

Lecture delivered by
THE HONOURABLE JUSTICE I D F CALLINAN,
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“BOOKS IN MY LIFE”

I often think what a great advantage people who like reading have over those who don't. Despite the diminishing size of laptops and screens neither is nearly as portable or accessible as a book. A person who likes books need never be bored. What a salvation a good book is if you happen to be stranded at an airport or are on an interminable cross-country train journey. Paul Johnson wrote recently in *The Spectator* (29/7/2000) that he needed novels to get through what Dr. Johnson called, “the great vacancies of life.” I know that books have helped to preserve my sanity in many tedious and stressful situations.

I think it is right to say that the question whether books, literature and particularly novels are passé remains unanswered. The Los Angeles Times Literary pages which carries some of the best reviews in the United States recently suggested that biography has replaced the novel. Will future generations become acquainted with books in the same sorts of ways as my generation did, or indeed at all? That having been said, each person has experienced his or her own revelation of the joys of literature.

I could not describe my parents as bookish people. But although they were not great readers they strongly encouraged me to read, and as I became more and more

interested in reading, readily provided me with the means by which I could obtain books. The earliest book, apart from nursery books that I can recall, was R M Ballantyne's "The Coral Island". It was a great favourite. I think my late, dear father must have read it to me, at my insistence, long after I could read myself, some three or four times. I preferred it to "Treasure Island", which I read soon after. The latter is of course a far better book, and one which repays revisits in adulthood.

When I was only about 10 or 11, in the days before free public lending libraries were fairly well distributed throughout the city there were commercial lending libraries. At the nearest little strip shopping centre at Coorparoo in Brisbane where I then lived, there was a lending library conducted by a rather genteel widow in partnership with another woman. These ladies regarded themselves as persons of some cultural distinction and refinement. They occupied a small shop filled with bookshelves divided into different sections: romance, adventure, biography, children's books and general, which included topics beyond their ability to classify them. There were numerous subdivisions within these categories. On Friday evening, their library remained open until 8.00p.m.. It was my regular task to ask one of the proprietresses to select two books, usually romance, - Ethel M Dell was a great favourite – for my mother's reading. She was content to rely on the judgment of the owners. I was also allowed select a couple of books myself. I cannot remember exactly how much it cost to borrow a book for a week, but it was some derisory amount of threepence or so.

The importance of lending libraries of this kind is not however to be underestimated. Most country towns and suburban centres had at least one each. These were the days before television and mass car ownership which was to take people to the beaches, other cities and the countryside, and away from the contemplative pleasure

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and, in view of the lack of leisure alternatives, almost indispensable pastime of reading. Because other people, like my mother, relied on the managers of circulating libraries to choose their reading they were often very influential. They were the successors to the great English firms of Mudie's and Smith's. These two could destroy or ensure the success of a novel in that country. They educated the public to expect three deckers, novels in three volumes: and that is one reason why Victorian literature errs on the side of being fullsome. Virginia Woolf's diary for October 1917 records her distaste for the power of the Mudies'. She wrote:

First I stood at Mudies' counter where a stout widow chose ten novels; taking them from the hands of the Mudies' man, like a lap dog, only stipulating that she wanted no vulgarity, not much description but plenty of incident."

The widow at the Coorparoo library always steered me towards the children's section, but I soon came to tire of Captain Johns and his numerous exonymous Biggles novels. There were, I recently read, some 92 of these in all. I don't think I ever got beyond about number 6 or so. Incidentally, I see that there is a proposal to film the Biggles novels again, as a series, rather like the James Bond series, and that Hugh Grant is being touted as the likely star, provided he is prepared to make a long term commitment, longer even than Sean Connery to the James Bond series. It has also been said that Biggles would need to discard his aristocratic languidity and penchant for a good war, to conform with modern values of egalitarianism and pacificism.

But I have digressed.

Back to the past, about 1948 or thereabouts. I had recently seen at the Roxy, my local picture theatre the film *Beau Geste*, and had become obsessed with the French Foreign Legion. I could not get enough stories about that exotic force. I read all of the P C Wren books set around the Legion first, and then went on to such other books by other authors about it as were to be found on the shelves of the lending library. From P C Wren's stories of the French Foreign Legion, I moved to other books that he had written. The proprietress thought these rather unsuitable for a person of my tender years and often queried whether my mother knew what I was reading. I assured her, disingenuously I admit, that she did. P C Wren is, I suppose, little read these days, but some of his stories, particularly those set in India rather than in North Africa or South East Asia, were, I think, good.

