arse.

I assume he doesn't recognise me, but one night, during the interminable slow movement of Shostakovich's 10th he crouches down and says: "Bugger me Ken! I thought it was you! I've been re-reading the reviews you used to write in the *Morning Star* and the *Free Press*. Yes, I cut them out as they appeared. What fun! French Lit mostly wasn't it? That one where you said Proust was a boring old tosser who could never get out of first gear, and another where you said you'd have to be a lifer in solitary to contemplate reading Zola's *Rougon Macquart* cycle and even then you'd probably top yourself

after *L'Assomoir*, and that one where you called Flaubert a sad provincial *branleur* who's idea of a good time was to dip his todger in his inkwell! Har bleedin har! I'm glad you're interested in music though coz I've got a proposition. The Arts editor on the *Independent* wants a string quartet critic and I reckon you'd be just the bloke. You'd have a box in the Wigmore Hall and a flat off Park Lane which you could use when there's anything good coming up. What we want is something like them old reviews. Nowt stuck up or poncified, none of that "the main theme returns at bar 658 in the subdominant with chromatic elaborations" none of that intellectual shite. No. What we are trying to do on the *Independent* is attract former *Sun* readers to the entertaining aspects of the string quartet. You know the sort of thing – if it's Bartok's Sixth say it sounds like somebody trod on the cat, or if it's a bit of Schoenberg say it sounds like somebody backstage kept opening a bog door and the hinges needed oiling and what kind of a mad bastard was he for thinking postmen would be whistling his tunes in 1950. Remark on the looks of the players. Ask if the violin ever shoots out from under the chin when they get sweaty. If the bow starts getting ragged like an old tart's blonde wig dwell on this and ask why they don't use lycra instead of horsehair. Speculate on why, if concert pianists can memorise hundreds of pieces, they're still fanning about grabbing at turned up page ends. If there's a lady cellist use that old Beecham line about her having between her legs an instrument which can give pleasure to thousands and all she can do is scratch it. What d'you say? Give it some thought. Here's my card. I'll be meeting Tony in the pub next Friday. You should hear him going on about his missus singing in the bath. He'd be up for the job but she wouldn't let him. See you later. Hey! Just cop old Pete! Wot a boat race! He looks like he's playing for the guards in Gulag after an eighteen hour day chopping trees down at minus forty!"

George Steiner finds it hard to believe that the guards at Auschwitz could listen to the Opus 131 in C minor and go out the next day and gas Jews. I was reminded of this when I came out of just such a Lindsay concert in the early 1990s. They had indeed just played the Opus 131 as part of their Beethoven cycle. I found my car door bust open and my stereo cassette radio gone. Two wires dangled out of the wounded fascia. The bastard had also helped himself to the four or five ten P pieces I kept in a slotted holder for parking meters, but,

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mysteriously, neglected to steal the magnificent two cassette recording of Handel's *Messiah* by Christopher Hogwood and the Academy of Ancient Music. I deduced therefore that the thief was an uncultivated lout. How much more desirable, in the pubs of Hulme, would be a car cassette radio with a recording of Handel's *Messiah* than the same item on its own (or even with *Motown's Greatest Hits*). Idiot! Neanderthal! But, apropos of professor Steiner's characteristically melodramatic crux, how I raged against that evil git! Gas-sing? Too bleeding good for him! I want meathooks! Get me electric cables! Let's make him swallow fishhooks and drag his intestines out through his mouth!! After that I never parked in Denmark Road again but left it on Oxford Road instead. Nothing ever happened in Oxford Road. Well, yes, there was the time American Studies lecturer Bob Bellflower was knifed for no apparent reason, and yes, you could get mugged if you used the cash dispensers, but Bob must have antagonised his drug crazed attacker and you'd be mad to get money out of a hole in the wall in that area – much better have it delivered by Securicor to your student digs and have the day off to receive it. Poor Bob must have been slightly off his head even then. It got worse and he eventually immolated himself with a can of petrol and a match in an alleyway next to his house.

The male occupants of the stage area are less odd than the women. The oddest is a very scruffy little geezer with a scrubby beard which looks like it has been stabbed on with a felt tipped pen. He has the regulation thick glasses, a snub nose and wild, thick black hair. He always dresses in a lumberjack shirt, jeans and dirty off-white trainers. Indeed his dress is so uniformly terrible that I guessed he was either the amenities attendant or the professor of Sociology. His familiarity with the building inclines me to the former. Usually he's with some nondescript slut dressed like a student. The slut changes with the year. Near him on a row next to the players is an Irish-looking middle-aged cove. He too has a scrubby beard, a grizzled, white growth, but he's more considered in his appearance and usually wears a waistcoat and an odd hat shaped somewhere between trilby and pork pie. His outer garment is a long black overcoat which comes off after a long silk scarf. He wears high sided black boots, sometimes a black shirt. Braces have been seen. It's all a bit theatrical. His characteristic expression is a wicked grin revealing small, sharp teeth. He reminds me of Mr James Duffy, the protagonist of

James Joyce's story *A Painful Case*. His self confidence is monumental; he sometimes seems to nod off (but closed eyes can signify concentration) and I have seen him yawn enormously and felt glad, at the time, that Mendelssohn wasn't there to see it. On the front row across the aisle from professor Klunkert, is a man who wears sandals without socks even when there's snow on the ground. He usually has a rucksack from which he produces a score. I always thought it a bit rude to scrutinise scores as the quartet perform but I understand this is common among the cognoscenti and is generally not considered, by the players, as a critical stock take from uppity punters who suspect a movement might be missed out

After professor Klunkert retired his prime seats were taken by an ugly old lesbian with a figure like a string bag full of turnips. This defect in no way inhibited a restless exhibitionism which had her stretching, standing, waving her arms about, even turning, before the performance, to face aggressively up into the hall. Sometimes she was accompanied by a less awful dyke who kept her coat on and had a more feminine hairstyle. What influence does this fat slag have I wonder? Why wasn't I offered these seats? What effect does this spectacle have on poor old Pete? Most of the front row was oddly empty in that last season. The occupants of the end seats, two sprightly oldsters, man and wife, very nicely dressed who were often engaged in chat by Ronnie Birks during the interval and who usually had to dash at the end making a sudden lunge for the exit while the rest of us gave the regulation four ovations (a bus to catch?) stopped coming. Dead? Bored? In the middle of the front row, another prized seat was also without its usual cargo. This was an young ex student, dark-skinned, perhaps eastern-European with a hooked nose and a massive flare of black hair. He looked, in profile, remarkably like Gaudier Bzreska's bust of Alfred Wolmark in the Walker Art Gallery. He always clapped enthusiastically, and even turned to glare on one occasion when a senile old codger a few rows behind began to burble inappropriately. Where did he go? Back to Albania?

In the latter years I sat immediately in front of two enthusiasts whose conversation never failed to intrigue. They didn't come together but, being season ticket holders, always occupied the same seats. I never turned round to look at them but occasionally caught a glimpse as I got up to leave. The one right behind me on the aisle is married to a

teacher who can't get out. He no doubt thinks he's being selfish but she probably never came again after the first visit and now watches East Enders with a stiff gin. He seems very knowledgeable about the repertoire and has a drawling, laid-back, diffident air, yet seems to know everything. The other was equally erudite and also had a vast record collection on both vinyl and CD. His voice has the weary, ironic, effeminate inflection of the invert. I see him at almost every musical event I attend in Manchester – he haunts the Bridgewater, the RNCM and even this esoteric backwater. A big bloke, over six feet, and well-fleshed. He is always smartly dressed in a pale suit, tie, and polished shoes. In this ambience he seems like a racehorse in a pigsty. His thick black hair is going a bit grey and is combed back in a wave. His large lensed specs make his eyes look owlsh.

He could well be someone's favourite uncle. But he's always alone. Is his live-in companion some brutish oik who seizes this opportunity to have a rave-up with his mates down the pub? Could he resemble, in this regard, my old acquaintance Neville Rawlinson, art-collector and translator of Jules Romains (those interminable *Hommes de Bonne Volonte* – 27 volumes) who lived in a large house overlooking the park in Whalley Range (yes, I know, *sic transit* etc...) and chose as his soulmate the evil Dickie, a clerk at AEI at Trafford Park, who knew everyone in the *Rembrandt* and the *Union*, in fact seemed almost to control the scene like a latter day Baron de Charlus, and who complained about all the books lying about and as for the paintings...well?! 'still it's surprising how some of them grow on you'.. Or perhaps he's a rarer type, the aesthete neuter, a Des Esseintes, a Gerard Manley Hopkins, living a solitary but not lonely life sustained by great works. Is this possible, one wonders, outside the asylum? I recall briefly embracing such a *weltanschauung* and going to a performance of Bruckner's *Te Deum* in a church in Oxford Road. Tedium indeed! What a disaster! Incompetent execution, an atrocious acoustic – I suspect this lifestyle can only come off in London or Paris. Amateur music is especially excruciating in that, unlike a bad film, book or painting you have to endure the agony and you know exactly how long it will go on. Think of sitting down to a production of *Parsifal*, without breaks, by the Cheadle scout troop. My last brave venture into this swamp was a performance at my local church by a pianist who planned to play Chopin's B flat sonata. After about fifteen minutes he stopped abruptly and announced,

somewhat insolently I thought, that he'd forgotten the rest. The paying audience applauded this brave effort. How English; the *Lande Ohne Musik* indeed.

When the topic of sponsoring a seat in the new auditorium came up the fleshy aesthete was properly enraged. The seat could be sponsored for £300. This gave you no rights over it but did allow you to have your name on a small brass plaque on its back (one sees the results of such meaningless privileges on park benches memorialising dead old farts. Strictly it should be restricted to those who were conceived, born or died on that spot. Soon we'll see – "Become Immortal for only £99.99!! Buy the B&Q park bench with free brass plaque already engraved: '(Your Name) was bleeding genius! A real diamond geezer!! The best bloke I ever knew!!'. He found the department's blatant appeal to vanity insulting. "I probably *shall* sponsor a seat" he said huffily "but I certainly do not want my name on it". A solution occurred to me and I had trouble preventing myself turning round. One could name the seat after anyone, Beethoven or Wagner, or even Adolf Hitler or Myra Hindley...or Tossopot, Shithead....Wanker. Yes. Let's see how far the greedy bastards will go to get your £300. 'Dear Sir I enclose a cheque to sponsor a seat. Please inscribe my plaque MUSIC-MAD BUM-FUCKER'

Imagine that reading is an arcane skill possessed by a tiny elite, but that we can all understand the spoken word and that our access to the great works of literature is necessarily mediated by this performing minority. Almost no-one makes contact with the written text of *King Lear* or *Middlemarch* but gets his experience of these masterpieces via readers like Geilgud or Olivier or even the author orating on the wireless or record. This is the condition of the average music lover. Even those who read scores rarely rise to the proficiency of, say, Pierre Boulez who, when asked if he had a record player seemed puzzled – of course he didn't – and if he wanted to experience a late Beethoven quartet? Why he simply got out the score. I guess if he felt hungry he read Escoffier recipes. But whereas the text is the exact and complete expression of the writer's intention the score is a vaguely coded representation replete with gaps and uncertainties, even something as specific as metronome markings are dubious. Unlike writing and painting whose marks are a definitive creation, written music is a hint, a starting point. What, for instance, do we

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musical illiterates make of the following circumstance: a few years back a letter in the *Gramophone* magazine opined that now we have CD players with programmable track selection why do we need repeats played and recorded twice on a disc? Why not just play and record it once and then have the CD player repeat the music as required. Sounds logical. But no! You idiot, replies some professor of music, obviously a repeat is never played the same way twice even though the notes on the page are exactly the same. So we need interpreters. So we have the Lindsays. But we also have the Vegh and the Emerson and the Italian quartets. All making a valid stab at recreating the original impulse.

