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EXETER COLLEGE, OXFORD, 1962–65.

IN OCTOBER 1962 I finally took up the scholarship, now converted from physics to mathematics, which Exeter College had offered me the previous year. After my sojourn in Cambridge, I felt fully prepared for Oxford; indeed I viewed my scholarship there (worth £100, which, together with the £350 state scholarship that automatically accompanied it was no mean sum in those days) as the next best thing to a private income, a passport to a promised land wherein one would be free to pursue one's own interests "without let or hindrance". The patrician attitude traditional at Oxford was fully consonant with, in fact almost encouraged, such a view. Only on rare occasions would the College authorities issue the tactful reminder to undergraduates that there were examinations to be sat and, presumably, passed. But I chose to ignore even these discreet suggestions, having come to regard examination study as a tedious chore to be avoided at all costs. In any case, virtually on arrival at Oxford I had got hold of copies of past examination papers and convinced myself that I had already "covered" the material in them that I found of interest. Nevertheless, I have long been nagged by the question: was my later failure to obtain the First seemingly expected of me attributable merely to a reluctance to master examination technique, or was it a deeper lack of ability that led to the "good", but unmemorable Second I actually achieved as an undergraduate? Self-esteem, naturally, compels me still to choose the former explanation. Of one thing, however, I am certain: while the end appealed, the means of achieving it did not. But I am running ahead of my story.

On arriving at Exeter College, I squeezed through the narrow door in the Turl Street gate and presented myself at the Lodge, where I was informed by the porter on duty that I had been assigned rooms on "Staircase 2, Front Quad". This seemed promising, since I recalled having liked the look of the Front Quad on my one previous visit to the place. Nor was I disappointed as I emerged from the shadows of the lodge into the light of the quad: straight ahead could be seen, beyond the well-tended central lawn, the façade of Peryam's Building (as I later learned it was called), and to the right the attractive Jacobean hall. The unpretentious clock-face above the Hall entrance brought an appealing touch of homeliness to the scene. But the pleasant impression of intimacy created by these well-proportioned buildings was disrupted by a glance at the massive Gothic Revival chapel which, looming incongruously along the whole of the quad's left side, gave the impression of having been forcibly inserted there by some giant hand. I was to learn that in the 19th century the College authorities had decided that the original chapel was too small for the needs of

compulsory attendance by the undergraduates, and had had it replaced by the present gargantuan edifice.

Staircase 2, close by the Lodge entrance, was quickly found. At its foot a board was mounted on which the names of its intended occupants had been carefully lettered in white paint: the pleasure of seeing my own name there inscribed was dampened somewhat by the fact that it was coupled with another, indicating that I was not to have a room to myself. As I climbed the stairs to the first floor rooms I had been assigned I wondered what sort of fellow my room-mate would turn out to be, and whether we would hit it off. I was soon enlightened: he proved to be an affected public school type and from the very first we disagreed on virtually everything, right down to matters as trifling as pronunciation. For example, initially I was no more than mildly irritated by his habit of stressing the first syllable of the word "piano", but constant repetition finally goaded me into pointing out that my mother, a professionally trained *English* pianist, would never have dreamt of pronouncing the word in such a pretentious way[1], an observation which merely caused the stubborn fellow to accentuate the syllable even more strongly. After a few weeks of reciprocal subjection to such pedantries it became plain that one of us would have to go, before our hostility assumed even less decorous forms. Accordingly I asked for, and was granted, an audience with the College's Rector, K.C. Wheare, to whom I presented my request to be allowed to move to a single set of rooms. With rectorial gravitas, he informed me that since, as far as he knew, no clause in the College statutes prohibited the exchange of rooms by undergraduates, I was free to persuade one of my fellows so to do with me. The question was: who?

At this point a bit of luck came my way in the person of a first-year historian happy to move to the Front Quad from the rooms he had been assigned in the less attractive Back Quad. (But he did not remain happy for long, later being observed brandishing a sword while chasing my former roommate around the Front Quad.) And so it was that, halfway through the Michaelmas term, I migrated to the top of Staircase 10 in the College's drab Victorian buildings fronting Broad Street. Although the "new" rooms I had chosen to occupy were cold, damp, and lacked running water[2]—excepting the occasional trickle

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[1] I was surprised to find that, according to the OED, in the British pronunciation of the *adjective* "piano" the stress falls on the first syllable. But still, my room-mate's adamance notwithstanding, this is *not* the case with the noun.

[2] Lord Birkenhead's caustic observations (from *The Prof in Two Worlds)* are à propos here:

> *Oxford has always regarded with watchful mistrust any private attempts to introduce bathrooms and other forms of essential modern sanitation, approaching the subject with some of the abhorrence of the medieval Church for the licentious baths of declining Rome. Indeed it is said that when a progressively-minded don asked permission to install a bath in his rooms an older colleague observed: "I can't think what all the fuss is about. After all, the term only lasts eight weeks."*

down the walls in wet weather—it was bliss, initially at least, to have a place all to myself.

But my pleasure at the prospect of solitude shrank somewhat when I assessed the conditions under which it would be passed. My domain, such as it was, consisted of a sitting-room and a bedroom. In the former a token concession to the occupant's comfort had been made by the installation of a gas fire, which, once lit, would sputter away pathetically, making little impression on the cold. Since the contraption irradiated, albeit feebly, just that part of one's body presented to it, leaving the rest quite unaffected, one could contrive to warm oneself up only through a continual gyration, like a piece of meat slowly roasting on a spit. But even the primitive amenity of a gas fire was lacking in the bedroom, a spartan chamber containing just a bed, a chair, and a battered chest of drawers supporting an antique ewer and basin in which, presumably, numberless former inmates had performed their morning ablutions. I cannot resist quoting here Vladimir Nabokov's amusing description (in *Speak, Memory*) of his experience with Cambridge (the "Other Place" to Oxonians) college bedrooms in the early 1920s:

> *I suffered a good deal from the cold, but it is quite untrue, as some have it, that the polar temperature in Cambridge bedrooms caused the water to freeze solid in one's washstand jug. As a matter of fact, there would be hardly more than a thin layer of ice on the surface, and this was easily broken by means of one's toothbrush into tinkling bits, a sound which, in retrospect, has even a certain festive appeal to my Americanized ear.*

Nabokov must have been made of sterner stuff than I, for in the winter of 1963, I finally threw in the (frozen) sponge and, leaving ewer and basin to their respective fates, dragged my bed from the deep freeze of the bedroom into the somewhat less polar conditions of the sitting room. My departure had been hastened by the appearance on the bedroom walls of a number of alarming fungal growths, the result of dampness caused by leakage from corroded roof gutters which, I learned, the college at that time could not afford to have repaired. Although not actually phosphorescent, these patches might still have excited the interest of a budding mycologist, but, not being acquainted with any, I never put this conjecture to the test.

The winter of 1963 was exceptionally cold by British standards, and, with the exception of a few stoical types, everybody complained about the inadequate heating. Roger Kuin[3], a flute-playing

[3] I recently learned that for many years he has been Professor of English at York University in Toronto.

undergraduate from Holland reading English, who occupied rooms at the bottom of my staircase, actually went so far as to pay out of his own pocket for a cable to be run into his sitting room so as to enable a decent electric radiator to be installed. As word of this miracle percolated through the college, Roger's rooms were soon transformed into a second JCR, attracting a steady influx of thermotropic "social callers". As a member of that company myself, I remain grateful for his hospitality.

I found to my dismay that the College statutes required each Scholar to take his turn at reading the Lesson in chapel. This duty appealed to me in no greater degree than had the prospect of having to join the "Corps" at Millfield, but this time I was not in a position to present the weighty claim that to accede would mean contravening official regulation. All I had to offer was the conscientious objector's line that it ran against my atheistic convictions. Nevertheless, I took this flimsy excuse to Rector Wheare, who, doubtless having heard it many times before, tolerantly granted my request to be let off.

One evening in my first week at Exeter I struck up a conversation at dinner in hall with the fellow sitting next to me, a second-year physicist. Learning that I was American, he remarked that he had been awarded his scholarship at the same time as "some crazy American kid" whose questionable exploits had made the newspapers, but who had subsequently vanished without trace. How surprised he was when I stuck out my hand and said, "Well, the kid's back." (or words to that effect). Thus began my friendship with Neil Gammage, which I am glad to say has lasted to the present day. I spent many hours in Neil's rooms at the top of one of the staircases in the Front Quad, listening to music and downing endless cups of instant coffee (Nescafé Blend 37 was the "in" substance at that time, I recall). Neil was an aficionado of 20th century music, and it was through him that I first got to know the Bartok string quartets and later Stravinsky works such as the Violin Concerto and the Symphony in Three Movements. Neil also introduced me to the Oxford University Record Library. Situated on St. Giles opposite St. John's College, this veritable cornucopia of vinyl was packed with thousands upon thousands of LP records all of which, for a modest membership fee, were available for borrowing. It seemed incongruous, but somehow very English, that the establishment should be run, not by certified melomaniacs, but by a late middle-aged couple whose bearing and accent reminded one of a retired Anglo-Indian colonel and his memsahib (which, for all I know, they may actually have been). They had a small terrier much of whose life was spent languishing in a basket behind the counter. The couple's lives, rather touchingly, revolved around this animal, whose merest whimper caused them to drop instantly whatever they happened to be doing and

minister to its needs. Neil and I were so struck by this that we nicknamed the place "The Dog."

Occupying rooms immediately opposite mine, and of a comparable dampness, was a first-year historian, Mike Gray. From our first meeting, I felt that each of us had struck a chord in the other, an affinity sparking one of those spontaneous, and yet enduring relationships forgeable only in youth. Mike was the closest friend I made as an undergraduate. If I were to attempt to portray him in words, I would draw attention to his kindness, his reserve, his depth of character. Our cultural interests diverged quite considerably. I strove to align him with my own tropisms, raving on interminably about the latest novel or piece of music that had caught my fancy. Mike spoke, when he had the chance, of history and architecture, the rich sonority of his voice contrasting so strongly with the staccato of my juvenile patter. His consuming passion, to my amazement, was the study of airline routes, and his pride and joy the extensive collection of airline timetables he had painstakingly built up. I feel certain that he did not really expect interest in such an esoteric pursuit to extend beyond the circle of a few fellow aerophiles, and clearly I was not one of these, having cynically gone so far as to attribute his obsession with the subject to the admitted fact that he had never actually flown. But his enthusiasm for history and architecture did rub off on me. When I asked him to recommend a book on British history he thought I might like, he came up with A. S. Turberville's *English Men and Manners in the Eighteenth Century*, which I bought and thoroughly enjoyed (and is still in my possession). I was very taken by Mike's handwriting, whose boldness and fluidity, pushed to the point of occasional illegibility, seemed to me greatly preferable to what I saw as the lack of definition of my own handwriting at the time (and which as a result underwent a change). It was from Mike that I learned to abrade the nib of an "Osmiroid" or a "Platignum"—fountain pens whose cheapness belied the costliness of the metals suggested by their names—so as to achieve a thick, bold graphic line.

Mike had grown up in Birmingham, a city to which he was still passionately attached. He made it his business to correct my abysmal ignorance of the place, rhapsodizing about its history and finally taking me on a personally conducted tour. Mike also had Irish connections, and in the early summer of 1963 we flew to Dublin by Aer Lingus, or "Air Fungus" as it was popularly known, to stay with Mike's cousin Frank Shine and his wife. Having just read—or attempted to read—*Ulysses*, I insisted that we go to see the Martello tower on Dublin Bay where Joyce had briefly lived, and which served as the model for the shared residence of "Stately, plump Buck Mulligan" and Stephen Dedalus in the book. We also went to Trinity College Library to see the *Book of Kells,* a superb illuminated manuscript of the ninth century: I

still have the booklet of reproductions of some of its pages I bought at the time. Two tiny incidents that occurred during our visit to Dublin stand out in my mind. The first: Frank took us to see a movie, a "three-handkerchief weepie" on a religious theme. When one of the sappy characters died onscreen, several members of the audience began to sob. Mike and I had considerable difficulty in containing our mirth at what struck us as the sheer silliness of this. Of course we didn't want to offend Frank, who seemed to take the film very seriously. The second: Frank had a passion for brass bands—a form of music for which neither Mike nor I could summon up much enthusiasm—and he cajoled us into accompanying him to a performance. We arrived to find that the proceedings had already begun, and that access to the remaining unoccupied seats could only be had by passing between the audience and the bandstand. So as not to obstruct the audience's view of what Frank seemed to regard as a sacred rite, he insisted that we scuttle to our seats bent double. This also struck us as verging on the absurd. After a week or so in Dublin we made our way to Athlone where another relative of Mike's, a young man by the name of Derry, welcomed us aboard the boat which, moored on the banks of the Shannon, served as his residence. Here I recall another small incident. One afternoon Mike and I took a walk along the riverbank, pausing occasionally to pick up flat stones and shy them into the water so as to make them skip along the surface. Our conversation turned to Oxford examinations, and, in particular, to "Maths Mods", the examination I had taken at the end of the summer term, just before our departure for Ireland. Unlike the preliminary examination in history that Mike had sat which issued in a simple pass or fail, Mods was classed, and I awaited the outcome with a certain anxiety. Mike proposed to employ my next throw of a stone as an augury, with one chance in four of yielding a correct prediction: if it skipped, I would get a First; if it sank, I would not. I threw the stone, it sank, and I was soon to learn that I had obtained a Second.

We returned to England to stay with Mike's family in Poole, on the south coast. I recall that while we were there no end of mirth was caused by the arrival of a postcard from Mike's younger sister's new American pen pal addressed to "Miss Brenda Gray, 94 Ringwood Road, Poole, Dorset, *Paris, France.*" Her correspondent went on to say that he'd "had a lot of pen pals, but this was the first one from Paris, France," an assertion whose second phrase Mike and I both felt rendered the first scarcely credible.

Mike was acutely sensitive to the feelings of others, and hated to give offence. This endearing and admirable trait could on occasion have ludicrous consequences. At that time few, if any, Oxford colleges had the facilities to house all their undergraduates during their three years of residence, and so in our second year Mike and I underwent the

customary exodus from the college into lodgings, or "digs", as they were known. Such usually consisted of a room, or rooms, let by a landlady in her own house. (I came to refer to landladies as "resident trolls" because of their habit—like the "troll under the bridge" in the fairy tale—of lurking below stairs ready to pounce on unwary lodgers attempting to enter the premises after hours.) While Mike found his own landlady congenial in most respects, he was less than enamoured of the greasy fried egg it was her habit to dish up for his breakfast each morning. But his sensibilities would never allow him to wound her feelings by refusing the thing outright, nor by leaving it on the plate, nor even by disposing of it in some place around the house where she might stumble across it. So he would regularly resort to wrapping up the offending object in his handkerchief and secreting it in his jacket pocket where it would sometimes remain, forgotten, for a day or two. I recall that on one occasion he extracted his handkerchief and, to my astonishment, a rubbery fried egg fell out! I suggested to him that he get the side pocket of his jacket lined with washable plastic so as to facilitate the smuggling off the premises of his landlady's unwanted offerings, perhaps even enlarging it so that whole meals could be conveyed without detection, but my sage advice went unheeded.

Another friend I made as an undergraduate was the Frenchman Yves Carlet, who was attending Oxford on a graduate scholarship, having already passed the *Agrégation* in English at the *École Normale Supérieure* in Paris. His wit and sophistication impressed me from the first, and I think that he was amused on his part by the gushing enthusiasms of a seventeen-year-old. My obsession with music led him to describe me as a "melomaniac", a word I first learned from him. He could scarcely believe his ears when, eager to impress with my own foreign origins, I told him that, but for the interference of an American immigration official, my surname would be "Balsitas". Hearing this as "Bell-stylus", he fell about laughing at the sheer absurdity of it. When we first met, Yves had just completed a dissertation on Arthur Koestler, a novelist of whom I had not then heard. Yves let me go through his work, which I found intriguing. and as a result I became interested in Koestler's novels, quickly getting hold of and reading with avidity *Darkness at Noon* and *Arrival and Departure.* To begin with Yves tolerated Oxford's quaintnesses with an amused Gallic scepticism—I well recall, for example, his mirth at the anglicization of his name to "Carlett" over the door of his college rooms—but he soon came to find the petty restrictions of life in college irksome. While the English undergraduates, most of whom—including myself—were, in John Betjeman's words, enjoying

Privacy after years of public school / Dignity after years of none at all,

and so found life in Oxford, by comparison, refreshingly unconfining, for Yves, older and unsubjected to the rigours of a British education, the atmosphere of the place must have seemed just the opposite. In any event Yves returned to Paris after just one year, to my regret. Thirty years later he was to become Professor of American Literature at Montpellier University.

