

**AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY**  
**(A WORK IN PROGRESS BEGUN IN 2014)**

**By Tim Cloudsley**

**CHAPTER ONE**

**IN THE BEGINNING: CHILDHOOD AND ESHER**

This will certainly not be, dear reader, any kind of autobiography that tries to cover everything equally in the author's life; nor certainly do I promise it will be universally "objective". I will try to be as honest as I can at every turn about myself: I promise I will not try to adorn myself in virtue – I have no interest in doing that anyway, as I don't believe anyone is or ever has been a saint or a hero. But I can't pretend otherwise than that I might say less about events or periods in my life about which I feel ashamed, embarrassed, or still so confused that I don't really know what to say about them – as my feelings and judgements always keep changing like quicksilver in a medieval pot, or a frog sitting by a pond with the sun above slithering in and out of bright or black clouds. Instead, I confess now that I will only write about what I feel like writing about – as any alternative ambition would very soon inhibit me, mire me down in anxieties and fears of dishonesty, or boastfulness, or self-destruction; or submerge me in sadness, regrets, or self-condemnations that might drive me to the brink.

Thus this autobiography will not be like Richard Wagner's *Mein Leben*, in which experts claim our Richard actually falsified the things that had happened to him and when he had

done them; not unconsciously, which is quite understandable, but deliberately: to paint a self-portrait that would confirm his egocentric view of himself. Friedrich Nietzsche, his erstwhile friend and later deep hater, wrote that one should “invent” one’s life in retrospect, to make it conform to a shaped “great work of art”. This is a very interesting idea, but I do not agree with it at all. Warts and all for me. But I love to think of Richard and Friedrich sitting together there when they were still friends “laying the foundation stones of the new art”, cooking up such an extraordinary justification for lying. Warped, bent, cracked the two of them were – but they were nevertheless among the greatest intellectual and creative geniuses humanity has ever harboured.

A bit nearer perhaps to this attempt at an “Autobiography” might be Robert Graves’ “Goodbye To All That”, one of the best books I have ever read in my life. I read that at boarding school on the advice of an English master. Here Graves does not attempt to spread the space of his work evenly or equally across time at all: in any case the book only goes up to the age of about 33 years, and the bulk of it is engrossed with the First World War; this was and remained in a way the core of his life, however much he tried to make things otherwise. I know, because I went to his house in Deya, Majorca, in 1987, and met his widow Beryl; who said Graves was mentally ill at the end of his life. She spoke of how she had arranged for Graves to see the marvellous BBC serial of his masterpiece “I Claudius” when he was old and feeble – which I thought was far greater than his poetry at that time. I would have to read it all again now to decide whether that is still my opinion.

I took a taxi to the gates of his house in Majorca in 1987, having asked the driver where his house was in Deya. The taxi-driver did not understand what I was talking about for most of the journey, until suddenly he understood: “Ah, el loco inglés! Roberto Graves!” he pronounced in perfect local dialect. On arrival, I walked down the drive of the house, and an elderly lady meandered towards me. “Ah, you must be Beryl,” I declared, having been recently reading a biography of Graves. The lady obviously thought I had some reason to be there, and invited me and my female companion into the patio of her house, and offered us a beer, which given the heat, we very happily accepted. We talked for a couple of hours about the great writer and poet Robert, until I felt it was time to politely take our leave. It was a totally unintentional con-trick I had pulled off, having no connection at all with Robert or Beryl Graves; but she seemed unoffended, as we talked about her former illustrious husband, life in Deya, and how much she had disliked London when she had recently returned there – crowded, noisy etc.

That biography of Graves, written by an author whose name I cannot remember, said that Robert Graves had suffered greatly in his old age, confessing to someone that he had “killed a lot of people” during the First World War. His interlocutor answered: “Ah, but you were a soldier, that’s not murder.” “Oh yes it is, you know,” replied Graves.

I think everyone holds a combination of selfishness and generosity, the issue is how to make the balance work. With no sense of self-preservation, you cannot survive, you will sink or be taken advantage of down to death. Yet without that generosity of spirit which Shelley speaks of in his “A Defense of Poetry”, which ignites the Imagination to put each person into the shoes of any and every other human being’s pleasures, pains and sufferings, we rise hardly at all above the beasts; indeed we remain below them, as they do not have the consciousness or technology to cause such deliberate harm to other living beings as we do. Leonardo da Vinci said something similar to this in relation to cruelty.

The Russian psychologist Vygotsky devised a theory of human cognition and consciousness in which he argued that the *practical intelligence* of a chimpanzee in the first two years of its life is ahead of a human infant. The latter can do little more than suck and make a hell of a noise (though I think now there is more known about eye movements and other things among human babies), whilst the chimp can climb onto a chair which it has previously placed upon another chair, attach parts of a pole together to make a stick, and then knock down a banana hanging from the roof in order to eat it.

Both chimps and human infants use signs – sounds – to communicate, but after about two years the human infant moves to a qualitatively new capacity to use symbols – words – which allow of *language*, which allows the communication of thoughts beyond the here and now. Many have tried to suggest that chimps – the most “intelligent” primates other than humans – *can* learn language with human assistance; but the most convincing ethologists now seem to think that what might appear to be the use of signals to say: “I want to eat, please give me a banana” are really only learned patterns of sign use, not internally appropriated creative speech.

But we can visualize that if other animals did advance beyond sign-use, they might develop extraordinary languages very different from those of human beings. When my wife and I are driving to our small finca, near Bucaramanga in Colombia, the nearer we get to it our little dog Tomkin makes increasingly varied and expressive sounds, as if he’s bursting to speak of his increasing excitement about getting there, as he loves the place. I like to imagine what language, and what poetry pincher dogs might produce if they evolved to a

new stage! But as Wittgenstein said: “If a lion could speak, we would not be able to understand him.”

It is interesting to consider in respect of this, whether we could not understand such a lion because we would not, as a different animal species, be able to understand any “lion language”; or whether we would not understand his or her language because we did not know that particular language.

Fantasy is always there, in any realm of human consciousness. Perhaps in animals’ consciousness as well – anyone who has had a dog, or cat, or a goat as I once did (in Oakenshaw, County Durham), realizes that animals are conscious, though on different planes, and in different forms from human beings, just as they have emotions. But their consciousnesses are different, though not utterly distinct from human consciousness. Similarly their fantasies, and dreams (which we evidence when watching them sleeping sometimes); different species or races of animal seem to have different forms of consciousness – Minet (our cat) and Tomkin (our dog), though they communicate and play together, are very different, in most interesting ways.

I sometimes feel, strangely, that the misery of humanity as a whole, or of the species, will never match that of the individual: bereft, deserted, in isolated pain and grief. “Into this world we’re thrown/Like a dog without a bone,” as Jim Morrison sang in “Riders on the Storm.”

Something that the reader will already have noticed is that I often paraphrase passages that I remember from what I have read or heard without trying to verify them exactly as quotations. After a long time in which I tried always to conform to academic norms and protocols with respect to quotations, exact references and so on, I came to the conclusion that no longer would I exhaust nor frazzle myself in guilt about my quotations being inexact, at least certainly not, in an Autobiography: readers can do that corrective work if they want to. If they find this intolerable and cannot forgive me for my manner of writing they are not obliged to read my book. (It will certainly make no difference to me either way, as I will never know.) As I’ve explained, unless I can enjoy writing this, at least to some extent, I do not want to do it. If it were to cause me agony, I simply could not do it anyway.

Obviously I cannot remember my birth, nor the first 18 months of my life which I lived in Cambridge, where my father was a post-graduate Zoology research student at the

University, investigating the behaviour of millipedes, having returned, wounded, from North Africa and then Normandy as a tank commander. He had had a knee-bone smashed out of his leg by an exploding German shell in his tank in Libya, and was invalided out by a hospital ship to Durban, South Africa, pumped with morphine. If I remember correctly, three of his crew had been killed outright, though the wireless operator had been wrecked, as my father explained to me when I was very young, his nerves being exposed to light in such a way that his survival after the war was unbearable. My father was estimated to be unfit to participate in the D-Day invasion, but actually managed to wangle his way into it, leaving behind his recently married wife, my mother, pregnant in 1944 with my older brother Hugh. My father always said later that he never believed he would be killed in the war, and could not have borne being uninvolved in the Normandy campaign. In Normandy he had further adventures, or misadventures, having his tank again hit by a shell from a very close-up Tiger Tank commanded by the notorious German tank hero Wittman. After this he was captured, then escaped. When I was seven years old we went on a family camping holiday in France (my father also had a short conference to attend in Paris – my mother and we three brothers stayed in a camping site in the Bois de Boulogne in the rain and mud) in an old Austin Eight, and afterwards retraced my father`s steps when on the run near Villas Bocage in Normandy, where he had hidden in the basement of a villager. My father talked with a very animated old man in the village where the basement still existed, who knew all about what had happened to the British tanks at the hands of the Germans, though I don`t think the two of them had actually met before. When he got back to the British line my father was given an honorary discharge, and went back to England and to my mother, who in November would give birth to Hugh. My father wrote of all this in his autobiography called “Memories of a Sharpshooter”, which is a very good read.

I often found with gaping jaws later, that people felt the fact of my birth and early months in Cambridge, somehow conferred or bestowed upon me some kind of advantage in life (which I never felt). Later in life in particular I found that some people felt that much about me was due to my upbringing, my family, with some presumed “advantage”. If only I had felt this too, I would have happily admitted it. But alas, I never did nor have so felt, except in certain specific ways that I will come to in time; and in even these respects I believe it was always as a double-edged sword, a mixed blessing.

My father, who thought the nuclear arms race – MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) – had “kept the peace” for fifty years after the Second World War, also thought that humanity was on the road to self-annihilation, though not due to nuclear war nor environmental

disaster, but rather because it seemed to him that a virus would emerge that would incapacitate the human species. It is extraordinary, but true, that I suggested this possibility to him in Khartoum once, when as a student of Zoology and Biochemistry at Cambridge, in a flash of terrible fantasy, I posited the idea that a virus might strike human beings and wreck their capacity for human intelligence. Not just Civilization, but human, social existence would entirely collapse, if people regressed to the state of any animal, i.e. with no coherent consciousness, no ability for social organization or planning. He later wrote a number of published articles expressing this thesis, much to my emotional horror, though I could not deny intellectually the possibility of such a catastrophe.

The event (my birth) apparently occurred at 6.00am on September 18<sup>th</sup> 1948, in a hospital called Addenbrooks; the lovely trainee nurses of which I met much later as a sex-craved student. The first thing I can remember however, is more than three years later, by which time our family was living at Glendoone, 10 Lower Green Road, in Esher, Surrey. I was waiting for a bus at a Greenline bus stop with my older brother Hugh on the Portsmouth Road (the A3), to go into Esher town, I don't remember at all why. I said to Hugh, suddenly thinking about my fourth birthday which was to come very soon (September 18<sup>th</sup> 1952), "I'm going to be four soon!" I remember him saying very distinctly as we boarded a red, number 206 bus, "Well that's not very much is it?" I do not however remember any great feeling in relation to this reply, except perhaps for a mild sense of disappointment. I am pretty sure I am not inventing this memory, as I clearly remember having narrated it ever since I was very young.

Here we may as well encounter what I imagine we will do repeatedly in this Autobiography, the question as to whether an autobiography is intrinsically egotistical. I remember my father, when I was by then at least thirty years old or more, writing a review of an autobiography by the American socio-biologist E.O. Wilson, in which my father said that autobiographies usually involve an ego-trip on the part of the author, and although I had little sympathy for Wilson at that time, thinking him to be philosophically reactionary and lacking respect for or knowledge of the Social Sciences as he pontificated about the biological bases of human social behaviour, I thought and felt this judgement of my father's rather harsh and foolish. Some decades later my father wrote an excellent partial autobiography, as mentioned already, called "Memories of a Sharpshooter", which only reinforced my life-long feeling that he could at times be rather hypocritical; judging things negatively until he chose to do or think them himself, or when he came to have a dawning understanding of something he had previously scorned or deflated, at least with me, such

as Mozart's music which I loved long before him (he had thought Mozart was a "light composer"); in time he did come to appreciate it, without however admitting that his earlier scorn had been based on auditory ignorance. This was a recurring theme for me with respect to my father – on issues ranging from what to me were mad, vicious, unjust wars waged by the United States against Third World Countries (supported by Britain and the West in general), through to arguments about Women's Liberation (for a long time he accused me of indoctrinating my mother on these matters); to dawning understandings of many things, ranging from the need for justice for the Palestinians, through to a love of certain aspects of imaginative poetry that had been outside of his appreciation before (not that he lacked very strong imagination with respect to the music or literature that he already admired). I do not claim that I was responsible for converting him, though he certainly changed his points of view without ever recognizing the hell he had caused me earlier, when I was still young and extremely sensitive.

However, he could point out to me the wonders of the stars and the constellations in the sky from a very early age, especially when camping out in open country, and tell amazingly imaginative spontaneous stories at any moment, many of them about the adventures of a boy named Whisk, who was really me, and open me to the beauty of that music which he did love – Beethoven, Schubert, and Verdi in particular at that stage, which was extremely important for me. It was my father who put the radio by my bed as I recounted in an essay called "On Art", which begins:

"When about eight years old, I was unwell, and had to be left at home when all the rest of my family went to the wedding of a very favourite aunt called Jean. I was despondent, but my father put a radio by my bed, and looked in the Radio Times, where he found I would be able to hear Schubert's Ninth Symphony whilst I was alone. I did hear it; and was plunged into a dimension of human life I have never forsaken since, a realm of grandeur, solemnity, beauty and sadness so noble and marvellous that I seem to have been chasing it like a demented hound after a sacred hare all my subsequent life. This is the strange reality I want to drift into in this short essay."

And this is a poem I wrote over sixty years later:

"Ah Schubert, how I love you again,  
Listening to your sacred songs sung by Elisabeth Schumann.  
You were my spirit's friend when I was a child,

Looking over our lawn from my bedroom one day,  
When I first heard you, such sweetness and sadness  
Pouring into the heart, the over-brimming stars at night,  
The burning ecstasies of the moon,  
The fiery sun within the circles of the sky.”

And it was on that white, plastic, family radio that I heard a story as a child in Esher, about a man standing up in a canoe on the Amazon, with long wild black hair, waving his arms and hands around frantically: whoever it was watching him came to realize there were actually thousands of huge black ants that were crawling over each other and over the man’s head. This initiated my impregnable urge to go to the Amazon, as I did many years later.

My father, the War, and his service were of course central to my upbringing. My mother however, although being proud and supportive of my father’s courageous contributions in the War (not however like Spike Milligan’s as recorded in his *Hitler: My Contribution to his Downfall!*), nevertheless said to me one day, in their double-bed into which I had sneaked, when I had spoken to the effect that I felt bad, undermined, and feeble that there did not seem to be a War I was likely to be able to participate in, equivalent to WW2: that there were far better things to throw one’s energies into than fighting wars.

Anyway, I came to the conclusion recently that to write an autobiography was no more egotistical than to write anything else. Treat it as a literary form if you wish, or a crazy kind of novel, or like the lyrics of a rock song! Nothing has to be taken seriously if the reader or listener does not want to do so – therefore I leave him or her to think for him or herself, and throw the wretched book into the nearest ditch if he or she wants to!

Actually of course, the question of genre is extremely interesting. I live now in Colombia, which is sometimes described as the “Athens of South America”, and has developed a most fascinating oeuvre and philosophical debate over the issue of the “historical novel”, vis-à-vis the writing of “literary history”. The greatest exemplar of the first is Pedro Gomez Valderama with his superb novel “La Otra Raya del Tigre” (The Other Stripe of the Tiger), whilst German Arciniegas is the greatest example of imaginative, literary history. William Ospina does both. These two genres overlap, and are ultimately inseparable. Very intriguing it is for me to have recently discovered that exactly these questions were debated and argued over in Ancient Greece; the earliest novels in Hellenistic times were sometimes

considered, as for example by the Roman Emperor Julian, as “fictions in the form of history”.

There was quite a debate in those times about what was “true”, and what was “untrue” or “imagined”, and the more one thinks about this, not only does the matter become more complicated, but the more does the dilemma seem ultimately unresolvable. Gabriel Garcia Marquez wrote: “Life is not what one lived, but what one remembers and how one remembers it in order to recount it.” There is no one “valid” account of one’s life, it depends on the moment one writes it, and what is operating in one’s memory at that time, in terms of thoughts and feelings, even fantasies.

I remember the plaque fixed to the front gate of our semi-detached house in Esher: Glendoone, 10 Lower Green Road. Doctor J.L. Cloudsley-Thompson. Quite smart, but not boastful. Nevertheless it was enough to put me off that kind of personal house-labelling in the future, I am not quite sure why at that stage. The name Glendoone about which I don’t think I had any kind of objection was inherited from previous owners: why they had taken this very Scottish name I never knew, though it is interesting that my father, who tended to dominate this kind of family consideration at that stage chose to keep that house name. He was always eager to be “original”, or perhaps could not help being so, but when something came his way in this form he was more than capable of accepting it (rightly, I might say in retrospect).

I remember very well that I sometimes deliberately provoked my mother, in order to receive sweet and loving reactions; if that didn’t work, I would be miserable for hours or all the night. I can’t say what was the cause of this insecurity on my part, for I remember my mother as nothing other than lovely when I was a child: when years later I read some of Ernest Hemingway’s novel “A Farewell to Arms”, where he describes in long, flowing, poetic prose how the protagonist’s lover came to kiss him in his hospital bed, her long, perfumed, dark hair flowing like the ecstasy of a tent over his face, I realized that was how my mother had been to me, so often, when she kissed me goodnight in bed. I don’t know what created a sense of insecurity about rejection, or, much more, abandonment, later: perhaps it was because my parents stuffed me in a boarding school after I was eleven. I can’t say because although I hated that prison, a concentration camp, I cannot specifically remember emotions of desertion, or desperation towards my mother; perhaps it was all too buried, or perhaps the deep wounds were already sown earlier; or perhaps in that generation, and in that kind of family, one might partially rebel, but did not, could not,

revolt. But I certainly did miss her painfully in the first years there, sometimes in a kind of soft, sweet, sad dream, imagining her face and I think her voice.

But the curious thing is that once I started to have girlfriends - through extraordinary emotional-psychological, utterly unshared farcical adolescent-youthful difficulties (especially in “serious relationships”) - and I fell constantly in love, it was usually me who ended those relationships, feeling they were unsatisfactory. I always felt sad and guilty about separations, but I was quite clear that I couldn’t go on with the relationships, feeling I would crack up or break down under the stress of repeated arguments, misunderstandings, sad break-ups followed by short reunions, things that seemed veritably to be destroying my soul. Short term, so-called casual, temporary relationships, without strong lasting commitments or obligations were usually much happier and freer for me, if I was allowed by the girlfriend in question to have it that way – presumably because it suited her too. Occasionally it was the girl who broke off a ”serious” relationship, and I suffered terribly; but generally not – only many years later did I really suffer the suicide-inducing misery of abandonment. Once or twice, with relationships that were actually quite hopeless, and I knew they were, I could not accept their ending. Romantic poetic misery, as for Schubert in his “Winterreise”, consumed me sometimes for several months or even years at a time.

A strange thing is that when I write poetry, fiction, or “non-fictional prose”, if I think about this at all, I feel I am writing it to the Universe, all Humanity, or for whomsoever is interested in reading it. But with an “autobiography” I am not at all sure for whom I am writing: who wants to know that when I was four or five I remember helping my father to push a car – I’m not sure whose it was, not ours yet, I’m sure of that, from the back, and I fell over and landed up with my legs being pushed back as the car slipped backwards, and felt my backbone was on the point of breaking, until my father came around the car as I had not been able to reply to his questions, and quickly resolved the situation.

I fear that one impulse behind my attempting to write an autobiography is the fact – the most “tragic”, “cruel”, and “devastating” thing that has ever happened to me – that my sons rejected me, did not want to know me, and therefore could never know my personality or life-history; having adopted hellish attitudes about me, that I simply could not and still cannot understand. My sweet boys, who had been so loyal, loving, and kind to me, suddenly turned against me, though this was extended through several blows over a long time, many years. No gratitude for all I had done or tried to do for them, just complete shunning of me and refusal to meet or communicate with me for donkeys’ years without a

squeak of explanation, then horrible accusations of what seemed to me fatuous, false, brutal judgements, often made to my brother Peter rather than to me. I cannot rebuff anything, as they only accuse me of dragging up the past, trying to justify myself, and other things that are unanswerable, so that every attempt I have made has only made things worse. If I beg them to forgive and forget, or communicate to me directly their grievances, or tell them how much I have loved them, they do not respond. And if I am angry, they resent that too. The whole thing undermines one so much, the vague guilt and pain cannot be easily escaped from. You cannot deal with vague accusations, any more than K could do in “The Trial”, if no one tells you what crime you are accused of committing.

I have suffered so much – I cannot help seeming self-pitying; but it is really a mixture of intense sadness, incomprehension and sometimes anger that I feel – in oceans of dreadful emotions: pain, sorrow, guilt, rejected love, smashed dreams of fatherhood and filial wonder; above all intense sadness at being unable any more to provide the help, support, and guidance that a father should provide for his sons. No words can ever gather up the misery I underwent and will always undergo until my dying day. It had the effect, and still often does, of gutting me completely, making me feel there is no point in anything, as the usual (irrational) sense of continuity from parent to offspring is wrecked, so that when you die you will simply sink into the cold, dark Universe, alone and without issue. If one had never had children in the first place it would be different; but when you have, this can feel worse even than if they had died. Mahler’s “Death of Children” only partially meets the total emptiness and destruction of self, purpose, and confidence I have felt; but I hope this feeling will become less and less over time, because I have a woman, my darling Nidia, whom I love, and who loves me.

Often I have woken in the morning, after a deep sleep, only to enter a hell of sadness, anxiety and depression, full of misplaced guilt (over nothing), regret, and a sense of there being nothing else but death. I often dream of my children, reconciled with them, but they are always much younger than they are in reality now.

How cruel it has seemed, after a life-time of experiencing discouragement from so many of my endeavours from so many envious cynics and resentful philistines - not that I mean my work and efforts generally have been so damned successful in terms of fame or fortune, but precisely the opposite; rather it is that most or at least many people don’t continue with a vocation like mine if they don’t meet with some such minimal “success” - then to have

my beloved boys evidently disdaining me, after such intimacy in their infancies and childhoods, and hold no interest in our father-son communications.

Other fathers that I know of, rejected unfairly in their own views by their children, can say “too bad, they’re wrong” (which is more or less how my wife Nidia thinks I should take it, and concentrate on other commitments). A friend of mine in Glasgow has also advised me to be like this: he had said “I’m not a bad person”, when his wife left him amid clouds of condemnation and when years later his son rudely rejected him too.

Not me, I forever worry about my sons, doubt myself again and again, feel an ultimate cosmic loneliness and coldness in the Universe; a morally undermined self-confidence, guilt, although rationally I do not think I am the things I am accused of. Though by no means do I think I am perfect, a saint, or an unadulterated hero. I think my ex-wife fabricated and exaggerated things, and transmitted falsities to our children. Many people, neighbours and mothers of my children’s friends among them, thought I was a “good” and “nice” father.

I have suffered, and still do, whenever reminded of fathers opening doors to ideas in their offspring, and of the fondness possible between fathers and sons; amid so many suggestions, whether in films, from talking with friends, or from observing the world generally.

I know I may seem self-pitying, as well as self-justifying, but I have wondered sometimes how I could have kept my post as a Sociology Lecturer at Glasgow Caledonian University and other institutions for nearly forty years, or had the Head of the Sociology Department in Glasgow give me a reference letter for the Universidad Industrial de Santander, describing me as well-respected by my colleagues, while I maintained a family with a non-working wife for over ten years, and two children, if I was so awful as my sons seem to feel I am.

I have been described at times by a few others as holding a self-destructive streak – I have never felt distinctly any such tendency within me, but when I was young I was certainly very “bold”, or “audacious”. My father described me once as “reckless”, which was meant to hurt – though he was very proud of his own audaciousness whether in the War or crossing the Sahara in a DKW with my mother many years later.

I certainly have a capacity for addiction – whether it is for staying up late at night or for sex (in the past) or for other things – thank god I never went beyond alcohol and cigarettes vis-à-vis “substances”, though I “tried” and took marihuana, hashish, LSD, mescaline, speed, and other things – which I hope to discuss later - but much less often. I think addictions are more complicated than mere self-destructiveness. The road to paradise is paved with excess, to paraphrase William Blake. For example quite a number of writers, artists and composers have been heavy drinkers and it is clear that for Ernest Hemingway drinking was vital to his writing. Traditional Chinese painters and poets openly praised wine for its indispensably inspiring qualities. Sibelius similarly drank whisky while he was composing, which annoyed his wife as she sometimes found him asleep, slumped at his desk in the morning. But what music it is! And he lived until he was over ninety. On the other hand friends of Mussorgsky thought his drinking was his downfall and the cause of his early death (though by god what music he also wrote). As for health generally I think I do care for myself – but all life is a risk or a wager, it is no good trying to mollycoddle oneself. I despise hypochondria or excessive fussiness about one’s health. I remember an American black and white film when I was a child in which a cantankerous old man scorned and ignored his doctor’s advice. And I liked Hildesheimer’s comment, in his superb book about Mozart, that over-concern with health, which Mozart did not manifest, is philistine.

The problem of addiction involves for some people the fact that they find “the world” difficult, and are susceptible to intense anxieties. Drinking, smoking, and sometimes taking more “dangerous” things helps them calm down, see the world from different perspectives, and can help them to concentrate on their work, their dedications, and even manage better in other aspects of life, ranging from sociability, or sex, to harmless relaxation. In time they may find themselves in a double bind, from which it is very difficult to escape. With respect to the potentially more “dangerous” substances, the situation is scarcely helped in a world of illegal global production and consumption of them (whilst the selling and buying of arms is not illegal), with supply meeting demand according to rule number one of the capitalist market system. Everything is pushed into criminality and obfuscation instead of intelligent judgement, “education”, or growing cultural awareness and so on. Not that I think I know the solutions to this scourge as well as I thought I did when I was younger, but then the problems with drugs have become so much more complicated than they were thirty, forty, or fifty years ago, as have so many other things, ranging from socio-economic-political issues to ecological disaster and international relations, war and peace, murderous political rulers etc.; partly because none have been generally treated intelligently throughout any of my conscious life-time.

I don't stint myself over sleep which has always been important for me (though I always feel guilty for sleeping too long) – it serves as pleasure, rest, and my version of meditation all wrapped into one, and dreaming has always been fundamental to what I write. Saint-Pol-Roux, the proto-Surrealist poet, living in a sleepy northern French village, put a notice on his door at night: “Do not disturb – poet at work!”

My wife Nidia often says I should look after myself more, but she is mainly talking about alcohol. She is very taken up with that theme, I think partly because she has family members who have or have had very serious alcohol problems. And I do not deny that I must always be more restrained than in the past, but I don't think I am in the same basket as them. For one thing, I drink slowly, beer or wine, or rum and fruit juice, whilst I am reading, musing, or writing. I do not swig down *aguardiente* in frantic bursts, as do Colombians when they drink, though usually they only do so on particular occasions. And when I stay up all night, sipping, reading, and writing, this is not a booze-up for me; I am WORKING, though they, especially my darling wife and her family, seem to think I am simply indulgently enjoying myself. (They go to sleep early and wake up frightfully early, doing nothing especially. But that for them is the CORRECT way to live!)

Of course self-destructiveness depends very much on matters of definition, as well also as one's philosophy of life. I think dangerous mountain-climbers and bungee-jumpers are bonkers but they may think that exploring areas of Peru, such as the environs of Vilcabamba, where *Sendero Luminoso* were known to be active, as I did in the 1980s was madness, as well as many other things I have done at different times in my life. I was trying to find the place where the last Inca, Inca Manca, hung out after the Spanish defeat of the Incas in Peru, and from where he directed acts of resistance against the Spaniards. But at that time, in the 1980s, its location had not been verified. I arrived at a disorganized settlement, with some kind of wretched jungle infection. There were soldiers all around, but I was certain I needed antibiotics. I asked some soldiers if there was a doctor in this strange place, and quite friendlyly they led me to a large tent, where a doctor asked me about it, and looked at my bubbly afflictions, before giving me an enormous injection in my backside. What a relief I felt; he said I would be alright now.

But as I walked out from the tent, a soldier demanded to look in my arm-bag, actually a nice indigenously made thing. I had a small plastic bag of marijuana in it; as the soldier bumbled slowly through my paltry things in this bag I strove to be entirely calm, and wondered what to do. When the soldier arrived at the small plastic bag, I gently took it

away from him, and if I remember rightly I showed him my watch – actually a cheap Hong Kong digital thing – and pointed at his watch as if to compare it with mine. This worked! He took his watch off and suggested we exchanged his cheap watch for my cheap watch. Soon his wife or girlfriend came up, and he smiled delightedly at her as if to suggest that the cheap watch he had received from me was something good.

As soon as I could, without seeming overly eager to get the hell of there, I said goodbye to the two of them, and fucked off slowly.

I have “sung” about my childhood in Esher in various stretches of poetry, and I will not attempt to “describe” all those experiences in prose now. Poetry is different from prose; the first always arises organically in the mind, like music – consciously and subconsciously – as sound, association, and meaning, and above all spontaneously. Poetry comes as an inspiration of meaning, musical sound, and verbal resonance, all together; the latter two are intuitive and therefore sadly revised or altered after the event. “Meaning” however, can be “improved” upon, whether in poetry or prose, as it is a scratching towards saying something “better”, more effectively or exactly as in philosophy, and still more so in science. But nevertheless it remains a shame in poetry to need to change words or punctuation after the initial outpouring of sound-feeling-meaning. Whereas this is not the same with philosophical, or creative prose, still less with “academic” prose. Autobiographical prose may retain some of the white-hot, unchangeable spontaneity of poetry, but it is still different; as Tolstoy’s “War and Peace” differs from José Asunción Silva’s *Nocturnes*.

In light of these observations, I include here a letter that I felt I had to send once to the editor of an Arts Magazine. It seems to me appropriate to include it here, as a corollary to the points just made, but some readers may prefer to skip it, if they are still with me thus far anyway, and that applies equally to any other part of this autobiography.

“Thank you for sending me the latest Issue of the Magazine. I must now say certain things to you about the inclusion of my poetry in the Magazine, very reluctantly, as the last thing I want in life these days is any kind of irritation or misunderstanding with anyone.

“I would like to start by saying that for nearly twenty years I have very much enjoyed the Magazine and the other associated publications you have edited, and have much appreciated your inclusion of my poetry, short stories, and sometimes short essays. I have enjoyed the kind of “Platonic communication” made possible with you and the other

contributors to these, and I much appreciated meeting you last summer; you were extremely kind and hospitable and showed me around a town ( ) that I did not know before.

“The problem is, quite simply, that I cannot accept having my writing changed by an editor. I have never experienced this before – whether in books, magazines, or in electronic anthologies on the internet – and where sometimes my prose, whether academic or creative has been changed even in the slightest way, I have found it intolerable and have not accepted it. An editor has the right to choose or reject any writer’s submission, but not to change it, and this is particularly the case with poetry. That is the opinion of every poet or editor of poetry with whom I have communicated throughout my entire lifetime or career as a poet.

“The problem started for me in Issue 44 when you altered, after nearly twenty years of respectfully reproducing my poetry without alteration – my poems “Itzamal”, “More And More And More”, and “Tone Poem”, by changing the capital letters of the first line to letters in the lower case. You expressed very clearly in your editorial to Issue 47 that in your view this was an antiquated style. I disagree with that judgement, and would like to suggest to you that if you consider the tradition of Spanish poetry, from Quevedo to Lorca, up to the present moment, it is indeed the case that each line does not start with a capital letter. If on the other hand you consider English poetry, from Spenser to Shakespeare, to Milton, to Byron, Shelley and Keats, to Gerard Manley Hopkins, to T.S. Eliot and Hart Crane, you find they all used this manner, and if you look in any contemporary English language poetry book or magazine or on-line anthology you will find that a great proportion, if not the majority of the poetry also maintains this. It is not a question of antiquated style, it is a matter of poetic traditions. I think, though I don’t know why, that English poetry maintained the convention from Greek and Roman poetry, whereas Spanish poetry did not. Originally, it seems to me that the idea of a capital letter at the beginning of each line stemmed from the perception that the *line* is the unit of poetry, not the sentence. This is not a question of grammar; I believe it originated from the bardic or shamanic “breath”, the expanse of an oral “line”, which when written down used the capital letter at the beginning of each written line to indicate that energy. But really, that is not the essential point; this is how I write my poetry, and have done so for about forty years (actually, beforehand when younger, I had not used this method, and I think I have sent you some poems from that early period, which you could choose to publish if you wanted to.) Other modern poets do not do this (i.e. use capital letters in this way), and that is their aesthetic choice just as mine is. I choose to work intuitively with the interaction between phrase,

sentence, and line, and my punctuation also responds to that rhythmic, musical, associational and meaningful interplay.

“I accepted the changes that you made over capital letters at first, very unhappily, because I did not want any kind of rift with you and the magazine. I thought that so long as nothing else was altered in my poetry - which is always extremely deeply considered by me in every detail - I could bear it. But then you started changing my punctuation, altering the lines, creating verses where I intended none, thereby interfering not merely with the intricacies and complexities of my poems, but altering the meaning and sense, and in some cases creating sentences without an active verb. I will give some examples now:

“I Took A Plunge Into Ocean Deep”, in Issue 46, is completely changed from the poem I wrote, and gave you permission to reproduce, from my book *Poems*, published by Dionysia Press. You have put a full-stop after “fear” in line 4, then started a new sentence and a new verse in line 5. At the end of line 12, you have replaced the semi-colon with a full-stop, and have started a new verse with “And consciousness.....“ At the end of line 17 you have changed my comma to a full-stop, and again have created a new sentence and a new verse with “Sun, and perfumes.....” Combined with the replacement of my capitals at the beginning of all lines these changes have ruined the poem as far as I am concerned. My original poem echoes passages of Shakespeare’s “Tempest”, in which the sinking and bubbling down and drowning of people ship-wrecked is a kind of endless, revolving process, resulting in a man arriving, thrown, onto a beach, unconscious and nearly dead, to open his eyes in order to behold a beautiful girl. Your changes have broken that poetic idea.

“Now Is The Time When The Sun Burns Red”, in Issue 47 is similarly spoilt. You have replaced my comma at the end of line 5 with a full-stop, and again created a new verse with “Swirling in inchoate.....” You have changed my comma at the end of line 9 with a full-stop, spoiling the unrolling flow of my poetry, and have done the same at the end of line 12, now yet again creating a new verse where I did not want one. You have broken the next line into two, as I did not write it, and have put a full-stop after “motion” in line 15. “Newly-spontaneous.....” in the next line, that refers to the last phrases in a continuous flow of poetic ecstasy, now starts a new sentence and verse, ruining the whole idea of the poem. The same thing is done at the end of line 17, where you have replaced my comma with a full-stop, and started the next line with a new sentence and a new verse. These last four lines have no active verb; this is not what I wrote, and the same applies to other

constructions you have created from this and the previous poem (in the latter the second and fourth sentences and verses you have made, have no active verbs).

“In Issue 49 you have again created new constructions which I do not like, out of my original poems. In “Bruckner”, you have put in a comma after “mystical”, and after “dissipation”, and after “pain”, and after “bones”, and after “soil”, which I did not intend and did not want, just as I did not want a full-stop after “yearning” (or I would have written one). The kind of written shaping you have imposed upon my poem is one that I do sometimes use, but did not want to in this particular case.

“It is similar with “Aida And Radames”, also in Issue 49. The reshaping, the imposition of commas and a full-stop where I did not want them have altered, negatively, the emotional flow and music of my poem.

“I often use commas (as well as verses!), as you must have noticed among the quantity of poetry that I have sent you over the years: where I do not it is because it is not appropriate to my poetic concept in that instance, because for example, I want the reader to sense the continuity and/or the breaks in the mood/flow/narrative/music of the poem for him or herself. The words in such cases swim around in a cosmic sea, joining and rejoining according to the poet`s (that is, my) imagination and that of the reader.

“This whole matter has upset me considerably and so I have decided to lay out my position to you. It is up to you to accept what I say, or reject it. I would like to continue contributing to Dandelion but I am absolutely clear that I will not have my work changed. That is not a price I am willing to pay in order to see it in print in whatever form. To me it is a matter of artistic integrity.

“I do hope you will agree not to alter my writing again without consulting with me about it. So far you have not altered my prose; if your position is that you will continue not to interfere with my prose but insist upon changing my poetry, please tell me this clearly, so that I can decide whether I want to continue on that basis or not. To me it is a great shame that you have not been able for some time to find among the multitude of poetry that I have sent you poems that you like as they are, without feeling a need to change them; after all, I write in a great variety of styles, and constantly change and experiment.

“I do hope all goes well with you – how I understand your lamentations about the winter blues in Britain! But now it is summer.....”

Who could imagine anyone changing the notes of a composer's music! Rimsky-Korsakov re-orchestrated some of Mussorgsky's music, but this is now Mussorgsky-Rimsky-Korsakov! Mussorgsky's original survives! And who would alter the colours of an artist's painting! One reviewer of my book of poetry called "Poems", in Scotland, took only three lines in the middle of a poem, and given the rather detached feeling of those out-of-their context lines, tried to ridicule them. I will return to this theme later.

So, I lived from the dawn of my consciousness, at Glendoone, 10 Lower Green Road, Esher, in a three-storey semi-detached house with a tasteful front garden and a large back garden with a small square pond, a lawn, and a wild wood behind. I met spirits on the lawn and in the wood, rather as had Federico Garcia Lorca when he was a child, as I later learned. I knew imaginary beings – Peter Pie-Pie and Buttercup Tree, the first a boy, the second a girl, with whom I talked when I climbed our fir tree, and sometimes fell down from terrible heights, saved only by the branches that broke the speed of my descent.

Lower Green Road, on which our house was situated, was really rather pleasant I think, with little traffic in those days, though every half-hour there passed electric trains very near, with their thunderous, shaking rackets. If you went to the right outside our gate, you arrived after a few hundred yards at the Old Bridge – how old it was I don't know, but it was dark, mysterious, ominous, and very fascinating. It was cool within its confines within old stone bricks, and damp; huge numbers of pigeons flew and fluttered and made their messes within it. It was marvellous of course for children to play under, especially when a train was roaring and shaking everything above. With shame I own to jumping out on a girl called Pamela Holt, who was in my class at Esher Primary School, from behind part of the walls in this edifice; I was infatuated with her, as she was with me – that was why she had followed me under the bridge, though she lived on the other side of it, after school one day. So stupid was I, with no idea of what I felt or what I was doing: the poor sweet girl.

At about the same time, or a little earlier, I fell in love with Jennifer Aldridge, in Class Three, under the teacher Miss Stokes, a very strict but fair teacher. (She spoke her mind: at morning prayers one day the minister from the Church was presenting an obscure message about "goodness" and how that contrasted with "perfection". Miss Stokes interrupted and said "I thought good was good and that was all there was to it!")

How jealous I was of my friend Christopher Humber, because he made Jennifer Aldridge laugh so much, especially when one day Christopher was told to clean up the aisle between two rows of desks. He threw down a dustbin at one end of the space between the two rows,

and in deliberate absurdity and roughness swept the floor along to it from the other end of the aisle. Oh God, I could have given up life! That girl laughed so much.

Perhaps all this kind of thing influenced me as an adult, not to be too soft and introverted – most girls are not and never have been interested in that – you have to be more extroverted, formidable in some ways, though pleasant etc. It's impossible to be an adolescent or a young man, really.

That's where the music of Bruckner comes in, and from, perhaps! He always wanted a "nice gal" to marry, but none wanted him – too eccentric and disordered, though not of course in his music of pure genius.

Because I was one of three brothers and no sisters, I think I lacked direct understanding of girls even at that stage – one's mother is something rather different. Then at the age of eleven I went to an all-boys boarding school which pushed this situation still further. Nevertheless in my childhood Esher days I did at least go to a mixed C/E Primary school, which was something. Though at playtimes the children were divided between two playgrounds – the infants of both sexes and the girls of all ages in one, the ruffian older boys in the other. This was absolutely *made* to encourage boys' transgressional entrances into the girls' playground to grab their skipping ropes and make a nuisance of themselves, when they were not forming columns running around shouting "We won the war!"

Miss Hutchinson was in charge of the older boys' playground, a real harridan, haggish to behold, but considering it from a later viewpoint, what a task she must have had! She blew a screechingly loud whistle whenever she saw misbehaviour, and if it was severe, she sent the offender to see the head-mistress, Miss Terry. A very funny incident I well remember: I and my friend Hugh Ricard found a rotten, squashed tomato in a corner of the playground one time. It seems I suggested to my friend that he hurl it as hard as he could across the yard. He did so, and it hit another boy! Miss Hutchinson screamed with her whistle, and reprimanding my friend, demanded to know why he did it. "Because Timothy told me to!" he replied, and whilst I was killing myself with laughter, she shouted: "and if Timothy told you to put your head in a bucket of water, would you do it?"

A few steps, a few yards, beyond the Old Bridge, there was the Post Office. I suppose this was something that today would be called a "convenience store", at least in the US. In it was indeed a P.O., old British style, but besides that it stocked what seemed to me then a bewildering variety of things: simple groceries, sweets, notebooks, comics, and many other

things. When you entered the P.O., a kind of ding-dong bell sounded, to let the people there know someone had come in.

If you went out of our gate to the left, there were only nine houses to pass before you arrived at the end of the road. Here there was (what I thought to be) a marvellous brown wooden fence, around the last garden, which exuded a remarkable varnish smell, if I remember well; then across the road, which was a four-way crossing, there was the original paradise, the first savannah, the first vast wood for adventure, the place where I stretched out and dreamed, and sometimes felt free. It was called Western Green.

If you turned right here, you walked towards Esher railway station. Just before the station there were two shops which together could keep you alive for a while. The United Dairies was quite large for those times, selling milk, cream, cheese, various cold meats etc. Nice plump middle-aged women served in it, but I don't think they were the owners or managers. The shop had a wonderfully clean smell.

Next to it was The Box, run alternately by an oldish man and an oldish woman, brother and sister, who lived in a house very near, on the street you passed to get there from the above-mentioned corner. Both used sticks to walk, and The Box, "Confectioners and Tobacconists", sold lovely chocolates and sweets, and of course cigarettes and so on. The man and woman in The Box, a very, very small shop, were extremely friendly.

I wrote in one or two poems about an oak tree on the left hand side of the road through Western Green, which latter was a sandy-coloured road if I remember correctly, about half the way across the Green. On this tree I tested my bravery for many years, seeing how high I could jump from without breaking a leg. When I tried a branch higher than those I had so far jumped from, I sat for a good while, summoning up the blood, stiffening the sinews, until suddenly I felt I could do it. So I jumped! How different from the more easily frightened man I could become much later. But that is still far in the future, and for many decades I don't think I lost that near-fearlessness that Wagner had Siegfried feel, until he tasted the dragon's blood. When a child, around the time of this jumping from the branches of the oak-tree, I went to a fair with my friend Christopher Humber; we went on a "swing-boat", on which both pulled a cord to keep it going. I was testing Providence by going higher and higher, so that we were almost vertically above the starting place each swing, upside down, open and not tied down. He was a tough boy, so I was amazed when he said later, "Tim, you really frightened me on that swing-boat".

The most drastic of these absurdities that I remember was obtaining weed-killer and sugar, which if you hit the right combination made a seriously explosive combination. I achieved this one day, accidentally, in a kettle on the fire of FORT X at the bottom of our wood, and the fire explosion frazzled my right hand, very badly, but I told my younger brother Peter not to let my mother know about it. I knew it was my fault and I did not want to upset her. But eventually it was inevitable that she should know, as my hand was literally dripping in burning fat or grease, really in drops I could see, so Mummy took me to Thames Ditten Hospital.

I shared as a child some extraordinary fantasies with my brother Peter. I kept all my “boys” under my bed, and brought some of them out onto the sheets of my bed, like Robert Louis Stevenson in his “Land of the Counterpane”, to give Peter a “show”. We slept in the same room for many years. There was Dong, who was actually no more than the handle of a hammer, whom I twiddled around aggressively, as he was actually a very good fighter. There was Woo, my teddy bear, Ducks (a soft duck-like bird), and various others. On a more diminutive scale were Mr. and Mrs. Pok, who rode a marvellous plastic open-air motor car. “Oh Nellie, Nellie”, Mr. Pok would say to Mrs. Pok constantly, causing great laughter from Peter, whom I called Pep, I think because he couldn’t say Peter when he was very small, and instead called himself Pep.

Sometimes Pep and I would ride on our bikes across Littleworth Common, and once I snuck into my bike-basket all the “boys” before we left our home, then streaked ahead of him at the last moment to get to a ditch which I called the “boys” Seaside, and had a few moments to put the “boys” next to the ditch, which I called the “beach”. When Pep arrived, he found all those “boys” relaxing on the “beach”, and proclaimed wonderfully: “So it’s true!” We also took some white sheets to spread on the stairs of our house, to seem like snow, and imagined we were climbing Mount Everest. Hilary and Tension had recently reached the summit of the world’s highest mountain, and our father had taken us all to hear a talk about the whole adventure in, I think, The Royal Festival Hall. It was all quite exciting; I suppose one of those last post-war spasms of Great British fantasy.

I keep delaying the continuation of this “Autobiography” – why am I writing it, who wants to know about all this; and it seems so slow to proceed to stages that are more “relevant”, whatever that may mean. I wonder if I should jump ahead into later stages of my life, then return, in “flashbacks” (which I have already done in fact). But something pulls me into the more conventional general form that is overall more or less, though far from entirely,

“chronological”, not that art ever really is. The peculiarities of memory – always depending at least to some extent on the moment and context in which a memory is recalled – and the elements of fantasy and imagination that never entirely desert any kind of rationality, make even the most painstaking chronologies uncertain – witness the numerous professional historians’ biographies of Hitler or Stalin for example, which constantly disagree on details of these monster-men’s lives and decisions, let alone on their interpretations of them. This does not mean I might not write later chapters or sections before those that come earlier; but the design in my mind is roughly “chronological”. Yet again to say, this does not mean I may not often jump forwards or backwards in time, when that feels appropriate.

I remember the day when I was about six or seven, when in a stupid bluster at teatime, I claimed to my mother and father that I had been advanced from one junior class to the class above. The next day my father walked me to my school, I in some kind of agony, he suspecting that it was a fantasy of mine, which it was.

He was determined to show me up for lying, to humiliate me. Why, is part of the whole mystery of his personality, as it showed itself throughout my life until he died. Was it simply a sadistic and authoritarian streak, or did he genuinely believe he had a responsibility to bring up honest, tough, truthful, determined, courageous sons? Or something more muddly and changeable in between?

As Philip Larkin wrote:

“They fuck you up, your mum and dad.  
They may not mean to, but they do.”

As a small child I heard about the mass murder of the Jews under the Nazis. My father sometimes, while doing the washing-up, we sons drying the cutlery and plates (my mother cooked – very, very well, but my father did the clearing up after meals), explained with intense emotional gestures how piles of dead bodies had remained, stretching like mountains as from our house to the bridge before the Post Office, thanks to the Nazis. (My father had of course been wounded in the War, part of his knee bone having been blown out by a shell exploding in his tank.) I did not know who the “Jews” were exactly, but I realized they were people, and the thing made me achingly sad. It was not the case, as has sometimes been said subsequently, that no one knew about it all in the 1950s; not at least in our household.

I had no idea whatsoever of politics or economics – this was a time of “austerity” in Britain, you needed ration tickets for many things, including orange juice and cod liver oil for children, and I was unaware that Britain was beginning to undergo a capitalist post-war growth, and that compared with much of the world we were all quite “lucky”. Later in the 60s, I was one of those who rebelled in mind, spirit and culture against “consumerist affluence” – I thought I did not want money or “success”; I believed in a new kind of “society” – if I understood what that meant, and I did not feel lucky at all. (And why had the “Democratic West” not stopped Hitler anyway?) Suffering and happiness are all relative to what one expects, what one’s dreams are, and fulfilment and satisfaction were not for me met in the world I experienced in early adulthood. As I came to understand oppression, exploitation, and injustice in the world, I became fiercely radical, and later joined the British Communist Party, once I came to trust that it did not think the Soviet Union was genuinely “socialist” (except for a “tankie” pro-Soviet minority in the party). I was in agreement with its “Eurocommunist” notions for a peaceful, democratic, liberal, socialist transformation. I entered into that vision strongly for about two decades. But above all it was the desire to overcome “alienation”, in the Marxist senses of the word, that most strongly gripped my soul.

I sometimes used to eat, or at least bite, coal that was kept piled up in the shed outside the back door. It is strange how I have always loved coal-dust, or any dust, ash, chalk powder, dusty smoke, or tarmac being laid on a road, ever since. My brother Peter liked drinking water from the pond in our garden. I once caught him drinking the slimy green water from an egg-cup, secretly as he thought. “Lubbly” he said to himself as he did so.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **HELL AND HEAVEN: DULWICH COLLEGE AND THE SUDAN**

When I was eleven years old, my parents went to live in the Sudan. My father had been appointed Professor of Zoology at Khartoum University. Much more glory and pain began at that moment than I could have possibly imagined, or could comprehensively describe today.

I hardly understood why or how this had occurred, though I remember a brief interchange with my father one evening in our dusty garage in Esher, which we had been “tidying up”; this included brushing hard the dusty floor, the smell of which I loved. He said he liked Esher very much, but felt he should go to a University in the Middle East, in the Desert. He was fed up with King’s College, London, where he was a lecturer in the Zoology Department.

I was an early adolescent when I first went to Khartoum: the climate was superb, so warm and full of lemon perfumes. No people could anyone find kinder and more hospitable than the Sudanese: I learned a few words of Arabic quite quickly and the Sudanese were always so warm and generous. My father’s students came to visit us in the bungalow given to my parents by the University: men and women, the latter partially veiled, so kind and laughing, drinking Coca-Cola. I never knew more friendly people in my entire life.

The garden of my parents’ house was usually dry, until men came to irrigate it and then all was suddenly sodden with water for a short while, and grasses and flowers burst into life. Once we were amused when a man in a long *jellabiah* was cutting the “weeds”, jumping and springing from one crouching position to another like a grasshopper, scything out the miscreants. There was no rain outside of the rainy season.

One morning a group of workers were talking nineteen to the dozen outside the window where we sons were sleeping: my brother Hugh leapt to the window and shouted “Yallah!”, “Escut”, meaning “go away” or “shut up”, and they did so for a minute, then started again in exactly the same vein. The whole thing was quite extraordinary for me, on Christmas Holidays from Dulwich College (one return flight was paid for each year for family members by the University), that horrible place as far as I was concerned. The contrast between that cold, cruel boarding school and this warm, crazy place, the Sudan, was beyond an adolescent’s comprehension. I had no idea of “politics” either in England or the Sudan. My father had crocodiles, tortoises, grasshoppers, lizards, scorpions and camel spiders in cages in and outside his office, on which he performed experiments to understand the capabilities of these animals to cope with stress from lack of water which they experienced in the usually dessicated desert. He was also curious to know whether a black

desert scorpion or a yellowy-brown camel spider would win in a fight between two equal-sized examples of these carnivorous arthropods. He put two huge specimens into a glass aquarium, with no food, so that eventually hunger would cause one or the other to eat the other. The scorpion had huge pincers and its forward lashing, stinging tail was poisonous. The camel spider had no poison, but relatively immense four-part jaws, and was more agile. The two creatures remained immobile for days; eventually they fought and after a harrowing battle the camel-spider got behind the scorpion, and grasped its tail in its jaws, avoiding the sting. Once having bitten off the dangerous part of the tail, it proceeded to attack and devour the meat of the now helpless scorpion.

