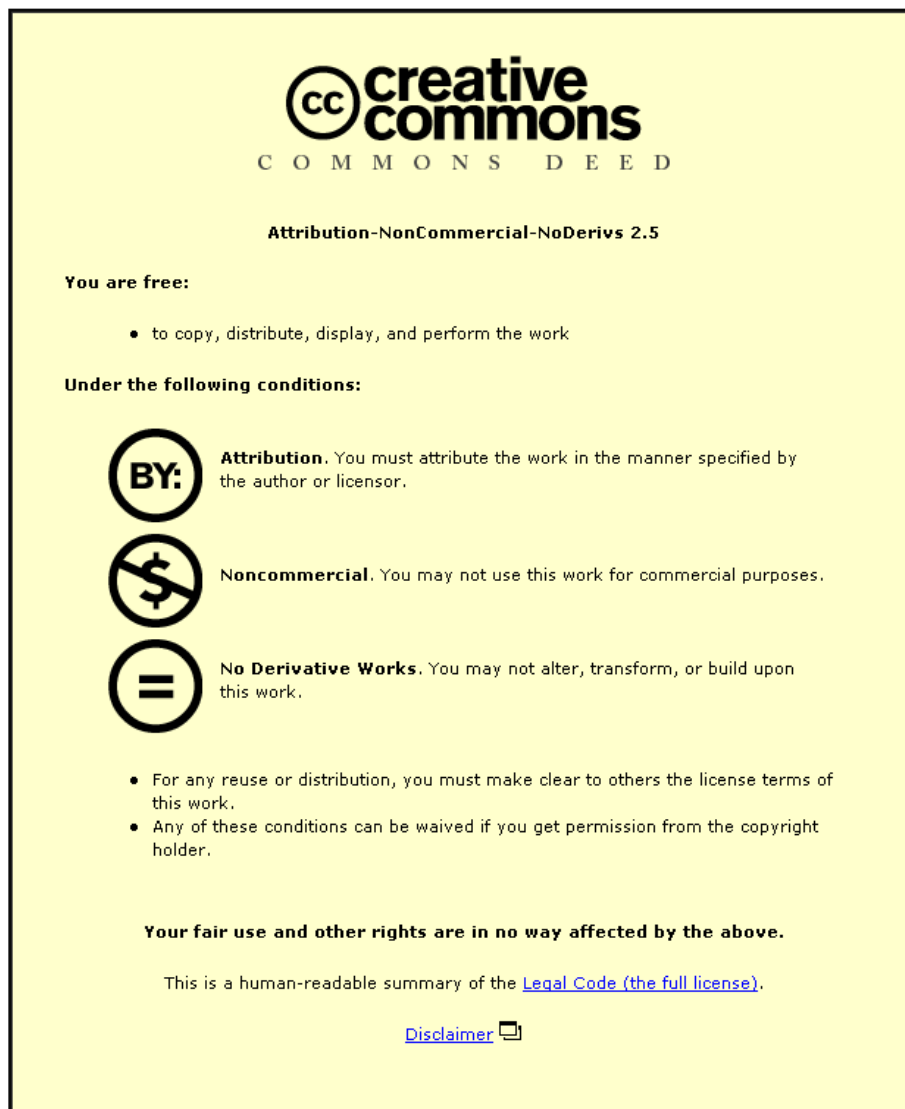




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
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
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BRITISH CONTEMPORARY FICTION AND THE NEW DYNAMICS OF  
AGEING

This thesis is in two parts comprising an investigation into British contemporary fiction with regard to the new social dynamics of ageing and a research-led novel entitled *EXEUNT* whose narrative engages with the concepts and themes underpinning the study.

KEY WORDS: Fiction, Publishing, Gerontology, Young-old, Sex, Relationships

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of  
Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

17 October 2012

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

This is to certify that I am responsible for the work submitted in this thesis, that the original work is my own except as specified in acknowledgments or in footnotes, and that neither the thesis nor the original work contained therein has been submitted to this or any other institution for a degree.

..... (Signed)

..... (Date)

## ABSTRACT

This Ph.D. thesis consists of a novel, *EXEUNT*, and research associated with it, both being specifically concerned with literary/cultural representations of love and relationships over the age of sixty-five. In consideration of the changing dynamics of ageing, declared internationally by gerontologists during the 1990s, the research investigates the perceptions of British writers, publishers and readers regarding their acceptance of late-life sexuality in British contemporary novels. It identifies key stakeholders in specific interest groups, and operates within an interpretive perspective as a suitable analytical framework for a pragmatic mixed methods investigation. Although the initial focus of the research was on publishers and writers, the inclusion of readers resulted in wider consequences that call for more transparency and a fuller understanding of concepts linked to ageism.

Having explored the dynamic between author, publisher and reader, the study concludes there is a superficial disharmony between them, whereas in fact they are mutually complementary. This dichotomy appears to be due to misunderstanding, and lack of trust. In reality, a large percentage of readers, in line with recent research on film audiences, feel it acceptable for people over the age of sixty to have such sexual needs and desires. This 'acceptability' and the 'new dynamics of ageing' inform the novel which places the research in a wider context and constitutes the second part of the Ph.D.

The multi-layered novel *EXEUNT*, in part ontogenetic, works against ageism within current prejudice by depicting the lovers in their fifties, sixties and seventies, and by doing so reveals the wide gap between subjective reality and the perceived public image. Their relationship is accepted by the British woman's friends, family and contemporaries, so that the epistemology of age is acquired only through negative opinions or actions, with the narrative embodying much of current research on the subject. Contrasting attitudes to ageing are found within the ethnographic detail of Romania during the period of communism, revolution and consequential freedom: 1982-2005. The frameworks of the fiction are encapsulated in the concept of Theatre as an analogy for life and death with a unique structure that portrays an ontological viewpoint. This underpins a reality where the attention of the reader/audience is disrupted by an intermittent reminder of the analogy. The term 'fictodrama' has been used to describe this combination of fiction and theatrical effects.

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I am also indebted to Professor Ion Stoica, the incumbent Director of the University of Bucharest Central Library during the eighties and nineties, for his invaluable help in providing key information from this period. Under his excellent direction, dedication and careful use of money donated from all over the world, the library, destroyed in the revolution of December 1989, was rebuilt with a new wing for which he received great acclaim and highest honours.

My gratitude must also go to those publishers, writers and readers who have spared their valuable time to inform the study and also to my daughter Dr. Cherry Taylor for her sound advice. Lastly, I would like to thank my partner David Cound for his wonderful support and encouragement throughout the three years.

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INTRODUCTION TO PART ONE: THE RESEARCH  
British Contemporary Fiction and the New Dynamics of Ageing

In consideration of the changing social dynamics of ageing, the current thesis opens with an overview of key factors in the research's conception together with its aims; the purpose of the study being to test the initial hypothesis that publishers were not in favour of accepting novels in which older main characters were involved in romantic relationships. The final version of the research question materialised as: 'If seventy is the new fifty, do British contemporary novels reflect the reality with regard to love and relationships over the age of sixty-five?' the key word being 'reality'. This is followed in the next chapter by the Literature Review that analyses the background non-fiction literature which informs the concept inherent in the above question. It also identifies briefly the relationship between fiction and non-fiction images of ageing over the last two decades, narrative gerontology, the memoir genre and contemporary fiction since 1990. These considerations are followed by an interrogation of recent coverage in theatrical ventures, television serials, media representations and research that together form a sound rationale for the conduct of this study. The subsequent chapter examines the paradigms, materials, methods and results of the data collection. Interpretivism is advanced as a suitable analytic framework for the pursuit of the investigation, which offers a methodological context for a pragmatic mixed methods approach. By operating within an interpretative perspective, it has been possible to focus upon the way in which the research respondents view the world and the relevant research issues. The study design, using first interpretive and then constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 146-49), presents a *raison d'être* for a phased approach to the work; the data being accrued from various sources.

The overall intention of the research was to keep the focus narrow but look for wide implications that would provide new knowledge and encourage writers to reflect in their work the reality and acceptance of love and relationships for those not 'sexually retired' in the late-life course.<sup>1</sup> Another intention was to illuminate possible entrenched bigotries regarding old age in an industry that appears to give emphasis to youth and celebrity culture.

The idea for this thesis emerged from two sources: the initial novels read during December 2009 when I was seventy-five and had just returned from twelve years living abroad, and comments made by well-established authors who were speakers at

the Writing Industries' Conference held at Loughborough University in March 2010. These writers surprised me by stating they had experience of publishers other than Mills & Boon who had given them a top age limit for characters involved in romance. This interested me as I had been a small independent publisher of literature in translation from 1984 to 1999 and such knowledge of the publishing world had sharpened my awareness about the difficulties experienced by both publishers and writers. I knew from personal experience about the problems of marketing, but some writers are unaware that the public's attention depends a great deal on the amount of costly publicity, whether for an in-house or bookshop promotion; the time allowed by bookshops for the shelf-life of a volume and the power of reviewers; who may well focus on certain points of interest and ignore others.

Like my friends over the age of sixty I was healthy, looked younger than my chronological age, led an active, adventurous life and was certainly not asexual. Despite this, upon my return I found certain organisations in society classed me as 'elderly' and 'too old' to teach, although none of my friends or family thought it 'out of the ordinary' that I was living with a new partner a year older than myself. In fact many friends my age, once bereaved or divorced, had remarried in later life, or found a partner. This dichotomy between society's attitude towards the elderly and the social reality led me to compare fictional older characters in romantic relationships and society's reactions to them as portrayed in contemporary British novels. Most of the representations in the books I read presented a wide gap between the subjective reality of self and the public image. Many stories dealt with impotence, reminiscences, loneliness and failing faculties, or else such characters were used as fools in comedy. There was little or nothing about acceptability of a relationship in older age by their families, friends and contemporaries, or of the new dynamics and cultures of ageing. A few memoirs by older authors revealed an honest account of their feelings regarding late sexuality, but there were few exceptions in novels, and these offered merely an approximation to the reality. On the other hand, however, non-fiction books, theatre projects, insurance and dating agencies, newspaper articles, magazines and non-fiction books on love, sex and ageing, were all declaring the age of seventy to be the new fifty. This fact is confirmed in recent works of biologists, sociologists and gerontologists (de Magalhães 21-47; Wolpert 1-3), who state that as we are healthier, due to new scientific discoveries, we will certainly be living longer than our predecessors. Examples of the fiction and other documentation will be discussed



further in the Literature Review. The final chapter of Part One, before the introduction to the creative writing, presents the Conclusion.

Qualitative research was chosen as a suitable paradigm because the search was for comments by respondents that would lead to a better understanding of the situation for all involved. Two theories were considered for the examination of data; the first being grounded theory (Silverman):

A theory which involves three stages: an initial attempt to develop categories which illuminate the data; an attempt to ‘saturate’ these categories with many appropriate cases in order to demonstrate their relevance: and the attempt to develop these categories into more general analytic frameworks with relevance outside the setting. (434)

The second was constructivist theory with an interpretive analysis (Charmaz):

A constructivist approach places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants.

Constructivists study HOW – and sometimes WHY – participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations.

A constructivist approach means more than looking at how individuals view their situations. It not only theorizes the interpretive work that research participants do, but also acknowledges that this is an interpretation. The theory depends on the researcher’s view; it does not and cannot stand outside of it. (130)

As a considered alternative for data collection, constructivist theory was thought more appropriate to investigate the opinions of publishers and writers using interpretivism as an analytic framework due to personal experience in these areas. Should a fuller investigation be deemed valuable, it was planned to move to a three-stage grounded theory (see ‘Paradigms and Data Collection’ on page 46 of this thesis).

To initiate the research, the first objective was to construct a theoretical model and then plan, design and disseminate a questionnaire for publishers in order to explore attitudes related to the subject and examine whether their practice had changed when confronted with a submission of an unpublished novel whose main characters are over sixty-five and express sexual needs and desires. The rationale for such an investigation was that if such informal and instinctive censorship, based on certain beliefs and values did exist, it would prove prohibitive for authors attempting to

reflect the reality experienced by ‘third age’<sup>2</sup> adults at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. Such a key finding would then explain the perceived absence of these depictions in contemporary fiction.

The next step was to test the hypothesis further by creating a concomitant questionnaire for writers in order to explore their attitudes in consideration of the above and then to examine the outcome for correlation, which if found, would suggest the earlier hypothesis correct. In order to achieve greater coverage, a web site was envisaged that could be cited by other agencies and so disseminate the questionnaire to a wider audience (see Appendix 1 on page 251). Key factors elicited from comments made by publishers and writers would then be coded, analysed and grouped accordingly. A decision could then be made as to whether or not to transfer to grounded theory as described by Silverman, in order to expand the original investigation to include the chain of interest groups mentioned by the respondents and extend the research to saturation point.<sup>3</sup>

Another aim was to seek out and examine other relevant research in this area that might either support or refute insights expressed by the above respondents. Should such evidence be found, the objective was to utilize the results and if necessary move to a mixed methods approach in order to increase the number of respondents. Then, if useful, results exigent from the elicited views of other participants would be compared with evidence discovered via the literature search. A suitable theory would then be developed to analyse the data, with the penultimate aim being to reflect upon the outcome and possibly make recommendations beneficial to writers and those involved in the publishing industry.

Upon completion of the investigation, the final aim was to place the research in a wider context by creating a literary novel relating to love and relationships concerning characters over the age of sixty-five. The main protagonists, fired by the myth and romanticism that inform their lives, would engage in an affair that reiterated the fact that ‘age’ is only external to the sexual needs and desires that travel with us through life. Another intention was to highlight the fact that in the new dynamics of ageing, even allowing for diversity, ‘late-love’ between healthy adults is now being accepted by family, friends and contemporaries. However, the epistemology of age is still usually acquired only through the words, phrases and imaginings of the younger onlooker; the older person becoming the ‘other’.

The main frameworks of the novel were envisaged as being encapsulated in the concept of Theatre as an analogy of life and death, with an ontological universe created by omniscient narrators who link, yet also interweave between: diary entries, monologues, duologues, stage directions, stage effects and a frame-tale. Due to the unique structure and inclusion of various voices, the word ‘fictodrama’<sup>4</sup> was seen as a suitable term to describe the hybrid nature of this fiction.

A holistic view of the characters creates many layers within the novel, the most important being the reflection of the new dynamics of ageing together with universal emotions of power and passion in middle and later age, grief and greed. These emotions play out against a global backcloth, but with ethnographic detail of Romania during the period 1982-2005. Other related themes envisaged for reflection in the narrative are: identity, ethnography, spiritual beliefs, ageism, philosophy, psychology, education and romanticism (see Part Two: ‘Introduction to the Creative Writing’, on page 73 for a fuller description followed by a diagram and narrative outline. A Timeline appears on page 78).

As well as the structure reflecting an engagement with a range of contemporary fiction, the role of the creative element in the thesis is to illustrate that a narrative of late-life romance can engage the reader without the visual aspects triggering preconceived ideas regarding the dynamics of the relationship.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

At the start of this research four key concepts emerged: ‘the new dynamics of ageing’, ‘narrative gerontology’, ‘contemporary British fiction’, and ‘ageism’. The primary function of this literature review is not to prove that adults up to and after the ages of sixty-five are still sexually active,<sup>5</sup> although ageist attitudes related to this fact are necessarily included. The main aim is to examine the above areas for previous studies and relevant research thus placing the current study in an academic context.

The term ‘new dynamics of ageing’ encompasses much more than a cultural phenomena where the present population is becoming healthier, living longer, and has a new openness towards sex and relationships in later life.<sup>6</sup> Originally, the new dynamics multidisciplinary research initiative, led by Professor Alan Walker and his team at Sheffield University, was to improve the quality of life for older people.<sup>7</sup> Their project inspired research teams at Brunel, Cardiff, Glasgow, Keele, Kings College, Liverpool, and Swansea universities so that the study became the largest ever undertaken in the UK. At the present time, the Open University and many others are taking part in the age-related cross-council research and/or originating courses linked to ageing.<sup>8</sup> Such universities are linked to other interested parties such as the Institute of Gerontology; the Biomedical Research Centre; the Florence Nightingale School of Nursing; the Institute of Psychiatry; Age Concern Scotland; the Oxford Institute of Ageing; University College London and many international centres for interdisciplinary gerontology.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, links are made with the UK government in areas such as the Department for Work and Pensions; the National Health Service Trusts; certain hospitals and public sector organisations. Non-governmental organisations such as ‘Grandparents Plus’ or ‘Agecare’ are also involved as are policy think-tanks, and many individuals have connections with the above in related fields like anthropology or consumer culture, but particularly in higher education, health, medicine or policy making.

Due to the fact that the phenomena regarding the prospect of increased longevity is global, the New Dynamics of Ageing Programme has expanded to include other governments worldwide and groups such as ‘The European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research’ and ‘Help Age International’<sup>10</sup>

To improve the quality of life and make the extended healthier years a positive experience for those living longer, it is necessary to try to eradicate ageist comments and replace them with positive images of ageing not only in society at large, but also in contemporary literature and the media.<sup>11</sup> A manifesto was drawn up in 2012 by a research group entitled ‘Women and Ageing’ (WAM) led by Dr. Ros Jennings, Director of the Research Centre for Women, Ageing and the Media. It was launched at a New Dynamics of Ageing event, ‘Ageism and Sexism in the Media’:

Colleagues working together as part of WAM’s collaborative research group demand that:

1. The academy and the public sector recognize, address, challenge and refuse misogyny directed at older women in the media and public life.
2. The media should aspire to more diversity in representations of old age than the dominant consumerist notions of ageing for women in public currently do.
3. Issues of class race, non-normative sexualities and materiality need to be recognized and responded to in relation to older women, both in academic work on representation and in public policy.
4. Older women need to be at the centre of debates to discuss their own identities, their own lives and the policies governing them.
5. Ageing studies need to produce research that explores intergenerationality as a means for old and young to work together in their diversities to produce real world outcomes and incremental change.
6. Research on women, ageing and media should be recognized as a form of activism that strives to empower women, and older women in particular, by demanding that a wider range of older women should be more visible in all areas of the media and media representation.

Although ageing men do not seem to experience the same problems as women, some suffer ageism in different ways, particularly when hospitalised or in a Care Home. At the present time, the media is sensationalist when highlighting abuse and lack of care, but health systems are shifting and attitudes are changing. The report of the World Health Assembly in 2011 stated the following:

‘Best practice’ does not offer any guidance with respect to the politics of health care reform in the unique circumstances of each country. In particular there is no mention of the advocacy, accountability and participatory role of civil society in driving health system reform. Historically, strong health systems have reflected the demands of political and social movements including the labour movement and public interest organizations. This dialogue goes beyond a technical construction of health sector reform, addressing the real needs of the people as part of a wider social protection strategy.’

Much non-fiction has been written on the subject of ageing and longevity in books and within the media, which makes the work carried out by social scientists, members of the British Society of Gerontology, and literary research connected with this thesis all the more relevant.

Anne Wyatt-Brown states in the introduction to *Ageing and Gender in Literature*, edited by Wyatt and Rossen:

Our collective understanding is that Anglo-American literary criticism, like the society from which it springs, until recently has been uncritically ageist. For many years most novelists, poets and playwrights have hesitated to make older characters the central protagonists for fear that such work would not attract readers. (9)

Written nineteen years ago, this significant factor is still relevant as British writers of novels rarely centralise protagonists over the age of sixty-five or have them engage in sexual relationships, despite the *Journal of the American Geriatric Society* recording in August 2011 that those even in their seventies and eighties who still enjoy an active sex life live a happier and healthier old age.<sup>12</sup>

Diana Wallace, in her essay “Literary Portrayals of Ageing” (Stuart-Hamilton, 391), notes Wyatt-Brown’s comments that as ageing is a missing category in current literary theory, it would suggest a “cultural blindness”. Wyatt-Brown goes on to cite Kathleen Woodward: “...with the attention given to race, gender and class, ‘only *age* has remained invisible, not subject to analyses” (see Benstock, 4. 90-113).

Despite this lack of ageing in current literary theory, there are many avenues relating to age in novels written since 1990. However, not until very recently has contemporary fiction begun to illustrate the reality of couples in their late fifties or early sixties having sexual needs and desires, whereas non-fiction and research has

given clarity to this fact since the publication of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Coming of Age* in 1972. The analysis in this review will amalgamate the four concepts that illustrate this dichotomy as they interact between: the attitudes and findings of sociologists, biologists, psychologists and gerontologists; narratives linked to other disciplines; memoirs; contemporary fiction; very recent fiction that appears closest to contemporary reality; comments by literary critics; unintentional ageism and research findings or relevant comments associated with film, theatre, television and other media.

Slight changes in British fiction that relate to accepting the fact that people in advanced countries are healthier in old age, living longer and have a late-life sexuality, developed slowly after the late nineties, although questions or statements from sociologists regarding definitions, terminology, and stereotypes in fiction have been in existence since the seventies. In *The Coming of Age*, de Beauvoir stated that the old, once adolescents:

. . . retain the virtues and faults of the men they were and still are: and this is something that public opinion chooses to overlook. If old people show the same desires, the same feelings and the same requirements as the young, the world looks upon them with disgust: in them love and jealousy seem revolting or absurd, sexuality repulsive and violence ludicrous. (3)

She could have added, 'and is rarely discussed', for sex involving older people was considered taboo. At that time, this important paragraph was largely ignored, while now, upon entering the second decade of the twenty-first century, her comments on ageing are still quoted in much non-fiction (Waxman, 1990; Johnson, 2004; Wolpert, 2011; Bytheway, 2011) and also in various articles relating to the changing dynamics of ageing. Non-fiction publications and research in this area linked to gerontology, sociology or biology have been prevalent for some time both here and abroad. In 1984 Brecher et al compiled a Consumers' Union Report entitled *Love, Sex and Aging*, where most respondents were born between 1905 and 1924 (a similar age-spread to the participants in the 1948 Kinsey Report). Researchers' findings regarding sexual activities over the age of fifty surprised them. On the back cover of the book are two separate comments, one by a husband and the other by a widow who acknowledged a lover. Both are stated as being aged sixty-five. The man comments that when he was younger he thought that by his age ". . . it would be all over," and the woman states: "Young people should know that sex is not only for the young. It

is integral for life. Not everyone remains interested, but those who are live more fully.” This was written in 1984; such attitudes have taken a long time to filter into the main protagonists of fiction.

In the eighties, academics and non-fiction writers in these fields took fifty-nine as a top age group for research into sexuality, considering that after this cut off point sexual interest diminished greatly and therefore of little interest to their surveys. In the UK National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles, 2010-2012, the top age group was increased to seventy-four.<sup>13</sup> The same facts were reiterated on television in the BBC TV 1’s ‘Living Longer Series’ (22.03.11).

As part of Brunel University’s contribution to the New Dynamics of Ageing Programme, scholars from the humanities and social science departments have concentrated recently on aspects of the new cultures of ageing which has included a study of narratives, fictions, and methods. This ‘Fiction and Cultural Mediation of Ageing Project’ (FCMAP), involving Brunel staff, Philip Tew, Nick Hubble and Jago Morrison, brought together academics and professionals concerned with researching the future, at an international interdisciplinary conference in April 2011. Among the visiting speakers was Barbara Czerniawska (Gothenburg Research Institute) who in her Keynote address stated: ‘The rate that life expectancy is increasing makes a mockery of addressing people in their sixties and seventies as old.’<sup>14</sup>

The conference handout spoke of enlightened researchers who viewed ageing as an opportunity rather than a problem and who hoped: ‘to see increased longevity bringing about exciting and radical changes of cultural forms; transforming collective and individual experience in the Twenty-First Century.’

On the same subject, Alan Walker, Professor of Social Policy and Social Gerontology at the University of Sheffield, and director of the ‘New Dynamics of Ageing’ programme, spoke in April 2009 on Radio New Zealand.<sup>15</sup> He discussed the profound change that has taken place in the nature of society and that for many countries longevity is one of their three great challenges. He went on to say that medical and social health advances over the last hundred and sixty-five years have extended the quality of life, although the variation of frailty among the old is larger within the age group than across it. He also commented upon the fact that models of ‘growing’ delineated in the categories – childhood, adulthood and old age, have changed because now old age can be divided into – young old age, and old, old age,



also known as the third and fourth ages. In the light of these changes, Walker insisted it was “a necessity to put the life back into those extending years.”

The topic of ageism and its impact on society in the twenty-first century cannot be viewed in isolation. It has to embrace international co-operation in politics, biology and scientific discovery for they are integral to the welfare of mankind. In relation to this and other aspects, many gerontologists, sociologists and scientists worldwide have continued to share their research on aspects of positive ageing. A recent article from Medical Press entitled “Healthy ageing more important than aged care”, quoted Professor Kendig and his colleague, Colette Browning from Monash University as saying how earlier social intervention can yield returns in life through generating greater independence, health and productivity. Despite this, little government action has been taken in Sydney, with the promise of a Ministry of Ageing ten years ago growing quickly into a Ministry of Care.

Exacerbated by the media, the U.K. government is presented to the general public as concentrating on the financial burden of an increasing ageing population. Newspapers in particular have given emphasis to the problems of loneliness, dementia, carers, poor housing and pensions; making it appear the government is unaware of ongoing research in this field. However, in 2007, the Science and Technology Committee of the House of Lords compiled a report entitled ‘Ageing: Scientific Aspects 2005-6’ from oral and written evidence on relevant aspects of ageing contributed by those societies previously mentioned in this thesis as well as others linked to the field. The publication of this report enabled representatives from these agencies to disseminate their current research, innovations, concerns or discoveries to the media and members of both Houses.

Whether or not such action will eventually lead to a positive attitude to age-identity and wellbeing remains to be seen. Ironically, where the present government *has* attempted to be fair by discarding the age of sixty-five as a cut-off point for employment and introducing certain reductions for pensioners regarding contributions to care, etc., the reality is that in the present climate of austerity, such changes make little impact.

In Australia Kendig and Browning have now changed their focus and are concentrating their efforts on a new generation of research in this field that confirms bio-psycho-social influences are essential to positive social ageing that produces wellbeing, health and independence, world wide.<sup>16</sup> This multidisciplinary, global

approach will no doubt reveal why some of the ageing population in the UK whose personal lives are not content due to poor health, housing, relationships within the family or poverty, are not expected to survive until the age of a hundred, unlike others, particularly the ‘Baby Boomers’ born between the years 1946-62. This particular generation who, according to Dawn C. Carr and Katherine Komp (*Gerontology in the Era of the Third Age*. 2011):

‘ ... manage their lives, have held key positions when employed, are well-informed on health issues, can afford private medicine and healthy activities, are outspoken, live in affluent areas with hospitals that are not overcrowded, are care-givers, technologically competent, aware of their human rights and not afraid to speak out.’

They go on to say that: ‘All these assets usually, but not always, provide health, independence, and of course ‘wellbeing’.<sup>17</sup>

The word ‘wellbeing’ is particularly relevant to this thesis as it is usually also associated with good relationships, and a fulfilling sex life. A change in attitude towards age-identity is necessary at all levels and all ages, and one way of achieving this is through the portrayal of characters that show positive aspects of ageing, in books, films, plays, television, magazines and advertisements, as well as in public discourse, health clinics and surgeries (Bytheway, 75-89). Another way forward might be, where possible, to avoid segregation of the old in all aspects of life, including hospitals, as according to the research of Yilmaz et al, “University Students’ views and Practices of Ageism”, recorded in *Aging International* 32. 2. (2012): 143-154, a mixed-age community is far more likely to have positive results regarding ageist attitudes. As the family unit continues to disintegrate, this will prove even more important for the future.<sup>18</sup>

Professor Hal Kendig, Director of the Ageing, Work and Health Research Unit in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Sydney, in November 2011, wrote in the November issue of *e! Science News: Health and Aging*: “Deep-seated ageism is at the core of our culture and at the heart of an unproductive government approach to healthy ageing.” Biologist Lewis Wolpert, in his volume *You’re Looking Very Well* (5-10), expands on the new dynamics of ageing when he reveals that a recent survey carried out by Age UK predicted that from ten million people who are over sixty-five and 1.3 million over the age of eighty-five, of whom 422,000 are men and 914,000 women, a sixth are now expected to reach their hundredth birthday. The Office of

National Statistics (ONS) is the most authoritative source as it introduces individual demographic variables and works alongside other agencies as well as the national charity Age UK.<sup>19</sup>

Research has revealed that people are not necessarily asexual as they grow older. In 1988, Bretschneider & McCoy carried out a study of two hundred people aged between eighty and a hundred and two, and found that sixty-three per cent of men and thirty per cent of women were still interested in sex, masturbation and affectionate relationships.<sup>20</sup> They noted in particular that those between eighty and eighty-five had active sex. What is interesting is that shortly after its publication, R.C. Lewontin and Richard Sennett questioned the validity of the survey as they could not believe that the respondents had spoken the truth. It was not until 1995, that Professor Christine K. Casell, a George Eisenberg Professor of Geriatrics, and a Professor of Medicine and Public Policy Studies, supported the initial research in the *New York Review of Books* in an article entitled “Sex, Lies and Social Science”, declaring it a most valuable study.<sup>21</sup>

Enquiry into the life-course has progressed considerably since Townsend’s ‘Structural Dependency Theory’ in 1981.<sup>22</sup> In the latest book, *An Introduction to Gerontology*, edited by Ian Stuart-Hamilton, Flycht and Kingsberg state quite clearly that “older adults have finally come of age”, as discussion about sexual behaviour among such adults, “once only whispered about”, is now no longer taboo (10. 283). Similar statements were made during the British Society of Gerontologists Conference, held at Plymouth University in July 2011, when Professor Andrew Achenbaum from the University of Houston reminded the conference of the work achieved by Robert Butler. An American psychiatrist, researcher and public intellectual, Robert Neil Butler founded The National Institute of Aging and the International Longevity Center. In 1968 he also coined the words ‘life review’, ‘productive aging’ and ‘ageism’.<sup>23</sup> However, results from this current study indicate that a taboo still exists in many adults under the age of forty, and the complex question remains for empirical research as to whether it is possible to address this, perhaps through education in citizenship.

In a recent UK project, ‘the ordinary person’ has been encouraged to keep a diary to share with others. Many volunteers have been or are still involved in the revised long-term Mass Observation Project (Mass Observation Communities Online Report. 32. 2010); one aspect of which was presented by former Director, Dorothy Sheridan,

at the Brunel 2011 conference, already mentioned.<sup>24</sup> Archives of contributions are kept in the Special Collections section of the University of Sussex library, and the study has been promoted in universities, schools and community centres involving many volunteers. In consequence, these memoir diaries, with themes such as ‘What do you remember about birthdays?’ are often used to help research, and reciprocally, such research has been of great interest to successful authors such as Julian Barnes<sup>25</sup> who write about old age in short stories or journals, while memoirs and autobiographies have helped social scientists towards a better understanding of the varied routes on the map of life.

Bill Bytheway (1-21) mentions this reciprocal factor when commenting on the Mass Observation research, and other aspects such as “Research on Age Discrimination” and “The Older Generation”. It is perhaps not very surprising that none of those participants seem to have proffered information to such a public arena regarding intimate personal relationships in later life. Very often such research is undertaken to inform government policy and for this purpose, diary extracts relating to personal relationships have not been deemed sufficiently important or of interest.<sup>26</sup> However other disciplines have also been exploring narratives as a research tool.

Much has been published recently regarding ‘narrative psychology’ and ‘narrative gerontology’. The use of the word ‘narrative’ in this context means a transmission of cultural and other values, starting with the metaphor of life as a storied element to identity. Whether recorded orally or as written word, it has already been expanded by health and social workers into many areas of their work that has included older people living in institutions.<sup>27</sup> In certain parts of the country general community projects are taking place in an attempt to integrate young-age with old-age, and social care agencies are involving their staff in the use of oral or written ‘narrative therapy’.<sup>28</sup> Other interest groups are agencies like Age UK in association with universities such as Sheffield, Liverpool, Derby, Keele and Cardiff.

William Randall, from St. Thomas University in Canada presented a seventeen page draft handout to participants at the 40<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the British Society of Gerontologists. In it he mentions that Bruner, Polkinghorne, Sarbin and Crossley have been interested in developing narrative psychology since the mid-eighties. As these researchers have grown older, Randall has seen the work of psychologists merging into the area of narrative gerontology. Bruner in particular is a good example as he set out a list in 1996 of narrative universals revealing certain similarities in

people's stories.<sup>29</sup> His work on generic particularity mirrors work of the Russian formalist, Vladimir Propp, on elements of narrative structure. While giving recent examples from books mentioned at the Netherlands' Conference on Narrative Gerontology in November 2010,<sup>30</sup> Randall also points out that there are no clear boundary lines between the disciplines, nor in this context is there any definitive definition of the word 'narrative'. So many books or articles have been written on this subject that Randall quotes eighty-two references between 1986 and 2011. It is therefore not surprising that the inaugural conference of the European Network of Ageing Studies (ANAS) held at Maastricht in October 2011 had "Theorizing Age: Challenging the Disciplines" as its theme.<sup>31</sup> Randall acknowledges the debt other disciplines owe to literary theory's concepts, and categories such as plot, character, genre, theme etc., but the concepts he feels most relevant to gerontologists are: meaning, memory, identity, development, relationships, emotions, embodiment, narrative care, wisdom and spirituality. It now seems the turn of the literary world to look more closely at these areas but through the lens of social scientists. The creative fiction in the second part of this thesis illustrates all the concepts mentioned above by Randall as they are of particular relevance to the narrative (See Introduction to the Creative Writing on page 73).

The prospect of reversing the once negative attitudes towards 'old age' is not only desirable, but also exciting. It would appear that social narratives of ageing and the actual conditions of life are in a state of flux, and although it will be a slow process, a positive outcome should be possible in part due to recent informative international net-working.<sup>32</sup>

With such important related research taking place in other disciplines since the late eighties, a time when Randall reminds us that Bruner remarked: "We become the narratives we 'tell about' our lives and a life as lived is as inseparable from a life as told".<sup>33</sup> it is even more surprising that British writers and publishers of contemporary novels have lagged behind in reacting to this cultural phenomenon described as the new dynamics/cultures of ageing. The distinction between books published in the UK and those from other English-speaking countries has diminished due to the conglomeration of publishing firms and their many imprints, but this research is predominantly concerned with those novels published first in the United Kingdom. Literary critics, sociologists and gerontologists however, search for examples internationally and so inevitably such titles will impact on this study. Much time has

passed since Wyatt-Brown and Rossen declared writers hesitant to use older protagonists as main characters but little appears to have changed in the UK.

In 1984 an American writer and Pulitzer prize-winner, Alison Lurie wrote *Foreign Affairs*. The novel is set in England and the female protagonist, Vinnie, is only fifty-four, but the comments she makes are prevalent in many novels printed over the following twenty years: “The fact that at 54 she still had erotic impulses and indulged them with such abandon seemed to her almost shameful” (80). We are then told, “She tells herself to act and feel her age, for heaven’s sake” (81), and later she declares: “No one over 50 is featured in classic British fiction unless depicted as a minor character (usually comic, pathetic or disagreeable). Only the young and beautiful make love. The relatively old and plain do so but it is a well kept secret” (213).

The first two quotations can be found in many studies of literary criticism on the subject of ageing, but the third is particularly relevant to this thesis, for it reveals the gap in attitude between fiction and non-fiction in the mid-eighties and also that the publishers mentioned in the extract are British.

In contrast to novels, the memoir genre has produced relevant texts on both sides of the Atlantic by authors who, having reached the ‘third-age’, describe or reminisce about their sex lives. In particular, Diana Athill, born in 1917, wrote *Somewhere Towards the End*, in 2009, and the American author, Jane Juska, born in 1933 wrote *The Round-Heeled Woman* where she advertises for a lover so she can “have a lot of sex with a man she likes before reaching her seventieth birthday”. This book was first published in the UK in 2003 and later, in 2004. Then, in 2011 it was adapted for the stage and performed at the Riverside Studios, London. Due to its success it was later transferred for a short run in the West End. Another American author, Rae Padilla Francoeur, wrote *Free Fall* (2010), an erotic memoir describing her love at the age of fifty-seven for a man ten years older and in April 2010, Diane Price, a reviewer of *Free Fall* on an American blog site stated:

‘Where are the books by and for women over 50 that deal honestly with sexuality?’ I’ve asked myself for years. Dozens of self-help books for our age group have appeared in the past four years, thank goodness, but where are the sexually honest novels and memoirs that talk about *our* lives, *our* passions, *our* desires, *our* sexuality, *our* inner lives? <sup>34</sup>

With this statement in mind, Joan Bakewell’s failure to mention her inner sensual life in the memoir *The View from Here: Life at Seventy* (2006) seems a wasted

opportunity. Another book that is said to have “bemoaned getting older in a youth obsessed culture” is a series of autobiographical essays by the late Nora Ephra, entitled *I Feel Bad About My Neck and Other Thoughts on Being a Woman*. It was published in 2006 by Random House (Alfred A. Knopf imprint), and proved such a success that Megan Power used the idea for a play. In 2011, Shari Graydon in Toronto wrote a similar book entitled *I feel Great About My Hands and Other Unexpected Joys of Aging* and on the back cover revealed that the rights from the book were paid into a Media Action fund “Challenging the under representation and objectification of women in the media.” This was confirmed on July 11, 2012 in a CBC Radio programme, *Maritime Noon*, hosted by Norma Lee MacLeod entitled “Why are women under-represented in the media?”

Such autobiographical accounts reveal a refreshing contrast to what is currently portrayed in fiction. American Romance novels in contemporary culture were criticised by A.C. Barra at a conference held in Atlanta in 2010 by the American Sociological Association. As there had been no serious academic investigation in the genre since 1984, her study hypothesized that such novels were inaccurate in their focus and out-of-date, yet upon investigation concluded that change *had* occurred in relation to empowerment by women and also in openness towards relationships other than heterosexual. However, the research made no mention of the new dynamics of ageing or of a cut-off point for the age of main characters.<sup>35</sup> Another American study with a similar hypothesis and timeline concluded that little had changed and more research was required.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the fact that it is quite normal nowadays for two people of similar age to have a successful passionate loving relationship in later life that is accepted as normal by the majority of today’s society, few mainstream British publishers of contemporary fiction have moved towards acknowledging the changing dynamics of ageing and its impact on late-life romantic relationships in the early twenty-first century. (See Kinsberg, (2002), Stuart-Hamilton (2011), Nicolosi *et al.*, (2004), Carr & Komp (2011),<sup>37</sup> and Endnote, forty-one of this thesis). The following examples of long fiction have been examined to elicit the age of the main characters involved in such a relationship, the reactions expressed by other characters, the way in which late-life sexuality is accepted by the protagonists themselves and for evidence of other aspects of the new cultures of ageing.

