Images in Words

Images in Words:

Only History Exists

By

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ENTRÉE

The seemingly challenging sub-title of this book means that only the past exists, since as we experience the present, it is flowing into the past, into history, into our memory, while the future cannot exist until it occurs. As such, what we call the present is simply our current awareness. And since our awareness depends on what we remember, we can be described as bipedic memories: and less memory means less awareness of our existence. As you read the poems and short stories in this book, you will be reading the past. Imagining–or creating an image in your mind–is akin to painting a picture of but a hypothetical present or future, a 'present' or 'future' which can only be trapped in the past, the memory that is the mind. Conversely, one can also imagine the past *per se*, which is akin to remembering. As you read some of the poems and short stories in this collection, images will undoubtedly be conjured up, both from the past and from the hypothetical future. The future is after all but a hypothesis.

My purpose is simply to stimulate your imagination and offer you pleasure by drawing you away from the manic speed of our increasingly digitalised lifestyles, where the Internet has become the international fast-food of the mind. After all, if you happen to think about it, you may realise that in order to reflect, you need to have the space *not* to think.

But what am I, a diplomatic historian with twelve published books under his belt, trying to do by writing this book about some of my, my brother's, father's (and one of my mother's) and late uncle's poetry and writings? I am writing to myself, to them, and to you, analysing and evaluating the motivation surrounding the production of each piece. I am enjoying it. Note that I say 'motivation', rather than just 'piece' *per se*. This is because I do not think that poetry can be analysed and evaluated easily. It is usually too personal, and will have different influences on different people. And a surfeit of analysis can even destroy simplicity and beauty. More than that, to try and encapsulate the human mind in one or another fashionable formula can be a sterile exercise. Even categorising poetry into different types can be futile. Was Shakespeare a Romantic? Was Wordsworth? Too much categorisation can stifle a clear and free view. The more the categorisation, the weaker the mind. Categories, when

taken too far, can be prisons. Consider these written words from Christopher Marlowe (credited with having written some of Shakespeare's plays): 'I walked along a stream for pureness rare.' This conjures up a beautiful image for me, of being alone, in pure Nature, with enough space not to have to think, where the water is clean and clear, and therefore populated by trout, away from the stench of human urban existence. Such perfectly chosen words, possibly more spontaneous than selected, create a beautiful image, an image beyond categorisation of the man Marlowe, an English literary version of Caravaggio, if ever there was one.

Why did I write my poems and short stories? In my case, the answer is simple: to let off steam in an enjoyable way. Pure graphotherapy: the power of the pen; nevertheless, a pen that cannot be destroyed by global greed. I am content to state here that I have not allowed myself to be 'empowered' by the shareholders of the military-industrial-congressional complex to be 'free'. Indeed, I think that the more advertising that I see with the word 'empowerment', the more that this misused word actually means 'slavery'. In other words, I suspect that the modern version of the 'hoi polloi' (the many) is the 'empowered person', with his smartphone and array of 'apps' (applications), his twitting (tweeting, but for me he is a twit), and his social and business media obsession *et al*. He is in fact a slave.

What I think comes across in reading the material in this book is that nothing changes, other than cosmetically. We can certainly learn more in our lives, but the basic human characteristics are always there. You will see that most of the book is devoted to some of my and my brother's writings, with our father and his brother getting a small amount of space. In my analyses and evaluations of the motivation behind each piece, recent history will come alive. For example, my uncle was a Squadron Leader in Bomber Command in the last world war. Was some of his occasional poetry influenced by his wartime rôle? And so on and so forth.

My younger brother and I are similar in many ways, particularly in our love and enjoyment of art, which surely stems from the fact that our father is an accomplished artist. Being more lackadaisical than my brother, I never had the courage to concentrate sufficiently hard on developing my drawing and painting to my satisfaction. The same goes for my classical guitar. My creative instincts tend more towards writing, although when I find the necessary gumption, I may well develop my drawing, painting and guitar. Thus it is that I am a diplomatic historian, rather than an artist or

musician. My brother, on the other hand, although never having plunged lock, stock and barrel into drawing and painting, is more fastidious than I, and, despite having worked as a manager in the corporate wasteland, went into teaching high-level English, and then returned to high level management. But he still has the energy and inspiration to paint and have art exhibitions, where he has sold. He is privileged to live in Paris. Although he writes very well, he has opted by nature for painting and drawing, while I, perhaps to escape from the dry academic writing of history books, have felt a need to use words for my art.

In this little book, I shall set out poems and short stories, with an explanation about each. I shall then do the same for some of my brother's few stories and poems, and a minute number of our father's (and one by my mother) and uncle's, ending with a view.

