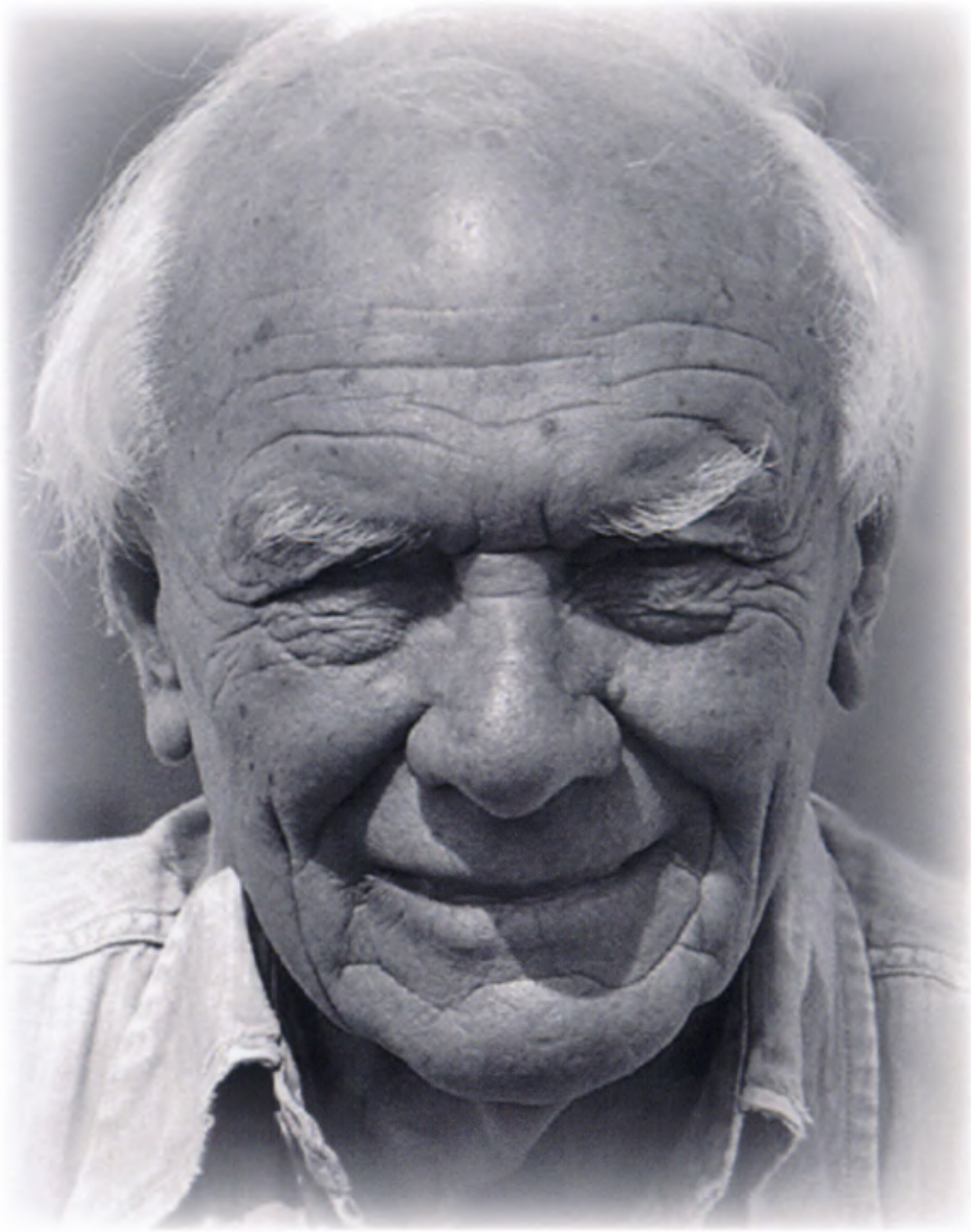
THE VERY BEST OF MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE



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The Very Best of Malcolm Muggeridge

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Introduction

In journalistic circles the name Malcolm Muggeridge does not carry the weight it did for half a century preceding his death on 14 November, 1990. To the extent that Muggeridge's reputation latterly derived from television, this is unremarkable: television giveth and indiscriminately taketh away. Yet for most of his life Muggeridge's reputation derived from his pen: as editorial writer, newspaper correspondent in Joseph Stalin's Russia, acerbic essayist, novelist, critic and latter-day Christian apologist. If he sometimes seemed a Jeremiah, hurling imprecations in the teeth of an unheeding world, no less often he appeared in motley and bells, like King Lear's fool, trying to humour us into looking at things a different way.

In 1966, when I should have been immersed in statutes, regulations and case law at the University of Toronto Law School, I was often ensconced in the periodical stacks at Central Library, reading Muggeridge's journalism. I had stumbled upon him quite by chance and was struck first by his elegant, wry, effortlessly readable prose, so clear, pungent and often devastating. His sceptical mind and loathing for cant were a welcome purgative to the academic conversations going on around me. I began systematically working my way backwards through the fifties, forties, thirties, even into the twenties, via back numbers of the *New Statesman*, the *Guardian*, *Time and Tide* and dozens of other dusty bound periodicals. By my third year of law school I could have answered any exam question concerning Muggeridge;

unfortunately, these were scarce, the examiners preferring instead to test my shaky knowledge of close corporations and the remoter pastures of the Income Tax Act.

One autumn Saturday in 1968, I saw an announcement that Malcolm Muggeridge would be speaking at the St Lawrence Centre in Toronto. I tried in vain to get tickets; all tickets had been gone for weeks. After machinations of one sort or another, I got hold of an out-of-town telephone number and placed a person-to-person call to Malcolm Muggeridge. When the phone started to ring I almost panicked and hung up. Malcolm could not have been kinder or more patient at this bumptious intrusion upon his privacy (his flight from England had only just arrived). We agreed to meet in advance of the St Lawrence Centre lecture. When we did, I asked him about some articles he had written in India in the twenties. At first, he barely remembered, then said: 'Nobody has mentioned those articles to me in fifty years', and went on to tell me how Mahatma Gandhi had published his first articles in the newspaper *Young India*. Conversation then truly began. Thereafter we fell into regular correspondence and on his frequent visits to Canada we met and talked, and often he stayed with us. Although a generation separated us in age – more in breadth of experience and intellect – Malcolm allowed me to feel an equal. As Dr Johnson said of Gilbert Walmsley, 'I honoured him, and he endured me.'

The same year that we met, Muggeridge published *Jesus Rediscovered*, which became an immediate, unlikely bestseller, planting unshakeably in the public mind the conviction that he had undergone some sort of Damascus Road conversion. That this was not so, that *Jesus Rediscovered* was only the expression of a lifelong and continuing pilgrimage, I knew from my reading of his early writings. Eventually I compiled and edited an anthology, *Things Past* (Morrow: Collins, 1978), to prove the point. It scarcely mattered. Myth has greater staying power than reality, and the myth of a latter-day St Mugg grew apace.

In 1978–9 Muggeridge and I swapped houses, as he had to fulfil a commitment he had made to be a Distinguished Visitor (or as he preferred, 'old hack in residence') at a Canadian university. I went to live in his sixteenth-century house in Robertsbridge, Sussex and there I wrote his biography (*Malcolm Muggeridge: A Life*, Nelson: Collins, 1980). Meanwhile, at 75, Muggeridge came to Canada and kept up a pace which I later learned had left his younger academic colleagues breathless.

Muggeridge's religious books (particularly *Jesus Rediscovered* and his book on Mother Teresa, *Something Beautiful for God*) obscured, to some extent, his earlier work: *In a Valley of This Restless Mind*, which I consider his masterpiece, originally published in 1938 and reissued in 1978; *Winter in Moscow*, published in 1932, which circulated for years in *samizdat* through the remote labour camps of the Gulag Archipelago; *The Thirties*, his ironic history of a low decade of betrayal; and the two volumes of his memoirs, *Chronicles of Wasted Time*, which the *Sunday Times* called 'one of the greatest autobiographies of this century'.

The sole criterion which I have here employed for selection is that I consider the extract worth preserving; necessarily this leads to catholicity. Some pieces were included because they are comic; others are poignant; some reveal the inner man; a few are profound, while others are prophetic. If a passage revealed something about the essential cast of Malcolm's mind, I included it; whether the source was fiction or non-fiction, play, letter, diary, or television documentary was immaterial.

A consistent thread running through all Muggeridge's writing is humour, even (perhaps I should say especially) in his religious books. Laughter, after all, is a primitive language of transcendence; Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity (like St Francis and his friars) were frequently to be found laughing; it is organizations like the World Council of Churches that are solemn and portentous, often funny but only by inadvertence. Malcolm's writing exemplified the

old hymn's exhortation: 'Him serve with mirth/His praise forth tell'.

At 80 Malcolm was as vigorous (and busy) as ever, at work on an eight-part BBC television series (*Muggeridge: Ancient and Modern*), writing book reviews and feature articles, lecturing here, there and everywhere. Only in the last years, as his eyesight and hearing failed and his memory occasionally misfired, were there intimations of mortality. I realized he was aging in 1985 when, on a beautiful sunny autumn afternoon at Robertsbridge, I suggested that we set out on our usual walk – through the hop fields and up the hillside past the grazing sheep, over the rickety stile that leads into the apple orchard, along the crest of the hill to the dead oak tree struck by lightning, over another stile, this one sturdy, and into Deadman's Wood where the path turns leisurely home again, a five-mile hike which we always called, for some incongruous reason, Australia. Malcolm begged off, saying that he was cold. Later that evening, at my request, he played a cassette recording of his presidential address to the Samuel Johnson Society in Lichfield; when, at one point, his talk became momentarily confused, he leapt up and shut the machine off, muttering; 'It's no good, it's not what I wanted to say.'

A year later I was again in Robertsbridge and he gave me the manuscript of his latest book (*Conversion*) to look over; before I had read more than a few pages, he came and took it away again, saying something about making corrections. It was painfully evident that he was embarrassed by its limitations.

The final chapter of *The Very Best of Malcolm Muggeridge* concerns death. Malcolm's death, unfortunately, was not, as he had hoped, an easeful passage from time to eternity; his mind disintegrated, he grew suspicious and quarrelsome, at the last he was confined to a nursing home. Yet though the mind was troubled, Malcolm could echo the words of Bunyan's Mr Valiant-for-Truth:

> Though with great difficulty I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive at where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage, and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me, that I have fought his battles who will now be my rewarder . . . And so he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.

Malcolm is buried in Whatlington Cemetery, in a plot near his father's grave on a slope overlooking the rolling Sussex countryside, close by where he lived the last 45 years. Malcolm chose the epitaph for his father's tombstone (after Joseph of Arimathea): 'He was a good man and a just.' On Malcolm's stone his children chose to have inscribed just three words: 'Valiant for truth.'