The eleven novels under consideration are Jenny Diski's *Happily Ever After* (Hamish Hamilton, 1991); Angela Carter's *Wise Children* (Chatto & Windus, 1991. New edition Vintage-Random in 2006); Penelope Lively's *Spiderweb*, (Viking, 1998); Elizabeth Jane Howard's *Falling*, (MacMillan, 1999. New edition, Pan, 2002); Fay Weldon's *Rhode Island Blues* (Flamingo, 2000); Deborah Moggach's *These Foolish Things* (Chatto & Windus, 2004); Doris Lessing's *Love Again*, (written in 1995 but first published by Harper, 2006); Jeremy Cooper's *Kath Trevelyan* (Serpent's Tail, 2007); Monique Roffey's *The White Woman on the Green Bicycle* (Simon & Schuster, 2009); Piers Paul Read's *The Misogynist* (Bloomsbury, 2010) and Rosie Thomas' *Lovers and Newcomers* (Harper, 2010).

In *Happily Ever After*, Daphne Drummond describes herself as a “dried up, 68-year-old novelist living in an attic” (10). Her landlord Liam, the man she seduces, is described as a “tiresome, pathetic, self-pitying and melodramatic old fool” (10), and later as a “middle-aged sex-fiend” (33). It is a surprisingly sexually explicit tale that could be described as a dark surrealistic comedy full of honest self-knowledge about sex and ageing:

All right, so my body isn't exactly fresh, and my titties don't jiggle and joggle around under my sweater as if God's attached elastic to the nipples and bounces them in time to some celestial boogie. But you could get over that. There's more to sexual attraction than firm flesh. My dear Liam, darling, you're not trying to see things my way. (11)

As his young wife has walked out on him, he is vulnerable to Daphne's lust, but at first considers her a disgusting devil that he has often told to vacate the premises. She is portrayed as a determined woman who, when she finds him alone and as usual in a drunken stupor, ties him to the bed rails for the whole night and sexually assaults him, while at the same time insisting she loves him and he loves her. She adds that he has no option but to reciprocate as she will soon be able to solve his financial problems. Throughout the narrative, and even in bed, Daphne wears a black witch-like shaped hat “made of the blackest velvet, with a soft brim that flopped in what should have been an elegant fashion over the brow” (20). She regards it as a symbol of very old age and had planned not to wear it until she reached the age of seventy, but discarded the idea as she “had aged suddenly, in fits and starts, putting on ten years in a night, and then having to catch up with herself” (20). Despite the love interest, this bizarre behaviour sets the tale apart from the other examples.



The reactions of her publisher, and also of the doctor from whom she seeks advice regarding vaginal lubrication, are of amused, concealed surprise. The social worker who visits views Daphne as a “sweet old dear with an interesting past” (22), and refuses to believe Liam’s story of the old woman’s sexual advances. When persuading her editorial director of the necessity of an advance in kind if not in money, Daphne tells him she is not interested in writing an autobiography:

‘No dear. We must stick to fiction. Otherwise, it’ll be impossible to tell the truth. If I have to keep typing “I” it’ll be sure to come out wrong. But don’t worry, everything will be there. And a glorious climax. Love and freedom, geriatric sex . . . the open road . . . destiny . . . all that sort of thing, George dear.’ (123)

Mary Eagleton comments on this in her article entitled “The Spectre of the Aged Woman Writer” published in *Doris Lessing Studies*<sup>38</sup> saying it was to the publisher’s credit that he thought it “might not be a bad idea”.

A six-year old girl, whose egocentric mother is another of Liam’s lodgers, wanders the house at night imagining she can hear crying. Even though Daphne’s relationship with the child is treated sympathetically, the child views her as eccentric. The fact that the author’s treatment of the character suggests Daphne is not sane, together with her abuse of Liam, makes it difficult for a reader to accept this tale as a reflection of normal late-life relationships in today’s society. Making love at the age of sixty-four is presented as disgusting in Part Four, when Maria, a young Spanish girl in the village where the couple parked their motor home, finds it very hard to imagine Daphne and Liam making love and makes ageist comments, the second of which reinforces the view of comedy and abnormal behaviour:

... she found herself staring at Daphne trying to imagine her naked body – her breasts, her thighs, her bum. She filled with disgust at the vision, especially when she added Liam into the picture. (232)

She was unable, therefore, to imagine how anyone could feel desire for the used-up body of a scraggy woman in a peculiar hat, who was older even than her own mother. (233)

Eagleton praises the novel for its positive feminist overtones, as does Zoe Brennan in *The Older Woman in Fiction* (77-9; 96-109) but such comments are irrelevant for the focus of this thesis.

Carter's *Wise Children* is another example of a comic, bawdy tale of two families, with explicit descriptions of sexual encounters that involve seventy-five year-old illegitimate twins, Dora and Leonora Chance, who look after an even older woman referred to affectionately as 'Wheelchair'. The story is set against a backdrop coloured by reminiscences of cheap vaudeville, Hollywood films, literature and Shakespearean drama. Ali Smith in her introduction to Vintage's 2006 edition mentions Carter's letter to Lorna Sage, stating why she had decided to join the Board of what was then a new publishing venture – Virago Books:

I am moved towards it by the desire that no daughter of mine should ever be in a position to write BY GRAND CENTRAL STATION I SAT DOWN AND WEPT, exquisite prose though it might contain. BY GRAND CENTRAL STATION I TORE OFF HIS BALLS would be more like it, I should hope.  
(xiv)

The duality of this story is not only in the numerous twins but also in the contrasting social and theatrical backgrounds, and it is this that enables the language of the novel to encompass *Wise Children* with a clear modernity that reveals the characters celebrating sex with a centenarian on his birthday. The sexual freedom associated with the artistic world has not changed much over time, but the Chance sisters manage to bring the reader well into the present even when they refer to their past experiences. This is expressed by them laughing at themselves. "They ought to put **us** in a museum!" (187). Sex and affairs are expressed by Carter as a normal part of theatrical life, and to dance and sing – a joy.

A sign that an aspect of our modern technological world has entered their home is evidenced when Nora confesses to her literary sister: "I must admit, sometimes, it gets ever so lonely, especially when you're stuck up in your room tapping away at that bloody word processor lost in the past while I'm shut up in the basement with old age" (189).

The sisters revel in their sexuality throughout the novel. Such behaviour could be attributed to their upbringing and life experience in a theatrical atmosphere; one that has remained more or less constant. However, despite having a life-style that does not necessarily reflect a general societal attitude towards cultural change, Carter's novel

expresses a positive aspect to the study in that the main characters are over sixty-five and their sexuality is acknowledged and accepted within their own theatrical circle of family and friends.

Penelope Lively's *Spiderweb*, was short-listed for the Booker Prize in 1998. The main protagonist, Stella Brentwood, a retired social anthropologist, is sixty-five; a fact that is reiterated many times in the fiction as she considers her present situation while viewing, and later living in, a small cottage in the West Somerset village of Kingston Florey:

She was sixty-five, apparently. This totemic number had landed her here. Having spent much time noting and interpreting complex rites of passage in alien societies, she now found herself subject to one of the implacable rules of her own: stop working, get old. (15)

I am sixty-five and sitting in a sugar pink restaurant with the husband of my old friend Nadine, who is not anywhere at all. How has it come to this? (89)

She glanced up at Stella. 'Tell me ... would you call yourself happy?'

'Of course not. I'm sixty-five. What is there to be happy about? Reasonably content, if you like. Most of the appetites in good shape – bar one.'

'Oh, that ...' said Judith. 'Why one ever made such a fuss about sex seems quite extraordinary now.' (127)

The various papers in Stella's desk told her that she was sixty-five. The face in the mirror – at which she gave only the most perfunctory glances these days – seemed like some disturbing distortion of her real face.' (132)

Stella considers her life to have been a dense web through time and space with intersecting lines crossing the globe. She considers them different incarnations of herself, "different Stellas ignorant of the significance of this site – that she would revisit as someone else" (19).

As she glances in the mirror she is aware of the present Stella which she describes in detail: "hair a gingery profusion spiked with grey", and describes her ageing face as like the rest of her: "thin, too – long pointed nose, wide mouth, blue eyes with a fold

of skin dipping down now above and a web of wrinkles below. Never a conventionally beautiful face, you would decide, but arresting.” (20).

A promising start that suggests to the reader Stella has not ruled out the possibility of further sexual encounters. There is no mention of any illness and she appears to have much energy. Her descriptions of life as a student at Oxford, and later her anthropological travels suggest that she was not immune to sex. The memories she recalls throughout the narrative reveal two romances when younger, that could have led to marriage or life-long partnerships. However, she always sees herself as her best friend at university, Nadine, described her: “detached – that’s the word. You’re not like the rest of us” (212). This independent quality, nurtured at Oxford by her ambition for a successful career, eventually leads to her rejection of the late Nadine’s husband, Richard’s offer to share a house with the possibility of sex. The offer came unexpectedly as there had been no mention in the novel of any obvious attraction by either party. Richard lists the key factors involved and among them, sex: “Sex – not to put too fine a point on it. We have reached the stage when the libido is in decline. I will say that mine is not yet extinguished and I have always found you an attractive woman. However, I feel that at our age this need not be a central issue” (214).

At the same time, her other best friend, Judith, also an archeologist and ten years younger than Stella, has just walked out on a lesbian relationship and writes: “What would you say to the idea of you and me setting up together? Shock horror/ Nothing physical – don’t get me wrong” (215). The novel ends with Stella rejecting both suggestions, putting the cottage up for sale and moving on.

The secondary theme of this novel, set in 1998, involves her dysfunctional neighbours and appears only to confirm Stella’s own doubts about growing old. The two teenage sons refer to Stella throughout as a “silly old cow” and feel “old people should just be put away like animals” (47). Their mother, the neurotic Karen who deceitfully makes a show of caring for their eighty-six year old grandmother with Alzheimers, agrees with her sons’ description. Interestingly, Stella refers to other people her age and older – as ‘old’ or ‘elderly’ (See page 27).

When considering whether this narrative complies with the research criteria, despite the age of the main character being sixty-five, the fiction touches only slightly upon the new dynamics of ageing with regard to relationships. This is due to the fact that the characters are very negative about sex after sixty. Stella has no real interest in

Richard's attentions, considering him more a subject for her research interests. Sex is seen more as a thing of the past. In conversation with Stella, Judith says:

We have a pretty good run for our money these days. It's not ageing and it's not the banking of fires and all that. It's being put out to grass. Sidelined when you've still got plenty of mileage left. (30).

Even Richard, the ex-civil servant, is hesitant to express desire due to his age. Whereas, as stated in non-fiction, by 1998, when this book was published, the age of sixty-five was not considered old as far as sexual relationships were concerned. However, the feeling of being sidelined certainly was.

Regarding modern technology, it is surprising that Stella, once having been a "competent enough user of departmental computers ... now declined to spend money on one of her own" (134), and prefers to use an old typewriter that brings back memories of past happiness. There was also no mention of mobile phones, whereas by the end of the twentieth-century they were in common usage. In this novel, the new cultures of ageing seem to have avoided West Somerset and as Stella and Richard never formed an amorous relationship, other characters in the narrative had no need to express acceptance or disapproval.

Elizabeth Jane Howard's novel *Falling* is a serious tale. Henry Kent is sixty-four. Daisy Redfearn is sixty-one, twice divorced and experienced in sexual matters, although: "She had concluded that sex without love did not do much for her" (265). Kent, a compulsive liar, manipulates her affections with careful calculation so she will fall in love with him. Both perspectives are given in alternating chapters. Henry reveals that Daisy renounced sex after the age of fifty-one, but goes on to describe her as having a good body for her age. The fact that Daisy still thinks that her "girlish ruminations" are "certainly unbecoming in a woman of over-sixty" (224), and later, that sex at their age, even if a little surprising, can be most enjoyable, provides the reader with a mixed message regarding the changing attitudes towards sexual needs and desires in later life. At first, Daisy's daughter, Katya, does not approve of this liaison, but Henry manages to manipulate her into liking him so that later she concedes it is a better for her mother to be with someone loving than be lonely. Daisy's friends, Anthony and Annie do not express disapproval outwardly, but are suspicious of Henry's intentions and by delving into his past reveal him as a dangerous con man.

Other aspects of Howard's text relevant to the research in this thesis are to be found in the following quotations: "We felt like children let out of school. At least, I did. When I said that to him, he laughed. 'We are not children,' he said. 'We are old, old people, supposed by many to be well past this sort of thing'" (377). This suggests that they believe many people still consider sex over sixty inappropriate or impossible: "An ageing woman, who actually believed that a man had loved her when he had done nothing of the kind. A common enough situation, perhaps" (405). The addition of the word 'ageing' followed by 'a common enough situation', could also suggest a negative societal attitude towards such a relationship.

Daisy, having questioned her own unexpected feelings, is left with a negative attitude for any future liaison that might come her way after her relatives and friends, in this instance quite rightly, have interfered in order to protect her. Although the main characters are approaching the age of sixty-five, the relationship flounders when Kent is revealed as a 'con' man with a mental disability he has had since childhood.

However, in Fay Weldon's novel *Rhode Island Blues* friends intervene for very different reasons. Whereas the American writer Alison Lurie set her novel *Foreign Affairs* in the UK, the English writer Fay Weldon's novel is set in Connecticut. Her main character is the eighty-three year-old widow, Felicity, who decides to take up residence at the Golden Bowl Complex for Creative Retirement. She insists on attending a relative's funeral and meets her distant cousin William Johnston, aged seventy-two. The affair that blossoms between them becomes the main focus of the story. The tone is one of comedy woven with strands of serious comments on age. Felicity has seen much love and sex in her lifetime and declares that since the age of forty-seven has taken an oestrogen tablet daily. Unlike Howard's novel, this affair is frowned upon by Dr. Homer Grepalli and Nurse Dawn, the greedy owners of the home. Surprisingly, her best friend and neighbour, Joy, aged seventy-one, also expresses distaste:

'They're courting,' he said. 'Aren't you glad for your friend?'

There was a shocked silence from the other end, and then: 'Not that con artist she met at a funeral?'

'... He's decades younger than she is: he's just after her money. You should see the dump he lives in.'

'She seems to like him,' said Jack.

‘If you mean what I think you mean,’ said Joy, ‘that is revolting. People of that age have no business having sex. It’s too upsetting for those around.’  
(163)

At first her granddaughter, Sophie, who works in the film-world, is also critical of her grandmother’s flirtations but later accepts the situation. In this novel Felicity has a good self-image regarding sex in late-life, as does her lover. The main reasons for dissent, expressed in the above quotation, emerge from ageist and materialistic attitudes even among those of similar age. In reality, the couple enjoy sex, are sincere in their affections and plan for a creative retirement. This revelation and comments on how society treats older people do convey aspects of contemporary reality, but the fact that those around Felicity cannot accept the situation and express distaste, fails to reflect the enlightened cultures of ageing in the UK or America.

Doris Lessing has made a significant contribution to literature that focuses on ageing, but *Love Again* has been chosen as an appropriate novel for this study, not because it examines the nature and origins of love, but because it comments on the new dynamics of ageing: “When Sarah arrived, her mother was working in her garden. She was pleased enough to see her. Just as Sarah in her mid-sixties looked fifty on a good day, so did Kate Millgreen, over ninety, seem a lively seventy” (252).

Sarah Durham is a sixty-five years old writer and theatre producer, described as “alert and full of energy”(1) who “was often thought to look twenty years younger than her real age” (6). Despite this she hopes to “grow old gracefully” (8) while tormenting herself with conversations between her objective and subjective selves. She is angry with herself for falling in love with a twenty-five year-old actor named Bill. During the same period, the American director, Henry, described as “having become an old man”, suggests having an affair with her. At the same time, her co-playwright, Stephen “a man of about fifty, large but not fat”, declares *his* love. She rejects both suppliants and considers how to reveal to Stephen that she is in love with “the pretty hero”.

It’s unforgiveable. And yet old women by the thousand – probably by the million – are in love and keep quiet about it. They have to. Good Lord, just imagine it: for instance, an old people’s home full of senior citizens, or as they charmingly put it, wrinklies, and half of them are secretly crazy for the young jay, who drives the ambulance or the pretty girl cook. A secret hell, populated with the ghosts of lost loves, former personalities meanwhile the other half are

making sniffy jokes and exchanging snide looks. Unless they succumb too.  
(171)

Her theatrical colleagues do not express surprise at someone her age falling in love, but Sarah still feels that despite being healthy and energetic, such behaviour is not acceptable to society at large, and that other older women feel the same way. Then to her dismay she discovers the man she loves is bisexual. Today, as in the year of the book's publication, such relationships are usually expected in artistic environments without comment from their peers, and it is therefore surprising that Sarah finds her reactions difficult to accept. It is also interesting to note that in five of the eleven novels chosen for analysis, the authors use characters with a background in the arts (literature, art, dance, theatre and film) when eliciting acceptance of the romantic or sexual situation. This could suggest a possible stereotyping, whereas in fact such situations are now very common in society at large.

Another example of love in an institution is described in Lesley Larson's *Breaking out of Bedlam* published in Toronto in 2010, but the novel has not been included in this study as the imprint is Canadian not British; although, it is interesting to note the plot. The protagonist, Cora Sledge is eighty-two and falls in love with another inmate, a suave Eastern European called Vitus Kovic. Eventually, Vitus is revealed as a homosexual, and like Kent in *Falling*, a con man, bigamist and thief. Cora eventually returns home but feels she has benefited from the experience. Larson also highlights a reawakening of emotions thought to be dead and criticizes society for thinking old people "just a bunch of dried-up zombies with no feelings left" (99).

The above extracts reveal the route, sometimes via con men, presumed or otherwise, from novels like Lurie's *Foreign Affairs* towards today's reality, a route to a destination which in these novels is never quite reached. Allowing for the fact that there are always personal exceptions due to ill health, today such passion among the young old is no longer considered unusual or something to make you ill. Nor do family and friends consider an older suitor must be deliberating seeking financial advantage.

Jeremy Cooper's *Kath Trevelyan* (Serpent's Tail, 2007), Monique Roffey's *The White Woman on the Green Bicycle* (Simon & Schuster, 2009), Piers Paul Read's *The Misogynist* (Bloomsbury, 2010) and Rosie Thomas's *Lovers and Newcomers* (Harper, 2010), are more recent novels that also have older protagonists involved in late-love relationships.



In *Kath Trevelyan*, outsiders are not mentioned, but in the other stories new relationships are accepted as normal by their family, friends or society. In addition, the lovers involved in all three novels are not surprised or embarrassed by “young thoughts of an old person” (*Kath Trevelyan*, 184).

Jeremy Cooper’s story is about a developing relationship between a very independent, healthy, energetic widow, Kath Trevelyan, who is a letterpress printer, aged seventy-two, with middle-aged daughters, and an antique dealer and art representative, John Garsington, almost sixty, and for many years, separated from his wife. Their relationship, like the novel, is slow-moving, and the world of art the catalyst for their friendship and love: “Love: to many merely another word, difficult to learn the meaning of in later life, without earlier experience. Not impossible though. It happens on occasions” (235).

Kath confides in her middle daughter, Esther, when the friendship with John flounders, but otherwise no mention is made of their relatives’ or society’s attitude towards their relationship. Towards the end of the novel Esther is said to have ceased questioning Kath about John as both appear happy and she confesses to being just a little jealous. Yet Kath at first questions her own feelings at her time of life, longs to tell someone, yet refrains from doing so: “Talk eludes her. And Kath is resigned to keeping the news to herself. Nobody need know. Nobody **did** know how much she cared for him” (126).

“Kath’s mood also changes - as it often does these days, tied to a gigantic see-saw that’s set, it seems, in perpetual motion. She doesn’t dream of telling her young friends what has happened to cause this peacelessness” (140).

The only self-deprecating comment comes from John in the penultimate chapter when they are holidaying abroad:

Then I suddenly saw myself as they must see me. A funny old man, good for a laugh. Don’t you remember the unquestioning assumption, when we were young, that older people were a different species? While you and I, we now discover, are more like children. Very human indeed. It’s they, their generation, who are adults. Not us. We’re just starting out. (277)

The reader is not given a description of their first physical union, and so must presume there was little embarrassment regarding aging bodies apart from: “Both of them have become lovingly attuned to each other’s vulnerable grace” (269).

*The White Woman on the Green Bicycle* by Monique Roffey was shortlisted for the Orange Prize in 2010. The opening is set in Trinidad in 2006, when her main characters, George, an English man and his French wife, Sabine, are seventy-five years of age. The reader learns how in love they used to be:

*Hello, my love, she used to say. Hello my love, my loving love-cup, my darling-heart. How was your day? Once she glowed when she saw him. She would throw her arms around him, reach up to kiss his cheek. Sometimes she would pull him into the bedroom. (24)*

Sabine, having lost her figure, no longer seems to love her husband. However, George still loves her, still yearns to touch her, despite the bodily changes that have taken place. Sabine, although ‘sexually retired’, and despite the changes in *his* appearance and his many affairs, has “never stopped wanting to talk to George” (10). George is not asexual and still seeks out a prostitute from time to time and speaks crudely about sex to family and friends. Despite this, the man and wife no longer have an intimate relationship and we are told, ‘rarely touch’. The main narrative describes their relationship with the island and the islanders, racism, injustice, their anger at police corruption, and the unsent letters Sabine wrote to the politician Eric Williams whom she admired, in which she describes her true feelings for her husband during their marriage. The final climax comes when George is discovered to have a brain tumour and dies. The rest of the book recalls the development of the couple’s relationship during the years 1956, ‘63 and ‘70.

As the action is set entirely in Trinidad, it is difficult to compare this novel depicting Caribbean culture with the other examples, yet it does reveal that the feelings of sexual attraction remain after the age of sixty-five and that grief brings human love once more to the surface. However, the novel does not convey other aspects of the new dynamics of ageing. Despite the opening description placing the fiction firmly in the year 2006 with the description of a circling mini-zeppelin, nicknamed ‘The Bleep’, placed above the Port of Spain for continuous surveillance of the “garish and glittering office blocks, government housing projects, Honda showrooms”, the families involved in the narrative do not accept George’s sexual needs as normal and appear to be out of touch with modern thought.

Piers Paul Reid’s *The Misogynist*, begins with the protagonist, Geoffrey Jomier brooding over his digital journal in which he hopes to document his life. While commenting on Jomier’s retirement, Reid makes an interesting statement about

publishing in 2010: “It is a rite of passage for men of his age. But no one wants to publish books by old men because no one wants to read them. Not, at any rate, if they are white and middle class and live in London” (4).

Jomier and Judith, meet at a dinner party on a blind date arranged by Jomier’s friend, Ruth indicating that friends of similar age accept the situation:

Jomier has heard this before and has never known Ruth’s predictions fulfilled. By ‘like’ Ruth does not mean a temperamental affinity, she means sexual desire. Jomier recognizes that some women in late-middle age are more intelligent than others, some more amusing than others, some more elegant than others, but as a genus they are unlikely to inspire desire. Nature dictates that men will be attracted only to pre-menopausal women. (63)

They are all around the age of sixty or are said to have retired and it is interesting to note that Reid, like Weldon and Lessing, suggests nature is a controlling factor; an observation later to be proved inaccurate in Reid’s narrative, but left undisputed by the other novelists: “Nature’s only purpose is to get us to procreate age in one piece, by whatever slipshod manner she can contrive. Once we’re past that she has no interest in us at all” (Weldon, *Rhode Island Blues*, 180).

I am also angry at Mother Nature, who discards us after we are of childbearing age and withers us up, in spite of what we do to stop her with pills and potions, and makes our knees ache and chill into our bones and gave us the ability to bear witness to our winding down. But she never had any interest in our comfort, let alone our contentment. All she ever wanted us to do was reproduce, and if we live beyond that, forget it. (Weldon, *Chalcot Crescent*, 61)

What does Nature think it is up to? (Eyeball to eyeball with Nature, elderly people often accuse it – her? – of ineptitude, of sheer incompetence.) I simply can’t wait to go back to my cool elderly self, all passion spent. I suppose I’m not trapped in this hell for ever? (Lessing, *Love, Again*, 180)

In *The Misogynist* Jomier and Judith are retired, divorced, have children and enjoy very different life-styles, food and beliefs, yet appear to share the same interests and enjoy sex. They are attracted to each other and eventually go on holiday to Venice where they are accepted as a couple without comment. In the description of their

successful love-making Viagra is mentioned and Jomier realizes that love around sixty is not as it used to be, yet surprisingly pleasurable.

When they decide to tell their children, whom it would seem evident are around forty, that they are proposing ‘cohabitation’, the conversation is polite, cautious and condescending on the part of Jomier’s son Henry, but his wife Sara is said to “turn away”. The author adds: “Neither wants to hear about sexagenarian sex” (204). When on their own, Sara and Henry consider the “downside” and question the possible response of Judith’s children over inheritance factors. Judith’s children are portrayed as “difficult” throughout the novel and their reactions never mentioned.

Although the main characters are described as ‘60ish’ and so do not match the exact age parameters of this study, the general atmosphere and response of friends remains positive. However, the children’s reaction over ‘inheritance’, suggests cliché when found in so many examples of contemporary writing.

The final novel to be discussed is *Lovers and Newcomers* by Rosie Thomas. Her main characters are ‘Baby Boomers’ – old friends, also a little outside the perimeters for the study, for they are said to be aged sixty or in their late fifties. The character Colin describes himself as “a man of late middle-age” (464). The author states in a question and answer session printed at the end of the book that her characters are experimenting with “taking stock and trying to live what’s left as gracefully as possible in the light of previous hard-won experience.” She goes on to mention the difficulty of understanding the concept of ‘being old’ when one has never experienced it. The novel has flashbacks to the time most of the main characters were at university together and, among other things, discussed age and growing old.

‘Why can’t there be a cure for old age?’

‘There is. It’s called **death**,’ Amos snapped. (21)

Later when the idea of living together in old age is suggested, the expectations of the young produce stereotypical comments such as:

‘We should all come back together again, at the end of our lives, when we’ve achieved everything we want to, and just refuse to do what old people do.’

‘Old people like my gran, you mean?’ A boy interrupted. ‘She sits in a chair all day waiting to be taken to the toilet, and begs for her cup of tea because she can’t remember she had it five minutes ago?’

Miranda looked on him with pity. ‘It won’t be like that. Not for us,’ she said. (21-22)

It is interesting that when in their early sixties the friends eventually come to live together at Mead, Miranda's mother, Joyce, then aged eighty-six, is portrayed on page 185 of the novel as doggedly independent while friends, health and memory slowly desert her. She is a forgetful old woman, swinging in mood from irritability to despair, who lives in sheltered accommodation but is in need of care. This is a definite improvement on the boy's prediction, yet Miranda still comments that "Old age is horrible" (184). To protect themselves from discussing ageing, a box is introduced to collect fines from anyone mentioning the 'O' word. Relationships blossom or self-destruct and Katherine's adult children (in their twenties) are shocked when they realize their mother has fallen in love and intends to leave their father for another man: "She was their mother, not a women's magazine feature on midlife crisis." Katherine understands how it was difficult for them:

– more than difficult, positively distasteful – to make this dizzy shift in reckoning. She belonged at their father's side, and if not there then in her office at the charity, or here in the flat cooking dinner in her William Morris print National Trust apron. The admission that she had just made set up all kinds of unwelcome speculations. Their mother had a mind of her own. Their mother made calculations for herself that did not number themselves as points one or two for consideration. Their mother almost certainly *thought about sex*. They were right on that one. Sex, she acknowledged to herself, occupied quite a large proportion of her waking thoughts these days. (282)

She then excuses her behaviour by saying: "Well – it's just the age that the two of us are."

Thomas attempts to 'throw light' on ageing by involving characters from three generations, but in general, the villagers' comments relate more to social inequality than age or relationships, as they regard the newcomers as 'posh' and 'rich'. Only Jessie, a local teenager, comments on the weirdness of living in a 'commune' at their age. Having lost her dog in a road accident, Jesse is invited to the old house for Christmas. "Her expression indicated that the quaint marital arrangements of old people were a legitimate focus for speculation, but her own losses were private" (404).

It would have been interesting to see how the story would have evolved had the old friends been five to eight years older when they decided to live together on the Mead estate owned by the widow, Miranda Meadowe. In relation to current changes in society, the additional years should not have made any difference to the emotional

outcome unless perhaps more of the main characters encountered serious unexpected illness. Colin is the only character who has been ill while grieving for his long-term partner Stephen. All the others are healthy, do not consider themselves asexual and have good self-images as to how they look for their age.

In all these novels little is said about modern technology. The following short comments from *Kath Trevelyn* regarding the use of computers in the modern world seems mere lip-service in the light of the fact that the couple has periods of time when each wonders why the other does not visit and yet remains silent: “Kath works with creative pleasure in the art-related software programmes on her Apple Mac, whilst refusing to use the Internet for anything other than email” (5).

There is no mention of mobile phones or the use of email for communication between them, and when discussing the promotion of their book John Garsington is said to accept the slower system as: “Kath does not possess, or want, a website and sales through the Internet are therefore impracticable” (219). This statement appears untrue as Amazon started selling books online in 1998.

This might indicate the author’s intention to stress the generational difference, but it is surprising that if the younger character is knowledgeable about such things, he does not act upon his convictions.

Apart from Nora’s complaint of Dora’s use of a word-processor in *Wise Children*, and Doris Lessing’s opening scene of *Love, Again* where she describes a fully equipped modern office, a sense of the developing technological world upon which we all rely, and whose expertise we use daily, is a serious lacuna in the chosen texts.

These examples from a variety of well-written narratives demonstrate how close and yet how far contemporary authors have come in creating a novel that truly reflects the fast-moving changes regarding love and relationships in the over sixty-fives living in contemporary society. The point that acceptance of late-life relationships by young people is rare, and has to be learned is well-illustrated in the above examples of novels that depict younger characters. However, the portrayal of acceptance by self, family and friends does not always convey the normative behavior found in most areas of the British Isles or as illustrated in the results of recent national surveys discussed in the next chapter.

In 2012, *These Foolish Things*, a novel by Deborah Moggach written in 2004, was adapted with many plot alterations for a film re-titled *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. It is an interesting fact that at the time of the book’s publication, reviewers chose to

ignore the sexual relationship angle, merely commenting on the paucity of good ‘care homes’, the hard-heartedness of middle-aged children keen to avoid having to care for a surviving parent and the fact that, at an age when many are becoming ill and so slow down, this group of ‘pensioners’ chose to leave home and seek adventure on a long journey into the unknown. The experiences of the pensioners communal life in India at the exotic Marigold Hotel were lumped together by reviewers of the novel with comments such as: “... they are not simply sitting around, waiting to die: the possibility of tumultuous change is there, if they are brave enough to seize it.”<sup>39</sup>

The in-house editor describes the book as an “acutely observed comedy of manners” with the emphasis on how other cultures “cope in the modern world”. Magrath is cautious when handling the tentative relationships of the British pensioners residing in Bangalore at the Marigold Hotel, now run as an old people’s home, and it is only eight pages before the end of the book that loose ends regarding such relationships are finally tied. Madge, the youngest (late sixties and the most risqué) finds herself an Indian millionaire and is said to be moving to New York to be married (273), while on the penultimate page (280), Mrs. Evelyn Greenslade, aged seventy-three, is stated to have married the widower Mr. Douglas Ainslie (also in his seventies). Earlier, Evelyn has expressed her surprise that the sight of a handsome man like Dr. Rama had “stirred feelings she had long ago thought extinguished” (125). The text highlights the hardships involved in growing old and the difficulty of keeping up with modern technology, but more importantly it also reveals quite a few in this group of third-age pensioners who admit to still being attracted to the opposite sex or having feelings they thought would surprise others.

The film version, however, gives more emphasis to the relationships so that not only is it a tale of “remembering – too late, or not too late – how to be alive” (*Times Literary Supplement*, 2004), but it is also about physical love after the age of sixty-five. *The Guardian* ‘Film Blog’ (February 2012), accuses the film of making “the usual cinematic clichés about old people”, but admits it does attempt to deal with key issues about ageing.

A renowned American cultural critic Margaret Morganroth Gullette, in her new publication *Agewise: Fighting the New Ageism in America*,<sup>40</sup> declares that ageism is something one should battle as strongly as one does racism, sexism and other forms of bigotry. Ageism can be unintentional or else encased in deep-seated or unexpected bigotry. As previously mentioned, Lurie’s *Foreign Affairs* was published in 1984.

However, twelve years later, Random House (Vintage imprint) republished it without additional comment by the editor, or by the two well-known authors who proclaimed the author's talents on the back cover. So anyone still reading this excellent story of late attraction and self denial is led to believe that such ageist attitudes by publishers, mentioned in the novel, still exist. Another such example can be found in the Little, Brown Group's new 2009 edition (Virago imprint) of Muriel Spark's *Memento Mori*, first published by MacMillan in 1959. Its new introduction by A.L.Kennedy comments that the author's work delights in mentioning:

. . . the unmentionable: that nice people think nasty thoughts and do nasty things, that dressed people can also be naked, that sex is rarely as elevated or romantic as we'd wish, that the idea of strangers, *or old people having sex can be appalling* that forgetting death renders us foolish and that dying can make us seem more foolish still (Introduction, xii. My italics).

This unintentional ageism can also be found in Kennedy's latest volume, *The Blue Book* (2011). The author's forty year-old protagonist and her lover are about to board a cruise ship around the year 2000. At the start of the novel, Kennedy encourages the reader to identify with her characters. Before stating their names, they are first addressed as a Man and a Woman. The effect of this is that when the protagonist/narrator describes the cruise ship as "a playground for geriatrics", the phrase appears offensive, although no doubt an accurate description. However, had she written 'a playground for blacks' or 'queers', such a remark would have evoked a marked critical response. Similarly the woman is said to be thinking:

Nevertheless, without using the medium of language he is still making it plain that he doesn't want to be surrounded by the staggering ancient as they whine about their pills and their luggage and their feet, or – should they by some miracle, have actually been processed – as they shuffle between the tea lady and the toilets while mouthing sandwiches and apparently coming close to coughing their last.

We are by miles the youngest couple here. (11)

These sweeping generalisations, although placed in the mind of a character, immediately alienate the older reader and suggest that all old people: stagger, complain about their situation, take many pills, drink tea, are in desperate need of a toilet, have few manners when eating and cough continuously.



As the sociologist, Bytheway states in his chapter 'Representation of Age' in *Unmasking Age*:

Captions and accompanying text consolidate visual images of what people of different ages look like, they can also create expectations of what it is to be a person of a particular age. (80)

In consideration of how age figures in the world around us, it is important to recognise that words and images are there to guide our thinking. (86)

He goes on to conclude that:

. . . all representations of age are intended to convey ideas that make us reflect on our own opinions and experience of age, perhaps changing the way we 'see' or think about age. In this objective, 'we' are populations of people unknown to the person who produces the representation. The latter, whether a writer, photographer, advertiser or social researcher, is seeking to represent age, setting criteria that define its boundaries, and forwarding a message that conveys a novel or challenging image of age. (89)

This statement would suggest that inclusion or omission of certain facts regarding change in society relating to age issues could bear a negative or positive message for the reader (See also Endnote 17).

The novel *Exeunt*, written to accompany this research, analyses and addresses many of the above issues, while also commenting on ageism. Ageism can be subtle, and not only in the fictional text. Editors' or reviewers' comments can emphasise the stereotyping of old age still current in society at large by describing characters out of context. One such example is from Kingsley Amis's novel *Ending Up*, first published by Jonathon Cape in 1974 and reprinted by Penguin in 1987. The characters are described as senile delinquents who are bored and possess a creeping decay, and on the front cover the publisher has used Quentin Blake's cartoon figures to illustrate this. A new edition brought out in 2011 has an illustration of two men, mouths open, and a woman on the cover (back view) all slumped asleep around a table with an empty spilt wine glass upon it. This still creates a very stereotypical scene. Most covers of books depicting older protagonists use abstract design, silhouettes or back and distant views of the protagonist. It was brought to the attention of this study by writer respondents that young Buyers for bookshop chains still appear to be influencing book covers by blaming the public for not buying a novel if it has a picture or portrait of an old person on the cover. In order to avoid this, Penguin

Classic publications have used paintings from past times, such as on the cover of Anthony Trollope's *The Warden* where detail is taken from 'The Morning Chapter', a painting by the Victorian artist Charles Spencelayh. One can find books with a grey-haired photograph of its author on the front cover such as Mary Wesley's appreciation of the West Country, published by Bantam in 2001, or the memoir of Diana Athill, but they are nearly always non-fiction. A carefully worded blurb on the back cover can also shield the possible buyer from knowing the actual age of the main characters. In Elizabeth Jane Howard's novel *Falling*, Henry is described as being in his "late middle-age" rather than saying he is sixty-five, and Daisy's age is never mentioned. This could be interpreted as a deliberate omission on the part of the publisher or editor who fears the word 'old' or the age of 'sixty-something' might alienate potential buyers.

Another interesting fact on ageing was raised in research carried out at the University of Iași in Northern Romania<sup>41</sup> (Hazaparu, 2011. 315-32). The study quotes one of the best-known Romanian sayings: "Those with no elderly people around should buy some." However, results revealed ageism to be more prevalent since the end of communism. Before the revolution in December 1989, the elderly in the family were cared for by relatives, friends or neighbours, but afterwards many people sought to become Westernised and had far less time for the old. Hazaparu's research indicated that the elderly in Romania are now under-represented in the printed media and in the case of recent newspapers, are given an opposite perspective to the one stated above. Another area of Romanian research 'Meaning and Representations of Ageing in Romanian Elderly' was carried out by Catrinel Craciun at the Free University of Berlin's Institute of Psychology, and published in *Ageing International*.<sup>42</sup> Findings indicated that Romanian elderly have a negative view of ageing and old age, but also have representations of how to age well. Craciun concluded that the results could inform interventions for promoting health assets for successful ageing.