And how does a common oik get into this esoteric world? Both sets of grandparents had a piano but I guess this was just furniture. My mother's father Alf used his to paper the ceiling. If he were alive now I could give him advice. "Alf! For chrissakes don't perch on that wobbly upright with hank of soggy anaglypta. Take a tip from the top jockeys of the joanna – Murray Perahia and Daniel Barenboim. They have concert grands in their parlours coz they know you can stand on them and still have room to park your paste bucket." Only one of my mother's nine siblings played (by ear) and none of my dad's family played at all. My dad said Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* was his favourite piece and this example characterises your oik's proclivities towards heroic tenors and the solo piano as far as the classics are concerned. The former for their sheer straining power (imagine being able to bellow an order in the pub at such volume) and the astonishing prestidigitation of the pianist, making one hand do one thing and the other do something else while at the same time working the feet. But give him his due, when I finally acquired Brendel's early Vox recording of this piece it was the simple first movement which got him going; when it speeded up he lost interest and suggested it was too loud. Brass bands were his true love. He did recall one incident from before I was born. The Polish maestro Paderewski played in the Parr Hall. The crowd became restive and one lout hollered "Play something we all know" whereupon the master stopped, got up, said "Varrington I spit on you" and left the stage. Probably apocryphal – my dad was never one to let a little thing like the truth get in the way of a good story.

My own career as a performer peaked at 11. I broadcast to the nation from the BBC studios in Manchester as one member of the school's recorder band. I still have that recorder in its original cardboard box but still detest it and its sound. This may be the origin of my lingering suspicion about musicians. I couldn't read music (I think most of us just memorised it) and couldn't play more than a few notes without going wrong. Was I the only schmuck in the band or were we all lousy, except for a gifted few who carried the rest? This suspicion was encouraged years later by many poor performance from the Halle in the 80s and 90s. I couldn't put my finger on it. Obviously they could play the right notes. Then I read a critical review which described the Halle as the "most cynical" orchestra in Britain. They just turned up, played the notes and took the money. There's much more to music than playing the right notes.

We didn't get a record player until I bought one when I was about 15. Before that it was the wireless. You'd get the odd snatch. I'd begun to listen to the Third programme but this was more for the arcane gabble of Isaiah Berlin than anything by Debussy. Up till then I thought nobody could speak faster than Mr Flaherty the clubman who called every Saturday morning. But Isaiah was much faster, and chucked in bits of German and French – and it was such a dazzling stream of sound you were hard pressed at any one time to say exactly what language was currently being used.

We had music at the grammar school for the first two years but I learned nothing from Mr Sydney Dell FRCO. We'd be marooned in a corner of the assembly hall where the piano was kept listening to him going on – about just what I'd be hard pressed to say. But it was years later at the same school when I really woke up. Our Spanish teacher Mr Wearne brought in his own record player around the end of term and played us the Brahms *Variations on a theme of Haydn*. Soon after I got my own record player and to the horror of my street mates started to become obsessed with Beethoven while they played Bill Haley and Elvis. I think there was an extra-musical dimension to Beethoven. He was heroic and a radical. I read a biography and realised that he too was a tortured isolated genius. Leonard Bast in *Howards End* is similarly smitten. Beethoven is undoubtedly an oik icon. It also helps, if you're an adolescent, that he was a noisy fuck who did great endings. And yet that's not entirely the whole of it

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since one of my earliest acquisitions was a record of Casals, Thibaudet and Cortot playing the *Archduke Trio*. It was years later when I came across the late quartets that I recognised another dimension – metaphysics, the mystical. If I'd come to these works from the quartets of Haydn and Mozart I might have found them incomprehensible, as did Beethoven's contemporaries. Some of this institutional difficulty is revealed in the story that Stravinsky, on meeting Proust, decided he was a poseur because he claimed to like the late quartets. Even to Stravinsky these were a remote peak – but to the receptive ignoramus with no musicological baggage? Well...they just work. Then I got bewitched by the Razoumovskys. Later still, an odd progression, I got to admire the early Beethoven quartets. I must have had recordings but I remember my friend Bob playing me one of the Opus 18s in his house in Rushford Avenue and it was as if I'd heard it for the first time.

So after all these years some truth begins to dawn. Scientists and engineers might think – well, here's the score, we feed all that data into a gadget which will reproduce it exactly – perfection surely? There was a time when I thought the pianola was such a device – an enlarged music box. It isn't of course. Those pianola rolls were cut by human players such as Mahler or Gershwin and were as idiosyncratically personal as a recording on vinyl or CD. So, our technical perfectionist might persist, let's just get one flawless interpretation on disc. Do we need anything else? But this won't do either. New instruments, new styles of playing; these things re-energise the vaguely coded simulacrum. Authentic music is a just another fad, one more way of playing it. Beethoven would have embraced the modern concert grand just as Bach would have relished the piano (indeed he helped to develop it). We can even believe that the original mental event in the brains of these geniuses was not the ultimate, exclusive expression. I imagine music as being up there like static and that the work doesn't exist until it discharges like lightning. Practitioners like to describe the music flowing through them; Peter Cropper often looks as though he's wired up to the mains. This may appear affected nonsense to anyone accustomed to the record player, but you've only got to go to Denmark road and *look*. Maybe next year, in the new place, I'll close my eyes more often, like Mr James Duffy from *Dubliners*, and *listen* to the Lindsays for the last time before they disappear into musical history.

“You’d never guess....!”

I’m milling small gun parts to limits of two thousandths of an inch—that’s what your darling daughter’s doing!”
“Dear me, that does sound difficult! Isn’t it very skilled work?”



“Not really, Mum—you soon pick it up. The foreman says it’s one of those finicking but important little jobs we women do even better than the men.”

“That was very nice of him. But I’ve heard it said before that women are often very good indeed at mechanical detail... Don’t you find it rather tiresome?”

“Not a bit, Mum. I love it! It’s grubby, but it’s grand—and glamour can wait. Our men need guns and we’re helping to make them. They’re fighting

for us. Why shouldn’t we help them?”

“I’m glad you look at it that way, Anne. Naturally we miss you and I expect you miss us—the best billet in the world can never be quite like home. From what you say, though, Mrs. Garside must be a dear.”

“Well yes Mum, but it’s Mr Garside who’s the problem. He comes

into my room after fire-watching and insists on giving me a good seeing to. He’s hung like a horse and doesn’t even take his boots off. But I suppose we’ve all got to make sacrifices.

★ ★ ★

CALL at the nearest office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service. You will be advised as to how, where and when your services can best be used. Any Post Office will direct you.

(THIS SPACE IS PRESENTED BY WHITBREAD AND CO. LTD.)

Our Finest Hour – Adverts from *Illustrated* 1941

IN THE BEGINNING

Tom Kilcourse

I confess to being one of those curious people who cannot resist reading anything on physics or astronomy: quantum theory, and a host of other semi-penetrable subjects. My bookshelves groan frequently as yet another weighty volume, in all senses of the word, adds to their burden. As any self-respecting space-nut should be, I am well versed in big bang theory, red shift, dark matter, black holes etc.: though I have yet to unravel 'string' theory. Therefore, when listening to a radio broadcast recently in which Dr. That debated with Professor This about the mathematical possibility of there being parallel universes, with parallel peoples, parallel governments and so on, familiarity with the topic caused my mind to drift. I found myself speculating about 'out there', what it all means, and that kind of stuff. The answer came to me that night. Not as a dream, I claim no recollection of images, yet upon waking I *knew* the truth of it. Naturally, I make no claim that my speculation compares in quality with that of Dr. This, or Professor That, but it might interest others nonetheless.

My starting point was the relativity of time and space, concepts that fellow aficionados will acknowledge as established fact. However, for the benefit of possible sceptics, I shall explain my rationale. Imagine some miniscule creature, too small to be seen with the naked eye, which has an average lifespan of less than twenty-four hours. This creature, let us call him Fred (For no better reason than that I know a miniscule creature of that name), will undoubtedly be as unaware of us as we are of him. To Fred, we are unimaginably large, outweighing him by a factor of any number you care to mention, followed by lots of noughts. So small is he by comparison with ourselves that his whole world comprises a chocolate-chip cookie, sharing this snack with his relatives and friends, all unsuspecting our presence, and attributing the wet, hot dunk to global warming, or some other phenomenon identified by a miniscule Professor Thin-gumy.

In timescale too, Fred differs from us by lots of noughts. If we take three-score-years-and-ten as the human norm, Fred's life expectancy is 25,550 (365×70) times shorter than ours, in absolute terms. For-

tunately for Fred though, time is as relative as size. What is to us a single day is a whole lifetime to Fred, and his concept of time will be proportionally different. So, as we reach for our mid-afternoon cookie, Fred is already middle-aged and thinking about a comfortable retirement in a chocolate bit.

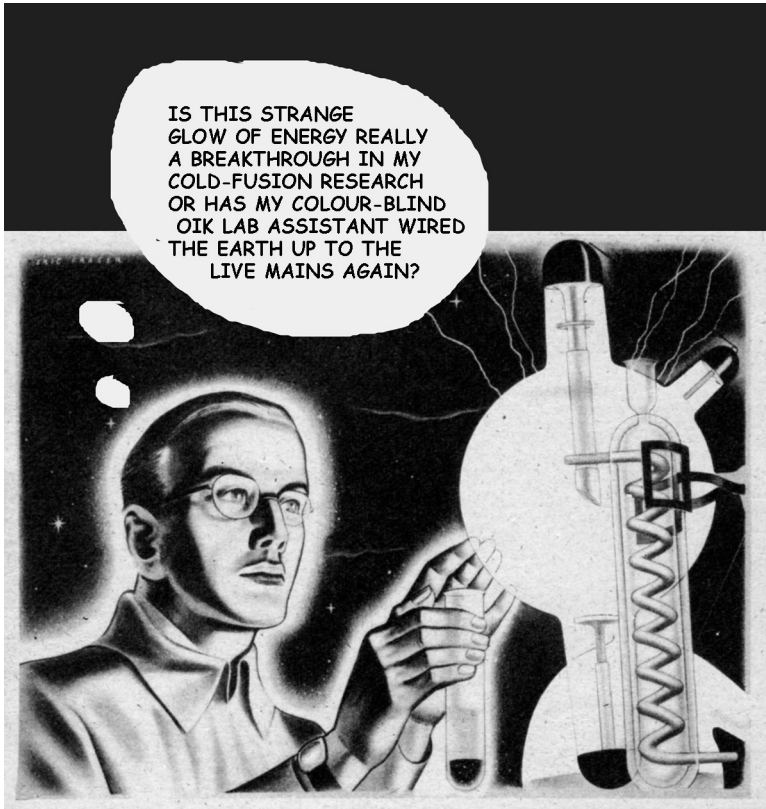
Now, to my theory. Put yourself in Fred's place, and imagine the existence of another universe so huge that we are ignorant of its being. It is an entity of gigantic proportions in which we are the mites, the Freds, and indescribably enormous creatures play our role. Our lifetime is no more than a few minutes in the life of the giants, so that the thirteen billion years that have passed since the creation of our universe is their recent history: indeed, to them, our species came into being at the beginning of this week. This elasticity of time explains why we believe that God laboured for six days and nights on our creation. In terms of the world I now describe it took seconds. I refer to the mother universe, the overarching existence from which all our parallel universes emanate. Known as Megagargantua by the ancients this universe is of such size that our solar system is but a single atom in its being. It is the realm of those we call gods.