This is intended to be a simple book. But beware, since simplicity is hard to achieve, mainly because, metaphorically speaking at least, being simple in public is like stripping nude. Perhaps this explains why people are such convoluted and complex creatures. Yet, from my experience, the more honest the person, the simpler he is. The more he cheats, the more convoluted he is, at least inside. He often cheats his own self, having grown unknowingly into one or more of the masks that he wears. Cicero said it all many moons ago![1]

For those among you seeking an academic bent, this book is not typically academic: you will find no models or theories, only ideas. But, to whet your academic appetites, there will be analysis and evaluation of the motivation and history behind each piece, a good chunk of it emanating from *Poets of our Time*,[2] which appears to have had a stimulating effect on me at the age of sixteen, and still does. The effect of some of the poems was surely subliminal: although we analysed them in class, I have always felt that too much analysis can destroy original meaning, just as too many models and theories can catapult simplicity into oblivion. I remember how at school, we were made to analyse Shakespeare *ad nauseam*, which, for me at least, turned me off the great playwright for many years. The human mind seems to have a destructive penchant towards over-categorisation. I think that, if writing a poem is to be unadulterated, and above the shackles

[1] Cicero, *Selected Works* (translated and introduced by Michael Grant), Penguin Books, 1982 (first published 1960).
[2] *Poets of our Time* (compiled by Finn, F.E.S.), John Murray, London, 1986 (first published 1965).

of convention and/or self-interest, whether good or bad, it must come directly from the heart. The only question is how pure and simple is your heart. I think that there is a direct correlation between purity and simplicity.

In terms of purity, a problem can arise when we consider the relationship between creativity and profitability. There should of course be no relationship, since pure creativity should have nothing to do with lucre, and *vice versa*: if an artist is devoting part of his mind to money, this will surely detract from some of the space and freedom he needs to create, just as a money-obsessed profit-maker can be burdened by creative thoughts which detract from his calculations, calculations being the very antithesis of artistic inspiration. Thus, with this book, I have not considered sales as a motive, only readability and simplicity. I also think that it could appeal to educated people born in the Fifties, and perhaps to their children, provided that they wish to better understand their parents' past.

CHAPTER ONE

MY POEMS

Introduction

I wrote these poems and short stories over the years, mainly in the mid-Eighties, the last three recently. There was no logic for their appearance in my mind: I was simply suddenly inspired to write them to myself. It goes almost without saying, of course, that particular experiences that I was going through stimulated me to put pen to paper (until ten years ago, I did not type or have a computer).

I was activated by a need to capture the images and thoughts that appeared to my inward eye, lest they disappear before I converted them to words. The precise cause of the need is another matter, and best left to speculation, the kind of speculation that depends on having sufficient space not to think, in order to reflect. Not everything must have a reason. An excess of reason can stifle clarity and simplicity. Some things simply occur, without explanation. However hard we try to encapsulate the human mind and human behaviour in this or that psychological model,[1] the more we try to find the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, a pot that does not exist.

Models tend to be Procrustean: the scientific psycho-modeller tries to fit his data into his idea of perfection, thereby subliminally cutting off protuberances, or stretching the data beyond the original. To this let us add Vico's contention that while science can ascertain how something is made, it can never explain the essence of that thing.[2] On top of all this, as Oscar Wilde wrote, most people are other people, their thoughts being someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, and their passions a quotation.[3]

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[1] Yutang, Lin, *The Importance of Living*, Heinemann, London, 1976 (first published in 1938).
[2] Vico, Giambattista, *New Science,* Penguin Books, 2001 (first published in 1744).
[3] Wilde, Oscar, 'De Profundis', *The Works of Oscar Wilde*, Collins, London, 1948.

Many people seek or create models, to escape from freedom, since they fear having no base from which to explain themselves, or what they perceive. Even a painter may suffer from this fear of freedom, in that he tries to encapsulate his perceptions on paper, canvas, plaster, or on a more modern medium, using whatever tools he prefers. Could one say the same for music? From the earliest times, the writing of music has been encapsulated into mathematical formulae, so that we have a starting point from which to capture for posterity the tunes that appear in our head. The genii Vivaldi and Mozart had to contend with already established norms, and were surely constrained by octaves, bars, tempos and the like, in which to set out what their minds heard. Yet they managed to transcend their constraints to some extent, through experimentation. Just as painters are constrained by the materials they use, oil, water, dye, egg and the rest, and by their tools, brush, pencil, finger, needles *et al*, the greatest manage to find a way to trick convention, by the mere application of a spot of white in what would otherwise be a humdrum copy of a view. With writing, it is the same. We are constrained by our alphabets, along with various grammatical conventions from which we depart at our peril. Few manage the feat of escaping from rigid grammatical rules; perhaps James Joyce did with his *Finnegans Wake*,[4] as did Virginia Woolf with *Mrs. Dalloway*.[5] The American Dashiell Hammett also has a unique style. Perhaps one purpose of modern poetry is to escape from the rules of prose-writing.

As I have said, in writing, as in music and painting, we follow conventions established over the millennia. The first words were onomatopoeic, often representing sounds heard. For example, according to Vico,[6] the word 'Zeus' (Greek pronunciation 'Zefs') came from the sound of a thunderbolt. In the absence of writing, the first language was poetic. In other words (pardon the semi-pun!), to remember a story, rhythm and rhyme sometimes accompanied by music, were important. How else could Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have survived for around four hundred years before being written down? From signs, the Greeks eventually moved to letters, and writing took off. Rules–necessary strictures–became important: Dionysios Thrax (170-90 BC)[7] is credited with having written the first book on grammar.

[4] Joyce, James, *Finnegan's Wake*, Faber and Faber, London, 1939.
[5] Woolf, Virginia, *Mrs. Dalloway*, Hogarth Press, London, 1925.
[6] Op. cit., Vico.
[7] Thrax, Dionysios, *The Grammar of Dionysios Thrax*, BiblioLife, 2009.