Much of the creative fiction in the second part of this thesis is set in Romania during the years before and after communism and highlights the varying attitudes towards the older person in Romanian society. In *Interpretive Ethnography*, Norman K. Denzin accepts that we are witness to tremendous changes in world culture as it has become not only postmodern but also multinational. He calls for new kinds of

experiential texts such as ‘performance-based, literary journalism and narratives of self.’ The creative fiction reflects this domain.

On the positive side, in the UK radio, theatre, television and the printed media have made changes some of which have been ongoing for a number of years. A translation of the clinical psychologist Marie de Hennezel’s *The Warmth of the Heart Stops the Body from Rusting* was broadcast on Radio 4’s ‘Book of the Week’ during April 2011. Chapter 11 of Hennezel’s book has a chapter entitled ‘A Sensual old Age’ where she mentions how the arts, the European TV channel Arte, and an American film made by Diedre Fishel: ‘*Still Doing It: the intimate lives of women over 65*’ support her case for the necessity to enlighten the young about the realities of “ageing without growing old” (175-199). Also in April 2011, on Radio 4’s ‘Open Book’, Jim Crace and David Lodge discussed Wolpert’s *You’re Looking Very Well*, in which on pages 22-24 the author confirms: “Those who are healthy in older age are twice as likely to enjoy a high libido and more likely to have regular sex, that is once or more a week.”<sup>43</sup>

A notable stage production that moved towards such change was a production of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (re-titled *Juliet and Her Romeo*) at Bristol Old Vic in 2010 in which eighty-year old actors played the eponymous characters.<sup>44</sup> The theatre programme elucidated the need to accept that love happens throughout life and at any age. Previous to this production, in 2009 director Ben Power used an adapted version of the same play in a Royal Shakespeare Company production of *A Tender Thing*,<sup>45</sup> to illustrate the same concept. In other areas community theatre projects are bringing old and young together in an attempt to combat ageism.<sup>46</sup> Verbatim theatre is another example of theatre reflecting the reality of the changing dynamics of age, and its work also reveals the interesting fact that the ‘search for passion’ in later age is not restricted to the richer members of society. Alecky Blythe makes recordings of personal interviews with ordinary people and then uses parts of conversations to create a play with a strange verisimilitude to real life. Her creation *Cruising*, which took place at the Bush Theatre, is a good example (Nick Hern Books, 2006).<sup>47</sup> Blurb on the back cover of the play script states:

Maureen is a pensioner in search of passion. Since her heart was broken by David from Aberdeen – the world’s best lover and millionaire – she is finding it difficult to meet anyone else who can satisfy her. After 33 blind dates and

12 cruises she is still searching. But best friend Margaret has had no shortage of suitors. . .

Despite the slightly mocking tone of the above and the reproduction of a Beryl Cook painting for the cover, the actual introduction by Blythe states:

What made her [Maureen's] story extraordinary – apart from her healthy libido – was an attitude towards men and love which mirrored the views of women fifty years younger. She spoke about her broken heart as if she were a love-struck teenager not a worldly widow of seventy-two with two married children. Her story threw up so many questions. How much do we mature emotionally? Do we not learn from our mistakes? Are one-night stands still as possible, and if so, as painful in one's seventies as in one's twenties? A whole new world of pensioners in search of passion had been discovered through Maureen, and she was willing to take me on her journey to explore it. (3)

In this play, more in keeping with the new spirit of the age, the older characters discuss Viagra, remarriage, affairs after sixty-six, love, loneliness and sending sexy emails to men throughout the UK.

Television has also been iconoclastic in broadcasting serials depicting older characters having sexual needs and desires. These have been 'East Enders'; 'Midsummer Murders'; Agatha Christie's 'Miss Marple' and 'Hercule Poirot' (1930s); Christopher Rothbauer's 'Waiting for God' and Bob Larbey's 'As Time Goes by' (1990s); Ollie Brown's 'New Tricks: Lost in Translation' (2011); and recently, 'Doc. Martin' written by a team of writers: Jack Lothian, Richard Stoneman and Ben Bolt (2004). In these serials characters of retirement age or over behave very differently from the stereotypes portrayed in repeats of British television comedy shows of the eighties and nineties. The writer's or director's changes seen in the above tales reflect not only the changing dynamics of age relating to attitude, but also to love and relationships in late-life and general acceptance of them.<sup>48</sup>

In January 2011, ageist attitudes among the public were obvious in certain newspaper coverage of stories like that of an old man proposing to the 90 year-old Duchess of Devonshire, while more serious newspapers ran articles on the same story, but supported notably by authors, Roy Connelly and Joan Bakewell who protested against such ageism.<sup>49</sup> In this instance, Bakewell does speak out against ageism and includes her own feelings on love in later life.

In most newspapers and in television advertisements, dating sites now include a category for older people to meet ‘the partner of their dreams’. Other aspects of society such as insurance and investment agencies, those catering for retirement needs or leisure activities, also use the slogan ‘70 is the new 50’.

Much of literary criticism on ageing tends to concentrate only on female representation. Similarly, the research survey mentioned earlier, entitled ‘Portrayal Vs Betrayal?: Film Audiences Speak Out’, carried out by the UK Film Council in March 2011, concentrated on exploring the considerations of women as to how they were revealed in films: Sixty-one percent of women aged fifty-nine plus considered themselves to be under-represented, saying they were shown as sexless, and often stereotyped. The same question was not put forward to male recipients (see Appendix 4 on page 257).

Interest in readers’ opinions regarding various aspects of ageing in novels have been published recently by various agencies concerned with Ageing, the main one in the UK being the New Dynamics of Ageing Programme that spans five Research Councils and comprises thirty-five projects, one of which is the Fiction and the Cultural Mediation of Ageing Project.<sup>50</sup> The Third Age Trust invited eighty-eight volunteers to form eight reader study groups from districts in and around London, with anonymity assured by means of given codes. Their task was to read a selection of set novels in order and to report back on the following texts:

LIST A *Deaf Sentence* (Lodge); *Arcadia* (Crace); *A Distant Shore* (Phillips); *The Body* (Kureishi); *Remember Me* (Azzopardi); *Wise Children* (Carter); *Quartet in Autumn* (Pym); *There Were No Windows* (Hoult) and *Chalcot Crescent* (Weldon).

LIST B *House Mother Normal* (Johnson); *Memento Mori* (Spark); *Late Call* (Wilson); *Mrs Palfrey at the Claremont* (Taylor); *The Seduction of Mrs Pendlebury* (Forster); *What a Carve Up!* (Coe); *A Spot of Bother* (Haddon); *Strangers* (Brookner).

The outcome was discussed in 2010 on Radio 4, when novelists Jonathon Coe and David Lodge were interviewed. They expressed surprise at finding that many volunteers who took part stated they would have preferred to read something more exciting; something they felt reflected their own lives. The clinical psychologist Professor Dan P. McAdams, in his volume *Stories We Live by: Personal Myths and the Making of Self*<sup>51</sup>, perhaps conveys a postmodernist approach when he states: “In the modern world in which we all live identity is a life story.” An opposing opinion is given by Jean-Paul Sartre who envisaged our identities as being created by other

people as ‘the unconscious was part of us others understand and we do not.’<sup>52</sup> This is an alternative view of identity than that offered by McAdams and which this thesis illustrates in the creative fiction. (See also M. Featherstone and A. Wernick)<sup>53</sup>

On the negative side, besides bookshop chain Buyers rejection of illustrations of old people on book covers, some in society still find sex in late-life disgusting or humorous. Evidence for this is found in the terminology used by those who refer to older people as ‘wrinklies’, ‘crinklies’, ‘crumblied’, ‘geezers’, ‘old farts’, ‘old fogies’, ‘battleaxes’, and older writers’ work as ‘Grey lit’, ‘Geezer lit’ or ‘Matron lit’. Such terms seemed to have spread by ‘word of mouth’, and the literary references were mentioned on a LinkedIn discussion by Boomer Writers in 2010. The term ‘wrinkly’ dates from the sixties. Jenny Hocket and Allison James evidence this in their chapter entitled “Back to Our Futures: Imaging Second Childhood” (Featherstone and Wernick, 1995. 9.133). As early as 1990, everyday verbal imagery was discussed in the media.<sup>54</sup> Such terminology is also to be seen on birthday cards, but mainly in jokes sent over the internet.<sup>55</sup> ‘Over the hill’, ‘past it’ or other such phrases reinforce society’s subjective norm among younger generations that sex is only for the young and beautiful. Such discrimination often originates from well-known British comedians or the internet. Isaac Bashevis Singer writes in his collection of short stories entitled *Old Love*:<sup>56</sup> “Literature has neglected the old and their emotions. Novelists never told us that in love, as in other matters, the young are just beginners and that the art of loving matures with age and experience” (1).<sup>57</sup>

To sum up, there is a growing interest in cross-disciplinary co-operation among many related disciplines concerned with ageing whose work has informed the New Dynamics of Ageing programme (NDA) that spans the social, medical, biological and engineering sciences as well as the arts and humanities.<sup>58</sup> Such research is international and has progressed fast in its use of ‘narrative’ in all its forms to elicit truthful portraits of ‘lives lived’. The development of the internet has opened up blank pages for anyone to contribute ‘their story’, while theatre, television and film are racing ahead to bring elements of the new cultural phenomenon to the forefront of public opinion. However, writers and novelists are only just beginning to explore the possibilities opened up by the new cultures of ageing so as to reflect the profound changes in society that will put life back into the extending years that medical and health advances have helped to provide. The following chapter explains the paradigms and data collection results in relation to this enquiry.

## PARADIGMS AND DATA COLLECTION

As well as my own critical response to relevant works of fiction, the research also considered the responses of publishers, writers and readers to British contemporary novels, so qualitative methods were deemed appropriate.

While instigating the qualitative research, three aspects were viewed as normative behaviour for those living in the second decade of the twenty-first century and have been consistently addressed throughout, having also been applied to an examination of the eleven selected novels for the Literature Review. The first was that a great number of people over the age of sixty-five still present as healthy, active individuals, with a keen interest in the latest technology; the second, being that if not ‘sexually retired’ by choice or serious illness, people of any sexual orientation over sixty-five, now defined as the ‘young old’, are likely to form new partnerships, enter into second marriages or even have affairs; and finally, that such emotional attachments in later life are now deemed normal by family and friends of those involved.

The same applies to older life-long couples in successful marriages. This normality is clarified in Chapter 10 of Stuart-Hamilton’s *An Introduction to Gerontology* (283-312), where the authors of the article “Sexuality and Ageing” claim, ‘The secret is out’, stating that the ‘young old’ are now less embarrassed about sex and so willing to talk about it among friends.

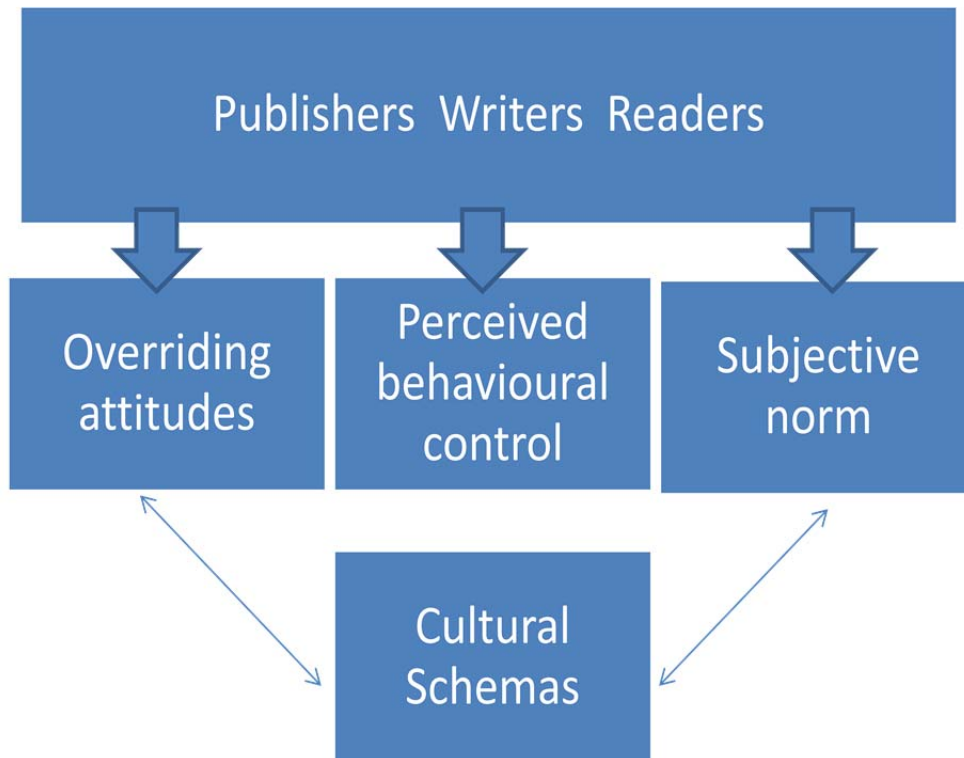
The novel *Exeunt*, in part two of this thesis, exemplifies the three aspects considered above. This ‘existential tragedy of three lives’ spanning twenty-three years, has a timeline that stretches into the present decade. Sex and ageing are discussed openly and the two main characters are portrayed as sexually active. All those aware of this close relationship accept it as normal and the lover’s interest in the development of modern technology continues throughout. To avoid the prejudice of youth or other aspects of ageism, one of the narrators at the start of the fiction suggests the reader ‘leave behind their preconceived ideas about ageing’.

The qualitative research took place between March and October 2010, and set out to examine the emergence of patterns and relationships in order to develop a fuller hypothesis from the data. The initial theoretical sampling consisted of publishers of contemporary British fiction; romantic novelists; mainstream novelists and self-selecting individuals who responded online. Later, readers were approached. It

provided answers to the investigation, but there were also outcomes and concerns not previously envisaged yet viewed as important to the respondents.

A frame of reference was created to organise observations made in recent fiction and non-fiction regarding the topic of the research:

#### INTERLINKED DEDUCTIVE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



The paradigm selected was qualitative interpretive using symbolic interactionism *en passant*. This related to the need to understand and explain the views and behaviour of those publishers of British contemporary fiction and their authors within the research perimeters, and also to consider results within the dominant disciplines that are embedded in trust, good communication, literary quality and financial viability.

The use of constructivist interpretive theory was chosen as it enabled priority to be given to patterns, perceptions and connections (Charmaz. 126) where facts and values would be inextricably linked. The research framework was also linked to social constructionist principles (George Herbert Mead, 1932) as these examine what respondents presume is real and how they react to such presumptions.



By constructing their own 'narrative', in other words by creating a subjective identity, there was always the question of whether or not enlisted answers had been given to comply with current political correctness or, in the case of publishers, to coincide with the firm's viewpoint. Replies of this nature were treated as findings rather than problems, and examined for articulation in interactional contexts.

The publishers' sample consisted of eighty-nine potential, relevant respondents selected from *The Writer's Handbook 2011*. Ethical issues were of paramount consideration, and the participant information sheet and informed consent form were explained clearly to all participants. Other publishers listed were not chosen as they specialised in areas other than contemporary fiction. Having gained ethical clearance for a participant information sheet and an informed consent form, a simple questionnaire was devised as a structured interview (see Appendices 5 and 6 on pages 260 and 263). This questionnaire was designed to elicit answers to three questions relating to whether or not, as publishers, they recommended a top age limit to writers who portrayed their main characters as actively involved in a physically intimate relationship in mainstream or romantic fiction; had such love stories on their lists already; or envisaged encouraging more authors to include such older characters in the light of the changing dynamics of age in society. A space was left for any other comments inviting non-directive additional information.

A pilot scheme was carried out with a few participants already known to me. The outcome indicated the need to ensure the questions would elicit a full response and that if possible the request should be made to a confident senior editor, experienced enough to provide the necessary information. Bias was avoided by not asking leading questions. It also confirmed the necessity to enlighten the respondent about the research and the researcher in order to create personal interest, enlist the editor's help and convey the university's gratitude. Ensuing from this pilot scheme, a letter of request was sent with an attached questionnaire delineating the researcher's profile and expressing the importance of the project in the light of the changing dynamics of ageing. Publishers were first approached by telephone to elicit names of suitable editors or directors and their office email addresses. The research was then explained either before or in contact with the respondent. On the whole publishers were very helpful although some preferred to give their opinions on the subject over the phone rather than spare time to complete the questionnaire. A total of thirty-two percent responded which, according to B2B (Business to Business Marketing Research

Agency) International's Ready Reckoner, (Market Research with Intelligence), is considered a respectable result. The square root of the 'universe', (number of respondent sample), is also considered sufficient to provide a valid analysis.

In consideration of qualitative insights (see Appendix 9 on page 270) gleaned from publisher respondents when invited to discuss whether or not they imposed an age limit for characters involved in romance, only one publishing firm admitted to giving a top age limit of fifty, but added it was now considering other options due to the changing dynamics of ageing. All the others were consistent in their replies, stating categorically that such action would amount to censorship and that they never dictated to an author what should be included or excluded. They insisted that literary quality was deemed important, adding that they encourage great books that reflect all areas of human behaviour. However, most publishers commented that if a story had such quality it would certainly be considered for publication. Some publishers mentioned recent titles in their lists that portrayed older characters looking back at romance or else were involved romantically with someone younger or older than themselves. Such novels offered only an approximation to the essence of the research: love and relationships over sixty-five, if desired, are normal in today's society but are not being reflected in British contemporary novels.

The subject of market forces was raised by a director of one leading publishing house who acknowledged that the group thought carefully before committing: "There is a smaller market for such books which is perhaps a symptom of there not being enough of them, as submissions are rare and we do think carefully before committing."

Another publisher from one of the large conglomerates of imprints acknowledged that the publishing and bookselling industries were geared towards the younger generation, but felt a really good novel with older characters would be taken up.

In conclusion, publishers denied censorship and put the onus on writers: "I think it will be the writers rather than the publishers who will change things by producing more stories about love in later life."

A similar questionnaire was conceived for writers. In the pilot stage, a convenience sample was made, respondents being approached via personal contacts that resulted in changes to again ensure all the questions in the questionnaire elicited open answers. Early participants in the theoretical sample involved writers from the Romantic Novelists' Association and Boomer Writers on LinkedIn. The first question was:

‘How would you feel if a publisher gave you a top age limit for the main characters in your novel who are in love or actively engaged in an intimate relationship, and has this ever happened to you?’

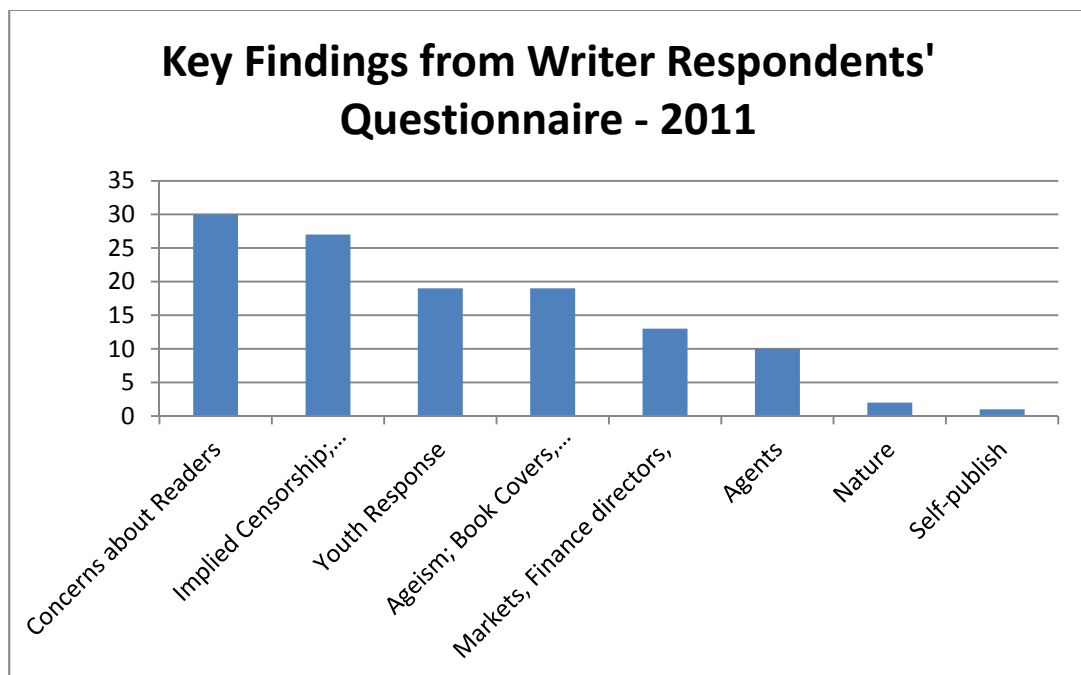
The second question enquired if they had ever written about such a relationship and if not how they would feel about doing so. The third reminded them of the changing dynamics of ageing and asked if they thought writers would move towards including such older main characters in romance or mainstream fiction, and if so how would they react. As with the publishers’ questionnaire, a space was then left for any other comments.

With the questionnaire and other information firmly established, a web page was designed with full details of research and researcher, together with the questionnaire and a square to be ticked acknowledging informed consent. A full list of organisations who agreed to cite the web address in their newsletters can be found in Appendix 7 on page 265. The Society of Authors allowed access to their data base of authors to enable personal contact to be made via email through the Society, resulting in twenty authors being contacted with a letter of explanation. Approach was made to as many writers as possible via a range of channels, including professional organisations, and those who came forward were included in the results. All such targeted authors, some of whom had critical acclaim, had written books involving older protagonists. Six of the twenty replied returning a completed questionnaire. Personal contact to other authors either by letter, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope, or by email, elicited ten replies. Some prize-winning authors were sent the questionnaire via the relevant award body, and a few agents were contacted requesting them to forward letters and questionnaires to some well-known authors, but no replies were received. Having had no response from letters sent personally to Philip Roth, Doris Lessing and Diana Athill, I felt it prudent to respect the privacy of authors mentioned in the thesis. Opportunity did arise to discuss the research personally with writers such as Alan Brownjohn, Maureen Duffy and Fay Weldon, but Weldon was the only author approached whose novel was selected for analysis. As Maureen Duffy explained that she deliberately withholds the ages of her protagonists so as not to detract from the main focus of her novels, this thesis does not include examples from Duffy’s fiction. However, as well as those authors mentioned above, Rosie Thomas and Piers Paul Read completed the questionnaire.

In general, writers were infuriated at the idea of publishers suggesting a top age limit for their characters, but some had experienced censorship in other areas, while another author also anticipated such action by avoiding mentioning the ages of her characters.

From a total of fifty-four writer respondents the following qualitative insights emerged (see Appendix 10 on page 277). Table A detailed below reflects concerns expressed by writers on certain issues, including the possible response of Readers.

TABLE A.



Writers thought older readers preferred to read for escape:

I think older readers like to escape the shackles of age and identify with healthy young bodies and beautiful unlined faces. All my older friends are young in mind but all have age-related health problems. We can forget these when caught up in a fictional world.

Writers also felt that reading tastes change with age, and that there would only be a small readership for such novels. They claimed one of the most significant controlling factors was a volatile market, sensing it a case of supply and demand. As a result they felt in danger of losing both publisher and readership should they offer anything “experimental”; such a change being viewed as a waste of time in the present financial

climate. Publishers were seen as wanting more of the same with a new voice, but writers did state they thought such a view short-sighted, as the older person had the money to buy books, whether light or literary, and also the time to read them. Sales were said to have diminished during the past two to three years, with the result that many novelists were dropped as publishers trimmed their lists.

In the following comments, writer respondents suggest implied censorship by publishers as being prohibitive to the age of the main characters involved in romance:

Not specifically, although there is an implication in the types of romance book I write that the top age limit should be about forty. There would be no top age limit for a romance between secondary characters.

I'm treading carefully though as I said. But I've got some excellent older characters in the sub-plots already.

I'm pretty sure my publishers and audience would be horrified if it all went a bit Harold and Maude.

I guess it all depends on what the publisher wants.

It's hard getting published in the first place; it's even harder staying published.

Agents and other gate-keepers such as Buyers for book-selling chains and bookshop managers or owners were also viewed with concern as some literary agents had suggested publishers would not want an older character involved in romance, giving forty as a top age limit, fifty at the most: "My previous agent (an older man) suggested keeping women main characters in their late forties, rather than fifties, even."

Bookshop chains' Buyers were said to be young and held great control when it came to choice of books or the volume's position on the shelf, and writers often referred to ageist attitudes. One such author commented that it was becoming increasingly more difficult to include older main characters as they were constantly made irrelevant in the realm of image and consumption in a capitalist world. They felt old people are supposed to be asexual and distant. One respondent stated that she had older protagonists but not in their seventies and continued: "The publisher doesn't want that. Sigh! But I sneak them in as secondary characters."

Other writers made similar statements. Ageist attitudes were also mentioned in connection with a bookshop chain's rejection of a title because there was an image of an old person on the cover. Another writer mentioned that the publisher's marketing department had stated that "an older woman on the cover wasn't working for them". One author's book had been rejected by the bookseller due to the colour of its cover with the excuse that "green-coloured books don't sell". This latter comment, although not relevant to the age issue, does reveal the intimidating power of gate-keepers.

Another area mentioned by writers was the difficulty experienced by youth accepting the concept of age. This factor prevented many writers from making older people their main characters. It was felt that the young would not engage with such a story nor understand how their elders felt regarding sexual needs and desires in old age. The subject was taboo. Writers' workshops were mentioned as suggesting writers should write only what they know, and that romantic description should stop at the bedroom door. It was interesting to note that one younger writer who found it difficult to accept the concept of ageing stated that it was like "visualizing your mum and dad having sex". Other younger writers who completed the questionnaire, mentioned under 'Any Comments', that now the subject had been brought to their attention, they might well reconsider their previous attitudes towards relationships between ageing adults.

Unexpectedly, nature was mentioned by one respondent as a contributing factor due to the sex drive lingering unproductively. The writer concerned thought prejudice was in the main due to nature itself losing interest in women after the menopause. In fact, one respondent, who stated she was menopausal, objected to being approached with such a questionnaire. This did highlight the diversity that exists when 'sexual retirement' is preferred. However, losing their readers and implied censorship appeared to be the most worrying issues experienced by writers.

Where a top age limit had not been given, or they had never written such a story, writers felt that they should not do so for fear of their work being rejected by publishers and readers. One respondent declared she had not taken any risks because she felt publishers implicitly expected characters to be of a certain age.

To sum up, the main concerns expressed by writer respondents in submitting a text with older characters are: possible rejection by publishers, the problem of current market forces and fear of losing their readership:

With the market being so picky and in such a state of flux, I wouldn't attempt anything experimental. It would be a waste of time.

It's more a question of understanding the markets (and their gate-keepers) which you have to do as a writer if you want to stay published, rather than getting explicit instructions. Novelists galore have been dropped in the past two or three years because their sales went down and publishers were trimming their lists. I don't wish to be one of them.

One gets the impression that the mainstream market is obsessed with niche marketing and there is no such niche for this. Publishers of good fiction on the fringes may look more kindly upon it.

Only two writers confessed to being self-published and therefore at liberty to write what they liked. All the above responses are reflected in Table A on page 51.

### **KEY FINDINGS FROM PUBLISHER RESPONDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRE 2010**

TABLE B.

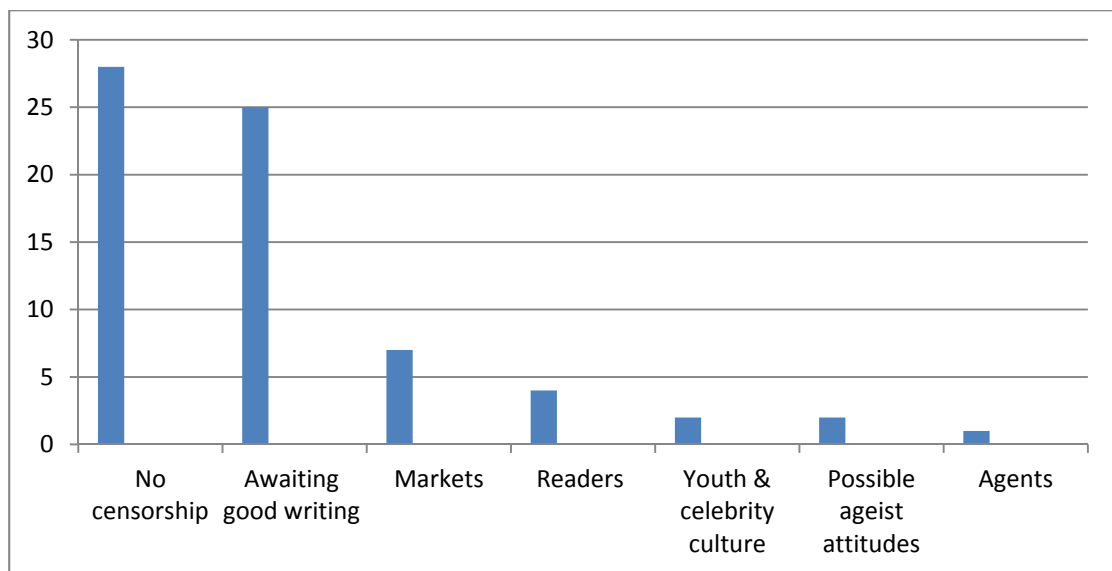


Table B illustrates the number of times various aspects were mentioned in the publisher respondents' questionnaires (see Appendix 9 on page 270).

The overriding attitudes emerging from the submitted data from publisher respondents indicate that they await good writers to reflect the new cultures of ageing

and are against any form of censorship. Only two respondents mentioned market factors:

There is a smaller market for these books, (which in itself is perhaps a symptom of there not being enough of them published in the right way) and we naturally think carefully before committing. It is unfortunate, but like TV, the books that sell in vast numbers are increasingly celebrity focused.

We foresee a market where there is still a strong demand for ‘golden-age’ characters, but more opportunity to produce niche fiction that caters for older or much younger readers.

The culture of the celebrity was mentioned by a few publishers who commented, that while wanting their fiction to reflect contemporary society, younger authors did tend to write from a younger view point:

I agree it’s true that publishing generally (and bookselling too) tends to be a young person’s industry, so maybe there is little inherent interest/sympathy . . .

On the other hand, writer respondents, who from their responses appeared to be under forty-five, mentioned age and inexperience of older age as prohibitive to their work and considered writing about intimacy, taboo. One young man from a creative writing group claimed he was advised to write only from his own experience. Another commented that so far he had not considered writing about older people, but might well do so in the future:

Young writers may feel that the topic of older people having an intimate relationship is somewhat taboo, or simply too difficult for them to write about or imagine.

I am in my 40s and so tend to write about a younger age group.

I have not written about such a relationship. I feel I should break the taboo around sex and age.

There’s a school of thought that says “write about what you know” (a view I don’t necessarily agree with – I like to step out of my comfort zone). Perhaps this is why there isn’t much material on this subject. Perhaps, as a result of taking part in this study, I’ll consider it more . . .



The result of the initial analysis led to a chain of other categories that could have been explored more fully by grounded theory, where a three-stage paradigm could have been applied to illuminate and saturate the data. In consideration of the social facts regarding ageist attitudes existing independently of the activities of publishers, writers and researchers, together with information gleaned from the initial qualitative research, saturation proved to be outside the possible perimeters of this thesis, so a positive paradigm was chosen which would support the need to elicit views of readers. This was due to the impossibility of using traditional methods of observation and measurement of the social phenomena.

A quantitative survey of readers was particularly necessary as a great many writers were concerned about losing their readership should they write about love in the 'late-life course'. A mixed methods approach had already been envisaged if required, and this was achieved by me commissioning an independent Consumer Omnibus survey to carry out quantitative propriety online research through Dynamic Markets and ICM (Independent Communications and Marketing) entitled 'British Novel Characters Survey'. (See Appendix 3 on pages 255-6) This was essential in order to examine the national view of people's attitudes towards this issue and build on existing research by the British Film Industry's using Harris Interactive Online in February 2011,, published 2 April 2011 and detailed in the Literature Review (see Appendix 4 on pages 257-9). The fieldwork for the survey of readers was initiated on 4 April 2011 and carried out between 6-8 May 2011. The methodology was as follows: One thousand, and thirty-six adults aged between eighteen plus and sixty-five were interviewed as part of an online omnibus survey hosted by ICM Research. However the questionnaire was designed by me personally:

'Do you think it acceptable or not acceptable for older main characters, aged 60 and above, to be portrayed in British novels as having sexual needs and desires?'

Respondents were then asked to indicate one of the following responses:

It is acceptable. It is not acceptable. Prefer not to say. Don't know.

During the omnibus research process, questions were posed to a panel of consumers and data was collected until various pre-defined sampling quotas were reached. The sample was then demographically weighted to make it representative of the United Kingdom population aged eighteen plus in order to overcome any sampling deficiencies and / or internet bias. The results were then analysed and sig-

tested at a ninety-five percent confidence level (see ICM tables in Appendix 3. 255-6).

Having interpreted these tables the main differences that seem interesting and statistically significant are as follows: From a total of one thousand and thirty-six respondents, results revealed sixty-eight percent of British adults (eighteen plus) thought it acceptable with the figures higher for the older age groups, there being no difference between those over forty-five and the sixty-five plus group, with little differentiation between the sexes, marital status or social class. Also there was no difference across the country in those accepting this issue with seven per cent finding it unacceptable. People below the age of forty-four were more undecided than those over sixty-five with three per cent preferring not to say and twenty-two per cent responding with 'Don't know'.

Results of this national survey are very close to those of the British Film Council, mentioned in the Literature Review, where sixty-one per cent of older women respondents claimed they were not portrayed as having sexual needs or desires in film and sixty-nine per cent felt that film tended to glamorise younger women, but older characters – especially older women – tended to be significantly under-represented and stereotyped.

The subjective norm of some writers, and around twenty-five percent of the general public, indicate that readers have grown to expect that love stories will depict only younger people (up to the age of fifty). It would appear the attitudes of many people under the age of forty-four remain: Sex in late-life is disgusting.

The qualitative research illuminated behavioural control that impacted on writers as: agents, who follow what they perceive as publishers' needs; bookshops and bookshop chains' buying teams, who place emphasis on the young; nature's disinterest once women are past the age limit for procreation; readers who still accept the current situation in the book industry despite some disagreeing with it; the need to be published enforcing conformity; creative writing workshops that tend to reinforce existing patterns, especially among the young; and lastly, finance directors, who are viewed as having overall control.

For publishers, the outcome is perceived mainly due to the lack of suitable submissions by writers, society geared to youth and market forces.

Deductive inference shows that although interlinked, the cultural schemas and subjective norms of this research show a division in society, particularly among those under the age of forty. However, as discussed in the Literature Review, although ageism is prevalent in some areas, certain positive changes in attitude towards older people have occurred in theatre projects, certain television productions, magazines and good quality newspapers. Conclusions and the close study of the interaction within the different contexts are examined in the next chapter.

## CONCLUSION

The contribution to new knowledge in this thesis is specific and groundbreaking; being the first research aimed at seeking an opinion from a wide range of publishers of contemporary British fiction. As illustrated in the first part of the Literature Review, much non-fiction by biologists, sociologists and gerontologists has been written over the last two decades relating to the concept of the new dynamics of ageing as defined in the Literature Review. Another relevant factor is that the catch-phrase ‘Seventy is the new fifty’ came into being from an unknown source around the year 2000 and spread rapidly in advertising and many aspects of the media. However, having engaged at length in analysing the current research literature, no one to date has questioned why, despite the new dynamics of ageing gaining public acceptance, the subjective realities regarding love and relationships over the age of sixty-five still wait to be thoroughly explored in contemporary British long fiction. Writers for television and new theatrical ventures have proved iconoclastic in their portrayal of much older main characters engaged in amorous adventures, and film directors have started to follow this initiative, but so far, there has been no research as to why publishers of fiction have been dilatory in relating to the reality of these facts.

The intention of this study was to analyse and test the hypothesis that British publishers of contemporary long fiction are avoiding accepting novels for publication in which main characters over the age of sixty-five, described in the Literature review as the ‘young-old’,<sup>59</sup> are involved in romantic relationships. A further intention was to produce a novel that would illustrate the existence of such relationships and their acceptance by family and friends before and after the Millennium. Many points in the interdisciplinary non-fiction examples, expressed in Part One of the thesis, inform the subjective realities of the creative fiction’s protagonists.

The Introduction to this thesis explains the dichotomy that led to my personal interest in the field during 2009. I was seventy-five and led an active, healthy life, yet was expected to conform to a public image of age and ageing alien to my own subjective reality. My main contention is that before beginning this research few comments had appeared in newspapers or magazines that related to ageist attitudes and late-life romance. The following are not mentioned in the Literature Review, but are deemed relevant to this study as they highlight the paucity of public comment on

the subject of the thesis during 2010, and the developing public interest over the following year.

In January 2010, Diana Athill, featured in an article for the *The Times* in the ‘Saturday Interview’<sup>60</sup> where, aged ninety-three and in a care home, she admitted that she still missed sex, and believed “the country in danger of becoming prudish again.” Then on March 15 *The Times* introduced their ‘Times2life’ section with a short editorial entitled “Sex and the Over-Sixties” saying “Times2 today explores one of the last unwritten taboos: sex, sexuality and the over-60s.” After quoting Sophocles, the passage ended with, “Sex as part of body-and-soul development is a key to celebrating life.”<sup>61</sup> Within that edition of ‘Times2life’, Julie Pascal’s article was entitled, “We’ve Never Had It So Good”<sup>62</sup> and Felicity Kendall contributed to the theme with, “Sex Symbol, Rebel and Gran”.<sup>63</sup> Also in the section was a narrow column by Dr. Mark Porter entitled “Concerns of Ageing”, with the following headings: “Low libido; Sexually active; Two or three times? The big problem; Reaching orgasm”.

