

The Society of Civil Service Authors

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Diary

PW Weekend

13th-15th July 2001

Closing Date – Bill Barnes Poetry
Competition

30th September 2001

DATA PROTECTION ACT

Members' names and addresses are held on a computer database which is used for mailing copies of the Civil Service Author.

DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in the Civil Service Author are those of the contributors and are not necessarily those of the Editor or of the Society.

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EDITORIAL

Adrian Danson

Still wearing two hats at the moment of writing, this is the time of the year when your Treasurer worries about renewals, or rather the members who have not renewed. Perhaps word has got out as to the identity of the new editor! I am sure the efforts of our new Publicity Officer will soon bring in a new lot of hopefuls, but what of the rest of us?

As an ex-engineer with modest literary skills, I have always enjoyed writing and believe this is something we have in common. We certainly differ in our subject matter and our creative skills, but perhaps also in our ambition. I take pleasure in simply creating a story, with minimal interest in publication. That is not to say that I would refuse, merely that this is not my motivation. Why then, one might ask, did I join and remain for many years a member of SCSA, now even willing to assume the editor's role?

The answer is that I take comfort from being a member of a society of writers of varying skills, comfort from reading stories in "Author", some better than mine and some worse. Each year I enter competitions; fail to win, try again and hope. Not too much though, as I try to uphold the Olympic ideal that taking part is more important than winning.

Of course we have members who have been published; members who show great ability and deserve their success; members who remain ambitious and determined to succeed, yet I believe it is our mixed ability and varying success that is the essence of our Society.

One of the most difficult features of writing is dealing with criticism. This partly relates to the critic's credibility in the eyes of the writer, partly their sympathy with your style or subject and partly accepting criticism in any event. I intend to deal with this as a specific subject at some future date when space allows, having detected a need for advice to members as well as the traditional contents. We recently introduced a panel of judges for competitions. Entries are divided into batches for each panellist. They forward the best 2 or 3 to the final judge. As each judge can be assumed to have at least a slightly different taste in topic and style, this should produce more variety. It also removes the single judge who traditionally short-listed entries for final judgement – often an onerous task

The delightful little tale from Elvira Bridges in the Spring edition uses that neat and tidy solution to dysfunctional marriage – death! I offer “Murder in Mind”, to suggest another possibility for resolving such problems.

Joan Hykin now runs an article folio, for interested members who circulate their work amongst themselves and offer critiques. Interested? Then write to Joan for details. Brian Jones has sent me an article on H G Wells that will be included when space allows.

Now I wonder if I can stir things up a bit? What do you think of crass phrases such as, “There you go” by shop assistants, never ever, listen up, really really, where the second word is clearly superfluous, or for free where the first is nonsensical? It is said that our language is rich because it is continually growing; ever changing. Can this be what they mean? Should we be “with it” and use such current abuse of English, or should we resist?

Please write to me on any of these matters, or perhaps your suggestions for improving “Author”, but please don’t take offence if your letter is not included, or if it is edited.

May I thank those members who wrote to offer their best wishes in my new role. Also to Graham Worrall and Alan Gibb, whose patient help enabled me to get the Spring issue out on time. Hopefully you are now reading the Summer issue due out on 1st June and awaiting with bated breath the Autumn issue on 1st September and Winter on 1st December. **NB** Deadline for contributions is 6 weeks before these dates.

Adrian Danson



PS “Getting too old now ...”

As treasurer I receive letters that used such a phrase. It is a reason for not renewing membership and my main concern was loss of income and need to find new members to ensure our survival. As editor I have become aware of another aspect of such thinking.

One member of a mere 83 spoke of giving up writing, another, not giving his age but implying he was older, cited not using a typewriter as reason for lack of competition entry.

Now this has got to stop!

I bowl with men who served in World War I, who are undoubtedly fortunate to have the ability to still enjoy such physical activity, and I so enjoy listening to their experiences.

Roy Froud sponsored an autobiography competition last year and once again this topic proved popular, but what of our memories of a particular day in the distant past. It may, or may not be, part of an autobiography – I suspect many are reluctant to expose personal matters to public view – but memories of the distant past can fascinate we youngsters. In this issue “Animals Do Talk” by Vivian Edwards, is an example of what I mean.

To help those who are finding it difficult to write, whether from lack of typewriter, or physical handicap, would anyone willing to convert a cassette tape, or hand-written work into typed form, please contact me. On the assumption that we have members who would be kind enough to help in this way, let’s have no more talk of being too old.

For younger members who resign because they are too busy, I suggest that £15 p.a. is not a lot to remain in touch until you can spare some time again – during your holiday perhaps?

For those who say they do not get what they need from membership – tell us what that is and we will see if we can help, e.g. we can publish the question and invite members to comment.



OBITUARY

VICTOR NEGUS MOORE

Alan S Watts

For many years Victor Negus Moore was the Vice-Chairman of our Society, and it is with great regret that I have to record his passing in December 2000. It is very sad that none of us knew him very well. He was a private person who said very little about his career or his connections. One has to gather hints from his poetry to build up a picture of his life, but it is a very fragmented picture. One little hint which I find very touching is

from a poem he published in FOCUS 1995 entitled: 'A Day on the Wensum'. Describing a little girl in a boat, he wrote:

She leaned over the side,
leaving only legs and behind
which I grasped tightly
as any anxious father.

But as to his official career, I know nothing. I gather he was in the Overseas Development Agency and that he held a senior position. Perhaps his poem on 'Locusts' was inspired by the work he had been engaged upon. But the important thing about him was that he was an excellent poet. He knew all about poetry, the purpose of poetry, the technical side of poetry, and its inherent difficulties, and he possessed the imagination to fill out his technical skill and produce works in the modern idiom which were at once beautiful and deeply satisfying intellectually. It was not really surprising that he should bring off the first, second and third prizes in the Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition of 1999. But then, he had taken many prizes in many competitions over the years, as well as publishing poems in a variety of journals.

I had several long talks with him about poetry, and I recall he brought me a number of recent publications to give me an idea of how poetry was developing and what editors were wanting. I enjoyed these talks. He had a very broad knowledge and could quote not only the old masters but many of the newer ones, relishing their love for words, the cadences in their lines.

Of late years he found it increasingly difficult to get about. He was crippled not only in his hands but in his legs and needed help to attend meetings. It was very brave of him even to attempt to do so but he enjoyed his membership of the Society and the warm fellowship of its functions. He was extremely generous, and I know I am not alone in being the recipient of his gifts and hospitality. It was therefore very sad that he should have been living alone when he suffered his last illness, and that none of us knew he was in hospital, nor did we learn of his death until some time after it had occurred.



LETTERS

It was sad to read of the death of Victor D. Negus Moore. So many of us will miss him.

In 1992 his description of a dilapidated house called 'Nuestra Casa de las Flores' first inspired me to write a short story. Later he found time to encourage and advise on prose and poetry writing, in an interesting and knowledgeable way.

Memorably, and in his words, his message to all of us was, 'Go to it' and 'Keep your talent honed'.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Ferris (Mrs)

I would like to express my delight at Bernard Stanley's article "If A Picture Paints A Thousand Words" (p 9, No. 153). I have often stressed the importance of the graphic arts to the freelance journalist and photography in this context is the most important.

Yours sincerely

Gordon E Gompers

STOP PRESS

Surely there is someone willing to help me by taking over the treasurer's duties. Any member with a few hours to spare will do, and ladies don't think it is a male job. Just a few trips to the bank, noting where the money came from, making out a few cheques and noting to whom they were payable. Please will someone help soon?

Sadly our membership numbers are lower than they have been for many years, but we should just about survive the year. Our publicity officer is doing his best and so is Roy Froud. He sponsored an autobiography competition last year in memory of his parents and has generously offered to sponsor another competition this year.

Details will be in our next issue. In case you want to make a start, this popular subject is being repeated, but only to the extent of remembering a single incident. In my case it is the day I murdered Sir Geoffrey Boycott,

but wait that was only a dream – actually I think it can be fact or fiction, so tough luck Sir Geoff!