It was with Peter Marks, a mathematician in his second year when we first met, that I had most in common musically. Peter loved chamber music and we would debate at length the comparative merits of Jascha Heifetz's and Nathan Milstein's recordings of the Bach solo sonatas. In 1963 we went to hear Milstein play some of these in Oxford Town Hall, which converted Peter totally to Milstein, but which, despite the latter's truly awe-inspiring performance, could not in the end wean me away from Heifetz.

Peter had a number of mannerisms which rather fascinated me. For instance, when thinking out loud he would suddenly pause, throw his head right back and stare briefly at the ceiling before conveying his next thought. He also had the habit of never grasping a cup by its handle, but would instead hold it, handle outwards, by the tips of his long delicate fingers. This subtle defiance of convention impressed me so much that I quickly adopted the procedure myself. Peter also had a sharp wit. It was from him that I first learned the invaluable concept of "Waldorf economy", through which one saves money by doing nothing, especially by not staying at an expensive hotel like the Waldorf.

Peter was of Eastern European Jewish origin, his family name having originally been Markevitch. Although not religiously observant himself, his knowledge of Judaism was extensive. I learned from him the surprising fact—surprising to me, at least—that there is no provision for an afterlife in Old Testament Judaism. He told me about the tetragrammaton YHWH, the ineffable symbol of the name of God. And it was from him that I first heard Rabbi Hillel's searching questions, which have always remained with me:

> *If I am not for myself, then who will be for me? And if I am only for myself, then what am I? And if not now, when?*

Knowing how poor the college food normally was, Peter's mother would occasionally send through the mail parcels of delicious boiled "kosher" chicken which Peter would kindly share with me. Later I was invited by Peter's parents, warm and hospitable people both, to spend the weekend at their house in Hove. It was there that Peter showed me the considerable collection of tape recordings he had made from BBC Third Programme broadcasts: I recall hearing on these for the first time both Haydn's quartet Op.76 no. 6 and Hindemith's solo cello sonata Op. 25 no. 1, works which both were to become etched in my memory.

Peter was an active supporter of the Labour Party, and it was from him that I received my first political instruction. I recall making the facetious suggestion that the campaign slogan "Let's *Go* with Labour" was too tame and that an American version such as "*Go! Go!! Go!!!* with Labour" might prove more effective. But despite the weakness of their slogan the Labour party managed a comfortable victory in the 1964 General Election.

Peter Lee, a fellow mathematics scholar, became a close friend. He occupied rooms on Staircase 2 immediately above my old quarters. On entering Peter's rooms one's eye was caught by the handsome array of chessmen set up on the board on the table near the window. Next to the board sat a curious double-faced clock, evidently a move-timer, from which it could be deduced that one of the room's occupants was a serious chess buff. This was Peter, who, more than being just a keen player, was nothing less than a chess wizard, having been (I think) British under-18 champion while still at school. He excelled at every kind of chess: I recall him once simultaneously taking on myself and another fellow at blindfold chess (that is, we saw the boards while he didn't) and effortlessly beating both of us. I was therefore not surprised by his hoot of laughter on reading the inscription in the copy of Reuben Fine's book *Chess the Easy Way*[4] I had been given as a child! Peter, tall and strikingly dolichocephalic, was a walking chess encyclopedia, who seemed to know the history of the game down to the obscurest detail. His talk was continually of chess players, past and present, most of whom seemed to bear exotic names such as Bogoljubow, Znosko-Borovsky, Nimzowitsch. Once I asked him what he felt his own ultimate ranking as a chess player would be. His reply was, "In descending order of ability, there are four categories of chess-player: Russian Jews, Russian non-Jews, non-Russian Jews, and non-Russian non-Jews. Falling as I do into the last category, I don't rate my chances very highly." Nevertheless, Peter's ability sufficed to enable him to win the British chess championships at Hastings in 1965, just after we both took our final examinations. Peter also excelled at card games, and in his third year was at the centre of a floating poker "school" which migrated from college to college. Now and then I would run into him on his return from an all-night poker session, his evident satisfaction at having, as usual, emerged £5 or £10 "up" on the evening belying the exhaustion proclaimed by the bags under his eyes. In my case taking Peter on at any sort of board or card game would, under normal conditions, have been utterly pointless, since I was hopelessly outclassed. The sole exception to this arose after someone introduced us to the ancient English game of "nine mens' morris", a more elaborate version of tic-tac-toe in which a player tries to prevent his opponent

[4] See p. 4.

arranging three pieces in a line. Although I had never played this game before, neither had Peter, and this emboldened me to accept his challenge to a game. How surprised both of us were when, no doubt by sheer chance, I managed to win! I am ashamed to recall that I refused Peter's request for a rematch, ungenerously deciding to cling to my unbeaten record of a single game.

I also became friendly with Peter's roommate Brent Longborough, a chemistry scholar from Devon. Brent had a deliberateness of manner somewhat reminiscent of my father, an impression reinforced by a top pocket bulging with pens in the manner of an engineer. I recall that in his first year Brent developed an interest in classical music, coming in particular to place a high value on his growing collection of Archive Records, the series of historically authentic recordings, chiefly of pre-eighteenth century music, which Deutsche Grammophon had begun to issue in quantity. It was somehow typical of Brent that he should go so far as to install in his gramophone pickup a diamond stylus reserved exclusively for the playing of Archive records, the other stylus in the pickup being, in his view, adequate only for playing what he dismissed scornfully as "ordinary" records.

Clinton Nelson Howard was an undergraduate in my year, a fellow-American sent to Oxford to follow in the footsteps of his father, a professor of history at a U.S. university, who had been an undergraduate at Exeter a few decades before. "Clint", as he was known, was an American of a kind I had not previously encountered, a quasi-Ivy League type affecting a pipe, which, having taken one up myself, failed to impress me, along with a number of curiously old-fashioned expressions, which did impress me—so much, in fact that I quickly assimilated them into my own vocabulary. In demonstrating the size of an object, for instance, he would stretch his hands apart and say that it was "yea" long and "yea" wide; he would never say "You see that tree over there", but "You see that tree yonder". While I liked Clint, he was not popular with Mike Gray, who (correctly, as I later came to see) regarded him as an American chauvinist, since he was continually defending the "right" of the United States to meddle in the affairs of Vietnam and sundry other parts of the world. Being politically quite unconscious at that age, such issues failed to ruffle my relationships, and I remained friends with Clint throughout my undergraduate years. (To provide some idea of my lack of political awareness at that time, I am astonished now to reflect that in October 1962, when I first went up to Oxford, I seem to have been totally unaware that the Cuba crisis was reaching its climax, and that the world was facing the possibility of nuclear annihilation!). On one memorable occasion Clint, being one of the few undergraduates of my acquaintance to possess motorized transport, generously took me on the back of his Vespa to visit my relatives near Cirencester—a round trip of some eighty miles. I recall

puttering through the countryside, perched precariously on the passenger seat of Clint's minuscule vehicle, its balance continually put at risk by the explosive laughter which escaped the two of us each time we spotted a priceless placename such as Kingston Bagpuize or Broughton Poggs.

Gary Cathcart was an American of a different stripe—a sharp-witted, sharp-featured Rhodes scholar from Wyoming whom I came to admire particularly for the fact that, unlike some of his compatriots at Oxford, he remained resolutely "Yank", making no attempt whatsoever to "fit in" by aping the Oxford manner. (I later came to joke that the typical American Rhodes scholar at Oxford could be readily identified by the mannerism of screwing an imaginary monocle into his eye.) Gary was pursuing postgraduate studies in mathematical logic with John Crossley, who was later to become my own research supervisor. Once I recall Gary attempting to explain to me in my first year what a "recursive function" was, but I did not find the concept especially appealing, and so it failed to provide the spur that was eventually to take me into mathematical logic. Gary returned to the United States after a couple of years without taking a degree; I later learned that, sadly, he had died in the 1980s.

Another American Rhodes scholar I recall was Fred Morrison from Kansas, who was reading not Law, but, as he never failed to point out, "Jurisprudence". Among his friends he had inevitably become the subject of a suitably modified version of A.A. Milne's well-known lines:

Fred Fred Morrison Morrison Weatherby George Dupree
Took great care of his mother though he was only three…

Equally inevitable was Fred's later rise to eminence in the legal profession.

I had known Johnny Sergeant, the son of my Russian instructor at Millfield, only slightly while at school, and it was not until his arrival at Magdalen College to read P.P.E. at the beginning of my second year that our friendship truly blossomed. A born raconteur and wit, Johnny never permitted a dull moment to pass in his company. I recall in particular his scathing, but side-splitting impressions of Alec Douglas-Home, the much-derided British Prime Minister of the day, who quietly faded away after the 1964 Labour victory. Also memorable were Johnny's imitations of "Fast Eddie" and the other pool-playing characters in *The Hustler,* which had been recently released in Britain. I got to know Johnny's family well. His mother, Olive, a vivacious and delightful lady, had parted from her first husband and married "Tom" Stevens, the Magdalen classics don, a brilliant Oxford eccentric. The manner in which I first met Tom is worth relating. Tom had invited Johnny and me to dine with him at Magdalen; immediately upon

entering the lodge we were greeted with the words "you'll take a glass of sherry, of course," by a bright-eyed character bearing a salver with a bottle and three glasses on it. This was, of course, Tom, who, after Johnny had introduced us, initiated a flow of captivating talk, part learned disquisition, part anecdote, which he maintained right through lunch. Johnny's family were extremely hospitable, and I was a frequent guest at their house in Headington, a village east of Oxford. There I quickly became identified as "John L.", both to distinguish me from Johnny and in recognition of my American origin. I recall being present at a number of uproarious family dinners during which Tom and Johnny would try to top each other's anecdotes. But a note of discord was introduced by the occasional appearance of Tom's own son, who was (I think) up at Cambridge. In contrast with his father, with whom he was obviously at odds, he was a rather dour, humourless fellow, and as a result was often the butt of Johnny's jokes. Burdened by his parents at birth with the absurd name "Cosmo", he had had it changed by deed poll to "Richard P. Stevens", showing a gleam of humour in insisting that the "P" was just a letter, standing for nothing. Understandably, however, humour gave way to irritation when I ventured the suggestion that the "P" could have stood for "Psilent." I don't know what became of Richard. After leaving Oxford Johnny went on to a distinguished career in broadcasting, becoming the chief political correspondent of the BBC, and latterly, of ITV[5].

Johnny's rooms at Magdalen were not, unfortunately, located in the college proper—surely the most beautiful college in Oxford—but in the functional, architecturally unprepossessing new building just across Magdalen Bridge. The ground floor of this building was, I recall, at that time occupied by the bookshop set up by Robert Maxwell, whose turbulent career was to end in spectacular ignominy some thirty years later. But his bookshop was outstanding: in addition to stocking what seemed to be as many books as Blackwell's, Maxwell had made several innovations, for example the sale of gramophone records, and—anticipating by several decades a development which did not generally catch on until the nineties—the installation of a coffee bar where one could sit, sip, and read. Thus there was double reason for Magdalen New Building to become known locally as "Maxwell House".

I got to know Ashley Thom in my third undergraduate year, after he had taken History Schools and was in the process of being "Dip-Edded", that is, hanging around Oxford for a fourth year ostensibly studying for the Diploma in Education, but in truth for the purpose of putting off as long as possible the evil day on which a living would have to be earned. Originally from Liverpool, Ashley had studied at the

[5] He recently published a sparkling memoir, "Give Me Ten Seconds", which became a best-seller in Britain.

Liverpool Academy where he claimed to have been a contemporary of three of the Beatles (Harrison, Lennon, McCartney). When we first met Ashley had already been married for a year, he and his wife, Jill, having had the marriage ceremony performed in the College chapel. Ashley's longish hair and colourful waistcoats gave him an appealingly raffish appearance, of a piece with his intelligence and anarchic wit. During my third year we spent much time in each other's company, playing darts and "shuvvers" (shove-ha'penny) in the JCR, bowls on the college lawn, going to the movies together—I recall seeing Cocteau's mesmerizing *Orphée* and Carné's entrancing *Les Enfants du Paradis* with him at the Scala, the arts fleapit on Walton Street—talking in my college room into the small hours endlessly puffing away on cigarettes (as a heavy smoker, Ashley's nickname "Ash" was quite appropriate.) Ashley seemed the least likely person to become a schoolmaster, but that is indeed the occupation he took up—initially at least—as did so many of my contemporaries. When I last saw him, he was teaching, with evident frustration, in a preparatory school in Hampshire. Unhappily (for me, at least), I lost touch with him after a few years, but I like to think that he abandoned pedagogy for a billet on that tramp steamer he often said was waiting for him somewhere.

Along with the majority of undergraduates living in college, I normally took my meals in Hall. There an antique form of segregation survived in the form of a "Scholar's table" at which only those holding college Scholarships were entitled to sit. This was itself a diminished version of the "high table" around which the Fellows of the college formally presided each evening. At that time the wearing of gowns for hall dinners was compulsory. The scholars' gown, initially billowing, soon became stiff with dried soup and other detritus unavoidably scooped up from the table by its capacious sleeves. But at least it had something like the weight and dimensions of a genuine academic gown, which could not be said for the exiguous article—known derisorily as a "bumfreezer"—nonscholars were required to wear.

Exeter College hall provided formal, but agreeable surroundings in which to dine. Unfortunately, however, apart from breakfast, which proved surprisingly edible on the few occasions on which I managed to surface in time to consume it, the actual meals proved hardly more palatable than those I had been faced with at school, the same "meat and two dispirited veg" reappearing with dismal monotony each evening. But I shall never forget the occasion on which the monotony was broken. Extracting my fork from the usual sodden mass—barely identifiable as cauliflower—sitting on my plate, I was astounded to see that I had succeeded in impaling a caterpillar. As I held the hapless insect, still wriggling feebly, aloft for all to see, it was inevitable that my triumphant announcement "At last, gentlemen, something edible!", would meet with the response "Pipe down, or

everybody will want one!". Given the more than six centuries of experience on the part of the Exeter College kitchen staff of boiling vegetables to the point of formlessness, it seems to me little short of a miracle that this lowly creature survived the process, however briefly.

While *coups de theâtre* of this sort were infrequent occurrences during hall dinners, there was a minor form of dramatic intervention which took place virtually every evening—the antique ritual of "sconcing". According to the *OED* a *sconce* is

> *A fine of a tankard of ale or the like imposed by undergraduates on one of their number for some breach of etiquette or customary rule when dining in hall.*

At Exeter such breaches of etiquette included mentioning a woman's name, as well as "talking shop"—the discussion of one's own particular area of study. As with so much at Oxford, in the sconcing ritual there was a hint of the patrician, or, at any rate, of the ancestral, for, in accordance with unwritten law, "only the sconced may sconce", that is, just those who had had the penalty imposed on them were permitted to challenge another. (Which raises the question: in duelling societies at traditional German universities were only those already bearing facial scars permitted to issue challenges?) At Exeter the clique of college "hearties" and "hooray Henries" strove to maintain the rite by enlarging the category of "talking shop" to embrace any topic having the faintest whiff of intellectual content, and then sconcing one other in hall each evening for all they were worth, even challenging the occasional outsider so as, presumably, to prevent the dwindling and final disappearance of the tradition through ingrowth, as was rumored to have occurred at certain other colleges. Since I had little contact with the hearties, who normally sat at a different table, I learned of all this only at second hand. But anybody dining in hall could hear the shout of "Sconce!" and see the dispatch of one of the college servants in attendance at table to deliver a capacious silver tankard, brimming with ale, to the man singled out for sconcing, who was required to stand and drain the vessel without allowing it to part contact with his lips. I do not know whether sconcing continues to be practiced in Oxford colleges, but it seems unlikely to have survived the radicalization of the later 1960s. While my recollection of sconcing lends a spot of colour to my efforts as a would-be memoirist, I had no wish actually to undergo the absurd ritual myself.

