

# Augustus Young Poetry and Prose a regular webzine

## No.5 December 2006 A Gloss on Soren Kierkegaard

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*This issue is mostly about Soren Kierkegaard and includes three extracts from the film/play 'The Secret Gloss', based on SK's life and work. For further details, see Intro and Links below.*

*The caricature of Kierkegaard is by Wilhelm Marstrand, from the Photograph and Print Collection at the Royal Library, Copenhagen.*

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## Intro and Links

**KIERKEGAARD AND 'THE SECRET GLOSS'**[Life of Kierkegaard](#)

'After my death no one will find among my papers a single explanation as to what really filled my life (that is my consolation); no one will find the words which explain everything and which often made what the world would call a trifle into an event of tremendous importance to me, and what I look upon as something insignificant when I take away the secret gloss which explains it all.' Kierkegaard, Journals

[The Secret Gloss 1](#)[The Secret Gloss 2](#)[The Secret Gloss 3](#)[Kierkegaard Plus](#)

'The Secret Gloss' (1988, revised 2002), a film/play in five acts, draws on Kierkegaard's Journals, 1842-1854, and a range of secondary sources, including his highly personal philosophical writings.

[New/Recovered Verse](#)

Kierkegaard's influence on twentieth century writers of fiction and drama is only equalled by that of Freud. As a philosopher, his reputation crosses the divide between the ecclesiastic and the secular. His ideas provide common ground between Sartre and the world of theology, something of a no-mans-land.

[Welsh Again](#)

In a short but flamboyant life Kierkegaard put into practice the concept of living an idea, with disastrous consequences. His writings logged the experience with a frankness that disarms, not least because he was, unlike so many philosophers, a superb writer of graphic psychological dramas. Kierkegaard spoke to another century, the next one, and to himself, his conscience taking the brunt of consciously applied ideas. He is both a tragic and a comic figure, who anticipated the Absurdist.

Kierkegaard's extensive writings were rediscovered by French and German philosophers in the early years of the twentieth century. In his life he was famous in Denmark more as an eccentric presence than as a great man. The great Dane at the time was Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875). Their paths crossed, both polemically and personally, and Hans Christian figures in a key supporting role in 'The Secret Gloss'.

**KIERKEGAARD AND OPERA**

The first existentialist went to the opera alone most evenings. He rarely sat through a complete performance, not wanting to be considered a serious person. As he didn't take opera seriously, this killed two birds with the one stone. He usually stayed for an act, randomly chosen, and played with the idea of putting together the bits and pieces of Cimerosa, Cherubino, Cavalli, Bellini and Balfe singing in his head into a patchwork opera 'in five and half or almost six acts'.

Opera for Soren Kierkegaard was a table d'hôte. You nibble an aria, half listening to the recitatives of the audience. Serio on stage was buffa in the boxes, if it wasn't the other way round. Hogarth's 'dumb show' guignoling into early Rossini's vocal hysteria. Topsy busses spit drinking songs. Bosoms wobble on the high notes. Wine glasses thrown down on the stage bounce. There was one exception, 'Don Giovanni'. He sat through a performance every year with his eyes closed.

Mozart's score for him was the banquet, and the libretto the crumbs under the table. The frippery of costumed staging and plot meant nothing to him (Beaumarchais might as well have taken the night off and gone for a good walk). The music was the story that sang to him. Far from being an accompaniment, it was what was happening. He couldn't disagree more with Bishop Mynster's dismissal of musical notation as

'inarticulate noises'. Denmark's worthiest divine was tone deaf, except to his own voice. The notes sounded 'the innermost essence of sensuality' with an immediacy words couldn't spell out, and therefore was beyond reflection. That was the beauty of it. The music had a reality of its own.

He dined on Mozart's 'Don Giovanni' in the remotest box of the house, the curtains drawn. The crooked smoke of a cigar wafted in the air during the interval, the only sign of life. The melodrama for him was metaphysical, what he called the three stages of the erotic - yearning (Elvira's daydreaming); seeking (Zerlina's flirting); and desiring (the Don's insatiable dreich). Hell opening was not damnation for fleshly excesses but their purification and renewal through fire.

It was a feast that sustained him from one year to the next.

## LINKS

The Menard Press

<http://www.menardpress.co.uk/>

Ars Interpres

<http://arsint.com/>

Elliott & Thompson

<http://www.elliottthompson.com/>

Cross-Cultural Poetics

[http://kaos.evergreen.edu/programs/cc\\_poetics.html](http://kaos.evergreen.edu/programs/cc_poetics.html)

Ian D Scott

<http://www.ciorse.com/>

Nichol Wheatley

[http://www.perfectcircleart.com/page/pca\\_home.php](http://www.perfectcircleart.com/page/pca_home.php)

New Hibernia Review

<http://www.stthomas.edu/irishstudies/nhr.htm>

Brian Lynch

<http://www.brianlynch.org/>

[Intro and Links](#)[Life of Kierkegaard](#)[The Secret Gloss 1](#)[The Secret Gloss 2](#)[The Secret Gloss 3](#)[Kierkegaard Plus](#)[New/Recovered Verse](#)[Welsh Again](#)**LIVING AN IDEA WITH SOREN KIERKEGAARD****From 'Chronicling Myself'**

Kierkegaard found himself in a supposedly Christian society and wrote under innumerable pseudonyms, 'so by anonymity he could annihilate his public self in order to criticise his fellow man's weaknesses and stupidities', without inducing outcries of 'who does he think he is, the son of an illiterate peasant'. That was his mother. His father, Michael Pederson, at forty, was rich enough to sell his business and retire to a life of contemplation, prayer and generating children. As a shepherd boy in the barren moorlands of Jutland caught in a storm, Michael Pederson believed he had struck a bargain with a Higher Power, which eventually harvested him a fortune in War Bonds. He was convinced that all his seven children would suffer a quiet despair and die before him. This would be necessary so he could be forgiven. As it turned out, three children, including the delicate Soren, outlived Michael Pederson.

Soren built his day around effacing himself in order to spend his nights defacing in writing the Danish establishment masquerading as the elect. His 'grand aggregation of knaves and fools' included kings, popes, bishops, merchants, salaried officials, guild members, fishmongers and the rump who scrambled to open carriage doors and for the crumbs. Effacing himself was easy once he realised people wanted to be deceived. He soon made himself known in Copenhagen as a clever clown with more money than sense, and more time on his hands than money.

You couldn't miss him. He exaggerated the limp (he had fallen from a tree in his childhood) and his quiff. His final appearance was to be seen shaking the hand of the conductor at the Opera between the fourth and final acts. Thirty seconds in the limelight, seen by at least seven hundred people, ample to confirm he was just an idle fellow with nothing better to do. His rather public engagement to the unfortunate Regine frittered out because he seemed to forget about it.

