

18 THE LITERARY YEARS

Ever since my teens I have attached a great deal of importance to writing. Leaving aside technical work, I have, however, rarely sought to get anything into print, pleading that my interest has been in writing for its own sake, not in suffering the humiliations of trying to persuade some young lad, or lass, in a publisher's office that his/her employer could make money out of it. My object, then, in writing – at least until recently - has been primarily to sort out my own ideas, which have always tended to be non-mainstream, and to express them in the most elegant fashion I can achieve.

I have to confess, though, that I regard my writings to be as important a validation of my existence as my production of a family or of technical or administrative work, which are all very worth while, but doable by more or less anyone so motivated. To be valid as a validation, nevertheless, I suppose some sort of communication beyond myself is necessary, and I am reduced to consoling myself with the thought that once, somehow, somewhere, they get into an archive writings are as permanent as most human artefacts. If only one person, now or in the future, reads them sympathetically the aim of communication will have been achieved. I have, for example, read my great-grandmother's unpublished poems sympathetically, and as far as I am concerned she is immortal.

My first poem did not come until I was around thirteen. Nothing very great, but there were three verses to it and I recited them proudly to my mother. I remember now only the first. The poem, which was about the recurring seasons, expressed my view at the time that poetry needs to both scan and rhyme, and it was based on my burgeoning interest in the natural world.

Searing wind and racing cloud,
Blinding snow and freezing rain,
Thus the winter's misty shroud
Is drawn across our land again

A bit tumpity tumpity. My interest in the natural world also motivated an early article on the fly agaric mushrooms to be found in our local woods, and this was one of my only two non-geological pieces to be published to date - in the Welwyn Times. I believe it was my mother who submitted it. Some months later I was surprised and gratified to receive a payment of seven shillings and six pence for this effort - the sole remuneration I have ever had from my by now considerable output.

In my early adulthood I was given to writing periodical assessments of life and my objectives, and also I produced the diaries and letters some of which are copied elsewhere in this account. In these years there were a few poems triggered by social happenings – 'Cherie' in 1957 and 'The Gardener' in 1959. I was, though, basically dormant in the literary sense – too much occupied with 'doing'.

It was not until the late 1960's that I really got going with production of poetry, starting with 'The Rulers'. My output rose to a peak in 1975, when I managed eleven completed poems, many with a marine theme, the sea being my great passion at the time. After 1975/76 there was a gradual tailing off, and some years were blanks. In

the Fiji years, 1982-4, there were three inspired by the ocean. One of these, written whilst sailing from New Zealand to Tonga and called 'South Pacific' I regard as one of my pieces de resistance. At the time of writing, year 2001, the most recent poem was 'Sand' written in France this year. In the nineties I was persuaded to submit 'Aurora' from 1976 for an American poetry competition, and this was published in the mid-nineties – my second publication. Christopher set 'Gold Bars' to music and it made a very sweet little song – might have gone far.

My prose writings increased in the late sixties/early seventies, more or less in parallel with the poetry output, but have not tailed off to the same extent. I divide my prose into several categories – essays, travel accounts, short stories, and novels. To date there have been just two novels – 'Cuckoo' written in the late seventies and 'Wildcat' in the nineties.

'Cuckoo' was based on my marine experiences in Scotland. It was largely written wearing headphones producing white music and sitting in front of a television churning out the cowboy films to which Lucette was partial in the late 1970s. I am still quite pleased with the introductory chapter, but after that the developing story line is distinctly non-plausible and would need a lot of skill to carry it off. I do not now believe I have managed to do so. The result is that I have not shown the draft to anyone except one publisher, who quite rightly rejected it. Maybe with major surgery it could be rescued. Just now I am a bit ashamed of it.

'Wildcat' is a different matter altogether. Set in pre-history it is a fairly straightforward story of a young lady pursued by four admirers – it has its endeavours, its magic bits, its ups and downs, its philosophising, a great deal of action, crises, and is as true to the period as is feasible. On re-reading some years after completion I still reckon it is good – thrilling in places. After some small amendment, the novel was accepted by the first agent to whom I submitted it. He has made complimentary noises but at the time of writing this has still not got it published although in his most recent letter he was still actively hopeful. I am fairly determined to get this one in print whatever, even if it has to be by a vanity publisher, but I am some way from that at present.

I wrote quite a lot in Fiji – essays, travel, poems and short stories – I pulled it all together in a typed and bound booklet called 'A Spell in Paradise', and gave copies to some of our friends in Fiji. One of them was Loma, a local artist, who had presented the same group with a folio of her sketches. 'A Spell in Paradise' was my effort to reciprocate. A bit crude, partly due to the inadequacies of my Fijian typist, but a 'publication' of sorts. All the Fiji and pre-Fiji work was written in m.s. and I needed to commission a typist. Since 1984 it has been hugely useful to be able to do my own typing.

And so it rests. And I have not finished yet. Just now I seem to be into essays, largely of a 'theological' bent if that is the right word. They are subject to frequent extensive revision, as is apposite to the subject. Time will tell where the tide of creativity will lead.