LIBERTY HORSES (A NOVEL): NARRATIVE AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS IN POSTMODERN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN TEXTS

By

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A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth in partial fulfilment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

School of Humanities
Faculty of Arts

October 2006

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ABSTRACT

This thesis comprises an original work of fiction, entitled *Liberty Horses*, and a commentary which explores and compares postmodern English and American fiction, locating my own creative writing practice in that field of contemporary writing.

My original work of fiction, *Liberty Horses*, is divided into two parts, being ‘Part One: Liberty Horses’ and ‘Part Two: Dreamland’.

The critical section of this thesis is divided into three chapters.

Chapter One, ‘American Postmodernism’, shows how American writers, such as Richard Brautigan, William Gaddis and Don DeLillo, continually re-interpreted American fiction in regard to its Anglo-American tradition and explored the nature of Consumerism and Corporatism within American society and how such writers refuted the implications and ideals of the American Dream.

Chapter Two, ‘English Postmodernism’, examines the development of postmodern theories within English fiction. In particular it discusses the ideas of History and Myth, as employed by such writers as Ian McEwan, Graham Swift, Peter Ackroyd, Angela Carter and Christine Brooke-Rose. The chapter also discusses the part played by the Booker Prize in the rise in commercial popularity of these writers as well as the acceptance of postmodern writing within a wider readership.

Chapter Three, ‘The Making of Liberty Horses’, explores the ideas which went into the creation of my novel, namely the image of the circus, paranoia and social, political and sexual impotence, as well as the writers, including Patricia Duncker, Richard Brautigan and Don DeLillo and other artists, namely Andy Warhol, David Lynch and Wim Wenders, who directly influenced the work.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the part played by Dr. Daniel Lane in the creation of the character of Norman Fintan in Nottingham many years ago. Similarly, my appreciation goes to Dr. Philip Terry for his encouragement in getting me to this point. I would also like to thank Dr. Anthony Caleshu for his enthusiasm in this project. Thanks are also due to Alan Munton and Professor Roy Johnson for providing valuable information. Finally, special thanks must go to Professor Tony Lopez for his patience, invaluable advice and help as well as his continual support throughout the writing of this work.

To my Mother and Father
This thesis is my own original work, apart from quotations which are fully acknowledged.

The layout of the original novel presented in this thesis uses differing narrative forms, including e-mails, newspaper columns, letters and a screenplay. The relevant forms of layout have been retained in the interests of clarity.

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award.


Signed  

Date
INTRODUCTION

In this PhD project, I am undertaking research and making my contribution to knowledge through the writing of a novel that explores, in a particular and specialised comic narrative form, issues of masculine identity, conflicting and independent views of reality, and the individual quest (for success and happiness, for eternal youth, beauty and truth, but also power).

In support of this creative project, and in order to make explicit issues and themes that are necessarily alluded to, dramatized and allowed for in the novel, rather than explained in the body of the narrative, I am providing a critical companion essay to the fiction as specified in the University of Plymouth regulations for a PhD in creative practice. This critical portion of the submission is ancillary to the creative work in fiction.

Early in the project, during my reading of a wide range of the most innovative fiction in English, I identified some distinct differences between novels published in the United States of America and in England. These differences ranged from the foregrounding of questions concerning the concepts of history and gender identity in English fiction to the problems of the individual in our modern consumer society and self-conscious experimentation with the narrative forms in American
fiction. From this initial reading, my own novel, *Liberty Horses*, through its multi-plot structure involving English and American characters, stages these different ideas in fictional form. In the accompanying commentary I intend to set out a comparison of these differing trends and concerns found throughout English and American postmodernism and to show how the tension that exists between them has been a productive force behind my own writing of *Liberty Horses*.

I should make it clear that in this commentary I am not attempting to provide a general survey of postmodern British and American fiction, nor to provide a critical account of that field, as interesting as that project would be, but rather I am referring my account to a number of novels that have been a productive influence in the development of this project.

There were two main influences that were present at the outset of the writing of *Liberty Horses*, and much of my other work besides. They both occurred in 1987 and both were theatre pieces. The first was a performance of DV8 Physical Theatre’s production of *My Body, Your Body*, and the second was a production of Heiner Müller’s *HAMLETMACHINE*, directed by the American writer, designer and director, Robert Wilson.

The importance for me of DV8 was their exploration within Dance Theatre of sexuality, particularly male sexuality, in both *My Body, Your
Body (1987) and in the later piece, Enter Achilles (1995). In My Body, Your Body, I was particularly affected by the portrayal of male/female relationships and the part power played in such relations. With its use of the female performers coming down into the audience and verbally attacking male audience members, including myself, one was made acutely aware of one’s own vulnerability and inability to hide behind stereotypical male standpoints of power and dominance. These themes were to be developed in DV8’s performance piece, Enter Achilles (1995). Writing about this work, founder member of DV8, Lloyd Newsome wrote,

[Enter Achilles] intends to look beyond issues of sexuality to the fundamental question of what constitutes masculinity... ‘Unmanly’ behaviour is often considered threatening, particularly by those who uphold rigid precepts of how men should behave. Why should non-conformity produce so much abhorrence and fear? Perhaps it reflects the fragility of masculine identity which has traditionally been about control – men controlling, and therefore needing to control others. (Newsome, original text, Online: Internet. dv8.co.uk/stage/enter.achilles/enter.html, 14/10/06)

Clearly it was just this questioning that went into my portrayal of the character of Norman in Liberty Horses and will be discussed in the commentary.

On the other hand, the theatre director Robert Wilson opened up a whole new visual vocabulary, with his use of dislocation and alternating points of view as perceived from the audience’s perspective, that I have constantly sought to transfer to my fiction. In this particular case,
Müller's text for *HAMLETMACHINE*, employs many of the themes (Americana, Brand names and cultural icons) and references that I have explored in different ways in *Liberty Horses*. Indeed, Müller was to write about the piece,

> When I wrote *HAMLETMACHINE*, after translating Shakespeare's Hamlet for a pamphlet against the illusion that one can stay innocent in this our world. (Müller, 1987, V)

Thus the Englishness of Shakespeare's Hamlet put together with American cultural references became an important element in the writing of *Liberty Horses*, illustrated by the different worlds in which the characters of Van Wrentl and Slingsby come to find themselves. As a result of these influences, I was interested to see how English and American postmodern writers dealt with these subjects themselves.

In Chapter One, 'American Postmodernism', therefore, I have chosen to look at the themes of corporatism and mass consumerism and how notions of paranoia arise out of the contemporary socio-political landscape with specific reference to the works of Richard Brautigan, William Gaddis and Don DeLillo.

These writers were chosen because I felt their work best represents the themes stated above and because they were a direct influence on the writing of the narratives of both Slingsby and Van Wrentl in *Liberty Horses*. Apart from these important themes, I have also focused on
matters of layout and presentation which are equally important in the
comic repertoire which this novel extends.

Chapter Two, ‘English Postmodernism’, discusses the manner in which
male English postmodern writers have integrated postmodern concepts of
History and Subjectivity within their reworking of the traditional English
novel. To this extent I have concentrated on the works of B.S. Johnson,
Graham Swift, Peter Ackroyd and Ian McEwan. These writers were
specifically chosen because their writing differently address, place,
history and subjectivity in a way that was influential in my narrative of
Van Wrentl, but also because they have an essential ‘Englishness’ that is
at the core of Norman’s narrative.

I then go on to make the distinction that women English postmodern
writers are more accepting of postmodern techniques and are more
adventurous in their explorations of myth, sexuality and the Self. Patricia
Duncker and Angela Carter were chosen to illustrate this point since the
themes they address in their fiction had a direct effect on my writing of
Norman as a character. Christine Brooke-Rose is also examined in this
chapter since her theories on narrative were at the heart of my approach
to the writing of Liberty Horses.

Chapter Three, The Making of Liberty Horses’ examines how these ideas
and influences were tried out and explored within Liberty Horses,
particular focusing on the themes of individual, social and political power as expressed through the characters of Slingsby and Van Wrentl as well as the secondary characters of Greenbacker and Bob Dawes. It also sets out to show how ideas of male sexuality and the use of comedy, specifically English comedy (with its characteristic use of layered irony), were vital to the creation of Norman's character within *Liberty Horses*.

To this extent, the first two chapters of this commentary do not represent within themselves a definitive study of postmodern English and American writing, but rather draw out and illustrate the differing ways in which my selected writers on both sides of the Atlantic have approached, integrated and advanced for themselves different aspects of those issues that are put into conflict in *Liberty Horses*.

One of the concerns in the writing of *Liberty Horses* was to see what happened when I placed an essentially English character enveloped within an English sense of humour into a predominately American text structure and to see what the outcome would be in terms of the writing process and the subsequent response to this inherent paradox. It is, therefore, the process of writing, and the writing of *Liberty Horses* that is at the centre of this thesis. I have tried to show, in what follows, the writers that have been most provocative and helpful to me in my working out of these ideas in fiction.
LIBERTY HORSES

PART ONE

LIBERTY HORSES

DAVID HUMPHREY
PART ONE

LIBERTY HORSES
The hero of this great history appears with very bad omens

- Christ, it looks like a fountain.
- You would have to say something like that, wouldn’t you, Norman?
- Well, it does.
- I'm sure it's not that bad.
- Not that bad. Is that all you can say, ‘not that bad’. Joan, it's like a Japanese ornamental water garden in here. Or at least some kind of giant fishpond.

What happened, anyway?

- Ben and Alice...
- Damn, we're ruined. This'll cost a packet. Did you say the kids, the kids did this?
- Ben and Alice had nothing to do with it. They were upstairs writing e-mails I think they said.
- E-mails? Who to, for Christ's sake?
- I'm not sure.

- Great. And how much is that going to cost us?
- Nothing. Look, a couple of pipes have leaked, that's all. I think it’s somewhere upstairs. Weren't you doing something up there the other day?
- Oh, that's right, blame me. I might have known.
- I'm not saying...
- Sounds like it to me.
- Anyway, I've called a builder.
- And what about the North Sea fishing fleet. Could be a whole new lease of life for them in here. Renegotiate the quotas, keep the Spanish out of course. Whaling! No, get too many Japs and eco warriors zooming about the place.
- Norman...
- Yes?
- What the hell are you talking about?
- What? Oh, nothing.
- Look at it this way, at least you'll have something to write about in your column.
- I'm not letting everyone know about my disasters.
- Human interest, Norman. It's what everyone wants from their paper. Specially in the morning with their coffee and croissants.
- Coffee and croissants? I'm standing here up to my arms in water and you're talking about coffee and croissants.
- Norman...
- Yes?
- Shut up.
- Ghostbusters!

- Anyone ever told you you’re a real dick, Hodges?

- Slingsby, how much do they pay you to keep your office like a rubbish bin...

- My personal income is none of your concern.

- And the paperless office seems to be none of yours. Amazing since you never seem to write anything.

- I'm an investigative reporter. I investigate.

- Like Hoffman and Redford, you mean?

- Woodward and Bernstein. If you like.

- Right. So which one are you?

- What?

- I see you more as the Hoffman type myself.

- Do you?

- Is that the image you tried to give that kid from the States, that you were just like them?

- If you are talking about Jack I believe he will make a very good journalist. Just as you could be. One day.
- So did you tell him why you had to leave The Times?
- That was on a need to know basis.
- And he didn’t need to know.
- Right.
- So why did you leave The Times?
- Hodges, you are so transparent.
- I’ll get it out of you one day.
- What’s past is past. It’s an old story and as such not one that we need concern ourselves with here. Though I can see why an old story might interest you since you are plainly not interested in new ones.
- And you’re now what is euphemistically called around here a special correspondent. That means you do what you’re told to do. Remember? You’re hands are tied. You don’t have any real power in the general scheme of things. Something of a downward move from the dizzy heights you once occupied.
- It’s lucky that I’ve been told to do this then, isn’t it. And who says I don’t have any real power, anyway?
- Well, just what are you investigating, as you call it. No-one’s ever seen the guy.
- He’s a recluse.
- Like Ava Gardner.
- Greta Garbo.
- I want to be alone...
- I know how she felt.
- I mean, all that may be OK for film stars, but this guy’s a businessman, for
Christ's sake,

- It seemed to suit Howard Hughes.

- Colonel Sanders...

- I'm not sure he was a recluse.

- Oh. Did a lot for chicken though.

- Not if you were a chicken. Now have you come here for anything in particular? I do have work to do.

- Well, there's no need to get on the back foot about it. I just wanted to see what you were up to. Who knows, you may be just stringing us all along and taking the cheques at the end of the month for nothing. I mean, is there even a story here, anyway?

- Do you know that if you took Bob Dawes' personal wealth and stacked it up it would be twice the height a jumbo jet flies at.

- At least I've seen a jumbo jet. Like I say, Bob Dawes may not exist.

- That is what I aim to find out.
DAWES REACHES NEW HEIGHTS

BY EDWARD SLINGSBY
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Despite initially struggling to hold a firm market position, it now looks as though Bob Dawes, head of the information technology giant Universal Information Systems, UIS, will soon become only the second person in the world to be worth over $100 billion.

Only last week Mr. Dawes' personal wealth increased by $1 Billion in five minutes due to a sudden rise on the Dow Jones. It has been calculated that he earns around $4,500,000 per hour.

Dawes, who has not been seen in public for some time, can now enjoy the fact that his personal wealth exceeds the economic output of all but 16 of the world's wealthiest nations. Should his wealth continue to grow in such a fashion, he would have $1,000,000,000,000 by 2006 and be richer than Britain by 2007.

If Dawes was to pile his money up in a single tower it would rise to at least 10,000 ft higher than the height at which spy planes fly, which is around 70,000 ft.

Dawes' company, which specialises in all aspects of Information Technology, is now reckoned to have a 75% share of the world's computer market and he has already expanded his concerns into other areas.

It is known that Dawes wishes to branch out into the field of Biotechnology and it is rumoured that there will be a major deal

However, despite all the wealth and staggering statistics that surround Mr. Dawes, little is known about him personally. He has recently cancelled many public engagements at which he was due to attend and even top level management in his own company are said to be unsure of his whereabouts. It is not known where he lives and although it is known that he operates within the confines of American Jurisdiction, it is entirely uncertain as to whether Dawes actually lives, or indeed spends any time at all, in that country.

Nevertheless, his evident elusiveness has not protected him from the criticisms of others. One such rival recently announced that he would not be surprised if Dawes's next deal would be to become the sole owner of the English Language, charging for the privilege of using it as well as for any upgrades (i.e. the introduction of new words) to it.
I

UNITY & DIVERSITY

- And, I would just like to take the opportunity to say again how delighted we are to have you here, Professor. You will have met one or two people I expect and I'll introduce you to some of the others later. In the meantime, make yourself at home. We have some fun and games laid on for later which you must feel free to join in.

- Sounds just fine, Vice-chancellor. And may I say that it is very kind of you to invite me here today. You have a lovely house and garden.

- You're too kind. You know I was only saying the other day that what is going to be Indian Queen's University's loss is the University of Outer London's gain.

- Glad to hear you think that way.

- Just jog my memory, if you would. Where exactly is Indian Queen's University?

- Thermopolis, Wyoming, Sir.

- Ah, yes, yes, of course. Good, good. Now, settling in all right?

- Well, this ain't Kansas, Toto.

- What?

- I mean, fine, just fine, Sir.

- Good. And that assistant of yours, what's his name?
- Greenbacker, Vice-chancellor.

- That's it. Not working him too hard, I hope.

- Heck no. His role is mainly secretarial. No, I do all the hard work, as I'm sure you will know yourself from your own experience.

- Quite so. Has this Greenbacker chap been with you long?

- No. He was at graduate school out east. We thought it best...

- Indeed. And he knows...

- Nothing. Just my memory.

- Good. That's good. Well, I wish you luck. Now, enough of all this. Ever played croquet before?

- Not as I know.

- Not a problem, I assure you. It's really all very simple and all very English.

- Isn't croquet a French word?

- I wouldn't know, I'm not French. Let me just explain the finer points. So you're not too confused.

- Shoot.

- Each side plays alternately playing two balls from the baulk lines at each end of the court after which once all four balls are on court each team decides which ball to play first when it is their turn by playing one stroke although extra strokes can be earned if the player's ball runs the next hoop or if the player's ball hits another ball making a roquet. Then they can place their own ball in contact with the other ball where it comes to rest and then strike their own ball so that the other ball moves or takes croquet after which the player is entitled to one further continuation stroke although of course in every turn the player may roquet and then take croquet from each of the other
three balls once. Everything clear so far?

- Oh, sure, Vice-chancellor. No problem.

- By the way, what exactly is your area of research at the moment?

- Presidents. I’m hoping to produce a definitive study of twentieth century presidents.

- Excellent. I wish you luck. One must remember, however, each time their ball runs its next hoop they may roquet the other balls once more thus by a combination of taking croquet and running hoops many hoops can be run in one turn which makes a break continuing until a player has made all the strokes to which he is entitled or if the ball is sent off the court by a croquet stroke or if he makes a fault or what you might call a penalty but I might just add here that a turn does not necessarily end if a ball is sent off court by any other than a croquet stroke which being the case after each shot any ball that has been sent off court is placed a yard inside the boundary nearest to where it went off and any ball lying between the boundary and the yard line except the player's own ball is also replaced on the yard line. Always thought Roosevelt was a solid sort of chap.

- Excuse me?

- Roosevelt. Solid. Wouldn’t you agree?

- Ah, yes, F.D.

- Thinking of Teddy, actually.

- Oh, really. Haven’t gotten round to him yet.

- No? I should have thought you would have started with him. Still, I expect you American chaps have your own way of working. Anyway, one must remember that at the end of a turn the striker's ball is brought on to the yard
line if it lies within the yard line or had left the court all of which leads
finally to the point when a ball has scored its last hoop and become a rover as
it is called it can then score the peg point either by the player hitting it to the
peg or by being hit on to the peg by another rover ball which results in both
cases by the ball said to have been pegged out and hence removed from the
court all of which essentially and ignoring some of the more common
misinterpretations of the rules being well put simply how one plays croquet.
Alright?
- Oh, just Jim Dandy, Vice-chancellor.
- Sorry? Oh, yes, of course. Very good, excellent. Well, I see one or two of
our guests are getting ready outside and I certainly didn’t invite you here to
talk shop. So now that is all sorted out why don’t we get on with the show?
From which it may be inferred that the best things are liable to be misunderstood and misinterpreted

- Clouds Hill?
- You've lost me.
- Clouds Hill?
- Are you some kind of Red Indian?
- Clouds Hill. Fintan.
- Oh, right. I see. That's me.
- Arthur Thompson, builder.
- Excellent. Come in.
- So what seems to be the problem?
- Well, come in and see for yourself.
- Water.
- Water.
- Everywhere.
- Can I get you a drink, tea or something?
- Not just now, thanks. Need to crack on.
- Fine.
- So it's all downstairs, is it?
- Floors, walls and some of the ceilings.
- Uh huh. No electricity on at the moment?
- I think the kids are upstairs watching the Teletubbies, or something.
- Might kill them
- What?
- Could kill them.
- Well I know it's a pretty strange programme but I wouldn't go that far.
- No, I mean the wiring might be damaged. Water and electricity don't mix.

Found that out to my cost on a job I did last year. Nearly blew myself to kingdom come. Made a hell of a mess. One wall had to come down completely.
- Really.
- Then with all the collateral damage we got with the fire the whole place had to be condemned. Family had to move out and everything. I'll be needing to get my hands on your drain cock.
- I beg your pardon?
- Not to worry at the moment but at some stage.
- I'm not sure I... Look, this isn't such a big job is it?
- Ah, well now. Lot of mess. Could take weeks. Months even.
- Well, I really don't...
- But not to worry. I'm a professional. You want a professional job, I take it?
- Absolutely. No question.
- There you are then. Know the Hamptons?
- Vaguely.
- Did their house.
- Wasn't there some kind of explosion?

- Gas. Not my fault. Could've happened to anybody. You can't get the equipment these days. Still, should've seen the place afterwards. A palace.

- I'm sure, but...

- So when do you want me?

- Well, can you really guarantee...

- 8.30 Monday suit?

- I...

- Don't worry Mr. Fintan. Soon have you back all shipshape.

- But...
ROBERT DAWES SHOWS WHAT HE CAN DO

- Saw your article, Slingsby. Nice work.
- Some of us still have it.
- But for how much longer?
- Meaning?
- The crash of course. Dawes may have survived one assault on his shares but you have to admit it's going to be hard even for him to ride out this one.
- Did you know that The U.S. Stock Exchange moved into a new building not so long ago?
- How nice for them.
- And do you know which company had sole responsibility for installing all the software, all the terminals and all the data projection systems in that building. In fact the only system that everyone in that Exchange has to use.
- Don't tell me, Dawes's.
- Well, if you're going to play football you might as well be the one who owns the ball.
- And the pitch, and the ground and, who knows, perhaps even the outcome of the game.
- What are you suggesting?

- Not much. Just whenever there may be a slump on the market not all share prices go down. Some may stay the same. A lucky few might even go up.

- How come?

- Some clever people might realise what's happening and decide to invest in concerns that are strong enough to weather the storm.

- Are you saying what I think you're saying?

- I'm only saying that if you put a thing together yourself then you're the one who knows how it works best.

- But that's...

- I'd be careful what you say if I were you. Let's just say shares can go up as well as down.

- Bloody hell...

- Quite. Now if you'll excuse me I have to go catch a ghost.
A $3 Billion rescue package was announced yesterday by the U.S. Federal Reserve in an attempt to prevent further losses being recorded on the New York Stock Exchange.

The crisis, which began at the start of the week, was brought about by Mid-West Financial Fund's rogue trading. President Clinton was reported as saying that it represented "the most serious threat" that American banking has faced since the war.

The crisis arose when Mid-West took a gamble on the direction of long-term interest rates. In the event, their speculation was hopelessly incorrect. Russia then defaulted, plunging Mid-West into financial chaos. At one point it was estimated that Mid-West had an exposure of $700 Billion, 200 times their capital base.

Once the scale of these losses became known the Federal Reserve convened an emergency meeting and the rescue deal was put into action in order to avert a crisis that would have threatened the whole of the American financial system.

However, the morality of the deal has come under fire from several quarters in the States. This is because of the American response to the devastating flooding that hit Nicaragua recently.

With a death toll that went into the thousands and virtually the whole country under water, American aid to the region initially amounted to only $3 million. It wasn't until two weeks after the disaster had occurred that President Clinton pledged a further $50 million in aid.

Criticism of the aid being given was further compounded with mounting speculation about the involvement of American multi-billionaire, Bob Dawes.

Although specific figures are unclear, it is rumoured that Dawes, whose own company was unaffected by the Wall Street crisis, is to donate a sum of money which is rumoured to be up to three times the entire amount given by the EU, estimated at $6 million.

Many observers here are worried by the signals being given out when an individual can offer a greater amount of aid than that initially announced by the President of the United States. Also a great many questions have been posed as to what his intentions may be, if any, in giving this amount of money to a country in a region that has had such a volatile past.
- Theodore Roosevelt?
- That's what the man said. Said he thought he was 'a solid sort of chap'.

Then we played croquet.

- Croquet?
- That's right. All very English, he called it. Like polo without the horses.
- Didn't polo come from India, or Persia - Iran?
- What do you know about polo?
- South Americans play it a lot. Argentineans.
- Well thank Christ I didn't mention them.
- You remember that?
- Greenbacker, I may have forgotten some things but for sure I'm still smarter than the average bear. Teddy Roosevelt, then. Why haven't we done him?
- You're calling the shots.
- Glad to hear it. So, what were we talking about?
- We were looking at Hamilton Fish Jr.'s concurring views on the role of the President in the Final Report of the Committee of the Judiciary, House of Representatives.
- Right. What about it?
- The Impeachment of President Nixon? 1974?
- Greenbacker, I don't like your tone. May I remind you that I am the Visiting Professor in Twentieth Century American History and you are my assistant.

- Of course.

- Now you tell me what was so important about 1974?

- It was the whole Watergate thing.

- Watergate, OK. Now we're getting somewhere.

- Thank god.

- And when was that again?

- The impeachment or Watergate...

- You just told me about the impeachment. No, Watergate. When was that?

- Jesus. 1972.

- Greenbacker, you knew from the start this was going to be a long haul. My condition was explained to you. The automobile smash and subsequent...

- Loss of memory. I am aware of all that...

- Well then try and be a bit damn more civil.

- Point taken and duly noted.

- Now, Nixon. Good cop, bad cop?
Containing much clearer matters; but which flow from the same fountain with those in the preceding

- Joan, where's that Thompson bloke?
- He had to go the builder's yard.
- What the hell for?
- He said he needed a screw.
- He said he needed a what?
- I don't know, something about needing a special kind of screw. I'm not a builder.
- How many kinds of screw are there, for god's sake?
- Not many in your case.
- What?
- Nothing.
- Don't you keep an eye on him?
- No, I do not.
- I don't trust him. I mean why does he have to ride that motorbike? He's a builder, he should have a van.
- He seems to get around on it quite happily.
- Man of his age.
- Oh, for heaven's sake Norman.
- I don’t care. Motorbikes make me nervous. Always have, always will.

How long’s he going to be here, anyway? There’s the insurance to consider.

We need an estimate

- He said it would take time.

- Right and what's he done?

- I'm sure he's a very competent builder.

- I don't know. I don't trust him.

- So you said. Actually, he's very interesting, as it happens.

- Interesting?

- Full of information. Quite chatty.

- Chatty? He's supposed to be working not talking.

- Well, perhaps if you spoke to him you might learn something.

- Me, why would I want to speak to him?

- Because he's working for you.

- Good point. I'll take some time off. That way I can keep an eye on him.

- Norman, you're over reacting.

- No I'm not. I know about these cowboys.

- He's not a cowboy.

- We'll see. He won't mess with me, I can tell you that.
THE LIFE & OPINIONS
OF NORMAN FINTAN

Disaster struck the Fintan household last week. On returning from the office the other day I found we’d had a problem with a water pipe. Fortunately the damage was not too great, but of course my wife Joan immediately flew into a panic. Her main concern seemed to be how much it was all going to cost us. It took me ages to calm her down and find out the complete scenario of the events that led up to what I could see before me.

Naturally the children remained completely oblivious to the whole situation. I sometimes wonder if they have an in-built mechanism that helps them to totally ignore all of life’s little ups and downs that don’t have any direct effect upon them. We could be on the brink of nuclear catastrophe and they wouldn’t bat an eyelid. But should a member of Boyzone get married, or the computer store not have the latest game the moment it is released, the whole lot of them go into a state of mourning that makes the average middle eastern funeral look like just few people being a bit upset.

So, as I said, I managed to instil a modicum of calm in the house and then swung into action.

But the situation did give me a moment to pause and think about people living on their own. The number of individuals in this predicament is rising which caused me to reflect on the difficulties they must face in making the right choices when faced with such dilemmas. It’s not easy for anyone to choose the right person for a job that lays outside one’s own expertise and I wondered if Joan, finding herself on her own, would be able to cope.

I immediately set about finding a builder and did so in short order. Obviously, legal restrictions prevent me naming the man in question, but needless to say he has an excellent track record and a very thorough approach to the work. We straightaway hit it off and I had no doubt that he was the right man for the job.

It goes without saying that the employer/employee relationship is one of the trickiest that one will ever have to encounter. It must above all be based on the notion of trust existing between both parties. This is doubly true when it occurs in one’s own home. It is essential to establish a rapport from the outset, since this will make those moments when problems arise, as assuredly they will, much easier to contend with.

I am happy to say that, bearing this in mind, I get on with my builder like a house on fire.

He also gets on very well with the rest of the family, which must make his job all the more easier. We have already had some amicable conversations between us, although of course there have been those moments when we have had to agree to disagree, as the saying goes.

In my opinion, one should not put up with these grossly incorrect comments one hears about the great British workman. In these days when so much of our national persona is being subsumed by Europe, I believe it is vital that we support such members of the labouring classes.
- Not you again, Hodges.
- Just keeping an eye on you, Slingsby.
- Why does that make me feel nervous?
- You should be.
- And why would that be?
- Dawes is a big fish. You just can't go round insinuating things without some kind of come back.
- Insinuating? I haven't insinuated anything.
- What about what you said in those articles. First you tell us how rich he is, then you tell us that while everyone else is pressing the panic button, he's still riding high.
- Just the facts.
- Yes, but before too long someone's going to start reading between the lines.
- What's the matter with you, Hodges. Not your usual bright and breezy self. It wasn't too long ago you were in here with a merry quip and all the banter. Do I detect a change in tone?
- I just think you might be pushing your luck
- Luck has nothing to do with it. Like I told you, I'm an investigative reporter.
- Well, what's all this stuff about Nicaragua, then?

- He made a donation.

- Yeah, but you think there's more to it than that.

- Now you said that not me.

- But you do, don't you?

- Things have been suggested. Anyway, I thought you said Dawes doesn't exist.

- I'm beginning to hope for your sake he doesn't.

- I'm touched.

- I'll ignore that. So these 'things'. Things have been said about what exactly?

- Not said, suggested. About Mr. Dawes branching out.

- Branching out? Jesus, what does that mean?

- You'll have to read about it in the papers.
DAWES TO TAKE UP 27% SHARE OF SeedTec

By EDWARD SLINGSBY
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Reports suggest that Bob Dawes is to buy a 27% share in SeedTech, the Biotechnology company at the forefront of research and development of genetically modified food.

Questions have been asked as to why Mr. Dawes should want to become involved with SeedTech considering the ethical debate that surrounds GM foods. However it may be such comments as those of Sue Dibb and Tim Lobstein of the Food Commission that genetic modification, “opens up possibilities that traditional methods never could”, which eventually encouraged Mr. Dawes to make his decision.

Indeed the advances in genetic modification have progressed steadily over recent years. Whilst it is impossible in nature for a fish to be crossed with a fruit, laboratory researchers have succeeded in producing a “frost-resistant” tomato by splicing its genetic code with that of a gene from a flounder that protects it from the cold. Similarly, a bay tree gene has been spliced into oilseed rape to improve the quality of its oil.

Although such research has been going on since the Austrian monk, Gregor Mendel, crossbred different varieties of peas and thereafter Crick and Watson cracked genetic coding in 1953, it wasn’t until the early 1990’s that research into GM food produced practical results.

In 1990 approval was given in the UK for the first genetically modified yeast. Subsequently, in 1992, a vegetarian cheese made with a GM ingredient went on sale and in 1996 supermarkets started selling genetically modified tomato puree.

However, it was during the period 1996-1998 that the whole idea of GM food began to take off. Professor Christiana deKoonig from the University of Capetown, who will address the World Economic Forum in Davos points out that during that period the worldwide area planted with GM food rose from 2 to 28 million hectares and that 60 genetically modified crops had been developed, Soya being the principal amongst these.

Despite continuing suggestions that the EU may seek to limit the importation of GM foods, SeedTech is known to be increasing its research, particularly in the development of so called “terminator seeds”. Such seeds used for growing of crops immediately become sterile, forcing the grower to buy new seeds for each new crop grown.

Some analysts are pointing to Mr. Dawes’ generosity in the wake of extensive flooding in Nicaragua as the reason behind his sudden interest in GM foods. Having already made a considerable sum available for the specific purpose of the redevelopment of that country, it has been suggested that SeedTech is hoping to become the sole supplier of GM staple crops to Nicaragua, thus paving the way for a considerable return on Mr. Dawes’ investment.
- Oh, good grief.
- What?
- Have you read this. About what Clinton's been up to? The guy's making a
mockery of the Presidency. He must be some kind of jackass.
- That's not what you called him after you met him that time at the White
House.
- Say that again.
- A couple of years or so ago. You went on record saying you thought he was
a great guy. Best President we've had since...
- Yes, yes, alright.
- Well, I'll tell you this, if he carries on the way he is he'll be out of that place
quicker than a priest in a whore house.
- Interesting thought.
- Philandering no-good good-for-nothing.
- I said enough, Greenbacker. Who were we talking about?
- Kennedy.
- He got shot.
- You know about that?
- Jesus, Greenbacker, are you trying to accuse me of something?
- I only meant...
- You’ll have me behind the grassy knoll next.
- Can we get back on track, here?
- Well I’d say he seemed to have been a ‘solid’ sort of a guy.
- As history would have it.
- I sense some reservations, Greenbacker. What’s the topic?
- The Cuban missile crises.
- I see.
- Not long after the Bay of Pigs fiasco.
- Greenbacker, one thing an historian must learn to be is to be objective.
- And you think it was objective to send a bunch of Cubans who were already in Cuba back to Cuba to invade it.
- Put like that, perhaps not. Do go on.
- Well after the Bay of Pigs fl...well, after that Cuba was still a problem.

Cold War tensions were mounting and then in October of ’62 intelligence reports showed the Russians were building nuclear missile launching sites on Cuba.
- Ah, the Russians.
- Anyhow, pressure was growing for military action against these sites,
- Like in ’75, the whole Mayaguez thing.
- Right. How did...?
- Er, reading. I’ve been reading.
- OK. So you might remember, I mean, might already have read that in this instance Kennedy rejected the military option and issued an ultimatum to the Soviets to withdraw.
- Good call.

- A blockade was set up to stop Russian ships reaching Cuba and Kennedy promised the Russians no further action against the Castro administration provided they got out of Cuba.

- And?

- After two weeks the Russians backed down.

- There you go.

- Except that the Soviets were still pursuing their aims in other areas which would eventually escalate out of control.

- But it does go to prove you don't have to go at it like some gun slinging cowboy like Kissinger did.

- Kissinger?

- That's what I said.

- How much reading have you been doing?

- More than you would know.

- Kissinger did get the job done and gave the Cambodians something to think about.

- But Kennedy showed you can lead from the front and stick to your principles.

- Sometimes your game plan can change if you see a man wide open who can take the ball and run with it.

- I just don't like these sneaky-petes who run around behind your back calling the shots to their own advantage.

- Like I say, if it gets the job done.

- Greenbacker, I worry about you.
I was reminded this week of the words of Dean Acheson. It was he, during a speech at the Westpoint Military Academy in 1962, who remarked that, "Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role". I mention this as a result of an interesting discussion that arose recently in the Fintan household. The topic of the discussion revolved around the relative merits of the now controversial Millennium Dome and those of the great Crystal Palace. It became apparent, through the general good-humoured conversation which our family continues to enjoy with our builder, that he is very enamoured of the Dome. And indeed no-one can argue that the giant marquee built on the site in London which was once known as Execution Dock - for the simple reason that public executions were once carried out there - is an impressive piece of structural engineering. But does it really match up to the great buildings of yesteryear? It seemed to me that as my children listened with rapt concentration to the facts and figures behind the Crystal Palace building of 1851, that it does not.

Prince Albert first suggested the idea in 1849 and the building, designed by James Paxton and built entirely of glass within a cast-iron framework, was completed only two years later. It was financed entirely by public subscription.

The Crystal Palace was built in prefabricated sections, which allowed it to be dismantled and rebuilt in Sydenham, S.E. London in 1854, and brought to the site by railway. The Palace covered about 19 acres and the ground floor alone had 8 miles of display tables, showing over 13,000 exhibits. The Dome, incidentally, has only 17 exhibits. The Great Exhibition lasted for just over 5 months during which time it received over 6 million visitors. Consider this when we have learnt recently that the Dome is having considerable difficulties in reaching its target of 10 million ticket sales for the year and is in severe financial straits. Even the controversial French Chief Executive, Pierre-Yves Gerbeau admitted that the figures were extremely poor.

