

The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers

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Diary

AGM

11th May 2002

Poetry Workshop Weekend

1st – 3rd August 2003

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 SCPSW 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

Thanks to those who sent me seasonal greetings and favourable comments on Author. I remain open to suggestions for improvements to Author. Thanks also to those providing material that has not yet been published. I hope to find space for everything in due course, subject to it not being too lengthy.

So far no one has responded to my invitation to comment on the use of word processors. Perhaps it is seen as akin to inviting comments on typewriters, but I think computer pros and con's are far greater than simply word processing. Some see PCs as expensive toys that demand too much time to learn and offer too little reward in return. I don't agree, but let me have your opinions.

Poetry Workshop members please note - Joyce has again run out of material. Particularly wanted is work from those rarely or not previously published in Author, though those who have been are still invited to contribute.

Subject to some members rejoining late, I regret to advise that our membership figures are about 20 lower than at this time last year at this time, thus well below the number we need to survive. Please do your best to enrol new members. We are most grateful to those able to pay more than their membership fee, whose generosity has provided an additional £366.

Our congratulations to member Ivor Hosgood on his award of MBE for services to music.

A few words from our Treasurer:

As everyone is already aware, the number of members in the society has declined over the last few years, and this year we have so few members that our financial situation has become critical.

Although we have many loyal members who have been in the society for years, we also have lots of members who join for just a year and then don't renew. Clearly we need to ensure that as well as attracting new members, we keep them.

The committee has agreed that I can start a focus group for the purpose of looking at ways of increasing the membership of the society. We

need to look at whether we can make any positive changes to the society, and in particular to make it appeal to people of all ages.

I would like a few volunteers to join the group, so that we can analyse what people have said, and to recommend any necessary changes. I would very much like to run the group via e-mail to cut down administration costs, and also as it's the quickest way to exchange ideas and information.

Naturally I do not want to exclude anyone from having their say because they don't have internet access, so if you would like to send me comments on what you like/dislike about the society, or to suggest any changes, please feel free to send me a letter.

I'd be grateful for any feedback or volunteers by Friday 18th April.

Louise Lloyd

Letters

Dear Ed,

I have not been in touch with The SCPSW for some years, yet musing on my relationship with it over these years it seems that my experiences may be of use to other inexperienced members. When I first joined I was encouraged by gaining a prize in 'The Vincent Brennan Travel Article' competition. I continued to enter further travel articles without success, but a habit had been started. A submission about a trip to Yemen was timely. By chance I had travelled the same route with the same Travel Agents as the hostages, so all I had to do was fax it through to *The Sunday Telegraph* and it was used for half of a double-page spread shared with a specialist writer!

Each holiday offers a new opportunity but one usually needs an unusual viewpoint to get one's work into print. A journey with 'The Japanese Garden Society' to see Japanese gardens gave me material for a beginners' view of Kyoto and its gardens. It was published in *Shakkei* the JGS journal. After accompanying 'The Field Studies Council' to Jordan's nature reserves I was able to write about the Jordanian achievement in wildlife conservation since Guy Mountfort had headed a group invited to advise King Hussein. It was published in *The Ecologist*. This triggered an account in *The Countryman* of 'Wildwood'. 'Wildwood' is indigenous woodland being managed for

indigenous animals in Kent. It is the project two practical dreamers undertook on their retirement.

Currently I am preparing a piece on Chinese gardens for *Shakkei*. The JGS do not pay contributors, but the amount the project has caused me to learn is a different kind of payment. Research is hard work as Sylvia Neumann suggests in the current issue of *The Author*, but if the subject interests the writer it is payment in itself, and good exercise for the brain in retirement!

We have a local group of U3A (University of the 3rd Age) the countrywide society for pensioners and I often write something I think of interest for its newsletter. It, too, is unpaid, but if I chance on a subject I think worthy of wider exposure I like to have a go! I have contributed a piece about a recent migraine-sufferer poll, another on the problems of journalists guarding their integrity while reporting the Afghan war, and a third was a review of a friend's poetry book. She had lost two sons in a car crash and poetry became both a therapy and a memorial.

I must not forget to mention my own brief sortie into poetry. My very first poem was published by *The Author*. It led to me collecting and publishing other people's poetry in a booklet entitled *Captured Unicorns* to raise money for a charity.

So — the existence of *The Author* creates ramifications into the future unimagined in their origins. The products of apparently tiny happenings are amazing. When I was a child my father chose a pattern for the lining of a raincoat. I see that pattern today in China, Japan, Hungary, Portugal, all over the world, on scarves, umbrellas, suitcases, shirts, even bathing-costumes!

I hope you find these musings of interest to your readers.

Jill Burberry

I do congratulate William Wood on winning the Herbert Spencer Poetry Competition. 'Wordmonger' is a marvellous poem but I feel that its full impact can only be demonstrated by a live performance — spoken preferably by an experienced actor or verse speaker. What astonishes me about 'Wordmonger' is the way it seems to change gear

— as it were — beginning with the first line of verse 4 — ‘You’ll take a sentence? Yes sir, long or short?’ onwards. The poem then takes on the format of a comic monologue. This is nothing if not innovative!

When I’d read the poem a few times, I began to envisage a platform performance where the actor/reciter would set the scene — so to speak — in the first 5 verses, as simply a reader, but with the opening line of verse 4, he would face the audience directly and ‘become’ the character — as one would in a monologue. With this in mind, I feel that ‘*Wordmonger*’ is a poem — not for the page — but the stage. It is performance poetry at its best, and most innovative. Let me hasten to add that I am no expert on poetic form, but I do have some experience in drama, having been involved with the subject for many years. However, I would be most interested, to hear the viewpoint of other members on ‘*Wordmonger*’.

Terry James

I was amused to read Pamela Hadman’s short story in the Autumn 2002 edition of *Author*.

Vertical quayside ladders always present a very specific and personal challenge, even to the young, fit and athletic. I recall my dismay when first confronted by the long, black and slimy ladders in the outer harbour at Ramsgate. At low water, scaling or even worse, descending, these are feats to be attempted only by the stouthearted (and sober!).

Other features of sailing, in UK waters anyway, as Pamela noted, are that the tide is always ‘favourable’ between 3 am and 4 am and motors always tend to cut out under or near bridges particularly where there is strong tidal current. I have vivid memories of the Swale and the Kingsferry (lifting) bridge.

Also whenever and wherever you choose to go it’s usually raining, the wind is always against you and the men always shout at the women.

There’s a lot to be said for saving up and chartering a yacht in the Ionian. The Pamelas will still get shouted at but it won’t seem to matter very much when the sea is warm, the sky is blue and it’s hot and sunny!

Peter Stock

Market Information

Gordon E Gompers

Inflights and onboards

Although I have often mentioned these publications I might have left some of you wondering exactly what they were. Inflights are magazines published by airlines for the benefit of their passengers. Onboards come in two categories. One is published by the various ferry boats and the other by various railway lines.

In my book *Have Typewriter — Will Travel* I stated that one does not have to travel in order to be a travel writer. What I meant is that wherever you live is a tourist zone for some one elsewhere in the world. Thus I sold two articles on The Tower of London, one to a Saudi Arabian airline and the other to an African one. Another African airline took an article on Cambridge. *Voyager*, inflight for The British Midland Airways took an article on Sark.

With onboards I did even better. *The Sealink Sun*, the onboard for the then Channel Island Ferries appointed me their chief copy writer. The joy of this is that I was paid several times for one article.

Most inflights seem to use transparencies for illustrations. In order to get this right I go to a specialist photographer who advises me on the best film to use, etc. It is worthwhile to join a camera club. To get illustrations right is imperative.

Not all submissions need be about places. I sold *Voyager* an article about tape recording.