So there you are. You don't need to send your literary gems to the magazines to make oodles of dosh (sorry Gordon) you win it from another SCSA competition, so get cracking!

Our poet members are currently showing signs of modesty by not sending their work to Joyce Thornton, for publication in “Author”. Your work is an essential part of “Author”, so please let Joyce have a little more of it as soon as possible.

MARKET INFORMATION

What A Nice Surprise!

By Gordon E. Gompers

The presentation at the new year's party of a special prize for my “support over the years and particularly for my regular helpful column” touched me greatly.

This presentation meant that some of our readers are happy with this column but some of the credit should go to Iain McIntyre. He allowed this column.

The Boys (And Girls) Of The Old Brigade.

It is a generally conceded point that our society needs to attract youth. In fact I know no member who disputes this. Of course, we just need members regardless of age but let us admit that the old codgers do a wonderful job.

At present our backbone is much boosted by quite a contingent of retirees. An organisation that has shown much interest in ours is The Civil Service Retirement Fellowship. I have mentioned our society in my talks to the various branches and have distributed our literature. At one of our annual lunches an elderly couple came up to me and said that they had joined our society as a result of one of my talks.

Of course, I might not be much of a good example of a representative of the old boys' brigade but fortunately there are a lot better. Alas, we have lost the cream in such stalwarts as John Ward, Victor Negus Moore and Bill Barnes but there are others still with us.

When I retired from the Inner London Magistrates' Courts service at my presentation I referred to my retirement as entering a kingdom because I could choose my work. I quoted W. H. Davies:

“The power to choose the work we love
Makes every man a king.”

To enable my fellow monarchs to put their knowledge of retirement to good use here are some relevant markets.

ACTIVE LIFE

Lexicon Editorial Group
1st Floor,
1-5, Clerkenwell Road,
LONDON, EC1M 5PA.

Lifestyle advice for the over fifties. Subjects: general. Submit ideas in writing. Length 600-1,200 words. Illustrations: colour. Dosh: good.

This is a freebie and can be picked up at most post offices. While freebies can be a bit dodgy this one's credentials seem impeccable. Not that I have ever had any luck with it myself but that could only mean that they are a bit choosy.

MATURE TIMES

M/s. Mature Times, Ltd.,
The Wharf,
121, Schooner Way,
Cardiff, CF10 5EQ.

Lifestyle advice for the over fifties. Best send a letter of enquiry before submitting.

THE OLDIE

45-46 Poland Street,
LONDON, W1V 4AU.

General interest magazine reflecting attitude of older people but aimed at wider audience. Dosh good.

SAGA MAGAZINE

The Saga Building,
Middleburg Square,
Folkestone,
Kent, CT20 1AZ.

Articles relevant of interests of 50-plus. Mostly commissioned or written in-house but genuine inclusives always welcome. Length 1,200-1,600. Illustrations colour transparencies. Remember my advice in previous issue (No. 153) to send these in a jiffy bag. Dosh: reasonable.

YOURS

Apex House,
Oundle Road,
Peterborough, PE2 9NP.

Of interest to the over 60s age group, including nostalgia and short stories. This is not a freebie but if you do not wish to pay the price, and at £1 monthly I do not blame you, it can be studied at most reference libraries. Payment at the editor's discretion.

Just a little something for you all to mull over. *Willings Press Guide* (Home and Overseas volumes) lists reputedly some 20,000 publications. Most need freelance work so there is no reason why any of my readers should go unpublished!



Many members will have seen copies of World Wide Writers competition winners published by Writers International, but they also now publish Writers' Forum. Any member who would like a complimentary copy should send a 12" x 9" (C4) s.a.e. to Writers International Ltd., PO Box 3229, Bournemouth, BH1 1ZS]

POETRY WORKSHOP PAGE

by Mike Boland

Chairman: Liz Rowlands, 19 Arkley Court, Maidenhead, SL6 2YR

Treasurer: Terry Rickson, 48 Marlborough Road, Ashford, TW15 3QA

Secretary: Mike Boland, 11 Boxtree Lane, Harrow Weald, HA3 6JU

Spring Newsletter

The Spring Newsletter, which is out now, contains details of the 2001 Bill Barnes Poetry Competition, Waves 2001, an update of the Focus booklets series and the last call for the PW Weekend. It also contains an article on the Victorian poet Christina Rossetti by Roger de Boer, taken from a talk he gave at last years PW Weekend.

AGM

As usual, the Annual General Meeting of the Poetry Workshop will take place during the Birmingham Weekend. Details of this are given in the Spring Newsletter. A full report of the AGM will appear in the Autumn Newsletter, due out on 30 September.

Membership News

The Spring Newsletter will be the last one members who have not renewed for 2001 will receive, so if you have yet to renew make sure you get your cheques/POs to Terry as soon as possible.

The associated membership scheme has seen only six people take up the option, including two new members and some we would otherwise have lost, so it has not undermined Society membership as was feared in some quarters.

Subscription

Subscription fees for 2001 are £3 for Society members. This gives you:

- three lively Newsletters each year, hopefully expanding to four this year
- the chance of publication in Waves
- access to the popular Postal Folio scheme
- eligibility for the Bill Barnes Poetry Competition
- eligibility for the annual PW Weekend at the University of Birmingham

If anyone is interested in joining the Poetry Workshop, please contact Mike Boland, at the above address, who will be pleased to provide further details.

Poetry Workshop Dates

13-15 July 2001 PW Weekend

30 September 2001 Autumn Newsletter

30 September 2001 Closing Date – Bill Barnes Poetry Competition

30 November 2001 Winter Newsletter

Urgent Notice

A new Publicity Officer is urgently required, preferably a serving member of our Society as contacts with other Ministries, Agencies, etc., is more easily effected by someone who is still working. This is not an onerous task, but it is critical to our survival. Please contact editor for details.

Bernard Stanley, our Publicity Officer for the past 2 years, is currently suffering from back problems that require surgery. He will be out of action for several months and I am sure every one will join me in offering our thanks for the work he has done for us and to wish him a speedy recovery.

To ensure some publicity is effected whilst we find a replacement for Bernard and they get organised. Will members who would be willing to take a poster to their local library please contact me urgently by e-mail or post. (Details on page 1)

Adrian Danson (Ed)

Residue Man

Rising from my bed
The lazy dent remained
Ever comotose

Adrian Sharpe

POETRY PAGES
Edited by Joyce Thornton

JESSIE FLEMING
by Bill Torrie Douglas

January eighteen seventy-four,
Robert Louis was twenty-three,
Disraeli was prime minister
and my great grandmother got married.
She was a farm-girl of nineteen.
He was a twenty-one year old coal-miner.
The certificate tells a story;
Jessie Fleming, her mark,
written alongside the 'x'.
They needed four witnesses,
two for the marriage,
two for her mark.
She mothered ten children,
who knows how many they engendered
in succeeding years.

I remember her,
a wiry old biddy
with a mutch on her head,
observant eyes,
skin creased and yellowing.
She lived into her hundredth year,
nearly saw mankind in space.
I doubt if she could ever write.

WINTER TWILIGHT
by Bill Torrie Douglas

A heron statuesque,
vapour trailing into the western dusk,
lonely star high on smoky blue,
and the moon a shining penny
in an aspic of frost;
landscape by an unknown artist.

SEASONS FOUR
by Terence Rickson

When Spring comes,
we pick the bones of Winter
off the lawn,
denying the scavengers.

A moon bathed rose
in creamy showers,
the mossy wall
streams scented down.

The year, musing in contentment
upon Spring's promise
and Summer's abundance,
amply fulfilled in a rich harvest.

In storms and hail Old Winter comes
and wipes a mirthful eye,
a holly bough in hand he bears
to Christmas revels in the hall.

CATS IN THE NIGHT
by Bill Torrie Douglas

Cats crying in the night,
like the sound of babies abandoned
to the spirits of the darkness. They cry
for something that is out of reach,
fountain of innocence,
source of truth,
the last pillar of wisdom.

Cats know the secrets of night
and continually wonder why

we cannot see in the dark.

MURDER IN MIND

Adrian Danson

I don't know why women ever get married,' said Harry's mother. 'It's work, work, work and where's the gratitude, where's the thanks for slaving over a hot stove every day?' she added as she dished out the salad.

