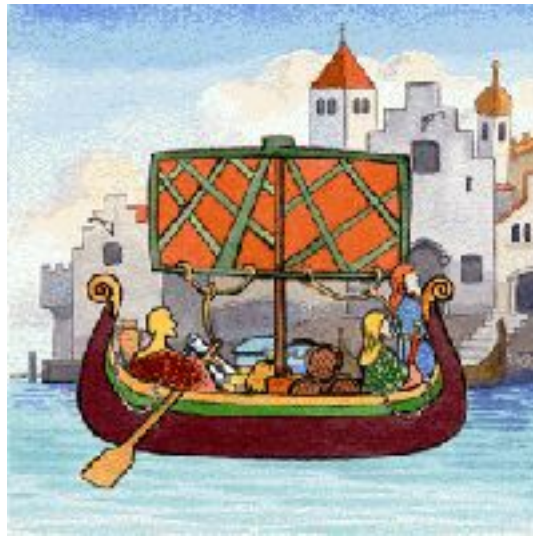


# The Art of Fine Publishing

by

**William Shepherd**



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**September 2004**

## The Art of Fine Publishing

### Prologue

I did not sit down to write this essay on *The Art of Fine Publishing*. Instead it crept up and caught me unawares. It all began when I broke off from preparing a prospectus for the sale of some shares in my publishing house *Academic Inn Books* to write a book review I had promised my friend Chris Wright. Working writers will know how these things happen.

In 2002 I had reviewed Chris Wright's first novel *Sod 'em at Gomorrah* and his second non-fiction book *The Community Manifesto*. Short 250-word versions of both reviews appeared in *Fourth World Review*. Two years later in the summer of 2004 a 100-word review of Chris Wright's second novel *Completing The Charm* appeared in *Fourth World Review* (Number 128). I had not read the book but suspected the review had failed to do the book justice. So I e-mailed Chris and suggested he let me have a shot at it. A copy of the book dropped into my mailbox a few days later so I put aside everything else I was doing and started to read. When I finally put the book down and turned off the light at two o'clock the following morning I knew my hunch was correct.

In my long review of *Sod 'em at Gomorrah* I had suggested that Chris Wright's novel heralded the early beginnings of a new literary genre. And I mentioned that my other favourite novel of this new genre was John Seymour's *Retrieved From The Future*. I also remarked that both books described human scale alternatives to the current madness in a manner that was sympathetic to the *Business As Usual* and *Onward and Upward* brigade.

Both John Seymour and Chris Wright like people. The more shapes and sizes people come in the better they like it. It might be possible to explain this by reference to genes or childhood. But I would put this down to something else. Both John Seymour and Chris Wright in their own different ways have spent their lives bringing out the best in other people. They have discovered that most people want to do the right thing and want to be liked. They understand the cleft stick in which people find themselves and the lesser of two evils paradox they must confront to struggle clear. So they don't want to change people. The trouble is the stuff between people's ears and the worlds they live in. These are what need to change.

To turn your back on mainstream society and change your lifestyle is a massive undertaking. Those who succeed realise with hindsight how hard it was. Both John Seymour and Chris Wright realised that the novel provided a way to prepare ordinary people for such a change. It could take the reader outside their daily reality and allow them to grasp the Kierkegaardian tensions besetting them and our wider society.

In my short review of *Sod 'em at Gomorrah* for *Fourth World Review* I had written about Chris Wright's exploration of the culture of the *Cultural Creatives* and *New Progressives* and his contrasting of their values and lifestyles with those of the suburban based *Guardianistas*.

I also wrote that *Sod 'em at Gomorrah* reminded me of the novel of ideas that H.G.Wells was writing a century ago. Since Wells the genre has shifted out of the mainstream into the literary realm of fantasy fiction...Piers Anthony, Anne McCaffrey etc. but also bubbles up to the surface in some of the dynastic novels by modern popular writers. Their broad sweep compels these writers to address the big issues.

Inevitably thoughts of novels of ideas and new genres collided with the *Academic Inn Books* prospectus and my related research into the publishing business. This essay is among the consequences. It discusses fiction and non-fiction publishing, writers and agents, novels, book clubs and e-publishing. By the end I am grappling with some ideas about the role of the novel in a society where everything is at sixes & sevens and about the moral responsibility of the writer in an inverted society where the natural state of a cathedral culture has been turned inside out by the ugly sisters of wealth and power.

Some paragraphs may appear to come from the *AIB Prospectus*. If anything it was the other way about. They may find their way there when this cobbler returns to his last. My blue pencil was poised to strike out these uninvited guests. But I stayed my hand, convinced they deserved their place.

The cameo appearances of George Orwell and Ayn Rand towards the end of this twelve thousand word essay came as a surprise. But the more I reflected on the role of the writer in society and the more I thought about the fuzzy boundaries between fiction and non-fiction...in the writing rather than the publishing...the larger their body of work loomed in the pantheon of modern literature. They are the forerunners of our new genre...the novel, not of ideas, but of values.

Strange how real writing can take on a life of its own. Proper writers will understand what I mean.

Rye, Sussex, England  
23rd September 2004

# The Art of Fine Publishing

by

William Shepherd

## Part I: The Writer

True Stories  
Non-Fiction Publishing  
The Exception to The Rule  
Proper Writers

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### True Stories

Anyone who can write letters to a friend can write a non-fiction book. Tens of thousands of grey-suited and power-dressed functionaries are furiously writing lengthy tomes every day in pursuit of bureaucratic advancement and corporate success.

Meanwhile their humbler brethren slave away in the basements and bedsits of our college towns before delivering their magnus opus to an unexpectant and underwhelmed academic world. But nobody thinks of labelling such works of non-fiction as 'books'.

Of course a skilled publicist like Daniel Ellsberg might dream up a sexy title like *The Pentagon Papers* and make the *New York Times* best seller lists but this is the exception not the rule.

Another truth is that any publisher worth his salt can sell non-fiction books at a profit. But only rarely will a project start life in the publisher's slush pile. Normally a literary agent or a commissioning editor will identify a gap in the market and commission a synopsis and a couple of sample chapters from an established non-fiction author.

In an ideal publisher-controlled universe the agent or publisher would have the publishing and secondary rights tied up before setting the author to work on the other ten chapters. The only thing that varies is the point at which approval is sought for the publishing project from editorial committees and finance departments.

A Texan artist friend who knew nothing about publishing but read a lot of non-fiction once told me that he only needed to read the first and last chapters and flip through the index to know what a book was about and where the author was coming from. Which all goes to suggest that composing reports is no great shakes for a wordsmith capable of stringing a few words together.

But what turns reports into published titles?

### Non-Fiction Publishing

It is not an ISBN number that creates a published title because *Whitaker* gives them to anyone who asks. Nor is it acceptance by a licensed publisher because there is no licensing and anyone can design their own letter heading and set up shop as a publisher. The truth is mundane. To be a publisher all anyone needs is the know-how to make pages and print & bind them into books...and the money to pay for it.

In 1996 I took the decision to do just that...with little know-how and no money. Eight years on I have worked my way through half of a couple of twenty thousand pound legacies and have accumulated about twenty thousand pounds of assorted debts.

