

# Making Up



Making Up:  
Research in Creative Writing

By

Graeme Harper

**CAMBRIDGE  
SCHOLARS**

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P U B L I S H I N G

Making Up: Research in Creative Writing, by Graeme Harper

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1.

What follows is a book that not so many years ago would not, indeed could not, have existed. It could not have existed because at the time of its conception in the countries influencing its birth – that is, in Britain and in Australia – the notion of research through and in Creative Writing did not formally exist. Therefore, given that original notion of this book emerged from a Creative Writing research project, it simply could not have existed.

Certainly the idea that works of Creative Writing contain human knowledge existed. That idea existed as a very well-supported and ancient notion: that works of Creative Writing contain important human knowledge, and that this knowledge can incorporate the individual as well as the cultural, the purposeful as well as the accidental, the emotional and personally dispositional as well as the more clearly factual or theoretical that is derived from methodical practices.

It has long been held that works of Creative Writing can contain many kinds of knowledge, and while they might not be used as the guides to medical practices (say Thoracic Surgery or Rheumatology or Gastroenterology), outlines of the policies of political parties, snapshots of psychological conditions, maps across wildernesses or to previously unexplored celestial worlds; that they be asked to provide solutions to economic problems or work as source books for field work in anthropology, geology, archaeology or biology, public health or management; or to be instruction manuals for trainee pilots, ballroom dancers, martial artists, machinists, sailors, tailors, singers, auto engineers or carpenters or a great deal else, it is undoubtedly true that various works of Creative Writing have provided some insights into these things, and a great deal more.

What is it, then, that we expect from a novel, a poem, a short story, a play script, a screenplay? Some might say that mostly we expect entertainment. As Creative Writing is one of the arts and the arts have this expectation associated with them in some fashion, this must be at very least partially true some of the time, no matter what form the work of Creative Writing might take or what reason there might have been for its writing. Simply enough, and fudging a little less, the arts *often* provide us

with entertainment. That might not always been their only purpose but it certainly is a key one.

Of course, the very clear point here is that we can also often expect something other than this. We can expect that a work of Creative Writing will provide more than amusement or diversion. We can expect this, and sometimes that is either or both the creative writer's intention and our ultimate discovery – more happens, more is provided, more is exchanged. In other words, works of Creative Writing always potentially provide us with the possibility of greater understanding, furthering our human knowledge – whether that knowledge is knowledge of our own individual emotional state or whether that knowledge is knowledge about medicine or dancing or mechanical engineering or whatever else.

What we value in works of Creative Writing is therefore complex yet entirely approachable as a subject. We might value at any one time the diversion a work provides while appreciating the understanding it helps develop. We might feel personally engaged with a work of Creative Writing because it relates to an emotional state with which we are familiar or one about which we are newly curious. We might value an exploration of character, image or ideal in which we have an interest or know someone close to us has an interest. Having a fascination with some field of human knowledge or another we might appreciate how a work of Creative Writing gives us insights into that area – even if we recognize that it does not necessarily delve concisely enough to make us deeply knowledgeable and, certainly, it is unlikely to delve long enough to make us expert.

Fields of human endeavor each define their epistemological integrity, the integrity of their knowledge – which is to say, fields of knowledge evolve by interest and challenge, by consideration and confirmation of what those involved in them believe to be truthful. Veracity situates itself in what experts at some time in history believe to be closest to reality with regard to a particular piece of knowledge and what lay persons – in most cases, ourselves, because any one of us is unlikely to be truly expert in more than one area (or a few areas) of knowledge -- are led to believe is the closest to the truth. Fields are competitive too: one might claim more truthful knowledge than another and history often reflects on the rises and falls of areas of knowledge. Fields of knowledge do this not least because we human beings employ belief to confirm what it is we should invest our time and energy in, and once invested we need to support this investment by belief in its worth.

In relation to Creative Writing, while we all might appreciate what is revealed in a poem or story about heart surgery, bridge building or dancing a particular role in a well-known ballet none of us is likely to take the

reading of that poem as a license to undertake any of these things with a high degree of expertise. So, again, we have to ask what is the value of that work of cardio-fiction, engineered sonnet or pirouetting script? Is its value more than simply our amusement or is it not? Given that works of Creative Writing are also most often written in the indigenous languages of countries and even of regions, does this add an additional consideration in terms of the local or personalized knowledge that these works convey?<sup>1</sup>

This is a topic that has tested the mettle of many – and those many and their avenues of thought have led to much debate. Some, such as John Gibson in his relatively recent book *Fiction and the Weave of Life* (2007), have tried to reconcile opposing views by suggesting there might be shared ground in that ‘we can regard a work of literature as opening up on to reality while also, and at the same time, explicitly presenting its content as fictional.’<sup>2</sup> Perhaps so. But once Creative Writing entered our formal sites of education we made a statement, however indirectly it was made, that we considered it had educational value, and in saying Creative Writing had educational value we said it had some kind of value in terms of human knowledge and understanding. ‘But is this simply because Creative Writing entertains us?’ we might ask. The answer is surely not only that.