When I think of Malcolm, and I do often, I remember his kindness and generosity; a wiser mentor and a kindlier friend no aspiring writer ever had. I remember his courage in speaking his mind whatever the prevailing orthodoxy; his books, which more than any university or teacher taught me what life is about; his humility, a true humility of the spirit which embraced everyone as a creature created in the image of a loving God, and thus infinitely precious – and at the same time, all trousered apes, derisory in their human self-importance, the butt of all jokes. I remember his wisdom, which flamed from a quick and well-stocked mind rooted in the basic conviction that life is to be understood as a drama and not as a process. I remember, above all, his laughter, building within, erupting outwards, so that sometimes out for a walk we had to stop and hold on to a post or a tree until the gale spent itself.

Ultimately I have come to think of Malcolm (in one of his own metaphors) as the gargoyle perched on the cathedral steeple, a grinning, gnome-like figure peering down at the antics of a world gone mad, and at the same time drawing

attention heavenwards. In an unpublished article, Malcolm wrote:

> Let us, then, while as we should, revering the steeples, remember the gargoyles, also in their way, purveyor's of God's word, and be thankful that, when the gates of Heaven swing open, as they do from time to time, mixed with the celestial music is the unmistakable sound of celestial laughter.

Ian A. Hunter
March, 1998

1

The Echoing Green

Such, such were the joys
When we all girls and boys
In our youth-time were seen,
On the Echoing Green.
William Blake: *Songs of Innocence*

The first thing I remember about the world – and I pray it may be the last – is that I was a stranger in it. This feeling, which everyone has in some degree, and which is, at once, the glory and the desolation of *homo sapiens*, provides the only thread of consistency that I can detect in my life.
New Statesman, 1968

I have always felt myself, perhaps to an abnormal degree, a stranger in a strange world. In my earliest recollections of life (actually, of walking down a suburban street in someone else's hat) I was consciously a displaced person – an expression which, doubtless for that very reason, has always filled me with a mixture of rage and heartache; of rage that it should ever have been devised, and of heartache that it should ever have been required.
The Thirties, 1940

The first story I ever wrote – in printed letters when I was very young – was about a train which, to the delight of the passengers, went zooming along through station after station

without stopping, until it failed to stop at their particular stations. Then they yelled and howled in protest, but it made no impression on the engine-driver, who just took the train roaring on. It was only long afterwards that I understood what the story meant.

Jesus Rediscovered, 1969

Religious instruction, so called, at first my elementary, and then my secondary school, consisted of Bible stories and secular moral tales, suspended in favour of mental arithmetic when examinations or government inspectors loomed. I maintained an attitude of detached contempt, as befitted the son of a Socialist and agnostic, and enjoyed airing my view that the Bible was demonstrably untrue, and the moral tales a mean device to keep the downtrodden and oppressed content with their lot. At morning prayers the headmaster often made us repeat 'Hallowed be Thy name' three or four times to get the aspirate right – which on one occasion induced me, in fear and trembling, but with outward bravado, to raise my hand in class afterwards and ask whether it was considered that the deity was as particular about sounding our aitches as the headmaster. The smile of the teacher and the giggles of my classmates made me feel pleased with myself, but even then my satisfaction was touched with a nagging worry that I had been in some incomprehensible way cheap and disloyal – to what or to whom I had no idea. The same sort of experience has befallen me again and again. On how many mornings have I, like Peter, heard the cock crow thrice with an aching heart!

Jesus Rediscovered, 1969

My elementary school was in one of those stark bare buildings which successive Education Acts spawned over the country; wherever children liable under the Act were gathered together. It stood in an asphalt playground; inside, the classrooms were divided by partitions which could be

pulled back to provide an assembly hall. Here we gathered in the morning for prayers and a hymn, and on Friday afternoons to sing 'Now the Day is Over' – which we did with enthusiasm since it signified two clear days of freedom ahead. This somewhat lugubrious hymn, if I happen to hear it, still awakens in me an instinctive response of delight.

Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Green Stick, 1972

The only teacher I remember was a Miss Helen Corke – a short, eager woman in a gathered smock. I was interested to discover, later, that she was an intimate of D. H. Lawrence, at that time also an elementary school teacher in Croydon, at the Davidson Road School. She makes a somewhat lurid appearance in one of his novels – I think *The Trespasser* – and, in a small volume, has added her gentle and moderate testimony to the numerous other accounts of him which Lawrence's associates have provided. The picture of Miss Corke, after grappling with us, her turbulent and unsatisfactory charges, laying aside her gathered smock and proceeding to grapple with Lawrence's turbulent and unsatisfactory Dark Unconscious is surprising and rather comical.

Tread Softly for you Tread on my Jokes, 1966

Through a school friend I got into the way of occasionally attending the services in a Congregational chapel near my home. It was a grey stone building in neo-gothic style with a tall steeple. The minister, a man from the Hebrides with a long white beard, seemed to me a prophetic figure, but my true motive for attending his services was to look at girls – something a good deal less easily attainable then than it is today. As I devoutly bent my head in prayer I would peer through my fingers at a girl's head similarly bent, brooding on her unresponsiveness to my passion, perhaps even unawareness of it; on her female body, warm and hidden, under her clothes.

Jesus Rediscovered, 1969

I never had a conversation of mutual understanding with my mother at all. I used to read my father's books precociously, and she once found me reading Rousseau's *Confessions*, when, God knows, I must have been very young. I shouldn't think I knew what it was about really, but she gave me a frightful dressing down, and said that Rousseau was a bad man. I remember the phrase she used, very typical; she said 'Rousseau was born with his blood boiling.' I had no idea what she meant by this, but I realise now that it was a sort of primitive way of saying that he was sexually obsessed.

Jesus Rediscovered, 1969

I remember the arrival of the first issue of the *New Statesman*, my father being an original subscriber. Its rather soggy paper – almost like blotting-paper – could, I discovered, be used to make ersatz cigarettes. I puffed at it before I began to read it, still less to write in it, deriving, I dare say, more solid satisfaction from it then than ever I did subsequently.

Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Green Stick, 1972

I listened avidly and ecstatically when, on Saturday evenings, my father and his cronies discussed how a better world was to be brought to pass. They were mostly City clerks like himself, belonging to the lower middle class, who had moved from the Chapel with its remote expectation of a heavenly sequel to a virtuous life, into the bright glare of Fabian and Socialist certainties that tomorrow or the day after heaven could be made to exist on earth. It sometimes happened that, as I listened, I dozed or fell asleep, to be brusquely awakened and sent to bed. Their ardent words mingled with my private dreams, so that if I muttered in my sleep, more likely than not, it would be about the public ownership of the means of production, or the nationalisation of the railways and the banks.

Jesus Rediscovered, 1969

I was brought up to regard the Fabians with awe. This was in the days of their obscurity, before they all became peers and professors and Privy Counsellors.

Tread Softly for you Tread on my Jokes, 1966

Our Fabian visitors were more sympathetic to my father; careless, untidy, pipe-smoking men; ladies whose bosoms floated loose instead of being laced up like my mother's, and whose hair was piled upwards like an overcharged haystack instead of being tightly curled like hers. They were, in my father's sense, cultured; had been to the university, mostly Oxford or Cambridge; had contributed to the review columns of the *New Statesman* and the *Nation* (then still separate), and maybe written books; called Lytton Strachey 'Lytton', and Keynes 'Maynard', and Shaw 'G.B.S.'. They represented everything my father most admired; had effortlessly acquired what he so desperately sought. They were what he wanted to be. Those hours at City libraries when he should have been eating or playing; the poring over French irregular verbs in order to be able to have a come-back if someone on the Croydon Council (an unlikely enough eventuality, I must say) quoted a Latin tag at him! – none of that for them. They were at ease in a world from which he felt he had been excluded, and which therefore seemed the more alluring – what he saw as the world of culture. How was he to know that this culture, for which he had an almost mystical veneration, was dying, if not already dead? That a neo-Stone Age rather than a neo-Fabian one lay ahead?

Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Green Stick, 1972

I was absolutely convinced that if my father and his friends took over, which I firmly believed they would, because it all seemed to me to be so reasonable what they said, that everything was going to be fine. It was just a matter of time, and people would see that the capitalist system was useless; that everybody should stay at school until they were sixteen or

seventeen, and that leisure time should be devoted to reading Shakespeare instead of going to race meetings, and so on and so on. All this seemed to me to be obvious, and it was just a matter of my father and his friends winning votes and getting into power.

Jesus Rediscovered, 1969

I remember my father most vividly and characteristically at the top of Surrey Street on a Saturday evening, where in those days there used to be a street market, with gas flares by the booths, and plenty of hucksters coaxing passers-by to take advantage of a wonderful chance to buy a gold watch for next to nothing, or a salve that would cure anything from the pox to pink eye, or shaving soap so pure and luscious that you could eat it – which the huckster then proceeded to do to prove his point, stuffing the suds into his mouth as though they were turkish delight. Meanwhile, my father had set up his little frail platform, almost like a gallows against the evening sky, and climbed on to it. He was bearded by now, having grown his beard as a result of being afflicted with a skin complaint called barber's rash which, I imagine, has now disappeared along with the cut-throat razor. The beard gave an extra dimension of drama to the scene; making a prophet of him, a voice crying in the wilderness against the soap suds man. I led the applause and the laughter, such as they were. Even at ten I knew for the most part what he would say; as well as all his jokes. They did not lose their piquancy for me because of that. I waited for them, sensed that they were coming, exploded with mirth prematurely when he was still working up to the pay-off line. 'Now ladies and gentlemen,' he would begin, addressing some ten or a dozen casual passers-by, who had paused out of curiosity to listen to him; along with myself, a couple of Labour Party stalwarts who had turned out with him, and perhaps another urchin or two – 'Now ladies and gentlemen, can you tell me this? It's His Majesty's Government, His Majesty's Navy, His Majesty's

Stationery Office. His Majesty's This and His Majesty's That. Every blooming thing seems to be His Majesty's. But it's the National Debt. Why isn't that His Majesty's? We'll gladly let His Majesty have that, won't we?'

It might raise an occasional smile, but mostly the point was lost, except on me and the two stalwarts who, of course, had also heard it many times before. Undeterred, my father slogged on, abolishing poverty, illiteracy, war, inequality, every conceivable ill and injustice, and ushering in the glorious era of everlasting peace, prosperity and happiness. His voice rose, his gestures grew more intense; against the night sky, he was a gesticulating enraged shadow calling on mankind to turn away from their follies and false leaders and realise their true destiny. What a sublime prospect it seemed! How relatively easy of attainment! And yet the people in Surrey Street seemed strangely indifferent; their attention more easily held by the gold watch, the magic salve, the edible shaving soap than by this sure prospectus for living happily ever after. Defiantly, my father, the two stalwarts and I sang 'The Red Flag' together, my small tuneless voice mixing with their deep ones, folded up his platform and made off carrying it.

Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Green Stick, 1972

I assented eagerly to my father's exuberant appreciation of nature, but only to please him; without truly meaning or feeling it. Then, on a particular occasion, I found I really did mean it. I can remember the occasion perfectly; it was near Chipstead, going along a lane that ran past the church, on a June evening at about seven o'clock. I expect the lane now is in the middle of a housing estate. The light of the setting sun slashed the trunks of the trees, so that they were half gilded and half in shadow. Suddenly I realised with a tremendous feeling of exultation that this golden light of the sun, this fragrance of a June evening and light rustle of leaves – the whole golden, glorious scene had some special significance

in which I participated. That in its all-embracing beauty it conveyed a oneness, and that to identify oneself with this oneness, and with the spirit animating it and giving it meaning, contained the promise of ecstasy. It was a moment of great illumination. Ever afterwards I have felt lost and imprisoned when only concrete lay around me for long. Like waking up in New York, and looking out of a hotel window before the day begins. Seeing the tall grey buildings as impenetrable prison walls; the narrow streets as for monotonous, aimless prison exercise; the tops of the buildings intersecting against the remote sky as prison bars. Thus imprisoned, what is there to do but live as prisoners do on fantasies of eroticism and violence; stupefied with drugs or their own despair? I owe to, of all people, Ilya Ehrenburg, an image that I invariably turn to for deliverance from such nightmares. Speaking of Pasternak's writings during the darkest days of Stalin's oppression, Ehrenburg said he saw in them the promise that, however high and thick the concrete might be piled, however widely spread, even though it covered the whole earth, there would always be a crack, and in that crack – greenness, life.

I will not pretend that, bicycling with my father and my brothers by Chipstead Church, all, or any, of this came into my mind. At the same time, it marked a sort of turning point; thenceforth, wherever I have been, and however dismal my situation or prospect, there has been the never-failing solace of feeling earth below my feet and seeing sky above my head.

Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Green Stick, 1972

The first event in the outside world that I remember as something actually happening and involving me was the outbreak of the 1914–1918 war. My father came home with a newspaper and told us. His face was grave, but what I most vividly recall is the tremendous excitement of everybody. The crowds in the streets shouting and cheering; the sense of terrific events about to happen. Contrary to what pacifists and other humane persons would like to believe, wars, when

they break out, tend to be popular. They offer the illusion of an escape from the boredom which is the lot of, particularly, technological man. He will be able to make off, not shamefacedly or furtively, but as a hero; the routine of his daily life and domestic relationships will be broken, and the sameness of his days give place to uncertainty and drama.

Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Green Stick, 1972

Armistice Day, when with a school friend I took a bus to Woolwich, staying on at the terminus and returning in the same bus to Croydon. From the open upper-deck we watched the crowds, all singing, shouting, dancing, embracing, vomiting, climbing on to the tops of taxis, grabbing one another and making off to the parks. It was, to me, an eerie and disturbing, rather than a joyful, scene – those flushed animal faces, dishevelled women, hoarse voices. Perhaps at fifteen – which I then was – I should have liked to join in; at the same time, in the light of my father's hopes, I had to consider that it boded ill. Were these the future citizens of his Socialist Commonwealth? Was this what freedom meant? I found myself, as I so often have, in the position of a reluctant and indecisive prig.

Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Green Stick, 1972

My going to Cambridge seems to have been almost accidental. Like most lovers of mankind, my father was inclined to be casual in making arrangements for his own family. Though my academic attainments were decidedly meagre, I somehow got myself accepted. It necessitated passing an examination in Latin, a language I had never studied, and now know nothing of. So there must have been some sleight-of-hand. I seem to remember learning off by heart the translation of a Latin comedy which seemed to me abysmally unfunny – a premonition, maybe, of becoming editor of *Punch*. There was also, in those days, a compulsory divinity exam which I somehow managed to get through. This involved mastering

Paley's *Evidences*, a long-forgotten work which purports to prove the existence of God. I cannot now remember any of the arguments, but I know they failed to convince me at the time.

Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Green Stick, 1972

Chapel in those days was compulsory, and I became familiar with the order of Anglican services and the Book of Common Prayer, almost the only beneficial result of the four years I spent at Cambridge.

Jesus Rediscovered, 1969

Cambridge, so far as I was concerned, consisted of boredom, dissatisfaction, and misty afternoon walks. Ever after, the notion of higher education as a panacea for contemporary ills has seemed to me a total absurdity – more than ever so today.

Jesus Rediscovered, 1969

In my last year at Cambridge, through my friendship with Alec Vidler – a friendship that has lasted all my life – I went to live at the Oratory House. It was the headquarters of an Anglican religious order, the Oratory of the Good Shepherd, to which Alec belonged, consisting mostly of priests and ordinands of the Anglo-Catholic persuasion. The offices were said during the day, periods of silence were enforced; in the afternoons I often worked in the garden with Wilfred Knox, a rare, sweet human being of whom I became very fond, and for whom I sometimes acted as a server when he celebrated Holy Communion. I fell into this way of life with great contentment, enjoying its remoteness from the University, and its relative austerity as far as food and domestic comforts were concerned. Austerity has always made me happy, and its opposite, miserable. I find it strange that, knowing this, I should so often have inflicted upon myself the nausea of over-indulgence, and had to fight

off the black dogs of satiety. Human beings, as Pascal points out, are peculiar in that they avidly pursue ends they know will bring them no satisfaction; gorge themselves with food which cannot nourish and with pleasures which cannot please. I am a prize example.

Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Green Stick, 1972

[T]he great advantage of the sort of education I had was precisely that it made practically no mark upon those subjected to it.

Tread Softly for you Tread on my Jokes, 1966

I first consciously set eyes on London seated beside my father in what must have been one of the very last hansom cabs to ply for hire along Moorgate. . . . Subsequently, I passed much of my life there, both in terms of time and of expense of spirit; questing for money, women, fame, all inferior satisfactions. It has been an intimacy more of hate than love; but still an intimacy, giving me the feeling that the place in its squalid way is eternal. London Bridge, after all, still has not fallen down despite T. S. Eliot, Hitler, and those innumerable feet which pound across it each morning and evening. If a million years were to pass, and I then to hear St Paul's clock chime, catch a whiff of floral scent against the Covent Garden stench of rotting vegetables, breathe into my nostrils the dank, dark flow of the Thames, I should know instantly where I was – in London.

London à la Mode, 1966

I remember my father saying to me once that he had imagined that growing old would mean becoming sagacious, serene, and immune to the follies and hurts of the ego. Not at all. He was the same man as he had ever been. The Old Adam did not tire with the years. But for the convenient circumstance of having grizzled hair, decayed teeth, short breath, wizened flesh, etc. he would behave accordingly as the costume and

the make-up changed, necessitating a different performance; not the part itself.

Diary, January 7, 1962

I heard from Kitty that Dad had died at 6 a.m. on March 25 [1942]. There were two letters.

> Your father now is dying. He is in the nursing home at Hastings. Your mother is staying with me. We go in the car to see him every day and stay about 20 minutes. He has lost his angry look and lies very still with a peaceful expression, and I don't think he any longer has any fear of death. He does not eat or open his eyes, and his hands lie on the bed very lifeless. He can with difficulty speak names – Douglas, Malcolm. Your mother is distressed because he does not look at her, and she tries to lift his eyelids and kisses his brow, but he cannot make the effort of recognizing her. I tell her that he knows she is there but is unable to say so. Sitting by his bedside, although he cannot speak, I feel closer in touch with him than before. I suppose being near to death H. Muggeridge is no more and he is just one of us giving up the ghost and therefore more familiar.
>
> Your father died on March 25 at 6 in the morning. He died in his sleep. The funeral was on Friday, and his grave is in the churchyard here as you said it should be and Noble took the service. About 12 people came to the funeral . . . He was buried very quietly and the people came and had refreshments here and spoke to your mother. It was a lovely day and it did not seem a very sad occasion even for your mother who received her guests with a great air, was more like Val at one of her parties than a bereaved

> widow. I think his death was a relief to him and to her, and an atmosphere of great relief seemed to hang about him when in the church he was hoisted on trestles in his box, as if he was singing 'Ain't it grand to be blooming well dead!' We are going to plant his grave with flowers and have a stone with his name on it. I went up with Colonel Wilson to choose his grave and we decided to have a double grave so that your mother can be there too when she dies.

These two letters were so exquisitely written, and so characteristic of Kitty, that I thought when I read them: what inconceivable good fortune to have such a woman for a wife. It is a benefit which I would not exchange for any other; no, not even to have written *Gulliver's Travels* or *Pilgrim's Progress* or *Don Quixote*.

Diary, April 12, 1942

On the way back from visiting new house at Brasted had time to spare, so visited Croydon Town Hall in the expectation of finding there a photograph of my father. Asked the porter, who remembered him well, but no photograph. Large portraits beside stairway of past mayors, whose names I remembered – Trumble, Eldridge, etc. Also Town Clerk, Newnham. Looked in at Council Chamber, which I hadn't seen since, as a child, I sat in the gallery and saw my father among the councillors below. Quite a small place, with elegant red chairs bearing Croydon arms, and large chair in which the Mayor presided. Asked at the library if there was a photograph of Mr Muggeridge and girl there said: 'You mean Malcolm Muggeridge?' Rather confusing, and destructive of my mood of filial piety.

Diary, April 7, 1951

2

Vendor of Words

> From earliest childhood it always seemed to me that the only thing worth doing in life was to write.
>
> Malcolm Muggeridge, *Tread Softly for you Tread on my Jokes*, 1966

What a moment that was in one's life when for the first time a limp, damp galley was laid on one's desk to be corrected, the ink running into little black rivulets as one attempted to write corrections on it! Empty words, no doubt, about some long forgotten issue, but read the next morning with such inordinate pride. Subsequently, there have been miles and miles of galleys, enough to encircle the globe; a preposterous paper-chase through the mists and swamps of troubled years.

Muggeridge through the Microphone, 1969

[I]t is one of the most bizarre notions of this age that newspapers and magazines exist to help rather than hinder governments. Their historic function is to provide a minefield over which politicians and administrators must proceed warily and at their own risk. They are, in fact, repositories of bad taste or nothing.

Maclean's Magazine, 1957

The Press, too, in my opinion, is in process of succumbing to the collectivist *zeitgeist*. At its obsequies the mutes are public

relations officers, and the service is read by an ordained Minister of Information, with massed choirs provided by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Queen's Quarterly, 1954

Whenever I think of the inexhaustibly interesting subject – the incidence and exercise of power – there is one incident which always comes back into mind. It was long ago, in the early thirties. I was having a drink in a café in Vienna. My companion was a free-lance journalist of sorts, and apropos of nothing and quite casually and ruminatively, he remarked, 'I sometimes wonder if I'm licking the rights boots.' The early autumn evening light was fading. That pause had come between day and nightfall, when work has ended and pleasure not begun, when the evening papers have been laid aside and the morning ones are still empty dummies; when a city seems for a moment somehow still, bracing itself for the switch from the light of the sun to all the little fragmented lights which will soon come out. Into this stillness my companion's remark fell like a stone into a pond, making widening ripples. If he is still around, he has more cause to wonder now than then.