However the positive side of the ledger shows a know-how glass that is more than half full (I am an optimist) and three money-spinning publishing properties: two nice little non-fiction earners...*Rye From the Water's Edge* by John Seymour & Connie Lindqvist and *The Good Yacht Guide*...and a twenty thousand pound investment in *The Magpie Sagas* (a four-book series of illustrated children's books) that is ready for market after seven-years of unwaged toil.

Over the next three months my publishing firm *Academic Inn Books* plans to raise twenty thousand pounds by a private placement of one eighth of the shares in these three microbusinesses, putting a price

tag of one hundred and sixty thousand pounds on the three properties. This will complete the opening phase of my 1993 dream of creating an international publishing house owned by its writers and artists.

*Academic Inn Books* is not the *Trent and Mersey Canal Company* but our progress is likely to be comparable. May my final success be similarly assured and herald in the opening of a new era of *Gentlemen Publishers* just as the Duke of Bridgewater was the unwitting handmaiden of the age of canal building in these offshore islands.

*Rye From the Water's Edge* took five years to break even but is now earning its keep and the first print-run of two thousand copies will have made eight thousand pounds of profit for the *Rye Water's Edge Partnership* by the time the print-run sells out in 2006.

John Seymour celebrated his ninetieth birthday in Newport in Wales last month. He embraced his sixtieth birthday by walking the English coastline. The text to the Rye book was based on two long out-of-print chapters written for the *Companion Guide to the South-East Coast of England*....the purpose of his second long march (his first was in Burma with the Chetwins).

To give you a flavour for our publishing adventure here is the start of John Seymour's foreword to *Rye From the Water's Edge*:

I got a lift to a place called Marshall Meadows which is on the east coast exactly on the English/Scottish border. From that lonely and desolate spot I started walking south, and, with various breaks and pauses, I walked around the English coast all the way to Bristol. Yes - I walked every yard of it - not even jibbing at what were to me such unutterably boring stretches as the sea-front of Skegness, or the even more desolating one of Brighton-and-Hove. During the course of this peregrination I occasionally came upon places that interested me exceedingly, and such a one was Rye.'

There are many talented artists painting pottery in Rye and I commissioned the best of them Connie Lindqvist to put John's words to pictures. It was an inspired choice. Connie grew rapidly as an illustrator while I rode into the world of publishing on the back of a postcard-size local guide in hard-back that slips into visitors' handbags and makes a perfect gift when they get home.

Shortly before her sudden death at the young age of 52 Connie had completed her *Rye Maritime Heritage Collection* of thirty six large water colours based on her pen and ink drawings for *Rye From the Water's Edge*. A newly constituted *Rye Maritime Partnership* will be publishing these with part of the *Rye Water's Edge* text as an illustrated coffee table book for Christmas 2005.

The other non-fiction title needed no inspired choices. It rather fell into my corporate lap. For a couple of years Connie had been working with a local Wittersham-based publisher Sheelagh Hoskyns to produce line drawings of the fifteen hundred boats featured in her *Good Yacht Guide*. When Sheelagh retired she wanted a good home for her husband's life's work. After some unsatisfactory discussions with *Adlard Coles* she set her mind on giving the property to us.

*Academic Inn Books* took over the *Good Yacht Guide* on Seven-One 2002...to adopt the latest American fashion in date talking. Three months later Sheelagh was dead. Three weeks after that so was Connie. Not the most auspicious beginnings. I wondered if I should have felt spooked. But it and I have survived.

Sales of the *Good Yacht Guide* were increasing at the time *Academic Inn Books* took over but profits were declining so hatches were down-battened. In the Spring of 2003 advertising in the boating press was cancelled to test out my hunch that the *Google* search engine and a good website would do a better job without the expense. Any publisher worth his salt can sell non-fiction books at a profit.

### **The Exception to The Rule**

Twenty years ago I wrote an essay entitled *Green Houses or Blue Moon Waves*. In this essay I discussed the work of the marine scientist Otto Pettersson. My sole source was a book first published in 1950 entitled *The Sea Around Us* by Rachel Carson.

For various reasons that I won't go into here my manuscript remains unpublished twenty years later but more surprisingly Otto Pettersson's work remains unknown buried with the object of his research at the bottom of the *Skaggerak*. A recent *google* search confirmed his obscurity and prompted me to write away to *Oslo University* for more information about the gentleman and his work. This was duly forthcoming - *watch this space for future developments*.

I tell you this tale because while browsing in the *Ashford County Library* I chanced across a Rachel Carson book entitled *The Sea* (MacGibbon & Kee, 1968, ISBN 058609052). Upon reading I discovered that the book was a reprint of *The Sea Around Us* bound together with *Under the Sea-Wind* written in 1941 and a twin to *The Sea Around Us* entitled *The Edge of the Sea* published in 1955.

*Under the Sea-Wind* was not a success when first published in America in 1941. It enjoyed excellent reviews but few readers. But then ten years later in 1951 came *The Sea Around Us* and instant success. Between one spring tide and the next Rachel Carson was world-famous and being showered with honorary degrees, scientific & literary awards and gold medals. The book remained high on the list of best-sellers for eighty-six weeks and was translated into thirty languages.

There were a couple of other interesting effects. Firstly *Under the Sea-Wind* was reprinted in America and published for the first time in Britain. But for the triumph of *The Sea Around Us* this remarkable book would have remained virtually unknown gathering dust in the basements of a few American public libraries. Secondly her success brought Rachel Carson the financial independence that was essential for the research and writing of *Silent Spring*...on which the introduction to *The Sea* had this to say:

'There can be few literate people who have not heard of Rachel Carson. Her last book *Silent Spring* sounded a tocsin round the world prompting governments in many countries to restrict the use of pesticides. It has been given to few women, other than the mistresses of emperors and kings, so to influence governments. It has been given to no other woman to do so through the medium of a book.'

For my part I was impressed that a small unknown publisher *MacGibbon & Kee* had dared to set about the task of combinding (sic) the three books into a single 600-page edition. Publishers seem ready to put together complete works and collections of essays but strangely reluctant to pick and choose from a writer's output in this manner.

Aldous Huxley wrote his utopia *Island* forty years after the dystopia *Brave New World* that established his name. His island paradise was eventually overrun by outside forces so he was not claiming he had the answer or anything utopian like that.

Indeed he rather took the view that brutal totalitarian regimes whether Communist or Fascist, would run their brief course before imploding. They would cause mayhem in their wake but this would pass. Huxley like Orwell was more fearful of 'soft power' where people are persuaded to behave in certain ways through advertising, consumerism and the media.

Yet here was a proper writer addressing essentially the same problem forty years apart and coming up with completely different answers. So Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* should be com-bound with *Island* and the two books introduced to young minds as two sides of the same coin and alternative visions of what might come to pass. Compare and contrast as the examination paper might say.

### **Proper Writers**

A book of non-fiction is only as good as its research and can be greatly improved by an experienced editor. The case can be made for doing away with non-fiction authors and relying entirely on researchers and editors. Rachel Carson may seem to argue against this but it is the exception that proves the rule. Some non-fiction authors become a little too overprotective about their research and writing and the reader suffers.