Can any person and, therefore, poem or short story, be original, in the sense of escaping from the conventions of our past? Not easily, since only the past exists: I have surely been influenced not only by my family, teachers, professors and friends, but by Heraclitus, Parmenides, Pythagoras, Herodotus, Thucydides, Machiavelli, Guicciardini, Oscar Wilde, Bernard Shaw, Henry Williamson, Somerset Maugham, Charles Causley, George Orwell, Ted Hughes, Graham Greene, John Le Carré, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Stendhal, to mention just a miniminipinny number of people, often vicariously, into the bargain. On top of that, certain animals, trees, flowers, rivers, lakes and seas have undoubtedly contributed to my outlook. Is my idea that the human being is a 'bipedic memory' original, or did it originate in some pre-Socratic line I read, and then forgot, which then reappeared in new semantic colours years later? Is my idea that in order to think (reflect), one needs space not to think, original? I think that it is, unless you can prove otherwise.

The above adds to my contention above that only history exists, synonymous with the past. The future cannot exist, except in our mind, since it has not occurred, while the present, too, can be a misnomer, since the flow of Nature cannot stop, meaning that the present is constantly becoming the past. Thus we are indeed but bipedic memories. Our memory is synonymous with our awareness. It is this awareness that led to my impulse to write the poems: a sudden but all too brief glimpse into what lies beyond the humdrum and packaged views we have of the world. As we now read on, I shall describe what I think led to my putting feelings into words. Readers may well be able to determine the precise cause that led to my impulse to write the poems and short stories. But beware overly fastidious attempts to put feelings into words: an excess of words and description can easily destroy purity and simplicity. Hence this poem.

Speechless, or Homage to Umberto Eco

Words describe, proscribe, decry, insult, consult, attempt;
And paint in words more words.
They link, conflict, depict and plead,
Are uttered for self's inner need,
Be they from pen or mouth.
They move and flow, and stroke the ear and tongue;
They fight the eye,
As does the lie.

Analysis and Evaluation

I wrote this poem before giving it a title. I think that Socrates' reported words 'One thing I know is that I know nothing', may have stimulated me into expressing my circumspection vis-à-vis the written–and spoken–word. I also recalled the opening words of a public relations professor at a conference: 'We all lie a bit'. This hit home, especially when I remembered Erving Goffman's book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*,[8] in which he succeeds in demonstrating people's vanity. But it is the late Umberto Eco who really succeeds in exposing the absurdity of how people use words to lie, even unconsciously. Words are indeed lies, in the sense that the moment they leave a mouth or pen, their meaning becomes the subject of interpretation, not only by the intended–or unintended–recipient, but by the very user of the words.[9] Let us now turn to one of my earliest poems.

Guitar

That curved side of dark, tanned wood
That flows with sound from
Strings that hug the neck tight,
Yet relaxed when fingers
Pluck or press
Strum or dress
In thought and tears
The everlasting sadness
Of recuerdos, memories
That lie inside that wooden shell, mysterious, melancholic void
That owns the guitar,
Expressing profound desire
To live on and on, with fingers
Urged on by the heart of feeling.

Just wood, nylon and metal.

Gran Jota, and to end it
A violent bullfight song
Expressing speed, distance
And expanse
For ever.

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[8] Goffman, Erving, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Pelican Books, 1984. First published in the USA by Anchor Books, 1959.
[9] Eco, Umberto, *A Theory of Semiotics*, Indiana University Press, 1979; *The Limits of Interpretation*, Indiana University Press, 1990.

Analysis and Evaluation

Guitar is my earliest poem. As a young diplomat, I wrote it for a Foreign and Commonwealth Office poetry competition. They never acknowledged it. I was still taking lessons from Patrick Bashford,[10] who had started teaching me at school, and introduced me to the fascinating world of what Mozart had described as a 'miniature orchestra'. I loved the smell of the wood and the sensitivity of the strings. Patrick remained a close friend until his death only a few years ago. He not only taught me the classical guitar, but allowed me to escape into flamenco, which he had learnt in Spain. At the time I wrote the poem, I was drafting answers to parliamentary questions and letters from ministers, and replying to letters from members of the public about how right Her Majesty's Government was to fish in waters claimed (quite rightly, incidentally) by Iceland. I was using the same tired formula that our fishermen had historic rights that transcended newer international agreements. What a contrast were my letters with my poem, and what a contrast with my next poem, which is about balance!

In the Balance

Oh, that tricky triangle,
Of heart, body and brain;
Of feeling, lust and pain.
Please, find some time for balance,
And thereby ease the strain.

Analysis and Evaluation

This is my simplest yet deepest poem. It appeared in my mind when I was feeling thoughtful and sensitive: I suddenly had this image of the three primal ingredients of our human existence: the heart, the body and the brain. Before the words had formed in my brain, I had drawn an equilateral triangle, with the heart at the top, and the base therefore forming the body and brain. I sensed that the heart is nearer to the soul than either the body or the brain, both of which are physical in essence. The heart also controls human behaviour, albeit with difficulty: being our

[10] Professor of Classical Guitar at the Royal College of Music. He had the space to teach the classical guitar at my old school, St. Paul's. He also managed to be a well-known international model (remember the 'Gee Man', when he was the clothing store Cecil Gee's main model?).