New Statesman, 1958

Following the course of public events and persons, as a journalist must, constantly confirms the truth of Lord Acton's well-known dictum, that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Blake made the same point more poetically:

> *The strongest poison ever known*
> *Came from Caesar's laurel crown.*

New York Times, 1979

With so much leisure on my hands, and an in-born chronic mania to use words and express opinions, I started writing

articles on Egyptian politics, dominated in those days by the pashas and beys of the Mohammed Ali Club, King Fuad with his Salvador Dali-like moustache, and Lord Lloyd, the British High Commissioner, on whose shoulder, he told me when subsequently we became acquainted, the King would sometimes weep. Planning and writing these articles, I all too easily acquired facility in the use of the fraudulent language of news; reporting, for instance, that opinion among Egyptians was hardening and that, conscious of their newly-acquired nationhood, they would assuredly never be content with anything less than full national sovereignty based on universal suffrage democracy. The words seems to pick themselves out on my typewriter keyboard of their own volition, and then to fly like homing pigeons in at the windows of the *Guardian* office in Cross Street, Manchester, whither I in due course followed them myself.

Christ and the Media, 1977

In our cubby holes along the *Guardian* corridor we expounded all the hopes and apprehensions this righteously exalted old man [C. P. Scott] entertained for mankind. We, as it were, wrote him down nightly for the edification of his paper's readers, in words that, as we fondly believed, would reverberate round the world. Bringing cheer to Asian peasants as they followed their wooden ploughs, uplifting bearded Bedouins as they rode their camels along desert tracks; spreading enlightenment over palm and pine, over campus and conveyor-belt, wherever there were minds to think and hearts to feel. Tapping away at our typewriters on his behalf, we called upon moderate men of all shades of opinion to draw together to ensure that wise counsels should prevail. Wars which threatened, all to be averted; wrongs which the downtrodden and oppressed suffered, all to be righted; conflicts all to be honourably resolved, and injustices all to be honourably corrected. The people of this country will never for a moment countenance, we sternly proclaimed; ourselves,

the people of this country and C. P., momentarily identified; one in three and three in one, another Holy Trinity.

Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Green Stick, 1972

It is painful to me now to reflect the ease with which I got into the way of using this non-language; these drooling non-sentences conveying non-thoughts, propounding non-fears and offering non-hopes. Words are as beautiful as love, and as easily betrayed. I am more penitent for my false words – for the most part, mercifully lost for ever in the Media's great slag-heaps – than for false deeds. Discussing once with Kingsmill this obliteration of language, we decided that there was no need for politicians to finish their sentences, the end being implicit in the beginning. Thus, taking the case of the then looming opening of the United Nations, the following all-purpose cues would serve for my orator:

On this historic occasion when . . .
There can be no one here present who . . .
We have just passed through an ordeal that . . .
No thinking man will underestimate the . . .
While there are many circumstances which . . .
There are solid grounds for hoping that . . .
It is surely incumbent upon all of us to . . .
While recognising the reality of . . .
No mere conflict of interest should . . .
The immeasurable strides that Science has . . .
Such is the choice that at present confronts . . .
It is idle to think that politicians can . . .
It rests with the common people to . . .
With head erect and clear purpose we . . .

Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Green Stick, 1972

The old enthusiastic stuff I used to write for the *Manchester Guardian* seems quite beside the point in any case. I'm glad of that. It wasn't much good. After all, I thought, I've had a

bourgeois education and I've got a bourgeois, that is, critical mind. I cannot but exercise this mind. Perhaps the next great civilization will be Collective; perhaps, to belong to it, one will need a different kind of mind – capable of and susceptible to continual propaganda. So let it be. For myself I can't put across propaganda, and when it's put across to me – of whatever sort – I feel just bored.

Diary, September 22, 1932

In the evening I went for a walk in a pine wood, strolling along straight avenues with trees on either side. I thought how I would write and write, trying to attain a particular kind of perfection of language – as cool and simple and adequate as an autumn evening. This is my ambition. I shall never master any subject or language thoroughly, but I shall slowly perfect myself in making a picture of life as I have known it – like it is.

Diary, October 17, 1932

Wraithby gave a party before leaving London for Russia. He was a dim, fitful person. Floating loose on society; making little darts, like a bee in search of honey, at newspaper offices and literature and politics and love affairs, and then hastily withdrawing into himself; interested in the world and in human affairs but having no contact with either; carried this way and that by changing emotions and convictions, he had observed from afar the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, and had felt it to be substantial. He knew that it was brutal and intolerant and ruthless. He had no illusions about its consequences to individuals and to classes. Only, he thought, it offered a way of escape from himself. It was *Brahma*; an infinite; and by becoming one with it he would cease to be finite. It would relieve him of the burden of his appetites and opinions, and give him peace and humility. It would make it unnecessary for him to formulate points of view about pictures and books and social problems and relationships.

His tired mind, everlastingly grinding into his soul like a dentist's drill into a tooth, would be able to sleep on its bosom. It was a sea that would cradle him. A baptism and a rebirth. He longed to lose himself in the Dictatorship of the Proletariat as Lawrence longed to lose himself in the loves of game-keepers and gipsies.

Winter in Moscow, 1934

Wraithby moved out to a remote suburb of Moscow, where he lived in a wooden house. There were long avenues of fir trees nearby, and a dilapidated park of Culture and Rest. Cardboard tractors, and slogans and graphs, faded and weather-beaten, flapped in the wind. He walked up and down these avenues every day until he was tired, and then went back to the wooden house to write. It was easy for him to write. He had only to take his life piece by piece and destroy it; hold each fragment up to the light and watch it shrivel away to nothing. It was a dry life that burnt easily; flaming and crackling and smoking like withered gorse on a common.

Winter in Moscow, 1934

In Moscow, as I soon discovered, news was confined to what appeared in the newspaper *Pravda* – a word which, as is well known, means 'truth', and so, in the circumstances, had ironical undertones for the local populace. Each morning my Russian secretary read through to me in a sing-song voice her English translation of news stories and articles appearing in this truly appallingly boring publication. The only comparable experience I can recall was when the late Professor Namier read aloud to me very slowly and laboriously an interminable article from the *Times Literary Supplement*.

Christ and the Media, 1977

He strode along proudly, feeling himself superior to the shabby, gloomy people all round him; feeling that he belonged to a more orderly, more balanced civilisation than

they did. Slogans pasted on the outsides of buildings filled him with contempt; and he suddenly realised how dreary his days in Moscow were. Stale, flat and unprofitable, he thought. Empty of everything I care for; of everything worth caring for. He hated even the fantastic towers, delicate and irrelevant, and the golden domes of the Kremlin because they, too, like the slogans, were abstractions; separate from people; fanciful cruel dreams, rootless and fabulous. Too fabulous, he thought, to be satisfying. Too fabulous to be beautiful. Too fabulous. He felt in himself a power of resistance, and knew that he was strong enough to suffer with dignity. He felt at ease and unafraid for the first time since he could remember.

Winter in Moscow, 1934

It is no more possible to describe the Dictatorship of the Proletariat dispassionately than to describe a mad bull rushing round a field dispassionately. The moment you become dispassionate you automatically make the false assumption that the bull is not mad, and thereby vitiate anything further you may have to say about the matter. Of all the accounts of the Soviet regime that have been written and spoken, the falsest – the ones least related to the facts – are by people who affect to have no prejudices or convictions either way.

Winter in Moscow, 1934

Course followed course and drink followed drink. As his senses dissolved Wraithby felt himself becoming part of the Japanese room. The room's pulsating walls closed in on him; and he saw Ouspenski through a tremulous mist; as though far away; his voice dim and remote. He had not expected to make the acquaintance of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat in such a place and in such a way. 'I want to ask you some questions,' he said. Ouspenski's thick lips folded into a complacent smile. He was used to answering

questions; and he thought he knew what the questions would be. Wraithby noticed the wave of his hair and smelt his scent.

'First, Who whom?'

Ouspenski was surprised. 'When the Provisional Government fell,' he intoned, 'the power passed to the broad masses; that is, to the first Congress of Soviets. This became the Dictatorship of the Proletariat which, under the leadership of Comrade Stalin and the Communist party . . .'

'No, but seriously,' Wraithby interrupted, 'Who whom?'

Ouspenski's voice dropped confidentially. 'The broad masses are like children. They need a father. A dictatorship of themselves. A force that is them but that, working apart from them, makes it possible for everything to be subordinated to their interests. Any other force must, by its very nature, deceive and enslave them. It alone . . .'

'Please,' Wraithby pleaded, 'Who whom?'

'I they,' Ouspenski whispered.

Wraithby beamed. 'Now I understand,' he said.

Winter in Moscow, 1934

Insofar as the tendency among liberals to look sympathetically on the Soviet regime is based on the supposition that it is now as greedy, class-ridden, imperialistic and unequalitarian as any other, they are justified. To each according to his need has long ago been replaced by the more usual and respectable slogan – to each what he can grab.

Fortnightly, 1936

Journalists, in my time, were still allowed to travel, and I went off by myself to the Ukraine and the Caucasus. It was very pleasant rolling along in old-fashioned *wagon-lits*, with glasses of tea constantly available, and with the possibility of halting conversation with Party officials and other dignitaries who alone were permitted to travel first-class. Once, an ordinary peasant, rather drunk, lurched into the restaurant

car. I have never in my life seen anyone ejected so quickly and so expertly.

The railway carriage was a haven of rest and good cheer. Without, there were unspeakable horrors. One left the train with dread, and caught another with relief. Khrushchev (and he, if anyone, ought to know because he was a high official in the Ukraine at the time) has provided an authoritative account of the appalling consequences of the forced collectivisation of agriculture. To me, even in an age that has overflowed with horrors, it all stands out as particularly horrible – the deserted villages, without any living creature, animal or human, left in them, and the groaning train in a siding packed with peasant families who were being deported; and, by contrast, Bernard Shaw saying in Moscow that there was no food shortage, the lush articles on Soviet plenty by Duranty and others, the bogus supporting statistics naively accepted in learned journals.

Tread Softly for you Tread on my Jokes, 1966

In a German settlement, a little oasis of prosperity in a collectivised wilderness, he watched peasants asking for bread. They wanted to be admitted to the settlement. They knelt down and wept and pleaded. Whatever else I may do or think in the future, he thought, I must never pretend that I haven't seen this. Ideas will come and go; but this is more than an idea. It is peasants kneeling down in the snow and asking for bread. Something I have seen and understood.

Winter in Moscow, 1934

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat sent an army to conquer bread, and it destroyed bread. It went to make the fields yield more abundantly, and it trampled the fields into barrenness. Its banners shut out the sun and prevented crops from ripening. Its slogans rolled over the land like a destroying wind. Its gloomy Marxist thoughts were a heavy mist choking

the life out of peasants and animals and soil. It spread death, famine and destruction everywhere.