*Implicitly*, by recognizing that Creative Writing has educational value we ask questions about its knowledge value. Education and knowledge cannot be separated. *Explicitly*, because we have continued to embrace Creative Writing in our universities and colleges, and in our schools, we have recognized that it is one of the most important arts and like the other arts it is capable of offering human kind something that goes beyond diversion, and that goes further than amusement. We might include here such things as the arts as avenues of expression of emotion and empathy with other human beings. We might include the arts as the site of personal human connection – artist-to-audience, or reader-to-reader, for example. And we might suggest, as even anecdotal evidence confirms for us, that we have Creative Writing in and around our sites of education because we want the next generation to appreciate the contribution Creative Writing can make to human exchanges and human understanding.

At this point, however, we have to consider what our thinking might be that encourages participation in the *creating* of works of Creative Writing and whether that is the same as thinking that encourages the reading or watching of such works. We have to consider this because our sites of education have not only encouraged us to be *audiences* for works of art they have encouraged us to be *creators* of the arts. In the case of Creative

Writing many writers have been launched on their careers, whether simply as personal endeavours or as decidedly professional careers, by their time spent in a university or college.

What becomes interesting here, given the wide appreciation of Creative Writing, is that the incorporation or inclusion of Creative Writing in and around universities and colleges has a varied history across the world. In some cases, Creative Writing has largely existed in informal ways as faculty and students have engaged in it as an activity, perhaps shared their work or work-in-progress in public readings, and through activities like their theatre and music productions, their film-making, and their student magazines. In other cases, the popularity of Creative Writing informally around campuses has been mirrored by the more formal recognition of it in the evolution of classes and courses and, increasingly, degree programmes, sometimes as a subject attaching itself to other subjects such as Literature, Theatre, Film and Media, Music, Education, and sometimes established as, or evolving as, a subject in its own right.

In this context, it is notable that Creative Writing was not studied in the United Kingdom or Australia at the terminal degree level – that is at doctoral level, the doctorate being the primary terminal degree in all university subjects in those countries – until the early 1990s. In the U.S.A, the route provided by the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) offered an alternative terminal qualification for those in the U.S.A. who wished to study an arts subject to its terminal degree point – an alternative, that is, to the Ph.D, which was not always regarded as an appropriate degree for a practicing artist.

Neither Britain nor Australia actively pursued the MFA as an alternate, arts practice focused, terminal degree. A few institutional examples have emerged since, but the fact continues today that Australia and Britain mostly choose the doctorate as their primary terminal degree for creative writers in Higher Education. The accompanying fact that this degree was not offered until the early 1990s, reflects on the importance of the development of doctoral level Creative Writing work in British and Australian universities from the early 1990s onward.

## 2.

In 2008 creative writers at Britain's National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE), produced the UK's first dedicated *National Benchmark Statement for Creative Writing*<sup>3</sup> and included within that national benchmark statement information about the undertaking of graduate work and research in Creative Writing. This benchmark

statement was written by creative writers at NAWE in response to the need for creative writers to be defining such benchmark statements if, indeed, such statements were to exist. The previous benchmark most commonly referred to in Britain, when institutions were seeking confirmation of what should be in Creative Writing programmes, was the benchmark statement for the study of English Literature and Language. Though this offered some useful insights, it was not Creative Writing specific, nor was it as relevant to the actual practice of Creative Writing that such a statement should be – if it is to exist.

From early undergraduate to doctoral level interest in Britain and Australia in studying Creative Writing has continued to grow and the focus on the doctorate as a terminal, or exit, degree has been as distinctive as it has been profound. Other countries – New Zealand, for example – have joined suit. Though the United States – housing the largest population of creative writers working in the English language in and around universities and colleges – has indeed long offered a doctoral option for those seeking to pursue Creative Writing (often referring to the writing submitted for that doctorate as a ‘creative dissertation’), the MFA in Creative Writing remains a degree that is most highly favored by the U.S.A.’s Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP), and is often considered to be the most writerly of terminal degrees. That appears to be a wide national choice, as the choice of doctoral degrees as the primary terminal degrees in Creative Writing in countries such as Britain, Australia and New Zealand, among others, is likewise such a wide national choice.