"Collections" was another Oxford ritual, but one of an official character. In the last few days of term the Rector and Fellows of the College would assemble in Hall to hear each undergraduate's account of his academic progress, if any, during the preceding eight weeks. It was understood that for this occasion jacket, tie, and gown constituted

suitable attire. Now undergraduates had already begun to extend the boundaries of the dress code at Oxford in a number of small but significant ways, for example by daring to show up at Hall dinner or tutorials minus a tie, or a jacket, but retaining the gown. While this practice was undoubtedly frowned upon by the more senior dons, it did not seem to have met with active objection. Thus a general belief had begun to emerge on the part of undergraduates, myself included, that for most official university functions one could get away with the mere throwing on of a gown over one's ordinary clothes. I resolved to put this impression to the test by showing up to collections without a tie. On the one occasion I can actually recall carrying through my resolve, I found to my dismay that I had overstepped the sartorial mark, since the normally avuncular Rector Wheare fixed me with a minatory eye and proceeded to administer a thorough dressing down for my act of omission. I believe that he was genuinely offended by what he saw as my lack of manners. Nevertheless, I intended no offence. My tiny defiance of convention was only intended as the mildest possible probing of my own courage.

The lodge porters at Exeter in my day were, I remember, a tolerant and amiable bunch. Among their duties was the closure of the lodge door at midnight, after which time it became necessary for junior inmates to scale the college's back wall in order to effect an entrance. I recall returning to the college one evening just as the college clock had begun to chime midnight. After I had scrambled through the lodge door, the porter on duty, John I think his name was, slammed the door shut and, as the clock continued to chime, turned to me with a twinkle in his eye and quoted Donne:

Never send to know for whom the Bell *tolls; it tolls for* thee.

Of course, after that he invariably greeted me with this line whether the clock was chiming or not.

As I have mentioned, in the second year Exeter undergraduates were normally required to move out of college into digs. Through the university lodgings office I found rooms with a Mr. and Mrs. Clark on the inappropriately named Divinity Road, an unremarkable street in East Oxford lined with terraced houses stretching as far as the eye could see. The sole varying feature in the otherwise identical facades of these dwellings was the colour of their drainpipes: I recall that the Clarks had painted theirs in what I was pleased to describe as "cerulean blue." Like all the houses on the street, the Clarks' was quite small and in renting out both a bedroom and a downstairs "study" to lodgers much of the available space had had to be sacrificed. But I discovered that, in any case, it was the Clarks' habit to spend the greater part of their time in the warm "back parlour" adjoining the

kitchen, and to use their chilly "front parlour" hardly at all. Given the fact that, like most British habitations of the period, the house lacked central heating, this seemed a sensible policy. My relations with the Clarks were, initially at least, harmonious. Mr. Clark, a ruddy-faced, rather stiff man, pedalled off each weekday morning to his work at the Morris factory in Cowley, and as a result I saw rather little of him. His wife, a tiny, kind-hearted woman, was afflicted with arthritis and moved about the house, which she rarely left, only with difficulty. At first I made an effort to rise early so as not to miss the substantial—and surprisingly edible—cooked breakfast prepared specially for me each morning by the good Mrs. Clark and which I would consume alone at my study table. (The Clarks would never have dreamt of sharing a meal with any of the "young gentlemen" who lodged with them.) But after a while my increasingly nocturnal habits made getting up in time for breakfast such a struggle that I was finally compelled to summon up my slender diplomatic resources and suggest to Mrs. Clark that she need not put herself out to cook my breakfast. She was somewhat taken aback at this, and indeed the very suggestion of my not appearing for breakfast must have fed the growing suspicion in her mind that I was something other than the "young gentleman" she had seen in all her previous lodgers. Mrs. Clark never tired of lauding my immediate predecessor, a landlady's dream who, if her account of the man's habits was to be believed, had risen each day at the crack of dawn and presented himself, hair brushed and tie knotted, to consume his breakfast religiously, leaving his plate so spotless that it could be instantly returned to the cupboard. By comparison with this paragon—and indeed in an absolute sense—I must have seemed a complete decadent in Mrs. Clark's eyes.

All this came to a head in the summer term. I had arranged with the Clarks to put up Michèle Aquarone, who happened to be passing through Oxford, in my study overnight. There she and I sat and talked—quite innocently—into the small hours until Mr. Clark, evidently piqued, dispersed us with a sharp rap on the door. The following morning I was summoned into the kitchen by Mr. Clark. Sternly, he proceeded to inform me that in "having a woman in my room after hours" I had committed an offence which he believed should be brought to the attention of my college authorities. He then went on to enumerate, for good measure, what he saw as my shortcomings as a lodger, and, by implication, as a human being: it "wasn't normal" to lie in bed all day; I had "no consideration" for his wife, etc. I was troubled less by the (genuine) wound to my self-esteem caused by his low estimate of my character than by the possibility of having the affair brought to official attention, for I was uncomfortably aware that

undergraduates had been sent down[6] for lesser infractions of the rules. It seemed absurd, but disquietingly possible, that my "career" at Oxford might be brought to an abrupt and ignominious end, not as the result of academic failure, but merely through breaching the proprieties of a narrow-minded landlord. So I had no choice but to implore the man not to carry out his threat, assuring him, with perfect candour, that "nothing untoward" had taken place in my study. Swallowing what little remained of my pride, I went on to apologize for my deficiencies as lodger and human being. It is unlikely that my words alone would have sufficed to overcome Mr. Clark's rigidity, but they proved sufficiently persuasive for his soft-hearted wife to convince him to reverse his decision, an effort for which she still has my gratitude. Fortunately just a few weeks remained of the summer term, at the end of which I left the Clarks, who were, I am sure, happy to see the last of me.

Having exhausted his Scholar's entitlement to two years in college, Neil Gammage had also gone into digs that year, his last as an undergraduate. His lodgings, which he shared with David Rowe, another physicist in his year, were a stone's throw from mine and so, as fellow-exiles, we saw a lot of each other. Their landlady, a Mrs. Beasley, was an easy-going, garrulous character with some comic turns of phrase. When redecorating her house, for instance, she told Neil and David that she would paint the walls what she called a "nice paystel". This struck us as so funny that, following the example of "Billy Liar" (the title character in a popular film of the day), we would continually try to work the phrase "nice paystel" into our talk, as, for example, in "I do like a nice paystel with my tea." Much of this nonsense was transacted by the three of us over dinner taken the "Continental Café, a modest restaurant on the Cowley Road run by a jovial pair of Greek Cypriot brothers. Alongside the cash register the proprietors had set up a silly illuminated fountain bearing the name *Hooper-Struve Fruit Squashes,* which led us to nickname the joint the "Hooper-Struve". We enjoyed mystifying the brothers by placing absurd orders of the form "Sausage, egg, chips, a green Hooper-Struve, and a nice paystel, please." When my eye was caught one day by an ad for a local undertaker in a newspaper being read by one of the brothers, I recall attempting to compound the absurdity by adding "… and two funerals" to my order.

I also frequented the few Chinese and Indian restaurants which Oxford boasted at the time. While the fare at these establishments provided, as I came later to realize, only the roughest of approximations

[6] That is, expulsion from the University. This was the most extreme of a range of punishments which could be inflicted by the university authorities on its junior members. According to the University regulations, the others, in increasing order of severity were: pecuniary fines; "gating", i.e., confinement within the walls of the offender's college, hall, or society; and "rustication", i.e., banishment from the University for a definite period.

to those two great cuisines, it had at least the merit, unlike the College food, of stimulating the taste buds. They also stayed open long after the pubs had shut their doors. There were two Chinese restaurants—the Golden City and the Golden Palace—inevitably referred to by the undergraduates as the "Golden Shitty" and the "Golden Phallus", respectively. The most popular items on their identical menus were sweet and sour pork and the inauthentic but palatable "curry" consisting of cubical pieces of chicken (one assumed) immersed in a greenish-yellow suspension of curry powder. The latter was, I recall, standard fare after a number of pints had been imbibed at the pub. The Indian restaurants ranged from the sedate *Taj Mahal* on Turl Street just opposite Exeter, to the dubious *Cobra*, which had the reputation among the undergraduates of serving curried cat, and which, seemingly no more than a jump ahead of the health inspectors, would be continually closing down in one location and reopening in another. Between these two extremes lay the *Moti Mahal* on High Street. No matter what one selected from the menu there, the dark brown sauce in which one's choice was immersed always looked the same, and, apart from minor fluctuations in the density of chili powder, tasted the same as well. But the flavour, however little it varied, was still far preferable to that of the humdrum College food! The *Moti Mahal* provided the backdrop for a couple of episodes which still stand out in my recollection. Over dinner at the place with a friend—I cannot now recall who—I floated my curious notion that the number *37* appears with greater frequency, in films and novels especially, than might be expected on purely statistical grounds. My friend's scepticism yielded only when the waiter presented the bill, which bore on its top right-hand corner the number 037. Of greater significance was the occasion at the *Moti Mahal* when I inserted a spoon into my *Bhuna Gosht* and extracted, to my amazement, a small nail, a carpet tack, really nothing to worry about. The metonymic impulse proving irresistible yet again, I came to refer to Indian restaurants as "nails joints", to Indian food as "nails", and would routinely place an order for "Tack Bhuna".

Very popular at Exeter was Nina, the vivacious Portuguese lady who worked in the College kitchens and who also served afternoon tea in the Buttery, a subterranean chamber just below the Hall. A widow, Nina lived alone in a small East Oxford house in which she would occasionally offer accommodation to undergraduates stranded during University vacations. One Christmas vacation, finding myself in this unfortunate position, Nina was kind enough to bail me out. And we got along famously. But even Nina's warmheartedness could not overcome the frigid conditions which prevailed in her house's spare bedroom that winter. In an attempt to insulate myself from the cold, I recall heaping on my bed, as Pelion upon Ossa, blanket upon blanket, eiderdown upon eiderdown, generating an impressive pile, under which I inserted

my shivering body with difficulty. But this failed to work: my tossing and turning throughout the night inevitably caused the mass to slither off the bed, leaving me with audibly chattering teeth. What to do? With the ingenuity of the desperate, the solution came to me: use the floor carpet to compress the pile of bedclothes into stability. So after laboriously reassembling blankets and eiderdowns, I dragged the heavy carpet off the floor and dumped it on top of the construction, causing it to settle in a highly gratifying manner. I again shoehorned myself beneath and, quickly adjusting to the leaden weight of the bedclothes, enjoyed a pleasant night's sleep, comfortably insulated from the cold. In fact the whole arrangement proved so effective that I slept through well beyond my usual afternoon hour of rising. By 3 p.m. or so Nina had become sufficiently concerned at my nonappearance to look in on me. While a "resident troll" would have been outraged at seeing her carpet on the bed instead of occupying its customary place on the floor, Nina, unfailingly accommodating, found the sight so absurd that she broke out laughing: as far as she was concerned, the episode merely confirmed my reputation as an amiable young eccentric.

On 22 November 1963, as everyone knows, President Kennedy was assassinated. And, yes, I can remember where I was when I heard the news, and how I received it. I had just entered Exeter College lodge when Jim White, one of Mike Gray's fellow historians, came up to me and exclaimed "Have you heard the news? Your President's been shot!" My immediate reaction was to think I was being put on, but when it became clear that Kennedy had indeed been killed, I felt sure that the assassination presaged a coup-d'état by the U.S. military. (Although, mercifully, this turned out not to be the case, I am still inclined to the belief that a conspiracy of some sort was involved.) Kennedy's biography, naturally, took up the lion's share of the obituary page in next day's *Times,* eclipsing that of my hero Aldous Huxley, who, I was saddened to see, had died that very same day.

Exeter College had embarked on the construction of a new residential building in the back quad, which was scheduled for completion by the beginning of my third year. Learning that this building was to be centrally heated, I, along with Peter Lee and a couple of others due to return to College that year, resolved to secure accommodation therein. Now it was common knowledge that Nina aspired to become a "scout", the Oxford term for a member of the College staff responsible for looking after a whole staircase. So when we applied to the college authorities for rooms on a staircase in the new building, we appended an appeal ("We want Nina!") that Nina be assigned as scout. Happily, both requests were granted, and so I and the rest of our little band were warm and well looked after in our final year at Exeter. As Roger Kuin had already discovered, the improved living conditions stimulated a sudden increase in one's popularity. I

came to expect, at any hour of the day or night, a knock on my door heralding the arrival of some unknown, who, muttering the words "social call," would breeze in and make a beeline for the bubbling Russell-Hobbs coffee percolator that Donald Brown (another resident of the staircase) and I, desperate for decent coffee, had jointly purchased. Of course, the knock could also signal the appearance of a valued friend, such as Ashley Thom or Mike Gray, with whom the night could be talked away in dense clouds of cigarette smoke.

It must have been in my third year at Oxford that I had my sole experience of total anesthesia. I woke up one morning in terrible pain, my lower jaw swollen up like a balloon. Having no regular dentist I staggered off to the dental clinic at the nearby Radcliffe hospital, where, after a session of X-rays, I was informed by the doctor on duty that my lower wisdom teeth were severely impacted and would have be extracted at once. This would require total anesthesia and a couple of nights in hospital. The doctor also pointed out that, inevitably, my upper wisdom teeth would also become impacted, and so would eventually have to be pulled out. Not unreasonably he suggested that I have the whole job done on the spot, but perversely I decided to hang on to my upper teeth (This turned out to be a mistake, because, sure enough, less than a decade later my upper wisdom teeth became impacted in their turn and I had to undergo the business a second time.) The operation was quickly arranged for the following morning, and I entered the hospital that evening. I spent a largely sleepless night in the ward anxiously awaiting the ordeal I would have to face. At the crack of dawn next day I was wheeled into the glare of the pre-op room to receive the anesthetic, which, to my dismay, was to be administered by injection not, as I had assumed, into my upper arm, but instead into a vein of my hand. In making her first stab at this the nurse missed the vein entirely, causing me to squirm about like an insect pinned to a board. But her second attempt was successful, and I went out like a light. I came to groggily a few hours later to find myself back in the ward with an aching jaw and a painful lump in my throat. After a while a doctor appeared and gave me another injection, telling me it should relieve the pain. Within minutes the pain obligingly subsided: more precisely, I felt that my consciousness had simply detached itself from the pain. For the next few hours I lay in a kind of trance, thoughts whirling along in a continuous stream, each impression before my mind's eye flowing quickly and seamlessly into the next[7]. As the mesmerizing effect faded and the pain, although still appreciably diminished, began to return, I wondered what drug had been responsible for my deliverance. I crawled out of bed to peer at the

[7] Never was I more aware of the truth of Coleridge's observation:

> *A single thought is that which it is from other thoughts, as a wave of the sea takes its form and shape from the waves which precede and follow it.*

clipboard attached to its end. The last entry read "Morphine sulphate intrav." Aha!, I thought, now I know how Sherlock Holmes must have felt after one of his self-administered "discreet injections". The next morning I was discharged from the hospital, my wisdom teeth, soon forgotten, replaced by the ineradicable memory of my one morphine "trip".