After the enormous success of the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace, similar exhibitions were held at Cork in 1852, Dublin and New York in 1853 and finally at Munich in the following year. However none of these foreign events were anything like as successful as the British one. Indeed the New York exhibition had to be closed soon after it opened because the roof leaked and it had accrued huge financial losses. Something that many people suggest our own Dome should do in the light of ever increasing handouts it is getting just to stay open. My children were fascinated that so much could be achieved so long ago and could not be persuaded by our builder that the Dome had anything to offer them.

Instead of our politicians trying to create for us half thought out visions of the future for our country perhaps we would all do well to first remember its great past.
IV

_Which all who have no heart will think to contain much ado about nothing_

- Marvellous what they can do these days. I mean, first it was Dolly the sheep and now it’s pigs.
- Really?
- Five of them, in fact. Of course the tricky part is finding a way to break down the enzymes or whatever it is that cover the pig organs.
- Didn’t there used to be a door here, Mr. Thompson?
- You see, the actual cloning part, well the technology for that is improving all the time. But it’s what you want to clone the pigs for that counts.
- What about the door?
- It’s not a new idea, really. I mean when you think about it, it’s like Ponce de Leon looking for the Fountain of Youth.
- Poncey who?
- Ponce de Leon. Spanish explorer. Looked for the Fountain of Youth in Florida.
- Fascinating; what about my door?
- It’s all about transplanting, you see.
- Are we still talking about Ponce de Whatsit or my door?
- Xeno-transplantion, to give it its full name. The idea is to clone the pigs so that the organs can be transplanted into human patients.
- Right. I was really just wondering about this door.

- Mind you, I can't say that having a pig's heart put inside me appeals to me much. But I suppose needs must when the devil drives, wouldn't you say?

- I suppose so.

- Damp.

- What?

- Your door. Well, your wall really.

- Damp?

- 'Fraid so. Got into the wall. Played havoc with your architrave. Probably have to knock it all through.

- The whole wall?

- That just depends on what we're looking at.

- Is that really necessary?

- You could leave it like it is and wait for the brick work to crumble under the plaster, becoming fundamentally unstable with the possibility of it collapsing in the near future, seriously injuring one of your nearest and dearest. Or you could have the job done properly.

- Put like that I don't suppose I have much choice.

- That's the spirit. I know what I'm doing, Mr. Fintan. You can rest assured on that.

- I'm glad to hear it.

- How would you feel if your wife had the heart of a pig?

- I beg your pardon?
SLINGSBY

IV

THE WARNING

- Have you read this, Slingsby?
- I try not to read the papers.
- I wouldn’t let your readers hear you say that.
- Just so long as they keep reading me.
- I doubt, like you, they would have the nerve to read anybody else.
- Well they certainly wouldn’t read your stuff.
- So what do you have for your loyal readers now?
- Dawes.
- I guessed that. So?
- I’ve heard something.
- The first cuckoo?
- Looks like he’s on the prowl again.
- I thought you already knew that. ‘Branching out’ was the term you used, I believe.
- Yes, but I didn’t know in which direction.
- When you say you’ve heard something...
- I have my sources. I can’t tell you.
- Can’t or won’t?
- What’s the difference?
- You could be getting into some very deep water.
- Don't be stupid.
- You can't go printing things on the basis of some rumour.
- This is a newspaper, isn't it?
- That's very cynical, if I may say. But I'm just saying you should be careful.
- You've told me this all before, Hodges.
- And you don't seem to have been listening. I'm warning you, this could all end in tears.
- Have you finished?
- Well, it's your neck on the block. By the way, someone rang for you earlier.
- Who?
- Wouldn't say. Just asked if you worked here.
- And you said what?
- Told him you did.
- Oh, great. Thanks.
- Well, you do, don't you. And besides, if you're not going to tell me anything about what you're up to, how the hell am I supposed to know what to say and what not to.
- You don't.
- There you are then.
- Just be a little more careful next time.
- Yes sir.
- Greenbacker...

- Professor?

- Ever since we got here this damn computer's been screwing me around.

- Screwing you around?

- Christ's sake, isn't that what I just said. Can't you get one of their people to have a look at it?

- Mine's working fine.

- Well that's just Jim Dandy but it doesn't solve any of my problems. I mean I'm powerless without it.

- That I can believe.

- What did you say?

- Nothing. This wouldn't of happened in the old country, you know.

- Greenbacker, this is 'The Old Country'. In fact, it has been known as 'The Old Country' for some time now. Where we come from is known as 'The New World'. Although of course, strictly speaking, most of us originally come from 'The Old Country'. Which, incidentally, these days does not necessarily mean this country.

- What the hell are you talking about?

- Take me, for example. As you may be aware, my surname is Van Wrentl.
That is because my family was originally Dutch. Part of my family left the Netherlands back in the 15th and 16th centuries to escape from religious persecution. The other part, realizing there was more of a future in persecuting than being persecuted, stayed. Hence my father, a math professor at the University of Leiden, was still in Holland in 1938 when he calculated that the chances of his family being back on the side of the persecuted in the next five years was unacceptably high. So he high-tailed it out of what I think of as my ‘Old Country’ with his pregnant wife to ‘The Old Country’ from where they went to ‘The New World’, where five months later I was born.

- Just how come you remember so much stuff one day and the next you know squat about anything?
- Luck. And it is our history.
- Your history.
- Excuse me?
- I just meant it’s...
- For a moment there, Greenbacker, I thought you were threatening me.
- Sure. Just it's not a lot of use to us now, is it? To what we are supposed to be doing here. It's a bit of a waste of valuable time, in fact.
- Greenbacker, I really do wonder about you sometimes. Get someone to fix this goddamn machine and then go write up some notes.
FROM: Greenbacker @ outerlondon.ac.uk

TO: JDT@Columbia.edu

CC:

SUBJECT: Sabbatical

Jack,

Been here a while now. Jesus Christ knows why I agreed to take this whole thing on. I don’t know how you took it over here. London must be a whole lot better than out here in the boon docks. The campus and the resources suck. But what’s eating me most is Van Wrentl. He is supposed to have lost his memory in an auto smash but I can’t work out if he’s just shitting me. Do me a favor, Jack, find out what you can about this guy. Go to Thermopolis on the web & mail me back. His terminal is down & I’m going to keep it that way for a time. Keep this under wraps, ok?

Hear from you.

Lincoln.
NORMAN

V

*Containing little or nothing*

- It really doesn't matter, Norman.
- Matter? Of course it matters.
- It's probably just with everything going on at the moment. The house and everything.
- I don't think it's the best time to talk about this now. The kids...
- They're upstairs. Alice had to send some e-mails.
- Again? I never see them these days. Who the hell do they write to, anyway?
- Why don't you go to the doctor?
- Thank God that Thompson bloke's not here. The other day he was on about some Ponce.
- Some what?
- I don't know. Some explorer who went looking for the Fountain of Youth.
- Could be useful. Did he find it?
- He mustn't know anything about this.
- Norman, he's the builder.
- Well he seems to know everything else. Wouldn't surprise me if he knows all about some miracle cure nobody else in the medical profession has ever heard of.
- There are things you can get, you know.
- Really.
- Yes. I've been reading about it.
- Oh, I see. It's not a problem but you've been reading up all about it on the quiet anyway.
- Don't get yourself over-excited, Norman.
- That's just the point, I can't get myself excited at all, can I?
- I was reading about these new pills. They're supposed to be really effective.
- How comforting.
- This company, 'Growth Labs' they're called, they've done a lot of research.
- 'Growth Labs', is that some kind of sick joke?
- It's a common problem in men of your age.
- How would you know? Actually, that's a very good point, how do you know. How many men do you know have this problem and how the hell do you know they have this problem?
- I told you, I read all about it on the Internet. It was very informative.
- You can get porn on the net, can't you? Maybe I could try that.
- Norman.
- Sorry. Seemed like a good idea to me.
- Anyway, these pills from Growth Labs. They're not available over here yet but you can get them off the net. From this web site.
- Oh, great. What's it called, 'Ifitslimp.com'. Or what about 'Getitup.co.uk'.
- For God's sake, Norman.
- But if I did get these pills, couldn't everyone find out. I mean with it being on the net and everything. Christ, what if the kids found out. They're always
using that machine.

- Don’t be stupid. What’s the likelihood of that?

- So you really think these pills might work.

- Well, like you said, if they don’t you could always download the porn.

- That might not be a bad idea. I could do with a bit of fun.
- HODGES!
- What?
- Did you write this?
- Did I write what?
- This e-mail. Did you send it?
- No. Why would I want to do that?
- Christ knows.
- What's it say, anyway?
- Well, read it.

FROM: HELLER @ NAVICOM.CO.UK  
TO: SLINGSBY @ UNITEDNEWSPAPERS.COM  
CC: YOUR EYES ONLY  
SUBJECT: MEETING

Would like to meet. Contact me at above address.

DON HELLER

- Who's Don Heller?
- Isn't it you?
- Me?
- Yes you.
- Why would that be me? Why would I send you an e-mail under a different name?
- Because the name sounds like some kind of Mafia boss and it's the sort of stupid thing you would do.
- Oh shit, I knew it. You've finally gone and done it.
- Done what?
- Gone and got yourself involved with the Mafia.
- It's more likely to be that bloke who phoned the other day.
- OK. So what's Navicom, then?
- One of Dawes's subsidiaries. Internet service provider
- More likely a front for drug smuggling or gun running. And what's this all about, for 'your eyes only'. Who does this guy think he is, James Bond? You see. This is just what I've been saying. I knew something like this would happen.
- What are you talking about?
- Those articles. I said they'd be trouble. Who are these sources of yours?
- You know I can't tell you that. They have to have absolute anonymity. As though they didn't exist.
- Just like Dawes then.
- Look, something big is happening here.
- You can say that again. You've virtually accused the man of everything under the sun.
- I haven't accused him of anything.

- No? Well it looks that way to me and it certainly seems as though it looks that way to this Heller bloke as well. There'll be hit men and everything. What are you going to do?

- I don't know yet. There's something new brewing with Dawes.

- When isn't there? Seems to me he's holding all the cards at the moment.

- I still have one or two up my sleeve. I need to find out what he's up to now and then maybe I'll get in touch with Heller. Confront him with what I have.

- Confront him with what you have. And what exactly do you have?

- Maybe quite a lot. Perhaps this Heller guy wants to talk.

- And perhaps he wants to shut you up.

- Then I'll just have to go and ask some questions myself.

- And what is that supposed to mean?

- Go to the States. Dawes's headquarters.

- Are you determined to create a whole lot of trouble for yourself?

- Dawes is up to something. I just know I'm right on this one.

- So you would have us believe.

- I'll find out what's going on.

- Well, I think you're in danger of letting the whole thing get out of control. Don't say I didn't warn you.

- You worry too much.

- Someone has to.

- Thanks.
- Hi, is this Media Services?
- Yes.
- This is Professor Van Wrentl in History.
- How can I help you?
- I'm having trouble with my computer.
- What's wrong with it?
- I don't know. That's why I'm calling you guys.
- Well, can you give me some idea?
- Look, I asked my assistant, Greenbacker, to deal with all this.
- Greenbacker?
- That's the one. Young guy. American like me.
- We've had no Americans in here.
- You mean he hasn't come to see you?
- Not that I know of.
- Jesus.
- Perhaps he forgot.
- That's what I do.
- Maybe he'll come in today.
- I asked him the back end of last week.
- Well we have been pretty busy here. Maybe someone else saw him.

- Right. So can you get someone down here?

- As soon as we can, Professor.

- OK.

- I’ll make you a priority.

- Long time since I’ve been prioritized first.

- We aim to please.

- That’s swell. I may finally be able to get some notes written up. Thanks.
In this the reader may pick up some hints concerning the education of children

- You see, Ben, it's all in the wobble.
- Really?
- That's right. The effect of gravity will cause the star to wobble. You see a wobbling star.
- Did you just say something about 'a wandering star'?
- No, he said, 'wobble'.
- Wobble? What's wobbling?
- Arthur and I were just talking about the possibility of other planets existing, Dad.
- Arthur?
- That's me.
- I know that's you, for Christ's sake.
- So you see, once the researchers had discovered a star that wobbled it was generally believed that there was a planet orbiting it.
- Hold on a minute here. Ben, why are you bothering Mr. Thompson. Can't you see he's got work to do?
- Oh, he's not bothering me.
- Who the hell asked you? And Jesus Christ, what's happened to my wall
here?

- I did say something would have to be done with it.

- That was that wall. I'm talking about this wall.

- Ah, well, it's your lathing. All have to be redone, I'm afraid. And then there's your bitumenized felt. It's not enough just to solve a problem, you have to contain the problem as well.

- And that involves knocking down another wall, does it?

- Absolutely.

- So did they find any?

- Well that was the problem. Although the theory said there should have been a planet next to a wobbling star, they couldn't find any.

- So what did they do next?

- Well someone came up with the idea that if there was a planet orbiting a neighbouring star, the light of the star would be slightly reduced when the planet crossed in front of it. And that difference could be measured, giving the size of the planet.

- Right, that's it. Are either of you two listening to me?

- Problem there, Mr. Fintan?

- Damn right there is. I want to know what's going on around here.

- As Ben said, I was explaining how astronomers started looking for other planets.

- It's very interesting, Dad.

- Why do I feel like I'm on a different planet at the moment?

- A very interesting philosophical question, if I might say so, Mr. Fintan. Or may I call you Norman?
- No you may not. Ben, upstairs now. Haven't you got homework or something to do?
- But...
- No buts. Do it. And you, I'll talk to you later.
- We'll take this up again later, Ben.
- No you bloody well won't.
- Very intelligent kid you've got there, Norman.
- Don't call me Norman.
FROM: HELLER @ NAVICOM.CO.UK
TO: SLINGSBY @ UNITEDNEWSPAPERS.COM
CC: YOUR EYES ONLY
SUBJECT: URGENT MEETING

Contact me immediately.
Vital we talk.

DON HELLER

- This guy sounds serious. Definitely shaken and more than a little stirred, I’d say.

- Very funny. That's one of quite a few, recently. I had one from Jack in the States asking about some guy called Van Wrentl but I don’t think it has anything to do with this.

- Well you might as well drag everyone in on all this while you’re at it. Don't you think it might be a good idea to get in contact and see what he has to say?

- Take orders from this guy, you mean.
- I mean, find out what he has to say.
- I want to get this article out first. Then I might see what he has to say.
- Do you think that's a good idea?
- Oh, come on.
- It just might be that Heller has some information that could help you.
- And it just might be that he has information to stop me going into print.
Isn't that what you're really saying?
- What's in this new piece, anyway.
- Have a look for yourself.
- OK, I will...

DAWES TO MOVE INTO PHARMACEUTICALS

Bob Dawes' business empire seems set to continue to grow with his name being linked to the American based pharmaceutical company, GROWTH LABS Inc., which specialises in the research and production of contraceptives and fertility drugs. Dawes seems likely to make a take-over bid for the company which has gained a major share of the market and is soon expected to rival Pfizer with the launch in the United States of its own impotency treatment. A development which could bring in over £300 million to the company in the short term alone.
If Dawes does make such a bid it will be the second major financial investment he has made recently, having already taken up a 27% holding in SeedTech, a GM food manufacturing company.
Although Dawes has managed to avoid official scrutiny up until now, if this deal is confirmed, which seems likely, any further bids of this nature will undoubtedly bring about the scrutiny of U.S. government financial watchdogs. Should this be the case, Dawes has already hinted that he would be prepared to fight such blocking manoeuvres in the courts.

- Growth Labs.
- Well?
- It needs rewriting.
- Funny. Now tell me what you really think.
- You think the SeedTech thing is related to Nicaragua, don't you?
- Could be.

- And now you think that this new thing with, what are they called?
- Right. This deal with Growth Labs could all be a part of Dawes’ master plan too.
- It might.

- You're not seriously suggesting what I think you're suggesting?
- And what might that be?
- Population control. Nicaragua is a Catholic country, for Christ's sake. It makes no sense.

- That's what I thought for a while. But I got some facts and figures off the CIA website.

- Wait a minute, you're telling me the CIA has a website on Nicaragua.
- And all points north, west, east and south.

- So you're saying that you're an investigative reporter and now I find out that all you have to do is look things up on the internet.

- There's a bit more to it than that.
- I should hope so.

- Do you want to hear this or not?
- Go ahead.

- Well, it's like this. Nicaragua has a population of only just over 4 million. Nearly 4 thousand were killed in the floods after Hurricane Mitch struck.
- That's not many.

- You're all heart, Hodges. Look, they have a birth rate of 28 per 1,000 of the population but the infant mortality rate is 35 in every 1,000 live births.
The population is only growing at just over 2%. 50% is below the poverty line, which isn’t helped by the fact that over half of the land is given over to agriculture of some description, most of which was just wiped out by the floods. They have some serious restructuring to do.

- Yeah but Dawes isn’t single-handedly going to sort all that out, is he now?
- I didn’t say he was. But it just so happens that some of Nicaragua’s main crops are corn, sesame and soya beans.

- Which is what they’ve been doing GM tests on.

- Right. The pills, the GM stuff, this isn’t about playing God. It’s about recognising a hell of a big market opportunity when you see one.

- It still sounds all a bit Aldous Huxley to me. You’re entering the Twilight Zone. Do-do-do-do, Do-do-do-do.

- That’s the sort of response I’ve come to expect from you. And anyway Aldous Huxley was a novelist, not a writer of American TV shows, by the way.

- Well really. You’ll be telling me Dawes is into flying saucers next.

- I did hear a rumour that he was financing some secret U.S. airforce research into UFO technology. But it was just a rumour.

- What?

- You know the sort of thing, back-engineering the propulsion systems of UFOs. Area 51 and all that.

- Area 51?

- Nellis Air Force Range in central Nevada. There’s a compound there, way out in the dessert at Groom Lake. One of those places the government loves to claim doesn’t exist but everyone knows it does.
- And what's Dawes' involvement?
- Well, the story is there is a secret laboratory under Papoose Mountain at Nellis. It's a widely held belief that the Americans have at least one alien spaceship down there. Some say there are as many as nine.
- Oh, please.
- It was a good enough rumour for the Russians. They've been spying on it by satellite for the last twenty years.
- Is that so? I suppose they were hoping to get some pictures of little green men.
- Nellis also happens to be the place where the Stealth bomber was built and tested.
- You're not saying that the Stealth bomber uses alien technology?
- They were working on it for a long time before anyone in the outside world got to hear about it. It represented a rather large leap forward in terms of technology at the time.
- So what has all this got to do with Dawes. What does he get out of it?
- The one thing he really needs. Information.
- Go on.
- You see, it's not about 'little green men', as you put it. It's about information. Controlling the flow of information. If you can do that you can become a very powerful man.
- So why would the American government let him in on it?
- Because they needed him. They needed someone who could create a system that would be able to download the information from the alien craft and then interpret it.
- And Dawes was their man.

- And Dawes was their man, as you say.

- This is all very interesting, but do you have any proof.

- There you go again. Take a look at these.

- What are they?

- Airline records. Dawes took eight separate flights to Las Vegas alone last year.

- Maybe he likes to gamble.

- Maybe he does, in a way. Vegas is the starting point for your magical mystery tour to Nellis.

- I'm sure this is all very exciting stuff, alien spaceships, secret bases, but is any of it really true. I mean, can you prove it?

- I don't know. But there are an awful lot of people out there who seem to think it is true.

- The weight of numbers isn't enough to make something true. You should know that. Besides, most of them are probably crackpots.

- I know. And I'm not so sure on this one myself.

- Really? You surprise me. You sounded pretty convinced.

- Sounding convinced and being convinced in a story like this are two different things.

- I'm glad to hear you say that. Look, I really think you should speak to Heller before you go to print with any of this.

- And run the risk of him trying to stop it?

- He may not want to.

- True. And I am going to arrange to meet him.
- Thank God for that.

- On the day this goes out.
- Mayaguez.
- What?
- Remember – Mayaguez? We mentioned it the other day. One of our ships involved in an incident during the Ford administration.
- You better run that by me again. Just to be on the safe side.
- Safe side for who?
- Not yours, if you carry on like that. Go ahead. Shoot.
- On May 12 1975 the container ship SS Mayaguez was sailing from Saigon to Sattahip. As it passed Poulo Wai at 2:20pm local time, a Cambodian patrol boat fired shots over its bow and then boarded the Mayaguez. Four hours later the President was informed of the incident and he convened the NSC. Ford publicly demanded the release of the ship and the Chinese were ordered to give a 24-hour ultimatum to the Cambodians.
However, and this is important, Secretary of State Kissinger...
- Kissinger again. Your hero.
- Kissinger urged that much more was at stake than just the capture of the Mayaguez and thus pushed for the use of force. So on the 13th, when the crew were taken to Koh Tang, the Marines were readied for an attack. The following day the crew was spotted being taken to Kompong Som by boat.
and the order was given for air strikes against the boat, but these failed to prevent it reaching the port.

It was only now that the government tried to settle the dispute by diplomatic means thru the U.N. But Kissinger was still urging the use of force. As a result the White House and the Joint Chiefs ordered a bombing raid on the area around Poulo Wai, Koh Tang and Kompong Som.

- Hold your horses, can't you?

- Right. This order was later rescinded, but the Marines were still ordered to attack Koh Tang. Now, here's the important part. Despite the War Powers Act of '73, which says that Ford should have consulted Congress before committing troops to military action, Congress wasn't actually informed until after the order had been given.

- Know how they feel

- Excuse me?

- Nothing. Go on.

- As it turned out Phnom Penh Radio was now broadcasting the promised release of the ship, but this wasn't enough to prevent bombing raids on Kompong Som. Then, during the morning of 15th, the Mayaguez crew were spotted being taken back to the ship and they were picked up by the Navy. The White House was informed but another bombing raid was ordered. Only then was the incident said to be over.

- Nice history lesson, Greenbacker.

- Thank you, sir. So, you see the point?

- I'd rather be playing croquet.

- It's like this. The Mayaguez incident became important because the White
House ignored the '73 Act.

- Yeah, but only because that Kissinger guy was pushing for a fight.
- But the President's in control.
- He went to the UN didn't he?
- Two days after the ship was taken.
- But by then, as you have it, Kissinger was already sneaking around behind the scenes.
- Sneaking's a bit strong.
- I don't think so. President's got to be seen to be doing all he can. He can't help it if some low-down good-for-nothing's creeping around at his shoulder trying to steal his limelight. Right, Greenbacker?
- Now I'm not sure if I see your point.
- Do you play poker, Greenbacker?
- No, sir.
- That could mean one of two things.
- How so?
- Either you really don't play poker, or you do and you're not telling me in case we have a game.
- Is this a game?
- Depends who's making the rules, doesn't it, Greenbacker.
GREENBACKER

II

FROM: JDT@Columbia.edu
TO: Greenbacker @ outerlondon.ac.uk
CC: 
SUBJECT: Reply

Lincoln,

Been asking a few questions about your guy. Called Indian Queens – all they would say was he had gone overseas for health reasons. Couldn’t get anything else out of them. History faculty here has heard of him. Seems well thought of.

Called up past copies of Thermopolis Herald & found article below dated a month or two before you went out there. What’s the story with this guy, anyway? Plan to reach out to a contact in the UK for further intel. Will contact you soon.

*Thermopolis Herald* – 2/15. Thermopolis Highway Patrol was called last night to an auto smash on Chichester and Main. The automobile, driven by Professor R. Van Wrentl, left the road and hit a tree.

The Highway Patrol blamed a combination of bad visibility and ice for the smash.

Professor Van Wrentl suffered head wounds and was taken to Owl Creek Hospital. No one else was hurt in the accident.
NORMAN

VII

_Consisting partly of facts, and partly of observations upon them_

- The Dome, now there's a building. Made a bit of a study of it, you know?
Well, of course it's in my line of work, so it's bound to be of interest.
- I wish we could go and see it. They've put it on the map at the beginning of
Eastenders now.
- Quite right too, it deserves to be there. It's a national treasure, after all.
Did you two know that in the middle it's as high as Nelson's Column? 50
metres, to be exact.
- Wow!
- But that's nothing. The roof's made out of something called PTFE-coated
- Amazing.
- And you could get two Wembley stadiums inside it. Bet you didn't know
that.
- So why do they want to knock Wembley down? They could put it in the
Dome instead and still have room for lots of other stuff.
- Not a bad idea, Ben. Yes, the guy who built that certainly knew what he
was doing.
- Which is more than we can say for you, Thompson.
- Dad, Arthur's been telling us how great the Dome is.
- Largest building of its type in the world. If they turned it upside down and put it under Niagara Falls it would take over ten minutes to fill it up with water.
- Seems like a bloody good idea, if you ask me.
- But Dad, it sounds amazing. Can we go and see it?
- No.
- But it's got educational stuff and everything in it.
- Cheap thrills, Alice. No, in my opinion you want Crystal Palace.
- Ha!
- The football club? They're pants.
- No, Ben, I meant the building.
- Never heard of it. Where is it?
- Well, it burned down before the war.
- Not surprising.
- Haven't you got work to do, Thompson? Anyway, as I was saying, it was built for the Great Exhibition back in 1851 and made entirely out of glass and iron. Very modern for its day. 700,000 square feet of glass covering nearly a million square feet.
- What's that in metres?
- I have no idea. Feet and inches have worked perfectly well for all these years and I don't see why we should go changing them now. Can't be doing with all this metres stuff.
- I don't think that's a very helpful thing to tell your kids.
- Who the hell asked you, Thompson?
- Well, I'm just saying we're part of Europe now.
- My point exactly. Crystal Palace was built back in the days when England was England. We had an empire, power and were proud of it.

- Lot of people go to the Dome.

- No they don't.

- Have you ever been?

- What's it to you?

- I just think you can't really make a judgement on something you've never seen.

- Ha!

- Arthur's got a point, Dad.

- No he hasn't. I've got a mind of my own, haven't I?

- We should go and see it.

- Have you seen it, Thompson?

- As it happens, yes.

- Well there you are then. You've obviously got too much time on your hands. You certainly aren't doing anything here.

- Please Dad, can we go?

- Yeah, go on, Dad. Let's go.

- Look, no-one wanted the thing in the first place. The whole shooting match is run by some Frog who used to work for Disney in Paris. Where's the Britishness in that? There's no pride in this country anymore.

- You have to appeal to everyone, these days.

- Thompson, why don't you just push off and go and fix my house up instead of standing there pontificating about all and sundry.
- You all set then?

- Ready as I'll ever be, I suppose.

- Has this Heller guy come all the way over from the States, then?

- No. Navicom has a base here. Reading or Swindon, somewhere.

- You don't know.

- I forget right now. I do have other things on my mind, you know.

- So how does he have anything on Dawes? I mean, if he's based over here.

That's if he has anything on Dawes.

- Well, that is what I hope to find out, isn't it?

- What time are you meeting him?

- 1 o'clock.

- Where?

- The Natural History Museum

- The Natural History Museum? Jesus, you could have at least said a

restaurant uptown or somewhere. Get a free lunch on expenses.

- This is slightly more important than getting a free lunch.

- And how are you going to recognise him. Will he be wearing a red

carnation and carrying a copy of the Times?

- I'll know. He's given me instructions.
- Instructions? This whole thing is beginning to sound all a bit John Le Carre to me. Burgess and McLean. Kim Philby.

- Hodges...

- Yes.

- Shut up.

- Are you wearing a wire?

- You've been watching far too much television.

- I'm serious. You of all people should know you should have a record of what he says.

- I have a tape recorder in my pocket.

- Good. And when you get back, for god's sake make a copy.

- I have done this before, you know.

- I know. I just don't like this.

- I'll be fine.

- Do you want me to come with you?

- Don't be stupid.

- Just asking.

- Yeah. Look, I better go.

- Right. Well, good luck. I hope you find out whatever it is you want to.

- I hope I find out what I should do.

- Good point. Anyway, like I said, good luck.

- Thanks.
- Professor, good of you to come.

- Always a pleasure to visit with you in your beautiful home, Vice-chancellor.

- Sorry I haven't been able to see you before this.

- I understand.

- How long has it been now?

- I forget.

- Played croquet in the summer, if memory serves me.

- I believe we did.

- You don't play bridge, I suppose?

- More of a poker kind of guy, Vice-chancellor. I've gotten quite good at playing my cards close to my chest.

- Never did get the gist of that game, I'm afraid. Although it's terminology does have a certain romanticism about it. The Wild West and all that.

- I'm not so sure the Wild West was romantic. Do you have any cards?

- Certainly.

- Why don't I show you a few hands?

- That might be fun. I could return the favour by showing you a few hands of Bridge.
- So long as you do me the favor of assuring me that it’s simpler than croquet. We could have ourselves a regular card school here.

- Yes, perhaps we ought to keep that under our hats. Here you are.

- Thanks. Ok, so there are a number of different kinds of poker. Omaha Hi, Texas Hold’em, 5 and 7 Card Stud. But I guess we should start off with basic Draw Poker.

- I shall be led by you.

- A hand in poker is made up of the best grouping of five cards. A Royal Flush – Ace, King, Queen, Jack, 10 of the same suit – beats all. Then comes a Straight Flush – any five cards in order of the same suit. Four-of-a-Kind – speaks for itself, Full House – Three-of-a-kind plus a Pair, Flush – any five cards of the same suit, Straight – any five cards in order, Three-of-a Kind – again obvious, Two Pair, Pair, No Pair and no wild cards.

- How’s that assistant of yours. What was his name?

- Greenbacker? He’s a tough one to call.

- I should have thought this would have been an excellent opportunity for him.

- You would have thought. But he seems so confrontational. Now, to start the game each player pays the ante and then the dealer deals out five cards face down consecutively to each player. You Follow?

- Oh, indeed.

- Of course, as the game goes on, the players can always up the ante.

- This Greenbacker chap is not getting in the way of your work, I hope.

- Sometimes I think he might have his own agenda.

- Ah, the arrogance of youth.
- But he’s nothing I can’t handle. So, once each player has their five cards they can bet on the strength of their hand, pass on the bet or fold. To stay in the round after this the players must either raise the bet or Call by matching outstanding bets. After this the players can discard any or all of their cards in the hope of replacing them to build a better hand.
- One of the few things in life, it would seem, where you are not stuck with what you are given.
- Which is more than I can say for the computer in my office.
- Problems?
- Damn thing won’t work. Greenbacker’s works fine, of course.
- I understand there have been a few problems ever since we changed last year to UIS. But I thought that had all been ironed out.
- I asked Greenbacker to check it out. Even made a few calls myself.
- Well, we are only a medium sized University. Resources are stretched.
- I quite understand, Vice-chancellor. Where was I?
- Replacements, I believe. Of cards that is.
- Right. Once the players have their new cards the betting starts as before. Of course, by now you probably will be bluffing on the strength of your hand to make everyone else think its better, or maybe worse, than it actually is. The Dealer gets the final Raise and everyone else must either Call or Fold. Those left in the round show their hands and the best hand wins the pot. That’s all there is to it...
- Intriguing. Playing poker could be a useful way to learn a bit more about one’s colleagues.
- Just don’t let Greenbacker sit in on a game.
- You think he might become a problem?

- Don’t worry about him, Vice-chancellor. He may have age on his side, but I have the experience.

- I’m very glad to hear it.
A friendly conversation in the kitchen, which had a very common, though not very friendly, conclusion

- You hear that?
- What?
- Exactly. I feel like I'm standing next to the U.S. air force.
- Arthur brought them. And there's no need to shout.
- Why does everyone have to call him Arthur. Has he suddenly become a member of this family?
- He's just doing his job.
- Taking a bloody liberty, if you ask me. An Englishman's home is his castle. What the hell are those things in the hall anyway, and why do we have to have them on now?
- One of them is a M90L de-humidifier, there's a MK de-humidifier and a turbo dryer.
- You sure it's not the engine from a stealth bomber.
- Oh, really Norman.
- What's he doing around here?
- Working.
- More like wrecking the place.
- Now you're just being stupid.
- OK. So why did the floorboards in the hall have to come up?

- Because they were damp. That's why we have to have these de-humidifiers on.

- How long for?

- He didn't say.

- So when's he going to put down the new ones?

- He didn't say.

- He never does. The man's running loose in my house.

- Our house. Look at the bigger picture for once, can't you?

- Joan, there is no 'bigger picture'. This is all happening right here, in our house.

- I meant, think how much better it will be when it's all fixed up.

- Right, and when is that going to be?

- You'll have to ask Arthur that.

- Arthur again. Is he king around here, or something. Is his word final?

- When it comes to building I suppose it is. Unless you know more about it than you're letting on.

- Where are Ben and Alice, anyway?

- Changing the subject?

- I'd just like to know what's going on in this house.

- They're upstairs on the computer.

- Doing what?

- I don't know. Playing games, writing e-mails.

- E-mails again. Might have known. So, let me see if I've got this right.

We've got a rogue builder in the house and two kids doing god knows what.
- It's Sunday, remember? The 'rogue builder' isn't here.

- I feel better already.

- Norman, calm down or go somewhere else. Go into the garden or something.

- You mean, while we still have one.

- Norman, just go. Get out of here.
A CASE OF IDENTITY

- Slingsby.
- Hodges.
- What you doing?
- E-mailing Jack in the States. Some information he wanted.
- God, I hope you're not getting into something else now.
- Don't ask and you won't know.
- Don't worry, I won't. So, what happened?
- With what?
- This guy you were supposed to meet. Remember?
- Bloody liberty. Bastard didn't show. I stood in that stupid museum for hours. Kids staring at me all the time. I thought security was going to chuck me out. I had to go round some bloody dinosaur collection three times.
- Maybe you missed him.
- I mean, what's the point. Heller contacts me, demands we should meet, I acquiesce and he doesn't even bother to turn up.
- Maybe he was busy.
- Busy. I'm busy.
- Well have you e-mailed him again?
- Why should I? All this was started by him.

- Not quite.

- And what does that mean?

- You started writing the articles about Dawes.

- Who I have yet to prove exists or not.

- I would say on the face of it I suppose he does.

- You've changed your tune.

- Because of you.

- Oh, so it's all my fault.

- Well the articles you wrote made him sound real enough. All those decisions he's made, you made it sound as though they were made by someone and that someone was Bob Dawes alone.

- So now I've created him.

- I can't answer that. Anyway, it still remains to be asked what are you going to do now?

- That I do know.

- I don't like the sound of that.

- There's only one thing I can do.

- Which is?

- Go to Florida.

- Is this the right time to be taking a holiday.

- It's where Dawes has the headquarters of UIS.

- You couldn't just go to Reading or Swindon, or wherever their offices are over here?

- That's a dead-end.
- And Florida is so much nicer. And you're just going to walk right on in there and ask to see him.

- Why not. Why shouldn't I?

- Look, I don't like this guy, whoever or whatever he is.

- Like I've been saying all along. If Dawes does exist he has money, lots of it. He owns a company that deals with IT. That means he can effectively control the use and distribution of information throughout the world. He now is in with a company that makes staple foods and can control their supply. I mean, companies are already making seeds that don't regenerate themselves so you have to buy more seeds from them the following year. So why assume he's got a more philanthropic purpose in mind. And now he's dealing in sex.

- You never mentioned that part. I could get to like this guy.

- That's not funny. All in all, he's become a very potent force.

- Powerful. You mean powerful.

- Do I? Anyway, he's too much of a loose canon. Nobody seems to want to stand up to him.

- Perhaps with good reason. But you said that's if he does exist. What if he doesn't.

- That worries me even more, the more I think about it.

- Why?

- Think about it. What if he's just a diversion? To get people thinking about him when it's what's going on behind him that really counts.

- I think it's getting dark again.

- What the hell are you talking about now?
- The Twilight Zone.

- You think I'm joking? Ever heard of something called the Simulation Argument?

- Here we go again. Well, go on. What have you come up with now?

- I haven't come up with anything. That's down to an American professor from Yale.