I mentioned that I had seen the film *Beau Geste*, more than once I might say. In those days films too could be a useful means of introduction to literature. The great Hollywood studios were at their zenith, and produced many pictures based on the books of the great authors. The fact that Sam Goldwyn and his colleagues insisted on adapting story lines to their own perceptions of public taste did not, surprisingly perhaps, operate as a discouragement to go to the original sources. The works of the Bronte Sisters, Sir Walter Scott, and Shakespeare himself, were very much, as I recollect, in vogue at the time as were those of Charles Dickens. Will there ever be a better Micawber than W.C. Fields?.

The fourth early association that I had with literature came about in this way. Our neighbours possessed, as did lots of households, a small library of so called great books, books almost certainly bought on mail order, and bound in leather with gilded lettering and gold tipped pages. Their function was ornamental rather than instructional or recreational. I was given access to a dozen or so of these that our

neighbours owned. The first that I read was David Copperfield. I was immediately entranced. It was a book that has stayed with me all of my life. I can still remember the names and doings of most of the major characters. Later I will say something about literary criticism, but suffice to say at this point that I do not agree with the comments of one of Dickens' rivals, Anthony Trollope, who said:

“ of Dickens' style it is impossible to speak in praise. It is jerky, ungrammatical, and created by himself in defiance of rules ...” (Anthony Trollope “Autobiography”.)

I am not sure just how well read Dickens is either these days. The other evening, at a dinner party, the person next to me who had, in recent Post Modernist times, obtained a doctorate of philosophy in English studies, derided my liking for Dickens. “Nobody reads HIM these days she said”, as if I had confessed to a great social crime in admitting that I thought Dickens a great and moving writer. I will continue to regard myself as extremely fortunate to have become acquainted with Dickens so young. I soon moved on to A Tale of Two Cities, Great Expectations, Bleak House, and The Pickwick Papers. As to the last, I doubt whether there was a better comic novel written in the Nineteenth Century.

I was blessed in another way, as far as access to books was concerned. My mother's cousin was the manager of a store in the city which sold ecclesiastical furniture, vestments and the like, and also suitable books for parochial schools. Publishers and their agents regularly visited the store and provided samples of books which they hoped to induce the manager to stock. Not all were children's books. I was given free access to these and soon had the good luck to come across Evelyn Waugh's “Put Out More Flags”. In my opinion Waugh is easily the best English stylist of this century, and I have read and re-read all of his books several

times. No-one can do better, who would wish to learn about verbal economy, elegance of expression, and irony than read the works of this occasionally, personally disagreeable, but remarkable author.

We all have our early favourites, and another of mine was an author who, so far as I can make out, is practically unknown today. His name is Upton Sinclair. His books had strong social themes. He campaigned for the oppressed and disadvantaged. He was an American socialist, rather a rare species, but was very well acquainted with the doings of the rich, powerful and famous. In short he was something of a name-dropper. He wrote a series of novels called the "World End Series" beginning just before the First World War and ending during the Cold War. His hero, Lanny Budd, was brought up on the French Riviera, but had influential connexions all around the world. These connexions enabled him to meet all of the famous figures of the period: Churchill, Presidents Wilson, Roosevelt and Truman, Lloyd George, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, and many others. Even the Australian politician Billy Hughes gets a mention. There was much dialectic in the books, but, unlike, in the state of some modern journalism, it was always possible to identify what was reasonably accurate historical fact, and what was the author's view or commentary upon it. I believe I learnt quite a lot of modern history, and perhaps a little realpolitick from Upton Sinclair's works. Some authors are best savoured when one is young and a return journey can be disappointing. Upton Sinclair is well and truly out of print now. But I had always wanted to re-read him. It took me many years to do it, but by 1984 I had managed to assemble a complete set of his works. I set out to reread them, doubting their appeal to an older, and, I hope maturer person. I am happy to say that they still appealed to me very much.

The last targeted body of reading that I undertook before adulthood was of some foreign authors. In the meantime I had read in an undisciplined way Mark Twain, Kipling, Galsworthy, Priestley, H G Wells, A J Cronin, Hemingway, D.H. Lawrence, Steinbeck, and many others. As for Steinbeck, had it been left to me, I would have given him the Nobel prize ahead of Hemingway, on the basis of Cannery Row, Tortilla, Flat and East of Eden alone. At about this time I also read Christina Stead's, House of all Nations, and that other great work by another Australian female author, who wrote under the name Henry Handel Richardson, The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney. I made a point next of reading, whilst at the University, Tolstoy, Dostoyevski, and Balzac, in translation I hasten to say, although for a time I did attempt Balzac in the original.