connexion to the soul, it is confronted by the pedantic brain and the lusty body. Thus, within ourselves, there is a constant conflict, which can only be dealt with through the harmony that comes with balance. Our body represents lust, mainly sexual, but also gastronomic and pecuniary. The brain represents the rational attempt to control and explain to ourselves our feelings and lusts. In this sense, it claims to be the responsible part of our make-up. A truly balanced human being would not allow either of the three to be the boss. Too much heart can mean drunkenness, madness and selfishness; too much body can entail insensitivity towards others, while too much brain can lead to a deadly excess of logic. In the latter case, Tolstoy's comment about the Germans believing in their own theories as the absolute truth has rung horribly true in certain wars.[11] So it is that I suddenly felt that balance is a key factor in preventing dangerous excess, the excess of the heart, which can lead to tragedy; excess of lust, which can lead to blind killing; and that of logic, which can stifle the soul.

If the above is beginning to prove uncomfortable for you, the reader, let us consider my next poem, *Peace of Mind*.

Peace of Mind

In those small and silent moments
When the birds suddenly pause,
And your heart again grows sad,
There's no need to seek the cause,
For there's really nothing bad.
Just remember that such peace is rare,
And the birds again will sing.

Analysis and Evaluation

Peace can sometimes create an illusion of sadness: I was feeling mildly melancholic, yet calm, when I awoke just as the birds had ceased their dawn chorus. It was indeed the sudden silence that caused my awakening. I remember just lying in bed, on my back, missing the beautiful birds, and felt sad about this. To write more would insult simplicity, the simplicity gained from Nature, on which the following poem is based.

[11] Tolstoy, Leo, *War and Peace*, Wordsworth Editions, Ware, Herts, 2001. First published in 1865.

Painting of an English October Dawn

The grey becomes silver-lemon sky,
Etched upon by charcoal-black branches
With twigs dripping gossamer,
Delicate,
Like the enquiring, twitching nose
Of the squirrel, as it quivers.
The ground smells earthy fresh.
There is no hint of wind.
The needle squeak of the tit
Lances through the clearing mists,
And its tiny eyes turn gleaming towards the sun.

Analysis and Evaluation

The aromas and sights of a walk I once had in the Eden Valley came back to me one day, and I felt compelled to try and put them into words. As I re-read my words, and re-tread the country lane, I am again there. We are indeed but bipedic memories, which is our awareness. The Eden Valley is where I cut my teeth with angling for trout. Admittedly, when a teenager, I used a spinning reel and bubble float, which detracted from sensitivity, but then graduated to my grandfather's split cane *Walker's Wonder*. I devote this poem to the trout that I have killed and eaten.

Wild River Trout

Dark shadow lies beneath, no movement;
Not even a twitch of the delicate tail
While it seeks its food.
More than hidden, it is part of the river.
It darts, too quick for eye to follow,
You see it in its new position.
The upward stab, the plucking bite,
The munching seconds, invisible to you.
You see only spreading ripples,
Then the golden glint, the creamy belly,
In the evening sun.
You cast, the sudden tug shocks you,
Despite your expectation.
It pulls and judders at your soul;
Such beauty, as you take him out,
Designed for hunting fly,
To feed its perfect muscles.

Body sculpted to living perfection;
Colours glisten, yet as deep as the river.
The hazel eye stares you out
Long after the death.
You feel no exultation;
It hunts your soul.
Thank God for procreation.

Analysis and Evaluation

The trout is one of my four favourite animals. Although I kill them for their delicious taste, I respect them, and have been fly-fishing for them for most of my life. Wherever there are wild river trout, the environment is generally beautiful and unspoiled. Henry Williamson's *Salar the Salmon*[12] has a rôle for a trout, whom he names 'Trutta'. I remember his writing how the gas from a disturbed leaf poisoned a young trout. I also remember the friendship between Salar and Trutta the Trout. I accept that my poem has been subliminally influenced by Ted Hughes' imagery, particularly by his love of nature, and by the way in which he tries to probe the mind of various animals. In this connexion, poems such as *Thrush* and *Pike* spring to mind. In the case of my poem, it was both love for wild river trout and for the River Eden and its surroundings that suddenly told me to try and capture my memory in words. Atavism plays a strong rôle here: my father, grandfather and great grandfather were born in Great Salkeld, at the top of the Eden Valley. In this beautiful environment, I also came into contact with frogs, another of my four favourite animals.

Frog

The tiny frog, cold yet tender,
Little throat quivering in tune to heart,
In the cold dawn.
It looks across the fells,
The morning drizzle glistening its skin,
Yellow eyes alert.
The first sheep coughs.

[12] Williamson, Henry, *Salar the Salmon*, Faber and Faber, London, 1935.

Analysis and Evaluation

I have found frogs interesting little creatures, for many years. They strike me as sad, small, smooth, delicate, flexible and mysterious. I remember collecting frogspawn in a Cumbrian pond in the Eden Valley, and how my father then placed the spawn in our Chiswick garden pond. I found the transformation of the spawn to tadpoles, and finally froglets, fascinating: a veritable transmogrification. We used to find them all over the garden, popping up in the most unexpected places. Once, when walking in the foothills of the Cumbrian Fells after heavy rain, I found some frogspawn in a puddle that had been left by the downpour. I shall never know whether the puddle dried up before the tiny eggs tried to grow into adults.