'Thank you dear,' replied Bert, as he said to most of his wife's utterances.

'Washing, cleaning, ironing, there's no end to it,' she continued.

'You're right dear and we're very grateful, aren't we Harry?'

'Yes Dad. Thanks Mum,' responded Harry, for whom these regular exchanges had a lasting effect upon his attitude to women. He accepted that peace at home depended upon agreement between husband and wife and that the latter's opinion always prevailed.

On growing up and daring to propose marriage to the very pretty Doris, he was somewhat surprised when she accepted, but was mentally prepared for the consequence.

His mother's words at his wedding only reinforced his beliefs.

'You're a very brave woman, taking on my only child,' she said to Doris. 'Don't expect any appreciation mind,' she added, whilst Doris smiled a knowing smile and Harry wondered what being an only child had to do with it.

Doris too was an only child, but Doris had been pampered; Doris had been used to having her way and Harry's place in her life was to do as he was told. 'Yes dear and no dear,' was usually the limit of his conversation at home. Each Saturday evening Harry was allowed to go with his cousin George to the local Pub and mix with other, 'Lazy, good for nothing men'. But Doris also allowed him one other relief. Once he had completed his chores to her satisfaction, he was allowed to visit his 6-foot by 8-foot garden shed to play with the woodwork tools acquired from car-boot sales over the years.

Into this refuge he carried some old floorboards cousin George had acquired from a derelict house. He began sawing and planing with considerable enthusiasm.

'You're always out there,' said Doris, ignoring the fact that he was washing the dishes when she made her comment.

'Heaven alone knows what you're up to,' she added.

'Yes dear,' he replied, knowing that anything more complicated was likely to lead to a torrent of abuse about something entirely different.

Naturally she did her best to find out, inspecting his work every day when he was at the office, was mystified by what she saw but wouldn't give him the pleasure of asking what he was making. She invited her friends to have a look, but they proved no wiser.

At night Harry began to apply depilatory cream to Doris's hairline. Gently, to avoid waking her. So gently that she smiled in her sleep, her usual stern expression and creased brow disappeared. She looked as lovely as on the day Harry had proposed.

Then there was the arsenic, at least that's what the label on the bottle stated and the skull and cross-bones reinforced the message. Stored at the back of the cupboard in Harry's shed and well hidden, it inevitably attracted her prompt but puzzled attention.

The woodwork continued and clamps were applied to some of the boards, which he then wrapped in some old towels and doused with boiling water. The resulting bend in the boards proved a good fit for the base he had shaped with his plane. Once he had screwed them to each side she began to see daylight. 'The silly fool's making a boat and thinks he can sail away for a year and a day, I'll bet,' she sniggered.

She found a drill and was about to make holes in Harry's boat when she stopped and smiled an evil smile. 'No,' she muttered. 'Why not let the fool drown. After all, how far could he get in a boat that size? Straight to the bottom as soon as the first wave hits him,' she chortled. 'And he can't even swim, now that's real sad,' she chortled again.

Then Harry fitted brass handles and she began to have doubts. Finding the arsenic bottle nearly empty, she thought of the amount of hair she had been losing lately. Recalling that hair loss was a symptom of arsenic poisoning, she began to go weak at the knees.

'Well! I never thought he had it in him. Would you believe it?' she asked herself.

Harry certainly couldn't believe it when he got home that night and was greeted with a kiss and the best meal he'd had in years.

Life was pretty good for Harry after that and he took Doris to Torquay, spending the money the Amateur Dramatics gave him for making the coffin for their production of Dracula, when he used up the last of the French polish he had kept in an old arsenic bottle.

'You were right about that hair remover George,' Harry said when they met in the local Pub on his return. 'Worked like a charm. Some sort of migraine you reckon she had eh? And that stuff gets rid of it?'

'That's what the letter in the newspaper said,' replied George. 'Being April 1st I never believed a word of it, but since you reckon it works I think I'll try it on my Hilda.'

PLACES FOR PLEASURE

Alan S Watts

The other evening I sadly reflected how many of the things I had industriously learnt, I had now forgotten. Geography, for example – all that stuff about isobars and rainfall, watersheds and contours, torrid zones and temperate zones – I can't remember a thing.

Yet despite this, I am full of geographical information. None of it was gained in the classroom. None of it came the hard way by nights of swotting. Every bit of it was impressed on my mind, indelibly, by Auntie Clara.

Auntie Clara was an inveterate collector of useless knowledge. Geography was her chosen field. She would challenge us children to little contests such as writing down the names of all the monarchies we could think of, or of rivers whose names began with the letter 'L'.

Once, we had to compile the most original alphabet of cities – Adelaide, Brussels, Cairo, etc., and I well remember she disqualified my Zion City, despite my fervent protests.

We spent many a happy evening scribbling away for her, listing the forty-eight United States (as they then totalled), and scratching our heads to try and remember another cape or headland on the east coast of Great Britain.

Auntie Clara was fascinated by changes of place-name – Byzantium, Van Diemen's Land, New Amsterdam – and would have revelled in the widespread alterations made by the Russians after the denunciation of Stalin.

This reminds me of the times we searched the map (at her instigation, of course) for Edinburghshire and Haddingtonshire. She also had other quaint counties up her sleeve (we never found them anywhere else) – Hallamshire and Howdenshire – which gave her endless pleasure.

The status of the Channel Islands was another subject she loved. Mention the Norman Conquest and she would bring in Alderney, Jersey, Guernsey, and Sark – not to forget Brechou, Little Sark, Herm, Jethou, and Lihou, which not being well-known were her special favourites.

“The remnants of the Duchy of Normandy,” she would say. “Don't think that England owns the Channel Islands. They own us.”

Another delight of hers was to ask for the names of the fourteen original Thirteen States of America. We were told time after time that Virginia had been divided after the Civil War, but Auntie Clara always thought the information was new.

The anomalous position of Berwick-on-Tweed was explained to us again and again. Whenever the subject came up we were treated to a garbled history of the Border which would have astounded Sir Walter Scott.

“So you see,” Auntie would conclude, “one day Berwick would be in Scotland, and on the next it would be back in England again. Even now, nobody quite knows whether it’s an English or a Scottish town.”

“But isn’t it in Berwickshire?” we would ask dutifully.

“Oddly enough,” Auntie would say in triumph, “it isn’t.”

(A reference book tells me that until 1885 it was a neutral town. In that year it was officially placed in the county of Northumberland.)

The ramifications of Auntie’s knowledge were wide and various, otherwise I am sure I would never have known that Southern Ireland is more northerly than Northern Ireland, that Bombay and Tangier were part of Catherine of Braganza’s dowry, that Dunkirk – not Calais – was the last English possession in France, that Gibraltar is one of the two upright strokes in the dollar sign, and a host of other items of doubtful interest.

Isn’t it odd that practically everything my geography teacher strove to teach me has gone, yet all the bric-a-brac with which Auntie Clara filled my head is still there.

By the way, do you know that Mousehole has the most westerly east-facing beach in England, and that Holyhead is not on the island of Anglesey?

Note:

Edinburghshire and Haddingtonshire are the old names for Midlothian and East Lothian respectively. Hallamshire is the district around Sheffield, and Howdenshire is the district around Goole.

ANIMALS DO TALK

Vivian Edwards

It was over fifty years, yet my memory remains evergreen. My sweetheart and I, both medical students, had just become engaged. A common bond between us was our love of animals. “One day,” my beloved would say longingly, “a dog will become part of our family life.” We celebrated our engagement by spending time together on the Downs at Eastbourne, overlooking the sea. It was a glorious day.

The jagged teeth of the cliffs towering above the waves, the wild blackberries, the scampering rabbits, their white scuts gleaming in the sun; and overhead seagulls swooping and diving in play. It was all far away from the stresses and strains of hospital life. For us both, it was like heaven on earth. We were in love with life; feeling at one with each other, and with creation.