All right! The point has been made. These are good markets but how to contact them? Well, there is only one listed in *Writers' & Artists' Yearbook* and not all that many in the American directory *Writer's Market*. The best source for markets is *Willings Press Guide*, available at most reference libraries, especially the Overseas volume. Since this is a directory aimed at advertisers rather than freelance journalists the address given could be for the wrong department; but your enquiry will be transferred to the correct one: at least I have always found it so.

BUSINESS LIFE

Cedar Communications,
1, Oxenden Street,
LONDON, SW1Y 4EE.

Inflight magazine for British Airways.

All material commissioned. Approach in writing with ideas.
Illustrations: colour photos and line. Dosh brilliant!

HEMISPHERES

Pace Communications for United Airways
1301, Carolina St.,
Greensboro NC, 27401 USA.

This publication is particularly interested in “destination” pieces by
freelancers who live where they write. Dosh 5¢ per word and up.

ENSIGN

The Walker Agency Ltd.,
Wooton Mount,
Bournemouth BH1 LPJ.

The onboard publication of Condor Ferries. Interested in articles on all
the Channel Islands on ports they use, i.e. Poole, Weymouth and St.
Malo. Illustrations: transparencies.



Publicity

As I am now dealing with our Publicity I would be grateful if members
could send me details or copies of any staff magazines they know of.
Also working members who would be willing to display a poster on
their staff notice board contact me. Any members who know Trudi
Morris will be pleased to know she is settled in a very nice nursing
home in Wimbledon in the same road as her house. Joyce Thatcher,
sister of Denis Thatcher is also there and he and Margaret visit, so she
is in good company! It is Queens Court Nursing Home, Queens Rd.,
Wimbledon Tel 0208 971 5019.

Ethel Corduff

Annual Lunch

Our Writer of the Year and President of the Society Charles Neilson Gattey was unfortunately unable to be present at the Annual Lunch due to a fall a few days before. We missed his witty presence. Alan Watts, chairman, ably presided over the proceedings.

This year our guest speaker was Anthony Wermer of Shephard-Walwyn, who published Charles' outstanding book *The Merits of the Monarchy* in the Queen's Golden Jubilee year, which earned him our "Writer of the Year" award. We had an informal discussion with our Speaker who gave us a very useful insight into the world of publishing with many useful tips. Though less members attended this year, those who attended enjoyed the change of format. Members came from London, Kent, Essex, Lincolnshire, Milton Keynes, Bournemouth, Devon, Middlesex and Hertfordshire.

Ethel Corduff

Judge of Froud Memorial Competition

The judge of the 2002 W F and F G Froud Memorial Competition this year was Ron Edwards from Poole, a professional writer with wide experience. His play "*Question Time*" was performed at Theatre Clewd, later he co-wrote "*Thriller Chillers*" at the Gateway theatre, Chester.

He turned to comedy writing and wrote sketches for Huddlines and the Russ Abbot Show, also becoming chair of the Comedy Writers association. Then he started short story writing and has had thirty published in national magazines including "*The Lady*" and "*Active Life*". He is now completing his fourth novel.

Writers Holiday 2002

Writers Holiday 2002 was held at the University of Wales Caerleon in July and was a revelation. The setting was picturesque overlooking a Welsh valley, the food was plentiful and varied. Well-known editors and novelists gave talks and courses on numerous writing topics. The

course I attended on “Writing for Publication” led by Chriss McCallum writer and former editor was excellent and covered every aspect of publication with workshops and practical advice.

Writing for the Radio was run by former teacher Steve Whetton and based on his experience on writing plays and sitcom. Unfortunately I missed two sessions of this due to wrong information given regarding when the holiday ended. Because the holiday has been running for 18 years and many return each year, the organisers have become complacent and did not deal with concerns sympathetically. Neither did they give any details of the content of the courses beforehand, nor housekeeping information which is essential for newcomers.

Since then as a result of questionnaires filled in, the organisers have wrote to apologise and deal with some of the concerns mentioned.

Ethel Corduff



Poetry Workshop

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

PW Weekend 2003

This year’s PW Weekend will take place on 1-3 August 2003, at Manor House, University of Birmingham. Cost is £121, which includes full board, en-suite room and conference facilities. Booking Forms were sent out with the Winter Newsletter, but if anyone would like to join us and either hasn’t received or has lost their form, write to me at the address above. A deposit of £30 is required with the booking, with the balance due by the end of May. Alternatively, it is possible to pay by monthly instalments, by arrangement with Terry, our Treasurer, whose address can also be found above.

Bill Barnes Competition

The winners of the 2002 Bill Barnes Poetry Competition were:

First Prize: Muriel Stammers

Joint Second: Ann Froggatt,
 Andrew Millican

Congratulations to them, and our thanks to Keith Scott who judged this year's competition. All entries appeared in the Competition Special Newsletter issued in February.

Details and rules of the 2003 competition will appear in the Spring Newsletter.

Spring Newsletter

The Spring Newsletter will be available to PW members shortly. As well as the usual digest of news and activities, it will also include the second part of Liz Rowlands' essay on "Keats & his Women" and an article by Joyce Thornton on "Prose Poetry", a subject that has been the cause of some controversy within the PW of late!

Subscriptions

Subscriptions for the Poetry Workshop fell due on 1 January. They remain unchanged at £3 for members of the Society. If you haven't already renewed, or you would like to join us this year, send a cheque for £3, made out to The Society of Civil & Public Service Writers Poetry Workshop Account, to Terry Rickson at the address given above.

Dates to Remember:

31 March 2003	Closing date for submissions to Waves
30 April 2003	Spring Newsletter
1-3 August 2003	PW Weekend
30 September 2003	Autumn Newsletter
30 September 2003	Closing date for Bill Barnes Competition
31 December 2003	Winter Newsletter

From the Treasurer of the Poetry Workshop.

"Members having any reason for sending cheques to the Poetry Workshop, should make them payable to:-

"SCPSW Poetry Workshop a/c"

All cheques, of course, crossed A/C payee. Attention in this matter will be appreciated."

Terry Rickson
Poetry Pages
Edited by Joyce Thornton

BUTCHERED
by Clare Gaen

The leopard fears
The day it becomes
Its own slab of raw flesh,
Tombstone
To the loins of freedom.

THINK OF THOSE WORDS
by John Abrahams

Think of those words I'm no longer using,
That shimmer of images I'm losing,
Consider this whole real world where I'm passing,
These earthly Edens where I dwell,
As if my ransacked head could raise itself again
To claim one moment more of conscious happiness.
Here we may wake to the orators' fluting
Which makes us forget we're more than stardust
In this cubbyhole of perceptions. And still
We wish to live sedately in freedom while the vision lasts
Before accident, ill-health and war break upon us
To make us change our lives. For then I will have lost
And will go under,
Despite these fresh-built castellations crowding into view,
Promising us the earth.

BADGER
by Andrew Millican

When I was a boy
and heard or read
of cute striped badgers,
I thought of words
like Brock or Bill.

But now when I hear
or read about badgers
I think of words like
dig dog bait gas
gun-fight and kill.

CLUNK

by Andrew Millican

Just when you think you've read it all
 your finger turns the page —
Up pops another example
 of our crime infested age —
And you ponder for a moment
 on how we reached this stage —
Where someone is killed for driving —
 a victim of road rage.

FIRE ALARM

by Roger de Boer

Fire engines sound bells
Reach the site
Where no fire dwells;
But into a trap
Laid by vandals
Keen to break
All windows down;
Never again
Will rescue come
Save for smoke,
Fire's herald —
Lead the way!

FLOODS

by Alan Watts

Safe in my dry home, comfortable, at ease,
I witness floods at Ilkley, listen to
A calm commentary, rainfall measurements,

Then there was the time factor. So often I found myself, story half-told as the bell rang, brought up short with another sharp reprimand. But the plots and characters spawned by my imagination simply could not be developed in 45 minutes.