Other non-fiction authors conscious of their dispensability look upon such commissions as hack work and hanker after being a proper writer. Proper writers do fiction and deliver it as poetry, plays & novels.

The problem with poetry is that no publisher in his right mind will touch it with a barge pole. There is absolutely no money in it. That leaves plays and novels. There may be money to be made in plays but it seldom finds its way to the publisher. Plays after all are messy affairs involving theatres and impresarios, rehearsals and actors.

G.B.Shaw, A.A.Milne and J.B.Priestley were successful playwrights and even P.G.Wodehouse popped off three dozen plays while relaxing from Psmith and Jeeves. But each was a rather special case. Wodehouse always imagined he was writing for a cast of actors even when writing a novel. Priestley achieved financial independence early on in his career thanks to the runaway success of *The Good Companions* and the generosity of Hugh Walpole. Milne had a successful career at *Punch* behind him...and *Pooh* and *Piglet* ahead of him. Shaw had his day job as a music critic but also dabbled in novels. He spins a good yarn about how this happened...and the accolades he received from literary critics. Here is the gist of it.

As George Bernard Shaw progressed from his first novel to his fifth, London's publishing world matched him rejection slip by rejection slip. After collecting a full hand of rejections on his fifth novel GBS sat back, thought about it for a few months and then resubmitted Novel Number Five under a new title. It was accepted. No doubt the publisher had heard of the author's name from his rejected novels but had forgotten the reason.

Much encouraged, some months later the newly published novelist dusted down Novel Number Four and sent that off in the post. That was accepted too. He carried on until all five novels had been published

with Number Five in the bookshops first and Number One bringing up the rear. The critics were unanimous. The novels clearly showed the growing maturity of the young writer!

So pity the poor agent. Their agency has a successful non-fiction author on its books. He makes money and they bank their commissions. But the agent knows that fiction is not like non-fiction. The would-be writer knows this too...but in a different way. His elevated thoughts are on the writing of fiction not the grubby job of selling it. The agent resigns himself to the inevitable for he knows his author is hankering.

Few notice the names of non-fiction authors. But with fiction the author's name is the first thing the reader looks for. The book will only sell if the author is known. The reader must have read something by the author and enjoyed it. Fiction is an agent's nightmare. The only redeeming feature is *Harry Potter*.

Buried in the midst of ninety nine failed novelists and several acres of pulped hardbacks there is a new J.K.Rowling bursting to get out. Stumble across her and your fortune is made. The trouble is that it is well nigh impossible to tell the failure from the fortune...except with hindsight.

However this is good news for authors because it means that publishers have no choice but to play the numbers game. Spend little on the many and then throw money at the few. So authors of true stories will manage to get their lies printed and their novels distributed. But royalties will be no part of any deal. Unknown authors only sell when they become known...and they don't get known until they sell.

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# The Art of Fine Publishing

by

William Shepherd

## Part II: Writing

Fiction Publishing  
Agents & Webmasters  
Writing Fiction  
Kohr & Schumacher

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### Fiction Publishing

The publishing world is embedded in a hinterland of *self-publishing* and *vanity publishing*. The literary agent Carole Blake in *From Pitch to Publication* (Macmillan, London, 1999, ISBN 0 333 71435) remarked that the two terms mean very different things but are often mistakenly believed to be interchangeable but then went on to the crux of the matter by pointing out that deception can creep in when a publisher promises marketing and selling skills that are never put in place.

Christopher Helms worked at *Penguin* and *MacMillan* in the early years of his publishing career before building up the four hundred titles a year publishing house *Christopher Helms Publishers*. In a 2000-word essay included as an appendix to Raymond Flower's *This Business of Writing* (Landmark Books, Singapore, 1987, ISBN 981 3002 03 4) Helms compares and contrasts the big and small publishers.

Big publishers, he tells us, have world-wide distribution, excellent marketing resources, high production quality, plush offices, tickets to Wimbledon...and pay royalties on time. But decision making can take years as proposals and typescripts wind their weary way between an elaborate succession of committees; there is a lack of continuity (Carole Blake advises her authors to think about an editor clause in their contracts); the author has to navigate through a maze of different departments and even then will never get through to the top man or woman.

As for small publishers, when they are good they can be very good...the reverse of the big publisher's bad news: personal attention from the chief, receptiveness to your ideas, rapid decision making and a quick production cycle. The worry for the author is in the bad news and here I am quoting Helms directly:

'Sometimes appalling distribution problems. For instance a complete failure to sell a book outside their own home town or state let alone overseas, may arise; possibly poor publicity, a lot will devolve on the enthusiasm of the author. Probably not much outside home town or state; cash flow problems leading to the need to cut corners in production and the late payment of royalties.'

As a publisher starting out into the big world of book distribution with a list that can be counted on the fingers of one hand I empathize with the woes of the little publisher. But there is a glimmer of hope in Christopher Helms' concluding remarks:

'It is my experience which embraces most sizes and conditions of publishing company that in the end sales of your book whether it is published by the mega-corporation or the small house will be much the same.'

My children's author might reasonably ask: 'How far to that end...and how long to get there?' It is my good fortune that she is too well brought up to do so.

### Agents & Webmasters

Vanity- and self-publishing has now exploded onto the worldwide web changing the nature of this hybrid category. Bloggers are just one small part of this emerging digital publishing scene. With hindsight the developments of e-publishing on the internet may turn out to be the first stirrings for the book publishing industry of the problems that have plagued the music publishing industry in recent years.

A relatively minor innovation like clockwork books might be enough to bring book publishing to the tipping point. After human muscle power (and shire horse power) the humble clock spring might represent the sane humane ecological future for many of man's (non-space heating) energy devices in a small-scale world beyond *Big Oil*. Wind-up torches and radios (*Baylis*) and mobile phones (*Siemens*) are already with us and the wind-up laptop will not be far behind. When did you last plug your grandfather clock into the wall?

The major publishers are undoubtedly very good at selling books. But they are not always so good at selling rights. So established authors prefer to let authors' agents sell rights. In fact you will not find a successful author without an agent. But unfortunately the publishing world is awash with failed editors, wanabee writers and abandoned single mothers from the better *Telegraph* and *Guardian* reading classes posing as literary agents.

Hence getting signed up by a good agent is every bit as difficult for the new author as attracting the attention of a good publisher. So deciding to publish and be damned penniless rather than seeking a publisher might turn out to be a smart decision. You will be in distinguished company with Walt Whitman, Beatrix Potter, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf as fellow self-publishers.

But without an agent or a publisher your choices narrows rapidly to printer or webmaster. A mountain of rejection slips as a typescript meanders between slush piles can sap the strongest morale and dent the most robust self-esteem. Who needs the character building? Aristotle he said...in Greek...'to learn how to do something, do it!'. But two parting thoughts.

The novice novelist's best hope of a wider readership may be by way of translation rights. A success in a small country such as Sweden will encourage the Swedish publisher to negotiate for the worldwide rights. Lo and behold a few years after your first English language edition disappears without trace the book will pop up again in a new English language edition after the rights are picked up by a UK publisher at the *Gothenburg Book Fair*.