Therein lies the secret of our beginning. It happened thus. It was a fine spring morning in the land of Leviathan, a peaceful country on one of Megagargantua's inhabited planets. Cows grazed contentedly in a field, watched over the fence by two city dwellers out for a day's hike. Without warning there was the most almighty bang, an explosion beyond belief which sent hot gasses churning into empty space. The emanation was accompanied by a great roaring sound, the echoes of which today's boffins have detected in the heavens. This event is referred to by these clever scientists as a singularity, or by popularising physicists as the 'big bang'. By the layman though, it would more properly be identified as a cow farting. One may care to note here the support that this theory lends to feminist perceptions of the creator as female. They are right in my view, and her name is Daisy.

It is fair to ask why, if this hypothesis has any basis in truth, it has not been discussed before now. At the risk of being thought paranoid, I suggest a conspiracy exists in which our senior scientists and world leaders are joined. Though fully aware that the evidence points to the black hole beneath Daisy's tail they fear the damaging effect

IN THE BEGINNING

that the truth would have on humanity's tremendous self-regard. Imagine what significance would be ascribed to our politicians and prelates, our array of celebrities, our most talented lawyers, academics, and presenters of television programmes if the populace at large should learn that they are merely the product of bovine flatulence. As for speculation over the nature of dark matter: delicacy forbids.



“Well, Jane..I’m proud of you!”

Fancy you an engineer, doing a man's job, you who never worked more than a sewing machine."

"Seriously, Dad, it is quite important work. You'd be surprised at what some of the women at our place are doing—really responsible work. And many of the delicate precision jobs the women are even better at than the men."

"I suppose you've made a lot of new friends. What are the other girls like?"

"Oh, quite nice, Dad. Like me, many of them had never seen inside a factory before. My best friend was a fashion artist. She's in the Drawing Office. And the girl who shares my billet is in the Inspection Department—she used to be a milliner. She's

married, but her sister-in-law's looking after her little boy and she gets home to see him quite often."

"Tell me, Jane, how are you off for funds—hard up as usual?"

"No, Dad, I'm not. With the money I'm earning now I can even save something each week. Since I started selling my body I'm quids in. I particularly like those black GIs. They're so well hung! I don't allow kissing and I certainly am not a receiver of swollen goods via the rear entrance."



IF you will call at the nearest office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service you will be advised as to how, when and where your services can best be used.

(THIS SPACE IS PRESENTED BY WHITBREAD AND CO. LTD.)

Our Finest Hour – Adverts from *Illustrated* 1941

THE NEW OIK

Brett Wilson

The other day a friend pointed out that it was no longer necessary to replace the ‘b’ in banker with ‘w’. “Just leave the ‘b’ in place. Everyone will know what you mean.”

“Er, ah....” I replied, somewhat embarrassed as we were queuing in the local Lloyds TSB. There was a self conscious cough two places back, and one of the tellers stopped counting banknotes momentarily before continuing with a cheery face. I much preferred to talk about Schoenberg. I had been listening to the first string quartet on radio three in the morning, and the most surprising experience was how sweet it sounded. Could I be listening to the same farrago of nonsensical sounds which had first assailed my ears twenty years earlier?

“Schoenberg?!” my friend spat out. “What bank does that tosser work for?”

It seems that my friend is an oik. At least the superficial appearance of one anyway. My friend reckons that an oik has now become the pikey, ned or chav. And we can add securities trader to the definition without too much effort. The thing is, I’ve been thinking. Surely there is more to it than that? But there is a problem. You see, I listen to Schoenberg and my friend doesn’t. I drink lager and my friend drinks wine. Perhaps more importantly my friend is a woman. These days oiks are hard to categorize and they don’t wear emblems. She reckons some of Victoria Wood’s creations are oiks but I wonder if oikness is primarily a masculine trait.

Clearly this issue needs some examination, so on arriving home I get out the Oxford English Dictionary. I look up the OIK definitions and references to see whether it explicitly includes or excludes a female aspect. With this in mind I read the following:

Oick, oik (Oik). slang. [Etym. obscure.] Depreciatory schoolboy word for a member of another school; an unpopular or disliked fellow-pupil. Also gen., an obnoxious or unpleasant person; in weakened senses, a ‘nit-wit’, a ‘clot’. Hence

oikish a., unpleasant, crude; 1940 M. Marples Public School Slang 31 Oik, hoik: very widely used and of some age; at Cheltenham

(1897) it meant simply a working man, but at Christ's Hospital (1885) it implied someone who spoke Cockney, and at Bootham (1925) someone who spoke with a Yorkshire accent.

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

And so on¹....

The scientist in me attempts to map the oik dimensions. Up/down tells us about class ("upper and lower" classes) and East/west informs us about ideology ("left" and "right" wing). We need one more direction. Lets call this the masculine/feminine dimension². Now we know where we are, right? Look at the definitions again. It seems quite obvious that class is a key component in the definitions, and by extension it follows that so is ideology. The working class are, after all, the antithesis of the capitalists who they are bound to overthrow³. So what is missing? Look carefully and we locate the words "boy", "man", "youth" and "son". No mention of "girl", "woman" etc. Quite easy to overlook. While the definitions explicitly define class as an attribute of oikness, they implicitly couple gender along with it.

It seems to me that oik methodology, taste and appearance derives from the definition of class and it is class experience which tends to harden an outlook towards women. The oik belongs to the lower class ("the proletariat"). You may have experienced (like me) the attitudes to women typical of the lower classes. So a male oik is likely to be sexist and comfortable with fixed conventions and rituals applied to gender (as well as being quietly stoic and rebellious). There is no mention of this in the definitions.

The literary oik dislikes authority and power and uses satire and imitation to undermine it (by temperament wanting to change the social order without perhaps knowing what to replace it with except perhaps in vague idealistic terms). The veiled hostility to the bourgeoisie comes from fear of reprisals. This fear also partly explains the tenacity to which oiks cling to sexism. It is their own petty power. Their compensation.

Trying to think of working class female characters from the past through which to express oik values is like wrestling with an 800 pound gorilla. One is apt to lose. I keep thinking of Elsie Tanner,

THE NEW OIK

Ena Sharples and even Hilda Ogden. But none of them were concerned with class and none were quietly intellectual (except perhaps Hilda, who had intellectual aspirations but no ability and Annie Walker who in her imagination elevated her own relative status to a higher plane).

Here are a few more observations which help us locate the oik:

- 1) An oik is more likely to include a reference to an idea or a thinker, rather than produce an extended or focused discourse on the same subject or person because his intention is to hint at his pedigree, not show his power. To attain or display power would be a class betrayal and hence by extension an oik betrayal (power is an attribute of the upper class). Also the oik tends to lack confidence in self expression, a characteristic of the lower class.
- 2) Surface expression of language may include swear words, slang and local vocabulary and idiom. This is particularly funny when conflated with learned references and high falutin' language.
- 3) Representation can be in the form of phonic actuality. This has a natural comic effect and also perhaps hints at an inability to spell (lack of formal education?)
- 4) Working and social life with its routine and trivialities are often given prominence since unrewarding repetition and drudgery were often the reality of the lower class.
- 5) Intellectuals are often bumptious (again for comic effect) and involved with banal problems.
- 6) References are to class icons but also to western culture with no references to other cultures (the lower class tends to absorb the colonial attitudes of the upper classes, not realizing that they are replicating the divisions they abhor.) This mirrors the sexism.

I put it to my friend, over a glass of chardonnay: "Hopefully this extension of the meaning will shine some light onto the dark and dusty areas that lurk in the corners of Oikdom. It's not meant to be a Femi-

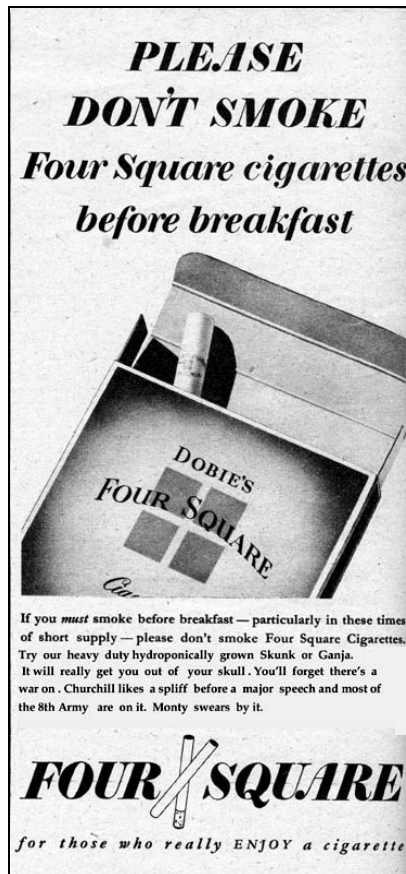
nist or Marxist critique (I don't even know what that means) even though it might look that way.”

“Bollocks!” comes back the reply.

1 Please consult the OED for more.

2 North/south.

3 Dialectical materialism tells us that the two classes will tend towards a synthesis, perhaps by revolution.



Our Finest Hour – Adverts from *Illustrated* 1941

LIBERTY LARGO

Nigel Ford

It was a good flat. He'd heard they were difficult if not impossible to find, but had managed. In the melee of the small vibrant city, yet somnolently detached.

Not large, o no, not large. Nothing large was required. Just a place to be, where he could exist in sovereign independency. To take things picked up; a free magazine, a book, a satchel once, one shoulder strap torn off, a computer with a working burner. So he had something to show pictures in that case? O yes, that was always important, giving in to self-indulgence. Often wished for someone to share that. A woman preferably. But you couldn't could you, or could you?

Collected books, had to get them free, specialising in self-published work. Many ingrained with a dull, sooty ambience as if no-one had ever succeeded in reading them right through. Friends, symbols of rebellion. The stamps, or seals if you will, of unknown free spirits. Liked especially to bask in the intimate revelation of those written mostly for friends and family. The odd bright spirit shone rarely among them. Pound was such a kind; he pretended to Pound. Waugh, another

Gathering over time, a suitable selection of planks found on the beach and in skips with which to build a bookcase. Covered an entire short wall and it was not just shelves, having a back, a top, a bottom and sides. A proper bookcase made entirely of wood. Definitely no chipboard, o no, chipboard was definitely not on. No nails or screws, only joints. Particular pleasure was taken in the appearance of the butterfly joints that he found he could still do since school carpentry lessons. Not regular or even evenly sized, but functioned well.

Vying for passage on the pavement in the crowd, trying to get around one another. After seconds of comic jousting gave up and stood face to face, letting the crowd split up behind her and join up behind him. Offered a lame invitation to the pub, sensing this was an opportunity fashioned by the charms of fate. Got turned down flat. Punctured,

poof, just like that! But added she wanted to see the film at the cinema out of which she had recently emerged.

“You want to see it again?”

“Yes.”

“Don’t want to sit beside you in silence. Want to go somewhere and talk.”

“I want to see it again. To show it to you, to know what you think. That’s what films are for.”

“Yes.”

“Particularly this film.”

“I see.”

Once the film had been reviewed a bus took them to the outskirts of the city to a shared flat. Talked on the bus. The flatmate was amiable, a pretty face on a lumpish body. A good person, he could tell. Amazed when he described the location of the new flat. At the good fortune. Sad envy drenched sad quarters. Smoked a joint or two and had themselves a time with wine.

Returned to his mellow flat and looked at pictures. Not sure if anything had happened Rang up. She laughed like a drain.

The other tenants were a cheerful crowd, a jolly lot. All ages and sexes. Pets were allowed. Three men were renovating the flat above his. Dressed neatly, with exquisite taste, they took turns walking a Jack Russell at regular intervals.

The residents threw him a party. Not because he was in any way exceptional, but because it was the custom to throw a party for every new tenant. A good ice-breaker, they had established. The party would be held on his premises. That too, was traditional, to hold the party on the premises of the new tenant. They were a rowdy lot, the bright-faced lady who wore sack dresses, hennaed hair and chain-smoked informed him. No need to clean up particularly before. Not fussy. But would he please invite the three men above him? Otherwise they might be too shy to come. It had happened before.