But institutional or organizational choices also need to be the choices of individuals. Individuals and, indeed, groups of human beings need to be able to explore their alternative modes of education. Simply enough, education must be personal as well as societal; education must empower not merely indoctrinate – otherwise it isn’t truly education, otherwise it is merely about the institution or organization and not truly about education at all. By this I mean, whereas there might be a clear reason why we have checks and balances in the education of certain professions – medicine, architecture, engineering, for example – where danger to other human beings might sometimes dwell in alternative visions of education, there seems little logic in one country, or one or other tradition, instituting checks and balances in the education of creative writers.

For this reason, it should be unnecessary to say that Higher Education institutions should not define Creative Writing – though it seems, given the strength of institutional choice at play, that it is necessary to express something of this ideal. Instead, the opposite should be encouraged:

Creative Writing should have the creative and critical space to assist in the defining and enlivening of Higher Education institutions. Students of Creative Writing should rightly find institutions of Higher Education to be places where they can explore and hone their understanding, individually or together. They should never be places where they must map their creative endeavors onto a set of rigid educational formulas, defined by programmatic notions.

The emergence of doctoral study in Creative Writing in Australia and in Britain in the early 1990s built on the idea present in those countries that Creative Writing should be seen as offering an avenue of knowledge examination and human discovery that is equal to that of other subjects that offer doctoral degrees as their terminal degrees – equal, but not necessarily in any way the same. The emergence of these doctoral degrees, degrees that can now be found all over the world as the highest level degrees in Creative Writing (and which have of course been known in the U.S.A too), was not aimed at challenging the idea of the American focus on the MFA. The ideal of the MFA as ‘a studio degree’, so defined, was not the consideration that drove the emergence of doctoral degrees in Creative Writing in Australia or Britain. Nor was the emergence of these doctoral degrees in Creative Writing in Britain and Australia meant to suggest that these were not degrees for working creative writers, writers who likewise would be ‘in their studios’ while pursuing their Creative Writing doctorates.

Creative writers working on doctoral degree research in Britain or Australia always were as much active creative writers as their counterparts working on MFA degrees in the USA – and they are indeed exactly that today too. Equally, it would be ridiculous to suggest that MFA creative writers in the U.S.A. did not (and do not) pursue topics and ideas and practices that would map very well onto the practices seen in doctoral endeavours in Britain and Australia. But the definitions, discussions and exchange of information regarding what Britons and Australians would largely call Creative Writing ‘research’ and what Americans would largely call ‘the studio’ for the creative writer have not yet been as widely explored as they should be, our engagements across the world have not been active enough, and we have not yet built enough on our considerable growth in formal graduate study of Creative Writing worldwide. The aim is that this book adds something to both the history of these developments and to the potential for future work.

## Notes

1. One conceit of parts of this book is that it is a translated text (translated into English from French) by a translator by the name of Claudette Chartier. The reason for this relates to questions of ownership and authorship – if this work were in fact translated who, indeed, would be the actual guiding force behind our experience of it?
2. John Gibson, *Fiction and the Weave of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p.174
3. Creative Writing Benchmark Statement,  
[www.nawe.co.uk/Private/17547/Live/CW%20Benchmarks.pdf](http://www.nawe.co.uk/Private/17547/Live/CW%20Benchmarks.pdf)  
National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE), 2008, (Last accessed 27 December 2012)





# CHAPTER ONE

## THE RECORDS

1. So these are the records of child 0901. The offending records. The have travelled with me now, unopened, for some years and bear the dust of five different houses and twice as many countries. The result is a manuscript chipped and browned on the edges and riddled with holes. (Such is a diplomat's life: neglected purely by circumstance). Other than that, to finally let these records out into the light is the sole extent of my office. *Sole* extent, Mr Secretary-General, judge and jury. And yet, I also have recollections that I feel the need of adding here.

2. At the time I was assigned to the administration block of the prison at B\_\_\_\_\_ (known, locally, as the prison in the Valley of the Tell). The program I was working under was that of personnel exchange between the member countries of the British Commonwealth and the French Republic and conducted under the auspices of Prism International, whose charter, you realize, is to investigate the holding of minors in prisons intended, ostensibly, for the incarceration of adults. I had only just come of age myself and wanted, in truth, to be assigned to the prison at Mettray as I had plans after my posting to hike or, perhaps, cycle around Italy (Don't the ancients inspire you? They do me) But in the preceding months, rebel activity had increased markedly around B\_\_\_\_\_ and there was wild talk of the region acquiring independence from France and even of the end of the Fifth Republic. So I put Mettray on hold and, with superior hardship standing in sight, crossed the Sicilian Sea for B\_\_\_\_\_ by Dakota DC3 at 7.20 on the morning of December 16<sup>th</sup>.