Absorbing all the criticisms, my love of English got lost by the creative process being strangled and squeezed until the life ebbed out of it. It was only years later that I realised that examination pieces, like competition entries are showpieces. In an exam (unlike competitions) there isn't much time to perfect, polish, prune. Gaps can't be left where scenes refuse to join at the seams on first draft. It all has to be "right first time". That's asking a lot. Not only does the true writer have his or her story voice to contend with but also the natural inclination to find the best phrase — le mot juste — for public show. Some writers can do this up against the clock. Others find it a dreadful torment. The truth is, of course, that exam success is a measure of exam success not creative writing ability.

So writing is a living process and there is a limit to how far this act can be artificially forced without detriment to the artistic process. I realise at last that stories like people take time to grow and have allowed my story voice the space it needs. Gifts of the muse are after all to be honoured not disdained.



Footballers' Names

Stephen Bibby

'Baker.'

'Sir!'

'Brown.'

'Sir!'

I call the litany of names, a mixture of trades and colours, and the school football team runs on to the bleak pitch.

'Carpenter, Dunn, Farmer, Goldie, Grey.'

A chorus of 'sirs' and off they trot. Goldie the captain is stocky, his jet black hair combed to one side.

‘Porter, Smith, Taylor, White.’

Four more ‘sirs’, the last from full back, White, a redhead.

It is the last match of term and we have a local derby to play.

My mind goes back ten years to another last match of term. Instantly I am back in far away Malawi, back in my first teaching post, back with a different litany of names. Those boys had exotic names — onomatopoeic names and names of plants and creatures. There was Phiri which in Chichewa means wind, Jinga (the bicycle) and Nkhuku (the cockerel). Our captain was Chimanga (maize) who could make a minor feast with his midfield of groundnuts, beans and bananas (Mtedza, Nyemba and Ntochi). We had leaves (Masamba) and a gourd (Mphonda). Our goalkeeper, a sisal plant, was the diminutive but athletic Khonje. The star of the side was our feared striker, Njoka — the snake.

Onto the hot pitch they ran, kicking an ancient leather football through the dust, eager to do battle with the school from the next village.

The chill of an English winter jerks me back to the present. Our headmaster has appeared. He looks the part of a minor public school headmaster. Wrapped up in tweeds against the biting wind, he parades the touchline with his dog on its lead. The handsome golden labrador sniffs the air and sits obediently when his master pauses in his perambulation.

‘Take the ball with you, Porter!’ he rasps along with other gems of supposed encouragement. ‘Guard your woodwork, Carpenter!’ he shouts to our hapless goalkeeper. ‘Don’t turn, White!’

Ten years ago my Malawian headmaster stood on the anthill by the edge of our pitch waving and cheering in the bright sunlight. Our supporters on the touchline exclaimed ‘Ooh’ or ‘Ee-aye’ when there was a near miss. Phiri did indeed run like the wind, although barefoot, as he was one who could not afford boots. Jinga, the bicycle, had three speeds but mostly used ‘slow’. Chimanga the captain was expensively shod, but then his uncle was a cabinet minister.

At half time a plastic bucket of doubtful water was brought on. The sweating players crowded round dipping their cupped hands into the quenching and cooling liquid. The score was nil-nil.

Today we have segments of citrus fruit. Brown slips orange down White's shirt and is sharply reprimanded by the headmaster, his golden labrador now off the leash and sniffing for scraps. All are fractious because there is still no score.

In the second half things start to go wrong. Taylor is stitched up by his marker. Farmer ploughs clumsily into a defender and it takes the diplomatic intervention of Goldie to prevent a sending off.

My thoughts revert to that other second half. Tempers were fraying in the hot afternoon. Nkhuku, strutting like a cockerel flapped on his wing, tripped an opponent and conceded a free kick. A true case, I remember thinking, of a foul being penalised.

Suddenly our headmaster started to execute a veritable war dance on his anthill.

'Njoka, Njoka!' he yelled.

Our eyes turned to our star striker. What final feat could he perform to win the game? Half the team swivelled in his direction but he was nowhere near the ball. Instead the opposition were attacking.

'Njoka, Njoka' came an even more agitated shout. But the cry was one not of encouragement. It was a cry of warning. A large deadly black snake was writhing through the midfield and its namesake had retreated beyond the touchline. Little Khonje in goal had no chance. We lost one-nil.

I am jerked out of my memories by my present headmaster. He is shouting in his unmistakable rasp, 'Goldie, Goldie!'

I look to our captain. The boys look to their captain. But their captain is stranded out on the right wing and the opposition is charging through the middle. The team is momentarily transfixed as the onslaught continues.

Again that harsh command, 'Goldie, Goldie!'

Too late we understand. As the ball goes into our net we realise that the golden labrador chasing phantoms on the next pitch has a name of no imagination and it is at him and not our captain that the shout is directed.

Two last games; two different schools; two different decades; two different cultures; two different continents — but it is still footballers' names that lose matches.

Pierre Loti

Brian Jones

The 19th century sailor and novelist Pierre Loti is the travel writer par excellence. Of all the men who sailed under the flag of France he must have been the strangest and the most adventurous. A childhood fascination with colourful lands beyond France led him to embark on a naval career that enabled him to seek adventures and love affairs in many latitudes. His romantic novels and travel books brought him fame and fortune but also he established a vogue that persisted until the Second World War — the vogue of the fictionalised travel tale.

Victorian romantics found in the East, glowing horizons, alien seas, fabulous peaks of emotion and daring which were, for them, now vanishing from the West. There the romantic image could still be translated into reality. It was a period when the West was becoming aware of the romantic aspects of the East. European travellers were returning home bringing fascinating tales of fierce Arab lands, of mysterious Africa, of far away Japan and China. No travel writer was more avidly read in his home country than Pierre Loti. In France his works are still widely read.

In the 1980's Kegan Paul International Paperbacks reprinted '*Aziyade*', '*Madame Chrysanthemum*' and '*The Marriage of Loti*' and did much to make his works familiar to a new generation of readers. The latter two titles retained the charming original illustrations inside, while '*The Marriage of Loti*', for its front cover, reproduced a picture from a Pacific cruise menu of the 1930's.

Loti's books were not translated and published in Britain and the USA in chronological order, for example, '*Aziyade*' was not published in England until 1927. Loti first came to the attention of the reading public in England through his Breton tales '*My Brother Yves*' and '*An*

Iceland Fisherman’, which was kept in print here by Everyman’s Library.

The 19th century romantics were men who wished to illustrate the drama and mystery; ecstasy and agony of their inner life in a world very different from the one in which they and their readers found themselves. The East, providing it was painted in hues of Arab Nights’ richness, would serve very well, as it was remote, strange, and half-magical enough to suggest the secret life of the soul. Here, the romantic can flourish, for he is not at home in society. He must discover himself, far from parlour and metropolis, he must experience adventures and love affairs in exotic, unfamiliar lands. He is not trying to express what ordinary men are thinking and feeling, not seeking any common denominator. It is what arises from the depths of his own being that demands expression.

The magical images of the unconscious are projected by romantics like Loti on foreign lands and women. Somewhere across the oceans, in some teeming, alien port is The Woman for whom the romantic is searching, The Woman who will lead him into his dream of love. The romantic rejects ordinary sensible women and seeks out some bewitching creature who cannot be tamed or domesticated. For love here is a pursuit, a torment, an unquenchable thirst, a fleeting ecstasy, anything but the foundation of an enduring and fruitful relationship between a man and a woman. Also, of course, there could be a powerful element of sexual passion, but this could not be depicted candidly in Pierre Loti’s century.

Julien Marie Viaud, later known as Pierre Loti, was born in the port of Rochefort in western France. His father was a government official.