LIBERTY LARGO

Consequent to this conversation he went upstairs to inform the three men renovating the flat above that they too, would be welcome to the party.

They did not hear him cross the threshold. One man was standing, back to him, naked except for a pair of drooping, old-time leather sea-boots, brandishing a whip in each hand. The other two, naked, were kneeling on the floor with their backs to this man, moaning and feverishly scraping the varnish off the floorboards with two-handed scrapers.

The man wearing the sea-boots half turned when his tread sounded on the bare boards. The pink tip of an erection glistened cheerfully.

They would be pleased to come, they assured.

Despite the bright-faced lady's advice, the place was spotless when the guests started to arrive, and he was most gratified to receive their expressions of admiration over the cold buffet.

The girl came to the party. Seemed quite at home, circulated chatting gaily. Sometimes entering into prolonged conversations. Returning regularly as if observing some private schedule, kiss him, squeeze his hand, and then be off again. Sat on his knee to eat.

In the small hours, when the other guests had left, they sat among the debris and watched one of his films. Did not care for that kind of thing, she said. They went to bed.

Awakened by a banging on the front door. It was his wife.

Surprised, being unaware she knew about the flat. It was her birthday, she reminded him. The children were coming to dinner. What was he doing here? Looked harried. His heart stretched out a finger.

Someone had asked if he had left her, because they had seen him coming in and going out of here quite frequently. Thought he must have moved to this address.

O no, he was helping a pal with some renovation work.

Her face cleared, but - where was the pal?

Gone to buy cleaning products.

Please come home now, she needed help to move the dining table. Wanted it in position and set in good time. Wanted to be sociable when the children and their families arrived. Not doing other things.

Grabbing a Pound from the bookshelf he joined her on the stairwell. He would pretend she liked Pound. As a present it would suffice. She would find him caring but endearingly misinformed.

When pulled, the click of the Yale lock in the door of the flat sounded final.

“I hope your friend remembered to take his key.”

“O yes, he did.”

Following down the stone steps in the echo of heels, it occurred that now, both unfortunately and inevitably, if he were to ask what the rubberneck gods called him, he would hear the name and sing that his name was Liberty Largo.

OIKUS
Dave Birtwistle

Losing the plot.

He was giving up his allotment. He'd hacked it out of wilderness into this beautiful raised-bed system. Indeed its qualities were enhanced by contrast with the scrubland behind where impenetrable brambles and tall nettles almost covered an old shed made of corrugated metal and decrepit doors. The young artist who'd opted out and squatted there crept closer and listened. "My back isn't what it was but it's these new rules and the health and safety. It's crazy. Take that old shed back there. Once over there were sixty of 'em, all originals. Turner Prize winners each and everyone!"

One Kind of an Answer.

In the Cern laboratory in Geneva, scientists from all over Europe pursue research into the nuclear and the sub-nuclear world. The Large Hadron Collider is the most powerful experimental apparatus ever created. It will probe the greatest questions of physics: what is the universe made of and how did it all begin? It looks wonderful. Its end-cap is like a light-pulsating, inter-galactic STARGATE interface, awesome enough to suggest it might truly divine some universal secret. What it will actually show us is that the Buddha was right all along - space, time and matter are all an illusion, you thick twats!!!!

203 West 24th St Downtown LA. The Acme Detective Agency

I was dead beat. I'd had the DA on my back all day. He's 22 stone. Suddenly a small blonde knocked on the door. I knew she was small because I could see her kneecaps through the cathatch. "OK blue-eyes," I said. "Quit spinning the faucet and give me the straight tomatoes." "You a sleuth or a slime-ball?" she asked. "The crazy thing is I am going crazy," I said. "And when I say nuts I don't mean cashews, I mean BRAZILS!!!" "You'll do me pal. A can of macadamias ain't worth a hill of beans in this screwball's world!"

The Landlady's Pub Grub.

The locals drooled over her scrumptious Boxing Day sandwiches so when 'Britain's Best Butty' started advertising they told her to 'get in there'. The recipe was a secret and the locals were happy to oblige and just eat. She took a clingfilm-covered plateful to the area heats and the judges devoured the lot. She was in. That meant telling all. The secret was Christmas leftovers - pork, turkey, veg, stuffing, cranberries, even the solidified gravy, all blended to a pate. She decided a secret was a secret and didn't go. If you're wondering how I got it, I'm not telling you either!

Watch My Lips.

The police used his expert advice to decipher CCTV tapes. As a lip-reader his challenge was to translate any voice, any accent. He was given unprecedented access to TV studios, editorial suites and archives. Last Thursday at Granada studios he sifted through six hours of The Royal Variety Performance. Whilst the boy bands were on the Duke whispered from the corner of his mouth. He cracked it, juggled the phrases and made up a short poem:

Gott in Himmel!

Blood and Sand! Jesus Wept!

Fucking Nora!!!

He sent it to a magazine and came second in the rude haiku competition.

Just the Job.

When the preview caught her eye she had to watch it. BBC2 - '*Grow your own drugs for Christmas*.' It involved an ethno-botanist presenting both recipes and natural remedies. What attracted her wasn't the herbal hangover cure for her husband but the two for the price of one, the fruity mince pies that also work wonders on cystitis. It could have been Delia or Jamie with herbal extras. Candied peel, sultanas, cinnamon, allspice, nuts and wild fennel and cow-parsley from the hedgerow. Boring uncle Harold came round and devoured them. "Hmmmmmm. What do you call these?" " '*Second Helpings*', Uncle Harold," she replied.

A cold, damp, November day in Jarrow, Northumbria: the dark ages.

The Venerable Bede was limping. Saelfric the Sly caught him up.

"Give yourself a break, lad. Take a Holy Day."

"I'm trying to think."

"Try Coast-Coracling. *Get away from it all!*"

"I've everything I need right here."

"That wattle beach-hut at Tynemouth. *Sand, Sea n 'Surf'*

"Listen, pal. The entire known universe is inside this skull. That's enough!"

"That hot geyser at Gateshead. Warm-water rafting! *There's fun for everyone.*"

"That doesn't grab me."

"How about: *Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by Indoor Real Peat Fire Holidays of Hartlepool?*"

"Book me in *because I'm worth it!!*"

That special ripeness of old age.

The research was done for insurance purposes. This small village in Somerset, with its, spring waters, fresh air and passion for grow-your-own emerged as the top location in Britain for longevity. 92 year old Harold Dehiob-Thripps has gardened for 63 years. Sitting in front of a home-made garlic and onion pie with cabbage and sprout mash and Jerusalem artichoke jus, he said "We put it down to fresh air, sex and soil high in sulphur. These vegetables surpasseth all understanding." As he spoke his breath stripped the paint off the plywood pelmet and the grapes threw themselves off the wallpaper.

It Just Goes to Show You.

Leading academics believe education is being undermined by the growing 'reward culture' in schools. "Children gain certificates for the most mundane achievements" they say. "Kids need strong, old-fashioned discipline," says William Wittering of the Leonard Swindley inner-city academy. "Those who won't read or write sit at the back twiddling raffia. We only give certificates if a pupil can put:

- his school cap on the right way round
- his glasses on the front of his head
- his spare dinner tickets in his turn-ups. I didn't get my Blue Peter badge for picking my nose and flirting it!"

The Big Slip.

Road conditions were treacherous. Water covered the thick ice. He walked to the shop slowly, like a deep-sea diver, keeping his centre of gravity low. It took twice the normal time. As he banged his shoes at the newsagents an ugly bloke in an anorak pushed past. Inside he had to wait as the guy monopolised the magazine rack. Once outside again, the man was there, reading. He ignored him and set off home. Behind him, a scuffle and skid. "Bollocks," he thought but he stopped and turned. The man was helping up the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen.

DipDipDop.

The recent freezing weather didn't stop those brave enough to go for an open-air swim. Brighton swimming club took their traditional Christmas swim in the English Channel. In Hyde Park swimmers dived in the Serpentine and were given a restorative glass of brandy afterwards. On the Pennines the Bacup Underwater Wrestling team cracked the ice on the local reservoir, swam to the Blubberfold Moor tripe fondling fete, rubbed themselves down with nettles to protect against rheumatoid arthritis and drank Benny and Hot to remind us all that the Battle of Bosworth Field was won on the northern slopes of Pendle.

Stairway to Heaven

He was an Egyptologist specialising in pyramids. It wasn't the dates or the kings and queens that fascinated him but the very shape and purpose of these structures. They acted as spiritual gateways to the heavens and their haunting geometry triggered a powerful, subliminal effect on the human mind. Doreen Dobson's interest in holy places was more practical. She enjoyed being shagged round the back of old churches. She loved to grind the plump, pink cheeks of

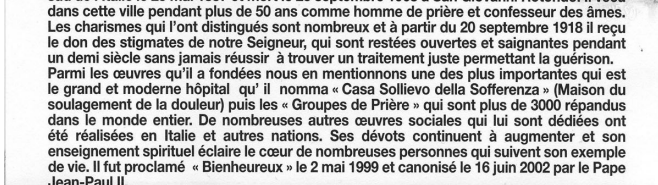
her arse into the brickwork behind the local Methodist chapel. It made him see stars but didn't do much good for his knuckles.

The Set Up

She came into teaching in her forties. The staff were mostly younger. She felt out of touch. To compensate she spoke to the kids like a 'with-it' teenager. Both staff and kids cringed. Simon Springett came in as new headteacher. He was business-orientated with contacts everywhere. She began to spend time in his office filling him in on what was going off. She became known as 'Springy's spy'. The staff led her on no end, plans, conspiracies, false rumours and she duly reported back. Two weeks later Springy turned grey whilst she was invited to train teachers at the poly.

Whitby.

He only went there for the fish&chips. He'd seen Rick Stein sitting in this cafe with a battered cod hanging over the sides of his plate. Then he got sucked in. First the replica of Captain Cook's ship and then The Dracula Trail, a guided tour of Bram Stoker's time there. The guide took them at dusk through the shadows and told them in a deep, slow, spooky voice about the occult and the supernatural. As they reached the famous 199th step, he recovered his breath, stuck a small silver cannonball up his arse and threw himself off the battlements.



Sera Pio est un prêtre, l'ordre des Frères Mineurs Capucins, né à Pietrelcina (BN), dans le sud de l'Italie le 25 mai 1887 et mort le 23 septembre 1968 à San Giovanni Rotondo. Il vécut dans cette ville pendant plus de 50 ans comme homme de prière et confesseur. À Rome, les charismes qui l'ont distingués sont nombreux et à partir du 20 septembre 1918 il repart le don des stigmates de notre Seigneur, qui sont restées ouvertes et saignantes jusqu'à un demi siècle sans jamais réussir à trouver un traitement juste permettant la guérison. Parmi les œuvres qu'il a fondées nous en mentionnons une des plus importantes qui est le grand et moderne hôpital qu'il nomma « Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza » (Maison du soulagement de la douleur) puis les « Groupes de Prière », qui sont plus de 3000 répandus dans le monde entier. De nombreuses autres œuvres sociales qui lui sont dédiées ont été réalisées en Italie et autres nations. Ses dévots continuent à augmenter et son enseignement spirituel éclaire le cœur de nombreuses personnes qui suivent son exemple de vie. Il fut proclamé « Bienheureux » le 2 mai 1999 et canonisé le 16 juin 2002 par le Pape Jean-Paul II.