My father was, I think, greatly liked and admired by the Sudanese staff and students of his department; he lacked absolutely any arrogance towards the Sudanese generally, from which observation I learned an enormous amount. One of his female post-graduate students, called Loriss, worked on desert gazelles and their water-control; she was I remember a very nice young lady. A visiting British Zoologist stole her experimental results and published some of them as his own work, about which my father was extremely angry. He was awarded a marvellous cup at his retirement from the University, before he returned to a professorship at Birkbeck College in London.

The Sudan had been a British Protectorate shortly before our family's arrival, and most of the ex-patriot lecturers and professors in the University were British. I wrote the following for the Minister to read out at my father's funeral:

## **A BRIEF FAREWELL TO AN ADMIRABLE MAN**

By Tim Cloudsley

“I think one of the finest of the many characteristics that I loved and admired in my father was the way he treated his responsibilities as the Head of Department of Zoology at Khartoum University in the Sudan in the 1960s. He loved the Sudan and the Sudanese people, and got on extremely well and warmly with his staff and students. He was especially respected because he was in deep sympathy with the principle of “Sudanizing” the University, unlike some other rather backward-looking European ex-patriates there.

He managed very well to help the best students to advance, and one of whom, called Faisal, became the head of Department after him, and also a life-long friend.

My father was given a wonderful cup of honour when he left Khartoum.”

I hated being in Bell House, the junior Boarding House, for two years, then in Blew House, the Senior Boarding house which I had to endure for a further five years. I remember when my mother took me to Dulwich College (Dull Witch College), when I was eleven years old, to take the scholarship entrance exam. I should have fucked up the exam, to avoid getting into the school, but instead I passed well. Sitting in the car afterwards, waiting for my mother who was dealing with something in the school, some boys in uniform came up to the window of our car, and leering at me, said, “Let’s hope *he* doesn’t get in!”

Harold Wilson could have abolished the Public Schools, but instead he opened up admission in places like Dulwich to boys of lower classes and lesser financial means, through the scholarship admission system and the Direct Grant System from County Councils. Thus I got in, fees paid by the Surrey County Council Education Department. It has often annoyed me when people assume that I got in due to a silver spoon, and that my parents were well-off. I wouldn’t claim it was cheap for my parents to send us to that place, but they were not well-off (unless all middle-class professional people are assumed to be) and it was certainly cheaper to go there than to little-known “progressive” boarding schools that they also looked into.

I cannot now say Wilson’s policy was or was not a good policy, but in the years of my most radical attachments I thought it was wrong. I thought he should have finished with that system, and then I would never have suffered the horrendous pains of those seven years there, though of course it gained me academic advantages. And nor would I have had to listen to repeated sneers of envy from people who thought that my going to “Public School” conferred an almost magical advantage upon me throughout my life.

Not that the teaching was always good, though I suppose the Oxbridge–aspiring ethos was a boost for the tiny minority who got into those venerable institutions. Some “masters” were absolutely hopeless, but some were astute and definitely did teach well. Others arrived late for their classes and mumbled from behind huge piles of paper on their desks, or clambered onto a desk holding a torch or something that signified they were dying to bugger off to do something else more gratifying to them afterwards. Others were simply horrible and unpleasant, though admittedly some disciplinarians did manage to cram stuff into we terrified pupils’ heads. The contrast lay with some “softer-souled” masters that

could not keep order. I found that equally as bad as the harsh disciplinarians, as pointless messing around just interfered with the progress of the class. I felt very sorry for one rather good maths teacher, who always looked haggard and down-trodden, which only excited the sadistic elements in the class to drive him even more crazy. But he also had human limitations: once he picked me up for a very minor offence. After the class I asked him why he had picked on me when other “boys” had been howling, whistling, throwing things around etc. I did not want to disrupt the class, especially as I found maths rather difficult. But he was most annoyed at my impertinence. One could not win in that mad, weird, “Public School”.

One master was fierce but a very good Latin teacher. No one dared even to squeak with him. He would make us translate difficult tracts of Cicero, Julius Caesar, or Ovid, unprepared, there in the glare of the classroom. Once he shouted to a poor boy called Dawkins: “Translate!” Dawkins could not, and after a few minutes the master bawled out “Can’t hear a word!” There was scarcely a titter among the other boys.

Then there was “Mogs”, as the boys all called Mr. Morgan. A Welshman, also very strict, but what a musician! He was the Music Master, and conducted the school orchestra in which I was very lucky to be a member as a cellist. I was rather mediocre as a player, but Mogs seemed to appreciate my love of music. He conducted like a fiend, stamping his feet and shouting and yelling his commands. Once we were to play Mozart’s Oboe Concert at the Christmas Concert in the Royal Festival Hall, and at the first try, a “day boy” took up his oboe and played it. I was so mesmerised by the mellifluous beauty of that music which I had never heard before, I must have stopped playing my cello part. How I envied that boy, seeming so casual as he ripped through the Universe! “Cloudsley-Thompson!” (my name then) yelled Mogs, quite justifiedly, though I felt a fool. I had never heard anything like this beauty before.

Later, for another concert we played Mozart’s Requiem. After one rehearsal Mogs took me aside, having evidently observed my stunned state at that music, and said, “Did you know Mozart never completed it?” I had nothing to say, just stared. Another master, called Brad Winterton, said to me however, that “Mozart was finished”, meaning he was complete, as I recorded in a review article about a book on Mozart I wrote quite recently, so I will not repeat that story.

Once I said to my cello teacher, Mrs. Wilson who had known Stanford and “the great Cassalls” as she called him, that I would like to be a composer. “Oh no, she said, if you

had that kind of musical talent it would have become clear by now.” She was quite right, I was to become a poet, though one who loves music above all. Dear Miss Kersey (my teacher in Esher who played in the BBC Symphony Orchestra and at Covent Garden), and Mrs. Wilson at Dulwich, teaching me, were very good cellists, real professionals, far too good to be wasting their time on me. But they gave me more than they realized – or perhaps they did realize, both as teachers as well as performers.

Yet there was at the horrible school a certain culture of academic achievement, that included “getting into Oxford or Cambridge”.

But all the time rugby and cricket seemed more important than learning; in the first of which I was mediocre and in the second I was hopeless. I hated cricket – with that fearsomely hard “ball” which was hurled at you to be bashed away. I often allowed myself to be balled out easily – not a hard job given my innate incompetence at the game – and in that way I managed to be excluded for quite a long time from any team listed to play on Wednesday afternoons, thank God.

But I was good at boxing. I was light for my weight and height, and punching like a frenetic maniac from the first moment, I always won. But I did not like it. My nose was inevitably streaming with blood within a few seconds, and I hated the artificial aggression, especially when sometimes my opponent was a friend. In time I extricated myself from this barbaric “sport” (it was “voluntary” unlike the two “major” sports), much to the chagrin of the boxing instructors, hoarse-voiced beasts from the Army, who no doubt thought I was a cowardly creep. (Perhaps if a spot of alcohol had been allowed me before a fight, my early “peace and love” attitude could have been replaced by something more angry. Thank God it wasn’t.) I was also quite good at athletics, winning in my first years, with medals, the hundred yards races and high jump. I veered away from this too, because I found the competitive wind-up, the ongoing adrenaline rush for hours if not days before a competition or race, dreadful. Rather as with the boxing, my withdrawal was attributed to something bad about me. A Master who abused boys (to be described soon) and hit me in Bell House, said to other boys that my withdrawal of interest was because I could no longer win, or in other words, was due to “sour grapes”. But whether or not my prowess was declining, that was not the reason for my changed attitude. I began to feel I wanted to compete in private, not in public. Perhaps I was starting to feel the impulses that have remained with me thereafter; to do what I do independently. To this day I will not submit my poems for competitions. What for? What I do is what I do, I’m not interested in others’

judgements – at least, not in the sense of being affected by them other than emotionally (i.e. being either saddened or “chuffed”). If someone likes my work, good, if they don’t, too bad.

But how I loved the annual Christmas Holidays in the Sudan! My parents usually took us on a “trek” far into the desert, or to the Nuba Mountains, to Nubia in the North, or the Red Sea where we went on marvellous trips on the coral reef off Donganab on the coast of the Sudan, with our friend Bill Reed on his boat from which we went snorkel-diving, to see and collect corals. Bill Reed was an Australian from North Australia, an expert on corals and pearl farming who worked for the Sudanese Government. He was a marvellous fellow who got on so well with the Sudanese at all levels and knew so much about it all, and joked about “chicken a la Donganab” where he normally lived, far from anything.

We went to other magnificent places where we met people from different tribes: Dinkas, Nubans, Bejas, and many more. I made a travel book from these trips while at school, replete with my Brownie or Kodak photos of the tribal peoples of the different regions, and learned more than I could now recount from those experiences. I think the book got lost years later during one or another move, so typical for me, but I can remember it to this day. We travelled in our Land Rover, camped in the desert, and got to know so many peoples, who were always so friendly and hospitable to us as a family. Never a moment of unfriendliness or hostility do I remember from these people, though we would be far away from towns or authorities of any kind. We were white “huajjis”, yet always treated in the nicest ways. This was of course before the hateful Islamic Fundamentalist stuff came into being. Never, never will I forget what I have recounted here in spite of the decades of fundamentalism that later arose in The Sudan and elsewhere. The “real Muslims” were those I shook hands with or from whom I received kind presents of fruit, nuts, bread or whatever (but please take this “metaphorically”, or “poetically” – I am not talking about the theology of Islam or the Koran). Who in England would have been so friendly to *them*?

Once my father said to an uncle of his, at the only Honourable Company of Skinners dinner in London that I attended with him, concerning the Sudanese, “What a shame it would be should they ever adopt our beastly, standoffish ways!” And when this uncle of my father’s said about Apartheid South Africa that he didn’t feel it was up to him to judge it, my father replied most emphatically: “But surely it’s not right to discriminate between people based on the colour of their skin!” I was about twenty years old I think at the time, and was

amazed. What a contradictory character my father was! Sir Alec Douglas-Home was also there, and looked at me disdainfully as I had long hair, craftily put into a kind of boff behind my head by my mother (who was not allowed to attend, these occasions still being “men only”). But another man, I know not who he was, cheerfully said this must be the first time in two centuries that a young man came to such an event with his hair like that!

Once we stopped to camp in the desert, far away from anything or anyone, cooked our supper and Oxo to drink, on a Primus, and early in the morning a couple of nomads on camels or donkeys saw us from afar and came towards us. My mother was in the middle of her “ablutions” as she called them and ran around the Land Rover, knickers down, while one of the two visitors tried to follow her to say “salam”, or “hello”. She called out in a somewhat “panties down” alarm to my father, “John, please ask him not to pursue me further!” We all roared with laughter.

Another time some people in a village to the West of Khartoum asked my father to help with improving their water-well. One man asked that we speak to the government about it. Apparently they did not realize that the British had not ruled the Sudan now for a good number of years! Independence had come before 1960; this was now about 1964. Actually the British had done quite little in the Sudan even during the years of the Protectorate (except for creating the Gezira Scheme to grow cotton, which was not at all successful), though they might have helped over the odd water-well. The Sudan had really only been taken over in order to prevent the French from forming a cross-African Empire. So there was little to resent the British about! The Sudan was an immense country with little connection between the regions and the capital. Communities and nomads were still very isolated and independent.

Local British governors had recently relaxed and drank whisky and soda. Two *jebbles* (small mountains south west of Khartoum) were named Whisky and Soda on a map we owned.

Once we were on a trek and arrived in a village in the Nuba mountains, well south of Khartoum but not in the Deep South of the Sudan. The Nuba people put on a dance for us, with words which I only understood later were about the United States with their ally Israel oppressing the Palestinians. They also knew about the Beatles, confirming John Lennon’s remark that “We are more famous than Jesus now”. How true Victor Kiernan was in his book “America – From White Settlement to World Hegemony”, when he disagreed with the idea that the Americans have preserved a useful outpost of American power within

Israel, a citadel against Communism and Russia: “The truth is the precise opposite: very little communism would have been heard of in the Middle East if there were no Israel”.

What was interesting was that these Nubans assumed we were Americans or of the same ilk as Americans, along with their knowledge of the Israeli/Palestinian issue right down there in such a remote part of the Sudan. Yet they were very friendly, and one man, drunk on local brew, approached us with something to eat. What is this called, asked my mother, in her brave use of Arabic (which was not the Nubans’ first language): “Ishmu gom” (it’s called something or other) replied the man, with a marvellous and warm smile, and with his marvellous regalia around his head.

My father said, in his extraordinary capacity to understand things at times, “Well the US supplies Israel with their fighter jets and bombers”. The historian Victor Kiernan wrote that there is a “contradiction between American support of Israel, which undermines US credibility in the Arab and Muslim world, and its espoused enlightened self-interest on the one hand and its ideological commitments”, which I have also thought for a long time now. If the United States and the West in general had taken a more even-handed approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over so many decades, God knows how different things might be now.

Back at the school, life was more than doubly oppressive for the boarders. The majority of the boys were “day-bugs”, we boarders had the authoritarianism of the classroom during the day, and even worse before and after each weekday and also at weekends. We could be beaten by the “prefects”, a kind of SA or SS in these miserable infernos called “Boarding Houses”, on any allegation without any apparent vigilance from the House Master. They were very closed, tight-knit “*Pseudo-Gemeinschaften*” (pseudo-communities). These prefects had “fags” to make their beds each day, and could command them to do whatever the prefect willed. Anyone who has ever seen the brilliant film “IF”, will have seen exactly what it was like. Indeed, I think Blew House was even worse than “IF”. It drove some “boys” quite mad. In one term a boy dropped a huge metal block required to keep the changing rooms’ door open while boys showered after rugby, onto the pillow of another boy sleeping, from the height of the wall of the next cubicle, which could have caused his death. Later he ran away with all the pocket-money he managed to steal from the House Master’s office – brilliantly – and was only detained somewhere in the north of England and then expelled. Another of his earlier as-yet undetected exploits was in the middle of the night when he and another boy escaped from the Boarding House to climb the clock-

tower of the school and paint a huge red hammer and sickle on it, which to all of our amazements we saw at breakfast! You see, all was at very close quarters for us boarders, though few of us noticed that the culprits of this grand effrontery were keeping in place the palms of their hands to cover blotches of red paint on their cheeks during breakfast.

Another misfit, charged with collecting mail from the mailbox each day in order to post it, stole it all for weeks. He helped himself to whatever was desirable in the letters, and threw everything else away. I think these events helped me to form an attitude later, always to support the “weirdo”, perhaps exaggeratedly at times, for example at Glasgow Caledonian University where much later I was a lecturer. I did not like the hounding of eccentrics, I thought it was like the persecution of Jews, misfits and outsiders, though I certainly had not clearly formulated such ideas when still at school. But I read “*L’Étranger*” by Albert Camus, with a kind of bemused involvement. Nowadays I avoid full involvement in all institutions, and all formal groupings.

I think the worst thing was that my own father was as bad as, or even worse in his autocratic unsympathetic oppression in those mid-adolescent years, as the school regime. I don’t know which I feared most: the one was dispersed, and more impersonal, the other absolutely foul-breathedly personal, and terrifying. Once during those years, when I was about fifteen, I managed to get leave from my boarding house for a Sunday, when my parents were in England but supposedly away for the weekend. I managed, with much subterfuge to bring a girl to No. 10, for a few hours, whom I had met at a train station, no mean feat, you must believe me. My brother Hugh was supportive, being himself in the house at that time, but out of the blue, unexpectedly, my parents came back to the house, horrified to find me there with this girl before I had even had the chance to try to do anything at all yet.

My parents were furious and made me take her to Esher station to get a train. More humiliating, more balls-destroying, nothing could have been. Once stuck back in the boarding school, my parents came to see the Dulwich College School Orchestra with me in it playing the ‘cello. Immediately after that my father sent a letter to me in my boarding prison, saying my hair had been far too long – incredible, when we boys had to hide in the toilets and changing rooms each week to avoid being dragged to the hair cutters, to get “short backs and sides”, and announced that I could no longer go “twisting in Saint George’s Hall” when free for a day or two from the school. It would be difficult for anyone to empathize with my loneliness, sadness, hopelessness, and my feeling of utter

trappedness at that time. I had participated, with great trepidation, one Saturday night at Saint George's Hall, a place in Esher, in a kind of display of male kids pretending to play maracas, to the Rolling Stones' song "Not Fade Away". As so often in my life, I wanted to be a "part of things", without realizing exactly what I wanted to be a part of, or why.

But to return to events within Blew House: I think those just described were only the tip of the iceberg. On reflection I think the place was in the throes of a collective psychosis. The norms of the place had not changed for decades – indeed they may have worsened, whilst meanwhile the world outside was changing. This was now the Sixties, the Rolling Stones sang "I Can't Get No Satisfaction", which of course we all knew. (One school clergyman, the Reverend Boxley, known by some "boys" as the God-Box, railed against this song from the pulpit one Sunday – but if you listen to the words they are very "moderate", reacting to absurd advertisements and such like, not preaching shallow indulgent self-satisfaction in a thoughtless form at all. But of course it was the menacing, self-confident tone of the song, yelled and belted out by Mick Jagger that disturbed his holiness.)

I know that everything changed after I left the school – prefects were abolished, a television was allowed in the common room, and in time even girls were admitted to the school, I don't know about all the boarding houses – but things evidently became more civilized. It seems however worthwhile to record all this, as I experienced it as it was then.

Unfortunately, I thought everything in the school was just about the school: I had no psychological vocabulary or "philosophical" means to analyse it in terms of society or history. If I talked to my parents, my father would say his boarding school had been even worse, and regaled me with stories of how prefects would hide a cup, order a "fag" – a "bottom junior" to clear up, and then beat him if he had not found the cup.

In Bell House, there was definitely what later would be called child sexual abuse by House Masters, but not even my mother was able to take it in. There was one such Master who woke boys up in the night and ordered them into his room. Fortunately I did not experience this myself – I only knew his vicious clout across the ear-hole when he wished to administer such. Once I was in a rebellious mood, and before tea all the boys were standing, waiting for a Master to bang the table with a knife or fork, at which harsh noise all had to be silent, so that the Master could boom out "Grace": "For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful." Fed up with standing there waiting, I banged a knife, and all was quiet. Aghast, the only Master present, who was not due to deliver Grace on this

occasion, nevertheless did so. This was one of the times when the above-mentioned rugby-expert Master delivered a crack across my head.

The “boys” vocabulary about the sexual abuse things did not go beyond “he’s a homo, he’s a queer”. Whether they told their parents about it when on holiday with them, or not, I never knew. I was not much more clear about it myself, though I don’t think I found such words as “queer” adequate (already so fussy about the appropriate ways to express things!). It certainly never occurred to me to warn my younger brother Peter about the matter when he came into Bell House, when I was already in the “senior” Blew House by then.

I cannot blame my mother too deeply: she was of a certain epoch, had been in India when young, her father in the Royal Engineers. Boarding schools were normal although she was upset at leaving us there. My father was in charge in those days – how my mother changed later, even excessively! But too late for me! She had been good at turning a blind eye, especially with respect to my older brother Hugh, who was beaten and badly treated by my father when young, as I was too, but not as savagely as he. Hugh seemed to “get his goat” as a boy, and perhaps my father was still more fucked up by the War than a few years later (one of Germaine Greer’s “walking wounded”). His nastiness towards me was greater when I started to think, and he did not like my opinions, or when I started to wear silly “countercultural” clothes, and with my interests generally as a teenager. (There was a fashion for wearing old red army tunics, which particularly horrified him. He refused to walk with me in the street if I was wearing one.) In time I came to think he did not really like my having opinions at all sometimes, and would argue against me even about my moderated attitudes when I was now trying to find some agreement with him.

Yet now I fear the pendulum has swung too far the other way on many of the issues touched on here. Too little discipline there is sometimes in schools and in the home – a sane balance is required, never accepting brutality, but at times requiring sternness against lack of respect and disorder; this in many parts of the world. Children need and want discipline and guidance, not harsh, but fair and reasonable. “We don’t need no Education!” Oh yes, you do now! This is no longer the 1950s or 1960s, in which the typical experiences of English/British authoritarian education prompted Pink Floyd’s fantastic music and lyrics, and when later black kids sang that song in Soweto, in South Africa.

In some countries there is almost a welcoming of the breakup of families, in which the father often has no recourse to protest, nor viable rights to maintain links with his children. Sheer Hite openly espoused the separation of parents, children growing up solely under the

mother, to avoid the bad influences of a father. In Britain for example, if a woman runs out on her husband with the children, she is often granted full sympathy from her family and friends, as if she must be behaving bravely no matter what the real circumstances may be. She may quickly be granted a government-paid residence with the children, and “income support”, no questions asked; the husband frequently has to sell the house he may have bought before he even met the woman he married in good faith, and must give her half its value and half of anything else he owned or earned, including his pension, and so on. He could have insisted on some kind of pre-nuptial agreement before marrying the woman, but in the throes of romantic love that never entered his head. The mother may turn her children against their father, as she now has indisputably the dominant influence over them, with no Wisdom of Solomon acting at all. Her running out is often regarded as virtuous with no further ado, even if the truth is that she had selfish, greedy, impetuous, cowardly or even malicious reasons for so doing, and the husband – obviously no saint, no one is! – is nonplussed and distraught at something he cannot comprehend, as he had done his best, had worked hard, and had never been violent or hateful. Now he is ruined financially, and emotionally broken. It may be that he is ill, and has had to retire due to ill-health. Nothing like that is taken into account, he must pay her half the value of his ill-health retirement pension, and if she had never worked during the marriage there is nothing to balance it up with. It is all silent, behind closed doors, managed by solicitors, often financially fuelled by government “legal aid” for the woman. Of course the children never understand all this; “Daddy has lots of money”, because that is what they have been told by their mother and her family.

Of course this account is only sometimes relevant to any particular case, but the arguably *much more* frequent injustices against women should not have been or still be allowed to underpin the sort of travesties spoken of here, though I doubt that they will end. Terrible heartbreak will continue.

I suppose that it must always have been sometimes possible for a wife/mother to desert the home with the children, not always with any justification, causing misery for the husband/father, though the norms, laws and financial realities in the past made it much more difficult. We tend only to hear of women escaping from abuse of various kinds however. Or we hear of women in the past being forced to give up children to adoption. And of course men must have sometimes been able to manipulate both the abandonment of the wife and the snatching of the children to him alone. But there must have been, and still are other scenarios.

This opens up an enormous field of thought, of course. Just one point stands out here however, for me. Some early feminist assertions that women and men are “the same” have obviously been surpassed now by “Second Wave Feminist” thoughts that men and women are “equal” but “different”. Women have particular needs as well as specific and distinct qualities. I have never been overly biological with respect to thinking about human culture and social behaviour – I am no socio-biologist, but it should be clear that human evolution rests ultimately upon reproduction, and as the child-bearing sex women have a particular biological “role” (though of course it is not always taken up); a female “being”, a physical/physiological and psychological “make-up”, though one should not be dogmatic or over-generalizing about this. I think that societies have always, and still are, to some extent arranged, or organized, around this reality. Women have always needed to be protected and revered, even though obviously that has not been or always is the case in reality! Giving birth to a child has not, I believe, throughout human social history, ever been an issue that is thought to concern only the mother – it is a *social* matter, even if this is confined largely to the “family”, in whatever form that may take in any particular society. When I was a full-scale radical activist, 40 to 50 years ago, I went on demonstrations and marches to demand rights over abortion, but I was never quite happy with the slogan “A woman’s right to choose”. It was and is of course a difficult issue, but as a moral, ethical, and therefore also social issue, an abortion cannot be designated in general as concerning the right of only one individual person. I do not by this mean to suggest that the mother is not the most important person involved, and often the only one. I am simply trying to connect this issue with the misery experienced by some men when their wife runs out with no warning, from the family home with the children, never to return, and when sometimes the father loses his children, as sons or daughters, due to that. My mother told me that after my wife’s desertion she spoke to her, and the latter said: “I love my boys”, and that “I would die for my boys”. My mother replied: “But they are not only your boys, they are Tim’s sons too, and the grand-children of Danny and Jenny and John and I!” All the last four are dead now, but the results of what happened then are not.

I must make it quite clear, if it is not so already, that I do realize there are often very real reasons for a spouse to leave their husband *or* wife, due to violent, or to terrible verbal or emotional abuse, or to great dishonesty, financially or otherwise over a period of time, to name some reasons. The issue of sexual infidelity is a little more complicated in our modern day and age, I believe, and though it still implicitly involves one of the marriage vows, the question is part of a moral debate among serious people, there being many views about the extent to which such prohibition should be an *absolute* at all times. For example there can

be issues of sexual satisfaction or otherwise in a marriage. Lack of it can induce frustration, stress, depression, loneliness, the feeling that life is a deranging trap; as well as destruction of self-esteem in either partner. An empty yearning, for romantic and sexual warmth, impossible to explain at the time, can motivate someone to be “unfaithful”, and stray from the straight and narrow, knowingly or with eyes closed, hardly really understanding it. (Consider Anna Karenina or Madame Bovary.) This situation may be unresolvable; or with real care and attention it may be overcome; but it is very easy for either spouse to hint or gossip an excuse for desertion by implying or claiming infidelity on the part of the deserted spouse. And where there are children involved, it seems quite wrong if personal, sexual, or emotional problems between the parents are used in any way to turn children against the other parent.

It is when children are involved that all this really counts. Any couple, whether legally and formally married or not, may “split up” for whatever reasons, according to the wish of only one or both of the couple; I am only pointing out the invidious situation that can arise if the wife and mother runs out on the husband, who subsequently loses his children, and is *also* financially ruined (the financial injustice *can* occur the other way around but, I think, that is much less common. The issue concerning the man snatching the children exclusively to himself is, unless statistics show me to be wrong, also much less common than the other way around.) The assumptions that are very common are that the man “must have been bad” if the woman left him, even if *he* loses his children because of that. It must have been his fault, all this being enabled by the woman’s propaganda which makes his fate doubly soul-destroying. This is something that must be spoken up about! I remember when a group of fathers climbed up some cranes in London during Tony Blair’s premiership in Britain to protest against being excluded from their children, and threw flour or eggs or something at him from the Gallery of the House of Commons. Blair merely laughed and joked about this, evidently oblivious to the agony the men must have been suffering in their impotence, that drove them to this action.

Of course my mother saying what she did made no difference. I endured the greatest tragedy and loss of my life, and I learned that the Law, and sometimes current social norms as well as governmental welfare policies, are often asses. My own, utterly hopeless solicitor, once said to me: “Grow up! The Law is not about Justice, it is a set of abstractions.” To a large extent this was because he was frightened to fight for me because he had made a dreadful mistake over my case, the details of which I will not dwell upon here (I shall later have to balance the desire to “tell my truth”, to use the current “Me Too”

Movement's phrase, with my reluctance to drag on for too long about this part of my life-story); but I am sure my solicitor did not want the divorce case to go to court, as he would have been shown up in a very bad light. And I could not get rid of him and change solicitor, as he well knew, because I did not have the money to pay him off. Whereas my "opponent" as he always called her, had apparently inexhaustible funds from "Legal Aid" to pay her solicitor to insult me and lie about me in letters, and extort all he could from me for her. No doubt he thought he was a knight in shining armour.

When I and my brother Hugh were young, our father was harsh to us both, with what he called a "cane", actually a horsewhip he hung on the wall in his study in Esher. He was bad with this to us both, but more with Hugh, the witnessing of which had a horrible affect upon me that never escaped me. But much later, when Hugh was free of the boarding school, but I was still in my last years there, Hugh had a kind of car, and he sometimes picked me up when that was allowed, and took me to a marvellous pub called the "Prospect of Whitby" in the East End of London overlooking the silvery Thames, rippling with the reflections of lights. "Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song", as Edmund Spenser wrote. People sang "Perhaps it's because I'm a Londoner, O blah de pthelah and plah, oh yeah!" There was no canned music in those days.

Going to Dulwich very quickly evaporated any childish religious feelings I had had. At my Primary school I had rather liked the Harvest Festival and Christmas services in the Church of England church right next door to the school, with its grey-white stone high spire reaching to the skies. I was sometimes one of the Shepherds in those altar pageants. My mother had read me "Line Upon Line", a child's version of the Bible when I was a child, and I was fascinated by it, especially about how Jesus wandered around the Sea of Galilee speaking to anyone there, and telling them such marvellous things. And I would pray to God or Jesus at night in bed before going to sleep. But I started to feel bad even before going to the School, when my brother Hugh said at a bus-stop one day that he would crouch down on entering the bus, in order to get half-fare. "You thefter!" I shouted, only to receive his guffaws. But something was slipping in me already, and a new guilt began to enter me, that I was no longer honest or good, either.

But at Bell House, after I was delivered there one Thursday afternoon, at eleven years old, Friday passed, I don't remember how, and on Saturday evening there was a kind of preparation session for the usual Sunday morning service at the school chapel next day. We "new bugs" stood in a row, whilst the House Master explained that every week, before

going to the chapel, we had to be inspected for a) our hymn book, b) a clean handkerchief, and c) for some coins to put in the collection. Some very rebellious instinct immediately took me over. We have to show the money we are going to give! A clean handkerchief has something to do with this! Is this a voluntary gesture of love for God? I was never the same thereafter. And then, at the right moment, in pain of punishment, when the Credo was announced, we had to turn to the altar, and recite, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth", etc. And then, during the prayer sessions, we had to bow down and hold our heads with the right hand, according to the official protocol, and if a master saw your eyes were not closed, even through the fingers of your right hand, you were in for it after the service. The experience, if I now try to describe it, was a complete lack of "centre", personal, emotional, spiritual, or whatever.

I do not believe you can "speak to" or "pray to" God, either with eyes closed or otherwise ("You *cannot* petition the Lord with prayer", proclaimed Jim Morrison). You can "engage with", or "enter" the Divine through mystical communion with Nature or through great music, poetry, or art; or Love. Usually these experiences are unpredictable, unintentional, and spontaneous as when Shelley's Inspiration lights up a fading coal into sudden flames.

We hear much these days of the question as to whether Islam is or is not a "religion of Peace". To me it is obvious that any religion, or any other ideology, may or may not be "peaceful", depending on the moment of history concerned and whom we are talking about. If the "Holy Book" of any religion is to be addressed, peaceful or unpeaceful episodes can be selected. Not too long ago I read part of Saint Matthew from the New Testament, and found the following passages, some of which I remember being read out in Church services or in nightly "lessons" at my boarding school:

"From that time began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up." (Intentional suicidal martyrdom.)

"Verily I say unto you, there be some of them that stand here, which shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." (Threat of death to non-believers? I'm not sure.)

"And whoso shall cause one of these little ones which believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he

should be sunk in the depths of the sea... woe to that man through whom the occasion cometh!" (Violent death for whomsoever disobeys Jesus.)

"Cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few chosen." (Salvation is not for all.)

"For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.... Then shall they deliver you up unto tribulation, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all the nations for my name's sake." (War will lead to violent death and hatred for all who believe in me.)

And the violent side of Jesus is revealed in his overturning the tables of the money-lenders in the temple at Jerusalem, and driving out the latter, which led to his arrest and execution; though behind that was the "small" fact of his incessant condemnation of the Pharisees *en masse* as hypocrites, when they might perhaps have believed in their vocations quite as strongly as Jesus did in his. He also asserted he was divine, but was equivocal about whether he was the Son of God. He liked the title "Son of Man", though at his persecutory "trial" he was asked if he was the "Son of God", and he said, according to St. Matthew: "Thou hast said it."

Nevertheless, I have never forgotten the passages where Jesus speaks of the need to love one's neighbours (to love one's enemies is a little more difficult! – though if this injunction means one should not hold onto unending rancour towards anyone or any people, then that is fine), and never to kill another person, under any circumstances. But this is ethics and morality; the Central Myth of Christianity is that Christ deliberately pursued a destiny of being crucified "to save us all", which is a powerful but preposterous notion. How are we helped by one thirty-three year-old man's violent and painful execution and death two thousand years ago?

I could never accept, once I came to think about it properly, that Jesus was both a man *and* divine. If he was divine, he was a god; if not he was just a man, however good. If he was only half-divine, and his fate was predetermined, what does that mean for the rest of us mortals? It was pre-given then, that he would rise on the Third Day and eventually float up to heaven. If on the other hand he was a fully human man, evidently he really came to doubt his mission on the cross, saying "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (*Eli eli, lama sabachtani* etc., as in Bach's sublime and divine "Saint Matthew's Passion".) In this case, he died realizing he had been engulfed in delusions. Of course this is a "rationalistic" interpretation of the central myth of Christianity. I recognize that there are

profound truths in imaginative, poetic, ambiguous myths – I am a poet! But Christianity rarely admits this, trying to take the central myth and the many legends written down in the Gospels literally, and indeed, it would no longer be Christianity if it did so admit this.

Does Christianity believe in two Gods, or Catholicism in two Gods and a Goddess? I had thought it was supposed to be monotheistic, not polytheistic. As for the “Holy Ghost”! What on earth or in heaven was or is *That*?

In fact the Holy Trinity probably represents a carry-over from Etruscan religion, which was absorbed into pre-Christian Roman religion. The triad of deities worshipped on the Capitol were Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, whilst the first Pope was the traditional Roman High Priest, the Supreme Pontiff, forced to take on the role of Christ’s Representative on Earth after the Emperor Constantine embraced Christianity and commanded it be the official religion of the Roman Empire (three centuries after Jesus had died). “The universal claims of Rome assumed a sacerdotal form but the continuity is obvious” wrote Jasper Griffin in *The Roman World*, speaking of earlier Roman religion, but the statement remains valid in respect of Roman Catholicism as well.

I think it is clear that Jesus did exist, and that he wandered around the Sea of Galilee for a few years, preaching his ideas to whomsoever would listen. The four Gospels differ in many ways but the general picture is the same in each one, which shows they were not dictated from God as He surely would not have given conflicting accounts in four different places. They were written by four different men about whom there is no evidence that they knew one another or each others’ accounts, about forty years after the execution of Jesus, and took their information therefore from others who had witnessed his existence, or more likely had heard about it second or third hand, indicating that there was already an oral tradition, which was most likely based on fact but embroidered with other myths and legends, and inevitably modified through limitations of transmitted memory and also imaginary fantasy, rather as Homer’s *Iliad* had been with respect to the Trojan Wars, which were nevertheless also most likely real historical events.

It seems to me that if Jesus existed, as I assume he did, at least according to the four Whatnots who did not know one another, (in their collections of second or third-hand accounts, mingled into myths and legends), he was not against enjoying life, however serious he was about God, the Divine, the necessity of loving one’s neighbour etc.; or, as Shelley would put it, drawing on Enlightenment and French Revolutionary ideas, however passionately he was opposed to “The Insolent Violation of the Sacred Laws of Nature

and Society”. He magically transformed water into wine at a wedding party, when it had run out, making even better wine than that which had run out, to keep the jolly party going. He magicked into being food for five thousand people, to keep them happy and well-fed. Obviously these are legends, but their nature must surely reflect something about the man, or at least the cultural matrix that gave rise to “Christianity”. He showed a strong antagonism to prejudices and meanness of many kinds, though as already noted, he also expressed some violent, vengeful and destructive inclinations, and was not short on accusing people of hypocrisy, among whom, as already mentioned, were people who may have had convictions quite as strong as his own. Generally he seems to have been a charismatic character, certainly not a dreary, heavy, dour bore, castigating any or all pleasures in life.

I think the most likely theory about the “historical Jesus” is that he developed within an heretical Jewish sect, such as the Essenes, some of whose beliefs he appears to have espoused. Hence his hostility to the “Pharisees”, the orthodox priesthood of Judaism; and started on his wandering “mission” when he was about thirty years old. His upbringing according to the Gospels is a mixture of myths and legends. Why does only Mary appear outside of the obviously mythical dimension, at his Crucifixion, and Joseph the carpenter not at all? (For much of ancient philosophy God was a kind of craftsman, such as a carpenter).

Sometimes here in Colombia I have found myself irritated by someone wanting to “say grace” before a meal in our house or *finca*, usually an *evangelista* pleading to the Lord (*Señor*) in a frenetic, frantic, even manic voice, begging Him to accept our thanks for the food he has “given us”. (These people don’t seem to realize that this evangelical Protestantism is an American thing, a curse of fanatical dogmatism). It seems for me to be like a return to the three daily graces (before breakfast, lunch, and “tea”) that I had to endure every day for seven years at boarding school, though they were far briefer. As I have already narrated, earlier and in a different context (I hope I may be forgiven for this repetition): everyone stood in front of their bench seat until the master on duty banged a knife or fork on the table, and when silence descended, immediately shouted: “For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful,” Once I picked up a knife or fork on impulse and banged it on the table before any Master had done so. There was instant silence, then a delay, until the master on duty realized what had happened, and delivered the amazing, magical words. It was Mr. Waterworth, who reportedly went to jail much

later for “gross indecency with young boys”, of Bell House; who afterwards, when I was now seated, came over and bashed me over the head.

What I don't like about “saying grace”, and didn't then, is that it leaves one with only two alternatives: either to pretend to participate in what to me is nonsense, or to seem sourly disapproving. As a Pantheistic-Romantic-Taoist-Chan Buddhist-Shamanistic-Agnostic-Einsteinian (??) I do not impose my “beliefs”, if that is what someone wants to call them (I recall how Zen Buddhists were not concerned with “beliefs”, still less with formal rituals, but with inner experience and state of mind), on other people (who might well rudely walk out of a shamanistic *Ayahuasca* session, in horror for example.).

I had an interesting conversation with my brother-in-law Ricardo in 2016, who had years earlier burlesqued me for a lack of a clear spiritual, religious faith, though now he waxed eloquently about how the human mind is intrinsically limited, how our senses receive information only within a narrow spectrum, as for example our vision which only takes in things within a spectrum of VIBGOR (violet, indigo, blue, green, orange, and red). Cats and bees receive other wavelengths. And so it is in many spheres - some due to physiological limitations, others due to psycho-social phenomena. In the country of the blind, the man who sees is thought to be mad (H.G.Wells).

It's all getting a bit too late to save humanity – not the planet, for as followers of the Gaia Hypothesis emphasize, neither the planet nor probably all life will be totally destroyed if or when humanity destroys itself.

As a teenager, in the summer holidays, I hitch-hiked alone around Europe - in France, Belgium, Holland, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy. My father was usually in Khartoum at those times, and I would tell my mother I was hitch-hiking with a friend. (How safe it all seemed in those days!) I would sleep anywhere I could, in my sleeping-bag, in a ditch, by the side of the road, or in an abandoned car, with no money (except for my boat-fare to get back to England), eating apples from orchards, or sleeping on a beach.

Already at the boarding school I had come to develop an interest in Shelley. I had a book with some of his poetry and letters. I remember one letter in which he said something like: “I forever read the Greeks, and feel I understand their genius, as their temples are like open-air forests, their columns like trees, breathing in nature”. But this was nothing yet like the mind, heart, and soul-blowing feelings I had about him later, which I shall describe later. I think however that it was that book which I had by my bedside once in Esher. Seeing it,

my father said Shelley was a “drip” because he sailed paper boats on the Serpentine in Hyde Park. I only read in a biography many years later that Shelley was going through a terrible love-crisis at the time, and sailed hundreds of these boats that he made in a manic state. But to be fair to my Dad, to say once again, he did come to change some of these kinds of viewpoint subsequently.

Much later I came to like C.S. Lewis’s essay taking apart T.S. Eliot’s banal criticism of Shelley’s poem “When the Lamp is Shattered,” showing that Eliot had not read the poem at all, making it out to be vague and full of junky mixed metaphors, when in fact it was absolutely pure in its descriptions and metaphors, resting on acute observations of nature. Eliot tried to compare Shelley with Dryden - Good God! Lewis wrote that anyone who criticized Shelley for poor observation of Nature, did so “at their peril”.

In the last year or months in the boarding school, I thought I wanted to be a writer (no longer a pilot! as I had thought as a child) though I also thought I wanted to study psychology and ethology, like Jane Goodall who studied gorillas and chimpanzees “in the wild”, to uncover their similarities with or differences from human beings. But I did not harbour the thought of being an “academic”. I thought I would write novels, but in time I came to realize that that was not to be. To concentrate on an imagined but “real” situation or “story” for a long time, with characters that would not disappear for months, or years, was not for me. A poet’s actual life was his “novel” – poetry and short stories, have been and still are for me written in short, sharp, hard, intense, even maniacal spurts – the sparks that flow out from the comet or meteorite of one’s life. Non-fictional prose – “academic” or otherwise - can be composed over long periods of time (as it has also been for me in my “semi-academic” projects), but “creative writing” has been like the fading coal that is spasmodically brought into flames by the winds of inspiration. Even long poems have usually been written in bursts, not like a novelist’s concentration, over quite a time, or in the case of a poetry sequence or series, over a very long, long time. While an undergraduate at University I came to realize that I would have to write poetry on the one hand, not novels, and should study not “science” in the “hard” sense of empirical observation, nor psychology, but *sociology*, - “social theory” in particular.

But although I wrote some poetry at that time – perhaps best thought of as “juvenelia”, and some essays outside of my curriculum, it was not until after graduating that I really began to find myself – in the two realms of sociology and poetry. In Durham County I saw on television a documentary film, a brilliant Omnibus production about Shelley, the poet

played by Robert Powell. That set me on fire, and from that moment my poetry changed greatly. Shelley wrote in a letter, that the brilliant actor read against the backdrop of Venetian canals: “I can only compare them (the gondolas) to giant moths”.

I also began to feel a scholarly vocation, reading books about art, literary theory and much else in 62 New Row, Oakenshaw, Co. Durham; reading them very slowly, staring out of the window at the garden and the grassland in front of the house and the woods behind, puffing occasionally at hashish in a pipe I had obtained in Afghanistan, sometimes interrupting my studies by scribbling poetry or some kind of “prose poem” such as appear in my piece later put together, which I called *Myriad Inventions*.

But I was also learning about the European Avant-Garde, Flemish history and Flemish landscape painting, and about Chinese history and art, and about radical theories of art and literature.

That’s where it started, in that short period when I lived in Oakenshaw, a blessed place, though also in Fincal Abbey caravan park just before, where I started reading Lukács on literature, and saw how profound he was one evening, when watching a film version of “Jekyll and Hyde” on a black and white television in the caravan. “Typical characters”, essential social processes explored through literary-aesthetic means! O what joy to understand.

I was riven with complexities and doubts about my love life with Marlene, the girl I was living with, though I really loved her as well as finding her extremely intelligent and interesting, but quite impossible to get on with in the long run, so volatile, crazy, and unbalanced as I found her. And I was frantically worried about what I was trying to do, writing a Ph. D thesis that was not in the end to be such. I could not write a cold, studied thesis, replete with all the paraphernalia of academia, simply to prove I could “do a Ph. D thesis”, no matter how banal, ephemeral, and contrived that would have to be.

But I started my first book – as it turned out to be, never yet published in full, though I later used chapters as articles and conference papers. I called it “Nature and Aesthetic Imagination in Capitalist Society” though my original title was “Nature and Transformative Praxis in Capitalist Society”, though this title was rejected by the Ph.D people at Durham University, presumably because they could not understand the meanings of the words. The thesis was failed, by an external examiner called Janet Wolf, who obviously could not understand it at all. Afterwards my supervisor David Chaney wrote in a report that he had

been “amazed at the intellectual scale of the work”, though he lacked the courage to say the judgement was banal and wrong. Raymond Williams however wrote to me saying: “it should never have had that result”, and that “to your credit you work with the concept of *processes*, which is not yet well understood.”

Raymond Williams recommended I send the manuscript of this failed thesis (actually I was told I could resubmit the chapter on “Flemish Landscape Painting and the Rise of Capitalism” as an M.Phil thesis, but I refused to do so, as it was an integral part of the idea of the whole work) to an editor at Macmillan, saying that he had approved its value for publication. This editor was sympathetic, but asked me to write something else on the topics involved, which I later called “Theoretical Essays on the Imagination in Capitalism”. But by the time I had written a couple of chapters of this supposed book, and sent them to the series editor in question as he had requested, he had changed his position, and his replacement said on the phone that what I had written and sent was “out of date”. (I instantly retorted: “It was never *in date!*”) and that in his opinion Raymond Williams was an overrated scholar, though most people active in the field saw him as an exceedingly fine “Sociologist of Culture”. So I completed the book and used the chapters that I later termed “essays”, as papers for conferences of various kinds. I printed and photocopied them so that everyone at these conferences who wanted a copy could have one.

“An Ode To Oakenshaw”, and later “Thoughts Aroused By Revisiting Oakenshaw”, were poems that arose from this early stage, experience, or period of my life.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **ESCAPE FROM SCHOOL, TO GERMANY AND AFGANISTAN, AND FROM CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE**

I had left school in July 1967 at eighteen, or nearly nineteen years of age. Caught by a late birthday in the school/academic yearly cycle, I was bursting now to *live*. I had got into Cambridge University to study Psychology, due to gaining two A1s and a B in my A and

S levels (advanced and scholarship levels) at Dulwich College. I had found out these results while on holiday in Cornwall, with my mother and brother Peter, at Mother Ivy's Bay, near Padstow. We were staying at a caravan site, which had a kind of shed in which people staying there had their letter-trays, and on that day we three went into it to see if we had any letters. And lo and behold, I picked up a card addressed to me, that announced I had been awarded an A in Biology A level, and a 1 In S level; whilst in Chemistry the same; but in Physics a mere B in A level. This crowded little shed was where Peter and my mother were sometimes annoyed because it was so small; once a woman came in with a dog, which was too much for my Mum, sniffing around her ankles, and she spake out: "Surely, there's little enough room in here without bringing a dog in!" Peter and I howled and killed ourselves with laughter.

The caravan was great fun, because our mother could be such a "laugh", joking and teasing about everything. The three of us met a very amusing, generous, boozy Irishman who was presumably on holiday too, though alone, and in a local pub he bought me a pint of black-and-tan (half a pint of Guinness and a half of Bitter, the which was my favourite drink for a long time afterwards), explaining that the "black and tan" referred to the horrible, cruel English military police in Ireland, in earlier times. I can't remember what my Mum chose, though it was something more elegant, though poor Peter was deemed too young for an alcoholic beverage. With his slick-backed black hair this chap was quite a picture. My mother obviously liked him, though there was no hanky-panky.

Anyway, I was of course ecstatic at my results, and later heard from my kind form-master, Mr. Malinson (known as Mousey Malinson), a rather nice though strict and a very effective Chemistry teacher, who wrote to me that I had achieved the highest result in the form, which was Class B1, the top class specializing in Biology.

Leaving that school was an incredible experience for me, in 1967, but "liberation" could only have been a word I would have used later. In the first place I felt I had been in there far too long: I was nearly 19 by the time I was let out, as I have already explained, something consequent upon my birthday falling when it does. To do things that were fairly normal for a boy/young man, like trying to "pick up girls", finding somewhere to hear good music and dance, risked getting beaten, or being expelled with all the disgrace, and anger, that it would arouse with one's parents. I had to break out sometimes, down a fire-escape, to get the hell out of Blew House, in the middle of the night, and return in time for breakfast in the morning. It was on such occasions that I went, sometimes with a fellow rebel or two,

to the Marquee Club in Soho and other joints and frequently heard Wilson Pickett (whom my father called Wilson Bucket when I played an LP of him in Esher), especially his great rock-soul song called something like “Waiting for the Midnight Hour.” Immediately after leaving school I spent the first part of the summer of 1967 at Esher, with my mother, and read “Crime and Punishment”, “The Brothers Karamozov”, and “Anna Karenina”, the greatest novels I have ever read, and scarcely ever again have I read the whole of such long novels. I have always remembered them, and with the blessings of Youtube, have seen marvellous films and series of them in recent years.

Later that first summer I went with some school friends to France in a Commer van I bought from my brother Hugh for twenty pounds. It was an old banger that didn't work. One evening, before the holiday, I drove it – without a driving license – to visit a girl I knew from Khartoum in Wimbledon or somewhere like that, and on the way back late at night I was stopped by the police because of the dreadful noise the car made, not to mention the ghastly fumes the exhaust spewed out. The policeman asked me for my driving licence, and I told him I didn't have it with me. So he asked for my name and address: I gave him the name of a friend of mine called David Morris, and his address in Purley, Surrey. The policeman, quite friendly told me to get the exhaust of the car fixed and take in my driving license to show at Purley Police Station. So I had to tell Dave about it, and he amicably lent me his licence which I duly took into Purley Police Station. Fortunately driving licenses in Britain at that time didn't require photographs of the driver!

The object of the trip to France was to go to Cannes, where Hugh had had many happy beach holidays with girls, and I convinced my friends we could do the same. We spent time inland in Provence and the Carmargue on the way to Cannes.

The holiday wasn't a great success on the girl-hunting front as far as I can remember, possibly because we were a bunch of five eighteen-years-old (nearly nineteen in my case) young men. Even then, and always later I found success with girls came far more easily when I was completely alone, as a lone-wolf. A year or two before this holiday, I had hitch-hiked around France, Switzerland, and Italy, and somewhere on the French Riviera I met a lovely girl, German I think, on a beach, who sneaked me into her holiday camp where I stayed with her in her cabin for a few days – absolute bliss! I had hoped again for such luck in 1967.

Another time that I entered a holiday club place, and met a fabulous girl who let me stay with her in her cabin, I blew it. At a dance with her I was stupidly too flirtatious with other

girls, so she changed her mind about me. What a fool I was! Was that simply my native personality, or was it a consequence of being held in a male-only boarding school, frenziedly having to make up for its privations when opportunity arose, in excess, and stupidly?

I arrived in Heidelberg, Germany, in the Autumn of 1967, to study German at the Dolmetscher Institut. Some extraordinary episodes occurred while I was there. At first I stayed in a student hostel for Lutheran students of Theology – I'm not really completely sure why now. My parents had very kindly accepted my wish to have a full year off before "going up" to Cambridge University, and my father knew a Zoologist who had worked at the Max Plank Institute in Heidelberg. He had actually died recently before I arrived at the beginning of October 1967, accidentally falling off a mountain where he had been exploring and observing birds I think, of which species I cannot remember; his poor wife and daughters received me, and helped me with my first accommodation. This turned out to be the Lutheran student hostel. Most of the students there were very friendly characters, though I found the overall ambience rather boring. On Sunday evenings there was a kind of religious get-together, that reminded me of the worst dreariness of my school years, with talks on various topics by certain inmates. One night a rather big and fat type gave a talk about going on a student exchange to the USA. My German was just about good enough by then to understand that he enjoyed it, and that the Americans were friendly and welcoming.

After his talk I remember he and I started to chat together, and he explained that Germany had not started the First World War, and that the conditions created after it had led to the Second World War. I had not enough knowledge at that time to respond in any clear way to these assertions.

I shared a room with a student called Fitz, who was very pleasant company. One day I bought a cheap LP of excerpts from Mozart's "Die Zauberflöte", and looking at it, he said the role of the Queen of the Night was very difficult (*sehr schwerig*). He was quite right of course.