3. By chance – and there is chance in any offence of a communicative nature – by chance, I arrived at the prison at the time 0901 was taken to the infirmary. The child was reported to have been injured taking part in a disturbance and, despite continued medical attention, was suffering from recurring spasms of the limbs and face and possible internal injuries as yet not ascertained. Although these injuries were self-inflicted all injured prisoners were properly cared for, the superintendent assured me and, as

no witnesses were available, the circumstances of the action could not be confirmed or denied. So I let the matter lie and began the job of recording the ages, crimes and sentences of the other minors held there under the strict new laws of civil unrest. I did not have cause to meet 0901 for almost 12 hours; but then the child's papers were brought to me and, as they were incomplete, I left the Admin. block, supervised by two guards, to gather the required information.

4. The child's cell was in Block B where minors convicted of aiding the rebels were held. The block was constructed in the same way as the blocks which house the other children, only the interior yard, known for no discernible reason as The Circle, is unrestricted during the morning hours, except for those youths who would shortly be old enough to be transferred to the adult blocks. Those youths were exercised separately between the hours of 2 and 3.

(Alternatively, Mr Secretary-General, the reason for this is quite discernible. That being, the method of exercise. Walking one direction for the first half of the morning and, for the second half, walking the other, circular in nature. I leave it with you)

5. At first glance through the spy window of cell 0901 I concluded the cell was empty. Accentuating this, the prisoner was small and, to help control the spasms, had learnt the trick of tucking its wiry legs up hard against its abdomen and its head down hard between its knees so it became no more than a shivering pile of brown rags. Male or female, I could not tell. The head was shaven, making the hair a shimmer of rust. The limbs were thin and monkey-long. The hands and feet were short and broad. A boy, I decided -- though this was entirely conjecture.

He unfolded partially as I was let in and I could see in the stilted manner of this unfolding that the pain of the injuries continued. It was unusual to find a child housed separately from the others; so I surmised this had been done for my benefit and had no intention of being swayed.

6. Without taking notice of who I was, he shifted his things from his bed-roll and pushed himself over hard against the wall of his cell.

'It is very safe here, sir,' he said, and cocked his small head at the guard in the doorway.

The guard placed the required papers on the floor beside him and, assuring me the prisoner was quite capable of reading and writing, suggested we return to Admin. before mess call closed the gate on the yard fence. I did not get chance to speak to the child then -- nor did I much

desire it. He seemed to me to be a creature so much part of the prison that his world and mine could not possibly meet.

7. His papers were returned to me two days later and, on preparing to enter his details into my report, I discovered that almost no information had been added. The single name ATTRIBUTED had been written in a large and ornate hand beside the question NAME and beside AGE was the answer: GRANDPA SAID I WAS BORN ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF V.E.DAY. Despite his diminutive size, this made prisoner 0901 (impossibly) fifty years of age!

No other questions were answered.

8. I was a new recruit and already under pressure from the others in the Prism team ('*Prismatiques*', the boy called them later) to become familiar with the prison system. Dr Elise Border, heading the team and renown these days in the field of cultural-communicative socio-medicine, was particularly watchful. So naturally, the child's refusal to co-operate angered me.

I reported this lack of co-operation to a guard.

'Look,' I said, 'we each have our jobs and I can't be expected to do mine if the child continues to make a fool of me.'

He laughed and nodded his head in agreement but added nothing more.

9. The next day I was required to go alone among the young offenders for the first time and, despite the demands on the walkways from prisoners eager to speak with me, I was drawn to this one child's cell. He was not there, having been taken with the rest of the lower tier to morning mess, but his things were arranged in a small neat pile by his bed-roll and the sack that had held them was hung over the black rim of the toilet pail. Though there were other smells present, those of tobacco smoke and urine, his smell was by and large the most pungent. It was more or less the smell of livestock.

10. I stood quite still in the centre of the cell, the bed-roll on one side and the wall close by on the other, and I tried to imagine 0901 standing before me in the hope that knowing a little of the child would help me reason with him, but I failed even to raise a dim spectre and left soon afterwards.

11. So it went from that day to the next. We passed in The Circle amid the circular wash of young prisoners but, strangely for such an insular place, we did not meet. I was aware of the child only in the agitated

conversations of other children. They spoke of Attributed at length and made a point of ignoring my questions and the requests I made for co-operation.

The guards, equally, spited me. They played the fool and told me a child as strong and as fearsome as Attributed was likely to do easy time.

‘We’ll say nothing against that little one,’ they said, and I could recognise the threats in their voices.

12. No one would offer me any assistance, neither among the guards, nor among the prisoners, not even among the Prism team, each member no doubt having their own hardship requirements in mind. It appeared that one child would go on living in that prison for the Valley of the Tell without anyone being suspicious of who or what he actually was.