Kierkegaard had Anders, a manservant who ate, drank and made merry on his master's behalf, and served so Soren didn't have to do anything at home except entertain ideas and write them down. He wrote his mind out to his heart's content. Millions of words, all anonymous. The legion of absurd names marched on - Constantine Constantius, Nicholas Notabene, Vigilus Haufniensis, Hilarius Bookbinder, Victor Eremita, Johannes Climacus. When he published 'Trying to Become a Christian' by Johannes Anti-Climacus it may not have been 'eagerly awaited' but his work was not falling on stony ground. He knew from sales and whispers in public places that in libraries and bedrooms, all over Denmark, he was the darling of a discriminating readership who regarded him (or the sum of his pseudonyms) as prodigiously witty and interesting.

Kierkegaard had created in the eyes of others an illusory personal existence not merely to distance himself from the ready reckoners, but also not to be distracted from his personal self. The town swallowed the effigy he fed. He left flattery and adulation to the naïve. Anyway, Hans Christian Andersen sopped most of it up. Indirect communication was good enough for him. It allowed Kierkegaard a degree of objectivity towards his work. He could change his mind when he noticed a contradiction. Kierkegaard even wrote against himself – Johannes Climacus versus Johannes Anti-Climacus. The dialectic of doubt gave

him a context to see both sides and to rectify exaggerations when he got carried away.

Kierkegaard well knew that to take on the truth you must enter the area of polemic. One is obliged to do something, anything, towards it, for a truth isolated from its consequences is as frivolous as a lie told merely for its own sake. Moreover, actioning a truth is the only way you can test it. It's a risk you have to take and one that necessitates judging your society, which means you will be judged yourself, and not just your writings. Your personal self will be put on the slab.

The score for Kierkegaard was that once his incognito was cracked, 'he would be made to carry the arguments found in his possession as a thief burdened with his stolen goods', so the court's judgment would be a foregone conclusion. He had no faith in the fairness he could expect. The people treated everything as a joke, except what was in their own immediate interests. Low irony reigned. Kierkegaard was a master of irony. He deployed it brilliantly as a literary device. He must have felt in a small way responsible and guilty. Too clever by half, he must have thought, but it was too late to engage in sincerity.

So, turning forty, he took the leap to reveal his personal self as the author of work that attacked the prevailing hypocrisy. He broke his silence, confronting the Church and the society which supported it, with the authority of shocking clarity of thought. At the same time, he challenged 'The Corsair', the 'Private Eye' of its time, not to spare him. Goldschmidt, the editor, was one of his secret admirers. But he couldn't say no to his hero and reluctantly handed Kierkegaard over to the not so tender mercies of PL Moller, who belittled him as an oddity, an odd man out and not a serious enemy of the establishment. Kierkegaard's feeble legs became a national issue. One shorter than the other. His trousers were displayed for popular amusement. 'I am being trampled to death by a flock of geese', he wrote in his Journal.

When the sainted Primate Mynster died apologising to his Faithful for having been 'an honoured pagan, not having attained what is highest', Kierkegaard pooh-poohed his false modesty. 'So that's all right then', he said publicly and in his own voice. 'The old hypocrite has forgiven himself.' Adding, 'There is nothing wrong with hedonistic indulgences if you don't present yourself to the world as the reincarnation of Simon Stylites'. In launching his unrestrained attack on cod Christianity with this sally in the open, he anticipated the hydra of ironical heads in the Holy Alliance club would nod together and declare, 'Poor Soren has fallen on his own squib and finally gone mad'.

Kierkegaard was mad inasmuch as he knew what would happen. His assault on failed Christianity had turned into one on himself. At first he was thrilled that he had pre-judged accurately, then he was bored by its predictability. These people only exist in the eyes of others. They don't have a self to think for themselves. Their reaction disappointed him. He would have liked to have been surprised. It would open up a new vein of work. But it was not to be and he knew his work, if not completed, was finished. He had nothing more to learn and therefore nothing more to say.

Like his work and life, the capital he inherited was also spent and he could not hope to make a living from attacking his paymasters. No longer could he afford to hire a carriage to ride through the night reading, with a hurricane lamp, correcting his galley proofs. He took to going out more, dining with friends who had not deserted him. A passive presence with nothing to say. It amused him to observe that the less he

expressed ideas, the more people seemed to like him. Old men know that trick, he thought. He was only forty-two.

In his youth he was invariably the life and soul of parties and hated himself for it afterwards. Now he was Uncle Soren, quietly concerned that peace reigned around him. The contrast between his social self and his public reputation for extreme opinions was repeatedly remarked in posthumous memoirs. Gentle, evenly humorous, balanced, and clear of mind in response to what others said. Yet he was writing his Journal. 'Amongst the mediocre, individuals are certainly not unreasonable towards one another. They do not provoke impudence. They respect each other's mediocrity. Their mediocrity tries to raise itself to the status of an ideal. Just as people insure themselves against fire, mediocrity as a whole insures the individuals who go to make up that mediocrity, that mediocrity is the truth.'

He suffered a paralysis at a dinner party, winking to his host, 'Oh, leave it, the maid will sweep it up in the morning', and had himself committed to the Royal Frederick Hospital, having drunk the last bottle of fine wine in his cellar and thrown away his last cigar. A few weeks later he died, still mildly amused by himself and sympathetic to those who sat by his bed. He died, I suppose, in a good humour. His last words were, 'Not to say I'm perfect or completely finished'.

Ontological integrity is rare amongst men. And Kierkegaard had it. He held that to be true to your personal self and let your personal existence be damned is the key to survival. When the person departs the self, the self still remains. Its existence does not depend on mere flesh and blood. It does not die.

Kierkegaard refused to see his brother on his deathbed because he was a priest. But Peter became what Theo was to Van Gogh. Through Peter's good offices Kierkegaard's work in its entirety saw the light. His body of work lives. You never know who your real friends are until you're dead.

[Intro and Links](#)**THE ENIGMATIC FAMILY**[Life of Kierkegaard](#)**Act 1 Scene I**[The Secret Gloss 1](#)[The Secret Gloss 2](#)[The Secret Gloss 3](#)[Kierkegaard Plus](#)[New/Recovered Verse](#)[Welsh Again](#)

[A gloomy dining room in Copenhagen, circa 1820. The table of Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard, a merchant with strong biblical leanings. The family are headbent for Grace. They comprise Michael Pedersen, a Nordic giant of a paterfamilias; his soft, submissive peasant wife; and seven puny children. The eldest (Peter) is old enough to wear a clerical collar. The youngest (Soren) is a scrawny, supercilious manikin with an enormous head and a witch's face. All the family, except the father, are dressed in monkish rough cloth. Nothing seems to fit. Michael Pedersen is wearing a long shaggy black suit like a lost parson. Peter, the seminarian, is concluding Grace.]

Peter: The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.

The Family: Amen.