On October 1, 1867, Julien entered, the naval school at Brest; he was received, as a cadet on the training ship ‘Borda’. Two years later Julien was gazetted, as a junior midshipman on board the ‘Jean Bart’ for an educational world-wide cruise. The ‘Jean Bart’ touched at all the five continents. He was back in Brest in 1870 on time to set sail in a corvette bound for the Northern Sea and the Baltic. He had been promoted to first-class midshipman though the commander’s report was not flattering: ‘A spoilt child — poor physique — no application to his professional interests — has the temperament of an artist.’ Not long afterwards Julien was baptised on a South Sea island.

For twelve years Loti sailed far and wide over every sea and absorbed the exotic quality of every land; Constantinople gave him '*Aziyade*', '*Fantome d'Orient*' and '*Disenchanted*'; Tahiti gave him '*The Marriage of Loti*'; Senegal, '*The Romance of a Spahi*'; Brittany, '*My Brother Yves*' and '*An Iceland Fisherman*'; Algeria '*Les Trois Dames de la Kasbah*'; Japan, '*Madame Chrysanthemum*'; the Basque country, '*Ramuntcho*'.

The affairs of Lieutenant Viaud were faithfully recorded in the journals he had kept since childhood. His melancholy, bitter-sweet memories of his Turkish amour are crystallised in his first book '*Aziyade*'.

'*Aziyade*' is the great Orientalist romance — Loti's account of his love affair in Constantinople in the last days of the Ottoman Empire. A chance turning in a narrow lane, a glance through barred window, and Loti's eyes meet that of the lovely Circassian harem girl Aziyade — a look that will change their destinies forever. Loti's vivid descriptions of the city and his evocation of a vanished world are masterly.

More than a romance '*Aziyade*' reflects Loti's profound malaise with every aspect of Western civilisation and the religion of his youth.

The modest success of '*Aziyade*' led to another fictionalised account of an episode in his life.

This was a bestseller, as were many of his later works. It is the story of a fourteen year old native girl and her love affair with a naval officer, an affair based, on fact, though the girl's name was not Rarahu as in the novel. Loti had a sincere love of primitive life and of the Polynesian earthly paradise which civilised men, in the form of European missionaries, were destroying. Loti aspired to the state of Rousseau's noble savage, living naturally and expressing himself freely.

'*The Marriage of Loti*' is a sensuous book that contains some of the finest lyrical evocation of the South Seas ever written and led to many imitations.

With '*Aziyade*' and '*The Marriage of Loti*' Loti set a pattern that he would follow in many of his succeeding novels.

Loti never returned to Tahiti after his first visit. Many years later, in 1898, he attended an operatic version of his novel in the theatre and

old memories flooded back; ‘Then I shut my eyes to see myself once more — oh! to see again — with what inexpressible sadness — the true scene — over there, across how many seas, far away in the depth of times past — and it was as if under layer upon layer of ashes I found again the faces, the scents and that marvellous intoxication of my youth, in that vanished midnight, among the orange trees, under the southern stars ...’ In ‘*Madame Chrysanthemum*’, Loti describes his experiences of living with a Japanese geisha. It inspired Puccini’s opera ‘*Madame Butterfly*’ but unlike the romantic opera it is rather a melancholy account of the clash of two cultures.

Loti’s prose was delicate, impressionistic and subtle, able to appeal to critic and public alike. In character he was a man of contradictions. He was well liked as a naval officer, both by fellow officers and the men and he performed his duties very conscientiously. Loti could be vain, moody and changeable. He looked and behaved like a typical French gentleman of his times and kept himself a little apart, though he was no means aloof. He had a writer’s introspection and chose his company with care. Also, he was a man who had the courage to challenge the current morality and religious beliefs of the late 19th century and offer the alternatives of Islam and Eastern philosophies.

Pierre Loti became accepted as one of the most outstanding figures in French literature but he pursued his naval career for many more years. Loti rubbed elbows with kings and emperors and married into society. During the Great War he wrote pamphlets against the Germans and defended the Turks. In old age his reputation as a writer declined. He found solace in the company of his son Samuel and his grandchild. A few faithful friends visited him in his palace which contained a Gothic hall, a Renaissance hall, a mosque built from materials in Damascus, and a vast Chinese hall in red and gold, adjoining a pagoda.

Pierre Loti died in June 1923, and after an imposing naval service at sea was laid to earth in St. Pierre d’Oleron by his son and a few faithful sailors.

Loti’s vocation for the exotic, in life as in writing, the building up of his character as a great traveller, breaking all normal family ties; his long withdrawals from Western society and from his bourgeois background; the egotistic choice of freedom and life in alien cultures make Loti’s life a fascinating exception to the sedentary existence of

most authors. From adolescence he had dreamed of countries where time had stood still in, primitive Gardens of Eden; distant worlds where he could leave his ship and find salvation. He never found his personal paradise, in its entirety — had he done so it would have destroyed his art and his life-long quest.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Arthur Bromley was born in Wallasey, Wirral, and had his Osteopathy and Acupuncture Practice in that town for many years.

During the second World War he was a SGT ARMOURER IN R.E.M.E.

He now lives in quiet retirement in Spital, Wirral.

Bird Watching

Arthur Bromley

During the second World War in 1945, there was a general strike in our Colony of Nigeria, West Africa which lasted about six weeks when every service came to a standstill.

Buses, trains, post office, everything came to a halt so, as always in a case like this, the Army was called in to start everything up again and to ‘man’ all essential services.

At that time I was in Lagos as the Chief Instructor at the Armourers’ Training School, but it made no difference what your job was, every soldier had to get ‘stuck in’ and do his ‘bit’ to keep the Colony running.

I was allocated to be a Train Guard on one of the trains which ran from Lagos to the sacred city of Kano, a distance of about 750 miles northward.

That was not all I had to do. I was also in charge of a six-man armed guard of African soldiers with rifles and ammunition as trouble was expected at all the stations en-route.

But it was the rails which were the biggest headache as we knew someone would sabotage them at some point, so it was decided to have a bogey to run a couple of miles ahead of the train, manned by two men. It was their job to check the rails just ahead of them.

There was one great ‘snag’ to this, as the bogey could only move at about 25 mph the train behind could only travel at the *same speed*.

The 'bottom line' was that a journey that normally took 22 hours was now going to take a staggering *seven days* because it could only travel during the daylight and was halted at night.

What a boring journey it was but I couldn't complain, I had a whole compartment to myself (first class) plus a very comfy bunk, first class food and, above all, a flushing toilet, something I never ever saw again in West Africa. Our toilets at camp comprised a wide plank of wood with a hole in it and a large bucket on the floor under the hole.

Sadly, being 1945, it was still the 'bad old days' when black people were segregated from the whites and they had to put up with, what I called, a *sixth-rate* carriage. In fact, the train was always so packed with Africans that many of them spent the whole seven days travel on the *roof* of the carriage.

As the journey from Lagos to Kano then back to Lagos took 14 days I only did two trips. The first was uneventful but the second was far from it, and just before we left Kano I was summoned to the Station Master's office.

"I have a most unusual passenger for you," he said, "which is to be put in your charge."

I was intrigued.

"It's a Crownbird," he said.

"A what?"

"A Crownbird, a native of West Africa. It's very like an ostrich but has a yellow tuft of hair on top of its head."

"I don't like birds," I replied.

"Just feed it twice a day, that's all, and it will be collected at Lagos."

"Is it in a cage?" I enquired.

"No, it's in the first class toilet."

I was in a daze as I walked back to the train. I decided to go and have a look at my unusual charge, I wanted to 'spend a penny' anyway.