Remplis lisiblement ce formulaire et envoie-le par la poste (carte déjà affranchie)
aux Frères Capucins du Couvent de San Giovanni Rotondo
Pour tout renseignement - TEL : 0039/01882 417600 - FAX : 0039/018

Nom **JARUZELSKI**
 Prénom **STEFAN**
 Adresse **CRAZY**
 Code Postal **10000** Ville **LA**
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MIRACLE IN MONTAUBAN

Stefan Jaruzelski

This year I pick grapes and itinerantly plumb in Midi-Pyrennees. Indigenous pipework and wine both shite, but, *comme d'habitude*, locals think they're world's finest, pointing to the Pont du Gard as the latest thing in aqueducts and plonk as holy blood of Christ. Pickers can drink all they like since no sane person would pay for it. Most finishes up in wine lake or as anti-freeze on roads. I ask boss *vigneron* if he have any Vosne Romanee by way of a change. "Vosne what?" he say "No we have none of that gitane homebrewed horse piss here!"

My plan is to visit Montauban where there are fine art works by Ingres and Bourdelle. I check into pension Robert de Montesquiou, recommended by my queer cousin Stanislaw, and arrange my bibelots: silver framed signed photo of Uncle Woicjeck in dark specs, small bust of Chopin in globe which plays Revolutionary etude during snowstorm when shaken, SS helmet from sister-in-law's cousin Boguslaw whose father was in elite unit, diploma of plumbing from technical college in Lodz with watermark of V.I. Lenin holding blowlamp, pump-up doll of celebrity Jordan left by client demanding threesome in daughter's Greek street flat. Cleaner comes in (all boys here) and pronounces scene "*un vrai Bourdelle!*" I much pleased with this accolade from compatriot of great sculptor. I give him 10 euros whereupon he tries to undo my pants. I say I have no need of valet and anyway am unreconstructed Polish commie and reject all master-slave nonsense.

Musee Ingres is massive brick building near river. The paintings are upstairs. Many stick-like, grey old trouts sit on benches drooling over male nudes. I get postcard for cousin Stani but note that my favourite girlie pics by the master are all in Paris. I particularly like the *Grande Odalisque* of 1844. Ingres give her extra vertebrae so that long body very flexible for improved jigajig. English critic Lord Clark write that "this fantastic floosie could wriggle and flow round Percy like a hungry anaconda". This picture give me horn – a sure sign of excellence according to Lord Clark.

Disappointed at this deficiency I descend to the Bourdelle room. Many fine sculptures here of kraut piano player Ludwig van Morrison who seems to be obsession of Bourdelle's. Not many lady figures though so I approach guardian of treasures, nodding off over *L'Equipe*, to ask if the great Bourdelle ever did statue of warbling Welsh hornbag Charlotte Church. He looks puzzled then says "Church? Yes just up road opposite - St Jacques".

St Jacques is vast and ugly brick shed - more Jakes than Jacques. Very old. Considered by locals much better than St Peter's in Rome. Inside very gloomy. Old black crones fiddle with candles. I try to recall childhood scenes in such buildings in Lodz. Suddenly my perambulation is arrested by eerie vision. Very lifelike, coloured and full-sized I see simulacrum of St Pio holding up hand adorned with fingerless gel-padded bike mitt available from Lidl at £2.99 a pair. The gesture seems to say "You're not coming in here in those dirty overalls Stefan." But then I hear voice saying that I am miserable sinner, atheist, follower of the anti-Christ J.V. Stalin and that my daughter is a "*putain sale*" - also that I overcharge for fixing ball-cocks. I remember childhood indoctrination. Stirrings still! I feel much apprehension. I fall to knees and shout "Holy St Pio I repent!!" My cry echoes in inky void. A distant crone shouts "*ta gueule!*". I stagger out, taking with me a prepaid Pio Information Service postcard from a small lectern inscribed "*Credo quia absurdum*". I vow to become faithful follower of St Pio.

Back in Pension Robert de Montesquiou I read article on St Pio, thought by many to be great fake, who died in 1968. He was made saint only in 2002 suggesting old pope also had doubts and suspected he picked off scabs to keep wounds open. I read what seemed standard atheist rant *a la* Dawkins, but now I see author is firm believer, probably Jesuit, who uses subtle irony to confound the pagan - like Swift who exhorted starving Irish to eat babies. And like Aquinas too, often praised by my old tutor Leszek Kolakowski in Lodz. Leszek was communist who saw the light and retired from luxurious Polish *apparat* to dingy, spartan Arseholes college Oxford. Aquinas, he say, was great philosopher who always presented anti-God arguments in the best possible light before delivering crushing refutation in his *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Pio article likewise has many quips about lazy arsed monks who eat nothing, weigh thirteen stone and

MIRACLE IN MONTAUBAN

bleed cupful of blood a day from hole which goes right through heart. How I larfed formerly. But now I see countervailing accounts of wrestles with Satan and persistent stigmata as convincing rebuttals of desiccated rationalism. I call in cleaning boy and ask him to watch while I fumble under blanket. He say yes it look very like I scratch scabs off palms but then I throw back sheet to reveal I having a J Arthur. The Pope refuted thus.

That night I wander round *Place Nationale* (finer than St Marks square in Venice say locals) looking for sinners to convert. I stumble across *Bordel Internationale* run by Chinese lady Suk Yo Koc. She takes me in and introduces me to steatopygous hottentot – a rarity in Lodz. Also she have a good Vacqueras 2005 as house wine which remind me of my time there two years ago when I first decide to become great poet. Soon I pissed as fart and in bed with whore. “Give me chastity” I shout down stairs – “but not yet”. “*Ta gueule*” shout back fat Eskimo with no teeth. Oddly this admonition common to both temples. I decide that Pio speech was hidden tape recorder. Funny turn result of lingering incense and childhood insecurities. I attempt to wipe arse on postcard but then decide to fill in Crazy Oik name and address instead.



La Grande Odalisque – JD Ingres

SATNAV

Ron Horsefield

Celebrity voices are now featuring on satnavs eg:

Gordon Ramsey

You just missed that left turn you crazy fuck. Didn't I say turn left? Take the next fucking left you stupid bastard. Oh no! You've missed that one too! Fuck me pink! What's wrong with you? Next left... What's this! You're turning RIGHT! Don't you know left from right numbnuts? Which hand do you wipe your arse with? Hang on a minute. This is the car park of the Happy Eater. The fucking Happy fucking Eater!?! Are you MAD? This place is full of shite. I wouldn't eat here if I was starving to death. Do a fucking U turn immediately. The car's stopped! You're actually going in there! The doors are slamming! Fuck me! This is madness! I'm turning up the volume so you can hear me as you go through the entrance. DON'T FOR CHRISAKES EAT THE FUCKING SAUSAGES!!!

Gordon Brown

You are proceeding down the northbound M6 carriageway at 80 mph in a southerly direction. This is absolutely unacceptable and contravenes several health and safety regulations. With a closing speed of 160 mph with on coming traffic you will almost certainly be killed. In this event we will extend our deepest condolences to your immediate family – we will feel their pain. Lord Adonis, the minister for transport, will set up an independent inquiry to look into increased safety on our motorways, This will report towards the end of 2013. Meanwhile we shall reduce speed limits to 25 mph and install speed cameras every 800 yards. There will be fixed penalty fines of £200 but with no points on your licence since we need the revenue from repeat offenders. Have a nice day. Oh and by the way if you're feeling peckish why not stop at the next Happy Eater – John Prescott tells me the sausages are fucking delicious! And if you don't I'll be round to give you a slap – of course I know where you live – I'm a bleedin satnav aren't I?

MY LIFE IN PRINT

Ray Blyde

CHAPTER NINE.

Elsie got progressively worse as time went by and Eadie spent most of the week there while Sed went back to work. The doctor diagnosed deep depression and recommended that she saw a specialist about some treatment in hospital. Eadie couldn't stay overnight because of her own commitments. Sed was having his sleep disturbed continually throughout the night as Elsie continued her trips to his bedroom, he tried locking the door but she would knock on the door until he got up, pacified heathen saw her back to bed.

"I can't take any more of this," he told Eadie.

"All right lad, I think the times come to insist that the doctor sends her to hospital or you're going to go down with exhaustion. Leave it with me Sed." Eadie made him feel safe and she was always someone you could talk to and confide in. Within a couple of days a specialist arrived at the house to examine Elsie, and prescribed some anti depressants and suggested that she should go into hospital to have a course of electric shock treatment.

"What is electric shock treatment?" enquired Sed anxious visualising his mother being strapped into an electric chair and executed. Doctor Valman laughed.

"No its nothing as dramatic or as dangerous as that. We'll be giving your mother some mild electric impulses to her brain, and after a couple of treatments she'll be as right as ninepence."

"Will it hurt?"

"No, not at all, she'll be under a general anaesthetic, she won't feel a thing, don't you worry young man we'll take very good care of her."

"When will she be going in?"

"We'll send an ambulance around for her first thing in the morning, why is that not convenient?"

"That'll be fine," interceded Eadie, "and you can come and stay with us Sed...if you like?"

"Thanks aunt Eadie, but I'll be fine on my own," he assured her. "If I can get some sleep."

"Sed, you've been through a lot this last couple of weeks, I don't think you should be on your own!"

"Honestly, I'll be fine." He couldn't contemplate living in the same house, as Uncle Tom even for a short time while he was hogging the tele and spitting in the fire.

"Well I'll pop in a couple of times a week until your mam comes home."

"Ok, aunt Eadie, and thanks."

"Are you going in to see your mam tonight?"

"Yeh."

"All right, I'll leave you to go in on your own, we'll go in tomorrow." Sed didn't know what to expect as he walked up the stairs to the ward. He visualised his mother either stretched out as stiff as a board unconscious, or tied down to the bed talking gibberish, he was pleasantly surprised. She was sitting on the side of her bed weaving a basket of some kind.

"Hello Sed!" She gave him a radiant smile, then kissed and hugged him. He was overwhelmed.

"How are you mam?"

"I'm fine, I'm coming out tomorrow!"

"That's great!"

"How's your dad?" When she said that Sed knew for sure she wouldn't be coming out tomorrow. As he left the ward he called into see the sister.

"Well, she's a lot better, doctor Valman's very pleased with her."

"What I can't understand, she asked after my dad, he died three weeks ago."

"Yes, I know, but don't worry, the treatment makes the patient feel a bit disorientated. When you come in again you may find that she'll repeat the same conversation you've had with her today, but that's quite normal with this treatment. This treatment works, we don't know how, but it does. I think she may be out next week. She's doing some occupational therapy and that's a good sign, ok?" Sed nodded his head and hoped she was right.

When Sed got back to work he discovered that they'd taken on another apprentice. This was good news for Sed because he would no longer be the dogsbody running errands etc for the chapel. The new lad was tall blond and slim called Charlie Aspinall, whose father Jim worked in the publishing room. That fact alone would make him acceptable to most of the blokes in the chapel. Although Sed had no relatives in the business he felt he was a part of the team now. He introduced himself and set about showing him the ropes, and as in-

evitably as night follows day Ralph was there asking him to put his name down for the football sweep and pressing into his hand the list for sandwiches and cigarettes.

"Hang on a minute Ralph?"

"What d'ya mean, 'Ang on?"

"Well, give the lad a chance to get his coat off, he only started this morning!"

"Hey, he's got to start 'as 'e means to go on, unless you want to do it?" Sed didn't want to do it, he hated running errands for other people, he felt it was a waste of good time which could be far better utilised learning the trade. However, at the moment he had no power or influence to change the practice, but resolved never to send anyone on errands for him when he was a fully fledged journeyman. Charlie turned out to be nobody's fool, he actually relished the idea of going out on errands. His enterprise knew no bounds. He charged everyone a premium for sandwiches and cigarettes, he was making a couple of quid a day. If anyone complained he told them "pay up," or go out themselves. Sed thought this was hilarious until it became apparent after a week or two that Charlie was making the money and he and Ralph were doing the work. To compound the problem King took a shine to him and would send him up to Tithebarn street to collect his weekly joint of meat and pigs trotters. Ralph was beside himself with annoyance.