[The formal, but frugal, meal begins. Relish in the meal declines in inverse proportion to the size of the participants. The daughter of the family is the exception: although she is particularly puny, she hardly raises her knife at all. Nobody seems to notice this. In direct contrast, Soren looks tiny behind an apparently oversized knife and fork, but he works both with great gusto. Soren talks with his mouth full, skilfully, articulating while munching his food. His voice is harsh, as though addressing a public meeting.]

Soren: The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Is that what is called God's gift?

Peter: Yes, brother Soren, and be grateful for it.

The Family: Amen.

[Soren taps his fork against his plate, and chuckles like a mildly demented old woman.]

Soren: I wouldn't call that much of a gift.

[A street-singer outside the window starts to sing. The family continue eating in a heavy silence. From time to time, Soren's fork is heard to beat time with the music.]

Street-singer:  
 Poor little Soren,  
 a sight for sore eyes,  
 conceived in a whoring  
 (his father's surmise).

Real mother in heaven,  
 as tight as a bun.  
 Her womb wouldn't leaven  
 a daughter or son.

The peasant housekeeper  
 brought in on her death  
 proved morally weaker,

six shames to beget,

the children of sorrow,  
the fruits of pure lust.  
O each little horror  
was born to be cursed.

Who would have thought  
the old man had the heart?  
Each sin against death  
brought another Kierkegaard.

These brats of bereavement  
to punish their dad  
were into the world sent  
to go to the bad.

The youngest is Soren  
so crippled with pride,  
what can be in store for him,  
this thorn in the side...

Michael Pedersen: My son, you know nothing.

[Michael P's eyes are consumed with a sense of tragic destiny. His face crumbles with the scene into barren moorland (Jutland). It is night. Wind and rain howl around a boy-shepherd (recognisable as Michael P, the haggard eyes). The boy is ill-clad, cold and crying. He is beating down a fire with a stick. Sparks are flying. The boy runs around the fire waving his stick, and shouting at the sky. He threatens the sky with his stick. The boy is hysterically angry.

Out of the fire emerges a well-dressed bourgeois merchant. A frail, balding parson is standing by the boy (Michael P's father). The merchant puts a warm fur coat around the boy's shoulders, shakes hands with the parson and gives over some money. A buggy pulls up beside them, and the merchant hoists the boy in. And the buggy disappears into the night. The frail parson looks at the fire. His eyes are the same as the boy's when he was cursing the sky. He picks up the stick, and breaks it in the air. At that moment a flash of lightening cracks the sky. Thunder follows immediately.

The thunder-roll ends in a bell-like sound which turns out to be a fork hitting the side of a plate. It is Soren. The rest of the family have gone and the table has been cleared. Michael P looks at his son, not without affection.]

Michael P: Ah! it's you, Fork?

Soren: What don't I know, father?

Michael P: Nothing, son, nothing. You do well at school. Not too well. Third in the class. Good enough for your purposes. My poor Soren, you will never have to earn your living.

[Michael P fixes Soren with a fanatical look for a second. Then his eyes melt into rheum. He is an old man. He appears to nod off. The fork is heard again. Michael P stirs.]

Soren: Please, father, may I go out? The Jorgensens are just passing. I can see them passing. And they are going to stop. Look, they are

stopped outside our house. They can see me. The boys from school all do that when they're going to the Old Market. They like to see me wave from up here. And when I wave they all take off their caps. See them, see them take off their caps. Father, please may I...

Michael P: Sit down, son. Wave, and sit down. You see enough of them at school. And they see enough of you. If they really wanted you down, they would knock.

Soren: They are afraid to knock.

Michael P: Why should they be? Your mother would deal with them. Sit down and tell me where you want to go.

Soren: I want to go to... the Old Market. Will I get our coats?

[Soren fetches two frieze coats. He hangs the large coat over his father's shoulders and puts on the small one. He sits down facing his father. Michael P stands up. The long coat hangs to his heels.]

Michael P: Come, son, take my hand. We are going to the Old Market.

[The old man and the boy walk together, slowly up and down the dour room. The floorboards creak. The room darkens as they become wrapped up in the walking.]

Soren: Where are we, father? I'm lost here. It's half an hour since we passed Franks Square. All this is strange. Tell me.

Michael P: Easy, son. We are going to the warehouse where I work. I am not much older than you. My benefactor and boss is a wool merchant. He is looking for a bright boy for the hosiery section. He has got a bright boy here, and strong and cheap at the price. There is his lady wife coming out of the office. Wearing the new sheepskin wrap which the boss promised her. I brushed it down myself last evening. Oh, so carefully. It took me two hours of my own time.

She is pretending not to see me, as well she might. But my boss has mentioned me to her several times at least. How this new boy now does the books, and how accurately too. How there is something uncanny about this new apprentice, the 'devil's apprentice' as he likes to call me. She is looking at me. She has every right to. She knows too that I made the suggestion to the chief clerk that all the wool stock should be made into thick stockings and sold to armies. She is smiling. Not at me, but at the thought of me. I don't deign to look at her directly. I am not shy. I know my place.

I know I have also suggested that the money from the socks should be spent in buying up spices from the North African fleets. That I told the clerk who told the boss who told his lady wife, spices are even more necessary to rich people nowadays than wool socks to foot soldiers. I look at her now. She is pleased with my honest look, my way of looking her in the eye. Not a slave or a sycophant. A bright boy going places, taking things over. She has a daughter. A pale thing and educated. She is looking closely at me now. I am sixteen years of age, and black-bearded already. She is thinking of those spices, sugar, cocoa, coffee and syrups too.

She fancies I will make her husband a fortune, and she's right. And that I will make her daughter a good husband perhaps someday, and gets into her landau very pleased with me. See, how she smoothes the

sheepskin wrap, and gives a small wave. Is it to me or the driver? The driver of course. But it is for me. I can feel the wind of her departure, horses flying off. But it won't be long until she will be waving at me directly. And it won't be goodbye.

Come, now, Soren. It's time to go home.

[A carriage pulls up. The door opens, and the lady wife in fine satins extends her hand to a young man who is the youthful Michael P dressed neatly in black. He gets in and the lady seats him between herself and an elegantly pale girl, her daughter. Soren peeps in from outside. The carriage drives off.]

Soren (amazed): Was that my mother?

Michael P: No. That was my wife. My real wife. She died many years ago... I made such a success of the business I could retire at forty. There were no children. I gave myself a pension sufficient to keep her in the comfort she was accustomed to. I had decided to dedicate the rest of my life to the study of the Good Book, for I knew that my success was not the work of God. I would expiate my luck in prayer and knowledge, and caring for her. But on the very day I officially retired she died. No warning. Heaven, it would seem, disapproved.

[Thunder and lightening together. A downpour. Raindrops splatter down on an open book in the large hands of Michael P. The book is a bible. The pages are smeared with blood from his hands. The shadow of a cross falls across the scene and a torch of fire runs through it.]

Michael P: We're home now. Take off your coat. Go down to the kitchen to your mother.