I consider myself indeed lucky to have had these early encounters, a number of them fortuitous, with good books. There is great debate today whether youth will continue to enjoy reading as I did. A North American author, Allan Bloom, has written a book, The Closing of the American Mind, criticising the failure of the West, particularly the United States to introduce and teach literature as my generation knew it. He contrasts the contemplative pleasures of reading with rock music with its, as he says, "illusions of shared feelings, bodily contact and grunted formulas."

He wrote:

"People of future civilisations will wonder at this pervasiveness of rock music and find it as incomprehensible as we do the caste system, witchburning, harems, cannibalism, and gladiatorial combats.

It may well be that society's greatest madness seems

normal to itself.”

The author poses this situation as an everyday one:

Picture a thirteen-year-old boy sitting in the living room of his family home doing his math assignment while wearing his Walkman headphones or watching TV. He enjoys the liberties hard won over centuries by the alliance of philosophic genius and political heroism, consecrated by the blood of martyrs; he is provided with comfort and leisure by the most productive economy ever known to mankind, science has penetrated the secrets of nature in order to provide him with the marvellous, lifelike electronic sound and image reproduction he is enjoying. And in what does progress culminate? A pubescent child whose body throbs with orgasmic rhythms; whose feelings are made articulate in hymns to the joys of onanism or the killing of parents; whose ambition is to win fame and wealth in imitating the drag-queen who makes the music. In short, life is made into a nonstop, commercially prepackaged masturbational fantasy!”

Some schools and even universities have abandoned the teaching of English literature as such. In its place, they teach subjects, described, I understand, as communication and popular culture and media studies. One justification is said to be that it is a waste of time for all of the masses to devote themselves to traditional English literature. This is for the elite, the academic and the managerial community. What the masses need, they say, are the means of economical communication with

one another and quick access to the electronic aids which will govern, and perhaps even be, their work, lives and leisure. In the early 1990s, the British Secondary School system gave a choice of material for prescribed examination studies which included the Australian soapie, “Neighbours”, “Allo ‘Allo”, “Coronation Street”:, and “Black Adder”. In a collection of essays edited by Professor David Myers, the Great Literacy Debate, there are some neat aphorisms by Buz Kennedy in his paper “Spewspeak in Australia”:

“The television set may be your best friend - but you wouldn’t want your daughter to marry one. Unfortunately, she almost certainly has. The Lochinvar of the lounge room corner has long since swooped up the fair Ellen (or Charlene or Cheryl-Anne) and carried her far away ... She shouting, ‘Boy-boy, darls’ to her parents, he whispering obscenities in her ear – things like ‘Oil take yew to a level playing field’ and ‘Fancy an Anartic honeymoon, luv? Orta be bewdy there in Febwee’. Regrettably, the wretched young woman will understand him perfectly and will answer, ‘Ooh, Lochie lovie, youse is so romanic!’”

“Tellies – presumably of another sexual persuasion – have carried off your sons. If any sons or daughter have been overlooked, radio has seduced them. But television is the major villain in the degradation of Australian English – a degradation appallingly apparent not only among the less educated but in the speech and writing of those who should know better, including, I regret to say, journalists.”

To find a writer to be enjoyed whom one has not encountered before is always a great pleasure. My most recent personal discovery is the Canadian novelist and playwright Robertson Davies, a man of great erudition, especially in unusual areas such as art, magic, medicine and circuses. There is in addition to his published plays and novels, a collection of his lectures, many of which are about the joys and technique of composition. The collection is called "The Merry Heart". He refers interestingly to a happy coincidence of interest and relationship with his Australian brother-in-law, the famous painter Sir Russell Drysdale who gave him much help in the writing of "What's Bred in the Bones" a novel about art fraud. I am also pleased to say that this remarkable author shares my great regard for Dickens, a regard that he repeated at length in an address he gave at the University of Toronto and which was published as "The Novelist and his Magic."