Bookshop quality will always be the most attractive way to present your typescript. This is the route I am taking with the *Magpie Sagas*. As an unknown publisher with an unknown author (Bernardine Fiddimore) and with pictures by two unknown pottery painters (Connie Lindqvist and Mike Avery) I really had very little choice in the matter. It has cost me twenty thousand pounds to get this far but with hard work...and a bit of luck...I believe it will work out. Hope springs eternal...and faith moves mountains.

### **Writing Fiction**

Writing fiction is not like writing non-fiction. The New York literary agent Donald MacCampbell used to suggest to young writers that they sit down at a piano and stretch their writing hand over an octave. Each note in that octave represents an essential ingredient of fiction writing: C - characterisation, D - dialogue, E - entertainment, F - friction, G - genre, A - action, B - background and C - composition. Raymond Flower provides a brief summary of each of these eight ingredients in his chapter on *Putting The Book Together* in *This Business of Writing*.

This cleverly written little book of just fifty thousand words started its life in 1986 as notes for a writers' workshop at *Victoria College* in Australia. Flower's remarks on characterisation are pertinent to the discussion that follows.

'It's worth remembering that we expect to know more about a fictional character than we do about a real person. There is a simple reason for this: the author describes his characters' emotions and motives from the inside, whereas in real life we know other people only from the outside.

We can only understand each other in a rough and ready way; there is no use pretending that we have complete knowledge of our family or close friends. We don't really know what is going on in the mind behind that best-loved face. But in fiction we do.

It's the author's business to get inside the skin of his characters, to feel their feelings and to think their thoughts. If one of them crosses the street, the author can tell you why and precisely what is going on in that person's mind as he does. We get to know the characters inside out. This is one of the great pleasures of reading a novel.'

### **Koher & Schumacher**

In *Guide for the Perplexed* E.F.Schumacher devoted a whole chapter to problems. Central to his treatment was the notion of two types of problem: convergent and divergent problems. As a philosopher he found convergent problems comparatively uninteresting because everyone tackling them would arrive at the same solution. Divergent problems however were the true stuff of life.

Characteristic of divergent problems is the existence of two conflicting 'goods'. 'Liberté and égalité' in politics for instance or 'discipline and freedom' in education. Divergent problems could not be solved; they had to be grappled with.

And in grappling a higher value or a transcending good would emerge to reconcile the two opposites. The *French Encyclopaedists* used the idea of 'fraternité' to such purpose and the good teacher instinctively knows he has to love the little devils...an exasperated retort that reveals the nature of the higher order reconciling value for discipline and freedom in education.

Jesus and Muhammad went for the transcendent every time. Rudolf Steiner three-folded at every opportunity. And triangulation has even crept into political discourse with President Clinton and Prime Minister Blair third waying it through every policy impasse. This is in sharp contrast to fundamentalists like George Bush or Ayatollah Khomeini for whom the world is two-fold and it is us or them, good vs. evil and God on my side.

But though political threesomes are an improvement on fundamentalism it is not the same as Schumacher's higher-order value. Triangulation does not much care if the third corner of the triangle is higher or lower. Hierarchies are not politically correct this year.

Propaganda for instance can triangulate one of two conflicting views into oblivion; and quangos, committees and regulators can tri-strangulate almost any issue into obscurity. Better to argue for and against with reckless bias if you wish to get to the heart of the matter.

In my essay entitled *The Foundations of Structural Sociology* I argue that there are not two but three types of problem. By breaking the bounds of the human scale our civilization has opened a Pandora's Box of uncircumvergent problems that can neither be solved nor grappled with but only managed. It was Leopold Kohr who wrote 'When something is wrong then something is too big!'

What to do? The recommended management style is to divide. Instead of letting your cities overdevelop, whenever the city oversteps its bounds you send your young men over the sea in boats to establish a new city somewhere else. This is how the Ancient Greeks managed growth. But this is by the bye...although it could give a whole new dimension to the English tradition of beating the bounds.

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# The Art of Fine Publishing

by

**William Shepherd**

## **Part III: Reading**

Celebrities & Soaps  
My Own Bloody Book Club  
Lies & Morality  
Globalization & Publishing  
Good Books

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### **Celebrities & Soaps**

I do not own or watch television. But there are times when I feel culturally deprived as a result. If you take this remark at face value then you will no doubt suggest I count my blessings. But this would misunderstand my meaning. Strange as it may seem three-ness has relevance to celebrity gossip and television soap operas.

In day to day discourse a television programme or a celebrity story in the *Daily Mail* can provide a common denominator for conversation. Only people do morality. Corporations and governments can't do it despite their propaganda to the contrary. Nor can mobs or political parties, tribes or churches.

Morality only happens between individuals...and they probably need to be part of a small community. Hence conversations matter. Wherever two or three are gathered together...as the Gospels instruct us. Timely reading of the next day's newspapers allows me to deal with my cultural deprivation so I cope and converse. But I do not share the same experience. How easily might cultural deprivation deteriorate into moral depravity?

These TV programmes and celebrity stories serve two different functions. They are the third side of the triangle but at the same time they allow different people to share the same information. A marriage counsellor, a trusted friend or a small intimate dinner gathering can serve similar purposes enabling a person to bring his or her inside to the outside and into the other person's hearing in a way they are unable or unwilling to do face to face.

This brings us back to the novel because we are now using Raymond Flower's language. In several ways reading books by candlelight is not so different to watching the idiot lantern. What are novels but soap operas? So there is no moral high ground in this. Besides it depends on what is read or watched.

But one advantage that television has over the book is that two people can more easily watch the same programme at the same time. Not so with books...at least not in our household. One book had to suffice for two readers. And what squabbling and dirty tricks ensued as each sought to outmanoeuvre the other to finish the book first! It was not enough to be first out of the blocks.

Whether or not it is a reaction to bad television or evidence of a new unheralded *Small is Beautiful* movement there is much to be said for the mid-West's rediscovery of reading groups. Much better to meet to talk about a good book than to buy plastic containers (1960s) or giggle over sex toys (1990s). Some may see it as the secularising of the old bible reading groups (1850s) and the depoliticising of workers and world education (1930s) but it is happening.

But what matters is not what is being said at these gatherings but what is remembered. If the book is bad, the group like-minded and the group-leader bigoted and wrong-minded then little of value will emerge and error will be reinforced. But it need not be so. And this brings us back to the nature of the novel. It was no accident that for centuries the Bible was referred to as The Good Book.

### **Mo-bbc**

John Seymour tells the story of his cruise to the Baltic in *Willy Nilly* with his yacht club pennant *MOBYC* flying from the masthead. Everything went swimmingly and he was wined and dined in yacht club after yacht club throughout his trip until one evening he was asked what the initials stood for.

He was leaving early the next morning so he answered quite shamelessly: 'My Own Bloody Yacht Club!' The Danes roared with laughter and bought him so many more drinks that he was in no fit state to leave the following morning and stayed another night.