Suddenly the peace was broken. The sound of horns shattered the silence. The baying of dogs drew nearer, fearfully frightening. Huntsmen and gleaming muscled horses filled our horizon. The dogs drew nearer. We both stood stock still, ours eyes fixed upon the panting body of a young fox. Golden brown eyes looked into mine. Reddish fur was upright. Fashionable all those years back were long full dirndl skirts almost sweeping the ground. I wore mine with pride. It made me feel very feminine.

The eyes of our fox looked haunted. Then the miracle happened. A kind of language, unspoken but deeply felt, passed between him and ourselves. Unhesitatingly he tucked himself beneath my skirts, out of sight. I felt his warmth. We stood there, gazing silently at the puzzled hounds eyeing us first from afar, then from a short distance. Baffled, the huntsmen gazed around and stared at us. My beloved kept his arms protectively around my shoulders. I was not afraid, convinced that the scent from my body had confused the hounds. Finally the hunt withdrew. It still seemed like a miracle. We assured the fox that he was free; free to go; free to love life.

I will never forget that fox; the look of love he gave us both; two humans; ones perhaps he considered his natural enemies. We watched his bushy tail disappear into the undergrowth. We knew we would never see him again, yet he remained in our thoughts, and coloured our lives.

We married, and in time were blessed with two children, a boy and a girl. We all loved our labrador bitch. She was kind and loving, and would never harm any animal, however small and defenceless. Our fox was never forgotten. We assured our children that he could only become wiser and fleet of foot. We know that the story of his amazing escape will be passed on from generation to generation.

H. G. WELLS IN THE 21st CENTURY

Brian Jones

We are now living in the new Millennium, at the threshold of the 21st Century. The last century saw appalling violence and upheavals, incomparable achievements in science and industry. What does the future hold for mankind? A world famous author traversed the future several times and reported in great detail, about what he saw and experienced. The writer was of course H. G. Wells, and it is of great interest now to study his prophecies, which were disturbingly accurate, sometimes hopelessly at odds with contemporary history.

Wells described the 21st century in a novel “The Shape of Things To Come” written 1932-33 also in the film version “Things To Come”.

No British film of the 1930’s affected public opinion, at home and abroad, as much as Alexander Korda’s epic “Things To Come”. It is not an exaggeration to say that it influenced the foreign policy of Chamberlain and Hitler before and during the Second World War. Although not a success at the box office because of its very high budget, it was a production that deeply disturbed British audiences and gave them a gloomy foreboding that mankind was heading directly towards the cataclysm of another terrible world conflict.

To modern audiences, though some of the acting and dialogue and scientific predictions now seem quaint and dated, we can still be enthralled by the massive sets which rival Fritz Lang’s “Metropolis” and the more recent “Bladerunner”, the huge crowd scenes and general epic scale of the film.

Wells was already a world famous celebrity and author before he wrote the original book, which failed to make many stirs in the literary world. He had already written several classic futuristic novels, including “The Time Machine”, “In The Days of The Comet”, “The World Set Free”, “The Sleeper Awakes”. Critics described “The Shape of Things To Come” as an example of the ageing Wells in decline. The excitement and wonder had gone.

All of Wells’s futuristic works have broadly the same plot. There is a world war, or some other global catastrophe, which more or less, destroys civilisation. These horrors create a radical change in human psychology, with a universal brotherhood of man. The huge work of reconstruction is

undertaken by a world congress, which creates a single world state. The congress abolishes all parliaments in every country. Then it introduces one single currency for all former sovereign states, one single world language (which should for the convenience of most people be English), abolishes sovereign banks and stock exchanges and reforms law, agriculture, housing and industry. The congress, after a short period of dictatorship, gradually reduces its own powers to nil. Then follows a golden future for mankind, completely free of poverty, superstitions and class distinctions. A world without strife or famine, no nation is noticeably richer than another.

This simplistic and highly optimistic scenario is also the plot of “The Shape of Things to Come” it purports to be a reprint of a manuscript written by the now deceased Dr. Philip Raven. A manuscript dictated to him in his dreams over a period of several years, a “Short history of the future”. A world war rages from 1940-50, exhausting the western powers and bringing in its wake famine, plague and ecological disaster.

In 1968 central London collapses into the Thames; America, which never recovered from the terrible slump of the early 1930’s falls apart into a multitude of states when no acceptable heir of George III can be traced. Over all the threat of new war still hangs, until the scientific elite, meet in Basra, in the Middle East, to plan a ‘new world’ order.

“The Shape of Things to Come” is still a good read, but it is pseudo history rather than conventional fiction, with all too few realised characters and human relationships.

After the world war, which Wells calls the Great War Cyclone the new world council, also known as the Air Dictatorship, begins to reform the under developed regions of the earth. In the words of Wells “from the year 2006 onwards the government sets itself to ‘tidy up’ the still half-barbaric peasant populations of Haiti, Ireland, Africa, South Italy, American Georgia, Eastern Bengal, regions where traditional superstitions, secret societies, magic cults or sacrificial practices showed an obstinate persistence. There was definite hunt for medicine men, sorcerers, priests, religious teachers, and organisers of sedition; they would be fined or exiled.”

Wells is completely dismissive and hostile to all organised religion. He writes – “The Old Catholic Church, it seems it was still in existence in these days, the last surviving Christian organisation, but it was greatly

impoverished, and it had suffered severely from schisms. There was a Pope in Dublin and another in Rome and a coloured Pope in Pernambuco.’

Of Ireland Wells wrote, ‘Ireland was the last stronghold of Christianity. The Dictatorship found itself fighting one of the most difficult battles for power with this tenacious people. The Irish came out in revolt all over the world.’

Wells also depicts the total extinction of Islamic religion. He is completely unsympathetic towards the formation of a Jewish Free State and urged all Jews to forget their special identity and try to assimilate themselves into their native countries.

Here, Wells was writing fairy tales. He was remarkably accurate in predicting the date of the Second World War, 1940; spot on if one discounts the “Phoney War” of 1939. He was also very accurate in predicting the participants of this ghastly conflict but, logically perhaps, depicts Britain as strictly neutral in 1940 and greatly exaggerates the military capabilities of Poland and France who try to invade Germany in 1940, the exact reverse of what actually happened in 1939 and 1940.

On the lighter note Wells has some intriguing things to say about dress in the 21st Century, where buttons are obsolete and zips fasten everything.

‘Nowadays the average life of our much simpler and brighter outer garments is about a week, and such light undergarments as we wear last about three days. We wear less clothing than our ancestors, partly because of healthier conditions, partly because we do not like to hide our lovely bodies.’

When three years after publication, Alexander Korda began the production of the film version, under simpler title ‘Things to Come’, Wells, himself wrote the screen play.

It was made under conditions of great secrecy at Worton Hall Studios, Isleworth and Denham, Middlesex.

The stars were Raymond Massey, Edward Chapman, Ralph Richardson, Cedric Hardwick and Margaretta Scott. The grandiose soundtrack by Arthur Bliss.

The final version describes three periods of civilisation in the metropolis ‘Everytown’. In every period we witness the struggle between progress and reaction. There is the symbolic character Passworthy, who learns that war is futile and the march of science inevitable. On Christmas Eve 1940

the world is plunged into a thirty-year war which decimates Everytown. From 1950 to 1970, a terrible plague rages, civilisation is replaced by tribal communities run by tribal chiefs. Into this chaos comes John Cabal and his followers who gradually rebuild Everytown into scientific Utopia. By 2036, against great opposition, the scientist-leaders have built a space rocket and send the first couple to the Moon. After the launch, Oswald Cabal, John Cabal's descendant, ponders with Raymond Passworthy, the choice left to mankind. 'The entire Universe or nothingness? Which shall it be, Passworthy? Which shall it be?'

Raymond Massey played John and Oswald Cabal. In his autobiography he wrote "‘Things to Come’, was a difficult job for all of us. We were always the puppets of Wells, completely under his control.’ About the costumes he said ‘in the unusually balmy autumn months of 1935 I spent my working hours in heavy woollen tights, with a papier-mâché breast plate and a huge Formica bubble or headpiece. Following this discomfort we faced 1935-36 the most savage winter, during which we wore abbreviated skirts and Tudor-like doublets of foam rubber and pleated buckram. For six months my legs, bare and knock-kneed were photographed for posterity on unheated stages and freezing locations.’