- Why is it when someone tells me that an American professor has come up with some new theory, which is I suppose what you are going to tell me, I just know I'm going to want to laugh out loud.

- You just might change your mind this time.

- Go on then, try me.

- Ok. So you know that the main topic of conversation has been about whether Dawes exists or not.

- Yes.

- Well, in a way the Simulation Argument relates to that.

- How?

- It's all a bit complicated really and I'm not too sure I've grasped it all myself.

- Now you tell me.

- As far as I see it the theory goes like this. At some point humanity reaches such a level of technological development that humans are able to construct a computer that has a consciousness.

- Thinks for itself, you mean.

- Basically, yes.

- Right, that's it. I'm off.
- No wait.

- No, you with this sci-fi stuff have gone too far this time.

- It's not sci-fi. Look, it's been worked out that for a computer to have such capabilities it would have to be able to do \(-10^{14}\) operations per second.

- Of course. Everyone knows that.

- Well, it just so happens that at the moment our present computers can just about get up to about \(-10^{12}\) operations per second.

- So?

- So supposing a human society had been able to achieve the power required to mimic the human brain. What then?

- I have no idea. You tell me.

- Right, if they had, those humans, or posthumans as the theory calls them, they would then be able to run simulations of human activity. Construct simulated human worlds and experience in those worlds.

- Hang on here just a minute. You're not trying to tell me that we are all in some kind of computer simulation.

- That's the logical conclusion of the Simulation Argument.

- And this simulation has all been created by Dawes.

- No; though it's an interesting thought.

- It's a bloody terrifying thought, if you don't mind me saying so. That would mean everything has already been, well pre-programmed. Everything would be out of our control. There'd be no freedom of choice, no free will, nothing.

- That's the whole crux of the argument. But don't worry. Just knowing about Dawes would mean that he would have to be inside the program as
well. And that, according to the theory, wouldn’t be of any use to the
programmer of the simulation. They have to be outside of it.

- That’s a relief – I think. But hell, I’m really confused. What does all this
mean?

- Well, let’s just assume for now that we are not in one of these ‘ancestor-
simulations’ being run by a posthuman society.

- I’ll go with that.

- But what if Dawes had managed to create a computer that could do \(~10^{14}\) operations per second?

- That would mean he could run one of these simulations.

- Right.

- But you said we wouldn’t be in it.

- That’s true.

- So what’s the problem.

- The problem is we know we wouldn’t be in it and the theorists who
developed the theory would know they weren’t in it, but what about the
ordinary man in the street? How could you convince him he wasn’t in it?

- And if no-one can find Dawes to ask him...I think I get the picture now.

- Exactly. Imagine what would happen to the Stock markets, for one thing.
Not to mention someone out there would undoubtedly want to have a go at
eliminating Dawes, existing or not. And the obvious target there would be
the States. Not to put too fine a point on it, the whole socio-political and
economic foundations that the whole world operates on would more than
likely go to pot.

- And only Dawes could put it right.
- Precisely. And he wouldn’t actually have had to do anything. He doesn’t even need to run a simulation. All that would be needed was a rumour that he could and that would be enough to throw everyone into not knowing if all this was a simulation or not.

- And you think this is what he has really been up to all this time?

- I haven’t said anything definite.

- I think that is where I came in. So we don’t know if we are in fact in a simulation or not and we don’t know if Dawes has created a computer that has the capability of producing these simulations or not, and we don’t know if Dawes exists or not.

- That’s about it. I really don’t know.

- So how do you find out.

- Like I said, go to Florida.

- And if Dawes is there he’ll just say come right on in and if he isn’t then the CIA or whoever will give you access to everything they have.

- You don’t know until you try.

- I think I’ll stay at home, thanks.

- You weren’t invited.

- Thank God for that. Send me a postcard from Disney World. I know that’s where you’re really going.

- That may be truer than you think.
- Zip-er-dee-do-da!
- What now?
- Hillary Clinton's going to run for the Senate. New York.
- So?
- Well I would hardly have thought that would have pleased your liberal sensibilities, Greenbacker.
- What are you trying to say.
- Just how did you vote in the last election?
- It's a secret ballot.
- Do you realize this could be the first step towards her running for the presidency?
- So what? We're supposed to be a great democracy and yet we haven't had a women president.
- Thank God.
- Now who's being the liberal? I'm only saying plenty of other places have had a woman as Head of State: Israel, India, even right here in England with Margaret Thatcher.
- I think the jury is still out on whether she was a woman or not. Or even human, come to that.
- Reagan liked her.
- My point exactly.
- So you're saying Reagan was no good as a President?
- He was the one who was an actor, right?
- You remember?
- Well that and something about a monkey.
- I think you're thinking of Michael Jackson.
- No, you jerk. I seem to remember Reagan was in a film with a monkey.
- So what if he was.
- 'Bedtime for Bonzo', think it was called.
- And what about the other things he did. Star Wars, for example?
- Was he in that as well?
- No, I'm talking about SDI. The Strategic Defense Initiative.
- What in tarnation is that?
- SDI was a defense system where surveillance satellites could detect the heat from enemy missiles which would then allow x-ray and particle-beam weapons to attack the missiles from space.
- To infinity and beyond! Sounds more like he was wishing on a star. You said, 'enemy missiles'.
- Yeah, you know, the Russians.
- But they're not the enemy anymore.
- So they say.
- This SDI thing was a success.
- Well it could have been.
- So what happened?
- The Russians wanted to get the U.S. to reduce its weapons base, especially in Europe. But Reagan, during a summit in Iceland managed to keep SDI out of any negotiated reduction in our defenses.

- Our weapons, you mean.

- Our defense system.

- Of course. So what happened?

- Congress got twitchy. Said it was costing too much.

- How much?

- Well, people exaggerate. Some say it cost around $150 billion.

- That's a lot of bucks.

- It was our defense system.

- Against the enemy, you said.

- Oh, so you would just have us roll over and play possum.

- I didn't say that.

- It sure sounded like that.

- Maybe this isn't the best time to discuss all of this.

- Right, just walk away.

- Greenbacker, I'm really starting to think you and me need to talk.

- Not right now. I have some notes to write up.
A little chapter, in which is contained a little incident

- WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING NOW?
- Morning Norman.
- Don’t call me Norman.
- Just checking your scrim.
- There’s a hole in my ceiling. This is my lounge ceiling.
- Ah, now that wasn’t supposed to happen.
- Wait a minute. Are you up in my bedroom?
- Just goes to show what can come up in a job like this.
- You are in my bedroom. Have you just knocked a hole right through from the bedroom down here?
- Good job I checked really. Who knows what might have happened. Oh, by the way, you and Joan might want to make alternative sleeping arrangements for a bit. It’s a bit tricky up here, what with this hole and everything.
- I don’t believe this. And it’s Mrs. Fintan to you.
- Now, do you want the good news or the bad news?
- Bad news? Bad news – I’m looking at the bad news.
- Your plasterboard will have to come up. Shocking state. You should see it.
- I don’t want to see it. I wasn’t planning on you seeing it.
- And I’d say we’re looking at a couple of RSJs.
- I'm looking at a bloody great hole.

- Like I say, just goes to show.

- What about the good news, you said there was some good news.

- Well, it's all fixable.

- Before you started it wasn't broken. How long is this all going to take?

- Ah, well now, that's a bit hard to say.

- Why am I not surprised?

- Right, I'll do some measuring up and get down the yard.

- But this hole, what about this hole?

- All in good time, Norman.

- DON'T CALL ME NORMAN.
- So just how long is it since you heard from him?
- I haven't heard from him since he left, Inspector.
- And how long is that?
- The last time I spoke to him was just before he flew to America.
- And you have tried to get in touch with him?
- Of course I have. He's never in his room where he's supposed to be staying,
I've sent him e-mails, but he never answers, even tried through contacts at
the paper but no-one seems to know where he is.
- But you do know where he was supposed to be going, Mr. Hodges.
- Yes. Like I said before, he said he was going to Florida to do some
research on an article he was writing.
- That would be on this American, Mr. Dawes?
- That's the one.
- And have you tried his office?
- Dawes's? You bet. But no-one apparently has ever heard of Mr. Slingsby.
- Have you spoken to Mr. Dawes.
- As far as I know, no-one speaks to Mr. Dawes.
- Just what was the nature of this article Mr. Slingsby was writing?
- Nothing much. Just a profile, really.
- Of Mr. Dawes.

- Yes, you know the sort of thing, the man behind the company, what makes him tick, that sort of thing.

- Hasn't Mr. Slingsby been, how shall I say, slightly contentious in the things he's written about Mr. Dawes in the past?

- Contentious? He's a journalist. He's supposed to be contentious.

- But some people may not like that.

- It's the job. He's very good at it.

- Was Mr. Slingsby in contact with anyone else before he went to the States?

- No.

- Our enquiries seem to suggest he may have been in touch with a Mr. Don Heller of something called Navicom?

- Never heard of him.

- Mr. Slingsby never tried to contact Mr. Heller, or ever met him?

- We never really spoke much about what he was up to.

- What he was up to?

- Pardon?

- You said, 'what he was up to'. Was Mr. Slingsby 'up to' something?

- No.

- Had he found anything out that could be damaging perhaps to Mr. Dawes?

- Like I said, we never really spoke about his work much.

- I see. Well, I'm sure there is some reasonable explanation for all of this.

I'm sure Mr. Slingsby is a very hard working and committed man. Maybe it's nothing more than the fact that he's just very busy.

- Busy?
- I'm sure there is nothing to worry about. But we'll make some enquiries.

Thank you for talking to us, Mr. Hodges.

- Is that it?

- For the time being. We'll be in touch.
SLINGSBY

X

DANGER

FROM: HELLER @ NAVICOM.CO.UK
TO: HODGES @ GUARDIAN.CO.UK
CC: NO-ONE
SUBJECT: SLINGSBY

CONTACT ME RE: SLINGSBY. URGENT.
CAN MEET ANYTIME, ANYWHERE.

DON HELLER
- Read my lips, I said 63 to 7.

- I know that, but what are you talking about?

- Greenbacker, don't you ever listen? The Miami Dolphins lost to the Jackson Jaguars 63 - 7.

- Is that bad then?

- Are you kidding me? This is the AFC play-offs. Worst defeat of their history.

- History of what?

- Football, of course.

- You mean soccer?

- One more time, read my lips. Football. Our national game.

- I thought that was baseball.

- Whatever. Though who the Sam Hill the Jackson Jaguars are I don't know.

- Things move on.

- Where are the great names of the past? The 49ers, the Giants, hell, even the Green Bay Packers.

- Like I say, things move on.

- You know one good thing about this country? Tradition. It values tradition.
- And gets stuck in the past. I did see the U.S. drew 1 - 1 with Iran.

- What are you talking about now, Greenbacker?

- Football.

- Soccer?

- Like I said, football.

- Jesus H. Christ, Greenbacker, you're an American. Stick to what we know best.

- Maybe that is what I know best. The old will always get overtaken by the new.

- Are we still talking sports here?

- Just telling it how it is.

- For you, maybe.

- Get on the bus or get left behind.

- And I suppose you're driving. And jumpin' Jehoshaphat, what are we doing playing soccer with Iran?

- I think it's you that's not been listening.

- Perhaps that's because I'm getting old.

- I'm beginning to wonder if that's all of it.

- What's that supposed to mean?

- Nothing. Now if you'll excuse me. I have work to do.

- At least you can. This goddamn terminal still isn't working.

- Well get someone to get it fixed. You're the Professor. You're the one who carries the weight around here.

- I have my doubts about that.
FROM: JDT@Columbia.edu
TO: Greenbacker @ outerlondon.ac.uk
CC:
SUBJECT: More intel.

Lincoln,

Got mail from Slingsby, the guy I worked with over in the UK. as part of my grad. studies. Seems Van Wrentl has a past he and others didn’t want anyone to know of. It’s true he was in an auto smash but what was not released was he was not alone in the car. He had one of his grad. students with him. A kid called Kathy Cox. She was quite badly beaten up. But, and here’s the point, no charges were brought against Van Wrentl. It appears Indian Queens did a deal with the kids parents to keep her out of the press. On their side they arranged Van Wrentl’s little trip to the UK to get him out of the way. I guess the idea is when he gets back she’ll have graduated and he’ll just slip out of academia with a good pay-off. I don’t know how Slingsby got all this stuff and I don’t want to know how you use it. But information pays and I’d say right now you’re in credit. Mail me.

Jack.
A receipt to regain the lost affections of a wife, which hath never been
known to fail in the most desperate cases

- So how many tablets did you get?
- 100.
- Good God, Norman. How many erections were you planning on having?
- Joan, please. A little decorum.
- Well I hope these Growth Lab people appreciate it.
- I hope I appreciate it. I hope you appreciate it.
- Norman, that was uncalled for.
- Well God knows, it was difficult enough having to get the kids to explain to me how to use the internet and then come up with some kind of excuse why I wanted to use it.
- It's really no big thing.
- I mean, what do they see in it, anyway. How long are they up there, *surfing the net*?
- Hours.
- Exactly. Well, In my opinion it just looks good, is fun to play with for a bit but never gives you what you really want.
- Hmm...Funny that.
- You don’t know what it’s like. I’ve had my private parts emblazoned
across the World Wide Web. I might start getting hate mail from feminists.

The CIA could be infiltrating my bits even as I speak.

- Norman...

- Yes?

- Shut up.
- Good Morning, Navicom Corporation, how may I help you?

- I'd like to speak to Mr. Don Heller, please.

- And who shall I say is calling?

- Smith. Mr. Smith.

- Thank you, Mr. Smith. Do you have the extension number?

- I'm sorry, I don't.

- Just one moment, please...I'm sorry, Sir. We have no-one of that name listed in our directory.

- Are you sure?

- Yes, Sir.

- Look, this is the fifth time I've called. It's Mr. Don Heller I want to speak to. H-E-L-L-E-R. Are you sure he's not on holiday or something?

- We have no-one by the name of Mr. Don Heller listed in our directory.

- Well, does he have a private line, or is he listed under someone else's name.

- Mr. Heller is not listed in our directory.

- Well then, put me through to Personnel.

- Certainly, Sir. Which name do you wish to enquire about?

- Bloody Don Heller, of course.

- I'm sorry, Sir, but...
- "We have no-one of that name...", yes, I know. Thanks a bunch.
- This is crazy. I mean, I can remember vacationing there.

- You can remember going to Montreal?

- Montreal? I'm talking about Davos. The World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Heck, look at this. Smashing the windows of McDonald's. What the hell good is that going to do? And how many anarchists in Switzerland are there?

- Not as many as there are clocks.

- Very funny, Greenbacker. What did you think I meant, anyway?

- We were talking about the UN Convention on Biodiversity in Montreal, remember? But you seem to have changed the subject.

- Oh, I'm sorry. I'd hate to interrupt your, what seems to be, eternal flow

- It's just we're letting them walk all over us.

- Who are 'we' and who is 'them'.

- Is that proper English?

- What would you know? Well?

- The Europeans. I was talking about the Europeans. They want to push through this Biosafety Protocol allowing countries to refuse to import GM foods.

- Oh no.
- Do you have any idea that if that happens what it could do to our companies working in the area.

- And the people don't matter?

- That's naive. And what's Clinton doing?

- Trying not to be beaten up by anarchists in Switzerland.

- OK. So you make your State of the Union address, you're out of the running for another term, so you wash your hands of everything.

- That's a bit strong, isn't it?

- But I ask you, what's he doing to protect us? He says the economy is the strongest it's ever been and then stands back when a major area is under attack.

- You make it sound as though there's a war on. So what's the solution?

- Get tough on trade.

- Back to isolationism?

- I...What do you know about that?

- Nothing – didn't you say something about it just now?

- No.

- Lucky guess, then. But since we are speaking of isolationism, I'm beginning to feel isolated from this work we're doing here. For example, why haven't I seen any of these notes you've been making.

- You know how it is...

- That's just it, I don't because you won't let me see your notes.

- Now you know that just isn't so.

- Do I? Get them now. Show me.

- That would be difficult.
- Why?

- They're just not straight yet.

- Greenbacker, that's the kind of excuse I'd expect from a freshman who hasn't handed in an assignment, goddammit. You're supposed to be my assistant.

- Like I say, these things take time.

- I want to see those notes, Greenbacker.

- I still have work to do.

- Well then, do it and show me the notes.

- Right away. Right away, OK?
The description of a person discontented with the present government, and apprehensive of the loss of our present liberties.

- You two should remember this, it's an historic occasion.
- But five weeks, Arthur, to elect a President — it's stupid.
- Maybe so, Ben, but it also took twelve hours to elect a new Speaker for the House of Commons recently.
- Bloody ridiculous waste of time.
- Some people might agree with you, Norman. In fact it led Tony Benn to call the House of Commons impotent.
- WHAT!
- What does impotent mean?
- Never you mind.
- Oh. So, who is the Speaker. I mean what does he do?
- He looks after the way debates go and things like that.
- What the hell did you just mean, Thompson?
- He must be very important then. What's his name?
- Never mind his damn name — Thompson, I'm talking to you...
- Well he'll be a damned socialist then. And if he's a Jock, what the hell's he doing in our House of Commons anyway. Haven't they got one of their
own up in the Highlands or somewhere? Should split them off at Hadrian’s Wall. Them and the Taffs.

- Like they did in Russia, do you mean?

- Absolutely.

- Look what happened there.

- Might have known you’d be a commie, Thompson.

- Dad liked Thatcher.

- At least she made the trains run on time.

- Didn’t they sell them off, though? Or was that the other bloke, the boring one?

- That’s not the point, Ben.

- But it is a good one.

- Thompson, you’ve turned my son into a liberal pinko.

- At least he’s taking a healthy interest in politics.

- But I pay your wages, mate and don’t you forget it.

- Sorry Norman. Didn’t you want to ask me something?

- What?

- Tony Benn? House of Commons and all that?

- Shut up Thompson and get back to work.
In this issue I want to talk about the role of adversity in our lives. As regular readers of my column will know, we recently had an unfortunate incident in the Fintan family home that has caused a good deal of upheaval. In fact, I am at present having to write this column in the Public Library due to the fact that my study is currently undergoing some repairs. Now, many people, let us be honest, would simply not put up with such disruption to their daily working lives. But if there is one thing that the recent unfortunate happenings in the Fintan family household has taught me it is patience.

And patience comes from adversity. After all, something that causes adversity to us is simply the result of someone else having to carry out necessary work so that in the long run it is our own lives that are made easier.

Take my builder for instance. Now I fully understand that he has had to carry out some repair work in my study. It may be inconvenient for me at the moment, but in the long run it is I that will benefit.

But it is of course not just in our own lives that adversity requires patience. Witness the recent selection of a new Speaker for the House of Commons. After the retirement of Betty Boothroyd, the House was thrown into the dilemma of having to choose someone to replace her.

It might have been that the House decided to do this as quickly as possible, in order to go about its business with the minimum of disruption. Instead the House sat for 12 hours, carefully listening to the speeches of each prospective candidate. Patience again arose out of adversity. It was not enough just to fill the job. But recognising the importance of that position, the House rather chose to take its time in order to ensure that the best person was chosen for that job.

We would do well to follow this example in the internal affairs of our own local clubs and societies. For if we choose to make quick decisions just to ensure the minimum of disruption, we may in fact only be creating further problems for ourselves in the future.

Of course, we cannot expect things to run smoothly every time we face adversity. Witness our American cousins and the terrible turmoil they created for themselves in Florida. I might suggest this resulted from exactly that desire to produce a swift resolution to the situation at hand. As a result mistakes were made. Procedures had to be re-done, votes re-counted.

This illustrates exactly my point. It is no good hoping something will be resolved just because you want it to. Plans have to be drawn up, systems put in place and an agreement undertaken on behalf of all that this problem needs to be solved and that this is the best way to go about solving it. The discomfiture of the present should be put aside for the smooth running of the future.

This is why I'm happy for my builder to go ahead with the work in my study, after prior consultation. After all, we've all settled for second best, only to have to retrace our steps sometime in the future.

Our community belongs to us. Our country belongs to us. At times our system of government may appear clumsy and slow moving, it is a concern for the future that belies this clumsiness.

So, in adversity, let there be strength. And to those in authority, no matter to whom their responsibilities may lie, don't listen to those voices clamouring just to get the job done. Yes the job has to be done, but it has, must and ought to be done well. I don't care how long it takes for my house to be restored to its former glory, just so long as the job is done well. And it is being done well. And with that thought in mind, we all can look forward to a sure and certain future.
- Just moments ago, I spoke with George W. Bush and congratulated him on becoming the 43rd President of the United States, and promised him that I wouldn’t call him back this time.

I offered to meet with him as soon as possible so that we can start to heal the divisions of the campaign and the contest through which we just passed.

Almost a century and a half ago, Senator Stephen Douglas...

- Who the hell’s he?

- Senator Stephen Douglas told Abraham Lincoln, who had just defeated him for the presidency, “Partisan feeling must yield to patriotism. I’m with you Mr. President, and God bless you.”

Well, in the same spirit, I say to President-elect Bush that what remains of partisan rancor must now be put aside, and may God bless his stewardship of this country.

... the U.S. Supreme Court has spoken. Let there be no doubt, while I strongly disagree with the court’s decision, I accept it.

- Oh yeah, sure you do.

- I accept the finality of this outcome which will be ratified next Monday in the Electoral College. And tonight, for the sake of our unity of the people
and the strength of our democracy, I offer my concession.

- What’s he want, a medal?

*I also accept my responsibility, which I will discharge...*

- Ha!

- *Which I will discharge unconditionally, to honor the new president-elect and do everything possible to help him bring Americans together in fulfilment of the great vision that our Declaration of Independence defines and that our Constitution affirms and defends.*

...This has been an extraordinary election. But in one of God’s unforeseen paths, this belatedly broken impasse can point us all to a new common ground, for its closeness can serve to remind us that we are one people with a shared history and a shared destiny.

...*Other disputes having dragged on for weeks before reaching resolution.*

*And each time, both the victor and the vanquished have accepted the result peacefully and in the spirit of reconciliation.*

*So let it be with us.*

Stirring stuff, wouldn’t you say, Greenbacker?

- Horse shit. The guy lost, for Christ’s sake. If Gore had his way they’d still be counting in Miami today.

- But they aren’t, are they.

- Only because the Miami court saw sense. A loser is a loser is a loser.

-You miss my point.

- The point is Gore lost, period. Get real.

- I despair at you, Greenbacker.

- There speaks a Gore voter. I have notes to write.
NORMAN

XII

*Fresh calamities*

- He knows something.
- Who?
- That Thompson bloke.
- About what?
- About me. About my... well, you know... my problem.
- Rubbish.
- I heard him. First it was that Ponce bloke, now he's taunting me with Tony Benn. Tony Benn for god's sake.
- Norman, you are talking complete nonsense.
- Oh, well, I might have known you'd be on his side.
- I'm not on his side. I just think you're talking a lot of nonsense.
- So you said. And why is it so cold in here?
- Ah, now don't get angry but Arthur took a look at the windows in your study and said the frames had rotted right through and it was best they came out.
- All of them?
- He said it was for the best.
- I bet he did. He's been here bloody ages, pulled things down, smashed things up and fixed nothing. When are the new frames coming?
- Well, there's a problem there, it seems.

- What do you mean, 'problem'?

- He can't get the new frames 'till tomorrow. Probably.

- Jesus Christ.

- So you can't use the study for a few days. He said you ought to keep it shut up in the circumstances.

- Shut up! Shut up! He took the bloody door off the other day, remember?

This is sabotage, pure and simple. I told you he didn't like me. I'm going to kill him.

- Now Norman, what good would that do?

- I have no idea but it would be a hell of a lot of fun.
- OK Greenbacker, sit down there and keep your mouth zipped.
- Pardon me?
- You heard.
- I don't understand.
- It's time you and me pulled up the rug and got down to brass tacks.
- Is there a problem?
- Problem? There sure is. Something of an ongoing problem. We've been working together here for how long?
- Seems like a lifetime.
- Right, since we came over from the US. But I can't help noticing you've changed since we first got here.
- People do. So have you.
- True, I can remember more. A whole lot more.
- Well that's good isn't it?
- Maybe so. But as I remember more, more worries me.
- How so?
- Like, why has my PC never worked properly since we got here and why have you, despite my asking, never shown me the notes you've been taking.
- We've been over this before. If you remember.
- But you've never given me so much as a straight answer.

- That's not so. I told you, it's a lot of work.

- Which I never get to see.

- Give me a couple more days and you'll have everything you want.

- Glad to hear it.

- Look, we've both been under a lot of strain. Christ knows it hasn't been easy being here. Specially for you.

- Don't make this personal. When do I see the work?

- Like I say, two, maybe three days at most.

- Nine o'clock, my office three days.

- You got it. I'll go write...

- Don't say it, Greenbacker, do it.
FROM: Greenbacker @ outerlondon.ac.uk
TO: JDT@Columbia.edu
CC:
SUBJECT: Return

Jack,

Thanks for the intel. on Van Wrentl. It sounds easy to say it now but I knew something was not right. The question remains, how much did Outer London know of this before they agreed to take him on. How far up does this thing go? All the way to the top? But I can’t do anything about this here. I have been making some plans. I won’t tell you what. I don’t want you dragged into this game. I’ve been used and now it’s payback time. Things have come to a head here between me and Van Wrentl so I think it’s time to get out. Coming home to JFK. Will be getting an overnight flight in the next few days. Will send mail when I have the flight details. Tell no-one I’m coming.

Lincoln.
In which the history is obliged to look back

- Why do you want to search the net for stuff on this explorer anyway, Dad?
- Just some research, Ben.
- Sounds interesting.
- Probably won't be.
- Ah, is this him? Don Juan Ponce de Leon. Excellent name.
- A bit flamboyant, if you ask me.
- What do you want to know specifically?
- Oh, this and that.
- Can I help?
- No, you're ok. You better get on and do whatever you've got to do.
- Well, I was going to send some e-mails.
- Again?
- I've got a lot to do.
- Well, I'll try not to keep you. Now, I need to get on.
- Shout if you need anything.
- I'm sure I can manage.
- That's not what mum says.
- Get out, Ben... Right, let's have a look at you, Mr. Don Juan. Don Juan—well that sounds promising, anyway.
PONCE DE LEON, JUAN (1460-1521)

Spanish soldier and explorer, Ponce de Leon was born in north-western Spain in 1460. In 1493 he accompanied Christopher Columbus on his second voyage to America and in 1508 established a colony on Puerto Rico, becoming it’s Governor in 1509. It was during this time he was to hear of the myth of the Fountain of Youth, for which he was to search for the rest of his life...

Interesting. So he never found it, obviously.

but which lead to his naming and claiming what is now the State of Florida in 1513...

Florida? So that’s where it is. He must have sailed there having not found it on Puerto Rico.

I wonder...
- Perhaps they’re like antibiotics.

- What?

- I was just saying, perhaps they’re like antibiotics and you have to take the full course before they start working.

- Joan, I ordered a hundred of these things. I should at least be beginning to perk up a bit by now.

Maybe I should sue them.

- For what?

- I don’t know – trade description.

- Would you be prepared to stand up in court and prove they don’t work?

- You could have put that better but I take your point.

- And anyway, as I’ve said before, you’re under a lot of stress at the moment.

- And we all know whose fault that is.

- Arthur is doing his best.

- If this is his best, I’d hate to see him at his worst. What’s he destroying now, by the way?

- Just a bit of wiring.

- Wiring? Christ, he isn’t a professional electrician, for god’s sake.

- It was only a small job, he said. Just like wiring a plug.
- I don’t like this, I don’t like this at all.
- I’ve told you before, he’s perfectly competent.
- Joan, look around you. We’ve got walls down, holes in floors, doors missing and no window. Does that look like competence to you?
- Well maybe he’s just been unlucky.
- Unlucky? You get hit by lightning, you’re unlucky. He is the lightning.
- He’s not as bad as that.
- Believe me, he is.
- You see, this is just what I was saying. You’re working yourself up again.

You should relax more.
- I’ll relax when he is out of my house.
- Look, he’s got a couple of jobs left and then he’ll be gone. Nothing to it.
- Ah, Mr. Fintan...
- ‘Mr Fintan’ is it now. What have you done this time, Thompson?
- Well, I’m sure there’s nothing to worry about really...
- But?
- You don’t happen to have such a thing as a fire extinguisher do you?
- A what?
- It’s just that we seem to have a small fire...
Dear Mr. Leggitt,

Further to my telephone conversation of the 12th, inst., with your colleague, Mr. Hatch and, having discussed the matter with my wife, I wish to confirm in writing my intention to take the fullest possible legal action against Mr. Arthur Thompson, Builder.

I am no doubt certain that your colleague has passed on to you the details of the matter concerned, but it may be helpful to include a brief summary herein in order to facilitate further discussions.

You will be aware of the flood damage sustained to the above property, the insurance details and claim and the subsequent contracting of Mr. Arthur Thompson, Builder, to undertake all necessary repair work. However, during such time Mr. Thompson worked on the property, it became increasingly evident that his work was of an entirely unsatisfactory standard. Indeed further damage was incurred to the property as a direct result, I believe, of Mr. Thompson's incompetence (details enclosed).

Having warned Mr. Thompson on several occasions about the aforementioned substandard workmanship none of the necessary repair work was satisfactorily concluded during the entire period of his working at the property concerned.

Indeed, Mr. Thompson, without my prior knowledge or consent, proceeded to undertake certain electrical repairs being, I might suggest, wholly unqualified to do so. The net result of these actions was the precipitation of an electrical fire (Fire Officer's report enclosed.) As a result my house was gutted.

The said property has now been officially declared unfit for human habitation and my family and I are currently residing in temporary accommodation.

As stated above, therefore, I wish to proceed with the fullest legal action against Mr. Arthur Thompson and hereby retain the firm of Hatch, Leggitt and Leetham to be my legal advisors in this matter.

I am sure that you will understand that my family and I wish to take a short break, as soon as feasibly possible, in order to overcome the trauma incurred by the aforementioned incident and I will of course notify you forthwith of our intentions.

I have every confidence in your ability to bring these matters to a satisfactory conclusion and will offer any further possible assistance I can to that end. I anticipate your further correspondence and thank you for your help in this matter,

Yours sincerely

N. Fintan, Esq.
- And you want to go out there and track him down?
- That's the idea. We can't just do nothing.
- What about the Police? What did they say to you when they spoke to you the other day?
- They don't know everything. In fact, I'm not sure they know anything. I checked his office. Just to see if he'd left anything that might give us a lead.
- And?
- Nothing. No notes, no copies of the stuff he'd already written. Nothing. You don't suppose someone could have got in there and cleared it all out, do you?
- Unlikely. Maybe he was just being careful.
- Careful. You've seen his office – it was a bloody tip. It all looks a little too tidy to me now. In more ways than one.
- I didn't think you two got on.
- It passed the time. Look Tom, I told Slingsby he was dipping his feet in some murky waters and now we haven't heard from him for some time. Doesn't that strike you as just a bit curious?
- True. And speaking purely from my own point of view, as Editor of this paper, having one of your own journalists disappear on you isn't very helpful.
- I promise not to do the same.

- Yes, well in your case...

- Your support is much appreciated.

- You really think this Dawes thing could have something to do with all of this?

- Look. Like I said, the Police don't know everything. Slingsby had been contacted several times by a bloke called Heller who worked for a company called Navicom. Navicom is one of Dawes's set-ups. It seemed he was really serious about wanting to talk to Slingsby.

- About what he was writing?

- I don't know. Anyway, when Slingsby finally agreed to meet him, Heller didn't show up.

- So?

- So I then get a e-mail from Heller telling me he wants to meet about Slingsby but when I tried to get in touch with Heller at Navicom, they say he doesn't work there and they've never heard of him.

- Maybe he was sacked. Maybe he resigned. Could be any number of reasons.

- Yes, but I mean Slingsby disappears and now this Heller guy goes and does his own vanishing trick. It doesn't add up.

- You're beginning to sound paranoid.

- Maybe. I thought Slingsby was the one who was paranoid at first. Now this happens. Like I say, it just doesn't feel right.

- Ah, now you sound like a reporter. OK, go. But watch your back.

- One more thing. There was this guy he'd been in contact with.
- Another one?

- Yes. Young guy called Jack. Slingsby worked with him when he came over as part of his journalism degree.

- You think he might be involved in this as well?

- No, I don't think so. But Slingsby might have looked him up when he got over there.

- OK. Well, find him and see if he can throw any light on all of this.

Meanwhile keep in touch. If you need anything, just say.

- Don't worry, I'll be back before you know it.

- Now you have got me worried. Oh, and Hodges, You're going to Florida on business, remember? I doubt that Mickey Mouse will know anything about this.

- I wouldn't bet on it...
THE PROBLEM OF THE PRESIDENCY

- You had no idea this was going to happen?
- No, can't say as I did. Least ways, not with any certainty.
- Well, this is a rum do, isn't it, Professor?
- Please, Vice-chancellor, call me Rick.
- And there was absolutely nothing that you can think of that might have precipitated this action.
- He could be a cantankerous SOB, excuse me, some of the time.
- I can understand your annoyance. And he has taken all of your notes?
- Every last one of them. Backups as well.
- What do you think he will do?
- Christ knows what's going on in that devious little mind of his. But I doubt his intentions will be good ones.
- Quite so. But surely he must know he can't get away with this.
- Perhaps he doesn't care about that. Maybe it's just me he wants to get at.
- This is an entirely personal action, you mean, rather than for professional gain, so to speak.
- Well, it sure looks as though it's panning out that way to me at moment.

Going back over it now, I guess I can say that I was beginning to have some concerns.
- Such as?

- I asked him to get my computer fixed. He never did.

- I see.

- And I never got to see any of the notes he was making. I know why now.

- You think that he might have been planning this all along. It wasn't just done on the spur of the moment.

- Things were becoming more cold. He was getting more defensive. I gave him three days to produce the notes. How did I know he was going to up and high-tail it out of here?

- Quite. We operate under a system of trust here, at all levels. I'm sorry for you that it seems to have broken down in this instance.

- I told him I'd got my problems with this memory thing and all this time I thought I had him convinced. Seems like it was all a bit of a game to him. He must have thought this old fool had been asleep all this time. He might have been right.

- You shouldn't blame yourself, Richard. The question is, what do we do now?

- Well I'm not going to let him make a horse's ass out of me, you can be sure on that. If he leaks any of this it could make it all very tricky for every one concerned.

- I quite agree. That young man has put us all in a very difficult position.

- I feel responsible.

- Not at all, not at all. You were taken on here on merit, not on, shall we say, past events.

- Thing is, how can I finish anything now? It's like everything's just gone
flat on me. With your permission I'd like to go back to the States, find him and run him through every court in the land. By the time I've finished with him there'll be so many lawsuits against him he'll owe more than the national debt.

- We'll, if there is anything we can do.

- Thanks. You've helped enough.

- And don't concern yourself with any commitments you may have remaining here. We can deal with those. As far as I am concerned you are free to return whenever you want.

- I appreciate that.

- How soon do you think you will leave?

- Within 48 hours. I don't want to let the trail get too cold. Then I'll hunt him down so as he'll be scared even to look behind him.

- Fighting talk indeed.

- Vice-chancellor, this is no fight. This is war.

- I wish you luck. You'll keep in touch.

- You can bet on that. This thing's not over yet.

- Well, goodbye then.

- Thanks. And like I say, I'll let you know how things are working out...
Happier prospects begin to appear.