13. In cell 0901, which I visited regularly, he left clues to himself that I, determined on doing my duty, was only too pleased to record. He slept, I surmised, without the aid of a bed-roll. His bed-roll was employed to steady the small table which he’d drawn over beside his bunk and on which was stacked some books and keepsakes. He had some superstitions which I took to be superstitions of the region. On a neck-chain was a talisman engraved WANDSOIL and he also kept a string of dull brown jewelry, which must have had local significance. He was a reader, though not in the same way as you or I. He read the remaining pages of spineless and seemingly incomplete books. His cell did not stay the same from one visit to the next. The child shifted around it. I could see where he had been during the night by his shape laid in the dust on the floor. When the night call was made and prisoners were required to sleep it appeared 0901, Attributed, stayed awake, having a small wedge of candle he preserved with a primitive copper snuffer and the places marked in his books with lengths of hair and wadding.

14. Believe me - I was not taken by this little rebel at all. I figured him for a cunning little cynic and did not personally want to hear about his life and crime, nor of his spasms which contorted him – as if the whole child was a grimace. My concerns were for the future. I had plans to enter the diplomatic corps on my return and ambition to rise rapidly through the ranks. As I’ve said, the ancients attracted me, Italy and Greece, and I was aware of the strict regime I would have to maintain in order to be considered worthy of such a posting. In that regard, I had hoped to enter into my curriculum vitae a recommendation from the doctor who headed

our team but I seemed my fledgling abilities in humanitarian aid were to be undermined by this one, no doubt bedeviled, child.

15. He was equally disruptive to the other prisoners. There were mornings when the sheet iron walls of the mess seemed to reverberate with small talk of what defiant young 0901 might do that day or might be thinking. He became known as a prisoner with a resolute point of view. His nerve was never challenged and his strength never questioned. It was decided that this child's efforts on behalf of the rebels must have been heroic (some went as far as to suggest divine support) and the more imaginative prisoners defiantly offered stories which had no basis in fact.

To his credit, these stories meant nothing to him. He did not present himself above or below the position of anyone and addressed all other prisoners with a mix of respect and simple courtesy.

16. Looking back, it is perhaps a fitting irony that the celebrity this child made for himself grew eventually to be the greatest of burdens. The whole prison became aware of him. In the week after my arrival, he could not leave his cell without drawing attention to himself. As his shape was formed and reformed by his frequent spasms, he was an immediate attraction to those children repelled by the sameness of their surroundings. He became, quite simply, a source of entertainment. He was a moving picture, a flickering film of a local boy. Though he no doubt had grander notions in mind, he soon was considered by everyone their mascot of wit and rebellion. The less open, the underground merchants, the men known to rat, the adolescent prowlers of the children's Circle, willingly left it to Attributed to encourage dissent and start trouble.

So, when it became obvious that a general revolt of the incarcerated had failed to take place, it was him they began to accuse:

'Attributed, the one-eyed,' they cried.

'Attributed, the bandy legged.'

'The ugly little monkey.'

'As wicked as he is ugly.'

17. It was a victory for me, of course, and I was rightly pleased by it. But, no sooner had I finished congratulating myself than the tide turned.

18. My stomach had become tight and gassy from the food our team was forced to eat: the mishwi, the marga, the laban which is, of all things Mr Secretary-General, a cocktail of yoghurt and mint leaves! My back was itching from some undiscoverable origin. I was not sleeping as a matter of

course: the quarters we were provided were on the western side of the Admin. Block and the perimeter lights there reflected off the vast salt chotts and on the granite of the Tell. Like trying to sleep in the freezing twilight of a football stadium! Bleary-eyed and listening to the small hours rattling of the prison, I knew I must get child 0901's true details as a matter of urgency. I was returning home within the week and still had some hope of receiving Dr Border's recommendation.

19. At first bells the next morning, I explained my urgency in a detailed message to the prisoner. Yet, by lunch, no details had been received. I could no longer contain myself. I told Guard Clergue that I would see this prisoner straight away and that someone should go ahead and recommend co-operation with me, representative to the prisoner's benefit that I was trying to be. I told Guard Clergue to relate my importance to this young rebel, and to act strongly.

(Inside me, sir, the gassy, gnawing, burning business continued unabated. A diplomatic hazard, you say? Cursed by alien spices and condiments!)

20. I went, steamed up by a peptic fire, but was nevertheless surprised to find Attributed at attention on the walkway, his thin arms raised and hands placed firmly behind his lowered head. It was 12.50 pm on the day of my departure, according to the bells ringing from The Centre.

I asked the young man immediately if he require my assistance to fill in his papers, and I offered to act as amanuensis if, perhaps, due to his illness of injury, he was unable to write.

'All I require,' I told him outright, 'is for each of you here to answer questions on your crimes and then on the treatment you are receiving.'