On the same day, in *The Daily Telegraph*,<sup>64</sup> a reporter for the paper wrote a short column on research mentioned in the *Journal of the American Geriatric Society*. One thousand, two hundred and thirty-five women between the ages of sixty and eighty-nine had been questioned during research carried out by Professor Wesley Thompson from the University of California in San Diego, who reported that the women were moderately or very satisfied with their sex lives and they perceived this as having an effect on the quality of their lives. This was followed on June 10 2010 by another interview with Diana Athill. While discussing the mask of age, and recalling Priestly, she told a reporter from *The Guardian* that “However old one is, one always feels as you used to feel.”

Despite the scarcity of articles on the new dynamics of ageing in newspapers or fiction during 2010, in contrast, those involved in the theatre continued their concerns with age and stimulated much discussion with various projects in London and Keele. However, the production most publicised nationally, was the production of *Juliet and her Romeo* at the Bristol Old Vic with octogenarian, well-known actors playing the eponymous Shakespearian roles that exemplified the theme stated in the programme notes: ‘Not all passion is spent’. This production stimulated much discussion of ‘love in old age’ in theatrical magazines and reviews (see ‘Literature Review’, 42).

An increased public awareness of the new demographics of age and ageism came about during January 2011. There was a great deal of media interest in discussions

about the BBC's apparent ageist policy. The programme 'Question Time', chaired by David Dimbleby on January 14, discussed Miriam O'Reilly's tribunal win. The tribunal had concluded she was discriminated against on grounds of age when dropped from the rural affairs show, 'Countryfile'. After much heated discussion the programme ended with a member of the audience commenting, "Most of us are living longer and we will certainly make our voices heard in the future!"

In February 2011, *The Sunday Telegraph* magazine, 'Stella', brought out a special Love issue;<sup>65</sup> the final part being composed of interviews with partners of all ages. It concluded with a couple, aged ninety-one and seventy-eight, who fell in love while in the same care home and then married in 2005. On March 14, two authors were interviewed in the 'Modern' section of *The Times*. Alice Thomson, who called for a new mindset about ageing,<sup>66</sup> and Marie de Hennezel, on her book, *The Warmth of Your Heart Stops Your Body from Rusting*. Media interest in the subject continued to increase during that year, especially on television, and in the theatre (see 'Literature Review', 42-46). On April 30 *The Guardian* published a review by Will Self of Lewis Wolpert's *You're Looking Very Well*. It ended with the quote: "The older people get, the older they believe 'old' to be." Such coverage was in contrast to the fact that writers and publishers of contemporary British long fiction appeared to be ignoring the social facts inherent in the new dynamics and demographics of ageing.

The main aim of this thesis has been to probe deeper into this enigma, using qualitative research as a suitable paradigm. To enable a search for insights from publishers and writers that would lead to a clearer understanding of the situation, Charmaz's constructivist theory was envisaged as a suitable analytic framework. This proved an effective choice as it offered a methodological context for a pragmatic mixed methods approach, used at a later stage with a quantitative survey to examine the views of one thousand and thirty-six readers. This theory also provided opportunity for an interpretative analysis.

By operating within such an interpretative perspective, it proved possible to focus upon the way in which the research respondents viewed the world and the relevant research issues. There is usually an appreciation that research participants and the researcher will be interactive. In this case, although no physical interactivity took place between researcher and the various groups, the subject matter and the nature of the questions still allowed for an awareness of a 'stranger' in their midst which could well have transformed the dynamics attached to answering a questionnaire, possibly

changing the ‘setting’ of their thoughts. However, I contend that in this case, the absence of the researcher allowed for a positive outcome and a deeper thought process among writer respondents, exemplified by comments that the questionnaire had provoked new thoughts on the subject. The interpretive response from a researcher is far from passive as thoughts are analysed, questioned and related to a social world which may be different from that of the respondents. The constructivist approach was successful as both data and analysis were created from shared experiences. My own experience as a reader, director of my own publishing house<sup>67</sup> and a writer, enabled me to identify with respondents in both fields, although there was no way of knowing whether there was a correlation of social worlds. In studying *how* and *why* participants constructed meanings in the hypothetical situation envisaged for this research, age, experience, and attitudes were evidenced in respondents’ comments. Exploration and interpretation of these comments are necessarily abbreviated due to pagination limits for Part 1 of the thesis.

The result of the analysis of non-fiction within the Literature Review that starts on page eleven of this thesis, illustrates that sociologists, gerontologists and scientists worldwide are continuing to share opinions deriving from research that has progressed from the late eighties when attitudes towards ageing began to change. Once scientists proved that longevity had increased to the point where many men or women could now live to the age of a hundred, there developed a world-wide interest in maintaining people’s health and in finding paths to a more creative, fulfilling old age. The fact that a person could still be sexually active and have sexual needs and desires well into their eighties has been largely ignored by writers and publishers of fiction, yet it has been mentioned in research dating back to 1984, and to the present continues to be a subject of interest for social scientists.

Also in the Literature Review, the eleven contemporary novels mentioned earlier are discussed in detail to assess whether the authors had acknowledged the changing dynamics of ageing and its impact on late-life romantic relationships. Many came close to doing so, but none of the selected fiction conveys completely the realities of the changing dynamics of age at the present time. The archaeologist, Stella Brentwood in Lively’s *Spiderweb*, avoids such relationships preferring to stay alone and independent. The ages of other main characters are coyly described as: around sixty, retired or close to retirement. Apart from the failing eighty-year old mother in Rosie Thomas’s *Lovers and Neighbours*, other main characters said to be older than sixty-

five in the selected fiction, were seen as either comic or else outlandishly bizarre. Considering that all the characters of the selected fiction are living in or approaching the twenty-first century, little is said in these novels about the older characters use of, or interest in, modern technology. Some main characters experience late-life relationships, but as in Elizabeth Jane Howard's *Falling*, any lover 'falling' for an older woman is suspected of being a con man or thief (see 'Literature Review', 29).

More media coverage on age, ageing and ageism took place during 2012, created mostly from the publicity given to the film 'The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel', but so far publishers have not presented any new novels reflecting the new dynamics of ageing in a way that relates to the content of this thesis. Moggach's *These Foolish Things*, was first published in 2004, and as stated earlier on pages 38-9 of this thesis, reviewers of this book during that year, concentrated on aspects of racism, middle-aged children and care homes, so it is not surprising that the concept of 'love in old age' was not emphasised sufficiently to be mentioned in any citation regarding relevant relationships over sixty-five. Although, in 2012 when the story was reborn as the film "The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel" with well-known film stars taking part, the 'publicity machine' excelled itself. The amount of money invested for the film allowed for collaboration with the publishers to make available a free copy of the novel to all customers of the supermarket chain, Morrisons. Yet, according to peer reviews on Amazon.com, those readers who had already read the 2004 edition were disappointed to find they now had two identical copies, apart from the titles, while those who had not read the earlier version were disappointed to find it failed to match the narrative depicted in the film or the witty dialogue of Ol Parker's screenplay. Despite some critics deriding the film as 'Saga Cinema', one positive aspect of this version was that the British director John Madden made a clear statement: "There is most definitely life after old age and love does indeed conquer all."<sup>68</sup>

Another positive factor is that the film stimulated many public comments on the portrayal of the 'young old' on screen. These appeared either in international film Blogs or in articles such as the one written by Deborah Moggach for *The Daily Telegraph*<sup>69</sup> in which she asked why the elderly are not treated with more dignity. She also commented on the current shift in attitude:

I think we're seeing a shift in consciousness. Life doesn't end with retirement; it can be a new beginning. If we're open to new experiences, we can find



ourselves transformed. And let's stop calling ourselves old; I prefer very grown up indeed.

The US studio has asked Moggach (aged sixty-four) to write a sequel, as the film was so successful netting eighty million pounds at box office worldwide. Moggach's reaction in July 2012, at *The Telegraph's* 'Way With Words' festival was the following:

These people in Hollywood are paid shedloads of money yet they didn't know something that was obvious – people like us go to the movies. Not everyone is 30. There's a huge amount of people not catered for in movies. . . . But there are no films for us – there's been *The King's Speech* and *The Artist* and that was about it.

We need films that aren't just catering for 20 and 30 year olds. <sup>70</sup>

A sequel would give Moggach an opportunity to bring the romantic relationships of people over sixty-five into the limelight of contemporary fiction as well as films.

Having analysed the relevant fiction and non-fiction, the aims of the study were to keep the focus narrow, but look for wider implications that would provide new knowledge, including possible entrenched bigotries. These aims have been achieved and already many writer and publisher respondents have expressed interest in learning the results of this study. Hopefully, this success will encourage writers and publishers to reflect on the realities discussed earlier and accept the possibility of love and romance for those not 'sexually retired' in the late-life course.

During April 2010, a pilot scheme for publishers proved successful as it allowed a consistency of approach throughout. Details of these, the questionnaire designs and results are delineated within the section Paradigms and Data Collection on page 46 of the thesis. A web site was designed for writers so that they could complete the questionnaire and consent form online. Resulting participation of these two groups was considered successful as thirty-two percent of publishers and fifty-four writers responded (see Web Site Design and list of writer contact points with request letters in appendices 1 and 7 on pages 251 and 265). This section of the thesis also set out to examine the emergence of patterns and relationships in order to develop a fuller hypothesis from the data and validate the project. Following Hennink's symbolic interactionism, a deductive conceptual framework was created as a frame of reference so as to generate a fuller understanding of the views and behaviour of the publishers and writers within the research perimeters. When examining key insights of

respondents, consideration was therefore given to the subjective norm, any perceived behavioural control and overriding attitudes that led to cultural schemas.

The main key findings of writers are detailed in Table A on page 51 of this thesis and I have thus demonstrated that all writer respondents claimed not to have experienced direct censorship by publishers regarding the age of their characters, although many suggested such censorship was implied indirectly. Despite this, many writers expressed a sympathetic understanding of the current financial crisis facing the publishing industry.

Table B on page 54, similarly indicates the number of times various aspects were mentioned by publisher respondents. They all declared that any attempt to give the writer a top age limit would amount to censorship and that any fiction of good literary quality would be considered for publication. However, only four publisher respondents mentioned market factors.

Besides publishers, writers and market forces, other interest groups emerged from the key insights. These were readers, booksellers and bookshop chain Buyers; young writers' workshops and agents. Surprisingly, nature was also mentioned as an key factor; the latter indicating the opinion that males are programmed to be interested only in pre-menopausal women, while females, after the menopause, no longer express an interest in sex. Whether this theory is correct is highly debateable as during 2011, the number of mothers over forty giving birth grew by six point eight percent.<sup>71</sup> Yet, nature was expressed as a possible problem in establishing relationships in later life by Piers Paul Read in *The Misogynist* and in two of Fay Weldon's novels, *Chalcot Crescent* and *Rhode Island Blues*.

It would have been interesting to follow up the chain of these interest groups by using Silverman's grounded theory to saturation point, but this would have proved too difficult considering time allowed, and the overall length of the thesis. Also, a more detailed result may well have been achieved if chief editors of publishing houses had been interviewed separately within a three month period, and writers around the country seen in focus groups. However, it was essential to test the belief held by so many writer respondents and a few publishers, that they would lose their readership if they raised the age of their main protagonists to over sixty-five or portrayed older age characters in novels having sexual needs and desires. Another interesting factor was that some respondents of both groups revealed a dependency attitude to old age, considering readers preferred stories about youth and past times so they could forget

their ageing bodies, whereas in fact a large proportion of reader respondents in the quantitative research refuted this.

The area of research of the British Film Council in April 2011, entitled ‘Portrayal Vs Betrayal’ (see Appendix 5 on page 260), was carried out by professional market researchers for the British Film Industry’s department of Research and Statistics, and in order to provide original comparative material for this thesis, it was essential to have a numerically similar survey on readers that would also be carried out by a professional market research firm. For this reason, also in April 2011, I commissioned ICM<sup>72</sup> who provided data set out in the tables appearing in Appendix 3 on pages 251-2. The results of this survey confirmed my hypothesis that the views of readers on ‘the acceptance of main characters over sixty in novels having sexual needs and desires’ would be very similar to those of film viewers on ‘the portrayal of older characters’. This highlighted the misperceptions not only of writer respondents but also of researchers from the FCMAP<sup>73</sup> and Third Age Trust (see page 44 of this thesis). In the Readers’ survey, sixty-eight percent of those over forty felt the portrayal of sexual needs and desires in characters over the age of sixty quite acceptable, with figures higher in the older age groups. Having analysed the results, this project was thought worthwhile as it revealed seven percent of people under the age of forty-four did not find it acceptable and two percent preferred not to say. This suggests a great deal needs to be achieved to combat this obvious ageist attitude among the young.

The fact that key insights of the qualitative research have revealed British publishers as tending to place the onus on writers to produce good quality submissions, and that many writers blame the publishers and/or agents, suggests there is a great deal of ageism, not only in the younger members of the general public, but also in the book industry itself:

No, but an agent suggested that publishers were really looking for heroines under 40 – she suggested I write a book from two points of view. One younger and one older character.

My previous agent (an older man) suggested keeping women main characters in their late 40’s rather than fifties, even.

In the light of these comments, in hindsight it would have been preferable to have included agents in the original research during the spring of 2010, before the media increased coverage on ageist attitudes in 2011.

To sum up, the main aim of this investigation and the study design proved successful, as the questionnaires and the created Web site produced full and interesting responses. However, the hypothesis that publishers set an age limit for romantic encounters in narratives was not supported; although the rationale for the research proved correct as writers did admit to feeling inhibited, not always due to experiencing censorship, but by believing that such censorship existed within the concept of ageism.

Writers added that they felt a struggling financial market was not sufficiently conducive to encourage them to instigate change; some self-declared 'young old' writers settling for portraying relationships among older secondary characters. Upon reflection of comments made by writer respondents, this study had considered that in view of the current economic world crisis and the field of power held by publishers (see Bourdieu, 1993), those taken-for-granted assumptions of writer respondents were ineradicable. Then, unexpectedly in May 2012, Waterstones, one of the largest bookshop chains, embraced the idea of selling kindles and low cost e-books. Their acceptance of selling such digital technology, once envisaged by the book trade as threatening, could now encourage more writers to use online firms such as Amazon or Google, not only for purchasing, but also for self-publishing. Attracting a wider readership is always a problem for writers, but this new venture by Waterstones, might possibly help writers overcome their perceptions of censorship by publishers. Whether the gate-keepers of the publishing world (see page 48-9 of this thesis), will consider such moves by writers as innovative remains to be seen. The growing power of the internet could change Bourdieu's sociological concepts of culture, habitat, capital and field affecting economic significance within the whole society. Technology would influence most forms of artistic endeavour and the aristocracy of culture would be those with advanced technical knowledge. The old 'doxa' would then be ruptured; for while at the moment not everyone owns or wants to own a computer, over the coming years advances in computer science, together with technological education in schools, will ensure that future generations hold the power.

Over the last two decades, an understanding of racism and gender has been promoted in aspects of education and culture, and to a degree have had some positive

effect on society. It is now time for ageism to be understood in a similar way. The future for change must lie in an inter-generational process that starts in schools and is supported by higher education, creative writing workshops, publishers, and writers in both print and the media.

Upon reflection, it would be valuable sometime in the near future, for this research to be followed up by others to provide a much deeper investigation. For example, further analysis of the data from the quantitative segment could yield many more research opportunities. Other areas, only touched upon in this thesis, deserve more attention; for example, ageism, as expressed unintentionally by authors, reviewers, fictional characters, editors or other members of the publishing industry; or the design of book covers. However, my main contention is that current literary theory would benefit from 'ageing' being included as a literary category (Wallace. 14. 389-411).

Finally, this thesis has demonstrated the uncertainty and lack of trust between writer and publisher, yet withstanding these negative attributes, many respondents from both groups thought this area of research important and sent personal messages for a successful outcome. My own age has been an advantage while carrying out the research as I could write with confidence from personal experience of the new dynamics of ageing. I have also gained a great deal from the fiction and non-fiction I have studied. Personally, I consider this research to be a valuable contribution and a foundation stone upon which others may build for it has already engendered much positive discussion when I have contributed a paper at recent conferences on ageing (see Appendix 11 on page 304). Despite the disparate views that have emerged from the respondents, it is hoped that good quality writing will soon emerge and thus encourage British publishers to promote the subjective realities experienced by the 'young old'.

The final aim of the investigation was to place the research in a wider context by creating a literary novel relating to love and relationships over the age of sixty-five. In this tragic love story, depicted as a fictodrama, the two main characters embody the term 'young old', and experience the new dynamics of ageing. They portray the reality of the twenty-first century by revealing the acceptance of their 'late-love', a creative and healthy lifestyle and an active interest in the latest technology. Apart from demonstrating these three aspects, the fiction makes a statement about ageist attitudes, and relates to many non-fiction references embodied in Part One of the thesis (see 'Introduction to the Creative Writing' on page 73).

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## PART TWO

## INTRODUCTION TO THE CREATIVE WRITING

Margaret A. Boden, on page one of her volume *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms*, defines creativity as “the ability to come up with ideas or artefacts that are new, surprising and valuable.” (1) The multi-level novel *EXEUNT* is a response not only to the exploration of a structured conceptual space but also to my research and the analysis of representations of ageing. McAdams, on page 44 of this thesis, mentions that living in this modern world is a life story, while Sartre envisaged our identities as being created by other people; education being integral to both philosophies. In this particular case the two lovers, despite growing up in vastly different political regimes, have both been influenced by the philosophy of aesthetics,<sup>74</sup> and this sensori-emotional attraction brings them together. Their identities, having been created via nature and nurture, slowly begin to merge.

As they grow older, the reader witnesses their belief in the new dynamics of ageing that enables them to cast doubt on the preconceived attitudes of the ‘others’ towards the ageing process. As V.S. Pritchett states in *The Living Novel*, the works of great novelists lived on because they embodied as new material that period “between two worlds” when values and conflicts, specific to that time, were in transition; the new material then becoming “a new seeing.” In *EXEUNT*, the characters mount this wave and arrive at its tip, not reflecting the age, but adding something to their discovery: people are living longer, healthier lives; growing older does not affect sexual needs and desires and the age of seventy can truly be described as the new fifty. This novel was written in the hope that it would provide a ‘new seeing’.

To avoid allowing prejudice to emerge from a reading of the opening scenes, the ages of the two seventy-year old lovers are not revealed until thirty-six pages into the novel on page 118. The reader knows only that they have been engaged in a long-term romantic relationship for twenty-three years. The story, full of rich memories, relates to a fast-moving world where travel is easy and most people have access to modern technology for communication. The plot works against ageism within current prejudice by depicting the lovers in their fifties, sixties and seventies, revealing a wide gap between subjective reality and the images of old age portrayed by those younger members of society who unwittingly propagate the old models – childhood, adulthood and old age. In this way, age is presented as an anachronism and the

epistemology of age as acquired only through the negative opinions or actions of the ‘others’. This is well illustrated by Gubrium and Holstein in their introduction to *Ageing and Everyday Life* (Gubrium, 5) when they reveal how the meaning of age is socially constructed. The normality of such a ‘third-age’ relationship in the twenty-first century is portrayed through the acceptance of the couple by their friends of all ages, the only dissent coming from two people, but on grounds of morality, not age.

A great deal of the novel is set in Romania allowing contrasting attitudes regarding ageing to emerge from the ethnographic detail of this Eastern-block country during the period of communism, revolution and consequential freedom: 1982-2005. Ironically, the research element of this thesis sets out to readdress inequalities, while the novel is set in a period of extreme censorship. Having once been a publisher, I can only praise those in the publishing world, who during that period addressed the problem by accepting translations from the communist block in order to support the novelists, dramatists and poets who risked their jobs or even lives by finding ways to speak out against the atrocities of the regime. Unlike such restricted communities, in the United Kingdom we at least have the freedom to write and publish what we like.

Doris Lessing in her novel *Love Again* comments: “The theatre, in short, was just like life (but in a condensed and brightly illuminated form, forcing one into the comparison), always whirling people and events into improbable associations and then – that’s it. The end” (191).

The structure of the novel, *EXEUNT* illuminates aspects of the subject raised by this quotation i.e. theatrical realism and metaphysical naturalism, the latter defined as: the belief that the physical universe is all that exists. Since the writing of the first draft, the novel has developed frameworks utilising the analogy of theatre for life and death where people and events are whirled “into improbable associations” until the curtain call. Although in part ontogenetic, the overall structure is unique in that it disrupts the reader/audience’s attention by intermittent reminders, via the imagery, stage directions and terminology, that life is enacted and must finally come to an end. The term ‘fictodrama’ is unique and has been used in this study to describe *EXEUNT*’s combination of fiction and theatrical effects.

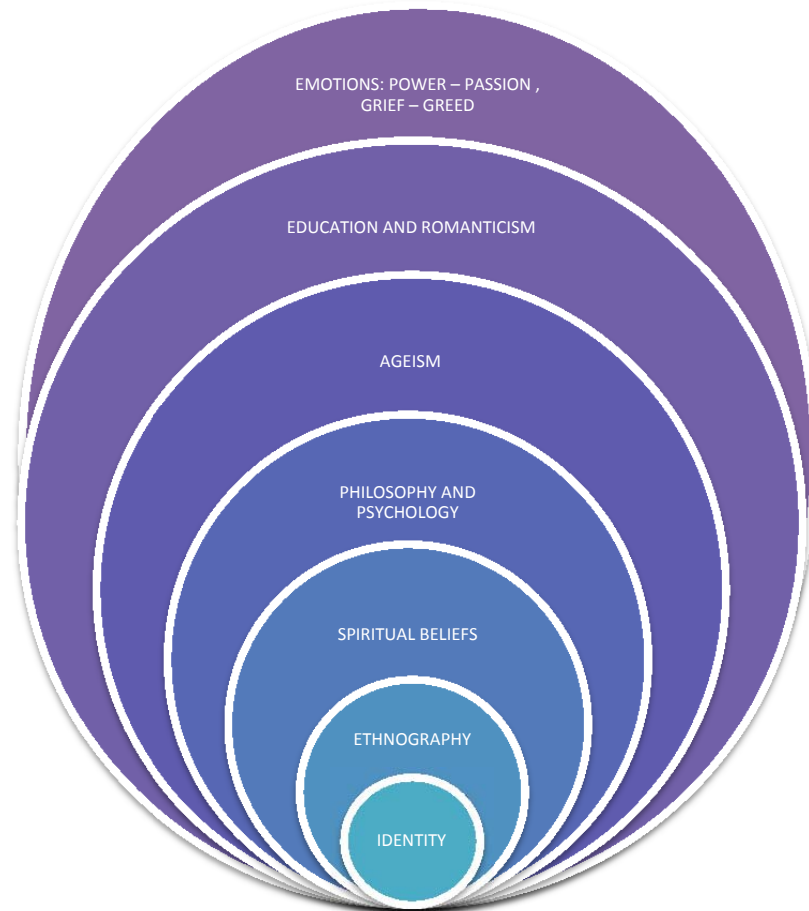
Emile Faguet in his small volume *De la Vieillesse* writes: “Old age is a perpetual play that a man acts in order to deceive others and himself and whose chief drollery lies in the fact that he acts badly.”<sup>75</sup> This too seems an apt description for those involved in the love-triangle. The characters of Glynis and Ştefan struggle to keep an

ideal alive in a changing materialistic world; the romantic ideal of truth, beauty and everlasting love, inherent in their classical and literary education, if not their upbringing. Eventually, the struggle is lost, and in desperation to gain control over the situation, Glynis seeks aid from the New Age Movement, pseudo-science and psychology.

Inspired by Alan Schneider's collaboration with Samuel Beckett on a silent movie entitled *Film*, enacted by Buster Keaton, the idea came to mind to have the shoe-box act as the perceiver and disembodied narrator. *Film* opens and closes with close-up shots of a sightless eye. The story of *EXEUNT* opens and closes with the shoe-box; the box containing the story and all the memories that form the essence of both the man and the woman. Part of this essence is perceived by the man as his 'spirit double', his lost soul-mate. Once self-perception is unavoidable, he sets out to destroy both soul and self.

This tragic existential love-story is an example of British contemporary fiction that does reflect aspects of the new dynamics of ageing and so brings together the concepts of the research. Its structure is envisaged as an e-book of the future, revealing many parts of the world superimposed by images of the main characters' childhoods and education.

## Multi-levels of the Novel



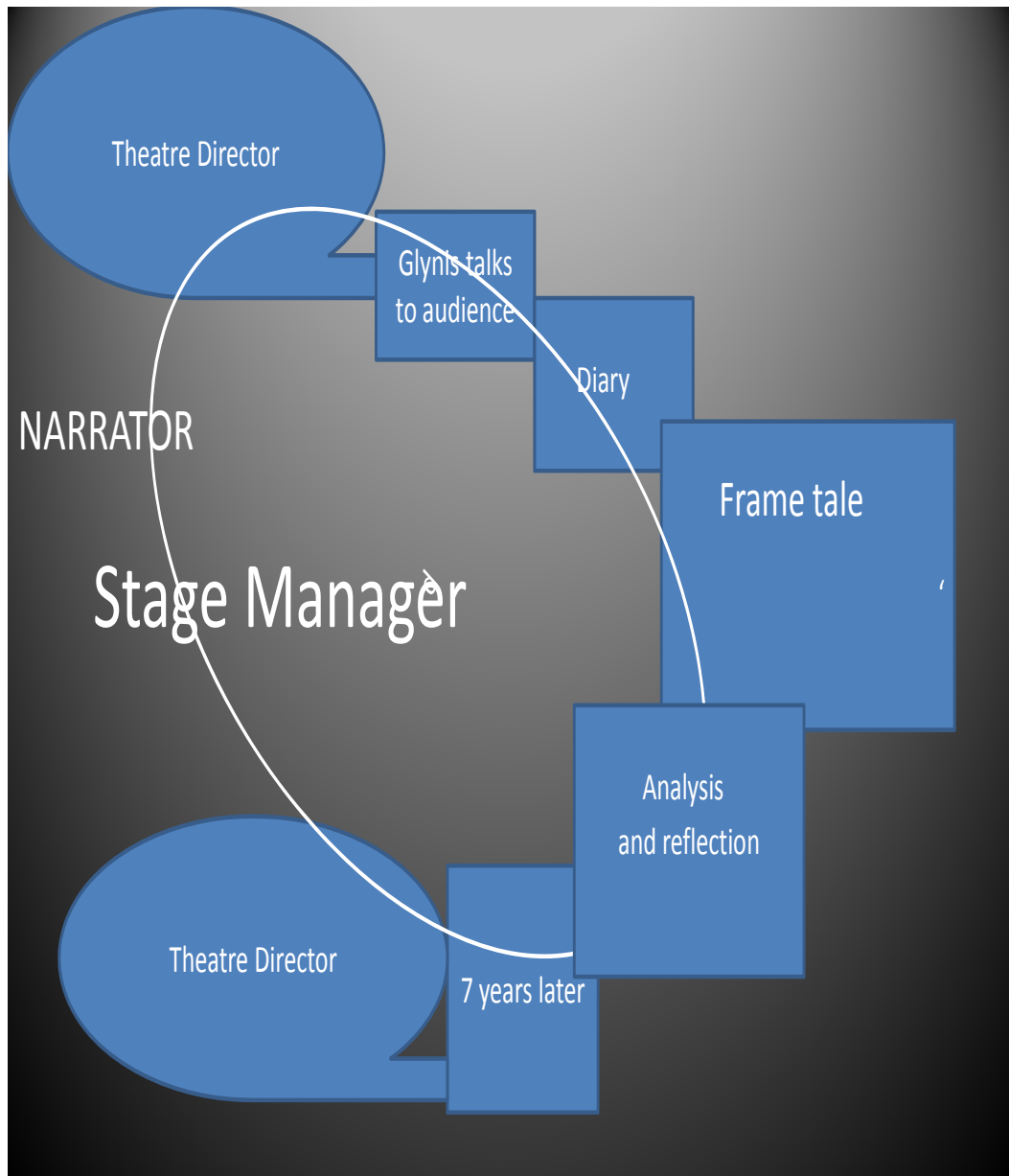
The three main characters in *EXEUNT* are holistically portrayed, and the above diagram illustrates the many aspects that affect their lives. To sum up the earlier statements: born with external identities, nature and nurture influence their development until they seek to break away from the parental bond in order to discover their true, internal identities. Education swathed in the classics and romanticism, plus a common interest in spiritual beliefs form the bond of Glynis and Ştefan's long relationship, but the emotions of passion, power and greed finally undermine their love, while grief simmers for past lives and past times.

Ageism is placed at the centre of the diagram as the 'young old' lovers are protected from such negativity while they still reflect each other's internal identities. However, when the relationship is terminated abruptly by the intervention of Ştefan's wife, Megara, the masks of 'old age' appear and they become conscious of ageism reflected by others.

Glynis

Ştefan

Megara



## Structure of the Novel

The Theatre Director is omniscient, and although invisible to the actors is presumed to be omnipresent.

The white oval links the Stage Manager to the narrative as well as to the disembodied voice of the shoe-box that acts as Narrator and describes throughout, the actions, inner thoughts and memories of the protagonist Ștefan.

The Stage Manager leads the reader/voyeur into the minds of the main characters and illustrates their turmoil visually and surrealistically.

## Timeline for the Novel

Glynis's father, Andrew Harding dies at 60 in 1950 when she is 16. He was 20 years older than his wife who also dies at the age of 60 but in 1970.

Glynis confirmed Church of England, marries Edward Levenson, a Catholic, in 1956. They have 3 children: John, Delia and Joanna.

Glynis's friend, Judy, is 15 years younger and once her student at College.

	Glynis	Ştefan and Megara Angelache	Edward Levenson
<b>Ages in 1982</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>47 46</b>	<b>54</b>

1982 Glynis visits Romania for the first time.

1983 Ştefan visits the UK for the first time.

1985 Glynis and Ştefan visit New York and Boston together.

1986 Ştefan goes to Amsterdam but alone. 1988 Ştefan's second visit to the UK.

1989 Romanian Revolution takes place in December.

1990 Glynis finds she is sole beneficiary to her uncle's estate in New Zealand.

1990-95 Glynis joins Ştefan in Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, USA, Africa, Cuba, India and Switzerland.

<b>Ages in 1995</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>60 59</b>	<b>65</b>
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1995 Edward dies aged 65.

1996 Glynis rents an apartment in Bucharest. Glynis and Ştefan visit Amsterdam.

1997 Glynis moves there permanently. Glynis and Ştefan visit South Carolina together.

1998 Ştefan and Megara invite Glynis to join them on holiday in Turkey.

1999 Ştefan and Megara join Glynis and friends on weekend trips to the Romanian mountains.

2000 Ştefan takes his wife to New York and Washington.

2001 Ştefan and Glynis visit Barcelona.

<b>Ages in 2002</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>67 66</b>	
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2002 Glynis invites Ştefan, Megara and a friend called Alexandru for a holiday in Lesbos.

2003 Ştefan invites Glynis to go to Berlin with him to celebrate twenty-one years since they first met.

<b>Ages in 2004</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>69 68</b>	
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2004 Glynis invites Ştefan, Megara and a friend called Lavinia for a holiday in Cyprus.

2005 Glynis starts writing. Visits Dubai, Fujera and London.

2005 Glynis returns to live in the UK. In 2012, she completes what she set out to write.

2013 Glynis dies of a heart attack in November, aged 79. Ştefan commits suicide 31 December at the age of 78. Megara dies naturally some years later.

# *EXEUNT*

**A fictodrama related to research about 'Love and Relationships over 65'**

**JOAN WALKER**

Part Two of the Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the award of

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## Disclaimer

The autobiographical elements of *EXEUNT* are based not only on my childhood, which would have coincided time-wise with the character, Glynis, but also on my lifetime of emotional experiences, and places or buildings I have visited in Romania as well as other countries. Historical references to events or happenings that took place in Romania before and after the 1989 Revolution are included to give a factual background in which the fictional characters and their relationships follow the logic of the novel in order to explore themes relevant to my research.

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*The afternoon of human life must also have a significance of its own and cannot be merely a pitiful appendage to life's morning.*

**Carl Gustav Jung**

*The Stages of Life*, 1930

*As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being.*

**Carl Gustav Jung**

*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 1962

*There is a sort of river of things passing into being, and Time is a violent torrent: no sooner is a thing brought to sight than it is swept by and another takes its place and this too will be swept away.*

**Marcus Aurelius**

*Meditations* bk.4, sect.23, 121-80 AD

## *EXEUNT*

### A Beginning near the End

**The Director:**

The drama takes place behind the proscenium arch that divides the space we call Life from that we name Death. The characters are neither black nor white but many shades of grey. At the start, a light discovers Glynis's face as she stands on the apron. It kindles a moment, and is gone. The curtain opens. This existential tragedy of three lives is presented to you, the reader – the voyeur.

**A figure:**

*'Yes, I heard. That's why I'm phoning you (pause). Yes (pause). A heart attack apparently (pause). No, no warning. Dumnezeu s-o ierte!<sup>1</sup> (pause). She came back to Romania recently and gave me a box, saying that should anything happen to her I was to pass it on to you (pause). Yes, I understand, but . . . (pause). I'll send it anyway. I promised her I'd do so (pause). No, not very big, the size of a large shoe-box: well, – more for boots than shoes (pause). No, it's sealed. Shall I send it to your house? (pause) Then where? (pause) Very well. Regards to your wife (pause). You too. Good-bye.'*

\* \* \*

**The disembodied voice of the Narrator:**

**A woman leans heavily against a table. She holds a stained cup, sips, then talks to another woman who is smoking. They bulge from wearing thick jumpers under their Romanian post-office uniforms. The remains of faded Christmas decorations hang perilously close to one of the bare bulbs. Someone in heavy shoes with loose ankle socks over tights comes through the open door scanning a small piece of paper: boredom oozing as she walks. She reaches upwards to a high shelf. She checks the name and address on the parcel with the name and address on the slip of paper, then goes back through the open door to the**

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<sup>1</sup> Romanian for 'May God forgive her!' but can also mean 'God rest her soul!'

enclosed counter, to the queue of people, to the queue of patient people. At the head of the queue, a man signs his name on the slip he is given, then moves to another queue, and another; resigned to the old system, still in place years after the revolution. He is fifth in the line.

A woman and child receive a large box. It has been opened by the Customs' official in the back office because it was sent from abroad. Tattered Christmas paper and clothing wave from the sliced opening.

A workman receives four small identical parcels and hurries away. A woman with many carrier bags receives an opened packet, while a youth has to stand to one side and wait. His parcel cannot be found. The next man receives an unopened parcel in the shape of a large shoe box. He pays a small sum and leaves. The darkness of the overcoat's armpit smells of mothballs and stale sweat as he trudges through the snow, the galoshes over his well-worn shoes, avoiding icy patches and the dirty slush around the car door. He places the parcel carefully on the passenger seat, takes off his leather gloves and starts the engine. He has been in the post office so long that ice has formed again on the windows. He reaches for the jar of salt, and a cloth reserved for such moments, then gets out to wipe the windscreen and wing mirrors. He is in a hurry. There is no time to wait for the engine.

The car arrives at the building at the base of stone steps that lead to the main entrance. Having parked, and with the box carefully nursed in his arms, he mounts the steps, greets the doorman, wipes his feet with great care so that the floors will remain unmarked, and makes his way directly down corridor after corridor, unseen and unheard, to a door that leads to a small study. He takes a key from his coat pocket and enters. Behind the door is a coat hook, and having placed the parcel on the small desk near the old-style computer, he hangs his overcoat on the hook along with his striped scarf and large black, bear fur hat, revealing – a worn grey suit and polo-necked pullover. The man inside the suit is of uncertain older age, pale, cleanly shaven and has lost much of his thinning white hair from his temple.

He sits facing the parcel, lifts and shakes it, listening attentively, and after a pause replaces it on the desk and starts undoing the string with firm well-trimmed nails. Then, he carefully folds the wispy plaited threads over the gnarled fingers and raised tributaries of his left hand. Now he gathers speed and

tears off both of the previously used brown paper layers until the box comes into sight, tightly sealed. He burrows in his trousers for a pocket knife and, trying not to damage the box, slices along the thick tape, finally easing off the lid to find a crown-crested glass swan submerged in a large amount of packing – confined, confined.

He pauses. He remembers.

He remembers the shop in Prague and two glass swans in the window.

Discarding the packing, he cups the swan in both hands, gazes – then replaces it carefully. Under the packing is a T-shirt he recognises as his; recognises the faint smell of perfume: Samsara. Wrapped inside the T-shirt is a plastic ring-bound typed manuscript the size of a large book.

He examines it flicking open a few pages here and there.

The wooden chair scrapes the floor as he shifts uneasily. He takes his glasses' case from his inside pocket. The glasses are thin metal rimmed; up-to-date. He puts them on, pushes the computer keyboard to one side, takes up the 'book' again, opens it and begins to read.

However, the Man sees only those words that overflow from Glynis's memory or her imaginings, for he is unaware of the Director, Narrator or Stage Manager; nor is he aware of the staging – yet plays a leading role.

It is midday.

\* \* \*

## Sounds of the Living

## 1.

**Stage Manager:**

*As I have been cast as your guide on this Brechtian voyage via theatrical realism and metaphysical naturalism, I suggest you don't stray too far from my parenthetical remarks in bold italics! I should also warn you that from time to time the staging may reveal surrealistic visuals with walk-ons that may use masks or giant-sized puppets. These will spring from your imagination as will music, loud sound effects, virtual figures, film clips and newspaper headlines spanning the years 1982 to 2005. Oh, and one other thing. It would be preferable to leave behind all preconceived ideas about ageing.*

*Well, let's make a start –*

*The words on the page translate into another's voice – Glynis's voice.*

*'Sing little box, don't let sleep overtake you. The world's awake within you.'*<sup>2</sup>

*The man, Ștefan, now begins to read.*

*Darkness gradually becomes light. Sounds of the living.*

**Glynis:**

Everything is in a shoe-box. Twenty-three years of our lives lying in a shoe-box: love letters, postcards, quotations we shared, artefacts we'd purchased together while abroad, so we'd each have one as a memento, our poems, and the photographs. Later we used email. They're in there as well. After the Romanian revolution I think he was afraid I'd expect him to leave his wife, (which of course I did at the time), but my husband's cancer had reappeared – so I stayed. Another issue was that he and Megara had lived through the drama of that uprising, ducking down behind the window to avoid bullets fired against an army unit nearby. When you have experienced such things together, a stronger relationship is bound to emerge.