- That sounds like a very good idea.
- I thought so.
- But what about all the legal stuff?
- The wheels of the legal profession turn very slowly, Joan. Besides, I've spoken to Mr. Leggitt and he sees no problem in us having a short break at the moment. And there are such things as telephones, you know.
- E-mailing might be slightly more efficient.
- Except I don't know how to do that.
- The kids do. I do.
- I'm not having the children run our legal affairs.
- Norman, don't be stupid.
- No dear.
- Right. So where do you think we should go. Spain?
- Not bloody likely.
- So this is going to be a democratic decision is it then?
- I only thought we might be a bit more adventurous. You know, what with all that we've been through.
- Fair enough. Somewhere like Egypt then. Cruise down the Nile, pyramids and camels.
There's something about camels that makes me uneasy.

-Thailand then?

- No. You get all those hippies going there. And then there's the... well, you know.

- What, Norman?

- You know. Those women who aren't really women.

- They do have a bit of culture as well, Norman.

- That's as may be, but I'm not exposing my children to all that sort of thing. Heaven knows what sort of effect it may have on them in later life.

- Probably not as much as having their house burnt down.

- That wasn't my fault.

- I never said it was.

- Good.

- What about Australia then?

- Haven't you been reading the papers? Peoples' legs blow up on those long haul flights and they die.

- That's a bit of an exaggeration I think, but I take your point. It is a long way to go in the amount of time we have. So where do you suggest?

- Well, I was thinking it should be somewhere where the kids can have a good time too.

- Fine.

- So what about Disney World?

- Paris, you mean?

- Good god no.

- America, you mean?
- Florida actually.

- But that would be lovely. Ben and Alice would be thrilled.

- That’s what I thought. Two weeks – Disney World, the beaches, the Keys. What more could you want?

- Isn’t that where that explorer Ben said you were trying to find out about went?

- Oh, really? I wouldn’t know.

- Norman, are you up to something?

- Who, me?

- Yes you.

- I can assure you I’m only thinking of you and the children.

- Well, so long as that is all you are thinking about.

- I just want us to have a lovely holiday.

- Alright. That settles it.

- We go?

- We go.

- Hey, Kids. We’re all going to Disney World!
PART TWO

DREAMLAND
The beginning of a great adventure

- Infernal machine.
- Something the matter?
- Of course not. I was just trying to get a map of Florida off the Internet. You know, for when we go to Disney and all that.
- They'll be sending all that sort of thing with the tickets, won't they?
- I suppose so. But I like to do my own research, as you know. Get things right.
- Well, for a start, that map you're looking at is the wrong part of Florida.
- Is it? Oh, yes, silly me.
- God, I hope the pilot knows where he's going even if you don't. You have some letters here, by the way.
- Really.
- So just who are the Bureau of Natural and Cultural Resources, might I ask?
- It's come. Great. Let me see.
- It's from Tallahassee. Who are they?
- Pardon?
- Who are they?
- Oh, no one important. They just look after national parks and places of
interest and such like.

- And the Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park. What’s that all about?
- It’s an archaeological park. You know what these Americans are like. Have to have flashy names for everything.
- If you think we are going to spend the whole of our holiday digging around for old bits of pot from some long lost Indian tribe you are very much mistaken.
- Of course not.
- So why are they writing to you, then?
- Because I thought they might have some ideas of what to do on holiday.
- Norman, we’re going to Disney World, remember?
- Yes.
- And I suppose you think that we have the only two kids in the whole world who will find Disney World boring.
- You never know. Besides, we might like to explore.
- Not likely. Not if you’re navigating.
- Very funny.
- This is supposed to be a family holiday, remember.
- I know that.
- Because it’s not just you that has been affected by all that has gone on over the last god knows how many months.
- I know, I know.
- We all need this holiday and I want us all to enjoy it.
- Well stop going on about it then and start relaxing.
- Just so long as you understand.
- And just as long as you understand that there might be things I want to see as well.
- Fine. We can sort all that out when we get there.
- Right, so before we've all made up our mind what we're going to do on this holiday, let's get there first. And while we're about it, you might tell the kids to stop watching that damned Disney promotional video you sent off for. Otherwise we might as well all just stay here and save the money.
- The insurance is paying for it, remember.
- That's not the point.
- Ok. But I'm warning you, if you're cooking something up and thinking of dragging us all off to some god forsaken museum full of old bones of dead animals, then you can count me out.
- If you are referring to this archaeological park, you might just find it benefits you too, in the long run.
- What are you on about now?
- You'll have to wait and see. I tell you Joan, I could very easily become something of a new man on this holiday.
- Do I take it from that that you are packing your pills? Because I would suggest that would be a very good idea.
- Well, as it happens, yes I am.
- Things are beginning to look, what shall I say, up.
- That is not entirely what I was referring to. However, you just wait. This holiday will really be one to remember, I can feel it.
- Norman, I'm warning you.

- Message received and understood.

- Because the kids really are looking forward to this. And you know that as well as I do

- So you have said.

- Just so long as you know.

- Would it be all right if I read my letters now?
- Can I help you, Sir?

- Yes, I’d like to buy one of these camcorder things.

- Certainly Sir. What sort of thing would you be wanting to use it for?

- I want to take pictures, of course.

- Stills? Well, then, can I recommend you go for one of our digital cameras, such as the Kodak DX3900? A very useful little machine that has everything you might need.

- Kodak? I’m not taking snaps here. No, no. I’m taking my family to Disney World and I want to make a film of it.

- Oh, I see. A holiday film.

- Not just any old film, sunshine. This is going to be big. The real thing.


- No, no. I want the best. All the bits. You know, the real McCoy.

- Well how much were you thinking of spending?

- What’s the most expensive one you have?

- Well, there’ this Thomson VMD160MS. AT £ 899.99.

- Don’t like the shape.

- Fine. What about this Sony DCRTRV 17., then?
- Ah, now you’re talking. That’s some baby.

- Indeed.

- What’s it got?

- Well, it’s a digital camcorder with memory stick, obviously...

- Obviously.

- Which allows you to store more images. It has a super steady shot, super night shot and a playback zoom. It also has digital program editing, an InfoLithium system...

- Naturally.

- And high stamina battery life.

- Stamina?

- For a longer life.

- I thought that was PAL.

- I beg your pardon, Sir.

- Nothing. Go on.

- Thank you. Now with this you also get a 4gB memory stick, USB cable and CD-ROM software. It has a mini DV, the Zoom is x10 and on digital it’s x120, which I think will more than meet your requirements.

- Oh, I agree.

- And the LCD is 3.5, by the way.

- Better not forget that.

- So, I think this should suit you perfectly.

- Fine. How much is it?

- £899.99.
- A bargain. I'll take it.

- Thank you, Sir.
Show and Tell

- What on earth have you got there now?
- It's a video camera. Well, Camcorder really.
- How much did that cost?
- That is entirely beside the point.
- I'm glad you think so.
- It is for all of us. It's easy to use and can do just about anything.
- Well I'm sure that's very thoughtful, but can you please tell me what you intend to do with it.
- I'm going to make a film, of course.
- What of, for heaven's sake?
- The holiday. I'm going to make a film of our holiday.
- Is that all?
- What do you mean, 'is that all'? This is going to be the proper thing. Not just any old holiday film. I'll do the script as we go along, maybe set up a few situations for you and the kids to act out...
- Oh dear god.
- Joan, can't you show a little enthusiasm for once?
- What do you know about making films, anyway?
- We are going to the heart of the movie world. I can pick things up.

- We’re going to Disney World, remember, not Hollywood.

- I can still learn a few things. Besides, I bought a book, *How to Write Screenplays*. It shows you how to do the camera angles, and all that sort of thing.

- Steven Spielberg move over. And just think, since we’ll be at Disney World you might learn how to draw Mickey Mouse at the same time.

- They do make proper films as well.

- Of course, I was forgetting. After all, films like *Herbie Rides Again* changed the face of world cinema. So do I take it from all this that you’re giving up the world of journalism?

- No, just branching out.

- Shame. For once I thought you might have had a really good idea. So in this film you want to use your family as your subject.

- I suppose you could put it like that. Don’t worry, It’ll be a completely accurate portrayal of us all and I’ll change your names of course.

- To protect the innocent. Do you really think this is a good idea?

- You’ll love it when you see the finished product. Just use your imagination.

- That’s what’s worrying me. I am. And why do you need to do a screenplay. We won’t need to act, we’ll be doing it all in real life.

- Ah, I intend to adapt it when we get back. Spice it up a bit. Add a bit of tension.

- I’m feeling quite tense right now, as it happens. Look, wouldn’t you rather
be an ordinary tourist and just take a few snaps every now and then like everyone else?

- And lose the chance of a lifetime to leave my mark on the great tradition of the American road movie. You know, *The Cannonball Run, Herbie Goes Bananas, Road to Morocco.*

- More like *The Straight Story.*

- Never heard of it. No, no way. No can do, as they say. I can feel it in my blood. Yes, film courses through my veins and there is nothing I can do about it.

- I was afraid you would say something like that.

- Don’t worry dear, I have the best laid plans this side of America...
TITLES
Running Over
EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET. EARLY MORNING.
We see an upper middle class, suburban street, tree-lined with one or two
good quality cars parked along it. It is early morning and therefore the
street is quiet. The camera draws back along the street so we get a full
impression as to its quality and therefore as to the type of people who live
there. After some moments the camera, in one movement, pans round to
the left and comes to rest on a particular house. This is the Fintan Family
home. This a four or five bedroomed house, set back from the road behind
an immaculately kept lawn and garden in full bloom. There is a large
family car parked on the drive with the boot up. The whole scene should
give the impression of order and tidiness. Having taken this in, the
camera then slowly travels down the drive to the Georgian style front
door.

SCENE ONE. INT. FAMILY HOME. EARLY MORNING
The interior of the house is elegantly laid out with fine furnishings,
fixtures and fittings. It is clearly a well loved and well kept family home.
There is nothing out of place and the whole house is obviously in
extremely good condition

CUT TO
SCENE TWO. INT. THE LOUNGE. EARLY MORNING
The scene is one of what some people may call organised chaos. However
the opposite is true. There is an underlying order to the proceedings,
thanks to Our Hero, Norman, who stands by the lounge door and looks on
with a calm but knowing look on his face. He exudes a sense of quiet
authority and is clearly a person on whom one could depend completely.
Suitcases and other various holiday paraphernalia stand about the
tastefully decorated lounge. Jean, Norman’s wife, is trying to make final
arrangements, daughter Anne is complaining about some item of clothing
she has not been allowed to take with her, the son Robert is obliviously
playing a computer game. After a few moments he looks at his watch and
then looks back at his family who are in obvious hopeless disarray.

NORMAN
If you people really want to go on holiday I really do think
that we should go soon.
CUT TO:
SCENE THREE. EXT. OUTSIDE THE FAMILY HOUSE. TWO HOURS LATER
Norman is professionally packing the cases into the back of the car, and calmness still pervades the area around him. Meanwhile the children are now playing tag around the car and Jean is checking that all doors and windows have been shut. Finally, satisfied that the house is secure she locks the front door with an air of completion and anticipation. She now shuffles the children into the car, Norman closes the boot, checks his pockets and then goes round to the drivers' side of the car. Jean gets into the passenger seat.

CUT TO:
SCENE FOUR. INT. INSIDE THE FAMILY CAR.
POV. LOOKING FROM BEHIND THE BACK SEAT BETWEEN THE TWO CHILDREN OUT TOWARDS THE WINDSCREEN.
We can see the backs of Jean and Norman in their seats in the front. Jean then turns round so she can see the children in the back.

JEAN
Seat belts?

CHILDREN
Check!

JEAN
Toilet?

CHILDREN
Check!

JEAN
Luggage?

CHILDREN
Check!

JEAN
Kids?

CHILDREN
(Laughing)
Check!

JEAN
Me?
CHILDREN
(Laughing even more)
Check!

JEAN
Dad?

NORMAN
(Patiently)
Can we go now please?

JEAN
Right then, off we go!

Norman starts the car. At which point Jean, Anne and Robert simultaneously start singing 'We're off to see the Wizard, the wonderful Wizard of Oz'. Norman remains perfectly calm throughout this scene. FADE OUT.

FADE IN TO:
SCENE FIVE. INT. THE AIRPORT DEPARTURE LOUNGE. LATER THAT AFTERNOON
Jean is sitting with Anne looking at some magazines and chatting. Beside them is an empty seat and next to that sits Norman reading a paper. Various items of hand luggage are on the ground around their feet. The airport lounge is busy and occasionally the tannoy relays messages regarding flights etc. After a few moments we see Robert returning back to his seat by Anne.

ROBERT
The display board says that our flight is delayed by forty-five minutes.

JEAN
Oh no.

NORMAN
Don't worry, dear. These things happen.

JEAN
Yes, but you know what this means. First of all it's forty-five minutes, then it's an hour and then before you know it we'll be stuck here all day.

NORMAN
(Reassuring her)
I really don't think that's going to happen.

ANNE
Mum, we are still going to go aren't we?
NORMAN
Of course we are. Your mother's just panicking unnecessarily, as usual. Why don't you kids go over to the window and watch the planes. See how many different airlines you can spot and where they come from.

ROBERT
That's a great idea. Come on, Anne, we can have a competition.

ANNE
But you know you'll win. That's just not fair.

JEAN
Come on, Anne. You've got to keep the girl's side up.

ROBERT
(Not wishing to upset his sister)
It won't be like a real competition. We'll just do it for fun.

ANNE
OK then.

ROBERT
We'll need some paper to write the planes down

NORMAN
Fortunately I have come prepared, as always. (Takes a notebook and a couple of pens from his inside pocket and gives them to Robert.)

ROBERT
Right, let's go.
(The two children run off to the window watched by their parents)

As the children run off Norman stands up to sit in the empty seat next to his wife. As he does so we can see that he is a tall, plainly virile man who has kept his looks, even though now he is entering elegant middle age.

NORMAN
You know, Jean, if we kept the children really busy this holiday, I mean I'm sure this place is really geared up for children, who knows...
JEAN
If you’re suggesting what I think you’re suggesting, the answer is a very definite no. Two are quite enough as it

NORMAN
Oh, come on Jean. Surely you must have thought about it?

JEAN
Yes, but not as often as you do obviously.

NORMAN
That's your response to everything. Relax a bit can't you.

JEAN
The difference between you relaxing and me relaxing is that you won’t end up having to carry around a ten ton weight for the next nine months. Now, I suggest you drop the subject.

NORMAN
Fair enough. But still, give it some thought, eh?

Norman and Jean sit silently side by side for some moments. Then this silence is broken by the sound of the public announcement system.

P.A.
Will passengers for Virgin Airlines flight VS276 to Orlando International Airport, please go to Gate 7. This is a call for all passengers for Virgin Airlines flight VS276 to Orlando International Airport, will they please go to Gate 7 to prepare for boarding.

NORMAN
That’s us. Quick, I’ll get the bags and you go and get the kids.

Jean immediately goes off in search of the children while Norman expertly gathers up the bags and places them on a trolley that he has had, with extreme foresight, nearby for just this occasion.

CUT TO:
SCENE SIX. INT. INSIDE THE AEROPLANE.
Jean, Anne and Robert occupy three seats to the right of the aisle, whilst Norman has a seat opposite them on the left of the aisle. Jean is talking to Anne, who sits next to her, while Robert is reading the in-flight magazine. Norman is peacefully reading a copy of the Times. They are about halfway through the flight and the whole family seems oblivious to the normal activity of the other passengers and crew that is going on around them.
CUT TO:
SCENE SEVEN. INT. INSIDE THE AEROPLANE
The plane is making its final descent into Orlando airport.

PILOT
Ladies and Gentlemen, this is your Captain speaking. We are now making our final descent into Orlando International Airport. I would please ask you to return to your seats, please make sure that your seats and trays are in the upright position. Please make sure that all your hand luggage has been placed in the lockers above you.
I would remind you that the No Smoking signs are now on and please fasten your seat belts. For your information the time now in Orlando is 3.45 Eastern Standard Time and that the temperature outside is a balmy 89°. On behalf of myself and the crew I hope you have enjoyed flying with Virgin and that your flight has been a pleasant one. Thank you.

ROBERT
(Singing to the tune of a well known football chant)
We’re here, we’re here, we’re here, we’re here.

NORMAN
(Fatherly)
Calm down, there son.

ROBERT
Will we be able to go on the rides when we get there?

JEAN
Well, there are quite a number of things we’ll have to do first, like check in and find our rooms. And then I think you two ought to have a bit of a rest.

ANNE
What’s the name of our hotel?

JEAN
It’s called the Hotel Sunsplash.

ROBERT
Will they have things for us to do there?

JEAN
Good heavens, Robert, we’re only five minutes walk away from the biggest theme park in the world. What more could you want?

NORMAN
Now come on, you two. The pilot’s got to land the plane. Sit up straight.
and let's have a little quiet for a moment, shall we? Seats belts all done up?

CHILDREN
Check!

NORMAN
Trays in the upright position.

CHILDREN
Check!

NORMAN
Seats in the upright position?

CHILDREN
Check!

NORMAN
Well then, welcome to the good ol' US of A everybody.

JEAN AND CHILDREN
Hooray!

FADE OUT.

FADE INTO:
SCENE EIGHT. INT. THE HOTEL LOUNGE. DAY
It is the following day, around noon. Norman and Jean are enjoying a relaxing drink in the hotel lounge. Norman is reading a local floridian newspaper while Jean is reading a typical holiday potboiler. Suddenly their peace is disturbed as Robert and Anne come running in to find them.

ROBERT
This place is amazing, Dad. You should see the games room they've got here. There's a Cybercade with loads of games I've never played and it's got CD-ROMs and the internet.

ANNE
And it's got a pinball machine.

NORMAN
Oh, good. Something I will be able to play.

ANNE
And there's a really huge swimming pool.
JEAN
Well, just you be sure you tell us when you want to go for a swim.

ROBERT
It’s alright, Mum, they’ve got lifeguards and everything.

JEAN
Even so, you be sure to tell us, ok?

NORMAN
(Calmly)
I’m sure the children will be perfectly safe, Jean.

JEAN glares at NORMAN.

ROBERT
Our room’s even got a Super Nintendo in it.

JEAN
I think I’ll stick with the mini-bar.

NORMAN
(Quietly)
Jean.

ANNE
And it’s got a telephone.

ROBERT
Yes, but it’s not a real one.

ANNE
Yes it is.

ROBERT
And there’s a TV and video. They’ve got loads of channels. More than we have at home.

NORMAN
Seems like we won’t have to bother with Disney World then.

ANNE
But Dad, you promised.

JEAN
(Annoyed)
Your father is only joking, Anne. Aren’t you Norman?
Of course I am. I'm going to get the tickets this afternoon. I've said it over and over again, I'm looking forward to this holiday just as much as you are, you know.

CUT TO:
SCENE NINE. INT. NORMAN AND JEAN'S HOTEL BEDROOM.
LATER THAT AFTERNOON.

NORMAN
(Shouting very loudly)
Well why the hell didn't you tell me?
You made me look a right prat down at reception just now.

JEAN
You were there at the time. Weren't you listening?

NORMAN
I was busy.

JEAN
Doing what?

NORMAN
Making sure we had the passports, all had our jabs, visas, stuff like that.

JEAN
You weren't listening.

NORMAN
So where are these tickets anyway?

JEAN
They're part of the room key.
(Jean waves the keys at Norman)

NORMAN
I knew that.

FADE OUT.

FADE INTO:
SCENE TEN. EXT. OUTSIDE THE THEME PARK. DAY

NORMAN
(Holding up the room keys for the rest to see, whilst at the same time glaring at Jean)
Now, I have the keys. These allow us on to all the rides.
So all we have to do is decide what we would like to do first.

ROBERT
Epcot! Typhoon Lagoon!

ANNE
Can’t we just look around first and then decide?

ROBERT
Scared you’re going to be sick?

NORMAN
If we just look around we could end up doing that all day and not do anything. And then we’ll have wasted a whole day, won’t we?

JEAN
Norman, this is Disney World – you can’t waste any time here.

ROBERT
We already are. Can we go in now please?

NORMAN
Well all right then, let’s go.

CHILDREN
Yeah!

CUT TO:

SCENE ELEVEN. EXT. INSIDE THE THEME PARK. DAY
Norman and family walk up to the entrance of the theme park and thanks to the authoritative stance taken by Norman after some shifty queue-jumping by another English family, they are soon through the gates and into the park. They walk along, the children, and Jean as well, evidently in awe of the whole spectacle which is dominated by Cinderella’s Castle in the Magic Kingdom. It is not long before they are greeted by a young woman in official Disney uniform

CAST MEMBER
Welcome to Disney World. A world where dreams come true.
(The Cast Member looks at both Robert and Anne with an official Disney smile on her face)
You kids are gonna have a great time here.
NORMAN
I bloody well hope so.

JEAN
Norman.

NORMAN
Sorry.

CAST MEMBER
Just remember, now, if you have any questions myself and the other Cast Members are always on hand to help you.

NORMAN
Cast Member?
The Cast Member, still with the fixed official smile on her face, looks at Norman, who gives her a look of cool authority, and then at the rest of the family. They all beam inanely back at her. The Cast Member then offers the obligatory, ‘Have a nice day’ before wisely moving away to swoop on another group of unsuspecting tourists.

JEAN
She seemed nice.

NORMAN
Cast Member? Does she think she’s in some bloody film? Ha. Now then you lot. I have come prepared with a map of the park. All you lot have to do is decide what ride you want go on first and I can lead us right to it.

JEAN
Oh yeah?

NORMAN
I shall ignore that.

ROBERT
I want to go to Epcot.

JEAN
That’s in another part of the park, dear. We can do that another day. Perhaps if you ask nicely your father might take you while me and Anne go shopping.

NORMAN
Dear god, you’ve only been here five minutes and you’re already talking about shopping.
ANNE
I want to see Cinderella's Castle.

ROBERT
You would.

JEAN
(Looking over NORMAN'S shoulder at the map)
I don't know but, I suppose, looking at the map, it would be as good a place to start as any.

NORMAN
If you lot would give me half a chance, I was just about to suggest the very same thing.

ROBERT
Well all right then, come on, let's go.

We watch the family as they gradually make their way to the Magic Kingdom. On the way the children are naturally excited by everything they see. Jean also shares their enthusiasm for the sights around her, pointing out shops and exhibits that the children might have missed. Norman, throughout the walk, maintains a cool air of detachment, or rather objectivity, interested as he is in the manner of the management of the whole place, the clever commercial ploys and strategies that make the whole place a slick, clean money machine. Suddenly Jean becomes unnaturally excited, jumping up and down, shouting at an embarrassing level and pointing hysterically.

JEAN
Oh, look kids, it's Goofy!

CHILDREN
Goofy! Goofy!

NORMAN
Amazing resemblance.

ANNE
Oh, Dad, take our picture with him.

JEAN
Oh yes, go on Norman.

NORMAN
Jean, really, act your age.
JEAN
This is Disney, Norman. And besides, he was always my favourite. Can’t think why.

NORMAN
Come then, let’s get this thing over and done with.

Jean, Anne and Robert all rush over to Goofy and there follows some banal tomfoolery. Norman swiftly and professionally films the group with Goofy. Then after some unnecessary and unprovoked intimidation from Goofy, Norman finally manages to persuade the mutt that he doesn’t want his photo taken too. As Jean, Anne and Robert all wave goodbye to Goofy, Norman walks ahead checking his camera, and wiping off a paw print that the stupid dog left on his lens. A few minutes later the family are in sight of the Magic Kingdom.

ANNE
Look mum, it’s Cinderella’s Castle.

ROBERT
I hope there’s something for me to do here.

NORMAN
I know what I’m going to do.

JEAN
And what might that be?

NORMAN
Buy a paper and find somewhere to sit down.

ANNE
Adults aren’t allowed to have newspapers in the Magic Kingdom.

NORMAN
Oh, Jesus. How do you know that?

ANNE
I read it.

JEAN
Never mind, Norman. You’ll just have to join in with the rest of us. And that includes you Robert.

ROBERT
OK, OK.
And with that the (Fintan) Family moves on into the Magic Kingdom.

FADE OUT

FADE INTO:
SCENE TWELVE. EXT. THE MAGIC KINGDOM. DAY

ROBERT
Oh, wow, look. They’ve got a whole place on Buzz Lightyear.

JEAN
And you thought there’d be nothing for you. What do you want to see, Anne?

ANNE
Winnie-the-Pooh, Winnie-the-Pooh!

JEAN
Ok. We’ll go to see Winnie-the-Pooh and you can take Robert to see Buzz Lightyear, Norman.

NORMAN
To infinity and beyond.

JEAN
We’ll meet back here in two hours.

NORMAN
Two hours?

JEAN
Two hours, Norman.

NORMAN
Wilco.

ROBERT
Come on Dad, let’s go.

NORMAN
Right behind you.

FADE OUT.

FADE TO:
SCENE THIRTEEN. INT. IN THE EXHIBITS.

(NOTE : Obviously I didn’t go into the Winnie-the-Pooh exhibit so there’s no film of this, though I think Joan took some photos of
Alice in there. The usual holiday snaps sort of thing, not very interesting. I took some film of Ben in the Buzz Lightyear exhibit, which was very noisy and full of yelling kids. Ben wanted me to go on the Star Cruiser ride with him, but I managed to persuade him he would enjoy it much more if he went on his own. The thing spun round and it made me feel sick just looking at it, although he seemed to have fun. However, I must admit trying to do in the evil Emperor Zurg was good fun. And in the end the two hours went quite quickly and quite enjoyably. Though, of course, I wasn't going to tell Joan that. We met up as arranged, although Joan and Alice were late.)

NORMAN
You're late.

JEAN
Well, we were having fun, weren't we Anne?

ANNE
It was great in there. I met Tigger and there were all these big books on the wall with really thick pages and stories that you could read.

JEAN
And how did you two get on?

ROBERT
It was really great. Loads to do. I could have spent ages in there.

JEAN
And what about you, Norman?

NORMAN
Too noisy.

ROBERT
Can we go somewhere else, now?

JEAN
Ok. Where to?

ROBERT
I want to go to Splash Mountain.

JEAN
What's that?
ROBERT
It's a water chute. You go down it on a boat. It's five storeys high.

ANNE
Oh wow, that sounds really great.

NORMAN
Five storeys? How high is that exactly?

ROBERT
I don't know, but you get really soaked.

NORMAN
Sounds delightful.

JEAN
Come on Norman, be a sport.

NORMAN
We'll I won't be able to go on it because I've got the camera.

JEAN
We'll soon see about that.

CUT TO:
SCENE FOURTEEN. EXT. THE THEME PARK. DAY.
From NORMAN'S point of view we watch as the children run off in the general direction of Splash Mountain. There follows shots of them on the ride and another as they are joined by their mother. After that we follow the family as they take in more rides at Space Mountain and the Magic Kingdom Mountains. Throughout all this time NORMAN professionally films his family as they go on all the rides. The filming is always clear and expertly framed, giving a great sense of the place.

Soon, however, Jean realises that time is getting on and that they ought to return to the hotel if they are to avoid the evening clamour for dinner. After a few moments of strong protestations from the children, Norman takes charge of the situation and order is soon restored. And with that, the family returns, somewhat reluctantly in certain quarters, back to the hotel.
FADE OUT.

FADE INTO:
SCENE FIFTEEN. EXT. THE THEME PARK. THE FOLLOWING DAY.
When we join the Family they are making their way to the Disney Studios. Jean, Anne and Robert are all in high spirits, whilst Norman is professionally documenting the surroundings and the antics of his wife and children. Robert carries with him a booklet that gives information about all the rides and other facilities to be found in the park.

JEAN
So, Robert, what have they got at the Studios?

ROBERT
Well, it sounds great. It says here you can enjoy an epic day of showbiz dazzle through the magic of the movies and the power of television.

NORMAN
Now that does sound interesting.

JEAN
Oh, so you are with us.

NORMAN
(Ignoring this snide remark)
What else do they have there?

ROBERT
There's a Muppet Vision 3-D movie

ANNE
I really like them. Will it be like The Muppets Take Manhattan, because we've seen that, haven't we mum?

ROBERT
Yeah, but this is in 3-D. You have to wear special glasses and everything.

ANNE
Can we keep them afterwards?

ROBERT
S'pose so.

NORMAN
Do they have anything on how they make the films?

ROBERT
What, the 3-D ones?
JEAN
Oh god, here we go.
(NORMAN again refuses to rise to the bait of this last remark)

ROBERT
Well, you can watch them making a TV film.

NORMAN
Ah, now that would be interesting for all of us to see.

JEAN
And just how do you work that out?

NORMAN
Well, the kids watch television, don’t they?

JEAN
Does that sound interesting to you two?

ROBERT
I think what does sound really great is the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror.

NORMAN
(Sarcastically)
Sounds delightful.

ROBERT
You can go in this lift that plunges down 13 storeys faster than gravity.

JEAN
Now, there is something your father could do.

NORMAN
(Glaring at JEAN,)
I’m in charge of the camera, remember.

JEAN
Oh, of course. I forgot. We wouldn’t want to interrupt the great director in his work.

NORMAN
I’m doing this for you, you know.

JEAN
And I’m sure we’re all very grateful.
NORMAN doesn't respond to this flagrant attempt to get his dander up, but instead turns to his children and, with a warm, fatherly smile of encouragement and a gesture similar to that John Wayne would use to lead the wagon train on, says,

NORMAN
Well, come on then the (Fintan) family. Wagons roll!

And with that they all head off towards the Disney Studios, the children running on ahead.

SCENE SIXTEEN. EXT THE DISNEY STUDIOS. DAY.
Jean, Robert and Anne are looking at the sights around them, while Norman is expertly framing a shot for his film. After a few moments Jean says,

JEAN
So, where to first, then?

NORMAN
Not this again. I thought we'd decided.

ROBERT
The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror!

NORMAN
Hang on a minute. Weren't we going to watch a TV film being made?

JEAN
Not scared are you, Norman?

NORMAN
Well, I don't notice you rushing ahead. And besides, I have the camera, remember?

JEAN
If you mention that damned camera again I'll shove it...

NORMAN
Careful, Jean. There are children present.

ANNE
Can we go and see the Muppet film, mum?

NORMAN
Saved by the proverbial...
JEAN
(Not getting NORMAN’S biting witticism)
Of course, if you want to, dear.

NORMAN
I thought this was supposed to be a family holiday.

JEAN
And so it is.

NORMAN
So why are you so eager to run off on your own as soon as you get
the chance?

JEAN
I would hardly say we were running off.

ROBERT
Can we go now?

JEAN
I’ll tell you what we’ll do.

NORMAN
Family holiday, remember?

JEAN
What?

NORMAN
Nothing, dear.

JEAN
We’ll meet up here again at twelve, have some lunch and all do
Something together this afternoon. That all right with you, Norman?

NORMAN
Your wish is my command.

And with that Jean and Anne head off to watch the Muppet Vision 3-D movie while Robert and Norman make their way into the Twilight Zone.
FADE OUT

FADE INTO:
SCENE SEVENTEEN. EXT. DISNEY STUDIOS. LATER THAT DAY
Norman, Jean, Robert and Anne are having some lunch in a
restaurant. They are on New York Street in the Disney Studios. This
has an impressive simulation of the Manhattan Skyline. Norman is trying to point out the important landmarks of the fake Manhattan to Robert and Anne. However they seem to be more interested in telling each other about the things they had seen in the morning.

NORMAN
...And over there is the Empire State Building, of course.

ANNE
...And this big snake came right out of the screen and it was like it was going to eat us all.
But I wasn’t scared. Although loads of the other kids screamed.

ROBERT
That’s nothing. You should try dropping 13 storeys in the dark.
It was brilliant.

NORMAN
And that’s the Chrysler Building.

ROBERT
I thought I was going to be sick. But I wasn’t.

JEAN
What about you, Norman?

NORMAN
What?

JEAN
How did you enjoy the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror?

NORMAN
Nothing to write home about.

ROBERT
Dad didn’t go on it.

JEAN
Well, there’s a surprise.

NORMAN
And over there you can see the twin towers of the World Trade Centre.

ANNE
What are we going to do this afternoon?
NORMAN
I wonder if they ever put King Kong up there.

JEAN
What are you talking about Norman?

NORMAN
King Kong.

JEAN
That was the Empire State Building.

NORMAN
Yes, I know. But, back in the seventies I think it was, they did a remake. It climbed up one of the World Trade Centre towers.

JEAN
Was that the one with Jessica Lange?

NORMAN
I don't remember.

JEAN
With hardly anything on.

NORMAN
Nonsense. She was very subtly covered up. With perhaps just a hint of thigh.

JEAN
She was the one who did it on the kitchen table with Jack Nicholson.

NORMAN
Jean, really. We are in Disney World, you know.

JEAN
Well, you were the one who brought it up.

NORMAN
No, I didn't. That was you.

JEAN
Well anyway, you shouldn't be thinking about that sort of thing. Not in your condition.
NORMAN
Thanks.

ANNE
(Insistent)
What are we going to do this afternoon?

JEAN
Well, I think we should all take a little rest.

NORMAN
Very good idea. I'm knackered.

JEAN
(Ignoring Norman, somewhat rudely in his opinion)
And then I thought later on we could all come back and watch the parade.

NORMAN
Oh.

JEAN
Very good photo opportunity.

NORMAN
Well, if the light remains good it could be all right.

JEAN
Norman, this is Florida. The light is always good. So what do you think?

ANNE
I'd like to go.

JEAN
Robert?

ROBERT
S'pose so.

JEAN
Well, that's settled then.

NORMAN
What about me?

JEAN
You do whatever we do, ok?
NORMAN
Evidently.

CUT TO:

SCENE EIGHTEEN. EXT. THE DISNEY PARADE. LATER THE SAME DAY.

POV: AS SEEN THROUGH NORMAN'S CAMERA.
Crowds of people line a mock up of a C19th street called, 'Main Street USA'. Naturally, they are all cheering and clapping and off camera we can hear the shouts and cheers of Anne, Robert and Jean — who is trying vainly to act in a more grown up fashion. As we look down the street the parade moves past, starting with a marching band playing, 'Zipper-de-do-da'. This is then followed by a Mississippi steamboat with Donald Duck at the wheel. Then come Winnie-the-Pooh and friends, closely followed by Snow White and the Seven Dwarves who are naturally singing 'Hi-ho,Hi-ho,it's off to work we go'. Mickey and Minnie Mouse appear, driving in a rickety old car. Finally, six black riderless horses come into view. These pull a small but ornate carriage in which sits a young woman, obviously meant to be Cinderella. Unfortunately, the horses don't appear to be behaving themselves and halfway up the street veer alarming close to the crowd. Cinderella does her best to look calm and wave charmingly at the crowd but it is clear the horses are very skittish. The horses now begin to pickup speed, not to any great extent, but enough to upset the children, including Anne who we can hear off camera asking in a distressed voice what's wrong. With no one to control them, the horses are clearly getting out of hand. Suddenly, one of the front horses breaks clear of its harness and lurches in the direction of Norman. We hear Jean shout, 'Get out the way', and for a moment the camera goes out of focus before what seems to be a white gloved hand darts momentarily into frame. The frame then tips violently sideways and then goes black completely.

CUT TO:

SCENE EIGHTEEN. INT. NORMAN AND JEAN'S DISNEY THEMED BEDROOM. THAT EVENING.

JEAN
Well that was a really stupid thing to do. Didn’t you hear me shout?

NORMAN
I could have had some bloody good footage, if you hadn't panicked.

JEAN
You could have been killed if Mickey Mouse hadn't run back and pushed you out of the way.
You should thank him.

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NORMAN
Thank Mickey Mouse? Are you mad?
I’ll sue Walt Disney first.

JEAN
(Unnecessarily sarcastic)
Because Mickey Mouse saved your life? Good idea, Norman.
(Pause: then girlishly)
Norman, you did bring your tablets with you, didn’t you?

NORMAN
Eh? Oh, I think so.