In May 1964 Lynette passed through Britain on her way to study art in Italy. At 17 already a colourful and uninhibited personality, she descended on Oxford like a tornado, leaving a number of bedazzled undergraduates in her wake. It took just one day for her to penetrate the local "drug scene" which she scornfully dismissed as "embryonic". My father had arranged to have some funds for her transferred to my bank in Oxford (the Midland, on Cornmarket). Each morning she would storm into this sedate establishment and demand her money, to be told by a quaking teller that it was "subject to delay". She would then insist on seeing the manager, who would, with regret, confirm the fact. However, after a few days of Lynette's onslaughts, the manager finally threw in the towel and gave her the money even before my father's draft had arrived. I recall that Mike Gray was particularly taken with Lynette, spending quite a lot of time in her company while she was in Oxford, and visiting her in Italy that summer. He later reported an amusing episode that had occurred during her visit. One afternoon he and his tutor, Greig Barr, were walking along the quad when they caught sight of Lynette and me outside the hall. Barr turned to Mike and remarked: "I take it that lady is Bell's sister. She must be older, of course. He's only about 14, is he not?"

Thinking of Greig Barr reminds me of some of the other Fellows of the college. The most colourful of these was, without question, J.P.V.D. ("Dacre") Balsdon, the Roman historian. I never got to know him personally, but years later, when I was sufficiently distanced from Oxford, I read a number of his entertaining books on college life. He could often be spotted circumambulating the front quad, a tutee or two in tow, dilating on some matter or other in his characteristic Oxford drawl. "Joe" Hatton, the physics tutor from whom I would have received instruction had I not opted to study mathematics, was another college character held in high esteem by his pupils—so I learned from Neil Gammage—both for his competence as a physicist and his dry wit. The philosopher Christopher Kirwan, my moral tutor, I recall meeting just once, at a little sherry party he held in his rooms a few weeks into my first Michaelmas term. But from that single meeting I have retained the impression of a gentle, warmhearted man.

Dermot Roaf, the young, recently appointed mathematics tutor at Exeter, was an applied mathematician, and so usually made arrangements—as in my case—for undergraduates at the college to be "farmed out" to other colleges for tuition in pure mathematics. I

received some tuition from Dermot in applied mathematics with the aim of improving my examination performance. I recall being impressed with his facility at solving mechanics problems—a facility which I could not hope to match. Dermot was (and is) an amiable, considerate, and patient man, but my unwillingness to work for examinations tried even his patience. I recall him saying to me in exasperation sometime in my third year, "You're not the only one of your kind in this university, you know!", which I took to mean that these other "prodigies" would, unlike me, apply themselves and get Firsts. (No doubt he was right!) But Dermot allowed me to follow my own academic path, for what it has turned out to be worth, and I have always been grateful to him for his kindness to me.

In 1963 Michèle Aquarone invited me and an American friend of hers, Pat Hinkley, to spend part of the Easter vacation in her family's Paris apartment, a cozy little eyrie on the top floor of a venerable building on the Île St. Louis. Having spent next to no time in Paris, I felt lucky to be introduced to the "City of Light" through its very centre. Like most visitors to Paris, I was attracted by its cosmopolitan elegance, which contrasted strongly with stuffy old Britain, and even with Oxford, which, while architecturally undeniably beautiful, seemed quite medieval by comparison. I began to understand Yves Carlet's boredom with Oxford. French culture had, in any case, already begun to impress me through the reading of French mathematics books (easily done in French) and French novels (in English translations).

Those few weeks Miche and I spent in Paris were also rich in farcical situations whose retelling quickly crystallized into "routines" which helped to cement my relationship with the Aquarone family, and which still make me chuckle. For instance, Pat Hinkley, irritated *inter alia* by my lack of finesse at table, was finally led to observe, in a remark destined for endless repetition, "John, you know what your biggest problem is? Your table manners!" Also from that time was the deathless *beurre fermier* episode. In an effort to save us all money Miche had suggested that we prepare our meals in the apartment's tiny kitchen. My culinary skills at that time being of a piece with my table manners, i.e., nil, I was delegated to do the shopping. Miche scribbled out a list and, handing it to me, said, "Just tell the shopkeeper that you want *beurre fermier*, 'farmer's butter' . She'll know what to give you." So, clutching my list, I trundled down the apartment building's steep staircase and issued, full of confidence, into the Rue Budé. Spotting the *épicerie* where Miche had suggested I make my purchases, I strode in and, issuing a cordial *Bonjour Madame* to the proprietress, began to reel off the items with whose purchase I had been charged. Despite my execrable accent, everything went well until I came to *beurre fermier*. In a sense Miche's prediction had been correct, for, on hearing those fatal words, the proprietress *did* know what to give me, namely a pair of

raised eyebrows and a mystified "*Quoi*?" *Eh bien*, I said to myself with a shrug, I'll find it somewhere else. I trudged from one end of the Île St-Louis to another, leaving no *laiterie* unexplored, in quest of *beurre fermier*. Drawing the line at raking the whole of Paris for something I suspected had long become obsolete, I finally threw in the churn and settled for a pat of *beurre ordinaire*, which I shamefacedly presented, along with the rest of my purchases, to Miche on my return to the apartment. "What, no *beurre fermier*?" she exclaimed in shocked surprise. I had to confess that, despite scouring the whole island, I could not find a single shopkeeper who would admit even to recognizing the phrase. "With your command of French, it's no wonder," she pointedly observed. I tried to convince her that the true explanation for my failure to obtain the elusive foodstuff lay elsewhere, but to no avail. The *beurre fermier* issue remains unresolved to this day.

Before leaving St. Andrews for the Easter vacation Miche had, with carefree generosity, issued a universal invitation to her contemporaries to visit her in Paris. As a result, a number of characters, some of whom she had scarcely set eyes on before, turned up on the doorstep. One of these was John McGregor, an egregious bore who seemed never to tire of drawing attention to his social and family connections, his acquaintance with Sir This and Lord That. When "McTavish", as Miche and I dubbed him, first showed up with his friend Gordon Spencer (a comparatively inoffensive fellow, actually) in tow, Miche hospitably suggested that the two stay for lunch, an offer which, she was dismayed to find, they took as a standing invitation to roll up each day to be fed. Naturally Miche grew quickly irritated at this, and to convey to them that they were *de trop,* she began to prepare meals of increasing austerity, in the end unceremoniously dumping a platter of plain noodles on the table. But the pair proved quite impervious even to hints of this degree of directness, and continued to chew their way imperturbably through whatever was placed in front of them. McTavish was still very much in evidence when Miche's parents Stan and Mado arrived to spend a couple of days in the apartment. McTavish turned up on the second evening of their stay evidently determined to impress them—it was then, I recall, that he produced his matchlessly boastful remark "Daddy's on the Senate [of the University of St. Andrews], you know." Not surprisingly, his efforts failed to have the intended effect. This all came to a head when, Mado having briefly left the room, McTavish, with great ceremony, produced a small box and presented it to Stan with the words, "A small token of my esteem for your wife." Stan opened the box and extracted from it a somewhat gaudy piece of jewellery. After eyeing this for a moment Stan returned it to the box and handed the whole back to McTavish with the words: "Very pretty, but I'm afraid it's much too good for *my* wife." This startling piece of irony,

characteristic of Stan, quite took the wind out of McTavish's sails, and little more was heard from him during the remainder of the evening.

At the end of our stay in Paris Miche and I attempted to hitchhike back to The Hague where I had been invited to spend the last week of the vacation. Our efforts at hitchhiking pivoted on the idea, gleaned from the movies, of having Miche flag down the vehicles while I skulked in the bushes by the side of the road, popping up only when a (male) driver had been "hooked". This procedure worked quite well until we found ourselves becalmed in St. Quentin, a bleak town in northern France. Thumbs drooping with fatigue, we admitted defeat and made the rest of the journey by train.

That first stay in 1963 with the Aquarones in their house on Benoordenhoutseweg— the same house in which my own family had lived a decade before—was a deeply affecting experience for me, marking a second beginning to a relationship which has endured to the present day. Treated from the outset as an "honorary Aquarone", I felt included within a magic circle of warmth and intimacy which still glows undimmed in my memory.

With Miche's father Stanislas ("Stan") in particular I established a bond of friendship and respect which was to be one of the formative influences of my life. Stan had had a peripatetic upbringing. His father, of Italian origin, travelled the world as a sea-going chef; Stan was born in Sydney while his father's ship was docked there. Thus Stan was an Australian national, but, strangely, his later travels, which were extensive, never returned him to the country of his birth. His mother being French, Stan—whose talent for languages revealed itself at an early age—was brought up bilingually in French and English. Later his family moved to Canada (a country for which he always retained great affection) where he attended the University of Toronto, later moving on to Columbia University in New York where he obtained his Ph.D. in French literature. Having also developed fluency in Spanish, he taught Romance languages for a while at Hunter College in New York, where he married one of his students, Madeleine Flum. During the war he seems to have been employed in some kind of secret work whose exact nature he never revealed. At war's end he returned to university teaching, but the meagre salaries paid young academics at that time made supporting his growing family difficult, and he decided to use his linguistic skills in the better paying position of United Nations interpreter. This soon led to his employment at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, of which institution he eventually became Registrar.

Stan had many delightful qualities, all of which were somehow fused in his character to make him the wonderful man he was: sparkling intelligence, articulateness, humour, optimism, probity and—for me his most endearing trait—a delight in absurdity. Although he

was some thirty years my senior, and I naturally looked up to him as to a father, in his company the difference in our ages seemed magically bridged by his enthusiasm and sense of fun. A keen walker, he and I often hiked along the beach at Scheveningen, discussing, as we walked, everything under the sun (which, it must be observed, in the Netherlands is usually obscured by clouds). My earnest efforts at explaining mathematics, which Stan called the "numbers racket", he found quite amusing. When I told him that I was studying topology, his amusement redoubled at the idea of anyone being identifiable as a "budding topologist." Stan's use of words had a colour, precision, and rapidity which was highly stimulating. He would speak, for example, of the "systole and diastole" of inquiry, of the "weft and warp" of reality, of a topic being "exoteric". He had a delightful habit of peppering his talk with terms and phrases from his North American student years. Thus, at the end of the day, he would signal his intention of going to bed by heartily announcing (as my own father might have done) "Well, old folks, old soaks, I'm for hitting the sack." And old soaks, like true Notre Damers, "never staggered, never fell, and sobered up on wood alcohol." He rarely expressed vexation by a phrase less decorous than an exasperated "Good Night!" Objects of his admiration were "fierce". Americans were "born with steering wheels in their mouths" (and analogously, Dutch with bicycle spokes, etc.). To be energetic was "to come on like Gangbusters." A rattling train was likened to the "Toonerville Trolley". The Dutch language (which did not appeal to him) was "Katzenjammer English". Stan adored the Marx Brothers, Danny Kaye (his favourite movie was *The Five Pennies*) and the doggerel of the Canadian versifier Robert W. Service, to whose immortal "Ballad of Dan McGrew", and "The Cremation of Sam McGee" he introduced me. This last sparked a long-running routine between us—undoubtedly a source of tedium to the rest of the Aquarones, but Stan and I never tired of it—in which he was "Sam", I was "Josh", and we kept our "sleds" in constant readiness for "hitting the trail". I recall while staying with the Aquarones seeing on television the thirties movie "The Green Pastures", one of Stan's favourites, lines from which, for example, "Reckon it's about time for a fish fry, Lawd!" and "Light up a ten-cent ceegar" were woven into the general routine. I was also introduced by Stan to S. J. Perelman's inimitable prose, of which he was a great aficionado, and to which I became addicted in my turn.

It seemed to me that Stan's delight in such merry nonsense provided a necessary balance to his position of high responsibility at the International Court of Justice, whose role as a legal authority in the world he took very seriously. Behind Stan's charm and polish lay a strong sense of values, an old-fashioned moral uprightness. At the same time I believe that he found it difficult to accept the existence of evil in the world, his fundamental optimism leading him, with few

exceptions, to see the best in people. If there was a vein of cynicism in him, he kept it well concealed.

Miche's mother Madeleine ("Mado") was of Franco-Swiss origin, but her family had moved to the United States some time before the second world war. Cultured and highly intelligent, Mado also had a down-to-earth quality, an appealing directness and strength of character. Her energy and competence in practical matters (I recall that it was she who dealt with the coal-burning stove and pounded in any loose nails around the house) enabled her to run the Aquarone household with seemingly effortless efficiency, and with grace and finish. Still echoing in my memory is her call of "*À table!*" to summon the family to the appetizing meal she prepared each midday, for which Stan would return from his work at the Court. Disliking waste, she gauged to a nicety the exact amount of food required to satisfy the company at table, providing a little bit over which, on the occasions on which I had the good fortune to be present, she would encourage me, as a "growing boy", to polish off. Like Stan, she was remarkably quick-witted, as the following episode, one of my favourite Aquarone stories, shows. Mado had put Rémy, Miche's younger brother, at the time a toddler of two or so, into the family car. Shutting the door, Mado was horrified to find that the boy had somehow contrived to get the fingers of one hand trapped, and that the top of his pinkie had actually been lopped off. Displaying great presence of mind, Mado retrieved the severed piece of finger, which had fallen in the snow, popped it into her mouth, and rushed the child off to the local hospital. On arrival there, she produced the fingertip, still warm, from her mouth and presented it to the astounded doctor on duty with the suggestion that no time be lost in reattaching it to the boy's finger. This was done, the graft took, and Rémy's finger grew back almost as good as new.

On a subsequent visit I struck up a curious friendship with Stan's aging and wonderfully eccentric mother, known to the family as "Nana", whom Stan had brought to The Hague after his father's death. I recall that when Stan first introduced us, he jokingly described me a *génie* ("genius"), which Nana apparently misheard as *genou* ("knee"). Thenceforth that was how she referred to me, apparently in the belief that "the knee" was some kind of nickname I had picked up. When she asked me what I was doing, I told her that I was a student at Oxford, to which she responded that she was sorry to hear it, because of "all those terrible riots there". This remark was highly perplexing, until it dawned on us that she thought I had meant not Oxford, England, but Oxford, Mississippi, about whose recent racial disturbances she had been reading in the newspaper. In Nana's eyes, I was always to remain not "the Yank at Oxford" but "the knee at Oxford, Mississippi."

Impressions of certain members of the Aquarones' extensive network of friends and acquaintances remain with me. Stan's colleague

Billy Tait and his wife Lou were wonderfully hospitable people who showed me much kindness: Billy had studied at Oxford in the 1930s and through his recollections of the place I learned that little had changed since then. I also recall Georges Droz, who, when off on a trip by car, stowed his luggage not in the boot, but in what he was pleased to call "the shoe". Also Louise Berne, a jovial woman whose partiality to "Craven A" cigarettes led to her being nicknamed "Madame Craven A" - the "A", of coursed, pronounced "Ah!" I had a number of stimulating philosophical conversations with Turan Gökoltay, a Turkish friend of the Aquarones whose intellectual acuity made a great impression on me. I also made the acquaintance of Mrs. Holz, a late middle-aged woman of powerful intelligence and personality who occasionally came to look after the younger Aquarone children in their parents' absence. Of Jewish origin, she had been a professional chemist in Germany before Hitler's decrees deprived her of her livelihood. Fleeing to the Netherlands, she managed to survive the war there. Unable to return to her former occupation after the war, she was reduced to making her living as an part-time domestic with well-off families. I learned that she had once been a championship bridge player; on one occasion I actually partnered her (with my usual inadequacy) in an informal game organized by Miche. Mrs. Holz was a lady of strong opinions, opinions she voiced fearlessly in her pronounced German accent. Forever associated with her in my mind is that hard "G" in the last word of her withering estimate of someone: "You know, he's not very intelligent." Finally I recall the Siegel sisters, Dora and Erna, the two gentle spinsters who had taught Lynette a decade before. By that time retired, they lived not far from the Aquarones in an apartment which, while in fact quite large, seemed cramped through the extraordinary profusion of objects crammed into it. These ranged from random bric-a-brac to valuable paintings of the Dutch school, including a Rembrandt or two inherited from the good ladies' father, who had apparently made his fortune as a merchant in the Dutch East Indies. The Siegel sisters' true attachment, however, was not to their material possessions, but to their numerous cats. I recall the afternoon Miche and I were invited to their apartment for tea. After we had settled down to our tea and cakes in their crowded sitting-room, the two ladies proceeded to enumerate the idiosyncracies of each of the apartment's feline occupants. Every so often one of these creatures would sidle up to be fed a treat fished out by one of the sisters from an elegant silver box any dealer in antiques would have died for. The sisters' pride and joy was a cat they claimed to have trained to *lick stamps.* When Miche and I diplomatically expressed surprise at this, the singular animal was forthwith produced and a demonstration of its remarkable ability effected. We were deeply impressed by this "stamp-licking cat", as it came to be known; many

years later Miche was to achieve a nice symmetry by her discovery of "cat-licking stamps", a series of stamps bearing images of cats.