I very much liked Heidelberg, and developed very early a dislike of the notion that the Germans were "bad people". Of course I grew up in awareness of the Nazi past – this was scarcely twenty years after the end of the Second World War, and I understood what some foreign students – Americans and others – meant when they said things like "I understand how the Germans could have been Nazis", but I didn't really agree with them, as many

Germans were very nice. (Years later, in 1999 I was in Hamburg where there was an exhibition of my poetry with various artists` art-works, and one night I found myself in a *bierstube* at a table with male lawyers and attractive female secretaries and administrators etc. One of the men was a bit cheeky to me; I can`t remember exactly what he said, but I replied with something equally curt. Then he said, “Well, we Germans are *this that or the other*” – I forget exactly what, rather as the author of “*The Tin Drum*” had recently said something similar about Germans always being loud, and I turned to him immediately and said firmly, “I don`t think the Germans are worse than anyone else.” The chap repeated my words as if they were a question, to which I repeated “No.” After that we all got on extremely well for several hours and many beers.)

Nevertheless, I felt I could discern a certain kind of conformity and acceptance of authoritarianism, in for example the banal example of how people waited to cross the roads until the lights were completely correct, which I would now judge as quite right. Britain evidently seemed to me still more anarchicistic than Germany. Yet I had two lovely German girlfriends during the few months I spent in Heidelberg – called Ute and Gundula – both of whom I fell in love with, though in extremely different ways.

In fact the extraordinary difference between the loveliness and beauty of German girls, and the knowledge of how they might have thought only two or three decades before, astonished my naïve imagination I think, all the time that I was in Germany. But I thought, when I hitch-hiked around other European countries during that year that I was based in Germany, that German girls were actually the most friendly, sexy, and companionable of all the girls I met in other countries. How strange, I remember feeling, that was. In a comparable way, when I teamed up with one or another student in Heidelberg, and went to one or another of the exciting student bars in the caves of the rocky banks of the River Neckar, that never seemed to close, to drink German beer or German white wine, the whole thing was most amazing. I would walk along the cobbled, old, narrow streets of Heidelberg, in day or night, thinking I was Raskolnikov (having read *Crime and Punishment* not long before, in Esher) – though of course I realized this was Heidelberg, in Germany, and not Saint Petersburg.

I enrolled in the “Dolmetcher Institut”, which was associated with the University of Heidelberg, to learn German. The teaching was extremely good; I found German devilishly difficult at first, and felt very stupid that outside of the classes I spoke and communicated in English most of the time – with foreigners or English-speaking Germans. But at a certain

stage, after two or three months I think, the language “clicked” for me, and I realized that if you learnt the *rules*, you could put sentences together quite well. German has far less irregularities or idiosyncracies than English. I came to find I liked the language, and came to realize how bewilderingly beautiful and intoxicatingly intense it could be, in for example, Schubert’s songs.

I remember having to read and translate Kleist in the class, whom I had never heard of before, and I liked him very much. At the same time Ute gave me a copy of Wolfgang Borchert’s short novel, “*Draussen Vor Der Tor*”, (*Outside the Door*), a pathetically sad story of a German soldier who returns at the end of the War from the Eastern Front, terribly wounded, to find his fiancée is no longer interested in him. This was more or less an autobiography of Borchert, who died of his wounds in 1945 or 1946, in a hospital after writing this tragic work, that deserves to be better known I feel.

I remember staying with friends of Ute away from Heidelberg, and the female of the couple asked me what German literature I had read. I said, presumably because it was fresh in my mind, “*Draussen Vor Der Tor*”. She said, oh but that is “*sehr neidergeschlagen*” (very depressing). I think I said “Yes, but it is very good.” Ute was pleased at my reply if I remember well.

The same teacher who introduced our class to Kleist, also took us on a Saturday coach trip to various fabulous houses and palaces near Heidelberg, and I particularly remember being knocked out by the Palace at Wurzburg, with its immense baroque paintings on the ceilings. On that trip, I got to know Gundula, a lovely blonde German girl, studying literature, older than me and far beyond me in learning, but I later realized I messed up that dream-love situation as so often, without meaning to or realizing I was doing so. I will come back to that later. The teacher who took us on the trip was a very strange man: he had an extremely strong Germanic voice, and normally talked in German to us foreigners in the Dolmetcher Institute (Gundula, like Ute, was a student in Heidelberg University proper.) He could be ironic and amusing, saying he liked Englishers but not Americaners so much, and that he liked Africans but not Afro-Americans. This was a bit rough for the one Afro-American in the class, even in such a pre-PC epoch, but the poor guy, an American GI appeared completely unphased by it. Perhaps the teacher meant it as a (bad) joke, as generally he was actually quite pleasant. Even now I remember the sight of the palace roof in Wurzburg, ornate with curling cornices, golden light, quite amazing.

I hitch-hiked around various parts of Germany in the first few months I was there, as well as going to Amsterdam. There, I met some hippy types which was helped by the fact that my hair had been growing from its short back-and sides school condition by then. I was amazed by the “underground” “hippy” “counter-culture” scene in Amsterdam, which was equally as freaked at that time as London or San Francisco. I found myself somehow in an enormous concert venue, like a bunch of unused warehouses, with dozens of acid-blues bands, and I think that was the first time I smoked hashish, kindly offered to me by a freaky long-haired guy. Later I was put up in a squat-house by a group of very friendly freaks male and female, all giving the V sign for Love and Peace.

On a different hitch-hiking trip, I managed to get to West Berlin. It was about three o’clock in the morning when I was let out of my last car, freezing cold, everything closed, very hungry (not that I had enough money to buy food in anything remotely like a restaurant anyway!), but I sneaked into a kind of bar that was closed but not locked up. I thought I could sleep there until morning. But unfortunately the owner or manager burst in and demanded of me: “Was machen sie den? Woher comen sie?” (What are *you* doing? Where have you come from?) I was wearing a deer stalker which was good to conceal the ears from the cold, so I must have seemed completely weird. I answered, in accord with his astonished and horrified face: “*Von der Luft!*” (From the air!)

He was so angry I immediately made my exit into the freezing wintry Berlin night air.

Although my parents were very generous towards me financially, seeing this in retrospect, I had to find some means to supplement their help through working. For some time I worked on an American Military base in Heidelberg, in a kind of dungeon below an enormous cafeteria above. Dirty plates, cups and saucers, cutlery and so on came down without pause on huge shutes, from which I had to pick them up and bung them into a kind of permanently moving escalator, so that the dirty things would go through various stages of washing process, with squirting water all along, until someone else had to pick them up several meters further along. It was extraordinary to think how much could be eaten and drunk, continuously like this! I had to strain to keep up with the endless movement, and avoid falling behind. But at times there were peaceful interludes, when I would sit down in a chair and read a book for a few moments. Once I was reading a Penguin book of William Blake’s poetry that my mother gave me. A foreman suddenly appeared and was angry and shouted “Was machen sie, den?” as in the earlier story, but he didn’t hold it against me,

chatting with me on a different day about how lacking Americans were in culture! I had to jump up and be ready for the next batch of dirty plates and cutlery.

After a while I left the Lutheran student hostel to stay with first one and then another girlfriend I had got to know (I don't know how I got away with this behaviour). Around this time I received a letter from my paternal grandmother, called Barbie, telling me that my maternal grandfather, Carpa, who lived with my grandmother (Bigmummy) in the Esher house, as they had done since my parents went to Khartoum, had died. I felt I had to go to Esher, as Bigmummy would obviously be alone, as my parents were in Khartoum. This was on a Friday, and it was too late to change a traveller's cheque or whatever I had, so I would have to wait till the next Monday to get some cash.

I had just enough money to pay for the channel crossing from Calais to Dover – not a penny more, so I decided just to go.

I left Heidelberg late on that Friday afternoon, taking a plastic bag with some bread and margarine in it, a small kind of suitcase I think, a sleeping-bag and, as I have said, just about enough money – around three pounds as I remember - for the channel crossing. I got onto the nearest Autobahn that led due west towards the French border. Hitch-hiking went rather slowly on that occasion, and I began to feel a bit anxious.

This was in November 1967 I think, and it got dark quite early, and cold. I was standing at an *Einfahrt* to get onto the next stage of the *Autobahn* to the border, but very few cars were coming! When eventually one did, a Volkswagen I think, I did a very stupid thing. The driver was obviously not going to stop when he saw my freezing thumb up and out, so I chucked the plastic bag mentioned above (I had already eaten the bread in it though there was still some margarine in it, which I did not take into account in my state of great frustration), at his front window pane.

The bag burst and splattered the margarine all over his front window screen! Immediately I regretted greatly what I had done; but I was not sure what was going on when the driver turned his car around, and instead of driving onto the Autobahn, he drove back in the direction from where he had come.

I felt concerned, but my worries faded as I began to feel gradually colder and more isolated. I think I had almost forgotten, when a police car: "POLIZEI"! roared up to me where I was standing and screeched to a halt. They approached me firmly but not officiously, and asked me if I had thrown some kind of fat or grease at a car's front window-pane. I had to admit

that I had thrown away some margarine in a plastic bag, but I had not intended to hit any car`s window-pane.

They said I must come with them, and we drove back to a police station. Immediately as I was escorted into the police station, a man – obviously the driver of the Volkswagen – jumped up and exclaimed: “Yes, it was him!” When I repeated that it was an unintended accident that it hit his window, he became very agitated and insisted: “Nein, er hat mit Kraft gemacht” “No, he did it deliberately”.

I knew I must continue to deny this, though I apologized strongly for my mistake. After a while the police told me to get moving – I had explained that I was heading for the French border, and that I had to get back to my parents` house in England because my grandfather had died and my grandmother was all alone.

Outside the police station the driver of the Volkswagen offered to take me to the French border, as he was going there as well. I accepted this with great gratitude, and hopped into his car. On the way to the border he asked me various questions (in German) about myself, then came to the big one: “Will you admit now that you deliberately threw the margarine at my window pane?” I replied, “But if I do you will drive straight back to the police station, won`t you?” “No I won`t” he replied.

So I admitted the truth, and said I had indeed thrown the bag of margarine in desperation, freezing coldness, and frustration, though I had not intended the margarine to splatter all over the man`s widow-pane, and apologized. When we got to the border, we shook hands and said goodbye.

Finding myself at the French border freezing cold again and hungry, I walked up to the frontier and went through the German control with no difficulty. I crossed the rotund bridge that separated Germany from France, but when I arrived at the French border control I did not get a friendly reception. After checking my passport they asked how much money I had. I don`t remember whether I showed them or just told them how much, but they derisively said that was not enough. I explained about my grandfather having just died in England and that I had enough money to get a channel boat so that I would shortly arrive at the house where my grandmother was. They said that was rubbish, I was obviously going to find work in France illegally. I emphatically denied this, but to no avail, until they just sent me back across the bridge and into Germany again.

Then something extraordinary happened. One of the German border controllers who had been very friendly to me a little earlier drove past me in the direction of the French border, having seen me being turned back, and slowed down alongside me. Again I felt afraid of something like the police. But I need not have done: he kindly asked me into his car, and while driving back to the German side said to me that if I waited until about three o'clock in the morning I would be able to sneak across the French border somewhat to the side of the control buildings! He said he had seen from a distance that I had been rejected by the French.

And so I hung around a long time in no-man's land, near the German side of the border, to the side of the bridge. At a bit after three o'clock (I had a watch), I began my escape from Colditz, and snuck across the rough ground until I reached the French side. After a while I chanced it to get on the now deserted road from Germany into France. After a while, again a car drove up from behind me, and slowed down alongside me. Now what was it? It was the same German official again, inviting me into his car again. Now he said he would take me outside of and beyond the French border town, and leave me by the road to hitch-hike my way to the north coast of France. So I got in, thanking him profusely, and sat back while he drove me outside of town. He had seen me sneaking across the border and onto the road, he said.

Once on the highway heading north towards Calais, I stood and hitch-hiked, as the first flickers of dawn appeared. A lorry stopped for me, with a typically friendly French driver. We drove through wonderful stretches of French countryside, until he stopped at a transport cafe where he ordered a big mug of coffee and a large cognac for each of us. My God how pleasantly wonky I felt after that, when we got back into his cabin!

I think I fell asleep after that, though I was abruptly woken up by a noisy skidding of the lorry in what was now a fairly narrow country road. He had had a puncture! Both of us got out, and the driver started to do things to change his tyre. He said I should perhaps walk down the road a bit and start hitching again, but I said "No! not after your kindness in picking me up." So I stuck with him, and after some time, I don't remember how long, we got moving again.

More of this journey I cannot remember, until I arrived in Calais. I went straight to the port, only to find the last boat to Dover had already left. It was late at night, very dark, and even colder than before. I tried to find somewhere to rest and sleep in the port, but there was no waiting room or space open. I wandered away from the port – very hungry, as I had only

eaten the odd apple or pear in many hours, but even more cold. By chance as I was walking along a street still quite near the port, I saw a placard on a house saying that something to do with the British Consulate was housed within it. I found that the front door was unlocked, a kind of gate door into a house divided into apartments on different floors. I went up some stone stairs until I came upon an apartment that was signed up as some kind of division of the British Consulate. The door there was locked, so I gave the bell a few good long rings. I thought if anyone slept there they would let me get a kip for a few hours. But no one came to the door so in disappointment I chose a corner to lay out my sleeping bag, got in it and went to sleep. At least it was a little warmer than outside.

The next morning I got up, went back to the port and got the next boat to Dover. I had exactly the right amount of money for the ticket and not a drop more, even for a cup of tea in the ship's cafeteria. I don't remember much more of my journey either across the Channel or the hitch-hiking trip to Esher. When I arrived at the gate of Glendoone, 10 Lower Green Road, the first person I met was my older brother Hugh, who grinning all over his face asked me, "Why have you come back here?" "Because I heard Carpa had died, and I thought Bigmummy might be all alone!" "Oh no," he replied. "Mum's come back from Khartoum".

Anyway, my mother was extremely warmed by the fact that I had come all the way back from Heidelberg, because my grandfather had died. For a long time afterwards she told people admiringly of my feat, which made me quite proud.

My grandparents on my mother's side were the Cloudsleys, on my father's side the Thompsons. My parents would often say that they created the double-barrelled name so that the name Cloudsley would not be lost, as my mother only had sisters, no brothers. I wondered though if they didn't feel they were adopting a rather grand name! All three of us sons changed our names by deed poll to just Cloudsley when adults, as we were sick of the teasings, jokes, puns and insults we were treated to for all our childhoods and even more as adolescents at "Public" Boarding School.

My grandparents Bigmummy and Carpa (both names invented by Hugh, the first grandchild) had come to live in our family house after my parents went to Khartoum. Each year my parents came back for some time in "leave" from the University. Carpa and Bigmummy were very nice elderly grandparents, though Bigmummy could be a bit grumbly, and the three of us boys came whenever our prison in Dulwich College allowed us out for the occasional "visiting weekend" and "half-term" holiday. These were the first times I had

been able to enjoy television – my parents had never wanted a television in the house before. I was able to watch occasionally Agatha Christie films, Laramie, the Good Cop series whose name I cannot remember, and Perry Mason, among other things, on those weekends of escape that made me love them greatly. Carpa (thus named as Hugh confused both grandfathers with his “pa” – both grandfathers had cars, at least at one or another point - unlike our father, so Hugh was directed to call them “Carpa” – smoked a pipe, while Bigmummy really liked smoking cigarettes. I very much liked the smell of all this tobacco smoke, especially in the daytime before they began smoking again, when the sun shined through the front window, and the gentle now blue-coloured smoke billowed and hovered around the room. It all seemed very cosy, especially on a Monday morning when we had to go back to the dreaded school, and my grandmother would pull in the delivered milk from the front door just as we were leaving to walk to Esher Station, to go to Waterloo Station and then to Dulwich Station, and from there to walk to the school.

My grandparents on my mother`s side, were on the one side the Morrisons (about whom a distant cousin of mine has recently published a Family History Book), and on the husband`s side Cloudsley. This grandfather had descended from Admiral Cloudesley Shovell, who started up as a cabin boy, rose up among the ranks, but then ruined himself and his reputation by getting the English Fleet wrecked on the Scilly Isles. He had apparently ignored the advice of a subordinate about where the ships were, and his arrogance resulted in his death. The story goes that a local woman saw a rather nice ring on Admiral Cloudesley`s finger, and cut the finger off, to steal this ring. Supposedly she admitted to this on her deathbed, many years later.

Nidia and I in 2017 looked at the bust of this man in Westminster Abbey, with a guide who very kindly explained to us about the Admiral`s life.

My grandparents on this side of the family came to live in our family house in Lower Green Road, when my father got the post as professor in Zoology at Khartoum University, in 1960. We sons came “back” to the house periodically, as already explained to spend part of the “visiting weekends” and “half-term holidays” from the boarding school, (the other half we spent with our other grandparents who lived in Hinchley Wood, not very far away. I will come to them later.

After a few days, I hitchhiked back to Heidelberg. The next extraordinary thing that happened, was that two German American students I had got to know called Larry and Roland, had hatched a plan to buy a Volkswagen bus and drive to Afghanistan, because

they wanted to buy antique rifles, studded with mother-of-pearl or bone and sometimes precious metals – enormously long, beautiful things, used against the British in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, in Afghanistan, and bring them back to Europe to sell at a profit. I managed to hold on to one, which I still have in my house in Bucaramanga. The two guys were both about 21 or 22 years old as I remember it, I was 19 years old. I asked them if I could join their journey, and promised I would support the intentions of the trip. With some trepidation I admitted two problems about my usefulness: firstly that I did not have a driving licence, and secondly that I had absolutely no money either to pay my way or help in the enterprise. Amazingly, Larry who had already bought a Volkswagen van for the expedition, said “Never mind Tim, we can do with you alongside us!” Halleluja.

So we set out from Heidelberg one day in February 1968 – just the right year for a crazy youthful adventure – and headed south to the Austrian border. We slept in the van at night and did not spend any unnecessary time on the journey through Austria, but I do remember the beautiful views out upon the mountains of the Austrian Alps. One particular occasion I remember very well, when we stopped at a simple family restaurant for something to eat, where the snowy view from a large window was absolutely stupendous. Roland, who spoke fluent German, said to the patrons, “*Ein sehr shon Ausblick!*”

We made our way to the Yugoslav (as it was then called) border, at exactly which crossing place I don't remember. I remember driving along the Dalmation coast, and drove either through or near to Dubrovnik, with its superb, imposing spires. We must have driven through several of the states of the former Yugoslavia which are now separate countries, without well realizing that they had formerly been distinct provinces and nations, and become separate again after bloody wars and massacres. The countryside was again fantastically beautiful, all three of us agreed.

Next we entered Greece, where we stopped in Thessalonika because either Larry or Roland had heard that you could sell your blood there at a good price. All three of us did so, but I did not like it at all: I could feel the extraction of my blood as a painful sucking out of my life-force, and afterwards I felt decidedly weak and debilitated. I was surprised at that, as the other two did not seem to feel too bad; but I recovered quickly. Then we came to the Hellespont, and were now in Asian Turkey.

It was much slower getting through Turkey, partly because it is much larger than the European countries we had thus far been driving through, but also because the roads were at times not so good. We found people very friendly on the whole, and when we stopped

at a *chi*-house, men (there would be few women) tried to chat with us in whatever way was possible: a few words of German was usually more useful than English or Arabic of which latter I had some knowledge from the Sudan. One night we took the van into a field to park, and then went to sleep. Early in the morning we were woken by a local peasant woman in traditional costume, full of smiles, who gave us some eggs.

Later, in the mountains of central Turkey, we were driving on very twisty, turning roads in the dark. I was at the wheel, as Larry and Roland felt that once out of Europe we could risk that, and they were tired. At one sharpish curve I tried to slow right down, but I didn't manage to do so fast enough. The Volkswagen van skidded and screeched, then started to roll over, back over front! We somersaulted at least four times, until we came to a halt fortunately to the right of the very narrow track, as a deep abyss was on the other side of the road only a couple of metres away from our now very beaten-up van, now right up against craggy rocks. We had narrowly got away with our lives! After a few hours the dawn came, and the van was still submerged in dust. I can't remember exactly how - I think we must have asked someone in a passing vehicle to send a recovery truck to pull us out - so that after some while we were dragged out by a tractor hooked up to the van. In horror we listened to the terrible noise of the transmission being wrecked, as we had neglected to try and get the engine out of gear. So we had to have the van put on a truck and taken to an engine repair yard. At the end the van worked perfectly, and but for the unnecessarily wrecked transmission there was no serious damage, only bumps, scrapes, and battered patches on the exterior; though the eggs given to us by the kind Turkish peasant woman that morning had disappeared without trace, as had also my notebook in which I had been trying to write what would have been my first travel account. For some reason I could not apply myself to obtaining another notebook after this, so I did not write the attempted book about our trip from Germany to Afghanistan and back; so I am now doing this from memory 53 years later! I decided after the crash never to drive a car again, a vow which I have kept almost completely ever since.

Over mountains and plains, stopping over in Ankara for a couple of days to replenish needed things, we gradually came to the border with Iran. For part of the trip through Iran we took the road along the superb coast of the Caspian Sea. We were amazed in Teheran to see such beautiful girls, gorgeously made-up and wearing deliciously short mini-skirts. Of course we could not know we were only a decade away from the ghastly Islamic Fundamentalism that would sweep all that away with a violent vengeance. But we got a glimpse of that alternative vision in Mashed in eastern Iran, outside a very sacred mosque

into which we not allowed, even if we went barefoot. People at the outer entrance told us we were Godless, to which I tried to reply that though we were not Moslems this did not necessarily mean we were Godless, but that made no communicative headway. Nearby we saw an extraordinary gathering of people in black clothing, women in black veils: not exactly a march or a protest, but with rather alarming huge black flags. We knew nothing clearly about what this was, but it was obviously a manifestation of dark religion. As far as I remember, I saw nothing remotely like this anywhere else in Turkey, or Iran, or Afghanistan later. It was very striking, and I described this years later to an Iranian friend who lived in Glasgow, called Yassmin. She understood exactly what it was, as she was an exile from the Revolutionary Islamic regime.

When the Islamic Revolution under the Ayatolla Khomeini succeeded in overthrowing the corrupt and oppressive regime of the last Shah of Iran in 1979, there was much discussion among people on the Left in Glasgow about what it meant, what the appropriate position was that should be taken towards it and so on. I believed it could not last long, as it had neither the potential of either “capitalism” or “socialism” to survive. Hopefully a process of internal, organic self-development would in due course move it towards “socialism”, in accordance with the growth of knowledge, awareness, and ”consciousness”. I think it is fair to say that this was the majority view of the British Communist Party then, of which I was a member, and that is some testimony to the reasons why I was. Yassmin and her English husband Dave Mather, who was a friend of mine and a colleague in the Sociology Department of Glasgow Caledonian University thought, like many “ultra-leftists” of various groups and individuals with no such affiliation, that the weaknesses of the system that had come into being in Iran would quickly be transformed by Leninist types of socialist revolution. Both of us were quite wrong, as after 40 years the Iranian Islamic regime persists. For much of this time Yassmin was an active, communicating member of the movement of revolutionary exiles scattered throughout Europe and North America, forever unable to return to their country, on pain of death.

After Mashed it was not very long before we arrived at the frontier with Afganistan. The first town after the border was Herat, whereafter I think we drove through rocky and deserty landscape southwards, to arrive at Jalalabad. We passed the huge, amazing statue of Buddha, that was later blown up by the Taliban. People in Afghanistan were very friendly, tough, and proud people, and later in life I bled with sadness at the mad suffering they had to undergo, and still do, at the whims of powerful, ugly, interfering outside governments. At that time - in 1979 - I think I thought there was nothing wrong with the Soviet Union

supporting the secular, supposedly “progressive” government of Afghanistan in 1979, but it was desperately wrong to invade the country to maintain it in power. Later I had no love for the Taliban, but it was ridiculous for the USA and its allies, most especially Britain, to invade the country. The “9/11” terrorist attacks on New York had not been directed by the Taliban. It harboured Al Qaeda people, and Bin Laden was apparently skulking around in a cave in Afghanistan, but the plotters of the Twin Towers attacks plotted and organized in the USA, Germany, and elsewhere. No useful purpose has been served by the now nearly twenty-year old war, evermore complicated and far removed from the issues of 2001, though there have been huge numbers of pointless deaths, and immense wastage of resources.

We often arrived in a village in the mountains of Afghanistan, and found a place to eat, where we would soon be surrounded by dozens of children in wide open-eyed amazement, each trying to push to the front of the crowd, to see if we were real. Once Roland said in a gentle way, “Some of you guys go away! I don’t like so many people watching me while I eat.” Of course the children did not understand. It was a shame we could not speak either Farsi or Pashtu – the two main languages of the country, but that did not mean we could not communicate. If we arrived at a village in the evening, especially in the areas north of Kabul (at times we would leave the van in relative safety in Kabul and travel by open lorries, either because we were having something done to the van or because the roads were too rough or too confusing to drive along in explorations), we would usually be led directly to the headman who was always most welcoming, inviting us to sit down on colourful cushions in his house. There was a clear “division of labour” between the sexes, though one could relate to the women. After a while we might be brought some food by them, with whom one could exchange smiles of thanks and other gestures of gratitude, and these would be returned in kind. Later the headman might have a huge ceramic hubbly-bubbly water-pipe brought in, and we would be offered wonderful hashish to smoke. Sometimes unreal music would emanate from one or another man’s lute, and these experiences were memorizing, intensely hallucinogenic and absolutely fabulous. Once an English hippie we had travelling with us for a few days said, “It’s too much isn’t it!” If I had been writing about it after much less time had past, this account would no doubt have been quite different, but so be it thus, now.

Another time we were driving in the mountains and stopped to sit down and smoke some hash. We listened to an audio tape of music we had recorded before leaving Heidelberg. I

remember most vividly Donovan's song "This is the Season of the Witch!" which sounded so powerful and vibrant.

We faced now two problems: being stuck for God knows how long in Afghanistan, due to a cholera epidemic in the region due to which we were prohibited from leaving the country by road. Although we very much liked and enjoyed being in the country this meant spending more of Larry's money than Larry had planned to spend. But the University of Heidelberg was soon to start a new semester, though for me it was not so important if I got back late. But for Larry who was a conscientious student it was, though for the not so conscientious Roland it was not. Delaying our return to Germany meant we would be spending more of Larry's money, adding to the expenses incurred by the accident in Turkey which I had caused (although this cost turned out to be less than we had expected). We also found out that custom regulations prohibited us from taking more than fifteen antique guns out of the country, which obviously limited the amount of money we could earn from selling them which was Larry's original reason for wanting to make the trip.

So Larry decided to fly back to Germany in time to start his next semester, leaving Roland and I to sort things out as best we could and come back to Heidelberg when we could.

So we bought fifteen of those superb guns (one of, as I mentioned, I kept, and still have) and then we had two brilliant ideas! First we decided to buy some hashish and smuggle it back to Germany to sell. Secondly, we decided to take a trip to the remote region of Nuristan in the Hindu Kush, in order to fill some time with a creative and instructive adventure.

It's incredible to think back now upon the idea of buying and then smuggling hashish to Europe, so reckless and irresponsible as it was. In my mind at the time I was motivated by an anxious feeling of obligation to go back and be able to give some amount of money to Larry, who led us to understand he had obtained his money out of some kind of trust from his grandmother which he should not have taken. Looking back on this it seems an unlikely story. How could he have put his hands on it then; unless it was just a matter of, for example, his parents telling him he should not touch it yet, but he did not say that. Later I came to feel Roland was not really so concerned about repaying Larry, as he used the money he got from selling the hashish to buy a car later in Germany. (I did send Larry the money I made from it in Cambridge – though I spent a bit of it on a record player – but that is another story.) As for ethical or moral considerations I really had no strong feelings about this then in early 1968. I saw nothing wrong with smoking hashish, and thought it was

ridiculous that it was illegal in the West. It was not illegal at that time in Afghanistan - it was very much part of the culture in the rural areas we went to. On the other hand alcohol was not commonly consumed, though you could drink it in certain places. Whereas in the West it was and is ubiquitous. Which was worse if consumed in excess? I certainly never smoked hashish regularly – only on what seemed “special occasions”.

So we bought I think about five kilos of hash, very cheaply, and I had an absurd idea of putting it INSIDE the walls of pots, so border officials would have to smash them to get at it. I soon came to realize that was a daft idea; firstly because border officials certainly would break a pot if they suspected anything of the kind, but more crucially because I don't think you could bake hashish into the sides of a pot without burning it up. I am surprised looking back on it that Roland took to the idea, but he did, and we went to a village where potters worked and asked them to make a bunch of pots, thinking we had communicated okay what we wanted. I think we might have gone with an Afghani student called Asiz we got to know in Kabul who spoke a little English to help us communicate.

But when we came back to the village a few weeks later they had not accomplished this probably impossible task! Either they had not understood our request or more likely they realized it was bonkers, and just made their usual beautiful pots and said we could put the hash inside them and then they would glue the lids on! So we had to give up on that idea. What we did in the end do, I will leave to later when we'll talk about the journey back to Germany.

I think it was during the time when we thought the potters were making the pots we wanted, that Roland and I went on our adventure to Nuristan.

Nuristan was and is a region north-east of Kabul in the mountainous Hindu Kush, very cut off by lack of roads and almost like a nation in its own right. It consists of a people with a distinct language, whose origins are unsure but probably quite mixed over time. One theory or myth which some people told us about is that they were descended from the troops of Alexander the Great who conquered most of Afghanistan for a short while during his amazing march eastwards. Part of the story we were told was that they were lighter-skinned than other Afghannies because of this which fascinated us but which we did not find to be true, at least among the people we met, but we could not know for certain because we could never know just how far we had penetrated into Nuristan as we could find no maps in Kabul of any part of our journey.

Before leaving Kabul we went to the bazaar and bought *jalabias*, the kind of long dress garment that men usually wear in Moslem countries, and turbans; also local types of firm, strong sandals, thus trying to look like Afghans. We tried to do this because we were told there were army guard posts along the way which stopped anyone who did not seem local from approaching Nuristan. This seemed to work as we walked past a checkpoint at some point along the way – I don't remember how far along the way it was, without any problems. Then we drove in the van as far as we could in the right direction, on increasingly bumpy roads until they came to an end. Once we arrived at the point where there were only bumpy narrow tracks left going in the right direction, we found a place as safe as possible to leave the van, shed the last vestiges of western or modern appearance such as wrist watches, and set off on foot.

We started walking along a narrow path which some people pointed to when we asked "Nuristan?" on what was now Day One. After a while we found we were walking on a path along the banks of a river which was not very wide but was full of rapids and extremely turbulent. Because we had no map we had no idea of this river's name. At night we unrolled the sleeping bags that we were carrying on our backs held in a local kind of material container, ate some of the food we had brought with us, looked upwards at the full sky of stars, and then went to sleep. We proceeded into DAY TWO without meeting anyone on the path. Nor were there any boats or rafts on the river: it was too tumultuous for that. I think it was on DAY THREE or DAY FOUR that we arrived at a rope and wood bridge that crossed the river. We waited a good amount of time hoping to see somebody on either side of the river to direct us to whichever side we should be walking along, but nobody appeared. Eventually we made a kind of mental toss of a coin, and continued to walk along the same side: this turned out to have been a near fatal mistake. We had run out of food, and were hoping we would get to somewhere where we could buy or simply ask for something.

It might have been on DAY FIVE that we saw some men on the other side of the river walking in the opposite direction to us. They waved frantically, indicating that we were on the wrong side of the river – what were we doing?

This was an awful moment: but we felt we didn't have the energy to walk back to the bridge now, cross it and walk God knows how far in the same direction before finding a house or something. So we carried on on the same side in the same direction; we were getting worried, but we weren't going to give up on our intentions and simply get the hell out of

the place. We could drink water from the river, and tried to eat leaves from the trees and small insects. We both felt in time that we had lost our senses of taste and appetites: we just felt weaker and weaker and walked more slowly, taking rests more often. Once or twice we made desperate attempts to cross the river with our backpacks on, then we would try to swim without them. But it was impossible: you would be bashed against rocks very quickly.

So we continued along the same path meeting no one, and seeing no one on the other side either, more and more slowly and feebly. Once I fell down from a side cliff where the path rose up, into the river. I didn't feel very hurt, though I had bashed path a couple of rocks on the way down.flame

When we settled down to sleep in the evening of DAY SIX, we both knew that if we didn't see a house or person the next day to give us food, we would have "had it". We didn't communicate this verbally, but we both said that was what we had felt afterwards. On DAY SEVEN, just as dusk was beginning to shroud everything in darkness, we saw a small hut strange ahead of us and a bit higher than our path. By God, were we saved? We called out and scrambled upwards towards this house. When we arrived there we found a young chap dressed very roughly, standing outside it.

It was a strange encounter. The two of us were tall, "white"-skinned men, exhausted, sweating, dirty: we obviously looked strange to the young chap in front of us. Perhaps he had never seen foreigners before, either in reality or on television as I don't think there were any televisions in those parts. He did not look frightened, just amazed. I think we just smiled at him at first, without trying to communicate any requests or desires at first. After a few moments he invited us into his one-roomed hut where we sat down somewhere, I of welcome. After a while of attempted communication Roland turned to three or four very young goats in the hut and pointed to one and at his mouth, as if asking whether we could eat it. The man shook his head vigorous but immediately pulled out a large black metal thing like a pail, put his hands in it, then brought out what must have been a lump of curdled goat's milk. He squeezed the white lump to let the liquid drain down into the pot, then divided the lump into two, giving one half to each of us. We nodded at him to convey our most intense gratitude.

This curdled goat milk was hardly cheese. It scarcely tasted of anything, but that might have been because our taste buds had gone on strike. It was full of hairs which we had to pull out of our mouths constantly, and we found it extremely chewy and difficult to

swallow. We agreed that we simply had to chew and swallow very slowly, as we had lost our normal “apetites”. Meanwhile our host looked at us intently. We did manage to communicate somehow, it’s difficult to remember how after more than fifty years, as we could speak neither Pashtu nor Nuristani. We didn’t really know if he was Nuristani or not, because as already mentioned we couldn’t know how far we had ventured into Nuristan if at all. When we got back we made efforts to talk with anyone who might have informed us of where we had arrived at, but nobody we met really knew the region though they had heard about it. And we certainly didn’t want to go to the authorities, because we had been told before that we couldn’t go to Nuristan.

At some point our host managed to ask us if we were Chinese, I don’t know how, to which Roland responed by shaking his head and pulling his eyes in such a way as to indicate an oriental face. Certainly China was fairly near this part of Afghanistan, but whether he had ever seen any Chinese people or had merely heard about them, we were unable to ask. After a while our host stoked the fire and added some wood to it, then started to lie down as he signalled to us that we might do the same. As we settled down, Roland and I agreed that “this guy may have saved our lives”.

It is so sad to think today about what has apparently happened to Nuristan in these intervening years: invasions, the Taliban etc. with God knows what horrible effects upon these people and their communities. Just look it up in Google.

The next morning we said friendly goodbyes to our host, I don’t remember whether we gave him some money or not (we had some of *that*, concealed under clothing) but we certainly had nothing else to give. He had nothing else to give us to eat, but we felt better after eating the lump of curdled goat’s milk the night before. We went to the wood and rope bridge that crossed the river very near the goat herder’s hut (which we had seen the night before in great relief) and crossed over on it. Once on the other side we felt safer, as it was obvious there were people here sometimes, and although we never saw an actual house or anything like that on this other side of the river during our seven day walk. We sat down near the river, and lying on our stomachs we took some cold refreshing water in our cupped hands and drank, as we had done periodically all the way along. Then we discussed what we should do; one part us wanted to continue in the same direction as before as we realized we had scarcely penetrated Nuristan if at all, as mentioned before, though we *had* passed an army check point I think fairly early on in the trip. We felt there must be a village or some kind of house further along the path on which we had seen men walking

in the opposite direction from us. But we also thought any such habitation could well be several days' walk away which would be little for Aghanis *or* Nuristanis who walked fast, knew their way, and would take with them sufficient food. So we decided, reluctantly though with relief, to walk back in the direction we had come, assured that the path on the side of the road we were now on was a proper pathway.

And we did just that. I don't retain strong memories of the journey back, which we completed in far less time than on the trip coming. The path was better, and there were no patches over which one had to walk, or stagger along an upturned half of a tree trunk as we had had to on the other side. Once I had fallen off the trump track into the river; fortunately My head did not hit a rock. Even without that happening it was a slow, taxing and exhausting process, all because *we had taken the wrong path.*

We found our Volkswagen van where we had left it, apparently unharmed and drove back, after eating well, to Kabul. There once again we got a room in a cheap but reasonable and comfortable hotel, and slept and rested for a while. Then we started to move around again, and I remember driving high above Kabul to see a superb view of it in the sunlight and then at dusk. We went occasionally to a very large cafeteria where foreigners congregated probably because you could drink beer there, with our Afghani friend Azis.

We went on a few more trips around eastern Afghanistan, including one to the border of Pakistan, but not surprisingly we were not let in. After a while the borders were reopened presumably because the cholera epidemic had either subsided or was brought under control, we really never found out much about the whole matter, nor did anyone else we met who spoke English seem to know much about it.

So we started to think about our return trip to Germany.

## CAMBRIDGE

After the immense adventures I had had in Germany and in the journey to and from Afghanistan, I spent the summer of 1968 in London. My mother was embroiled in the purchase of a flat at 4 Craven Hill, W2, wonderfully near to Hyde Park, though I did not realize in what a superb location it had been till many years later, when house prices had absolutely skyrocketed. She was buying this flat because she had persuaded my father to return to the Mother Country, after eleven years in the Sudan, though I think he would have been happy to stay there for ever.

When I came back from Germany, my mother had rented a pleasant but simple little apartment near the flat that she was in the process of buying. Here I spent a couple of months, sometimes with my mother, other times with my brother Peter, and for a little bit with my beautiful girlfriend from Heidelberg, Gundula. I was basically waiting to “go up to Cambridge” as they say. Very near to this flat, and to our “flat soon to be” at 4 Craven Hill, lived a very lively friend of my parents, one Richard Carrington, just across from Hyde Park, opposite Bayswater Underground Station. He was an amazing character, an author and traveller/explorer, that my have forgotten father had come to know because he wrote a book about African elephants, something about which my father was an expert.

Richard Carrington was also a very amusing chap. One evening I was with him in his flat in Bayswater, with my mother also, and his live-in secretary whose name I have forgotten. We were talking about music, mainly that of Mozart and Beethoven; at some point the secy said in respect of her appreciation of music, “I like to *feel* before I think.” Richard blurted out very quickly, “Whenever *I* feel before I think I get a slap in the face.”

I had applied to Cambridge first through UCCA, the system at the time for applying from schools to universities. Cambridge was first on my list of six; University College was second, and I have forgotten the other four. The subject I was applying for in all of them was Psychology. At school I had developed a group of fantasy/dreams about “what to do” in my life. One had been to study higher primate behaviour in forests, an idea no doubt influenced by a “son follows father” notion, but also definitely what I had learnt about Jane Goodall’s research that seemed inspired by a thirst to understand human behaviour better through the study of those animals closest to human beings. She is still at work today (2000), and full of fascinating thoughts about the predicament of Man, so I come full circle with her now in a sense. I also wanted to write novels, which led a very perceptive girl I went out with a few times near Dulwich during my last school year to say, “ah, so you can understand better about the human beings that you write about in your novels”.

Getting into Cambridge had some unpredictable consequences for my “career”, a term I don’t really like at all. I thought I wanted to study Psychology, but you couldn’t do that in your first year, and Psychology was in the Natural Sciences Faculty, not that of the Social Sciences. So I took the Biology of Cells which included biochemistry and genetics – this was not too many years after Watson and Crick’s discovery of DNA and the genetic code, which had a strong vibrancy in Cambridge, where the startling discovery had occurred. I apparently got my best marks in this in the exams at the end of the first year.

At last, in my second year I could take Psychology and I paired that up with Zoology. I was soon utterly disillusioned with the kind of Psychology that was taught in that course. Except for Cognitive Psychology and Vision, which were fascinating, the greatest emphasis was on Behaviourism. I was bemused by this subject, for which Skinner was the author of it in its then contemporary form. Everything was concerned with the behaviour – very narrowly defined, and in the most unnatural circumstances – of rats and pigeons in cages and mazes. The central ontological assumption of this branch of “science” was that one should not attempt to understand what happens “inside” an animal, even with human beings. Psychology was about measurable stimuli and responses – even for human beings. “Mind”, “communication” and everything I wanted to learn about were tabooed “black boxes”. It seemed to me that Behaviourist Psychology did not and could not even learn much about rats or pigeons, let alone human beings. As Chomsky argued, human language could only therefore be studied as measurable responses to external stimuli, not as words with meanings emanating from the mind. Fatuous graphs were obtained from rats or pigeons eating or pecking tiny pieces of food provided at differing rates, with varying pauses between them. At these elaborate graphs I could summon up little more than a “so what” reaction. Of course there was no Psychoanalysis taught, except for three lectures on Freud, Jung, and Adler.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE USA AND LATIN AMERICA**

The following is a kind of journal of the hitchhiking trip I took starting just before Christmas 1971, from Boston, through much of the southern United States with my girlfriend Marlene. It starts in New Orleans, soon after which we crossed the border into Mexico. After a while we found hitchhiking rather slow, while long-distance buses were quite cheap, so our mode of travel changed.

I cannot emphasize enough that some of the ideas expressed in this journal I have no longer subscribed to for a very long time. This is a “travelogue” that I wrote nearly fifty years before the moment in which I write this!

## **LATIN AMERICAN JOURNEY**

*December, 1971 – June 1972*

### **NEW ORLEANS**

**December 9th, 1971**

We arrived in New Orleans at the beginning of December, so it was cool. But the sense of being in the tropics could not be avoided, what with the dank still humidity and the tendency to rain with a ferociousness that suggests the water cannot wait to splash the earth. And, of course, the vegetation – made up of “moss-trees” whose eery effect is as if normal trees had been strewn with the delicate embroidered finery of a giant witch. They create intricately detailed confusion and chaos, reminiscent of the slightly sinister surrealism of Hyman Bloom’s paintings.

The highways, the Texaco stations and the modern part of the city cannot make you forget you are in the tropics, and that this is inherently “wild” country. A palm tree in the corner of a 75 cent parking lot makes the latter seem out of place rather than vice versa. I felt the same thing as we crossed the long bridge over the steamy swamps when approaching the city from the east. I marvel at, yet at the same time resent, the powerful taming process of the “American way”, something which originates from the north-east of the country, yet with its unprecedented economic enormity can bring a measure of uniformity, efficiency and Anglo-Saxon bureaucracy to a jungle or a desert. Of course, many tropical countries have sky-scrappers and tarmac roads, but none has ever had the financial strength and

cultural hold to make a way of life and a way of building, (which in this case belongs essentially to a temperate climate and a Protestant work ethic), pervade such vastly varying geographical conditions. Louisiana is not, any more than Nevada or Arizona, a hinterland being successfully “opened up” by the cultural and economic centres of the north-east. Rather “New York” is already here and working on its own.

As one crosses the Mississippi on the ferry, (full of commuters from New Orleans going to Algiers), between the active and messy docks can be seen short stretches of trees with branches dipping into the muddy-red waters of the majestic river. From such a glimpse, one can envisage how it was for La Salle, the Frenchman who navigated the waters of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers all the way from Canada to New Orleans, in order to claim the vast uncharted territory for his country. As a result, an area of over one millions square miles was named after and put in the possession of Louis XIV, who really could hardly have cared less about it. Spanish explorers had travelled periodically in the area, but since gold did not glitter on every river-bank, and nothing else was immediately found which could provide distraction at the court of Spain, they did not bother to stake a claim. Later, after France had not been able to realize quick profits from it, she equally apathetically gave it to Spain to administer, merely to avoid its falling into the hands of the British. The extraordinary behaviour of the European giants is like that of spoilt children playing with toys, keeping some to spite a rival, giving others to secure the transaction of a royal girlfriend. For two years after the French gave the territory to Spain (which was somewhat unwilling to accept) the people of Louisiana were not even aware of the fact, and when finally a Spanish governor turned up with ninety soldiers he was turned about. Interestingly enough, the people of New Orleans were the first in North America to rebel against their European masters, and for a short while to exist without such rule.

Later, Napoleon must have thought he was a clever business-man when he took the territory back from Spain, and 20 days later sold it to the U.S. for 15 million dollars. But he was dealing with an unopened package, and the U.S. was certainly showing superior and longer-sighted business manship. So apathetic to the land itself was Napoleon, that the borders of the territory were not exactly defined, and Spain thought it owned some land still in what is now West Florida. The European giants were too caught up in their own intrigues to realize what was really happening, to see that a new giant was emerging that before long would be buying them all up. Is it nor ironic that Spain, in control of Louisiana at the time of the American revolution, helped the revolutionary states so as to put a thorn in the side of her hated enemy? And that Britain herself was relatively unconcerned with

the “unruliness” in this one of her dominions, the East being at that time of more importance? Neither knew that in the midst of the squabbles of their era, destined to last not so much longer, they were planting the seeds of a new nation, a new phenomenon, a new world.

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The French quarter of New Orleans is like a stage-set from “How The West Was Won”. It seems this way round since although quite authentic, it is encapsulated in a different world. Unfortunately, Bourbon Street is commercialised (although elegantly and without a trace of the vulgar detergent-style commercialism). However, with the street barred off from cars to allow people to wander up and down, it seems to exist now to take money from vacationing New Yorkers, Bostonians and Chicagoans, rather than as living still in its own spontaneous pulse of all-night jazz, bar-gossip, and delightful debauchery. One very pleasing phenomenon in the French Quarter is that the Black people are dignified, self-confident and un-resentful, which allows them to be much warmer than in the north, much to my surprise. Perhaps it is because they made the place what it is, and they know it, so there is no question as to the rights and respect due to them. Jazz is an exclusive art, and more important it is less political than Rock or Blues music for example, which could only be so if its originators do not question, and therefore do not have to assert so strongly, their self-respect. Louis Armstrong was no Malcolm X. The social outcast, the tragedy of disintegrated self-esteem, is rather to be found in the white alcoholic, in the new part of the town on the other side of Canal Street.

**MEXICO: Coahuila, Saltillo, San Luis Potosi, Lagos.  
29th, 1971**

**December**

This part of Mexico is a strange and wonderful paradox. From a road, the countryside is rolling, vast and colourful. Close up, or when you are walking through it, it is dry and harsh and spikes or burrs get into your clothes to continually harass your flesh. It is somewhat like the Spanish language – soft, lilting and Latin at first sight but on closer inspection full of harsh, dry sounds, with a texture similar to much of the spicy hot Mexican food.

Coming from Texas and the United States, I felt the continuity of the American continent, rather than the break between North and Latin America which one assumes from an intellectual or historical perspective. Firstly, the enormity of geographical features and the distance between towns in both the U.S. and Mexico is so New Worldish in character; secondly, the south of Texas (e.g. San Antonio) is very Mexican, presenting a gentle break-in to what you later find south of the border. But most important is the realization that, for all the differences in culture, the essential mode of life is the same – dependence on cattle in a dry water-short land and the corresponding life-style of ranch and cowboy with round hat. The similarity came across to me more powerfully than the difference, although in Mexico the ranch-house is of mud-brick, has no water nor electricity, is often far from a track where motor vehicles can drive, and the lands are divided up by fences made from locally-collected branches. One is presented with the results of two peoples faced with the same challenge; on the one hand the Anglo-Saxon, on the other the Spaniard-Indian, or Mestizo.

I tend to ask the question: which other cultures that I know is the Mexican way of life similar to? The small towns present an obvious fusion of Indian and Spanish influence. On the one hand the houses are of mud-brick or cement, often painted in brilliant colours, suggesting a rather non-European childlike (I don't mean primitive) simplicity. On the other hand, the small courtyards, the neatly-lined streets, the aesthetically laid-out pot plants at the fronts of the houses and the village church are distinctly Spanish. In Saltillo I was struck with the thought that it was extraordinarily similar to a Turkish town of the same size, in the sense that both represent a bridge between European and non-European cultures.

The centre or shopping district of a town like Saltillo is an atrocious American imitation. Shops with sterile fluorescent lighting display American-style products giving an overall plastic glitter which you never find in the U.S. itself. A tumble-down cinema has flashing neon lights as a poor attempt to give glamour in the American way. Perhaps this is because Saltillo is only a few hundred miles from the border, for San Luis Potosi, a town of similar size, has none of this, but rather a beautiful unself-conscious market, reminiscent to me of a middle-eastern bazaar.

We were very lucky to stay over a week in a little village in the country near Lagos. This sublimely peaceful place was composed of several rancheros, the houses of the farm-workers, a couple of shops selling primarily Coca-Cola, and a church. The people live

frugally but not in squalor. Each family had a mud-brick house with ceilings of wood beams which was built by the man of the house. Most had only two rooms – kitchen with stone fireplace and bedroom in which all the children slept with the parents. The houses, the courtyards with pretty flowers, and the corals and chicken pens were all meticulously neat and delightfully cosy. Each family owned a little land, a couple of pigs, possibly some cows, chickens, and dogs to prevent coyotes stealing eggs at night. The traditional self-sufficiency of the hacienda was evident. People ate mostly what they produced themselves, or else bought from nearby friends what they lacked. For example, our hosts who owned a shop bought alfalfa to feed their two or three pigs from a friend who most probably returned the money through the purchase of soft drinks and cigarettes. Only for clothes and a few commodities not grown locally such as tomatoes, would they go once or twice a week to Lagos, 8 km. away. Each family also had on their plot of land a water-hole for washing and for the animals to drink from, human drinking-water coming from elsewhere.

Although the village was small, the houses were scattered over considerably more ground than one finds in a similar sized village in Africa, the Middle-East or the Orient. I was tempted to speculate on whether this is a part of the New World tendency referred to before, of being accustomed to greater distances and larger scales in natural and man-made phenomena than are Old World counterparts. Levi-Strauss made this simple but significant point in *Tristes Tropiques*, when he noted this feature common to a New York office building, the slums of Chicago, the Andean mountains or the statue of Christ in Rio de Janeiro.

When walking in the rugged, stupendously beautiful countryside around the village, out of sight of house or human being, I found myself expecting a nomadic Arab to appear if anyone at all. When I remembered that a Mexican, were he to appear, would be wearing western clothes, I was jolted. This made me feel the closer historical roots of the people to myself and therefore less of the sense of strangeness and exoticness one experienced in the Sudan for example. The similarity of the terrain to that of North Africa (which is on the same latitude) led me once again to a realization of the different ways that the same challenges of nature can be coped with. Instead of the *jelabia* and the *emma* (turban), here it is the round Mexican hat and the poncho which protects the skin from the sun. In common, the two cultures use goats and mules, but use the horse in one and the camel in the other.

Much of the vegetation is the same as in N. Africa – the acacia tree, succulents, spiky grasses, but what is totally unique to the New World is the cactus. Such extraordinarily expressive forms, telling of the difficulties of their existence! Some species grow into distraught tangled shapes, as if holding eternally a frightful story they are not allowed to divulge in their sentence of silence. If you look at one for a while, and imagine it was a human face, you see paranoia, a fear turned into bristling aggression against itself and the outside world. Van Gogh should have come here. He would have found comfort in seeing a natural expression of his internal agony, outside his own imagination. Other species form gentle lobes like the faces of cows or the ears of huge mice or mules. They grow in patches, the lobes of one plant relating delicately with its neighbours, like human body sculptures from Living Theatre.