Winter in Moscow, 1934

The famine now raging in Russia is different from any that has hitherto happened because it is organized from within. No external cause like bad weather or a blockade can be blamed for it. People feel it to be a consequence of an inward corruption. It seems to them to be innate in Bolshevism and a fruit of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. This makes their despair the more hopeless. They see the Dictatorship of the Proletariat going over the country like a flight of locusts, taking away or destroying everything edible and leaving behind a barren wilderness. They hear the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, with fatuous statistical complacency, hail the locust flight as a great achievement, a sublime victory.

Winter in Moscow, 1934

The future seemed empty to Wraithby. It was easy to burn up the past; but not so easy to face a future lacking everything that had given the past substance. Even for him; a person of no importance; a nobody, the patterns he'd made and unmade in his mind meant something. They'd at least filled up a certain space. They'd at least given him an occupation. Now, he thought, my occupation's gone. Ambition stirred painfully in the emptiness he'd made inside himself; and with adolescent morbidity he began to long to die.

Winter in Moscow, 1934

He knew that he had reached an epoch in his life. There were two alternatives; clearly marked; unmistakable; and he had to choose between them. At that moment, and only for that moment, everything fitted into place. Every tendency in himself, in societies; the past and the future; all he had ever seen or thought or felt or believed, sorted itself out. It was a vision of Good and Evil. Heaven and Hell.

Life and death. There were two alternatives; and he had to choose. He chose.

Winter in Moscow, 1934

To me at least a novel is essentially a means of expressing an attitude to life, a philosophy of life. I begin with that. And then the characters I intend to symbolize a point of view come to life, like a flash; a moral comes into the book. As usual with my work, there is a tendency towards the grotesque. I like this. But it is sure to be criticized.

Diary, October 29, 1932

It was Podolsky who passed the only indubitably true sentence I ever telegraphed – perhaps that ever has been telegraphed – out of Moscow. At the time I was standing in for one of the news agency men and received a request: SEND SOONEST REACTION SOVMASSES LAVISH SCALE ENTERTAINING THEIR EMBASSIES ABROAD, to which I replied, without consulting so much as a single *moujik*: REACTION SOVMASSES ARDENT WISH GET NEAREST BUFFET. Podolsky, like nearly all his colleagues in the Foreign Press Department during my time in Moscow, in due course disappeared into a labour camp, never to be seen again. I trust I did not expedite his departure.

Christ and the Media, 1977

Journalists follow authority as sharks do a liner, hoping to feed off the waste it discharges, with perhaps someone occasionally falling overboard to make a meal, and once in a while the whole ship going down and providing a positive feast.

Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Infernal Grove, 1973

I love a routine like this – walking and writing and reading. If Wordsworth continues not to use my leaders, I shall write on Monday resigning from the [*Calcutta*] *Statesman*. In any

case, it is only a matter of time before I resign. I see now that the unhappiness, as far as jobs are concerned, is on my side. I can't fit in. I wish I could. Anyway, this is my last attempt. When I get away from the *Statesman* I'll just write, and starve, go under, anything, but never again attempt the impossible task of cooperating in carrying on an organization I don't belong to. How glad I am, though, that I made this last attempt. If I hadn't made it, my mind would have been restless; now I know that however hard the future, I shall always feel in the bottom of my heart that I'm well out of it all.

Diary, April 13, 1935

As a journalist, I have preferred the hazards of street-walking to the security, such as it is, of being permanently attached to one of the licensed houses.

Tread Softly for you Tread on my Jokes, 1966

In news-gathering, as in love, there is always one who embraces and one who offers a cheek.

Affairs of the Heart, 1949

Through the night I rise and fall with the successive editions as they come off the rotary presses, rushing to and from the stone, poring over damp galleys, yelling, stampeding, and then relaxing to gather strength and energy for the next bout. My heart and the presses beat together, and I suppose always will. Through my sleep I hear the coloured vans make off, furiously starting up and accelerating as they carry away the next day's paper, to be pushed through letter-boxes, laid beside milk bottles, sold to somnambulistic commuters, and then laid aside to wrap fish or stop broken windows. I have spent so much of my time attuned to this rhythm that it abides with me, as, back on land after a sea voyage, one still seems to be afloat.

London à la Mode, 1966

All who have been concerned in the day-to-day reporting of the game's progress – I mean the collection, presentation and dissemination of what is called news – know better than anyone how slight, fragile and fraudulent are the available sources. The bucket dropped into the ostensible well of truth is leaky indeed, and such water as it brings up, brackish and polluted.

Jesus: The Man who Lives, 1975

The news media now provide the opiate of the masses.

Unpublished, 1968

As I so often have on such occasions, I fastened a sheet of paper in my typewriter with the vague idea of covering it with words. This act is always momentarily reassuring – a taking up of action stations. Without the impulsion of immediate urgency, however, it is usually unproductive. The white space requiring to be filled seems illimitable; the little hammers requiring to be lifted stay complacently in their places; the words requiring to be written remain in confusion, like letters in a spelling game, all higgledy-piggledy. On this occasion, I stared hopelessly at the keyboard for some little while, and then decided to go for a walk.

Affairs of the Heart, 1949

If, after aeons of time in hell or heaven or purgatory, I were to be asked what earthly life was like, I should still, I am sure, say it was a sheet of paper fixed in a typewriter and needing to be covered with words; not to-morrow, or next week, or next year, but *now.*

Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Green Stick, 1972

The New Year begins ill for me. I'm in debt, I've had 300 pounds advance on a book that should have been written three months ago, and still is not nearly done, and that I'm not getting on with. I feel as restless and unhappy as ever, and

more settled in melancholy than I've ever been. At the same time I think my writing has improved, and that *Ripeness is All* will make a fine novel once I can get to it. Also, I'm still learning, and I begin to see the possibility of having, not settled convictions, but settled values. The worst thing is my health, which troubles me more and more. I so seldom feel well.

Kitty and I read the Book of Job aloud this evening. I love it. I cannot see anything substantial that has been learnt about life since it was written.

Diary, January 1, 1937

I did quite a lot of work for Lady Rhondda's *Time & Tide*; a feminist organ, largely staffed and written by women. Lady Rhondda, plump and curly, was the daughter of a coal magnate who had been Food-Controller in the 1914–18 war. She and her father were on the *Lusitania* when it was torpedoed in 1915, and she wrote a very good description of the adventure. It appears that she found herself in the water holding onto a spar, at the other end of which there was a man likewise holding on. She says that she and this man looked at one another, whereupon he unaccountably disappeared. Somehow, I understood why; working for *Time & Tide* was rather like holding onto a spar with Lady Rhondda at the other end.

Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Infernal Grove, 1973

The last two days I have spent in the House of Commons listening to the debate on the American Loan. It was extraordinarily unreal, even absurd, and shabby. Speakers took up their position, but the only reality was the fear which none of them dared to express – the fear of the consequences if cigarettes and films and spam were not available from America. I sat in the Press Gallery listening hour after hour, with a kind of fascination, thinking of my father, and of how

he would have loved so to have been there in the House, every now and again making my way to the telephone to let Johnstone at the office know how things were going; once losing my way, lost in corridors mysteriously leading into each other, with in the distance the chatter of a division taking place. It was eerie. It struck me then, as so often, how in my life everything I have seen or been connected with has given me that feeling of something past its prime, running down, growing shabby and decrepit.

Diary, December 14–16, 1945

I've been kicked around a good deal for having agreed to act as chairman at two sessions of the recent Poetry Festival. As something of an expert in this field, I should say that the Eng. Lit. hoodlums are decidedly tougher than, for instance, the Empire Loyalists and Tunbridge Wells ladies who once made a concerted attack upon me; or even than the bishops and clergy of the Anglican Church whose wrath I have occasionally experienced. . . . An Eng. Lit. man, Donald Davie – a prof, I believe, from up north – took great exception to something I had said about T. S. Eliot, which made me, he considered, such leprous company that no self-respecting poet would consent to recite a line in my presence. He went on to suggest that I specialized in squirting poison around from the putrid heart of London.

Fair enough. If I'm a poison-squirter and some of it has reached the prof, I'm sorry, honestly I am. I must, however, point out that, far from seeking the job of compering the Poetry Festival, I was persuaded into it against my own wishes and judgment. Perhaps I was wrong to be persuaded, but certainly it was not for reasons of vanity or money or because I considered myself to be well-qualified, by virtue of my knowledge and appreciation of contemporary verse, to take it on. I didn't want to do it, and, as you correctly divined, I didn't much enjoy doing it. Nor, I must confess, did anything I heard read lead me to alter any of the attitudes

you find so reprehensible, though it was a great pleasure to make the acquaintance of some of the poets – notably Berryman, Laurie Lee and Ted Hughes.

The remark about Eliot to which the prof took such exception was to the effect that he, Eliot, was the death-rattle in the throat of a dying civilization. I quite see that, to an admirer of Eliot, this is a bit off. All the same, it happens to be my opinion.

I think that in our time the genius of man has gone into science, where it has achieved the most astounding results – far, far greater in my lifetime than in the whole of the rest of recorded time. In literature and the arts, in mysticism and religion, nothing has been done that will be of any major interest to posterity, and a good deal that will invite derision and even contempt. As I see it, posterity (assuming there are any and that they're interested) will have the greatest difficulty in understanding how we could possibly regard a book like *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as anything but fatuous beyond words, a novelist like E. M. Forster as more than irretrievably second-rate, the later Picasso as anything but a bad joke, *Ulysses* and still more *Finnegans Wake* as other than total incoherence which, had it not been for the smut, would long ago have been totally forgotten, if, indeed, ever noticed, and so on and so on. Dear prof, I'm now at your mercy. How fortunate that I've passed the age when I might have to look to you for A levels.

Letter, *Guardian*, 1967

Though the media as we know them today are a comparatively recent growth, a great deal, one way or another, has been written about them, and there are already – always a very ominous sign – in some of our more recently planted groves of academe, departments which specialise in the subject, with their due complement of professors, lecturers and other academic grades, all busily producing a plethora of theses on media subjects. Across the Atlantic, I need scarcely add, this

development is even more marked than here. Not just the media themselves, but the study of the media, is very much a labour-intensive and growth industry.

Christ and the Media, 1977

I have always enjoyed writing obituaries almost more than any other kind of journalism. What is more pleasurable than to begin: 'We deeply regret to announce the death of . . .' and then go on to expatiate upon the civic virtue, kindly generous disposition and discerning mind of some portentous public figure still out and about, seemingly with many more years of active life before him. One always had a vague hope that perhaps it might serve to abbreviate his days. Alas, in my experience, it nearly always works the other way; just preparing someone's obituary seemed to make him immortal.