[Soren in bed. He hears footsteps. His father is pacing up and down the room above. Slow, heavy footsteps. Soren hears weeping somewhere in the house and begins to cry.]

[Intro and Links](#)**THE HOLY ALLIANCE**[Life of Kierkegaard](#)

Act 2 Scene 3

[The Secret Gloss 1](#)[The Secret Gloss 2](#)[The Secret Gloss 3](#)[Kierkegaard Plus](#)[New/Recovered Verse](#)[Welsh Again](#)

[The Holy Alliance club is in session in a room above the café. It is a gathering of Copenhagen intellectuals and artists. Hans Christian Andersen is a leading light. The room is rather grand in a Regency style, and is hardly conducive to the bohemian atmosphere aspired to by all present. A large oblong table is the central attraction. The members are all male. They stand around the table in inordinately relaxed postures: thumbs in waistcoats, hats tilted, legs crossed as though in pirouette. Tall, cadaverous men with elbows lean on the commodious shoulders of squat Herculean watercolorists. The air is smoky and enthusiastic. However, Hans Christian is hosting the evening. His rather ponderous diffidence makes the livelier members a bit restless. Hans Christian is a large homely figure, very pleased with the respect universally accorded him. He has a nervous stutter, which wins him sympathy, or at least a hearing. He balefully plays with the company, tempering unduly prolonged pauses between clauses with strategic stutters.]

Hans Christian: Once... upon a time (laughter) there was a Parrot, a young Parrot with a... chip on his shoulder... and an unprepossessing figure. This Parrot had, despite the beautiful voice of his master, Professor Molbeck, who adopted him at the University... out of charity of course (laughter)... this Parrot had the most horrible voice in the whole of Copenhagen, and, indeed, if we are to believe the Standing brothers who have been to China... so they say (more laughter. The laughter does not necessarily coincide with a joke; it is the arbitrary laughter of the inattentive but sycophantic)... indeed... in the whole world that knows human speech.

This unpleasant Parrot was not blessed by nature... Or, it is said, by his father... a large black woolly Parrot with very rich feathers...and a religious bent. He was ... not to put too fine a point on it... a miserable specimen of Parrothood. The sort of bird nobody could love. Because of this, the unpleasant Parrot liked to scratch and... and screech. One day he clawed through his cage, and flew into a row of books on a window-ledge... which is as far as he got. Outside there was a handsome garden with elegant trees and a very blue sky above it. The Parrot hated the garden, particularly some peacocks whose noble plumage trailed along the landscaped lawn. He squawked a little, scoffing, threw his eyes up to heaven... and was awfully offended by the blue... Yellow was his favourite colour. He kept looking, nevertheless, this very young but unpleasant Parrot. His owl-like eyes, for he did not see very well, fell on some birds of paradise who frolicked in the treetops. He squawked and screeched more and more horribly at this sight.

Down below in the garden the good Gardener was at work. He was used to the Parrot's squawking as the Parrot hated him even more than the blue sky and the birds of paradise. The Gardener was a hardworking man, a... lover of nature. He particularly loved human nature, and indeed could extend his considerable charity to... dumb creatures too. This included parrots, although all parrots are not dumb, of course... Still with this unpleasant Parrot he had a... crisis of conscience: loving what was easy to love... was one thing. The truly virtuous man must go further than that. He knew from his gardener's bible that... the most beautiful flowers frequently accept the embraces of the most noxious

weeds, and seem to tolerate them. 'Flowers are truly Christian', he thought. 'They even love their enemies. I must henceforth seek out the unlovable for my attention. Beautiful flowers who are tolerant teach us a lesson: we must learn from the flowers to love our enemies... and...

[At this point, Soren and his friends make their presence felt, having entered the room from the back. The friends are tiptoeing, but Soren makes as much noise as he can. The disturbance generated by his umbrella and lurching gait causes Hans Christian to pause. Soren speaks in a loud grating voice (he has the sharp delivery of a hunchback or a parrot), heckling Hans Christian.]

Soren: And we must learn to hate our friends. Carry on, flowery philosopher, and surpass yourself in silliness.

[The club members quell the interruption and the riot starts amongst the livelier section with good-natured banter. Soren sits down at the table (except for a few very old members, most of the Holy Alliance are standing), and composes himself to stay quiet and be bored. This show of resignation in the face of Hans Christian's laborious polemic against him (Soren is the Parrot) is appreciated by the members (good show!). However, Hans C is flustered and cannot carry on. Still, he compensates by radiating good humour, in mood with the Holy Alliance motto, ART IS GOOD NATURE. GOOD NATURE IS ART (the society poster is prominently displayed behind the speaker). The great man looks down on Soren with paternal benevolence, rather forced in fact.

Israel and Brochner join Soren, who turns to meet them and confides in a loud whisper.]

Soren: This man is a fool. Why don't we just take advantage of this stunned silence and get out before he starts twaddling again? We, after all, have a more important engagement.

[Soren makes to go.]

Hans C: Stay, Master Kierkegaard. You are young, and we understand youth. Listen to what your elders and, for the moment, your betters have to say. Listen carefully and you may learn something which is not in German books. Experience! You can learn something from others' experience. Particularly from the more venerable amongst us. You are too young to be...

Soren: Old. And you are too old to be young. And still not thirty!

[Hans is only seven years older than Soren, in fact.]

Hans C: You are too young to be bitter. What are you? Not of age yet. And full of venom. Experience will no doubt sweeten you. Meanwhile, my boy, those who have walked down the long avenue of experience can perhaps give you directions...

[Soren has been making his obstreperous way to the door, followed by his embarrassed friends. He taps his umbrella loudly on the floor to the rhythms of Hans C's homily. Soren is in a hopping rage by now. He leaps up on a chair by the door, knocking things over, spoiling the aura of good nature in the Holy Alliance. He is telling his friends, 'The man is a total...' etc. He shouts at Hans Christian.]

Soren: Experience, experience! You may have had experience, and it has gone to your head. Dogs have experience. Cats have experience.

Bishop Mynster has had experience, I dare say. You have had experience, and long may you continue to have had experience. But remember this, experience does not make people wise, more often it makes them mad.

Where is Anders, Israel? I have an appointment with experience elsewhere.

[Soren leaps from the chair, and out of the room, followed by his friends. Anders remains behind briefly. He has been lurking in the wings. He approaches the table, hat in hand.]

Anders: Your Excellency Mister Andersen, forgive my master. He is young and not used to tipple. I, his humble servant, bow to you, the greatest storyteller for children in history, so I'm told by everybody, in apology.

[The Holy Alliance breaks out in spontaneous laughter. Hans C does not like it at all. He knows the joke is on him. Nevertheless, he smiles studiously, indicating another Holy Alliance motto, framed behind him, BROTHERS IN CHRIST AND ART, with upturned palms, Christ-like.]

[Intro and Links](#)**THE END OF THE ENGAGEMENT**[Life of Kierkegaard](#)

## Act 4 Scene 3

[The Secret Gloss 1](#)

[The hall of Kierkegaard's house. Late afternoon a few days later. Friday. The household is preparing Soren for the evening out.