Jumping now (if you can pardon the inadvertent pun) to cats, I have to say that the cat is not one of my favourite animals, perhaps because I suspect them of extreme selfishness. They are nevertheless fascinating, hence my need to have written the following:

Ode to a Cat

That trout-like sharpness and manner, enquiring,
Belied by that smoothly squiggling eiderdown body:
The undulating bundle.
There lurks the leopard: each mouse is a zebra.
The innocent look, but the eyes are ancient,
Going beyond Osiris, beyond the grave.
The controlled lope, the sudden stop:
It is time to guard your throat, before the rush;
For they do not let go, except in play;
They are the body of night in day.

Analysis and Evaluation

Cats seem to be a contrast to wild animals: yet deep down, despite their domesticated status (I am not writing about lynxes, jaguars and the like), there seems to be something utterly wild and primaeval. I used to enjoy their smoothness and tactility, liked to stroke and squidge and play with them, yet sensing at the same time that they were independent, unlike dogs, who seek masters. Tramps, of course, have no master, except themselves.

Tramp

A figure, hunched on the bench,
Bags never far from his fingers;
Or peering into a bin, ignoring the stench;
All the time in the world, and thus he lingers.

What was his past,
What is his future?
How long will he last,
What became of his stature?

His home he eschews,
Until the approach of death.
In distant parts he's paid his dues,
And so returns for his last breath.

Analysis and Evaluation

I had seen an old man foraging in a dustbin in Chiswick, and decided to think about it. Hence the poem. William Davies chose tramphood–for a while–as his form of hermitude, writing: 'What is this life, if, full of care, we have no time to stand and stare?'[13] Of course, he was not a total tramp, and could surely have avoided tramphood if necessary, just as George Orwell was not forced to go underground in Paris and London, but chose to. Yet both temporary escapees clearly understood the pressures of life. I only mention Davies retrospectively, because his words above appeal to my heart, body and brain. My poem was stimulated by thinking about what a tramp is but, yet more importantly, who he is. Clearly, a good many tramps are better people than we, who superciliously eschew tramphood as a parasitic activity. When one thinks of the parasites of the banking and arms 'professions', however, one sees that most tramps are not parasites at all, but merely survivors who cannot cope easily with an ever-faster moving pace of life. Some of the best tramps are women, although they are in a clear minority. One, a former concert pianist, Anne Naysmith, lived in her car in Chiswick for decades, somehow supporting herself without begging. A true aristocrat: her own mistress and her own slave. Sadly, she was recently run over, and killed. As a Chiswick resident, she lived near the Thames, about which we now read.

[13] Davies, William, 'Leisure', *Songs of Joy and Others*, A.C. Fifield, London, 1911.

Thames

I saw a tree against blood-setting sky,
By the river bank, on the other side.
It looked black and beautiful, could never die.
Uproot it though they might, to kill its pride,
T'would always remain in my mind's eye.

Analysis and Evaluation

The Thames is a very different kettle of fish to my beloved Eden. But I love it as well. Here I am of course thinking mainly about the Thames in London. I know it well from having been a competitive oarsman for many years, even falling in a few times. Thus I have seen London from a very different viewpoint to that of most landlubbers. I think that the essential point about this poem is that the tree that I saw on the far bank would always be there, by virtue of its position by this great river, since our memory is our awareness. We now move to the sea and to another of my four favourite animals.

Dolphin

Benevolent hunter of the seas, evolved to smooth perfection;
Created by eternity, they remained in the ocean, eschewing the land.
Yet breathe as land creatures: the best of both worlds.

Cretan Greeks loved them, and boys would ride them;
They save people from drowning, play with pleasure.
Obsessive Man tries to use them, in war as well as zoos.

With Man it is different, trapped in his own dirt,
Hermetically sealed freedom, fear of eternity.
The dolphin smiles:
Noblesse oblige.

Analysis and Evaluation

On the rare occasions when I have seen a dolphin, it has always come as a surprise, and inspired awe, peace and respect in me. I have always sensed that they are wiser than Mankind. We judge animals by our own criteria, and thus feel superior. Yet we shall never understand dolphins' own criteria. As for the octopus, that is a rather different kettle.

Octopus

Eyes, seemingly malevolent, look up from the deep,
Crab, creeping, moves too close;
Quicker than a chameleon's tongue comes a tentacle;
Joined by others, they envelope crab, beak crushing.
Later, only shellbits left, even the claws drained.

They can unscrew bottletops,
Stop shells closing with a well-placed stone;
Then the tentacles, probing, sucking, throttling.
Unseen in their naked camouflage,
They blend.

Grasp one, and you'll feel the fluxing power,
See the ink squirt out in anger,
Body smoother than a kitten's belly,
Despite the bumps;
The tentacles, tapering to nothing, to eternity.