JEAN
(Again girlishly)
Why don’t you take one?

NORMAN
(After a long considered pause)
I was thinking of hiring a car.

JEAN
What?

NORMAN
So I – we, can have a drive out. See a bit more of
Florida. We don’t have to be shut here forever, do we?

JEAN
I would hardly call two weeks forever. And it’s
a pretty nice place to be ‘shut up’, in my opinion.

NORMAN
I just thought it might be nice. For the kids.
And us of course.

JEAN
Are you sure it’s going to be safe?

NORMAN
I can drive, Jean.

JEAN
I don’t mean that.

NORMAN
Well then.
JEAN
It's just that I read they found this body.

NORMAN
Body? What body?

JEAN
In the Everglades. They found this body of this man.

NORMAN
Really, Jean. Murders happen everywhere.

JEAN
But he was English.

NORMAN
Well, sadly even tourists get killed. But it won't happen to us.

JEAN
But he wasn't a tourist. He was a journalist.

NORMAN
Oh, well there you are then.

JEAN
It says here that his name was Hodges. He worked for the Guardian.

NORMAN
I rest my case.

JEAN
(Rudely ignoring him)
Apparently he was over in Florida looking for a colleague. He was supposed to be doing an article on this chap called Bob Dawes.

NORMAN
Fascinating.

JEAN
But he's gone missing.

NORMAN
Who has?
JEAN
Slingsby.

NORMAN
I thought you said this chap was called Dawes.

JEAN
No, Slingsby is Hodges’ colleague.

NORMAN
And who does he work for?

JEAN
The same paper as Hodges.

NORMAN
My, my. To lose one journalist may be regarded as a misfortune, to lose two...

JEAN
(Unnecessarily angry)
Norman, you're not taking this seriously.

NORMAN
Well, really Jean. These things happen.

JEAN
But this was just down the road.

NORMAN
I think you have been here too long. There’s a real world out there. Just because it’s called Disney World doesn’t mean that the whole world has to be like Disney.

JEAN
There’s no talking to you, is there Norman.

NORMAN
I was just saying...

JEAN
Well, hire your damn car, Norman. Do what you want. But me and the kids won’t be going with you.

NORMAN
Oh, come on Jean.
JEAN
No, Norman. Do what you want but you do it without us.

NORMAN
(Secretly pleased)
Very well then. I will.

FADE OUT

FADE INTO:
SCENE NINETEEN. EXT. DAY. OUTSIDE THE HOTEL.
Norman stands very proudly in front of a cream coloured Plymouth Continental waiting for his family to emerge from the hotel lobby. After a few minutes they do so. Jean immediately looks shocked while the children show obvious excitement an admiration at their father’s choice of car.

ROBERT
Oh wow!

JEAN
What the hell is that?

NORMAN
It’s a Plymouth. Archetypal American car.

JEAN
Couldn’t you have got a Toyota or something like that?

NORMAN
When in Rome...

ROBERT
(Excitedly)
Can I have a ride in it?

NORMAN
Of course. But when I get back from my trip.

JEAN
Now wait a minute, Norman. You’re not going on your own in that thing anywhere.

ANNE
It’s a nice colour.
NORMAN
Thank you, Anne. And I can drive, you know.

JEAN
But not in a car that size and on the wrong side of the road.

NORMAN
I'll be perfectly fine.

JEAN
Nonsense. We're coming with you.

ROBERT
(Shouts)
Yeah!

CUT TO:
SCENE TWENTY. EXT. DAY. IN THE CAR.
NORMAN is driving the Plymouth as if he had been doing so for years. Jean is in the passenger seat and the two children sit comfortably in the back. They are heading away from Disney World, on towards Orlando and then the coast.

ANNE
Where are we going, Dad?

NORMAN
We're going to see a little bit of history.

ROBERT
Oh no. Not boring museums and stuff.

NORMAN
Not really. It's more of a park. You'll love it.

JEAN
Norman, I think you better tell us where we're going. I have no food, it's hot, the kids have no drinks. Now, If you don't tell me where we are going, me and the kids are going to get out of this monstrosity of a car right now.

NORMAN
Will everyone just relax. Ok, so it's not going to be Disney But I think everyone is going to enjoy it just the same.
JEAN
(Pressing)
So, where are we going?

NORMAN
We’re heading north to a place called St. Augustine. It’s on the coast.

ANNE
Is there a beach?

NORMAN
Might be.

ANNE
Great.

JEAN
And what, may I ask, is at St. Augustine?

NORMAN
Now that you will have to wait and see.

ANNE
Is it far?

NORMAN
An hour or so. There’s a map there somewhere. You can look at the route.

JEAN
And what about food and drinks?

NORMAN
We can stop at a petrol station on the way. They usually have somewhere to eat out here.

ROBERT
(Authoritatively)
Gas station. They call them gas stations in America.

JEAN
What ever they call them, I hope you’re right, Norman.

NORMAN
Just calm down, everyone, and enjoy the ride.

FADE OUT.
FADE INTO:
SCENE TWENTY ONE. EXT. DAY. THE JOURNEY.
This scene will include several short cuts centring on the family in the car, the view around them and the road ahead. i.e typical 'road movie' shots:
I) medium CU. POV from side of car taking in NORMAN (Closest to camera) and JEAN as they are driving along the highway. Also, similar to (I) of ANNE and ROBERT.
II) medium CU. POV front of car looking directly in at whole family in car.
III) LS. POV looking ahead at highway from front seats.
IV) LS. POV out of side windows, left and right, looking at passing traffic and countryside around.
V) ECU. POV above looking down at the lines in the centre of the road as they roll past.
These shots can be edited into any order. (NB. Can also be edited in throughout the whole of the film in post production as required)

FADE OUT.

FADE INTO:
SCENE TWENTY TWO. EXT. DAY. LATER ON THE CAR JOURNEY.

ANNE
Are we nearly there yet?

NORMAN
(Knowledgeably)
Just a little way up the A1A here and then we have to turn left.

JEAN
Are we allowed to know where we’re going yet?

NORMAN
All will be revealed.

JEAN
Oh, for God’s sake Norman.

ROBERT
I’m quite excited, really. It’s been like a mystery tour.

NORMAN
There you go. Good lad.
(JEAN just stares at NORMAN and says nothing)
CUT TO:
SCENE TWENTY THREE. EXT. DAY. APPROACHING THE ARCHEOLOGICAL PARK.
POV from inside the car, looking straight ahead. We turn left, off the main highway and down a road to an ornate arch. Around it is written, in Elizabethan-type script ‘Fountain of Youth’. Robert reads the name out as Norman drives under the arch and into the park.

JEAN
(Looking somewhat stupid with her mouth agape)
Where the hell is this place?

NORMAN
Somewhere I’ve been wanting to see for quite a while now.

ANNE
Are there any rides?

NORMAN
I’m not sure. But they have got lovely gardens, a planetarium and stuff about Red Indians.

ROBERT
Native Americans.

ANNE
What’s a planetarium?

ROBERT
It’s like a big map of the stars.

NORMAN
And what’s more they have crocodiles around here, you know.

JEAN
(To NORMAN)
Perhaps we could persuade one of them to eat you.
(The children burst into hysterical laughter.)

NORMAN
Could we all just give it a chance?

CUT TO:
SCENE TWENTY FOUR. EXT. DAY. INSIDE THE ARCHEOLOGICAL PARK.
Norman parks the car and gets out enthusiastically. The others all get out somewhat slower. After a brief discussion Norman goes off
to get the tickets. When he comes back the family are still standing around by the car. He also has with him some leaflets about the park.

JEAN
Norman, what's this all about? Why are we here?

NORMAN
Just thought it might be something a bit different. You know, see a bit more of Florida than just Disney.

JEAN
(Unconvinced)
Mmm.

NORMAN
Now, I have here some information about the park. There's lots Of Indian stuff and things about the planets and such like, and of course there's the gardens, which I'm told are really quite lovely.

(Hands the leaflets to JEAN)
Now, if you want to take these, I suggest you go off and have a look around.

JEAN
Why, what are you going to do?

NORMAN
There's something I want to see.

JEAN
But, Norman...

(Before she has a chance to say any thing more, NORMAN is off down a path and through some trees. JEAN watches him go and for some moments we focus on the remainder of the family as they all stare dumbly after the pioneering and adventurous figure of their father.)

FADE OUT.

FADE TO:
SCENE TWENTY FIVE. EXT. DAY. THE ARCHEOLOGICAL PARK.
NORMAN stands on an area of stones, looking down into a shallow, flat pit that lies before him. Encrusted in the floor of the pit is a cross made of stones, 15 on the vertical, 13 on the horizontal. It is the site where Ponce de Leon believed he had at last discovered the Fountain of Youth.
NORMAN stands in appropriate reverential silence before the cross
and is totally unaware of the one or two people who are also at the site.
After some moments a man comes into the site and slowly walks towards NORMAN. The man stands to the side of NORMAN and also looks at the cross. NORMAN is unaware of his presence. After some moments of silence, the man speaks.

VAN WRENTIL
(Quietly)
You could argue this was where the American Dream was born.

NORMAN
(Coming out of his justified reverie)
Pardon.

VAN WRENTIL
The American Dream. Ponce de Leon came here in 1513. Landed at St. Augustine just up the coast. He was supposed to colonize the place. Instead, he called it Florida, after all the different flowers they found here, got on with the natives and went in search of the Fountain of Youth.

NORMAN
Sounds idyllic.

VAN WRENTIL
Until he was shot by some slightly less friendly natives eight years later.

NORMAN
Ah.

VAN WRENTIL
I guess that’s what happens to dreams. You’re English, right? Are you vacationing here?

NORMAN
Yes. We’re staying at Disney.

VAN WRENTIL
So what brings you here?

NORMAN
Long story.

VAN WRENTIL
So you knew about Ponce de Leon?
NORMAN
Oh, a bit. Why are you here, Mr. ..?

VAN WRENTL
Van Wrentl. But call me Richard.

NORMAN
(Extending his hand)
Fintan. Norman Fintan.

VAN WRENTL
I'm looking for something.

NORMAN
Aren't we all.

VAN WRENTL
Or perhaps I should say I'm looking for someone.

NORMAN
(Intrigued)
Really. Who?

VAN WRENTL
I've just come back from being a Visiting Professor at a university. In England, as it happens. I was supposed to be writing a book on US Presidents. But I had a research assistant. He stole it.

NORMAN
(Rightfully shocked)
What?

VAN WRENTL
Yes. All the time I thought he was helping me in my research, he was taking it for himself. So he could publish it under his own name. I know that now because one day he was just up and out of there.

NORMAN
(Rightfully enraged)
Bastard.

VAN WRENTL
You can say that again.

NORMAN
And what are you doing here. If you don't mind my asking?
VAN WRENTL
I came after him. To get my work back. I heard he was in Florida. I’ve been travelling up and down the coast trying to track him down. Then just yesterday I was in the area and decided to come here. In some strange way I thought it might help.

NORMAN
I know what you mean.

VAN WRENTL
Oh yeah? Why’s that?

NORMAN
(Looking away)
It’s personal. What are you going to do now?

VAN WRENTL
Well, I’m beginning to feel I’m chasing a dream.
(NORMAN nods in agreement)
I doubt I’ll ever find him.

NORMAN
(Encouragingly)
You shouldn’t give up.

VAN WRENTL
I don’t think I’ve got the interest left in me.

NORMAN
Hence you’re coming to the Fountain of Youth.

VAN WRENTL
Searching for something that’s basically elusive, you mean. You might say that.

NORMAN
Oh no. I didn’t mean...

VAN WRENTL
That’s alright. I understand. And so what about you?

NORMAN
Well, I suppose you could say I’m doing the same. Although what I want isn’t so elusive. Not medically, anyway.

VAN WRENTL
Glad to hear it.
NORMAN
It’s just I supposed I hoped I could get it back without the use of pills.

VAN WRENTL
Your youth – health?

NORMAN
And all the vim and vigour that goes with it.
(VAN WRENTL laughs and NORMAN joins in)

VAN WRENTL
Well, you could say that’s what Ponce de Leon wanted. Find the Fountain of Youth in the New World. What could be more perfect? A kind of Paradise. And ever since people have been coming to America in search of the same thing.

NORMAN
You don’t sound too convinced.

VAN WRENTL
Maybe once. But not now. Look, I’m holding you up. Are your family with you?

NORMAN
Yes they are. And I better get back to them before I get it in the neck again.

VAN WRENTL
Family life, eh?

NORMAN
You married?

VAN WRENTL
No, never.

NORMAN
Ah, well. Nice to have met you, anyway.

VAN WRENTL
And you. And have a nice vacation.

NORMAN
Hope you get your book back

They shake hands and Norman walks off in search of the rest of his family. We hold on Van Wrentl for some moments as he stares
down at the cross of stones that supposedly marks the spot of the Fountain of Youth.

FADE OUT.

FADE TO:
SCENE TWENTY SIX. EXT. DAY. ANOTHER PART OF THE PARK.
JEAN and the children are just coming out of the gift shop. The children have bought plenty of things and look quite content with everything. JEAN, on the other hand, looks annoyed. Her mood does not get any better when she sees NORMAN looking around trying to spot them.

JEAN
(Shouting)
Norman, where the hell have you been?

NORMAN
(Walking excitedly towards them)
You'll never guess.

JEAN
(Angrily)
I don't want to guess. I want you to tell me where the hell you've been.

NORMAN
To the Fountain of Youth, my dear. To the Fountain of Youth.

JEAN
What are you on about?

NORMAN
I'll tell you later.

JEAN
(Pushy)
Norman...

NORMAN
And what have you kids been up to?

ROBERT
It's been great. We went to the Navigators' Planetarium. It shows you how sailors used to navigate by the stars in olden days.

ANNE
And then we saw an Indian burial ground and an exhibition
about the Indians that used to live here.

ROBERT
The Timucuas.

ANNE
I know that. And the flowers are really lovely here, aren't they mum?

JEAN
Well, I have to admit they are, yes.

NORMAN
Did you know that's how Florida got its name, after the flowers.

JEAN
(Sardonically)
Heavens. Aren't you the intellectual all of a sudden.

NORMAN
(Ignoring this)
Well, it's getting late and we have a long drive back.

JEAN
If that car of yours ever gets us back.

NORMAN
Shall we go, everyone?

NORMAN and the children walk back to the car, talking excitedly about their day. Jean trails some way behind.
FADE OUT.

FADE TO:
SCENE TWENTY SEVEN. INT. EVENING. NORMAN AND JEAN'S BEDROOM.
NORMAN seems to be in a very happy mood. JEAN is less so.

JEAN
So, what was all that about?

NORMAN
All what?

JEAN
Today. The Fountain of Youth and all that.
NORMAN
I met a very interesting man there. American.

JEAN
(Unimpressed)
Really.

NORMAN
Just come back from England, actually. Working at a university.

JEAN
What has this got to do with anything?

NORMAN
Just telling you. Do you know, he was writing a book and his assistant stole it.

JEAN
What are you talking about?

NORMAN
This chap was writing a book and his assistant ran off with all his work.

JEAN
So what was he doing at this Fountain of Youth place?

NORMAN
He’d heard that this guy was in Florida and he was looking for him.

JEAN
OK. And what were we doing there?

NORMAN
I told you. I thought the kids might find it interesting. And it seems they did.

JEAN
Well, yes. I suppose I have to say they did.

NORMAN
And I thought it might help us.

JEAN
What do you mean?

NORMAN
Well, it is the Fountain of Youth, after all.
JEAN
That's just a legend.

NORMAN
How do you know?

JEAN
Oh, come on.

NORMAN
Jean... ever thought of having another child?

JEAN
(Shocked)
What!

NORMAN
I've brought my pills with me, remember?

JEAN
What on earth has brought this on?

NORMAN
Maybe it's my little visit to the Fountain.

NORMAN walks slowly over to JEAN and kisses her.

JEAN
Norman, the children.

NORMAN
They'll be asleep by now. Trust me.

He kisses her again.
The NORMAN goes over to the light switch and dims the lights.

NORMAN
Well, do you fancy seeing if these pills work?

JEAN
Really Norman...

They kiss again and as we go into as long, slow fade, it is clear that something magical is going to happen that night.

(Long slow fade, as indicated)
THEN INTO:
SCENE TWENTY EIGHT. INT. EARLY MORNING. IN THE CHILDREN'S' ROOM, DISNEY WORLD.

It is the morning of Tuesday September 11th 2001. The children are playing happily with various toys bought from Disney and those bought from the Archeological Park. NORMAN AND JEAN are sitting at a table, talking. It is clear that they are much happier together and a faint air of something special might have happened the night before is palpable. In the corner a television is on, showing various cartoons. Suddenly, the cartoons are interrupted and the words BREAKING NEWS appear on the screen. At first no-one pays much attention, but then NORMAN catches the screen and begins to stare at the screen dumfounded. After a few seconds he taps his wife on the arm and points to the television. She looks at the screen and slowly lifts her hand to cover her mouth. The atmosphere in the room has now totally changed. Outside, the unfolding news crawls like the Wicked Witch into the realm of Disney World.

The whole family is now staring at the television in utter silence. They listen as the voice of the reporter tries to make sense of what is going on.

NEWS REPORTER

(Voice over as we watch the now famous live pictures of the terrorist attack. Obviously the text cannot represent the passing of time but it is intended to hold a close up on the television and the reaction of the family as they watch the 'live' pictures on the screen.)

What you are seeing are live pictures from New York where only moments ago a plane crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Centre. As yet it is unclear if this is a tragic accident or some kind of terrorist act. Fire crews and Police were quickly at the site, but as you can see from these pictures, the plane hit, we believe, around the 80th floor.

As I say, these are live pictures we are seeing here from the World Trade Centre in New York, where at 8.48 East Coast Time a plane smashed into the north tower. Er...we can see here now some of the workers leaving the tower...fire crews are here and I'm told have entered the building.

At this point we have no idea how many people are in the building, but on a normal day, and clearly this is no ordinary day, 40 to 50,000 people work in the Trade Centre complex.

(The family continues watching in silence as the events unfold. About fifteen minutes later we are watching people out on the streets staring up at the fire still raging in the north tower. After a few minutes, i.e approx 9.06am ECT, the whole scene changes again.)
We see a long shot of the twin towers. Suddenly from the right of the screen another plane appears. Almost before anyone can realise what has happened, this plane hits the second, south, tower. Off screen we hear someone shouting, 'Shit' and then 'There's another one. Another plane just hit the south tower'. JEAN screams, NORMAN just says, 'Oh my god'. The two children turn round to look at their parents. You can almost hear the shock as the family watch these images in their room in Disney World. We go back to the television.

NEWS REPORTER

...OK. God. This is unbelievable. A second plane has just hit the south tower. I repeat, these are live pictures. A second plane has just hit the south tower. Both towers are now on fire. What we are now witnessing is a scene of chaos on the streets of New York. The Police are trying to clear the area but it's just chaos down there...Er, hold on a moment, we're getting reports coming that another plane has been hijacked. That's reports of a third plane has been hijacked. As yet we don't now what plane this is or where it's headed but we'll keep you informed of that as more news comes through.

(More pictures, etc).

We're getting reports coming through that some people in the towers are using their cell phones to contact families...and er...now we can see the from our helicopter a view above the towers. You can see the thick black smoke rising above both towers now. These are live pictures you are watching now. Both the towers are on fire...Oh Jesus, it's going...the tower is going...shit...Jesus...

(The TV. shows the image of the first tower collapsing and the huge cloud of dust growing larger and larger as the tower rapidly crumbles to the ground. We then see people running like hell through the streets of New York to get away from the approaching cloud. You can just hear voices above the pictures as the cloud gets closer. Then we hear someone shout, 'Get down, get down'. The camera angle drops to the ground and then everything goes black. Outside the room in which the family are watching the TV., Disney World has fallen silent. One or two people still walk about but no-one is making much effort to enjoy themselves. Most rides have stopped and others will stop in the next few minutes. It is as far from Disney World as it can get.

We return to the television and see a long shot of the World Trade Centre. There is an obvious gap where there was once a tower. The second tower still burns. The scene is total chaos with people, police and firemen running around in all directions. The sky has gone black and a thick pall of dust lies over upturned cars, the streets and the people. All sense of order has been lost.

We go back to another closer shot of the World Trade Centre. We can hear people shouting, crying. Some people are just standing,
transfixed, to the spot, looking at the devastation in front of them. Suddenly, the scene takes on a terrifying atmosphere. It is obvious that the people on the screen know something is going to happen seconds before the viewers.
Then, although we see nothing, yet we can hear shouts of, 'It's going, it's going!' And then, very slowly at first, the cloud issuing from the impact area begins to grow. Almost completely engulfed by now by this cloud of smoke we just see the top of the second tower begin to drop. The fall begins to accelerate. Within seconds, the tower has disappeared from view as a new cloud of dust, just as big as the first, begins to envelop the scene. And then it all goes dark).

NEWS REPORTER
Both towers have now collapsed. I repeat, both the towers of the World Trade Centre have now collapsed. Oh my God...

JEAN
(Quietly)
This is like a very bad dream, a very, very bad dream.

ANNE
(Bewildered)
Were there people in that building?

ROBERT
(Equally bemused)
Did terrorists do that? Were they terrorists? Who were they?

NORMAN
(Quietly, almost silently.)
Jesus Christ. It's just as though the whole world has run out of control and there's no-one there to rein it in...
In 1961 Philip Roth wrote in his essay, ‘Writing American Fiction’, that,

the American writer in the middle of the twentieth century has his hands full in trying to understand, describe and then make credible much of American reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one’s own meagre imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are an envy of any novelist. (Bradbury, 1990, 29)

Roth concluded his essay with this abiding struggle between the writer as Self and the cultural and political constructs of the society in which he lives. Despite Roth’s essay being over forty years old, his basic argument is none the less both an astute and prophetic observation since thirty five years later the writer and critic William H. Gass was to write in his essay, ‘Finding a Form’,

Passivity, self-mortification, substitute gratification, impotent bitching, drink: these were the ways of life set before me. Now, when considering the insides of a writer, pondering the psychology of the occupation, I always look for the weakness that lead him to it; because, make no mistake, writing puts the writer in illusory command of the world.
(Gass, 1997, 32)

This idea of how the writer, and by extension his characters, operates within the world was to become a singularly important feature of American postmodern writing. As in Britain, American society during the post war years was having to re-examine not only its own identity within itself but also its identity and place within a constantly fluctuating world order.
On the one hand, politicians such as John Foster Dulles were calling for America to take an overtly active role in world affairs by suggesting that America should be the ‘policeman’ of the world. On the other hand, the United States had one foot in a mythic, ‘Old World’ concept of ‘Kingdom’ with John F. Kennedy’s new ‘Camelot’ as well as the solid family values at the centre of the Disney ideology.

However, essential to both these views of itself was the notion that the American Way was the right way. Unfortunately, how a nation perceives itself and how others see it do not always coincide. Inevitably, such a dichotomy in the attempt to understand the idea of statehood and that statehood’s relationship with others is mirrored in the individuals understanding of their own subjective self and of that self within the world.

John Kennedy Toole’s, *A Confederacy of Dunces* (1981), is an example of this preoccupation. Written in the early 1960s it concerns the exploits of one Ignatius J. Reilly. Reilly, who lives with his mother in New Orleans, spends his days ranting against everything he dislikes in the modern world. He hates the lack of geometry and theology in contemporary society and finds it impossible to form a lasting relationship. His mother is driven to distraction by her son’s inertia and assumes that all he needs is to get a job. Ignatius does indeed have several jobs during the course of the novel but invariably his distaste for the American Protestant work ethic leads him into conflict with his employers and his various jobs never lasts.
Ignatius is also involved throughout the book in a doomed 'relationship' with a woman called Myrna Minkoff. Myrna is diametrically opposed to Reilly as a character. She is socially and politically active, which Ignatius deems to be a complete waste of time. Reilly tells us, in one of his abortive encounters with Myrna, that,

She dug into her large black valise and assaulted me (almost literally) with greasy copies of *Men and Masses* and *Now!* and *Broken Barricades* and *Surge* and *Revulsion* and various manifestos and pamphlets pertaining to organizations of which she was a most active member: Students for Liberty, Youth for Sex, The Black Muslims, Friends of Latvia, Children for Miscegenation, The White Citizens' Councils. Myrna was, you see, terribly engaged in her society; I, on the other hand, older and wiser, was terribly dis-engaged. (Toole, 1981, 161)

This notion of disengagement is crucial on two levels. Firstly, it mirrors Toole's own sense of that feeling - Toole was unable to get the book published and committed suicide in 1969. Secondly, and more importantly, as the sixties progressed, writers were to investigate this notion of disengagement and to re-evaluate the relationship of writing between itself and the reader as well as the place of writing within the world as a whole.

One of the aspects of disengagement that begins to permeate American writing in the 1970s is the idea of what Ronald Sukenick called 'Inverventive Fiction'. Sukenick (Foley, J.'The Rival Tradition'. Online:Internet. flashpointmag.com/sukeint1.html) posits the idea that the writer, finding himself within the 'Conglomerate Culture' must,

cut the lines of authority that are implicit in most of what gets published. And it is an authority, it's written by stooges of the
Establishment, enforced by money and distribution, and promotion. (Foley, J. ‘The Rival Tradition’. Online: Internet. flashpointmag.com/sukeint1.html)

In other words, the writer ideally should turn his back on the mass market of modern publishing and what it regards as the generally accepted notion of taste at any one time in order to, ‘write in different ways so that readers can get out of the moulds that are prepared for them.’ (Foley, J. ‘The Rival Tradition’. Online: Internet. flashpointmag.com/sukeint1.html)

Sukenick, therefore, sees the role of the writer as intervening and changing the accepted norms of reality. As Sukenick says,

The way to best understand my concept of the ‘interventive’ is as the end of a series of things. First there was the idea of holding the mirror up to Nature, the realist tradition. Then there was the idea pushed by Surfiction that writing could be, not an imitation of reality, but an addition to reality. The next phase is what I conceive of as interventive, meaning that writing can actually intervene in and change reality, or experience. (Foley, J. ‘The Rival Tradition’. Online: Internet. flashpointmag.com/sukeint1.html)

Here then, Sukenick is proposing a new relationship between the reader and the text. And this new relationship is built upon difference.

Hence, for Sukenick, American writing must look back to those writers such as Melville who sought to break away from its roots in the English fictive tradition and re-establish itself on its own terms. As Sukenick says, ‘what I do is breach the conventional contract with the reader, I cancel that contract and make another kind of contract’ (Foley, J. ‘The Rival Tradition’. Online: Internet. flashpointmag.com/sukeint1.html).
American fiction, then, becomes different from English fiction, and the tradition from which that evolves, precisely because it takes these differing standpoints.

In other words, American fiction must re-form itself and make itself anew. However, the question remains as to how far American postmodern fiction has achieved this new contract between reader and writer. Similarly, if this new contract does exist, what was the journey American postmodern fiction took to reach such a point? Finally, in what ways do American postmodern writers actually break away from the Anglo-American tradition?

One writer who was to have an influence on the development of American writing was Richard Brautigan. As the Beat Generation of the 1950s was re-inventing itself and reconsidering life in America in the 1960s, through such texts as Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1979) and Kurt Vonnegut's, *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1992), so Brautigan joined the debate as to what it meant to be a contemporary American writer.

In Brautigan's collection, *Revenge of the Lawn* (1974), the stories, published throughout the 1960s, explore and contrast a remembered pre-war America with its contemporary present. In the title story of the collection, the narrator remembers his grandmother, who, 'in her own way, shines like a beacon down the stormy American past.' (Brautigan, 1974,)
The narrator here is offering us an idealized vision of a character shining like a beacon from the past. Yet, that 'beacon' has the effect of overshadowing what is already a 'stormy past'. Similarly, this is no innocent old lady. She has the Sheriff and the County in her hands through her bootlegging operation. Then, one day, an Italian real estate salesman from Florida arrives selling, what is in effect, the America Dream, the chance of a better life:

He was selling a vision of eternal oranges and sunshine door to door in a land where people ate apples and it rained a lot. (Brautigan, 1974, 12)

This is a land where the American Dream can be sold 'door to door' and turning this down means, literally in this case, that such a lost opportunity will come back one day to sting you. Now living with the salesman, the grandmother, one day, deposits some leftover mash from the still onto the lawn for the geese to eat. The geese eat the mash and end up drunk and staring on like some helpless, primitive American advertisement for aspirin under the pear tree... (Brautigan, 1974, 15)

The world of commerce and all it affords breaks in again with the reference to advertising. But, once more, the promises of capitalism bring nothing but disaster as Jack, returning home and plagued in his car by an errant bee, tries to avoid the drunken geese and crashes into the house. The story ends in a mocking reference to the myth of George Washington and the cherry tree as the narrator half remembers someone, perhaps Jack, cutting down and setting fire to the pear tree, thus creating a myth for his own life.
The Revenge of the Lawn (1974) offers a subversive image of the picket-fenced lawn so iconic of small-town America. The notions of property and security inherent within the ideal of the American Dream are turned upside down so that 'the lawn' becomes a place of treachery and danger. This idea of an undercurrent of prospective violence in small town America is repeated in such works as David Lynch's film, Blue Velvet (1986) and Jeffrey Eugenides' novel, The Virgin Suicides (2002). These depictions go to point out the vast difference between the idealized vision of America and the reality that lives within it.

This idea can be found in the story, 'The Cover For Trout Fishing In America', found in the collection, Trout Fishing in America (1976). In this piece, Brautigan describes the statue of Benjamin Franklin, which can be seen in the photograph on the front cover of the book. Around the base of the statue, we are told, are,

four words facing the directions of this world, to the east WELCOME, to the west WELCOME, to the north WELCOME, to the south WELCOME. (Brautigan, 1976, 1)

Here is an image, so long cherished by emigrants since the Pilgrim Fathers, of an America opening its arms to the world with its promise of personal betterment and security. However, once again the reality, in this case, is just across the street from the statue. Here stand the poor, waiting for the handout of a sandwich from the church, a sandwich containing a single spinach leaf. Brautigan closes the piece by referring to the Czech writer, Franz Kafka. Brautigan asks the question,
Was it Kafka who learned about America by reading the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin...
Kafka who said, 'I like the Americans because they are healthy and optimistic.' (Brautigan, 1976, 2)

The reference to Kafka is deliberately ironic. Kafka’s novel, *America*, published posthumously in 1927, was a bleak, yet comic, narrative describing the emigration to America of Karl Rossman. Rossman soon discovers that America is not ‘the land of the free and the home of the brave’, but rather it is a land of loneliness and isolation. This view of life in the States is reinforced in the story, ‘A Long Time Ago People Decided to Live in America’ (1974). In this story of a chance meeting between the narrator and a young woman, the narrator begins to imagine the possibilities this meeting might offer him. However, the possibilities of human contact die as soon as it is born and the girl,

> departs beautifully towards all the people that she will ever meet, at best I will turn out to be a phantom memory, and all lives that she will live.  
> We’ve finished living this one together.  
> She’s gone. (Brautigan, 1974, 110)

This dichotomy between the myth and reality of America life is starkly drawn in Brautigan’s story, ‘The Scarlatti Tilt’ (1974). Only two sentences long, the story manages to convey the aspiration to a higher cultural norm, in its reference to the ‘Old World’, and the bleak American response to those aspirations:

> ‘It’s very hard to live in a studio apartment in San Jose with a man who’s learning to play the violin.’ That’s what she told the police when she handed them the empty revolver. (Brautigan, 1974, 52)

The Scarlatti of the title refers to the Italian seventeenth composer,
Alessandro Scarlatti, generally regarded to be the founder of modern opera. Thus the reader is made aware of the clash of cultural expectations implicit within the text. On the one hand, there is the search for artistic value with the man learning to play the violin, which in itself refers to Scarlatti and the culture of the ‘Old World’; whilst, on the other hand, there is the amoral ease to commit murder which is suggested to be both solution and norm of modern American culture.

Clearly, this is no simple three-line story. One has to ask, is this a simple short story in the conventional sense and if not, then what form of writing is it? Or is it simple reportage or crime story? Brautigan is subverting the expectations of what a short story should be in terms of form. Similarly, he is questioning the notion of recognised genre and, in the process of doing so, arguably creating a new form.

Whatever the case, it is clear that Brautigan is disrupting the notion of what the author seems to be proposing of a text and the expectations of the reader of that text. This subversion of genre is continued in Brautigan’s works, The Abortion: An Historical Romance 1966 (1974) and Willard and his Bowling Trophies: A Perverse Mystery (1975). Clearly, for the reader, it might be difficult to accept the idea of a novel ostensibly dealing with abortion to be a ‘Romance’. Similarly, one might expect a work with a historical perspective to cover more than one year, 1966.

With Willard and his Bowling Trophies (1975), Brautigan again confronts
the reader with an ambiguity of expectation by using the sub-heading, 'A Perverse Mystery'. What exactly is a 'Perverse Mystery'? Is it perverse because there is in fact no mystery or does the idea of perversion refer to something else?

Brautigan, therefore, can be seen to be exploring both what a text can do and traditional notions of the relationship between the reader and that text. He also questions the idealized view of America, bringing to attention what he sees as the deep sense of isolation and the possibility of violence that lies beneath the American myth.

Another writer who questioned the idealized view of America and the status of its cultural antecedents was William Gaddis. By the time Brautigan was writing, Gaddis had already questioned the Anglo-American perspective of American writing with his novel, *The Recognitions* (1955).

The novel centres around the character of Wyatt Gwyon, who fakes paintings in the style of the European 'Old Masters'. Gwyon is struggling to understand the reality he exists in but his anxiety is compounded by the fact that so well done is Gwyon's work that the art world cannot decide if they are real or fake. Eventually Gwyon's work is adopted by a number of businessmen who are strictly interested in their profit value. As a result, the whole notion of authentication is brought into question. It is through this idea that Gaddis, therefore, is able to question what, if anything, can
be called real, and hence authentic. This idea is an exploration of the same issues that Baudrillard will later come to address when writing in *America* he says,

America ducks the question of origins; it cultivates no origin or mythical authenticity; it has no past and no founding truth. Having known no primitive accumulation of time, it lives in a perpetual present. Having seen no slow, centuries-long accumulation of a principal of truth, it lives in perpetual simulation... (Baudrillard, 1996, 76)

Baudrillard exaggerates for effect here, but he is none the less putting forward the idea that American culture does not operate from the same standpoint as that which has evolved out of the European tradition. Indeed, America has no such tradition. If this is the case then the question has to be asked, what effect does this have on American fiction?

William Gass, writing in his introduction to *The Recognitions* (1993), suggests that American fiction, which up until this point was reliant on the Anglo-American tradition of realism, could no longer be justified:

Too often we bring to literature the bias for 'realism' we were normally brought up with, and consequently we find a work like 'The Recognitions' too fanciful, obscure, and riddling; but is reality always clear and unambiguous? Is reality simple not complex?...the traditional realist's well-scrubbed world where motives are known and actions unambiguous, where you can believe what you are told and where the paths of good and evil are clearly marked as highways, that world is as contrived as a can opener. (Gaddis, 1993, xi)

Gaddis, in *The Recognitions* (1993) therefore, is putting forward the premise that American art cannot and perhaps should not compare itself to the European tradition of art. Instead the reader is presented with the idea

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that it is the concept of Corporatism and its institutions that are at the ideological heart of American society. To this extent it becomes unimportant as to whether a particular painting is a fake or not, rather what is important is the intrinsic monetary value of that work of art. Art in America becomes valuable only when it is seen as a commodity. This, of course, is the case throughout the western world but it is more blatant in America.