I opened the toilet door very slowly and looked in. The bird stood about 5ft in height, but seemed docile enough. I walked gingerly towards the toilet, the bird looked at me but never moved. About 30 seconds later it went mad and made a lunge at me, beak opened wide, and he grabbed hold of my hand. I let out a yell and bolted for the door. Was I glad to get outside, not waiting to 'adjust my dress'.

I never went in that toilet again but pushed his feed just inside the door. And I was very glad to arrive at Lagos and hand him over to a zoo official who had been waiting.

The funny thing is that in the intervening 57 years since I played ‘nurse-maid’ on that train I have never visited a zoo as I didn’t wish to meet one of those birds whose ancestor almost did me a **SERIOUS MISCHIEF**.

The People of Peace

Vivian Edwards

Love and Peace has at last come to Palestine. Let me tell you my story, for in the manner of mortals, the way in which it happened will be proclaimed and handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. Memories are evergreen.

One night a thunderously deep reverberating sound almost split our eardrums. Then suddenly the skies sparkled, twinkled with a thousand exploding stars which cascaded downwards through the dark velvet of the night. Weirdly glittering roofs slowly crumbled, crushed as if by a giant’s hand. Orange flames flickered in a macabre dance of death.

An Israelite settlement was on fire.

How we danced with joy whilst our Israelite enemies were consumed in the flames. We gloried in their agony and pain. Their helplessness. Did not the Jewish prophets themselves proclaim:

‘Thou shalt give life for life. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth ... burning for burning.’

We, the followers of Allah, may His name be praised, had been displaced from our rightful land; persecuted and massacred. Proud Arabs slaughtered like slaves. We who also believe that there is only one God; and that Mohammed is His prophet. Vengeance was ours.

But now Jews and Arabs have been united; become the People of Peace.

My daughter’s husband is an Israelite. It was a love match.

Let me start at the beginning. My family and I lived in Kissutim, a small village within the Gaza Strip. The Israelites stole our land; Palestine; treated us worse than the pigs they despised. We hated them. After the invasion of our land, the Israelis imposed a curfew

upon us. We could only leave our homes for one hour, under guard, and that only to collect water. We had no work; no food or money. Our schools were closed by the Israelites; there was nothing in life for our children. They rebelled. We all starved.

Starved under house arrest; prisoners within our own homes.

Terrible tensions rose in the village. A volcanic fury almost tore apart my two teenage sons Jihad and Muhammed.

We killed and ate our dogs, and our beloved horses. Even the rich who owned camels sacrificed them in order to eat. One night, my beloved husband was killed whilst hunting deer. Hit by an enemy bullet, he bled to death; alone on the bleak coldness of the barren hillside. It was then that my two sons, consumed with rage, armed with scimitars, deserted me, intent upon their revenge. The killing of the Jews.

I prayed that Allah would have compassion on a widow. Miraculously my prayers were answered. One stormy night, my two sons returned home, leading by the hand a diminutive girl child; fragile like a fairy. She seemed to be mute. Were they deranged. *Mad with hunger?*

“We felt compelled,” they said simply. “We had no choice.”

What could I say. They had no choice. I had no food.

Nothing ... nothing but mouths to feed.

We called her Ayesha ... which means gift from God. She remained speechless. We learnt to gaze deeply into the enchanting depths of her blue eyes; blue like the sea on a sunlit day, they seemed to swallow the torture of our daily existence. Love shone from their depths. On her wrist she wore a gold bangle, twisted like a snake, carved with strange characters that none could read. By night it glowed, glittered strangely, making clear the rocky paths ahead whilst our village men foraged for food.

Ayesha's coming was a mystery. She was a child from another world. By night, my sons stole down to the sea, led by Ayesha. Without bait, the fish rose to the surface; became trapped by eager hands. My cooking pot was never empty.

Our people learnt to live and to love again. Her smile was bewitching; it comforted all. Time passed us by, yet strangely, she

never grew. She was the eternal child amongst us. Then one day, Ayesha wandered out into the street. Guarding the well stood a stern Israeli soldier, gun on shoulder, ready to challenge anyone who dared contravene the curfew. Fearlessly she fixed the blue depths of her eyes upon him, and pointing her fingers to her mouth, panted like a dog. Amazed, he drew up some water from the well. Gently he gave her a drink.

It was a miracle.

Who was she. Where had she come from?

Suddenly, even whilst the child was still drinking, there came that dreaded swooshing sound; seemingly another missile. Shielding Ayesha against his breast, that Israeli soldier ran swiftly ... *towards our home* ... for shelter.

There he beheld my only daughter. Our beloved Ruth.

After that time, freshly baked brown bread studded with sesame seeds appeared daily outside our door. Sometimes there were eggs; often fresh fruit and milk. I knew then that my family would never starve. One day our young soldier helped Ayesha to collect drinking water for the whole village in the time that was outside the curfew hour.

I knew then that Ayesha was not of this world,

My two boys, true sons of Allah, all praise to His Name, had emerged from starving boyhood to lean muscled manhood. Their tenderness with Ayesha was extraordinary. She was after all only a female child. One night, whilst out hunting, they found that young Israeli soldier lying bleeding, doubtless left for dead by some of our vengeful villagers. My sons bound up his wounds; carried him to the Israelite camp. Charity, like Christian love, prevailed. The hungry were fed. Their Commander filled our wells, lifted the curfew, and presented our Headman with two sheep and a ram, two cows, and a fine bull. Soon afterwards, that Israelite soldier came openly to my house, bringing yet more bread. Enough for all the village. Moses was his name. How shyly he smiled at Ruth. Ayesha never spoke. Only her eyes smiled; showed their happiness when at last Moses asked for Ruth's hand in marriage.

How we all rejoiced. Jews and Arabs together, we feasted.

Ayesha's bracelet sparkled in the sun. A wondrous smile lit her face. She spoke for the first time: "Read," she whispered. Her voice was singularly sweet; birdlike.

I bent my head, taking her tiny wrist bearing the bracelet between my fingers. The *Arabic* characters were startlingly clear. “Peace,” I cried in wonder. “It spells Peace.”

Moses bent his head low with mine. “Truly these are *Hebrew* words,” he cried in awe. “Shalom ... Shalom ... Shalom ... meaning Peace.”

Little Ayesha smiled. “You all read ‘Peace’: *Each in your own tongue*. And so it is time for me to return back to my place of birth ...”

I felt a piercing pain in my heart: “Ayesha ... *Here* is your home ... here ... with Jihad and Muhammed ... with Ruth ... and with Moses.”

“All are my brothers ... my sisters; I must return. Here my mission is fulfilled. Here I have planted the seeds of Love and Peace ...”

Ayesha told us, for we listened entranced, that she came from another planet, inhabited by the People of Peace ... where flowers never fade ... where friendships never falter ... where hope springs eternal ... where Love abides. The place ruled by the Father of Peace who sends out his children as harbingers of Love to all suffering worlds. Sometimes, she told us, those pioneers suffered pain and tortures; their bodies were destroyed by men’s cruelty. And so there would be great rejoicing on her safe return. Then she explained our ancient origins to us all, for by this time both the Arab villagers and all the Israeli soldiers had gathered around; listening intently. I remember her exact words. I always will:

“You all should know the story of Abraham, for it is told in the Jewish Muslim and Christian Holy Books. Abraham, whose name means ‘Father of Nations’, had two sons; Ismael by the slave girl Hagar; and Isaac, by his aged wife Sara. Now God of the universe promised Hagar that He would make her descendants too numerous to be counted: He also promised Sara that hers too would be like the stars in the sky. You all know, from your Holy Books, that from Isaac sprung the Jewish nation, and from Ismael the Muslims, the followers of the Islamic religion. Thus Jews and Arabs are *blood brothers*, for they have both sprung from the seed of the one father, Abraham: and Jesus Christ, whom the Christians call the Messiah, was born into a Jewish home. His ancestry was also traced back directly to Abraham. He too taught his followers to *love* their enemies. Thus all are God’s children ... These too are the teachings of my People of Peace.