Korda's film predicted the mini-skirt, but not only for females but men also!

In 1940 scenes were treated as contemporary with 1930's London serving as the model for Everytown. The realistic bombing of the city and the grim battle scenes were achieved by the use of miniatures, photographic superimpositions, and back projection. The 1940 set, London in ruins, was very striking with horse drawn cars and Londoners dressed like cave men. The machinery used for rebuilding Everytown, which appeared so gigantic on the screen, were all miniatures. The mammoth rocket launch was also a miniature.

In 2036 Everytown has been rebuilt – it is light and open and terraced, lying under the green hill above. Vincent Korda with the help of the director William Cameron Menzies and Wells created the world of the 21st Century. A world of spacious rooms, tubular glass lights, Monorails, immense apartment blocks, helicopters, huge television screens and space ships. The mini-skirted, unisex costumes of the 21st century, were designed by John Armstrong and Rene Hubert.

‘Thing To Come’ opened in London to rave reviews. The critic of ‘The Sunday Times’ wrote – ‘A leviathan among films – stupendous spectacle – staggering to eye, mind and spirit, the like of which has never been seen and never will be seen again.’

The film failed in the United States, where, as one distributor complained, ‘nobody is going to believe that the world is going to be saved by a bunch of people with British accents’. Americans were dismayed to discover that, after all, they were not to dominate the 21st Century and Britain, not America, would be the first to land on the Moon!

The appeasers of Hitler and Mussolini took the scenes of London ruins as an accurate portrayal of what would happen if the Luftwaffe attacked the capital. Also it sustained the belief of the Air Ministry and Churchill in the efficacy of heavy bombing. It contributed to the idea that heavy bombing would destroy civilisation. (At the beginning of the Second World War British official estimates of civilian casualties and damage to buildings were wildly exaggerated.)

Hitler was very impressed with the film and Neville Chamberlain thought it a powerful argument for peace.

As for ordinary filmgoer many found it cold and inhumane, a picture where characters make speeches rather than engage in everyday conversation. It has one very moving scene – the child rescued by a gas attack, Raymond Massey takes a gas mask from a dead airman in the rubble of bombed out London.

In spite of its obvious faults the Korda/Wells production ‘Things To Come’ was one of the most striking and memorable conceived in the 1930’s and one that advanced the British film industry to even greater heights.



High Queue

Four hundred on top
Of Everest stood waiting
To plant their banner

Adrian Sharpe

SITTING ON THE FENCE

Scoop Gutterpretz

They say nothing changes and I'll vouch for that. I've been scribbling for the same old local rag over thirty years. It's only a free paper now, but it was a proper paper when I joined it and I still remember one particular day back in 1960.

It was Monday and the politicians had let us down. Nothing of local interest from Westminster and the local talk shop had done no better, no strikes, major accidents or hospital cases involving the famous or infamous. Nothing for the front page and the paper had to be put to bed in another thirty-six hours.

'Tell you what,' said Shorty Barker, who was Editor then. 'Why not try outside the manor. Long as you stick to London I'm sure our readers would be interested.'

That's how I came to be across the Thames. I tried to talk to people in the street and got nowhere. Everyone seemed in a rush, like shoppers on opening day of Harrod's sale. I made my feet sore tramping granite cobbles, past St Pauls, Tower Hill and into the docks. I went for a pie and pint on the Isle of Dogs. Solace for a throat dried by futile questions. I was alone in the bar except for the Landlord who kept going on about somebody I had never heard of, but I listened anyway. I couldn't do any worse than I'd done so far that day.

'Sid Devereaux always sailed close to the wind. It were nothing short of a miracle he didn't spend his whole life in gaol. Six years in the Scrubbs for blowing a Bank's were enough to keep him clean the rest of his natural, or so he kept telling everybody here at the Crown and there's some as might have swallowed it.

Thing about the Crown is it's close by the foot tunnel from the Island to Greenwich. Handy for getting away from them geezers what likes cars with noisy bells, but them wireless's was getting a sight more reliable and the tunnel weren't what it used to be. If Sid had twigged that he might have stayed clean like he boasted, long as you understand clean means he weren't nabbed Don't mean he weren't doin' nothing. Perish the thought!'

Another customer came in to the riverside Pub and interrupted the Landlord's tale, but only to buy a packet of Craven 'A' cigarettes, then we were alone again.

'Now where was we?'

'You were telling me all about the man who ran this Pub before you,' I said.

‘Well not all. I mean nobody knows all, do they? Well they might think they do,’ he continued without waiting for my answer. ‘I mean that's the point about Sid really. People thought they knowed him and it weren't 'til after he been arrested they found out the truth, even then nobody was sure if it was the whole truth, not even them as went to Court every day.

I were working for Sid then. Had been for about a year and with him being in Court like, I had to stay here. I mean somebody's got to keep things going ain't they? Anyhow the Brewers said they was grateful, then they give me the job permanent and I been here ever since. Nigh on ten year. Gordon Bennett! I just thought. If Sid gets full remission for good behaviour he could be out any day now, but if he thinks he's taking over the Crown again, then he's got another think coming.’

‘Do you think the Brewers would offer it to him? Given that he's done two stretches now, I doubt that he could get a license. In fact I'm a bit surprised that the Magistrate gave him a license the last time.’

‘Oh they're quite reasonable, so long as the 'Old Bill' don't raise no objections. Anyway, most of our customers have done time. No offence Guv!’

‘Oh none taken I assure you. There but for the grace of God and all that jazz. Quite a few of my mates, weren't so lucky.’

I wished I hadn't said that. It was a clear opening for him to question me. Anytime now he's going to ask what I do for a living, I thought. If I admit I write for a local rag, he'll know I'm sniffing about for a story and he'll dry up.

I didn't have to lie as he didn't ask. He was too keen to tell his story about Sid. He probably bored his regulars to death telling them the yarn over and over. Anyway he was back where he left off, like a needle dropping into the groove of a Jukebox record.

‘Course they knew ‘e done it, but they never found the loot and ‘e never told ‘em nothing. CID was buzzin' round him like bluebottles round a jam pot.’

The memory made him laugh so much that I joined in. I couldn't see the joke but he was like Gilbert and Sullivan's laughing Policeman, his laughter was contagious.

‘Can I get you another?’ He asked, when we eventually stopped, as if expecting me to pay for my entertainment.

‘Not just at the moment, but let me get you something.’

He accepted the price of a pint, topped up his glass by about a third and returned to the story.

‘Best part of a year they followed him around. Anybody talked to him got the third degree. They kept hanging round the bar standing him drinks, like they was trying to get him drunk so as he might let something might slip. No bleedin' chance, but it kept our regulars away and that give us a bit of bother with the Brewers, 'fore they complained the police was harassin' their tenant and then we got back to normal, or so I thought.

I got to admire him when I thinks about it. I mean, got to admire him getting away with it all them years and nobody knowing. Well some must of done that's obvious, but I didn't, his Missis didn't, his brother-in-law Jack Bishop didn't and I could name a lot more as might of knowed but didn't.’

‘Sorry, I don't follow you. What didn't you know?’

‘About him launderin' Ginger's money. Ginger, the biggest fence in the East-end. Ginger didn't want to, mind. He hated Sid's guts in fact, but Sid got something on him and Ginger got to toe the line or else, and ‘or else’ won every round bar the last.

I told you about the foot tunnel and in a minute I'll tell you how Sid got caught in it. Ginger would of done a stretch as well, if he hadn't grassed Sid up. There's some still can't believe Ginger done such a thing, seeing as how he was East Ferry born, but they never seen him suffering all them years like what I did, doing whatever Sid told him and burning up inside all the while. Wonder he didn't do for Sid long before, but I suppose that's because Sid was just too clever for him and he got to like it or lump it.’

‘Did you ever find out what Sid had on Ginger and what Ginger was doing for Sid?’ I asked in frustration at this lack of detail. I couldn't see what the Sid had done to make him so admired, still less why the allegedly important trader in stolen goods should have been under his control.