Things Past, 1978

In his social history of the forties and fifties (*The New Look*, Secker and Warburg, 1963) Mr Harry Hopkins writes: 'And then, in the new year, came an event which, in an instant, somehow transformed the whole quality of the situation, seemed for a moment to sweep away the last remaining certitude – and then to restore them all.' The event in question was the death of King George VI. 'The news spread swiftly from mouth to mouth in unbelieving whispers,' Mr Hopkins goes on. 'The muffled bells began to toll.' 'A great hush, a sabbath stillness,' wrote a witness, 'descended on the City.' I remember the occasion well. I was walking along the Strand in the direction of Fleet Street and the City. There was no hush that I could discern; no unbelieving whispers passed in my hearing. The early editions of the evening papers had banner headlines announcing the King's death. That was all. No face I saw, no remark made to me, intimated a last remaining certitude swept away. Now, who is reporting this incident correctly,

Mr Hopkins or me? There is no means of knowing. No doubt his version is nearer than mine to tele – or editorial – truth. All who have written editorials know the splendid sweep of sentences tapped out on a typewriter about how the people of this country will never for one moment countenance . . . how they repudiate with indignation any suggestion that . . . how they mourn the passing of . . .; just as all who have sat before microphones know the weird and awful sensation of hearing one's own voice as though it were someone else's blowing bromides like bubbles into the air. All this stuff remains on the record; the cuttings, boy, the cuttings! Sometimes, going through an envelope of them, I have come across some particularly fatuous observation which was vaguely familiar. Now where had I heard that before? What idiot perpetrated it? Then a light breaks. The perpetrator was myself. Like a parched desert traveller, I was drinking my own urine.

New Statesman, 1963

George Orwell worked for a time in Broadcasting House. He told me once that it gave him the idea for the Ministry of Truth in *1984*.

Tread Softly for you Tread on my Jokes, 1966

The first broadcast I ever gave was on Sidney and Beatrice Webb. I have totally forgotten how I came to give it and what I said, but it must have caused offence because I received a letter from George Barnes – a bizarre but rather attractive ex-naval officer then bearing the extraordinary title of Director of the Spoken Word – briefly informing me that a scheduled repeat of the broadcast had been cancelled owing to objections which had been raised. This sort of thing, I have to confess, has quite often befallen me, though, believe it or not, in most cases I have been unaware, until it was pointed out, of the reason why. It is tempting to attribute such unawareness to a degree of innocence in oneself, or to

an obsessive passion for truth. A more likely explanation, I fear, is just a congenital awkwardness: a proneness to tread on people's toes and stumble against them, in deed and in comment. The punishment for me came – and there is always a punishment, and it is always appropriate – when, in the course of a broadcast, the producer held up a sheet of paper on which he had scrawled in large letters: 'Be controversial!'

Muggeridge through the Microphone, 1969

Being on *The Critics* involved going to a film and a play, reading a book, listening to a radio programme and visiting some sort of art show. It was one of those experiences which, though not particularly momentous in itself, yet stamps itself like stigmata upon one; the more so in my case because I have always had a rooted objection to being entertained or culturally uplifted. Having digested our pabulum, and having prepared one's own particular script – in my case, the book – one presented oneself at Broadcasting House on a Thursday in time for luncheon. Donald Boyd, an old colleague and friend of mine from *Manchester Guardian* days, presided. He has long ago retired, and I never see him, but vividly recall his brooding, ironic presence, conveying a sense – to me, most sympathetic – that human beings are always ridiculous, and never more so than when they clothe themselves in the magisterial garments of literary and artistic punditry.

Our deliberations began over luncheons (tasting, I used to reflect, of the Home Service), and received a certain amount of alcoholic stimulus. We each had an allotted role, mine being that of an ageing and already grizzled *enfant terrible*. It is the nature of mass-communications thus to require of their exponents that they should acquire and sustain a role, which in time takes over – poor Gilbert Harding for ever imprisoned in his irascibility, a Dimbleby in his pomposity, a Frost in his jocularity. We mass-communicators grow old and grey in the service of our *doppelgängers*, and may expect,

like Harding, at last to succumb to them. There is no escape; if tonight I were to recite the thirteenth chapter of Corinthians on the telly, viewers would respond, according to their dispositions, by applauding or denouncing my irreverence.

Muggeridge through the Microphone, 1969

One of the most curious encounters I ever had in a television studio was participating in a BBC program set up when the South African surgeon, Dr Christiaan Barnard, had just carried out his first heart-transplant operation in the Groote Schuur Hospital . . . The program was billed as 'Dr Barnard Faces His Critics,' which, as I well knew, was BBC-ese for 'Dr Barnard Faces His Adulators,' as, indeed, proved to be the case. One of the great contributions of television to preparing the way for the collectivist-authoritarian way of life towards which all western countries are, in their different ways, sleep-walking, is its capacity to present consensus in terms of ostensible controversy.

The studio was packed with medical practitioners of one sort and another, including distinguished figures like Lord Platt, all of whom were in a state of euphoria about Dr Barnard's achievement. As befitting such an occasion, the Church was represented, in the person of the appropriately named Dr Slack, who on its behalf gave full approval, not just to the particular transplant operation that was being celebrated, but to transplants in general as and when required, whatever the organ concerned. In the event, I found myself pretty well the lone representative of the critics Dr Barnard had been billed as meeting.

When the time came for me to put a question, one shaped itself insistently in my mind. Was Dr Barnard, I asked him, the first surgeon to chance his arm with a heart-transplant operation, whereas elsewhere there were still qualms and hesitations, because in South Africa the doctrine of apartheid had devalued human flesh, reducing it from something God had deigned to put on, to a mere carcass?

The question, when I put it, was extremely ill-received. Some of the doctors present went so far as to manifest their displeasure by hissing, while Lord Platt rose to apologize to Dr Barnard, pointing out that I represented no one but myself, and that he, and he was sure all the others in the studio, would wish to dissociate themselves from my insulting question. Dr Barnard himself, I should imagine deliberately, misunderstood what I had asked, assuming that what troubled me was a fear lest he had transplanted a black African's heart in a white African's body. In fact, the donor was a white girl.

As Dr Barnard made no serious effort to answer my question, I persisted, to the further displeasure of the doctors, pointing out that his and their attitude showed little sense of the sanctity of life, which, in the Hippocratic oath they had all presumably taken, they had sworn to respect. As a Christian, I said, I worshipped a God who, according to the New Testament, could not see a sparrow fall to the ground without concern, and quoted Blake's beautiful couplet in the same sense:

> A Robin Redbreast in a Cage
> Puts all Heaven in a Rage.

This caused a titter of amusement, and I lapsed into silence. It is the usual practice after such programs for all the participants to make for the hospitality room, there to continue the discussion over a drink. For once, I just made off, having no taste for any further contact with Lord Platt, Dr Slack and the others.

Human Life Review, 1977

The first time that ever I went out on a colour television filming expedition, I noticed that a member of the camera crew was carrying something rolled up under his arm. When I asked him what it was, he told me it was the plastic grass, real grass not being green enough for living colour. 'Keep

the witch-hazel handy,' a floor manager was instructed during the filming of a Nixon commercial during the 1972 Presidential election, 'we can't do the sincerity bit if he's sweating.' *Cinema verité* or *cinema falsité*? Not only *can* the camera lie, it always lies.

Christ and the Media, 1977

[A]s a television performer, I see myself as a man playing a piano in a brothel, who includes 'Abide With Me' in his repertoire in the hope of thereby edifying both clients and inmates.

Christ and the Media, 1977

There is quite a strong pressure in England, as I imagine there is here, to get the Legislature likewise on television. This if it happens (as it well may) would finally fulfil de Tocqueville's gloomy prophecies about the outcome of universal-suffrage democracy. He correctly foresaw the growing fraudulence of the system as the franchise was extended; the nightmare prospect of the voters actually *seeing* their representatives deliberating upon their affairs was something he was mercifully spared.

Sunday Star, 1971

The tabloid Press, with many readers, deludes few. Serious newspapers like *The Times* and the *Guardian*, with fewer readers, delude many.

Tread Softly for you Tread on my Jokes, 1966

My belief is that the media are in the hands of people who simply have no coherent purpose of any sort. They simply have this machinery of persuasion, this screen to fill, these sheets of newsprint, these hours of radio time, to *fill*. All they know is that there are lots of viewers listening, eyes looking, minds requiring, this particular *pabulum* that the printing presses produce. And they deliver it. The number of them

who have got any sort of purpose – even an evil purpose – is very few. Indeed it would be very agreeable to think that there *was* a wicked conspiracy to delude us all with this great machinery of persuasion so immeasurably more powerful than anything of the kind that has ever existed, because then we could get rid of the conspirators and make use of it. But the *shallowness* of it and the falsity of it, believe me, are built into the medium itself.

Interview, 1972

'Ten thousand people shouting the same thing make it false, even if it happens to be true,' Kirkegaard says. News is ten million people induced to think the same thing, which makes it a thousand times more false in the unlikely event of its happening to be true.

Christ and the Media, 1977

Now in my capacity as an old practitioner and looking back on a lifetime spent in and out of newspaper and magazine offices, in and out of television and radio studios, going like the devil to and fro in the world and up and down in it, questing for news, it seems to me increasingly clear that the media have become the great fantasy machine of all time.

Address, 1978

Had I been a journalist there I should, I am sure, have spent my time hanging about King Herod's palace, following the comings and goings of Pilate, trying to find out what was afoot in the Sanhedrin; the cameras would have been set up in Caesarea, not in Galilee, still less on Golgotha.

Christ and the Media, 1977

[T]he glory of journalism is its transience. Only the greatest bores like Walter Lippmann imagine that their offerings reach beyond the last edition.

Tread Softly for you Tread on my Jokes, 1966

It is the nature of our trade to live in the passing moment. Yesterday's papers are for pulping or wrapping fish; tomorrow's are still empty dummies, the video tape is wiped to record another story. I like this in a way; it delivers one from much undue campus or faculty solemnity and pretentiousness. Swinburne used to say that he looked forward to the day when the last king would be strangled in the entrails of the last priest; I similarly should like to live to see the last sociologist fed into the last computer. Even so, I must confess that, now I am old, I look back on all the yelling down telephones, the frenzied tapping out of words, the rushing to the stone with some last minute sensation, as yet another version of Shakespeare's tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury and signifying nothing. I doubt if I shall ever again address so large and eminent a gathering of fellow-journalists, and, like an old super-annuated clown on his last benefit performance, I should like to say something serious. Just that, over the years, looking, not very assiduously or systematically, but always looking, looking, for a light in a dark time, the only one I have found shone first in Galilee.

Address, 1971

3

Faces in Time

> The only fun of journalism is that it puts you in contact with the eminent without being under the necessity to admire them or take them seriously.
>
> Malcolm Muggeridge, *New Statesman*, 1964

Samuel Butler

Butler liked Cambridge, too, and settled happily and thankfully into its mood. That sort of life always appealed to him. It was masculine, very private, very remote from the things he feared, from life; very ingenious and droll and protected. He might easily have been a don. In fact really he was a don; only in a one-man university.