The learned Jewish Rabbi nodded his silken side curls in agreement.

Ayesha’s audience sat silently weeping, as she sang sweetly, clasping the hands of Ruth and Moses.

‘Time is running out; put hatred to sleep:

Live ... live together in your Holy Land:
Shoulder to shoulder watering your sheep ...'

Even as she sang, her form faded; Ayesha disappeared from our sight.

It was because of Ayesha that Ruth my daughter became the wife of the Israelite Moses. They lived together in peace and happiness. In time she bore him twin sons. Shalom and Salaam. Those words mean peace both in both Hebrew and Arabic. Later there followed many such unions between Arab and Jew. Everyone looked to Ruth and Moses for guidance; like Solomon in our Holy Book, both were esteemed for their wisdom.

Thus Ayesha's dream came true.

Jews and Arabs learnt to live side by side, in peace, worshipping the One Universal God; the Father whose love is for all mankind. Thus the promised land Palestine became the true Holy land, the domicile of both Jew and Arab.

And that is how it came to pass that in Jerusalem, some two thousand years after the birth of Jesus Christ, Jews, Muslims and Christians celebrated together in worship for the first time in the history of our world, within *our* sacred Muslim Mosque known as the 'Dome of the Rock'. It stands on the site of Solomon's temple, and encompasses the great rock from whence Abraham prepared himself to sacrifice his son Isaac to God. The rock is revered; held to be holy, not only by Moslems but also by Jews. As we praised God together, a voice was heard; birdlike; sweetly singing. It was, we all knew, our Ayesha; our messenger from that other planet; inhabited by the People of Peace.

'The wolf is dwelling with the lamb; and the leopard Is lying down with the kid; and the calf and the lion and the fatling together; and a little child led them. The cow and the bear are feeding; their young are lying down together; and the lion is eating straw like the ox. The suckling child is playing over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child is putting his hand on the adder's den. They are not hurting or destroying ...'

Blessed words from our Holy Book.

Slowly, Ayesha's voice became softer and softer; slowly it faded away.

My daughter Ruth has already borne me two grandsons. Moses her husband, has taken me into his home. I have become his mother. He has become my son. There he nurtures and protects me. Never again will I be afraid.

I know now that Ayesha was a heavenly being; a child sent to succour both Arab and Jew.

Peace will reign forever in our beloved land of Palestine.

The Man With The Million Dollars' Worth of Flies

Alan S Watts

The man who staggered down the gangway looked incredibly ill. Yet there was triumph in his eyes.

"I've got them," he called. "I've got them!"

Anxiously he supervised the unloading of his luggage. The boxes he was so careful about were amazingly light. Once they were safely ashore a great load of worry seemed to have been lifted from him.

"At last," he sighed. "At long last they are here in Hawaii."

But what was in the boxes? Spanish doubloons? Black pearls? Diamonds from secret mines?

Not at all. Had anyone lifted the lid from one he would have beheld – a few flies. That was all – a few small and insignificant flies!

But what an incredible adventure it had been to find these creatures. It had begun four and a half years earlier, in the year 1906. The sugar planters of Hawaii had been faced with ruin. A weevil grub was attacking their crops. Millions of dollars each year was being lost.

All methods of ridding themselves of the plague had proved in vain. Insecticides were powerless. Gangs of labourers employed in picking off the grubs proved just another expense. Calling in an "insect man" seemed to be the last hope.

Fortunately they selected the right man for the job. The dour Scotsman, Muir, was not one to let difficulties deter him. Having decided that there must be another insect in the world which preyed on the grubs, he set out to find it. This meant searching through those

parts of the world from which the sugar cane had originally been taken.

He made his way to China and then into the Malay Peninsula and from thence across into Java. But he was quite unsuccessful.

After a year working in sugar plantations he eventually came across the weevil again. In the Tenimber Islands he found it living on the sago palm.

Week after week he worked in the swamps searching for cocoons, collecting them, opening them to see if any had been attacked by some other insect. But there was no sign of strange eggs in any cocoon he opened.

It became clear that the weevil's natural home was not in the Tenimber Islands at all. Muir accordingly retraced his steps to the Moluccas and on to Amboina.

Here he found a fly, very like an ordinary housefly, which laid its eggs in the cocoons so that its newly-hatched young would have food to sustain them.

His next job was to catch some of these flies and get them to the sugar plantations of Hawaii. Catching them was fairly easy. Transporting them was another matter. The first cases he sent to his agent in Hong Kong were apparently empty on arrival. Then a few dead flies were shaken out of each.

He decided he would accompany the next consignment himself and nurse them on the voyage. But one by one all the flies died before he was anywhere near Hong Kong. It seemed a hopeless task.

Back he went to collect more. This time he planned to take them to New Guinea having discovered that the weevil on which they lived was plentiful there also.

But his own health was giving way. The hard work in fever-ridden swamps was telling on him. He contracted typhoid on the voyage. When he recovered every fly in his collection was dead.

Once again he returned. He succeeded in taking his next captures to Queensland, where he was able to breed a new generation. He then decided to make another attempt at getting them to the half-way house in New Guinea.

Yet once again his health broke down. Had it not been for a colleague in New Guinea another collection would have been lost. But he was able to recover and breed more generations ready to move to Fiji.

So step by step, dogged by fever and recurring malaria, Muir took his flies across the Pacific, until after years of struggle he had them ashore at Honolulu.

Here he bred more and more and eventually loosed them among the sugar canes. The weevils ceased to be a menace. Muir's work was done.

“Sir Daniel” and the Old Steam Train

Terry Rickson

‘Sir Daniel’ was a big powerful diesel engine who pulled the express trains from the Big London Station.

His proper name was “Sir Daniel Gooch”, after the famous railway man in the days of Queen Victoria. He had the name fixed in a long metal strip on each of his sides.

‘Sir Daniel’ was painted a rich, dark red with a black roof. He shared the diesel depot with three other big engines, his friend “Green Dragon” and two others named, “King Arthur” and “Princess Royal”. They also pulled the fast trains from the Big London Station.

“My wheels and cab windows,” ‘Sir Daniel’ used to say as he raced along, “this is the life!” He liked going fast, very fast indeed.

When he got back to the depot at night, he used to boast about how fast he'd gone that day. The other engines liked going fast too but they didn't always believe ‘Sir Daniel’. They called themselves ‘The Hundred Miles an Hour Club’.

If there was one thing that made ‘Sir Daniel’ very cross, it was red or orange signals, which meant he had to stop or slow down.

Sometimes an orange signal would make him go slowly through the Country Junction Station. Out of the corner of his cab window, he would often see the old steam train waiting in the little bay platform. The Private Steam Railway took lots of excited children, their Mums and Dads and men with cameras around their necks, down the branch line, through the country, to the seaside.

If a wind blew puffs of steam or smoke over his cab window, he would hoot loudly and shout, “Dirty, smelly, old thing!”

The steam engine was neither dirty nor smelly. It was painted a lovely dark green and its polished copper and brass parts shone and winked in the sun. There were gold letters on the side of the tender, where the coal and water were kept, which said, “Great Western”. Over one of the wheel splashers was a curved nameplate that said, “Chepstow Castle”, also highly polished.

“Can’t think why they bother,” ‘Sir Daniel’ would snort.

One morning ‘Sir Daniel’ felt quite out of sorts. He grumbled and groaned all the way from the depot to the Big London Station. His wheels squeaked and squealed and worst of all his insides rattled and banged.

“Oh, my wheels and cab windows,” he said, “I can’t go fast today.”

“Come on, come on,” said his driver.