It is a matter of regret that many people in my own discipline, particularly, I gather, younger barristers, tend to read much less beyond their calling today than my contemporaries. They claim that demands upon their time are significantly greater than those that burdened my generation, but I am by no means sure that that is so. Sir Anthony Mason, a former Chief Justice of the High Court said that every barrister should read of the order of 40 books a year. I agree with that. Reading away from one's discipline is, in my view, an indispensable aid to legal work. Reading assists not only with expression and felicity of language, but also provides insights into other lives and events beyond the law.

Law and literature have a great deal in common. Law and literature are both primarily concerned with the use and manipulation of words. One would therefore expect them to be more companionable bedfellows than they are. That the

relationship between them is often an uncomfortable one, may perhaps best be explained by reference to one word, “ambiguity.”

Literature thrives on ambiguity. Mixed and uncertain motivation, and absence of clear resolution can be the lifeblood of a good novel. Life’s journey from a position of certainty to one of tolerant flexibility is also a frequent theme of successful theatre. The wise author understands that absolutes are rare in real life. The successful author also knows that completeness is impossible: in life there are always loose ends.

Literature aims to uplift, divert, inspire, inform, reform, lead, edify, amuse, and entertain.

By contrast, the law and lawyers are engaged in a never ending search for clarity, completeness and certainty and there are not a lot of laughs, *Pickwick Papers* aside, in the law courts.

The constant objective is either to present a case, make a judgment, or draw an instrument or a statute, in such a way as to admit of no misunderstandings and to cover the whole field.

Much good art is ambiguous. There is a story that a Hollywood producer asked Raymond Chandler, one of the finest authors of the crime genre, whether the plot of his novel, *The Big Sleep* was too complicated, and who committed one of the murders that occurred in the book. Chandler is reported to have replied that he couldn’t understand the plot himself, and he didn’t know who the murderer was. The producer of the Jack Nicholson – Faye Dunaway film, *Chinatown* apparently

said he couldn't understand the film and nor would the public. He misjudged the public. On release it attracted a huge audience.

Some of the finest authors in the English language have been unsuccessful or reluctant lawyers. Chaucer studied law at the Temple, as did Thomas Gray: Arnold Bennett worked as a law clerk for his solicitor father: Dickens struggled unhappily around the law courts before writing *The Pickwick Papers*. Although he was not in sympathy with the law and was often highly critical of its practitioners, Dickens had a magnificent gift for exposing some of the great injustices of Victorian times. He could do this passionately or humorously. The trial of the breach of promise suit in *The Pickwick Papers* is the best piece of legal farce I have read. He punctures any pomposity in the system, and those within it, with the same amusing and penetrating incisiveness as Mortimer in his *Rumpole* series.

Dickens' portrayal of the Chancery Courts in *Bleak House*, is both satirical and passionate. One of Australia's most loved poets, A B Patterson, was a lawyer who was not in love with the law or its constraints. One of his best known poems, "Clancy of the Overflow", rues the bonds of an urban solicitor when he writes:

"I am sitting in my dingy little office where a stingy ray of
sunlight struggles feebly down between the houses tall,
and the foetid air and gritty of the dusty, dirty city through
the open window floating, spreads its foulness over all."

The poet Wallace Stevens is one of the few successful lawyer-poets. He was an accomplished corporate lawyer at the same time as he was writing some of the most highly regarded poetry of the twentieth century. It is said that he composed his

poems whilst walking to work and dictated them to his secretary upon arrival. None of Stevens' poems are about lawyers or the law, but it is easy to see why he was such a successful lawyer. He always seeks precision, and, ironically, he often writes with great precision about the difficulty of the search. A lesser, but still highly readable lawyer author is Louis Auchinloss who practised for a very long time on Wall Street and wrote shrewdly about the rivalries of the partners in the large firms, and the eccentricities of their rich and demanding clients.

The contemporary United States lawyer and author Scott Turow would have no need to ply his lawyer's craft after the deserved success of his best seller "Presumed Innocent" which I think graphically captures the anxiety and fear of the courtroom during a murder trial.

Lawyers can however be as precious about their writing abilities as sometimes they are about their claims to a monopoly upon good sense and an awareness of public thinking and attitudes. They forget that other professions have strong, and perhaps equal or greater claims. Somerset Maugham, an author who has sometimes been disparaged as much as for his popular success as for any literary defects in his works, trod the words of St. Thomas' in Lambeth Palace Road for long enough to qualify as a medical practitioner. Celine, Slaughter, William Carlos Williams, Anton Chekhov and Walker Percy all also studied medicine, and Keats embarked upon an apprenticeship in surgery, but soon came to relinquish it because of a revulsion for dissection. The knowledge gained of human nature in the pursuit of any profession is bound to be valuable to any would-be author.