Analysis and Evaluation

I have been killing, and therefore eating, octopus for many years, using either my bare hands or a trident, depending on how deep and ensconced they are when I locate them. Studying their habits and environment has helped me in my hunting. I have experienced some intriguing things. For example, an octopus will place a stone into the top of a pen shell, so as to prevent it closing, whereupon it will slip in and eat the mollusc. If one finds one on a sandy seabed, it often turns blue, either in fear, anger, or a combination of both. Despite having killed over one thousand octopuses, only one has ever bitten me, a small one, when it realised that it was to die, and perhaps sensed that I was about to kill it. I still feel a little ashamed that I killed it, as I do not as a rule kill small ones. The manner of their death is as fast as possible: a bite between their eyes, as suggested to me by a Florentine expert. One should always keep the contents of the head, especially the delicious ink sac and liver. One only discards the stomach. They are highly tactile creatures, but so good to eat. My favourite method is to partially skin them, dip them in olive oil, vinegar and coriander, hang them out in the sun, and then grill them in the open. There are of course other ways of preparation, but this is not a cookery book, so I shall not elaborate. I have surely been influenced, yet again, by Ted Hughes, who, I am glad to say, has never to my knowledge written about octopuses. In that sense I can at least stake a claim to some originality. The imagery is

purely mine. But above all, I have been influenced by the sea, that great pacific instigator of natural reflection. I have been spearfishing for years. When I emerge from the water after several hours, after scanning and studying the sea bed, diving down into a cave and waiting to ambush a fish, people seem like buzzing flies for a few hours. But let us now turn to the land, and the horse, the last of my four favourite animals.

Equus

Naïve, gallant and noble is the horse,
Used by Man since ancient times;
In war, travel, races, on the farm.
Eaten, too: no quarter given.

Emperors succumbed to equine beauty,
Alexander to Bucephalus, Napoleon to Marengo;
Charles spoke German to his;
They gossiped about Catherine and a horse.

Horses, white, wild, manes flying,
Breathing freedom in the Camargue,
Across the salty marshes their horizons rush,
While humans look in awe.

Man understands nothing, prefers to calculate,
A slave to other men and greed.
The horse just feels, tame outside, but free inside.
Noblesse oblige.

Analysis and Evaluation

You can again see how I have subliminally used some of Ted Hughes' methodology, although his *Horses* is utterly different in approach. In fact, I now see that I was influenced by his poem *Jaguar*, one line of which is 'Across the caged floor his horizons come'. Thus, I have written, under this subliminal influence: 'Across the salty marshes their horizons rush'. I am not certain whether Jonathan Swift's Houyhnhnms stimulated me into writing the poem. At any rate, my respect for horses grew, as I learnt to ride. I well remember the last time I took a horse out, a white one by the name of 'Christmas': it refused to move, so I dismounted and tried to lead it, whereupon it stamped on my foot. I do not know why, but I somehow respect that horse, even though at the time I was merely irritated. We now leave the animal kingdom, and probe feeling.

Remember

To your beauty-hunting body,
Oh grant some time to feeling.

To your love-thirsting heart,
Oh grant some time to harmony.

To your self-seeking soul,
Please accord some time to thought.

To your success-hungry ego,
Just grant some time to others.

To your power-seeking eyes,
Oh grant some time to introspection.

To your adventure-seeking feet,
Oh grant some time to knowledge.

To your God-seeking soul,
Please give some time to prayer.

Analysis and Evaluation

I admit here to an element of aping: my poem was directly stimulated by a shorter one by a Belgian nurse, Luc Petit, who in 1985 gave me a small volume of his poetry. At the time I was childishly obsessed with a young woman, and the poem was intended to irritate her. Luc Petit's poem reads as follows:

'A ton esprit qui a soif de beauté,
Accorde une heure d'Harmonie,
A ton coeur qui a soif d'Aimer,
Accorde une heure d'Amour.
A ton âme qui a soif de Dieu,
Accorde une heure de Prières'.

My written English interpretation is:

To your mind, thirsty for beauty, grant an hour of harmony.
To your heart, thirsty for loving, grant an hour of love.
To your soul, thirsty for God, grant an hour to prayer.

Hence my own–longer–effort.

CHAPTER TWO

MY PROSE

Introduction

I think that I have established above that I have been influenced to some extent by Henry Williamson and Ted Hughes, at least in some of my attempts to write poetry; and this, before I knew that Hughes was influenced by some of Henry Williamson's writing, surely by *Tarka the Otter*[1] and *Salar the Salmon*.[2] I read the latter two books after reading the *Beautiful Years*[3] and *Dandelion Days*,[4] realising that Williamson was particularly sensitive towards the countryside and its wild animals, finding them, perhaps, a beautiful retreat from the madness, greed and warmongering of Mankind (see his later books). *The Beautiful Years* ends thus: 'The father went to the window and looked at the young moon wandering with the course of the old one towards the western rafters of heaven and his sigh breathed a dim blur upon the window pane.'[5] *Dandelion Days* ends with the words: 'Silently and with arms linked they passed down the right-of-way, through the wheat that swayed and sighed in the wind. The wheat was tall, and soon would be ripe for harvest; it was July, 1914.'[6] One can wonder whether the wheat represents the generation of young men slaughtered so pointlessly in the mud of Flanders.

Hughes, like Williamson, evokes Nature, also combining his piercing observations of human behaviour by entering the mind of certain wild animals in a poem, and then concluding by contrasting the animal's behaviour with that of the human. A germane example is his *Thrush,*

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[1] Williamson, Henry, *Tarka the Otter*, G.P. Puttnam's Sons, 1927 (revised edition).
[2] Op. cit., Williamson, 1935.
[3] Williamson, Henry, *The Beautiful Years*, Faber and Faber, London, 1929 (revised edition).
[4] Williamson, Henry, *Dandelion Days*, Faber and Faber, London, 1930.
[5] Op. cit., *The Beautiful Years*, p.238.
[6] Op. cit., *Dandelion Days*, p.294.

where he describes how the bird hunts a worm ‘with a bounce, a stab and a ravening second’, going on to muse about their ‘single mind-sized skulls’ and ‘bullet precision of purpose’, ending with Man who, in contrast, spends years worshipping himself, performing heroisms on horseback, outstripping himself at a broad desk or carving at a tiny ornament.