Although Gaddis's first novel had limited popular success, his preoccupations and ideas were to be taken up by other writers and artists. Andy Warhol's collection of essays, *From A to B and Back Again: The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (1976) was published when Warhol was at the heart of the American art scene, but what is interesting, in relation to Gaddis, is his method of production. Warhol called his studio 'The Factory', implying a sense of industrialization which was manifested by the use of repeated images of the same subject within one work. But what is more important to note is the fact that Warhol's own actual involvement in the production of the work could be distinctly minimal. Warhol would decide the image to be used and what colours to be laid over that image, but in most cases, it would be his assistants who would actually physically make the work. This inevitably throws into question our whole notion of originality and authenticity since if Warhol did not actually put paint to canvas, so to speak, on a piece of work, how far can the finished product be actually called a work of art by Andy Warhol? Yet, to Warhol, it was precisely that finished product, as product, that was of more importance
than the actual making of it. In this collection Warhol wrote,

An artist is somebody who produces things that people don’t need to have but that he – for some reason – thinks it would be a good idea to give them.
Business Art is a much better thing to be making than Art Art, because Art Art doesn’t support the space it takes up, whereas Business Art does.
(Warhol, 1976, 129)

Clearly Warhol here is acknowledging the idea of Art as Business above that of Art as Art. Business is what drives the American ideal and Business defines cultural, and indeed personal, worth. It should not be surprising, therefore, that Gaddis’s second novel, JR (1993), which was published the same year Warhol’s collection came out in America, concentrates on the theme of free-enterprise America.

JR (1993) is the story of 11-year-old JR Vansant who, through taking advantage of offers in the junk mail he receives, succeeds in building an enormous business empire. Money, therefore, and its relentless pursuit, is the essential currency of the novel.

However, it is important to note that in JR it is not how much money is accumulated that matters but rather it is the process of accumulation in itself that is important. Vansant’s various deals are all based on the recycling of unwanted goods. In his introduction to the novel, Frederick Karl writes,

the goods of the world are not produced but merely redirected; so that use goes to detritus, back to use as a way in which money can be raised, and the cycle re-begins. (Gaddis, 1993, ix)
The character of JR is a new brand of entrepreneur who lives in a world of non-productivity. This idea re-establishes Gaddis's previous concerns about originality since in this world there can be no buying of any product that is truly ‘new’ since every product has been re-cycled from something else. Interestingly enough, this idea is taken up by Warhol when he suggests,

There should be supermarkets that sell things and supermarkets that buy things back, and until that equalizes, there’ll be more waste than there should be. Everybody would always have something to sell back, so everybody would have money, because everybody would have something to sell. We all have something, but most of what we have isn’t saleable, there’s such a preference today for brand new things...We have to get more organized. People who tell you we’re running out of things are just making the prices go up higher. How can we be running out of anything when there’s always, if I’m not mistaken, the same amount of matter in the Universe, with the exception of what goes into the black holes? (Warhol, 1976, 131)

It is just this new economic vision of selling, buying back and re-selling that JR Vansant is at the heart of and sustains. He has become part of what Baudrillard called,

A generation neither fired by ambition nor fuelled by the energy of repression, but completely refocused upon themselves, in love with business not so much for profit or prestige as for its being a sort of performance, a technical feat. (Baudrillard, 1996, 110)

Clearly, if Gaddis is putting forward a new approach to the ways and means of the American free-enterprise economy, the manner in which this new approach is delivered will also, in itself, require a new, or at least different, style of delivery.

So it is that JR is almost completely made up of dialogue. The effect of
this is that no one particular character at any one particular moment can, through the traditional intervention of the third person narrator, be understood to be the originator of a particular unit of speech. Through the use of external interruption from radios, television and the like, the white noise of the surrounding world continually breaks through into the speech of the characters. In this example, a conversation taking place in an office at the school Vansant attends is interrupted by a recording of a lesson:

- Sixth? That?
- Glancy. They're doing percents.
- merchant, and this merchant sold a coat marked fifty dollars at ten percent discount...
- Glancy reading cue cards. You can tell.
- Don't show them that, just Glancy writing on a blackboard.
- that this merchant still made a twenty percent profit, lets find the cost of the original... (Gaddis, 1993, 29)

The effect of this method, as Frederick Karl, is twofold. First, it is that 'meaning',

is clearly not to be found solely in words or in passages, or in thematic development, certainly not in plot or character; rather, meaning derives from the assault on our ears, from the waves of Americanese suggesting how business is done. (Gaddis, 1993, x)

Second, as Karl (1993) goes on to say, 'the reader is forced to think not of what he or she is given, but of what is being held back.' It is interesting to note that in the passage quoted from the novel above, the intruding 'voice' breaks off just as it gets to the word 'original', as if the very originality of whatever item is being referred to precludes it from being allowed to exist within the text. As Karl states,
If the business of America is counterfeiting, imitation, fakery, Gaddis has discovered a way in: through a discontinuous, aborted language serving as a vehicle for both the energy and the depletion of American ideals.
(Gaddis, 1993, vii)

As has been stated, Gaddis's reputation as a writer of postmodern American identity was slow to come about. However, critics do now acknowledge the pivotal part which his work played in bridging the concerns between modernist writers, such as Fitzgerald and Faulkner and their postmodern counterparts; Pynchon and DeLillo, for example. The commodification of Money and Power and the representation of these commodities through language were the central themes that Gaddis employed, and these themes continued to engage writers such as Max Apple with his novel, The Propheeters (1987), concerning the empire-building exploits of both Howard Johnson and the Disneys, right up to David Foster Wallace's satirical view of the advertising world in his story, Mr. Squishy (2005).

In JR, Vansant has to operate his commercial empire via the telephone. Since he is only twelve years old, no Wall Street dealer would take him seriously face to face. Vansant, therefore, has to maintain an element of secrecy. And it is this secrecy that allows his power to exist. Don DeLillo is another writer who is well aware of the relationship between money, power and secrecy.

DeLillo's novel, Players (1991), concerns a married couple, Pammy and
Lyle, whose marriage has stagnated. Pammy works for Grief Management, the offices of which are in the World Trade Center, and which offers counselling to the bereaved. Lyle works in the New York Stock Exchange, and, in a semi-official capacity, is involved in the investigation of a terrorist cell. Both characters have become de-sensitised to their relationship and the world in which they find themselves and seek to find ways to give life to their existence.

Eventually the terrorist cell, with which Lyle has gradually become involved, attacks the New York Stock Exchange purely because, as we are told, they,

wanted to disrupt their system, the idea of worldwide money. It's this system that we believe is their secret weapon. It all goes floating across the floor. Currents of invisible life. This is the centre of their existence. The electronic system. The waves and charges. The green numbers on the board...their closest taste of immortality. Not the bulk of all that money. The system itself, the current...It was this system of theirs we wanted to destroy, this invisible power. It's all in that system,...the flow of electric current that unites moneys, plural, from all over the world. Their greatest strength...

(DeLillo, 1991, 107)

Yet no authorial moral standpoint is offered concerning the actions of the characters and events that take place within the novel. Each is merely out to extort from the world whatever it is they need at that moment and the consequences of these desires are never considered, or at best glossed over.

As DeLillo states,

We live in a world where everybody can think up a worst case scenario. But the fact that we don't act that scenario out differentiates us from terrorists. I believe these people at first also differentiate between the violence they are willing to carry out and the consequences of this violence. But at some point they force
themselves not to see that difference anymore. And a person who is only committed to his own ideas or those of some great resolute leader will at some point be unable to see the difference and thus become a danger to himself and others. (Frankfurter Rundschau, 20/11/2003, No. 271, 28-29)

This sense of the arbitrariness of violence is again addressed in the novel, The Names (1987). The central character of this work is a political analyst called James Axton who assesses the political stability of middle-eastern states. Whilst travelling in Greece, Axton becomes aware of a series of murders committed by a cult where the victim is chosen purely because the initials of the victim’s names are the same as the geographical location they are in at the time. These seemingly random acts become mirrored by the attitudes of the people Axton meets towards America and American foreign policy. As Axton is told by the Greek, Andreas:

I think it is only in a crisis that Americans see other people. It has to be an American crisis, of course. If two countries fight that do not supply the Americans with some precious commodity, then the education of the public does not take place. But when the dictator falls, when the oil is threatened, then you turn on the television and they tell you where the country is, what the language is, how to pronounce the names of the leaders, what the religion is all about...TV. Look. This is Iran, this is Iraq. Let us pronounce the word correctly. E-ron. E-ronians. This is Sunni, this is Shi’ite. Very good. Next year we do the Philippine Islands, okay? (DeLillo, 1987, 58)

Although the narrative voice of Players may not directly comment on the actions of the characters within the novel, DeLillo himself does refer back to those themes found in the work of Gaddis and Brautigan. In an interview given in 1992, DeLillo says:
Today, I believe, we are at the point where reality itself is being consumed, used up... We walk through the street, we see an act of violence, a shooting, and say: Just like the movies. We have become unable to grasp something unmediated. (*Desalm, Koelner Stadtanzeiger, 27/10/1992*)

Similarly, in a 1998 interview given to *Die Zeit*, DeLillo states, ‘Our culture is all about consuming, and a second later everything is turned into garbage.’ (*Burger, Zeit magazin, Nr. 42, 8/10/1998*)

These themes of consumerism and violence are melded together in DeLillo’s work, *Mao II* (1992). In this novel, DeLillo, through the character of Bill Gray, who is asked to speak on behalf of a Swiss poet being held hostage in Beirut, asks the question what is the role of the writer in contemporary society and has he/she been superseded by terrorist activity? However, these concerns are centred within an investigation of the nature of consumption and, in particular the consumption of the Image.

DeLillo uses the idea of the visual image throughout the whole of the novel. The image of Mao is on the front cover of the book, whilst within the text itself are photos of a Unification church wedding, the Hillsborough disaster, the Tiananmen Square student protest, supporters beneath an image of Khomeini and, finally, some boys in a bunker, one of whom appears to be holding a gun. Similarly, Gray comes into contact with another character, Brita Nilsson. Nilsson is a photographer who wants to photograph the reclusive Gray.

These images allow, as Mark Osteen writes in his essay, ‘Becoming
Incorporated: Spectacular Authorship and DeLillo’s Mao II’ (1999), the novel to be seen as,

a multimedia event...DeLillo’s incorporation of photos thus discloses his participation in the culture of images that Gray abhors and his construction of a novel form of authorship – one which we might call ‘corporate’, since it is collective, and seems at once corporeal and simulacral - shared with photographers and their massed subjects. (Osteen, 1999, 645-646)

Bill Gray’s abhorrence of what Osteen calls the culture of images can be seen when Gray tells Brita,

I’ve become someone’s material. Yours, Brita. There’s life and there’s the consumer event. Everything around us tends to channel our lives toward some final reality in print or on film. Two lovers quarrel in the back of a taxi and a question becomes implicit in the event. Who will write the book and who will play the lovers in the movie? Everything seeks its own heightened version. Or put it this way. Nothing happens until it’s consumed. (DeLillo, 1991, 43-44)

Again here, the relevance of Warhol to the whole concept of the Image cannot be denied. Not only does Scott go to see an exhibition of Warhol’s paintings, but the work that captures his attention the most, Mao II, appears on the front cover of the book. As Klaus Honnef writes, concerning the effect of Warhol’s work:

Continual reiteration undermines the exceptional nature of the original subject matter. Its uniqueness is dissolved by virtue of repetition, it loses its contours, fades and by fading brings into force a world cloaked by the constant barrage of the mass media. Spies rightly speaks of overstepping the subject matter. Here it turns out that Warhol’s structure of repetition leads to the attrition of the articles themselves and their character. Reiteration gnaws at the entire picture. In some of his more memorable pictures Warhol managed to capture the desolation of repetition, the destruction of feeling by overexposure and of enjoyment by consumption. (Honnef, 2000, 68) ¹

¹ ‘Spies’ is a critic with whom Honnef is taking issue.
The consumption, as well as the production of such images, is done by the ‘mass’. Crowds abound in the novel, opening, as it does with the mass of believers at a Unification Church wedding and the crowd that observes it. The Hillsborough disaster is watched by Karen Janney, who herself took part in the wedding. As the character, George Haddad, says,

There’s too much of everything, more things and messages and meanings than we can use in ten thousand lifetimes. Inertia-hysteria. Is history possible? Is anyone serious? Who do we take seriously?...The artist is absorbed, the madman in the street is absorbed and processed and incorporated. Give him a dollar, put him in a TV commercial. Only a terrorist stands outside. The culture hasn’t figured out how to assimilate him. It’s confusing when they kill the innocent. But this is precisely the language of being noticed, the only language the west understands. (DeLillo, 1991, 157)

Thus it is that the novelist has been usurped. The terrorist now produces, through his actions, the images that confront, disturb, but ultimately satisfy the need for images. And, of course, the bigger the terrorist act, the more impact the image and the greater the need to consume the image of the act becomes. As Bill Gray says,

There’s a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists. In the West we become famous effigies as our books lose the power to shape and influence...Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated. (DeLillo, 1991, 41)

For Gray, terror and terrorist acts have become the all-consuming concern of society. As he tells Brita,

Because we’re giving way to terror, to news of terror, to tape recorders
and cameras, to radios, to bombs stashed in radios. News of disaster is the only narrative people need. The darker the news, the grander the narrative. News is the last addiction before – what? I don’t know. (DeLillo, 1991, 42)

Gray’s, and by extension DeLillo’s, concerns about terrorism, as we now know, turn out to be prophetic. In the same conversation Gray has with Brita, quoted above, Gray asks Brita to tell him about New York. Brita tells him, in an exchange that is to become all too poignant,

‘...it’s all being flattened and hauled away so they can build towers.’
‘Eventually the towers will seem human and local and quirky. Give them time.’
‘I’ll go and hit my head against the wall. You tell me when to stop.’
‘You’ll wonder what made you mad.’
‘I already have the World Trade Center.’
‘And it’s already harmless and ageless. Forgotten-looking. And think how much worse.’
‘What?’ she said.
‘If there was only one tower instead of two.’
‘You mean they interact. There is a play of light.’
‘Wouldn’t a single tower be much worse?’
‘No, because my big complaint is only partly size. The size is deadly. But having two of them is like a comment, it’s like a dialogue, only I don’t know what they’re saying.’
‘They’re saying, “Have a nice day”.’
(DeLillo, 1991, 39-40)

DeLillo, by having Gray use the clichéd phrase, ‘Have a nice day’, sums up the socio-political consciousness of the time. As long as the status quo of daily life is sustained on the surface, underlying fears concerning the stability of that socio-political norm can be subsumed, if not completely ignored. As Baudrillard writes,

With the marvellous complicity of its entire population, New York acts out its own catastrophe as a stage play. And this is not an effect of its decadence, but its own power, to which there is, of course, no threat. In fact, this absence of threat is its power. Its density, its surface
electricity rule out any thought of war... This centrality and eccentricity can only create a crazed sense of its own end... which the whole city collectively cultivates in its technical frenzy for the vertical, its constant acceleration of the banal...(Baudrillard, 1996, 22)

Baudrillard is recognizing here that sense of the inviolate that permeates not only the New York psyche but also the American psyche. Images can, and are, consumed precisely because they are just images. Their constant repetition denies their original individuality as well as the physicality, impact and consequence of the subject being represented. So we find in *Mao II*, when Karen watches a report on the Hillsborough disaster,

She sees the fence up close and they stop the film and its like a religious painting, the scene could be a fresco in a tourist church, it is composed and balanced and filled with people suffering. (DeLillo, 1991, 33)

Karen knows people are suffering, yet she, like others who are at the scene, becomes taken in by the image of what she is seeing, not the reality of it:

They show men calmly looking on. They show the fence from a distance, bodies piling up behind it, smothered, sometimes only fingers moving, and it is like a fresco in an old dark church, a crowded twisted vision of a rush to death as only a master of the age could paint it. (DeLillo, 1991, 34)

DeLillo shows us the banality of the human psyche in the era of American consumer society. It can accept the image of violence and threat while at the same time denying that any such violence or threat actually exists.

Yet this attitude was to suffer the ultimate blow and, perhaps not surprisingly, DeLillo again suggested its coming with his novel, *Underworld* (1999). DeLillo's novel is a panoramic view of American life.
spreading over fifty years. Beginning with a baseball game the novel takes
in all the themes expected of a DeLillo novel. Popular culture,
consumerism and waste, paranoia, and violence can all be found in the
work, yet it is the cover image of the book that has taken precedence over
the text for many DeLillo critics and readers alike.

The cover image for DeLillo’s *Underworld* shows the Twin Towers of The
World Trade Center in New York. In the foreground is the cross atop St.
Paul’s Chapel. What appears to be a white dove flies overhead. As has
been seen above, DeLillo discussed the importance of the Towers in *Mao
II*. They represent the inviolability of the America Dream and the
supremacy of the Capitalist and consumerist elements that go to make up
that dream. As Baudrillard writes,

The Americans are not wrong in their idyllic conviction that they are at
the centre of the world, the supreme power, the absolute model for
everyone. And this conviction is not so much founded on natural
resources, technologies, and arms, as on the miraculous premiss of a
utopia made reality, of a society which, with a directness we might
judge unbearable, is built on the idea that it is the realization of
everything the others have dreamt of — justice, plenty, rule of law,
wealth, freedom: it knows this, it believes in it, and in the end, the
others have come to believe in it too. (Baudrillard, 1988, 77)

If we are to accept Baudrillard’s viewpoint it should be no surprise that the
Twin Towers are a part of the ‘World’ Trade Center, or that the biggest
competition in baseball, with which *Underworld* begins, is the ‘World
Series’. This is despite the fact that historically only domestic American
teams took part in it. Writers, such as Brautigan, Gaddis and DeLillo, in
their work, do present the idea of America expounded by Baudrillard
above. Yet crucially, what they then do is intervene between the text and
reader, in other words between the image and the consumption of that image, by asking the question, what actually is the reality behind that image? Further to this, such writers go on to ask, what happens when that image of America comes tumbling down?

This question was suddenly to come crashing to the fore with the events of September 11th 2001. On that day the image of America perpetuated by America and Americans literally did come crashing down with the attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York. That this spectacular act of terrorism on American soil was to fundamentally attack and effectively destroy the image of America maintained up until that point is undeniable. As DeLillo states, when asked in interview what September 11th meant to him:

For me it marks the actual beginning of the 21st century. Because while the zeitgeist before the events was shaped by a belief in the omnipresent power of money and in America's invulnerability, which was rooted in the late 90's, that belief has now been replaced by fear. On that day we entered a new age of fear and uncertainty. If, up to that point in the US, we were occupied primarily with watching the streams of money in internet cafes or at home in front of the computer, we are now governed by laws, more human ones. The collapse reactivated worries and fears that we thought to be lost.

(Frankfurter Rundschau, 20/11/2003, No. 271, 28-29)

If we accept DeLillo's premise that after September 11th America entered a 'new age', then it must follow that American writing also entered a 'new age'. Yet, postmodern American writers, from Brautigan to DeLillo and up until the present day have continually challenged concepts of narrative and the text, drawing away from the Anglo-American tradition, and also questioned the nature of the culture in which those texts exist. In their

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work they criticize and present differing possibilities to the social, economic and political realities in which they find themselves living. There is in the work of these writers a constant refusal to ‘buy into’ the concept of the American Dream, the mass consumerism and corporatism that is implied within the American Dream, and their writings seek to lay bare its inherent fallacy.
Perhaps the most fundamental point to be made when discussing the postmodern English novel is the degree to which the author is prepared to utilise those elements that go to make up a postmodern text within his or her own work. In other words, should the novel be predominately anti-experimental, mimetic and conventional in its narrative, or can the English novel engage wholeheartedly with postmodernism? Similarly, it has to be asked, is the English reader prepared for the novel to break away from its nineteenth-century traditional background, or is it that readers do not wish the novel to hold back from branching into those areas explored by its American counterpart? Indeed, Andrew Marr raises this point in an article he wrote for Prospect magazine in 2000. As he states:

"Somehow, the male American novelist has an openness to history, to the wider culture and a sense of men's condition that the British male novelist does not...Is it because of the grandeur and glamour of 'the American century' or the easily-mocked but triumphant cultural earnestness of part of the US elite? At any rate, our story seems smaller by comparison, our male imagination (for this does not apply to female novelists or less so) inward, pinched, shrivelled, unconfident. (Marr, 2000, 32)"

However, one must ask, is this how the postmodern English writer sees the position of contemporary writing? In his short essay, 'Future memory' (1996), Iain Sinclair suggests that,

"The composition of fiction is an exercise in future memory; the attempt to formulate an accurate description of events that have not yet occurred but which haunt the novelist like a troublesome dream. The right to lie, distort, transpose, edit is what distinguishes fiction from document. Fiction plots to undermine itself, to subvert the shape of the plan as it's first revealed. It aspires to the trance of false memory, sets up
hypnotic rhythms, changes of pace and temperature to lull the only audience that matters into an unearned sense of security: the audience of one – the writer. To delete or deny the original sustaining impulse is to escape history. It's the thing we all aim for, to divorce the text from its dim scribe and to set it free. (Sinclair, 1996, 36)

One writer who can be said to deliberately set out to 'lie, distort, transpose and edit' is B.S. Johnson. In his novel, *House Mother Normal* (1984), Johnson tells the story of a House Mother in an Old People's Home and a number of inmates of that particular home. Chronologically operating over the same time span, the individual narratives each retell the same event. However, the language of each monologue, every one unique in its own way, gradually breaks down as we reach the disturbing denouement of the tale. So much so that we may have only one word on the page, as in George Hedbury's monologue where there is only the word 'moving' in one of the sections of his particular narrative (Johnson, 1984, 154). Hedbury's monologue proceeds to collapse so much we are presented with only a series of totally blank pages (Johnson, 1984, 156-158).

Johnson attempted to extend the limits of the novel with such works as *Albert Angelo* (1964) and *The Unfortunates* (1969). It can be argued that Johnson saw the role of order within the text as the central problem in the construction of the novel. This order is imposed by the author him/herself, as well as by traditional concepts of order passed down through literary history. As Johnson writes in his work, *Albert Angelo*,

There was this tremendous need for man to impose a pattern on life, Albert thought, to turn wood into planks or blocks or whatever.
Inanimate life is always moving towards disintegration, towards chaos, and man is moving in the opposite direction, toward the imposition of order: as the animals are, too, but to a far lesser extent. (Johnson, 2004, 133)

Thus, for Johnson, there is an inevitability about the place of order in the life of man which necessarily filters down into the forms he produces. The implications of this are that one has 'to establish your own set of rules, let alone your own obedience of those rules, your own discipline' (Johnson, 2004, 132).

Johnson later in *Alberto Angelo* set out what these 'rules' were and the disciplinarian approach they required. In the final section of the novel, entitled 'Disintegration', he wrote that it,

- Is about the fragmentariness of life, too, attempts to produce the moment-to-moment fragmentariness of life, my life, and to echo it in technique, the fragmentariness, a collage made of the fragments of my own life, the poor odds and sods, the bric-a-brac, a thing composed of, then. (Johnson, 2004, 169)

Johnson, as we have seen, represented this fragmentation within his own texts with the use of blank pages and elaborate constructs rare in the writing of the novel at that time. His work *The Unfortunates* (1999), can even be seen to question what the contemporary novel actually is, comprising wholly of loose, unbound pages presented in a box which can be read in any order without disrupting the narrative line. This is because the narrative of *The Unfortunates* revolves around the very same 'moment-to-moment' fragments of his own life that Johnson referred to in *Alberto Angelo*. 

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Such fragmentation enabled the author to break down even further the traditional divisions of the novel, from parts and chapters, to the individual page itself. The page, then, through various techniques, could itself be broken up into even smaller components. Johnson was to write,

- A page is an area on which I may place any signs I consider to communicate most nearly what I have to convey: therefore I employ, within the pocket of my publisher and the patience of my printer, typographical techniques beyond the arbitrary and constricting limits of the conventional novel.

(Johnson, 2004, 176)

However, what Johnson saw in the possibilities of the text on the page did not always sit so well with the critics. In a review in the *Times Literary Supplement* of the 9th February 1973, one critic was to write of his novel, *Christie Malry's Own Double-Entry* (1973), that,

It's the stuff of a shrewd psychological study, with the scope for much incidental satire; practitioners of black comedy among American writers could have made it work. But Mr. Johnson's devotion to the short novel, and the arbitrary manipulation of characters and happenings on a strictly non-realistic, resolutely anti-novel, level (despite the patient, indeed loving realism of his settings), means that it all evaporates in knockabout fantasy almost as soon as it has started.

(Template, ‘Please be brief’, Online: Internet. grapefruit-web.co.uk 30/05/04)

Such was the importance for Johnson, on the other hand, of these ideas that he went on to write, in what might be seen as a side-swipe at such critics of that time, that,

- To dismiss such techniques as gimmicks, or to refuse to take them seriously, is crassly to miss the point. (Johnson, 2004, 176)
Despite unstinting praise at the time from the likes of Samuel Beckett and Anthony Burgess, Johnson was never to become a best-selling author. In fact, in the 1970s authors were more likely to be interested in the traditional, plot driven novel, than those which stretched the boundaries of the novel. Similarly, contemporary critics of the time also conveyed attitudes that resisted experiment. As David Lodge wrote in his essay, ‘The Novelist at the Crossroads’ (1969),

There are indeed good reasons for anticipating with something less than enthusiasm the disappearance of the novel and its replacement by the non-fictional novel or fabulation. Especially to anyone whose imagination has been nourished by the great realistic novelists of the past, both these side roads will seem to lead all to easily into desert or bog- self-defeating banality or self-indulgent excess. (Bradbury, 1990, 109)

This fear of the novel ending up in a desert or bog leads Lodge to assert ‘a modest affirmation of faith in the future of realistic fiction’ (Bradbury, 1990, 112).

The novelist Ian McEwan recognises this reticence toward progressive literary ideas in an interview he gave to Robert Birnbaum. In this McEwan says,

I started publishing in the mid '70s and the literary culture and publishing culture were unchanged for scores of years. In the '70s it was still much as it had been in the '30s. My first book came out in '75. It was still a fairly gentlemanly, stuffy clubby world. Rather obscure. It was of very little interest to journalists – literary journalists. (Birnbaum, R. ‘Ian McEwan’. Online: Internet. themorningnews.org/archives/birnbaum_v/ian_mcewan.php 05/07/06).
Indeed, Ian McEwan’s first novel, *The Cement Garden* (1978), divided critics. Having already published the short story collections, *First Love Last Rites* (1975) and *In Between the Sheets* (1978), McEwan was at least attempting to extend the boundaries of what fiction could be about. Child abuse, extreme sex – including incest and what McEwan himself called, ‘lurid physical detail and a sense of cold dissociation’ (Dodsworth, 1994, 334) were McEwan’s subject matter.

*The Cement Garden* (1978) was something of a crystallisation of this point of view. The story of a family of children who bury their recently deceased mother in the garden, it is a deeply unsettling novel. Yet it was arguably too disturbing for most readers and the critic John Holloway wrote,

> an insistence on ostentatiously dismissing traditional values as empty, can in the end obliterate all sense of value whatever; even in writing which contrives to aim at social comment or which combines that with literature-of-language interests. On the whole this is so of the interminable formalized sex in Ian McEwan’s short stories and novels. (Ford, 1983, 122)

However, McEwan was not alone in this new development in English literature. As he says,

> Our generation came along. Probably a little more formally ambitious. More diverse. That rather stifling little England quality of British literary fiction in the ’60s and ’70s got swept away by new arrivals like Timothy Mo and Salman Rushdie and Ishiguro – new voices bringing in remnants of the old empire. Different Englishes, as it were came in. Our generation travelled more than our parents, despite the world wars. So we were much more at home in America and really the second half of the 20th century really was... the American century for fiction and we were much more excited and fascinated by that than the Kingsley Amis generation. (Birnbaum, R. ‘Ian McEwan’. Online: Internet.
As McEwan states, there was a new group of writers in the '70s that began to make an impression on the literary scene. McEwan was obviously one of these, as were Mo and Rushdie. Other writers that might be loosely termed 'postmodern' and can be placed in this category are novelists such as Graham Swift, Julian Barnes and Martin Amis.

Writing about these authors, Brian Finney says,

Unlike their counterparts in the States, these British postmodernists do not necessarily cultivate radical experimentation nor do they confine their appeal to an elite, mainly academic coterie. They are capable of producing bestsellers such as Martin Amis's *Money*. They produce works of fiction that are turned into movies, such as Angela Carter's story, 'The Company of Wolves', a rewriting of the traditional fairy story of Little Red Riding Hood. They have absorbed the triumphs (and absurdities) of poststructuralism and can utilize those aspects of recent theory that suit their purposes without becoming enslaved by them. They have never lost their readership. But they are clearly distinguishable (and distinguish themselves) from the mainstream of British realist novelists. (Finney, B.H. 'Peter Ackroyd, Postmodernist Play and Chatterton. Online: Internet. Csulb.edu/~bhfinney/Peter Ackroyd.html 07/07/06)

One of these writers, Graham Swift, when speaking about the writing process, says,

One writes fiction because one doesn't want to write fact. Fact is involved in fiction, but what drives you is the exercise of the imagination. There is a way in which you need to keep your subject matter distant from you. It has to be un-autobiographical, it has to be 'over there', so your imagination can take flight to it. (Begley, A. 'Graham Swift: “One writes fiction because one doesn't want to write fact” '. Online: Internet. bookpage.com/Bpinterviews/swift492.html 07/07/06)

Swift, here, not only goes to the heart of his own concerns in writing, that is the role of fact and fiction within the text, but also is addressing the
interests of many of those writers that were more ‘formally ambitious’, as McEwan puts it.

Indeed Swift’s novel *Waterland* (1984) has at its centre a discussion about the nature of historical narrative and its fictional representation. The narrative is preceded by a dictionary definition of the term ‘History’ (Swift, 1984, ix), yet the narrator begins his narrative by stating ‘we lived in a fairy-tale place’ (Swift, 1984, 1), and that his father contributed to this atmosphere of the fairy tale as he,

had a knack for telling stories. Made-up, true stories; soothing stories, warning stories; stories with a moral or with no point at all; believable stories and unbelievable stories; stories which were neither one thing nor the other. (Swift, 1984, 1-2).

Swift’s novel, which centres around the enforced retirement of History teacher, Tom Crick, after his wife ‘steals’ a baby, uses, just as Crick’s father does, many different forms of historical representation. Oral storytelling, literary narrative and what might be termed ‘traditional’ history are all employed to present the story of the Crick family from the seventeenth century. Indeed, Crick himself verbalizes this dichotomy between historical fact and personal experience when he says,

Reality’s not strange, not unexpected. Reality doesn’t reside in the sudden hallucination of events. Reality is uneventfulness, vacancy, flatness. Reality is that nothing happens. How many of the events of history have occurred, ask yourselves, for this and for that reason, but for no other reason, fundamentally, than the desire to make things happen? I present to you History, the fabrication, the diversion, the reality-obscuring drama. History, and its near relative, Histrionics... (Swift, 1984, 34)

By foregrounding different representations of history Swift here is indeed,
as Finney says, absorbing and utilizing elements of the postmodern
(Finney, B.H. 'Peter Ackroyd, Postmodernist Play and
Chatterton. Online: Internet. Csulb.edu/~bhfinney/Peter Ackroyd. html
07/07/06) within what remains a readable narrative.

Swift continued to explore the themes of History and the Individual in his
novel, Out Of This World (1988). In this work the central character Harry
Beech, a war photographer, tells of the death of his father by an explosion
caus ed by terrorists. Interwoven in this narrative is that of Harry's
daughter, Sophie, who relates the event from her point of view.
Throughout both narratives the theme of photography, in terms of
perception and representation of historical events, is drawn out and
juxtaposed against the idea of personal memory of those events. Once
again, therefore, Swift is using postmodern techniques and themes that had
already become, and continue to be, important elements in American
postmodern writing. For example, the use of short chapters with
descriptive headings in Waterland is similar to the way they are used in
works by the American writer Richard Brautigan, such as The Tokyo-
Montana Express (1982). Also the use of photography in Swift's Out Of
This World can be compared to its usage in Don DeLillo's work, Mao II

This new generation of English writers, therefore, were introducing
postmodern forms into their work. In particular, the idea of history and its
different modes of representation became an important way to investigate
What the postmodern writing of both history and literature has taught us is that both history and fiction are discourses, that both constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past... In other words, the meaning and the shape are not in the events, but in the systems which make those past ‘events’ into present historical ‘facts’. This is not a ‘dishonest refuge from truth’ but an acknowledgement of the meaning-making function of human constructs. (Hutcheon, 1996, 89)

What postmodern writing of fiction and history does, therefore, is to reinstall historical contexts as significant and even determining, but in so doing, it makes problematic the entire notion of historical knowledge. This is another of the paradoxes that characterize all postmodern discourse today. And the implication is that there can be no single, essential, transcendent concept of ‘genuine historicity’ (Hutcheon, 1988, 89).

This idea points towards Sinclair’s notion of setting the text free (Sinclair, 1996, 36). Ironically, since Sinclair has been critical of his work, the writer Peter Ackroyd can be seen as another of those writers who sought to extend the scope of English literature.

During the first part of the 1970’s Peter Ackroyd had studied at Yale in America. It was during this time that he met the poets John Ashbery and Kenneth Koch as well as the painters Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. Finney argues that it was these artists that were to influence Ackroyd’s writing (Finney, B.H. ‘Peter Ackroyd, Postmodernist Play and Chatterton. Online: Internet. csulb.edu/~bhsinney/Peter Ackroyd.html 07/07/06) so much so in fact that Ackroyd was to go on to write that
he deplored,

the English subscription to a great tradition of literature (as defined by F.R. Leavis) built on a conventional aesthetic which rests on key notions of ‘subjectivity’ and ‘experience’. (Finney, B.H. ‘Peter Ackroyd, Postmodernist Play and Chatterton. Online: Internet. csulb.edu/~bhfinney/PeterAckroyd.html 07/07/06)

Ackroyd was to conclude that in fact English literature had isolated itself from the theoretical debates going on at the time in America and Europe and as a result English fiction and theoretical writing had very little to offer him as a writer at that time (Finney, B.H. ‘Peter Ackroyd, Postmodernist Play and Chatterton. Online: Internet. csulb.edu/~bhfinney/Peter Ackroyd .html 07/07/06).

To this extent, Ackroyd’s first novel, *The Great Fire of London* (1982) was to introduce many of the ideas Ackroyd had been formulating and to subvert one of the great texts of the English Literary canon. Set against the backdrop of Spencer Spender’s attempts to make a film adaptation of Charles Dickens’s *Little Dorrit* (1857), Ackroyd explores the problems a realist artist has in trying to recreate the past. Yet as Spender struggles to imitate the world of Dickens, Ackroyd himself employs just those linguistic and narrative techniques that Dickens did in his novel.

This reproduction of linguistic modes was to be central to Ackroyd’s second novel, *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* (1984). This work not only foregrounds the character of Wilde, but also adopts the characteristic Wildean voice throughout the work’s fictional reconstruction of Wilde’s
diary in the months before he died. As such, Ackroyd here is deliberately questioning notions of subjectivity by interweaving actual quotations from Wilde with fictive quotations in the manner of Wilde, thus once again subverting our notions of Wilde’s writing within the tradition of English literature but also of our traditional notions of Wilde himself. As Ackroyd himself noted, ‘fiction’s often more factual than biography and far more precise’ (Finney, B.H. ‘Peter Ackroyd, Postmodernist Play and Chatterton. Online: Internet. csulb.edu/~bhfinney/PeterAckroyd.html 07/07/06).

Indeed, he was to go on to state that,

There’s no reason why you shouldn’t use pastiche or parody of the subject’s style within the biography. (Finney, B.H. ‘Peter Ackroyd, Postmodernist Play and Chatterton. Online: Internet. csulb.edu/~bhfinney/PeterAckroyd.html 07/07/06).