For the past twenty years I have been running my own bloody book club (*Mo-bbc*). It began in 1984 when I sent a friend in Bogotá a book for her birthday. After that our book club despatched a different book to *Mo-bbc's* two members in early January each year. By 1994 we had created a tradition. By 2004 we were ready to challenge the annual *Bookers List* with our *Mo-bbc* list.

In recent years our annual bride has acquired a pair of handmaidens with three books being listed and shipped each year. This does wonders for the bottom line at *amazon.com* although that is not the reason for doing so. I even find myself announcing the January 2005 *Mo-bbc* selection six months ahead of schedule in August 2004.

Two thousand and four was the year of Noel Barber with *Tanamera* (ISBN 0340282622) and *A Farewell to France* (ISBN 034034709 0) and *A Woman of Cairo* wafting their way past the Colombian customs' sniffer dogs. In 2005 it was to be *Saigon* by Anthony Grey (ISBN 0330280422) together with one of Wilbur Smith's trilogy from Ancient Egypt (*River God*, *Warlock* or *The Seventh Scroll*) and one of James Clavell's masterpieces about the Far East (*Noble House*, *Tai-Pan*, and *Shogun*).

But then I read *Wild Swans* by Jung Chang (ISBN 0006374921) which meant this had to be included. Shortly afterwards I chanced upon three books at my local library by the best-selling Swedish author Marianne Fredriksson...first read in Swedish a decade ago.

Since then she has been picked up by a big English language publisher. So in went *Hannah's Daughters* (ISBN 0752849409) and relegated to the B-list were Wilbur Smith and James Clavell. I am sure they will take it very well...and grieve all the way to the bank.

### Lies & Morality

It has been remarked that the novelist's business is to tell lies. Less noticed has been the fact that good novelists are liars who tell the truth. They may make it all up...that is why it is fiction and not non-fiction...but proper writers create their falsehoods to reflect reality...and try to do so as accurately as possible. With purpose comes a sense of morality and integrity. Did you notice these in Mr. MacCampbell's octave scale?

Reading a book is a one-way conversation. You meet the writer's mind but he does not meet yours...although proper writers will have met a mind like yours by skilful deployment of the editing resources at his disposal.

But unlike the sermon the book cannot claim a captive audience. The reader can always put the book down and go out to play. Does this make reading a moral act? The extension of reading to two-way conversations like radio phone-ins and internet chat rooms might suggest otherwise. But we must account for quality as well as quantity by bringing in the idea of wisdom.

There is an old adage that the wise man can learn from a fool but the fool can never learn from a wise man. If you have already rushed out and bought or borrowed a copy of *Guide For The Perplexed* then at this juncture you should prowl beyond Schumacher's chapter on problems and delve into his discussion of *adaequatio* which runs over several chapters and has much to say about hierarchies.

There is a moral relationship between writer and reader and a position of *adaequatio* between them. This places two different forms of responsibility on the writer while also requiring tolerance and understanding of the writer's dilemmas on the part of the reader.

At the limit characters in a novel should behave decently. And integrity should inform the manner in which a writer uncovers and reveals aspects of his novel to the reader. Decency? Integrity? Does beauty reside in the five black notes? Is good to be found among the semi-tones?

### Globalization & Publishing

Why do the books in the *mo-bbc* list bear so little resemblance to the books on *New York Times* bestseller lists? The straightforward answer is that the *mo-bbc* list includes old books and does not restrict itself to new publications.

My range extends from charity shops...*Oxfam* in Ashford is excellent...local libraries, market traders...the stalls on London's South Bank, in Cambridge Market Square and at Rye's Thursday market are all good sources...bookshops and antiquarian booksellers to book reviews and recommendations from an extensive but informal panel of readers which includes my daughter and son. All these are within my compass so I am not limited to the publishers' blurb. But there is another facet to this discrepancy

Fifteen years ago I became interested in the idea of publishing *Alternative Reports*. In pursuit of this fleeting campaign I spent a few days pouring over the *Annual Report* of the FT-100 company *Grand*

Metropolitan. - search for 'New Labour Company' on the [www.cesc.net](http://www.cesc.net) website for the full report. Below is my analysis of the company's share ownership in a section entitled *Hidden Assets* squeezed between *Follow The Money* and *Pension People*.

'In 1965 *GMM* was selling at 45 pence a share. By 1982 they were up at 141 pence a share...both figures adjusted as more shares were around in 1982 than 1965. Shareholders are happy. I like happy people. Perhaps we can get together. I wonder who they are.

Let's delve into the small print. 77.8% of shares are owned by 0.7% of the shareholders. So the small shareholders with holdings of less than 100 shares wield one share for every 1000 shares held by the big boys. Some power! No matter. Who are the happy boys?

Oh dear. It gets worse. Try this for size. Guess which shareholder category holds 52.3% of the shares. Here's your choice. Men, women, joint accounts (individuals), banks & insurance companies, pension funds, nominee companies, other companies. I would have gone for pension funds...perhaps banks and insurance companies. I would have been wrong.

Nominee companies hold more than half of *Global MegaMob's* shares. Who are they? You may well ask. Nobody knows. 4871 anonymous invisible nominee companies, 4.7% of the total shareholders, hold 440 million shares, 51.3% of the total of 857 470 725 shares. Some distance away come banks and insurance companies with 165 million (19.3%) spread over 10 996 holders. Did you know there were this many banks and insurance companies?'

Few realize the corporate nature of global publishing and the extent of the industry's global consolidation in fewer and fewer hands. The *Publishing & Globalization* table below skips many big beasts like *BBC Publications & Penguin* but indicates the degree of concentration.

### **Publishing & Globalization**

**Harper-Collins** - owned by *Rupert Murdoch's News Ltd*  
the eponymous imprint in the UK, Australia, Canada and the USA  
plus Flamingo, Fontana, Fontana Press, Thorsons, Times Books and Voyager

**Little, Brown** - owned by *America's Time Life group*  
Little, Brown in the UK  
Little, Brown in USA, plus Warner, Abacus, Virago

**Bertelsmann Group**  
Bertelsmann in Germany  
Bantam, Doubleday Dell in America & Canada  
Transworld - Bantam, Corgi, Doubleday, Anchor, Black Swan in the UK  
Transworld in Australia and South Africa

*who own*  
**Random House**  
Arrow, Chatto, Ebury, Methuen, Sinclair Stevenson and others in the UK  
Random, Crown, Knopf, Vintage and others in America  
*who owns*

**Reed-Elsevier's Reed Group**  
Heinemann, Mandarin, Minerva and others

**Holtzbrinck** - owned by the *German Holtzbrinck family*  
Fischer, Rowohlt, Wunderlich, Droemer and others in Germany  
Macmillan, Boxtree, Picador, Papermac, Pan and Sidgwick & Jackson in Britain  
Macmillan, Pan and Picador in Australia  
St Martins Press, Henry Holt and Farrar Strauss & Giroux in America

**Hodder Headline** - *UK Publishing Group*  
Coronet, Delta, Headline, Hodder, New English Library and others in the UK  
Some of the same imprints in Australia  
Distribution agreements in Canada, South Africa & Europe  
No US publishing company

**Orion** - *UK owned and based group part-owned by Hachette*  
Orion, Weidenfeld, Phoenix House, Cassell and Gollancz in the UK

The proliferation of brand names as imprints also sows confusion. How many young ladies browsing through the *Virago* bookstand realize that *Time-Life* is the paymasters for their heroines? Who knows that *MacMillan* or *Picador* are German-owned or that the French giant *Hachette* has a stake in *Cassell*?