So now to my prose, influenced by my having read a plethora of authors, but occasioned by experiences, space and circumstance, which can contribute to the inspiration required to put pen to paper.

The Au-Pair

Peter and Jane Glossop were a youngish, well set-up couple. As such, they tended to mix with other youngish well set-up young couples. They had met years before in the Admiral Codrington one early September evening. Peter had just returned from a group sailing holiday in Crete, following his graduation from Exeter, in law. Jane, having completed a secretarial course in Knightsbridge, had gone off to an island called Lesbos (also known as Mytilini). Now, having been in introduced to each other by an ex-flatmate of Peter, they exchanged holiday experiences, Peter in his navy-blue Guernsey sweater and white and blue striped business shirt, and Jane in her simple Laura Ashley. The group had gone on to dinner afterwards.

But they had not become close for three years, the years it took Peter to get out of his shared flat, finish his articles, and buy a little house in Fulham with a little help from his parents. They had met again at a wedding, the usual thing, a marquee, navy and army people, secretaries who described themselves as ‘helping the managing director’, and young men who were ‘something in the city’.

One thing led to another. They went skiing together in Verbier with friends, played tennis, and invited each other to their cocktail and dinner parties, which were, of course, little more than coupling rituals. It became generally known that they were ‘going out together’, the euphemistic phrase for copulating on a regular basis. The predictable stag night had taken place, the bells had rung, and they had said ‘I do’. Jane Walton became Jane Glossop, the solicitor’s wife.

Now Peter was thirty-two, Jane twenty-seven. Peter had never returned to Crete, nor Jane to Lesbos. Instead, they would motor down to Brittany

with their baby boy, meeting other like-minded couples, going for walks and drinking wine.

It was at the dinner party hosted by the couple that a bizarre and deadly train of events was set in motion. Someone had asked Jane what nationality her au-pair was. Abashed, Jane had hurriedly answered that although they had not yet got round to getting an au-pair, they were looking for one. The questioner suggested that they turn up at his cocktail party the following evening, where a German girl, the sister of his own au-pair, would be happy to meet them. So, that night, Jane and Peter made their accounts, not without some bickering, since Jane had a job in publishing, and considered all she earned 'her money'. 'Oh well', said Peter, 'I daresay that we ought to have an au-pair.' Privately, he saw no practical need to have one, since there was a perfectly good nursery which their toddler attended. But he did recognise the social kudos which mention of the phrase 'our au-pair' could attract. He was however annoyed at paying the putative au-pair himself, since Jane had recently come into a chunky inheritance.

They arrived at the party late, so as to avoid the ritual of introductions, and warmed up on several glasses of punch. Peter, affected by the alcohol and a plethora of bare female shoulders, felt his loins stirring. He had in any case felt rather frustrated of late, since his wife, as he had recently taken to calling her, had not been interested in having sex with him. This annoyed him, since Jane, a veritable English rose, with her smooth peach-coloured skin, vibrant body and naughty laughing grey eyes, still attracted him physically. Yet Jane's disinclination to engage him in sex was understandable: he had developed an odd little paunch–despite his weekly game of squash–and was beginning to show considerable baldness, and had bad breath.

Across the room, across the cacophony of guffaws and the haze of City-suits and Laura Ashleys, Peter could see his wife with her back turned to him, looking particularly sensual in a tight slip-over woollen dress that accentuated every movement of her body. But then he caught the eyes of the girl to whom his wife was animatedly speaking. They were dark green, he could tell, even at that distance. The hair that fell around them was golden-peach. The cheeks were impish, with little dimples when she smiled, reminding him of a sculpture of Bacchus that he had seen in a museum seven years before. His loins stirred yet more, and he had to indulge in a quick but surreptitious bout of pocket billiards to readjust his

genital equipment. And before he knew it, his wife was at his side with the green-eyed one, leading her playfully by the hand. She introduced her to Peter, adding how coincidental it was that she had met the girl who wanted to be an au-pair, without the necessity of being formally introduced. The usual courtesies were exchanged, and it was agreed that Sabine would start the following Monday. She would have the room at the top, with a television.

As they walked home later, Jane remarked that Sabine had, like herself, once visited Lesbos. Curiously, that night, she was all over Peter in bed. During his more orgasmic moments, Peter imagined that he was with Sabine of the impish and Bacchanalian smile. It helped him. And so the weekend came: breakfast television on Saturday morning, shopping, and tennis in the afternoon (Jane allowed the puffing Peter to 'win'). As usual, they rose late on Sunday, after another Jane-instigated session of love-making. As they read the Sunday papers in bed, Peter wondered what had come over his wife. After months of passiveness in bed, she was suddenly allowing him to give vent to his pent up sexual frustrations. The heavy genital activity increased Peter's appetite: the Sunday joint was totally devoured, with no leftovers, as was usual, for Peter's Monday work sandwiches. They drove to Richmond Park, and had their usual walk. That night, Peter could not sleep, despite yet more sex from Jane. His mind, filled with a newly awakened appetite for lust, concentrated on a certain Bacchanalian smile. Although he found it difficult to concentrate at work on Monday, he was saved from any embarrassment by the routine nature of his work, which consisted largely of conveyancing.