It is worth noting, at this point, that a contemporary of Ackroyd, Julian Barnes, was also to subvert the traditional notions of biography, subjectivity, experience and form in his work, Flaubert’s Parrot (1985). In this work a retired Doctor, Geoffrey Braithwaite, is trying to come to terms with his wife’s suicide, a fact that directly impinges upon his obsessive study of Flaubert. In other words, while he is trying to collect the facts of Flaubert’s life, the experience of his own life gradually eludes him. In fact, Braithwaite is forced to consider whether it is possible to encapsulate the life of another in one finite whole or whether it is what is left out that is of most importance. As he states at the beginning of the book,

The biography stands, fat and worthy-burgherish on the shelf, boastful and sedate: a shilling life will give you all the facts, a ten pound one
all the hypotheses as well. But think of everything that got away, that fled with the last deathbed exhalation of the biographee. What chance would the craftiest biographer stand against the subject who saw him coming and decided to amuse himself? (Barnes, 1985, 38)

In Ackroyd’s novel *Hawksmoor* (1985), the subversion of biography is taken one step further since he places London, and its architecture, into the role of central character. The novel revolves around the eighteenth-century architect, Nicholas Dyer, and the modern day detective, Nicholas Hawksmoor. In alternating chapters the two narratives gradually become interwoven and the lives of Hawksmoor and Dyer become inextricably linked. Behind both narratives lies the story of London which, in itself, becomes the main character. Ackroyd therefore, within the book as a whole, explores themes of subjectivity, history and place and, particularly in the sense of concepts of History and Time, draws on the work of T.S. Eliot and Eliot’s portrayal of London in ‘The Waste Land’ (1922) and Time in the ‘Four Quartets’ (1935-1942). One can see how the idea expressed regarding the nature of Time in ‘Burnt Norton’ has a direct influence on not only the construction of *Hawksmoor* but also on the ideas expressed in Swift’s *Waterland* (1983) and, to some extent, Barnes’s *Flaubert’s Parrot* (1985). Eliot writes in ‘Burnt Norton’:

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Time present and time past
Are both perhaps both present in time future
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
(Eliot, 1980, 189)
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Ackroyd therefore, with the interweaving of historically documented places, theories of time, historical characters and their fictional counterparts, and the use of other texts, can be seen to be directly engaging in acknowledged postmodern debates regarding the nature of History. As Finney points out,

the work of art is itself a reordering of other works of art from the past. Texts, seen as Ackroyd sees them in a poststructuralist light, are not the inventions of unique writers of genius, of the artistic imagination at odds with society. Texts are rearrangements of other texts. (Finney, B.H. 'Peter Ackroyd, Postmodernist Play and Chatterton. Online: Internet. csulb.edu/~bhfinnie/PeterAckroyd.html 07/07/06)

Much of the success of such writers as McEwan, Swift and Ackroyd can be put down to their ability to utilize elements of postmodern theory within accessible narratives. However, McEwan also points to the role of the Booker Prize in increasing the readership of such writers. As he says of the Booker Prize,

It does have extraordinary power, this prize. I think my experience must be just the same more or less of everyone else's who has won. I have a literary following and people have known about my books for years, but now the potential readership suddenly leaps. The Booker has somehow caught everyone's imagination, and you find that worldwide there's an interest in your writing from people who otherwise wouldn't be reading it.
(randomhouse.com/boldtype/1298/mcewan/interview.html 12/10/03)

McEwan won the Booker Prize in 1998 for his novel Amsterdam (1998) and Swift won the prize for his novel Last Orders (1996) in 1996. It is also interesting to note that Swift's novel was later made into a film, as was Michael Ondaatjee's 1992 Booker Prize winning novel, The English Patient (1992). Pat Barker, who was to win the prize in 1995 for her novel The Ghost Road (1995) being the third part of her First World War trilogy
of novels, was also to have her earlier work *Regeneration* (1992) made into a film. Clearly, then, as McEwan argues, the Booker Prize did much to markedly broaden the commercial popularity and readership of such writers.

Amongst other writers who were to benefit from what might be called a renaissance in the popularity of the English literary novel were Kazuo Ishiguro and Louis de Bernieres. Ishiguro’s first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* (1983), received great critical acclaim, and his second book, *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), won the Whitbread Prize. This critical and popular success continued with his third novel, *The Remains of the Day* (1989), which won the Booker Prize, and the film rights of the novel, which were subsequently bought by Harold Pinter, enabled it to be made into the film of the same name. But perhaps the most notable success of all these writers was that which Louis de Bernieres achieved with his work, *Captain Correlli’s Mandolin* (1994). De Bernieres had published three novels before he was named as one of the 20 Best Young British Novelists in *Granta Magazine* in 1993. *Captain Correlli’s Mandolin* did win the Commonwealth Writers Prize, as had both his previous works, *The Troublesome Offspring of Cardinal Guzman* (1992) and *The War of Don Emmanuel’s Nether Parts* (1990), but much of the success of *Captain Correlli’s Mandolin* has been put down to word of mouth recommendation amongst his existing readership. Whatever the driving forces were behind the novel’s success, it was made into a major Hollywood film and achieved huge sales figures. Clearly by the mid-90s the English novel was
enjoying a resurgence as a popular art form.

Whilst the writers discussed above, amongst other themes, were developing postmodern ideas of History and Subjectivity in their work, English women writers were engaging in subtly different postmodern themes. Notions of Myth and Sexuality were to become crucial areas of concern for women writers, which was to differentiate them quite distinctly from the themes predominately addressed by their male counterparts. Perhaps most notable among such women writers is Angela Carter.

Undoubtedly, the most recognised elements of Carter's work are her use of myth and fairy tale. In her use of myth, Carter states she was, 

basically trying to find out [what]certain configurations of imagery in our society, in our culture, really stand for, what they mean, underneath the kind of semireligious coating that makes people not particularly want to interfere with them. (Katsavos, A. 'An Interview with Angela Carter'. Online: Internet.

centerforbookculture.org/interviews/interview_carter 10/10/03)).

Carter points to her second novel, The Magic Toyshop, published in 1967, as an example of this use of myth. The basis of this work is the myth of Leda and the Swan. However, in Carter's version instead of it being the person of Zeus in the form of a swan, the swan is in fact a puppet constructed by a man. This not only pushes the use of myth beyond a simple retelling to a more subtle subversion of the original but also serves to introduce Carter's other main preoccupation, that of the position of
women within society. If, as she says, ‘myth gives history shape’ (Katsavos, A. ‘An Interview with Angela Carter’. Online: Internet. centerforbookculture.org/interviews/interview_carter 10/10/03), then to subvert the myth in the manner Carter does in *The Magic Toyshop* (1967) is to subvert the very idea of history itself.

Carter was to become less concerned with the fore-grounding of myth and fairy tale in her later works. Speaking of her novel, *Nights at the Circus*, which came out in 1984, Carter says of the claim of the main character, Fevvers, that she was hatched from an egg, that,

> We are talking about fiction here, and I have no idea whether that’s true or not. That’s just what she says, a story that’s being constructed... Part of the point of the novel is that you are kept uncertain... What you have to do is to change the rules and make a new game...

(Katsavos, A. ‘An Interview with Angela Carter’. Online: Internet. centerforbookculture.org/interviews/interview_carter 10/10/03).

This idea has a clear correlation back to B.S. Johnson’s notion of the writer setting his or her own rules. But Carter not only used and subverted traditional myth and fairy tale, but also was prepared to do the same with traditional notions of character, creating in the reader just that uncertainty of which her male counterparts were uncertain themselves. Further to this she was then to deny the familiarity of place within the text. Although *Nights at the Circus* (1984) starts in the recognisable surroundings of London, it moves outward and across borders, through St. Petersburg to Siberia. The effect of this is that the reader now has to cope with the intrinsic uncertainties inherent within the text but also the unfamiliar
geographical locations in which these uncertainties take place. Hutcheon labels this device used by Carter as being ‘ex-centric’. She writes,

Angela Carter’s *Nights at the Circus* combines [a] freak-circus framework with contestings of narrative centering: it straddles the border between the realistic/historical, between a unified biographically structured plot, and a decentered narration, with its wandering point of view and extensive digressions. (Hutcheon, 1996, 61)

Carter had already investigated the possibilities of the ex-centric in her earlier collection, *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). Of this collection Carter states,

The stories in *The Bloody Chamber* are very firmly grounded in the Indo-European popular tradition, even in the way they look...There’s this long tradition in Europe of taking elements from the oral tradition and making them into very elaborate literary conventions...Even the werewolf stories are set in some horror-filled invented landscapes, but there’s more a kind of down-to-earthness in those stories. (Katsavos, A. ‘An Interview with Angela Carter’. Online:Internet.centerforbookculture/interviews/interview_carter10/10/03)

The result of such ex-centricity is that whether it is in the area of character, sexuality, place, narrative and narration,

Postmodernism retains, and indeed celebrates, differences against what has been called the ‘racist logic of the exclusive’...Difference suggests multiplicity, heterogeneity, plurality, rather binary opposition and exclusivity. (Hutcheon, 1996, 61)

Another writer who was to have an important role in the development of the postmodern is Christine Brooke-Rose. Without doubt, Brooke-Rose
has done much to open the novel to the possibilities that, particularly in this case, the French postmodern novel has explored. But such exploration does create its own problems. In an interview with Ellen Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, Brooke-Rose states,

People often use the term ‘experimental novel’ to mean just something peculiar, or as a genre in itself (on the same level as ‘realistic’ or ‘fantastic’ or ‘romantic’ or ‘science fiction’). But to experiment is really not knowing where you’re going and discovering. (Friedman, E.G. and Fuchs, M. ‘An Interview with Christine Brooke-Rose’. Online:Internet.centerforbookculture.org/interviews/interview_brookerose 10/10/03)

However, Brooke-Rose does go on to acknowledge that, ‘there’s a beauty and humour in confronting different discourses, jostling them together, including, for instance, computer language’. (Friedman, E.G. and Fuchs, M. ‘An Interview with Christine Brooke-Rose’. Online: Internet.centerforbookculture.org/interviews/interview_brookerose 10/10/03)

This amalgamation of differing discourses must necessarily enhance the ex-centric nature of any text, limiting the foregrounding of any one discourse to the position of the primary.

In her novel, Such (originally published in 1966), Brooke-Rose collides an ontology of the world of the present with that of the world that is to come. This is manifested through the use of differing metaphoric constructs. For example,
- Yes, look at him, says Brenda less remotely, and the worlds rebound from inside the map-like contours emanating from her...
- I meant something a little different, the professor says gently, or pretends to say inside the latitudes and longitudes he shows to men...he has an undoubted presence on the screen of social discourse that flickers its arpeggios like harp-strings up and down our sublimities. The elasticity of shock should equivalate the elasticity of pressure the mass of matter resists. You should call matter resistance. (Brooke-Rose, 2006, 280-81)

Here the metaphors range through astrophysics, geography, information technology and finally end in the musical metaphors of arpeggio and harp as well as physics. Thus, although the discourse of the characters can be thought of as real, no one single category of metaphor is used to describe that reality.

This collision of worlds and their individual discourses was further developed in Brooke-Rose’s work, Textermination (1997). In the opening two paragraphs of the work we find Jane Austen’s eponymous heroine Emma seated in a carriage with Goethe. The latter naturally speaks in German, but what is more disconcerting is when the archetypally English Emma answers Goethe in his own language. This simple scene presents the reader with a collision between the historically ‘real’ and the fictional, but also subverts not only the reader’s expectations of a character, Emma, but of that character’s expectations of themselves. As Emma herself thinks,

she wonders how she comes to be speaking in German, and whether she can keep this up without the threat of becoming quite other. Which is worse, she now asks herself, involuntarily leaping through time: to misread a man’s suit to her as addressed to someone else and suffer the vexation of her error but at least to be in power still and able
to repair; or to be thus misread by someone else unknown to her and quite beyond her control. (Brooke-Rose, 1997, p.2)

The problem now for Emma is not just that her discourse is conducted in a language foreign to her but that it is beginning to threaten her very ontological awareness of her own Self in regard to the Other.

This idea of ontological uncertainty leading to what can be called a sense of dispossession is the main theme of Brooke-Rose’s later work, Next (1998). This text is entirely written without the use of the verb ‘to have’ and the words ‘my’ and ‘I’ are only used when one of the dispossessed characters is in the company of another. The limited nature of the subjective ‘I’ is evident on the first page of the work where the typography of the text is laid out such as to create this letter within the text itself. However it should be noted that the ‘I’ is not only in lowercase, denoting an innate hesitancy and reluctance toward self-affirmation but also that it is created by emptiness. That is to say, it is not the text that creates the ‘I’ but the absence of text.

As with B.S. Johnson in House Mother Normal (1984), Brooke-Rose in Next (1998) uses a multi-character narrative, twenty-six characters in all. Each character has their own particular discursive style, which may, in fact, be said for some of the characters to be the only thing that they actually do possess. Unfortunately, it must be said that in Brooke-Rose’s attempts to accurately reproduce some of the characters’ speech patterns through phonetic spelling, the text can be seen as parodic, rather than
accurate, as in this example:

What are you called?
Blike.
That's a poet.
Ah am a paowet.
Is it a surname?
Naow, iss me firs' nime. An you?
Ulysses.
Wha'Kinduv
Greek hero. And a famous novel. Call me Uly. Where d'you live
Blake?
In care. Yoowth plice in Kiwb'n.
No parents?
Brixton. Thy spli' ap, me dad wenter prison. Ah was tiken awhy.
Years an years agoo.
(Brooke-Rose, 1998, 49)

This interchange between two of the characters, one of whom is using
Received Pronunciation and the other who uses what has come to be
termed, 'Estuary English', does tend toward the comic. But despite its
potentiality toward the absurd, it does ask a serious question. That is,
which of these two forms of speech are we more comfortable with and
why? Has Received Pronunciation, and its associations with a socio-
political and economic elite, actually been dispossessed of this status and
therefore can now be seen to be subordinate to Estuary English? Language
itself has now become the subject and not those who speak it. Character
has become de-centred and wanders aimlessly through the text, in its own
self-reflexive homelessness.

Yet, finally, one problem with the work of Brooke-Rose is the dominance
of the form over the narrative. Indeed, it can be argued that the form
becomes the function of the text within which narrative is sacrificed. This trend can be seen in the novel, *Thru* (1975), with its use in the text of geometrical shapes, lists and tables. However, one cannot deny the importance of her work within English postmodernist development.

Another writer who has done much, in both the worlds of the academic and the creative, to push forward the boundaries of postmodernist thought is Patricia Duncker. The critic, Sean Matthews, says of Duncker's fiction that it,

> is similarly characterized by attention to, even fascination with, transgression and extremity in personalities and events. Indeed, Duncker's appetite for transgression extends to her relation to genre; this is a writer who resists categorisation.

(British Council. 'Patricia Dunker', Online: Internet. contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth33 01/02/06)

An example of such transgression and extremity of personality can be found in Duncker's novel, *James Miranda Barry* (1999). The story, which is based on the life of the actual nineteenth-century physician, questions both Barry's gender and the validity of his/her discourse. If Barry is, in fact, a woman masquerading as a man in a man's world, what validity does Barry's discourse have as a man speaking as a man?

Here again we can see an example of Duncker extending the idea of the ex-centric. If actually male, Barry would be legitimately within his rights, in the nineteenth-century world, to take up his position as surgeon, socialite and duellist. If as a woman Barry had attempted to enter the
world of medicine she would only have progressed as far as propriety would allow. The role of duellist would have, in this case, been unthought of by her. In any event, the narrative of the text would most certainly have taken a different course, relevant to the world in which Barry found herself. But Duncker transgresses all these points. First, by making her woman a man, thus transgressing archetypal concepts of gender, then, by making that woman as man successful in what should be a hostile world. As Matthews writes,

The allusiveness of the text, as elsewhere in Duncker’s work, serves specifically to deepen and complicate the surface narrative, locating the story in an altered semantic and symbolic field, provoking the reader to reconsider both the normative bases of our moral perspective and our assumptions of psychological verisimilitude and realism. (British Council. ‘Patricia Dunker’, Online: Internet. Contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth33 01/02/06)

Another example of Duncker’s use of the transgressive text can be seen with her short story, Sophia Walters Shaw (2003). Again here the central character of Sophia immediately complicates the reader’s preconceived assumptions and certainties by announcing, in a first person narrative, that,

My name is Sophia. But there are three of us, and the other two are here with me now. We go everywhere together. (Terry, 2000, 78)

Does Sophia have a multiple-personality complex, or are there in fact three separate individuals to whom Sophia is referring? Even when we are fairly certain that the latter is the case, the conviction for Sophia that she Walters and Shaw are at once all and the same is equally as certain, indeed if not more so:
My future lay with them, or nowhere. But even so, I willingly accepted the things I couldn't change. 

...I feel the other two bunched in my stomach, my thighs, waiting...But I am never alone. And now I will never be alone. They are my guardians and my keepers, my cold eyes, my right hand. (Terry, 2000, 98-9)

There is then, at the heart of this story, a dichotomy as to the very nature of the character of Sophia. But whereas James Miranda Barry (1999) raised the question as to the gender of a single character, Sophia Walters Shaw pushes the boundaries even further because to question the character of Sophia must inherently involve the questioning of the characters of Walters and Shaw as well.

As if this were not enough for the reader to deal with, the whole narrative in itself operates on a transgressive level, dealing as it does with the themes of murder and rape. The story centres around a man who relives his wife's rape over and over. The effect on the reader of this narrative of rape should be one of disgust, but this is complicated by Sophia's own attitude toward it and the world in which she lives. As she says,

For us, pornography was like religion used to be, a condition of being, the way we thought, the way we earned our livings. And rape can't exist if all women, women everywhere, all of them, say yes, yes, yes. I knew no one who would think otherwise. (Terry, 2000, 90)

Clearly, this statement does transgress the moral norms. The reader is not expected to concur with this point of view. Yet, once again, the already established transgressive nature of the text is compounded one stage further by the fact that this particular text is written by a woman. Everything is thrown into the arena of subversion. What we bring to the text in the shape of our normative moral values is immediately challenged.
by the text itself, even to the point of reversal. The text is effectively asking the reader to accept a new value system, the value system evidently accepted by Sophia Walters Shaw herself.

Therefore, we can see, just by looking at the work of a small selection of women writers, the depth and breadth of their concerns. Myth, language, subjectivity, morality, amongst other concepts, are all investigated within their works. The readiness to engage with these issues and to do so within a postmodernist paradigm can, arguably, be seen to arise from the very eccentricity women feel themselves to experience both historically and actually. This sense of marginalization creates from within itself a need to investigate the marginalized in all forms. Male writers, it can be said, do not largely operate from such a standpoint of marginality. Thus their subjectivity, language and morality exist within pre-existent forms of understanding. The result of this can be said to be that the male English writer continually has one foot placed, consciously or subconsciously, behind him in the traditional and canonical forms that have gone before.

However, it should be noted that there are male writers who, like Duncker do cross the boundaries of genre, subjectivity and language. Mark Haddon was already a successful children’s writer when he made the transition to the adult market with his novel, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time (2003).

Haddon’s novel is narrated by a 15-year-old boy, Christopher Boone, who
has Asperger’s Syndrome, a form of autism. As a result, the adult reader has not only to adjust to seeing the world through the eyes of a fifteen year old but also to see the world with a sensibility that is totally other to the norm.

To achieve this, Haddon uses illustration within the text (Haddon, 2003, 2-3), thus subordinating language to the figurative. Similarly, Haddon also uses lists, letters and differing typefaces (Haddon, 2003, 72, 121-122, 180), foregrounding the subversion of semantic and generic norms. However, the author is able to bridge the gap between the postmodern and the conventional by grounding the work within the tradition of the murder mystery, although here again this archetype is subverted given that the victim in this case is a dog. This use of the genre of the Detective novel has the effect of giving the text, whose central character by virtue of his illness is dissociative, a coherent framework and thus an essentially plot driven narrative.

Ironically, so successful was Haddon’s drawing of the marginalized back into the centre that the novel achieved acclaim both critically and in terms of public popularity. The ex-centric had become the accepted with the subtle integration of the unconventional, in the guise of the character of Christopher Boone, within the conventional genre of the Detective novel.

As we have seen, as early as the 1960s English writers were beginning to break away from accepted dominance of the realistic novel, and hence the
traditional literary canon that it implied, and engage with new forms of literary narrative. B.S. Johnson was to experiment with fragmentary narrative and typographic styles, yet arguably by the 1970s the prevailing trend was still toward the realistic narrative. By the 1980s, however, as McEwan argues, the new school of young writers was more prepared to engage with those postmodern ideas of form and narrative theory that could be found in American texts. Writers such as McEwan, Swift, Barnes and Ackroyd were prepared to adopt postmodern theories of history and subjectivity within their texts whilst, at the same time, succeeded in producing novels which achieved great popular acclaim.

Arguably, the role of the literary prize on English literature, and its influence on the fiction market as a whole, had much to do with the acceptance of such novelists and their work despite such critics as David Lodge asserting their faith in the longevity of the traditional, anti-experimental novel. Women English writers, such as Carter, Brooke-Rose and Duncker, were also engaging with postmodernism and expanding the accepted notions of narrative, subjectivity, history, gender and genre. Marginality was bought into the centre and, as such, concepts of ‘the Other’, and ‘difference’ underwent an essential re-examination and are still central to the development of writing in England today.
CHAPTER THREE: THE MAKING OF *LIBERTY HORSES*

Perhaps the best and most obvious place to start in any discussion about the writing of *Liberty Horses*, which had its conception in the autumn of 1998, is an explanation as to just why the work is called *Liberty Horses*.

A Liberty Horse is defined by the Chambers Dictionary as ‘a circus horse that, as one of a group and without a rider, carries out movements on command.’ (Chambers, 2003, 855). It was these ideas of control, and the potential of losing control, as well as the image of the circus that were the main influencing precursors to the writing of my novel. This image sprang directly not from any literary source but came, in fact, from two films by the German director Wim Wenders. *Wings of Desire* (1986) is the story of an Angel called Damiel who, after falling in love with a circus trapeze artist, wishes to become mortal again and thus regain control of his destiny and *Faraway, So Close!* (1994), being the sequel to the former film and the conclusion of that story.

The idea of being out of control is reflected in the Liberty Horse. As a Liberty Horse has no rider, the possibility of its disobeying the intentions of its trainer, in this case myself, and instead doing precisely the opposite of what I wanted it to do, always remains. To put it another way, using the image of the circus, I, as Ringmaster could announce one act only to have the clowns come on and cause chaos, disrupting the whole proceedings. It
was this potentiality that was to have a major influence on the form of my text, if not so much on the plot of the text. To illustrate this point, it should be noted out that the beginning of *Liberty Horses* in the first draft is very different from its final form. The original opening paragraph was as follows:

It was not oil, land or water that caused the outbreak of world-wide conflict at the end of the twentieth century, but sperm. That and the seeming inability of a certain politician to control his own. (*Liberty Horses*, 1998, 1st draft)

Clearly the theme of potency and power is evident in this opening, but perhaps the most obvious element of eventual change in the form was the doing away with the omniscient third person narrator. This came about directly from the image of the Liberty Horse and the potential for the loss of authority that is inherent within the image itself. I felt that the use of the third person narrator would restrict the direction characters would choose to take for themselves, and necessitate traditional, objective descriptions of the characters and the environments in which they find themselves. Norman, for me, is a fully rounded character who lives independently of anything I might propose for him. He exists in his own right and as such it is he that will suggest what happens next within his own particular story. Behind this notion lies an idea of Keats' which he proposes in a letter dated 22nd November 1817 to Benjamin Bailey:

The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream—he awoke and found it truth. (*Gittings*, 1981, 37)

In other words, the imagined reality of my characters, who are in themselves real, is the defining force for their actions, since it is their only
reality. To write the work without traditional narrative devices allowed the characters, their plots and actions to go in any direction they decided and thus be both challenging and liberating for me as a writer.

To this end, the novel is written predominately in dialogue form in an effort to do away with the traditional narrator. This is not a new idea. As Christine Brooke-Rose writes in her article, 'Narrating without a narrator' (T.L.S, 31/12/99),

The twentieth century began with a growing resentment of the author's guiding presence in every sentence, the enveloping of every fact with comment. The novel, in fact, has been making a huge effort, largely ignored, to shake off the traditional narrative mode and pass wholly into speech mode. (Brooke-Rose, 1999, 12)

The influence of this idea on writing in general and on Liberty Horses specifically is reiterated by the American writer, William Gaddis. In an interview with John Kuehl and Steven Moore, Gaddis says,

In approaching JR as a novel, I was at pains to remove the author's presence from the start, as must be obvious. This was partly by way of what I mentioned earlier, obliging the thing to stand on its own, take its own chances. But it was also by way of setting up a problem, a risk, in order to sustain my own interest, especially since the largely uninterrupted dialogue raised the further risk of presenting a convincing sense of real time without the conventional chapter breaks, white spaces, such narrative intrusions as 'A week later'. How some of the writers I come across get through their books without dying of boredom is beyond me. (Kuehl&Moore, Online: Internet. centerforbookculture.org/interviews/interview_gaddis.html 02/03/06)

Brooke-Rose goes on to cite the use of tense as a problem confronted by writers trying to subvert and relegate the role of the author within
individual texts. For Brooke-Rose only the French writer Alain Robbe-Grillet has no author at all. She argues Robbe-Grillet, in such novels as *Jealousy* (1960) achieved this by dispensing with the first person narrative, and hence the present tense, in favour of narrative that is rooted in scientific observation and objectivity (Brooke-Rose, 1999, 12).

Yet, Brooke-Rose does acknowledge that however much the novel form might resist the pre-eminence of the author the prejudice against experiment persists (Brooke-Rose, 1999, 13). Not only does the attempt to do away with the author elicit resistance from outside forces but it also raises problems, paradoxically, for the very person, namely the author, who is trying to absent themselves from their own text. As Brooke-Rose writes,

>I have called my narrative technique a constraint; it is hard to use rigorously. It is a limitation which refuses some of the familiarities of language in order to focus with great intensity on one less familiar aspect, the constant impact of outside phenomena on an active, but not always reflective consciousness. (Brooke-Rose, 1999, 13)

Since *Liberty Horses* was an attempt to do away with the authorial voice it was inevitable that such problems would arise during the creation of the text. This predominately had to do with plot development in terms of explaining situations, environments and characters' reactions to these. I tried to overcome this with the use of e-mails and newspaper articles written by the individual characters themselves. The other, more obvious, technique was the use of speech or dialogue. This got rid of the need to use the phrases, 'he said' or 'she said' etc., since I attempted to use
different speech patterns, or more directly names, to indicate who was speaking at that moment.

However, there were further costs to myself as writer and costs to the reader by using such minimal techniques to enhance the comic potential of the work. The rich complexities of direct narration: atmosphere, embedded opinions and attitudes, rhetorical development, location in the 'social text', have to be renounced. The characteristics of a novelist's style are primarily communicated through the performance of direct narration. By trying to do away with the third person narrator and relying almost entirely on dialogue you have to create character out of speech by implication from within that speech. Your reader may then regard the novel as a script rather than a prose narrative. In this case, despite the work retaining its visual qualities it may be all too easily seen as an episodic T.V. comedy. If this is the underlying approach of the reader to see the text in this regard then another problem arises since the reader might legitimately expect to be told who is speaking at any one time. I deliberately decided not to consistently provide this information since one of the main forces behind writing the work in its present form was to make reading it more difficult for the reader than they might have come to expect from more commercial and plot driven narratives. The outcome of this is to slow the reader down and to cause them to think for themselves as to what is going on at that particular moment within the text. I therefore assume a reader who can work out from the text who is speaking and can construct character themselves from implication.
A further consequence of adopting a minimalist style is the problem of characterization. If there is no third person physical description of a character then should this be required it has to come from another character. Personal traits, therefore, have to be developed through each particular character's speech pattern by reference to repeated catchphrases, expressions or their sense of humour. Personally, I never regarded the lack of any physical description within the text as a problem since it allows each reader to visualize their own version of a character, for instance Norman or Van Wrentl.

Finally, in regard to the costs involved in adopting a minimalistic style, is the problem of showing place and time within the text. In other words how do I as writer let the reader know where the action is taking place and how much time has passed since between points in each of the characters' particular storylines. To some extent this can be overcome by the use of e-mails, newspaper reports and letters. Within these time scales can be introduced by the person writing the particular e-mail or article. Yet here again it should be pointed out that I was not primarily concerned with locating the text within any particular time frame. The fact that the text starts at one point, that is in Norman's house in England, and finishes with Norman and his family in America, must in and of itself denote time passing (as do the other main narrative strands within the book). The problem of place within the text only really becomes a problem if it relates to a specific incident to which the environment in which it takes place is
important. In regard to *Liberty Horses* obviously the most important event is the destruction of the Twin Towers and where Norman and his family are when they watch that event. This was solved again by having Norman ‘write’ the script that takes up most of Part Two and therefore allowing him to include directions in the screenplay within which he could make clear where any of the characters were and what they were doing and indeed going to do in the subsequent scene.

In the end, therefore, although there may be seen to be costs in writing in a minimalistic fashion I personally never saw these as being insurmountable. This is because the primary element of the text is its fictive nature, the very point of which means that any problem arising in the writing of the text can be avoided since it is a piece of fiction and does not have to adhere to any strict laws of nature, reader expectation or logical process that exists in reality. Similarly, it was never my intention to make this an easy text for the reader. It does imply a certain level of ability within the reader to understand its humour and its ironic standpoint as well as a degree of understanding of narrative theory from which the work derives.

The central plot of the text came from a very distinct starting point. This can be found in an article by Jon Ungoed-Thomas in the *Sunday Times* of the 20th September 1998. In this article, Ungoed-Thomas reports that the co-founder of Microsoft, Bill Gates, had become the major shareholder in a company manufacturing an impotence pill to rival Viagra (*The Sunday Times, 20/9/98, 3*).
It was interesting to me that Gates, through Microsoft, effectively controlled our access to ready sources of information and communication, was now to be the dominant force behind a company producing a pill controlling sexual activity and procreation. Thus it was that the essential theme of Liberty Horses was born.

Finding a vehicle, that is a character, for this idea was not a problem since it was always my intention to write a trilogy of works, or triptych. I prefer this essentially artistic term since it was common for triptychs, especially those placed over an altar, to be painted on three panels, the outside two panels of which could be folded over the centre panel. In terms of my three works this suggested that all the texts could be ‘folded’ over onto each other, enabling the images and themes to move freely between each of the texts. In this sense the works are no longer limited to a linear progression of plot and narrative, moving from the first to the last book, but instead the reader could start with any of the three texts and read them individually or as part of the whole. Since the first two parts of this trilogy, Desert Song and A Pizza's No Place for an Anchovy had already been written I decided that the main character of those two works, Norman Fintan, would become the central character of Liberty Horses.

At the same time, the emblem of impotency pills and the involvement of Bill Gates allowed for another character to be created. An interest in the genre of Crime Fiction, in particular with Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes
mysteries, and a certain desire to write a work in that form, led to the creation of the character of Slingsby. Slingsby was to investigate the mysterious figure of Bob Dawes whose company produces impotency pills. This idea, along with Norman’s concerns about problems with impotence, thus allows the two narratives to interlock with each other, as it does to all three narratives with Slingsby’s subsequent journey to, and murder in America. Similarly, it also allowed for the themes of power and control to be developed and to ironically offset them against the image of the Liberty Horse.

There were two main reasons for the creation of the character of Van Wrentl. The first revolved around the intention that Liberty Horses was the last work in the trilogy or triptych. The idea that there should be three main characters in the third work of this trilogy arose out of a sense that it gave something of a balance not only to Liberty Horses but also in itself to the project as a whole.

The second reason for the invention of Van Wrentl centred around the main concerns of my research project as a whole. I wanted to dramatise my ideas about English and American postmodern fiction and culture, namely concepts of History, Sexuality/excentricity and mass corporate culture, by embodying certain aspects of these ideas within the characters in the novel. And so it was that Van Wrentl came about.

In his story, Van Wrentl has come to England from America and the
University of Indian Queens, near Thermopolis, Wyoming, where he teaches. The joke that exists behind this is twofold. First, Thermopolis is south of the Big Horn Mountains, and therefore brings to mind Custer and the Battle of The Little Big Horn. Custer is an iconic figure who, taken with the battle, looms large in the myth of America. Yet Custer was ultimately defeated just as Van Wrentl, who finds himself in a battle with his amanuensis, Greenbacker, will be defeated.

Second is the idea that the name Thermopolis reminded me of Thermopylae. This reference to a battle of ancient Greek history where the Greeks successfully held off the invading Persians ironically contrasts with Custer’s battle. These two references also serve to parenthesize the discussion between Van Wrentl and Greenbacker concerning Van Wrentl’s personal family history and the ideas of the ‘Old Country’ and ‘The New World’.

At the heart of Van Wrentl’s narrative is a scandal. The professor, we discover, was involved in a car crash back in America. But what has been suppressed by the University authorities is that one of his female students was also in the car. The idea for this came from Joyce Carol Oates’ novel, *Black Water* (Oates, 1994), which tells the story of the death of a young woman, Kelly, when the car she is travelling in, driven by an American Senator, leaves the road and ends up in marshland. The reference to the Kennedy family and the Chappaquidick affair is there to be made. For Van Wrentl the potential scandal is enough to precipitate his temporary
move to England. However, Van Wrentl will claim that he is suffering from memory loss as the reason for his secondment, obviously not the most helpful condition for a History Professor to be labouring under. And it is this that his assistant, Greenbacker, whose name obviously plays on the term ‘Greenback’ used for Dollar notes, hopes to use to his advantage in his plan to publish Van Wrentl’s work under his own name. This subterfuge on the part of Greenbacker will lead to Van Wrentl’s subsequent return to America, thus allowing him to eventually meet up with Norman.

This device of contriving Van Wrentl’s return to America also links into a theme that all three of the main characters share; the idea of the journey or quest. Norman, Slingsby and Van Wrentl all have to undertake a course of action that they hope will ultimately lead to a successful conclusion, be it emotional or professional.

This device of the quest has its roots in ancient narrative works such as Beowulf and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and in the very beginning of the novel with Don Quixote. Yet where in the traditional form of the quest narrative the ultimate goal is one of resolution and the reaffirmation of a distinct moral and spiritual order, in Liberty Horses the journey towards such a resolution is continually thwarted by delays and digressions which ultimately serve to subvert the success of the quest as a whole. We never know whether Norman and his wife do actually have another child. Slingsby ends up murdered in Florida, the mystery of the existence or not
of Bob Dawes is unresolved and what ultimately happens between Van Wrentl and Greenbacker is left without a conclusion.

The unfulfilled quest does exist in various postmodern texts. In Don DeLillo’s *Mao II* (1992), Bill Gray is sent to be a major contributor to the release of a Swiss poet who has been taken hostage in Beirut. However, Gray dies before he is able to take part in the proceedings organized around the release. We are never told what happens thereafter to the poet as we rejoin the other major characters in the novel back in America who are left to pick up the pieces of Bill Gray’s literally incomplete story. In Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), Oedipa Maas is left to untangle the intricacies of a former lover’s will. Yet at the precise moment we are about to find out the secrets of ‘Lot 49’ the novel ends. This subversion of the quest narrative and the expectations inherent within was a direct influence on my writing of the narrative of Slingsby and Hodges in *Liberty Horses*, since neither character successfully finds his particular quarry and thus no resolution is achieved.