‘Well, you remember I told you they never recovered the money from Sid's bank job?’

‘Yes,’ I said, in a voice more patient than I felt.

‘Well it was used notes, all except some bundles of new fivers what Sid posted to the CID bloke's homes. Nigh on laughed his self to death, readin' them newspaper stories about their wives getting arrested trying to spend the robbery money. At least half a dozen got done before they twigged.

Anyway Sid gives Ginger the rest, all the used notes, so as he could use it to buy hot money, you know stuff what they can trace. Sid and Ginger was tight bastards only give two bob in the pound and took their time laundering it all round town. Bookies, down the market, crashed cars for cash then floggin' 'em cheap for clean money. You name it they was into it 'til all the hot stuff was

gone and they got a nice little bundle. Bought a couple of second-hand car sites and a row of Stepney lock-ups.

Ginger put sixty per cent in his name and forty in Sid's. That were the first and last time Ginger were ever in partnership, but he didn't know then that writing down all them details in his own fair hand was so bleedin' dangerous. Course if Sid hadn't somehow got hands on them bits of paper, or if Sid hadn't got a microphone under the table taping every word of their plan and where they got their money, maybe things wouldn't have turned out like they did. See that's how he made Ginger his accomplice. What briefs call after the fact of the bank job and before the fact of his spending the money what he stole. He was settin' Ginger up right from the start. Real crafty blighter our Sid.'

'But Sid couldn't harm Ginger without harming himself, so what did Ginger have to be worried about?' I asked.

'You don't know Sid. He would have done time if that's what it took to convince Ginger. Ginger had to do what he was told, or him and Sid would be going down together and Ginger knew Sid would do it too. Now Ginger fancied 'is self as a toff and got a nice little gaff up Hampstead way and two little girls what he said was gonna be Deb's when they growed up. He got a lot to lose and Sid got nobody and nothing but this Pub. Thing is Sid didn't seem to want nothing else so we couldn't twig why he got mixed up with Ginger in the first place, though somebody who was at school with both of 'em says Ginger used to beat Sid up in them days.

So Sid's got the goods on Ginger and don't give a toss if they both goes down. Course we didn't know that then, we just seen Ginger down here every bleedin' night and givin' Sid this envelope what was supposed to be Sid's cut. Sid told us later it were only bits of folded paper 'cos he didn't need no money, then Sid'd get Ginger to serve him a drink or two 'fore he sent him home. It were the same every night.'

'So Sid was only trying to humiliate him, not take his money though, from the way you tell it, I imagine Ginger would rather it was money. So how did it come to an end?'

'The usual George?'

I jumped as a voice behind me said, 'No, make it mild and bitter. I'm proper parched and I don't want to get sloshed or I'll get roasted when I get home. Bet Stan been rabbittin' on about old Sid again ain't he?' He asked me. I turned and saw a second door from the street. It was behind me and I hadn't noticed it before. 'It's the rubber soles,' he said, having seen the way he'd made me jump. 'Quiet as a mouse and rubber soles is what Sid should of got his self, right Stan?'

‘That's what I was just going to tell this gent 'ere.’

‘Gilbert. Call me Bert,’ I said.

‘He told you how Sid used to sit on Ginger then. We was all scared of Ginger, yet there was Sid who we thought weren't no more than a three rounder, treatin' Ginger like a slave. Slapped him down if he said a word, made him clean up the mess if a drink got spilt. Sat on him right enough, sat on him proper. I'm only surprised it lasted so long without no blood being spilt. Go on Stan, it's your yarn, you tell him.’

‘Can I get you something, Bert?’

I got the message and bought a round to pay the story teller's fee for the next episode. Once more Stan filled his glass with an inch or two, gave George his cheap mild and bitter and charged me for three pints of bitter.

‘It ended when Ginger come crashing in sweating like a pig and runs over to Sid in a right tizz. ‘You got to help me,’ he says. ‘Or I'm done for. I'll take you with me, see if I don't,’ he screamed at Sid. We didn't have a clue what he was on about, but Sid must have 'cos he didn't slap him down like we was used to.

‘Old Bill on your tail?’ He asked Ginger, who just nods. All his breath gone see, just pants with his mouth open and stares at Sid. Bloody good bit of acting weren't it George?’

‘Yeah, but we didn't know that then. Go on Stan tell him what happened next.’

‘Well Sid was staring at this suitcase Ginger brought in and he says, ‘The stuff in there, is it?’

‘Ginger don't answer, he just opens up the suitcase and starts covering the table with solid gold watches and red and green and blue jewels, whoppers like I never seen in my life before.’

‘Me neither,’ said George.

‘Put that stuff away you stupid bastard,’ says Sid and he starts putting it back into the case. Now what Sid and none of us noticed was, Ginger was wearing gloves. What we was to find out later was, the only prints on that swag was Sid's. They was on the gems, the case, everything.

‘They got East India Dock Road blocked off and they're coming down the Island like fleas lookin' for a fresh dog,’ says Ginger and he started rolling his eyes around, like them Jamaican matelots. What a performance, eh George?’

‘Should of got an Oscar,’ grinned George.

‘Through the tunnel, it's the only way,’ said Sid, as he pushed Ginger outside. Then we heard whistles and the sound of running, but we still put our money on Sid. This weren't the first time he only got a few yards start and got away in the past few years. All that stuff about going clean. What he meant was thanks to that tunnel he never got caught, but this time was different, this time they got wireless's what worked and they got a dozen rozzers waiting to nab 'em at the Greenwich end.’

‘So what happened to Ginger? I asked.

‘He told them he was only running 'cos his mate was running and he didn't know nothing about nothing, least of all this talk about Hatton Garden. When was that supposed to have been? He asks and surprise, surprise, he just happened to have mates who'd swear he was playing three card brag with them about that time. Course they didn't believe it, but when he starts telling them about the money Sid give him to invest they went easy on him. Joke is, Sid's brief got him off on that, so he kept the money, or the property as it was by then, but they got him for receiving all them jewels and things.’

‘So Ginger went back to being the East End's number one fencer of stolen property did he?’

‘For a bit he did, but not for long. Sid weren't going to let him get away with that. No! Sid sold his forty per cent and used the cash to have Ginger laid to rest.

‘You mean murdered?’

We never said that, did we George? Let's just say he weren't never seen around here after that and nobody seen him nowhere else neither,’ he added. George said, ‘Ask no questions and hear no lies,’ with an exaggerated wink.

I don't mind admitting now, I believed every word. I might have made a fool of myself and the paper if I hadn't looked once again at the boxing photograph displayed behind the bar. This time my eyes focused on the boxer's names and the penny dropped.

National Boys Club Champions 1948. George ‘Ginger’ Devereaux - Middleweight. Stanley Ignatious ‘Sid’ Devereaux - Welterweight. Stan, alias Sid, saw the direction of my eyes and began to laugh.

‘Let me introduce you to my brother George, or Ginger as we used to call him before he lost his hair.’ We all had a good laugh then and I paid for another round of well earned drinks before heading home - still without a story!

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

Elvira Bridges

“Did you see that in the local paper?” Jenny tutted. “Poor old soul had been lying on the floor all night. Over in Parkway. Community nurse found her, just in time. They think she’ll recover. What do you think of that, Malc?”

Malcolm glanced up from his detective story, “Mmm, glad she’s all right.” He returned to his book.

“She could have been there for days. You never know what goes on behind closed doors, do you?” Jenny smiled as she got into her stride. “You’ve only got to look at the neighbours. As I say, you never know what goes on behind closed doors.”

Malcolm whistled quietly through his teeth. How many more times?

“Are you listening?”

“Yes.” Malcolm made a face. “What gossip have you heard now?”

“That couple down the road, you know, he’s got a limp, married to the woman with the dyed black hair. Black? Black, my eye! You can see the grey in her parting. Can’t get away from roots, that’s what I say. Why she can’t be satisfied with what God gave her naturally, I don’t know.” Jenny shrugged. Then grinning with self satisfaction, she carried on. “I never dyed MY hair. Well, you know that, don’t you, Malc? This is how God made me and that’s good enough for me.”