I never set out with the intention of hurting anyone. I was no bitch trying to steal someone's husband or break up a family, but the fact remained that Ștefan Anghelache and I were never able to resist one another for long. There was magnetism stronger than logic, brought about by touch or sight. Who knows which? It took only a moment upon seeing or touching the other for the magic of anastomosis to begin.

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<sup>2</sup> Vasko Popa. "The Admirers of the Little Box." The quotation refers to Glynis's shoe-box and its contents.

Only a moment – for this ‘second life’ of ours to shipwreck.

*(It is Tuesday, the 9<sup>th</sup> of September. The 25<sup>th</sup> day of the year and Saturn’s rings are at maximum tilt, 27 degrees towards earth. Glynis’s memories jostle for attention. Your attention. Obsessive memories. Glynis hears Megara’s voice as it echoes in her head but thoughts dart from past to present: from present to past. Listen! She addresses you!)*

A sharp burst of word-fire came from Megara’s brightly coloured lips.

‘Ştefan will stay in the room!’

It was the day before the planned trip to the Troodos Mountains. A warm morning, full of soft Greek music and cries of happy children on the shore.

Summer was nearing its end.

*Ştefan will stay in the room!*

I tried conversing pleasantly with her in a mixture of Romanian and English. You know, insignificant things. Her monosyllabic responses grazed me with unease. We chose our space, adapted the pool-loungers to a comfortable position, and settled to read amid the chatter of garrulous sparrows hopping round the windbreak of hibiscus.

‘*Ştefan will stay in the room!*’

Why had Ştefan chosen seclusion in preference to cheerful assignation? As I felt unsettled and needed more distraction than a book, I decided to go to the beach and invited Megara to join me. She refused in staccato tones.

‘I prefer here. The wind it will disarrange my hair.’ Eyes expressionless. Lips – slightly smiling. Then after a pause, ‘Also the children are too loud.’

‘Then I’ll leave my handbag here with you if that’s all right?’

Curt nod, glance piercing the page. ‘*Ştefan will stay in the room!*’ I escaped invisible constraints and flip-flopped down the path that led to the sea. ‘*The wind it will disarrange my hair.*’ ‘*The children are too loud.*’ ‘*The children are too loud.*’ Then I suddenly remembered the faint stain on the sleeve of my jacket waiting in the wardrobe for ‘House-keeping’ to collect. I’d forgotten to leave a note with it, so returned to the hotel through the nearest entrance and took the lift. ‘*Ştefan will stay in the room!*’

The jacket was still there, so I hastily wrote STAIN on a scrap of paper and pinned it on. Thoughts turned to Ştefan so I reckoned I might as well ring.

‘It’s me! When are you coming down to the pool?’ And before he could answer, ‘Use the communicating doors! They’re unlocked.’



You see, unknown to anyone, I'd found them open when I first inspected the rooms and had decided to leave them unlocked, thinking it might be useful if we all needed to communicate, but somehow never got round to mentioning it. I could hear him moving a chair and then in a few moments, clad only in swimming trunks, he joined me. During those few seconds I cleared away the chair from in front of the door on my side, and – more out of tidiness than for any other reason – moved one of the curtains.

'You must go down again, *now!* She will come to find you.'

'No she won't! I left my handbag with her and she'd never leave a bag unattended, hers or anyone else's!'

'She will. Believe me, Glynis, I know her. She's a very jealous woman!'

He moved towards me, 'Now, go!'

'Well, why did you stay in the room?'

Urgency softened as he smiled. 'I wanted to read and be on my own a little.'

Hands caressed hair, drawn closer, tongues met. Then –

'Please go! I want to keep you forever, you know.'

A little hurt by his fear, I turned to leave. Perhaps he read my expression, for he came back, desire evident as he pressed against me.

'I love you! Never ever doubt me. Now go!' he ordered, and retreated through the communicating doors closing mine behind him.

Anger punched the word 'coward' into consciousness. For a fleeting second I wished Megara would find out and challenge him. Then, without looking back, went into the corridor and as I did so, the main door to his room closed. I thought perhaps he'd decided to come and 'see me off' but had changed his mind, then thinking no more of it, I hurried on, turned right towards the lift and waited.

Suddenly, Megara's voice boomed stilted English from the junction of the corridor I'd just left. Hands on hips, interrogating from under the over-sized flowery-brimmed sun hat.

'Why did you return to your room?'

In a state of shock and disbelief, while an inner voice whispered, 'Curiouser and curiouser!' I wondered how the hell she could have got there when there was no entrance or exit from that point. I tried to answer in Romanian – but couldn't find the right vocabulary or construction, while my actor's sixth sense told me I sounded guilty. 'Guilty as charged'. I should have been indignant. She didn't wait for an

answer but flounced away. I followed, intending to prove my innocence by showing her the jacket, but she reached their door first, slamming it shut. I heard Ștefan shout, and Megara shouting back, although I couldn't make out any words. I fumbled with my key-card, and once inside, waited with an ear to the communicating door, understanding nothing.

Eventually, I heard her leave. Ștefan telephoned urging me to get the doors locked again as soon as possible. Apparently she'd burst in to find him standing inside his side of the communicating door just as he was closing it. She'd been watching the window, seen the curtain in my room move, and presumed it was to hide the fact he was there. I'd said I was going to the sea but hadn't, and these three events proved to her beyond all reasonable doubt that we were having an affair. Ștefan denied it, as he'd always said he would. Years earlier I'd written a humorous poem that changed tone suddenly to end with:

*What would you do? Deny me thrice  
If I stood by your side, faced her  
And said I loved you – and that you love me too?*

On that occasion, he'd given me a loving hug, saying: 'I love you! Never ever doubt me.' Now, Ștefan was censuring me for coming back, and not leaving sooner. If only he'd told me that this was the third day she'd taken her key-card with her, I'd have been more cautious, but he'd kept this fact to himself. He'd told Megara I'd knocked because he failed to hear the phone from the balcony: that the door was locked on my side so he couldn't have entered if he'd wanted to, and that he'd not gone further than just inside their part of the double doorway to respond to me asking when he was coming to swim. At his request, I raced down to reception and insisted someone come immediately to relock the doors.

As I was paying for their holiday, I decided the best thing to do was take on the role of hurt host. I returned to the pool and reclined nonchalantly on my lounge. Megara fired up at me from a prone position, with steel-cold eyes, and speaking in Romanian said something I didn't fully understand, but sounded like:

'I'm no fool you know! I never imagined . . . Coming on holiday so you could make love to my husband! I never want to speak to you again.'

I responded with, ‘Just because you and Ștefan have quarrelled there’s no need to take it out on me!’ and went to sit at the bar. She strode to the small pool nearby. I called out, proffering a glass of fresh orange, which I knew she’d enjoy, but she just waved the offer away with an angry fling of the head. So I gave up.

Towards evening, when I’d gone back to my room, Ștefan rang to say they wouldn’t be joining me for dinner. He then mentioned, quite pleasantly, but in a guarded tone, that they’d not be going on the trip in the morning either. I accepted reluctantly saying it was a pity, but promised to bring them souvenirs. Anyway, Megara would have done nothing but moan, for the coach was packed, dirty, and uncomfortable, with little chance of finding seats together. I was sorry for Ștefan because he was really looking forward to going to the mountains, as well as to the dinner we’d arranged at the Amathus, built in the style of a Byzantine monastery – a special treat to end this holiday on Aphrodite’s island.

Hmm! So much for the mantra: ‘I love you! Never ever doubt me! I love you! Never ever doubt me. I love you! I love you! Love you!’

At this point I was unaware that I would never see Ștefan or Megara face to face again.

*(Her words, his words – hum, ringing, clanging. A theatrical tinnitus always below the surface.)*

When I got back from the trip he rang. The voice, polite but warm, ‘We have some news for you Glynis. We have changed our air tickets and we will leave tomorrow.’

I’d anticipated this and responded coldly. ‘All right, I’d better say goodbye now then.’

He agreed. ‘Goodbye, Glynis.’

Stuck to the wall like a gecko I tried to grasp bits of conversation, but all I heard in Romanian was, ‘We don’t have sex any more,’ from Megara, and ‘I can delete them,’ from Ștefan. I realised he was talking about all the holiday photographs and camcorder coverage he’d taken over the years.

As they were my guests (said they couldn’t afford it!), and not wanting to embarrass them, I paid the bill and shoved the receipt under their door.

The next morning I rose early and went down for breakfast, hoping to catch a glimpse of him. I sat on the terrace and made my coffee, cereal and toast last an hour

and a half. Then, concluding I must have missed them going in, I moved to the bar where there was a good view of the restaurant's exit. Eventually, I spotted them leaving, arm in arm, walking slowly – very slowly, as if recovering from a long illness. At that moment, I really imagined that, once back in Bucharest, it wouldn't be long before I saw Ștefan again, so I wasn't too concerned, just upset at the inconvenience all this had caused. I knew they'd be leaving around noon so waited in my room until I heard their door close, hesitated a few minutes then went to the pool, kicked off my sandals and recent events, then lay submerged in sun for the rest of the day. As to the future? That, I considered – was just a matter of time. After all he'd always said, 'I love you! Never ever doubt me.'

*(A night sky. A bed appears as it always does while the world revolves.)*

I couldn't sleep. Just kept tossing and turning, juggling memories of all Ștefan's intimate secrets. A cautious man, with few male friends. I crooked my arm over the pillow to enter my own 'dream world of closed eyes'.<sup>3</sup>

Morning. I remembered:

*(Glynis hears Ștefan's voice.)*

. . . so happy caressing you . . . as he can't afford medicine Father needs me to . . . and we were so poor, Glynis . . . My father was the teacher of the village school and I was the only child who had shoes . . .

Mother died when I was thirty . . . and now the village, the land and memories of my childhood . . .

. . . Autumn, when the moon is big and red, when frosts come in October. We call that time Bruma, iubito<sup>4</sup> . . . and the sky is full of stars . . .

. . . For the next school I had to leave home, but I had good fortune because my parents had old friends in Pitești. They had influence with the school inspector and so I was their lodger and went to high school in their town. The education was good but strict. I liked sport and literature. I'd read Creangă's 'Fairy Tales' and his 'Childhood

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<sup>3</sup> Walt Whitman. "The Sleepers". *Leaves of Grass*.

<sup>4</sup> 'Lover'.

Memories', and I wanted to write like that; or be a playwright like Caragiale, or a poet like Eminescu and Blaga . . .

. . . But when I went to University in Bucharest, it was hard because my father's twin brother was a priest and lived with us! Families of priests were seen as enemies of communism and so were not encouraged to go to university. My uncle never married and died in his middle years, but the stigma was still there. I had excellent marks, but needed influence . . .

. . . And there was always the fear that they would ask me to leave. But I was careful. I never went with students who rebelled against the regime . . .

. . . It was so hard to get a university place . . . and I wanted to teach literature . . .

. . . How beautiful is the peace of your arms . . . You will always be part of my soul.

. . . Love? About fourteen. A young gypsy girl working at home asked if I knew how to love. I said 'Of course!' . . . She took me to the barn and taught me in the hay.

. . . Marriage? I loved another girl . . . her parents said I wasn't good enough, so I married Meg . . . Still saw the other one though . . . still made love to her till she married . . . died in childbirth . . .

*(The world spins more days, more nights. The stage revolves. A small desk. An open laptop ready to absorb Glynis's thoughts as she types up her diary. Ștefan, now engrossed, reads on.)*

Back home in Bucharest. Alone.

Ștefan and I *had* planned to meet at my place on the Monday and I half expected him. Instead, he telephoned. Very upset and spoke despondently.

*(She relives the conversation, so we hear...)*

'She's killed something in me!'

'What? Our love? Without you I shall die!'

'No!'

'I couldn't go on living without you! Why has fate suddenly deserted us?'

'I'll come tomorrow and return the new phone.'

'I don't want to see you if I can't touch you. If you're going to be cold towards me! Throw it, use it, do what you like with it. I don't care. I love you!'

‘And I’ll always love you!’

*(Anguish crashes against anguish. Two seconds. Just two seconds. In just two seconds he could have shut the communicating door and there would have been no evidence to suggest he’d been with her for those few last moments. In two seconds, their life-jigsaw scattered. Pieces lost. No longer fitted).*

‘She says she’ll kill you if she gets further evidence and can prove we had an affair! She said she’d watch the block and come with me to work or anywhere I go!’

‘You know she won’t do that!’

‘And what’s worse, she keeps going round the house crying all the time. Glynis, she’s done nothing wrong. I can’t just leave her.’

‘I’ve never asked you to. Has she told anyone else yet?’

*(Hesitates)* ‘No, I don’t think so. And I don’t think she will.’

‘What about her family?’

‘Not yet, anyway. *(pause)* Darling, thank you for all the wonderful times we’ve had, and the memories.’

‘Don’t speak like that! You can’t just say ‘thank you’ and walk away. I don’t want thanks. I want you!’

‘Someone’s coming, I have to go. Goodbye my darling.’

He was gone. I paced the room, dead-heading his words with knife-edged accuracy. Why didn’t the thought of her crying move me? Usually I couldn’t bear to see or make anyone upset. And why didn’t I feel guilty? I’d never felt jealous, for he’d told me years before they no longer made love and slept in separate rooms. Personally, I’d have taken her threats lightly, for she usually slept in until 10.30 or 11.00, had no money and no car. Why wasn’t he angry, or firm with her, as any man would be if truly innocent? He was no actor! Perhaps she’d said she didn’t want to see me again and he’d had to agree. As to the crying, I considered it was mere attention seeking; a means of getting what she wanted. Looking into the future, I realised there would be no more shared social gatherings. Even if she hadn’t told anyone else, I was sentenced. My play that he’d started to translate would no doubt have been thrust down the rubbish chute. All photographs which included me in the frame would have been thrown out or deleted. Video, music tapes and presents, destroyed. Nothing would have survived this onslaught. In fact, all trace of me would

have been eradicated from their apartment. Exterminated – and he would have had to carry out the execution!

*(The telephone rings. We hear both voices. Glynis speaks first.)*

‘Judy! I thought it might be Ştefan!’

‘Has he rung again?’

‘No. I’m getting really desperate. I was so stupid. I shouldn’t have stopped him coming round. If we’d come face to face, we might have been able to find a solution for the future. As it was, we parted there and then with loving words, both of us close to tears.’

‘Oh, I’m so sorry Glyn. Got your email. Sounds horrendous. Wish I was nearer to give moral support.’

‘Just talking’s some comfort. You’ve always been supportive and a good friend ever since you were my student at Westfield.’

‘Well, let’s face it we’ve been sort of Mother Confessors to each other! Look, Glynis, this life’s not a rehearsal, it’s the real thing, and you’ve only got one chance! Keep ringing him – or why not walk over to the university and wait for him to come out? Go for it!’

‘I’ve tried that, but there are two entrances and I never know which one he’ll use, or where he parks.’

‘You sound desperate! I’m so sorry! But I’m sure he’ll come round. Just give him time for things to settle at home.’

*(Pause)* ‘How’s school?’

‘Oh, the usual. Kids up the wall. And the new head seems hopelessly disorganised. Yesterday, I had to take the music lesson with forty-five of Year 6 in a tiny classroom with no piano, just because he hadn’t remembered workmen would be in the hall and one of the class teachers had a hospital appointment!’

‘Poor you!’

‘Yes, it was hell! But never mind me. You must cheer up and get busy with something. How about that new play you were going to write? How’s that going?’

‘Can’t get started. No inspiration.’

‘Glynis! With all that’s happened to you and Ştefan, you’ve already got a plot, plenty of conflict, as well as a climax, so why don’t you use them? Imagine it on

stage! In a theatre where a production team can use the latest digital technology for effects!’

‘I’ll think about it, but right now I haven’t got the creative energy to write anything of worth.’

‘Anyway, what did he say at the end of his last call?’

“‘Goodbye, darling”, and then rang off.’

*(The rest of the conversation fades away.)*

**The man has read the text quickly, scanning, grasping for meaning, and now sits back in the chair, his face a mixture of pain and sadness. His hand goes to his forehead and he remains very still, reliving the emotion of those past events. Eventually, he leans forward, rests his elbows on the desk again and continues to read. He also remembers their first meeting.**



## A Romantic Island

### 2.

*(Release your imagination! More sounds join the voices. A starcloth. The revolving stage turns again, slowly, imperceptibly, revealing a large swan of ice between two guards. The subconscious enters a maze on a romantic island, while pride and gypsy rhythms lay siege, stir hidden emotions. Glynis returns to her diary. Returns to her water-falling thoughts – of words, phrases. Sequences of cascading memories.)*

### The first time I met Ștefan

It's been three days since I heard from him!

The first time we met how frightened I was arriving alone in a strange country. How different *my* whole life had been compared to his. How different my childhood. Yet we were almost the same age; enjoyed the arts, read literature. Domnul Ștefan Anghelache was a handsome man.<sup>5</sup> An American philosopher once said, 'The sky is the daily bread of the eyes',<sup>6</sup> but for Ștefan it must have been the lower depths of the sparkling 'eye of the mountain': his Carpathian lake, for he was extremely patriotic – a Romanian, whose roots reached deep, stretching from the poor flat soil of the tiny impoverished village of Șerbănești into the bedrock of old Wallachia.

I'd chosen to research a book on contemporary Romanian drama because in 1982 little was known about the country's culture. The Attaché at the Romanian embassy said he would be very pleased to arrange an investigatory visit for a week, and so in October 1982, I left London for Bucharest. It was the time the *Mary Rose* was being excavated, and people were taking part in a victory parade to celebrate the end of the Falklands war, but those events were far from my mind as I celebrated the end of my own successful week in a restaurant at Hotel Lebăda, known in English as 'The Swan'. A narrow, guarded causeway led to this romantic place on an island in Lake Pantelimon. My imagination revelled in gruesome tales of Dracula's decapitated remains, buried treasure and unseen swans.

After that evening at any sighting or mention of a swan, Ștefan or I relived our first meeting. I can still remember every detail.

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<sup>5</sup> 'Domnul' is the Romanian form of address for 'Mr'.

<sup>6</sup> From *English Traits* (1856) reprinted in *The Prose Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol. 2.

The party: The long table, members of the Securitate who had arranged my visit to explore Romanian drama, and Ștefan facing me. A young lady called Luana Bogdan acting as interpreter, Domnul Anghelache, a Prince Charming telling jokes, and everywhere – penetrating eyes showing intense interest, and not only because I was a guest to their country.

His wife: Sitting next to him, attractive in an old-fashioned sort of way; very tall, thin, not much of a bust. I later learned she'd already suffered from news of his many affairs; some real, some fictitious.

**The man bites his bottom lip recalling the time one of the female librarians pestered him for promotion, and when he refused, took revenge by slithering gossip into his wife's ear.**

Then he was just Chief Librarian of the Pedagogical Library; a crumbling building adjacent to Cișmigiu Park. The only reason Domnul Anghelache attended this party was because during my week's official visit to the University, the Academy, theatres, and high schools specializing in the arts, – I'd met his wife.

Megara was a member of the inspectorate for such schools, and – being officially 'approved' – had not only been invited, but surprisingly, had been allowed to bring her husband. Very few of those I'd met had received an invitation.

Thinking back to my arrival at Otopeni airport, my timidity must have been obvious to the plain clothes police, always in evidence, heads sunk into black overcoat collars. Sparrow hawks waiting for unsuspecting prey. New to Romania, knowing little of communism and even less of Ceaușescu's hold over the population, I was interested only in adventure and the search for information for my proposed research. I went hoping that all I'd heard about this political system would prove untrue. In retrospect, I was indeed politically naïve, a romantic since childhood, fed on myth and poetic moonshine.

So many memories. My husband, Edward. Our life in London. We'd moved from Southport to a large but modest home in Wandsworth. A happy, two-car family, financially comfortable, with three emotionally-stable kids. Edward, a staunch Catholic, happy to be appointed Head of Education at the Maria Assumpta Teacher Training College in Kensington Square, until the government's reorganisation plans

closed it down. He had a flexible timetable for teaching practice supervision, and so was always able to help me juggle a job and three children. As for me? An agnostic.

I really missed the theatre in Southport, which the amateurs owned, and where, from childhood, I'd spent many happy creative hours. I was unhappy to give up a teaching post to follow my husband to London and be unemployed for months, yet content to turn a new house into an attractive home. A financial struggle, then came luck. I was appointed Lecturer in English and Drama at Westfield College in Hampstead and stayed on when it merged with Queen Mary's.<sup>7</sup>

Years after this appointment, during a break in the autumn semester I had a chance to begin researching my next book. This had led to Lebăda, Ștefan and I dancing, and the long dangling threads of my silver necklace guiding his eyes. 'The definitive moment', he'd said; certain we'd become lovers, close friends. The sincere Romanian charm, the kissing of the hand, the sense of humour, gypsy music, and the beautiful sound of the Latin language led me like a fire-fly, gently, ominously onto the sticky-paper of communist lies and deceit. At the end of that evening Ștefan asked me to contact an academic who taught at King's to see whether it would be possible to reissue an invitation he'd received the previous year to visit the UK, but hadn't been able to accept.

When I returned from that first visit, I did as he'd asked and also bought 'Teach Yourself Romanian' – book *and* tape – for I was determined to try to learn that language whose very structure propagated poetry. What I didn't anticipate was the outcome – or the length of time two lives could be consumed by so much passion.

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<sup>7</sup> Later to become Queen Mary University of London.

## The Boundary of Dreams

## 3.

*(The stars have vanished. Now nightmares burst from the screen of Glynis's imagination – at the boundary of dreams. Mirrors turn to Megaras, locks to lack, love to loss. A court is in session, but the Judge's chair remains empty. Books of all sizes lie scattered, pile up, are out of proportion. Ştefan – Car – Ştefan – Guilt – Ştefan.)*

Tuesday again, September 18<sup>th</sup>.

Drifting off to sleep, with the annoyance of being left alone in Paphos still prodding, thoughts turned to nightmares – A giant-sized Megara in her flowery-brimmed sun hat, hair streaming out behind her, spreading into the sides of a corridor of mirrors. An osmosis of over-pink flesh and glass, as she stumbles forwards; all the while her body multiplying, growing out of proportion, sometimes wide, sometimes long, arms disappearing into fluid sand and potash that expands to cut me off. Wherever I go in this world of distorted mirrors, the images follow until their heads finally dissolve into the turbulent water of the swimming pool. I wait, breathless, until it calms. No sign of her. Turning, I see an enlarged Ştefan nearby trying to catch papers flying from his briefcase. He looks straight through me. I am minute, invisible.

Woke in a sweat, head half-buried in the pillow. Wednesday had already arrived. There was an email:

*Glynis,  
We travelled well home.  
Megara do not want to see you more. She thought you her friend and is angry as she is thinking still we are guilty, both. She is affected all the time and so she and me we'll not see you in the future.*

*Megara and Ştefan*

What did he mean? No 'Dear Glynis', no greeting at the end – just names? Perhaps she dictated it in her poor English. Perhaps he'd phrased it carefully, to indicate they wouldn't see me in the future – *as a couple*. Still, the harshness hurt and shocked. The reality of the situation crawled menacingly towards me from all sides.

*(Sounds of a murmuring sea. Soon waves will grow to a crescendo while seagulls shriek like Furies.)*

Four weeks passed without hearing from him. I tried to keep busy, although I was continually on edge, looking out for his car, hoping he'd ring – listening for the phone. As I had already accepted an invitation to attend the Writers' Conference at Neptun and had started to prepare a paper on the given theme, 'I and the Other', I decided to complete it. A few days at the seaside would do me good. While adding to the article, I remembered Donald Murray's words on teaching the writer to listen to his other self. Edward often quoted him.<sup>8</sup> So I began by recalling Albee's comment: '*I write for me. The audience of me.*' Then I elaborated, also mentioning Nabokov's statement, '*I think the audience an artist imagines, when he imagines that sort of thing, is a room filled with people wearing his own mask.*' With this in mind I ended the piece with a scene using dramatic dialogue where the counsel gives his brief in court, counter-pointed with the voice of conscience. After analysing a recent definition of 'guilt' with the one in my father's copy of 'The King's English Dictionary', I called it 'We and the Other Me'. The stage direction read: *Those in court all wear a mask identical to the face of the speaker.* It began . . .

*My Lord, we are here today to speak before the Court relating to charges brought against my client who represents Western Society. The charges are as follows: Namely 'that we have acted selfishly and perversely for our own ends.'*  
*To proceed, let us start with a definition of the word 'guilt'.*

*Guilt – neglect of known duty. So says the King's English dictionary.*

*That 'Guilt sickness' – the gene we all possess, but rarely find.*

*Oxford states: Guilt – remorse or self reproach, feeling that one is responsible for a wrong or an offence.*

*Yes, I plead guilty: guilty for enjoying life, for forgetting the Other . . .*

*Council reiterates. We plead 'Not guilty'.*

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<sup>8</sup> "Teaching and the Other Self: The Writer's First Reader". See Murray.

It lasted fifteen minutes and was well received. I wondered if Ștefan was feeling guilty and how *he* would have defined the word. In the beginning I knew very little about him, but as the years passed, I'd learned a great deal. He did eventually become Assistant Director of the main university library, but claimed he trusted only one or two of his colleagues there, but never his acquaintances or students. In the big cities most people were afraid of the regime, but Ștefan was also afraid of his wife, and guarded his secret love-lives within a web of lies. Friends were his possessions, and like his material ones, he feared lest they were scattered and lost. Publicly, he was proud, but his 'poor as a lowly sparrow' image was always burdened by an invisible guilt that followed him like a surly dog, attempting to hide its tail.

*(Poets mingle, pontificate with philosophers playing chess in the guise of 'The Thinker'.<sup>9</sup> Playwrights jostle with journalists. All joke, drink, debate, eat, gossip, fuck.)*

We all stayed at the Writers' House on the edge of the seafront, and besides earnest discussion, there was an air of jollity as we sat in the sun and drank wine. The two weeks passed calmly and the other papers on philosophy and drama were interesting enough to distract me. Yet, I had no appetite and a feeling of loss or longing always hovered in the gut. I still lived in hope because I simply couldn't believe Ștefan could actually sever the lifeline and leave me to drown. The temptation was always there: to wander down to the sea, into the sea, to swim far out, too far out . . . but someone was always around. On the last day of the conference one of the speakers mentioned Voodoo. Voodoo! The Fujairah Hilton! I remembered my daughter, Delia – the one that lives in Dubai – taking me sight-seeing to the Gulf of Oman. We had lunch at the Hilton and afterwards, while she sunbathed, I discovered the Beauty Salon run by a woman called Diwata. I booked in for a pedicure and we chatted. The conversation moved to love. I mentioned Ștefan, and to my surprise came, 'Perhaps I can help you. In the Philippines we do that sort of thing you know!' I'd laughed. 'I think I'd rather leave it to fate.' Why would I ever need her help? We were deeply in love; like children in a magical world of shared interest and transformation scenes to far-away places, but when I heard the word Voodoo *again*, I decided to make contact.

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<sup>9</sup> A sculpture by Rodin or Brâncuși.

## Words Peg Themselves on a Line

## 4.

*(‘Bruma’ has arrived. The days grow chilly. Telephones ring. Words and photographs peg themselves on a line. Letter by letter words rise in the air, drift then fall. Voices, angry voices. Whispers diminish to murmurs. The bright lights fade to leave the scene in darkness. Thoughts scratch piercingly like sharp chalk on a blackboard.)*

I rang Diwata. She remembered me and I explained everything. She said she couldn’t do much without me actually being there, but to send photographs. She’d go to her church to pray to bring the two of us together again. I asked if it would cost much. She replied money wasn’t necessary unless I’d like to make a donation to the church. I sent off photographs of us both and enclosed a hundred euro. The reference to a church surprised me.

Meanwhile, my friends rang. ‘He’ll be back!’

Then I was alone – really alone.

Like floating seaweed, I drifted round the flat. Aimlessly. In masochistic mood, I deliberately bought no food, ate nothing, drank nothing. My weight fell dramatically. All creativity seemed lost. I could no longer write, compose, paint or read. Perhaps Ştefan was feeling the same. His voice surged in my head. Everything that happened in Cyprus or over the past years loomed into every waking thought creating white lace upon dark depths. He was in my mind when I went to bed and when I woke. I longed to ring him, to leave a message as I used to, but even before the holiday there were technical troubles. I emailed Judy.

*Hi, Judy,*

*Luck seems to have deserted me completely! The charger for his mobile, an older version of Motorola, no longer works. Before the holiday, I said I’d get another more up-to-date for him, which I did, and he took it to the library so he could read the instructions in private. You know he keeps a study-room there for himself for when he retires! Well, he’d taken out the SIM card so that I could try it in my phone, for it didn’t work, and between the time I’d tested it and the time I gave it back to him, God knows where it had gone! Can you believe it? Neither of us could remember exactly which of us had it last, so we decided it would be safer to cancel the card and get another after the holiday. And to make matters worse, I dropped my mobile phone and cracked it. Then the charger wouldn’t work! Our main source of communication*

*gone! All that's left is his personal mobile and Megara uses that! I rarely use it except in cases of emergency.*

*I'm desperate! Love G.*

Almost immediately the response came.

*Poor you! Risk it and buy another! Why don't you resist ringing 'til Tuesday, when I presume his University courses will have started. Just off out. Will ring. Love J.*

I took her advice, bought another mobile and waited.

***(Projected images and voices enter her mind: streets, cars, restaurants. Thoughts continue to scratch with unclipped claws on the window of the brain.)***

*'Ştefan will stay in the room!' 'I love you! Never ever doubt me.'* Knowing the time he'd be leaving the University, I rang. He answered. The background noises suggested he was in the car and going to speak, but then a voice, deep and stern answered, 'Da?'<sup>10</sup>

'Who is it?' I asked in English.

He answered angrily 'Who is it?' also in English. I closed the phone, but then dialled again thinking I'd got the wrong number. I switched to Romanian.

'Cine sunteți?'<sup>11</sup> He obviously recognised my voice and was speaking sternly to let me know Megara was sitting beside him. This time he didn't give me time to say more. Even angrier and louder he shouted down the phone in Romanian 'Cine sunteți? Cine sunteți?' I rang off.

*'She's a very jealous woman!' 'I want to keep you forever you know.'*

The next day, around six in the evening, I was sitting with friends in an open-air restaurant discussing my dilemma when Ştefan rang my mobile. Seeing his name, I left the table with a brief apology as I didn't want to be overheard. The call came as a surprise and his tone was cold.

'Hello, Glynis. How are you?'

I lowered my voice. 'Ştefan! Darling!'

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<sup>10</sup> 'Yes.'

<sup>11</sup> 'Who is it?'



‘It’s the first time I’ve been alone. My courses started a day late.’

‘I *had* to ring. I miss you so much. I needed to talk to you!’

‘Megara was with me. She heard you speak English and recognised your voice.’

‘I’m sorry!’

‘I denied it, but it started the quarrel all over again and she still cries all the time.’

‘I can’t concentrate, can’t eat.’

‘It’s the same with me.’

I reasoned with him, asked him to at least speak to me in warm tones. Slowly his voice softened, but he was trying to resist. Megara was apparently a little calmer, but each day would bring up the final events of the holiday. She was shocked; thought me her friend.

Who was he trying to blame?

‘She could well have walked in on us when you came to my room and made passionate love to me while she was washing her hair! She only had to try that communicating door!’

He agreed.

I was getting nowhere. ‘Why stay if life is such hell?’ I knew what his answer would be before the words came.

‘Because if I did, I couldn’t face my mother, my sister, my friends. I’d be no one!’

His overpowering pride again! ‘What would the neighbours say?’

It was an attitude that my generation had given up decades ago. Many Romanians of his age were still fifty years behind in much of their thinking, rather like life in a small village, but Bucharest was not a village and many of his generation had divorced and happily remarried without being ostracised by friends and relatives. Others, mainly older women friends, had told me the only reason they hadn’t remarried was the difficulty of meeting someone else. When discussed, he had always excused his inaction with the words, ‘She’s done nothing wrong.’ He told me I’d find another man. I told him I didn’t want anyone else, I wanted him. I was sympathetic and said I’d wait. He sighed. I asked him to at least ring me every fortnight. He said he’d ring the following week.

‘Goodbye darling.’ I said quietly.

There was a pause.

‘Goodbye my love,’ he replied.

I heard the choked sob, then the click of the phone, as I memorised his last words.

I would have preferred to be alone so I could concentrate on what he'd been saying. Just before he'd telephoned, my friends had been trying to convince me I was better off without him: that he was no good: that everyone knew about the books he'd stolen from the Library after the Revolution. Very old books – one a rare Bible, that he'd said was destroyed in the fire. Nobody knew the titles of the missing volumes, but some donated copies from abroad were found in second-hand bookshops, and as he'd been responsible for receiving these, it was only natural for him to be accused. Poor directors – they always got the blame when something went wrong. The sheer number of donations and the time they were kept in another library building before Ștefan could get them into the new premises, gave ample opportunity for anyone to steal a few and then sell them. It was a bad winter. The books were difficult to store. Eventually the army had come to the rescue with lorries to move the stock into the new building. Any one of hundreds of people could have been to blame, but gossip spreads fast in Romania and anyone with the title 'Director' before the revolution was sure to be accused. Knowing how Ștefan loved books I never believed he had anything to do with their sale. The sheer number of donations! A bad winter! Very old books! Stolen books!

That pride.

That overriding pride.

He did ring, but I had the feeling we were on sinking sands.

'Hello, Glynis.'

How was I? I told him I'd lost more weight, been ill, had no appetite, couldn't sleep. He said he was the same. Had written nothing. Yet nothing had changed his mind. In fact his attitude had hardened. He had this thought, this 'will', he called it – to keep away from me so it wouldn't start all over again and he wanted to keep it that way. I argued that if we were to part then at least we should make love for the last time in a way we would remember, so that the moment was beautiful, sacred – after all it had been twenty three years. It shouldn't be hurried and in fear as it had been in Cyprus. He agreed in softer tones. I told him I was prepared to take a room in a hotel – the Lido, the Continental. I'd leave him to choose. He said nothing. I summed up courage to accuse him.

'You're afraid aren't you?'

'Yes, I'm afraid.'

I warned him that at the moment there was still a sanctuary lamp of love in my heart, but if it ever went out, I wasn't sure what action I'd take. Hatred? Revenge?

'I'll ring next week.'

He was gone.

I refused to believe this impasse would last. Why such cowardice?

'He'll be back! You'll see! He can't live without you! Twenty-three years! That must count for something! He couldn't just walk out on you!' Friends amplified my inner hope, but I wasn't reassured.

*(Voices leap-frog, topple over each other.)*

'He's no good!' 'A weak character!' 'A mouse!'

'I could kill him hurting you like this!' 'How cruel!' 'What a selfish man!'

'Ah, well – from a family of Priests!'

I'm not listening, not listening, not listening!

I hadn't wanted to absorb those comments from my friends of all ages who once rejoiced in our relationship. The following Tuesday afternoon, he rang in his break. It was brief. The voice still cold.

'How are you?'

'Worse. I miss you. I wake in the middle of the night and can't get you out of my mind!'

'I'm the same!'

Despite this he'd remained adamant.

He couldn't write, couldn't sleep, couldn't eat, was no longer a man – but we shouldn't meet. He thought that as months passed the urgency would fade and he'd get back to normality. He still had this 'will' to resist.

Was he treating me like some bad drug habit that he'd acquired and needed to kick? Why? It was all so illogical. Everything was illogical in that Shaffer world of Black Comedy: even the switches and locks were reversed; cards dealt anti-clockwise. My temper was rising. Such little time to talk and plan, discuss, sympathise . . . What had I been doing that week? What had he been doing? How were things at home? How was his father?

'I *need* to see you!' thundered out.

He began to say something like ‘Wait until after November 26<sup>th</sup>’ . . . but I interrupted – a gargoyles spurting syllables.

‘It’ll be too late, I go to Dubai November 19<sup>th</sup> for a week and then I have a lecturing commitment until December 16<sup>th</sup>, and shortly after that I go to the UK for Christmas and New Year. We’ve no other time, it has to be *now!*’ I don’t know if he understood everything as the words splattered.

‘I’ll ring you next week. Goodbye, Glynis.’ And he’d gone.

I was so anxious I’d forgotten to ask what he’d meant by ‘after November 26<sup>th</sup>’. What a fool I’d been. Perhaps he meant we could meet after that date? What did he have in mind? I needed to know. I emailed the library where I knew he still had his computer and own email address. I simply put the subject as QUERY and then typed, ‘I forgot to ask what you meant by ‘after November 26<sup>th</sup>’.

I asked for the message to be confirmed on reading. Having heard nothing, I emailed Judy to ask her advice. Her answer was short and comforting.

*Hi, Glyn,*

*What if he isn’t going to the library now? If Megara’s keeping an eye on him, perhaps he’s had to change his routine! You sound pretty low. I could fly out if you like after the school concert. Let me know. Love J.*

If Judy was right, how stupid to give in to Megara and change his routine: another sign of guilt! Perhaps . . . Perhaps . . . In the past if *he* had ever said ‘Perhaps’, I knew from experience what he really meant was ‘No’.

\* \* \*

Another week of pretending to be fairly normal among friends. I emailed family and acquaintances with chatty details about work, the weather, politics, and the International Women’s Association events. When outside, my eyes always scanned the horizon to catch sight of his car.

\* \* \*

*(Glynis unwinds the skein of family and friends that have crisscrossed her life.)*

My grown-up family only knew of Ștefan's existence after my husband Edward died. Apart from my youngest, Joanna, my other two children accepted the situation with discreet interest. When I told them that Ștefan had decided not to see me anymore, they were all sympathetic, but Joanna, a Catholic like her father, said that although she still loved me and always would, she could never support a situation that split a man from his wife. How could she understand the exact circumstances? I'd never told her. My son John knew and wanted to hug and console me. Delia sent a card from Dubai, 'SO, SO SORRY!' and invited me to come and stay, declaring she was always at the end of the phone for me day or night; I'd only to call. She thought Ștefan should make a clean breast of it and tell his wife everything.