21. His head cricked abruptly to one side, then steadied, and he peered up at me through a single sapphire eye. 'O yes,' he said, 'what I heard. But please, do you think we should be standing out here in the cold?'

He turned his head toward the entrance of his cell. The door was propped open on its metal brake and inside I could make out his bed-roll and a single corner table with his things piled upon it.

'Look,' he said softly, 'I can see by the pattern the sunlight makes on the walls that it is now afternoon. I no longer spend a moment without knowing what time it is.'

22. He wanted to move his hands, but as they were ordered up behind his head he could not; so, as a matter of goodwill, I gave him permission and

he stretched his thin arms wide and with his thick fingers took from inside his shirt a wad of dough which he offered to share and I refused.

23. 'Master Andry,' he said, eating, 'I wouldn't for the life of me laugh at people like yourself. Although I am no more or less than what they call me, I have a great regard for persons who trek off to distant places on their own free will or the purpose of recording what they see and hear. We are not so different here, sir. I have always liked the idea and when I see you, smart as you are, it is brought back to me that so much of the world would be no more than shadows or dim outlines if not for persons of such persuasion.'

24. His cell was dark to my eyes but obviously not to his as he appeared to move freely about it. 'You've come for the experience?' he asked. 'I know a little about such things. You're an educated man, I can tell. Word is you're straight from the most important halls of Western learning and sprouting fresh shoots of knowledge. There's the rub!'

He began eating his dough, tearing it from the wad with his thumb and forefinger and eating it as an average man might eat a maraschino cherry. 'Just last night I came across a fantastic passage in *Les premiers mystique de Victor Hugo*. You'll love it, I'm sure. It suits you entirely.

25. In the dim light he flayed the pages of a book. 'This is funny, very funny:

Condemned to death! Well why not. I remember reading.

'All mankind are condemned to death, with infinite respites.

How then is my position altered?'"

'Odds bodkins, Master Andry, have you ever heard such profanation - one hundred years before Camus? But that is not the piece I wanted to read to you. This, please, this is it:

'All the revolutions of the future are enclosed and embedded in this phrase: Gratuitous and obligatory instruction.'

'Master Andry, what do you make of that? It is not possible, naturally. How would you police such a thing? If each of us had to suffer gratuitous and obligatory instruction we would have to time for life itself. Obligatory living would be more appropriate, don't you think, and leave the gratuitousness to the dying?'

26. The young man had caught me off guard. I had not expected him to speak to directly and so intelligently and, without realizing it, I was soon

seating myself on the bed-roll beside him. He lit his knob of candle, for my benefit, and I had spent until the next bell with him.

27. So it went, Mr Secretary-General. We always met in the privacy of his cell. In time I was able to secure him a wooden chair and we took turns using it while, in the yard below, the voices of the children who had grown disenchanted with him, called for him to make amends for their situation which, truly, had nothing to do with him whatsoever. On occasions I arrived to find him in the throes of a spasm 'The Grand Mal,' the good Dr Border termed it. 'Petit focal hiatus followed by non-specific epileptic disturbance.'

The young man curled in upon himself. He was both trapped by the Mal, but likewise made absent. His legs buckled as if a great weight had suddenly descended upon him. The curve of his back became abrupt and severe, rising with the incline of a hill and finishing at his neck like the final rocky cut of a cliff. As he cramped tight, his arms appeared to extend. Their narrowness hardly seemed sufficient support for his spread and distended hands. He fought, of course. He was alarmed by all this; but, as the Grand Mal moved through his limbs, animating him in portions like a rodent poking its busy nose up through a cheese cloth, it left him weak and by the time the condition had reached his face, which in repose might well have recalled Dante, there was no strength left in him. His mouth twisted; his nose flared and thickened. Losing all shape, the left side of his face devoured one eye and the corner of his mouth melted there into ridges and fissures.

28. I could merely observe and, when this Grand Mal was over and he returned to a sweating, shimmering version of himself, I tried to put from my mind that it had ever occurred. He talked openly then about his desire to explain who and what he was, but when the question of his former life and crime arose he only ever shifted the conversation away. I thought at first the prisoner might have been playing me for a fool. That it was customary in prison to treat free men as buffoons. That these spasms were also spasms of the conscience and that he did not mind leading me on. But this was not the case. He always addressed me formally and credited me with a high degree of intellect. He showed a fraternal interest in the progress of my work and, when he heard of my struggle to gather the material I needed, he became genuinely concerned.

'Don't give in, sir,' he said. 'After all, when you leave you will probably not have the opportunity to return again.' And he did not appear to be saying this merely for my benefit.