I had expected the Mexicans to be frivolous, flamboyant and loud in a characteristically southern European manner. So far they seem far from this. They are level-headed and quiet; often a group together will talk very little, though when they do it is warmly and gently. But it is certainly not a land of wine and song. Actually, there is a slightly stoical dourness - the Indian *geist* that shows through in the mestizo temperament.

We happened to be in the village for Christmas Eve, when we were invited to see a traditional pageant. This was a highly allegorical portrayal of the Nativity with bright costumes and banners. But the emphasis was on the conflict between Good (portrayed by a boy dressed in white with angel's wings) and Evil (portrayed by three men dressed as devils). There was also a wise hermit from the mountains with a flowing white beard, who was harassed and chased around by the devils to the accompaniment of shrieks of laughter from the children in the audience. One by one the devils had a symbolic sword-fight with the angel, the resolution and victory of Good being symbolized by all of the devils bowing before the crib. I wondered if the main characters were Indian in origin, the Christian Nativity offering little more than the symbol of Goodness and the names of the devils (Lucifer, etc), the latter being most probably Indian evil spirits. Certainly the whole portrayed a pantheistic sentiment, and no Maria was identifiable. When we questioned our hostess about this point, she told us that all the women present represented Maria – a warm and humanistic interpretation of Catholic spiritualism.

**MEXICO: Guadalajara, Lake Chapala, Jocotepec, Morelia.  
9th**

**January 5th-**

Living cultures can be observed for what they are, and a certain degree of understanding is attained from seeing them in their concrete contemporaneous detail. But for an understanding of real depth, a historical consciousness is essential. Nothing ever arises *de novo*, and nothing ever ends completely. Influences stretch and ramify through time and across continents, fusing with others, and sometimes fading out to reappear elsewhere in time or space. The American continent is a complex historical sea, fed with waters from a vast variety of rivers: If one were to analyze the chemical composition of a sea, the explanation for the presence of a certain compound might require an expedition up one of the rivers feeding it, to find out what rocks it passed through. An interesting expedition of the mind in the content of Mexico could be made along the historical path of Islam.

All the countries of Western Europe acquired dynamic energy before and around the time of the Renaissance. In a sense, this was the legacy of the greatness of Antiquity, politically the regeneration of the Roman Empire, culturally the regeneration of Greek Civilization. The “Dark Ages” was a period of 1,000 years of dormancy, in which the latent dynamism had had to deal with the overlaying of Christianity. From the Renaissance till the 20<sup>th</sup> century France, Britain, Spain, Germany and Italy were the most vibrant world creators. Portugal and Holland were almost as important, but for this argument those five countries are sufficient. All of these five burst forth spiritually, three of them burst forth imperialistically too. They were the three nations that were already united. Germany and Italy were not united until the 19<sup>th</sup> century and therefore largely missed out on colonialism. Their expansionist energies could not be channeled until they were unified nations and then it was too late, so they put these previously untapped energies into a fascist-based 20<sup>th</sup> century attempt at world domination, and executed the inevitable act of Europe’s self-destruction.

Now Spain and Italy experienced similar histories at the period of Rome’s decline; both were invaded by Visigoths. Why was one united by the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the time of Columbus, and the other not? Was it not because Spain had been overrun for centuries by the Arabs? Foreign occupation often engenders solidarity in a people who would otherwise be made up of squabbling factions (as was Italy). And if they successfully oust the invaders, as the Spanish did, this is frequently accompanied by an outflow of national pride, optimism, military competence and a spiritual strength that only needs a new direction in which to be

channeled. The power and fervor of El Cid found its new challenge in the lands discovered by Columbus.

Thus the phenomenon of Latin America owes much to the Arabs who invaded Spain. In a more profound sense, the whole of the American continent (and by this token, the whole world also) must recognize the significance of the Arabs. For during the “Dark Ages” it was the Arabs who held on to the philosophies of Antiquity, the spirit of enquiry, knowledge of science and astronomy, and kept much of the world open through trade. When Europe’s slumber ended, it reappropriated these ancient legacies which might well have died had not the Arabs been at a cultural zenith during Europe’s “Dark Ages”.

Thus although superficial observation shows little Arab influence, the historical-cultural phenomenon of Mexico as a whole is strongly linked with that of Islam. On the observable level, it can be noticed that Guadalajara is an Arabic name, that Spanish has harsh sounds not present in its sister language Italian, that some Mexican-Spanish houses reveal Moorish influence, and that Spanish churches have spires very reminiscent of Islamic minarets.

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The state of the present world rest heavily upon the spirit and activities of the three major colonial powers of Western Europe: France, Britain and Spain. The U.S rests on a basis of the Anglo-Saxon mentality – the Protestant work ethic, philosophical empiricism and pragmatism, and a political framework derived from struggles in England between constitutional democracy and monarchism.

Latin America was colonized by Spain, which was very different from the essentially English settlement of North America. Firstly, the Spanish came over in large numbers to Mexico earlier than the English did to the U.S., so that the Mexican culture is older than the American, and partly for this reason has a more entrenched tradition. Secondly, the Spanish intermarried with the Indians, whereas in North America the Indians were killed off or segregated. This was partly because there were fewer Indians in the North and these had attained a less extensive level of organization and civilization, whereas the Spanish were dealing with a land already cultivated and politically organized. It was also because the Anglo-Saxon arrogance was of a different sort to the Catholic Spanish, the Protestant psychology of individual isolation and distrust of the Other being antithetical to intermarriage. At any rate, the Anglo-Saxon pioneer dealt directly with Nature, bringing order to the elements and extending a variant of the Protestant world-view to a truly New

World. The Spaniard colonized by bringing his world-view to an indigenous race, through conversion to Catholicism. The activities of both had a largely religious origin, but the former was manifested in practical, secular forms to a greater extent.

Spain did not undergo an Industrial Revolution. In any case, the Spanish colonization was completed before the Industrial Revolution, and neither during it nor after was Latin America able to benefit from an influx of technological values from its “mother country”. Spanish culture was in decline just as Britain reached its zenith. Though both lost their political hold on their American colonies, Britain was able to interact with the U.S. philosophically and economically in a way that allowed the material advancement of both. These facts go some way to understanding the differences between North and Latin America.

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The wonderful, softly beautiful Lake Chapala is spoiled by the “American Colony”. All around the shores are smart houses belonging to Americans and Europeans. The result is that the wonderful sensation of having nothing to blight one’s vision in any direction is lost. It also means that one has difficulty walking around the lake without trespassing on private property, or coming up against walls and fences.

It seems so wrong to be able to “own” a lake or even part of it. This is not an intellectual or political view, rather it is a feeling that such ownership is discordant with the universe. A lake can only own itself, or be itself. That is the first reason for my dislike of Lake Chapala. The second is the insensitive wholesale deposition of the “American way”. This has to do with what is “natural”.

There is no reason for feeling one culture’s way of existing is any more or less natural than another’s, though one may be more or less natural than another’s, though one may be more or less destructive of nature (as with industrial pollution and technically efficient hunting of rare animals in the West). What gives one the impression of unnaturalness is one people imitating or having forced upon it the style of another culture, particularly when this is the Western one. Petrol stations, billboards, and telegraph poles do seem naturally ugly to me, but they are much more so in non-Western settings. American houses around a lake in California would not jar on the senses, but in a country like Mexico they do because they are out of place. The Mexican houses and villages blend with and seem to grow out of the

landscape, because of their shapes, colours and the types of materials used. Western architecture often seems alienated from natural forms. Houses are always put there from the outside, the styles are conceived of outside their physical context; they never emerge from the earth.

The effect is even worse when non-Westerners use Western methods in building etc. Semi-Westernized towns are so often messy, uncoordinated affairs like junk-yards. The same people who build so aesthetically in their own style, seem disorientated with the Western one, not knowing how to deal with it either inside the buildings or in overall town lay-out. The sight of a pile of petrol drums at the edge of a cornfield, the sound of crackly radio music instead of live native music, or people drinking Coca-Cola instead of coconut juice; these are all tragic examples of the phenomenon of cultural influence following the lines of economic influence (or domination in the Marxian sense), regardless of the intrinsic values of the dominant or usurped culture.

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In the presidential palace in Guadalajara is an impressive mural by Orozco. As you ascend a flight of steps, first the pounding fist and then the defiant, angry face of Hidalgo appears. With bulging eyes and flushed cheeks, the face is fanatical. Below him is the human insanity symbolized by gaudy battle-scenes, death and the banners of various 20<sup>th</sup> century ideological powers: the swastika, hammer and sickle, and also the cross. The idea is desperate, direct and unsubtle, yet it is not banal. It is interesting that Orozco (a very socially conscious artist) chose the national Abraham Lincoln as his symbol of freedom, and modern Western European political movements as the symbols of repression and slavery. From this and various statues of Hidalgo, it is interesting to compare this hysterical personage with the staid, upright appearance of Lincoln. Hidalgo abolished slavery in Mexico at Guadalajara fifty years before Lincoln did do in the U.S. This fact is carefully put as an appendage to the English translation of the Declaration, obviously for the American tourists!

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At Jocotepec, we climbed a mountain. At first up a path, and then up a steep slope, holding onto trees to prevent ourselves from falling. High up most of the lake was visible and the nearby mountains looked as if they had been sculpted with a giant finger-nail. The distant mountains looked ethereal, as they disappeared into the haze. Passing clouds cast shadows over mountains, and created strange effects of light on the water surface.

As we got higher, we could notice how the vegetation changed. Lower, near the town, it was sparse, much of the land being cleared for mescal (cactus) cultivation. The rows of these cactuses looked like the stubble of a two-day old beard. Higher up, there were trees, and the undergrowth was thicker. Obviously the rainfall was considerably greater higher up.

The mountainous area south of Lake Chapala is like the Alps in Europe. Compared with the vastness of scenery elsewhere in the country, the lush green and the way each kind of vegetation covers only a small area, give the effect of a country garden. Nevertheless, the mountains are huge. Morelia is like Bern in Switzerland; it is small, quiet, with mountains right up to the city edge, and like Bern, the streets are lined with arches it is small, quiet, with mountains right up to the city edge, and like Bern, the streets are lined with arches. The architecture is early colonial. White stone houses, square or rectangular, make up a very uniform style over all the town. A dignified yet gentle style – it seemed strange that the architecture of glorious conquerors should have struck me in this way, and not as pompous or loud.

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We went to a folk-dance festival in Guadalajara. Most of the dances were in Spanish styles, exuberant, elegant, sometimes frivolous, sometimes melancholy – but missing a profundity one would expect in such high-quality music. One Indian dance was sombre, slower and more deliberate.

The Cathedral has a gold-gilted baroque interior; stupendous but “lighter” than the Italian baroque cathedrals. This is partly because the walls are white, and because sunlight streams in through the windows. None of the Mexican churches have the dark mysteriousness of Italian churches. Nor do you find the list of regulations about clothes and behavior; rather you find very short skirts, trousers on women and casual, informal behavior in church.

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## **MEXICO: Playa azul, Las pinas – The Pacific Coast.**

Coming across the mountains which separate Morelia and Uruapan from the coast, we found an increase of about 20° F between Uruapan and Nueva Italia, a distance of about 20 miles. At Nueva Italia and from then on it was mild and comfortable to sleep out at night.

On the coast, mud-brick houses give way to thatched houses of dry palm leaves. At Las Pinas, a long, sandy beach was backed by stately coconut palms in a plantation. When we were thirsty, we could pick coconuts and drink the juice on a deserted beach.

The horizon out to sea was always clear, but along the beach the view became hazy from dust in the air. Viewed through this, the palm trees took on a strange and wild appearance.

The sea is not tranquil as is the countryside near Lagos. It is turbulent to the mind, especially toward dusk, raising so many indefinable issues. For Conrad, the sea was the metaphor for the unconscious mind, the backcloth against which his characters acted out their lives, analyzed themselves, or were filled with strange primeval passions. For me, the sea represents my mind and the vastness of the universe. Only the surface ripples and waves are visible, not what happens below, that which causes what is visible. To have the sea before your eyes is like being presented with your life's quest, the task of understanding yourself and the universe. Hence the sea arouses not only turbulence, but a nostalgia for what is only felt through intimidation – what has not yet been experienced.

If you watch an area of choppy sea, you notice the complexity of Nature in even such a fraction of the Universe, ever in motion, moving against itself and changing its contours. When the waves splash against the rocks, you see that the mystery of Nature is that it follows its own laws blindly and regularly. The force of the wave brings water high up into the rocks, replenishing the water in the rock pools. In the lull between the waves, the excess water immediately returns to its source, the sea, through the force of gravity, by any channel or crack in the rock. The movement is infinitely variable, different each time, yet it always follows the line of least resistance, obeys a law. It falls back until a new wave forces it up again. The consciousness of a viewing human being cannot help wondering: why does it start to fall back if within two seconds it is always to be pushed up again?

The sunset on the coast is a very delicate pink, by contrast to the powerful blood-reds, oranges and yellows inland. Dusk is sudden and an intense experience, especially when there are no electric lights to soften its impact.

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On the coast, we were eating much fish and coconuts. Yet for most of the people, including our hosts at Las Pinas, the staple diet was still beans and eggs, as inland. I marvel at the usefulness of chickens – so little trouble to keep, and always giving a supply of protein. No wonder everyone keeps them, even in the towns. Fish is a speciality even on the coast. It is eaten regularly only if a man in the household is a fisherman.

All the houses have rope hammocks, which blend perfectly with both the leisurely, gentle life-style and the palm-thatched houses.

## **MEXICO CITY**

In Tristes Tropiques Levi-Strauss describes how he, like many anthropologists, is faced with a conflict. On the one hand he is critical and radical with respect to his own society (the West); on the other hand, he studies other societies with the desire to understand and respect them without judgement. This he realizes is inconsistent, since criticism of facets of his own society should lead him to judge and disapprove of those same facets when found in other societies, thus making objectivity in study impossible. Alternatively, if he is to be objective and not judge other societies, he should be consistent and treat his own society the same way. I find the same conflict when I am travelling, for whereas I am deeply critical of my society, when in non-Western societies I want only to understand and respect their ways and attitudes; I want not to criticize, but rather I strive not to offend.

Thinking out his problem has helped me to resolve tentatively a deeper conflict that has beset me now for several years. Right from the beginning of my political consciousness I felt a desperate conflict. My understanding of the nature of the social structure, its forms of economic and cultural domination and repression led me to feel the absolute necessity of radical and structural change. At the same time, I always believed that individuals should and could believe different things, and live their lives as they wanted, and that all should

strive to coexist in creative difference. This made me antagonistic to the delineation of a “good” society. I detested the structure and uniformity of political movements, although theoretically a consistent policy and solidarity in opposition seemed essential for radical change, for I saw that this meant the replacement of one conformist structure for another. Also, I found political activists deeply pessimistic, negative and grey – not at all representing the spontaneous zest for life or joyful liberation that I felt revolution should be all about.

The resolution, I am beginning to feel, lies in a powerful acceptance of the Universe on a higher metaphysical plane. This is a realization of something beyond good and evil, a Buddhist Unity. It is connected with the idea of an absolute truth on a transcendent plane which cannot be directly translated to the concrete world; that is, that no philosophical system nor mode of existence is the complete revealed truth. All such systems contain contradictions, whilst contradictory systems may both contain important elements of truth. The world, by its very nature, is beset with paradoxes which are resolved only on a higher, almost mystical plane. This higher Truth must guide action in existence but only as a powerful light beyond the immediate conflicts; it can never dictate what is right in all possible situations. Thus, man is left in an existential situation of choice.

The resolution of the conflict lies in the development of this higher consciousness of acceptance simultaneously with facing the challenges of paradox and conflict in the world. The paradox with respect to political action involves the distinction between tolerance, which is a strength and a virtue, and acquiescence (which is cowardice and a vice). Knowledge of a higher Truth makes acquiescence to a corrupt political system wrong. Therefore, I must oppose it in myself in whatever way is an expression of myself, and not according to a set of rules of what should be achieved, arrived at through intellectual labyrinths, unconnected with an understanding and expression of my self. Political radicalism must entail an active, individual resistance and creativeness, not a group structure; and this must be simultaneous with a healthy tolerance of the system opposed.

I do find some hope for this in the tendency of the New Left to avoid unifying policies, and to forge continual reanalysis and discussion. There must be no more drawing up of plans for the future, but rather political action should be seen as an open-ended creative movement of man, in which there is never full knowledge of exactly what should be (which means stagnation and ossification) but merely the continual drive for freedom in whatever

form it may take. Most importantly, different individuals must do this in whichever ways are right for themselves.

The way I see political issues now involves the realization that society is not all bad in the present, while the future will (or should be) all good. Good and bad co-exist in a dialectical relationship. Often in history a movement for what has seemed entirely good has given rise to evil later, and vice versa. As an example of the inextricable co-existence of good and bad facets of a single complex phenomenon, one might observe the historical phenomenon termed the “Protestant Ethic”. On the one hand, this worldview is related to, has given rise to, or is involved with a massive alienation of man – a solitary, conscience-stricken inner self hopelessly split from a mechanical, impersonal social self. On the other hand, it has fostered a dynamic tendency for self-analysis and the search for truth. It is responsible for a repressive bureaucratic consciousness but also for a deep and pervasive egalitarianism. And Catholicism, although intrinsically authoritarian and hierarchical, has maintained a sense of and a respect for the individual soul.

Thus the paradox of the co-existence of good and evil in the concrete world is an eternal condition. Yet the higher understanding, the acceptance of good and evil, the absolute Truth, must make one fight for the good in concrete existence.

Now, as I observe and enjoy societies other than my own, my attitude must be one of acceptance, since criticism is dogmatic and arrogant. But my own society is dialectically related to me; it has helped to form me, and all that I do is as a part of it - and therefore contributes to its transformation. Thus, the critique of, and the desire to change it is intrinsic to my self-expression, my creative life.

With respect to my self, the relationship is the same. I must try to change and improve myself. But again, I see the need for a Buddhist-like acceptance of the good and the bad within myself, on a higher plane. I have always been hostile to the Christian ideal of a “good man”. He is formed by a purging of evil (followed by a projection of this evil onto the world). The Christian virtue is equated with a wishy-washy purity, inhibitive and repressive. Christ himself, I believe, was actually more a Buddhist than a Christian. His teachings are full of deliberate contradictions and paradoxes; he was a true dialectician. His harmony is on a different plane. The world for him is complex, exciting and not to be dealt with by a book of rules. Sometimes he preaches tolerance, at other times refusal to compromise. Sometimes he talks of peace, at other times of radical opposition to evil. He understands and values love and hate.

I believe now that without this self-acceptance true fulfillment and completeness of the self is impossible. Without it a person moves either toward a belated self-righteousness, or else is plunged into despondency whenever he perceives evil and failings in himself.

Travelling allows my consciousness to develop a pervasive acceptance and understanding of the world as it is. I feel myself more than at other times flow with the universe, and begin to find a unity between myself and the world. At times, I truly begin to see the unity within the paradoxes, to love the world for both its good and evil. It is also, I hope, helping me to draw up my strength for future involvement in concrete efforts and battles, in which a firm sense of ultimate acceptance and absolute truth may give direction, but never exact, dogmatic prescriptions.

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**January 25, 1972**

Levi-Strauss' considerations on attempted objectivity in anthropology being in conflict with a critical attitude to one's own society raises another question. For me, it is impartiality, non-judgment and acceptance of foreign societies which is desirable. It is not a question of scientific objectivity, for I do not believe that is possible in the social sciences. The study of man takes place within a particular total conceptual framework. In the physical sciences the situation is different, for the categories dealt with arise from the nature of the phenomena studied. In social studies, the categories and the varying emphases placed on them arise from the preconceptions of the group or the individual investigating. An analogy would be life on a planet with no atmosphere, the people living in domes each with a different gaseous composition. A person would have the choice of various atmospheres (analogous to different conceptual frameworks) but could not decide to live outside the domes in a "non-partisan" environment, for there would only be a vacuum. This vacuum is analogous to the notion of so-called objectivity in the social sciences. The actual world-view that passes as objective (positivist-empirical sociology, behaviourism, quantitative statistical social measurement, etc) is in fact one particular orientation among many.

Max Weber made a great mistake in thinking his method was objective. He accepted that personal interests directed the sociologist in his choice of study and the aspects of the subject that he was most concerned with. He accepted that the climate of the cultural milieu or "zeitgeist" would affect the relative importance assigned to particular aspects of the subject studied. But he then thought that because the subsequent dealings with the selected factors could be impartial, that the method was objective.

In fact, such results are partial truths, and this is all that can be expected. Different orientations from different philosophical, epochal and individual perspectives can all give different partial truths, there is no overriding, single objective truth. Once again the Absolute Truth is on a transcendental plane, which cannot be revealed in the concrete without paradox.

Weber was himself tormented to the point of neurosis by the conflict between his desired objectivity and his powerful emotional beliefs. If only he could have realized that his subject should have been inextricably involved with his self, his life, and his social beliefs. He should have followed what he knew was right, still realizing it was only a partial truth, related to his place and time and his psychic make-up.

Marx is the man who thought most about the relativity of thought and truth in terms of class consciousness, ideology and historical relativity. Unfortunately his considerations upon the nature of a pure consciousness – one free from contradiction (also explored by Lukács in terms of his notion of a pure social realism in literature) – led him to believe it was possible in concrete human individuals in society, rather than as a speculative notion on an abstract plane, that could then serve as a light to guide the movement of human societies towards the perfection it would not reach. In other words, the harmonious resolution (synthesis) of contradictions was for him a concrete possibility instead of a reality only on a higher plane of consciousness.

**MEXICO CITY**  
**26, 1972**

**January**

The city seemed like a mixture of three kinds of metropolis. The chaotic, sprawling layout, especially on the outskirts had the feeling of a Chicago; modern highways and flyovers next to ramshackle buildings, noisy traffic (causing pollution worse than in any American city) and a general throwing together of myriad styles. Another characteristic is that of a large, modern non-Western city, like Teheran, Istanbul, or Cairo. This is difficult to define, but it has something to do with the street-side stalls which sell every conceivable thing, edible and non-edible, useful and useless. It is also related to the fact that many of the people have something very non-urban about them in appearance and manner, which suggests they are country folk dragged into the city. And then there are the crazy drivers

(with cranky vehicles) who seem not to care if they hit pedestrian or bus. (This contrasts strongly with the way people are on the pavements – very un-pushy and far less bustling than in New York or London). And then there is a partial atmosphere reminiscent of a Southern European capital - Madrid or Rome, derived from the architecture, the expansive boulevards and the abundant plazas with monuments.

And yet there is something else quite unique about Mexico City. Exhaustingly crowded, a continual hubbub, yet it is strangely gentle, charming, and elegant.

## **PLAYA AZUL TO ACAPULCO**

**January 24, 1972**

We travelled from Playa Azul to Acapulco along a very bumpy dirt road whose only traffic is concerned with the construction of the new road linking Acapulco with Guadalajara. It was only possible to attempt this after the dam had been built near Melchor Ocampo, providing a crossing over the river.

The trip took us through wild country, and villages noticeably out of contact with the “wider world”. Often we would drive through rivers and would see a woman washing clothes with a wooden board and rolling pin under a half-constructed viaduct, the bulldozers rumbling around her. We thought about how much the new road would affect people’s lives; externally many would benefit economically from selling commodities to travelers, and more would be affected indirectly from the opening up of the area. However, the basic life-styles would not change so greatly, as can be judged from other places where electricity and roads have long been present.

We faced the full import of this schizophrenic condition on the outskirts of Acapulco. Next to the horribly loud road heading north to the capital, in full view of the modern apartment buildings overlooking the bay (this view of the modern apartment buildings overlooking the bay of monte Carlo) was a collection of huts where the people kept chickens, pigs and had to walk to get their water. Did they realize the schizophrenia they were a part of? It seems that consciously they could not, for those that opted for the modern side of the fence would be street-hawkers on the make with the rich tourists. Anyone who opted with awareness for the old life would surely opt to live in the tranquility of the countryside, since staying in Acapulco would bring no advantage, but rather only noise, confusion and the

proximity of others financially better off. I could only conclude that those people were not conscious of the situation or of the existence of a choice; but were staying there out of inertia, unconcerned and un-envious of the modern life, yet not greatly nostalgic for the old one.

**THE AZTECS**  
**26, 1972**

**January**

The Aztec cosmology is truly an organized paranoia. The excitement I felt at seeing the Aztec art and sculpture was mingled with a chilling eeriness. The faces and body positions portray terror, brutality and insanity. They seem like artifacts of a distraught collective psyche; I was immediately reminded of the theory Freud propounded in *Totem and Taboo*, that the so-called primitive mind is akin to a neurotic, full of compulsions and obsessions, living in a universe peopled with the projections of his dream-terrors.

It is true that the Mexican *altiplano* was a far more hostile environment than were the other “cradles of early civilizations”. Earthquakes, volcanoes, windiness and sporadic rain could easily lead to a view of the universe as predominantly hostile and to a god-tormented psycho-social reality. Yet the Aztecs show this more than the other civilizations of Meso-America; the Olmecs, Totonics, Zapotecs and Mayas all have happy faces and dignified statues as well as the hateful paranoid ones. What was it that infused these people with something so powerful, that drove them to such a religion at the same time as an unprecedented warlikeness?

I felt great pain when looking at reconstructions and models of Tenochtitlan, which was destroyed by the Spanish. Such an act must have meant great psychological weakness on their part; seeing such an enchanted city (by their own description) and such a sophisticated art and culture must have wracked them with a severe self-doubt.

As I stood on top of the pyramid to the sun at Teotihuacan and viewed the great plateau, windswept and dusty, I was filled with an immeasurable awe, I think greater than that which I experienced in front of the colossal gold altar of the cathedral built on the ruins of the Aztec temple by the Spaniards. Yet both peoples had drama and pride, and a sense of something great in themselves and beyond themselves to which they built eternal edifices.

And both were great in brutality. On the one hand, the sacrifices of palpitating human hearts to Huitzilopochtli, on the other, *auto da fes* and public executions – the second carried out on the same site as the first. The one had fearful gods, the other put paintings on their cathedral walls of people burning in hell, looking hopelessly upward at saints floating in ethereal skies; and suspended gory, bloody crucifixes over their altars.

In view of the cultural heritage of the Mexicans, it is not surprising that there exists some remnant of this morbidity today. The Mexican preoccupation with death has become something of a cliché since D.H. Lawrence's *Mornings in Mexico*, but what is interesting to me is whether this stems primarily from the Aztec or the Catholic tradition. In Mexico there are an incredible number of gruesome magazines with pictures of peoples' heads smashed in by car accidents, anecdotes and stories of rape, murder and so on. And these seem to be read as widely and unashamedly as any newspaper. In the murals of Orozco, Diego Rivera and their contemporaries, there is an inescapably Aztec-like sense of the hostility of the universe, death and horror. And in Orozco there is the same obsession with skeletons and ugly, tortured faces.

When I looked long before at the remains of the Ancient Egyptians, I knew that their civilization had gone through its own cycle of growth, zenith and decline. Also, I knew that it was connected by an uninterrupted thread to the present; the Egyptians influenced the Cretans who influenced the Greeks and so on through to the Romans to the present. They interacted with the civilizations of Mesopotamia, which had contact with those of the Ganges and also influenced Europe. Some historians also think the Egyptian culture spread through most of Africa, specially affecting the Bantu civilizations. Hence, to see Ancient Egypt is to better understand the basis of an historical-cultural pyramid at the top of which I stand. The present-day world, by simply being extant, is doing honour to it.

But the American civilization was cut dead in its own cycle. That is a tragedy unique in the history of man. Of course, other individual cultures have been conquered and decimated, such as the Etruscans and probably many others with potential genius. Of course too, the *geist* of the Indian is carried forth in some way in Latin American culture. Yet at no other time was a whole complex of humanity in such a vast geographical area of the world nipped in the bud.

I wondered how it might have been if history had taken a different course. About 1,000 B.C. the Olmecs and Mayas were developing mathematics and astronomy. On the other side of the Atlantic, the Phoenicians were devising an alphabet. If, after this, the American

development had been faster, by about 50 B.C. they might have had boats good enough to cross the Atlantic. If they had arrived in Europe just before the Romans reached their zenith, they might have conquered them and nipped their development just at the point the Spanish much later interrupted the Aztecs. Then the Aztecs would have taken claim to the growing Roman Empire as the Spanish did theirs in reality. Europe would have been ruled from Tenochtitlan and the hearts of Saxons, Huns, Slavs, Goths and Romans would have been sacrificed to the gods of the Aztec pantheon. The Industrial Revolution would have been American Indian and later the New World – Europe – would have fought Wars of Independence against the colonial Indians. They would have rebelled against Aztec culture in Paris, Maya culture in London, Toltec culture in Spain. Finally, invigorated from overthrowing their masters and having learnt from the epoch of domination, the United States of Europe would have become the greatest industrial power on earth while the Old World underwent its decline.

### **MEXICO: Oaxaca, Monte Alban**

Oaxaca has an enchanted market. You walk through it, and buy for very little delicious coconut cakes, drinks of coconut and milk, fresh juices, fresh fruit of every possible kind, exotic tasty dishes, musical pipes made of black pottery (Coyotepec Indian), brightly-coloured woven clothes and so much more....

The colonial buildings around the centre are of a soft, lime-green colour. The town is as exciting as a city, as intimate as a village, and the mountains and fields as are always in sight.

Monte Alban, the temple-city near here is situated on a high mountain which was leveled off before the construction. All around, 1,500 feet below, is a glorious golden valley, and this is surrounded by more vast mountains. The sky toward dusk was dark and awe-inspiring; the mountain-top seemed clothed in a heavy silence. How could they have resisted building a temple city here, and how could they not have reserved it for religious ceremony and the abode of the priests! The people it served lived in the huge valley all around. The architecture is a progression of Olmec, Maya, Zapotec, Mixtec and Aztec styles, for the city was in use for over 3,000 years. The simple, abstract designs of the

Olmecs can be seen on the lowest levels of the temples. Here also one can walk hunch-backed, with flickering match to guide the way, through tunnels within the stone buildings.

The Mixtec gold jewelry from tomb 7, opened up by Professor Caso, can be seen in the Oaxaca museum. This is so gentle and refined, that the traditional distinction between art and craft seems to disappear. Especially wonderful is the gold breastplate of the god of death. Metal-working (including gold) only came to Mexico in the 13-14th centuries BC from South America. How fast they developed an exquisite expertise and refinement! It is dreadful that the Spanish melted down so much gold-work into ingots to pay for an army to maintain a crumbling European empire.

Oaxaca has Mezcal, a very slightly hallucinogenic alcoholic drink, which brings on a wonderfully soft, gentle high....

## **OAXACA**

**February 4, 1972**

In *La Iglesia de la Soledad* is a statue of the Virgin Mary inside a distasteful glass container. The face is expressionless but she is wearing a sumptuous black velvet cape studded with jewels and a gold crown. She is supposed to represent the real arrival of the Virgin at Oaxaca in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; according to the legend, she was found in a chest carried into the town by a merchant's donkey (which apparently died under the strain). In the museum adjoining the church are paintings on wooden blocks of various citizens receiving her spiritually for the first time. These visions suggest individual and group hallucinations.

The hallucinogenic quality of Christianity was also brought home to us by some paintings in another smaller church in Oaxaca. One showed the cross, with only the top part of the body of Christ. Below him, in the position his heart would fill if the rest of his body were shown, was a red heart (very large and out of proportion) encircled by a crown of thorns and with flames and golden rays coming out of the top of it. Above Christ's head was a huge eye suspended in the air.

Christian spiritualism can be seen as resulting from a dualism between pure spirit and the concrete bodily world. The abnegation of the physical results in the sublimation of

sensuality into pure spirituality. This is evidenced in the sumptuousness of the heavenly sphere and the blatant eroticism in the Christian (especially Catholic) love of God, Christ, the Virgin and the Saints. The dualism also results in a split between the concrete and the symbolic, which allows free reign for the symbolic world – a condition akin to that found in individual schizophrenia, and leading naturally to hallucinations. (This contrast with the “Buddhist” interpretation of Christ in the newly discovered *Gospel According to Saint Thomas*: “When you make the two one, and when you make the inner as the other and the outer as the inner... then shall you enter the Kingdom.” This is the view of R.D. Laing, Marx (praxis = integration), and Buddhism, as opposed to that of Platonic and Christian schizophrenic dualism).

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Mexican Catholicism has a high degree of morbidity as far as images are concerned. The figures of Christ always have an unnecessary amount of blood dripping from every possible part of the body. Is this a worshipping of projected misery? Other figures are also rather gory, such as one we saw in Oaxaca of a saint with blood streaming from his eyes. I am tempted to connect this with the Aztec dancing figures which on close inspection, turn out to be wearing the skins of recently sacrificed humans.

Mexican Catholicism has some of the same characteristics as the old Indian religions – belief in the need for placation and attempted manipulation of the Gods. In many churches there are side chapels dedicated to particular saints. All over the walls you read plaques and messages thanking the saint for his benevolent intervention in a successful operation or a near-fatal accident. And by the sides of winding mountain roads are numerous crosses and shrines to help the driver make his journey in safety. Most lorry drivers have a crucifix or an image of the Virgin in the cab.

## **OAXACA TO CHIAPAS**

Driving south from Oaxaca takes you through and out of the stupendous mountains and into the coastal plain of Tehuantepec. The vegetation is once again tropical. This natural wildness was enhanced for us by very powerful gales, almost too strong to walk in. Here

in this low-lying land, on one of the narrowest portions of the American continent, the difference in air pressure between Pacific and Atlantic seems to get balanced out.

We went up again into the highlands of northern Chiapas. Here it was damp, cold and misty, the clouds chopping off the view of mountain peaks. The atmosphere was mysterious, the countryside starker than in Oaxaca state. Much of it is flat plateau, punctuated with isolated mountain tops each with their own story to tell, and not interfering with one another.

Driving into Chiapas seemed like going into the “back and beyond”, because of the landscape, the weather and the fact that we left the Pan-American highway which stays south and enters Guatemala at Tapachula. Reaching Tuxtla Gutierrez was therefore a strange jolt, since it is a modern sophisticated town, wealthy and organized – quite different from the simple enchanting market atmosphere of Oaxaca or Guadalajara.

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I must not forget to mention the Zapotec Indians of Tehuantepec, whose women wear the most gorgeous blouses and skirts of hand-embroidered gold, yellow and red velvets, in wonderful intricate patterns. This skill in embroidery (the best we have seen in Mexico) reminds me of the designs on the Zapotec temple at Mitla, which have been described by Aldous Huxley as “petrified weaving”.

At Mitla, the Indians are living right around the temple in all their creative colourfulness. At nearby Yagul, the temple ruins are surrounded by the silence of the mountains and valleys.

## **TO THE FOREST OF THE LACANDONES**

I had read a brief paragraph about Indians who had remained unintegrated into the Mexican nation ever since the Conquest, and who lived deep in the jungles of Chiapas. An informative truck-driver who took us from Tuxtla Gutierrez to Comitán suggested we should go to Las Margaritas and from thence take horses into the jungle. The route he suggested turned out to be inaccurate, but he initiated the first step which led to the next

and so on; the whole trip was a sequence of movements which led us to new information, we never had a complete picture ahead of time as to what we could do and what to expect.

We took a bus to Las Margaritas. There we were unable to hire horses but we found the road continued to various villages that were nearer the jungle. So we took a bus to Palmira along a very bumpy, stony road which restricted the driver to second gear. The way was lush, green and hilly, and we could see the peaks of high mountains ahead. Palmira was no more than a couple of houses on a coffee ranch. The man of one of these took us in. He gave us the names of villages and ranch-houses that we would walk through to get to San Quintin, which lay in the jungle. He said it would be a four-day walk, and suggested where to stop off for each night. His information was somewhat inaccurate, especially with regard to the relative distances between places; and four days was horribly optimistic for the time required. Yet he helped us a great deal, especially considering that he had never been that far along the trail himself.

We started early in the morning with the bare necessities wrapped up in our sleeping bags tied to our backs. We very soon came upon the difficulty which turned out to be the scourge of the enterprise – taking the wrong path, just as it had been years before on my walk to Nuristan in Afghanistan. Early in the journey we came across people to check the “road” with, but later we would sometimes walk half a day along the wrong one without meeting anyone. Sometimes we would be told to take a left after some distance. Then we would come across three paths going in three directions. Or we would take what we thought was a left, then come to another junction and not know whether this was our left turn, or simply an irrelevant path leading only to a maize field (in which we would collapse in exhaustion and despair!). Sometimes a path turning off the main one went to a single house or a field and should have been ignored, but for us there was no way of knowing.

When we asked about distances we also had difficulties. Sometimes we would be given distances in the old league (one league = 4 km.) but more usually in terms of hours’ walk. We learnt to multiply these estimates by 1½ - 2 times. The Mexicans walk fast – the “Indian hop” they call it. It is really a kind of pidgeon-toeing, the walker leaning forward (often with backpack strapped around his forehead) and only just keeping balance with each fast step. He does not hesitate at awkward points in the path, but keeps upright by shifting rapidly from one unsure foothold to another.

The first night we spent at a *colonia* – a group of ranch-houses called Villa Hermosa. This was in a small damp valley supporting two families whose livelihood was coffee. All the

way along the trail, until we were near the lower, warmer jungle region, the cash crop was coffee, which is taken by mules and horses along the slushy paths we trod, all the way to Comitán to be sold.

The further we got from Palmira, the last point that can be reached by motor vehicle, the fewer marks of “civilization” could be found. It was interesting to note how far along certain items would be present, brought by mule, and which dropped out earliest. At Villa Hermosa our host had cans of sardines, sugar and various non-local items. Later *colonias* would have almost nothing from outside, being completely self-sufficient. Never did we find a *pueblo* or *colonia* without at least one radio, however. Cigarettes were not present for the middle part of the journey, but the men smoked locally-grown tobacco wrapped in leaves. Nearer San Quintín they were attainable again from the cargos brought in by plane.

Each day’s walk entailed, more or less, climbing one mountain and arriving in the next valley to find houses. The existence of the people is very powerfully linked to and dependent on the Earth. All that is needed for settlement is a mountain stream; the people clear some land, build a house with the wood, put some cows, pigs or chickens on the land, and later if there is more land that can be cleared, grow maize or coffee.

Almost as soon as we left Palmira we started to hear about an American called Enrique who was supposed to live in San Quintín. First of all, this disturbed our notion of going into the wilds. But as we picked up more snippets of information about him, a fascination grew. We heard he was old with grey hair and beard. Some said he composed music, others maintained he wrote books. We found out that he ate only fruit and vegetables, the people being particularly surprised at his not partaking of maize or tortillas (which they eat almost exclusively!). Then it appeared he did not live in San Quintín (which in our minds had taken on a Samarkand-like mythical character) but entirely alone in the jungle. He used to walk our route, but in recent years had occasionally used the plane (the plane was something else we only heard about after setting off, annoying us as we thought that too would detract from the wildness of the area. Little did we know how later we would depend on it!). So Enrique gradually became a legend for us, and we resolved to visit him.

The second day we covered a good distance by about 4:30 pm. We were at a hamlet called Chayabe, and an old man told us we could arrive at Laguna, in a very nearby valley, after only one more hour’s walk. We set off, mistakenly. After a little while, the path became a mud-bath, sometimes knee-deep. At first we delicately picked our way from one grassy clump or stone to another thinking the wet patch would surely end very soon. But it didn’t,

and presently darkness fell and the rain accompanied it. We ploughed on, always thinking a house would appear. But there was nothing, and our calls were lost in the rain-drenched mountains. In the dark, we kept falling in the mud and losing our way, so we were forced to find an area of earth slightly less damp than the rest and sleep. More memories of my trip to Nuristan in Afghanistan four years before came into my mind where the same thing had happened, and we had got lost through faulty information. Yet this time were better off – we had with us bananas, avocados and tortillas and a can of sardines which was to be smashed open on a rock in an emergency.

In spite of mosquitoes and intermittent rain, we survived the night surrounded by dark mountains whose turns echoed the screams of coyotes. In the morning we donned our mud-clogged clothes. There was a huge beautiful red flower near where we had slept, but we felt too dismal to drink it in. I was sure we would come upon Laguna soon, and that we had been given bad information rather than that we were lost. Sure enough, after an hour or more of negotiation of the mud, I ascended a hillock and at the instant my senses received the data, I yelled “house!” (which was to happen on other occasions) and Marlene brightened up the valley with a “yippee” or some such sound of glee.

The people at Laguna (two houses) were wonderful, offering us a hospitality somehow biblical in its sincerity and gravity. We drank sweetened *posoli* (maize in water) and ate well.

The third night, we arrived at San Geronimo, a single house on the top of a hill, which in the sunshine of the late afternoon was sublime. The people were extremely kind again – relations of the old man of the Laguna household who had said we should stay with them as they were “buena gente”.

The next day offered a better path, and we had to climb a great deal; also it was hotter. We made it to Margaritas, a larger village with the brown palm houses spread out on a grassy carpet. Our hosts here gave us a coffee-tray to sleep in, which caused much amusement among the villagers. On the fifth day, we walked a couple of hours to Realidad, and here the people told us to take a left-turn some way out of the village. There was ambiguity and we did not take the right one. Our path went into jungle and fizzled out at a clearing where trees had been felled, but we found no people. We went back and tried several other turnings, but there was no way of knowing which way to interpret the directions. We tried every psychological avenue – “if they meant this, then we should go here”, etc., but not wanting to spend another night out, we went back to Realidad. The people were

sympathetic, but not disturbed at the idea that their information had been unclear. Marlene amused everyone in making an important point politely; she said we needed much food for which we would pay much (we were exhausted and starving, though in reality did not have very much money); I needed seven eggs and she four, for I was big and she had done much work.

The next day, someone was supposed to show us the path as he was going that way to work, but somehow he set off without us knowing and again we had to leave without a guide. This time we took the one path we had not tried the day before, a very insignificant-looking one, and this turned out to be correct. We crossed a big river which we took to be the Rio Eusebio (from the map we copied from a forestry official whom we met the first day just after leaving Palmira). Soon we arrived at San Antonio Hidalgo. Here we ate and began to feel very weary, I was also developing a blister on my toe. We set off, but again there was confusion with the path so we lost time. Also, we began to feel ill. Just before dusk we arrived at a very green valley with a river, cattle and the ominous black stumps of burnt trees. There was one house, but no people. One room in the house was a maize-store, the other had a fireplace, pots, some beans, salt and coffee. We had with us dry *posoli* and some sugar, so we ate and drank well – alone in the valley with a fire in our house. The next morning, I was definitely ill (probably with ‘flu). Some people arrived who turned out to be from the house in Hidalgo where we had eaten the day before; they were not at all surprised to see us. They did not own the house but had come to grind the maize, which they do by scraping each cob with an old stock hardened by fire. Later, the owner arrived. Phlegmatic and easy-going, he minded us not at all. When we told him we had eaten his beans but would pay him, he said he could simply eat the remaining tortillas instead.

We did not leave that day, as I was too ill to walk far. I slept all that day and the next night – about 30 hours in all, and recovered. On the eighth day since leaving Palmira, we made it to Nueva Providencia (only one hour from San Quintin) thinking we had only reached Santa Rosa. In fact, we passed the latter without noticing it, as it was a little set back from the main path! Very excited, we ascertained that Enrique’s house was about three hours in a different direction from San Quintin. Two boys on horses agreed to show us the way for 5 pesos, and as we walked too slowly we ended up riding one horse while they rode the other. They took us to the obscure turn-off, and said it was no more than a few minutes to the house. Actually, we walked for over half an hour (becoming anxious once again, and cursing our guides!) and then only came to a village. Here the people took our packs and led us to Enrique. It was still a couple more miles, and we were beginning to feel Enrique

was indeed legendary. Through a jungle path, over a narrow log, across a creek around a corner and there it was! a thatched open house set in the trees, as if it had always been there. Immediately we saw him, sitting in a hammock, long white hair down his back. With her back to us was a woman and sitting sideways a young fellow with long hair whom I took to be American. My immediate impression was that Enrique was an old-style “freak” and I anticipated incense and a water-pipe of hasheesh. I felt an instantaneous disappointment (although I thought such a person would be fun); subconsciously, I had been hoping for a person with something profound to offer. We shook hands, sat down and very soon the impression changed. He said we had arrived in the middle of a “revolution” which was part of “the world struggle”, and my next idea of him was that of an old-style communist, who used the well-weathered expressions, and again I was disappointed that anyone would drag all that into the jungle.

Later that evening, he told us some of his life story, and from the way he very readily gave intimate information of his life some of it in a self-flattering manner, and from the way he lorded it over the two women who spoke little, we both felt he was a little insensitive and domineering.

However, all the first impressions were dispelled. The girl he seemed to boss around was his step-daughter, which altered the connotations, and he had a weak heart so he could not more around too agilely himself. Some of the early impression remained later, but basically we were mistaken; with a few gladly-made allowances, he turned out to be someone to respect and admire. He was religious, unfortunately with a Judaic-Christian moral stamp, sometimes seeming preoccupied with the ritual and outer trappings more than an inner wholeness. We decided he was limited in his spirituality; his strong need for a faith made him grasp at the other-than-spiritual aspects of religion. They kept the Quaker silence before meals, were Christian Scientist about medicine, and read from the bible each night.

But Enrique had had a dream all his life, which he had followed as if it were his quest for the Holy Grail. He had looked for a place in the jungle far from civilization, where he could grow fruit and vegetables to live from, and live communally with others in search of personal religion; and where he could help others not through sacrifice but by being and expressing himself. He had gone to England in his youth to study at the only college for cooperative farming then existent, in Manchester. He had gone to Denmark to see the Danish cooperative system. He went to Paraguay to live in the jungle with a religious German sect which had escaped the Nazis. He sailed in a boat which he resuscitated with

one other man in San Francisco, across the Pacific to the South Sea Islands, looking for an island where he could start the life he wanted. Unfortunately he found them all full of plantations, and the uninhabited ones had no streams, which he needed coming as he did from Vermont, a country of hills and streams. I felt a closeness with his personal need for the right kind of country for his soul. He had never stopped searching until he found what he was looking for; Paraguay he had left because the people were not vegetarian and because he argued with the priests! He had always kept away from orthodox churches and any particular sect. His first wife had left him and taken their child at a particularly difficult time when he had only ten dollars left.

Finally, he came upon Chiapas in a book, and read about the Lacandone Indians, who lived in the jungle, wore long hair and long robes (just like I had). That was it. He went and built the house, later met Jan and Becca (who was only four years old) and married again.

When he first came here, his house was very deep in the jungle. He had traced the Lacandones after several arduous unsuccessful expeditions. At that time, tapirs had walked up the creek by the house, monkeys came to their table, macaws had nested right by them. Only the Lacandones were anywhere near, whom he got to know; and they came to trust him.

Gradually more people (mestizos) have moved into the area, burning the forest to grow maize and graze cattle. Large areas of jungle have been destroyed. San Quintin is only ten years old, the savannah plain around it is new. As the people wear out the land with their monoculture, they move on and destroy new virgin forest. One of Enrique's and Jan's big battles has been to persuade people that they can never regain the jungle, and that their practice is very inefficient. Enrique and Jan grow about 50 kinds of fruit and vegetable, which allows the jungle to stay the way it is, allows recycling of the soil, and provides the most productive sources of protein, vitamins, etc. They have imported all kinds of tropical plants to see which do best here. They eat very well – a great change it was to the unvarying diet of beans, eggs and tortillas during our journey – and the people all around have the food offered generously by Enrique. He has never sold the products of his land, but has given them away, partly in the hope that people will be convinced of the value of growing them.

The Lacandones are the descendants of the ancient Maya. About a thousand years ago, the Maya in Chiapas numbered about three million; as they were dependent on a Neolithic monoculture (maize) they wore out the land, and were driven out by famine. That is the

reason, according to Enrique, for their moving to the Yucatan (described as the “mysterious” desertion of their temple-cities here, in most books on the subject). The Lacandones represent those who remained in the jungles of Chiapas. There are two groups, the one here and the other near Bonampak on the Guatemala border, which have been separated for over 500 years. This other group apparently descends from the priests who remained with the temples and show signs of this. They had more contact with other peoples, while the group here was isolated. The Spanish never conquered them; one major campaign failed because the Lacandones retreated into the jungle, moving their villages so that the *conquistadores* could not find them. The Lacandones, and one group of Indians in the jungles of Belize, are the only ones never to have been conquered, nor yet to have been brought into the national law, economy or culture, in the whole of Central America. The Lacandone village near San Quintin, however, has contact with the Mexicans, but this is very recent and few can speak any Spanish.

Enrique helped the Lacandones in the early days. He brought them machetti knives, seeds, helped them with their agriculture – though he says they grew sensible things – bananas, cacao and a vegetable similar to spinach. And he tried to discourage them from hunting monkeys, then with bow and arrow, now with guns. The more primitive dependence on maize and the pig, according to Harry (his name in English, though I always thought of him as Enrique!) stems from the serfdom of the hacienda system imposed by the Spanish, since the lords told the peons what to grow; so they lost their previous wider agricultural knowledge.

Enrique also created some faith in the white man. Their only previous experience was in the ‘40’s, when criminals were brought into the area to find *chicle* trees which supply the basis of chewing-gum. Some of them found a Lacandone village, killed the men and raped the women – the typical procedure with Indians ever since the Conquest.

One day we went to the Lacandone village. Through dense jungle, we suddenly came on a small clearing with three houses. The houses are very simple – 4 corner stakes and a thatched roof, no walls. By the village flowed a quiet green majestic river. Moored to the banks were *coyuco* boats – long canoes dug out of a single cedar tree, the same kind the Maya used to navigate the Gulf of Mexico as well as the rivers.

The people in the village took almost no notice of us, carrying on with their business. As it grew dark, they sat with their flowing robes like priests; each posture seemingly spiritual. They spoke very little and seemed to allow very little obvious expression on their faces. I

could image how such people quietly resisted the Spanish, infuriating them with their unresponsiveness and refusal to submit. And I remembered how Enrique described how the Spanish were unable to make slaves out of them, how the Indians would lie down in a ditch, would be beaten to death in silence rather than be slaves; so that in Cuba they were exterminated before the Spanish learnt the lesson and avoided the mistake by using Negroes in Mexico or creating serfdom instead. And as I thought of it, I wanted to pull my hair and scream and grab the earth, less through hatred of the Spanish than through admiration of the Indian who would die before being enslaved.

The atmosphere of that night was somewhat spoiled the next morning when the man of the house we had slept in asked for money for the night. It seems that this attitude has been instilled by a “progressive” woman “patron” of the Lacandones. She has followed Enrique’s suggestion to try and turn the *Laguna de Lacandones* region into Mexico’s first National Park – the issue is being fought out in Mexico City at the moment. She has added to the idea by suggesting that tourists could visit a “model” Lacandone village, bringing an income for the Lacandones – a horrible, humiliating idea, to my mind.