'Mum, his whole life has been a lie! And it can't be good for his health! Any loving relationship must be based on honesty and trust. You should tell him that!'

If only it were so simple!

One has to understand so many facets of a society, as well as a person's past and present life before any judgement can be made.

I began to wonder exactly what hold Megara had on Ștefan. Could she be blackmailing him in some way?

Had she threatened to disgrace him in front of his father or his sisters?

She knew his Achilles' heel as well as I did.

Or was it to do with money?

Judy invited me to leave everything and stay for a while at her place in Wimbledon, but I declined. My best friends in Bucharest, Lavinia Naum, some expats, and Aura and Doru, invited me out, tried to entertain me, dropped in either to console me or verbally slaughter Ștefan. Although I wanted to be alone with my thoughts, I accepted invitations to dine out, but having no appetite, felt guilty when they paid for food I'd wasted.

Time passed. Tuesday came and went again. No call.

Wednesday. I watched the clock. At a quarter past five Ștefan rang and asked me to ring him back. I did so and this time we spoke for twenty minutes.

'It's worse,' he said, 'I'm getting old and ill.'

'So am I! This is ridiculous. Why should we kill each other just for the sake of meeting occasionally? Even once a month would be better than nothing.'

'Once a month?'

Was there a hint of hope in his voice?

He didn't pursue the idea.

But he *did* admit to being afraid and said he'd thought long and hard about things but couldn't give up his home. I said no-one was asking him to give it up or divorce Megara. All I wanted was to see him again.

'I did so want to believe that love like ours could last a lifetime.'

He answered quietly, 'Me too!'

In desperation I added, 'I'm beginning to think that I have never really known you and that you are a cruel selfish man who never *really* loved me.' He denied this profusely saying of course he still loved me and always would. Then the tone became official.

'I'll ring next week. Goodbye Glynis.'

*(The large October moon swells; a balloon about to burst.)*

\* \* \*

Eight weeks had gone by since we returned home and I really did feel older. Food had no taste. Not even the smell of Aura's cookies tempted me. Having lost weight my waist felt like a prune, and I worried about the part of me that attracted Ştefan most.

I didn't want to be part of the world's ugliness. I remembered Ştefan quoting Freud: '*Beauty has no obvious use; nor is there any clear cultural necessity for it. Yet civilization could not do without it.*'<sup>12</sup> I had responded with Oscar Wilde's, '*It is better to be beautiful than to be good. But . . . it is better to be good than to be ugly.*'<sup>13</sup> Hopkins' rhythms sprang, rang, sprung to mind:

*How to keep – is there any way, is there none such,  
nowhere known some, bow or brooch, or braid or brace, lace  
latch or key to keep back beauty . . .*<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Sigmund Freud. *Civilization and its Discontents*.

<sup>13</sup> Oscar Wilde. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

<sup>14</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins. "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo".

Eight weeks without seeing each other! We'd always reckoned two weeks too long, three an eternity. We needed each other; needed the ardent passion of caressing, of creating a chain of gazes. I waited for yet another Tuesday feeling more confident that he would at least ring once a week.

At four o'clock, the phone went.

The voice was still cold and urgent.

'No, don't ring me back. I haven't much time. I'm in the break.'

I suggested we talk again the next day. He said he wouldn't be there. The usual questions. Things were a little calmer at home. How was I? He was the same. I said I really needed just to see him briefly and suggested we meet at the turning off the crossroads on the main road. If he rang just before he left, I'd be there. It was only a minute's walk from my block. The side road led behind a derelict hotel and then curved back onto the main road. We'd done it before and it would only take a minute or two more.

'What if Megara's waiting for me outside?'

'If she is well that's it, but if not, ring me and I'll come.'

He agreed.

'Goodbye.'

'Goodbye.'

I was happy, but had forgotten to ask him the significance of the words 'after Nov 26th'! I tried to keep busy for two hours while frequently glancing up at the clock to check the time. A quarter to six!

No call –

I decided to walk to the junction of the main road in the direction he'd come. If I kept out of sight I could at least catch a glimpse of them.

The crossing with Calea Victoriei was a disturbed wasps' nest. I was there by 5.53 and waited, hiding twisting fingers in jacket pockets. My eyes no doubt shone with eager anticipation as cars pulled up at the traffic lights or shot past at great speed. I hoped I hadn't missed him! I allowed my eye to wander across the road to the chrysanthemums in cut down plastic water bottles guarded by a large smiling gypsy-woman who sat on a low stool: long-skirted knees splayed. Street dogs roamed the unkempt flower-beds in front of Banca Societe Generale. *He* rarely bought me flowers. I bought them for myself!

A Renault passed – black not navy!

Facing the Bank on the other side of the road, near the flag pole and fountain, a small boy caught my eye as he ran up the long flight of steps to Cercul Militar.

The droning sounds of car after car, but not his! Ștefan and I once danced in its magnificent ballroom at the Caledonian Ball, visited its art galleries together, and drunk tea on the terrace above the steps, but always with Megara present.

I kept scanning the cars until the lights changed. Behind the flower-seller, a doorman in uniform lingered outside Casa Capșa.<sup>15</sup> I glanced for a moment to the left at the stationery queue of oncoming traffic. On the other corner of Kogălniceanu, the blind oval windows of the old Hotel Bulevard, waiting patiently to be restored, seemed to be listening to the traffic's fanfare of brakes, horns, or engines revving to a sudden crescendo as the traffic set off in the other direction. Behind me, braving the late October chill among fallen leaves, young couples sat outside Pizza Hut. I'd often bought a take-away there if Ștefan came for lunch.

The lights changed again.

Car upon car raced past, either downhill towards the crumbling buildings at the next junction near the park, or up to University Square. University Square, where not so long ago – or so it seemed – groups of students and professors protested against former members of the communist party standing for election.

They'd blocked the crossroads and camped out with tents on the grass in front of the National Theatre. A jolly company with camp fires, waving banners, and singing. They sang through loudspeakers well into the night; and night after night . . . The words and tune still linger at the back of my mind, for at that time Judy and I had been staying in the Intercontinental Hotel that faced the square.

As I peered hard at every car, I remembered them, and also Ștefan's acknowledged lack of courage on a similar occasion decades before.

*(Young male voices sing) Mai bine haimana, decât trădător,  
Mai bine huligan, decât dictator,  
Mai bine golan, decât activist,  
Mai bine mort, decât comunist.<sup>16</sup>*

<sup>15</sup> A historic restaurant in Bucharest, once a famous meeting place for artists and writers.

<sup>16</sup> Better a tramp than a traitor, / Better hooligan than a dictator,  
Better a highwayman than an activist, / Better dead than a communist.



Caught up in the memory I almost missed the car as it sped past.

It was just after six – and he was alone! I suppose I should have waited to see if he lied or admitted to being alone, but I didn't. I fumbled for my mobile with an angry urgency and rang.

'You've just passed me and you were alone! Why didn't you ring?'

He answered angrily, 'I'm picking her up *now*, at the other University, the *other* University. *Now!*'

I was so upset I couldn't remember whether I'd said 'You're lying!' or just thought it. Anyway, we rang off and I froze. A statue on the pavement. Convinced he'd lied, I was amazed he could think me so stupid as to believe him, for the *other* university building was by the Opera. There were no shops there and no reason for her to *be* there, miles from their home or the main town. If they'd planned to go to the Opera he'd have already bought the tickets and there was no reason not to tell me so in the first place. She never did things like 'buy tickets', and even if she *had* been waiting, an extra two minutes diversion at the crossroads would have been neither here nor there. And if he'd meant a private university there were none near their home. I was devastated. How could he be so cruel? I felt that even if he *had* decided to stay faithful to his wife, he was still not being very fair to me! I came home, and furiously stormed the apartment, devising an email I might well send him in the future. The stage of my grief turned from denial to anger and I pounded the keyboard.

*Ştefan – Never have I known such a selfish, cruel and self-centred, arrogant man concerned only with his own pride and reputation. Over the years you have told me so many lies, and I overlooked them because I loved you with all my heart and soul. I gave up everything for you, my home, my family . . . But I also told **you** lies. In fact all my friends here and in the UK, writers, critics, editors, other important people, and all the members of my family knew of our relationship over these twenty-three years; even my husband when he was alive, and they now know how you have treated me. You are indeed nothing in their eyes! All the objects we have bought together that I kept safe, are packed in a shoe-box together with love letters and postcards from 1984, copies of past emails; photos that remind me of all the places we visited, where we held hands when we walked, where we made love far into the deep night. Megara knew nothing about these, and they are ready to send or present to her when I feel like it! The essence of our two souls. I have nothing to lose except the love I thought was sincere. You have lost everything! Glynis*

I'd wait for the right moment. Some of the anger abated, but the sanctuary lamp was flickering. Congreve's words from 'The Mourning Bride' hammered to be let in: 'Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned, nor Hell a fury like a woman scorned.' Another quote we'd shared! Then in fun, but now how true!

I'd started to create plans to end my future, beautifully, but leave behind such damning evidence that would make revenge sweet! Over the years I'd collected sleeping-pills as I didn't intend to be a burden to anyone!

Light, like hope in Pandora's Box, was there but very faint.

**The man sits back, his hands gripping the chair's arms as if he means to rise. He is staring at what he has just read. Disbelief is coupled with anger as he searches his memory for an email he is sure never arrived. The furrow between his eyes has deepened. Teeth have clenched and a large vein on the side of his neck pulses.**

**Eventually, after long moments, his hands relax and drop to his knees. He rubs them up and down as he leans forward to peer again at the page.**

## Freezing Fog Descends

## 5.

*(Autumn leaves fall from golden orbs and dream images interweave with shadows left on stage. Freezing fog descends. Signs of winter. The thread between Eros and Thanatos frays.)*

The first week of November.

He didn't call Tuesday *or* Wednesday. Just as I expected. He was probably furious at me for catching him out in a lie, and in a way 'chasing him'. Again I'd been a fool.

Suddenly, very early on the Sunday morning I startled at my mobile ringing, but it was nowhere to be found although I searched everywhere desperately, expecting it to cut out at any moment. Then there it was on the kitchen table. I answered. It was Ştefan sobbing and saying. 'I can't go on. I have to see you!'

'All right, my darling, where? When?'

'Thursday'.

That was the moment I woke.

It was so real, the ringing, the voice. I'd actually heard him speak! Seldom did I manage to bring his voice or image to mind in a dream and never so clearly as this had been. I wondered whether he too had actually woken thinking of me. I knew he still slept alone and usually woke in the early hours. It pleased me to think that perhaps he was suffering too, yet if so, why the hell didn't he do something about it! When Thursday came I made sure I was always in earshot of the telephone. Of course, he didn't ring.

The second week of November.

He'd have one more chance before I went away.

I'd wait. I still kept Ştefan's photograph on my bedside-table, and from time to time glanced at the one taken soon after we first met that was on the dressing-table. I even put one as wallpaper on my computer so when I turned it on in the morning, those brown eyes, that always seemed to say 'I love you!' gazed at me from the blue screen. He was my soul-mate, my doppelganger. Now all the photographs were in the shoe-box. I no longer found myself listening out for the telephone nor planned my future week keeping possible dates for meetings with him in mind. But was he doing

the same? Was urgency slipping away from him too? The thought panicked me. I learned that the teachers and professors would be on strike again the following week. If he didn't ring . . . that was it. I would be out of the country. As his mobile no longer had 'roaming', as far as communication went – I may as well have been the other side of the moon. I wished technology would hurry and produce mobiles where you could also see the person. I had Skype, but it was too dangerous for him to have at home.

Days passed.

I waited. Kept thinking back to past times. Time had stretched so much that actual dates with months, years had merged. The last international conference to which he'd received an invitation had been held in Boston. As Director, he'd gone with a number of colleagues and one in particular, due to retire three months later. I queried how the State could agree to this expense when the man didn't speak English and wouldn't be at work long enough to put the experience to good use. He told me it was a kind of 'thank you', a 'leaving present' for all the hard work he'd put in during the library rebuilding programme after the revolution. When I asked how the Library could agree to this, he said he'd used international funding.

'But,' I paused, 'how could you put such an expense down in the accounts?'

The answer came as a surprise. 'Some money doesn't have to be accounted for officially.'

I said nothing more, but began to think. Had he filtered a little aside for himself and Megara during their retirement?

Could this explain all his 'gifts from friends'?

**The bang of the fist on the desk sets the computer keyboard rattling. The man slams 'the book' shut, shoves it away and sits glaring at it. He rises angrily, scraping the chair backwards along the wooden floor and paces the room, finally moving to the frosty window overlooking the noisy corner of the street. In frustration he keeps banging both fists on the window ledge, until an incident below distracts him momentarily. He rubs the glass with his hand but the snow still falls and obscures the view. When the only sound left is the wind, he turns to glance again at the book. Curiosity overcomes him and he returns to the text, slapping his way through the pages until he finds where he left off.**

Any negative flotsam was soon washed out to sea, for while he was in Boston he'd told me how he'd left the group and given himself time to revisit the places we'd been together, so as to recall those precious moments. We'd been on the Freedom Trail where guides in period costume had taken us back to the year 1776, and chatted about the founding of American Independence. Then we'd set off on our own following the red line painted on the pavement that led to the Old South Meeting House.

'That's where colonialists planned the 'Boston Tea Party', he said, 'Throwing all that good tea in the sea! What waste! It was a violent period too. Did you know they tarred and feathered anyone who went against them? I hate violence. All I need is the peace you bring me!'

Then the flotsam floated back. Each day memories crowded in.

I'd kept his voice on the answer phone of my telephone/fax machine. One day, months ago, he'd used that number instead of the usual one. Can't think why. Anyway I'd kept it, just in case something awful happened to him, and then at least I'd still have his voice. It was during the time I was lecturing, so had left early:

*Have a nice day darling. It's a quarter to eight, but you are early like each day – a very busy woman. I love you. Bye.*

The voice, warm, kind and loving. I would often play it over and over:

*Have a nice day darling. It's a quarter to eight, but you are early like each day – a very busy woman. I love you. Bye.*

*Have a nice day darling. It's a quarter to eight, but you are early like each day – a very busy woman. I love you. Bye.*

*Have a nice day darling. It's a quarter to eight, but you are early like each day – a very busy woman. I love you. Bye.*

'I love you!' At least I could hear him say those words whenever I wanted to: Play/Skip/Stop. Everything under my control! That was then. After all that had happened, I decided to copy the recording onto a separate tape and add it to the things in the shoe-box.

I didn't even bother to change the sheets. No point. He wasn't coming. No point in shopping or cooking; he wouldn't be popping in for lunch. Why clean the house?

No one was visiting. I'd no real wish to go out, although I forced myself to do so. The doctor at the American clinic had already offered me pills as she thought I was showing signs of depression. I refused politely.

I forced myself to write some lecture notes and watched the odd soft porn film freely available on Romanian television, but it disgusted me. I wanted to make love, not have sex, and not just with anyone. I wanted Ștefan's love. If he was a drug, he was a drug. He was the pill I needed at this moment and I'd have given any amount of money in order to get it. In desperation, I decided to pass the hours by putting all the emails we had sent each other in date order. That would take some time.

I lifted the shoe-box from the lower shelf beneath the television, took the printed emails from a large brown envelope and spread them out on the large dining-room table. I could have covered it twice. They dated from the January when I broke my arm and Ștefan became busy during a hard winter, until the spring we got mobile phones. As I read I relived the happiness of those times. Then having sorted and grouped them, I discovered that in two years we'd communicated by email two hundred and forty times. If only we'd had Skype then! Grief resurfaced with disbelief that after so long he could flood the causeway of our love. Over the years, whenever he'd been distressed by work, I'd remained loving and patient. I knew I didn't own him. I just loved him, and cared for his welfare. This time had I been unfair? Should I have kept saying that I'd wait for him no matter how long it took until he felt settled and unafraid? Had I grown to feel I 'owned' him? If so, it went against my belief regarding relationships. Edward and I never owned each other, or our children and we brought them up to think the same way.

How I oscillated from anger to compassion! But now it was different because I couldn't contact Ștefan at all! He was the one in control! *He* chose when to contact *me!* It was no longer a shared responsibility. Also, it wasn't possible to meet socially, with Megara or without her. I wondered would it have made any difference if I'd not panicked and been so upset. Perhaps if I'd been more sympathetic?

Mothering instincts defused the angry thoughts that tore through that unsent email to Ștefan. More ethereal conversations formed:

'Darling, how are you? Don't worry you couldn't make contact. I knew you were thinking of me. I had this dream and I felt you were upset . . . '

'Hello, my love? How are you, darling? I do hope that you are eating properly now, sleeping better, writing again, and aren't ill . . . '

‘Hello dear. I was worried when I didn’t hear from you because I thought you might be really ill. I do hope things are better for you. Me? Oh, I’m carrying on trying to be positive. I miss you terribly, but I understand and I’ll wait . . . ’

And if I had responded to his call with any of these, would it have affected him? Would he feel tempted to move back into his other body, the role he played opposite me? I had no way of telling. Could I live without him? Ever give another man the love and devotion I’d given him? Could any other man desire me as passionately as he had done and could I respond in the same way? I doubted it. I didn’t even want to consider it. It might have been easier if I’d heard he’d died – in a tragic accident. Then I could have worn black and grieved; could have held the love precious in my heart like an urn of his ashes – ashes that would never be totally black. They’d kindle from time to time and warm me, and from their sparks I’d continue to create. He’d said he’d work hard to make me proud of him, and he’d certainly done so.

Monday.

Dreamed of him again. This time he didn’t speak but just passed me in the street as if I’d been a ghost, vanishing before I could approach him. It had been just a glimpse. I tensed up whenever my BlackBerry rang, scurried to find it, and scanned the name. At other times I carried it on me so as to be within earshot. I wondered if it would help if I went back to the London College of Psychic Research: a place I’d ventured into shortly after Edward’s death. I could still recall that first visit vividly – outwardly in control, sociable, strong and able to cope with any situation. Inwardly – clasp straw to survive. Time hadn’t altered that feeling, only this time the cause was Ștefan’s sudden departure and not Edward’s death. ‘How are you?’ my friends asked. ‘Fine!’ I’d say. The show must go on! Experience in the theatre reinforced such thinking. My mother had always been interested in Spiritualism and so I suppose I was not averse to such ideas from childhood. On a sudden impulse I booked a flight to spend a long weekend with Judy, and arranged to go into London to visit the college again, but this time not just out of curiosity.

\* \* \*

*(London streets; Christmas shop-windows; bustle and hustle of familiar places. An artist infiltrates Glynis’s hopes.)*

The lady I'd seen before wasn't available so I saw a psychic artist instead. She started to draw using soft pastels, and as she drew, described what was coming into her mind about the man slowly emerging from the pad on her knee. Without knowing anything about me, I found she was describing Ștefan. She said this man had been either my lover or husband in mediaeval times and we had lived in Aquitaine within the small village of Sarlat in the Dordogne. She could see fortified walls and peasants coming to a market, set up in the town square. Then the scene changed to battles, suffering and siege. She thought it might have been during the Hundred Years' War. He was a troubadour who sang and played at nearby chateaux, and she thought he was French. We had a daughter, but as he was so often away, I had eventually left him and this had caused him to suffer terribly for he was so much in love with me. Sounds of water, shouting and horses' hooves came into her head and she felt he'd drowned. The artist couldn't say more except that after our deaths, we'd agreed to return to live another life where we'd meet once again to experience this love, only this time he would leave me, so that I'd have to experience the suffering he'd endured. When she'd completed the drawing, it was the eyes that drew my attention: the dark, dark eyes that looked intensely up at me from the page she was holding. I was convinced they had Ștefan's expression; the expression that said, 'I love you!'

She continued, 'He wears a cloak over his shoulders and walks with great pride although he also suffers a great guilt! I can't say more'.

Ștefan usually strolled with his jacket over his shoulders like a cloak, with head held high. All this amazed me providing much food for thought, but when I returned to Romania, I unlocked the door to let logic sneak in. How stupid it all seemed. I shoved the tape and drawing in one of the bureau drawers.

For the first time that month I'd glanced up at the trees, but it was misty. Autumn had gone and winter was descending with torrential rain; slowly flooding all open graves.

Weeks later.

I decided to take the drawing out again and had difficulty smoothing the rolled paper flat. *Had* our meeting in Romania been arranged by those from a past life? Was that the reason Ștefan had now left me? I peered at the face for a long time. To believe or not to believe?

A loud commotion of scolding horns chided from the street below.



I tore the drawing in half and started packing for Dubai.

Dubai! Fujairah! I reminded myself to telephone Diwata again to check what I needed to bring. It would take half a day and I would get someone from my son-in-law's office to drive me there. Hope still smouldered.

Yes! She'd received the photographs and the money, but they had taken a month to arrive. She'd also been to the Philippines and told them about my situation. Later she'd sent on the photos. And yes, she could arrange to see me next week and would try to help. All I had to do was let her know exactly when I was coming. Was I a fool to be doing all this? Something inside urged me on.

*(A warm ethereal light appears to dispel moving shadows weaving among crumbling scenery. The world of Glynis shifts its axis.)*

Late afternoon and the noise of impatient Bucharest drivers filtered through the double glazing. I hadn't eaten anything apart from a few cereals at breakfast, but decided to make an effort to go swimming again soon as I hadn't been for weeks. I'd even started tidying up and dusting. Could this be another sign of recovery?

Sorkey, whose real name was Sorin Lucescu, a middle-aged ex-pat who claimed to be Romanian by birth and lived nearby, dropped in unannounced to see whether I was alive.

'And how's Glynissima today? Still pining for her male lead?'

Many of the ex-pats called me Glynissima for fun, and I preferred it to Glynis. Sorkey often came over with a bottle of wine to tell me about his latest female conquest. We joked about us being spies and sometimes I joined his friends and we would all go out for a meal or to a concert. He was great company and always made me feel light-hearted.

As his visit had made me feel much better, I asked if he'd go swimming with me. He laughed.

'I only swim in summer and then it's at the seaside... starkers! But I'll walk halfway with you as I'm going to meet someone at that new hotel near the Writers' Union.'

We set out at a good pace cutting through the back streets. Why did they park cars on all the pavements so that one had to walk through puddles that fill the accumulating holes in the road? More and more cars. More and more pollution!

I noticed they'd shored-up the old Palace Hotel. How did they expect pedestrians to get past the rickety wooden scaffolding? No 'health and safety' rules then! Propped up on a broken brick! At least the cosy, traditional restaurant 'Vatra' had managed to survive. An old man, outside the small grocery shop on the corner where the road divides, had a tatty homemade shopping bag full of small jars of pickled vegetables and attempted to sell us some. We refused, politely. Then Sorky swore as he tripped.

'Bugger these holes! Why can't they learn to maintain things?'

'God knows! Look, there's 'mad Margareta'. *She's* strayed from her usual haunts!'

Half-clothed in rags, a woman of indeterminate age was squatting in a doorway puffing at the end of a cigarette, a trickle of pee oozed from beneath her. I smiled a greeting, but like the tramp in the park with his few possessions beside him, she was lost in her own sad world.

Cutting through an alleyway to Strada Ion Câmpineanu, we walked on under the glass verandas, past the modern shoe shop opposite the large Communist style Sala Palatului; a conference, cinema and concert hall, nestled behind the National Art Gallery. How beautiful the area must have been when it was the part of the former royal palace grounds.

As we passed, a few loitering gypsies encircled us like gnats. One had a baby strapped to her back; another cradled a sleeping child in her arms. Next, came a boy of about five carrying a puppy hardly old enough to leave its mother. He joined the whining plea for money. I had the phrase ready: 'Lasa-mă în pace!'<sup>17</sup> They sauntered away as we walked on towards the Lutheran Church. Gone were the days when I gave money to any begging child. Many beggars, some maimed at birth, were dropped off by car early in the morning and then collected at night; their takings used by an organised gang. Giving money did not help the situation, but I often bought an extra loaf for Margareta, or a cake to hand to a pensioner who gazed longingly at food in the baker's shop-window.

Young children from the Catholic school in neat school smocks under their anoraks crossed the street with their parents having come from mass at the nearby cathedral.

For a moment I remembered Edward, and my children when they were small.

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<sup>17</sup> 'Leave me in peace!'

Sorkey bid me a dramatic farewell in a stage whisper: ‘Agent Levinson, I shall make contact in the usual way. Do not contact me!’ and was off. It was still mid-November, but the town’s Christmas lights were already in place. I diverted to climb the steps towards the Cathedral entrance and step inside for a moment; to enter the stillness where nuns went about their business. I sat absorbing the calm. The urge to go to confession gnawed me, but I resisted. Then my inner voice changed as I forced myself to see everything that had happened from the reality of a wife’s perspective. I tried to understand Megara’s position, find excuses for her behaviour, my behaviour. And Megara? Wasn’t she entitled to bind him to faithfulness after so many years of marriage and so much *unfaithfulness* on his part? In a few months time they would both be in their seventies and I was almost two years older.

Wasn’t it time? It was a point of view I didn’t wish to consider for long. Ștefan had said in one of his last communications to me, ‘We are seventy. It is an age, Glynis!’

Where was the spirit that once led him to tell me – and not so long ago –

‘I’ll make love until I’m eighty, or even older?’

And I’d replied, coquettishly, ‘And so will I!’

The Cathedral had a Christmas tree and children were helping to decorate it. I was in no mood to celebrate Christmas or donate my usual gift of a tree for the hall of my block. Poor Ștefan, torn between what had happened and his love for me. I knew her words would destroy him. That’s what he’d always feared. He said that if she ever found out there’d be no peace, just a living hell, and he wouldn’t be able to write or work. On the phone he’d said, ‘She has killed something in me.’ *Did* he mean ‘love’? *Our* love? Was it so fragile? After twenty-three years? Having always said that the only peace he ever found was when he was lying in bed with me at his side?

Upon leaving the cathedral, I made my way towards the Leisure Centre of the Hotel Bucharest. As I entered the new western elegance I was still wondering what he was doing each evening, each day, each night. Then, I changed into my swimsuit, showered, and dived into the deep end – surfacing slowly.

## Megara's Voice

## 6.

*(Megara's voice bombards the conceptual space.)*

The man pauses. The knuckles on his fisted hands grow white and the runnels on his forehead delve deep into his mind as he leans back in the chair and closes his eyes. He is listening to his wife's tirade; that phone call to her sister in Switzerland when she thought he'd gone out to buy water . . .

*That woman's a bitch, nothing but a bitch. She's had her eyes on my husband ever since they met! Well before her husband, Edward, died. I bet she drove him to it. He could never have known or he would have divorced her (pause).*

*I know! Can't think what Ștefan saw in her. She's not as beautiful as I am nor so well cultured. I read novels in French and she can't even speak it! Just because she's got money and I haven't, she thinks she can lord it over us! Inviting us here and there just to rub it in that we can't afford it (pause).*

*Yes, on our holidays! Planned by both of them just so that they could make love behind my back. Mind you, I don't blame Ștefan. She bewitched him. Got her claws in. Kept coming back to Romania just so as she could take him from me (pause).*

*No, of course not! I reckon she only got his play translated and performed in England so as to hook him. He's very ambitious you see, an egoist, and a performance in English was most 'prestigieux' for him, so she knew how to get him (pause).*

*Perhaps. They say she is a spy! Maybe she wanted to pump information out of him to pass on to the authorities: whoever they are in England (pause).*

*God knows . . . and she wasn't religious. She told us so. Never lit a candle for Edward, or crossed herself! (pause)*

*She must have thought I was a real idiot not to see what was going on. I knew all right but couldn't prove it. Ștefan kept saying it was all in my mind, but a woman knows. I have always known when Ștefan was seeing another woman (pause).*

*What was the point? You know full well it's normal in Bucharest for a handsome man, and anyway, it never lasted long. But this one! I felt there must be something between them because he 'lit up' when she was around, kept*

*mentioning her name, played certain tapes of music. Then she kept telephoning. Would you believe it, she once rang at midnight to see if we could book her a room at the seaside! I kept my eye on him when once she ended up in a hotel near us at Mamaia. Do you know she actually went swimming in the outdoor pool after sunset with men in the water!* (pause)

*Yes, I know, but what kind of a woman is that, I ask you? And do you know that in Mangalia she actually suggested that I let Ştefan stay and sit on the beach with her while I went back inside the hotel* (pause).

*Well, it was still too sunny and dangerous for him to be out, even at half-past four. Our doctor had told us that. Hasn't yours said the same?* (pause)

*I told Alina and Vlad that I thought something was going on, but I was going to keep Ştefan well under lock and key. I knew how to get round him. I had my suspicions that she joined him while he was abroad, but of course had no proof. She had money and freedom. She could do what she liked, twist him round her little finger, use him to benefit her own career . . . She did you know! He helped her a great deal with her research for a book she was planning to write! And then what did she do? She actually had the nerve to come and live in Bucharest on our doorstep, or rather on the Library's doorstep and the University was even nearer, but Ştefan was never away from me at night and was always regular as clockwork in returning for meals. His timetable at work was very regular and when we both had mobiles I could call him on the phone whenever I wanted. It was rarely switched off unless he was in a meeting or teaching and I knew the time of his classes. She never seemed to call at the Library or his secretary would have told me, so I relaxed and actually befriended her, although I thought it strange that she never asked me out alone* (pause).

*Oh, well once I think! Yes, that was the time Ştefan was away. When I mentioned it, he said that she was his best friend with similar interests and why shouldn't a man have a female 'best friend'? In Turkey she spent the time showing off her so-called talents. It's a wonder she didn't get ill swimming early in the morning, dancing at the disco all hours of the night and sitting at the bar alone – no doubt to attract men! Then there was that Irish man she introduced as her boyfriend years ago! I saw all this man's aftershave and things in her bathroom so I knew they were sleeping together! Then she showed off like a teenager going down this water chute. What 'lady' of her age would do that? And she encouraged Ştefan to do it again. I'd told him not to be*

*so silly with his back problem. They kept going off to the sea and after a while I thought I should keep my eye on them, so I went too (pause).*

*Then once she tried to show me up by saying that Western ladies never asked their husbands to accompany them to the toilet, but I knew good manners, and Ştefan will still accompany me if I ask him to (pause).*

*Well, I think it's good manners! When we were in Lesbos she took him off for a day on his own. I reckon now they had sex somewhere, and remember, he'd told me he wasn't a man anymore. Couldn't get it up! I expected him to say he would keep his wife company on the beach if she didn't want to go in the car, as any decent husband would have done, but SHE whisked him off. Used emotional blackmail no doubt and there I was stuck with that madman, Alexandru, and his stupid binoculars! But I showed him my feelings when he got back. I wouldn't let it drop. Day after day I reminded him. How dare he leave me alone and go off with her! How dare he! (pause)*

*I can't help going on about it. I have to talk to someone. Just imagine how it felt knowing all this and not being able to prove anything. Deep down Ştefan must have known I knew. In Cyprus I'd say 'Go on, you can go after Glynis now!' Before we ever started out on the holiday I kept making odd sarcastic remarks. He ignored them, but I knew they'd struck home! But what happened on that last Wednesday of the holiday was the limit. I wanted proof and I got it. Ştefan said he'd stay in his room for a while and write. I thought she looked disappointed when I left our room alone. We sat by the pool and she was pretending to read a book – but of course she can't really read Romanian – then suddenly she gets up and announces that she's going to sit on the beach. Now I'd wondered why Ştefan had decided not to come down and thought they'd perhaps arranged to meet, so I was keeping an eye on her. She went towards the beach thinking I wasn't watching, but I was. When she was halfway she chose another path that led back to the hotel, unaware that I could see her. I watched the window of her room and when I saw the curtains move I knew she was there. Immediately I jumped up and went in towards the lift. She'd left her bag with me but I didn't care for her bag or my own. I just wanted to catch them at it (pause).*

*No. I was too quick for them. How dare she! How dare she! Right under my nose! I was furious. I'd carried my key-card with me for three days just in case they tried something on. I marched in and there he was standing in the doorway of the communicating door. It was obvious he'd been in her room. He*

***was in his bathing suit and I'll swear he was slightly erect. I shouted at him. He shouted back saying it was all imagination (pause).***

***To hell it was! She'd lied to me, moved the curtains so I wouldn't see him in her room and they'd used the communicating door! I stormed out and banged on her door. There was no answer so I hurried towards the lift. There she was as cool as a cucumber standing in her swimsuit and matching drapery. I demanded to know why she'd gone back to her room. She looked shocked and guilty. Of course she looked guilty. She WAS guilty (pause).***

***I told her I didn't want to see her again and I'm making sure neither of us will. He keeps on denying it, saying it was all in my imagination, that I was living the life of the heroine in a novel. I cried and kept on crying. I knew this would move him and it did. I made him promise that he'd not see her again even if he was innocent, so that at least we could live out our days in peace. He agreed. I'd won! I made sure I saw the email he'd sent. If they had been having an affair, she would suffer. Serve her right! I've suffered all my life. Why shouldn't she? And I'm the one who has been faithful –***

**The man remembers the early days of their marriage. The tiny room, the day she told him with joy that she was pregnant and wanted to ring her family right away. His reaction. His gentle art of persuasion. The impossibility of raising a child in such a small space and with such little money. The back street abortion. The illness. The guilt. The tears and those recurring words whenever there was an argument: *'I'm the unhappiest woman in the world'*.**

\* \* \*

After swimming and chatting with Sorkey I decided to take Judy's advice and so started to think seriously about the play I would write. Ştefan and I had always said one day we'd write about our love and growing old. Perhaps it would be therapeutic. Who knows? I thought one day I might even get it produced or made into a film. It would show that age and ageing don't matter when it comes to love, for we remain adolescents in our ardour. It's only our bodies that change. Yet such change is hardly perceived when two people are in love, for they see themselves only through each other's eyes. My story would declaim the truth about ageing to those under forty who

call us names, send us comic ageist cards and would cast us off to some ‘granny flat’ or ‘care home’.

So – title? Well – for a start, ‘The Drama of Three Lives’ would do. I decided I’d write the story first, so as to plan what to include in each act. Dialogue could come later. I’d save it on one of those memory sticks and who knows, one day it might even be a book for future e-book technology, with surrealistic visuals, film clips, sounds, headlines, masks, giant puppets, letters, emails, postcards, crowd scenes and diary extracts, spanning the years 1982 to 2004. A span of whirlpool-time where countries and dates merged, replaced each other, teasing the audience into attention.

**CAST LIST: (*They introduce themselves*)**

**Glynis Levinson (née Harding):** Aged forty-eight and since a child has always looked younger than her years. Short with blonde, curly, shoulder-length hair that nestles untidily around the ears. Smiles a great deal, blue eyes, full of fun. Three children.

**Edward Levinson:** Four years older than his wife. College of Education lecturer. Tall, grey-haired and of a shy, retiring nature. A Catholic. Ex-public school.

**Ştefan Anghelache:** Aged forty-seven, Romanian Librarian. Black hair traditionally cut, charming manner, tall and handsome with intense dark eyes.

**Megara:** Ştefan’s wife. Aged forty-six. Member of the Inspectorate for schools. Tall with straight hair, usually auburn. Speaks French fluently but little English.

**Alexandru Gheorgiu:** Widower aged sixty-six. A retired professor of natural history. Speaks excellent English. Has a passion for bird-watching. Keeps very healthy.

**Ramona:** Older woman. Secretary at the Library.

**Sorkey:** Actually it’s Sorin Lucescu, aged fifty-four. A middle-aged ex-pat who lives nearby.

**Aura Badescu:** Interpreter and member of the Translators’ Union. Seven years older than Glynis, with a son who lives in France with his wife and two small children.

**Doru:** Aura’s partner, a year older. Once a fighter pilot and very proud of the fact. Timid, quietly spoken and not much bothered about appearance.

**Lavinia:** A psychiatrist. Friend of Glynis. A lively person around forty-six and full of fun.

**Sorela:** A young psychologist and a friend of Glynis.

**Judy:** A friend, peripatetic music teacher. Fifteen years younger than Glynis.



*(Memories unjumble. Order themselves. Time's reel accelerates backward to 1982 and the mind's back projection brings sights and sounds to life. When the story of her play begins, Shakespeare's influence is never far away. Explore a little on your own.)*

### The Prologue

'Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more.'<sup>18</sup>

Glynis loved life, made friends easily, got on well with her husband and particularly enjoyed male company. She adapted to any lifestyle, and unlike Ştefan, was not at all patriotic, apart from her love of English and Drama she taught at university. She enjoyed lecturing, and her dedication and enthusiasm stimulated students from all walks of life, all nationalities. A tiny invisible critic was ensconced on her shoulder, and as life for her was a dramatic experiment, she would debate with this stern lodger, hypothesize, analyse, carry out her enquiry and then – only then, reach a conclusion. When she failed to do so, when events suddenly caught her out, she panicked, grew angry with herself and battled to restore balance.

The theatre took her into another world where she could identify with any character she chose. And in life too she found herself playing many roles, changing as easily from Hedda Gabler to Dolly, from Mimi in *La Bohème* to Shaw's Major Barbara, or even from Jean Brodie to Lady Teazle. When older, she accepted odd aches and pains or slight bodily changes. Ignored them. 'The show must go on!' As a child, acting was her passion, although she took an equal interest in music and art. Despite what her three children thought, she was not ambitious, simply curious. If a crack of light appeared under a door of opportunity she would push it open – as far as it would go – and venture through. It was through one of those doors she ventured into Romania to explore another world of theatre. Unexpectedly, she met Ştefan and this chance meeting led to a labyrinth of doors.

In 1983, when Glynis heard he had received and accepted an invitation to visit London as a guest of the Great Britain East Europe Centre, she rang their office to find the dates and where he would be staying. Then she wrote a card of welcome addressed to Dr. Ştefan Anghelache at the Royal Scott Hotel in Kings Cross Road,

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<sup>18</sup> *Macbeth*, 5. 5 24-8.