[The Secret Gloss 2](#)

Considerable bustle. Even Ansla is playing her part. She dusts down Soren's rather elaborate tops and tails. Israel is Master of Ceremonies. He has a stage-manager's scroll. He marks off items from time to time.

[The Secret Gloss 3](#)

Anders is back in ridiculous livery, and has fully recovered his virile health. Despite his splendid regalia (the mock-military get-up) Soren is pale and worn, and almost spastic in his movements. However, he is performing a puppet-show version of a man about town. A knock on the door. Israel rather than Anders answers it. It is Hans Christian. Seeing all the preparations, he is disconcerted, feels shabby.]

[Kierkegaard Plus](#)[New/Recovered Verse](#)[Welsh Again](#)

Hans C: If I'd realised it was a formal affair... I just thought it was a friendly meal with Olsen en famine. I mean en famille. Dear me, I will have to...

Israel: You'll do, Mr Andersen. You look... respectable, quite statuesque in fact. I'm glad you left the furs behind.

Soren: What do you think, Israel, are we ready?

[Israel has a small clock in his hand. He listens to it for a few seconds. Its alarm goes off. He hands it to Anders, having wound the alarm again. Anders carefully puts the clock in his breast pocket.]

Israel: Time, Soren, Don't waste a minute.

[Soren and Hans Christian, followed by Anders at a servant's distance (two steps behind) depart. Israel and Ansla gather at the door, and watch them get into the carriage. Anders sits beside the coachman in front. Soren needs help getting in. Hans C provides it. The carriage pulls up outside the Olsen house, Hans C briefly restrains Soren from getting out, leaning towards him, hand lightly on his knee. Soren sits back like a king disdainful of a supplicant.]

Hans C: Be kind to the girl. She is only a child.

## Act 4 Scene 4

[The Olsens at table with Andersen and Soren. Regine is absent. Supper is concluding, and Old Father Olsen is a little tipsy and talkative. The brothers, Jacob and Jonas, are particularly bleak and bowed. Hans C is distinctly uncomfortable.]

Father O: Oh, but my dear Andersen, on the contrary, I am of the opinion that the honest man who marries, and brings up a large family, does more service to the state than he who remains single, and only talks about art.

Soren: Or Malthus! I agree with you, Olsen. Producing children to serve the state is the best we can do in the present age. A perfect definition of the modern man. I congratulate you. Andersen here is just a primitive romantic. He believes in a more natural, spontaneous reason for sexual relations.

Father 0: Money, perhaps. Or barter it would be. Fair exchange. Hans Christian, do not be offended. I agree with you too. There is such a thing as the foraging instinct. We cannot deny it.

Soren: Olsen is correct. And Hans Christian, you are too. It ought to be like that. Crude, realistic, barbaric lust moderated by crude, realistic, barbaric necessity. But it's not possible to be natural anymore. Savage sense has been sacrificed at the altar of individual responsibility.

Christianity has a lot to answer for. It has made us bashful in the face of honest passion. We have to think about it, give reasons for it, take it home to sleep on, and we do not sleep. It's ridiculous, all this reflective recoil when faced by a simple reflex. I am ashamed for the present age. It must hide behind a reason. Producing children to serve the state. To serve the state? Heavens, the King should not be compared to Mynster's shepherd, but to the Master of the Stud.

[The Olsen brothers leave the table in a cold fury. Their leaving relaxes the atmosphere. Olsen takes a long drink, and moves closer to Soren.]

Father 0: It's such a relief to talk about something other than our troubles. But I can't help thinking of them. Though my thoughts don't show, I am a proud man. But I...

[An alarm clock rings in the servants' quarters. Not very loud. But Soren perks up. He gives Olsen all his attention.]

Father 0: But I beg you to speak to Regine. She expects you upstairs. Olga is not with her. I am a proud man. I would be obliged.

[Soren looks at the beseeching face of Olsen (his eyes are maudlin, rheumy. Soren sees in them the self-pitying look of his grandfather, his father etc). He is not moved. And gets up. Hans C is snoozing. Anders enters the room (to cue, the alarm has worked). As Soren leaves, he speaks to Father Olsen.]

Soren: Father forgive me, for I know exactly what I do.

[Anders opens the door for him. They mount the stairs, Anders a respectful step behind Soren. Soren knocks, and enters. He takes a few steps into the room. His gait is extremely twisted and he looks ludicrous in his elaborate attire (umbrella as well). Anders enters discreetly behind him, looking like a young Adonis in comparison. Regine is standing at the far end of the room (more nursery than boudoir), and sees everything.

Regine is dressed simply. She has lost her puppy fat, and that makes her more mature and grown-up. She observes Soren and Anders and immediately realises that the engagement is over. Soren has made himself appear sufficiently absurd in her presence to confirm this irrevocably. In addition to his deformed stance, Soren is grinning at her, giving his longish nose pointy twitches.

Regine is lady enough not to laugh. She ignores Soren's performance. No trace of hysteria or malice. She just looks sad, but not fooled. Somehow she realises that Soren has won hands down. She knows the score, but not the game.]

Regine: Will you never marry?

Soren: Well, perhaps in ten years time when I've sown my wild oats, I may need a pretty young thing to rejuvenate me.

[Regine is not shocked by Soren's cynicism. She does not believe it, too pat.]

Regine: Forgive me for what I make you say.

Soren: It is your forgiveness I need. I have been enjoying myself at your expense.

[Soren staggers across the room, and falling more or less on a knee before her, grabs her hand, to steady himself, and plants a clown's kiss on it. Then he gets up quite nimbly and dashes off, nearly knocking Anders down. His corkscrew is almost acrobatic. He stops at the door when Regine speaks.]

Regine: Will I see you again?

Soren: When I get back from Berlin, I'll visit the family, no doubt. If I am invited.

Regine: I don't think they will invite you.

Soren: Of course, you will be married by the time I get back.

[Soren laughs, and waves his umbrella. He pushes Anders before him, horse-acting as they descend the stairs. Olsen and Hans C watch the pair roll out the front door. The carriage shoots off at pace.]

[Intro and Links](#)**KIERKEGAARD AND BARNUM**[Life of Kierkegaard](#)[The Secret Gloss 1](#)[The Secret Gloss 2](#)[The Secret Gloss 3](#)[Kierkegaard Plus](#)[New/Recovered Verse](#)[Welsh Again](#)

Stendhal wrote his memoirs ('La Vie de Henry Brulard', 1835–36) for publication forty years after his death ('The majority's sensibilities reflect the vogue'). It ought to have been read in his time. He hadn't a good word to say for his contemporaries, except Napoleon and a few of the women whose identity he changed (except for the diva Madame Pasta, whose name was too good to be true). Soren Kierkegaard's only political tract, 'The Reflective Age', (1846), appeared in his lifetime as a pseudonymous review of an obscure novel by an unknown woman, one of several postscripts buried in a vast tome said to be about Adolph Adler, a forgotten Danish divine in a sect that no longer exists. 'The Reflective Age' previewed the next century, though Soren Kierkegaard thought it was his own. He lived in his head rather than the mid-nineteenth century. He thought that, through representative impositions from above, popular values, passions and material gains had become poor reflections for the majority of people, who possess what they have (or haven't) by proxy.