And is national identity a necessary and sufficient identifier of power and control in these days of off-shore trusts and nominee companies? The evidence of my *Grand Metropolitan* research would suggest the answer is a resounding 'no'.

Big Global Publishing is no yardstick for our *mo-bbc* book awards. Instead we need to take an absolute rather than a relative approach by asking the question: What is it that I like about my *mo-bbc* selection?

### Good Books

The basic criteria I use to select a book for the *mo-bbc* list is enjoyment. Did I enjoy reading the book and do I believe my fellow *mo-bbc* member will enjoy it too. If I am enjoying a book I find it hard to put it down. So to discipline myself...I need to get through some 'proper work' on the side...I try to set aside particular times of the day for such activities. This means that my books must serialise well and lend themselves to *Book at Bedtime* status.

But this criteria rather begs the question. Why do I enjoy the books that I enjoy? There are two principle reasons. Firstly I feel short changed unless I am learning things I don't know. I picked up James Clavell because I knew nothing about the Far East and thought he would teach me a thing or two. This he did...but as a bonus, while acquiring my knowledge, I discovered that he was a proper writer too.

Secondly I notice that the books I enjoy deal with life's big questions...birth and bereavement, parents and children, friends and marriage. Most of them have also taken a grand sweep across the generations implying that the individual life is a work of art and that life's triumphs and tragedies are the waft and weave of 'the stuff that the gods dream on'...see the final lines of *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare.

In these modern epics the world is in flux and the wheel of fortune is the human condition. Only relationships and communities endure. Relationships between sons and daughters; parents, sisters and brothers; husbands, wives and lovers; friends and enemies. Peace, happiness, beauty and the good life are transient things that vanish in the twinkling of an eye.

For a few fleeting moments our players realize they are living in a golden age...but we readers know this will not endure. The more far-sighted characters see that war and misfortune is poised to invade their world and sweep away the lives and livelihoods of their families, rend asunder the old friendships and forge new dependencies from the hells of their forthcoming struggles. The weak depart the stage while the strong and the fortunate survive.

So these *mo-bbc* books are about the nobility of human life and the resilience of the human spirit. I might have chosen similar words to describe the 1930s American novels like *Anthony Adverse* or *Gone With The Wind*; or the mid-nineteenth century imperial novels from the *English mid-Victorians*...Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope.

And is it too fanciful to suggest that I am here describing the re-emergence of those universal themes animating Homer's *Odyssey*, the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* and the Finnish *Kalevala*? This was the direction William Morris believed we should go.

Some years before his untimely death the former *Poet Laureate* Ted Hughes published a dazzling 500-page tour-de-force on Shakespeare's final twelve plays - see *The Goddess of Complete Being*. Hughes was convinced he had found the dramatic equation that Shakespeare used.

Ted Hughes established to his own satisfaction that the same formula was used to create the friction...Donald MacCampbell's F-word...in every one of these plays. Shakespeare producers should be required to pass a written examination on *The Goddess of Complete Being* before getting their Lord Chancellor's performing licence.

I mention Ted Hughes' book because these *mo-bbc* books have a dramatic equation of their own, similar in function to, but different in nature from, the formula Ted Hughes discovered in Shakespeare. The dramatic equation of these modern epics, and hence the key criteria governing selection to the *mo-bbc* list, has at its heart the tectonic plates of classes and cultures grinding inexorably against each other.

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# The Art of Fine Publishing

by

William Shepherd

## Part IV: The Book

Topside & Takers  
Class & Culture  
Left & Right  
Moochers & Looters  
From Ideas to Values

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### Topside & Takers

Foreigners often mock the class-ridden nature of English society. I have no argument with them. I am as horrified by it as they are. But while pointing out the moat in my national eye these foreigners are often blissfully blind to the beam in their own eyes. I have spent time in America and Sweden where I have been much amused by their insistence that unlike the English they live in classless societies.

Everywhere I go there is class and Sweden and America are no exceptions. But I see not two classes (workers & capitalists) as Marxists see the world...or three including the semi-detached *petit bourgeoisie* who were clearly put on this planet by a non-existent god to frustrate the vanguard at every turn.

At the limit real writers must see themselves as a class of one. This is their lonely fate or the sacrifice the gods demand of them. In their many little local worlds they should see not two or three but hundreds if not thousands of classes with the finest and subtlest of graduations between each.

False aggregations are one of the graver errors of our age; perverting the social sciences, corrupting political discourse and destroying our humanity. The liberal arts is the last bastion of sanity and the final refuge for the individual. Proper writers have a responsibility to keep the aspidistras flying.

Were I to adopt a three-fold classification of class I would turn to Jack Priestley not Friedrich Engels. In 1958 J.B.Priestley published a short book that took the form of a conversation between an elderly gentleman and a young man.

The older man explained to his ambitious young guest that the modern world was made up of *Topside* and *Takers*. *Topside* ran the show and *Takers* accepted whatever *Topside* threw at them. This was not capitalists & workers in modern dress for in a communist state *Topside* was the *Communist Party's* vanguard and Marx' masses were *Takers*.

The young man was alarmed and determined, upon the instant, to put his name down for *Topside*. The elderly gentleman cautioned him against being so hasty for not everybody subscribed to *Topside* or *Takers*. Some had retained the habit of thinking for themselves.

Priestley's third group was not the *petit bourgeoisie* who Priestley saw as no different from any other social group on the take. This third group wanted to be left alone to live their own lives. They did not accept *Topside's* legitimacy and wanted as little as possible to do with *Topside's* baubles and beads so beloved by *Takers*.

Numerically they accounted for no more than one in twenty of their circle of family and friends. Priestley worried that they were being squeezed out and might even become extinct one day. His elderly gentleman was a recruiting sergeant for their renaissance.

Priestley was careful to explain that this third group was not a definable class but individuals distributed throughout society. They were typically unaware of each other's presence. They were a society's dissidents and freethinkers.

Priestley saw them as a mindset rather than a group...minds that thought for themselves. He believed that the English had more of these minds than other peoples and that this was part of the explanation for the English genius. They were the yeast that made the bread rise.

A characteristic feature of many of Priestley's novels...*Festival at Farbridge* is a good example...is the way that half a dozen of these characters are brought together by chance from different walks of life, take on the world of *Topside* and *Takers* and finally win through.

Priestley's third group included many of the most creative, innovative and eccentric members of society. They did not constitute a recognizable group...they were not 'the intellectuals' or 'the students' or 'the artisans'. They were to be found in the nooks and crannies of every social group, getting on with the life of their group as best they could while secretly alienated...Colin Wilson might label them *Outsiders*.

But their ability to think and act outside the box meant that they were often valued by their own group or class. Not always, for ordinary people would oftentimes find their heretical thoughts and strange ways threatening. So it could be touch and go between survival, banishment and liquidation. But usually there were wiser heads who realized that the group needed its eccentrics to cope with change.