London WC1, making sure she added her home address and telephone number, signing it, 'With all good wishes, Glynis and Edward Levinson.' She was glad to have passed on his request for a reissue of the initial invitation he had been forbidden to accept the year before, for she remembered with pleasure her first visit to Romania and that final party at Lebăda where he had flirted with her so outrageously.

Two days passed after the date he was supposed to have arrived and she had heard nothing. A little hurt, but envisaging all sorts of practical reasons as to why he had not contacted her, she ignored her initial smart and telephoned the hotel. The person at the other end confirmed a Dr. Anghelache had checked in, but – no, there had been no correspondence waiting for him. Glynis then asked to be put her through to his room, and waited with eager anticipation as the ring tone commenced.

Ştefan answered cautiously in Romanian, but once he realised who it was, his voice changed. They stammered a few exchanges, he in broken English and Glynis in what the family laughingly called her 'speaking to foreigners' voice. Then she offered to come to the hotel that Saturday to take him out in the car to see the sights, adding that perhaps one evening he might like to come to dinner at their house in Wandsworth and meet her husband, Edward. He said he would like that very much and hoped one day they would both come to his house in Bucharest so Edward could meet his wife, Megara.

The night before, Glynis had suggested to Edward that he come with her to welcome Ştefan, but as it was the Finals, he was busy marking.

'No, best you go on your own,' he said pleasantly.

So she did.

She could still recall the day vividly. It was springtime, the first of many springtimes Glynis and Ştefan would spend together, and as she drove she noticed how the sun warmed the colours of the usually drab buildings around the Kings Cross end of Grays Inn Road.

She found room 117 and knocked gently.

'Da?' A man's voice.

'It's Glynis.'

The door opened and Ştefan threw open his arms in welcome. 'Glynis! Come in!'

How different her name sounded spoken in a Romanian accent! An orb of sound rather than two Lancastrian hammer blows. It was a small room with no chairs, so

they sat facing one another each on the edge of single beds. From that moment, their eyes danced only in each other's light.

They left the hotel and she led the way to the car park. As he lent forward to climb into the seat beside her she started to apologise for having to drive her daughter's old red mini.

'My car's in for a service, but anyway,' she chattered on, 'even if it *is* a bit old and rusty, don't worry it's quite safe!'

They set off rumbling their way around the sights communicating as best they could, Glynis knowing practically no Romanian and Ștefan – very little English.

The tour ended in Hyde Park where they parked and went into a pleasant wine bar. There Ștefan told her he was a playwright. 'So am I,' Glynis replied, considering herself one, despite having written only two short plays still awaiting publication. She hadn't written much poetry since adolescence, and academically, nothing apart from the publication of academic literary articles, a thesis for her M.A. on Yeats' contribution to Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, and later, her doctorate on eighteenth-century productions of Shakespeare's plays. At that moment she was in desperate need of another publication to add to her C.V. As a schoolgirl she'd spent all her pennies and sixpences on second-hand books usually displayed on a trestle table outside a small shop she passed while cycling home. Most of these volumes were beautifully bound works of poetry or plays. She loved the theatre and had always had a secret ambition to be a playwright.

They sipped red wine. He smoked.

Long moments passed.

The air became charged empowering unspoken words.

Eventually, venturing into the sunshine past sweet-smelling orange blossom, they wandered along the path that led to the lake; to a bench overlooking the lake.

It was late afternoon. Children in pushchairs were being hurried away while tiresome, tired toddlers resisted tugging hands.

Ștefan started to teach Glynis Romanian, '*lacul*', lake, '*rață*' for duck.

Many birds glided peacefully with their young through the branched reflections of dipped arms and lacy fingers. The sun went behind a cloud, casting shadows, and Glynis shivered. Without hesitation Ștefan removed the jacket draped over his shoulders and placed it gently around hers. As she half expected, the arm remained –

a gentle weight; an inviting pressure. Glynis turned towards him and as she glanced up at his face, he lowered his head to reach her lips. She didn't resist.

'The hotel? Shall we?' he murmured.

She nodded agreement and they left. They say the first love-making is always the best and most memorable. For them it was indeed an occasion they never forgot. She remembered that he closed the curtains, and produced a small towel. His sensitivity, although strange, was especially pleasing for Glynis felt embarrassed about her body with its hysterectomy scar; vulnerable for this sort of adventure.

Then, eager fingers unbuttoned her. She didn't remember *him* undressing or any foreplay apart from his mouth on her raised nipples. She just recalled being pulled to the edge of the bed, his legs parting hers as they wrapped around her ankles and Ştefan entering with force – a magical force, a force that excited, sending tremors of 'the little death' into the animal cry that burst from her throat. He supported his weight on his elbows. This too was new. Never had she experienced such desire; a desire undiminished over time for they remained adolescents into their seventies. His eyes would always say 'I love you' or else he would mouth the words when he was sure no one was looking.

On that occasion he stayed in the UK three weeks. On one of the weekends that followed the dinner party held at Glynis's large semi-detached house, she drove Ştefan to the Lake District. Again Edward apologised for not joining them. The first stop was Keele, and it was here they spent their first full night together at a Travel Lodge.

How surprised he had been when she presented her credit card to the Receptionist and asked for a double room.

'Un femme extraordinaire,' he exclaimed as she led the way. They made love into the early hours, for he could always delay his own satisfaction.

During that weekend there was one day of incessant rain. They reached the Lake District through mist-clad hills, but were determined the bad weather would not stop them exploring. They had lunch at Windermere, then drove on to Bowness and Far Sawrey. Glynis was heading for Hawkshead to show Ştefan the old grammar school where not only Wordsworth had been educated, but also, more recently, Glynis's father, Andrew Harding and his brother, Robert.

It was a seventeenth-century slate-roofed, roughcast stone building, looking more like a house than a school. They learned later that its entrance and mullioned windows

were later improvements dating from 1888. In the main room they signed the visitors' book and then wandered round. Ştefan, armed with a guide book, was interested in the 'chamfered beams' and many artefacts, but Glynis went immediately to the long row of fixed desks attached to a single bench. Having removed one of the carefully placed slate-boards, it didn't take long to find what she was really looking for. Scratched into the lid of the middle desk were the initials AH and RH, and close by, WW.

On the route back that would take them over Skelwith Bridge towards Ambleside, for no particular reason Glynis suddenly turned the car up a side lane that appeared to wind upwards. Eventually, they reached a small car park some five-hundred feet above Coniston village. It was a deserted spot apart from an empty parked car. The occupants were perhaps on a very damp, muddy trek to 'The Old Man', the highest point of the Furness Fells.

She turned off the engine. Symphonic rain and spattering drops enclosed them in a languorous adagio while the tape of mediaeval music played counterpoint to the natural sounds that held them in thrall. In that ethereal, window-steamed atmosphere a bond formed – one they swore was for eternity. One they swore would overcome age and ageing. She traced the faint lines on his face with her finger, unaware their eyes were indeed threaded upon one double string!<sup>19</sup>

**The man pauses, sits upright, removes his glasses and closes his eyes for a moment, a long moment. He is listening attentively to some far distant sound of the past. Then, after a while, folds his arms as if cold, as if enfolding someone within them, and strokes his jacket sleeves, caressing them slowly above the elbow. He puts his glasses on again and returns to the story.**

During this visit to Britain, Ştefan arranged to introduce Glynis to some Romanian friends of his who also lived in south London. She drove him there and spent a

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<sup>19</sup> John Donne. "The Ecstasy"

'Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread  
Our eyes upon one double string:'

pleasant Sunday afternoon, although it was difficult at times as the others spoke mostly in Romanian. Before leaving, Ștefan begged them to give Glynis literal translations of one of his poetic dramas, so she could convert them into poetic English. They agreed and a solid friendship formed that became extremely helpful over the coming months and years.

Glynis worked hard studying the language, and found that Ștefan's verse plays revealed a man who spoke of soul, nature, beauty, loneliness and peace. They were sad, introspective, abstract – yet when read in Romanian the feminine endings, inherent in the language, produced rhymed, lilting, forlorn melodies. Lyrics from a Latin island in a sea of Slavs!

Ștefan viewed religion as synonymous with nature, which was unusual for the nephew of an Orthodox priest. The three weeks passed very quickly, and after he left, Glynis began to long for him with a reverence usually reserved for gods. He had told her he longed for a child. If younger she might have complied, but instead dormant creativity propagated. She bought oil paints, had lessons, copied postcards and styles, then discovering her own talent, 'gave birth' to a foetus in a womb shaped like an apple, illuminated by a bright light against a background of dark chaotic shadows. She called her creation – 'The Light of Love', inspired by Holman Hunt's 'The Light of the World' she had seen in Saint Paul's Cathedral.

Or should it have been 'Phaedrus' chaos'?<sup>20</sup>

She became buoyant, blonde locks bobbing: animated steps. Colleagues noticed the change in her.

Eyes alight.

Everything a joy.

*(From now all roads lead eastwards.)*

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<sup>20</sup> Plato. *The Symposium*. Phaedrus tells of Hesiod writing:

*'First Chaos came into existence . . .*

*. . . and then*

*Broad-breasted Earth, a secure seat forever,*

*And Love.'*

## Behind the Gauze

‘I’ the east my pleasure lies.’<sup>21</sup>

Early in the summer of 1984 the idea of getting the college to produce a Romanian poetic drama in English translation seemed a perfect strategy to enable Glynis to travel back to Romania, keep in touch with Ștefan, and cut through the restrictions of Ceaușescu’s tough regime. She began to plan ahead. After his first visit to England, she went back to Bucharest, having persuaded the Romanian Cultural attaché in London, that she was now ready to expand her initial interest in his country’s dramatic literature. Beforehand, she had caused havoc in the Anghelache household by forgetting the time difference of two hours and ringing his home from the UK at ten at night. His wife had a sharp aggressive manner even then. Ștefan reported back to Glynis that she had asked threateningly, ‘What is there between this woman and you that she rings at midnight?’ Glynis had telephoned simply to ask the name of a good hotel on the Romanian coast as she and Edward intended to go there for a few days. He suggested the Ambassador in Mamaia, and said they too would be at the Black Sea in August, so perhaps they could all meet up. They never did. Either he forgot or deliberately omitted to pass on the name of the hotel and dates of their stay. She never raised the courage to ring him again.

Edward was tall and still good-looking with a full head of greying, wavy hair, cut traditionally as one would expect from an ex-public school-boy. In their youth she had met him at the local Dramatic Club. He appeared to lack confidence, yet was slightly bombastic at times which embarrassed Glynis, but he had been the handsomest of the four young men who proposed when she was twenty. So she overcame her dislike of his finger-tips yellowed by smoking and the way he emptied the spit-valve of his trombone onto the carpet, and accepted him. It had been a whirlwind romance. Six weeks and they were engaged and married two years later when he’d finished his National Service. To be engaged at twenty-one, married at twenty-three, and have your first child when twenty-five was the norm in the fifties. Edward was extremely honest and kind, but surprisingly shy. Other people became invisible when he retreated into the mist of his own thoughts. The one big disappointment for Glynis in the early days of their marriage was his desire not

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<sup>21</sup> *Anthony and Cleopatra*. 2. 3.1.6

matching hers. His joking, yet to her, ‘cutting’ remark during the honeymoon: “You surely don’t expect it every night do you?” often emerged from her long-term memory. She reckoned it was due to his Catholic upbringing!

How innocent they had been in those early days of marriage!

To discover more about Romania Glynis attended some of the meetings of the British Romanian Friendship Society. They also arranged holidays, and so towards the end of August the Levensons booked one of their tours to Mamaia. However, upon arrival found they were to be escorted most of the time.

Edward was not impressed with Bucharest or the hotel where they stayed overnight before travelling the four and a half hours’ journey by communist-style coach to the coast.

‘Not a cup of coffee anywhere and the whole city drab and colourless!’

He swore never to return. During that visit Glynis noticed the way some members of Romanian society enjoyed dominating others. She had come down the wide staircase of the Ambassador Hotel into the large hallway to witness a group of untidily uniformed maids, of all ages, standing – broom in hand – like an army platoon. They stood almost to attention while another woman, obviously ‘in charge’, dressed formally in a white blouse and navy suit, stood in front haranguing them. Glynis was reminded of Victorian England. What form of communism was this?

Everyone equal? How well Orwell had predicted this in *Animal Farm*!

On Glynis’s third visit to Bucharest, during the following autumn break, Ștefan met her at the airport after she was escorted from the plane in style by ‘Business Security’, arranged through the Romanian Embassy in London when she applied for a visa. Being treated like a VIP was quite an experience and of course much pleasanter than going through all the frightening, pre-revolutionary formalities at Otopeni airport. Fierce looking guards would examine luggage very carefully hoping for bribes of cigarettes or other scarce items. If they were handed something they needed, surreptitiously, you would be allowed through without further hassle. One of these business Securitate was called Marin, and Glynis thought he must have been a high-ranking official, perhaps even an army general (plain clothes of course), for as they approached the exit he questioned her closely as to the identity of *that man* waiting at the entrance. She explained honestly how she had met him and thought nothing more of it.



The next day Ștefan took Glynis around Bucharest. Sometimes he held her arm, or placed his round her shoulders. She had been warned by her Romanian friends in London of possible dangers and so tried to explain to him that being so intimate with a Westerner may have serious consequences. He reassured her that his personal life was his own affair. He had done nothing wrong at work and that was what mattered. How naïve he had been!

They visited a few churches and came across a wedding and a Christening. Ștefan took delight at Glynis's bright-eyed wonder and explained many of the country's traditions, promising that one day he would show her the beautiful mountains and villages. He never mentioned the poverty and the fear, or the abandonment of children with special needs, at that time unseen to visitors' eyes hidden behind the gauze of bonhomie. Many Romanians, although aware, preferred to ignore things they felt helpless to change.

Ștefan carried himself proudly in the warm October sunshine: jacket, as always, slung over his broad shoulders, his short-sleeved blue shirt revealing sun tanned arms. Still looking happy and confident, he led Glynis towards the Metro. The underground station was dimly lit, but very clean with loud-speakers broadcasting classical music. As they waited she became aware of the stillness, the silence of the crowd, the passengers waiting patiently facing one direction, while always aware of the person behind, in front, straight ahead, near the steps, close by. On the train Glynis and Ștefan nestled close, sensing the current that flowed between them.

Suddenly, Ștefan whispered, 'A neighbour!'

Furtively separating hands, he greeted the man politely. Glynis could sense that Ștefan was now on edge, no doubt alarmed at the prospect of this man reporting back to Megara. From the underground they merged in with the crowd, but no longer showed signs of affection as they walked through the tree-lined streets, passing the occasional gypsy sweeping leaves or pruning roses in the large flower beds that separated pavement from road.

Ștefan and Megara lived in an elegant part of Bucharest called Floreasca, not far from Herăstrău Park, in a four storied, fairly modern block set apart from some very old houses whose French or Italian architecture was covered in rich, wine-red vines. Behind the block was an army unit hidden away behind tall walls, and beyond this Glynis saw the skyline of drab, discoloured, high-rise dwellings, very different from the large, elegant houses they had seen in passing: detached properties taken over by

the State in Stalin's time. Luckily the Anghelache's apartment was on the second floor, and there was a lift. The joy and excitement of taking Glynis to see his home, and of being together outweighed any sense of danger they should have felt on entering the faintly grubby, dim and musty smelling interior of the building.

Apparently Megara had spent all morning colouring and setting her hair. She had chosen a very dark black with tints of auburn, a colour Glynis soon learned was the fashion for most Romanian ladies that year. It was back-combed into a bouffant style and she wore a pink loose-fitting dress pulled in at the waist by a red leather belt. 'Decidedly under-weight,' thought Glynis as Megara fetched and carried, looking even taller as her black high-heeled shoes chipped away at the faded parquet flooring. In profile her nose appeared a little too long and there was a bleached patch beneath it. As her eyebrows were well-plucked and she wore heavy make-up, it was difficult to guess Megara's age. Her finger-nails were well manicured and coloured crimson. Glynis guessed she wore rubber gloves while doing the washing-up and her conjecture was confirmed when she sneaked a glance into the tiny kitchen. It was a three-roomed apartment, but seemed small due to large pieces of furniture and the long heavy table that occupied the centre of the dining-room. Everywhere was clean and tidy; its small enclosed, weather-worn balconies being used to store various ungainly objects and remnants of potted plants. A faded red was the predominant colour of the furnishings and the floors were all parquet, interspersed with colourful woven mats.

Although she did not speak any English, Megara was most welcoming. She revelled in the role of hostess, and even though good food was scarce, managed to provide a feast, communicating as best she could by speaking French. Not knowing what to expect, but having seen shops with empty shelves, Glynis did not expect more than the food already on the table – a platter of assorted cold meats, cheese and salad – so ate heartily. In fact, the meal lasted three hours, with the first course being followed by soup, roast chicken with vegetables, coffee (they called Ness) and then desert, with an accompaniment of fine Romanian wine and plum brandy. When it came to seven o'clock, Glynis decided she really must go back to the hotel. Ștefan called a taxi, but when the phone rang to say it had arrived, both of them accompanied her to the exit of the block. The only real contact Glynis made with Ștefan that whole evening had been when he pressed his hand hard against her shoulder when helping her on and off with her coat, and of course – through the longing she read in his eyes.

Since that time, it had occurred to Glynis more and more, that probably as a school inspector, Megara must have been a strong and active member of the Communist party. Glynis knew from what she had read about the regime that Ștefan's wife would have enjoyed the perks as well as the power it gave her over lesser mortals, for Megara seemed to belong to that group of people who enjoyed exerting control. Yet other experiences indicated quite the reverse. From time to time she would appear very afraid and insecure, doing nothing for herself. Ștefan would have to go with her to the doctor's surgery and she always insisted that he accompany her to the door of the 'Ladies' in a restaurant, or to their hotel room if she had forgotten something.

Ștefan once told her how Megara had wanted to study art at the Institutul de Arte Plastice, or the Universitatea de Artă Teatrală și Cinematografică, but after having met Ștefan on a train, she insisted on taking the difficult entrance exam to study French so they could be at the same university in Bucharest. Apparently, Megara later regretted her decision, for she still liked to think she had been trained as an artist. After some time, Glynis noticed this, for she would find opportunities to pontificate on styles and names of painters, and whenever the camcorder was turned on or someone was taking a still photo of them, Megara would pose like a model in a manner she thought artistic. Ștefan would excuse her by saying, 'It is a small fault of hers. She is egocentric.' Megara would say the same thing to Glynis about Ștefan, as well as to his face: 'Ești egoist! You think only of yourself!'

Ștefan and Megara never did have children.

In London, Glynis had asked him if he'd conceived a child with anyone else.

He had laughed: 'I don't know. I think not.'

Yet he did confide to Glynis about the abortion. Afterwards, Megara got an infection and was unable to conceive. A hospital termination seemed unlikely when abortions were forbidden during the communist period, and knowing this, Glynis was puzzled.

This hiatus during the early months of their marriage left Ștefan with a tremendous guilt-complex; his incubus. It was necessary to tell his parents that Megara had miscarried; a lie that shamed their consciences and pride, for in the eyes of the Orthodox Church abortion was a deadly sin.

Megara's family came from Maramureș, an area steeped in superstition and tradition. In some villages they still believe the more children Romanians have, the richer they are, and the greatest desire of newlyweds, especially the bride, is for God

to bless them with a son or daughter. Various remedies are sought to help conception – such as certain kinds of orchids, white roses, and white lilac boiled in honey or wine. If this fails to work they try placing nine young garlic plants in a jar of wine. The jar is then kept for nine days in the chimney flue. The main problem for Megara would have been her family's conviction that a woman who failed to conceive was not accepted by God. Visiting her village after the marriage must have been very hard: year after year the questions, the teasing, and then the silence.

'It will be the end, for neither have my sisters any children. When I die . . .'

Ştefan did not complete the sentence. The slaughter had begun. They had killed something in each other. They'd killed the child – and he still grieved. She wondered if he had ever read Diotima's words to Socrates,<sup>22</sup> for he often quoted from *The Symposium*.

Ştefan and Megara had no money in the early days: Romanians who worked for the State in any capacity were classed as lowly sparrows or else church mice. It was not even possible for someone to get their small pension from their first job if they still had access to money from elsewhere. Compulsory retirement from the library would come at sixty-five, and if after that he decided to teach at a university, even for two afternoons a week, he would have to wait until the age of seventy before any pension came his way.

During that period no ordinary Romanian would have dared enter hotels such as the Intercontinental, the Atheneé Palace or the Bucharest, as members of the Securitate were thought to be everywhere. Everyone was suspect, from waiters to chambermaids, from doormen to bar-tenders. It was common belief, and no doubt true, that microphones in such places were well-hidden and that rooms allocated to foreigners were usually bugged. The atmosphere of Romania created fear so that everyone was considered an informer, yet Ştefan had said it was easy to rent a room for an hour or two in a small hotel. He knew of some – obviously from experience! When talking to other people in later years, Glynis found that anyone booking into a hotel room had to hand in their identity cards, and if not married, were sent packing.

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<sup>22</sup> Plato. *The Symposium*. Ibid.

'The object of love is not beauty as you suppose. ... It is reproduction and birth in beauty.'

No doubt, bribery worked as it did at the airport; a gift of some kind, however small, would be reciprocated, and if a hotel manager knew you – a packet of Kent could well result in a surreptitious exchange.

Ştefan now worked at the historic neo-baroque library, and a few days after going to the Anghelache household, he invited her to his office. Managing to get past the security doorman with the phrase Ştefan had taught her – ‘Domnul Anghelache m-aşteapta’, she smiled to herself as she made her way up the wide flight of central stairs. She clung to the wide wooden banister, unsure of her step on the treacherous, dirty, torn canvas covering used to protect a dusty, ruby-red carpet, and was aware of her heart thumping loudly under her rib cage as she avoided the loose stair-rods set to spring the unsuspecting or unwelcome visitor. Following directions, she came round a corner to a closed door.

Uncoloured nails pecked the wood.

It was opened by a dowdy, stern-looking woman who ushered Glynis into yet another office. Ştefan sprang up from his desk and came towards her smiling, greeting her formerly in stilted English as he kissed her hand with no obvious show of emotion. He then offered to accompany her round the building. He took pride in telling foreign visitors that the library had been designed by the French architect, Paul Gotterau, and built on land donated by King Carol 1<sup>st</sup>. The tour was carried out quietly and discretely, without fuss. After they had seen the oval rooms beneath the cupolas and were in the rounded Aula lecture theatre with its plush red seats, long raised dais and patterned-glass dome, they continued talking in an official way about the history of the place. Then, coming to a doorway covered by a heavy, red velvet curtain, that sealed from sight a short passage to another door, he seized Glynis in his arms and kissed her passionately. A moment later they emerged the other side looking as innocent as when they had entered.

Ştefan’s secretary, Ramona, was a pleasant, older woman, devoted to pleasing him, and from then on whenever Glynis visited, Ramona led her quickly to his personal office, and then closed the heavy, leather-coated, studded door firmly behind her.

Those few moments alone were precious. They wasted no time. Attacking seconds like starving wolves, they spilt the silence with hungry words quenching his thirst on her famine.

That week, Glynis visited daily on the pretext of studying literary texts and he always escorted her safely to the library reading-room. It was all done officially and

correctly. Ștefan had given her a pass and she actually did spend an hour or two peering idly over literary magazines and old copies of plays. Despite the attractive old-fashioned lamps, the light was poor and at times she struggled to see, but was able to make some sense of the texts having learned Latin; and besides, she found it interesting.

Having moved from the Pedagogical Library Ștefan was waiting to be promoted officially as Director of this main library; an honour long sought, as the position had been vacant for months. Promotion was imminent. A few days later, Glynis visited again and Ramona took her hurriedly to his office, but this time to be told in a hushed voice that something serious had happened.

'*They*' had come and told him that if he wanted to become Director he must 'stop seeing this English woman'.<sup>23</sup> They asked why he had disobeyed instructions and taken Glynis Levinson to his house without reporting it to the Police. He explained his wife had been there, that it was just for lunch and they had only discussed plays and music; that he had been to Mr. and Mrs. Levinson's house in London and he was just being courteous by returning the hospitality. As to the library visits, Mrs. Levinson was visiting legitimately and he could show them a copy of the pass to prove it. Everything had been in order.

He was clearly dismayed – and very frightened.

'I cannot see you again. Glynis forgive me, but you can write officially. You can write to borrow a book or send me a poem. Please do this. I can write back officially. How do you say? Keep in touch?'

Glynis swore not to give in to the regime, and promised to find a way to return and see him. She said she would ring from time to time on New Year's Eve or on his birthday. She wouldn't speak, but he'd know it was her. In the security of his office, they embraced, holding the moment as long as they dared, but he was afraid and she must . . .

'Go quickly! *They* will be watching!'

The Securitate building was close by. He knew when their microphones were active and firmly believed, even from that distance, they could pick up sound. A statement Glynis accepted without question as if she too had been a Romanian. He

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<sup>23</sup> 'They', usually accompanied by a gesture tapping a shoulder, indicated a member or members of the Romanian secret police known as the Securitate.

told her he could hear the vibration on the glass when the listening device was on. They edged their way to the top of the stairs. She descended slowly down the main staircase, and, as the flight of steps curved, looked up towards his deep, dark eyes.

She paused.

They held the glance a long time – then he turned away. On her way out through the main doors, Glynis had already started making plans to defeat those trying to separate them. A few months later he was promoted to Director.

She did ring him on those special occasions and kept her promise not to speak. She played a few bars from the tape of medieval music they had once shared, and never once stopped to consider that with modern technology her calls could be traced.

It was hard to communicate in Ceaușescu's time, but Glynis paid a Romanian living in London to translate one of Ștefan's plays called *The Ages of Man*, and then managed to persuade the head of Queen Mary's English and Drama department to allow her to produce it for a public performance with a cast of staff and students. Based on Book 1 of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, she planned to teach it alongside a relevant scene from Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and the 'Ages of Man' monologue performed by John Gielgud in 1957. Once the Bucharest gossip-vine had absorbed this into its roots, it led to her meeting other Romanian writers. Although Ștefan was not a member of UNITER,<sup>24</sup> or the Writers' Union, other writers were curious to meet this lady from London who had not only persuaded someone in England to translate such a 'minor playwright', but had also produced his play at a London university.

Those in officialdom considered her a spy. However, when the women writers, many of whom wrote love poems, met Glynis and realised exactly why Ștefan Anghelache had been the lucky one to have his play performed in the West, they set about helping her communicate with him. In writing circles Glynis was affectionately referred to as 'Glynușa', because she was not very tall and appeared so young. The university's production of Ștefan's play was a great success and of course it was reported in Romanian literary newspapers and magazines. The writers encouraged her to continue her own writing, promising to translate and publish parts of it. Enjoying this secretive notoriety on her visits, she adapted quickly to the new environment and its culture. With positive reinforcement, imagery bred imagery, and her friends set about helping her learn and translate the language. Her words interwove with his

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<sup>24</sup> The Romanian Theatre Union

until she developed a distinctive voice of her own. So, over the months Glynușa's own writing appeared here and there – and of course all literary newspapers, magazines and journals ended up in the library! Glynis's friends were sympathetic, but . . . most of the writers believed that anyone in the role of director was bound to be not only a communist but also an informer, and as Director of the University Library, Ștefan Anghelache didn't escape such accusations, although it was some time before Glynis heard these asides.

Those who knew about their affair lapped up the 'Romeo and Juliet' aspect of the tale and naturally gossiped in true Romanian style. Glynis soon learned that misinformation was used by the regime in order to scare the general public. Life was so tedious and hard that a good joke or a piece of gossip made living less boring and the people lapped it up. She was never afraid for herself, but often feared for Ștefan.

Ștefan was always unaware of this current of tittle-tattle, just as he was unaware the Securitate knew of their romantic attachment from the start; a fact Glynis discovered in 2004 when talking to a retired employee who once worked behind the door marked PROTOCOL at the Ministry of Culture. Apparently they did not mind about the romantic liaison, but insisted she was a spy.

'You were, weren't you?' – A conspiratorial whisper. Glynis roared with laughter, delighting in the thought that the *rara avis* image had been kept alive. Yet she would have liked to examine the securitate files, open for certain people to view after the Millennium, just to see what had been written about her and Ștefan.

In the years before she retired, Megara was not really well-known in artistic circles, only academic ones, and circles were circles, rarely overlapping due to the fear that pervaded not only the streets, but the houses, the bedrooms, the schools, and the work place. An innate terror.

No one could be sure who was who or who would tell what to whom.

People feared they would suddenly disappear.

They feared being tortured or ending up drugged in an asylum.

For the writers, but not for the Anghelaches, fear led them to cover the telephone with a cushion, turn up the radio and then whisper in their own homes. People were not allowed to meet in groups of more than three in the street, and to ensure they stayed at home on a Saturday, Romanian Television broadcast the only film of the week, usually in Bulgarian. As nothing else of interest was on offer apart from folk



singers and government controlled images of hard-working and ‘happy’ industrial or countryside workers, often in the company of Ceaușescu and/or his wife Elena, most people stayed indoors to watch.

\* \* \*

Glynușa concentrated on learning Romanian.

The Cultural attaché at the Romanian Embassy obviously considered they could use her interest in theatre to their own advantage, and she was encouraged to return to the country whenever she was free to do so.

Glynis fulfilled the promise she made to Ștefan the day ‘*They*’ had been to see him. She wrote officially and so did he, keeping their love alive by ‘reading between the lines.’ Ștefan also read the published translations of extracts from Glynis’s plays in various Romanian literary publications and sent her a copy of his new verse play in Romanian once it had been published in Bucharest. Friends then helped her to translate. This ruse of communicating worked, and he had no more hassle from the Securitate.

Her confidence blossomed. So did Ștefan’s.

Once he was officially made Director and the follow-spot switched off for a while, he grew bolder. Occasionally, he would go to wherever Glynis was staying, offer some pretext to the person at Reception, and find her room. They would make love urgently, and then arrange the next meeting before he hurried away. It was during this period that they spoke of perhaps trusting a mutual friend to enable them to meet more freely on Glynis’s future visits, and give them a chance to make love unhurried, free of fear.

Glynis had met Aura Bădescu on a trip outside the capital organised by the Theatre Union, and they got on extremely well together. She confided to Glynis that for two years she had applied for permission to visit her grandchildren abroad, but had been unable to get her passport. Everyone’s passports were kept by the authorities until a request was made to travel. Then, only if the journey was officially approved, were they able to collect it a few days before the planned date of departure. Upon their return the passport had to be returned to the authorities ‘for safe-keeping’.

She lived in a single-storied villa, near an area called Colentina, about five kilometres from the centre of Bucharest. It was a home full of antiques, beautiful

paintings and old books. These were Aura's 'treasures', but what pleased her most was to be in her long wild garden with its vineyard running down one side and a decrepit caravan tucked away among ancient fruit trees – nut, apricot, apple, plum, pear. You could almost smell the jam. Doru excelled himself when making wine and plum-brandy in an improvised contraption hidden away in the rickety garage and their guests would sample it sitting on the small terrace shaded by vines. They kept hens that wandered among the musty leaves, three dogs, and a vineyard: a safe haven interrupted only by barking, or a tooting horn from one of the few vehicles that passed by. Ring-doves cooed and grasshoppers chafed their hind legs to find a mate. Aura was a very warm-hearted person who delighted in offering hospitality or helping people in need, and looked much younger than her actual age.

As a child she played the piano, hoping to be a concert pianist or else a doctor like her father, but in the end, having lost so many years nursing him after he fell ill, she ended up a translator and interpreter. One advantage was that this enabled her to travel. She and Doru had lived happily together ever since Aura's mother died, having suffered from Alzheimers; fortunately the authorities failed to register this 'space' and so did not insist on one of the rooms being rented to a stranger. Space was measured, rationed out, and few people were allowed to have more than their fair share. Not long after her mother's death, Doru offered to help with the enormous garden. Eventually he moved in, but created a 'retreat' for himself in the old caravan hidden under the low branches of the great oak. It was shortly after Doru had come to live with her that Aura suggested to Glynis that her villa might be a safe place for the lovers to meet. Official interpreters were usually viewed with suspicion, but Glynis trusted her and so passed on the suggestion to Ştefan. One entrance gate was at the end of the long, wild back garden that let out onto an unmade road, while the other opened onto the main road at the front, but the house itself was shielded by a high wooden fence. It was a safe place for there were rough, pitted cobbled side streets nearby where one could park easily and out of sight. Doru suggested he or Aura could come to collect Glynis from the hotel where she was staying while the other prepared the house for Ştefan, who would appear later.

All was agreed. Glynis decided to enter from the back gate and told Ştefan to come to the front. Aura was a true Juliet's nurse and prepared the bed with fresh linen, the bathroom with clean towels and put out a tray of home-made 'cookies' and a flask of herb tea. Then, she and Doru would both disappear into the old caravan and

stay there with just an old paraffin heater and two old deck-chairs until Ștefan had left. For a couple of years it seemed the perfect cover. They could never be sure whether the Securitate knew of this haven and so were always extremely cautious, although Aura's old orange Volkswagen Beetle, which Glynis sometimes borrowed, could easily have been recognised had they looked for it.

The first time they put this idea into practise was something Glynis would never forget. It worked splendidly. Ștefan arrived one sun-trapped autumn when the leaves were molten gold against a clear blue sky. Reassuring himself that the house was empty and the shutters closed, he relaxed and led Glynis to the bedroom.

They were unaware of time, or fear, and rocked each other across borders of reason, discarding skin after skin, of guilt, of authority, of domesticity, and then grew coils to bind each other. He coursed through her veins so she felt wings emerge. Sounds grew louder, pounding in their ears and small night creatures traced patterns in the dew on his back, white owls fluttered in their arms and velvet bats pressed upon her lips. For a long time they possessed each other in the desire and pursuit of wholeness.<sup>25</sup> He stayed an hour, and when he left a part of Glynis left with him.

Even in winter with ice, snow and freezing fog: when people clung to the open doors of old gas cylinder buses like clusters of swarming bees, Ștefan arrived, usually on time, for he was a very punctual person; there being little traffic in those days to delay him. Aura remained faithful to her word for she spoke to no one of their secret. Glynis remembered when once Aura was in another part of the country and could not help with transport, Doru had come instead, even though he had recently fallen from a ladder, broken three ribs, and had his left arm strapped up. Glynis had no idea how he had managed to get the car out onto the road because after he had collected her, there were many moments on the way when she had to move the gear lever for him. It would have been unsafe to go by taxi as every taxi driver was expected to write down details of any rides given to foreigners, noting pick-up point and destination. Also no doubt they would have noted what conversations were held in their presence. One presumed they could understand, for training in the Securitate was very thorough and included learning foreign languages.

However, as pressure mounted in the country, Ștefan grew uneasy.

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<sup>25</sup> Aristophanes explanation of Love to Eryximachus in Plato's *The Symposium*.

If a workman's van parked outside or anywhere near the villa, panic set in and the ability to make love rapidly diminished. Glynis's Romanian friends used a code name for her when they spoke on the phone. 'Have you seen Floriçica recently?' was the innocent question. Ştefan of course could never reveal the truth.

Glynis enjoyed being Floriçica one minute and Glynuşa the next. She enjoyed the flirtations of other men she met on her travels, the thrill of meeting people from all walks of life, and the fact that it was dangerous for a Romanian to be seen with foreigners, for this added to the excitement of her visits. Yet, despite having so many new friends, she never discovered anyone as attractive as Ştefan, nor as culturally matched as they appeared – at that time. They enjoyed sharing so many things and had both lived through a war.

Their backgrounds, however, were very different. In the forties, Glynis had been fed on stories and poems in a cellar under the school building where the children remained unaware of the devastation of war, of men playing soldiers, of dangers across the water where the Mersey poured into the sea leaving its trail of mud behind. She could still remember the air-raid shelters, the gas-mask she had to carry, the identity bracelet on her wrist, sheltering under the table at home with her dolls or crouching in the womb of the stairs at night.

It was her father who encouraged her love for literature. He was kind, but twenty years older than her mother. Tolerant and loving, he would affectionately call her 'Ducks' and try to help her do copper-plate writing with a quill pen. Glynis failed; fingers and book covered in ink. Later, when she was twelve he had a stroke and taught her to type in the hope that she could write his letters while he worked from home. He had many interesting volumes in his tall glass covered bookshelves: a complete set of Dickens, the Brontes, Hardy, Shakespeare, Shaw, Henry James, Tennyson, Southey, Keats and many more poets in *Palgrave's Golden Treasury*. He also had the first books Glynis read without illustrations: *Les Miserables* and *Mill on the Floss*, but for her, his most wonderful possession was the illustrated dictionary.

During the Second World War even small Romanian villages had soldiers billeted on them for Romania had sided with Germany on condition they did not persecute Romanian Jews, or so the populace believed at that time. Like the Anghelaches, Glynis's family also had lodgers. It was her family's war effort. Over the years, three of these lodgers contributed by unveiling quite another view of the world. More

educated than her parents, they were younger, more tolerant, generous, well spoken, and much to Glynis's delight, bought her good children's books.

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After the war, Glynis's life at Hillside, near Southport, would have seemed idyllic to twenty-first century children. It was a safe world where she was free to roam the sand-hills at leisure, alone or with Prince, her black Cairn terrier. Her grandmother moved to live in a small bungalow in Seagers Lane, not far from the sea at Ainsdale, and Glynis loved to visit; to wander along the rough path that led alongside a cornfield at the back of the house. She could remember the peace of the countryside, the smell of new mown hay, the joy of ripe corn, the butterflies, wild flowers and collecting caterpillars in the vegetable garden.

It was there that she was forever scarring her knees as she learned to ride her first bike; that shiny two-wheeler on which later she was allowed to explore the lanes alone across the Moss; with hardly a car in sight. There was just the chocolate brown richness of the flat fields, the clouds' stories above her, and the breeze in her long blonde curls. Curls created at night. Hair tied roughly by her mother into long, lumpy, uncomfortable rags. It was there Glynis first experienced death. The death of someone she loved – her grandmother. When it happened her mother ran across towards the neighbouring bungalow where Glynis had been parked for the night, banging on the window and shouting dramatically, 'She's gone! She's gone!' It was then that the eight-year old started questioning the concept of a God – and that the dead go to Jesus.