Norman’s quest, on the other hand, operates more overtly on the level of parody. Perhaps the most successful of all the characters in relation to his own quest in my novel, since Norman actually does find the site in Florida of the mythical Fountain of Youth, his reasons for embarking on the journey are morally ambiguous. This is because he sets out on his quest not to defend the honour of any faith, virtue or reputation except his own. In other words, he does what he does for his own good and not for the
good of others as usually the case in traditional quest narratives. Norman’s whole quest centres around, at the purely base level, his inability to have sex and his belief that finding the Fountain of Youth will solve his problem. Therefore, if Norman is to be seen as the questing knight figure, the traditional symbols of lance and spear are degraded to at best the state of parody and at worst nothing more than double entendres. Indeed, the image of phallic impotence is carried on, in a different sense, with the collapse of the Twin Towers at the end of the novel.

The second level is that Norman aligns himself to a real historical figure, Ponce de Leon, who in sailing with Christopher Columbus and thereafter being appointed to high government office, would have achieved a level of respect amongst his peers. Yet, like Norman, Ponce de Leon became obsessed with finding the Fountain of Youth and hence subverted the ideals of the quest to his own end.

The third level of parody is that Norman embarks on his journey as a result of what he sees as the patronizing attitude his builder has toward him. Constantly, in his eyes, being put down by the builder Arthur, Norman obviously believes he has something to prove. I also intended that the fact the builder is called ‘Arthur’ should lead the reader to make the reference back to King Arthur and therefore the fables of the Knights of the Round Table. However, Norman regards Arthur as being of a distinctly lower class than himself and to be goaded into undertaken a quest by someone of a lower status that oneself is not arguably the best reason for undertaking
such a task.

In addition to these elements that relate to and subvert the quest narrative tradition is that the quest narrative form actually has its basis in the oral tradition. To use the idea of the quest within a work that attempts to do away with traditional narrative forms and is written almost entirely in dialogue was therefore a deliberate attempt to refer back to the beginnings of storytelling.

Running within the idea of the quest is the idea of the conspiracy. This is a very prominent theme in postmodern texts, appearing as it does for example in Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and DeLillo’s *Players* (1991). As such I made a conscious point of introducing the idea, specifically within the narratives of Slingsby and Van Wrentl. For Slingsby the conspiracy revolves around the character of Bob Dawes and his questionable involvement in information technology, genetic engineering and pharmaceuticals. This relates to the problem of the identity of ‘JR’ in the novel of the same name by William Gaddis. But Slingsby’s narrative is also, as is Slingsby himself, consumed by conspiracy theories from Area 51 to genetic engineering. For Van Wrentl the conspiracy centres on his assistant, Greenbacker, who, unknown to the Professor, is all the time conspiring to steal the latter’s work.

The introduction of the conspiracy within the quest narrative serves to subvert that form yet again. This is because whereas in the traditional
quest narrative the hero is met with singular problems along the way which he has to overcome, the conspiracy implies that there are far greater things going on outside the hero's main quest which may or may not directly affect him but over which, nevertheless, he has no control.

It was these elements, therefore, that formed the basis of the three main narratives found in the first part of Liberty Horses. A more detailed discussion of each of these narratives now follows.

Norman Fintan, as a character, from his very beginnings in Desert Song, has his roots in the British comedians of the 1950s,'60s, and 1970s, such as Tony Hancock, Kenneth Williams, Frankie Howerd and Tommy Cooper. Most influential to the creation of Norman, however, was Tony Hancock; that is to say the character of Tony Hancock as portrayed in his radio show, Hancock's Half Hour and later in the television series, Hancock. Like the character of Hancock, Norman feels that the world has not recognised his true worth. As the writer Richard Webber (2004) says, 'Hancock, the character, was burdened with all of man's known weaknesses, including cowardice, pomposity and pretentiousness'. The writer, J.B. Priestley, similarly acknowledged the essential elements of Hancock's character when he wrote,

His pretensions as this TV character were absurd, making us laugh every week (and would make us laugh again next week, month, year), and yet this was somebody close to the mass of man today, coming out of the faceless crowd, hopeful, near to glory, for some minutes, before the lid comes on again, before he shrugs his way back into the dark. (Priestley, 1975, 170)
These elements of pomposity, pretentiousness and ultimate failure, were embedded in the character of Norman from the outset of his creation. Eric Idle (BBC One, 20/11/2000) cites these attitudes as being essential parts of what he calls ‘The Comedy of Irritation’. This characteristic has been embodied within such comedy characters as Tony Hancock to Victor Meldew, where their sense of justice and fair play is at distinct odds to the rest of the world. In other words, such characters as Hancock, for instance, have an innate sense that the world ought to revolve around them and when they find it doesn’t then their inherent pretensions and opinions are exacerbated into truculent self-defence.

However, there was another element to the overall character of Norman which was in itself an important driving force not only for his character as a whole but for my verbalization of particular concerns through him.

This verbalization of personal concerns was important because it allows for a special sense of irony to be added to the comic value of Norman’s actions and words which is essentially English. As Italo Calvino writes in his essay, ‘Definitions of Territories: Comedy’,

Think how much the sense of humour has counted for in English civilization; and not only that, but how much it has done to enrich literary irony with fundamental dimensions unknown to the classical world. And I am referring not so much to a sort of undercurrent of melancholy good feeling toward the world as to that primary quality of every true humorist: the involvement of himself in his own irony. (Calvino, 1989, 63-64)

I had decided that the idea of impotence was to be one of the central
themes of *Liberty Horses*, be it sexual, social or political. Within this, inevitably, arose questions that have a particular interest for me surrounding male sexuality, or more specifically in *Liberty Horses*, the psychology of male sexuality. These questions found their release through the character of Norman. Norman, in the book, believes he is impotent and this obviously directly affect both his thoughts and deeds resulting in an essential confusion as to his own feelings about himself and also his relationship to others, specifically, of course, his wife. An example of this occurs at the beginning of *Liberty Horses* when the Fintan home is flooded. Norman’s wife Joan organises a builder to come and deal with the problem. Yet Norman presents us with a totally different story. In the first of Norman’s newspaper articles for the ‘Hunfrith Times’, (‘Hunfrith’ being the Old German spelling of my surname, Humphrey), Norman says that he took control of the situation whilst the rest of his family are unable to cope. Thus straight from the start we see Norman’s overwhelming desire as the ‘Man’ of the household to remain in control and to be seen to be in control by others.

This theme is brought out by the constant clash that exists throughout Part One between Norman and the character of the builder who is supposed to be repairing the Fintan house. Arthur, the builder, may not be a very competent builder, and incidentally, neither am I, so Arthur’s knowledge about the building trade comes entirely from the *Sunday Times Book of Do-It-Yourself* (1980), but he is a fountain of knowledge. This undoubtedly threatens Norman as Arthur seems to be able to interest his
family whilst there is a sense with Norman that he is at something of a loss when communicating with the rest of his family. Norman, in this sense, despite being the main character of the work around which most of the action was initially centred is, in fact, in those terms defined by Hutcheon, 'ex-centric'.

This notion of 'ex-centricity' demonstrates itself through Norman's fear of his own imagined impotence; sexually, socially and in his case, intellectually, and was intended to have behind it his own inability to understand his inherent femininity. Jonathan Dollimore notes in his work *Sexual Dissidence* (1992) that it is the self,

> which is the origin and arbiter of the true, the real (and/or natural), and the moral, categories which correspond to the three main domains of knowledge in Western culture: the epistemological, the ontological and the ethical. In other words the self is conceived centrally within those domains. (Dollimore, 1992, 39)

Norman's sense of his Self in these terms is clearly not grounded. In his newspaper articles for the 'Hunfrith Times' Norman has a viewpoint that differs from those around him. He experiences the day to day activities within his house on a wholly different level and he presents a determination to sweep everything and anything aside which does not correspond to his world view.

Whilst Norman is not essentially gay, his character was developed from the great camp comedians from the fifties to the seventies and the humour they
created, such as Charles Hawtrey, Frankie Howerd and Kenneth Williams who, along with Hugh Paddick, created the archetypal gay characters, Julian and Sandy for the radio series *Round the Horne* in the mid '60s. An example of this can be seen in Chapter X of Norman’s narrative. Norman has just bought some of the impotency pills manufactured by Bob Dawes’ company via the internet. He then has the following conversation with his wife Joan:

- So many tablets did you get?
- 100.
- God God, Norman. How many erections were you planning on having?
- Joan, please. A little decorum.
- Well I hope these Growth Lab people appreciate it.
- I hope I appreciate it. I hope you appreciate it.
- Norman, that was uncalled for.
- Well God Knows, it was difficult enough having to get the kids to explain to me how to use the internet and then come up with some kind of excuse why I wanted to use it.
- It's really no big thing.
- I mean, what do they see in it anyway. How long are they up there, 'surfing the net'?
- Hours.
- Exactly. Well, in my opinion it just looks good, is fun to play with for a bit but never gives you what you really want.
- Hmm...Funny that.
- You don't know what it's like. I've had my private parts emblazoned across the World Wide Web. I might start getting hate mail from feminists. The CIA could be infiltrating my bits even as I speak.
- Norman...
- Yes?
- Shut up.

(*Liberty Horses*, 104)

Clearly this dialogue between Joan and Norman is laden with double entendres and innuendoi. But there is also a suggestion that stereotypical gender roles have been reversed. It is Joan in this exchange who is
rational, calm and controlled whereas Norman plainly feels humiliated and
indeed violated by the whole process of buying the pills. That this scene
was influenced by the *Carry On* films and the typically suggestive
language they used should not come as any surprise to the reader, but in
this particular case the character of Norman owes more to Frankie Howerd
than it does to Hancock. Norman here adopts the same kind of voice
Howerd used and which Priestley (1975) says is ‘funny because he spoke
exactly as some kinds of women speak; we are listening to a parody of the
feminine manner’.

However, this is just one part of Howerd’s character that has, in this case,
in turn influenced Norman’s. Priestley once again puts it well when he
says of Howerd that he would be,

One minute groaning or whining about the conditions of his
employment, the next minute leering away and about to speak the
unspeakable, then enlarging his suspicions of everybody and
everything, then indignantly demanding we musn’t laugh when he is
obviously making a fool of himself. (Priestley, 1975, 174)

Such distrust and indignation that Priestley sees in Howerd can also be
seen in Hancock and as such it is in this dialogue that these comedic
elements can most clearly be seen as well as the overall influence of both
these comedians.

So there is an uncertainty in the character of Norman which he fights
against throughout the book. Norman’s obsessive desire to find the
Fountain of Youth is due to his belief that then, and only then, will he
regain his potency and therefore reaffirm his sense of his Self. Indeed there is a suggestion that whilst in America Norman and Joan do have sex. But this possible conception of a new life is darkly overwhelmed by atrocity of the terrorist act on the Twin Towers in New York on 9/11/2001.

The Towers, it can be argued, were in themselves a symbol of power, specifically male power, wealth and self-certainty, as demonstrated by their dominance of the New York skyline. Thus the Towers represent an image of male physicality and dominance. Their collapse produced a paralysis of response, a taking away of what was a certainty, namely the dominant position in the world that America held for Americans. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 changed that world view and thus America had to react for fear of being seen as impotent against, not only that attack, but other such terrorist action. In that sense, the use of this image at the end of the work brings us back to Norman’s own inability to understand the unease he feels about the world he finds himself in throughout Part One.

Fears about understanding the male psyche and physicality can also be found in the other two main characters of the work. Bob Dawes is supposed to be one of the richest and most powerful men in the world. However, no one knows if he actually exists. His status, relying as it does on money and power, is therefore, brought into question. Van Wrentl, on the other hand, is an academic writing about American presidents, traditionally seen as the most powerful men in the world. However, although Van Wrentl is writing about the history of the most powerful men
in the world, he is powerless to prevent his research assistant Greenbacker stealing his work and absconding. The master/servant relationship is transgressed and Van Wrentl will eventually be left with the reminder of his own fall from, if not power, then at least authority.

Each section or chapter in the first part of *Liberty Horses* has a chapter heading, being the name of the relevant character and also a sub-heading. In the case of Norman’s narrative these sub-headings are taken from the novel, *Tom Jones*, by Henry Fielding (1784), except Chapters 11, 12 and 15, which are taken from *The Vicar of Wakefield* by Oliver Goldsmith (1766). These two novels were chosen for the sense of the carnivalesque that they invoke, whilst the headings themselves were introduced as a postmodernist technique of which McHale notes that,

> Extremely short chapters, or short paragraphs separated by wide bands of white space, have become the norm. Indeed, so familiar has this new convention of segmentation become that we are apt to forget what an effect it has on our reception of texts by, for instance, Brautigan, Barthelme, or Vonnegut.

(McHale, 1996, 182)

Brautigan, it should be noted, was indeed a particular influence in the layout and use of titles or headlines, as can be seen in his works, *A Confederate General From Big Sur* (1964) and *In Watermelon Sugar* (1968) on *Liberty Horses*. Such spacing, McHale argues, may seem,

> A trivial, superficial convention, one might think, of no real significance; but, depending on the context in which it appears, spacing can be motivated as an act of subversion. (McHale, 1996, 182)

McHale further points out that spacing is part of a carnivalesque revolution
Such headlines tend to corroborate what the spacing already implies, namely that each short segment constitutes an independent unit, a miniature text in its own right, thus in effect completing the physical disintegration of the text that spacing begins. (McHale, 1996, 182)

The carnivalesque form was of interest because it carries with it just such an idea of disintegration and subversion. Eagleton suggests,

carnival unhinges all transcendental signifiers and submits them to ridicule and relativism; by the ‘radicalism of humour’..., power structures are estranged through grotesque parody, ‘necessity’ thrown into satirical question and objects displaced or negated into their opposites. (Eagleton, 1981, 145)

The first words spoken in the novel are ‘Christ, it looks like a fountain’ (Liberty Horses, 15). In this first sentence, Norman unknowingly is making a reference to the ‘Fountain of Youth’, with which he will later become obsessed but it is the cause of Norman’s exclamation that gives onto the plot of his story.

Primarily, this revolves around Norman’s attempts to have his house renovated by the builder, Arthur Thompson. Thompson, in fact, will prove to be the bane of Norman’s life. Not only does the builder in fact effectively single-handedly demolish Norman’s house rather than repair it, the rest of the family ignoring this, but he also proves to be something of a ‘know-it-all’ in virtually any subject. This makes Thompson very popular with the Fintan children, as well as endearing him to Joan Fintan, Norman’s wife.
However for Norman, Thompson and his 'work' becomes a nightmare. Indeed, he will eventually write a letter to his solicitor about Thompson's work (*Liberty Horses*, 126). This letter, it should be pointed out, allows for what may be seen as another postmodern game since the letter appears to be signed by Fintan in his own hand. Of course, the signature is in my own hand, signing myself as Norman Fintan. Going back to the ideas of Brooke-Rose and narration, this, it might be argued, is the only point that the identities of Norman and myself as author are deliberately incorporated within the text.

As his fears of his own impotency grow, so does the devastation to Norman's house. But this is something Norman does not wish to admit, and so it is that Norman denies all this in his capacity as columnist for the local paper, the *Hunfrith Times*. In his column, it is Norman who remains calm whilst everyone around him falls apart. Similarly, with his references to the Crystal Palace and Dean Acheson (*Liberty Horses*, 43), as well as his opinionated political views (*Liberty Horses*, 114), Norman shows himself to be a far from reliable reporter when compared to the articles written by the professional journalist, Slingsby.

As has been said, Norman's fears of impotency grow throughout his narrative, which leads to his obsession with the Spanish explorer, Juan Ponce de Leon and the finding of the Fountain of Youth, reputedly located in Florida, as is Disney World. This idea introduces the idea of myth into the story; the myth of the Fountain of Youth and the myth of America as
portrayed in the homely and secure environs of Disney World, which will in itself become one of the defining images of Part Two of *Liberty Horses*. In terms of plot, it also allows Norman to become the first of the three main characters to travel to America.

So it is primarily due to the state of the house, that, at the end of Norman’s narrative, he has persuaded his family to go with him to Florida. Supposedly this is to enable him to indulge in his newest plan to make a Road Movie, but really it will give him the opportunity to search for the Fountain of Youth, which he believes will be the answer to all his problems.

Unlike Norman, who is an amateur journalist, Slingsby is a professional. As such his narrative follows his investigation into the character of multi-millionaire and Head of Universal Information Systems, Bob Dawes. Dawes is a shadowy figure who, we learn, has not been seen in public for some time. At the same time, Slingsby, we discover, has something of a murky past himself. This sense that he has been involved in what might be termed ‘dirt’ is played upon in his own name. Slingsby is actually the name of a company that makes litter bins, a fact alluded to in the first section of his narrative (Liberty Horses, 17).

As has previously been pointed out, Slingsby’s narrative has at its centre a mystery. This use of genre was influenced by the Sherlock Holmes stories and therefore the sub-headings are all taken from chapter headings found
in the Sherlock Holmes stories, ‘The Study in Scarlet’ (1887), ‘The Sign of Four’ (1890), ‘Adventures of Sherlock Holmes’ (1892) and ‘The Valley of Fear’ (1915).

As Slingsby’s investigations progress it becomes evident that his story has a lot more to it than Slingsby at first thought. Many of the images used in the narrative refer to games, but as Slingsby starts receiving enigmatic e-mails from someone called Heller, who works for Navicom, a Dawes owned company, it becomes clear that what he has become involved in is anything but a game.

Slingsby’s articles, far more objective that those of Norman, reveal a tangled web of business deals with which Dawes is involved. Clearly, Dawes is a very powerful man. Slingsby’s colleague, Hodges, recognises this whilst Slingsby seems oblivious to what he is getting himself into. Eventually, it is the e-mails from Heller that lead to the type of contrivance within the plot that one finds in Victorian novels. Slingsby decides to go to the headquarters of Dawes’ company which, as it turns out, is situated in Florida.

This decision, which now allows two of the three main characters to be in America, turns out to be fateful. In section IX of Slingsby’s narrative we learn from Hodges that his colleague, now in the States, has seemingly disappeared (Liberty Horses, 97-98). Then Heller urgently contacts Hodges about Slingsby. Calling him back, Hodges discovers that no-one
by the name of Heller has apparently ever worked for Navicom.

Armed with this information Hodges decides to go to Florida to search for Slingsby. However, this decision ends in tragedy as we find out from Norman's wife Jean, in Part Two of *Liberty Horses*, that Hodges' body has been found in the Everglades (*Liberty Horses*, 169) and Slingsby is still missing. At the end of this story the mystery of Dawes, Slingsby and Hodges remains unsolved. The quest is incomplete, is subverted and questions remain unanswered. The notion of resolution is therefore denied. Something which does not happen in any traditional quest, mystery or Sherlock Holmes narrative.

Van Wrentl's narrative, the sub headings of which are all taken from M.J.C. Viles', *Politics in the U.S.A* (Vile, 1976), represents the American interest of the work. Van Wrentl, because of the potential scandal he faces back in America, has come to England to complete his work on American Presidents, accompanied by his assistant, Greenbacker.

Our first meeting with Van Wrentl, entitled 'Unity and Diversity' (*Liberty Horses*, 21-22), centres around his first meeting with the vice-chancellor of the university to which he has been seconded. Throughout this meeting we begin to see those elements which are common to, and also separate the English and Americans, such as history, language and particularly in this case, sport. This theme is one that is central to Van Wrentl's narrative, developing as it does into the larger idea of the 'Old World' and the 'New
In our second encounter with Van Wrentl, ‘Judicial Review’ (*Liberty Horses*, 31-32) we are introduced to the character of Greenbacker, Van Wrentl’s amanuensis. Here, through the example of the impeachment of President Nixon over the Watergate scandal in 1974, the themes of power and control are introduced once again. Who, we will eventually have to ask ourselves, is really in control between these two characters? At the same time, the idea of the notion of truth is raised. Has Van Wrentl told the truth about why he has come to England? Similarly, by extension, do Norman’s newspaper articles tell the truth about his home life and are they a realistic representation of the environment in which he finds himself? Finally, what is the real truth about Bob Dawes, whom Slingsby is investigating?

The discussion between Van Wrentl and Greenbacker from this point begins to range over a number of topics crucial to the narrative of American politics, from Cuba, the Mayaguez Affair to the Clinton presidency. With regard to President Clinton, Greenbacker states that Van Wrentl has in fact met the President (*Liberty Horses*, 39). Such interaction between fictional characters and historically documented people is something of a feature of American postmodern writing. For instance, Robert Coover’s *The Public Burning* (1998), centres around the notorious spies of the 1950’s, the Rosenbergs, whom presidential candidate Richard Nixon visits in prison, but then has Nixon playing a round of golf with the
fictional American patriotic figure of ‘Uncle Sam’. Similarly, in E.L. Doctorow’s *Ragtime* (1985), the escapologist Harry Houdini, Henry Ford and Sigmund Freud all make appearances at various stages throughout the text. Some English writers use this technique as well. Pat Barker’s novel, *Regeneration* (1992), is one such novel where the fictional Dr. William Rivers comes into contact with the First World War poet, Siegfried Sassoon at the hospital where Sassoon has been sent. Another writer who often introduces historical figures into his narratives is Peter Ackroyd. In his novel, *Hawksmoor* (1993) the seventeenth century architects Nicholas Dyer, a fictitious name for Nicholas Hawksmoor and Christopher Wren are central to the murder mystery at the heart of the narrative. Similarly, in his novel, *The Clerkenwell Tales* (2004), which concerns the authenticity surrounding the apocalyptic visions of a fourteenth century nun, both King Richard II and Henry Bolingbroke, amongst a long cast of historical figures, appear throughout the narrative.

Thus it was felt a relevant idea to employ the technique used by Coover and Doctorow, amongst others, within Van Wretnl’s narrative as a direct allusion to American postmodern writing. In passing, it should be mentioned here that the meeting between Van Wretnl and Clinton referred to by Greenbacker is mirrored later in the text in deeply ironic fashion when Norman is ‘saved’ by Mickey Mouse as a Liberty Horse runs into the crowd during a parade at Disney World. In this scene it was intended that the implication is that Mickey Mouse is in fact the ‘real person’ and Norman the fictional one.
From their discussions, then, it becomes apparent that Greenbacker has a more liberal political outlook, therefore implying he is a Democrat when it comes to voting, whereas Van Wrentl is much more conservative in his views and therefore is a Republican.

However, Greenbacker's liberalism, as well as his motives, is very soon called into question. Through a series of e-mails to his friend Jack, who is also an ex-colleague of Slingsby's, Greenbacker sets out to learn the truth about Van Wrentl's move to England. This use of e-mails is important as it allows for the non-intervention of a third person narrator to continue by letting the characters themselves explain the developments within the text as opposed to an intruding authorial voice and it also introduces yet another form into the text.

Eventually Greenbacker will use this information to his own advantage. By doing this Greenbacker is playing something of a game with Van Wrentl. This idea of game playing is reflected by analogies used in their discussions, but it also draws out the differences between American and English culture, such as when the vice-chancellor tries to explain how croquet is played to Van Wrentl (Liberty Horses, 22-24), and when Van Wrentl later tries to explain poker to the vice-chancellor.

When Greenbacker gets the information as to the real reason for Van Wrentl's move to England (Liberty Horses, 71), the narrative is free to
move towards its conclusion. Eventually Greenbacker disappears, taking with him all the work Van Wrentl has so far done on his book. This forces Van Wrentl to try to find his assistant in the only way he can, that is by going back to America.

And thus it is through Greenbacker’s actions that Part One of *Liberty Horses* ends, in an example of the familiar 19th century literary device of coincidence, with, somewhat conveniently, all the main characters in the process of leaving England for America.

The choice of the title for the second part of *Liberty Horses*, ‘Dreamland’, is designed to operate on several levels. First, it can be seen to relate directly to Disney World in Florida, where ‘dreams come true’ and where the majority of the action takes place. Second, it operates on two mythical notions. ‘Dreamland’ refers directly back to the discussion Slingsby and Hodges have in Part One concerning the cult of Nellis Airforce Base and ‘Area 51’ (*Liberty Horses*, 65) and the alien craft supposed to exist there. This idea brings to the fore the concept of the ‘conspiracy theory’, found in the political machinations in such American fiction as Pynchon’s novels, *The Crying of Lot 49*, first published in 1966, and *Vineland* (1995) as well as Don DeLillos’s *Libra* (1989). At the same time, the title also can be seen as relating to the notion of ‘The American Dream’, being the idea that the American social, economic and political system makes success possible for every individual.
Essentially Part Two consists mostly of the screenplay, written by Norman, of the Fintan family trip to Disney World. The idea of setting Part Two predominately within the environs of Disney World came about because of what it has come to represent. As Tim Dowling writes,

The word ‘Disney’ represents a wide-ranging abstraction, a brand of reliable sentimentality, moral certainty and blithe cultural disregard that can be used to sell films...Disney traffics in an absurd and whitewashed version of America and its pervasive influence extends far beyond America’s normal consumer reach. (Telegraph Magazine, 2001, 24)

Similarly, Baudrillard, also comments on this point that,

What attracts the crowds the most is without a doubt the social microcosm, the religious, miniaturized pleasure of real America, its constraints and joys. (Baudrillard, 1994, 12).

Yet, he argues, this is a view of America that has been ‘embalmed and pacified...digest of the American way of life, panegyric of American values, idealized transposition of a contradictory reality’ (Baudrillard, 1994, 12). For Baudrillard, Disney ‘exists in order to hide that it is the ‘real’ country, all of ‘real’ America that is Disneyland’ and thus ‘Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real’ (Baudrillard, 1994, 12). Baudrillard, like Warhol, recognises the need in a mass production economy to recycle in order to maintain the illusion that Disney projects. As he writes,

Everywhere today one must recycle waste, and the dreams, the phantasms, the historical, fairylike, legendary imaginary of children and adults is a waste product, the first great toxic excrement of a hyperreal civilization. (Baudrillard, 1994, 13).

However, as we shall see, such righteous complacency does not necessarily
belong to a bygone era. It was just this complacency that was destroyed with the attack on the Twin Towers on 9/11/01.

Norman calls his foray into the world of film a ‘road movie’, again an essentially American cinematic form. However his knowledge of that form appears to be rather sketchy (Liberty Horses, 144). Indeed, what he finally does produce is arguably nothing more than a fairly average family holiday video. This, I intended, should be seen as a reference to the grand plans and the inevitable failures that Hancock came up with week after week in his radio show.

Norman’s film follows his family around as they spend time at Disney World. During this visit many of the most enduring characters from the Disney canon are mentioned, such as Mickey Mouse and Snow White, and the family also sees sets from famous movies. Norman points out the twin towers of the World Trade Center and refers to the 1970’s remake of King Kong (Liberty Horses, 166). Of course, none of the family at this time knows what is going to happen to the towers and how the towers will soon become another, more devastating, symbol of American life.

However, Norman does have a second agenda in taking his family to Florida. That, as we have already seen, is his obsession with Juan Ponce de Leon and finding the location of the Fountain of Youth. Norman mentions to his wife Jean that he is thinking of hiring a car so that they can see more of Florida. It is at this point we find out the fate of both Slingsby
and Hodges (*Liberty Horses*, 169) but despite his wife’s fears, Norman is determined to make the trip. The car Norman hires is a Plymouth Continental. Norman calls this, the ‘archetypal American car’ (*Liberty Horses*, 171), but the name also suggests the voyage of the Pilgrim Fathers from Plymouth to the New Continent of America. This, as we know, is a factual piece of history, but when Norman is asked where he is taking his family, he replies, ‘to see a little piece of history’ (*Liberty Horses*, 172). In fact, as has already been stated, he is taking them to the mythical site of the Fountain of Youth.

The Fountain of Youth, it turns out, is situated near the city of St. Augustine. Once again the Old and New Worlds collide at a place named, it should be noted, after the first Archbishop of Canterbury, in a State famous for Disney World, beaches and popular T.V. police series.

Norman does indeed find the site of the Fountain of Youth and stands silently before the cross that marks its position. Here Van Wrentl states, ‘you could argue this was where the American Dream was born’ (*Liberty Horses*, 177), referring to the idea that in America anything is possible, but also resonating in his words is Norman’s wish to return to full sexual potency and thus a more secure sense of himself as a Male.

In fact, the above quotation is the first spoken in an exchange where Norman meets Van Wrentl. During this conversation we learn why Norman is at the site and why Van Wrentl is in Florida. We also discover
that Norman isn’t really entirely convinced the visit to the site will help his medical condition and that Van Wrentl’s view of America has become decidedly jaded since Greenbacker absconded.

Norman and Van Wrentl part. Norman is now left to return to his family and travel back with them to Disney World, the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers still an unknown. And indeed, before this happens, one note of hope is finally proffered. Back in their hotel room Joan questions Norman as to his motives for their trip. As he explains, the idea they might have another child is raised (Liberty Horses, 184) and it is intimated that, at the end of scene twenty seven, they will have sex and possibly produce a new child in the shadow of September 11th.

The final scene, scene twenty eight, of Norman’s movie, and indeed the final scene of the whole novel, consists entirely of the family watching the events of September 11th. These events were added to the text as a direct reaction to what happened on that day.

Coming up with a suitable reaction to the events of 9/11 was to create a dilemma for artists in all media. On the one hand they had to come to terms with their own individual response to that day, whilst, on the other hand, artists had to take into account the effect it had upon the American psyche as a whole. As Alan Munton argues this was due to the innate inability of Americans to address the notion of ‘the Other’. Munton writes,
The actions of September 11th marked the dramatic arrival of the periphery at the centre, and were designed to enforce one possible view that the periphery might have the centre....September 11th was a symbolic act directed against Western modernity, and in that respect the choice of targets—the Twin Towers, the Pentagon, perhaps the White House—showed a shrewd understanding of what the West would understand as a symbolic attack to be. ...the attacks were an assault upon the symbolic meanings that the West confers upon the physical manifestations of modernity. The planners of these attacks showed an informed understanding of Western modernity and of the ways it legitimises itself...September 11th was a practical critique of the modern, in which the periphery found its Other in the symbolic structures of the West. (Munton, 2002)

However, since 2001 a steady stream of work has been published. Perhaps most notable among these novels are Frederic Beigbeder's book, Windows on the World (2005), Jonathon Safran Foer's, Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close (2006) and Jay McInerney's, The Good Life (2006). But perhaps the most interesting problem for writers in addressing the events of 9/11 is how to portray an event in words that was such a significant visual event. It is for this reason, therefore, that it may be films, such as United 93 (2006), being the story of the failed attempt of the fourth hijacked plane to reach its target on that day, September 12th (2006) and Oliver Stone's World Trade Center (2006), that creatively impact on the public mind and will cause the event to be re-addressed as much as the Kennedy assassination has been.

As for Liberty Horses, other events had already been included in the work, such as Hilary Clinton running for the Senate (Liberty Horses, 92) and the World Economic Forum in Switzerland, (Liberty Horses, 108), as they occurred. In these events Americans and America, and therefore the West,
had a sense of its own certainty. To ignore the Twin Towers terrorist attack would be to deny perhaps the most important event in the present millennium up until that point, not to mention an event that had an enormous impact on myself as an observer.

And so it was that the events of what has generally become known as 9/11 had to be addressed. The expression of the date here is also important in itself because it points to a terrible irony that artists and commentators alike seem to have failed to acknowledge to a large extent. The attack on the Twin Towers occurred, as has been said, on September 11th, but it should be pointed out that Americans refer to this day as ‘9/11’. Take away the ‘forward slash’ and you are left with 911. This, in America, is, of course, the telephone number for the emergency services, which would appear to be something of a sick joke on the part of the terrorists and something hardly mentioned in coverage of the attack, probably for good reasons. One might suggest the reason for this is that the idea constitutes just those conspiracy theories and paranoid reactions that writers like Pynchon and DeLillo have claimed to exist in the American psyche. To acknowledge those reactions and fears would compound the already seriously attacked and suffering ‘safe’ notion of the American Dream.

In scene twenty eight, the family watch what happens in their hotel room within the Disney resort. This was a deliberate choice in order to juxtapose the make-believe vision of America with the hard reality of its place, as seen by others, within the world. The News Reporter's
statements, as well as the directions, are taken from numerous sources, including live television coverage at the time, and subsequent television, newspaper and magazine reports.

Having watched what has just happened it is left to the four members of the Fintan family to utter the last dialogue of the whole work. Joan states, 'This is like a very bad dream, a very, very bad dream' (Liberty Horses, 186), which relates back to the whole imagery of part two and its title, 'Dreamland'. The children then utter their complete bewilderment as to what they have just seen. Finally, Norman speaks these words, bringing us back full circle, to the image of the Liberty Horse which, as we have seen, permeates throughout the whole of the piece:

'It's just as though the whole world has run out of control and there's no-one there to rein it in. (Liberty Horses, 187)

It should be pointed out here that initially there was an intention to add a Coda to the text which, it was felt, strongly related to this final scene. The piece chosen was a poem by the American writer, E.E. Cummings, which was originally published in a collection in 1958, and runs as follows:

'next of course god america i
love you land of the pilgrims' and so forth oh
say can you see by the dawn's early my
country 'tis of centuries come and go
and are no more what of it we should worry
in every language even deafanddumb
thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry
by jingo by gee by gosh by gum
why talk of beauty what could be more beaut-
iful than these heroic happy dead
who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter
they did not stop to think they died instead

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then shall the voice of liberty be mute?"

He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water
(Cummings, 1977, 19)

However, it was later felt that the poem emphasised the American aspect
of the work too much and was therefore not included in the final draft.
Nonetheless, the poem, it must be said, and particularly lines 9-13, do have
a clear resonance to that which happened on September 11th 2001.

Although the above has not been a completely definitive reading of the
making of *Liberty Horses*, it has been an attempt to draw out the main
themes and images employed in its making. I have also pointed to those
techniques deliberately used in the creation of the work as a direct
recognition of those postmodernist writers that infuse the text.

Finally, it should be said that *Liberty Horses* was an attempt to produce a
piece of work by someone ostensibly described as English but who wanted
to cross cultural literary boundaries that so often define English and
American texts.
CONCLUSION

My project submitted for the PhD degree in Creative Writing is the novel *Liberty Horses*. It is the composition of this experimental work of prose fiction that constitutes the research activity and research outcome submitted as a contribution to knowledge in the field of Creative Writing. My commentary makes the research component explicit.

In this work I have dramatised specific issues of gender identity, personal and political power and the role of the quest, presenting these themes within a comic narrative that both adopts and subverts postmodern narrative forms that I identified through my initial reading by writers such as Brautigan, Gaddis, DeLillo, Barthelme, Coover and Pynchon.

I have then set out to explain in my commentary how this initial reading has influenced the writing of *Liberty Horses* and how I then explored and extended the experimental aspects of such writing (the severe limiting of direct narration, the reliance on epistolary exchanges and so on) within my own narrative.

In order to delineate between the purely creative and the critical elements of this project, my own work *Liberty Horses* has been presented first since the novel is not meant to be an example of postmodern writing but rather exists within its own right as a work of postmodern fiction. In support of my original work of fiction and to make explicit those themes and ideas
that are addressed within the narrative I have then supplied a critical essay
that serves to complement and is ancillary to, the work of fiction.

The critical portion of this project serves to identify those distinct
differences that I have observed to operate between English and American
postmodern novels. These differences range from the foregrounding of
questions concerning concepts of gender identity and history in English
fiction to the problems of the individual in consumer society and self-
conscious experimentation with narrative form in American fiction. I have
then set out how these tensions that exist between these two forms of
fiction have been a productive element in the writing of Liberty Horses.

It is, as has been said, the process of writing Liberty Horses that is at the
centre of this project. I have subsequently tried to show, therefore, the
writers that have been the most productive in the creation of that work
rather than to present a critical analysis of postmodern English and
American fiction.
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