Priestley's concern was with the effect on a society of this group's disappearance. *Topside* and *Takers* were incapable of renewal. Regeneration comes from the heresies flourishing within the established orthodoxies. He saw these small groups of outsiders as the guardians of these heresies. Without them the fires would go out. Eccentrics keep the home fires burning. Today's heresies are tomorrow's orthodoxies.

### **Class & Culture**

Every society is permeated through and through by this mosaic of classes. Each maintains the subtle distinctions between their own class and every other class. Each has its own leavening force of outsiders. Class is the very stuff of community and society. These Priestleyesque outsiders are key to the proper writer's dramatic equation. They are his agents of change. They are the raw material for the proper writer.

The man on the Clapham omnibus thinks of his country as being run by the upper classes. His parents may have been lower or blue-collar working class but his children have their feet firmly placed in the middle or white-collar class. He is not against the upper classes but he doesn't have much time for the upper middle classes who are not proper toffs like Prince Charles.

Our man in the street sees little difference between the aspirations of the working classes and the smug achievements of the lower middle classes. But he worries that his children might get above themselves and forget their working class roots. He may not know them as such but he has a lot of sympathy for peasant values. Political correctness and ethnicity confuse his picture of the world so he dislikes them and is against immigrants just as his great grandparents were against the Jews and the Irish.

Meanwhile the grocers have their own class system based on shopping...while the men with clipboards think of the world as their focus groups writ large.

I prefer to talk of class and culture and to relate them by analogy to a cell in the human body. The cell is the *culture* and the proteins, chromosomes & genes inside the cell are *classes*. A culture is a stable system of class relationships. But this sound-bite goes down like a lead balloon across the dinner table. So it is simpler to stick with the man on the Clapham omnibus.

Fiction writers with a social agenda have always written comparative anthropology. Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, William Morris and Leo Tolstoy spring immediately to mind. The socialism of Oscar Wilde, H.G.Wells and G.B.Shaw meant that the plays and novel of ideas acquired a left-wing reputation. But there is nothing inherently left-wing about the genre. It is politically neutral.

The case of Eric Blair is particularly interesting. If you or I wrote a novel about the poor in order to make a social point we might spend a few days on the road with no money and do the odd night or two in the *YMCA*.

But Eric Blair the *Etonian* scraped along on the wrong side of the poverty line in Paris for a year, repeated his folly in London and then wrote *Down & Out in Paris & London* about his experience. It eventually reached the bookshops under the name of George Orwell after five complete rewrites by which time it was no more 'authentic' than the book you or I might have written.

*Burmese Days*, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, *Coming Up for Air*, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and *Homage to Catalonia* followed much the same pattern.

Eric Blair researched like a non-fiction writer but then crafted his books like a novelist. It is a moot point whether these books should be read as fiction or non-fiction. If you have a hundred tales to tell but select only half a dozen then you are fictionalising by omission even if you are scrupulously accurate with the six tales you tell.

And in George Orwell's case the style is deceptive, the method devious and the purpose political. Then George Orwell took the genre even further to the left by writing two of the shortest and most-widely read novels of all times: *1984* and *Animal Farm*.

But it was a different left. Eric Blair understood that the *Old Left* had become increasingly irrelevant. George Orwell's two novels had ideas and values in abundance...nowadays we would say they had attitude...but they were really education masquerading as propaganda. Such matters interested Eric Blair.

### Left & Right

In 1989 I published a 100-page book about the future of party politics in Europe for the benefit of non-European audiences. Some day it will be widely used in China for the teaching of English as a foreign language. The work was 'dedicated to the young people of China who lost their lives in June 1989 in the struggle for democracy'.

Eric Blair's essay on Charles Dickens popped up in my prologue to *The Rise & Fall of the Swedish Green Party (1982-1997)*. Here is what I wrote:

'George Orwell in 1939 commented when assessing the political side of Charles Dickens and his work that 'if you hate violence and don't believe in politics, the only remedy left is education'. The real world is such a wonderful muddle that such clear cut categories for human action will always merge into one another in practice.

The power of violence, politics and education are not evil or good things in themselves. There will always be a time and place for each of them, either separately or in combination with the others. Our problems arise when common sense loses control and the size and speed of our application of these things becomes either too great or too small. Then that which is good becomes evil.

The meaning of left and right came up in the epilogue as I sought to discriminate between *The New Left* and *The Old Left*. I see now that it was a confused piece of writing. Readers would be unclear whether I was sticking to the conventional definitions of left and right as collectivism and individualism or had reverted to the *French Revolutionary Assembly* of 1795 where delegates demanding structural change to French society were seated on the left and supporters of the old ways sat on the right. Here is an extract:

In this essay I have tried to throw light on the forces at work in the rise of the *Swedish Green Party*. In order to do this it has been necessary to look more broadly at the Swedish political landscape. What this study has revealed is that far from being neither left nor right, the *Green Party* are part of an emerging *New Left* which comprises all those parties which seek to use the ballot box for structural change to society.

However the real problem with the left & right dichotomy is its twoness. Political economy has a threeness about it and the z-axis to the individualist vs collectivist x-axis and the structuralist vs politician y-axis is elitists vs levellers. Hegel is the elitists' philosopher and Thomas Jefferson is the levellers' hero...although Gore Vidal might beg to differ - see *Burr*. A true man of the left can see a right-wing fascist bastard coming a mile off. Behind the man-of-the-people facade is a hate-the-people reality.

### Moochers & Looters

Yet despite my muddled composition Ayn Rand's *New Left* was given fair treatment...even though it seemed to be the collective noun for everything she disapproved of. Here is what I wrote:

'After the riots on American campuses in 1969, Ayn Rand published an essay entitled *The New Left*'. Her subtitle for the essay was *The anti-industrial revolution*'. She saw the rebellion as the result of years of hearing nothing but collectivist sophistries and was alarmed at the widespread moral cowardice that resulted in a failure to fight *The New Left* ideologically on moral-intellectual grounds.'

Ayn Rand merits pride of place in any history of the novel of ideas and values. Firstly she defies any attempt to suggest that the genre is the private property of *The Old Socialist Left*. In American political terminology Ayn Rand's politics are to the right of the *Libertarians* and the *Mid-West Militias* and in European political terminology to the left of *Anarchists* and *Syndicalists*.

Ayn Rand's politics is rooted in her *Philosophy of Objectivism* for she is a political philosopher first and a novelist second. Her politics is against collectivism, against governments and for the right to carry guns; it sanctions the right of the individual to exploit natural resources and accumulate private wealth...although this is conditional upon honest endeavour, sound money and fair exchange of value.

Ayn Rand's politics despises the manipulators of men & money and condemns the 'second-raters' who dispossess society's producers (the 'first-raters') by looting (violence) and mooching (guilt); it insists that money is the root of all virtue...provided it is sound money (and preferably gold).

The head of the *Federal Reserve* Alan Greenspan is reported to be an old friend and devout disciple of Ayn Rand. The fact that he is hell-bent on destroying the American dollar is therefore of some interest.