Reflecting on my first stay with the Aquarones evokes a number of musical impressions. In the dining room of their house was a massive sideboard whose top drawer was crammed with records of classical music, most of which I had not heard before. One of these was Mozart's last string quartet, the one in F, K. 590, whose splendid opening—a majestically rising sequence of three chords followed by a descending flurry of notes—is seamlessly fused in my mind with that enchanted time. In this treasure trove I also found Rudolf Serkin's recording of Beethoven's "Diabelli" Variations, the first of Beethoven's solo piano compositions to have a real impact on me. Also memorable was an old 78 rpm recording of the great violist William Primrose playing a sonata attributed to W. F. Bach.

Miche's birthday and mine fall on the same day and we have held a number of joint celebrations over the years. I cannot now recall whether the first of these, in 1963, took place in Paris or The Hague, but I do remember on that occasion being presented by Michele with a pipe and a pouch of Dutch Amphora tobacco. Thus was I introduced to the pleasures of smoking. An absurd sight I must have presented puffing away in a desperate, and mostly unsuccessful, attempt to keep the thing alight. It soon became clear that I was not a "pipe-man" by nature, and so, like virtually everybody else in those days, I took up cigarettes.

In the late summer of 1963 Miche and I attended the Edinburgh Festival, where we heard Beethoven trios with the Stern-Rose-Istomin Trio, Bartok quartets with the Tatrai Quartet, and the Bartok Solo Violin Sonata with Yehudi Menuhin (who on this occasion played magnificently). The only other thing I can recall about the episode is that we stayed in a curious Edinburgh boarding house with separate dormitories for men and women.

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In the summer of 1964 I returned to California. The airfare from Europe to the U.S. west coast at that time being far beyond my means, I arranged to take a relatively cheap charter flight to New York and travel from there to San Francisco overland by Greyhound Bus. Ed and Elinor Bohle were, once again, my hosts in New York. I was taken by Elinor to the Museum of Modern Art. I still recall the sheer impact of the paintings I saw there, Miros, Ernsts, Mondrians, Tanguys, Magrittes, Kandinskys burning their images onto my visual memory. This was a formative experience for me.

After a couple of exciting days in New York the time came to board the Greyhound bus for the West Coast. While I was aware that the

journey would take upwards of 72 hours, with only occasional rest stops, I figured, quite wrongly as it turned out, that I could sleep most of the way. Little did I know that the trip would be, as I later came to refer to it, "purgatory on wheels", that I was to learn at first hand what it really meant to be "Hounded across America". After bidding farewell to Elinor, who had come to see me off, I boarded the bus and settled myself into a window seat. Naturally, I had hoped that the seat next to mine might remain unoccupied, but a man soon sat down next to me, and when the bus pulled out of the station it was almost full. After a while I struck up a conversation with my immediate neighbour, whom I shall call Mario, an affable middle-aged gentleman of Italian origin on his way to visit his married daughter in Chicago. I learned that Mario was a watchmaker employed in the New York office of the prestigious Omega watch company. As the bus laboured its way westward, to pass the time he told me an amusing story. It seems that every Omega watch came with a unconditional guarantee that, if found to be defective for any reason whatsoever, it would be repaired or replaced free of charge. Mario had the responsibility of determining, whenever a watch was returned, whether it was reparable or should simply be replaced; in the former case it was his further job to repair it. He told me that, while most of the watches he had dealt with over the years were perfectly bona-fide returns, he had had a few "rogues", watches which had been deliberately tampered with by their purchasers so as to force the company to replace them. A certain character, he said, had played a cat-and-mouse game with the company, returning one "defective" watch after another—including a specimen crushed to wafer thinness so rendering it the size of a saucer—and receiving a replacement each time. Finally this joker sent along a watch whose works had been partly eaten away by acid. Mario and his boss agreed that it was about time to put a stop to this, but instead of supplying a new replacement, Mario repaired the old watch as best he could and returned it to with a note to the effect that this was positively the last free watch that the fellow was going to gouge from the Omega company. In response I told Mario my Timex story[8], on hearing which he laughed and said that he wasn't surprised—for his part, he wouldn't be seen dead with a Timex, it fell apart almost before you strapped the damn thing on. According to him there was only one shoddier brand on the market: Ingersoll. I was glad that my own wristwatch, although hardly an Omega, was of neither make.

Thus we agreeably whiled away the fifteen hours to Chicago, where I was to change buses. After bidding farewell to Mario, I had a quick bite to eat at a hamburger stand in the station and boarded my next bus, a direct to San Francisco. Soon after I had taken my seat a man

[8] See p. 30.

came around dispensing pillows which at first I thought would be provided for free. But no, it was a case of "$1 please"—apart from one's seat, everything on the Hound was an "extra". I coughed up the money and, accepting a minuscule pillow in exchange, tried to make myself comfortable. As the bus pulled out of the station, I was suddenly oppressed by the thought that I faced another sixty hours or so of sitting nearly bolt upright. I dozed fitfully in my seat that first night, continually aware of the roar of the bus's engine punctuated by a baby's cry or an occasional groan. The following morning I opened my eyes, which were smarting with fatigue, to find that the bus had arrived in the outskirts of a city I blearily managed to identify as Omaha, Nebraska. By this time I had worked up a considerable appetite and was looking forward to a decent breakfast. As the bus threaded its way through the city we passed a number of inviting looking "eateries", but the driver showed no sign of slowing down. Eventually he pulled up at the Greyhound station, which was situated in a desolate no-man's-land on the other side of town. The nearest decent restaurant being miles away, there was no choice but to choke down the lousy, and by no means cheap food on offer at the station café. This pattern was to be repeated throughout the journey. On reboarding the bus I found to my chagrin that my pillow (along with everybody else's) had been removed, and that, sure enough, I would have to shell out yet again for another one. I did so, but only because I wanted to see whether I could beat the system by hiding the pillow somewhere. (Needless to say I failed.) We pulled out of Omaha and droned our way through the endless Nebraska plain, having our attention drawn to the few places of interest by the new bus driver, who occasionally attempted to liven things up by essaying a witticism, for instance, describing a auto junkyard we happened to pass as a "women's parking lot." Arriving some hours later at Cheyenne, Wyoming, my fellow passengers and I, by this time dropping with fatigue, staggered off into what seemed an inferno—the temperature there hovered in the nineties. After another dose of greasy Hound fare, we reboarded the bus and ground our way through another grueling night and most of the following day, passing through Salt Lake City, Winnemucca, Reno and Sacramento before pulling in at long last to the familiar 7th St. station in San Francisco. I had removed my shoes for the final segment of the journey and, when I attempted to put them back on again, found to my dismay that my feet had swollen up like a pair of balloons. Cramming them into my shoes somehow, I stumbled out to await my last change of bus, to Santa Cruz, and deliverance. When I finally reeled off the "purgatory on wheels" at Santa Cruz I felt, and no doubt also looked, like something the cat had dragged in. The Greyhound's slogan at that time was "Leave the driving to us", but what they failed to mention is that the suffering is left to the passengers. Still, what could you expect for $99?

I arrived at 24 Pasatiempo Drive to find that my father had gone into the construction business, having bought out the owners of Clark and Clark Inc., a local construction company. Unfortunately, right from the start the newly purchased firm had cash flow problems which were shortly to force it into liquidation, resulting in the total loss of my father's investment, all of which had, it seems, been put up by Margery. The "Clark and Clark" issue was a constant source of frustration and anxiety for them. Nevertheless Margery, with her usual grace, managed to made light of it.

I spent most of my waking hours that summer sprawled in a deck chair on the patio, reading. Having recently acquired a taste for philosophy, I got through a number of philosophical works, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus,* mysterious and fascinating, William James's "Essays on Pragmatism", G. E. Moore's philosophical essays. I even ploughed through Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, a copy of which I found in my father's collection of Great Books. I also studied Gödel's monograph, *The Consistency of the Axiom of Choice and the Generalized Continuum Hypothesis.* The first two-thirds of this mathematical tour-de-force, in which Gödel presents his axiom system for set theory and develops its essential properties, seemed reasonably clear. But, despite my best efforts, I was unable to fathom the final part of the work, its grand finale, so to speak, in which the consistency of the GCH is established. A good few years were to pass before I felt I truly understood what was going on.

I shared the annexe to the house on Pasatiempo Drive with my younger brother Pete, who was then 12 or so. Because he had been no more than five or six years old when I had left home, we scarcely knew each other. But, remembering him as a toddler, I was not surprised to find that he had developed into a very nice boy. We enjoyed rambling around the neighbourhood together, and climbing into the nearby hills. On one of these rambles I happened to brush with my bare arm a clump of bushes bearing oak-shaped leaves of an attractive crimson hue. This turned out to be a dreadful mistake, since the plant in question was poison oak, the bane of the California countryside, to which I turned out to be pathologically allergic. That night my arm started to itch fiercely and, without thinking, I scratched it, thereby initiating the spread of the allergy to other parts of my body. By the next morning my eyelids and lips had puffed up with oedema, and by the end of the day much of the remainder of my body surface. had followed suit. The itching was simply indescribable. My face, swelling to acromegalic proportions, began to bear a close resemblance to Fred Gwynne's in his Herman Munster makeup. Most embarrassing of all, the oedema proceeded to spread to my crotch. Of course in this leprous state I was confined to my room, except for a visit to a doctor who, clucking at my foolishness at having got within 10 feet of a patch of

poison oak, prescribed a dose of cortisone tablets. These failing to alleviate the condition, I began to worry that the oedema might invade my lungs, with potentially fatal results, cases of such extreme reactions to poison oak being on record. So again I was trundled off to the doctor and this time given a massive injection of ACTH (adrenocorticotropic hormone). I had the impression that, if this didn't work, it was goodbye Charlie. But, thankfully, it did the trick, and both swelling and itching began quickly to subside, so that after a day or two I was in a more or less presentable state. As for poison oak, I felt that if I never set eyes on the wretched plant again it would be too soon.

This wasn't the only misfortune to befall me that summer. A comical, but nevertheless painful episode occurred one evening in the living room where Margery, my father and I were having pre-dinner drinks. I had recently bought a Zippo lighter: in those days no serious smoker was to be seen without one, and I was very proud to be included among their number. My Zippo having just run out of fuel, I got up in search of a can of lighter fluid. Finding one in the kitchen, I squirted liberal amounts of its contents into my lighter, in the process overfilling it. On returning to my aperitif, I put a cigarette between my lips, flipped my Zippo at it, and, with a whoosh, the whole lighter, along with my hand, burst into flame! Frantically I attempted to beat out the flames with the other hand, succeeding only in setting that hand alight as well. Finally I managed to quell the fire by sitting on both hands, but by this time they had sustained quite serious burns, and had begun to hurt mercilessly. Margery applied ointment to my hands and wrapped them in bandages. She suggested cognac as an anodyne, and as a result I was drunk by the time I finally got to bed, but, as they say, "felt no pain". When my father looked in the following morning to see how the "human torch" (as he quickly dubbed me) was faring, I was able to report that it looked as if I would pull through, and in fact the burns healed up after a few days. My near self-cremation taught me to be a lot less cavalier with lighter fluid, though.

Later that summer the Aquarones passed through Santa Cruz in the final stages of the camping trip around the U.S. that Stan had yearned to make. It was, as always, a delight to see them again. Stan had come up with a whole new set of routines: I recall his "McQueen for a Day" and his delight with Smokey the Bear's admonition that "Only *you* can prevent forest fires." I hit the trail with them, driving north through San Francisco across the Golden Gate into Marin County in search of Samuel P. Taylor State Park, where they had planned to camp for the night. Failing to locate this elusive watering-hole, we stopped to ask a passer-by if he could inform us of its whereabouts. Our would-be informant proved to be a curious Japanese, who waved his arms excitedly and produced a torrent of speech from which we were able to make out something like "State Park? No State Park here, no State

Park there, no State Park anywhere!", a line which was quickly absorbed into our repertoire of routines. I cannot now recall whether we found the place, but we did pitch our tents somewhere, I insisting that our campsite be free of the slightest trace of the dreaded poison oak. The next day we drove back to San Francisco to put Miche on a plane for Scotland, to which she had to return to resit an examination. I myself returned to Britain soon afterwards.

I spent the Christmas vacation of 1964 most enjoyably in Cambridge with Donald Brown and his family. While I was there Donald introduced me to Christine Smith, a tall, attractive, dark-haired girl of striking intelligence and force of personality, who was, I learned to my surprise, only 17 years old and still at school. Christine and I hit it off from the start, and we quickly became friends. I also got to know Christine's mother, a strong-minded and highly capable woman of French origin who, widowed soon after the war, had brought up Christine and her older brother Ian by herself. She had nurtured and encouraged the development of her children's evident abilities. Both had been brought up bilingually in French and English, and both were musical, Ian playing the piano and Christine the violin—how I admired her for that accomplishment! I recall first hearing Beethoven's "Spring" sonata in a rendition by Christine and Ian at the Smith family house in the Huntingdon Road. My friendship with Christine was sustained when, two years later, she went up to Oxford to read Modern Languages while I was still a graduate student there.

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Dermot Roaf had arranged for David Edwards, a functional analyst at Lincoln College, to act as my tutor for my first couple of terms. A shy, prematurely balding man in his early thirties, Edwards was the first mathematician I had met (apart from my fleeting encounter with John Pryce) who actually *practiced* the kind of mathematics I had picked up from Kelley's book, and which so fascinated me. Tutorials were held in his office in the old Mathematical Institute on Parks Road. At our first meeting I told him that I had tried my hand at the problem sets in Kelley, and that I had become particularly interested in the theory of Boolean algebras. This was something with which Edwards was familiar, and he recommended that I get hold of a recently published book on the subject by Philip Dwinger. Much of my first term with Edwards was devoted to working through this excellent little book. Edwards also stimulated my interest in functional analysis, and in my second term, under his guidance, I started to work my way through M. M. Day's highly compressed monograph on normed linear spaces. I felt very fortunate to receive instruction and guidance from Edwards, a first-class mathematician. Later I was gratified to learn from Dermot

that in his report to Exeter College on my progress Edwards had said that my work with him "would have done credit to a graduate student." On the basis of such rare observations is one's self-esteem built.