The dilemma that Enrique, Jan and Becca were in on our arrival is a complicated business. A corrupt lawyer from outside the region “sold” a vast area of land for a large sum of money to a Chiapas rancher. That land includes Enrique’s land (about 100 hectares), about 100 hectares belonging to a pure-blooded Indian ex-peon, given to him by Enrique, and the communally held land of several *colonias* nearby who legally own it following a stipulated number of years of “sitting” on it. In reality, the rancher has bought the right to kick off the land whoever happens to be on it, the lawyer being able to hush it up and deal with the legal problems. The ranchers involved are the barons who still regard themselves as the law, and entirely disregard the results of the 1917 revolution, which made the *latifundario* (serf) illegal, and restricted the maximum size of individual land holdings. They walked in and told the ex-peon he no longer owned the land, but that he could stay there and ask permission to grow maize, and work for the rancher in return for the permission – not for remuneration, i.e. to become a serf again. The man is timid like the rest, and were it not for Enrique, he and the others would have left. Walterio (a Mexican from Mexico City who has come to live in the jungle, and was with Enrique when we arrived) has done official business on behalf of Enrique, by going to Tuxtla, the state capital, to bring it to the state government’s notice. They have recognized that the rancher’s papers of ownership are false, and are fortunately on Enrique’s side. But the ranchers (“barons” Enrique calls them) are tough-guys; they wear pistols and have apparently killed over land before, and since

they have threatened the ex-peon not to go to the government again, and Enrique is a pacifist and does not want to risk anyone's life, he thinks they should leave.

If he goes, he will try to fix up Thomas (the ex-peon) with land, and will try at least to secure his own land as an experimental station for tropical crops. Otherwise twelve years of painstaking work will be destroyed, since the rancher will fell the trees, burn the land and bring in cattle.

This is the sort of thing that has been going on for centuries. We felt they should carry on with the fight, but Enrique is no coward; he is a pacifist and will do anything short of use of violence or physical defence. It is possible that the barons will fail, however, firstly because the government knows about it and is against it, though Enrique does not want to go to them and ask for soldiers. Secondly, the Forestry commission is stamping down on the felling of trees.

Nevertheless, Enrique and co. do not like the atmosphere any more, nor the spread of people so close to them (even the good ones), so they are going, to try the jungles of Surinam. They won't be forgotten here for a long time.

Our trip was terminated by a nasty skin infection we both got. Marlene had it especially badly in her foot and could not walk comfortably. Luckily, after waiting wretchedly in San Quintin several days, we got a ride to San Cristobal in the only plane that came while we were there. We had treatment and rested up in Comitán.

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The jungle has snakes, humming-birds that sound like insects, large slow-moving flies, and in limestone caves we found bats.

As you walk through the jungle you are usually facing the ground to see where to make the next step; but if you stop and look up you see lianas and climbers going right up to the canopy above, spirals and swirls of large leaves encircling your head; ever-changing sprinkles of light let in by the canopy leaves cast patches of lightness and shadow that look like the surface of rippling water.

In Peten, we saw palm-leaves up to 15 feet long, which twisted gently and elegantly in the breeze.

## GUATEMALA

March 11, 1972

The first, most noticeable difference between Mexico and Guatemala concerns the Indians. It is easy to believe that they constitute 60 per cent of Guatemala's population. All the way from the border to the capital and especially around Lake Atitlan and Antigua, we saw Indians in their fantastic traditional costumes. Each village has a distinctive outfit, and a distinctive style used in every kind of garment and cloth. The Indians have always lived as village-communities; here one can see each village as a single collective consciousness or collective creativity.

The Guatemalan Indians (of the Northwest of the country) are very pleasant and friendly, by contrast to those of Chiapas whom we found either rather dour, or occasionally a little unfriendly (such as the group from San Cristobal who wanted to charge me 50 pesos if I took a photo of them).

In Guatemala City, we spent a day with some upper-middle class people. Their attitudes were very interesting to observe. They had both developed a philosophy composed of nihilism and happy-go-lucky hedonism. It was easy to see how they came to the first standpoint. As Latin American upper-class intellectuals, they are far more alienated from their total society than are American or European intellectuals. They are culturally much more distant from the masses of their society, and have lived and been brought up in the U.S. and Europe. They look to the U.S. for fashions, rock music and 'groove culture' and to Europe for cultural and intellectual inspiration. Paris, May '68 was the focus of their political-intellectual thought, and it was also the germ of their present pessimism.

Their feeling of impotence with respect to society was displayed philosophically in the forms of "one can't change anything", "it doesn't matter anyway" and "everyone chooses what he wishes to revolve his life around, whether a peasant or an artist". They had gone a full cycle in political involvement and had ended in frustration. For example, they realized their ancestors had humiliated and exploited the Indian. Yet they themselves could not help being either wealthy or accustomed to a certain state of affluence. They were not Indians or common-people and could not kid themselves they were (as American and European intellectuals often manage to). There was nothing they could do about the Indians which would not entail more interference, and forcing them into looking at the world through a European political conceptual framework.

Their frustration was conveyed not in an intense guilt-ridden mode as with Anglo-Saxon students and radicals, but in a characteristic Latin lightness and effervescence. They waved their arms about enthusiastically even when airing their nihilistic views. Likewise, they had gone through a self-purging of their own upbringing (with the help of marihuana), questioning and throwing out much of their parents' culture's views on sex, behaviour, religion, etc., etc. Yet the process had none of the frantic Lutheran intensity of similar young Protestants of the U.S., England, Holland or Germany. This too was conducted with a wave of the hand. As Latins (like the French or Italians) they do not need a thousand decibels of Hendrix rock music to blast the old ideas out of their heads; it is a simpler gayer process.

They also showed tendencies towards the sort of anti-Americanism that I despise. This stems not from political grievance, over either the structure of American society or foreign domination. Rather, it is an outmoded European aristocracy's snobbishness, fed also by an envy of those characteristics for which the Americans should be admired.

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Guatemala City's museum of Maya relics is phenomenal. Particularly striking was a carved wooden panel from a temple at Tikal – a beautiful delicate combination of representational and abstract art. The model reconstruction of Tikal was even more like a supersonic moon-city than that of Tenochtitlan. One pot showed an erect figure, stretched out in a position of Dionysian ecstasy and frenzy. Generally, the Maya art is a deeply psychic hallucinogenic genre, portrayed in sophisticated, soft lines and curves, showing remarkable variety and exploration.

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Antigua is set in a valley with the mountains and the volcano clearly visible all around it. The remains on exhibit in the museums plunged me deep into the feelings of power, exuberance and religious fervor which characterized the colonial period. The ruins of the convent of Santa Clara (destroyed like the Cathedral by the earthquake in the 18<sup>th</sup> century) still convey the atmosphere of quietness, piety and an extremely powerful, almost frightening withdrawal from the outside world. Not even the volcano is visible from the cloistered courtyard.

Guatemala has an unavoidably large proportion of American enterprise, evidenced among other ways by the advertisements and billboards bordering the road out of the city. The city

has a large proportion of completely white Spanish descendants, not found in Mexico; and a large number of expensive, well kept-up cars in the city (Mercedes, Cadillacs) confirm the presence of this still-powerful white elite.

The county has had an unbelievable number of revolutions and changes of government. Their major revolution was in 1944 (much later than in Mexico, though independence from Spain came at about the same time). The second president of the revolution was Arbenz, who was overthrown by Arbas in 1954, since the former's government was supposedly infiltrated by the Communist Party. This was believed to have involved the C.I.A. and the United Fruit Co, of the U.S.A., since Arbenz intended to expropriate and divide up all land-holdings above a certain size. His other controversial policy, also supposedly C.P.-inspired, was the formation of a Workers` Militia as a competitor to the regular army. Ever since the Arbenz overthrow the country has been in a political crisis.

The present president has been in power one and one half years, has apparently killed about 20,000 people, inhabitants of a whole village who gave food to the guerrillas. The guerrillas are apparently all but wiped out, but the legend is continued by the government to create fear, and to justify any further slaughter which they may desire. Heavily-armed soldiers are numerous in the city, and the conspicuous lack of long-haired males seems a part of the repressive regime. No-one is allowed into the country with long hair. The president of the country receives the highest official salary of any country's presidency – and undergoes the highest risk of assassination.

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**March 12, 1972**

The Museum of Popular Art in Guatemala City shows examples of contemporary Indian arts and crafts. Looking at these raised a number of complicated questions in my mind about cultural fusion. Ideally, I would like to undertake a deep psychological analysis of Maya art, then trace the changes in Indian art from the time of the Conquest on, showing the relationship of these changes to psychological influences and adjustment.

Firstly, it is obvious from the post-Conquest Christian art that the high culture of the Maya was completely destroyed. The distinctive Maya characteristics which continued were those of the common people, so there is the problem of relating facets of one class of a single society with another. It is evident that high Maya art was confined to an elite of the priests, rulers and artists, so that little of this remained once the Spanish removed the elite from power and changed the religion.

The aspect of the indigenous artistic character that survived most noticeably is the skillful use of bright, simple colours in combination. This is the only thing in common between the old decorated Maya pottery and the paintings in the Popular Arts Museum. The Indians were and are highly attuned to colour, in contrast and balance. These paintings have a sophistication and a childlikeness simultaneously, found elsewhere only in Gauguin and perhaps Modigliani. Most interesting are the biblical paintings, for example, of the Magi on camels gracefully walking past the Egyptian pyramids. There is a strangeness, a mystical quality quite different from any Oriental styles, or from any European imitations of Oriental styles. The simple brightness and eternal feeling in it bring one to the Middle East without there being a trace of Middle Eastern culture in it. The kings look more like Indians than Chinese or Arabs.

Other paintings had an other-worldly, phantastic quality, similar to Chinese garden pictures with exotic flowers and birds, and yet again there was nothing Chinese about it. It was nearer Gauguin than anything else (and in some ways like Rousseau).

We saw some dolls dressed in the costumes for the "Dance of the Conquistadores". This was most interesting, for here you have Spanish costume and appearance as seen through Indian eyes. They portrayed the Spanish coloured gowns with Indian materials - brightly coloured and covered in sequins. And the Spanish hats had quetzal feathers, making them look ultimately more Indian than Spanish. Some masks of European faces presented extraordinary caricatures. This phenomenon is like Tchaikovsky attempting to use a "Chinese" genre of music in the "Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy", or Verdi's attempt to create an Egyptian atmosphere in "Aida". The allusions are more evident to a westerner than to a Chinaman or Egyptian, who would probably find the music typically European!

There were some religious figures made out of clay. A group composing the Mystery from Antigua had a Christ in a cradle, the representation of his halo looking exceedingly like a Maya head-dress. Generally, these clay figures were lifeless, with a frozen doll-like quality; this stiffness resembled the very old Indian figurines of the Cuicuilco or pre-Maya culture, and completely lacked the balance, movement and excitement of Maya high culture.

Most of the "art" of the Christian-Indian amalgam is shoddy and tinselly, very disappointing when contrasted with the art of these people's ancestors. Superior is their work with embroidery and materials, presumably because this would have been well-diffused into all strata of Maya society rather than being confined to an elite which was eliminated by the Conquest.

## **Peten province, Guatemala & Copan, Honduras**

The pyramids and temples of Tikal are huge, imposing buildings, in contrast to the smaller, more peaceful temple at Copan. The latter has a wonderful arch, constructed by making successive blocks project further toward the centre until they meet at the top. The steles from Tikal are very intricate designs and symbols in bass relief, whereas those from Copan are three-dimensional statues of gods. What is fascinating about the latter is that the backgrounds to the figures are composed of symbolic phenomena - faces, animals and designs. Faces will appear out of legs or leaves, not on a flat surface but carved deep into the stone, with many hollowed-out areas. The original colours of the Copan steles are still evident – bright reds, greens and yellows. Apparently the temples at Tikal were all painted red before – the sight of a completely red temple-city deep in the green sweltering jungle is fantastic to imagine. At the time, Copan was inhabited by the Maya (approx. 400 AD – 800 AD) the terrain was apparently jungle too, but now it is dry with light vegetation.

At both places there is the most exquisitely beautiful pottery, and also bones decorated and carved with very refined designs, and scenes of human activities. One small bone at Tikal showed a boat with eight beings in it – the most extraordinary collection of individuals imaginable, half imaginary animal and half human. The carvings at Copan of humans had bolder, more symmetrical forms than those we saw at Guatemala City and Tikal. Distinctive were the symbols of authority in several statues, with the men clasping their chests. Also at Copan was the tortoise-god of water, with a most horrific face and claws. Water must have been a great problem although there is a small river at Copan. At Tikal, the Maya had to collect rain-water in man-made reservoirs. How they survived there before they reached a stage of civilization that could organize such constructions is a mystery.

Other statues at Copan showed remarkable contrasts – there was a stone bat, with spread wings and revealing a very accurate anatomy of the fingers and the thumb which forms the webbed wing; its face contained more evil than I have ever seen in a statue. On the other hand, there were faces full of kindness and Buddha-like serenity. Many figures were seated in the lotus-position. We also saw for the first time very heavy stone structures shaped like iron magnets that were put around the neck before praying. And, of course, we

saw the stone utensils used for grinding maize (made of volcanic rock), which look exactly like the modern ones we saw for sale in the market of Jocotan the day before.

We walked in the jungle near Tikal and saw monkeys in the trees - once several were in a tree right over our heads. On one occasion, Marlene saw a jaguar run across the road. The Maya were evidently impressed with the jaguar (as evidenced by carvings) just as the Egyptians were impressed by the lion and the Hindus by the tiger. The largest member of the cat family is always the king of the jungle (or savannah) for man. We were told by a half-Mayan archeological worker that the largest temple at Tikal is mistakenly called the temple to the Jaguar. He maintained that the jaguar was simply the emblem for the city of Tikal, as the lion is for England, and the maple-leaf for Canada, and that the jaguar-motifs found in the temple had a secular significance.

The little village of Tikal is a nasty place. The people are not indigenous to Peten, but have come like vultures to make money from the tourists. Around the air-strip are hotels and restaurants charging exorbitant prices for bad service, and this spoils the sanctity of such great edifices to Man's greatness. It has been made a big tourist attraction, which has not happened to Copan yet, although we saw surveyors on a spot of land right by the latter's ruins, preparing for a motel to be built. It is sad that economic development means the destruction of something sacred. On the practical level, it raises the question as to who has the right to prevent or allow private individuals to build hotels, etc. Who is to judge whether a new building is an eyesore in a glorious haven, or the one good idea in otherwise drab surroundings?

Most of Peten is dense jungle, which is slowly being eaten into. Now there is a road right through it, connecting Guatemala to Belize. More people (mestizos) are coming, and are burning the jungle to grow maize. Apparently, the government is selling large areas of land specifically to Americans and Canadians, in the hope that the area will become highly productive through foreign investment. The Indians who live on the land in jungle clearings (and live externally to the national economy) will be ignored or kicked out.

We stayed in a little village called Yshbobo south of Tikal. The indigenous people are Kekchi Indian (these and the Maya constitute the indigenous people of Peten) but some mestizos have moved there recently. One day, after walking in the jungle, Marlene and I came back separately. Marlene got lost and went to a Kekchi household for help. They showed her to the road but were obviously confused by her behavior (she was showing anxiety!), and since only one man could speak a little Spanish, communication was difficult.

The next day they came to the house we were staying in and told our hosts that we were insane and bad people; even after lengthy explanation they were not altogether convinced, and wanted to fetch the army from a military post 20-30 miles away.

This is similar to a story we heard in Chiapas. About 15 years ago, a young American artist had wandered into the country north of San Cristobal to find an Indian village. He arrived in the afternoon while the men were working in the fields. Finding children there, he started to play with them and in his enthusiasm acted like a dog, getting on his hands and feet and barking. When the men returned, the women informed them of the arrival of a man who was possessed of the spirit of a dog, and who had been harming the children. Presumably through fear, the men put the poor artist to death.

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Often in Latin America we have been sitting somewhere, waiting for a ride or enjoying the countryside, and people have come up to us and simply sat with us. If one were to think in a European way, one might feel nervous if a conversation did not seem to be forthcoming, but with these people it is not necessary always to talk. They do not necessarily expect you to stay anything. We often remark on how the people are just Being. When we have stayed with simple people in small villages, we have found the daily routine wonderfully relaxing. The reason is that the external activities of making tortillas, feeding the pigs etc., never upset the "beingness" of the people. That is constant, and the other things just float over them. They are exactly the same in the morning, in the middle of the day and after dark. The time of day and what they happen to be doing do not jolt their inner calmness, and we have felt this and benefitted from these people enormously.

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It is interesting to look at the jungle in terms of the advantages and disadvantages it holds as an environment for the emergence of civilization. In the modern day, it is thought of as impenetrable, hostile, infested with disease and dangerous animals, difficult for communications. But for primitive man it holds great advantages. Usually it has rivers, and even in Peten which has few, the rainfall is high. There is ample material for building houses and implements. Most important, tropical jungle has the most luxuriant vegetation of any geographical type. For someone who knows the jungle, it is impossible to starve. There are berries, fruits, certain leaves and even the wood of some trees that can be eaten; this is not to mention the animal life. Once I looked into the dense jungle from a maize

field that had been cleared out of it, and I compared the profusion of organic life on the one hand, living on every level above the ground, with the single level of maize in the field, relatively so thin, showing brown soil between each plant. The jungle is rich, and I am sure Enrique was correct in advocating the use of the jungle as an ecological environment, by growing the right kinds of trees simultaneously with bushes and soil or sub-soil vegetables.

And the jungle is cool. Where the sun is so hot that exposure to it would leave everyone lethargic, the jungle provides continuous shade. Lastly, the jungle abounds in herbs, incences etc., which are important for the development of “sophistication” in cultures; also, it is rich in medicinal herbs, etc., which are genuinely effective cures in many cases. The Maya had and still have prescriptions for every kind of infection and illness.

**From Central America to Colombia – Medellin  
4 1972**

**April**

It was on a hot afternoon in Flores that we walked into a wonderful sight. A very small boy was lying by the side of the road with his arms entwined in those of a friend about the same size as him. The friend was a spider monkey. We stopped and looked at them; soon the boy sat up and the monkey came over to Marlene who had sat down. After pulling at her bag, he very deliberately and seriously lifted up her bright red skirt and had a long look at what was revealed. The boy looked on nonchalantly. Then the monkey started to climb on some criss-cross bars on the outside of a window. The boy began to climb too; once when the monkey got in his way, he gave it a firm but still playful punch which nearly made the poor thing lose its balance. The reprisal came fast; approaching from over the top of the bars, the monkey gave the boy a hearty push. His retreat was superbly rapid, it was absolutely as if he knew the boy was peeved. The latter started to make after it, but thought better of it when the monkey was clearly out of striking distance.

The boy then fell back into his calm nonchalance, while the monkey climbed around him un-selfconsciously. “Su amigo?” we asked the boy, pointing at the monkey. He nodded.

On the other side of the road was an ice-cream vendor sitting in the shade soporifically. Marlene was suddenly struck with an idea. She went over to him and asked for two ice-creams. The monkey had skipped across the road after her, so she merely pointed at it to

explain to the vendor that one was for the money. He nodded quite casually, and handed the goods to the skinny fellow. Marlene gave the other to the boy, and they ate their ice-creams together, the boy slightly less messily than his friend, who dropped it on the ground from time to time, and did not seem to notice it dripping on his foot.

The whole thing happened matter-of-factly with no quizzical smiles from anybody. When the ice-creams had been devoured, we said goodbye and went away.

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The mountains of Honduras are of a softer, rounder form than elsewhere in Central America. Toward dusk this softness is continued into the sky, which is tinted with the palest pink and blue imaginable. Such was the background for Lake Yojoa, when we drove past it one afternoon at twilight. The water was shimmery and almost white, it seemed as if it must have had the texture of silk.

Little wonder that the Maya people had a legend about a white goddess, Nikte-ha, who was born in a bed of lilies in this lake. She was the daughter of the god of water, and was not to be touched by any mortal. There was one prince who could not resist her. His punishment for touching that which is exquisite beauty, for trying to possess that which is beyond possession, was death by drowning.

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The trip from San José to the top of the nearby volcano, Irazu, in Costa Rica, took us through the same climatic changes that we would have experienced had we journeyed from San José to Greenland. We drove through the sub-tropical vegetation of the valley San José is in, with its fairly dense, dark green foliage, interspersed with trees of brilliant yellow, pink or red blossoms. As we ascended, it grew cooler; the trees and bushes were characteristic of a temperate climate. We saw men working in the potato fields, and the countryside looked remarkably like Ireland, were it not for the wide-rimmed hats covering rugged earth-brown faces, and the painted wagons drawn by oxen.

Further up, cultivation ceased, and wisps of mist played in between moss-covered trees. Perpetually damp here, mosses grew everywhere, even on the wooden posts by the side of the road; and dew-drops emitted a dulled twinkle in the lazy sunlight. Soon even these trees disappeared, giving over to a complete tundra landscape – the plants no higher than six inches to a foot.

Occasionally a bright-coloured flower would appear like a lost star in the chilly barrenness.

At the rim of the crater we peered into the strangest view of our lives. A desolate inorganic terrain stretched in front of us, up to where it was engulfed in thick mist. The volcanic dust crunched silently underfoot; so light were the particles that each footstep gave rise to what looked like a puff of smoke. The hillocks in the crater had been carved by the wind into shapes like miniature Saharan sand-dunes, with soft curling lines and curves. Suddenly we would come up to a ridge and look down into an inverted cone, mysterious and seductive. We looked along a ridge and saw curls of mist flick over its edge. In the complete silence, with not even the sound of wind, I felt a shudder of excitement at the realization that this was a lifeless world – no birds, no flowers, not even a leaf or scrap of wood. Only the bare elements were there, as the mist formed droplets in our faces and hair.

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The small towns of Central America, on the main roads at any rate, completely lack the aesthetic charm of Mexican *pueblos*. Almost without exception, the villages in Honduras and Nicaragua (that are situated on the Inter-American highway) and some of those in Guatemala, are shoddy scrap-heaps made up of gasoline stations, dumped vehicles, and corrugated iron shacks. Even the wooden shacks are distinctly unattractive. It made me feel that Mexico, being an older and more settled culture, has a sensibility less vulnerable to the onslaught of the combustion engine and corrugated iron.

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Tegucigalpa can only be described by one word – crazy! Nowhere else have I ever seen portable restaurants serving (good) food at benches and tables actually in the roads, so that you can sip chicken soup and sweet strong coffee while the monster-like buses pour black smoke into your face and shatter your ear-drums. The streets run higgledy-piggledy, with the oddest assortments of architectural styles plonked next to one another. Sometimes the houses are battered wrecks, sometimes they have quaint shapes like one that was triangular and filled the space between a fork in the road. At other times, they are imposing and beautiful; each category however provides plenty to wonder at.

San José is cleaner and more organized. It seemed the “best” North American imitation up to that point, in the sense that the flashing lights of advertisements, etc., did not jar ridiculously with everything else going on around. Rather things were neat and the

“Americanism” seemed to have been adjusted and now used according to Costa Rican taste.

I had not yet seen Medellin, for that is verily a city of the New World. Much quieter and dignified than the capitals of Guatemala or Mexico; it has lofty sky-scrapers and a panorama at night challenging that of Boston (but not yet New York!). I could conceivably live there for a while, which is the first time I have so felt in a city this size in Latin America.

Barranquilla, on the other hand, was like an unbroken U.S. ghetto. Large badly kept-up houses and messy streets seemed in keeping with a sea-port. So did the dark bars and night-clubs and the warnings about pick-pockets. Yet if it looked as sorry as a ghetto, it did not feel so. In the bar I went to people were having fun, smiling and enjoying the incredibly loud music. The music, by the way, was something very unexpected – the Carribean coast of Colombia has a large number of black people, and this music was a mixture of Calypso rhythms and the weirdest jazz. Wherever black Africans went or were taken, they injected something indefinable into music and life-style. Spontaneity, rhythm, and an involvement of either intense happiness (as in calypsos) or intense sadness (as in blues): – these various facets make up that thing, perhaps best called “soul”. I could recognize it that night in Barranquilla even though I was unacquainted with the style, and it moved me along with it from right inside myself.

**THE ANDES – Popayan, Silvia**

**April 16, 1972**

Huge green valleys, peaks that pierce a sky that is nearly always white, grey or silver, torrential mountain rivers that are one minute sparkling and clear, the next muddy brown after a sudden deluge, but which change (chameleon-like) back to transparency within hours of the downfall; this is the Andes, a magnificent but rather sad setting for four and a half centuries of mingling and conflict between Spaniard and Indian.

Popayan is grand but pretty too. Rows of joined houses are the same whiteness as the grandiose cathedral and churches, blending delicately with the cloudy sky. Some of the houses have carved wooden doors, some have wrought-iron gates, while others have the crests of old Spanish families over the doors. The most striking work of art that I saw here was a large wood-carved side altar in the church of San Francisco. Otherwise the altars were decorated in gold-leaf or gold paint, not very differently from others in Latin America.

The colonial art museums had the usual collection of dowdy embroidered cloaks, second-rate madonnas and lifeless statues. The art of the two centuries following the Conquest certainly fell into a sorry state; imitations of a style that without the original spark became over-ornate, and in the case of the crucifixes, thoroughly morbid. With the passion gone, one is left with the institutionalized celebration of a holy murder. There were two interesting items, however; one was a bright painting of Christ bidding Lazarus to rise from his bed, the movements of which were impelling. The other was a crib scene painted by the indigenous people of the region shortly after the Conquest. Simple in line, colour and content, this had an aura of pathetic holiness.

As usual, I was more interested in the pre-Colombian items. The people of Inza (called in the museum the “Tierradentro”) made deformed heads presumably equivalent to the deformations they brought about on human infants by pressing on the soft skull with wooden boards. The Tumaco made extraordinary asymmetrically disfigured heads; for instance, one ear would be normal, the other extended in a weird shape. One edge of the mouth would be flat, the other edge turned-up.

The Quimbayo people made large sitting figures with the body and head completely flat, the eyes and mouth represented by thin flat slits. There were also some cylindrical seals from these people, probably for marking property and thereby transferring “mana”. After being dipped in some coloured liquid, they were rolled on a surface where the pattern would appear. The Patia and Caluna people made “anthropomorphic vases” – shaped as heads, or just a pair of legs terminating at the waist which was the rim of the vase.

Near Silvia is the village of the Guambian Indians. The land they work now has been only recently given to them by the Colombian government. Their village is about 11,000 feet up and it rains most days of the year. Obviously mud-brick houses of the usual variety or wooden huts would be unsatisfactory in this climate, so they make houses of mud-brick which are then white-washed heavily. They look as if they are made of stone, and the whole village is pretty and looks quite affluent.

I was in Silvia for the Sunday of the presidential elections. In the morning, everyone was dressed in his Sunday-best, the white and mestizo people in black suits and ties, the Guambian Indians in clean blue “dresses” (male and female), blue or black cloaks (called *gabardinas*) and black hats rather like bowlers. They milled around the central plaza quietly, whilst armed soldiers, brought in from the barracks at Popayan, stood near the election tables to keep order if necessary. But in this town, surrounded by the Andean hills

and overlooked by a lovely church with a pink façade on one hill-top, I certainly could not see any signs of the renowned Colombian political fervour.

Later I walked up the Río Piendamó, above the rushing noise of which I could only just hear the bird calls. I walked to where I was surrounded by hills. Frequently it would rain, and only once for about five minutes did I see a light blue sky between the clouds. While sheltering from the rain, I stood under a tree and watched the water drip from leaf to leaf and finally form drops on the ends of twigs. Beautiful flowers on bushes were drenched in rain, through which the mountain tops were barely visible.

In a break in the rain, I would walk on again in silence broken only by birds – then I would hear the gushing sound of a hidden gully, water splashing its way through breaks in the grass-covered earth.

Finally I walked back, until around the edge of a hill appeared a house that I had taken as a landmark when I left the road. Soon a telegraph pole appeared too, and the charm was broken - I had to stiffen myself again to go back into “the world”.

**QUITO, ECUADOR**  
**1972**

**March 23,**

It occurred to me in the last few days that with a Latin American city you are watching a process having a great many similarities with the England of about 130 years ago. In the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, people flock to the towns, creating an oversubscribed labour-market and bad housing. Although there has been response to slums, to such city planning and building projects as there are, these are of course behind the need and inadequate. Rural habits of hygiene have not had time to adapt to the small town in some cases, let alone the city. *Lark Rise*, by Flora Thompson, describes the English rural common people as late as 1870-80. Their “privy” was a hole in the ground. And the horror of the more sensitive English individuals of the upper and middle classes (such as Dickens, Engels or Blake) gives an idea of the cities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. An industrial economy just starting cannot (or has not yet been able to) give adequate wages and public services quick enough to prevent the rural migrants sinking into a deplorable living condition. There is a drop because much more is required in a city than in the country materially and because of

the time needed for psychological adjustment. We have met large numbers of drunks in the cities, but none in the country. A more pleasant aspect in a city like this is its delightfulness; I saw an image of 19<sup>th</sup> century London in a cobbled street in Pasto: wagons and carts drawn by oxen and horses, stalls along the sides of straw-covered streets. In Quito I saw an entertaining pedlar of the sort that existed in Olde England and was a leading character in Fellini's film "La Strada". This man was enraging a rattlesnake and doing other tricks. A small boy was getting things out of a big black bag. The man talked at the top of his voice about his feats and popped a hat in front of the people watching.

This evening I walked past an official of a bank who was telling a peasant family that they could not sell baskets of alfalfa outside it. They had been told every day for four days that they could not do it there. The peasants were pleading and the official kept on explaining, then he would put his fingers in his ears and shake his head, or walk off spinning a whistle around his fingers. He was doing it kindly I thought; I was sorry for him and the peasants. I was the clash of two epochs in a microcosm.

As in the English 19<sup>th</sup> century, people still go to church here. I went to a Vespers and watched the people come and go in Quito's cathedral. Sometimes people walked in very hurriedly and sometimes very casually. They would go past the fantastic gold and wood side-altars, cross themselves quickly and nod at the prophet or saint depicted in the centre painting. The breakdown of institutional or ritual religion in North-West Europe, and to a lesser extent North America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is of course the major factor involved in their social alienation (not denying that religion itself may be seen as a form of alienation). The emotions directed by a church can be put into so much greater things, but never have the masses been at a point where they can do this; hence, the communal involvement, security, belief in a sacred structure of the universe, and the feeling of spiritual beauty are all just cut and hung loose.

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The Spanish priests at the time of the Conquest were really very like the priestly cast in Ancient Egypt. They sanctified the royal conquests (on a chapel at Quito I saw a picture of San Vicente blessing the royal family of Spain), helped in the psychological part of human conquest, justified the state's acts with a divine significance, undertook the scholastic education of a small elite, and bound together tradition and law by their interpretation of ancient writings. One picture in the same chapel had angels and monks carrying old scrolls and tomes, rather like the Egyptian scribes depicted on tomb walls.

Other interesting paintings in this chapel were of San Vincent preaching to the Jews and in another to the Persians. In both cases the hearers were braking down in the recognition of their evilness, and praying to God for mercy. The Rabbis were looking at Hebrew scrolls in horror or throwing them away in dramatic renunciation.

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At Sibundoy, I went for enchanted walks through the land where the Sibundoges live. Some mestizo peasants who were very kind and invited me for coffee and a meal told me they were “very good people, just been civilized by the fathers”. I thought of the hideous process of breaking in a Neolithic community, with its very rich and entrenched culture, into a semi-Europeanized society with its Christianized morality. But looking at a Sibondoge man, in a rather Roman-looking tunic, and carrying a large machetti, I felt there was plenty of untamed wildness there, that the priests had not been able to take out so quickly.

On a bus from Pasto to Sibundoy, we went very high into flat mountain tops. Here there was no cultivation, so signs of man, and the things growing felt wild. Frantic trees shoved and squirmed to exist. I had the most incredible sense of the untamed force to survive amongst the tremendous obstacles to life. With complete lack of order, one kind of plant spilled into another, and each turn in the mountains offered a new vista. There were no hedges and neat lines, just crazed life bursting through. Then it seemed as if men, with their curling dirt-track and their bus heaving and creaking slowly over the huge landscape, were like batches of maggots emerging from inside a melon, and wandering over its surface. Man was struggling too, just to survive on this inorganic sphere, which so unconcernedly can swallow up living things in earthquakes or mountain slides. Like ants, men had created little dwelling places in the valleys, and were able to seep life out of the land. And like ants, they would crawl from one safe valley to another.

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The mountains offer so much variety. Areas differ in the shapes of the slopes, and the size of typical physical features. Over this surface, each layer of vegetation comes and spreads a new blanket, varying in exact response to the changes in the basis. Lastly, man comes. The possibilities of his existence are dictated by the accumulated opportunities or obstacles built up by the processes before him.

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The tombs at San André were probably a communal burying ground of a Neolithic settlement. There were no signs of differentiated graves for different classes. This was a culture not yet arrived at the stage of temple-city development, where the elite of priests, rulers and specialists monopolized on precautions for immortality. The art-work was primitive too, and coarsely carved faces were on the walls to scare away spirits. Regular patterns of red and black lines showed some aesthetic leanings within rigid stereotyped designs. Probably these were magically involved in the whole enterprise. There was a hole between two tombs for the souls to move to and fro and meet friends or relatives in the afterlife. This hole was about the size and shape I would have guessed a soul would be if asked, an oval about 1 foot by 2 feet!

At San Agustín the statues were of a larger community more advanced artistically and probably having a chief or corn-king. The latter was possibly also a god, since the recurring figure of a man with canines like a sabre-toothed tiger was always depicted with the protection of two fierce warriors, holding stone clubs high. If a god, his beneficence had to be maintained by letting him know that these mortals were protecting him.

Exciting and unique to me in Stone or Bronze Age art was the use of nature as a starting block or canvas. The actual rocks in a natural waterfall were carved into figures of people, toads and demons. One rock on dry land was left mostly untouched. A single portion of it was carved into the face and forearms of a huge frog or toad, continuing the shape suggested by the rock.

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When I walked out of the Quito cathedral, a man came up to me and, a little aggressively I think, asked me if I was Catholic or Protestant, and whether I liked the cathedral. Then he said that they (the people of Ecuador) were Catholics and it was their church. When I said yes and nodded, showing him I appreciate these things, he warmed to me. When he left, he wanted to give me two Sucres. Obviously, I had without realizing it shown a respect for something important to him in a way that was necessary for him to be convinced of it. I noticed in the cathedral during Vespers that I was not regarded strangely if I stood still or sat, but that I would be if I just strolled around.

On two occasions, a little boy has run up to me in the street and offered me some money (from his mother perhaps, somewhere out of sight). They must have thought I was in difficulties and they tactfully wanted to help.

Travelling, especially if you are going fast, shoots you into new human situations one after another. You just begin to get a feeling of one, then you are into another. Each one could be fascinating for months, and many more in any country are missed altogether. It is like constantly taking a snippet of information, like flipping through an encyclopedia.

Now I am coming to feel this, it is time for me to stop travelling, I thought today of how different these months would have been if we had just stayed at Socorro and Jesus's village in Mexico.

## **IQUITOS, THE AMAZON AND THE JUNGLE 1972**

**May 9,**

In the three or four hour flight from Chiclayo to Iquitos, I crossed over the coastal desert, which is barren rock and sand right up to the sea and often devoid of vegetation. Then I was over the Andes and could see that huge landscape from above, from where it looked as solemn and overbearing as on the ground. There was a portion of the eastern foothills that was jungle-covered, then we were flying right over lowland jungle. When I looked straight downwards, I could see a moving reflection of the sun in between the trees; they grow out of deep water. The rivers form huge loops, bends and cut-off lagoons, and this landscape continues forever. Iquitos, from the air, was no more than a dot in this vastness; I never forgot that as long as I was in the town.

Iquitos is an island. The jungle all around is an inundated swamp, a hybrid that is neither land nor water. It cannot be walked over, nor can one get very far from the river by canoe. It must be the most impassable terrain in the world. In Iquitos, you know you cannot go very far except by plane or boat; if you walk out of the town, you soon come to water. Houses try to spread beyond the dry island, being built high up on stilts. Belen is a town of several thousand people which is built high up on stilts. Belen is a town of several thousand people which is built entirely in the river, floating on log-rafts. It is a remarkably organized, clean metropolis in water; the water smells quite fresh and the "streets" are straight. Women can be seen washing clothes from a canoe or cooking on a fire inches above the water.

There is a paradoxical feeling about the town. There is the feeling of isolation, at the same time as a feeling of being very much in contact with the whole world. Ocean-going ships come here and return to New York non-stop. By the docks are shipping companies dealing with cargos destined for remote countries. Very fancy import shops sell materials, furniture and perfumes in an ostentatious manner. The number of such shops attests a relatively large affluent class here. Often these shops have placards outside on which is written: “just arrived”, with a list of treasured items unloaded from a recent boat.

Half an hour’s paddling in a canoe from one of the many ports will take you into wild, untouched (and untouchable) jungle. Ants crawl frantically over the vegetation – very quickly the canoe will be full of them if you leave the paddle near plants or trees. Sometimes a large area of vegetation will look like dry land, until a motor boat passes whose ripples set the whole carpet moving with the surface of the water.

Movement is slow, silent and dignified on this vast river. Its smaller tributaries are as wide as the Thames in London. The tempo of existence is set by this, which is a difficult adjustment to make.

Never have I seen skies so large and with such colours! At different times of the day there are large areas of translucent blue, green, magenta, pink, purple, silver or white. At sunset particularly, the world is double – the still river reflects everything above it.

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**May 27,1972**

In Iquitos, I took Hyawaska, an hallucinogenic extract of a plant root that is used by the Indian tribes of Loreto. I went several times to the house of a witch-doctor, an old Indian woman who gave it to a group of people at midnight. It is not considered safe to take in the heat of the day. At exactly midnight, the rituals began. Everyone present was silent while the woman mixed potions, made humming sounds and soft motions with her hands. Then she summoned each person one by one to come and sit in front of her. She gave each a carefully measured portion of the Hyawaska, then hummed gently and blew smoke over each person’s head, down his back and behind her own back. She dabbed perfumes of herbs over the forehead. Among the bottles of herbs there was a jar of Old Spice aftershave lotion. This and her ritual use of cigarette smoke was a wonderful example of a tribal village tradition becoming modified in a town, upon contact with “civilization”. Among the signs she used was the Catholic crossing of the breast.

She bade each one of us sit quietly and allow the drug to make us calm, and meditate. Once it was working on everybody, she would come over to certain individuals, hum and blow smoke around them. At another time, she beckoned me over to sit by her. Very softly she said to me in Spanish: “Be calm, don’t talk (I had been talking a little with someone near me), let your heart rest. Feel God within you and within everyone and everything else. Let the God within you expand and meet the God in all else, till it becomes one.”

The woman’s humming and movements were as soft and gentle as the effect the drug was having (clear and high – not at all “chemical”), and were in complete accord with the direction we were to move in the spirit. The rituals seemed after a while not as something quaint and interesting, but as something profound and warming, intimate and close.

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Iquitos is full of crazy people. There was an American who had so many unfortunate experiences in Peru that he had lost equilibrium, and took to insulting Peru to everyone and thereby landing up in endless squabbles. There were those who were waiting for Copisa, a one-aircraft airline that flew monkeys, parrots and people to Miami. Normally it flew once a week, but at that time it had not flown for a month because it had failed to pass an inspection and was awaiting parts to arrive from Chicago. The people who had tickets were told each day it would fly tomorrow, and were gradually succumbing to the strain. Most of them had little or no money, as they had planned on this cheap escape from South America to get them to their home country just in time. Finally, the thing went bankrupt after losing 5 weeks of fares, and it even seemed that the people would get no refund. Interviews with governors, prefects and military officials eventually provoked anguished telegrams to Lima from where the money blessedly appeared.

There was a little Italian with long hair who ate one egg a day, had no money and no possessions. There was a Costa Rican who approached an American I knew in the street with a diamond he wanted to sell. My friend said he knew nothing about diamonds and therefore would not know if it were genuine or if it were, how much it was worth. Whereupon the Costa Rican, with an amazement tainted with contempt, shouted, “And how many years at school did you do? In Costa Rica children who have had four years of school know where France, Germany and England are, and you, after all your education, know nothing about diamonds!”

And there was a Peruvian schoolteacher whose classes I took one morning, who taught English and loved to use English slang. He would avidly get us to write down any colloquial expressions whether ghetto American, hip lingo, London cockney or whatever, which he would then use to death, literally dragging their usage in by the hair. Once when I met him in the street with a girl, he pointed to her and said, “I am putting the make on this chick”.

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I flew to Leticia in a seaplane, a military flight providing cheap transportation for civilians in the jungle regions of Peru. I flew very low and I saw the jungle and the river even closer than before.

Leticia is a neat and tidy little place. The people are most friendly and relatively affluent – it has very nice little shops. Communications are excellent too, considering the nearest significant place in the same country is Bogotá, a thousand miles away. Popular music and announcements are given out from a loud-speaker at the top of the church spire. It is a military post (there is great concern for the invisible lines in the jungle at this junction of Peru, Colombia and Brazil), and the people get their income largely from contraband.

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A beautiful boat-ride took me to Benjamin Constant. The boat went among Indian canoes and houses on stilts, and everyone on the “recreo” (bus-boat) was happy in the warm sun and cooling breeze.

Benjamin Constant was smaller, altogether funkier, older and more isolated than Leticia. When I went to the governor to show my passport (this is Brazil) we could hardly talk above the thumping and singing of a poor individual in a dismal dungeon next to the office. At first, I thought he was some criminal being treated in a disgusting way (his cell had no light, and smelt like a pigsty), but then I found out he was nuts. He has flipped out on a petroleum-topography boat on which he had been working, and had been tied down after smashing all the plates on board. He was being kept temporarily in this cell until other accommodation could be found. In fact, no criminal had inhabited the cell for years.

Benjamin was a beautiful calm, happy place. A wooden wharf continued into a street on dry land bordered with wooden houses, shops and restaurants on stilts. A couple of streets ran perpendicular to the main one; these were mostly submerged while I was there and

little boys took you up and down in canoes. I spent hours situating around just watching the people peaceably doing nothing or working, sometimes chatting with them. On the wharf, I would see a boat come in with a day's catch just before dusk, and people with rolled-up trousers would walk along precariously balanced planks to get to the boat and buy some fish. All around the boat, little boys would swim and splash and show off to the girls standing on the wharf, who would scream with laughter at each idiocy. Behind, on the horizon, would reign a sublime, indescribable sunset.

There was a travelling circus in town. No animals, but they had tight-rope walking, acrobatics, fire-breathing, clowns and a dwarf. The group was Colombian, and they lived (about 15 of them) in a very small boat moored at the wharf. That was a sight! The thing was spread-eagled with drying clothes; chickens strutted and a very lively monkey pranced around on the roof. Pots and pans hung or lay everywhere, and at all times of the day someone was frying plantains, while the rest, especially the dwarf, fooled around and teased one another.

I spent a couple of nights in a deserted hut right in the jungle a couple of hours' walk from Benjamin. Here was blissful quietness but for the strange cries of birds, and the singing of insects. When I walked past a house very often the people would ask me in for a cup of coffee, their faces beaming with smiles. Their friendliness was overflowing, I was dazed. The emotions I felt in this place gave me an almost painful, wondrous feeling, like a lump in the throat.

From Benjamin, I took a boat to Manaus. If I had thought the people in Iquitos were crazy, I did not know what was in store for me on this boat. After several delays and false departures that turned out only to be trips to the other side of the river or back followed by a few more hours' wait, the boat left. It had a barge tied to its side which was full of wood and a broken-down tractor; other cargo included empty oil drums, bananas, coca-cola bottles and two giant turtles, one of which was banished to a latrine which made the latter extremely difficult to use since the animal filled all the ground space. I felt sorry for this poor turtle, since the place stank either of what would be expected in a lavatory, or else of a pungent disinfectant that it was doused in once a day.

Among the passengers was a group of soldiers returning from their border post. These were very rowdy oafs who made mealtimes an ordeal. The cook brought to the table one big plate of rice, one of beans and one of gristly meat each mealtime (supper was without the beans), and once this had been devoured no amount of pleading would procure more. The

fellow diners grabbed at what there was in such a way that after one hungry day I had to agree to behave like a pig or else starve. When I complained of not getting a share of food these characters laughed; for the rest of the trip, my hunger was a stock joke. However, before the journey was over, I came to like every single one of those motherfuckers.

Sometimes the boat would stop for no apparent reason. If this was at or after dusk, the boat would be descended on by a blanket of mosquitoes. One night after stopping at Te Fe, we were informed that the boat would not leave till the next morning, supposedly because there was something wrong with the propeller; but I think it was because the crew was drunk and everyone felt like going to a dance in the town. A strange Belgian doctor on the boat got some of us into the dance free. The girls were very beautiful and everyone was very drunk and happy. Two good companions on the boat were Argentinians - they had not a penny but had been travelling for months. With their fast tongues and wit they got free boat rides, air flights, meals and even free board in hotels.

For seven days and nights the boat ploughed along this enormous river, sometimes a mile wide; at other times it took us through narrow straits between islands. For seven days and nights the scenery was water, jungle and sky, yet it was different and unique every moment. In the heat of the day, the water would sparkle and the trees would glisten. While it was raining, the water would be pock-marked, the trees would be dripping and the sky a dull grey. In the early morning, the banks would be shrouded in mist; at night they would be monotonous, somber silhouettes. During the day, the sky might be a delicious blue and white, then, from a distance, a grey sheet would approach the boat, the water troubled. Once-two-three crash! The storm would be upon us like the vengeance of Heaven. Within minutes, we would re-emerge from the dismal grey into translucent, shimmering sunlight. When this happened at night we would get soaked asleep on the deck. Shelter was not forthcoming except for those with cabins, since the sides were open and the rain tore in almost at right-angles.

Often we would see huge dolphins lunging above the water surface. Birds would squawk as they flew in front of the boat. Then at sunset! I might turn my head or raise my eyes and feel I was beholding the presence of God Almighty Himself.

We would go sometimes a whole day without seeing signs of Man. At other times, there would be little groups of wooden huts on stilts or on an outcrop of dry land. The ports that we stopped at – Amataura, Fonte Boa, Te Fe and many others, were slow, sleepy affairs, composed of crumbling stone buildings and decadent old boats. When we drew in, the

people from the town would come and sit around near the boat. Some of us would swim and fool around with the local lads, or chat to the pretty girls.

One afternoon, we were at a place called Anori during the two hours before nightfall - the most beautiful hours. As usual, the naked brown bodies of children were flapping about in the water. Silent canoes slipped in and out of the little harbour. On the shore, strewn with planks to walk on, and half-built boats, chickens and vultures mingled and strutted and pecked. The pipe-like voice of a woman called – and another woman laughed. Men with furrowed faces hauled in sacks from a boat, while streaks of pink, yellow and orange were ever-changing on the canvas above. Here was exquisite, total, unselfconscious beauty. Here was the happiness of a single laugh, the tragic beauty of a colossal, confounding continent. For what is America? It is a branch of humanity that has cupped its hands, filled them to the brim with the ecstasy and tragedy of the cosmos, and has drunk; has drunk very deep. And what have I gained from this America? I have drunk deep too.

## MANAUS

In the centre of a plaza at Manaus, next to the Opera House, is a monument to the fourth centenary of the discovery of Brazil. It was presumably built during the rubber boom, since the style is a loud and imposing neo-classicism, rather like that of Eros in Picadilly. The painting on the ceiling of the Opera House is of a Greek mythological scene with nymphs and so on, in the same vein.

Around the central statue of this monument, are four individual ones, dedicated very interestingly to Europa, Africa, Asia and America. I found it very striking in its clarity; the three continents of the Old World and the indigenous Americans are the four pivots to Brazil's history and society. Perhaps sociologically Brazil represents the New World par excellence, since Brazilians have a culture entirely of their own, yet are a synthesis of the major old cultures. Admittedly the Asians in Brazil (Japanese, Indians, Lebanese, Syrians and others) have not intermarried much yet, nevertheless, there is the feeling of a single homogeneous nationality. In contrast to the schizophrenic split in the Andean countries (between Amerindians and others), there is little physical difference between the middle-class and poor here; they make up one society. No doubt in the North-East the poor are

mostly black and the rich mostly white, but it is not exclusively true, and where there is such an ethnic split, it is not accompanied by a cultural split.

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Down by the dockside in Manaus, there was an old tramp sitting on a collapsed cardboard box. A boy was about to light his cigarette with a match. Just as the match got near, the boy jerked and nearly pushed it in the poor man's face, then threw it away. The man picked up a nasty piece of sharp wood and made after his persecutor. He soon retreated and someone else lit his cigarette without bother. A little later, a rotten fruit arrived with speed from above; another boy was on a roof. Again the man shouted and jumped to his guard, this time using the cardboard box as a shield and brandishing the piece of wood. Other people looked on blandly.

I laughed, I didn't feel sorry for the man. He was not mortally wounded and probably enjoyed it in his own way. After all, he was responding to someone else as that person was to him. After a while I noticed a kind woman give him something to drink. He was all right, the world works in a funny way; it doesn't have to be all rosy to be good, nor even fair. I was reminded of Camus's story *L'Etranger*, and the mangy old man who beat his mangy old dog. He was one of the characters that illustrated the meaningfulness of life most strongly.

## **From Manaus to George town**

**June 9, 1972**

At Manaus, I was very lucky to get on a boat going up the Rio Branco, for there is no passenger service. I got a free ride on a military supply boat; actually it was two driving boats lashed together pushing a pontoon. It was a magnificent journey; on the boat were only the crew and three Guyanese fellows who got a free ride too.

For the first two days, we were on the Rio Negro. It is correctly named – I could not conceive before how water could be so black, but indeed it is. When still, the river looks like ebony. When churned up by the propeller, it looks like crude oil – yellowy black. The Rio Branco does not look white however, it is a muddy brown.

More even than before was I staggered by the vastness of this jungle. The boat droned on and on, but around each bend in the river there was forever more jungle. At night I would

sit at the front of the pontoon, where I could barely hear the engine. We were going up-river so we kept always near the bank. The searchlight up on the bridge made me feel the boat was a huge but sleek animal, placidly forging its way at a never-changing speed. The boat stopped once (at the only port on the way) in five days, and then it was at night while I was asleep. The continual movement for five days and nights through unending jungle gave me a sense of the enormity of this planet that I had never experienced before.

A whole day had passed, and I had been looking, watching avidly for anything that appeared. I saw herons, carra-carra birds, piranha fish that jumped and another shark-like creature (the name of which I have forgotten) that jumped high but is apparently harmless unless one is struck by it. Once I saw a brightly-coloured toucan and once.... an alligator. It bubbled and surfaced for an instant very near, between us and the near bank. But for the whole day, not one house nor one humanly created dent in the jungle did I see. I watched much of the night too – there was nothing. The next day we came around a bend in the mid-afternoon sunshine: there was a single, solitary, tiny house, in a patch of dry land that had been cleared. An old man stood outside it, the boat slowed right down, and I watched intently as one of the crew called to him, got into the canoe and went onto the land. He talked to his friend for three minutes then returned to the boat which had moved a little further on in the meantime. I asked him how long the man had live there all on his own. “Oh, many years”, was the reply.

In the last two days, there was gradually more and more dry land. There was actually a continuous bank after while, making what we were on a *river* instead of merely a winding portion of the swamp where trees did not grow and where the water moved! It gave me a sense of security – the inundated jungle is very and mysterious. Soon bluish mountains were visible (the Sierras do Macajai) to the northwest. By the time we reach Caracarai, the jungle was thinner and interspersed with patches of savanna.

From Caracarai to Boa Vista, we drove on a bumpy that trail took us through thick bush, interspersed with grassland. Between Boa Vitas and Lethem, it was continuous savanna – but with low, green grass, not the tall, yellow grass of African savanna. The horizon was visible all around except where tall palms followed the line of a creek. Cattle could be seen in small groups from time to time.

At the frontier, we crossed the narrow river Takutu to set foot in Guyana. This was the first time I have crossed a border in a canoe!