As he approached home that evening, he felt a strange sense of trepidation, compounded by the fact that he had tried to calm his nerves with two double whiskies, poured from the bottle which he kept semi-secretly in the left-hand bottom drawer of his desk. As he drew nearer to the front door, he was reminded of the time when he had been summoned to the headmaster's study at prep school, knowing that he was likely to be beaten. He had been.

His faintly twitching hand turned the key, and as he pushed open the door, he saw her in the hall, quite obviously waiting for him. 'I heard you coming up the garden path, Mr. Glossop, and I thought that I would like to welcome you German-style.' 'Oh, do please call me Peter', he replied, following her into the sitting-room, his eyes riveted on her wriggling yet pert posterior. She had prepared a small Teutonic tray, on which she had

placed a bottle of Schnapps, two glasses, some pretzels and small white napkins. They ate and drank in silence. After a minute's brain-wracking, Peter said: 'Well, Sabine, what brings you to London, apart from wanting to be an au-pair?'. 'Oh, Peter, you know, Germany can be quite boring and, apart from wishing to improve my English, I was truly interested in living with an English couple.'

As things warmed up, Peter realised that his wife had not come down to greet him, or at least to join in the German welcome. Although he was not particularly interested in seeing Jane, he nonetheless felt it good form to ask the tantalising Sabine where Jane was. She told him that Mrs. Glossop was having her hair done. This surprised Peter, since Jane had gone to the hairdresser only last week, and she did not normally go more than once a month, bar special occasions like Wimbledon or the Caledonian Ball.

Peter and Sabine drank on and chatted while awaiting Jane's arrival. When she arrived home, he was shocked to see that she had had a near crewcut. Noticing his undisguised surprise, she told him not to be so fuddy-duddy. It was the latest in fashion, as were the tight leather black trousers that she was wearing. Peter had to admit to himself that Jane did look rather seductive, far more than in her usual Sloane Ranger gear. The trouble was, that Jane had given him the cold shoulder in bed the previous night, while he was now confronted with sexy clothes and Bacchanalian suggestions.

At dinner, Sabine was particularly friendly towards Peter, flirting almost openly. Curiously for Peter, Jane did not seem to mind, which made Peter feel that he could himself flirt with impunity. He felt that Jane trusted him, so perhaps with due discretion, he might be able to have something on the side. In any case, since last night's sudden and enforced sexual inactivity, he was again feeling frustrated.

In the following weeks, Peter improved his appearance with diligence. He seemed to have found a new vitality: saunas every lunchtime, no more after-work drinks, a new suit, new casual wear. He even traded in the BMW for a Lotus; and whereas before, he had remained in his suit until bedtime, he would now change into a pair of tight jeans and a Lacoste T-shirt. Somehow, he had regained the lithe form of the erstwhile sailing fanatic that he had once been. The incipient baldness? Well, he simply combed his hair in a different way and, well, it was hardly that worrying,

since Sabine of the impish smile kept remarking how manly his hairstyle was. For although nothing physical had passed between them, their flirting had become a bit of a joke between all three of them. But Peter was simply awaiting his opportunity, albeit with the increasing frustration brought on by Jane's refusal to satisfy his sexual desires. Peter did wonder at Sabine's disinclination to meet other men. At one party to which she had been invited, she had given one young merchant banker a very cold shoulder. Peter hoped that she was simply storing up her desires for him. As for Jane, he began to actually dislike her.

And then, when Peter was feeling increasingly desperate sexually, and having resorted to masturbating in the shower, Jane announced that she had to go to Peterborough to look after her mother, who had fallen and cracked a hip. She would be away the whole of the coming weekend. Peter's eyes met Sabine's with what could only be described as an inviting look. He awaited the weekend with butterflies in his stomach. Pure lust apart, he had become infatuated with Sabine.

The weekend came, and with it some fine weather. Jane left on Saturday morning, but Peter decided to bide his time until the evening before making his move. He bought two bottles of Champagne, non-vintage Dom Pérignon (to impress Sabine), some Beluga caviar, and some smoked salmon, inviting Sabine to consume it with him for supper. He liked the use of the word 'consume', since it evoked carnality for him, which detracted from the feeling that he might be in love with Sabine. For he rationalised that while he could justify having some good lusty sex with Sabine, it would not do to actually fall in love with another woman, since he was after all a married man.

Despite all the flirting and sexy thinking, he now realised that it was quite a big step to take the plunge when confronted with the real thing. Thus, he spent some time in planning his opening gambit. He was therefore pleasantly surprised and relieved when Sabine made the first move. They were on their second bottle of Champagne, talking, in a perfectly business-like manner, about the dividing lines between carnality, passion and love, when Sabine started rubbing her knee against his, in rhythm to the old Rolling Stones number (Honky Tonk Woman) that Peter had put on. He immediately responded by taking her hand. 'Carnality may be one thing', he said, 'and love and passion something separate, but as far I'm concerned, one just does what one feels, without dividing up the emotions so clinically'. He was surprised at his own lucidity, given that