In my second year I was "farmed out" to a young algebraic topologist at Hertford College, Brian Steer. My relations with him were somewhat less harmonious than those I had enjoyed the previous year with David Edwards. At our first meeting he demanded to know why I had only obtained a Second in my Mods examination the previous summer. I told him straight out that I wasn't really interested in studying for exams, and that being the case, a Second was the best I could have achieved. It was obvious from the expression on his face that he was less than happy with this explanation. I went on to say that I had become interested in Gillman and Jerison's *Rings of Continuous Functions*—I recalled the delicious sense of inclusion I had felt on reading the book's very first sentence: *This book is addressed to those who know the meaning of each word in the title; none is defined in the text*—and that perhaps I could work my way through it under his guidance. Alas, he didn't seem very taken with this suggestion either. But he nodded approvingly when I mentioned that I had been studying Bourbaki's *Topologie Génerale* and *Algèbre.* He asked me if I knew anything about Lie algebras, to which I replied in the negative. "In that case," he said, "I'll make a bargain with you. Get hold of the first chapter of Bourbaki's *Groupes et Algèbres de Lie* and work your way through it this term. Write out solutions to the exercises and bring them to me each week. If you agree to do this, next term we'll go through Gillman and Jerison's book. What do you say?" I was happy to fall in with this proposal, and so that term I ploughed my way through the exercises in Bourbaki's *fascicule.* Bourbaki's characteristically elegant presentation of the theory is—equally characteristically—quite devoid of motivation, so that I was left completely in the dark as to what the deeper mathematical significance of Lie algebras might be. It was to be some time before I learned that Lie algebras arise as algebras of infinitesimal transformations on analytic manifolds or Lie groups. I don't recall Brian Steer ever pointing this fact out to me (but he may have done). And Bourbaki doesn't introduce the concept of Lie group until a later chapter of his opus, which at that time had not even been written. Nevertheless, I came to enjoy grappling with the intricacies of Lie algebras. Each week I presented Steer with my efforts at solving the (often very difficult) Bourbaki exercises. On the rare occasions one of my solutions met with his approval, he would say to me, in his prim way, "I'm *pleased* with you." Praise indeed! In accordance with our agreement, the following term I started on Gillman and Jerison's book, each week bringing Steer solutions to exercises therefrom. The study of rings of continuous functions on a topological space combined algebra and topology in a fashion which was very much to my taste, but not, as

soon became evident, to Brian Steer's. I recall in particular his expressing outright disbelief at the claim made in one exercise in Gillman and Jerison's book that a certain condition on a topological space was necessary and sufficient for the space to be determined up to homeomorphism. He took some convincing to accept the correctness of the claim. We had a number of disputes of this sort, but in the end, I think, we parted on good terms.

My study of Boolean algebras and set theory had made me curious about logic, and so I was delighted to learn at the beginning of my third year that my tutor was to be John Crossley, a young Fellow of St. Catherine's College, who was at the time the sole mathematical logician on the Oxford faculty. John and I hit it off instantly. Warm, informal, encouraging, he bubbled with enthusiasm for logic. Despite the fact that I was still an undergraduate, and had yet to undergo the ordeal of "Schools", John graciously treated me as if I were already his graduate student. He suggested that I read through Hartley Rogers' notes on recursion theory (the well-known book only appeared a couple of years later), and later asked me to present at his seminar an exposition of Myhill and Shepherdson's 1955 paper *Effective operations on partial recursive functions.* It still surprises me to reflect that this, my first "official" lecture, had as its topic recursion theory, a subject for which I have never been able to develop much of a taste.

By a happy coincidence, John had arranged to teach a graduate course on model theory that year, devoting the first part of his exposition to a proof of the completeness theorem using Boolean algebraic methods. With my enthusiasm for Boolean algebras, I was agog at this prospect. Alan Slomson, a very bright first-year graduate student of John's, and I were delegated to take notes on the lectures. Alan and I proved ideal collaborators, developing such an enthusiasm for model theory that John suggested that *we* give the course the following year. Using as a basis the notes we had taken on John's course, we wrote up our own, which we gave in Oxford in 1965-6. Later John encouraged us to polish up our course notes into publishable form, and smoothed the way for the resulting book to be published by North-Holland. Thus was *Bell and Slomson*[9]*: Models and Ultraproducts*, the first student textbook on model theory, born. Alan and I both recognized how important a part John Crossley's generosity and encouragement had played in its birth. We owe him much.

John was very generous to all his students, and to me in particular. On a number of occasions I enjoyed his and his wife Stella's hospitality at dinner in their house in Kidlington north of Oxford. One evening John invited me to dine with him at St. Catherine's High Table.

[9] Later spoonerized to "Slob and Mellson".

I felt somewhat nervous when I was directed to take one of the College's characteristically modernistic high-backed seats next to the Master of the College. This was Alan Bullock, whom I knew to be an eminent historian, author of *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny,* a book I had seen but not yet read. But he proved affable and down-to-earth, and made me feel very much at my ease. After dinner the company withdrew into the Senior Common Room where the port bottle was passed round. I thought I was holding up my end conversationally until a sharp young Fellow in linguistics (I think) threw in a word I had not heard—*elision*. My fear of being seen as ignorant being no less pronounced then than now, it strikes me as surprising that, instead of temporizing, perhaps even changing the subject altogether—certainly what I would do today in a similar situation—I meekly asked my interlocutor the meaning of the word: perhaps, after all, I was less self-conscious then[10]. In any case, he defined the word for me without a trace of condescension. Some years later I confided this tiny contretemps to a close friend, who responded with the following limerick:

Your ignorance of the word "elision"
Once led to a certain derision.
But your progress since
Quite makes me wince—
I submit to the master of erudition.

Undergraduates at Oxford were not, in the ordinary course of events, burdened with the responsibility of following lectures, and accordingly I attended just a select handful. In my first term I heard Ioan James lecture on topological groups, a subject to which I had once again been introduced through exercises in Kelley's book (and which I had studied further in Pontryagin's classic *Topological Groups*). I recall that on one occasion James, a slight, quiet-spoken, rather charming man, lost his way in the middle of a proof at the blackboard. At that point an American voice in the audience piped up: "Professor, could I be permitted to interpolate a remark at this juncture?", a request to which James, perhaps as startled as I by the intervention, acceded. With a clattering of chair legs, a truly mountainous man laboured to his feet from the back row of the lecture theatre. He then proceeded to outline, with impressive authority, how the proof should go. This was the first, but by no means the last, of the interventions of Alan Tritter, a graduate student in mathematics whom I came to know quite well. In

[10] So let the self-consciousness I've acquired through growing older be overcome through an observation decently confined to a footnote, as age decrees. The verb "elide", as I learned through my humbling introduction to its associated substantive, means "to omit a vowel or syllable in pronunciation". I've noticed that writers who should know better are now using the word in the sense of "to identify" or "to conflate". *Vive la pèdanterie*!

his late twenties, I would guess, at the time we first met, Alan, I learned, had been a child prodigy, graduating in mathematics from the University of Chicago at the age of 15. Not long after this, his weight had begun to undergo a sudden, and alarming increase. He consulted a number of physicians, but to a man they attributed the phenomenon to hormonal imbalance, or even, humiliatingly, to overeating. He was put on diets, and various drug regimens, but to no avail: his weight continued to mount inexorably, coming to exceed 400 pounds. Finally a doctor of superior sagacity came up with a bizarre, but as it turned out, correct diagnosis: Alan's excess body tissue was in fact a colossal lipoma, a benign tumour, whose symmetric growth had misled the experts into attributing the swelling to metabolic disorder. If this diagnosis had been made early on, the tumour could have been removed without serious ado. But, as Alan explained to me, it had been allowed to grow for so long that it now weighed in excess of 100 pounds, so that its removal would involve major, and very risky, surgery. Moreover, as he observed with his customary grandiloquence, "after excision of the tumour, wrapping up the remainder of my body in my epidermis would present the surgeons with a nontrivial problem in spherical geometry." I don't know whether Alan ever had that operation. He later, so I heard, became a member of the research group at the IBM labs in New York.

In my second term I attended the lecture course on module theory by A.L.S. Corner of Worcester College. Corner's presentation of the subject was masterly, and I took scrupulous notes, rewriting them in fair copy in a notebook, just as I had with Hoyle's lectures. (I was never to do this again.) After the course ended I wrote to Corner asking if he would be willing to look over some "research"—so I was pleased to call it—of mine on modules over Boolean rings. (What exactly it was I have long forgotten.) He kindly consented, and invited me to come to his rooms one afternoon to discuss my "work". Although he was cordial and encouraging, I somehow gained the impression that he was less than overwhelmed by my mathematical efforts. But then, over tea, he asked me if I liked music, and I naturally responded in the affirmative. We spent the rest of a (to me, at least) memorable afternoon listening to select items from his record collection: I recall in particular hearing for the first time the Cortot-Thibaud-Casals performance of the Schubert B flat piano trio, Op. 99.

In our discussion about modules over Boolean rings Corner had suggested that I write to M.H. Stone, the creator of the theory of Boolean rings, and one of the grand old men of American mathematics. I did so, outlining the "results" I had obtained. He wrote me a gracious letter in return which is unfortunately lost.

My efforts at self-education, in mathematics as in all else, continued throughout my undergraduate years. This was abetted to no

inconsiderable extent by the presence of Blackwell's bookshop on the Broad just across from Exeter College. Like many Oxford undergraduates, I had taken out a Blackwell's account. This was supposed to be paid off at the end of each term, but inevitably I allowed mine to run into arrears. I recall receiving a politely worded reminder from Blackwell's, headed by a quotation from one of Plato's dialogues, which it amused me to parody along the lines of "How, Socrates, can one be accounted an honest man if one fails to pay one's Blackwell's bill?" When I still failed to pay off my debt (like most undergraduates, I was chronically hard up), Blackwell's dispatched a somewhat less politely worded note, now bereft of quotations and, indeed, close to the dunning. This failing to have the desired effect, there finally arrived a curt communication informing me that, unless I settled my account forthwith, Messrs. Blackwells would have no choice but to refer the matter to their solicitors. At this point I gave in and paid up.

Forty years ago scientific books were very much cheaper than they are now, and booksellers, Blackwell's in particular, were able to maintain almost complete stocks of those currently in print. I spent many happy hours among Blackwell's lavish display of mathematics books—considerably more time, in fact, than in any of the (admittedly excellent) Oxford libraries. My browsing eye was soon attracted by a series of brown and grey French paperbacks entitled *Éléments de Mathématique*, the work, so the title page of each volume modestly noted, of the oddly named N. Bourbaki. I was excited to find that this was intended to be a complete, systematic account of "abstract" mathematics, precisely the kind of mathematics to which I had already been converted by Kelley's *General Topology.* I was soon to learn that "Nicolas Bourbaki" was the collective pseudonym playfully adopted by a group of prominent French mathematicians under which to publish their joint pedagogical efforts: the name "Bourbaki" was, it seems, that of a Greek general in Napoleon's armies. The Messieurs *oeuvre* included not only *Topologie Génerale*, but *Algèbr*e, *Thèorie des Ensembles, Espaces Vectoriels Topologiques, Algèbre Commutatif,* magical titles indeed. I bought as many volumes as I could afford, often in obsolete—and so cheaper—editions (the whole enterprise seemed to be undergoing constant revision), and started to work my way through the collections of challenging exercises at the end of each section. To the solutions I had already written up to Kelley's problems on Boolean rings I added a series of solutions to exercises on topological rings in the *Topologie Génerale*. I augmented my notes on Corner's lectures with solutions to exercises on modules over principal ideal domains from the *Algèbre*, appropriately inscribed, I felt, in one of the two solid blue-bound notebooks I had purchased from the *Papeterie Joseph Gibert* in Paris. The second of these notebooks I devoted to solutions to the exercises on ordered sets in Chapter 3 of the *Thèorie des Ensembles.* It

was from these that I first learned about ordinals, which Bourbaki presents in the original Cantorian manner as order types of well-ordered sets.

Kelley and Bourbaki were major early influences on my mathematical development. This influence was exerted not through sequential reading—I have never been able to read a mathematics book as one reads a novel, "passively" as it were, that is, unattended by the feeling that one should be attempting to write a book of one's own—but "actively" through the systematic presentation of solutions to the many exercises included in the texts. Writing these up gave me a sense of achievement, a glow of self-worth, however ephemeral, at having produced a "work" of my own. These fledgling expository efforts furnished the basis for all my subsequent mathematical writings.

There being no canonical text on model theory, in my third year I studied the subject mainly from original papers. I was particularly taken with the ultraproduct construction, about which I learned from Kochen's *Ultraproducts and the Theory of Models,* Frayne, Morel and Scott's *Reduced Direct Products*, and Keisler's *Ultraproducts and Elementary Classes.* Basic model theory I gleaned from Tarski and Vaught's *Arithmetical Extensions of Relational Systems.* In one of Keisler's papers I came across the assertion, stated without proof, that elementary equivalent saturated structures of the same cardinality are isomorphic. I figured out a proof of this (essentially by adapting the "back-and-forth" argument which establishes the corresponding result for ordered sets) which I thought might be worth attempting to publish. So I typed it up and submitted it to the *Bulletin of the American Mathematical Society.* This was my first attempt at publishing a mathematical paper. After a few months a letter arrived informing me of the paper's rejection on the not unreasonable grounds that my proof was already known; while unpublished, it was the standard proof given in graduate courses in model theory at Berkeley. This, at least, I found consoling.

Blackwell's served as the main source of supply for the many novels and other works of literature I devoured as an undergraduate, and which still crowd my shelves. I read a great number of translations in Penguin Classics, the uniform appearance of whose colour coded bindings—green for French, red for Russian, brown for Greek, purple for Latin, blue for Italian, yellow for Chinese—appealed to me much as series of stamps had once done. (I didn't much care for the glossy new "artistic" bindings which Penguin were introducing at the time.) I developed a particular passion for French novels—Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, Zola, Huysmans, Gide, Sartre, Camus, Celine, … Huysmans's extraordinary "decadent" novels *Against Nature* and *Down There* gripped me. I was also riveted by Camus's *Outsider,* Sartre's *Nausea*, Celine's *Journey to the End of the Night.* The great 19th century

Russians—Gogol, Goncharov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Chekhov—also greatly appealed to me: I loved Goncharov's *Oblomov*, Gogol's *Dead Souls,* Dostoevsky's *The Double, Notes from Underground, The House of the Dead* and *The Idiot*, Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina, War and Peace*, and *23 Tales*, Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons.* Of Chekhov's stories I recall being particularly struck by the bleak *Ward 6,* reputed to be Lenin's favourite, in which the director of a mental asylum winds up, ironically, as one of its inmates. I also conceived a liking for modern Russian literature: Zoshchenko's humorous feuilletons, Ilf and Petrov's *The Twelve Chairs* and *The Golden Calf,* Isaac Babel's *Red Cavalry* and *Odessa Stories,* Ilya Ehrenburg's *Julio Jurenito,* Sologub's *Little Demon.* I read American novels: J. D. Salinger's immensely popular *The Catcher in the Rye*, Heller's even bigger success *Catch-22,* Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, John Updike's *Rabbit, Run,* Dos Passos's *USA* and *Manhattan Transfer*, Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, Saroyan's *The Human Comedy*, Herlihy's *The Sleep of Baby Filbertson* and *All Fall Down,* Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and *The Wild Palms,* Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* and *The Great Gatsby.* I thought Carson McCullers's writing exquisite: *The Ballad of the Sad Café, Reflections in a Golden Eye, The Member of the Wedding, The Heart is a Lonely Hunter, Clock without Hands.* Other novels I recall making a big impression on me as an undergraduate included Elias Canetti's extraordinary *Auto-da-Fé,* Robert Musil's *Young Törless*, A. E. Ellis's *The Rack*, Italo Svevo's *Confessions of Zeno,* Hašek's *The Good Soldier Schweik,* Čapek's *War with the Newts* (to which I had been introduced by Stan Aquarone), Stefan Zweig's *Kaleidoscope* and *Beware of Pity*, Joyce's *Dubliners, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* and the monumental *Ulysses.*

I must have been about 13 when I first come across a copy of *Ulysses* on the shelves of the Riswold's house in Berkeley. Attracted by what I took to be a book on Greek mythology, I recall my surprise at opening it to see the arresting first page, with its enormous **"S".** I knew the book's reputation as the supreme work of modern literature, and I felt duty-bound to attempt to read it. So in my first year at Oxford I bought the Modern Library edition (which is prefaced by Judge Woolsey's landmark 1933 decision lifting the U.S. ban on the book) and dived in. While of course it was tough going, and it is highly doubtful that I actually read every line, I was mesmerized by the book, and certain portions of it have always remained with me: the beginning in the martello tower, the journalistic episode, the catechetical account of Bloom's return home, Molly Bloom's final interior monologue. In *Ulysses* Joyce provides what amounts to a complete education in the English language. I was (and am still) amazed by Joyce's erudition and the sheer range of his vocabulary, which continually transcends the bounds of the best dictionaries. It was in the pages of *Ulysses* that I

first encountered the words *omphalos, matutinal, hegemony, falciform, ebullition, humected, oleaginous, supererogatory, symposiarchal, jocoserious, epistolary, metempsychosis, postexilic, glyphic, epenthetic, hagiographical, homilectic, toponomastic, mnemotechnic, periphrastic, sesquipedalian, leucodermic, imprevidibility, lattiginous, crepuscular, irruent, homothetic, rutilance, prurition, ormolu, dado, lagan, eructation, septentrional, epicene, velation.* (If Joyce had chosen to use the word *elision,* I would have looked it up and so would have been spared the later humiliation I have already recorded.) It was there that I came across the phrase, quickly engraved in my memory, *the ineluctable modality of the visible*. I was struck too by *As for living, our servants can do that for us,* a line of Villiers de l'Isle Adam quoted by one of Joyce's characters. For me *Ulysses* is *summus*, its vastness of scope and the detailed ingenuity of its construction making it the literary equivalent of Bach's *Art of Fugue.*

I felt that my efforts at literary self-education would be incomplete unless I became acquainted with some of the older classics. A number of these were conveniently and attractively assembled, in translation, under the Penguin imprint. It was in this form that I read Homer, the ancient Greek dramatists, those of Plato's dialogues centring round the death of Socrates, Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, Lucian's delicious *Satirical Sketches,* Apollonius of Rhodes's *The Voyage of Argo*, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales,* Dante's *Divine Comedy,* Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel,* Cervantes's *Don Quixote,* the plays of Molière and Ibsen, the *Confessions* of Augustine and Rousseau, and Voltaire's *Candide.* I read Goethe's *Faust* in the translation by Louis MacNeice and E.M. Stahl. A favourite of mine was Arthur Waley's translation (in those so attractive yellow covers) of *Monkey*, the Chinese classic. This was my introduction to Chinese culture: through it I was led to discover the beauties of Chinese poetry and painting.