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At Lethem I met an Englishman who owned a provisions store and an abattoir. He told me much about this region. Lethem was named after the D.C. who built a house here – it was the only one then. Soon Lethem grew to be the centre for the dozen or so cattle ranchers in the Rununi Providence. In those days, there was a cattle trail up to the coast, which took eight weeks and had to be done at exactly the right time – long enough after the rains for it to be passable, but before the vegetation that had sprung up during the rains had died off in the drought. Furthermore, once a couple of large herds had been along it, the vegetation was all eaten and that was it for another year. In the jungle regions, the rivers had to be at exactly the right state for it to be safe to cross. Here the trail was narrow, and if the river was too swift, it would sweep the cattle downstream where they would not be able to climb out, the banks being flanked by an impenetrable wall of green. Nowadays the trail is no longer extant, for the government ceased subsidizing its annual weeding when it acquired some D.C.8s. Cattle are flown out and provisions flown in. So the arrival of the aeroplane has helped to close the interior rather than open it up.

The same situation exists with the rivers. These are fast-flowing, and full of rapids unlike the lower, easily navigable rivers of Brazil. To manage them is an art, and since the aeroplane people have not bothered to retain it. The old pilots are dying off fast.

In the days of the cattle trail, a Chinaman tried to make money by hawling provisions from Georgetown with water-buffalo he imported. Usually horses were used. But these animals apparently refused to work in the heat of the day; they would make for the nearest pool and drag in their cartloads of rice and sugar. The Chinaman finally let them go near Lethem, after which they interbred with wild cattle, producing a very aggressive wild herd. Men have been known to be trapped four days at the top of a tree whilst these beasts lounge around on the ground, ready to attack the captive if he descends.

The area has always been dominated by a single fiery family, the Melvilles. The first one, a complete dissolute, got himself appointed Protector of Indians by a governor in Georgetown who was a drinking friend of his. He made the Indians pay their fines for offences committed in the form of cows, and thereby built himself up a large herd. He also licensed most of the land in his own name. He soon generated a batch of half-breeds, who eventually owned between them all the land in the province. The members of the family always have hated and still do hate one another; they used to have fights with guns or knives frequently in the bar at Lethem.

A few years ago, there was an extreme right-wing uprising against the government in Lethem. This was led by some of the Melvilles who wanted to separate from Guyana and keep the land to themselves, for the government was introducing land reforms. The Government of Venezuela supplied them with arms, supposedly supporting an anti-Communist “counter-revolution”. The rebellion was quashed, and the leaders fled to Venezuela with which Guyana is not on good terms now.

Near Lethem is a large Mukushi Indian Village, called St. Ignatius. The houses are very distinctive, made of mud-brick with a “scaffolding” of bamboo sticks. The people I met there were very gentle and kind. It was wonderful to be able to talk to pure Amerindians in English. They had learnt it from missionaries and spoke very clearly.

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The government of Guyana is trying desperately to develop the almost untouched interior, for nearly all the population is in the coastal region. What seems quite obvious is that pioneering cannot be encouraged from the outside very satisfactorily. It is no good getting people into the interior who want the same conditions as in the towns. Pioneers of the Wild West braved the elements, built their own houses, dug wells and constructed trails. Here the government builds a road through virgin jungle hoping people will follow; and builds houses with water and electricity supplies to coax settlers out. It seems that unless a society holds the tendencies for a “pioneering spirit”, such development will occur haltingly.

In Georgetown, (not in the interior), I felt there was definite social unrest and apathy. There is not much apparent resentment or humiliation, but an underlying unwholesomeness, which is surely a testimony to colonialism. The Guyanese have a hard psycho-social struggle ahead of them. Everyone seems to be grabbing for a dollar, and there is much distrust. Most bars have an iron grill separating the barmen from the drinkers, and all have notices saying, “No Credit Given”. Some of these were quite amusing. For example: “No credit today, try tomorrow”; “Credit will be extended to anyone over 99 years of age who is accompanied by his grandfather”.

Many restaurants and shops make you pay before giving the goods. You cannot walk ten yards without being asked for money; the unemployment rate is apparently 29 percent. Even prostitutes cannot find clientele! In one office I read, “This is a non-profit organization. It isn’t intended to be so, but it is!”

From Lethem I flew with the Guyana Defense Force to Mahdia, since the road was impassable due to the rains. We flew over dramatic scenery – steep jungle-covered cliffs and crags. Mahdia is right in the jungle again. It is a gold and diamond town – the people who search for them are called “pork-knockers”. Wooden shacks have signs: “Licensed to trade in gold and liquor”. The people drink a lot, and talk about their last lucky find.

From Mahdia to Bartica, I went on the road that the government is very proud of – a narrow track through dense, unending jungle. Bartica has buildings that indicate a flourishing past. Now it is in decay, and considerable drunken hostility seems to have accompanied this. The timber and quarry industries are in decline, but more important is the fact that it used to be the place from which provisions were sent down the rivers Essequibo, Mazaruni and Cuyuni, by boat. Now, aeroplanes fly provisions from Georgetown – again encouraging centralization. People in the interior focus to such an extent on Georgetown that they refer to it simply as “town”.

From Bartica to Parika I went on a boat. The river was lined with jungle, but for occasional plantations and ports with wooden buildings. From Parika to Georgetown, a train took me through coastal terrain. This is swampland, most of which was reclaimed by the early Dutch settlers. With canals criss-crossing the flat, green countryside, the weather overcast and rainy, this looked remarkably like Holland. Grand plantation-owners' houses were frequent and imposing amongst the smaller shacks on stilts.

In Georgetown, I was struck with the impression that even this is like a large trading-post – the country as a whole has very much a “settlement” quality about it. In Georgetown, there are so many warehouses, wharfs, banks, merchants' establishments and so on. Yet the architecture is very beautiful, not only in the grand buildings (all wood) but in the common houses lining the straight little streets also. In some places, canals and bridges reminded me of Amsterdam, at other times houses with big bay windows are reminiscent of England.

Ethnically, Guyana is a most exciting mixture of Asiatic Indian, Negro, Amerindian, Dutch, British, Portuguese and Chinese. And the language shows it. It has an element of Hindi sing-song intonation, Negro West-Indian English, and an unmistakable flavor of north country or Scottish dialect. It is often most difficult to understand.

In Georgetown, I saw an incredible contraption made of junk metal. It had wheels and a cross up high. It was dumped somewhere and its function was a mystery to me. It had a sign on it saying: “Women stop whoring then men will stop stealing and killing. Be loyal.”

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **DURHAM; SCOLARLY AND POETIC BEGINNINGS**

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **EDINGURGH, “THESIS” AND POLITICAL COMMITMENT**

At the Heriot–Watt University in Edinburgh, the Head of the Sociology Unit in the Business Studies Department, in which I held a temporary lectureship, once said to me over coffee, that a precursor of mine had had to be “disciplined” by the students, so that he would “keep his Commy bullshit to himself”. This was obviously aimed at me, and he meant I should realize the same truth; but as so often I was too slow to grasp his insulting meaning. I taught Marx and Weber to my classes. I thought I was simply presenting the Marxian view of modern Capitalist Industrial Society, as well as the Weberian one; though no doubt my sympathies towards the former came across clearly to the students, some of whom probably complained, or at least commented to him, about my slant. I was teaching a fourth year course on Industrial Society.

Across the road from the University was a pub which had gorgeous go-go dancers. For some reason Edinburgh was tolerant of this lovely entertainment, whilst Glasgow was not,

as I discovered later when I went to live there. This was probably due to a long-standing puritanism, but also to a fear that the excitement that such eroticism might arouse would create riots among Glaswegian men.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **GLASGOW, ACADEMIA, WRITING, EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH IN PERU; THEN MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN**

I moved to Glasgow in 1978, after separating from Paola, and stayed for a while with Dave Walsh, the Head of the Sociology Department in what was then Glasgow Polytechnic. I tried to find a flat to rent, but they were all so expensive, so I bought a flat at 14 Athole Gardens, raising the deposit from selling my house in Oakenshaw and taking a bank loan. The mortgage and endowment policy cost together more than one half of my monthly income, but I was at first very happy with that, with the freedom at last, though I quickly came to feel lonely. I had no family roots or long-term friends in Glasgow, though the West End was marvellous, with very tall, luxurious trees blowing and billowing in the wind fantastically, bordering many streets, and for the first time, at the age of thirty, having at last a full-time “permanent” job. At that time Glasgow was a bit alienating for me; it was still a rather hard, working-class kind of place, women rarely entering pubs, which closed at ten o’clock, booting you out ten minutes before, and closed on Sundays. It had little of the cosmopolitan, trendy feeling that came later, even in the West End. (I was called a “teddy bear” when I boarded a bus wearing a very long furry Afghani coat.) It felt philistine to me, without very much of a “counter-cultural” element that existed even in Edinburgh, and I was disappointed with the Communist Party that was still rather hard, Stalinistic, and “tankie”. In Edinburgh I had liked fellow members, who, from whatever class, seemed more conscious of the need to change old habits. In Edinburgh, the CP members, and the Scottish Communist Party leaders, were very “enlightened”, always very friendly and

approachable to me, utterly working class, but never seeming to deride me for being “English”, “middle class”, and so on. The Industrial Organizer John Kay, and people like Mick McGahey, the leader of the Scottish miners, Jack Ashton and others were remarkably open-minded, very aware socially and politically, internationally very knowledgeable, very decent men, who understood that to change society was an immensely difficult task, requiring tolerance, sophistication, deep humanity, and a genuine commitment to democracy, peaceful organization, acceptance of differences between all those who wanted to see a better, just, fairer society. Their working-class roots were strong and stalwart, but they understood the need for culture in the broadest senses, philosophy, and their warmth never made me feel a silly middle-class post-graduate student dropping into a different world. It was all one world for them, and I did not feel awkward with them at all. We could discuss the best ways that a working class movement might unite with teachers, lecturers, professional types who wanted this change; they were if anything too easy-going with respect to those with out of date attitudes who were hell-bent on wrecking the development of this new party. Socials, with Chilean or Palestinian and other exiles, were wonderful experiences, from which I learnt so much, in a kind of fraternity that I have never ever quite felt again. They were so different from the stereotypes held by so many others on the Left, let alone other people, of them as Communists, it made me cry. Many of these fine people must be dead now, but I will never forget them. I remember so well that at a social occasion celebrating the Asians who lived in Glasgow, at which the Asian “comrades” cooked some delicious food, I was helping to serve the people there. When I took a plate to Jack Ashton and his friends, he gave me a wonderful smile, but I did not manage to come out with a pertinent remark. That was the last time I met him.

Mick McGahey was quite happy that his grand-daughters went to discotechs, for example, which at that time was very open-minded for resolute militants to the cause. He was a tough man, an absolute whisky-drinking Scotsman, but also very kind and gentle. I liked him and his ilk. I was most disappointed to find that in Glasgow, the heartland of Red Clydeside, with the largest membership of the Communist party outside of London, that so many did not hold to these values; less it seemed than in Edinburgh. The people there were self-educated in exemplary ways, and open to influences. They were extremely critical of the Soviet Union, like the General Secretary Gordon McLellan, quite openly, though they held hopes as I myself did, that the Soviet-type system could transform, retaining whatever gains might have been made in them, but utterly abandoning one-party rule, lack of democracy, autocracy, secrecy and so on, as Gorbachev was to propose much later. There were those

who, being “out of date” tried to obstruct these transformations, often not working class types at all, confusing the message that we of a Eurocommunist, liberal and democratic conviction wanted to advance. It was nothing but a tragedy that the whole thing fell apart.

In my young “pre-politicized” mind I had had no regard for the Soviet Union or its imitations, nor for China about which I knew nothing at all. As I grew more “Marxist” – though I sought to expand (arrogantly or bravely?) what that should mean in my two books “Aesthetic Imagination In Capitalist Society”, and “Theoretical Essays On The Imagination In Capitalist Society” – and was roundly condemned either for being a “Marxist” or for being a “bourgeois aestheticist individualist”, or for talking nonsense or being “out of date”. Over a long time I decided that socialist “experiments” supposedly guided by “Marxism” had brought into being socio-economic systems quite different from the hopes or dreams of Marx himself and the early “Marxists”. State control of the economy and all society was not what Marx and Engels had hoped for at all, nor was it what other “Utopian” socialists intended. Marx and Engels’ wanted the “dictatorship of the proletariat” to be an actively transitional condition during which unequal classes, exploitation, and the state would disappear. It was an unfortunate term, given the way “dictatorships” developed in the subsequent decades, but it was intended to denote that whereas Capitalism was the “dictatorship of the bourgeoisie”, the dominance of the working people, the majority of society, would become predominate, until such a time as inequality and classes had disappeared, by which time there would no longer be the necessity for the state in the sense that Marx understood it to mean.

I think it is fair to say finally now that these ideas were delusionary, utopian in the senses of being unrealistic and impossible, and so on. It cannot be said that the given “State-bureaucratic Communist” or “State Capitalist” or “Industrialized Tzarist” systems were anything like the “freely-associated producers” undertaking the emancipation of society from exploitation and alienation through the radically democratic “collective ownership of the means of production” and the “self-determination” of the social totality. Marx plainly said it was not for him to prescribe the menus for the cookshops of the future: i.e. humanity would have to discover what was good and what also worked, not simply strive to create a preconceived model of society. There did not exist and never has existed a clear single thought about how to create a society of relative equality, social justice, universal human creativity and fulfilment, peace, etc., and if there were one, how the majority of human beings might be brought, without force, into agreement about it. Marx did not have a clear

idea about what Socialism or Communism would look like: it was to be the opposite of Capitalism. The “dictatorship of the proletariat” was to be a radical democracy for the vast majority in society, under which all hitherto existing forms of exploitation and oppression would be gradually abolished. These ideas resolved massively complex problems in the abstract.

Thus in spite of the still important analyses of history and especially of Capitalism in Marx, and the new conception of a human society being a self-transforming reality/process within definite material constraints, it has to be acknowledged that Marx had no clear idea of what “Socialism” or “Communism” could or should be like, and really gave only an abstract idea of them as the opposite of Capitalism, in which over time all forms of historically created oppression, exploitation, and alienation since the dawn of human society and history would be overcome and eliminated.

Though it might be conceded that some “gains” were made at first in terms of universal education and health systems in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and Cuba, by comparison with other comparable countries and relative to their starting points, the Soviet-type systems were not “socialist” at all, in terms of any reasonable thinking about the Marxist meaning of the word. It is possible to argue however, as did Alec Nove in his excellent “The Economics of Feasible Socialism”, that certain aspects of the Soviet-type planning systems indicated problems that might be manifested in any kind of post-capitalist system: how to maintain initiative and incentive without market “freedom” or private gain? (Alec Nove lived down the road from me in Hamilton Drive, Glasgow, though I didn’t know him personally.)

China’s Maoist experiments in the 1950s and 60s, symbolized in the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, *appeared* to offer a different model of development, under real popular control, overcoming the alienating divisions of labour established in both Capitalist and Soviet-type systems; overcoming the dualisms of town and country, industry and agriculture, as well as breaking down class systems; but this all turned out to be false, and in the end China embraced market capitalism, though maintaining a state role different from that in the West.

It was necessary to think again. There can be no single panacea to change the world, though the present system – call it globalized capitalism or whatever, is still no good! And nor was

there ever a satisfactory “discourse” within Marxism concerning environmental sustainability in its broadest and most all-encompassing senses.

Marxism I felt, with all its particular inadequacies, had provided the best hitherto-existing analysis of previous historical transformations, the heir to which is among others the theory of Steven Sanderson in “Social Transformations”. I felt when I read this in 2015-16 that first there was Hegel, then Marx, then Sanderson, so impressed was I with the last’s synthetic and comprehensive theoretical construction. As for the mode of functioning of the bourgeois-capitalist socio-economic system in the abstract, Marx’s analysis was and still remains brilliant, though of course it has to be moved on all the time. (Marx’s brilliance is demonstrated, among a million other examples, in his insight that China’s history had been fundamentally different from that of Europe, due to the absolute necessity in China of irrigation, canals, and hydraulics generally if it was to advance beyond small communities with low crop yields and small populations, this due to *Nature* in China. His concept of *historical materialism* – Engels’ term, not his – ensured that he conceived of human societies as *immersed in and active within nature* – but he avoided geographical determinism, as his concept of *material base* involved the *economy* as well as the *natural environment* in *permanent dialectic interaction* and mutual influence; in spite of his inadequate ecological perspective.)

But it was *wholly* inadequate, indeed despairingly wrong, on the entire issue of how this system might, could, should, or would be transformed. The concept of a pan-human proletariat that would make “revolutions”, to create a new world of sanity and justice, was in retrospect about as ridiculous and meaningless as the older idea of creating the “Kingdom of Heaven or God” on earth.

The whole, in retrospect false problematic about which “mode of production” was dominant in the U.S.S.R. or China, was encouraged by Marxism’s inclination to see fixed categories, or slots, into which particular societies must be put: Primitive Society, Ancient slavery, Feudalism, the Asiatic mode of production, Capitalism, or Socialism/Communism. In biology, already in the eighteenth century – a century before Darwin’s Theory of Evolution - it had become clear that biological reality is made up of many different forms which are always changing. Though species can be grouped, and groups can be put into classes, phyla, and so on at any point in time, all must be seen in the light of ongoing dynamic change. It is the same with types of human society – even more so, as the

timescales within which societies change are so much shorter than those in which most changes in biological evolution occur. There are no pre-given “types” of social system, they are all constantly changing, so there is little point in quibbling about what the U.S.S.R. was. It had similarities with Western Capitalism but also differences. And capitalist societies take on many different forms: American, British, German, and now Chinese and so on. The same applies to “early” societies: primitive societies (nomadic or settled), chiefdoms etc.: both those that “came before” state civilizations appeared, and also those that now still exist, in different parts of the world.

Similar arguments should be made against the inclination of orthodox Marxism to see in history fixed “stages” of development; for example, from “primitive” society to slave-owning “civilizations”, to feudalism, then to capitalism, and then to “socialism”. The only alternative from this schema based on European history (though capitalism becomes global and so therefore socialism should do so “after” it), is the “Asiatic mode of production” which replaces Western Feudalism in China. But there are in reality no fixed orders in history, though some transitions are in certain conditions or circumstances or historical moments unlikely or almost impossible. This point applies also to “stages” undergone within any major period of history, which may or may not see the passing of, for example, small-scale hunting-and-gathering societies, to small-scale village-based settled agricultural societies, or which may or may not evolve into pastoralism, or to horticulturalism combined with hunting-and-gathering. And sometimes civilizations or chiefdoms, for example, “devolve” into “earlier” social forms, as when environmental or other stresses, or invasions, cause their breakdown into simpler, small-scale groupings, as happened in the past in the Central American rainforests when the Mayan Civilization collapsed long before the Spanish Conquest, or in the Amazon basin, where riverine civilizations were destroyed and scattered to the winds after the Spanish and Portuguese invasions.

From a close study of the French Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the Nazi Nightmare in Germany, and the Chinese Revolution, I think one can see what a process of moving towards better societies in the world in future *cannot* be. It cannot rest upon violence, still less emerge from full-blown war, either in its emergence or in its system and functioning. It cannot be sudden. It must be gradual, experimental, capable of learning anew and rethinking all the time, and rely on the active, peaceful participation of the vast majority of people in any given society, who are able to engage in cultivated, educated

thought, and civilized debate about objectives at every point. Debate can involve argument of course, but always trying to hold on to a tolerance of differences in thought and feeling. If these requirements are incapable of being achieved, no real, deep, genuine improvement in global human society will ever occur, which is what in fact I believe I thought from the earliest efforts at thinking about politics, but which I now feel quite sure about. I am talking about “politics” as from the present moment of course, not in regard to judgements about the past, which are infinitely complicated, and defy any brief conclusions.

Democracy is an infinitely complex concept; there is no one model for it. It should be something advanced and deepened in historical development, a gradual experimental progressive process. Economic justice is an equally complex idea; no pre-given model can be imposed upon a society. Most importantly, we must learn from history, that a “revolution” or “radical change” must ensure at least as much democracy, economic well-being, and security as was known by any population beforehand. It cannot be expected that people will freely accept a backwards drift in any of these things, in the hope or promise that “sometime soon” things will not only get better, but much better than before the transformation began. No one wants to get worse off in any way, even temporarily, no matter how fanatically fervent they may be. Leaders will make sure *they* are alright over the believed “short term”, though the rest will have wait (and shut up, stay in line).

It seems sometimes, that there is never enough time for humanity to absorb its history and present condition, so as to learn from them properly, and engage in an effort really to think out a new approach to reality and the future – something that should go far beyond “parties” and “ideologies”. As for one little example, Britain set into motion in the Sudan when that was a British Protectorate, the Gezira scheme, which entailed an irrigation system based on the Blue Nile that would allow the production of cotton for export to Lancashire where the textile industry could turn it into cloth and clothes for further export. In the event the project was a failure. It turned out that the irrigated land, normally nearly all year round absolutely parched and cracked, simply evaporated the water very fast, leaving the soil salinated, and even more hopeless for agriculture than before. I don’t know whether the technical failure was due to insufficient research into the issue, or whether no one could have known the consequences of the action.

The apologetic claim of the initiative was that it would create employment for Sudanese workers in the region, introduce new technologies etc., and allow a boost in the declining

textile industry of Lancashire. From radical Marxist perspectives it presumably represented no more than another capitalist colonial effort at exploitation of a Third World country's resources and labour. From the point of view of Karl Marx himself it would have represented just that, though he would also have applauded it at the same time as the inevitable development of Capitalism's global progress, whereby the world outside of the heartlands of Capitalism – Europe and North America – would be hastened into modernity, creating a proletariat, and advancing in this case beyond the ancient condition of a camel-born nomadic society (and “the idiocy of village life”). The growth of an international global proletariat, combined with money, more advanced technology and labour technique, would herald the world's transformation into Socialism: the beginning of “True History”.

But from yet another point of view entirely, what a shame to lure, seduce, a dignified people, though always living a hard life, into clock-driven monotonous labour, a cash economy, and a psychological enslavement to money and commodities!

What can be the conclusion in this respect for the whole world today? If society needs always to learn more about what has gone on and what is going on, who can slow down this ever-speeding up, dreadfully rapid “progress”? Should the Palaeolithic Age have continued longer, or the Neolithic, so that the next steps could have been based on greater awareness? Would it have been better if “State Civilizations” had progressed more gradually, so that their positive gains – however evaluated – could have been retained before the next avalanche of “progress” washed them away? This is a difficult conjecture, since thought only advances *with* “progress”, especially in respect of ideas penetrating into the majority of people in any given society.

The vast majority of one's life one cannot remember, although one can drag up memories of things one hasn't thought about since they happened, perhaps many years before, if one concentrates. This makes one wonder what the point of it all is, i.e. life, for it probably means that the longer one lives the smaller the proportion of what has happened to you can be remembered.

My father handed me a bottle of brandy to swig in the tent on holiday in France, on the coast of the Bay of Biscay when I was about eight or nine. We were camping by Carcon Plage, near Bordeaux. In the sea were many jelly fish that I hated, so my father made up a

song for me: “Why are there so many jelly-fish in Carcon Plage?/ And if there have to be why do-they-have-to-be-so-bloomin´- large?”

I have felt sometimes, throughout my (adult) life like a Fool at Court, or as someone who challenges normality unintentionally, as does Mr. Bean in exaggerated and banal ways, the significance of which only become clear over time. For example, the leaders of poetry “Encuentros” in South America, have sometimes been unhappy with my over-excitability during these processes, which are partly induced by the phoney protocol within something that is supposed to be about POETRY but which often appears to have more to do with Mayors´ speeches and such like, or the money and prestige to be received by the organizers. Like Mr. Bean´s exposure of fraudulence over “Whistler´s Mother”, which was all for money; even though Mr. Bean was an “idiot”. An American playwright of “the Absurd”, Edward Albee, wrote a play about how marriage requires acceptance of the partner´s eccentricities, which may indicate a need on the macro-plane as well (though there must be limits to this tolerance, as for example with regards to Donald Trump! And there´s the rub.)

I was taken to Madame Tussaud´s and its “Chamber of Horrors” by Mrs. Halliwell, our family´s house helper and child carer for a while, when both my parents worked, when I was a child of about seven or eight. In the Chamber of Horrors I was shocked by the medieval tortures and such like, but what really terrified me were the wax statues of evil people. I remember the sinister face and figure of Goebbels, and many famous murderers. Not surprisingly I was struck by the legend of a man who took a bet to hide in the Chamber at closing time, and stay there alone all night! According to the story he had become mad by morning when he was found by the museum´s keepers!

One of the murderers was a Mrs. Thompson, and as my surname then was Cloudsley-Thompson, and I often went by Thompson alone, my over-suggestibility led me to think I was destined to be a murderer called Mr. Thompson! I had nightmares for a long time about the evil people in the Chamber of Horrors, and kept the programme booklet of Madame Tussaud´s under my bed, from where I would periodically take it to wallow and shake in existential foreboding and predicted guilt. My mother found out about this, and proclaimed my fears unfounded, and lamented the fact that Mrs. Halliwell had taken me to the basement of the wax museum.

Perhaps there has always been something in my personality that lent me to an exaggerated guilt about certain things that did not warrant the hellish anxieties I suffered; or at least other people I have known have not seemed to be subject to such self-doubt about themselves, especially about their pasts, whether they recognized mistakes made or not. At any rate, this mental-psychological tendency was reignited by my children's rejection of me at the end of 2003 into 2004, which marked the end of over twenty-six years of living in Glasgow, albeit during which I had had many stays elsewhere and made many journeys away from the city. The whole thing about my sons has and still does utterly undermine my self-confidence and self-esteem, and has swamped me with anxieties about death and non-renewal for many years. As already mentioned, for years I have woken up on many days shaking with pain, regret, anxiety and tragedy, often after having dreamt of them, in lovely illusory reunion, though with them much younger than they really were now.

More than ten years after the initial breakdown of communication with my boys, I wrote this to my older son:

“Hello,

“I'm sending you poems I wrote to you and Alexander when you were babies. You probably don't remember those times, though they must have been important to your emotional development. (“Bunding time”. “Griggle”.) Do you really believe I was not a good and loving father to you? Have you been convinced of this by others? How much I looked after you both and played with you and told you both stories! Do you believe all this is false and phony? Dig deep into your heart at last, please.

“I remembered recently having you as a baby on the sofa in Athole Gardens, very late at night. I looked after you at the same time as marking students' exam papers that year, so your mother could get some sleep. You were very lively at night as a baby. I had been working at the University all day and would have to again the next day. But I tried to do my share of looking after you both as a busy working father, providing for a family. I could send you photos of you if you would like.

Bye, Dad”

These were the poems:

## **POEMS TO DORIAN AND ALEXANDER**

### **IN DEDICATION**

To thee, my darling boys, I assemble  
These poems, written in deep warmth  
For thee, when thou wert small,  
Sweet babes; in such delight  
As no one can describe.  
Through all the chaos and disappointing pain  
You, my wonderful sons, were always true  
Suns and stars of deepest love,  
Glorious to me in happiness and truth.  
No matter what happens in paleontology,  
Nor in long-term galactic history,  
You have been, and are, pure miracles,  
Never could the Cosmos be, without you.

### **TO DORIAN**

You are better than any book  
My little baby face,  
You are better than any written poem,  
You try as hard as any grown-up hero,  
Wonder is in your eyes, yet uncorrupted;  
Yours is the future - the moon, the sun, and hope,  
In the joy of your babbling sounds is the Indecipherable.

What did you dream, my darling boy,

What did you dream last night?  
Was your sleep as soft as you, all night,  
Was it warm and well, as you?

How were your dreams, my sweet boy,  
How were those dreams at night?  
Was there sun through clouds in shafting light,  
With music sweet, like you?

I do not want you one minute older,  
I do not want you to cease being a baby,  
I do not want you bigger, better, brighter, braver,  
I love you as a baby.  
I do not want you to move on rapidly,  
To make great strides, be very clever,  
To do much more, develop, grow,  
Learn to walk, and talk, and know  
What the world's about - no, I love  
You exactly as you are.

In you a heaven is in my eyes,  
Your soft sweet lovely baby face,  
Your cuddly smell and warm talk  
Makes salvation in my life.

Growing into consciousness with flaming wings  
Expanding into being alive and knowing it  
Like elastic fire of divine miracle  
Becoming a human being with powers

Of thought and control and feeling and imagination  
And flight into ever new created universes  
Of miraculous birth and labyrinthine mystery  
Of love and adventure and nobility

### **TO ALEXANDER**

Like a mountain rose in the night  
And the spotted deer basking by our gate  
In the moonlight,  
We did sleep  
And in the unreality  
Deep in the dream of eternity  
We did love beyond all time

As the stars shone in sprinkled fire  
Pinnacled against the intense inane  
Of darkness,  
In that night  
Yawning like kisses dripping  
In the lulled quietness  
Of ecstasy

Sweet baby toddle at night with me  
Trailing clouds of otherworldly memory  
Darling son of a pygmy size  
I do believe thou art so wise

That was why I tried to say  
In the way of poetry  
That thou teachest me anew

Of love and life anointedly

Sweet little baby  
I'll sing a lullaby  
My darling Alexander  
I wonder why

My tiny little baby  
Sweet cuddly thing  
Do you like my lullaby  
As you softly sleep?

### **MY BABY ALEXANDER**

There's my baby Alexander in his buggy.  
You might think life was about wars -  
Battles fought on huge plains with vast armies  
In night or day, darkness, sleet or heat;  
Or about exploration: strange, wild, extraordinary mariners  
Daring existence at the edge of the earth,  
Or fighting for survival in unknown empty deserts  
Battered by sun above, at one hundred and forty degrees;  
Or you might think life was about absolute romance -  
Love among twinkling stars of beauty,  
Leaning over a bridge together, melting with the moonlight  
In the rippling water, becoming one, eternally:  
Or one could think life is this little baby  
Who was born five weeks early, and has only just  
Reached the date he should have been born on,  
Alone in his pram unable to move  
Beyond waving his arms frantically above his head

Like a charging warrior, looking bemusedly  
At the lights and the coloured curtains, sometimes screaming,  
At other times gurgling with new-born laughter,  
Unknown to himself, or to the outside world;  
My tiny sweet baby with eyes so beautiful  
When they open, and that new babyish smell  
Like milk, is just here, like life.

### **COMFORTING ALEXANDER IN HIS TEETHING**

Ah, my little Great Alexander,  
Staring up at the stars forever,  
With flying looks of love and lightning

Like music dreaming itself into existence,  
Suffering pain bravely and resolutely,  
Comforted and comforting in my arms with sweet balm.

Sweet loving smile  
My joyful baby  
No need for time  
To make you grow  
All is here  
In your lovely babble

Staring at the ceiling as a baby,  
Quietly penetrating the mysterious essence  
Of everything - no answers, no questions,  
Intuition making all one with all,

As if music were its own creation.

## **TO BOTH**

Ah, my little boys  
Dorian and Alexander are sitting there  
And watching television:  
Not reacting to each other much  
As they stare so close into 'Superman",  
Or the 'Aristocats', though sometimes laughing  
Or holding each others` arms, or ruffling  
Each other`s hair, or jumping on  
And bundling the other up,  
And then returning to their deep attention  
To the colours and funny beings flying  
About on the screen, the strange voices  
And happenings in Unreal Land,  
Which is probably just about as real  
As the garden is;  
Then Dorian dons his Batman suit  
And proclaims that Alexander is Robin.

Now with these birds chipping  
Sounds of children playing  
Dorian in his red jacket  
Shooting down the chute

Dorian walking through the grass  
Speckled with white flowers  
Dreams are here and at home  
Suddenly all is one

Alexander is his brother now  
Together they will go  
Life is rounding out at last

There is an ecstasy in the air  
When I am with Dorian and Alexander  
In our garden, and the sunny light  
Causes the leaves to shimmer and shine  
And the air to rustle around the leaves  
Rolling shadows around the yellow  
Sunlight, and the greenness whispers  
Its mysterious essence in loveliness,  
And the worm upon the brown soil,  
And the snail walking over the stone,  
And the fishes swimming quick as light  
In the bright pond, and the flowers around  
Beaconing blue and purple sounds  
Like hums of eternity, with the innocent  
Worm dripping and the snail`s slime  
In fragility, and all is perfected  
By tweets and songs of the twilight`s birds  
Twittering with the floating white and orange  
Clouds in ethereal everlasting blue  
Sky singing silent warmth

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **COMING TO COLOMBIA**

## LETTER FROM COLOMBIA

Colombia is famous and celebrated as the country that has the greatest geographical and ecological variety, and the largest biodiversity in relation to surface area, of any country in the world. In the Andean region the climate and ecology often change greatly after travelling only a few kilometers, whilst the Amazonian rain-forest region is one that affords immense variety of flora and fauna. But it is the Andean region – meant in the broadest sense, which includes the immense valleys and plains that lie within it – that has been most determinant with respect to Colombia's destiny historically. In Colombia the Andes split into three distinct and mind-bogglingly rugged ranges – the *Cordillera Oriente*, *Central*, and *Occidental* – that have always made, and still do make, communications and transport between regions extremely difficult and demanding. Colombia, as the north-western cornerpiece of the South American continent, linking North and Central America to South America, might look from a glance at the map, as a 'gateway' to South America. But in reality it is more like a huge great blocking wedge.

Without wishing to espouse a geographically determinant theory of human history, it is quite obvious that the geographical make-up of what is today called Colombia has always been a crucial influence upon the socio-historical characteristics of the region. That is to say, Colombia's geographical features do not by themselves explain Colombian pre-history and history, but without reference to the former, one could not properly understand the latter. Put simply, geography may not be sufficient to explain the curious character of Colombia's central problem - its violent multi-polar conflict – but it represents a necessary factor for the latter's comprehension.

In pre-hispanic times, that is, before the arrival of Europeans in that region of South America today called Colombia, there never existed – according to archeological evidence – any form of society with a fully developed state, covering vast territories, as there did

in Peru for example. When the Spanish arrived in Peru, the Inca state ruled over one of the world's largest ever empires. Before the Inca period there had been at least two other huge empires in what is today Peru and Bolivia – the Tihuanaco and the Huari. Significantly however, the Inca empire pushed its northern frontier only as far as the present-day border (roughly) between Colombia and Ecuador.

In the territory of present-day Colombia there were numerous pre-state societies, or chiefdoms, many of which developed superbly sophisticated art and sculpture in gold, stone, and pottery. These include the Muisca, the Guane, the Tairona, the Tumaco, the San Agustín, the Quimbaya, the Sinú and the Nariño – of which cultures the descendents of some still live in 'indigenous communities'. Why did one or another of these chiefdoms apparently never conquer or merge with at least some of the others, as the Incas who came from a valley in the Cusco region of Peru did, blow by blow, until they ruled an empire as large as the Romans had done? I don't think this question has yet been fully answered. The explanation cannot be put down simply to the enormous geographical, climatic, and ecological variety of Colombia as such, for in Peru too there is enormous variety and the Inca empire precisely drew its strength from its domination of many ecological niches, allowing it to make use of and re-distribute a large number of distinct foods and other resources. I think the answer must be a function of the sizes of the particular areas which different pre-hispanic chiefdoms occupied in Colombia. Perhaps none of them occupied a sufficiently large and/or agriculturally productive enough area to sustain a population sufficiently large to support an army that could both defeat in battle and occupy a neighbouring chiefdom long enough to allow them to assimilate them to their dominance. There were wars between groups, sometimes chronic and long-term, but never apparently the permanent dominance of one major group over others. The Muisca for example, lived on the fertile plain of Bogotá, but did not move beyond a system of alliances between chiefs which included periodic conflict, in order to develop a state, and still less did they conquer and occupy on a long-term basis other chiefdoms or other groups of chiefdoms. It must be something to do with the ratio between the size and/or productivity of ecozones, the populations they could sustain, and the size of armies necessary not just to win particular battles but to absorb other chiefdoms occupying different ecozones.

When the Spanish arrived in what they were to call Nueva Granada, they found the territory very difficult to penetrate, so that the conquest of Nueva Granada was slower than that of Peru and various other regions of Spanish South America. It is significant that Pizarro founded Lima, the later capital of Peru in 1534, while Jiménez de Quesada did not found Bogotá, the later capital of Colombia, until 1538. Four years was a long time in that frenzied period of conquest. The fact that the founding of Lima (far further away from the Caribbean, from where the Spanish launched their invasions of the mainland, than is Bogotá) came before the founding of Bogotá is testimony to all this. Even after their conquest of Colombia - which always remained incomplete, most jungle areas scarcely coming under Spanish rule – the Spaniards could not integrate the territory of Nueva Granada effectively.

Of course this was largely because the Spanish never intended to create ‘nations’ in any case; different regions had stronger political and economic links with metropolitan Spain than they did with one another. But that situation – common to all the Iberian American colonies – was made even more chronic in Nueva Granada than elsewhere.

So that, when Simón Bolívar and the Independence Movement he led broke, through war, the ties of Nueva Granada with Spain, conflict between and within the different regions of now-named Gran Colombia broke out immediately nearly everywhere. Bolívar died in despair in 1831 as Venezuela and Ecuador split off from Gran Colombia, and the Colombia that remained began to engage in internal wars that erupted and re-erupted throughout all the nineteenth century. What was unleashed was much more than mere regional conflict; many social groups that had been squashed into the colonial hierarchy for nearly three centuries were now able to burst out and find their differences with the others. Colombia was showing itself to be a “Fragmented Country, Divided Society” as the historians Marco Palacios and Frank Safford significantly subtitle their recent history of Colombia. Similar conflicts certainly did arise in other parts of the no longer existent Spanish-American empire, but not to the degree witnessed in Colombia.

After the life-times of Bolívar and the other Independence leaders, throughout the rest of the nineteenth century perennial violent conflict was institutionalized between the Liberal and Conservative Parties. This was not class conflict, even in extremely mediated form. Each of the two entities had its ruling elite, and supporters in all social strata. There was no real difference in economic ideology or policy between the two parties; both relied

on laissez-faire market principles yet both resorted to protectionism and support for domestic production at certain times and in certain spheres. They had significant differences over the preferred role of the Catholic Church in the state, civil society, and education, and over whether Colombia should be federal (the Liberals) or unitary-centralist (the Conservatives).

But these differences cannot explain the savagery and physical brutality of the constantly resurgent violence, at every level of society and in many regions. It was like two symbolic orders permanently at war for little purpose; as in Jonathan Swift's satire two nation-wide gangs mirror-imaged and periodically fought each other.

The activities of the two parties with their local organizations reflected the lack of effective central state power; instead much of society's life was organized into these two pyramidal hierarchies constantly in conflict. (This however did not prevent extreme factionalism among the political leaders of both parties, who frequently entered into tactical alliances with the other party.)

This very complex history can obviously not be followed closely into here; what is necessary to garner from it however, in order to understand the later twentieth century and the present-day tragedy of Colombia, is the conflictive fragmentation of the country into regions; the fact that the state has never administered the entire territory of Colombia; the habits of violent conflict that do not logically correspond to real, meaningful political or ideological struggles, and do not entail struggles between distinct and identifiable social groupings. Rather, violence goes round and round in the killing and torturing of victims in ways that are almost arbitrary from any viewpoint that would seek a progressive improvement in Colombian society. It is in these respects that there is continuation from the earlier Liberal-Conservative violence into the nineteen sixties and the post-sixties conflicts, up to and including now, which have not been, and still are not true 'civil wars'. The subtitle of Daniel Pécaut's recent book on FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) reads: "A Guerrilla War Without End Or Without Ends?"

In 1948 the assassination of the radical Liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán sparked off a chaotic period of conflict known as *La Violencia*. The earlier crazy, undirected Liberal-Conservative violence was released again. This terrible phenomenon is one of the seed-beds for the era of guerrilla and paramilitary violence, or perhaps one should say the

‘mould’ into which the latter fell. For although the origins of FARC in the 1960s lie in peasant struggles – claiming or reclaiming land from large private haciendas, and in peasant self-defence against attacks from landowners and government forces – FARC was not the same from its inception nor did it develop in ways similar to classic revolutionary movements. The peasant self-defence groups from which FARC evolved were at the start of the 1960s fighting less the state than other self-defence groups, taking with them the traditions of La Violencia as well as those of the so-called ‘mafia violence’ of the 1950s, through which individuals and groups struggled murderously against one another for business and economic gain, especially in certain coffee-producing regions.

FARC has always claimed that the immediate trigger for its birth was an attack on a ‘zone of peasant self-defence’ called Marquetalia by government forces, as part of its U.S.-sponsored counterinsurgency offensive in 1964. However, FARC as an organization was formally constituted only two years later, in 1966, from a bloc of peasant self-defence groups.

Today, in the problematic areas of Colombia, multiple groups with shifting frontiers engage in various forms and degrees of conflict, between themselves and with the government. FARC, splintered paramilitary groups, and narco-traffickers fight one another in one area whilst cooperating where convenient or necessary elsewhere – over the production, shipment, and marketing of drugs. Paramilitary groups however tend to avoid direct conflict, preferring the massacre and displacement of civilians in FARC-controlled areas as a means to shrink the size of FARC’s dominions (though it is also true that FARC deliberately target civilians in their ‘military campaigns’.

Paramilitary groups formed both to counter the growing power and size of FARC, but also to eliminate trade unionists, civil rights activists, and various categories of politician or journalist (amongst other people) that displease their paymasters. And like FARC the paramilitaries control zones of extortion from drugs, gold, oil, and coal production. Paramilitaries have often acted in covert cooperation with government forces and politicians. Yet at the same time it is frequently alleged that government-appointed military leaders are involved in arms sales to – guess who? - FARC.

FARC is rigid and unchanging about its objectives – which are nothing less than total power over all Colombia. It sees itself as the legitimate, armed government-in-waiting.

Negotiations with FARC by the government have hitherto not yielded anything positive. This history is extremely complex, yet it seems clear that agreements have meant no more to FARC than temporary means to gain advantage, though it is also true that paramilitary murderers have also rendered peace agreements nil. But in any case the vicious circle of war-need for finance-extension of territory for extortion and drug production-need for more war, etc., probably makes cease-fires or peace agreements structurally impossible for FARC.

FARC seems to recognize no significant social or political changes that have occurred in Colombia since it was formed nearly fifty years ago. In this respect it displays a depressing likeness to the many 'failed' or 'degenerated' so-called socialist regimes that have subsisted or collapsed throughout the world over this whole historical period. Its ruthlessness makes it loathsome to the majority of Colombians living outside the regions of its rule, which include nearly all Colombia's city dwellers (who of course watch everything on television, daily). Examples: FARC have been known to execute individuals found to be HIV positive. They frequently kill women who are believed to have had amorous relations with government soldiers. They kidnap any individual they think will be useful, either to extort money or to trade them with the government for imprisoned FARC people. They often kidnap leftist politicians who favour the government talking with FARC and who oppose attempts at a military solution. Similarly with members of left-wing organizations which in any way disagree with FARC. The increasingly rare, yet essentially unchanging political declarations that emanate from FARC bear little relation to their actual activities and practices. There are few of FARC's strategies more terrible than the deliberate displacement of hundreds of thousands of residents from areas that lie under FARC control, because their presence does not suit, for whatever reasons, what FARC sees as its interests.

Large swathes of FARC-controlled territory in the jungle have been colonized by FARC advancing together with landless peasants – territory which has never experienced the administration, the legality, nor the normal services provided elsewhere by the state. Sometimes FARC expels indigenous communities, so that it is as if a FARC-ruled domain has been planted in what was previously a political vacuum. In such areas FARC normally controls a coca- or poppy-producing agricultural economy, and decides which peasants will be allowed to grow the crops. Such favoured families are frequently obliged to

provide a son or daughter for FARC's army. FARC controls the sale of coca and other drugs to drug-traffickers; knowing that the drugs trade at this period of Colombian violence(s) is responsible for a huge proportion of the enormous annual numbers of homicides. Besides that, the profound cultural corruption that ensues from people's seduction to a psychology of easy money can hardly be overstated.

Territorial control is an objective in itself for FARC, and is inseparably connected with extortion and the obtaining of sources of finance. This reality, common to FARC and the paramilitaries, is surely quite different from any classical peasant revolutionary model in which 'liberated areas' are established.

I think the hope must be that existing socio-historical forces currently eroding FARC will continue to do so, and that it will gradually break down and disintegrate. Increasing desertions, evident demoralization, the shrinkage of FARC-held territory and thereby the reduction of revenues from drugs and extortion; as well as a decrease in conviction and credibility on the part of both FARC people and outsiders, all tend to point in the direction of a slow contraction. These processes are far better ways to see FARC's demise than a bloody militaristic defeat. Cunning acts to free hostages from FARC captivity without violence, such as President Uribe's government has successfully pulled off recently are highly desirable, both practically and morally.

Yet FARC's fortunes could change, as they have done before. Yet I think the decline of FARC is the single most important hope in Colombia today because of the huge areas over which it still dominates and because of its terrible effects upon Colombian society as a whole, as also upon a genuinely 'socialistic' attitude of mind; that is, upon hope for a better society. For where civil society actually functions in Colombia, it is vibrant. If FARC were no more, immense resources – human and material – would become newly available. Drug gangsterism and continuing paramilitarism might perhaps become easier to respond to effectively, and generally a 'civilized', peaceful kind of left-wing politics might be more able to emerge. These are matters difficult to predict, but it does seem that a progressive politics in Colombia really cannot mature until the state administers at last, and has responsibility for, all Colombian territory.

Progressive changes might occur if some of the hopeless, socially fruitless multi-polar conflict presently occurring in Colombia could be reduced, which could only lessen the

self-destructive, corrupt realities of Colombian society. Already existent humane and intelligent forces – idealistic political values that have gestated in the Colombian collective mind ever since the struggle for Independence - combined with enormous pent-up popular urges for greater equality, justice, and social welfare provision, might bring about social improvement, whilst simultaneously the popular understanding of the historical reasons underlying Colombia’s colossal, tragic problems would grow. That would in turn begin to unravel the evil twisting spiral of violence and general distrust that has engulfed Colombia, blocking its immense potential as a beautiful country possessing marvellous cultures, for so long – far, far too long.

Sex as lust, followed by love, O that *is* possible eventually in life. “Use your wife!” said Nidia one day, deliciously and vulgarly, honestly. And she wrote this poem to me:

“When the mountains are dreaming, it is your soul; souls appear with your love! And your love is an anchor. This is our existence and this existence comes to be the truth of our real love!”

Your wife.

This is an email I wrote to my eldest son, when he was 25 years old. I am taxed by the balance I feel I wish to maintain between wanting to avoid self-pity on the one hand, and the fact that this has been and remains such a salient fact of my life; as well as many other conflicting thoughts and emotions I feel about the whole thing, which I shall explore again shortly. Here is the sad and angry missive:

“I have to say this, although I know you will probably not reply, nor feel any love nor compassion for me, nor change one iota of your cold, cruel attitude towards me. So I have nothing to lose. Perhaps we will never meet or communicate again. You do not miss me nor feel any remorse for me at all, quite obviously.

“You had it wrong from the very first moment. FIRST I was hurt and upset by a wretched solicitor’s letter in 2003 saying you did not want to sleep on Friday nights in our house.

This was after six difficult years in which I had to take out loans to keep the flat going and got into deep overdraft, when that was still allowed (before the banking crisis).

“THEN I was unable to communicate with you or your mother (changed telephone numbers, refusal to answer the door, no reply to my numerous letters, avoidance of me everywhere I went to meet with you as if I was leper.) When we did meet for pantomines that year (through solicitors!) I explained that I could not afford to keep the flat going, I would have to rent it out. You obviously were too young to take this in. I wanted to talk with your mother about it and agree on some plan but she would not communicate with me in any way or form. Later your mother’s solicitor presented the fact that I had rented out the flat as "news". Threatening the tenants, the whole thing was fucked up, so I had to sell the flat instead of keeping it for you, as I have many times explained.

“I had suffered heart failure from which I very nearly died; within a split second I would have expired but for the urgent intensive care I received. As I had to retire on an ill-health pension and incapacity benefit your mother’s desertion at that particular moment was disastrous. She had never worked whilst we were together, which was a great mistake, and what we planned was that she would now do so. But immediately on return from the holiday in Menorca which was supposed to be a “convalescence” for me as well as a family holiday, on which I had spent the bulk of my remaining retirement "lump sum" paying for your grandparents (in some kind of deluded "gratitude"), she ran out, and I was left in emotional devastation, continued recovery from illness, something like a nervous breakdown, and an impossible financial situation.

“You obviously never understood any of this, and I certainly never spoke of such matters in those years. It has nothing to do with who was a "goodie" or "baddie" in the marriage, though I had no intention of breaking up the marriage or the family. I had done my best to make the marriage and family succeed, although I have never claimed to be a saint, or hero, are YOU? Linda thought your mother rushed out because she was "weak", and could not cope with the uncertainty of my retirement and our financial situation. She had the assurance of financial support in a housing association, income support, etc. But my family-based incapacity benefit was instantly stopped. As I say, your mother had never worked (except for a few nights a week for a few weeks in a pub at the beginning of our relationship), which was a great mistake, and now that I had had to retire it was the time for her to start. But that was the very moment she ran out on the sinking ship. She never

understood our financial situation, she just got angry when I told her we had now to be very careful.

“So I found myself in the family home alone, having the two of you two nights a week. Never at Christmas, or Easter, however. I loved you both so much, but I was extremely lonely. I had not grown up in Glasgow, I had no relatives there, and now that I had had to retire due to ill-health, other human connections were whittled down - especially Open Circle, the arts and poetry group I had worked so hard within which had come to the end of its financing, and I no longer had the kind of social communication I had had with colleagues or students from the University for decades. Your claim that I have not been a good father is monstrously unjust. I had to rent out the flat; this plan I explained to you and would have talked to your mother about if she had allowed it. I could not sustain the cost of paying the mortgage and the endowment policy alone now; also your mother made it absolutely clear that the flat was no longer hers! At the time of the "separation" it had "negative equity" so she would have owed me money if we were going to settle up on value! She said to you it was “Daddy’s house”! But crucially, everyone “over there with you lot” must have thought my trips to South America meant I had some source of money to pay for them. But the fact was that apart from the airfare it was CHEAPER for me to survive there than in the UK, as it is still now.

“After months and years of utter misery (perhaps you know nothing of these emotions) I had the guts to pick myself out of the gutter of despair, and tried to build a new life and career as a writer/investigator in South America, continuing much of what I had been doing before I suffered heart failure. I thought you would be proud of me, not mouldering away in a small room in Glasgow (as that would have been my fate, unable to keep the flat in Hamilton Drive going without more money). And I thought you would love to have an adventurous father, living in South America, where you could come to follow up your interests in paleontology, music, and much more, in great happiness. Whereas you have only created misery - I had "removed myself to another continent", according to the miserable language of solicitors (that you repeated to me), cramped within a mile of your mother in the freezing rainy town which you had the opportunity to escape from, at least periodically.

“I have no idea whether you understand a word I say, as you have only responded in thirteen years over a very short time, in which we never spoke of anything significant (I avoided any discussion of the past in Glasgow when we met up that summer in spite of your

insinuations to Peter to the contrary). After the first seven years of silence and non-reply to my bending expressions of love and concern, all utterly ignored, I thought things were at last ok. But no, I sent one little email late one night asking if you would correspond a little more with me. What a sin!