The Earnest Atheist, 1936

As allegory was beyond Butler's comprehension, so was any expression of truth in other than intellectual, even mathematical terms. If there was forgiveness of sins there must be sinlessness; if God numbered the hairs on each individual head, then He must keep a ledger and adjust the entries day by day as hairs fell out or were restored. A conception such as of sin being innate in human nature, and yet of human beings being made in God's image, of miserable sinners being forgiven their sins so that they are spotless, and still being miserable sinners in need of forgiveness, or of a God who is

infinitely concerned with men and women and their doings, as a father with his children, and yet who sees them as grass, one day growing and the next thrown into the oven – such conceptions were beyond him. He could not get inside them. They baffled him, at the same time intrigued him. He tried to estimate them, but with the wrong measure, like someone trying to weigh a scent or calculate the area of an emotion.

The Earnest Atheist, 1936

Walt Whitman

I have long been of the opinion that Walt Whitman, rather than Thomas Jefferson, George Washington or Abraham Lincoln, is the true originator of contemporary America, and I try to read everything I can lay hands on about this bearded, narcissistic old charlatan-pederast, who wrote adulatory reviews of his own works under a pseudonym, and paid for a national tomb to be constructed while sponging on others for his housing and sustenance. Imagine my delight, then, at receiving a magnificently printed and produced volume of his *Specimen Days* (Godine) the first complete edition of his autobiographical jottings to appear since the original publication in 1882. A truly wonderful book to read and to possess. Whitman was an early devotee of the camera, that instrument of moral destruction more deadly in its consequences than nuclear weapons. Many photographs of and connected with him are finely reproduced, including a remarkable assortment of him in old age, when his vanity had swollen to monstrous proportions. There is also the famous butterfly portrait, which appeared as a frontispiece to *Leaves of Grass*; it shows Whitman looking tenderly at a butterfly perched on his finger. Among his effects there was found the cardboard butterfly specially fitted with the wire loop which was used for this photograph.

Esquire, 1971

Oscar Wilde

A ready means of being cherished by the English is to adopt the simple expedient of living a long time. I have little doubt that if, say, Oscar Wilde, had lived into his nineties, instead of dying in his forties, he would have been considered a benign, distinguished figure, suitable to preside at a school prize-giving, or to instruct and exhort scoutmasters at their jamborees. He might even have been knighted.

Tread Softly for you Tread on my Jokes, 1966

Frank Harris

Frank Harris was such an inveterate and extravagant liar that when by accident he tells the truth (as Max Beerbohm remarked, even Harris's inventiveness about himself sometimes ran dry) he can scarcely be believed.

Tread Softly for you Tread on my Jokes, 1966

Kingsmill describes how when he was twenty-two he accompanied Frank Harris to Paris, where they visited a brothel together. Some days later, walking along the *Promenade des Anglais* in Nice with him, Kingsmill became aware of an unfortunate consequence of his indulgence. Just at that moment he heard Harris observe: 'Christ went deeper than I, but I have had a wide range of experience.' I see the two of them: Kingsmill a good deal the larger, faltering a little in his step at the intimation of a disagreeable malady contracted; Harris bounding energetically along; the fading evening light, the white Mediterranean waves and the yellow beach, the lights coming out along the coast. If Harris belongs anywhere, it was surely there, and there his bones rest.

Tread Softly for you Tread on my Jokes, 1966

Rudyard Kipling

I read Kipling's verses all the afternoon (he died yesterday). It struck me how good the verses were, how full of genuine vitality, how full of contempt for what I despise – 'brittle intellectuals' – and of poetic genius; how, if he praised Empire, it was not at all because he had not counted the cost (who has expressed better the wrongs of the common soldier?) but because, men being what they are, he saw it as one of the less despicable manifestations of their urge to overrun and dominate their environment.

Diary, January 17, 1936

Kipling was born in India (in Bombay on 30 December 1865), a hundred years ago this month. He spent but seven of his adult years there – 1882 to 1889. Yet, as I see it, his response to India represented far and away the deepest and most formative experience of all, at any rate as far as his writings were concerned. He positively looked like an Indian (the source of the ridiculous, but widespread, rumour that he was really a Eurasian), being sallow, and supple, and maturing early for an Anglo-Saxon. He had a moustache while still a schoolboy. If he had never been to India he would have been a totally different person; perhaps some boring and pedantic don lost in the fastnesses of Eng. Lit., in which he was exceptionally well versed. Or, following a clear bent, one of those tedious maniacs about machines who insist on explaining to all and sundry how the wheels go round. I have been told, even in the Athenaeum – that haunt of seasoned bores – members were liable to flee when his bushy eyebrows and gleaming spectacles were seen entering the club, in dread of the tedium he might inflict upon them.

Listener, 1965

I remember very vividly, as though it were yesterday, strolling along the Mall in Simla around six o'clock on a November

evening thirty-two years ago, and thinking suddenly of Rudyard Kipling with such intense vividness that it almost seemed he was there with me. If one had happened to believe in ghosts, I reflected, his presence in that place would have been in no way surprising. It was Anglo-India *in excelsis*, and he was the prophet, the chronicler, the poet of Anglo-India, the only one. If he were to walk anywhere, it would surely be there on just such an evening – the distant, majestic Himalayas glowing with the light of the setting sun, and the notes of '*Colonel Bogey*', played by a military band in full regalia, sounding so clearly in the crystalline mountain air from the bandstand further along the Mall.

Muggeridge through the Microphone, 1969

Lord Willingdon

I lunched at Viceregal Lodge yesterday. It was a large party. We lined up with the band playing. Then folding doors opened and someone announced: 'Their Excellencies!' They walked along shaking hands with everyone. On the whole they do their stuff very well. The great thing is, they enjoy it, and their enjoyment is infectious. After lunch Lady Willingdon sent for me. She is really a fascinating creature in a way, so vulgar and full of vitality. She told me how stingy the Commander-in-Chief was, how he had only given *Rs*300 to the Jubilee Fund. She also said:

'The Viceroy's looking well, isn't he?' This she said a bit anxiously, as though she feared that at any moment he might pop off. I assured her I thought he was looking very well indeed. Then she said how she wished he could stay on for another term and be the first constitutional Viceroy. I saw how she dreaded ceasing to be Vicereine. It was so naive that it was charming. 'Our successor?' she asked. I named Linlithgow. 'He's terribly pompous,' she said. I agreed that pomposity was amongst the very worst sins.

'Look at Anderson,' she went on. She was referring to Sir John Anderson. 'How he's changed!'

'Why?' I asked.

'Not out of the top drawer.'

After a while I was passed on to a dim young man and then to the Viceroy. He looks, as I've said, like the elderly beau of Restoration Comedy, except that his eyes are pale, as though life was draining out of him from the top downwards (as Swift died). We talked about Ramaswamy Iyer and the passion of the Maharani of Travancore for him.

'While he was here,' I said, 'she sent him mangoes. Is that a bad sign?'

He said he thought it was.

He was such an old buck, almost like Lady Chatterley's father. 'Get her on her back, me boy,' with a titter.

I liked him, too, though. When I went (I'd had a sip to drink) I felt quite affectionate towards them.

Diary, May 6, 1935

Very curious to be here thirty years later trying to relive my life in Simla for BBC television. Tried to read over the diaries I'd kept, but flagged, India even more depressing now than before; a ripe, withered fruit about to fall off the branch. Independence was not a beginning, but the end of an end.

Went up to Viceregal Lodge. Fantastic scene there – carpets rolled up, pictures removed leaving the blank spaces on walls, etc; throne Viceroy used to sit on with silver footstool left in place. Sat in this pretending to be Viceroy to amusement of officer and one or two others who showed me round. Felt quite fabulously exhilarated at this dismantled power; he hath put down the mighty from their seats and exalted the humble and meek. The scenery being taken away, the props sent back to store, the stage cleared for another play. I love everything which demonstrates the transience of earthly power; never have I been served so piquant a demonstration. Upstairs, from

a balcony, looking over the staggering view – range upon range of mountains, I lifted up my heart unto the hills whence cometh my help.

Diary, May 3–7, 1964

Amrita Shergil

No one, apart from a few power maniacs and fools, allows public affairs to take precedence over private ones. Thus I'm delighted to note in my Simla diaries that my own personal affairs loomed much larger than the news I was supposed to be covering. King George V's Jubilee, which must have been a tremendous affair, seems to have passed me by. For one bare mention of the King George V Jubilee there are pages and pages about becoming acquainted with Amrita Shergil, now generally recognized as the outstanding modern Indian painter – then of course largely unknown. She's dead and I'm old, and our brief but intense intimacy mattered to no one. A portrait of me by Amrita now hangs in the National Gallery of Modern Art in Delhi, in a room dedicated to her work. She was gay, alive, beautiful – a combination of qualities not unduly plentiful in Simla, or for that matter anywhere. She studied at the *École des Beaux Arts* in Paris and sometimes, rather affectedly I'm afraid, we'd speak French together. I remember how when she came to see me off, at the station at Simla when I went away, she said there'd been some '*beaux moments*'. I agreed, and I never saw her again.

Muggeridge through the Microphone, 1969

Jawaharlal Nehru

I was in Travancore when Nehru died. It was quite extraordinary. We were driving along and didn't know, and we suddenly just saw these processions that were forming spontaneously; they just formed into processions going nowhere.

Everyone was completely silent and you heard this pat-pat-pat of feet, bare feet on the dusty roads, and that is all you heard. Nehru was in a way the last Viceroy. We unified the country and he was the last Viceroy. Now he was dead and that was the end of it.

Muggeridge through the Microphone, 1969

Hilaire Belloc

Belloc's house fairly roomy, but shabby, rather desolate. His daughter received us wearing a heavy tweed suit. Auberon said that formerly she wore what he described as a 'Pixie Franciscan costume'. Grandson also there. Belloc came shuffling in, walks with great difficulty because he has had a stroke, inconceivably dirty, almost on the Mrs Dobbs level, mutters to himself and easily forgets what he said, heavily bearded, fierce-looking and angry. He saw some sherry on the table and said: 'Wine! Oh good! I want lots of it.' Actually very little available, and that of indifferent quality. Sucked on a pipe, said that he had been prevented from getting a Fellowship at Oxford because he was a Roman Catholic and against Dreyfus. This was sixty years ago, and it seemed very pitiful that such a grievance should survive so long. Wondered whether in old age I'd have such a grievance myself. Not at all a serene man. Although he has written about religion all his life, there seemed to be very little in him. Spoke about Cardinal Newman coming to distribute the prizes at his school when he was a boy. Reminded me oddly of Churchill, and even of Mrs Dobbs – the fearful wilfulness of the very old when they are not reconciled. The will still beating against the bars, and the strokes becoming more and more frenzied and futile as they become feebler. Again thought of King Lear. Belloc occasionally hummed snatches of old French songs, and then burst into what must have been a music hall song when he was young – 'Chase me girls, I've got a banana, oh what a banana!' This song pleased him hugely. He gave

me one of his books and wrote my name in it with a shaking hand.