Gentle reader, I owe you an example. A micro one all of my own. Cameras have taken the immediacy out of holidays. The good time is recorded in order to show after dinner parties. So in a small way you become a representative person for the guests. They watch you watching yourself behind a lens. You are able to watch them watching you watching yourselves. What you both see has been once removed from reality, which in any case was a mockup. In a reflective age nothing is what it seems.

Self-consciousness controls all the stages from the snap to the showing. Even the chance element in photographing has been removed. The picture is previewed in a monitor and a click determines the reflection of a something that only happened because you set it up. The present has been forfeited to gift the guests a present that you presented to yourself. It was given to you but you do not want it. You pass it on to those who cannot refuse it, being your guests, or pass it on as it has been shop soiled by the showing. They must allow themselves to be entertained by it, faute de mieux.

Your holiday becomes theirs, but it was a non-event.

Extrapolate this example to a macro life as a whole. The showing is of representative people whose everyday lives are lived in the opposite to 'in camera'. The entire world is exposed to what public relations stages into existence, and what cannot be avoided is difficult to resist. Submitting to its reflected 'glory' is the lot of the majority. It becomes more than a part of their lives, increasingly substituting for their own, until the elite come to act as their proxies, 'enjoying' their lives for them.

Kierkegaard's idea was taken up by his contemporary, Phineas T Barnum (Copenhagen and Connecticut share the same longitude but it must have been telepathy because it is not known that they were otherwise in touch). Old Brass Mouth of course vulgarised it, going for representative exceptions like the bearded lady, the Cardiff giant, the Fidji mermaid, General Tom Thumb, Jenny Lind, the Swedish Nightingale. He could have included Kierkegaard with his corkscrew walk and air of total self-absorption, but Soren was not looking to be displayed as entertainment in a circus. Amusing the corner boys of Copenhagen was enough.

My friend Tony, who is a literary detective, started asking questions. 'Did Kierkegaard ever meet Hans Christian Andersen?'

'Of course, Copenhagen was a small place.' At the back of my mind I remember Kierkegaard mockingly reviewed a book by Hans Christian and years back I wrote a play with the two of them sparring. I have forgotten whether my sources were primary or secondary or pure invention. The play's title, 'The Secret Gloss', does not help.

My answer was defensive and Tony kept at me, feeding me lines such as 'HCA was in love with Jenny Lind in the same way Turgenyev was taken by diva Paulette Viardot'.

'And Stendhal with Madame Pasta', I might have added. 'All three authors were party to a ménage de trios.' But I was holding back. You never know what you'll get into with Tony. So to put him off the track I sent him a copy of the above paragraph. 'It's the relationship between Barnum and Kierkegaard I'm interested in', I said, getting sniffy.

But he was on to the scent like a shot. 'That's easy. Jenny Lind is the connection. Barnum would have heard about Kierkegaard from her lips.' True, they must have relaxed together after a show and the subject of Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard's main pseudonym, though he had innumerable others, could have come up. Philosophical conversations in show business are quite common, given its uncertainty. Still, the problem with circumstantial evidence is it depends on circumstances, and circumstances change over the centuries. For instance I, or indeed Tony, have no notion of the Green Room mores in Barnum's time. Let alone Jenny Lind's status in his circus, surely not on the same level as the other 'freaks'. Would she have been above socialising with a mere showman, even after a successful night?

So I said to Tony, 'Hearing them at it, though, if they did, she with her loud voice and Barnum being a bit of a barker, must have spread Soren's reputation like wildfire amongst the circus hands, and the animals too. I wonder how Hans Christian put up with it?'

'He knew how to modulate it. 'Are you sitting comfortable now I'll begin'.'

'Anyway', I said to Tony, 'what has this to do with Soren Kierkegaard meeting Hans Christian Andersen, anymore than 'SK' rhymes with Danny Kaye? I don't think they shared her.'

His reply was a right Sherlock. 'How do you know?'

'Indeed', I said 'But, come to think of it, why did the Swedish Nightingale, the toast of kings and drawing rooms everywhere, have to display her vocal cords to gawking ghouls in a Yankee Doodle fairground?'

'She probably needed the money. What with her extended household. And I doubt that her husband, Otto Goldschmidt, the composer, earned much. And Hans Christian, of course, was famously tight.'

'I wonder if Otto was any relation to the Goldschmidt who edited 'The Corsair', the satirical rag that had it in for Soren Kierkegaard?'

'His uncle.' Game set and match to Tony. Or is it Kierkegaard? ('Indirect communication is my natural qualification').

However, Phineas T Barnum got Kierkegaard's idea upside down. The

Dane saw the 'freaks' as the audience and the satisfied customers the exhibits. But the Barnum and Bailey freak shows were abominated as no better than public executions by humanists. For instance, when he rolled out Phineas Gage, the quarry worker who had a three and half foot bolt stuck in his brain after an explosion, and survived with half a face and his marbles but nobody would employ him (currently back in the neurology textbooks as an early example of someone whose personality changed after an accident). Phineas T reversed his 'You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time' to 'You can't fool all of the people all of the time'.

Say that to Antonio Damasio, who required a braindamaged psychopath from the past to give historical depth to his notions on the exact location of madness in the cerebral cortex. Gage was just a man made shy by his appearance who, desperate for work, could only get it as a showpiece, until a benevolent farmer facilitated his escape by giving him a job in his stables. Gage spent the rest of his life with horses, who didn't mind how he looked (in French the word 'gage' means 'a forfeit'. He wasn't taking any chances with the human race. Apart from his mother, he couldn't trust anybody not to laugh at him. Though he didn't mind amusing his sister's children when they were small).

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## New/Recovered Verse

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### FOR CAROLE OUT OF PLASTER

Now that you have your own wings back  
 the sky's your limit. Off you flap.  
 You'll fly along - all chantilly  
 in off-the-shoulder evening gown  
 and matching wrap - to paint the town  
 with Ted (no, not with Ted, silly).  
 The tout ensemble is bright red.

### COUP DE DÉS 3

I'm an ordinary citizen  
 who's marked to be wiped out, amen.  
 Being like everybody else,  
 I am game for random violence  
 from a cluster bomb, or some such  
 device I accidentally touch.

Maybe we should take to the streets  
 and protest against ourselves. At least,  
 it might prevent the careless fates  
 from targeting inane innates  
 as nondescript as the moon in  
 broad daylight. And scarcely human.