“It’s no use,” ‘Sir Daniel’ said, “I feel too unwell.”

He went slower and slower until he finally came to a stop at the Country Junction Station.

“Oh, my wheels and cab windows, I can’t go a wheel further,” he sighed.

The people on the train began to put their heads out of the carriage windows.

“What’s wrong?” they asked.

“I’ll be be late for my meeting!” some said, pointing to their watches.

“I’ll miss my plane at the City Airport,” said others.

“We’ll do our best to start the train again,” said the guard.

People began to walk up and down the platform talking loudly into their mobiles.

No one, except ‘Sir Daniel’ noticed his driver talking to the driver of the old steam engine and then speak into their mobiles.

“Are they thinking that old heap of scrap iron can pull my train?” ‘Sir Daniel’ gasped. How his friends at the depot would laugh at him.

To his horror, he watched as ‘Chepstow Castle’ moved forward, her wheels squealing as she clanked over the points and on to the main line.

The big diesel shut his eyes tight as ‘Chepstow’ backed towards him.

“Oh, my wheels and cab windows,” he wailed, waiting for the bump.

There was no bump, only a gentle squeeze on his buffers.

All the passengers got back on the train.

The guard blew his whistle and station man raised his arm to the driver.

‘Chepstow’ gave three loud blasts on her whistle, which made ‘Sir Daniel’ jump.

“Now, old girl,” her driver said.

With a mighty whoosh of steam and spinning wheels, the train moved forward slowly.

“Can’t you help and give a bit of a push?” said ‘Sir Daniel’s’ driver.

“No I can’t,” he replied sulkily.

In a cloud of steam and smoke and whistling loudly, ‘Chepstow’ puffed under the bridge and away. The people watching on the platform and from the bridge, cheered and clapped.

For ‘Chepstow’, this was just like old days, once she got comfortable with her train, she began to pick up speed. She whooshed under bridges and whistled at country stations. How she was enjoying stretching her wheels with a good long run.

The railway ran for some way beside a main road. Normally ‘Sir Daniel’ would race along this bit at speed, whizzing past the cars and lorries, how they would laugh at him now! Some cars were slowing down to watch, some had even stopped by the side of the road and the lorries were grinning all over their radiators.

‘Chepstow’ was going at a good speed, a white plume of steam streaming over the carriages behind her; she treated the cars and lorries to a long whistle as she went past.

“Huh,” said ‘Sir Daniel’ to himself, “she won’t be able to keep this much longer, wait ’til she gets near the City Station.”

But ‘Chepstow’s’ driver had already begun to ease back on the speed.

“We’ll take it easy, old girl,” he said.

By the time they reached the tunnel before the City Station, the train was just rolling along. Giving a short, sharp whistle, ‘Chepstow’ entered the tunnel.

She remembered the City Station from her young days, there were lots of points and crossovers outside it and easing herself over the lines, she brought the train to rest at Number One Platform.

They’d made up time and were only two minutes late. Even ‘Sir Daniel’ was impressed.

Lots of passengers, including those who said they were in a hurry, stopped to admire the old engine, as she stood at the head of her train, wisps of steam rising from her warm, oily smelling boiler.

“How old is she?” someone asked.

“Built at Swindon seventy-five years ago,” the driver replied.

“Good for another hundred years!” said another voice.

“And more,” laughed the driver and fireman.

Soon ‘Chepstow’ was uncoupled from the train and drifted quietly away from the station but not before ‘Sir Daniel’ had managed to say, “Thank You.”

The City diesel depot found a long hose-pipe and put water in her tender, then ‘Chepstow’ took a nice steady journey back to her Country Junction Station.

Three dirty, cheeky diesel shunting engines came along and after much biffing and banging, pulled ‘Sir Daniel’ away.

“Oh, my wheels and cab windows,” he complained, “I’ve never been treated like this before. Just you stop it!”

The shunters didn’t care, laughing and chattering, they rattled and shook poor ‘Sir Daniel’ all the way back to his depot.

There 'Green Dragon' found him, alone and cold outside the depot.

"Come on, old friend," he said kindly and pushed 'Sir Daniel' into the repair shop.

He was soon fit and well again and back at work on the expresses.

He's not so boastful as he was.

Now, he gives 'Chepstow' a friendly toot if he sees her at the Country Junction Station.

The Train Set

Vivian Edwards

Through the half open door of the dining room I watched my son Jonathan. There he was, inside with all his friends, laughing, chattering, contented.

I was left outside; an exile.

Anger bubbled inside me till it threatened to erupt in a scream of hellish torment. Jonathan was my only child, and just thirteen years old. It was his birthday. This was his party. Laughter was loud ... filling the room, seeping round the side of the door like a multitude of soap bubbles, exploding in my face.

The food was all but finished; those sausages perched on sticks; chocolate biscuits; strawberries and cream; all the paraphernalia of a birthday tea. Little was left of the cake I'd made and iced so lovingly. The bright yellow icing, dotted with small edible figures. Bedouins and red-coated British soldiers, fighting together in the sands of the desert. On the solitary remaining wedge of cake, someone had stuck a small silk Union Jack. A battle victorious.

Thirteen burnt out birthday candles lay in a desolate heap.

Mutely I watched my son Jonathan giving away all his birthday presents; so patiently, so lovingly purchased. Watched whilst he gave them all to his friends. Eyes were eager, expectant. Bodies were tensed, stretching forward. Hands reached out expectantly. There were exclamations of thanks; of joy. Jonathan only hesitated over his train set. It was superb; still in its plastic packaging. I remembered its

selection, after hours of patient searching, by my husband James, Jonathan's father.

"I think," said my son hesitatingly, caressing the bright hard edges beneath the toughness of the outer covering, "I think I'll give this to Mr Thomas. *Just imagine* what all my form mates will say. I can see the look on their faces."

Barry Thomas was Jonathan's teacher.

My son leant forward, his frail figure bowed over the table. Suddenly the fragile strength that was his seemed to spill out of him, leaving his form strangely shrunken. Still he smiled. Clenching my teeth, burying my face in my hands, I stopped myself from invading his sanctuary. I had promised faithfully to leave him alone.

His mother had to be out of sight; on his thirteenth birthday.

Jonathan raised his head: "Peter," he said slowly, groping beneath the table. "Peter ... this is for you." He picked up a plain brown carrier bag, passing it over to a surprised looking boy.

All eyes slewed round to Peter. Only a deep intake of breath, a simultaneous sighing sound, broke the silence. Peter half rose from his seat in his excitement, his thin intelligent face alert; expectant. He took the bag. Opened it. Quickly removed the contents.

"Gosh. Thanks," he said huskily, eyes glistening, delight breaking the leanness of his coffee coloured skin. Peter was a Pakistani. Always he had been Jonathan's best friend. He held in his hands my son's new Sea Scout uniform; Jonathan's most treasured possession.

"Gosh ... Thanks ... thanks a lot," he almost stuttered. Peter needed a new uniform. He too was a member of the Sea Scouts.

Instantaneously a babble of voices broke out:

"When are you going back to the hospice?"

"Can we come and see you?"

"We'll keep all these presents till you come out."

"I won't come out. *Not* this time." Jonathan's voice was knowing; matter of fact. "But you must *all* come and see me."

Peter put a protective arm round my son's shoulders. "I'm tired," he said, with a perception I thought strange in one so young. "Why don't

we all sit down on the floor. Stop talking for ...” and he looked at his battered oversized watch ... “for at least ten minutes.”

Total silence reigned. My son rested his head on Peter’s shoulder, closed his eyes, and instantly fell asleep.

Still watching, I let my tears fall. I wasn’t needed. My son was secure amongst his friends.

Didn’t he remember me, his mother?

Why was I so angry. *So afraid*. So suddenly afraid?