“Perhaps this is the last time I will communicate with you if you don’t reply. You have utterly gutted my emotions, hopes and dreams towards you, and perhaps I will never write again. But if you have the courage to reply to me I will read it with interest. You have caused me the greatest tragedy of my life, completely without my understanding why. Do you remember nothing of our love and closeness? Of the games we played, of the stories I told you, the trips we took to the Isle of Aran, Devon, and so many in the Glasgow area and Loch Lomond? I say goodbye if not; no, you cannot suddenly decide when YOU want to communicate again. I am no more "hysterical" than is anyone driven to craziness by horrible misfortunes, that I wonder if you will ever suffer, but only time will tell, and that will most likely be after I am dead. Then perhaps you will realize I did not do too badly, making a new life to which you were welcome to join in in whatever way you wished. You have been blind and incredibly different from the little boy I knew, fascinated in dinosaurs and astronomy, disappointing me beyond belief. But your stonewalling and shunning me for all these years, having me beg at a letterbox to talk to you, as if I was a horrible criminal, will never leave me.

“I am not a perfect man, but if you believe I have deserved all this, the sense of purposelessness it has caused me, the loss of any sense of continuity through my sons, that even a criminal does not feel, I would like you to present some clear accusations. But you will not, you simply shun, don’t respond, as through all those years that I wrote loving letters and sent presents to you, came to Glasgow three times before you would meet me, then had you break all communications again after we met up at last, in spite of my having offered to help you with some money that I received after the deaths of my mother and father (to whom you refused even to write a short letter when they were still alive. Not a word to me at the death of my father, your grandfather).

“Were you led to believe I or they were rich? It was not so. What did I do wrong - trying to find a new life as long as I still had some energy? Do you not try to fulfil your aspirations as a musician? What did I do wrong? If I try to explain anything you cruelly condemn me for "justifying" myself. I have nothing to justify, I have occasionally tried to explain myself or defend myself against accusations from you or your mother. Who is "obsessed", are you,

Winston Churchill, Mozart, or Jimi Hendrix? Why have I had to suffer so for my determination, conviction, creativity? Were your mother and grandparents bitter about it, is that what you learned? I am a writer, sociologist, and poet, and you have ruined any happiness I could enjoy with this, when I only wanted to share it with you, in love and communication. What have I been able to be "controlling" about? That is nonsense too. What was I "bad" about concerning the "divorce"? I wanted a civilized agreement about money and your sons - your mother through her solicitor made it a nightmare, claiming I had never done anything for you, either financially or in terms of care! I wanted to support you both within my means, and to know what you were doing, which is normal. (By the way, most people do NOT all find me exasperating as you assert. I have many friends and colleagues, some of whom think quite highly of me, thank you.) I am a writer, thinker, sociologist, and poet, not some horrible bastard as you like to think, and you would realize that very well if you communicated and met with me in a normal way. No doubt it is convenient for your mother and her family to think badly of me, that happens in marriage breakdowns, which I did not cause, and my relations with them had not been thus before. You sent an unpleasant email replying to me some years ago after I wrote that letter asking you to communicate more with me; your response to that request was quite unnecessarily unkind, telling me you were so busy, that I didn't accept a "modicum of responsibility" for what had happened - though exactly what you were referring to I puzzled over agonizingly for years; and complaining about what hour my emails arrived in your inbox, and other extraordinary things. You never wrote again, although I tried to reply friendly to each of your claims. Another thing you asserted was that I demanded you to be an intermediary between me and Alexander, which was not true. I distinguished clearly between the two of you. I had said before to you that A had asked me to help him financially with going to St. Andrews, about which I was delighted, having advised him how to get in there. I just wanted to know his financial situation - costs, fees etc. and incomes - about which he was pissed off but you said what I wondered about was quite reasonable! What is the problem with the two of you, I cannot squeak a word? Both of you have lost out on so much by "cutting off your noses to spite your faces!" I think all the time about this madness.

"The things of the past between your mother and I are well and truly in the past! I don't give a damn about them - now YOU drag them up. It is because of you that they hang in the air, not me. All that is over for me!

"I want only Love, Peace, and whatever Happiness one can find in this life. I try to fulfil my destiny as a writer, sociologist, and poet. Do you ever look at my webpage?"

(Follow-up email next day)

“On consideration I would like to retract the statements: "perhaps we will never meet or communicate again" and "this is the last time I will communicate with you if you don't reply," made in this last email to you. I think they were unwise and unconstructive; I know you despise "back-peddalling" like this but I do not and nor do other people I know. Communication is important in life and one should never be too proud to modify what one has said if the emotion of the moment has led one to say something that appears later to be unwise. You must be very perfect if you never find the need to do that.

Your father.”

Now I will add a letter I wrote to my wife/nearly ex-wife about ten years earlier. She did not reply, but rather gave it to her solicitor who thought it was scandalous, and threatened litigation for libel against him (not apparently realizing that he was only the last of a string of solicitors I referred to, all paid for by “Legal Aid”. Later I sent it to my sons, but as usual they did not reply at all, so I never knew if they had even read it, let alone if it had illuminated them in some way. I only sent it to them because of accusations I had heard that they had made about me vicariously, alleging bad things about me with respect to their parents’ divorce:

“I have thought again and again for many months about whether to write to you or not, and have finally decided to do so. I feel I must try to communicate certain things to you which I do not think you know about, because we have had no direct communication for so long now.

“The first thing I want to say is that I wish you well, and hope things are alright with you. I understand from the guidance teacher, Margaret Pollock, that both boys are doing extremely well at Hyndland School, and that both seem to her to be very happy, which is a great relief to me.

“It’s difficult to know where to start. I think I’ll start with July 2003 when I came back to Glasgow. I was extremely anxious about how the boys would react to my being with a new partner, and that no doubt made me exaggeratedly touchy. I realized they were dismayed that I had her with me, but I felt that given a little time and sensitivity they would adapt to the situation, as children usually do. Of course I must have made mistakes, but they were not due to lack of consideration. I had not warned you or the boys before I came back about

it because I thought that would build up anticipations, and I felt that making as little of it as possible was the best way. That was probably a mistake.

“The boys did not seem badly out of joint though, as I was often with them alone and we were as close and intimate as ever. We had lovely times together as we always have had, and I did my very best to give them a nice time and make them happy, as I always have done. I felt that with time things would be okay. At that time I had not made long term plans for the future. I did not yet know whether my partner and I would live in Glasgow, or Colombia, or live between both places. One hope was that she might get a job in Glasgow with something like an import-export company, translating and such like, which would allow her to move between Colombia and Glasgow. But this became impossible when she was unable to extend her visa beyond six months. I had been told by the British Embassy in Bogota that if she took an English course she would be able to extend it, but once in Britain it turned out she had to do a specific kind of language course which was too expensive. She therefore had to return to Colombia after six months.

“I was upset and hurt by your letter saying I was treating the boys like chaperones because they went across the road with Nidia one day to buy milk and sweets. I thought it would be good for them to get to know one another a bit without me there. It seems incredible now that something so petty could spark off such a chain of disasters, but that is how life is sometimes, and it is this that I earnestly want to try to communicate with you. Then when your solicitor`s letter arrived, saying the boys would no longer stay over on Friday nights, I was still more hurt and upset. I have always tried to do my utmost for the boys, though it obviously does not seem that way to you, and to find they knew about this letter was too much for me. Issues concerning children when their parents are separated are not things for solicitors to be brought into, in my book. I was so upset that I thought it better if they slept that night at Elie Street because they had school the next day. That way I thought I would have time to calm down and they promised to telephone or come over the next day. In my distress I probably said a lot of silly things that meant nothing (as I did in my letters to you and later in telephone messages) other than that I felt sad, angry, misunderstood, stressed, and so on. I said repeatedly that I was not angry with them, but with the situation. In all these things, I exploded in hurt and pain, which manifested itself in angry insults (or counter-insults, as they seemed to me).

“Here I must interject something about my illness. It is now much better known to medicine how mental stress interacts with myocarditis. I have studied this quite a lot now and talked

to specialists both in the UK and in this country. Extreme stress disrupts electrical waves in the brain, which disturb the electrical waves which regulate the heart's pumping movements. I'm sure this was behind my heart failure and near death in March 1996, and the relapse I suffered after you left our flat with the children in September 1997. For some time before the original heart failure I had been desperately worried by our ever-increasing debts, bank loans, and overdraft. I was also reaching a stage of breakdown and exhaustion from my University job that was becoming ever-more demanding, after more than twenty-five years of continuous teaching and research. The uninterrupted studying, reading, and writing, which provide the basis for research and teaching, which last is what an academic earns his living from, are not always well understood by other people. They may not realise the build-up of stress and anxiety that these silent activities can build up. And unlike nearly everyone these days, we were trying to survive on one income alone. I remember you thought we should move to a cheaper flat, and now I think you were quite right. But at the time we understood that the flat would be unsellable until the gable wall job was done. We would have had to let Halifax simply take the flat over, and there would have been little chance of buying a new one. I was over 45, so getting another mortgage would have been difficult, and there would have been little or perhaps no money for a new deposit.

“You will remember my mental state of distress and depression after my heart failure in March 1996. My anxieties became more intense when I was forced to retire in March 1997, because I was quite unable to start work again, and if I had not retired I would not even have been able to receive a pension and Incapacity Benefit. I was desperately worried about our future as a family. That was behind the absurd kerfuffle on the holiday in Menorca.

“Extreme stress can cause a person sometimes to explode and say things he or she does not really mean. I am sure you must understand this. It is particularly true of someone suffering from myocarditis. I still have atrial fibrillation (arhythmic heart-beat) and an enlarged heart. And although my physical strength partially returned over time, I still suffer from other problems associated with the illness including interrupted sleep patterns, insomnia, and profuse sweating, besides anxiety and depression. The sleep issue made me especially sensitive to the criticism of my sometimes sleeping late in 2003. There was nothing more than this stress and mental exhaustion behind what happened in Menorca, or with the boys that day six years later. We all see such things – people reacting under stress – happening all the time. People normally just let them pass and try to avoid repeating the things that triggered them off.

“You knew very well that I had always got on extremely well with your father, whom I liked very much (as also I did your mother). One night in Menorca, when I was more than half asleep looking in the refrigerator for something cold to drink, I accidentally spilled a bottle of water. I went back to bed and completely forgot about it. When your Dad challenged me about it the next day, and it came back to my mind, I was offended, and perhaps overreacted, as you three most certainly had. I felt a bit of water on a stone floor in that climate was hardly the end of the world, and his manner towards me seemed out of place and ungrateful when I was paying for the holiday that I had invited him to come on. That was what led to our argument the day we returned to Glasgow which ended with you running out of our house, with the children, into your parents` car. It was all utterly trivial, but our family was destroyed forever by it.

“You obviously did not understand, and perhaps never will, how devastated I was by your leaving like that with the children, from our family home. I suffered a depression of suicidal intensity for about two years. I only came out of it with the help of anti-depressants and then when I started to explore again my interests in South America. That was how I pulled myself out of total despair and futility. I cared for and loved my boys whom you allowed to come over about twice a week, but my situation was desperate. The rest of the time I was alone in the family flat, with no job, ill and suffering depression. Unlike you I had no family in Glasgow. I had some friends, but to a great extent my social contacts had been connected before with my job and things like Open Circle that were now finished for me. My pension and Incapacity Benefit did not even cover the mortgage, the endowment policy premiums, and Council Tax. I was in an impossible situation. The flat was still unsellable, but even if I had sold it or let Halifax repossess it, where would I have lived? I would never have been able to buy another flat. I suppose I could have rented a room somewhere or tried to get some kind of council accommodation due to my illness. But I was in no mental state to think of these emergency actions. Instead I started to borrow money, because at this time banks were starting to extend their loaning facilities and credit cards were letting people get into huge debts. That is how I kept the flat going whilst also going for spells to South America. There I wrote an enormous amount, which has created for me a new career as a researcher and writer, though it is not a money-earner, just as it never was before. I am still a poet and a sociologist.

“There is another tragic dimension to what happened over those years. My parents were so worried about my situation that they re-mortgaged their house to raise money to give me to keep paying my mortgage. (Now there will be very little for me or my brothers to inherit

when my parents die. My illness and marriage/family breakdown largely destroyed my family`s finances, as well as to a great extent their happiness in life.) They understood the flat was a roof over my head, that I was too disorientated to sell up and move, and that I wanted to keep it as the boys loved coming over to play there and I quite unrealistically thought I could keep it for them to use later, and to have when I died.

“Now to return to 2003. About the same time as the problems about your solicitor, and the horrible business of communication with the boys being broken, my Incapacity Benefit was stopped. My unreal financial situation dawned on me at last. I was over &35,000 in debt, and only just beginning to realize what the financial help from my aged parents had done to the family`s finances. It was obvious I had no alternative but to rent out the flat if I was going to keep it going for the children. That combined with other reasons to cause me to return to Colombia at the end of 2003 with Nidia. It was beginning to become clear that with only my pension as income I could hardly afford to live in the UK any more, even if I were to separate from Nidia because both for visa reasons and financially she was not going to be able to stay in the UK. But I had certainly not decided to live permanently in Colombia.

“So we returned to Bogota. When I saw the boys in the café on Byres Road and at the pantomimes at Christmas time 2003 they promised to keep in touch with me. Everything seemed perfectly as it had been before with them. I spoke to Dorian once on his mobile phone in Jan. 2004, but he never answered it again and neither he nor Alexander has communicated or spoken to me again.

“What happened between that last phone call, immediately after which Dorian phoned me back by reverse charges and promised he would do so every week from then on? Evidently your then solicitor received notice from my solicitor that I wanted a divorce. Before leaving Glasgow, I asked him to approach your solicitor with a view to agreeing with you a) a long-term understanding about my contact with the boys, b) a mutually acceptable financial settlement and 3) a divorce. I wished that I had not had to initiate it in this way, but you made any form of communication absolutely impossible. However, I asked him to pursue these aims and negotiate over them in as amicable and civilized a way as possible. I never saw his initial letter to your solicitor concerning these matters so I do not know how he expressed it.

“I felt after six years of separation, and with the boys older, that it was about time to get divorced. Did you not? Why the immense hostility from you after that, and the complete

breakdown of my communications with my sons? Under normal circumstances I would have talked to you about it first, but after the unpleasant business about the boys, and your telling their head-teachers that there was some kind of legal procedure going on, when there wasn't – anyone can get a solicitor to write a letter – I felt aggrieved. Nevertheless that was another mistake on my part. I should have kept calm about everything throughout. The point was I felt I could no longer trust you at all.

“There is another point. For six years I had no serious relationship with a woman. I did not want one, largely because I did not want it interfering with my relationship with the boys. After that time I thought it right and proper to enter one if that's how things developed. I don't know how much this has to do with what has happened over the last two years because neither you nor the boys communicate with me. I believe my living in Colombia is also implicated in the present unpleasant impasse. But as I've explained, I could not be with Nidia unless I was here right now, and apart from that I had no future in Glasgow (but I am not saying I have come to live permanently in Colombia, I do not know the future). Apart from my beloved sons, I had no job in Glasgow any more (nor could I work while I was on Incapacity Benefit and that was cut just before I was due to leave!), my creative writing was recognized far less in Scotland than it is here, when translated, and the climate is terrible there for somebody with a bad heart. I don't think it would have been right, even to the boys, to stay unhappily in Glasgow for the rest of my life, and probably not live long at that. I do not think I would have been a good father offering a courageous example in life, if I had simply wilted away in loneliness and despair in Glasgow. And what if they were to leave Glasgow after their time at school and/or University was completed? These things are quite different if a family is united, but if it has broken up they are much more complicated. Separated parents often live far apart for all sorts of unavoidable reasons. Do I understand that you thought I should live in Glasgow forever? Certain things have come back to me through the “grapevine” and I would be so grateful if you felt you could communicate with me about them. I wonder whether you have understood about my financial problems, and that I could not have continued living at Hamilton Drive under any circumstances. I had hoped to hang on to the flat by renting it out, but when your solicitor threatened my rental agent with court action, she got the tenants to leave. The flat lay empty for a couple of months, and so I got even more in debt and had no alternative but to stop paying the mortgage and endowment policies, and so to sell the flat, as you cannot simply leave a flat empty and stop paying the mortgage. I was utterly devastated yet again by this, as I had always promised the boys they would be able to use the flat when they were older, and would inherit it from me after I died.

“Here I had better explain the question of both our names being on the title deeds of the flat and on the endowment policies, from my point of view. After you left the flat in Sept. 1997 you wanted to get your name off the title deeds. The flat had negative equity at that time and was unsellable anyway. Halifax were going to charge us an “administration fee” even to look into the possibility of taking your name off it. My solicitor asked your solicitor if you would pay for half this administration fee in the same letter in which he sent the surveyor’s report showing the flat had about £12,000 negative equity. Your solicitor never replied to this, and I certainly could not afford this administration fee alone. I understood that you realised you had left behind a debt and would never expect money from the flat in the future. I also understood from my solicitor that it was the value of matrimonial property at the time of separation which was divided between partners in a divorce settlement. Financial changes after that date were not part of the property that should be divided. It was obvious that I had paid the mortgage alone from Sept. 1997 until the flat was put on the market 7 years later, and had maintained and kept it up all alone. I was amazed and horrified when your solicitor claimed the value coming from the flat sale should be divided. It seemed obvious that that money came out of my investment in the flat, alone, after we separated. As it happens, that money is not really even mine as I must pay back my debts that arose from my paying the mortgage over those 7 years, as well as try to help my family’s finances, as at the moment, because of my dreadful problems, Hugh and Peter stand to lose the money they might have received from my parents’ estate when they pass away. I ask you to dig deep into your humanity and sense of justice in response to what I am saying here, which may transcend the issues as the Law sees them. Besides, I put your name on the title deeds and the endowment policy entirely due to romantic love. You had not asked for that, and so I was snookered by my own foolish kindness.

“It is similar with the endowment policies. I assumed the value of these that accrued after the separation, after which the premiums were paid by me alone, was my money. I kept paying them as I thought in the end that when they matured they would pay off the mortgage or most of it. As they were also mutual life insurance policies it meant that if one of us died before they matured the other would get the flat with the mortgage paid off. I had no problem about that as if you inherited the flat at my death it would go in time to the boys. I never imagined I would have to sell the flat before 2004, but theoretically it was self-evident to me that any gain in either its value if it were sold or in the value of the policies after the date of separation, was wholly mine. Besides all this, your Housing Association’s rules quite clearly forbade its tenants owning property elsewhere whilst gaining the advantage of a cheap rent for one of their properties.

“Now I must explain the situation regarding my financial responsibilities towards the children. I love my sons, and will be responsible to them as long as I live, and if I have any money at my death I will leave all or much of it to them. I do not think you have understood the financial situation from my side since our separation, and I suspect certain misunderstandings lie behind your hostility to me and the breakdown in my communication with my sons (among other things). After you left the flat in Sept. 1997 I had no net income whatsoever after the mortgage and endowment policies were paid for each month. That was why the Child Support Agency ruled I was not obliged to give you money to support the children. You were receiving Income Support for them and other public benefits, including a Housing Association flat with rent paid.

“Nevertheless once I started borrowing money I gave you money – several thousand pounds between 1999 and 2003 – to help over the children. To repeat, this was money borrowed from the bank and from credit cards. You had a &6,000 PEP when you left, and shortly afterwards I gave you &1,200 for half the Halifax shares. When the boys were with me I paid for trips, piano lessons, art classes, their pocket money, dinner money and many other things including looking after them. I bought them bicycles and many other items. Why did you have your solicitor say I had never cared for nor provided any financial assistance to the children? Dorian was born in Athole Gardens that I had worked for years to pay for, and had originally bought with money from the house I had previously owned in Durham. When we sold it we were able to pay the deposit for Hamilton Drive with the sale money. Alexander was born there, and the whole family lived from my salary alone. After you left, as I say, I got into debts helping over the children`s needs and did my very best to be a father to them in the most horrible personal circumstances for six years. Now, I have no intention of ceasing in my responsibilities towards them but it is very difficult to ascertain their needs if neither you nor the boys communicate with me. I imagine Dorian will go to University when he leaves school, and I certainly intend to support him as best I can. Why did you tell your solicitor to say I will no doubt not provide financial support for the children in the future? Why not ask me my intentions on these matters?

“In the first months of 2003, after I had talked to Dorian on the phone from Bogota and after you would have received the letter proposing divorce from my solicitor, your solicitor wrote various mind-boggling things about the boys. He said once that you did not think on-going contact with me was in their interests, and later said Dorian had decided not to have further contact with me and that Alexander would probably decide the same in due course. How could I conclude anything other than that you were influencing or manipulating them

not to want to communicate or see me? This brings me to perhaps the most miserable part of the whole dreadful saga. I had not had the money to buy an air fare back to the UK before we each received &5,000 from the money from the house sale. My returning to the UK coincided with the whole shambles of the offer which was made to you, completely by accident. This offer I understood the two solicitors had worked out and I accepted it reluctantly. It was not based on any principle of logic or justice and I did not like it. There was no need to put money aside for the children as any money I can afford I will always make available for them anyway.

“I came back to the UK to try to sort out the following problems. All my things from the flat were in storage in Glasgow at great cost. I came to throw things out, move the rest to London and give the boys their things. I wanted to give them more notice but when I arrived in London an arrangement was made very hurriedly to hire a van and go to Glasgow with my brother Hugh. It was all very expensive, and as my family were giving me a great deal of help in a ghastly situation I did not find myself easily able to control events. When the reply came from your solicitor that the boys did not want to see me I was absolutely distraught with grief. I could not believe it, and still cannot understand why. Such a thing is incomprehensible, nobody I know understands it. What parent would not try and talk to his son in such a diabolical situation? I could only stay a few days in Glasgow – we were in a bed-and-breakfast at considerable expense - please understand I am relatively poor when I return to the UK now! When the boys would not meet me I didn't know what to do with their things – their bikes, books, videos, all their presents from me for years! Dave Mather said they hadn't got room to store them, only later Yassmin said she could keep them in the University. I tried everyone I knew, eventually Donald said he and Louise could keep them. I was in tears, I went the last afternoon I was able to, to try to see the boys coming out of their school, but I suppose you organized things for me to miss them. I was strongly tempted to throw myself over a bridge, but instead went to your house. I rang the bell, and heard a voice that I thought was you, because the sound was poor. I begged whom I thought was you to talk to me. At that moment someone came out of the building and without thinking more I went in. I kneeled at your door for a few minutes and talked to my son Dorian through the LETTER BOX. What parent would not do everything he could to see his sons, when he had NO IDEA WHY THEY WERE REFUSING TO SEE HIM?

“Later I heard about your indignant complaint from my solicitor.

“This letter is already far too long yet there are very many other things that need to be communicated. No doubt you will feel it is all about me, and not about your difficulties. But I would be more than happy to hear about these if you would communicate with me, and encourage the boys to maintain communication with their father. Perhaps it is time to say that I recognize that you did not think I was a good husband to you. I realise I had many faults and made some serious mistakes. All I can say is that I loved you, I married you in good faith, and had no intention of leaving you or the children. I do not think all told I was so desperately bad, nor that you were perfect. We both had faults, and no one is perfect, though I have suffered a very great deal thinking about how I failed to make you happy and why you ran away. Evidently you found living with me too difficult, though I always find it hard to recollect serious difficulties in our life together prior to my illness. I think it’s obvious that our dismal financial situation at the time had a lot to do with it, as well as your fears about my illness and whether I would ever be able to earn money again. As you left you were shouting that you would now get your own money, and you told Dorian later that the argument had been about money. Your immediate short-term situation was much better because you could receive state benefits.

“But I want to suggest that we take a new turn now, mainly for the good of the children. Please let us try to recognize both of us have made mistakes, and try to come to some kind of civilized accord. You surely cannot believe it is good for two teenage boys to have no contact/communication with their father, even if you don’t care that I have been utterly heart-broken by what has happened and have many times been on the point of suicide over the last year and more.

“Please let me beg for some kind of reconciliation and mutual respect and regard all round. Let us come to a sensible, reasonable conclusion about a financial settlement, and about communication between me and our boys. I can stand no more of this degrading, vile bickering over the money, over my miserable ill-health pension, and all the rest. I can stand no more false accusations from your solicitor. It has to stop, we have to find a normal sort of way to arrive at a settlement, as most people do. (This does not mean solicitors cannot be involved, but that WE make our decisions and agreements and they do what we ask them to do. That is how most people go about these things.)

“I cannot put up with any more threats about being taken to court. Do you and your solicitor really think I’m going to be bullied, blackmailed, or brow-beaten into accepting a settlement that is plainly unjust, because of these threats? You must realize that I will sign

to no agreement unless I believe it is fair and reasonable, and so the money will simply sit there until one of us dies, or until a court passes a judgement on the case. If you want to, if you feel so confident a court would see things all in your favour and against me, why don't you just go to court instead of making constant threats? But if you went to court and won everything, could you really face yourself afterwards? Could you face your sons when in the future they came to understand what you had done – how that I had been left at the end with a small ill-health pension, huge debts, no longer with a home, struggling in old age on a low income in South America? Please, I implore you to think about what I am saying.

“Far better would be to come to some agreement, based on logic and fairness, and some give-and-take on both sides. I am not mean, and from the beginning I imagined I would be making you some payment. I have now paid my solicitor over &3,000 in fees yet nothing has been achieved. The stress, anguish and torment of this is utterly intolerable and I see no solution in sight. I often fear if this goes on much longer I will have a stroke, or another heart failure, or a complete mental breakdown. Do you think the boys would like to see me dead? I am really serious here.

“I would be very pleased if you would communicate with me now. I am desperately earnest, I have no motives beyond what I speak to you about here, I want no arguments or unpleasantness, just sane, sensible dialogue.

My very best and sincerest good wishes.”

I showed a provisional draft of this autobiography to two writer friends at an early stage who did not know each other nor who the other was. One felt (a) that the discussion of my marriage and family breakdown was not of general interest, especially the letters to my ex-wife and son, (b) that it was invasive of their privacy, and (c) that it was unfair to speak of these matters as they had no opportunity to come back on what I wrote.

The other friend's view was (a) that it certainly was of general interest, (b) that it was a “powerful and lacerating” account of my “hurt”, (c) that it could scarcely be an invasion of privacy if it was of no general interest, as no-one would want to read it, and (d) that as it was clear that the complete stonewalling of my ex-wife and children and their silence, meant that they had not wanted to counter my thoughts and feelings, it was up to them to do so if they wanted, as that was at bottom all I had wanted: communication.

My first friend's reaction hurt me and made me feel it was wrong and bad of me to write what I had. But my second friend's views are closer to what I really think: I include what

I say about this matter both because this has been and is part of my life, and although I make clear at the beginning of this autobiography that it obviously cannot be a complete record of everything that has happened to me in my life, this is not a merely “intellectual” or “political” kind of autobiography, or something concerned with only certain aspects of my existence. Also, I believe I stumbled into something terrible that a man can experience in life, especially at this time in history. As with many issues concerning women’s and gay rights, and many other such issues which are at least allowed to be expressed nowadays, it seems very hard to speak or write about what I have written here without feeling ashamed, inhibited, doubting of one’s right or validity in doing so; not wanting to claim one is the proverbial “victim”, doubting that perhaps one is “blaming others”, being self-pitying, self-justifying, lacking in self-criticism or awareness, or simply indulgent. So I decided I would let this discussion stay in.

Besides, who is to define what writing is of “general interest”, and what is not? It only requires one person to find something is of interest, to disprove the assertion that it is not!

The following is a response I wrote to my friend Hugh McLachlan’s article called “Pay and Gender – Should we mind the gaps? (inequalities)” in 2019.

I will begin my commentary on this interesting article by Hugh McLachlan, Professor of Applied Philosophy at Glasgow Caledonian University with his first point about “the gender pay gap”. I believe that pay for a man and a woman at any particular time should be the same for the same work. Of course, issues of differences go beyond this facile point; for why are there so many more male engineers than female engineers in many countries, and why are there, it seems, at least as many female art historians as male art historians, and why are engineers generally paid more than art historians, so it would seem, admittedly without my having recourse to any relevant reliable statistics about these matters?

What are the social dynamics behind these differences, and how could or should they be changed? It can hardly be claimed for example that Engineering requires access to more University education than does History of Art, so that more financial support is needed for the first than for the second, so that it might be alleged that the differences in numbers of male and female students of these disciplines is an example of sexual discrimination, resulting from differences of funds available as between the sexes. Perhaps instead, engineers want to be closer to the processes of production and profit than art historians who investigate, interpret, and present ideas to that part of the public which is interested in the

mysteries of Art. If this is the reason for the gap it is not due to sex as such, but to the fact that these societies place greater importance on material than aesthetic values.

A similar issue lies beneath the fact that, as Hugh McLachlan points out: “some academics choose to remain academics although they could receive more pay in other occupations (and)....many academics choose not to strive for the more highly paid jobs within their own universities....which often have managerial and administrative responsibilities.....” And as he also states: “For whatever reasons, males and females might have different preferences and make different trade-offs between incomes and other aspects of employment.”

Hugh follows these points with this observation: ”Hence, the presence of a gender pay gap within or between organizations or of any other sort is not necessarily something we need to feel alarmed about. It depends on the reasons for its occurrence.”

As already noted, I agree to an extent with this last point. But to me, if the social conditions that produce these differences are unjust, then there *is* a moral issue or imperative to change those conditions. I think morality is on one level an *historical* thing: over time societies change their ideas about what is moral or immoral. But if these differences of choice are due only to individual, cultural, or sexual differences, resting upon free choices at any moment of time there is no reason to engineer alterations. This would be to enforce autocratically a dogmatic, ideologically given norm upon a society. Of course it is often argued that more men choose to study engineering than do women due to the social structuration of attitudes, ambitions and so on as between the sexes. But this goes too far if we are to assume that unless 50% of students studying engineering or any other discipline *ought* to be male or female. This is to deny that men and women may actually *be* different in certain ways!

Connected to this is the (for me) very irritating and never-ending reporting in much of the media about the appearance of the first female CEO of Coca-Cola or of a finance company, or the wonderful new billionaire Chinese women, all of which information is supposed to indicate staggering blows for the “advance” of women. I can only imagine that this constant barrage of information about, and praise for, “very successful” women must cause considerable anxiety among some women, especially when it comes to “glamorous celebrities”. Those women whose criteria for “success” are quite other than the

achievement of power, wealth, status, public prestige, or fame etc. must sometimes find it all an unpleasing pressure, just as the mirror-image of this constant propaganda is for many men. This of course brings into consideration not so much “morality”, as rather a possible philosophical yearning for forms of society very different from those that dominate in much of the world today. For example, societies that would be content with slower progress, gentler life-styles; their emphasis being on peaceful existence in harmony with nature; on cultivation of the individual’s creativity, a deeper idea of “fulfilment” than that baked into the “rat-race” of an urgent, rushing-around blindness known now as “normality”. And societies that might evidence *much less material inequality* than now, though I no longer believe in the possibility of a completely “socialistic equality”, which rests upon a Utopian assumption that “Human Nature” could and will change in ways that would make possible the required social transformations within a preconceived time-span. And nor do I now believe that the word “equality” means anything at all in many spheres of human existence, such as love or artistic transcendence. For these dimensions of existence should not involve competitiveness, and would not if they were no longer linked to the mechanistic social philosophy to which I have hinted at above. Thus superiority and inferiority should have no place in these realms.

This discussion leads us into the realization that particular questions regarding “equality” inevitably involve asking what kind of society do we have *now*, and what kind of society do we want to have in the future.

In radically unequal societies, is it so important that the few at the top of the heap in terms of money and power render sexual equality? I suppose so, if it is equally important that those at the very bottom of the social pyramid, men and women, can manage to grovel and scrape just about the same pittance to survive.

In any particular society – gradually, through globalization becoming simply SOCIETY, - morality (the consensus, however much coerced, about what is right and wrong) changes, morphs, transforms itself, over time – in different ways in different spheres, by no means uniformly or evenly. At any one moment, morality varies even within a particular social context, as between groups, classes, the sexes, ages, etc. There is a perpetual contestation between the different moralities available, in dynamic processes of transformation, mergence and divergence, such that talk of any particular “movement” or social idea

quickly becomes out of date. Socialism, Counter-Cultures, the Hippie Phenomenon, Feminism, Nationalism, Fascism, Anarchism, Equality, Freedom, Fraternity, and many other terms and “isms” are all subject to this kind of socio-cultural process and transience.

### **A VISIT TO CUBA**

It would take a while to narrate all my impressions and thoughts from Cuba. The first thing you notice is an officious attitude in the airport when you arrive in Havana, by contrast with Bogota for example, where immigration people are business-like but friendly and pleasant, even smiling from time to time. Not so in Cuba. Then once outside, having felt like a schoolchild awaiting judgement from a master, you get in an old battered banger of a taxi and drive on a near-empty road to the city. Not that I would complain about scarcity of cars - there's far too much traffic everywhere in the world - but there is a feeling of being cars are not available to buy even if someone has the money. Only politicians, diplomats, or sports people can get a new shiny car.) Indeed Cuba seems in danger of degenerating into a North Korea, with so many people in uniforms and great equality because (nearly) everybody else is poor. Several taxi-drivers I talked to said they had professional degrees such as in engineering but could earn more as taxi-drivers. Wages and salaries are abysmally low - if you give a tip of a dollar to a waiter that is probably more than he otherwise earns in a day.

And there is a run-down feeling everywhere, except in certain very attractive old parts of Havana and elsewhere. The immediate refrain often heard is that "they've got no money", but this does not convince me - there is a lack of initiative and sense of being able to do what is obvious. In one hotel in a place called Holguin where there was a cultural festival our group went to participate in - which was fabulous by the way, culturally Cuba is most interesting, but one wonders whether such culture digs any deeper down into the wider population than in "capitalist" countries - I entered my room (without being shown to it as is customary in most parts of the world) - touched the curtain-blinds, which immediately collapsed, so I had no curtain against the morning light for four nights, when after constant begging someone at last came and fixed it!

I wanted to approach Cuba without preconceptions, but on the whole it confirmed my long-held belief that "socialism" needs MORE democracy than capitalism, not less! It requires flexibility, imagination, grass-roots involvement, not a rigidly ossified state regime, and it is scarcely possible to have much democracy where only one party exists, and one man rules for fifty years (then passes on power to his brother). There is always the feeling, from the police, to people working in banks and hotel receptionists who love to keep you waiting, that anyone with a little bit of power can treat others shoddily. Not everyone - of course many people were very nice, even among the groups mentioned. But it is very different from generally friendly Colombia or Peru. One of the reasons is that as someone who has spent considerable time in Cuba later told me: "the Comité de la Defensa de la Revolución has a centre based on every block of every city in Cuba spying on people and noting everything they do which is not in line or is considered "mentally-impaired behaviour." People live in perpetual low level fear. This includes fear of getting angry or losing your cool in a bank or shop or office. You can get fucked over even when you have not done anything but an important person doesn't like you. You have to cow-tow to anyone in authority."

I wish I had known this before I went.

There is of course no doubt that Castro's Cuba's problems largely emanate from the United States and its appalling policies towards their small neighbour. (Some people even claim that the great difficulties in using the internet are due not so much to the government's restrictions, but to US electronic sabotage, which is perfectly possible.) After the other Latin American territories became independent from Spain and Portugal, Cuba dragged on as a Spanish colony for nearly a century, during which time slavery actually INCREASED. The US position was quite explicit: they would wait until the right moment, and when Spain was weak, the "mature fruit" would fall into the arms of the US, as part of its "manifest destiny" within its own backyard. After its "independence", Cuba became a playground for Americans enjoying sex, rum (the very best, it must be said) and a free haven for the mafia. The US fury at Cuba's revolution contained and still contains immense malice. But this does not justify everything in favour of Cuba's government. I met people who thought the impasse between the US and Cuba NOW, is a case of 50:50 blame. Castro is a bloody-minded and stubborn character. The whole thing has been like the Cold War in general: dogmatism, opportunism, dishonesty, oppressiveness, lust for power on both

sides: each side working up anti-enemy frenzy in their respective populations in order to justify and conceal their denials and suppression of real democracy and rights on both sides. Cuban television has a lot of documentary-type programmes about the bad Bay of Pigs times featuring Fidel and other commandantes of the Revolution holding forth interminably.

It was great to see no commercial billboards around, advertising shampoos, cars, or cans of soup, but on the other hand the political slogans nauseated me, for example: "La Patria! We will win!" (What exactly?) "All for the Revolution" with far-sighted photos of Fidel and Che, and worst of all one that preached "The last word has been said, now we must work!"

As I have said, the festival of ten days that I was directly involved in, reading poetry and giving the odd talk was very good. There was deep appreciation and interest, which made the whole thing worthwhile. Some other poets and art exhibitions were great too, but especially I loved the music! Salsa-like jazz is what it was, but also with so many other influences. This is an incredible island for music, very sophisticated and wild, amazing.

It is not surprising that as a female friend of my brother's that I met in Havana said: "El Cubano tiene resentimientos." The problem is a long-term one, exacerbated by the regime deciding long ago to expand tourism, which has now been for some time a major economic earner. But package holiday tourists are protected in their enclaves, and if there are any problems their tourist agencies deal with them. Not so for me.

The whole resentment thing is made yet greater by the fact that the country has two currencies, one convertible for foreigners, the other unconvertible for Cubans. I found the whole thing very difficult to understand, and this led me into terrible problems. Before going into this however, it is worth pointing out that the majority of Cubans cannot participate in the convertible currency, cannot even enter hotels and many restaurants (until recently this was a legal matter, now it is simply financial.) Some of the foreigners in my group and outside it did not seem to understand this, and were lauding constantly the wonderful socialist system in Cuba, which provides, though they knew nothing about it, a universal health and educational system.

Anyway, though many people undoubtedly love Fidel (though what that really means on a psycho-social level would be worth considering), many do not - people I met because I strayed outside the fold of the "encuentro" into "ordinary" bars etc. There I heard of much discontent, of corruption, poverty, sickening resentment at tourists with their dollars, the suffocating, mad bureaucracy that stops you doing anything or makes you wait and wait (I found this from the first moment, even when trying to get a Cuban sim card for a cell-phone, or for example later hearing from one nice person I met who wanted to send a book to me in Colombia, that it would be very expensive to send it and would require a special plastic covering necessary for something fitting the category of a "book"; and oh how complicated to send any money to Cuba from outside!), and the impossibility or great difficulty of travel, doing anything or going anywhere.

Two terrible things occurred to me in Cuba, due to which I don't think I will ever return there. In Holguin I was due to give my financial contribution to the organizer of the group I was part of called "Poetas del Mundo", about which matter I had tried to find out how I could best pay from him, from the Cuban Embassy in Bogota, and from many other sources before going to Cuba. When there, I simply withdrew money with my Bank of Scotland Visa card whenever it was possible or convenient, to pay off the debt. It was not explained to me that I had to pay the whole lot before we left Holguin (we were going to other places together afterwards), and the Chilean poet who organized the visit did not explain that the money needed to be transferred to a Cuban state agency. On the last night, I was asleep, when six policemen burst into my hotel room, handcuffed me behind my back, and frog-marched me to a police station. After several hours all the idiots involved had understood that it was all insane. I had no intention of cheating anyone. I was let free, my shoulder badly hurt, amid vague assertions of apology and error, especially from the "cultural agent", whose closeness to the police had resulted in my arrest; though he also reminded me that I was "in his country". (I told him I felt as if I had been grabbed by the Gestapo).

To me that was fascism, not "socialism". What disappointed me most was that some of those "poets" did not react to it as an outrage against justice.

I must interpose that between these problems I much enjoyed many aspects of Cuba, of the "encuentro", and of many people I met there. The bad things did however rather spoil the general experience. The history of Cuba is most fascinating, and I came across a good

number of interesting books that illuminated me on this. There are also some remarkable museums in Havana (if you are lucky enough to find them open).

Well just to finish this account, I am interested in "failed socialism" just now, whether in Cuba or Colombia or anywhere else. The basic reason for the general failure, so it seems to me, is that "socialism" started at the wrong end of the earth, not, as Marx had hoped, in the most "developed" countries.

Anyway, after the exhausting "encuentro" I returned to Havana. Unfortunately I was no longer with the group "Poetas del Mundo", and went to a hotel where I was completely alone. When at the reception - I still cannot understand why exactly, perhaps because I expressed some irritation at their apparent lack of interest in the service I was inquiring about - I was assaulted by what I later realized to be hotel Security Guards. They dragged me from the hotel, manhandled me, stole the cash I had on me, then left me alone, shouting "go back to your own country!" As now I had no money, I went to an ATM, but perhaps because I was so shaken up I reacted slowly, and it was all in pitch dark; the machine snuffled up my card. It was Friday evening so I had to wait till Monday morning to retrieve it. The hotel would not let me stay without paying in advance - even though I offered to give them my passport, my cell-phone, or anything else they wanted to hold from my personal belongings - and threw me out the next day into the street. Only after a long ordeal, for which I am far too old - at 19 one can survive such "adventures" - I found somewhere to sleep - with the kind help of an immigration officer who rescued me from my dilemma - with a family who were kind enough to wait two days to be paid, and I reclaimed my card from a lazy rude bank staff the next Monday. (The day after my being beaten-up, the real police were called to the hotel, who did nothing about my assault, but took me to a run-down, overcrowded, peeling-walled hospital, for my bruises to be most unsympathetically examined.)

If that is Socialism, I don't want it - but it is not!

## **CHAPTER TEN**

## REFLECTIONS FROM DARKNESS AND LIGHT (LIVING IN COLOMBIA)

Regardless of differences in circumstances or situation, living requires a great deal of courage, whoever or wherever one is. I'm tempted to say "especially as one gets older" (though in fact life can be "tough" at any and every age); not only due to age as such, but because irredeemable problems mount up over time, whether they result from mistakes, errors, or bad judgements in the past, or health, or from the accumulation over time of experiences and situations that were not necessarily caused by one's own fault, but which traumatize you. That is why many people die, I suspect, before "natural causes" require they reach the end of their lives. Our friend Maria de los Angeles wore a tee-shirt on which was blazoned:

"Live with no regrets  
Love with no limits."

Easier said than done!

There is the question of self-reflection, seeing oneself as certain others appear to see you: is that good for your self-awareness, or does it incline one to self-destruction mentally and psychologically, undermining the self, even to the point of madness? Dostoyevsky-like, or Kafka-like.

I love to observe Nature in my own way - sunsets and sunrises, *ocazos* and *madrugadas* – the latter after a night of drinking and writing; then the view from my bedroom window of trees, the typical Colombian roof of another house, and the blue sky above. I cannot be other than what I am.

People who cannot understand, are like the kiss of death. Poetry is music, intuitive resonance, and meaning – though the last is often enigmatic and complex. It enters buried thoughts, emotions, and the soul; it does not always "speak" or "sing" to the hearer in immediate or simple ways. That may take time.

There were several times in my life when I wanted to turn to China, go to China, even perhaps learn the language a bit. But I never did, as one cannot do everything, and cannot be in two or more places at one time. But I studied and wrote about Chinese art, poetry, spiritual philosophy, traditional science, and history, and saw the mist over the mountains from our finca, in absolute Chinese Taoist or Chan Buddhist style, and I still do.

There was a period in my life when I felt an acute sadness or discontent about the fact that one could not be everywhere, could not know many more people and things than is possible for one person within one lifetime; could not be many, many people doing many, many different things all at once. This strange and extraordinary feeling was reflected in a number of poems I wrote in the 1980s and early 90s.

Perhaps I have just been out of touch always, simply receiving the wrong messages from Reality. If I give a talk, or try to encourage someone to read my writings about indigenous shamanism, all they can sometimes think about is taking *yajé*, or *ayahuasca*, which is in vogue now among some people. If I am fanatically enthusiastic and driven, all my sons seem to be able to say is that I am hysterical and obsessive. Others, after a talk I have given in Colombia, ask what is it like for a European, with European ideas, to drink *ayahuasca*?

At our finca I opened a book one day about Renoir, replete with fine colour reproductions of his paintings. Though all this was not new to me, I was so struck by his astonishingly beautiful portraits of women at many ages – in childhood, adolescence, young femininity, older womanliness; - so engrossing, attractive, real, sweet; or frustrated, or anxious; they seemed to grab that half of humanity – women, even if only in one part of one country at one time – Paris, France, in the nineteenth century - so gorgeously as to overwhelm the senses and the mind. A wonderful example of Marx's "education of the senses."

In about 1980 I sent George Steiner my first book of poems called *Poems To Light (Through Love And Blood)*. Presumably he didn't like it very much, and wrote in his reply to me that my poems were "somewhat rhetorical and *voulu* (underlined)". About twenty years later I went to a conference in Naples on "Estrangement", organized by the publication called *Lo Straniero*. I talked about the estrangement of art and artists, particularly in relation to Wagner and Nietzsche. Before the conference began I spent a day and an evening with a nice woman also attending it. Evidently she didn't think I was feminist enough for her to like me very much, yet later I sent her some books of my poetry, on her request, and she responded, saying: "As the winter begins to absorb us all, I have

been reading your beautiful poetry”. She was a very good actress, a partly-Jewish Swedish-American.

At different times in my life I have sent poetry to editors of poetry journals, anthologies, and later of literary websites. Sometimes these submissions have been enthusiastically received and some poems published, but among the rejections I remember was the suggestion that my poetry was reminiscent of other poets and poetry, and that I should strive to make every word my own; another which averred that I should look for an LSD/acid publication for my poetry; another that my themes were too grandiose, overweening; another suggesting that my poetry celebrated alcohol abuse and pornography, whereas the website in question celebrated the “raising of consciousness”; another that my style was “rambunctious”. I think it was that one that quite obviously misquoted “cloacas” as “clocks” to make it seem ridiculous in the context. These are just a few of the comments I remember!

The deepest soul of love, disillusionment, loneliness, hope, enthusiasm for life, the meaning of life, the meaning of the Universe, Eternity, is in poetry and music. The greatest poets and composers have not been soft men all the time; their quietness and softness have had to be hidden, preserved, and protected; if they had not done so they would not have survived long (as many did not), any more than a shaman in a traditional community would if he could not “hold his own” in normal life as well as during visionary sessions in moods of shamanistic flight.

I had thought that I lived for much more than myself; for love, for ideas and causes that go beyond my little box of a life. But then I have come to wonder at times whether perhaps indeed I do live for myself, though perhaps badly, unsatisfactorily; and that my love for others, in my intensities of commitment and so on, are really just balustrades for my self-esteem, my sense of purpose in an utterly atomized world. But I hope I am being too cynical and self-doubting about myself when I am in those moods; I hope the roughness of the world, of life, and the sceptical views of me, or of human nature in general, that some people around me have shown me during my life, do not justify any complete abdication of that optimism, idealism, and belief in love, truth, beauty and freedom, which I have experienced and still do sometimes experience.

I had thought that nothing could be more magnificent as a child than Beethoven’s enormous suffering, whilst creating such fantastic music when he was deaf, isolated, and alone, for

all humanity and making himself something that must survive far beyond his short life-span. But perhaps that is nonsense, as beyond the moment of sublime creation there is nothing; once dead, nothing can mean anything anymore to anyone.

I think I had always wanted and needed a “love of my life”, but I was for long stretches of time such a “womanizer” (where I could pull it off), so utterly consumed by sexual desire, lust, besottedness with women physically; and also so desperate in my need for freedom, in so many respects, also so confused about what “love” for me really was, as opposed to infatuation, or an overcoming of loneliness, that it (“love”) did not happen.

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Here now is an email exchange between me and Susan, a Jewish American girl whom I had been in love with in the late 1960s and very early seventies. The emails mainly concern the early stages of the Trump catastrophe in the United States.

Hi Susan,

I absolutely agree with your reference to the rise of Hitler, as there are indeed parallels between Trump and him. I cannot shake off either a daily feeling of terror that the "Trumpite phenomenon", which Carl Bernstein has called "American neo-fascism", not just that of the vile man alone, is worming its way to a dictatorial inhuman hell in America, and not just there. It is working in phase horribly with other processes in the world - including "Brexit", which is at bottom an English (not British) xenophobic nationalism (though one is obliged to make the obligatory remark that not all the people who voted for either Brexit or Trump are followers of either ideology, though both Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage are close to Trump).

Every step of the way seems to be acceded to by so many; the "base" in each case seems evermore sucked into that strange kind of besottedness that one can see so well in, for example, the famous photo or piece of film of a youngish woman in a crowd in early-Nazi Germany, with an almost deranged facial expression. Two women at the 4th July military parade said with tears in their eyes how they loved Trump, "their favourite president", either to a BBC or CNN interviewer. But of course we must remember that this is America, not Weimar Germany; there are real "checks and balances" but they are not always working

well. There is also a "Civil Society" much stronger than that in pre-Nazi Germany, but infuriatingly slow in "uniting and fighting" in a coherent way. I worry all the time, especially when talking with people of various nationalities who think CNN is "obsessed" with "bashing Trump!" (Thank God if it is!)

About immigration there are very mixed views in Colombia. Some think Trump is horrible, very unsympathetic and unkind. Others seem really to think nothing about it all, even burying their heads in the sand as they still manage to get visas. We know two gay guys who managed to get into the States, then got asylum in Canada as they claimed threats on their lives for being gay in the town they lived in in Colombia. I think as everyone says, more "educated" people with a bit of money fly to the USA after making arrangements with the American embassy here, then sometimes overstay their visas, but I suspect less now. It is poor people who grope their way cluelessly to the southern border, to be treated disgustingly now - which was not so much case before Trump. That is tragic. Yet many "ordinary" people are rather fond of the US if they've been there, and many others yearn to go. It is mostly more "educated", politically-minded people who are cynical about it.

Health wise, I do have some problems mostly connected with my weak heart and atrial fibrillation due to heart failure over 20 years ago. But that was what allowed me to retire with an ill-health early retirement pension. Without that I would probably have been stuck in Glasgow until 65 and would not have got myself to South America which I much prefer. I spend a lot of time reading and writing, even when travelling which we do as much as possible - last year to the Llanos in Colombia and China. This year we are going to Medellin soon, the second city of Colombia and capital of the Department of Antioquia, which is at the heart of coffee country.

Do tell me about your life.

Tim

Thanks for this analysis! I always love reading your ideas.  
In terms of immigration, what are you hearing in your local communities? Are people more or less likely to seek asylum in the US?

On another note, how is your health? How do you spend your days? Do you travel?

Warmly,

Susan

I will follow this up with some more comments, hoping you are not bored with my opinions!

All the best,

Tim

*Hello!*

Impeachment proceedings against Clinton actually helped him win re-election - it ignites their base. I like Kamala Harris but not sure she could win. These are scary times in America. Really reminds me of the rise of Hitler. How are you?

Susan

On Wed, Jul 10, 2019 at 9:29 PM Tim Cloudsley wrote: Hi again Susan, how are things going? Who do you favour among the democratic candidates? Do you think Nancy Pelosi is right in not getting on with impeachment proceedings over Trump?

All the best,

Tim

Susan Paynter Ed.D.

“Music in the soul can be heard by the universe.”

— [Lao Tzu](#)

I love your quotation from Lao-Tzu: “Music in the soul can be heard by the universe,” with its non-dualist cosmology and feeling towards the individual human being and the Divine. WE have divinity within us; it doesn't always shine through (to put it mildly) but it is not

something exclusively outside of us as monotheistic religious theologies often conceive things. We can try to draw out our own sparks of divinity, but we do not have to beg "God" who is alone able to bring it out of us. It is like Albert Einstein's superb statement about Mozart, that "it is as if the master plucked his music ready-made from the Universe."