Language, whether legal or literary is difficult to control. This feature is recognised by some recent literary theory. It is a feature however, that has been known to users of professional language for a long time. T S Eliot was alive to it in his Four Quartets: (and, one might add, captured it in a way infinitely more attractive than anything said on the subject by postmodernism). In the Burnt Norton Quartet, Eliot writes:

“ Words strain,
 Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
 Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
 Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
 Will not stay still ...”

I cannot mention Eliot without referring to the dangers of plagiarism (subconsciously absorbed no doubt) that authors sometimes face, a danger that does not confront lawyers to whom precedent, the words of others and of the past, are meat and drink.

Recently the great similarity between Eliot’s poem, the Journey of the Magi and a sermon by Bishop Lancelot Andrewes (1555 – 1626) has been the subject of comment.¹ The Bishop wrote:

¹ See Dot Wordsworth “Mind Your Language”
 The Spectator, 18/25 December 1999.

“It was no summer progress. A cold coming they had of it,
 at just the worst time of the year, just the worst time of
 the year to take a journey, and specially a long journey in
 the ways deep, the weather sharp, the days short, the sun
 fartherest off in solstitio brumali. The very dead of
 Winter.”

TS Eliot’s lines are suspiciously similar:

“A cold coming we had of it,
 Just the worst time of the year
 For a journey, and such a long journey,
 The ways deep and the weather sharp,
 The very dead of winter.”

The different approaches of the disciplines to ambiguity translate into aesthetic differences between literary and legal language. Much legal language is not pretty. It need not however always be so. Lord Denning often wrote with great subtlety and movingly and poetically. He was the master of the short, simple, beautifully expressive short sentence. A famous example (of literature rather than necessarily of good law) is worth quoting:

“In summertime village cricket is the delight of everyone.
 Nearly every village has its own cricket field where the
 young men play and the old men watch. In the village of
 Lintz in County Durham they have their own ground, where
 they have played these last 70 years. They tend it well.

The wicket area is well rolled and mown. The outfield is kept short. It has a good clubhouse for the players and seats for onlookers. The village team play there on Saturdays and Sundays. They belong to a league competing with the neighbouring villages. On the evenings after work they practise while the light lasts. Yet now after these 70 years a judge of the High Court has ordered that they must not play there anymore. He has issued an injunction to stop them. He has done it at the insistence of a newcomer who is no lover of cricket. The newcomer has built, or has had built for him, a house on the edge of the cricket ground which four years ago was a field where cattle grazed. The animals did not mind the cricket. But now this adjoining field has been turned into a housing estate. The newcomer bought one of the houses on the edge of the cricket ground. No doubt the open space was a selling point. Now he complains that when batsman hits a six the ball has been known to land in his garden or on or near his house. His wife has got so upset about it that they always go out at weekends. They do not go into the garden when cricket is being played. They say that this is intolerable. So they asked the judge to stop the cricket being played. And the judge, much against his will, has felt that he must order the cricket to be stopped: with the consequence, I suppose, that the Lintz Cricket Club will disappear. The cricket ground will be turned to some other use. I expect for more houses or a factory.

The young men will turn to other things instead of cricket. The whole village will be much the poorer. And all this because of a newcomer who has just bought a house there next to the cricket ground.”

Another lawyer who had a great capacity to write with elegance was Lord Radcliffe who was the only barrister appointed to the House of Lords directly from the bar this century. In his book, *Not in Feather Beds*, he wrote of what should be a sister discipline, the media in these terms:

“A man may glitter with new and valuable ideas or burn with wise thoughts or passionate feelings, but if he is to communicate them to any circle wider than that of his own immediate friends he has got to render them acceptable to the realensors of thought today, the editors, the publishers, the producers, the controllers of radio and television.”

Appointment of a barrister to silk is no guarantee of mastery of language. When one particular senior counsel appeared before Sir Owen Dixon he quipped: “I know of no one over whom the English language has such command.”