Sometimes I dream I could become  
 the lonely sniper with a gun.  
 But who would be the hit? You've guessed.  
 A sad bystander like myself.  
 I wonder what I'm guilty of?  
 Merely existing is not enough.

Nobodies of the world unite.  
 You haven't much to lose. Recite  
 'I'm hardly worth the time of day.  
 Ignore me and I'll go away'.  
 That will attract whatever  
 now passes for human error.

See me clutching an intestine,  
 rupturing blood and shit. All mine.  
 I have been made famous by chance,  
 rolled screaming into an ambulance.  
 Observe the usual family  
 not looking good, mourning for me.

### AUGUSTUS' REPLY WHEN WELSH SAID...

'Life becomes less interesting and more difficult.  
 So death's a relief, a merciful end result.'

Nabokov quite fancied a 'mixing with the landscape',  
 but mourned 'the end of the tender ego'. 'To escape  
 from a bad state to an uncertain one has merit.  
 Particularly if there's nothing to inherit',  
 mooted Montaigne. My mother said, 'You can't take it with you.  
 Still there is always something to look forward to'.

Allow me a Lear-like raging against the dying light.  
I can't let myself go gently into the night  
without stirring up the dust and riding the hounds  
of hell to gatecrash heaven. I'm on soggy grounds.  
But I don't want to believe in the nothing at all.  
We've a future, even if it's only chemical.

#### HEALTH WARNING

As a young man I did not bother about health.  
My guts were upset. It's all in the mind, I felt.  
Pull yourself together. Now I'm in the habit  
of trying to find out what's wrong with me. And it  
interferes with the cure, which is time or maybe  
death. It's bad to think of the state of your body.  
Leave it, I say, for the attention of other folks  
(but learn to slam the door on delegations of Jobs).

#### THE FALSE IMMORTALS

Though one foot in the grave,  
the ancient friends behave  
like four legged savages.  
Time, it's said, ravages,

but these two, man to man,  
ravage time rather than  
the other way round. Then  
ravage one another.

#### ON FLOGGING THE DEAD HORSE

You haven't gone away. You're in hiding. Biding your time.  
Riding the bumps to wear them down.

Don't let the horsemeat decay. If flogged off fresh,  
it will serve to pay for wining and dining.

After night the day always comes. See, the sun is shining.  
No more down in the dumps.

#### THE ZEALOTS (1990)

After Pasolini

These dun dour damners of others.  
Don't expect a crumb of mercy  
from the unforgiving mothers  
with hairshirt under the jersey.

It's not Marx's teachings makes them tick,  
or Nietzsche, or Simone Weil:  
the triumph of good over evil  
is theirs, and they lay it on thick.

Men of Principle, the extreme  
examples of the one-track mind,  
will stop at nothing in the blind  
alley of self-love and its dream.

Reason to them is 'I am who am'.

Their selflessness is selfish sham.

#### VIRTUAL GOD: GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK TULLY (1996)

Above the babble of discordant voices  
one note like a telegraph pole humming  
in the wilderness, sustains itself and us.

This is God speaking, but sadly telegrams  
no longer exist, and the message is not  
delivered. We are left with a memory

of a dead line, and the insistent voices  
echoing what was said before when the wire was live.  
But it is not Him, and we do not listen.

I pray fervently that God will soon adapt  
to the new technology and send a fax  
and, when I come down for breakfast, it is there.

#### THE CASE FOR UNEMPLOYMENT (1998) Flaubert at 29: letter to his mother (1850)

So I must have a little job  
to sell my sweat by day and drink  
it back by night?  
Like being a cob  
that hacks it doltishly, all blink-  
ered whether saddled or tethered  
to a trap. Tied down. Too fettered  
to plough a seam or steeplechase.

Why take a job? To kill time, or save face,  
or money?  
I haven't time to think  
for myself, am too vain to care  
what the neighbours think, and could never  
hold down a job that pays enough  
to affect my income.

A man  
about the house, I would add,  
without an occupation can  
devote more time to tender love  
and bring the family closer  
together.  
And that can't be bad.

#### THE ESCAPE TO BACK WHERE I AM (2002)

Knowing too much of where I am,  
time to move on to where I'm not  
a worm in a rotten coffin  
feeding off mangle meat on the bone.

Freeing my spirit, I'll inhabit  
a haven in some unknown  
country where ignorance is bliss.  
I'll live without a safety net,

careless of cracked ceilings, old wines,

choice windfalls dropping on my head,  
waited on by the illusion  
of lush hillsides that throw banquets.

Although in my Hendon redoubt  
by day the sky is crossed with bars  
of floating metal from Heathrow,  
on a clear night I can walk out

and see the stars growing bigger.  
On the foothills of the Chilterns,  
I will look down on Colindale  
and Edgware - where street lights flicker

with dreams of freedoms that exist  
only in the mind - padlocked to  
Brent Cross, Cricklewood and Kilburn.  
I'm the warden of this prison.

#### THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL (2002)

World cluttered with cars and barbaric wars  
where dumb Faiths spread faster than Pizza Hut,  
how can I find a path to cycle on?  
Thank Mammon my next meal won't be my last.

The human mind is half-baked and vicious .  
Folk like to kill each other and still want  
to live in comfort and die in their beds.  
I'll be glad when I get out of this place

where the sky is a circus of Jumbos  
crashing into one another and once  
in a while on to earth. And you can't go  
anywhere without walking on dog-turds.

The logical mind is 'back to square one'.  
And the old ideas have been forgotten,  
superseded by public relations  
which fall foul of their own propaganda.

There will be things I'll be sorry to leave.  
The curve of a hill that's going nowhere.  
And the trains that never arrive, good on.  
And the operations cancelled. Just as well.

But not the carelessness of coevals  
who moved from naive to knave without a blink,  
who have become their fathers and mothers  
without noticing and are proud of it.

World of blossoms and the fruit thereof,  
your nature is in fashion with perfumes.  
Flowers once velvet have become plastic.  
When will the wind and the rain be bottled?

So I take my bundle of belongings  
and seek my fortune in a world beyond  
my comprehension. Full knowledge can  
only lead to the corrosive contempt.

Disdain not what you do not know you know.  
Delight in what you didn't know you could have.  
And don't look back at what you leave behind  
sinking in its mire, expressing bubbles.

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[↑ Haut](#)

augustus-young-no-5  
29/11/06

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WELSH SUR LA LOUPE  
from 'Conversations with Welsh'

Moral Judgments are Black and White and Welsh is a Colourist

Welsh likes to present his life as pampered. Only the best Pierre Champion ready-made dinners from Auchan, the SuperSupermarché. This is what he says. Toasted cheese with English cheddar. The best for Welsh rarebit, he claims, and he may be right. He is a man of property too - two houses, acres of mountain, two ateliers and a flat he never pays rent on. The owner gave up asking years ago and became his friend instead. He charms bailiffs at the door, the wolf too, and borrows money to convince well-meaning people into buying his paintings at half price. A left-handed form of blackmail, but the payout is a bargain and good for their souls. The relation between art and crime is above the law when the work is worthy of the transgression (artists from Benvenuto Cellini to Manet have written well about creativity and crime, and Picasso practised both).