Malcolm turning the page of his library book muttered unintelligibly.

“Are you listening? Malcolm! I said are you listening?”

“Yes,” he paused before adding a sarcastic, “dear.”

“That couple, you know the one who ...”

“Dyes her hair!”

“Oh, you ARE listening ... well, Mrs Martin, tall woman in number 32, you know the one. She told me that Edith, her friend, in number 34 ... that’s her next door neighbour. Are you listening, Malc?” Jenny tapped the cover of Malcolm’s thriller. “Well, this Edith told Mrs Martin that the couple across the road from her, at number 29 ...” Jenny paused for breath and glared at her husband, “Malcolm ... will you stop reading when I’m talking to you.”

“Sorry, dear.” Under his breath he said, Shut up, woman. He raised his eyes for a second to her face, as animated as it always was when she imparted gossip.

“Yes. Well. Mrs Martin said that she heard them, or rather the man, the one with the limp. She said he was shouting. Screaming more like, she said. The

woman with the dyed hair sounded as if she was being murdered. I said, didn't I, you never know what goes on behind closed doors."

A little devil entered Malcolm at that moment, he said very quietly, "And was she?"

"Was she what? Malcolm, you do talk in riddles sometimes."

Malcolm sighed, "Sorry."

Impatiently Jenny sniffed and said, "Well, you will be." Jenny glanced at her husband. "Was she what?"

"Being murdered." Malcolm found it hard to keep the smile from his voice. "You said, it sounded as if she was being murdered."

"Don't be ridiculous Malcolm. It's just a figure of speech."

"But she could have been ... murdered, I mean. Has anyone seen the dyed haired one since she was heard screaming?"

"I don't know, do I?" Jenny found herself becoming more and more irritated as Malcolm talked nonsense. She pursed her lips, but not to be dissuaded she said, "As I always say, you never know what goes on behind closed doors."

"Yes. You do always say that. You've been saying it all the years we've been married."

"Is that sarcasm, Malcolm?"

"Sarcasm? Perish the thought." He turned his head away so she couldn't see his expression. "Anyway, what are you, and Mrs Martin and her friend Edith, going to do about it?"

"Malcolm you are being absolutely ridiculous. We can't do anything about it. There's nothing to do. I'm sure that woman is perfectly all right. Surely people in their own houses can have an argument without you saying that the woman has been murdered."

Malcolm was becoming increasingly confused. "But I didn't say she'd been murdered. YOU did!"

"May you be forgiven, Malcolm Woods. How can you say such a thing? Comes to something when a couple can't have a row without you going off at a tangent, accusing that poor man of killing his wife." Jenny smoothed the front of her skirt, "You've got too much imagination for your own good. You'll be saying next that if we quarrelled you would kill me. You know your trouble, don't you? It's all those detective stories you read." Jenny pointed an accusing finger at the library book. Warming to her theory she continued, "Men, normal men that is, don't go round murdering their wives on a whim."

Malcolm closed his book with a determined click. He stood up. "Don't they, dear?"

HARVESTING

Alan S Watts

For the hundredth time Martha asked herself what a lone woman could do on the homestead. Why had she come back? What was the good of it? To torture herself with the sight of Ben's old coat hanging on the peg and his old gun in the corner, was that the reason?

Torture her it did, reminding her vividly of that fatal afternoon when they had taken the buckboard into town. The crop had just been sown then. There was time to spare, and with the stores depleted by the long winter she and Ben had gone to make purchases. Cafferty's had been busy. They had loaded the buckboard with hardware, a drum of disinfectant for the cattle, patent medicines, tools, nails, a coil of wire for the fencing, and Martha had been inside the store fingering over a choice of gingham for a new dress. There had been voices raised. The thud of boxes and goods tumbling to the floor.

"Quit yuh brawling or git outside wid yuh!" from Cafferty trying to restore order.

Then suddenly, a shot.

Martha looked up in horror and saw Ben twisting round clutching the breast of his tartan shirt. She hurried through the clutter of merchandise. Outside in the road, men were shouting. Hoof beats told her of someone galloping away, spurring his mount to greater speed.

But she heard without fully understanding. What she did understand was that Ben was on the floor and a red rivulet was trickling from his stained shirt. He died as she bent down to him.

Cafferty had seen it all. Ben had not been involved in the brawling, but was standing by totalling up the cost of his purchases. The man who had killed him had fired at the other man in the argument who had dived for cover when he saw his opponent draw.

"Guess he meant it for me," he said laconically.

"You know him?" asked the sheriff who was quickly on the scene.

"Name o' Dryburgh. Not o' these parts. Met him prospectin'. Guess he meant to kill me all right. He threatened me, sheriff, when we was prospectin' as I told yuh."

The sheriff lost no time in calling for a posse. But they never caught up with Dryburgh, and he vanished. A bill was posted up offering a reward, but no-one ever claimed it. Martha came back to the homestead. And now the crop was ripe.

She looked over the corn as the wind made it ripple like the sea. What was the good of it? She could never hope to harvest it single-handed, and she had no money to hire hands. The homestead was too far from town to make it a desirable possession and she knew it would be useless to try and sell it. The thought occurred to her that she might set everything on fire, house, crops, out-buildings and all. One great funeral pyre. Burn it to the ground, leave nothing but charred wood and straw, and go somewhere else leaving it as a monument to the tragedy her life had turned into.

She was thinking of this when her quick ears heard the regular drumming of hoof beats approaching through the gorge by which the river entered the plain. Her immediate reaction was to snatch up the shotgun from the corner and see that it was loaded and cocked. She then stationed herself behind the window which commanded the approach. In a few minutes the rider came in sight, cantering lazily along the dusty path to the hitch rail before the house.

As he dismounted she went onto the verandah.

“And what’s your business?” she wanted to know, levelling the gun at him.

He swung idly out of the saddle, a lithe spare man with sharp features and pale blue eyes beneath bleached eyebrows. He grinned at her.

“I jest reckoned yud’d need a hand with that corn crop, ma’am.”

“And who told yuh of my corn crop?”

“Guess there was a waggoner passed this way not a week or two ago.”

She nodded. It was true. There had been a couple of bull-whackers.

“It so happens I’ve taken on a couple o’ hired hands to bring it in, she lied.

He grinned the wider.

“They ain’t a done much yet, ma’am. P’raps they ain’t a-come yet?”

“I’m expecting them.”

“Yeah! Yeah! Then, until they arrive, ma’am, p’raps yuh’ll let me get cutting that crop. There’s work enough for two or more men, I’d figure.”

“I’m very grateful. Truly grateful, mister. But ... I’ll tell yuh the plain truth ... I jest can’t afford no more help.”

“Don’t go talkin’ of affordin’ it, ma’am.”

“I must. I haven’ more than an odd dollar, and no provisions for extra mouths.”

“I’ve enough in my saddle bags to keep me alive for a day or two, ma’am. All I need is water to drink and somewhere to stretch out at night.”

She was troubled. The man was too persistent. She looked anxiously into his bronzed face, but there was nothing there to suggest dishonesty.

“I’d prefer yuh to ride on,” she told him abruptly. “I don’t need no help.”

“I know yuh do, ma’am, but I won’t press myself on yuh if yuh don’t feel comfortable about it.”

He grinned, and slowly swung himself into the saddle again. Turning his horse’s head, he rode slowly down the track and out of sight. She watched him go sadly, and yet with some relief. Then she went back inside the house.

The next day towards sundown she became aware that someone was over on the far side of the corn patch. She caught sight of a dark object – not unlike a man’s hat – bobbing up rhythmically above the ridge of the standing crop. Her uneasiness returned, but she did not pick up the gun on this occasion.

As evening was settling in, she heard a footfall on the verandah.

“Yuh, there, ma’am?”

“So – yuh came back?”

“Yuh needed help, ma’am.”

“Sit down, and I’ll make a meal for yuh. Yuh sure must be weary after cutting corn all the day.”

He dropped into a chair.

“What’s your name?” she asked.

“Jackson. Luke Jackson. And yours, ma’am?”

She told him, and they settled down to a respectful friendship which grew stronger as the days passed and the rest of the crop was harvested.