Intuitively I knew that Jonathan had been right. He had wanted, demanded to be alone with his friends; undisturbed by my maternal over-protectiveness. He would always keep that memory of his special day, his birthday party, green in his mind. The security in the company of his special mates; the warmth of companionship and laughter, would never be forgotten. They all shared a contentment, a joy even, that cut me out of their company, making me feel an outcast in my own home.

Jonathan had elected to return to the hospice on the day after his thirteenth birthday. Had he sensed my fearful anticipation; exuding from every pore of my skin like a strange ectoplasm, surrounding us both like a shroud. A shroud before its time. That dreadful clinging fear.

“Honest Mum. It’s best for both of us,” he’d said, clutching my hands imploringly. “Best for Dad too.”

Truly my life had revolved around my son. I had shut out my husband James in the blackness of my despair. Even extended my anger to him. Mine was an anger against the awful unjustness of life; even against God Himself. My son had a brain tumour. It was untreatable and inoperable.

Over the past year Jonathan had spent much of his time at school, deciding to board, alternating with seemingly recuperative periods in hospital, and then finally the hospice. Somehow with the instinctive understanding of childhood, I knew he sensed that death was near. My son did not seem afraid. Then came the school holidays. Frailer by the day, he’d chosen to rest in the hospice; away from home; away from my care and concern; my constant presence.

Jonathan’s illness had all started off with vague ill-defined feelings of fatigue. Always a hearty eater, he’d started to nibble at food, like a girl emerging reluctantly into womanhood. Then came a little vomiting.

Headaches that got worse; increasing tiredness. At first, his family doctor had been comfortingly cheerful:

“Difficulties at school?” he had queried sympathetically.

I’d pondered over my reply. Jonathan loved his active school life; was good at sports; a natural leader amongst his peers. He tried hard in the classroom, but he wasn’t academic. Certainly he loathed Latin, and was cheeky with his Latin master; French he disliked ... but I quelled my anxieties ... later he could give up Latin. Initially unbeknown to me, he started to skip school. Finally his doctor referred him to a psychiatrist.

“Common in youngsters,” that man had said cheerfully. “School refusal syndrome.”

Medicines had even been prescribed; designed to lift Jonathan’s depression. Then came a second batch, given to sedate him, stop him feeling sick. I’d bullied my son to take them with monotonous regularity.

The headaches had only deepened in intensity.

At first, I’d kept my son at home, protected by my love. It seemed strange to me when he begged to return to school; longing for his friends. He became moody, irritable; changed before my eyes. Eventually I’d acceded to his repeated requests.

It was Barry Thomas, his teacher, who asked to see me one evening. My husband was away on business. The man’s face had reddened with embarrassment as he spoke: “Impertinent of me of course,” he’d started off apologetically. “But I have a big advantage over you ... and your son’s doctors ... I’m not so personally involved. Jonathan has been away for two weeks, so I haven’t seen him for a little time. Your son *is not* shamming. He *is* ill ... really ill. You mustn’t blame everything on his inability to cope with languages. Lots of boys dislike them.”

How my anger had exploded over Barry Thomas. Volcanic like. But only because he’d confirmed my innermost fears. James and I had taken our son to a paediatrician for a further medical opinion; there were prolonged investigations. Jonathan had a brain tumour. Untreatable. Inoperable.

The specialist was kind. She tried to comfort: “An earlier diagnosis wouldn’t have made the slightest difference. Perhaps treatment would even have prolonged the agony ... for you ... and for your son.”

“But Jonathan was made to feel so *guilty* staying away from school,” I protested.

The specialist nodded her agreement. She looked at my husband, then laid her hand over mine:

“I’ve a boy of my own,” she said simply. “I *do* understand. Don’t look back now. Don’t torture yourself ... and your husband ... and most of all ... Jonathan. Start afresh, Aim to give your son some happiness.”

Happiness ...

I cursed the word; an anathema.

But, strangely, my son had been happy. Almost contented; certain in the knowledge that he had not rejected the school that had been his life. He started having periods of rest in the hospice; then revitalised, he had returned cheerfully to school. Barry Thomas gave every support. So did his class mates. Jonathan returned to his language sessions. Sometimes, we were told, his eyes closed in sleep, but no-one ever said a word. Then came the school holidays; and his birthday party ... surrounded by his friends ... content.

Only I screamed out against his fate.

So, behind that half closed door, I watched my son. Watched and waited. Waited and listened. I saw Peter look at his watch. Thirty minutes had passed, and my son was still asleep. Gently Peter tapped him awake.

“It’s time for us all to go,” he said. “We’ll take turns in coming to see you ... *me first.*”

Jonathan smiled. “Thanks,” he said simply. “Come tomorrow.”

As one body, his friends rose to their feet. Politely said their ‘thank-yous’ and ‘good-byes’ to me; and then departed, clutching their presents.

I felt oddly desolate as they left. I looked at my son. “Enjoyed yourself?” I asked gently, doing my best to ignore the whiteness of his face.

Jonathan grinned, almost his old self. “*Smashing.* The best party ever. Your cake was smashing too ... really really super ... thanks a lot Mum.”

“Have a rest now,” I said, trying to restrain my anxiety. “It will give me a chance to clear up and get a meal for us all. Dad will be home soon; then we can all watch your video film.”

He nodded happily, as he made his way slowly upstairs; stumbling, clumsily dragging one leg ... I knew I mustn’t help him.

I cleared away the remnants of his birthday feast. Prepared supper for James and for Jonathan; then sat down in a crumpled heap, contemplating

that train set. Carefully I placed it beneath the table. Jonathan would look at it later. He'd always wanted one, and so had that husband of mine ... secretly longing to shunt round train carriages alongside his son.

Silently I crept to my son's room. He looked seraphic in sleep. All lines of weariness were eased from his face. Satisfied, I crept downstairs again to wait for James. He came at last. Always protective, he smiled to see me more contented.

"I knew the party would go well," he said. "Sorry I couldn't make it ... but he wanted to be left alone in any case."

I nodded my agreement. Yes ... Jonathan had been happy.

Together we made our way upstairs, and looked down upon our son.

His face was still seraphic. Only this time it was in death.

I howled my vituperation upon James, till his face sank stupefied upon his breast. But still he tended me; followed me as I rushed to grasp that unwieldy plastic packaged train set, cradling it in my arms. It had been our last gift to our son. Never never would I part with that last sacred memory. It was mine forever. Wildly I rushed to our bedroom, and shut it in a cupboard; out of sight; forever mine.

That night I locked my husband out of our bedroom.

James became part of the background. Non-obtrusive by day, but there all the time. As if in a dream, I heard him use the telephone, move around the house, talk with the doctor. Late next morning, the front door bell rang. Fiercely I opened it, wanting to repel all intruders; ready to spew out my rage. Peter presented himself, heading a little group of Jonathan's very special friends. He carried that brown carrier bag in his hands; held it out to me:

"We loved Jonathan too," he said. "So we've brought you back his things; the presents he gave us. Brought them back to you." He swallowed awkwardly, his eyes filling with tears.

It was then my grief erupted. Burst the flood gates. I held Peter tightly to me. We wept together.

"You keep them," I sobbed. "My Jonathan wanted *you all* to have them ... so keep them for him."

They all cried. All that little band. Howled out their anguish, and with me leading them. Then Peter looked up at me, tugging at my sleeve:

“I’m coming back to see you again. Coming another day,” he said. Then he went, taking all Jonathan’s friends with him.

James took me in his arms. I went to the telephone; picked it up reluctantly, holding it in the dampness of my hand:

“You do it,” I said hesitatingly at last. “*You* phone Barry Thomas. Tell him that Jonathan wanted to give his train set to his classmates ... so *everyone* can enjoy them. *You* tell him *now* ... before I change my mind.”

That night I slept in my husband’s arms.