Welsh is a master of cold, calculating but beautiful paintings. The character he brings to his work has the integrity of a crowbar. In everyday life it is a blade of grass that comes and goes with the wind and the dew. He is a creature of dissolutions and reconstitutions. But Welsh rotates his own seasons, breaking everything down to their components and handling them with individual care, like a hermit with his beads, and sleeping in a bunk bed in the basement of his dust-laden studio. I think he is a sort of saint, though with some redeeming vices.

Why Everybody Loves Welsh

Enter his atelier and there he is, the jack in his box, in a different mood each day, the laughing boy or the sad old man, take your pick, but always the same stories, thrice-told tales. I underestimate. He never remembers who he told them to because he's really telling them to himself (I've said that before but at least I remember it). The world enters his shop to look after him. It is like a casualty ward and Welsh is all the patients.

His levées are dress occasions for his visitors. Hot or cold from the street depending on the season, they are always overclad for the lukewarm reception of his dusty atelier. He himself always looks half dressed, a patient who threw on some clothes, but underneath you can see the rumpled neck of his nightwear. Their sweaty presences put them at a slight disadvantage. It's a dress occasion for him too, an un-one. Not quite, but sufficient to disquiet. As though you caught him between his bed and ablutions, though he isn't bothered a whit. He sits there in control of the crowd, willing them on, as if to say, 'You bring me gifts and I give you the gift of himself. My ailments will make you feel better'.

I think of Alban's remark about Welsh being a closet cross-dresser. Does he secretly dress up as his real mother, who died when he was an infant? If he did I would understand. He had a not very wicked stepmother, who did what she had to but without love, he says. Welsh's real mother held his hand warmly and he must have felt it grow stiff and cold as she faded into the night.

'I am a homosexual who does not like men. Does that make me a

lesbian?', he once said when his dribble was brandy.

'No. Just let's say you love women.' And so he does in his fashion.  
Loves them as himself.

You can usually tell a chap's a transvestite.  
There is something about him that's not quite right.  
It's not the belladonna or the evening gown.  
But how he always leaves the toilet seat down....

I prefer to think of him amongst the hardened prisoners of war in 'La Grande Illusion' (1941) when Marcel Dalio's trunk of women's clothes transforms them into a chorus line of Jack Lemon coquettes ('Some Like It Hot', 1964). The Corsican trap opens as they contemplate one another, basking in the illusion of femininity, tender for a moment. Then the trap snapshots and war resumes, relentlessly male and boring.

Welsh's cross-dressing can only be seen by old men with diminishing sight. Unless you allow for the actor in him. Given his admiration for the original Lady Macbeth, I can't wait for his 'What bloody man is that!' in a shift.

In Le Pub Welsh told me, 'I've never been convinced that Lady Macbeth, the supreme gamestress, could go mad because of a spot of bother. When things went wrong she would have screwed her courage to the sticking place and married Macduff, or whoever was there at the final flourish. Shakespeare shamefully misrepresented her. The lady was an early feminist and introduced the 'bru' into Scotland'.

'So she invented Irn Bru', I said, thinking of the least soft of soft drinks.

'No, I mean social security'.

'Where did you read that?'

'Prebble. I'll loan it to you.'

'You mean the A J Cronin of Scottish historians?'

But there is no stopping him. 'Shakespeare did the dirty on Richard the Third too. He was a just king much maligned, and less handicapped than Laurence Olivier. The children were murdered by someone else.'

I can't wait for his performance as Margaret, the widow. Or better still her mother Queen Elizabeth ('Should I forget myself to be myself?').

...Including Me

Welsh's 'too sensitive' remark really got under my skin, and when I have worms they grow and grow until I am a wriggling snake pit. He deserves a bed of roses, with the odd thorn, I think. I am prickly, and my sharp edge showed this morning when he said, 'We must really get you reading Patrick O'Brian'. As though it was my reading habits that are deficient. That from a man who reads Dudley Pope because he rewrites O'Brian yarns, dropping the ancillary scholarship and replacing it with imaginative accuracy, particularly when naval history is at stake. I am not sure if this is true. Perhaps I should read Patrick O'Brian after all, and Dudley Pope to check him out.

Welsh bulk-buys any old English paperbacks that brocantes are bazaaring and devours them with his gourmet high teas. But still he

won't read 'The Confederacy of Dunces' (though he was born to love it) and couldn't finish my 'Light Years' (a lesser offence). He sees himself as the betrayed loner reading Dickens in the jungle at the end of 'A Handful of Dust'. But who has let him down? Surely not his real mother, who no doubt died unwillingly. It is the Little Nell in him, I think. Pathos is his citadel.

I love Welsh, though why I don't know. Maybe it is because he is someone I invented and didn't make a very good job of and feel responsible for, like my abandoned fictional pieces. Or maybe it's the other way round. But, I know, whimsy apart, Welsh has an adentelegus (Plautus) quality which has nothing to do with me. He is a man so cool that if his teeth were kicked out, he would pick them up one by one and put them back in his mouth.

### Making Meets End

Of course Welsh is not the carefree hippie of his self imaginings. He has a living to make and, I think, this requires mixing business with his talent. This does not always bring the pleasures or paintings he aspires to. The economic perils of being Welsh are as endless and repetitive as painting the Forth Bridge, round and round you go until you get dizzy and fall off. Sometimes he must feel that he is whipping up a wobbly old top. But when I see him curled up in his cot of an evening, junking down the yellow print, I know he has a life of the imagination that makes real life necessary, if only to prevent him disappearing into his own ether.

We are, I think, friends and that means when I drop in to see him I have no idea what to expect. I take him as he comes. And if my mood is dark, I find it can disappear suddenly because there is something on his mind that is more amusing or puts my chagrins in their place. He does everything on the spot. If I want him to read something I have written, it is best to stand by him until he picks it up, if only to avoid the stamping of feet in my head that can lead to stampedes. But that's not the only reason. Nobody reads like Welsh. He gurgles, guffaws, scoffs, groans and, all going well, concludes, 'That's magic, Augustus, you're cooking with gas'. If he does not like it much, reader's lockjaw is mentioned. Even when he owes me a favour, the bullshit does not apply to the writing or his painting. He knows what is not important is what matters.

Now, with the tourist season starting and his regular buyers no longer commissioning pastels of deceased relatives, pets and fancy cars, his Dufy pastels of sail boats sell well. Welsh's moods rise and fall with the wind of sales, the wind in his sail is the sale in the wind, a sailor through life, depressed when becalmed and the sales slack. Only bad artists do not have to struggle to make ends meet. He does what people want sometimes, but never the way they expect. It's a hard life, but interesting. He always starts out with a black canvas and ends up in the red.