We are all part of the Universe, and its divinity is also therefore within us literally and materially in the scientific senses of chemistry etc. and at the same time spiritually. Feuerbach was right in his critique of religions like Christianity as no more than human beings' projections of their own ideals, hopes, and dreams onto an imaginary "God". The Universe is Divine, and we can be in tune with that, however difficult and transitory that might seem to be.

#### A VISIT TO CHINA    Sept.-Oct. 2018

**This piece was written as a direct response to my personal thoughts and feelings whilst travelling in China. It is a kind of *haibun* - prose interspersed with poetry written during a journey through part of Eastern China in 2018. It is not about politics or economics, it is strictly about some of the thoughts and feelings I had in the country as directly experienced. There can be a great difference between an unfiltered direct experience of a people and culture, and the knowledge arising from social, historical and political analyses.**

I first came upon, and discovered a fascination for Chinese Ideas, when I was a student at Pembroke College, Cambridge University, in 1968. I was not studying anything remotely to do with China, nor did I know very much in particular about it (except what its capital was and its population), and nor did I have any particular input from my family concerning China. My father was born in India, where my mother also lived for a while when an infant; my father was fascinated with Africa, whilst my mother was with Italy, Greece, and many

other parts of the world. No one had fed into me any particular charge of philosophical, cultural, or aesthetic enchantment with China. I just saw a book about the three main philosophical, or religious, or spiritual fountains that had together fed China for nearly three thousand years in Pembroke College Library: Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, and about how they had combined and intertwined in Chinese history and culture over such a vast extent of time. These three “spiritual” and “moral” traditions of Chinese Civilization expressed a strong tendency towards mutual tolerance, interaction, and interlockingness, except during phases of mainly state-directed, violence. I found that extraordinarily fascinating.

Our first days in Beijing were quite extraordinary and unforgettable. The pretty, friendly, smiling waitresses, so helpful, patient, and delightful, reminded me all the time of the young concubines, maids and serving girls depicted in many traditional Chinese paintings;- so nimble, delicate and elegant, so artistic and subtle in their bearing and expression. Later, outside the Shaanxi History Museum in Xian we met a charming and beautiful Chinese girl called Candace, who had lived in New York and spoke very good English. We talked about many things concerning China and at one point my wife Nidia said Candace looked much younger than 29 which she had said she was. I said, “Well, all Chinese girls look young,” to which Candace replied: “Yes, people often say Asian girls always look young.”

These things mingle in memory with the Art, especially the hallucinogenic bronzes, ceramics, porcelain and statuary of the Shang, Chou, Han and Tang Dynasties; and with the sense of peaceful tranquillity rendered in paintings of and about scholar-poets, drinking rice wine from bowls, soaking into mountain mists, loving their calligraphy, their pictographic words, and their brush strokes – in a quietness still maintained today even in the busy but not extremely noisy *hutongs* of central Beijing; and the lovely food, the clear blue sky of Beijing’s September: these will remain for me, I hope, like so many Chan Buddhist moments of the ‘Eternal Now’, Enlightenment, *jetzt-zeiten*, “forever”.

After Beijing, we took a rapid-train ride to Xian, through countryside that at first was disorganized and untidy, with high tower-blocks of apartments randomly breaking up the apparently unattended land in an ugly fashion. Gradually the countryside came to seem more orderly and cultivated, and the designs, forms, spacing, and conditions of the apartment buildings started to seem more tidy and aesthetic.

Shortly after arriving in Xian, we went, as no doubt nearly all visitors do, to see the Terracotta Army of the first Qin Emperor. Seeing this is like an hallucination without taking any drug or stimulant. The thousands of amazingly modelled soldiers, so exact in uniforms that register rank and weapons, each with distinct faces, nothing standardized, is nothing short of mind-boggling. The idea of this Emperor ordering and overseeing such an enormous task from 226 BC until his death, for the purpose of defending him from his enemies after his death is uniquely extraordinary. Of course it follows traditions - not unique to China – of planning the tomb of a deceased ruler to ensure his survival in the Afterlife, but this is surely on an utterly amazing scale.

It made me wonder whether the Emperor really believed that terracotta soldiers could protect him or his soul after he died, and if so in what ways; and still more whether his courtiers, and especially the artists and craftsmen who made the model soldiers, really shared any such beliefs that their Emperor might have held. Such beliefs appear today as exceedingly childish: the whole thing reminds me of when I was a child and believed that the toy animals, teddy-bears, and assorted “fighters” that I kept under my bed at night – including the handle of a hammer that I called Dong – could fight off devils who might approach my bed at night. Nevertheless, however “childish” the conception might seem, the organization of the Qin Empire was anything but childish, its Emperor terrifyingly powerful in the most earthly ways.

Seeing the fantastic works in especially the Chinese National Museum in Beijing, the Shaanxi History Museum in Xian, and the Shanghai Museum of Art – the most stupendous museums imaginable – re-aroused in me a set of conjectures I have held for a very long time. These concern the thought that shamanism, itself originally connected with magical hallucinogenic inputs into the mind from plants, was/is central to the imaginative, religious, and spiritual history and culture of East Asia, especially of China and Siberia. It is clear that the major influxes of Oriental Asians across the Bering Straits into what Europe much later came to call the “New World”, around 15 to 10 thousand years ago – the exact timings are always given to intense debate – must have brought “styles” of thought and art with them. Can the same “deep psyche” of East Asia and Amerindia not be seen in designs, stelae, horrific carvings, imaginary animals, hybrids, man-animals and so much more in China and in North American carved Totem poles, Mayan art, pre-Inca and Inca art and

design, and the hallucinogenic textile patterns of many Central and South American indigenous groups?

After seeing the Moslem Quarter of Xian – in which the ancient mosque astonishes with its Chinese architecture, and its Taoist and Buddhist kind of temple-world - we wandered through the old, narrow shopping streets which are like hybrids between a Middle-Eastern bazaar and Chinese *Hutong*. Soon after that we flew to Guilin, and while there we took a boat trip along the River Li to Hangzhou, through stupendous karst scenery, mountains with extraordinary shapes and peaks. The Tang poet Yan Hu wrote these lines, presumably on a bright moonlit night:

“The river winds like a blue silk ribbon,  
While the hills erect like green jade hairpins.”

And I wrote this:

### **GUILIN (IN A RESTAURANT WITH MY WIFE)**

“My poem cannot be a replica:  
The River Li flows and swims as a blue silky moon  
Like sorrow and pain, and then back.  
The huge high green karsts erect to the skies forever;  
What changes with the Autumn winds?”

We also went on a night boat on Lake Shan – to the plaintive sound of a woman playing a traditional Chinese single-stringed instrument, and rode past a wonderful spectacle of girls dancing in traditional form, arms above their heads as they revolved.

From Guilin we flew to Hong Kong, where one is immediately struck by the differences between “The Mainland” and Hong Kong. The very term “Mainland”, used in the South China Morning News, suggests that the people of Hong Kong don’t really feel part of the “Mainland”, no matter how much they know they are Chinese. A hundred years under British Colonial rule resulted in their feeling different. The guide who met us at the airport

and took us to our hotel said he felt both Hong Kong and Chinese, but a waiter serving us with delicious food a day or so later said he would be happy if Hong Kong was ruled by Britain for another 500 years! Both had lived a good while in Peru in the first case and California in the second.

Public sculpture in Hong Kong is rougher and more avant-garde than that which one sees in mainland China; popular music in the People's Republic is not so frenetic as in Hong Kong, even though the country is just as crowded. (I am speaking here of course of those parts of Eastern China that we visited). There seemed to be in this main part of China less Western music than in Hong Kong, though there is plenty of Western-influenced music, though that is there in Hong Kong as well. It is interesting that one of the earliest Western popular musicians that was invited to perform in China was Jean-Michel Jarre, whose music is exciting, but also gentle and tranquil, rather as watching Chinese girl dancers in traditional costumes, movements, and facial expressions is.

The music in Hong Kong streets is not necessarily Western, but closer to it. The streets felt in some sense more frantic. The buses remind you of London even though they are different – twenty years after the “handing back”. A bus station we could see from a restaurant window looked as boring as one in London. If many Hong Kong people are a bit afraid of being “taken over” by China proper, the latter is wary of tendencies that might emanate from Hong Kong which could be disturbing to its nature and being. The Chinese versions of rock, folk, romantic love songs, or jazzy background music, in “Mainland” China, lack the urgency somehow, the up-to-the-hilt emotionality (and indeed at times ferocity) of Western music. But it is not dull, not *kitsch*, not de-adrenalized or de-intensified. It is of Chinese culture/civilization, a different thing from European and neo-European cultures/civilizations. China is different from the West! Not the raw, hard edges of the Blues, Jimi Hendrix, or Wagner. Much softer.

An extraordinary sense of calm, serenity, politeness and self-control predominates in China, in spite of huge crowds walking across enormous complex spaces, squares, hotel and other lobby areas, and the great activity and pushy schedules.

From Hong Kong we flew to Hangzhou, the Capital of the Southern Sung Dynasty.

The very picturesque and piquant names and expressions from both ancient and modern China, are so striking. Such as Mao-tse-Tung's "Let a Hundred Flowers Bloom"; in Hangchow's West Lake there are the "Three Pavilions That Mirror The Moon". One Hangchow local beer is called "West Lake Green Rain Beer", whilst another place in West Lake is called "Lotus in the Breeze at Crooked Courtyard". Pang Chunmei, one of the favourite concubines of Ximen Qing in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century novel by Langlin Xiaoxiao Sheng, is called "Spring Plum Blossoms". Hong Kong means "Island of Perfumes", Kowloon means "Nine Dragons".

On the banks of West Lake, shortly after it had become dark, the Leifeng Pagoda lit up, and the reflections of that light twinkled their way in ripples to the shore, whilst an old-style red lantern lit up a Taros tree, so that its falling kind of night-green dark tent shone upon branches in front of us. Now we could have been in Classical times, pre-electricity, when light at night came from flaming torches or oil lamps, and a boat like a gondola or giant moth might arrive at the shore where the Emperor waited, accompanied by his delicate courtesans. These are some of my responses:

"I take up my bowl,  
And the wine unites me with the essence of Nature  
As I follow the Tao into the essence of Truth;  
The spirit of Reality is what I pursue  
With my brush-strokes, in painting, or poetry."

This was inspired by Yua Tu, a Tang Dynasty poet:

### **A FOUNTAIN AND LIGHT SPECTACULAR AT HANGZHOU**

"The splendour of existence  
The gratitude for being  
Beauty exudes from the visions of essence  
Between reality and imagination."

## WEST LAKE

“I see a peach-colour lovely light  
Somewhat hazy like a misty cloud  
Here there is so much delicious air  
Girls that turn to you with sweet smiles and care  
This is the turn of beautiful dream  
Around a Lake that is soaked with millennia of wonder  
Here I feel I join again  
My real love, Nidia, my delicious one.

I see Elephants, with enormous mouths,  
Dragons, making out their teeth so strange  
Their tails are absolutely turning to the North,  
Here we know where we are, or not?”

Misty willows and painted bridges retain thousands of years of lingering nostalgia; the shape of Shang bronze spoons is the same as modern plastic restaurant ladles; politeness as one of the highest of moral virtues in civilized society is as ubiquitous today as ever. China has been/is culturally continuous though punctuated periodically by long gaps of disorder. Order restored, it has been, and is again being rebuilt culturally and physically, down to streets, shops, entertainment areas, and everything else.

“I was swimming  
Through the dark  
I was swimming  
In the deepest dark  
I was that  
I was awaiting  
Enlightenment!  
In Chinese Art!

Now I feel the *qi*, and see the Spirit in the Tao of Nature

Wherever it moves, and how its essence flows  
Enigmatically and ambiguously everywhere.  
Ah! Is not Southern Sung Landscape Painting among the greatest Art ever?  
“Soundless poems” are the Divine Creation of the Tao  
Working its Way through the Artist’s Mind  
As it tells the hand how to render Nature  
For Nature itself to enjoy.”

Everything in China seems absolutely orderly, and without that, chaos would reign. People obviously not only realize that, but have no inclination to go against it anyway, for Taoist, Confucian, Buddhist, and even Maoist reasons. And for good reason: look at the thousands of huge tower blocks, sky-scrapers, with millions of people living in apartments in peace! There is peace, solidarity, kindness, happiness (insofar as these are possible for humanity). There is freedom of thought about a great deal – police or soldiers do not invade your small gathering out of the blue. Things get blacked out periodically on the television when they are obviously “difficult” for the government – for example when we were looking at a TV report about an Interpol official from Hong Kong who had suddenly disappeared in China. But one does not feel regimented by people in uniform as in some other countries – the police and army seem very friendly, helpful, and polite. If you talk to people about political prisoners and things like that, they don’t want to respond, - that is clear. But in general people speak very happily and freely, indeed smilingly, about nearly everything. This feels a lovely country: Nidia and I adore China.

## **THE NYMPH OF THE LUO RIVER: GU KAISHI: COMMUNICATION OF THE SOUL**

“Wind blows gently across, and the river  
Drifts vigorously along, so vividly and dramatically.  
A perfect visual poetic story is created  
Combining reality with imagination.  
The Nymph of the Luo River is on the other side  
Of the river. The Poet could see her but not touch her;  
All is for him lingering and in despair. The Nymph seems to walk

Slowly over clouds and ripples, so elegantly and romantically.”

From Hangzhou we went again by rapid train to Shanghai. Apart from the fantastic Shanghai Museum of Art, I was most stunned by the view out from the window of our hotel room on the 16<sup>th</sup> floor. At night I looked for hours upon dozens of immense, tall, apartment buildings, their lights twinkling crazily all night. Here were the residences of many hundreds of thousands of people within one’s sight. Looking down, far down, one could see the many-laned streets, driven along, in perfect silence as it seemed from our room, at an even speed by cars and other vehicles hour after hour, absolutely perfectly disciplined as it seemed to us so high up. Something like this has existed for millennia, and it is part of and affects culture and behaviour.

How terrible was the behaviour of the British in 19<sup>th</sup> Century China, as was also that of France, the United States, other Western Powers, then also Japan. They took advantage of the protracted collapse of the Ching Dynasty; China in its long hours of suffering and disaster, and exploited the great warmth and predominantly easy-going nature of the Chinese people, which Westerners can now feel and know so easily. The standard Western criticisms and condemnations of post “Communist” Revolutionary China in the light of their own earlier actions, has been and still is immense hypocrisy. The “Opium Wars” waged by Britain to force China to accept the import of opium, such that large numbers of Chinese became abject addicts of the drug, was utterly criminal.

Chinese history is all about the rise and fall of dynasties, with periods of chaos, conflict, and war in between. The 14<sup>th</sup> C novelist Luo Ben wrote: “They say the momentum of history was ever thus: the empire, long divided, must unite; long united, must divide.” Mao-tse-Tung founded the latest dynasty. Each time the past is recreated in new forms, literally. You can see this in the streets of Hangzhou that was destroyed many times and has now been recreated in recent decades. This has not been mere replication; and has constantly recurred over centuries in Chinese history.

## **BRAHMAN IS ETERNAL, UNCREATED, AND INFINITE**

## **ARJUNA**

I was at the front of a huge battle, with enormous numbers of soldiers and other people all milling around, not in chaos or disorder, but in great excitement and a subdued, triumphant agitation. We were on the point of a retreat, after a tremendous victory against the enemy. I was sitting on a cart, where an old, small black tape-recorder was playing, a voice speaking about about the battle, about the different commanders and their achievements, and about particular troop movements and the troops` courage amid the blood and sweat of their victory. It was very dark, but I could just make out a large cart on which sat one of the commanders talking with ordinary soldiers. I drew as close as I could with my cart, and leant across to them, saying: this is a great moment for democracy and equality, with a great captain talking with his men.

The captain looked at me with deep, profound eyes, and replied: “I thank you stranger; I am sure you understand that I am against all violence, but if it is inevitable and there is no alternative, we have to do what we are obliged to do, and succeed.

And the Emperor Ashoka, “Beloved of the Gods”, said much the same thing in an edict: “When Kalinga was conquered, 150,000 people were taken captive, 100,000 were killed, and many more died. Just after the taking of Kalinga, the beloved of the Gods began to follow righteousness, to love righteousness, to give instruction in righteousness. When an unconquered country is conquered, people are killed. That the Beloved of the Gods finds very pitiful and grievous.”

## **SCIENCE AND HINDUISM**

Science can tell us with some conviction,  
What happens and happened, when it happened and happens,  
And how it happened and happens.  
It can never tell us WHY something happened

In any ultimate sense. Many other systems  
Of thought attempt to do so;  
One of these is HINDUISM.

Essentially, a Hindu temple is a map of the Universe,  
At its centre is an unadorned space,  
The *garbhagrita*, an inner shrine,  
Which is symbolic of the `womb-cave' from which  
The Universe emerged. Is there a contradiction in this,  
Or simply reality: Brahman is Eternal, Uncreated,  
And Infinite?

As Ruben, a *Campesino Santanderiano* said last night,  
Love can change to Hate, as if by an electric shock.  
I am not seeking anywhere more beautiful than our *finca*  
Here in San Gabriel. I am going to India  
To learn things sociological, spiritual, architectural,  
And aesthetic; and to have great fun and enjoy people and things.  
Oh, how I want to see those temples!

But the beauty of a red sunset,  
The beauty of the whole universe,  
At whatever stage it is in its recycling,  
Is nothing compared to the beauty of your lady –  
Physical, and of her unique personality;  
Ah the Cosmos has much in mind  
As it turns around and reinvents everything.

Jaipur`s old city, its rich colour deepening and fading  
According to the light, is lined with long,  
Twinkling bazaars. Vegetable-laden camel carts  
Thread their way through streets jam-packed with cars, cows, rickshaws;  
Bicycles, snuffling pigs, motorcycles and pedestrians.

There is a beauty that rises up from chaos:  
Chaos can be *the Hidden Order Of Art*.

Everything good must always flow its way into the world,  
As everything ultimately belongs entirely to the world;  
The magic number Seven is that of the shamanistic layers,  
Upward from the underworld unto the highest levels of Heaven.  
“All that I see with my own eyes  
Seems to be a dream or a mockery.”  
“Life is a Dream.” Illusion or Reality. Brahman or Maya.

Vishnu is He who manifests, yet whose manifesting magic remains unmanifested and not to be grasped.

I am the Lord-Creator-and-Generator-of-all-beings, the order of the sacrificial ritual, and I am called the Lord of Sacred Wisdom. As celestial light, I manifest myself, as wind and earth, as the water of the oceans, and as the space extending to the four quarters, lying between the four quarters and stretching above and below. I am the Primeval Being and the Supreme Refuge. From me originates whatever has been, shall be, or is. And whatever you may see, hear, or know in the whole of the Universe, know me as He who therein abides. Cycle after cycle, I produce out of my essence the spheres and creatures of the Cosmos.

And when the sun and moon have disappeared, I float and swim with slow movements on the boundless expanse of the waters. I bring forth the Universe from my essence and I abide in the cycle of time that dissolves it.

The wild gander alights, when it wishes, upon the waters of the earth; when it wishes, it withdraws again to the void on high. Hence it symbolizes the divine essence, which, though embodied in and abiding with the individual, yet remains forever free from, and unconcerned with, the events of individual life.

When a man sleeps, the person who consists of understanding rests in the space within the heart, having through his understanding taken to himself the understanding of the senses.

And when that person has in this way absorbed the senses, one is said to be asleep. The breath is absorbed; the voice, and the faculties of eye, ear, and intellect. And when a man thus sleeps, the whole world is his. He enters the high, and the low. This person asleep, taking with him his senses, moves around in dream in his own body as he pleases.

From this Self come forth all the senses, the worlds, the gods, and all being.

### **OUR VISIT TO INDIA**

It seems that the Art, Literature, and the Hindu Scripts  
Of India are all of a single miraculous One.  
Perhaps it will be like flying into a unified Dream  
When we finally arrive there, even at the airport!  
Enture into India`s  
Now I see lovely girls dancing  
So young and pretty, with all the spirit of the Universe  
Within themselves, and when I close my eyes I see them more.  
What more is there? Sometimes their gorgeousness and sexiness  
Can defeat every sadness

But now I fear there will be delay  
Before we venture into India`s Dreams:  
Yet it WILL happen whenever comes the Hindu Grace  
To restore my prayer.

(I must acknowledge with warmth the inputs to parts of the above that came from Joseph Campbell, Heinrich Zimmer, and contributors to *The Lonely Planet* guide to India.

## **LOCKDOWN 2020**

### **A Strange Street**

I found I was walking along a street on which everyone looked sombre and turned away from me, and if I asked anyone for directions or the time no one answered. From time to time I thought I saw a girl I knew, but each one turned out to be very different from the way she had been the last time I met her. To my amazement at length I met a very pretty girl, slender and with dark brown hair, whom I had an instant became really wish to kiss on her friendly, loving lips, and to my even deeper astonishment she responded in the same way; her eyes lit up as she kissed me sweetly and beautifully.

Then I woke up.

### **A Beast And His Bottomless Boot**

There was a very ugly beast, who made horrific faces when he was annoyed. If he became really angry, he would hoot and screech and yell in terrifying ways, so that in time no one else – human or animal – wanted to live near him, so he went to live alone in the forest. His only companion was an old boot – he himself never wore either shoes nor boots – but this old boot became his ever-present friend.

Now one day he tripped over his boot-friend as he got out of bed and uttered forth an appalling noise, so fierce together with his face that even his boot disliked it, inanimate though it was. Seeing the dislike in his boot-friend's manner, the beast picked it up, and tried to punish it by sticking his hand right down deep within the boot. But he could not get to the bottom of the boot, where he had intended to pinch its soul very hard. The boot had suddenly become bottomless, and from that moment on the lives of both the boot and the beast were changed forever.

## **HONORARIUM**

All honour to they who work as nurses,  
Doctors, all medical staff, directly with  
The victims of the Coronavirus, but  
Without the necessary protective equipment!  
In the face of useless national leaders  
Like Johnson and Trump, who is a lying, ranting,  
Cowardly, corrupt, dangerous and incompetent fool.

### CHOPIN NOCTURNE NO. 9

Soft music of love, so easy to put down  
As illusion, narcissism, unreality;  
So why do we know such yearnings,  
And sometimes feel they`re so real:  
Though they escape almost as soon as we know them.

Poor Spanish, South Asian Indians, *limeños*, who run  
To the Sierra, as to stay in your *barrios* will mean death  
Without work, with no money, while at least in your  
*Aldeas* as *Quechua* you may know some *familiares*

Who grow some *yucca*, have some *cui* to eat,  
And you can work, survive, and keep your  
Families alive. And poor destitutes on the streets  
Of Bucaramanga – Colombian *indigentes*, Venezuelan escapees,

Both more desperate than normal, but with amazing  
Fortitude, fatalistic Stoicism, to survive.

I must record some important insights I gained from Paul Fussell`s extraordinary book “The Great War and Modern Memory”. One thought I take from it is that “reality” cannot be written; either it is forbidden to do so in some way or another or there is simply no way to write it. Nor is there an escape from this problem in fantasy, science fiction, and so on. These are different things – rendered perhaps in Romantic or Surrealist poetry or prose, or in fantastic dream-like stories.

Fussell quotes Freud who wrote in 1915: “Our own death is indeed unimaginable, and whenever we make the attempt to imagine it we can perceive that we really survive as spectators.”

I don`t know whether I woke up from a dream, or whether I fell asleep and entered a dream. Either way, I perceived a despot, a dictator,

A hypocrite, preaching from a pulpit,

Sickening my ears with his vile noise, or terrifying some part of me that must have come into being eons ago.

Is everyone vacuous at bottom? It is impossible to know everything and everyone.

Ah, but in recompense, perhaps we could clutch each other and love and kiss, if not forever, then for as long a time as possible.

Yeah, still *lockdown*, but in a beautiful finca –  
Most of my problems are in my mind,  
Though I think all the time about this fucked-up world:  
It`s not just one thing, it`s everything!  
Capitalism, Racism, Corruption, rotten forms of technological progress;  
Over-population, planetary destruction in all spheres,  
And now Coronavirus: will anything be learned?

In Enigmas we are all at home,  
As nothing is really very clear for long;  
What should we do if thus it is,  
Shall we look into forests again, or trees?

Melania Trump and Eva Braun  
Flew to the very Moon!  
They never had anything to say at all,  
They just wanted fame and fortune;  
Without doing anything at all!

Perhaps when you get older, you realize that you can see  
Nature just as well from afar as from right inside it;  
Even in the view of a roaring sea  
On a television screen: you no longer need  
To be right within each maelstrom of Nature as you did when you were younger.  
You can know it from any angle, as it is within you too:  
For you are part of it.

A world riddled with lies,  
Worms creeping around volcanoes.

With the power of music  
We can walk through the danger of death.

Immense mountains of glorious hope and sight:  
Tumbling ice as far as unpredictable vision.  
This is awe for dawn-light-red immensity of light  
Wherever it may be: in mountains or in your mind.

Goodbye, because we don't know who we are.

Goodbye, because we don't know who we are.  
We don't know what to do  
Because we don't know where we come from,  
We don't know what to do  
Because we don't know where we come from.  
No matter who I am, from where I come,  
I deeply ask that I be left in peace, just for a while.  
Will I arrive in time to play in the concert?  
Will I arrive in time to do my exams?  
Sometimes I feel I am unravelling:  
Where and what am I doing, and for what good?  
Everything I say is useless, or forbidden.  
Black Lives Matter!  
Muddy Waters!  
Yeah, Jimmi Hendrix!

Being English is so ridiculous,  
But no more impossible than anything else  
In this strange, infinitely variable time,  
Through the past and present of what?  
Humanity.

### **Princess Margaret**

She had found Love, just that once,  
And wanted it forever. But she was not allowed,  
And so she thought she would have to die.

Sometimes I feel I am unravelling:  
Where and what am I doing, and for what good?  
Everything I say is useless, or forbidden.  
Less than 135 gms. per litre.

## Interlude

Snow lirts through forest leaves like perfumes  
The air is sharpened as pointed fern-twirls  
Leaving lightly the unnoticing twigs  
Clouds staying the same all through the day  
Dripping with sadness  
Tingle tinkle  
Snow-like notes through magical space  
Tells us so much is there  
Steinway through the stars

This is when the music stops  
This is when the storm breaks  
A Trump comes down an elevator  
Until He ends up a lying virus  
So Positive he disappears  
Then rises again with a black mask on  
Celebrating the death of many  
Thousands that he has willed to die  
And oh, built his deplorable forty per cent!

But only does the sun have to shine warmly  
In its air in the morning for all to *seem* redeemable,  
Like a golden ship gliding into the harbour  
Like a soft dream opening into the skyvirus.

Homeless people with mental problems,  
Out in the streets as the weather gets wintry cold;  
And with Corona virus.

A period of several months began with an apparent coincidence of my health entering a bizarre phase just at the time the corona virus pandemic was beginning to bite in Colombia, at the end of March 2000. This had been preceded by difficulties in walking very far, the discovery that I suffered from chronic bronchitis, extensive tiredness, and the emergence of a damnable lack of good balance in my legs and feet over the few years before March 2000.

In March 2000 at our finca I began to suffer from fevers, crazy and hellish dreams, perpetual tiredness, congestion and general bad health. I wondered if I had contracted the dreaded Corona virus, and one day when my temperature became quite high, Nidia managed to get me a medical appointment in Bucaramanga. I described my symptoms to a very good and attentive doctor who ordered a Corona test there and then, a blood test to see if I had some other infection which could manifest similar symptoms such as Dengue, and a chest X-Ray. The hospital was almost empty, as it was gearing up for a Corona onslaught, but there were as yet few cases in Santander. A nasty chest infection was detected straightaway, and within a week or so I was diagnosed with Dengue but found negative for Covid.

The long and the short of it is that after dengue, with a nasty lung infection too and the resulting tiredness, I fell over crash on our marble-like floor and badly fractured my pelvis. I am slowly recovering, it is very painful but less so with time. I am in Bucaramanga not the finca, and at least I can read, watch TV, youtube etc. Patience: I have always been too rushed. The biggest worry is to understand exactly what caused the "lapse"; it was not a blackout, I did not lose consciousness. I stood up from a chair, turned around and got my right foot a little twisted in my "chancla" (sandal). I simply fell, something I have never done in my life in exactly that way before. Doctors think it is to do with my heart which is gradually weaker, but once I am better I am going to investigate other possible causes.

## **THE LADY AND THE WORM**

Once there was a Lady who was married to a worm. Unfortunately the worm became ill one day, with an infection of his bristles. So he went to bed, and felt very sad and miserable. One of the reasons for this, beyond the constant pain he suffered, was that now the Lady had to look after him more than was usual, while he was unable to do the many things he normally did for her.

Joy can be something that rises up  
Like licking flames to divine music;  
Thereafter one can know who one is,  
Who one loves and what one feels.

How gently moves a simple breeze,  
Softly waving the yellow flowers  
On tender twigs in mid-afternoon  
Arousing nothing but my pleasant views.

Poor America (even if it is all its own fault),  
First gets Trump, then came Covid  
On top of Trumpcrap that multiplied  
Death from the lovely Corona Virus!

Trump is an old maggot whose vile eggs  
Are eaten by his followers.  
There he lies, the more he is true to his followers.  
His lies like his followers. And his followers, like him,  
Are in a psychoid twist with them.  
I think he likes that, wherever it goes, dear God!

## **ON THE ECTORAL DEFEAT OF DONALD TRUMP CALIGULA (HITER?)**

**NOV. 7<sup>th</sup> 2020**

At last the end of the vile, lying, cruel, vicious, pompous, dangerous, psychopathic,  
ignorant pig!

There are still so many problems in America and the World. But by God this moment raises the spirit!

In a dense darkness of ignorance,

Every pin of light should be embraced.

The following is a partially edited email exchange between my brother Peter and me beginning at the time when a partial lockdown had begun in Colombia. In places it has been difficult to recall the order in which one or another was sent or received as they did not always retain their dates of writing in my cell-phone, but usually the original chronological order of these emails can be understood. The interchange was undertaken with cell-phones between us both as we were in the countryside at the time, that of Peru for Peter and Colombia for me, both with limited internet availability 😞

Hello Pete,  
17 March 2020

I'm wondering how you're getting on with the Coronavirus. Are you in fact in London at the moment?

Colombia has been a bit behind the "hot-spot" countries so far, but now the early, level state is moving up, with new cases most days but no deaths so far. The government is urging everyone to stay home as much as possible, especially over-sixties with pre-existent conditions. All schools and universities are closed, bars and restaurants close at 10.00p.m. Of course things will probably change as the growth curve becomes clearer.

Tim

Hi Tim,  
17 March 2020

No I'm in Chincha still. I realised that I would be stuck somewhere after the problem got serious. I think I'm better off here than in London where there is lockdown as of yesterday. I watch a lot of stuff on youtube.

Peru got serious as of yesterday although people didn't take much notice, today there is an order that the police could take your car away from you if it wasn't an essential journey like going to the super market. I think we are less likely to get the virus here than in Europe as the number of cases is still low. But it's a pain being stuck at home. I rent a room with this Chinchano family so I can chat with them and use their little pool.

But some places are saying this social distancing could go on for a year! That is horrific!!! Just one step at a time I guess, and try to keep mentally positive. It's what Dad would have predicted and said it would have happened sooner!!! Peru has closed all her borders! So no telling when I'll get back. I am planting native plants on this land. There was a Kew gardens project to save species in danger of extinction and they are supplying me with specimens. In their experimental planting near Ica all sorts of mammals and birds appeared so it could be quite interesting, and insects, bees etc. Seeds dormant in the desert suddenly come to life unexpectedly when there is water from the irrigation ditches or the well.

I bet it's tempting to make a dash for the finca to hang out for a bit? Hope you will look after yourself though. I was a bit careless last week in going for a massage in Chincha as there were 2 cases, but I'm taking more care now. Asthma is not a good precondition to have apparently.

Take care Pete

Hi Pete,  
21 March 2020

I had no idea you were in Chinchá, nor do I really know anything about the place. Hope you tell me more about all that.

It is very lonely isn't it, living in isolation in Peru or Colombia? Can you continue to work on your replantation project under these conditions?

I wonder how you are managing to "isolate" yourself from the Coronavirus. What is your lifestyle? I have much to say about it's effect on me, if you are interested to learn. Nidia's mother is exactly the same age as me - 71 years of age. Nidia wanted her to come here by bus just at the beginning of this crisis, and I suffered a virtual nervous breakdown about that due to her strong insistence. I have been happy for her to come here over many years, but at that moment it was an insane idea.

Much more to say, if you would like to email.

To Pete  
March `20

Absolutely no pressure meant or felt - but your not writing again worries me that you may not be feeling good. If watching too much about the crisis unnerves you limit it to what you need to keep on top of matters. Personally I find watching TV about it - news and information changing every few hours - necessary for my peace of mind, and as a sociologist it is my inclination to know as exactly as possible what is happening in the world. But being 24 hours a day in the house means I still have plenty of time to read, study, write, type up completed work, listen to music and watch marvellous concerts on youtube, films etc.

You are lucky you can still go out to your land and meet people there. We have just heard that come next Tuesday people over 60 will not be allowed out of their house AT ALL so we will have to choose whether we spend the next month here or at the finca. Another person must go to buy goods. I find it difficult to believe that I am not allowed even to go in the car without being stopped and fined by the police, so I am urging Nidia to ascertain the facts exactly about this. The great drawback with the finca is that the Internet doesn't work there, otherwise I would have no problem spending some weeks there. We cannot

have customers now so it will be quiet, with only the *viviente* couple. Money will become a problem yet again.

It's difficult to know what else to recommend to you. Taking a valium once in a while is not such a terrible crutch - I drink beer and wine as part of my unapologized-for *modus vivendi* - I am sure you can keep yourself unaddicted. I understand that you like to move around fairly regularly - you will just have to daydream about trips for the future. We were planning to go to India just before virus crisis burst upon us here and in India. Very much looking forward to hearing from you when you are ready. Good luck and be positive.

Why not get back down to that excellent autobiography you started? I return to mine in fits and starts.

Love Tim and Nidia

To Pete

We are in agreement that lockdown has been applied appallingly in many countries. None was ready for it, and delayed or denied nearly everywhere. Neither health provisions nor emergency relief plans existed to the extent necessary in most of the world in spite of years of expert advice available concerning the probability of such a pandemic from scientific experts in the field. I do not agree that "they have filled us with FEAR" - I think that is a paranoid conspiracy theory of which there are many including Trump's vile accusation that China sent the world its killing virus, whether deliberately or through incompetence. I heard Coleman's talk and explained why I disagreed with it. Sweden is the latest example of the falsity of the "herd immunity" theory, with four or five times more deaths than either of its neighbours Norway or Finland, and with no evidence at all of a creeping immunity through the population (it is increasingly doubted that there is immunity to the virus, any more than there is for flu or Dengue, whilst even if a vaccination is found within a year or 1 1/2 years how is the world going to produce billions of it to vaccinate the whole world?). And Sweden's economy is as badly affected as are its neighbours. The only strategy seems to be to control and contain until the virus is more confined as with thousands of other

viruses. I say this with HUMILITY as there is no certainty for anything in this world. This is mine and millions of others' "best judgement".

Gireck (or however it is spelt), the Swedish epidemiologist speaks of democracy and the freedom to do what one wants: so people can go around threatening people with guns, carry around poisons, spit on people outside, and the police in democratic countries don't stop them? During the black-out during the War in London police didn't stop people shining lights that might let German bombers above them know where urban residences were?

There is no evidence that this virus is affected by temperature.

It seems to be big capitalist interests that want a "return to normality" most in the US and Britain - after over 90k and 30k deaths respectively, with no indication the virus is in decline in either case.

I'm very sorry you are taken by such fury with the world situation. No one likes it, I'm dying to go to a restaurant or bar, meet friends face to face and so on. I don't think your reactions help you at all, that is my "advice" (?)

Tim

Hi Tim

Bad news today. They extended the lock down till the end of June, that's 6 more weeks of it!!

Meanwhile UK is getting back to normal just a tiny bit. Yet Peru began its lockdown BEFORE the UK !!

UK is going into summer so that will help, Peru is going to a cold winter here now, so people catch colds!

Tim, sorry so slow writing, I get through this long isolation by having a sort of routine and often I don't feel like doing certain things. There are times when I feel at peace because there is nothing that HAS to be done since no one is doing anything these days but I notice they do get absorbed by something, because many people don't seem to get around to doing things either!

Yes I wanted to reply to your email before about F. Capra and the Gaia Theory. It does seem that certain ideas come around in 30 year cycles for example in the 60s the Gaia Theory and all those 60s -ish ideas, then there was in the 90s Capra, Rupert Sheldrake, and so many highly popular writers like Eckhart Tolle and also various people wrote about ayahuasca, shamanism (you and me). Now nearly 30 more years on we have this situation and the realisation that we have not evolved much as a civilization, only small scale communities, organic sustainable farming etc. An awful lot of "green" technology like electric cars have only succeeded in making it possible for the world to continue the same! While population has been seen as taboo by both the religious right and the left who say it is wrong to tell people in developing countries not to have big families, meanwhile we go on burning much more resources than they do even with their large families.

When I say the lock down is not working in Peru, because people don't take it seriously enough in some places, while in shanty towns they can't survive without working and their houses are overcrowded, and now this problem of thousands of migrants returning to the Sierra – I mean that the government has got to be very generous and make available food shelter and medical support, if they are to make the lockdown work. Unfortunately, they see the science of it but are unwilling to see what they must do because they are too interested in their class interests. That will be their downfall, as they can't avoid the virus, even if they had an apartheid here they would still have maids from shanty towns, don't you think?

So that's what I meant in my last email.

Its good you can go to and from the finca, so you get variety, you have done well to be in a good position. I just hope you keep improving your chest illness.

They are testing people before allowing them to go back to the sierra and they have promised \$100 per person in the informal economy but many slip through the system and

miss out. I don't know if you still get Peru Support newsletters, I'll forward mine if you would be interested.

Today they started mining, fishery and textile industries only, the rest have got another 2 weeks lock down, God knows what will happen then. Lima is not a good place to be. I just don't know what the risk is of shopping in a super market like I did today. I go every 5 days and load up my bike with as much stuff as I can. I feel so sorry for the cashiers risking their lives but for doctors its worse. A number of Eva's colleagues have died in Iquitos, its really desperate there. She is stuck in Lima now, there was no warning at all when this lockdown came into effect 8 weeks ago. She has been offered well paid posts in Iquitos working without proper protection with virus patients. I told her no way accept the job much as she feels the calling for it. Her lungs are so screwed up from years working at the hospital with a chronic condition that say in the super market she would die from the virus.

You really don't want to need to see a doctor for anything these days, don't fall over or be stung by an insect even!

The most interesting thing is to see the countries in the world whose governments don't have much solidarity with their people, Trump for example, although the governor of New York is a good man and many governors are very good. What a mish mash the USA is! Have you thought what would happen if the whole financial system went down? It would be understandable if workers said no! we're not going to risk our lives any more to keep it all going. Then everything would break down and politicians would wake up! I can only get my head around it for a time then I have to think about other things. I can't fully believe what's happening. Then when you see hostilities around the world, even China vs. America, and weather systems still out of kilter, forest fires, you realise there's more. When will the world come together? Everyone hates globalization now. They realise it caused so much misfortune just for a few cheap goods made by slaves in China! And now America can't even produce its own drugs without relying on China. Maybe the Shumaker idea of Small is Beautiful will take on a new significance!

Pete

On Sat, 18 Apr 2020 at 13:15, Tim Cloudsley <[timcloudsley@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:timcloudsley@yahoo.co.uk)> wrote:

Thanks so much for your kind words about my review. Yes, I think many people are thinking about how the world must be more sane after this has passed, but unfortunately others think differently like Trump who wants to return to AMERICA FIRST!

I have heard the first part of the talk you have just sent me. I fear telling you my opinion lest you are angry Pete but he is quite wrong. The estimates concerning elderly people versus children and young people have changed drastically over the last two weeks. Many young people have died whilst many more children who are asymptomatic can spread the virus. Opening schools would be calamitous.

The so-called "herd immunity" which Trump calls herd mentality - he loves the idea of just letting the virus run wild - is bogus. Boris Johnson liked it at first, delayed taking drastic action for a couple of weeks, caught the virus himself and placed Britain in perhaps the second worst position in the world now after the US. Do you never listen to Dr. Fauci, probably the leading pandemologist in the Western world? Where do you find people like this last speaker?

Tim

El dom., 19 de abr. de 2020 a las 12:25 AM, Peter Cloudsley  
<[pcloudsley@gmail.com](mailto:pcloudsley@gmail.com)> escribió:

Hi Tim

Who is Wil Wheaton? Who is Susan Peynton? I don't think stringing together lots of nasty words about Trump does anyone any good. And I beg to differ about the strategy for combating the virus. Only much later we will know which was right, in the mean time a bit of humility is probably the best basis for an interesting conversation which is what I look for in these worrying times. To say he 'loves the idea' makes Trump into a monster!

Most of the people who end up needing a ventilator seem to die I read somewhere. There is an argument that more will die from not having X-rays, scans and routine check ups due to their not going to hospital for fear of contagating the virus. Then there is mental illness

from people being locked down, and stress and fear in families unable to escape from each other, broken marriages, domestic violence.

I don't like Trump one bit, but epidemiologists don't all agree and he's only the president, not a medic.

Honestly I don't mind that you didn't like the Dr who was interviewed in the link I sent you, and certainly not angry. It may turn out that many more have been exposed to the virus than we think. In which case they will be immune and we will be nearer than we thought we were to herd immunity, which is probably the only way this thing will come to an end. I think we will eventually be exposed to the virus nearly all of us. So best to get it over with the argument goes, while isolating the elderly and weak with pre-existing conditions.

People also die in USA because they are so unhealthy to start with. We should be building resilience in people. If they are all fearful and locked away that reduces immunity, lowers their spirit.

If I was Boris and had been convinced that it was the way to go, I'm sure I too would have got cold feet. Just think if he was wrong only to discover in 6 months time. The trouble with the debate is that people first of all decide whether they are Democrats or Republican supporters and then criticise the policy of the other side I rather think.

Wouldn't it be better to look at the evidence so far - even though difficult? Anyway I hope that doesn't make you angry now!!!!

I am glad you tested negative and hope you are feeling better each day. A very nasty illness to have just when the clinics are all upside down.

Pete

On Sun, 19 Apr 2020 at 01:54, Tim Cloudsley <[timcloudsley@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:timcloudsley@yahoo.co.uk)> wrote:

Susan was my girlfriend 50 years ago about new communication with whom you were

interested a couple of years ago. I sent you the opinion she had just sent me as you have sent me numerous opinions about which I have also thought who the hell is he or she.

El lun., 20 de abr. de 2020 a la(s) 11:13 PM, Peter Cloudsley  
<[pcloudsley@gmail.com](mailto:pcloudsley@gmail.com)> escribió:

Tim, My criticism was of Wil Wheaton. I don't know about you but I do research on the internet and get over involved in certain reports. A lot of people are going a bit crazy. Did you see a report about demonstrations in California and Colorado against the lock down? Well I must say I have some sympathy in a democracy. In Sweden for example they inform people and let them take their decisions. Each person has their own risk depending on age and medical conditions. What do you think?

Then there are the jails and refuge camps, and now the price of oil has gone into the negative, how weird!

The tiny pool here had its water changed over the weekend and so I couldn't swim - that has made my state of mind terrible. Fortunately it was ready today and I swam and feel a lot better now.

I wonder if it isn't better to be with someone during this crisis. Or whether if the relationship isn't too good it might be worse. I feel isolated here. The family is a bit dysfunctional and I don't really get on that much although they are civil and I occasionally eat with them just for company really. However I do talk by phone and do a lot of Whatssapping with friends around the world.

Tell me your feelings about the world. Is everything crumbling? With droughts and other environmental damage, or is this the only way humanity will correct its relationship to the planet? I find many people can't really articulate what they are feeling.

Pete

El mar., 21 de abr. de 2020 a la(s) 1:28 AM, Tim Cloudsley

[timcloudsley@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:timcloudsley@yahoo.co.uk) escribió:

I also thought the piece by Wheaton was very emotional. I have no idea if he is just a friend of Susan or someone better known. I sent it to you to convey how desperate people are in NY state especially, the epicentre of the US virus, 45,000 dead now. Where does Susan live - in Woodstock!

The demonstrations against the lockdown are organized y Trumpite groups, in States where democratically elected governors - dems and reps - have called for them. These are not democratic at all and put other people's lives at risk. Trump has publically given support to the lockdowns but simultaneously supports this defiance because he thinks that will maintain extreme Trumpite support.

On Wed, 22 Apr 2020 at 00:51, Tim Cloudsley <[timcloudsley@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:timcloudsley@yahoo.co.uk)> wrote:

Yes, I take a quick swim before my shower - refreshing but cold, the weather is strange at the moment. I find it exceptionally cold. I'm sorry you don't find your family very good company - how did you meet them and what sort of people are they?

If I was alone it would be terrible but it does put strains on a relationship. It all depends on the personalities - I think there are many break-ups when a lockdown ends. I would go crazy if I could not write and read interesting books but that's always so anyway.

El jue., 23 de abr. de 2020 a la(s) 9:16 PM, Peter Cloudsley <[pcloudsley@gmail.com](mailto:pcloudsley@gmail.com)> escribió:

Hi Tim,

This tragedy is affecting people in all sorts of ways, the stress is underlying every moment. I find the best thing is keeping busy and meditation. Every day there seems to be some new development more serious than the previous day, so one is never fully adjusted. In Peru they just extended the lockdown for another 2 weeks to May 12th. But they only just started testing so the figures have jumped up and there is no telling how many case there are.

South America seemed better off than almost any other continent but now they are saying that we haven't got to the peak yet and few hospital beds. Let's just hope we don't have any other medical problems to deal with while this is happening. The real problem is people not taking the distancing seriously in the markets of Lima and other cities. And poor people can't be expected to comply. So what started off in places like Miraflores where young middle class people return from Europe with the virus, will gradually move to the shanty towns, and then how will it ever be controlled. It might end up worse than Europe where some countries are easing up now. Although UK has a way to go still.

I cycled to my land today and it only took 35 min. I had a permit so it was legal. I was worried before because they says you can't use the car for some reason I can't understand. So I felt temporarily normal pulling weeds and watering the fruit trees and going around with my gardener who is a very humble man from Ancash and being with him somehow always puts me into a nice grounded state of mind. I'm sure you understand what I mean, a Quechua speaker, non literate, quite hard to understand what he's saying, another world.

But getting back this evening - like you mentioned in your message - the swim felt much cooler as we go toward winter and that was a bit worrying because it really affects me badly not to swim. I have been through so many subjective states about this I can't remember them all! But right now its just keep sane, occupied, reading sometimes very hard to concentrate, and I try not to force myself to do what I think I ought to with so much time on my hands like cleaning up, organizing papers, the laptop, or writing something or playing an instrument - unless I just do it naturally. My only real discipline is swimming. I do rely on whatsapp to have some sort of sociability.

Yes the family are the people who sold me the land. I only expected to live here a short time while building the house but that took longer than I thought. They sold the land to those English friends who I may have mentioned as I used to visit them a lot and they sold me a corner of their land 7 years ago but then had to renege after a year and a half when they suddenly had to sell everything and the new owner would not countenance me having a corner of the large piece of land.

After your suggestion I started looking at CNN. Before I saw Al Jazeera, BBC, Channel 4, PBS. Its good to get a variety. They are all there on YouTube which is very handy as I don't have a TV as you guessed. There are loads of excellent documentaries on YouTube too. I

like DW the German station. Trump is amazing, like a punch and judy show, a Trump and Judy show, funny if it wasn't a reality.

The unacceptable side of Capitalism, as Ted Heath would have called it, is these massive monopolies like Amazon and Monsanto, Google etc. It would be interesting to see if they come to the rescue of Nigeria and so many countries like that. Could they be enlightened like Bill Gates?

I hope you are still making a recovery from the flu you had. Its good you are settled at the finca, that is some good karma indeed, well done. I have been trying to get this place together in Chincha for 6 years altogether including the fiasco with the plot I had to let go of because of those 'friends'.... and so I didn't quite make it in time for this crisis, I was 2 weeks short to be able to move in!

Pete

On Mon, 11 May 2020 at 21:02, Tim Cloudsley <[timcloudsley@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:timcloudsley@yahoo.co.uk)> wrote:

Hi Pete,

I've returned recently to writing "My Autobiography" and one thing I started to do was to put in chronological order the chain of email correspondence between us, slightly edited, about the Coronavirus for inclusion in a section of a chapter to be called LOCKDOWN 2020. It is most interesting reading over our exchanges, and I want to give all that a break for a while as everything is always changing so fast in terms of the pandemic itself and the social-political realities.

I wonder if you have continued your autobiography. I thought the section you sent me some years ago was excellent. But I find for myself I can only dip into it from time to time, and not for too long at a time. In a way I find it the most difficult thing I have ever tried to write.

Tell me how things are going,

Tim

Tim Cloudsley

Sociologo, Escritor, Poeta

[www.timcloudsley.com](http://www.timcloudsley.com)

Mon, 11 May at 20:11

I'll read this closely in time. Dreadful tragedy - thousands of people moving en masse to many destinations, which will spread the virus much faster than has already happened now. Every government on announcing stay-at-home or lockdown promises disemployed workers and poor people at least a subsistence income or food provision immediately but even in the US has not kept the promise. Did the Peruvian government promise that? It is not very consistent here in Colombia either, mass migrations occurred here at first too. In both cases the upward curve will go on longer than necessary because of this movement and the number of deaths will be greater than necessary.

Was what you said meant as a kind of answer to my question about what you advocate? To me it underlines what I've thought from the beginning. Complete lockdown should follow immediately one single case being detected, with provision for those in most need as a result of it, so that they can respect the policy. If this does not happen then opening up can only start after an enormous death toll as in Italy, or it starts when cases and deaths are still rising as in the US (80,000 deaths so far) and Britain (32,000 deaths). New Zealand terminated lockdown after 5-6 weeks with only 29 deaths, something similar for Germany with 7,000 deaths (to be considered in relation to populations of course). I have heard of no evidence that people lose their normal immunities being at home for that short length of time.

Tim

Hi there, thanks for the articles. The assessment for South America is rather as I expected, as although the virus got here later than China, Europe and the US and at least Peru and Colombia reacted quickly and delayed and denied less than the above (except for Brazil) they still gave it a breathing space after its first arrival. Thus the woman who arrived in Cartagena - Colombia's first known case - gave it to a taxi driver who passed it onto his wife. They both died, and then the gov. made its first moves closing down bars and

restaurants completely. Clearly the cat was already out of the bag and ever since the number of cases and deaths has been rising.

Why did your friends sell their land, were they bad to you? It is clear to me now that the lung infection I had was growing for many months in me - not flu - and by sheer coincidence came to a head at the same time as the lockdown. I am still recovering from it and the very heavy antibiotics. Luckily locals from our vareda can still come to buy things from our shop, swim and play billiards which gives us a small trickle of income in the face of losing the rents from guests and our locale.

## **Tim**

I certainly think the world is changing. Sometimes we see positive signs like employers and wealthy people caring about employees and others, perhaps showing that capitalism can be tamed. But have you seen the food riots in Nigeria today - and consider all the trauma experienced, children whose childhood is utterly different, rather as in wars. As for death from causes other than this virus: well that shows that the world needs sufficient health resources to cope with 'normal' problems *and* unexpected pandemics. It's surely absurd to think in terms of either/or: who should live and who should be left to die.