Legal language may present problems for lawyers wishing to become writers. The practice of law conditions one to think and write in a certain way. Many lawyers would like to be writers but a legal style may be an inhibition on imaginative flight. That is not to say that the discipline of legal writing does not confer some advantages, such as precision, when precision is required, a facility with words, and

a habit of concentrated reading, assembling and writing them. As we know there are very few writers who can make a full time career from their work. A A Milne said: "Almost anyone can be an author. The business is to collect money and fame from this state of being." Graham Greene, with false modesty perhaps, asserted that all that was required to be an author, were work, application, work, and more application. He was said to write no more than 400 words a day when he became a successful full time author. He would write these in the morning and review his effort of the previous day before lunch. He lived on the Riviera when he was actively writing. Work would be followed by a leisurely lunch, a sleep, and a companionable, substantial dinner. In his last years he followed the same regime except that the 400 daily words were reduced to a mere 100.

Not everyone is so fortunate as to have Greene's time and lifestyle. I began my extra-legal writing on the wrong side of 55. Almost everyone has started writing something, usually a novel. The trick is not the ability to start but the ability to finish, by, as Greene said, work, application and work. In my own case I knew that unless I could write a complete work in a finite time I would never really write anything. I was aware that a modern play contained about 20,000 words. That was, I hoped, an attainable number during a Court vacation. And so I wrote a first draft of a play in about four weeks. Later I turned to novels as well as more plays. For myself novels are more satisfying. Both are risky but plays are more so. To write anything is to court danger, but to write, and to have produced a play, is to place one's fate in the hands of the public, and the critics in the most exposed way.

Auberon Waugh in his editorials in the Literary Review always counsels authors against writing novels. He told me that he gave up writing novels himself simply because he thought that there was no room for another novelist, particularly one with

the name Waugh. But the novel, as I earlier suggested, has been said to be in its death throes from its infancy.

A character, Cecil Lyne in E M Forster's "Room with a View," written in 1907 says: "All modern books are bad". TS Eliot said: "Ulysees' had shown that the novel ended with Flaubert and James". After writing "Mrs Dalloway", Virginia Woolf claimed, "I'm glad to be quit this time of writing a novel and hope never to be accused of it again". George Orwell said the writer: "is merely an anachronism, a hangover from the bourgeois age, as surely doomed as the hippopotamus."

Milan Kundera, in "The Art of the Novel"², said this of novels:

"In its own way, through its own logic, the novel discovered the various dimensions of existence one by one with Cervantes and his contemporaries, it inquires into the nature of adventure; with Richardson, it begins to examine 'what happens inside', to unmask the secret life of the feelings; with Balzac, it discovers man's rootedness in history; with Flaubert it explores the *terra* previously *incognita* of the everyday; with Tolstoy, it focuses on the intrusion of the irrational in human behaviour and decisions. It probes time: the elusive past with Proust, the elusive

present with Joyce. With Thomas Mann, it examines the role of the myths from the remote past that control our present actions.”

The novel has accompanied man uninterruptedly and faithfully since the beginning of the Modern Era. It was then that the ‘passion to know’, which Husserl considered the essence of European spirituality, seized the novel and led it to scrutinize man’s concrete life and protect it against ‘the forgetting of being’; to hold ‘the world of life’ under a permanent light. That is the sense in which I understand and share Hermann Broch’s insistence in repeating: The sole *raison d’être* of a novel is to discover what only the novel can discover. A novel that does not discover a hitherto unknown segment of existence is immoral. Knowledge is the novel’s only morality.”

But Kundera too warned of its fragility and how it could die. He wrote this in the same book.

“About half a century ago the history of the novel came to a halt in the empire of Russian Communism. That is an event of huge importance, given the greatness of the Russian novel from Gogol to Bely. Thus the death of the novel is not just a fanciful idea. It has already happened. As we now know how the novel dies: it’s not that it disappears; its history stops: after that comes nothing but

a repetition in which the novel keeps duplicating its form emptied of its spirit. Its death occurs quietly, unnoticed, and no one is outraged.”

Well, the novel so far has proved wonderfully resilient notwithstanding the onslaught of film, radio, television, video and sundry totalitarian regimes. The question may be, will it withstand the Internet, and all of the other devices as yet undiscovered in this and the next electronic age.