Diary, December 6–8, 1950

Beatrice Webb

[In Winter in Moscow *many recognizable figures appear under pseudonyms; Beatrice Webb appears as Mrs Eardley-Wheatsheaf.]*

As to the unquestionably repressive nature of the regime, Mrs Eardley-Wheatsheaf thought that visitors from more civilised countries ought to keep their heads and to see things in proportion. It was true, as she explained at many subsequent lectures, pursing up her lips tightly, perhaps a little venomously, that Soviet officials sometimes disappeared (she accentuated the word 'disappeared' to give it its full significance); and naturally she deplored such goings-on, just as she deplored the press censorship and the suppression of all opposition opinion. At the same time she had to admit that, given the peculiar conditions prevailing in Russia, administrative disappearances carried with them certain advantages which she for one was not going to overlook.

Winter in Moscow, 1934

On the occasion of the interment of the Webbs in Westminster Abbey, the then Prime Minister, Mr Attlee, remarked that everything the Fabians had striven and worked for had come to pass. It was, if one came to think about it, a curious observation. The world was in a condition of confusion and prostration unknown for centuries – infested with displaced persons, heaped with rubble, and, as a result of the discovery of atomic fission, confronted, for the first time in its history, with the possibility of its own extinction. Clearly, it was not these sombre circumstances that Mr Attlee had in mind as having been worked and striven for by the Fabians. He meant

himself and the social legislation his Government had introduced. Yet the one could scarcely be admired without reference to the other. It is the disparity between the Fabian achievement and the world setting in which it came to pass that has tended to detract from its impressiveness in contemporary eyes. Admiration for a tasteful window-box display is diminished if the building incorporating it happens to be on fire.

Tread Softly for you Tread on my Jokes, 1966

G. K. Chesterton

[W]hen I was still a schoolboy my father took me to a dinner at a Soho restaurant at which G. K. Chesterton was being entertained. I remember that the proprietor of the restaurant presented me with a box of crystallised fruits which turned out to be bad. As far as I was concerned, it was an occasion of inconceivable glory. I observed with fascination the enormous bulk of the guest of honour, his great stomach and plump hands; how his pince-nez on a black ribbon were almost lost in the vast expanse of his face, and how when he delivered himself of what he considered to be a good remark he had a way of blowing into his moustache with a sound like an expiring balloon. His speech, if he made one, was lost on me, but I vividly recall how I persuaded my father to wait outside the restaurant while we watched the great man make his way down the street in a billowing black cloak and old-style bohemian hat with a large brim. I only saw him once again. That was years later, shortly before he died, when on a windy afternoon he was sitting outside the Ship Hotel at Brighton, and clutching to himself a thriller in a yellow jacket. It, too, like the pince-nez, seemed minute by comparison with his immensity. By that time, the glory of the earlier occasion had departed.

Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Green Stick, 1972

H. G. Wells

I have a vivid memory of how, when I was very young – at most in my early teens – I was taken by my father to some sort of Fabian Society gathering to be addressed by H. G. Wells, and of hearing him in that high squeaky voice of his insisting that *we just haven't got time* to occupy ourselves with the largely mythological doings of an obscure, quarrelsome nomadic tribe like the Israelites. He was referring, of course, to the Bible, and specifically to the Old Testament. Nowadays, such an observation would pass quite unnoticed, humanistic scepticism having moved on to far wider essays in unbelief than Wells's insistence on his inability to find time for reading and studying the Bible. Then, however, it still seemed delightfully audacious, not to say cheeky, and the little man was obviously well pleased with the notion that he was far too occupied with matters of high import, with writing and speculation of the utmost significance for the future of mankind, to bother his head about such antediluvian trivia as the Garden of Eden, the rise and fall of tinpot monarchs like Saul and David, and the ranting of Hebrew prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah.

Address, 1976

C. P. Scott and Lord Beaverbrook

[Muggeridge's novel Picture Palace *satirizes C. P. Scott in the figure of John Savoury.]*

Old Savoury sat in his room in the offices of the *Accringthorpe Courier* reading press cuttings about himself. It was a large room, furnished with leather armchairs and a wide, polished desk. He had sat in this room each evening for fifty years, with printing presses pounding away like a heart beneath him. Through windows, always open, came the noise and smell of Accringthorpe. It was all very familiar to

him; and now, because he was old and worn out and soon to die, he felt that it was slipping out of reach. Each day, it seemed to him, his hold on what had been the substance of his life was more and more precarious – eyes too weak to see, and ears too weak to hear, and nostrils too weak to smell. Decay without matched the decay within. Furnaces cooled with his blood, and factories worked as fitfully as his heart. Why, he asked himself bitterly again and again, should what had seemed so solid prove frail now when he was frail himself? Why? And he set his teeth, concentrated all his will on stretching out his days to their utmost limit.

The press cuttings were a solace to him. As the future dwindled, bore down on him, they became more precious. Phrases from them lingered in his mind – 'a great editor . . .' – 'Integrity and courage . . .' – 'Powerful and beneficial influence on English journalism . . .' He played with such phrases, using them, like bricks, to rebuild the past, to recreate its triumphs and certainties, its happiness and fulfilled ambition. How he had been able to dominate the circumstances of his life! How clearly he had seen and how resolutely spoken! The past was satisfying; but the present – the present seemed as remote and unreal as the future. He reached for it, and it slipped through his fingers. There was no contact between him and it. He found the present incomprehensible and the future terrifying.

Picture Palace, 1934

The essential difference between Scott's control of the *Guardian* and Beaverbrook's of his papers was that Scott had views and attitudes which, however distasteful, were fairly consistent, and could be cogently expounded; whereas Beaverbrook, when you got down to it, really had no views at all, but only prejudices, moods, sudden likes and dislikes, which his newspapers had to keep abreast of and reflect; in their news columns, as in their features and editorials. Overnight, he might reverse a previously held position as a result

of a conversation, or of something he had read or heard. Or he might have a row with one of his children, and in the heat of it start a campaign for higher death-duties; or fail to ingratiate himself with some high-born lady and, to work off his irritation, mount a ferocious attack on class distinctions. Equally, if the approach proved successful, we might find ourselves adulating the lady in question, as being notable for beauty, wit and concern for the commonweal. Working for Scott was like waltzing with some sedate old dowager at a mayoral reception in Manchester; for Beaverbrook, like taking the floor in a night-club in the early hours of the morning, when everyone is more or less drunk.

Chronicles of Wasted Time: The Infernal Grove, 1973

Lord Beaverbrook's rancour is like the Dead Sea – so salty that, thrown into it, you cannot sink.

Things Past, 1978

Edward Crankshaw

When I had been at Ash Vale for some months, and attained the acting local rank of C.S.M., I was instructed to meet an officer from the War Office at the local railway station, who was visiting us on some special mission. I pressed my uniform until it almost stood up of itself; I polished my belt and the crown on my sleeve until they shone like the morning sun; the toes of my boots, treated with a hot spoon, likewise gleamed. As the officer descended from a first-class railway carriage I gave him a salute clamorous enough to be heard a mile away. He nonchalantly returned it and we got into a waiting motor car; he at the back, and I in front beside the driver. As we drove along, I examined him in the driving-mirror, and seemed to find something familiar in his sensitive, intelligent, vaguely melancholy countenance. He was doing the same thing to me. The moment of recognition was mutual and instantaneous. It

was Edward Crankshaw. Afterwards, he told me that my terrific salute led him to reflect that old sweats such as he supposed me to be were the backbone of the British Army. To the consternation of our driver, we began to fall about in the car in a condition of hopeless mirth at the unconscious deception we had practised on one another. I believe I never took the war, certainly not the army, quite seriously again.

The Thirties, 1940

Evelyn Waugh

[O]n the few occasions that I have been on speaking terms with Mr Waugh, I have formed the impression that he does not like me.

Tread Softly for you Tread on my Jokes, 1966

Mr Waugh, I always feel, is an antique in search of a period, a snob in search of a class; perhaps even a mystic in search of a beatific vision. His bad temper and bad behaviour are symptoms rather of an unrealised quest than of any native malignancy in himself.

Tread Softly for you Tread on my Jokes, 1966

Like all failed saints (Swift, for instance) [Waugh] was given to irascibility and humour – the one unedifying and the other delectable. The twentieth century, which he so hated, nonetheless moulded him, as it has all the rest of us. He too was a man of his time – avid for delights he could not enjoy, bent on journeying where he did not want to go; on fighting for causes which soon turned to dust, and burrowing into the past to mock the future. His gifts were great, his use of them estimable, his follies easily forgiven, and his death (to use Johnson's splendid memorial to Garrick) 'has eclipsed the gaiety of nations, and impoverished the public stock of harmless pleasure'.

Esquire, 1966

P. G. Wodehouse

The most extreme example I ever met with of this propensity of the pure in heart to answer laconically was P. G. Wodehouse, who, when I asked him if he had ever been interested in religion, simply answered, No.

Something Beautiful for God, 1971

P. G. Wodehouse wanted to know what books had been published and how they were selling; what plays had been put on, and how long they had run; who was still alive, and who was dead. I satisfied him as best I might on these points, hampered by a tendency, reaching morbid proportions in the war years, to suppose I have read the obituaries of practically everyone, especially women novelists, eminent Quakers and popular clergymen.

Tread Softly for you Tread on my Jokes, 1966

Ramsay MacDonald

Ramsay MacDonald's disappearance was more gradual. He slowly faded away, existing at last in a kind of twilight; there and not there, making an appearance in Parliament and at public functions, once collapsing at a Lord Mayor's Banquet in the Guildhall, sometimes speaking, certainly moving, smiling, shaking hands and otherwise indicating that he was alive and in possession of what faculties he had, yet difficult to believe in; in the House of Commons, often seated alone, as though none cared to take their place beside so ghostly a figure. His resignation from the Premiership was announced on June 6, 1935, on grounds of physical incapacity, and once more, and for the last time, he appeared at Seaham Harbour to appeal for votes. Inflated German marks were on this occasion of no avail; pickaxe and shovel were alike unserviceable, and working-class friends distinctly unfriendly. He often had difficulty in making himself heard, always in making

This definitive treasury of the best of Malcolm Muggeridge is drawn from all sources: books, essays, journalism, broadcasts, scripts, diaries and letters spanning his sixty-year career from 1926-1986. Some material, collected by Muggeridge in the early 1980s has never previously been published.

Ian Hunter has collected short, pungent pieces chosen to exhibit the essential cast of Muggeridge's mind: his insights, wit and singular capacity to see through, not with, the eye. In a single volume, this is the essential wisdom of Malcolm Muggeridge, perhaps the most prophetic and individualistic thinker of his generation, standing beside G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis.

Ian Hunter is Professor Emeritus of Law at the University of Western Ontario. His articles and reviews have appeared in many Canadian and American publications. Dr. Hunter has also written a biography of Muggeridge (*Malcolm Muggeridge: A Life*) and Muggeridge's friend, Hesketh Pearson (*Nothing to Repent: The Life of Hesketh Pearson*).

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