Ayn Rand wrote two short novels early in her writing career. *We The Living* has aspects of autobiography and recounts the suffering of a family in Stalin's Russia and their escape to the West in the 1920s. *Anthem* is a powerful statement of Ayn Rand's political philosophy set in a society of the future where 'I' has been erased from memory and the heroine struggles to rediscover the idea of an individual.

The *Fountainhead* is the first of Ayn Rand's two long novels and contrasts the careers of an architect who refuses to submit to society and dilute his genius before the demands of the second-raters and his contemporary who compromises his art and ultimately his life to his false sense of ambition.

Ayn Rand's political creed achieved its finest statement in *Atlas Shrugged* where one man John Galt conceives the idea of bringing the world to a halt by persuading the first-raters to refuse to bear the burden of producing for the non-producers. They slip away one after the other until the novel ends with the country collapsing into chaos while the reader is given a tantalising glimpse of the beginnings of a new world in *Galt's Gulch* hidden away high in the Colorado Rockies.

All four of Ayn Rand's novels feature powerful heroes and heroines who defy the world of the second-raters and create a world where honour, integrity and value reign. The idea of a society where individuals trade and exchange values is the central idea in Ayn Rand's two long novels.

### **From Ideas to Values**

Aldous Huxley once said that to write fiction one needs a whole series of inspirations about people in an environment, and then a whole lot of hard work on the basis of those inspirations.

But characters and environments are not enough. A writer works with dialogue. Once the writer has dreamed up his plot and characters and placed them in their surroundings he must get them talking. For he wants his characters to speak for themselves and he wants their words to ring true.

But the natural sounding dialogue you read in a book is different from the way people normally talk. It is more selective and omits the hesitations and the ramblings. Good written dialogue is crisp & lively and carries the story forward. The only time you hear talk like this in real life is from a good story teller when in story-telling mode. They talk differently at other times.

The trouble with the play or the novel of ideas is that it is a made-up affair in which the character of each personage must be implied in the ideas for which they are the mouthpiece. In *Point Counter Point* Aldous Huxley had one of his characters (a writer) remark that one defect of the novel of ideas was to restrict the author to writing about people who had ideas to express. In the estimate of Huxley's fictional author this excluded ninety-nine people in a hundred.

The second defect is that people who can reel off neatly formulated notions are slightly monstrous and in the long run living with monsters becomes rather tiresome even when they are only on the stage or between the covers of a book.

You may now begin to admire the technical mastery behind Bernard Shaw's plays and Ayn Rand's novels. Yet the principal criticism about their heroes and heroines is that they are unreal. Ordinary people seem willing to suspend their disbelief and forget they are sitting in a theatre when watching a play on the stage but are less willing to make allowances for the unreality of a play's or a novel's characters.

These are desperate times. The world is in crisis. There is a need for proper writers to return to the novel of ideas. But they must move beyond it to the novel of values. The pitfalls are the same but are confounded by new obstacles. Not only must the characters imply the ideas in their dialogue but they must demonstrate their values in their actions. This will be no easy genre.

Increasingly ordinary people are coming into contact with strange alien worlds. But they are discovering that these worlds are inhabited not by alien creatures but by their own friends and close family. In Aldous Huxley's terms what is starting to happen is that people are finding they are unable to picture their friends and family in the physical, psychological and emotional surroundings within which they live their own lives. These new novels should be designed to help them.

In novels of value the writer describes two cultures and the web of class relationships in each culture. A well-written novel of this genre will address readers in both cultures and each should recognize the portrayal of their culture. There should be no difference in principle between the comparative anthropology of the novel of value and that of Margaret Mead's reports from islands in the South Seas.

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## The Art of Fine Publishing

### Epilogue

There is nothing new about the novel of value. It has merely been out of fashion. There were many authors publishing in this style in the early decades of the 20th century and they were still being read well into the sixties.

For me J.B. Priestley is the master of the genre. His second novel *Angel Pavement* reads as well today as when published eighty years ago. It did not get good reviews but critics were expecting a sequel to *The Good Companions* so this was predictable.

But several of Priestley's contemporaries have faded into obscurity though as novelists they are in Priestley's class. Nevil Shute's *Ruined City* for instance is a little masterpiece about a successful respected banker who risks his fortune and reputation to bring health and employment to a dead city whose inhabitants are the starving victims of depression. Proper writers looking for ideas could do a lot worse than trawl through the Nevil Shute back catalogue.

Or take the unknown writer Chris Wright whose novels prompted me to write this essay. In *Sod 'em at Gomorrah* the action moves between a mainstream suburban culture and an alternative rural scene (which even includes a local exchange trading scheme). One particularly effective literary device is to set the novel ten years in the future to allow an exaggeration of current trends.

The novel's friction (the F-word) is created by the hero setting out with his liberal values to search for a teenage girl who has run away from her suburban home. The reader learns about the alternative scene where the hero eventually discovers her and also finds out what drove the young girl away from her comfortable suburban lifestyle. This is the simplest dramatic equation for this genre.

In his second novel *Completing The Charm* Chris Wright uses a different dramatic equation. The cultural anthropology is there...Carol is a teacher and Dave is in marketing. But Carol's husband Steve Ryder works in alternative energy and Dave's wife Ruth Parker is into community development doing good deeds on the wrong side of the tracks...and eventually moving there George Orwell fashion.

The dramatic equation is one that Danielle Steele or any other popular novelists might deploy. Eyes meet across a crowded room...an alternative energy conference in this case. But then something unexpected happens...remember this is a novel of value...because Chris Wright's heroine has different values to a Jeffrey Archer heroine so the selfishness of the 'me generation' has been jettisoned.

All of a sudden the reader is in the emotional and psychological atmosphere of a Jane Austen or a Catherine Cookson novel...but in a modern setting. Different values. Different outcomes.

J.B. Priestley is dismissed as a middle-brow writer. Critics will tell us that his books do not qualify as literature. Only high-brow writing counts. But what strange expressions and what a peculiar idea. Marx believed that the masses would be the wellspring of revolutionary change. And in 1984 George Orwell seemed to be leaning the same way. Any hope lies with the proles.

We all understand that the rich and powerful will not just roll over and give up their privileges. Many of us expect change to be accompanied by violence because we see few historical precedents for it happening without it. But we do not accept that large swathes of intelligent, resourceful, caring people can be dismissed by lumping them into a social category.

A few of us have a hunch that Ayn Rand...and Tom Paine - see my short pamphlet on *England's Landed Property*...were on the right track in condemning debt money systems. But we are also fairly certain that Marx got hold of the wrong end of the stick. Indeed the more conspiratorial among us will nod sagely and say this explains his popularity. A red herring sponsored by the *Money Power* to ensure that the real threats remain in obscurity...see *Human Ecology* by Thomas Robertson (1947) or Michael Hudson's historical research into *Clean Slate Movements*.

Proper writers know that society changes when middle class values change. And these change when cultures and classes clash. It may not be possible to hasten the change...perhaps the old professors must be dead and buried. But George Orwell understood that Charles Dickens was right. If you hate violence and don't believe in politics the only remedy left is education. Schooling has its part to play. But so has good publishing. Readers are ready once more for good books. The writer's job is to create them.

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