I also made a stab at philosophy, reading Decartes' *Discourse on Method,* Spinoza's *Ethics* (the statements of the theorems at least, since I found the "proofs" unenlightening), Leibniz's *Monadology* (intriguingly delphic), Locke, Berkeley and Hume, Schopenhauer's *Essays in Pessimism,* William James's *Essays on Pragmatism.* And of course Bertrand Russell's breezily brilliant *History of Western Philosophy.* My attempts to penetrate the profundities of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason,* were frustrated by the work's apparent indigestibility. (I came to appreciate its depth and philosophical importance many years later.) I greatly enjoyed Hans Reichenbach's *Philosophy of Space and Time.* On Blackwell's shelves I came across Norman Malcolm's *Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, whose frontispiece, a photograph of Wittgenstein taken in the 1930s, bore, to my eyes, a more than passing resemblance to my friend Neil Gammage. I was deeply moved by Malcolm's portrayal of Wittgenstein, in which he emerges as an intellectual ascetic of

compelling moral grandeur. Even his tiniest defiances of convention, for example, his refusal to wear a tie at dinner in Trinity College, I found admirable. I recall being particularly struck by Wittgenstein's singular taste in literature, as reported by Malcolm: Tolstoy's *23 Tales* (which soon became one of my favourite works of literature as well), and "pulp" magazine stories published by Street and Smith. Malcolm also mentions three of his contemporaries, all students of Wittgenstein—Elizabeth Anscombe, Georg Kreisel, and W. A. Hijab—the latter two of whom I was later to meet. Reading Malcolm's memoir stimulated me to attempt to read Wittgenstein's philosophical works. I was captivated by the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, a masterpiece of sybilline refinement and compression in which Wittgenstein embarks on the heroic effort of reducing philosophy to the expressible, but in the end washes up on the shores of the ineffable. I was less impressed with the *Philosophical Investigations,* finding Wittgenstein's later conventionalism unappealing. I confess I still do.

In my undergraduate years at Oxford I developed a taste for painting. Of the classical artists, Leonardo and Dürer became my heroes. But it was modern art that really captured my fancy. The walls of my various rooms came to be festooned with increasingly tattered prints of 20th century paintings: I recall Picasso's *The Three Musicians,* Modigliani's *Reclining Nude,* Chagall's *The Green Violinist,* Klee's *Senescio, Sinbad the Sailor,* and *Rich Harbour,* Miro's *Harlequinade* (only the last two of which are still in my possession). Magritte, Ernst, Kandinsky, Mondrian and Tanguy were favourites of mine. I also came to like Oriental painting. On a visit to San Francisco in 1964 I found, in a junk shop, three attractive Japanese prints which, at 50 cents each, seemed to me an amazing bargain, and which I instantly snapped up. These turned out to be by the 18th century Japanese painter Suzuki Harunobu. Framed at last, two of them (the third having unaccountably vanished) decorate the walls of my living room today. I got to know something of Chinese painting by leafing through the lavishly illustrated book on the subject published by Skira in the 1960s, and which was stocked by the ever-reliable Blackwell's. I yearned to have it in my possession, but its cost was far beyond my means at the time. Many years later I purchased a remaindered copy at half-price in Dillon's bookshop in London. My satisfaction at having finally acquired this gorgeous volume can easily be imagined.

My enthusiasm for literature and art was exceeded only by my passion for music,—"audible mathematics inducing objectless emotion" as I have come to call it— which I considered the ultimate escape from *tedium vitae.* By this time I had acquired a comparatively decent record player—a Bush portable which was to serve me well for many years to come. I was determined to get hold of the two remaining Heifetz recordings of the Bach solo sonatas and partitas (B minor and D minor

partitas, G major and C major sonatas) which were at that time not issued in Britain. With some effort I managed to obtain these in French and German pressings. Finally hearing them was, as always with Heifetz performances, an experience of almost religious intensity. I was transfixed in particular by Heifetz's rendition of the colossal fugue—one of Bach's longest—in the C major sonata. The unflagging power of the playing seemed to me almost superhuman. Heifetz performs the last stretto section of this fugue with an attack and precision whose mere recollection suffices to send shivers down my spine. I would sometimes play this and other portions of the solo sonatas at 16 r.p.m. (a speed with which my record player was fortunately equipped) in order to unravel the mysteries of Heifetz's technique. It was a revelation to hear Heifetz playing at half speed, in slow motion, as it were. Here, one experiences with total immediacy the precision of Heifetz's fingering, the subtle variability of his vibrato, the sinuous articulation—amounting almost to an intrinsic geometry—of his line. I later learned from my jazz musician friends that they applied the same trick to records of their jazz heroes (who were to became mine also) such as Charlie Parker and Bud Powell.

I also developed a real enthusiasm for Beethoven, in particular, the string quartets. In the early sixties the Budapest Quartet[11] made their last series of recordings of these, performances which quickly supplanted those I already had on disc. I was gripped by the precision of their ensemble playing and entranced by the explosive sweetness of their sound. Particularly striking was their performance of the A minor quartet, op. 132 (my personal favourite—the one described in Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point*). It was to be many years before I managed to obtain a complete set of these recordings (which, forty years later, have still not all been reissued on CD). I also came across (at Maxwell's bookshop) a German pressing of Heifetz, Primrose and Piatigorsky recording of Beethoven's string trios Op. 9, nos. 1 and 3. These, too, proved to be revelatory performances.

It was also at Maxwell's that I bought my first recording of Mozart string quartets: the Juilliard performances of the "Haydn" quartets in G, K. 387, and the famous "Dissonance", in C, K. 465. I quickly came to adore the uniquely subtle homogeneity of this music, and determined to obtain the rest of the Juilliard's recordings of these quartets. Fortunately they were issued in Britain not long afterwards. These performances remain my favourite to this day. In San Francisco in 1964 I bought a record of Mozart's duos for violin and viola K. 423 and 424, performed by Joseph and Lillian Fuchs, which simply bowled me over. My introduction to Mozart's piano music came through a

[11] Known as the "Four Russians" , none of the members were in fact of Hungarian origin. Here one recalls Heifetz's famous definition: *One Russian—an anarchist, two Russians—a chess game, three Russians—a revolution, four Russians—the Budapest String Quartet.*

recording by Wilhelm Backhaus, which included a performance of the exquisite A minor rondo, K. 511. Later I heard Artur Balsam's performance of what was to become my favourite Mozart piano sonata, the one in F, K. 533. I also got to know some of the Haydn quartets in performances by the Budapest (Op. 76, nos. 1 and 2) and Schneider Quartets (Op. 50, Op. 76, 3-6).

I had first conceived a liking for the music of Brahms through listening to records of the fourth symphony at school. While staying with the Linfoots I got to know the violin sonatas, which led me to the string quartets, op, 51 nos. 1 and 2, first heard in splendid performances by the Amadeus Quartet (only later to be supplanted in my estimation by the Budapest recordings), and the cello sonatas opp. 38 and 99. My first recording of these by Pierre Fournier and Wilhelm Backhaus, but this was soon to be superseded by the muscular performance of Janos Starker and Abba Bogin. Janos Starker had taken the musical world by storm with his staggering recording of the Kodaly solo cello sonata, to which I listened in fascination over and over again. His recordings of the Bach cello suites were also outstanding.

The Oxford university record library had an extensive collection of records of twentieth century music, which quickly became a special favourite of mine. It was through my borrowings therefrom that I got to know the music of Bloch, Hindemith and Schoenberg. The first of Bloch's works to capture my attention were the propulsive *Concerto Grosso no. 1* and the entrancing violin sonata no. 2, *Poème Mystique*, in the Heifetz recording. Soon afterwards I was enthralled by the Griller String Quartet's matchless performances of the Bloch string quartets in the original Decca recordings. Lusting to obtain copies of my own, I was disappointed to find that they were no longer in print. So I wrote to the Decca record company, enquiring whether they still had copies available. Imagine my delight when I received a letter in return informing me that not only did they have copies of the first two quartets, which I had heard, but also a recording by the Grillers of quartets 3 and 4, which were new to me. I instantly dispatched a cheque for the three records. When they arrived in the post a few days later my heart leapt, and I could scarcely contain my excitement at the prospect of hearing the "new" quartets. Nor was I disappointed, for Bloch's 3rd string quartet, written when the composer was more than 70 years old, turned out to be one of his finest works, a miracle of compressed energy which simply overwhelms the listener with its power.

The energetic and contrapuntally intricate music of Hindemith had an especial appeal for me. I particularly liked the Kammermusik no.4 for violin, the brilliant performances by Ruggiero Ricci of the solo violin sonatas op. 31 nos. 1 and 2, the sonata for solo viola op. 25 no. 1,

Janos Starker's stirring performance of the cello and piano sonata op.11 no. 3, Ivry Gitlis' energetic rendition of the 1939 violin concerto, Fournier, Riddle and Pini's driving performances of the two String Trios, the Fine Arts Quartet playing the string quartet no.3, and the sinuosities of the Clarinet Concerto as performed by Louis Cahuzac. My liking for Hindemith's music has not diminished over the years.

The first work of Schoenberg I can remember hearing was the Violin Concerto of 1936 in the recording by the little-known violinist Wolfgang Marschner. I recall being struck by the work's sheer *oddness*—romantic, and yet at the same time highly dissonant. This was modernism with a vengeance! But I couldn't get the sound of it out of my head. (Later I was amused to learn that Heifetz had originally commissioned the work, but then refused to play it![12]) The only other work of Schoenberg I got to know at the time was his *Second String Quartet*, with its curiously atmospheric vocal line. Some years were to pass before I became acquainted with any other composition of Schoenberg's. But eventually my ears were truly opened to a composer of blazing originality.

The music of Bela Bartok was enjoying something of a revival in the early 1960s, and many recordings were released. I was greatly impressed by the Fine Arts Quartet recordings of the string quartets, as well as by Isaac Stern's recording of the *Rhapsodies* and Yehudi Menuhin's performance of the solo violin sonata. Menuhin's recording, on Mercury records, of Bartok's violin concerto was also a favourite of mine at the time. Mercury records were known for their high technical standards, of which they made something of a fetish, as is attested to by the following portion of the record's sleevenote:

HI-FI FACTS

The present recording was made on the morning of February 18, 1957, between the hours of midnight and five o'clock, after a short break following the all-Bartok concert referred to above. The scene of the recording was Carnegie Hall. The exceptionally large orchestra called for in the *Violin Concerto* included piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, double bassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, bass trombone, timpani, snare drums, bass drum, cymbals, tam tam, celesta, harp and strings. The orchestral forces were deployed across the stage in normal concert fashion. A single microphone was suspended approximately 18 feet above the podium. The soloist stood slightly to the left of the conductor. Painstaking efforts were made during a test period to achieve

[12] A footnote to the parenthesis. In rejecting Schoenberg's violin concerto, Heifetz created an unfortunate precedent, since to date (2003) no "name" violinist has ventured to perform the work, let alone record it. We are lucky that the superb violinist Pierre Amoyal, ironically a Heifetz pupil—but still no "name"— has recently recorded a marvelous version of Schoenberg's concerto, the greatest (along with his student Berg's) of the 20th century.

> perfect balance between solo and tutti, and also to locate the precise aural focal point of the hall. Once these two objectives were achieved, a level check was made. From that point on, the conductor was in complete control of balance and dynamics. Fairchild tape machines, in conjunction with McIntosh amplifiers, recorded the master tapes. The edited tapes were transferred to disc by means of a 200-watt McIntosh recording amplifier and a Fairchild tape machine, driving a specially designed Miller cutting head operating on a Scully automatic variable pitch recording lathe. Wilma Cozart was the recording director for the session; Harold Lawrence the musical supervisor. C.R. Fine was the engineer and technical supervisor; and tape to disc transfer was made by George Piros.

As an example of informational overload, this takes the palm! Nevertheless, Mercury records *were* technically outstanding.

Stravinsky was also being celebrated through the issue, by Columbia records, of his complete works, many conducted by the composer himself. This series, with its colourful sleeves, provided my introduction to Stravinsky's *Symphony in Three Movements, Violin Concerto* (with Isaac Stern), *Le Rossignol, Symphonies of Wind Instruments, Symphony in C, Octet, Soldier's Tale, Concerto for Two Solo Pianos, Two-Piano Sonata, Movements for Piano and Orchestra.* I also got to know and love the *Duo Concertante.*

Other works I came to cherish at were Kodaly's Quartet no.2 and Villa-Lobos's Quartet no. 6 (in the hard-driving performance by the Hungarian Quartet, a copy of which I was never, alas!, able to purchase), Prokofiev's Concerto no. 2 in the electrifying Heifetz recording of the 1950s, and the elegiac Berg violin concerto in the performance by Isaac Stern.

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In my third year John Crossley encouraged me to apply for Senior Scholarships at Merton College and Christ Church. While I was familiar with Merton, Christ Church, known as "The House" (from its official name *Aedes Christi*) is the grandest—and by reputation the snobbiest—college in Oxford and I had had no previous contact with it. I didn't feel that I had much of a chance of being awarded a scholarship there, but, figuring at the same time I had nothing to lose, and knowing also that I had Crossley's backing, I submitted an application. In any case, the Christ Church scholarship had the advantage over Merton's of being awarded before the sitting of final examinations, and so was not tied to the class one obtained in the Schools, which in my case would, I took it, be less than outstanding. A few weeks later, I was, to my surprise, summoned to Christ Church for interview. This turn of events quite excited me, but at the same time I experienced little anxiety, since as

far as I was concerned, the whole affair was, to use a term I was later to learn from S. J. Perelman's writings, pure *lagniappe.* On the day of the interview I presented myself, suitably attired in jacket, tie and gown, at Christ Church lodge, and was directed by the bowler-hatted porter on duty—a figure far more imposing in appearance, it seemed to me, than any of his Exeter counterparts—to the room in Tom Quad in which the affair was to take place. At the prescribed time I knocked on the door and was admitted to a spacious and elegantly decorated chamber, in whose centre stood a large table, along three sides of which sat the Christ Church dons in solemn assembly. There is something fundamentally intimidating about the idea of the traditional British interview, in which the candidate cannot help but see himself as the luckless captive of a band of inquisitors out to trip him up. This dispiriting thought may have been running through my mind as I took my seat opposite the company, but, if so, it was soon dispelled by the interrogation itself, which turned out to be less of an ordeal than I had expected. I recall being asked to explain the sort of research I intended to undertake as a graduate student, and giving in response a lengthy account of the work I had already begun in logic. Attempting to probe my pedagogical potential, one of the dons (I seem to recall it was C. H. Collie, the Christ Church physics tutor), suddenly asked me how I would explain the concept of a matrix to an undergraduate. In an effort to show off, I glibly replied: "a matrix over a field is a map into the field from a Cartesian product of two sets." Judging from his stony expression my questioner was less than impressed by this effort, and as the interview came to an end I felt sure I had blown the whole thing. My surprise and delight can be imagined when, a few days later, a letter arrived announcing that I had been awarded what was grandly described as "a Senior Scholarship at the House of £500 per annum, tenable for 4 years, including free rooms and meals and the right to dine at the High Table twice a week." As far as I could see, the condition for initial tenure of the scholarship was the mere possession of a first degree: the apparent indifference of the Christ Church authorities to its actual class, underscored by the awarding of the scholarship before the sitting of final examinations, reinforced my impression of the place as a bastion of aristocratic privilege. But all this seemed very glamorous to me, as it did to Ashley Thom when I excitedly showed him the letter. Giving a low whistle, he remarked that, as an official communication from "the House", (which he jokingly pronounced "Hice" in the received upper-class manner) the missive had presumably been delivered by footman driving a coach and four.