"What the bloody 'ell's going on with this bloke, he's 'ardly done a stroke since 'e started 'ere"

"What d'you suggest Ralph, report him to King?"

"Huh! that would do a lot of good, he's the bosses blue eyed boy. Why don't you 'ave a word with 'im?"

"Oh no, you're the head apprentice you speak to him." Well Ralph did have a word, it wasn't a particularly friendly word and Ralph finished up with a punch in the eye. The situation was finally resolved at chapel level when the F.O.C. took him on one side and read him the riot act. Even then Ralph wouldn't leave well alone. It was customary to change into a pair of combination overalls before starting work, and with the heat from the casting pots it was more comfortable to strip down to a vest and underpants before putting on the overalls. On this particular occasion King sent Charlie on an errand close to finishing time, when he returned he discovered that someone had taken his clothes from out of the locker and hidden them in various inaccessible places in the department, naturally nobody admitted

responsibility, and having spent two hours of his own time looking for his clobber Charlie got the message.

When Elsie came out of hospital she was a bit more like her old self, but still a little subdued, which wasn't surprising taking into consideration the trauma of the funeral and the subsequent nervous breakdown. When Sed came down for breakfast the following morning Elsie was reading a letter from Lloyd.

"What's he got to say mam?"

"He's getting married." She handed him the letter.

"It's someone he met in Freemantle Australia."

"I'll bet she's an Aboriginal!" mused Sed. She laughed.

"Nothing in this world surprises me any more."

"Yes but he's jumped ship for this woman, if the authorities catch him they'll deport him won't they?"

"Probably, but that's Lloyd isn't it, act first, think last. Anyway, worse things happen at sea." Sed frowned.

"But he won't be at sea anymore?"

"No he won't, not if the shipping company have any say in the matter. What would you like for your breakfast Sed?"

"A couple of rounds of toast'll do mam."

"Right, well I'll go and put the kettle on." Sed read the letter again and laughed at the suggestion in the postscript that he would come home post haste if he was needed. What on a rollerskate? There was a strong possibility that they would never see Lloyd again.

At the weekend they were both invited to tea at the O'Neills. They were a big family not in number but sheer size. Mr O'Neill was at least six feet three, Mrs O'Neill must have been nearly six feet, Henry of course towered over everyone even without his helmet. It was like being in the valley of giants. After tea he got his second surprise,

Henry's sister Gwen made her appearance. She wasn't at all what he remembered at school where she was snotty nosed, pimply, and as thin as a lath. She'd blossomed into the most gorgeous thing he'd ever seen, and unlike the rest of the family she was small and dainty with long black hair.

"I don't know who she takes after, but it's none of us," said Mrs O'Neill proudly.

"You don't remember me do you Sed?" Sed felt himself going hot all over.

MY LIFE IN PRINT

"N..no... you've changed...for the better of course," stammered Sed, not knowing what else to say.

"Do you cycle Sed?"

"Yep..I've got a bike, but I haven't been on it for a while."

"Well you know what they say, you never forget how to ride." Sed laughed and warmed to the possibilities.

"Hey!" said Henry. "Don't let her lead you astray, get yourself a motorbike, a pushbike's too much like hard work."

"Yes, and you're getting a paunch Henry O'Neill!" interjected Gwen and you're only twenty one."

"Aye, and if I have any more old buck, you won't reach twenty one!" replied Henry throwing a playful backhand in her direction. Sed was enjoying himself, and so was Elsie. After a wholesome meal they all sat down to play a game of monopoly. Gwen plonked herself down beside him and whispered,

"I was sorry to hear about your dad Sed." and gave his hand a reassuring squeeze. Sed nodded and felt on cloud nine.



WINTER WONDERLAND.

David Birtwistle

He'd promised to keep an eye on the garden whilst they were away especially if the temperature dropped. He didn't think it would be necessary but sure enough there was an unexpected fall of snow. It was a crisp, bright, cold morning, a day for children and snowmen and everywhere he looked seemed an unravelling illustration from a book of fairy tales. As he crunched his way along the pavement the world filled with a wonderful muffled cocoon and the light illuminated a peachy pinkness on the white rooftops. Small silver clouds drifted past a clear blue sky.

He walked carefully, mindful of ice underneath the crunching snow and decided to call in at the shops on the way - bread, bacon, more tea-bags just in case. Everyone seemed well wrapped up. As he queued with his groceries in a metal basket, he noticed that the woman in front had a large fur hat and a thick wrap-around scarf. He looked down at his own thick soled boots and his fleece and anorak with hat and gloves in the pocket. He was miles away when her voice came to him. He looked round and she was smiling broadly. Her large, dark curls tumbled out of a fluffy beret and she wore a long multi-wrapped woollen scarf, a tightly belted coat and green wellies with flowers dotted all over them. Her face glowed. "Lovely to see you. What are you up to?" She joined him in the queue and they paid and went outside.

The light had grown brighter still and the sun radiated warmth on the red brickwork. Underfoot they crunched and crumpled the snow together, past the shops and headed for the health food store. "I'm calling in at this garden," he said. "It's remarkable. A walled garden, off the beaten track with outhouses and a big south-facing greenhouse. You'd walk past it and never know. It's a very secret garden. I'm just checking that everything's protected. It's beautiful at this time of year." "Sounds brilliant. Can I come along?" she asked. "Of course," he said and they continued compacting the snow together. She pointed out an exposed magpie's nest high in a tree. He pointed to the sunlight hitting a small stained glass window in someone's Victorian vestibule. Twice she skidded slightly and put her hand on his arm to steady herself. He smiled and she smiled back. They continued to compact the snowman quality snow under their boots.

WINTER WONDERLAND

"This is the one," he said. "You'd never know from outside, would you." She shook her head in amazement. He opened the wrought-iron drive gate and held it for her and walked down the side of the house. He brushed the snow off an earthenware plant pot, lifted it up and extracted a brass key.

It fitted the lock in the sturdy gate set into the tall fence. Next to it was a cat-flap. "The cats round here look after themselves. It's their private domain." He opened up, pocketed the key and led her into the back garden. He closed the hasp and jammed in a thick piece of dowel so that effectively they were locked in. They stood there in the shade of the house and took in their surroundings. The garden was much bigger than anyone would expect. It opened up down a stone paved courtyard; ancient six-foot high brick walls enclosed the space and held espalier fruit trees along the bottom border. A large mahonia's yellow inflorescence caught the sun as it topped the near wall and further down a small monkey-puzzle tree. To the right was a shade garden with cyclamen, nightshade and flowering hellebores, and further down still, birds' nest ferns, maidenhair ferns, spleenwort, marsh-buckler, tufted grasses and bamboo. He pointed these out to her and named them as he did so and together they placed fleece or straw over the tenderest specimens. He took her a tour of the outhouses with their slightly musty oldworldiness and she ran her fingers over ancient carriage wheels, brass lamps, gas light fittings and large, dry piles of fire-logs. Then he brought her into the big restored greenhouse. There were still chillies, capsicums and tomatoes bearing the last of their fruit. He reset a dial that would boost the minimum temperature and then they covered up other pots. "We'll fill up the watering cans and leave it at that" he said and gently pushed aside the branches of the weeping willow tree. There by a holly bush was an ancient raised-stone well. He looked at her and she looked at him: no words were necessary. They both shared the sense of enchantment and their eyes reflected the pure magic of this hidden gem.

"A wishing well," she exclaimed. "Let's wish!" In this quiet, secluded space shimmering with dappled light they looked like the prince and the sleeping beauty filled with a sense of childhood wonder. Silently she took his hand in hers and entwined their little fingers. "Make a wish. Please. Now!" she whispered. They closed their eyes. In the innermost recesses of his brain he concentrated hard, willing her to double the wish. Three weeks later she stood in her flat

looking at her new, spangled ballet slippers as her spare room bulged with enough sparkling shoes to make Emelda Marcos blush. He looked out of the bedroom in his semi to see hundreds of pairs of green Wellingtons spilling from his garage and his entire vegetable patch brimming with frondescent ferns.



Our Finest Hour – Adverts from *Illustrated* 1941

TWO POEMS

Bette Braka

MANIFESTO

I like to write
Satirical, political,
Sometimes, a little critical;
Of current affairs,
While having a laugh
At every Government gaffe.
It is NOT poetry
As you know it,
Just doggerel for the masses,
And even the Upper Classes.

GORDON AND PIERS

Oh, Dear Piers,
What about those tears?
Gordon shed them freely,
When questioned sincerely
On the loss of his daughter.
He was visibly touched,
He really emoted,
But did he really consider
The families, so devoted,
Their lives so disturbed,
THEIR children, now interred
By HIS decisions
To limit the Budget
For Army Divisions .



Some wartime oiks preferred the sun-roof version of the Andersen. In the daytime you could cop a few rays while at night you got a much better view of falling incendiaries and ack ack fire. And after all – if you got a direct hit from a doodlebug a flimsy half-arsed chunk of corrugated iron wouldn't do you much good would it?

THE ANDERSEN SHELTER

Soon after war was declared, in 1939, my dad got a job as a labourer working for the Council. Shortly afterwards, along with his mates, he was drafted into the Rescue Service. One of the first tasks he had to do was help distribute air-raid shelters to the residents of Prestwich. You could have a Morrison shelter--an iron mesh structure to go under your table, or, if you had space and money, a brick and concrete one, or an Andersen shelter. Like most people we opted for an Andersen. The council wagon which stopped outside our house to deliver it was piled high with glittering shelter parts. My dad carried the shiny sheets of curved, corrugated, galvanised metal over his head like a sack of coal. Burdakie and Midgeley, two much smaller men, carried the straight pieces for the front and back of the shelter, and the base-frame girders, and a hessian sack containing the washers, nuts and bolts. There was a sheet of paper inside the sack with a diagram and instructions as to how deep to dig the hole and how to put the pieces together.

The shelter had to be erected in a hole at least three feet deep. Some people dug them deeper but in some parts of Prestwich they filled up with water if you dug down deeper than two feet. You had to heap the earth from the hole on to the top and sides for extra protection. The shelter was six feet in height, eight feet wide and nine feet long. With its rounded roof it looked a bit like an igloo. My dad marked out an area in the back garden and dug the hole. It seemed enormous to me. After a foot or so down the rich, black soil turned to gravel and then to pure, golden sand like on Blackpool beach. I let my rabbit dig in it. I had only looked away for a second and it had disappeared down a hole. Our Ernie put his foot on the sand and the hole caved in. I screamed. My dad came to the rescue and quickly dug out the rabbit.

My dad made duck-boards for the inside of the shelter and built two wooden bunks and a slim, wooden bed for my grandma. There was no room to move when we all got inside. Our Archie and me used to fight with our Ernie for who would sleep on the top bunk. My grandma made sleeping bags for each of us out of some old eider-downs she had got from a jumble sale. The sleeping bags only came level with your armpits but they had crossed straps sewn on to slip over your shoulders so that the bags wouldn't slide down and leave you uncovered in the night. Once you were strapped in, you couldn't

get your arms free to get out. We kept candles in the shelter but nothing much else. Some people, my dad said, had everything in their shelters bar the kitchen sink. We had a hedgehog.