29. During the long night, when nothing was happening, he would call out to the other prisoners. He was genuinely impassioned to hear from the others and had composed, over the months, a list of activities they accomplished, from religious rites and the hiding of food stolen from the mess, to reading, writing and strenuous exercise, all in the boundaries of one cell. If it were possible, he said, he would have liked to drift out of his skin and float through the walls, observing the whole community, each cell at a time, one by one through the entire cellular structure. But, in fact, it was not until the day before my departure that was I able to observe Attributed beyond the B Block confines.

30. The morning was one of those in that region when the air is thick with moisture and green scent and the sun clings to the white rock somewhere high up on the Tell Atlas and casts the long shadows of the cell blocks together, as if they are the thick spokes of a single huge wheel.

He did not see me and, if he had, would no doubt have assumed I had important business in hand. Unlike the other dawks in the prison laundry, who worked methodically, his thick hands were animated and self-propelled. They conducted their work as they went. He told the others that when he was released from his cell he felt he was, 'Out on a wild sea somewhere in a small white sailing boat!'

The crispness of his movements belied the stench and mundaneness of the task. From the baskets on the floor he jiggled up the soiled shirts and trousers of the guards and, armfuls at a time, stirred them into a cauldron of water heated from beneath by gas rings and gridwork. His whole spasmed body was awash with perspiration and with suds crawling grey and brown out over him. Only when he had finished all the baskets at his feet and the cauldron was draining into a channel, hissing and steaming and flowing somewhere beyond the prison, did he give himself the brief luxury of rest.

31. It was impossible not to be impressed by child 0901's capacity for lateral thought. He had obviously shifted himself out of the place, beyond the walls, as prisoners must do, and was living in the free range of his imagination. Even the guards, who were afraid he would incite unrest, were taken aback by his capacity for work. A tiny twisted frame like his: it was impossible not to see that he had discovered that great secret: Fill Up Your Time.

32. So, Mr Secretary-General – when the bells rang for the mess the next morning I left the administration block and requested permission to take

the breakfast to child 0901 on the pretext that I had not completed my report on him. Dr Border, who would later join the Red Cross and serve with them in Ethiopia and, much later still, write a book entitled *Commemorative Stamps of War and Political Upheaval* (Elise Border/Upwell 1983), grudgingly gave me permission and I slipped into the prison, and crossed the yard to the cookhouse.

33. On the orders of the superintendent, child 0901 had been confined during meals to prevent his presence creating disorder in the mess. I arrived with his breakfast, kept warm in a covered tomato tin. Greeting him, I took a seat on his bed-roll and he uncovered his meal and offered to share it with me but I told him I had already eaten.

34. 'I was that way once,' he said.

He plucked up his meal between his thick fingers and began eating.

'I could make do with very little and sometimes forgot about eating and drinking altogether. The truth is, Master Andry: some days I'd lay in a bed beside my pioneering grandpapa because there was absolutely nothing else I wanted. But these past months I've been taken over by an appetite quite the opposite and so you see me like this, hungry for everything that passes in front of me and only by polite agreement declining one thing or another.'

35. I told him wryly that I couldn't see any reason why a clever boy like him would want to encourage such an appetite in a place like that. Suppression, I said, would be much more sensible. I told him he appeared to be an entirely rational young man (and added, tactfully, that he appeared mature beyond his years) and he must have seen there were limits to what was set out for prisoners and he, momentarily stopping eating, agreed. 'There is logic in what you say. Absolutely, Master Andry, total logic.'

36. The bells sounded then for the day count and I was forced to leave. He joined the prison mass who lined up triple-file in their blocks, each standing beside their adjoining numbers and, from beyond the grill gate I could hear the guards shouting out their numbers and the calls in return and I was sure, after a while, that I heard the distinct chime of his voice.

37. Later, at the evening country, our team was visiting and drinking with the superintendent and the governor general who praised our efforts and invited us to return, if not on official business then most certainly to experience the beauty of the beaches of Tipasa and the ancient ruins of the

western coast which, apparently, surpassed even the ruins of Athens. I saw child 0901 only once more. He was among the crowd of young rebels who had been brought down for us and lined out, tier by tier, for the guards to count. I stood in the late shadows of the Admin. block while the superintendent made comment on the order and fine appearance of the prisoners and our doctor, though lamenting the necessity of such a sight, could only agree. I watched Attributed push himself up as erect as he could be, shoulder to shoulder with the numbers around him and, when they called on him to lead the children back to their cells, he did so with his thick jaw set firm and his monkey arms swinging smoothly beside him.