It is of course one thing to write something, but an altogether different matter to have it published or produced. I was lucky with my first play, *Brazilian Blue*. Keith Michell the expatriate Australian Shakespearian actor took a liking to it, and said that he would be prepared to return to Australia to star in it. But there were conditions. There are always conditions. As a first play, inevitably it was somewhat rough around the edges, but Keith demanded much more than a smoothing of those. He had me re-write substantial portions of it, but the thrust of most of the changes was to convert dialogue between Keith's character and others into monologues by him. In practical terms, if I wanted the play aired, I had no choice but to comply. I have often wondered how the play would have gone had it retained its original format. I do not mean to be begrudging in saying this. I was grateful for his participation in the production. But his attitude did provide an early warning of what was to follow. In the theatre, everyone is a potential author. All the actors want changes, and it would be churlish to suggest that their proposals almost always involve additional lines and stage time for them. John Osborne, the famous English playwright, said that the author at rehearsals is about as useful as a father scrubbed and gowned at the birth of his child. Even the ubiquitous stage cat would offer new lines if it could.

If the transition from the merely written work to the stage is traumatic, it is nothing like the convulsion of conversion of the word to film. I was commissioned to write a screenplay for my play, *Brazilian Blue*. It has been an interesting experience. My editor constantly told me, and rightly so, to stop thinking verbally but to think visually. The technique is altogether different. For a start, you don't need explanations. Events actually happen on celluloid before the audience's eyes rather than off stage. A few seconds of exposure can replace pages of dialogue. You don't have the problem that Shakespeare had with his audiences who tended during the Third Act to go off to the taverns, in consequence of which so much of the Fourth Acts of his plays involve a great deal of recapitulation.

As with most authors my first novel, "The Lawyer and The Libertine" did the rounds of more than one publisher before it found a mid-wife at Central Queensland University Press. It is a sad thing, and perhaps a result of the declining interest in literature, that there are so few University imprints left in this country.

When you have gone through the pains of writing and re-writing a novel, of finding a publisher for it, and then re-writing it again, it has to be proofed. In the meantime, someone will have had an idea of how to do it far better than you have. My first version of "The Lawyer and The Libertine" was a first person narration by a journalist who was a life long friend of the two protagonists. One publisher said she was prepared to consider publication if I changed the book to the third person. I did that but she still did not publish the book. When CQU Press finally agreed to publish "The Lawyer and the Libertine", my editor asked, "how about changing the narration into the first person?" By that time I was writing something else and was not prepared to change the book back again. All of this I mention simply to show how difficult it is to maintain ownership of anything that is written.

But all of these trials and tribulations pale into insignificance before the confrontation with the last enemy, the gatekeepers, the ever alert critics whose vigilance is most marked in the case of intruders from other lives and other disciplines?. There is only one defence against them and that is a knowledge of the way in which even the greatest of authors have been reviled by their critics and rivals. Tolstoy despised the works of Shakespeare. G B Shaw pungently criticised the great man. Carolyn Chute, a critic of the New York Times, said of William Faulkner:

“he uses a lot of big words, and his sentences are from here back to the airport.”

Virginia Woolf , in “The Common Reader” described Jane Eyre as a book of trivial personalities decomposing in the eternity of print. The diaries of Anthony Powell, the author of “The Music of Time” series disclose his contempt for the work of Graham Greene.

Coleridge said of Edward Gibbon that his style was detestable but that was not the worst thing about him. And TS Elliott said that Henry James had a mind so fine that no idea could violate it.

But public life is in some respects a little like the theatre, with which I have had, as I have told you, some acquaintance. Neither actors nor authors can afford the luxury of sensitivity. I’ve never read any description of a judge of the kind written by Bernard Levin, the English critic and polemicist, of an actor, Dennis Quilley playing in a musical version of Blithe Spirit, in these terms:

“Dennis Quilley played the role with all the charm and

animation of the leg of a billiard table.”

When Michael Redgrave played the lead in *Hobson's Choice* the poison pen critic, Kenneth Tynan said, that although some critics had seen overtones of *Lear* in his portrayal, he thought a somewhat bad tempered Father Christmas would have been near the mark.

When Terrence Stamp played *Dracula*, *The Times'* dramatic critic said that he had nothing to offer except a noble profile, his entrances were insignificant, his voice without menace or mystery and his physical tricks consisted largely of flapping his cloak like a bat failing to take off.

One of the most damning criticisms was of a play by J B Priestley called “*When We Are Married*”, of which one critic said:

“It would make an ideal treat as a night out for your despicable inlaws. Send them a couple of tickets and then meet them later at the Theatre restaurant for a blazing row.”

There is probably only one consolation, and that is to believe, whether it is true or not, the one offered by an author Channing Pollock, in “*The Green Book*”:

“a critic is a legless man who teaches running.”

With those somewhat diffuse thoughts I leave you.