The hedgehog was not in the shelter from choice. We had come across Mr. Prickles, as we christened him, while we were scuffling through a pile of leaves in the park, looking for conkers. I had noticed a gleam of polished-brown-light through the split shell of a spike-studded green husk the size of a small fist. I felt an elation of luck when I spotted it. I split the shell with my thumbs and a beautiful, dark, brown-stained, gleaming-new chestnut with a matt-white horseshoe scar on its side popped out. I held it, cold and waxy in the palm of my hand. Our Ernie nudged me and it dropped back down into the pile of leaves and was lost. I delved my hands deep into the leaves to search for it and shrieked with pain. I had pricked my fingers on the thorns of a hedgehog that was buried, deep down below the crispy leaves. It was wrapped in a ball of dry grass and bracken. We prodded it with a stick but it remained tightly clenched, its prickles menacingly proud. I took off my jacket and rolled the hedgehog onto it with my foot. I wrapped the bundle up and took it home with me. The hedgehog was full of fleas. When I next put my jacket on I got badly bitten. "Serves you right for messing about with such mucky creatures", my mam said.

At first we kept Mr. Prickles in a rabbit hutch: a small, square, wooden box with a hole in its side and a hinged lid that lifted up. A flimsy-framed wire-netting pen was fixed to the side with the hole in it so the hedgehog could stroll about, which it obligingly did. We fed it worms from the garden and black-beetles which we collected from inside the shelter each morning. I couldn't bear the crunching sound the hedgehog made as it greedily gobbled them up so it seemed a good idea to let it catch the beetles for itself. When the hedgehog next made a ball I scooped it on to the coal-shovel and wobbled it down the wooden shelter steps and left it to hunt the beetles on its own. I moved the steps so it couldn't climb out. When I came back it had gone. We took up the duck boards and moved the bunk beds but there was no hedgehog to be found.

A few nights later there was a heavy raid on Manchester. Bombs were dropping the moment the siren wailed out its warning from the roof of the Co-op at Kirkhams. A mobile Ack Ack gun was cracking off shells from in front of the shops on Bury Old Road. Incendiary bombs were falling all over Polefield estate. I could hear shrapnel

THE ANDERSEN SHELTER

from the shells clattering over the roof slates and clinking against the cast iron gutter. I remember lying in bed, thinking I must ask Mr. Hunter, the window cleaner, to get some fragments for me.

My dad was out with the Rescue Service. My mam and my grandma were on their own with us. My mam rushed into the bedroom shouting: "Get up! Be quick! Get up! She grabbed our Arthur in one arm and a blanket to wrap around him in the other and bundled our Ernie and me down the stairs in our pyjamas. The dull boom of distant bombs filled the spaces between the bursts of pom pom guns from Heaton Park. There was a small wedge-shaped space under the stairs into which she crammed the three of us whilst she helped my grandma out to the shelter. We had caught my mother's panic and were whimpering with fright. Our Arthur was crying. Our Ernie had his hands on his ears.

In a brief lull in the raid my mam dragged us out from under the stairs and herded us towards the shelter. It was no more than four yards from the back door but the grass was wet and it seemed a long way. Whilst my mam and our Ernie were clambering down the steps I looked up into the sky. I could see long straight lines of silver tracer-bullets chasing each other deep into the darkness. Searchlights crossed like wigwags as they sought out German planes, or probed in jerks and jumps about the sky. There was a smell of smoke like bonfire night and a flickering orange glow in the sky behind the houses down Polefield Grange.

I pulled the shelter door to behind me and fixed the catch. The candle light cast big black shadows on the walls of the shelter. Our Ernie was in the top bunk. My grandma was sitting on a chair, her lame leg stretched out in front of her. Both hands gripped the curved handle of her walking stick. "We'll be alright if we don't get a direct hit", she said. "Oh don't say that Annie!" my mam shouted.

The candle wick was too long and there were no scissors to trim it with. The smoke tainted the air and made a black stain on the silver, crystalline coating of the corrugated metal roof. As the wax spluttered and dribbled down the candle the flame flickered and the shadows danced menacingly around about us. Our Ernie was making silhouettes of animals on the walls with his hands. Suddenly my mam shouted: "My god! What was that! Be quiet will you!" We held our breath and listened. There was a loud rasping sound like a wire brush being scraped across metal, then silence.

My grandma's head slumped forward, jerked back up a couple of times, then settled down, chin on chest, and she quietly snored herself to sleep. One by one, my mam, our Archie, then our Ernie, trailed off after her. I couldn't get to sleep. I lay in the dark listening to the muffled thuds of distant bombs and the occasional crump of anti-aircraft guns. Each time I closed my eyes a picture of Mr. Prickles appeared. Magnified in my mind I could see his two, black, opaque, shiny eyes set in a small, tapering, hairy face with a dry, black snout and wet nostrils. A huge ball of spikey criss-cross spines encircled me as I curled up to try to get to sleep.

Four years later, when the war ended, the Council asked everyone to dig up their shelters and have them ready for collection. Alternatively you could buy your shelter for a pound and use it as a shed above ground. I helped my dad dig ours up. We cleared the earth from the top and sides and dug a trench round the outside of the metal. There was a hollow run round the back. In a corner, crumpled up, was what looked like a large leather glove. My dad picked it up on the tip of his spade. It was the dried-out body of the missing Mr. Prickles.

HOLIDAYS OF THE FUTURE



■ This seems a strange time to be thinking about holidays. The last summer holiday we had is now a faded, snapshot memory, while the next is still an unplanned dream hardly worth talking about yet.

Why not? We take a very optimistic view of the future. Already we are beginning to relish the new opportunities for travel after the war. The possibilities are staggering. Just think for a moment where all this experience in long distance flying, now being so grimly acquired, is going to lead us. To the United States and Canada, for certain. To South America, Hawaii, Tahiti, Bermuda, Mexico. Aeroplanes now fly

the Atlantic in a few short and uneventful hours: civilian and military air pilots cross and recross from Canada and America without mishap.

Soon experienced airmen will be taking us over for our first holiday in the New World. South Africa, Egypt, the Holy Land seem distant places now and impossible for a short vacation, but in the future—well, we'll soon be there!

For week-ends, we shall hop across to Switzerland or to the South of France as casually as to Brighton or Blackpool.

Spain, Greece and Turkey will also be popular destinations since these dago countries are sunny and sell cheap booze where oiks can get bladdered and burnt and eat local dishes which look like they've been eaten once already. How the aircrew will larf as the oiks join the return flight with their sombreros and litres of ouzo and brandy. How they will join in the many sing-songs as they mop up the vomit and piss from the flooded aisles. Some revellers may even attempt to blow up the plane for a larf, leading to long queues at airports so that everyone can be searched. This may mean it'd be quicker to go to Benidorm on your bike but then you'd miss the knees-up with your fellow oiks in a seat which is only three inches behind the one in front. And don't think you can stretch your legs by going to strangle a dorkie—the bog will be full of mile-high shaggers and drug addicts or just some one who wants a fag. Yis, it'll make that coach to Blackpool feel like the Queen's Rolls Royce.

Pears

RENOWNED AS THE LEADING TOILET SOAP SINCE 1789

No. 2 of a series of advertisements issued by A. & F. Pears, Ltd., Isleworth, Middlesex

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ULLA HOLMBERG?

Nigel Ford

I am not loved or liked much either. I'm socially incompetent and my nose turns purple after a couple of beers, which is a shame, because if it didn't I might conjure up enough Dutch courage to be sociable. Needless to say, my relationship with my parents, who are of humble origin, has never been good. I featured neither the brightness nor the resolution to rise above my station, despite my educational advantages, and am therefore a disappointment. Obviously, my status with the opposite sex has always been low. I once had sex with a prostitute to see what it was like, but I was not impressed. The experience failed to "hook" me as they say. I resolved to stick to porn. However, I do have a dog who adores me unconditionally. His name is Nixon.

Recently, I had read an article about the courageous exploits of the Dippers Society in the local newspaper and been drawn towards their ideals. So much so that I had awoken this morning possessed by an irresistible urge to throw myself into the sea and to do so out of season. To be different, like they were. To return to my origins and submerge in the chilly green roil of my roots. I badly wanted to be able to grasp that freedom and shake it about, a symbol of rebellion and rude health. Provide my sorry character with a more heroic identity.

Taking Nixon along on that early spring morning was foolhardy; I hadn't thought it all through, only the part about taking a dip in the cold cold sea. Having changed into bathers and spread a beach towel on the hard bumpy pebbles, I now faced the problem of what to do with him. I walk Nixon down to the beach regularly, and the option of not taking him along had simply not occurred.

Although a very loyal and trustworthy dog, he was a dog and he liked people and not all people liked dogs. He might approach someone walking along the beach while I was bathing, and his attentions might not be welcome. I contemplated the icy grey sea and the surf foaming and grating the pebbles, trying not to think about jumping in. It looked like soiled liquid ice.

Nixon was eying me quizzically, warm breath panting into my face.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ULLA HOLMBERG?

At this moment I saw Ulla Holmberg walking carefully along the path that ran along the top of the beach, a favourite local walk, not least for locals with dogs. Some of the senior citizens in my community are kind enough to chat with me on occasion, being almost always eager for conversation, and Ulla Holmberg was one in point.

Nixon was bounding up to Ulla in no time. Ulla loves Nixon and they were soon making a great fuss of each other. Although Ulla is elderly, she is still robust and should, I thought, be able to dissuade Nixon from jumping on any passers-by. It seemed only natural to ask her to look after him while I took my dip.

‘Jon! How nice to see you! What are you doing here dressed like that? What a windy day! Surely you’re not going for a swim. Won’t it be cold? You youngsters!’

With her words came the realisation that I could not back down now if I wanted to. Face would be lost, our chats would never be the same again. I would risk losing one of my rare social lifelines. The pebbles gripped my toes, pitiless and unrelenting. ‘Hello Ulla. Yes, well, I would like to take a dip, but I was wondering what to do with Nixon. Could you mind him for a few minutes? I don’t suppose I’ll be long.’

‘I’d be delighted. You go ahead, although you must be potty.’ She grasped Nixon’s lead. ‘Come here Nixon, come on! There’s a boy!’ Then turned back to me. ‘Mind you don’t catch your death!’

It was cold, o my it was cold, but an exhilarating achievement. I could hardly believe I was in it, this chilled thick salt water moving me this way and that, pulling at my feet with small painful avalanches of pebbles battering my ankles. I managed three crawl strokes out to sea before the cold became too much and I stopped and touched bottom. Numbed from the waist down, I was standing in the tugging waters, pushing the hair back from my face, when I saw the other dog.

It was approaching along the path and towing what appeared to be two schoolgirl dog-watchers, who had to resort to a stumbling run to keep up. Ulla was standing watching me in the sea, back turned towards them, but Nixon was not; he had lost interest in my antics and was intently watching the other dog. As this drew closer I saw that it was a male. Galvanised into action, I began to wade ashore, my progress painfully slow and clumsy.

I was far too late. They did what male dogs do, they picked a fight

with each other. Ulla, clinging heroically to the leash, was no match for the mighty Nixon with all his adrenaline flowing, and was pulled over to crash face down onto those pitiless pebbles.

There was a flurry of dismay, a brandish of mobile telephones, a reproach of dogs. Grabbing my jacket I rushed to Ulla's aid and turned her over, wrapping her in my makeshift blanket. Her face, covered with blood, did not look good; an ugly gash ran along her hairline. The ambulance arrived briskly and Ulla was whisked off to the County Hospital amid a loud gush of sirens and a swish of blue lights.

I had to go and make sure she was alright. Having first taken Nixon home, I caught the bus along in pursuit.

The County Hospital complex is a daunting maze of random buildings of various ages that fit into each other. At the information desk in the hospital foyer, in response to my request for information as to the whereabouts of Ulla Holmberg, I was asked for my ID. 'Sorry, I've no ID with me. I've only come to visit a patient. Bit of a rush.'

She shrugged her shoulders and pouted. 'I don't suppose it matters.' She looked English, or American. Freckles, pink cheeks, and very pretty. 'Your name please dear?'