It was a week after he had arrived and he was sitting on the verandah sipping a glass of rye and water, when they heard the sound of hoof beats again, and the rattle of wheels. He stood up at once, and she saw he was agitated.

“Ma’am,” he told her, “I have reasons for not wanting to be seen. If anyone asks if yuh’ve a hired man on the farm, tell ’em no. I’ll get myself into the hayloft until they’ve gone.”

She looked at him enquiringly.

“Luke,” she said. “Have yuh bin honest with me?”

“Through an’ through, ma’am.”

“Yuh’re a wanted man, Luke?”

“If I am, ma’am, don’t think the worst of me. But that horseman’s coming near. I’ll get into the hayloft as I said.”

“Shortly afterwards Mike Cafferty the storekeeper drove up on a rickety buckboard. He was hot and sweaty and after hitching his mount to the rail, he staggered up the verandah steps in a state of near exhaustion.

“Guess I’m a little surprised to see yuh, Martha,” he panted. “I’d sort o’ figured yuh’d ha’ moved on someplace. Don’t tell me yuh’ve been livin’ here all on your own?”

Then his eyes lit on the half-emptied glass of whisky.

“Ah!” he exclaimed. “Not on your own, I see.”

“I’ve a hired hand,” she explained. “Jest for to get the corn in.”

“Yuh’d need a hired hand,” he continued to pant. “Maybe if yuh’d fix me a drink too, Martha, I could talk more coherent-like.”

“Here’s couple o’ fingers,” she said. “If yuh need water, there’s some in the jug.”

He waved the jug aside, and emptied the glass at a gulp.

“I came over to see if yuh was still here,” he explained. “An’ if yuh was, Martha, I thought I’d offer yuh some credit jest to tide yuh over till ...”

“Till what?” she asked.

Cafferty was for a moment nonplussed.

“Till yuh, kinda fixed up,” he stammered.

Martha frowned. She had noted the way Cafferty had been running his eyes around the place, as if he was taking an inventory. Guess, he had been a little surprised to see her, like he said. She figured he’d expected to find the place deserted but with much of the equipment still lying about. Most women would have packed up a few things and gone. She had nearly done so herself.

“Kind o’ yuh to think o’ me,” she said.

Cafferty was holding his glass as if he expected a refill. She handed him the bottle and told him to help himself. He obeyed with alacrity.

“Any news o’ that fella Dryburgh?” she asked.

“Not a whisper.”

She was silent. As Cafferty looked at her, he knew she was thinking of Ben and that day in his store.

“Not a whisper. Nor a sight,” he said.

“If he re-appears in town,” she said, “send someone to tell me.”

Cafferty smiled.

“He’d never dare re-appear in town,” he told her. “There’s still that reward on his head.”

“Dead or alive?” she asked.

“Dead or alive,” he confirmed.

“I’d like to claim it,” she said slowly, “and him dead.”

“Waal,” drawled Cafferty, and from the change in his tone, she felt he had some new slant on the fatal incident.

“Well?” she asked.

“It don’t kinda make matters better, o’ course,” he began.

“What don’t?”

“Waal, it all came out when a United States marshal came and picked up Rorke.”

“Yeah?” she queried. “An’ who might Rorke be?”

“He’s the guy that bullet was aimed for.”

“And so he was picked up?”

“Waal, it seems that all he told us – about the prospectin’ and all that – Dryburgh and him being down there, and Dryburgh trying to kill him – was all moonshine. Whatever was between them two, and whatever made Dryburgh take that shot at him, it was nothing to do with prospectin’.”

Martha shrugged, wearily.

“So?” she asked. “Ain’t Ben dead whatever they was quarrelling over?”

Cafferty gave a deep sympathetic sigh.

“Guess so,” he agreed.

Martha rose from the chair she had been sitting in.

“I’m obliged to yuh, Mr Cafferty for coming this way out to see me. Maybe yuh could fix for some corn dealer to come and offer me a price. Then I can make my purchases with no need for credit. I never had none, nor did Ben. An’ I don’t need none now. Though I’m grateful for your kindness all the same.”

Cafferty had a last fill of whisky before taking his hat and his leave. She stood on the verandah and watched him go. When she turned back into the house she was in a black pensive mood.

Luke Jackson did not return to the house for an hour or more. When he did he found her seated at the table staring at the sepia photograph of Ben and herself on their wedding day at Memphis. She remained staring at it after he had come into the room.

“Anything wrong, missis?” he enquired.

“Wrong?”

“Yuh don’t look quite yourself.”

“No. I ain’t quite.”

“Who was that who called?” he wanted to know.

“A man named Cafferty. He keeps the store up in town.”

Luke nodded.

“Yeah. I’ve met him.”

She stood up wearily, and wandered, almost in a dream, to the door. There she stood, looking across at the pine woods, her hand reaching up the door-post, and the hem of her rough dress scraping along the wainscot and threatening to topple the shotgun which stood in the corner there.

“Not bad news?” he asked.

She made no reply. They stood in silence for several pregnant moments, then she suddenly turned about.

“Did yuh ever know a man named Rorke?” she demanded.

He had no chance to affirm or deny. His face gave her his answer.

“Your name ain’t Dryburgh, is it?” she demanded.

And as the name came out, the shot gun was miraculously in her hands.

“And if it is?” he asked her.

“Put your hands up.”

“I’ve no gun,” he told her.

“Put your hands up, all the same.”

“Let me talk to yuh,” he begged. “Don’t point a gun at me.”

Her face was hard. Her finger curled around the trigger.

“I’ve sworn to shoot yuh,” she said grimly. “And shoot yuh, I will. Didn’t yuh shoot my husband? Didn’t yuh kill my Ben?”

“It was an accident.”

“It was a killin’.”

They faced one another. Then, suddenly, the woman dropped the gun to the floor.

“Go! Go! Get out of my house! Go, before I change my mind again! Go, where I’ll never see you again.”

“Missis, just let me ...”

“Go! Go! Go!” she screamed. “Go on!”

He walked past her, and out into the yard. She hid her face in her hands and her frame shook with sobs. A few minutes later she heard his horse walking out over the sun-hard ground. As he reached the gateway he turned, but she twisted away as if she was ashamed of being found to have been watching him. The horse moved on towards the pine woods.

She sat at the table and burst into uncontrollable tears. Then, suddenly, her body stiffened. Her sobs ceased. A shot was echoing among the pine trunks.

She hurried out of the house and along the dusty track to the woods. A buckboard drawn by a lean horse was coming towards her, another horse trailed behind.

“Guess that reward’s mine,” cried Cafferty as he drove up.

He thumbed over his shoulder to the inert form on the buckboard.

“I had a strange feelin’ as your hired hand was Dryburgh. Couldn’t believe my eyes when he came riding straight towards me. I’d been waiting up there, hoping to catch a glimpse through your windows after sundown. An’ there was no need. That’s your man, Martha. That’s him.”

Martha turned away, sickened.

“Yeah,” she managed to say. “That’s my man.”



Statement of Income & Expenditure for the period
1.4.00 to 31.3.01:

	Income £	Expenditure £
Subscriptions	2907.50	
Subscriptions paid to Poetry Workshop		211.00
“Author” printing & distribution costs		3028.52
AGM receipts	62.00	
New Year Party receipts	154.00	
Annual Luncheon receipts	757.00	
Cost of room hire & refreshments		1164.88
Readings	18.00	
Committee members expenses & stationery		186.51
Bank interest & charges	24.17	10.00
CS Drama Federation		10.00
Competition receipts	264.00	
Competition prizes		620.00
Competition sponsorship contributions	160.00	
Competition judges fees		35.00
Gifts, reimbursements & advertisements	82.70	
Total receipts/expenditure per above	4429.37	5265.91

Income less expenditure	(836.54)	

	Balance @ 31.3.00 £	Balance @ 31.3.01 £	Difference £
Treasurer account	1163.05	694.65	(468.40)
Moneymaster account	1233.91	856.34	(377.57)
Joyce Brennan account	527.57	537.00	9.43
Totals	2924.53	2088.23	(836.54)

Prepared by A F Danson Audited by A S Watts