In June 1965 I sat "Schools", the Oxford final examinations, so named because they are held in the Examination Schools buildings on the High Street. Being in the happy position of having already obtained a postgraduate scholarship, I did not feel especially concerned about

the outcome. This was just as well, because, having signally failed to develop "exam craft", I could hardly have expected to shine in the examinations. For university examinations it was necessary for candidates not merely to show up in cap and gown but also to garb themselves in what at Oxford was known as "subfusc" clothing (apparently from the Latin *fuscus,* "brown"), consisting, as prescribed by the University regulations, of "a dark suit, a white bow-tie, white collar, and white shirt, black shoes or boots, and black socks." In my case this meant, in particular, getting hold of a suit from somewhere. I had borrowed one for the Mods exams, but I decided that this time the occasion warranted investing in a suit of my own. I tried on a number of off-the-shelf suits, but finding none to fit my gangly frame, I was forced to have one tailor-made. For this purpose I went to the cheapest tailor I could find, John Collier, where I had a suit run up from a startling electric blue cloth which had taken my fancy. The result was a veritable "zoot suit" hardly meeting the sober requirements laid down by the university authorities. Thus attired, I presented myself at the Examination Schools one morning in June to face the first of eight three-hour mathematics papers. My lingering apprehension that the gaudiness of my suit might lead to my being turned away by the invigilators being unrealized, I made my way with my fellow-candidates along the long rows of tables set up in the imposing examination hall. Spotting my own table, I sat down and opened the examination paper. Disheartened at having to face the bottomless pit of examinations yawning before me, I felt almost ready to get up and leave without inscribing a single symbol. But my sense of self-preservation prevailed. What, I wondered, would become of me if I failed the examination? And in any case, I consoled myself, it would almost certainly be the last written examination I would ever have to face (as indeed it was). So, lacking the courage to do otherwise, I bowed to convention and began to scribble. I have often reflected on the significance (or lack thereof) of that moment for my life history. The fact that I stayed to write the examination seems the result of my own choice, that I was truly free to do the opposite. In that case the decision would stand out as a singular free action in what I have come to see as an essentially predetermined existence. But I now hold even this freedom to have been an illusion: I think I knew, subliminally, that I would never get up and throw the whole thing over[13].

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[13] Many years later I came across the following passage in Schopenhauer, which is strikingly apropos:

> *…everyone considers himself to be* a priori *quite free, even in his individual actions, and imagines he can at any moment enter upon a different way of life, which is equivalent to saying that he can become a different person. But* a posteriori *through experience, he finds to his astonishment that he is not free, but liable to necessity: that notwithstanding all his resolutions and reflections he does not change his conduct, and*

As an ironic touch, I found myself sitting not far away from Brian Davies, an undergraduate reputed to be the most brilliant mathematician of our year. I could see him scribbling away, piling up sheet after sheet of solutions, in sharp and humiliating contrast with my own doodlings. He deservedly got the top First of the year, and went on to an outstanding mathematical career. I had to content myself with a pedestrian Second.

As organizer-in-chief of the 1965 Summer School in Mathematical Logic, John Crossley naturally arranged for all his students, including myself, to attend. Held over a three week period during August and September in a hall of residence of Leicester University at Oadby, a village just outside Leicester, this conference, my first, was a seminal experience for me. Not only was I given the opportunity to meet—and learn from—some of the world's most distinguished logicians, but during the course of the conference, which proved very enjoyable, I made a number of enduring friendships. The summer school featured lecture courses designed as introductions to advanced topics in mathematical logic. I attended C. C. Chang's *Ultraproducts and Other Methods of Constructing Models* and Dana Scott's *Measurable Cardinals.* These were superb expositions, from which I learned much. Chang and Scott, both outstanding logicians, were quite approachable, and during the conference I became in particular quite friendly with Chang, or "C.C." as he was generally known. I found C.C.'s Chinese urbanity and dry wit greatly appealing, and I was well aware that, as one of the world's best logicians, he could teach me a great deal. Learning that he would be taking sabbatical leave from UCLA in 1966-7, I urged him to spend it in Oxford, so that I might study with him that year. (Jumping forward in time, this did come about, but, coincident with my becoming his official pupil, his attitude towards me suddenly underwent a startling, and unpleasant transformation, his erstwhile cordiality replaced by an authoritarian brusqueness of manner which I found quite hurtful. I am sorry to say that this led to a rift between us that was never really healed, at least in my mind. But more of this later.)

I had first seen Moshé Machover lecture at Crossley's seminar in the old Mathematical Institute the previous year. I recall that on the blackboard announcing his talk his name had been chalked up as "Dr. M. McOver". Accordingly I was somewhat surprised when, instead of the dour Scot I had esxpected, an intense, strong-featured young man, evidently of Middle Eastern origin marched into the lecture room. I do not recall whether Moshé and I were introduced after that lecture, but I

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that from the beginning to the end of his life he must bear the same character that he himself condemns, and, as it were, must play to the end the part he has taken upon himself.

do know that we hit it off immediately when we met at the Leicester conference. Right from the start I felt an affinity, a comradeship with him. While I admired the acuity of his intellect, I was even more strongly drawn by the warmth of his personality and by his whimsical sense of humour. We were to become close friends and colleagues.

I also met Bill Lawvere for the first time at the Leicester conference. Amiable yet intensely serious, he had a burning ambition: to establish category theory as the *organon* of mathematics. I recall him showing me a paper he was then in the process of writing in his large, sprawling hand. It was entitled *The Category of Categories as a Foundation for Mathematics.* Knowing next to nothing of category theory beyond the basic definitions, I could not then grasp the import of what he was trying to achieve. Years were to pass before the course of my own work led me to a partial understanding of the thinking of this visionary mathematician, but when that understanding finally came, it was a revelation.

Imre Lakatos (whose colleague at the London School of Economics I was later to become) was at the summer school—I recall that that he was usually surrounded by a nimbus of disciples, all engaged in earnest discussion. Haim Gaifman—brilliant, intense, combative—was also present. It was from him that I first heard of the problem of "the truth-teller, the liar, and the randomizer." Here one is presented with three people identical save for the fact that the first always tells the truth, the second always lies, and the third answers *at random*: the problem is to determine with certainty, in no more than three questions, which is which. My immediate response was that the presence of the randomizer made the problem insoluble, but Haim showed me that I was mistaken[14]. While at the summer school I also struck up a friendship with Wasfi Hijab, an amiable professor of applied mathematics at the American University of Beirut who had once studied with Wittgenstein[15]. Wasfi told me that while at Cambridge under Wittgenstein's spell he had considered taking up philosophy as a career, but that Wittgenstein had persuaded him to continue with mathematics. But he had always retained his interest in

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[14] I cannot now recall the details of Haim's solution to the problem, but here is one. Let us say that the liar is *less truthful* than the randomizer, who is in turn is *less truthful* than the truth teller. Labelling the three *A, B, C,* address to *A* the question: *which of B and C is the less truthful?* The answer (*B* or *C*) will invariably be either the truth teller or the liar. By asking *B* or *C*, as the case may be, a question to which the answer is known, e.g. "Is 2 + 2 = 4?", one determines his identity as truth-teller or liar; by asking him whether *A* is the randomizer the identity of the latter is determined, and that of the third person then follows by elimination. The essential point is that the procedure initiated by the answer to the first question works whoever A may be, even if he happens to be the randomizer.

[15] I was delighted to find a reference to Wasfi in Malcolm's memoir of Wittgenstein, the book that had made such an impression on me as an undergraduate.

Wittgenstein's philosophy, which explained his presence at the conference. Wasfi had known Kreisel, at Cambridge in the 1940s, referring to him as a "pleasant young man", a delineation I found most surprising.

Light relief at the conference was also laid on. I recall that on the first morning the mail pigeonholes were found to be stuffed with grey-covered mimeographed booklets, the professed work of one "Luciano Büchler of Trieste", who identified himself as a "Prof. h.c. Epistemologist." Evidently the lucubrations of a crank, the booklets bore such preposterous titles as *The Theory of the Impossibles* and *The Logic of the Unitarian Ethical Relativity.* Most of the conference participants sensibly consigned their copies of these singular productions directly to the wastebasket, but Alan Slomson and I, along with a few others, found their contents, on further examination, so absurd as to be irresistible. Even now I find it difficult to repress a chuckle when I recall the "fundamental equation $\alpha = \omega o^2$ " of the boldly named "Unitarian Ethical Relativity". And I still laugh out loud when I open one of the few of these booklets still in my possession to see, above a florid signature, the warning *Copies without autographical sign of the author will be considered as counterfeit.* Inserted into each booklet is to be found the moving appeal:

> *The series of pamphlets is written extemporally on the stencil, in five languages, as possible, by the author himself, of Italian expression, without having any time and practical conditions to rework them better. For this reason, we ask very kindly, to all critics, which are not concerning with the subject, to be indulgent and comprehensive.*
>
> *Thanks.*

In *The Theory of the Impossibles* one finds the following illuminating passages:

> *Physical Example. Let us have two mobils, A and B, parallel travelling one in front of the other in the direction A to B. They are travelling in the absolute vacuum, on a same spatial axe…they believe themselves to be in the rest. … And when A and B will shock between, each one will discuss to sustain that it was the other to arrive it on, being that both are travelling at the speed of 40. Both will have the same figure of that drunk people, who had hurt himself in falling down against the footpath, and who was explaining to the policeman that it had been the footpath to come and to hurt him.*

> *We have heard also in some international conferences, that in his cosmical flies, the man will lengthen his life proportionally to his speed. What a disastrous incomprehension of Einstein's Theory!*

And *The Logic of the Unitarian Ethical Relativity* contains these gems:

> *How could we see clearly through some not polished glasses? We may have many colors and types of mud, but there is only one type of clearness.*
>
> *There is only one truth-value: the Truth. All the rest is non-sense, uncompleteness, chaos.*

Alan Slomson and I were so impressed by this last observation that we used it as an epigraph for our book *Models and Ultraproducts*.

But which of us was Luciano Büchler? No obvious candidates presented themselves. After a few days, however, it emerged that the person in question was a certain late middle-aged gentleman of dignified appearance, sporting a goatee and a cravat, seen at mealtimes deep in conversation with an invariably puzzled-looking interlocutor. The man certainly did not *look* like one's idea of a crank; rather, he fitted my image of a nineteenth century Italian aristocrat, stepping straight from the pages of Henry James. But those of us who had read his "works" knew that behind that facade of respectability lurked a crank of the first water. I would have liked to have talked to him, out of sheer curiosity, but, fearing that I would not be able to keep a straight face, and not wishing to give offence, I refrained. He badgered John Crossley to allow him to give some lectures during the conference, and John finally gave in. As it happened, Büchler's final lecture (no one of which I attended, knowing that I would not have been able to prevent myself from laughing out loud) took place on the very evening that the participants in the formal Colloquium began to arrive. What they made of the *Theory of the Impossibles* remains unrecorded.

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Since going down from Oxford the previous year Neil Gammage had been employed at Elliott Computers, a firm in Borehamwood, north of London. When he learned that I needed to find some way of supporting myself during the summer, he kindly suggested that he might be able to persuade his superiors at Elliott's to offer me a job. Thanks to Neil's influence, soon after a letter arrived from Ian Barron, Neil's boss, offering me three months' employment at Elliott's as a "Research Associate". As for my duties, it was suggested that I undertake an investigation of recent work of Chomsky on phrase-

structure grammars, submitting a written report at the end of my tenure. The pay wasn't princely, but it was enough to live on, and the job provided me with a welcome opportunity to get to know London. So I jumped at it. I found a room in North Finchley near the flat on Regent's Park Road that Neil shared with three other employees of the firm. My landlord, a Mr. Rosenthal, was Hungarian. When he agreed to take me on as a lodger he requested that I pay a week's rent in advance, and that I make out my cheque to "T. Rosenthal". On impulse I said: "I bet the 'T' stands for 'Tibor'." "How did you know that?" he asked in surprise. I replied: "I didn't. It's just one of the few Hungarian names I know." I had the impression that this little exchange put our relationship on a good footing right from the start: at least, I cannot recall feeling as if I was on the verge of expulsion from Tibor's domain while I was there. Still, for all I know, hearing the grate of my key inserted into the lock of his front door each night may have caused him to grind his teeth with regret at having issued the thing to me in the first place.

I usually ate breakfast and dinner with Neil and his mates at their flat. These—John Brooks, John Covington, both engineers, and Alan Woodcock, a physicist—were a convivial bunch, and we all got along swimmingly. To distinguish the three "Johns", I proposed that, through the natural elision (see above) we designate ourselves as "J'bell", "J'brooks" and "J'covington". The sheer absurdity of this suggestion naturally led to its being adopted straightaway. Each weekday morning we would shoehorn ourselves into Neil's Mini for the trip to Elliott's, a matter of some ten miles, made short work of by Neil's penchant for fast driving. As an hourly-paid employee at Elliotts I was obliged to punch a clock on arrival. At precisely 9 a.m. the colour of the numbers printed on the time cards would change from black to red to indicate that one had arrived late. Throughout that summer my cards showed a uniform succession of red numbers, unbroken even on the one occasion I arrived on time, only to find that the colour pattern had been inexplicably reversed!

As a temporary member of the "Research Section" I had little direct contact with actual computers, which in those days were massive, clumsy, and slow. When I visited Elliott's "Airborne Computing" laboratory and saw the congeries of wires, vacuum tubes and whatnot proposed for installation in an aircraft, I could not resist remarking that I doubted if the whole mess would ever get off the ground. Who could foresee (certainly I didn't) that these dinosaurs would, within a few short years, evolve into the compact devices which now dominate our lives?

Elliott's was also in the business of designing robot devices and it amused us to append the suffix "bot" to any word connected with the place. Thus our two immediate superiors were dubbed "Barronbot" and

"Monkbot", and Elliott itself naturally became known as "Ellibot". By extension launderettes became known as "washbots", and milk dispensing machines—formerly "mechanical cows"—as "milkbots". In the final report on my research I even managed to introduce the mathematical concept of a "*G*-bot", where, of course, *G* is a group. What Barronbot and Monkbot made of this I never found out.

One isolated incident of that summer stands out in my mind. Returning from central London to North Finchley on the tube one afternoon I somehow fell into conversation with the passenger sitting alongside me, an elderly, scholarly-looking man who spoke with an appealing central European accent. It emerged that he was the secretary of a society dedicated to disseminating the thought of one Martin Buber. When I failed to recognize the name, he explained who Martin Buber was, and impressed upon me the importance of Buber's philosophy. He recommended that I read Buber's *I and Thou.* Struck by the man's evident sincerity, after we parted I bought a copy of the book he had recommended, and was deeply moved by my reading of it. *I and Thou* occupies an honoured place on my shelves to this day. My only regret is that I cannot recall the name of the man who introduced me to this revelatory work.