English I deducted. 'Pedersen. Jon Pedersen.'

'Pederson.'

I noticed she had trouble with the difference between Pederson and Pedersen. Foreigners often do.

'Pedersen,' I corrected her, with the emphasis on the "sen" part.

'Yes. That's what I said dear.' She tapped her keyboard. 'Who's the patient you've come to see?'

'Ulla Holmberg. She's only just got here. By ambulance. She had a bad fall.'

She tapped the keyboard again.

'Thataway ...' She pointed down a wide indoor boulevard, up and down and across which people in whites and greens were scurrying and people in civvies were walking, shuffling and hobbling, interspersed with those slow pyjama crawlers, pushing drop frames and festooned with tubes. Standing gazing at the crowd, I noticed a good many of the hospital staff were foreign looking. I had heard that this

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ULLA HOLMBERG?

was so, but this was my first visit to a hospital, that I could remember at least, and I had not previously witnessed the phenomenon. 'Follow the yellow stripe,' she instructed. 'To the left. This side.' She shot her arm out to her left.

'Right. Thank you very much.'

'To the left. Have a nice day.'

I was aware that "have a nice day" is a standard phrase in America, and apparently, contrary to what I had learned during English lessons at school, among English people too these days, but nevertheless I found it comforting.

At the end of the boulevard I found two yellow stripes leading in opposite directions. I took the left hand stripe as directed. This was interspersed with arrows that indicated I was proceeding in the correct direction, and took me securely and safely up a long broad corridor full of harassed, darkly concentrated people moving with hurried deliberation, and then turned sharp left into a narrow corridor down which I confidently marched. It seemed very easy and no problem at all, a very efficient system of getting around, instead of giving people complicated directions.

Several other stripes had now joined the yellow stripe; a red, a green and a blue. The blue was indicating the same direction as my yellow stripe, while the red and green were pointing back the way I had come.

I reflected that this could be an interesting way to pass some time. To visit the hospital and follow one of these stripes at random, to see where it led. Like a treasure hunt.

Brushing this temptation aside I continued; my duty was to Ulla Holmberg. One by one the blue, red and green stripes led off into other corridors and I was left alone once more with the two yellow stripes.

Further on, the yellow stripe pointing back the way we had come made a sharp left, while my yellow stripe carried straight on. Not unnaturally, I found this disconcerting. With relief I realised there had to be a one-way corridor system. But why? I never did find out.

The single yellow stripe and I took another sharp left into a slightly broader corridor lined with myriad anonymous doors. Then a sharp right turn followed immediately by a right-hand fork.

We arrived, the yellow stripe and I, at a square where there were people sitting on mostly hard furnishings. The yellow stripe stopped. I walked across the square to the mouth of the opposite corridor, but there was no sign of any yellow stripe here. This then, I assumed, had to be my destination.

To the left ran a counter topped by a long glass window with two apertures. Behind each aperture sat a woman in a white coat tapping at a computer keyboard. A sign above the counter proclaimed “reception” and a smaller notice requested “please take a number and await your turn”. But there was no one standing at the counter so I knocked on the glass window beside one of the apertures and the white coated woman busy with her computer in there looked up at me and frowned. ‘Where’s your number, honey?’

American this time then. ‘I don’t have a number. I thought because no-one was standing here...’

‘You need a number, honey; you can get one from that machine there.’

‘I’ve come to visit Ulla Holmberg.’

‘The other people waiting don’t like it when you jump queues honey; that’s naughty.’

‘Just trying to make sure I’ve come to the right place.’

‘Just this once then, but don’t do it again! What’s your name honey?’

‘Jon Pedersen.’

‘Pederson. Okay honey.’ She turned back to her computer and tapped the keyboard a few times and looked back at me. She was still frowning but the nature of the frown had altered; it had become one of concern. Her voice had softened too. ‘You’re in the right place don’t worry, honey. Take a ticket and sit down over there. Help yourself to coffee. Someone will be along to fetch you.’

‘Thank you very much.’

‘No trouble. Make yourself at home. And good luck, honey! Have a nice day.’

Her unexpected and sudden affection for me warmed my heart. I felt as if I had won a prize. Clutching my number 53, I sat down in a chair beside a table piled with magazines and used plastic coffee

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO ULLA HOLMBERG?

cups and watched the display, which showed the number 47.

A man sat down on the other side of the table. 'It's a damned shame, a thing like this happening don't you think? You read about it, but you'd never dream it's going to happen to you. Gunnar Dahl. Pleased to meet you.'

'Jon Pedersen. How d'you do.'

'What number are you?'

'Fifty three.'

'Could be ages yet. Probably gone for a coffee break. I'm number forty eight.'

'But I was here before you.'

'No, you came after. I've been to the lavatory. You need to empty before going in.'

'I see.'

'You'd better do the same. They moan at you if you haven't got it all out. You've plenty of time.'

'I'm here to see someone else. Not here on my own account.'

'It's nothing to be ashamed of. It's a lot more common than you'd suppose. Although I'd say you were young to have it happen to you. It usually happens to men of a certain age.'

A doubt rose in my mind. 'Excuse me!' I called to a harried nurse carrying a clipboard.

She slid to a halt on the polished lino and turned.

'Excuse me. I just want to make sure I'm in the right place. I've come to see Ulla Holmberg.'

'What's your name darling?'

English again this time. 'Jon Pedersen.'

She was very attractive in her crisp green uniform and orthopaedic slippers. 'You're late, darlingbut that's alright, we were running a little late too. I'm sure it won't matter. Hang on just a sec.'

All this attention was extremely gratifying. It was years since I'd been bathed in such concern. I'd hardly sat back down again before she returned, in a great hurry, she was literally tripping along. 'Come along darling, your turn!'

‘Here!’ Gunnar Dahl had risen to his feet, face flushed. ‘I was here before him! I’ve got number forty eight. He’s got number fifty three.’

The nurse ignored him and shepherded me away. I was important, I was redeemed! I was above all, suddenly preferred! I was not sure why I suddenly found myself on the receiving end of such wonderful gifts, but I had no desire to break the spell.

‘Go into a cubicle and take everything off darling, except for your socks, and put on one of the white gowns and the blue foot covers. Please empty your bladder into the lavatory across the way here as completely as possible, if you have not done so already. Then knock on that door and we’ll let you in darling.’

I would put myself entirely in their hands I decided. I was feeding, I was a glutton for favouritism.

Having emptied my bladder to the best of my ability, I knocked on the door situated at the end of the corridor behind which voices could be heard. A different, larger nurse opened it. Very blond. Obviously not foreign. ‘About time too Herr Pederson! I hope you’ve emptied your bladder to the best of your ability.’ Even this admonition, I sensed, held a degree of comforting concern.

There were two of them in green overalls and a long couch with a television apparatus suspended above it with several other auxiliary appendages, one being a drop. The other nurse was the same English girl who had shown me to the changing rooms. She took my arm. ‘Lie down there please, darling. Make sure you’re comfortable, put your legs up there, push your bottom forward to the end, that’s right, well done, that’s absolutely perfect darling! Nothing to worry about, just going to give you a wash, I’m just going to put in a little local anaesthetic in here. It’s a jelly, stings a bit, but you won’t feel a thing. There’s a big boy.’

‘Ouch!’

It would have been foolish to question it. After all, these were competent, professional people. They were looking after me, treating me like a precious object. My penis felt numb, not painful. It was very comfortable and soothing lying back with my legs up in the supports, putting myself in such caring and capable hands. I drifted off to be abruptly startled by a hearty voice booming in my ear: ‘Jon Pederson! How d’you do Jon? I’m Doctor Mossberg. Let’s have a look at you shall we, you can watch on the screen if you like, some people

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like to watch, some prefer not to. I'm just going to insert this little chap in here.'

'Ouch!'

'That's it; that didn't hurt did it? Now I'm going to have a butchers.'

Best to come clean before I lost something essential. 'My name's not Pederson, it's Pedersen. I think there's ...'

'Nothing to worry about here as far as I can see.'

'There must be some mistake, my name is not Pederson, my name is Pedersen. With a "sen" " " at the end, not a "son", and I came here to visit a patient, Ulla Holmberg.'

'Nurse! This patient is supposed to be Jon Pederson.'

'It is Jon Pederson,' said the English nurse.

'It's Jon Pedersen, I'm afraid, with a "sen" at the end, not "son".'

'Can't you tell the difference between "son" and "sen"? Bloody foreigners!'

I heard the slam of the door behind him.

The English nurse fussed over me while unstrapping me and covered me with apologies. Once I was standing up she went so far as to hug me gently. The other nurse appeared to be busying herself with something in one corner of the room and had her back turned. She was ignoring us I realised, ignoring the embarrassing situation. An overwhelming gratitude welled up inside me. I would not have missed it for the world.

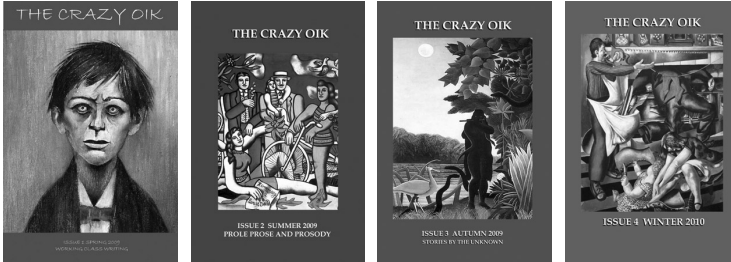
'bye darling. Have a nice day!'

I had been loved! I had been cherished! I had been paid undivided attention!

It was not until I was seated on the bus homeward bound, that it occurred to me to wonder what had happened to Ulla Holmberg.

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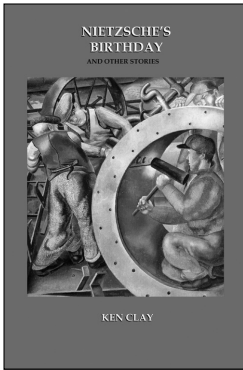
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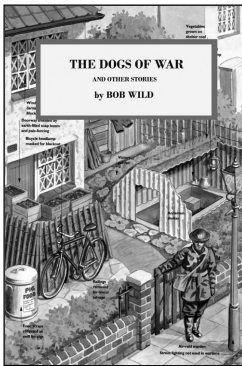
Nietzsche's Birthday – Ken Clay 140pp ISBN 978-1-4092-9536-5



When the title story appeared in *Voices* in 1977 people wrote in saying it was disgusting. Ken wondered whether to write back saying that was exactly how blokes in workshops spoke – but then decide he couldn't be arsed. This story probably ruined his chances of writing for the parish magazine. Maybe the Communist Party of Great Britain thought it was labelled too but it collapsed before a complaint could be lodged.

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

The Dogs of War – Bob Wild - 260pp ISBN 978-1445219813

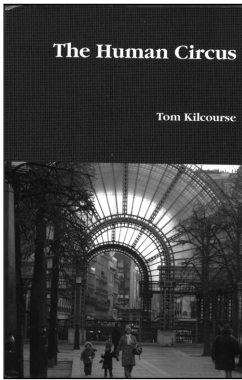


Bob Wild was born in the 30s in Prestwich Manchester. He became a printer who later went to University where he took a doctorate in Sociology. Back in printing he became Acting Head of the Printing Department at the Metropolitan University. He taught sociology at the Open University. He finished his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

Available directly from Amazon

THE CRAZY OIK – ISSUE 5

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



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

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

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A Definition From The Oxford English Dictionary

oick, oik (oik). slang.

[Etym. obscure.]

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

oikish a., unpleasant, crude;

oickman (see quot. 1925).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Are you a crazy oik? Submissions are invited by post or email to the editor at editor@crazyoik.co.uk

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