38. And that, I dare say, is enough of my recollections. They are my best evidence, Mr Secretary-General, against your accusations that I have fabricated records detrimental to the harmonious relations of this organization. Who can say what the Representatives will think? Far and above – the point must be obvious that this young rebel lived perfectly well in that prison. He was, you might say, made by it. Of course, he never did act as a subject for my report, though I do not believe this was intentional on his part. He was an open respondent in his own way; but had not yet reached conclusions of his own. He had no regard for interviewing and chose, instead, to put everything in this manuscript which arrived quite some years later in the office of Prism, and was redirected here to me.

39. I was surprised to receive such a package. I had moved on by then, right through each phase of my diplomatic training, the study of politics, social institutions and economics, and had finally cleared the way for my first overseas posting by completing all the required units of international law. The manuscript, in fact, deals with events which I cannot recall but which I believe occurred sometime before my arrival. On other occasions, the dates appear to be somewhat haphazard and I wonder if the young writer is not a little confused. Where I do recognize events they bear a close resemblance to events portrayed in any good history book (you might, Mr Secretary-General, wish to refer to *Wolves in the City* [Simon and Schuster, 1970] and *Wretched of the Earth* [Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965]). In other parts, the records leave the strict form of a journal and become what I'd call the metaphysical reconnoitering of a young man not yet settled in himself.

40. After receiving the manuscript, I immediately dispatched a letter to B\_\_\_\_\_ with a note saying that I would certainly read it with great interest

and would hope one day to meet again with its young author. (I told him, by the way, that I had a genuine belief in the economic possibilities of the region. With oil and gas revenue exceeding 6 billion dollars in the current financial year, I said, and iron ore production at 3.2 million tons I could see nothing but a bright future for the region). But no reply was received and I, to be honest, could not hold to my side of the bargain as the lure of diplomacy attracted me and the prospect of a posting overshadowed all else.

So much, I dare say, for the enthusiasm of a novice!

41. I am hopeful now that this young man has risen above the circumstances in which I found him. I am confident he is still living. It is a vast area and, despite strongholds of western civilization, there is ample opportunity for a person to hide themselves away in primitive company. Though his physical conditions was poor, his eyesight damaged and posture often affected by this Grand Mal, he had a perpetual look about him and a strong hold on the earth which no doubt continues to sustain him.

42. In which case, Mr Secretary-General, I hope you will understand my reasons for releasing these records to the wider public. I now realize it is what the young man expected of me. As failure is regarded here as the complete negation of duty or the non-accomplishment of a recognized task, I trust the OCD will acknowledge the success of this publication. QUO ANIMO. . . . No, sir, I do not believe it is a blunder, Mr Secretary-General.

43. Nevertheless, in light of my sometimes irascible nature, no blame either way must fall on my staff here at the OCD who have weathered the frequent gusts of my recent discontent and the many convolutions and contortions of diplomacy which I must now confront. Thanks to my attaché protocol who has helped order the material in an ill-treated and faded manuscript and made many observations which reflect his ubiquitous soul. Thanks, most particularly, to Claudette Chartier whose expertise as a translator is only exceeded by her erudition. To her I owe the addition of chapter titles and thank her also for the enthusiasm with which she has so readily approached the task of interpretation.

Mektoub, Claudette *Mektoub*! You offer us indeed the personal and the private!

44. These records, sir, were never intended to adopt the mantle of official sanctification. I accept that we cannot lend our seal to them in that capacity. Nor, bearing in mind the delay between their composition and their publication, do they contain a current account. (Their printing will not, incidentally, be detrimental – result in injury or death – to anyone or anything). Ms Chartier has called them, in fact, ‘A meditation between the particular and the universal’ and the attaché protocol, in his more pensive moods, has suggested they are ‘A metaphor’.

45. Perhaps -. But I simply remember the young writer’s own comments, We were talking, one morning, about the future of the prison in the Valley of the Tell and he, scooping up his breakfast from the tin, told me,

‘The revolution in this country, I understand, is said to be the result of what has gone on in recent years, the forming of opposition parties, the discovery of quantities of oil in the desert, the great differences in opinion on matters of worship and wealth. But this is no more than profanity, sir. Isn’t the journey seamless, don’t you think? Don’t we carry our past along with us in the present? What, sir, of free will? That is the single mistake, Master Andry, that Camus has made. He does not understand freedom. A man of intellect such as himself has prescribed a journey and in these bad times you can recognize such journeys by their mechanics. A whole generation losing its belief in human instinct. That is what I see, Master Andry.’

46. I recall these words when releasing these records. The young writer belongs to the world of both the prisoner and the traveler, forced to live in that small and unpredictable shape. Unlike a movie camera which would turn a record such as his into a string of static frames this manuscript seems to me to suggest a life flowing instinctively, continually between the time of the spirit and the spirit of the times.

47. Perhaps that is the metaphor to which the attach protocole refers. As for other interpretations they, appropriately, must be left to the mind of the reader.