The Mersey was always grey, but she could still remember the wild beauty of the place where steam trains puffed across deserts of sparse grass, and sandhills – her islands – rising from lush salad-seas. They were *her* seas, peopled by characters created in her vivid imagination, while creatures hidden among the reeds of the marsh shared her solitary summer and white sand trickled, oozed through her sandals. She never remembered it raining. There was one hill she climbed that to her was a mountain shared with soprano skylarks, and from where she surveyed the world. She was made taller by the wind that seemed to enter and lift her. Then she would slide down, roll down, the side of its wild, prickly carpet. But as she grew, Glynis planned to climb much further than her mountain towards a very different world; a world

where she could fly and be permanently free from her unloving mother's apron strings. Now when she visits Southport, her library and both schools no longer exist and at Hillside, her mountain is no more than a mound. Only Saint John's Church where she was confirmed and Our Lady of Lourdes where she married, remain.

Glynis's childhood was a happy one as long as she was out of the house and busy. She enjoyed school more than home. A middle-class education brought her into the realm of beautiful, converted old houses, fed on stories, poetry and myths. Their romanticism wound round her, clinging like ivy; hard to remove over time. When bored with the lesson, she would 'cut off' and stroll into the flowery fields and tragic excitement of her other world, until soft-spoken words beckoned her back. "Really, Glynis! Do try to attend, dear! One day you may need your knowledge of Latin! You never know!"

There was the joy of running free in the school grounds, climbing trees, risking the front stairs, the Head's room, assemblies, – singing the Lord's Prayer. It was perhaps inevitable that after her first job at sixteen, arranged by her father – a dingy bare insurance office on the fourth floor, in a building reeking of stale tea leaves mixed with urine, Glynis took command of her own life. She left the clanking iron lift that for six months had led to yet another inner cage, and started a journey towards more aesthetic things, like drama and literature, beauty and truth. A route circuitous but rich in experience.

Not long after that momentous decision her father died, leaving Glynis, for years to come, with the pervading scent of pine and chrysanthemums. For to her they signified death; signified a God who never answered prayers.

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In the years that followed Glynis took on the roles of student, actress, wife, mother, house-keeper, decorator, cleaner, teacher, and eventually, care-giver . . .

Then, in 1970, her mother died of lung cancer, aged sixty. How old someone in their sixties looked in those days. How fragile.

Having escaped bondage and grown in confidence, Glynis, at thirty-six, accepted an even more demanding role. That was the time she became a university lecturer.

The children grew up without much incident. Schools changed. Homes changed. Time passed.

Now she wanted adventure, to dance, to be with someone who would appreciate her work, travel, would give comfort in times of stress, be tactile and really desire her. She wanted to be loved sincerely and for eternity; loved for herself – not for her talents. It was Ștefan who offered her all of these and she had returned his love – unconditionally.

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In 1985, two years after Ștefan was made Director officially, he was invited to America – New York, and then Boston. Glynis went too, stealing six hours and approximately thirty-five minutes to turn night-time to day-time, Toy Town to Downtown.

That weekend in New York they stayed at the Doral Inn opposite the Waldorf Astoria at 49th Street and Lexington Avenue. He had been invited officially but they managed to share a large double room, and at the end of the stay Glynis persuaded the management to prepare two bills. In that way her presence was never known to the Romanian authorities.

It was not her first visit to New York, but on the previous occasion, with Edward, it had rained hard and they had not been able to appreciate the city. Now everything looked different. The sky seemed to stream down walls like waterfalls degged with sun. To Glynis and Ștefan the rest of humanity was hidden behind leaning towers that seemed to sway in the wind. They were alone and the world was theirs; their dream. Glynis remembered many things, but especially the silkiness of the Egyptian cotton sheets. She was like an insecure child comforted by the smell of the person that meant most to her. She often held Ștefan's pyjama top to her nose and inhaled deeply. It was a habit she had kept up over the years, for she would get him to leave his vest behind in summer, or an under T-shirt in winter so that she would have his scent to inhale until the next time they were alone. They explored buildings and streets. They laughed at the signs WALK / DON'T WALK, explored Greenwich Village with its lively exhibition of Japanese art at the newly opened Tenri Cultural Institute, and ate at trendy cafés.

He showed her the United Nations building with all the flags and she was even allowed in with him for a moment to glimpse where the Romanian delegation would be sitting. Glynis felt proud to walk holding the hand of such a strong, handsome man. Proud that he desired her above all others. Proud, when he put an arm around

her. Proud, when on an escalator he would lean forward towards her as she leant back on him. Proud, when he showed her the Brâncuși exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art, and proud when he made love to her. That feeling of pride was ominous. Ștefan was also proud, very proud, and years later Glynis would find herself criticising Megara for the same sin.

The weekend passed too quickly and Glynis had to leave for there were commitments waiting for her at home, and Ștefan had to travel on to Boston at the end of the week. On her flight back to the UK, Glynis made two decisions. The first was to tell Edward of her love for Ștefan, and the second was to return to the States the following Friday. She reckoned that if she didn't, she would never forgive herself for missing the opportunity. After all, it could be a long time before he was allowed to travel abroad again. He realised his phone had been tapped a few weeks before departure because a telephone engineer had called at their home, reeking of vodka and with accompanying stage whispers had shown them the electronic bug he had been told to insert under the telephone's base.

Glynis waited to tell Edward until they were preparing for bed. He said he had sensed her euphoria and wondered if she had met someone else. Words came in loud explosive volleys, explanations, accusations, awkward pauses, and finely, silence broken by Glynis saying, 'I'll sleep in the spare room.'

'No, please stay! I don't want to lose you.' All anger now deflated. 'I'd rather share you than lose you!'

'I'm sorry. I can't explain. I need him. His love's different.'

'Come on. Come to bed.'

She obeyed, reluctantly staying near the edge with her back turned towards him. He sidled up close so they lay like packed spoons on one side of the large mattress. His arm arched over her waist. 'I can't be what I am not. But I *do* need you – and I still love you.'

Then after a long pause, lightly, softly, 'Even when you *are* bad-tempered and want your own way.'

He sensed the tension diminishing slowly, very slowly as her body seemed to shift inwards to close the slight gap between them.

\* \* \*



Glynis was familiar with Boston and knew the Sheraton. They sat in Quincy Market surrounded by the bustle of their second springtime.

The idea of growing old, of becoming ill, vanished.

They were eternal.

At the top of the John Hancock Tower they listened to the guide, 'If you really want to see Boston, you've just got to get out and walk!'

And they did, recapturing history on the Freedom Trail, glancing upwards at glinting golden domes, spires and cupolas. They visited the Science Museum and saw exhibits and experiments that revealed how eyes and ears could deceive. They walked together through the giant-sized heart and gazed with pleasure or disbelief.

When the time came on the Sunday evening for Ştefan to go back to New York by train, she cried in his arms. The cheery station porter admonished her.

'You got no need to go worrying there, Lady. He'll be back!'

'You don't understand,' she sobbed, watching Ştefan's face merge into the steam of the engine as the train chugged away.

He sent her a love letter written in English.

On the back of the envelope was printed: Sheraton University City Hotel, N. York.

*20th June*

*Dear Glynis*

*Many people need things and money to be happy. These days I understand that for me, to be content and happy means to be with you, to see you, to feel you, to talk with you, to caress you. Now, when I am alone, this big town, New York, is only a crowded city, without suns for me, full of noise. If my plane should fly now, I leave NY immediately without regrets.*

*I have read your poems which are so nice and so deep. I am happy to know that somewhere in this large world, above the distance, your heart is near my heart. That makes me strong. I promise you again to work seriously so that you can be proud of me. I remember all the moments spent with you. Last night I heard your voice and I woke up. I was so sad because it wasn't real.*

*I kiss you, Ştefan.*

*P.S. Excuse me for the faults.*

And on another occasion there was a postcard from New York written in Romanian which a friend translated for her:

*I miss you, Glynis,  
I like to travel and see many things.  
Here nothing interests me any more without you.  
Why did I change so much? I stay in the hotel  
and I read and write as if I will stay here for many  
days. My only joys were given to me by you and  
by the positive outcome of the meetings I attended. I  
return home to start my work again and to plan a  
new journey. When will this be? Until then I kiss  
you many, many times.  
I love you.  
\* I hope you'll be able to manage with a dictionary.*

And then there was Amsterdam . . .

*A postcard from The Hague. Without you.  
A happening, so it always happened, but  
we have always been more powerful than  
it. You are with me everywhere. The world  
is a big home for both of us. It's peaceful  
and good. This is my gift to you – my  
longing for you.  
A kiss.  
Ştefan*

**The man's back tenses. He turns back a page and bends lower over the print. He reads again and the muscles around his lips soften. The fading afternoon light returns his youth; shades the long barrows beneath his eyes with shadows.**

Amsterdam held many memories for them, before and after the Revolution. However, the first time Ștefan visited, in 1986, was the one they remembered most as they planned it meticulously hoping to trick the regime. Glynis was on one of her visits from the UK, and as she was not yet fluent in Romanian, she asked Afif, a Syrian who worked for a friend she knew, and who was usually around to help, to book her a ticket to Amsterdam for the next day; a Sunday.

The time then was 11.00 am on the Saturday and the ticket could only be purchased from a kiosk in the Bucharest Hotel that closed for the weekend at noon – sharp.

Glynis went there and waited, but her friend was late. She tried to telephone, a difficult task in those days for there were no mobiles.

Yes, he would come, not to worry.

The hands on the clock above the Reception desk reached 11.45. She began to feel desperate. It was getting more dangerous to meet in Bucharest and here was a great opportunity slipping away.

11.50! She paced up and down. Pestered the girl in the kiosk, who was unable to help. The kiosk would close at 12.00 and there was no other way to purchase a ticket. Glynis had money on her but as it was the wrong currency. She needed her friend to negotiate and if necessary pay on her behalf.

Two minutes to twelve . . .

He arrived, hurrying from the car and then through the contorted passage-like hotel entrance, past the uniformed Doorman, also Securitate and it was of course obligatory for Afif to stop and greet him with his usual Arabic gregariousness.

Another minute gone! Finally he reached the kiosk. The girl knew him and smiled as Glynis rushed over to present her passport. Afif exchanged her money for dollars and paid. She sighed with relief when she felt the plane ticket in her hand. Now everything was fine. They would soon be on the plane together – on their way to moments of freedom.

Sunday dawned. A fine day.

She arrived at Otopeni airport on time, went through the old security procedure where no one smiled, and every passenger was viewed by armed airport police as a potential terrorist upon arrival, or a smuggler of Romanian patrimony upon departure. The journey into the final sanctum, where passengers boarded an ancient bus to get to

the plane, always reminded Glynis of a Greek legend where perilous tasks lay in wait at every step.

She had to lift her own luggage onto the conveyor belt of the X-ray machine, show her ticket and passport, then wait until a sharp gesture indicated she must proceed through to the inner hall. It was as if she had planted dragon's teeth, for guards suddenly sprung into sight. She stood anxiously on the other side while a uniformed official in a steel-blue, pork-pie hat peered at the security screen, muttered something to a female colleague who, as Glynis's suitcase came once more into view, barked 'Open!' She had nothing to feel guilty about for it contained only clothes, but the atmosphere was so tense that she began to suspect herself of smuggling precious artefacts. The woman, as officious as the man, searched enviously through underwear, and delved deep into the sponge bag, retrieving the bottle of expensive perfume. She lingered over it so long, that Glynis was tempted to tell her to keep it, but felt she daren't in such a public place. How hard it was for women like her to see and touch goods they were unable to buy, for not only did they have no money for luxuries, but such treasures could only be found in the Dollar shops set up in the large hotels or foreign embassy areas, for ex-pats and tourists. Members of the Securitate could use them, but rarely ordinary citizens.

The first task was to carry her case to a man wearing a grubby brown overall over his workday clothes. He then placed this sacrifice onto the one and only conveyer belt that rumbled hungrily as it carried Glynis's case into the darkness of the dragon's den.

Task one accomplished!

To reach the next hall everyone had to pass a kiosk where an expressionless face peered at 'escapees' above the top of a computer. Glynis shoved her ticket and passport through the small arched space in the glass and waited. A queue of silent people started to gather behind her. The man in the kiosk moved slowly, glancing suspiciously at Glynis and then back at the screen. Every page of her passport was examined slowly and then compared . . . to what? She never knew, as everything was so well hidden below the small, high window. She answered his questions, and again – waited. He rose and tapped on the window of the adjoining kiosk to attract the attention of his colleague. Glynis, not understanding what he was muttering, was relieved when he returned with a lit cigarette in his mouth. Eventually, the ticket and the passport – minus the exit paper clipped inside at entry – were slid back to her.

Glynis averted her eyes so she could not reveal any of the ‘guilt’ she felt on Ștefan’s behalf. Task two completed.

Now all she had to do was wait for Ștefan to go through all these procedures and come to the next hall where she would be waiting. On an upper level, looking down on the waiting area was a small space for refreshments where they sold cheap vodka, a juice of sorts, weak tea and stale-looking sandwich rolls or biscuits. Glynis gazed up. No sign of him there. She watched sparrows darting around the metal beams. There must have been some entry holes in the roof for they were usually alighting hungrily and noisily on the soiled plastic tablecloths of the small café. The well-worn black and orange plastic chairs in this ‘lounge’ area were set back to back in rows. Glynis chose one and sat gazing at the tarmac through the large rectangular windows.

One task left. Old, dirty, oily-smelling buses grumbled their way to the planes, and through the smudged glass she watched luggage being loaded and people closely guarded as they jostled to mount the rusty stairways pushed into place by security ground-workers.

Time passed and still no sign of Ștefan.

An announcement in Romanian called Glynis’s flight number and those for Amsterdam began to descend the flight of steps that led to DEPARTURES; another waiting area. Glynis half thought he might be there already and that she had missed him, but still no sign. People sat or stood for about ten minutes until eventually a bus drew up in front of their gate. By this time Glynis was despairing and extremely anxious. Had he been found out? Caught? Had someone listened in on their plans? What if he had been arrested? Everyone boarded the bus that eventually took them to the far side of the tarmac.

Bored guards carrying rifles sauntered casually nearby. Passengers had to enter from the back of the plane and Glynis made her way to the seat indicated on her boarding slip. It was in the non-smoking area, midway on the left-hand side. Before she slid heavily into it, she looked round searching faces for a sign of his. Nothing – he was definitely not on the plane. Suddenly, she caught sight of a black airport-car driving towards them. It stopped at the steps reserved for VIPs, and a man climbed out and someone handed him a briefcase. Who could not recognise Ștefan’s proud, unmistakable gait? Glynis’s pulse raced. All depression vanished. She had overcome the dragon and here was the trophy!

There was no Business Class in those days: front seats were reserved for important people while lesser mortals were kept at bay. A smiling air hostess invited him to take one of the two rows of empty seats at the front. He chose the one on the right and settled himself down. Determined to let him know before take-off that she had managed to get a ticket and was on the plane, Glynis unbuckled her seat belt and walked down the aisle.

‘Good morning, Dr. Anghelache.’ He leaped up.

‘Doamna Levinson!’ While kissing her hand in greeting, another air hostess appeared from behind the curtain as if on cue. She was older and had that superior glare on her face mixed with misery and unconcern that Glynis had seen so many times on the demeanour of those who worked for the regime. This tired-faced woman attempted to shoo her away back to her seat, but Ștefan intervened.

‘It’s all right. I would like her to sit here with me.’

The stewardess acknowledged defeat and Glynis edged past her to sit in the window-seat next to him. Surprisingly, Ștefan was unconcerned that during the journey the stewardesses saw the two of them holding hands, or gazing lovingly into each other’s eyes. They had made it this far and soon they would be over the mountains and into the West. In Amsterdam they planned that after they had collected the luggage, they would exit separately. Then Glynis would stay near enough to catch the name of his hotel: for this time he had not been told in advance. If she could not overhear, Ștefan would find some way of coming over to tell her. There would be no problem. They had done it all before.

Glynis leant back and gazed contentedly out of the dirty window as they drew gracefully away and all she could see of the Carpathian monster was its long, veined, mountainous backbone.

The journey passed quickly and uneventfully. Having had such a good flight they lingered over the luggage. Glynis went through Passport Control quickly and waited in the Arrival Hall until Ștefan would emerge. In the meantime she had looked around to see if she could spot whoever might have come to meet him. She was already anxious and grew tenser when she could not see anyone in a suit or who looked like a university professor. Suddenly, a man with a small boy of about four moved towards Ștefan. Glynis’s heart sank. She’d guessed what was coming.

‘What hotel do I stay in?’ Ștefan asked in a loud voice.

‘Oh, we didn’t want you to be lonely in a hotel, so we’ve arranged for you to come and stay at our place. I do hope that’s all right?’

The sound of the automatic doors opening and shutting behind them, grew louder.

What else could he do but put on an accepting smile? He found some pretext to check his briefcase and moved closer.

‘What will you do now?’ he whispered anxiously.

‘Go back home to London on the next plane.’

‘I love you! I’ll always love you!’ and he turned back towards his host.

Unable even to say goodbye, she wandered disconsolately to the Airline desk and bought a single ticket at vast cost. Ştefan and the man left the airport with the small boy between them and it was many months before Glynis was able to see Ştefan Anghelache again. As her plane took off, Glynis relaxed and closed her eyes. Well, there had certainly been a humorous side to this adventure . . . her lips broke into a wry smile . . .

**The reading has stopped. The afternoon draws to a close. Outside, cars are hurrying home and the snow falls heavily. He opens the desk drawers one by one until he finds what he is looking for. It is a faded photograph of a woman with blonde curly hair standing on a quayside in Amsterdam during their visit in 1996. She wears a cloak and is smiling. He props it up lovingly against the computer and stays a few moments gazing at it. Then he glances at his watch. Time has moved on.**

**He takes up the ‘book’ again, adjusts his glasses and continues to read.**

*(The Prologue is over, the gauze lifted and Act 1 of this virtual reality will soon draw to a close. Meanwhile, the puppets of Ceauşescu’s regime continue to dominate lives; the lives of Glynis and Ştefan, the lives of all those who live or visit this open prison. It is Spring and the year is 1989. Return to their world.)*

## The End of Act I

‘There is a world elsewhere.’<sup>26</sup>

Glynis met Vlad, her young interpreter, with the intention of going to the Literature Museum on Boulevard Dacia. She had met his father, Teodore, many times. Although Chief of Protocol at the Ministry of Culture, he was very pleasant, understanding, and from the sad expression set in the lines of his face, long-suffering. The previous day Vlad had taken her to the Writers’ Union on Calea Victoriei to decide which writers were to be included in her research, and the President of the Union had then suggested she visit the Literature Museum to see some old drama scripts and talk to the Director.

Afterwards, Vlad stopped at the statue of the famous writer Ion Brătianu and started to tell Glynis about the Croatian-born sculptor, Ivan Meštrović, whom he said had become an American citizen in 1954. He appeared uneasy, then suddenly changed the subject.

‘Mrs. Levinson, if you would really like an invitation to attend the Writers’ Union Tour during the anniversary events to commemorate the death of our great poet, Mihai Eminescu, it would be very beneficial if you could go to meetings in London and report back to us what bad things are being said about Romania.’

Glynis stopped as if confronted by a scorpion. Then, knowing he was only a spokesman for his masters, replied in not too unkind a tone, that she didn’t spy for the British and by no means would she do so for Romanians, and to tell that to whomever had asked him to pass on such a request. Now, her mind fully composed, she gave a hurried farewell and padded purposefully down the back streets to the British Embassy. After showing her British passport to the Romanian soldiers at the gate she was allowed to enter. At that time the British Council Offices were attached to the Library in the Embassy grounds and she went straight to her friend, Rosalind, a member of staff there, and asked if she would like to come for a walk. The Brits knew what this meant. ‘Walls Have Ears’ was still a relevant phrase even in 1989 and all embassy telephones had a note on the dials saying THIS LINE IS NOT SECURE. Glynis explained what had happened, and announced she would still attend the July ceremonies to commemorate the centenary of the death of Romania’s national poet,

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<sup>26</sup> *Coriolanus* 3.3.1-131



but as a tourist. It would mean staying in Bucharest and not going on tour with the other writers: but as Ștefan would certainly not be invited, she didn't mind.

On her way back to the hotel she began to wonder whether the British might also be suspicious of her! After all she had heard clicks and odd noises on her telephone at home when ringing Romanian friends in London. She dismissed the thought, and still angry at the Romanian proposition started back across roads laden with mud from sudden April squalls. She passed the ever watchful eyes of young men in dark suits and overcoats, always at street corners or along the main highway: members of the Securitate ready to shift people away from the road if Ceaușescu and his entourage were about to speed past.

She wandered into Piața Amzei near the Town Hall and made her way into the flower market housed in a long, dilapidated building near the entrance to the square. In spring and summer it was the only place where Glynis had seen happy shopkeepers. Old wooden, rickety tables supported discoloured metal buckets or sliced plastic water bottles full of flowers: a rainbow of heavy-scented petals seeming to illuminate the dimly lit space. It was as if people there felt the healing power of nature and were able to escape for a short moment from that dreariness outside, where all they could sell were rotting vegetables and bruised apples. Their one joyous moment was at the end of the school year when they sold crowns of flowers to the most successful children to wear at prize-giving: but now there were no proud mothers searching handbags for precious 'lei'.<sup>27</sup>

It was almost the weekend. Weddings sprouted from the Town Hall steps, with best suits, elderly aunts, and cousins clutching three carnations – symbols of flesh, love and resurrection – always an odd number: evens for the dead. At ten minute intervals the game of find the family occurred and furs hid the touch of faded colour carefully sewn for all to see. And eager pushing replaced waiting . . . at ten minute intervals. Behind the throng of people the double doors opened and closed suspiciously. Glynis presumed a marriage had taken place to celebrate the end of youth: the start of what? Ten minute intervals to birth – and death?

Glynis tried to imagine Megara and Ștefan at their wedding.

The sun had teeth as she cut through to Cișmigiu Gardens, and the willows wept in full splendour. A child dangled a stick in the lake, newly filled after winter drainage,

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<sup>27</sup> Romanian money.

but the old rowing boats and oars were still stored one above the other under the trees. The swings and see-saws were old, but parents still let their children use them for there was not much else. Young couples snuggled as close as they dared on damp faded benches, while an old man sat alone in the weak sunshine, head back, eyes closed, also lost in illusion. Others sat singly, huddled alone with their thoughts. Not one smiled. What was there to smile about? Solemn gypsies were removing old bedding plants, overseen by an older woman dressed formally in a suit. Her mandibles worked hard on sunflower seeds, and from time to time, between issuing orders, would spit out the husks. As she enjoyed discovering the history of places, Glynis stopped to read the faded writing stating that the gardens had been created in the middle of the nineteenth century on the site of a lake called 'Dura, the Merchant'. Aura and Dan had told her that it had soon become a popular fishing site and a nesting-place for mallards. Both Germans and the Russians had instigated the changes and the horticulturist, Carl Meyer, was commissioned to create this small haven. He had planted it with loving care, creating nooks and crannies, shaded arched walkways, a folly, a fountain, a lake and waterways with small bridges. Glynis had suggested to Ștefan that they meet there, but he was always too afraid of being seen. It was in one of these inner gardens hidden by evergreen hedges that Glynis saw the old men still muffled in scarves, sitting hunched over stone tables playing board games, like elderly gods gambling with lives. They had brought tabula, drafts or chess from home and played in silence, overlooked by solemn, stone heads of great writers in the next enclave. Solidarity in concentration.

Glynis cut back to the Intercontinental Hotel deep in analytical thought. The doorman greeted her courteously as she entered the large poorly-lit hallway and made her way to the lifts. The dollar shop inside the hotel, near Sabin Bălașa's wall mural was unusually busy.<sup>28</sup> As always, she felt watched.

That July, when Glynis arrived at Otopeni, Rosalind met her with the news that the Ministry of Culture had issued an invitation after all. Eminescu was always compared to Shakespeare, and Glynis had written a paper contrasting the imagery of 'Romeo and Juliet' with Eminescu's famous poem, *Luceafărul*.<sup>29</sup> His romantic style appealed to her. He too denied time, considering the dimension of past and future illusory: the

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<sup>28</sup> Romanian artist 1937-2008 who referred to his work as 'Cosmic Romanticism'.

<sup>29</sup> 'The Evening Star'.

whole of existence a continuous present. During his short lifetime Eminescu created in his poetry a synthesis of national and folk traditions as well as standardising the Romanian language. Ștefan and other Romanian academics likened him to Chaucer for they idealised their great poet, particularly his linguistic creativity.

This tour was to the northern areas of the country and would take them first through Transylvania to Eminescu's birthplace, a village called Ipotești, near the town of Botoșani surrounded by hills and deep forests. The programme planned a visit to the small Eminescu Museum where they would be met in the traditional manner: young children in national costume on the wooden doorstep offering salt and bread. Inside they would be presented with a glass of țuică,<sup>30</sup> or a small cognac. The atmosphere would be one of jollity and prosperity, but there would be a dark side. Every foreigner would have mentors – guards, no doubt a friendly writer who would be held responsible if any guest stepped out of line. There would be a new backdrop with revels of Bacchus, roasted pig on a spit, traditional dancing and fine wines, while in neighbouring towns and villages, unseen from tourists' eyes, people struggled to survive.

The guests would be visiting the birthplaces of famous writers including the playwright Caragiale, and the lake where their great romantic poet wrote the poem *Lacul*; that is why Glynis was so keen to attend. She would also get the chance to see the painted churches in Moldavia and visit the Monastery of Văratec where Eminescu's lover, Veronica Micle, was buried. Unable to live without him, she had committed suicide for he had died at the age of thirty-nine, having inherited syphilis. Ștefan had once promised to show her such places, but never had. So why shouldn't she would take this opportunity now? She was also looking forward to the theatrical performance in Eminescu's honour in the town of Iași near the border with Moldova: an area handed to Russia at the end of the Second World War. There would be dancing, poetry and music all the way, while she would no doubt see from the coach windows, peasants struggling to till their fields with ancient farm implements fit only for the Muzeul Civilizației Populare.

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<sup>30</sup> Plum brandy

In the November of 1989, when tension in the country was growing daily, Glynis listened anxiously to BBC Europe. She already knew about Ceaușescu's 'violent overreaction to public unrest and local issues such as food shortages'. She also knew that rumours, spiralling among circles, were reaching a crescendo, as the BBC television and Radio Free Europe also broadcast many programmes about what was happening in Romania. They had reported the earlier Brașov revolution in 1987; a demonstration march over unpaid salaries at the factory, Steagul Roșu, which had turned into a minor revolution with disastrous results for the workers, many of whom were beaten, imprisoned or exiled.<sup>31</sup> Officials in Romania had responded with a short statement on the radio. 'The small disturbance in Brașov was the result of hooliganism'. Now, Western radio was informing everyone about houses in the countryside being pulled down while the owners, having lost their livelihood on the land, discovered themselves re-housed in unfinished city blocks. Even worse than this, Ceaușescu was in the process of demolishing any building, even a church, if it stood in the way of his plans for Bulevardul Unirii to become his 'Champs Elysées'.<sup>32</sup> The windows of his unfinished palace with a thousand rooms, the second largest building in the world, would enjoy this view.

Rumour had it that the people had no say in the demolition and even had to contribute money towards this 'modernisation' of Bucharest. If they refused, the workers, a job usually forced on the gypsies, first cut off the utilities, and then hooked off the roof. Finally, if all this failed, the occupants were forcibly removed, even if bedridden: thrown into a van along with their furniture and carted off to some block of flats on the outskirts, in unfinished surroundings, muddy and full of building waste. Pets were forbidden, so cats and dogs were left to roam the city, breed freely and become feral. The playwright, Marin Sorescu, confided in Glynis that some people had tied anti-communist poems to the tails of wild dogs, and soldiers, carrying out orders, shot the animals. By enforcing such measures, together with extreme censorship, Nicolae Ceaușescu hounded the intellectuals, as had happened once before – in Stalin's time. Glynis's Romanian friends whispered to her about the irony of a shoemaker's son having become such a powerful dictator.

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<sup>31</sup> 'The Red Flag' recorded in *The Day We Won't Forget*. See Oprea and Stejăruț.

<sup>32</sup> *Parfumeria*. See Kerim.

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By the end of November, winter had seeded, and tension in the country was quickening. Friends told Glynis, ‘Something has to break!’ They still met, but Stefan grew more afraid, for Glynis’s name had become associated with critics of the regime in the UK and her interaction with the playwrights made her suspect. For this reason she was always afraid to walk too close to the library, but on this occasion she knew Ștefan would be outside. Despite her inner turmoil she acted calmly. He was sitting in his old Dacia with Mircea, a colleague and close friend. Glynis joined them. After a few moments Mircea got out tactfully and left them alone to say goodbye. This time, six years after the Securitate had ordered him to ‘stop seeing this English woman!’, it was her turn to say they had to part, as she realised her presence in Romania was putting his life in danger. She promised to wait until he was ‘allowed out’ again and they both agreed to try and communicate the way they had done in the past.

‘I’m not coming back to Romania, but I will wait for you. I love you Ștefan’.

Eyes mirrored tears.

‘I will always love you, Glynis!’

His voice was soft. He gazed past her at a man standing on the corner. In silence and hardly able to see through the welling-drops, she opened the car door.

Glynis’s feet led her back to the hotel. The old houses seemed haunted by a past beauty, windows fringed with sleeping vines. Trams, like great slugs, lurched through the fog across frosted veins to the next stop, and the next.

Then the game of dominoes began.

The Berlin Wall fell.

## Act II Scene I

‘The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day:  
Now spurs the lated traveller apace  
To gain the timely inn.’<sup>33</sup>

‘Tim iș oar ă!’

The town’s name rang out in the square: a single voice from the depths of the crowd facing the balcony. Puppets of the regime. A sullen, tightly packed crowd, for they had heard the news. A crowd usually paid to cheer the dictator who controlled them.

Then the contagious syllables came again, and again, courage spreading the sounds into a roaring, rippling chant that obliterated the recorded patriotic music. On the balcony, Ceaușescu, just back from Iran, moved away from the microphone, hesitated, then turned towards his wife and bodyguards with television cameras still rolling. He tried again to address the crowd, but then came the slogans, even louder than the chant, ‘Jos Ceaușescu!’ ‘Libertate!’<sup>34</sup> He retreated inside as the people surged forwards. It was December 21<sup>st</sup>, 1989. The Berlin Wall had fallen and now, whether previously planned or not, the Romanian Revolution had begun. In the West, Romania dominated the headlines.

Glynis watched the news on television, amazed that at last the people had started to rebel. Over the next few days, she read varying reports coming out of the country; conflicting details of events rumouring among the circles, who viewed truth from their own perspective. They spoke of criss-crossing voices meshing telephone lines. Bosses were ordered not to allow their employees to leave their place of work, while enkindled youths headed for the street. Fearing gunfire, mothers kept children well away from the windows and staff at the Radio and Television Centre decided to play safe and broadcast only music. The police and army were told to quell the riots, and appeared on streets in large numbers, backed by tanks that cornered people by blocking the ends of streets. Shots rang out, followed by machine-gun fire, and the crowd’s fear turned to determination; a coiled spring of anger released.

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<sup>33</sup> *Macbeth*. 3.3.5-7

<sup>34</sup> ‘Down with Ceaușescu! Liberty!’

The next day, Ceaușescu, having again failed to address the crowd, left the capital with his wife, taking off from the roof of the Senate in a helicopter towards what they thought was a safe haven. That night, the army joined the people. Battles still raged on the streets, but this time against the Securitate still loyal to the dictator. The buildings in the centre of Bucharest were soon scarred with bullet holes and broken windows. The University Library, being situated between the Securitate building and the Senate, was surrounded by crowds that included soldiers at the height of the evening battle on December 22<sup>nd</sup> 1989.

Shots were heard coming from the direction of the library and the army assumed members of the Securitate were inside. It was dark and there was much confusion. As the library and the Securitate building were close and of similar construction, the orders given to shoot resulted in the library being set alight and in the devastating fire many valuable books were destroyed. From the safe haven of London, Glynis spent hours trying to ring her Romanian friends to discover if Ștefan had survived, for she guessed he would have been in the library to protect the books during the cross-fire. She did not know at that time that gunmen had also been there, but left before the fire started or that Ștefan had gone out to tell the soldiers that the snipers had gone. The young soldier in charge could not control the shooting in such chaos, and the firing continued. Three days later on Christmas Day, television revealed that Nicolai Ceaușescu and his wife Elena had been caught, and after a brief trial, executed by firing squad.

Glynis poured over the photographs in the January editions of *Newsweek* and *Time International*;<sup>35</sup> the executed Ceaușescu, the tanks and burnt-out ruins of the library, walls pitted with bullet holes, the graffiti on the university walls, the wooden crosses on the traffic island at University Square and flowers laid in respect at unexpected places. These, she thought to herself, were the New Year gifts presented to the population. To the inmates of this prison who were at last free.

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<sup>35</sup> 'The Last Days of a Dictator: A Violent End to a Year of Revolution.' 08.01.1990

'When Tyrants Fall: Rumania – A Firing Squad For Ceaușescu. Bucharest, December 1989.'

08.01.1990

The destruction made it necessary not only to rebuild, but also to restructure the library and restore it to its former glory. Ștefan took on this job with even greater pride for it involved building a new library wing on the old Summer Theatre site and completely modernizing the equipment. Ștefan told Glynis that the architect was about to receive an award from the government, and that he was a little disappointed not to have been included in such an honour. Megara was furious at the news and set about verbally slaughtering anyone she thought might be responsible for the omission.

However, after 1990 he was invited to travel to conferences abroad, or to consult with directors of foreign libraries, generous in their donations and advice. Glynis usually joined these visits in secret and would make herself useful by contributing in some way, such as transforming his speeches into a less ornate style of English. Many skills were unknown to him at that time. Everything appeared new. In the south of France, she hired a car and taught him to drive on a motorway, use a self-service petrol station and cash machine. Before the revolution, if going on holiday in Romania, people would have to queue up over night to get petrol. To be able to help one's self, and so quickly, must have seemed an amazing advance. At other times there were smaller or individual meetings arranged, and for many years they always managed to be together on such occasions. Sometimes he invited her to join him, while at other times the initiative came from her. The actual order and dates of such visits faded from their memories, but never the emotions and the happenings.

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In the late eighties Ștefan had been given the opportunity to go the States as Ambassador, but had declined. In the nineties he told Glynis that, not being a political animal, he firmly believed the way forward was to stay inside the walls and not leave as so many had done. The pair often laughed about politics, especially when they recalled his first visit to England in 1983. They had gone to Greenwich via the underground tunnel under the Thames. On the Essex side was scrawled in graffiti, 'Welcome to the Republic of the Isle of Dogs'.

On another of his visits, when his English had improved, they had sat on the grassy hillside below the Greenwich Observatory discussing Ovid. This Roman poet, exiled to Timiș, had died in Western Romania, and proud of the connection, the Romanians had erected his statue at Constanța in a place they named Ovid Square. Ștefan's



knowledge of English grew steadily, mainly under Glynis's tuition, and when he became fluent, they were able to chat in more depth. They spoke of grief, ageing and although en route for sixty, how far they felt from that demarcation point that might lead to senescence. They discussed simply, but at length, the ideas of philosophers and writers. Tennyson was a poet Ștefan admired, which led to a discussion of his 'In Memoriam' and his use of the word 'soul'. Was there a soul? Were people individuals or just part of the collective soul of humanity? If they didn't believe in a God, could there be a spirit that lingered on after death or was the physical universe all that existed? The concept of God was definitely not encouraged in a Communist country. Ștefan had told her in whispers about a man called Gregorian Bivolaru who had been tortured, imprisoned on false charges and later sent to a psychiatric hospital, just for starting a Romanian Transcendental Meditation Group. Yoga and other Oriental inspired rituals were considered activities against the State. Yet, despite such things Ștefan was keen to advocate the good qualities in the system, but after half an hour with Glynis playing devil's advocate, he began to agree with her criticism of the regime, yet reiterated he would never want to leave because he loved Romania, its literature – its scenery.

After the revolution, people felt free to speak openly about what they felt, and so Glynis and Ștefan were able to continue their debates. He taught her about Romanian life and *his* literary world, while she eventually introduced him to post-modernism. During the nineties, the British Council started to bring examples of new British culture to Eastern Europe, but the older Romanians remained unimpressed by the representative exhibitions of postmodernist art and sculpture. Their cultural field was not based on economics and so people from every age and walk of life could afford to attend the opera and ballet regularly. Glynis had always enjoyed going to the Opera House with Megara and Ștefan. He would sit between the two women, and during love scenes, as in *Tosca*, Glynis could sense the electricity that crossed from Ștefan's arm into hers, as their elbows touched casually over the arm of the red, plush seat. At such moments she too would have killed to protect him.

Romanian youth soon made its voice heard. They had gone out into the streets that bloody December and for them the word LIBERTATE was permission to do exactly as they wished.

During those post-revolutionary years Ștefan always refused to join any of the new political parties. There were so many! Everyone wanted to have a say and the last

thing the people wanted was another dictator. Ștefan's only concern was to have the library rebuilt and to ensure it was beautiful. It took him ten years.

\* \* \*

One day in 1991, Glynis received a letter from a solicitor telling her of an unexpected inheritance from a cousin she had never met. Apparently her father's brother, whom she had not seen since childhood, had gone to live abroad. He and his wife, long since dead, had left one unmarried son, John Robert Harding, who had recently died in a car crash. She had not realised that her uncle had been a most successful sheep farmer in New Zealand, and so was very surprised when the letter came out of the blue explaining that as she was the only surviving relative, she had inherited a large amount of money and property. Although sole beneficiary, Glynis shared this windfall with the family and paid off the mortgage, but there was still enough left to enable her to retire early and fulfil her childhood dream of travelling. When Maria Assumpta College closed, Edward was successful in his application for the post of Deputy Principal at Rachel MacMillan College of Education in Deptford. This meant a longer journey and a much heavier time-table, but he was engrossed in his work. The children had reached adulthood and were busy-busy with their own adventures, so Glynis travelled alone.

Until 1995, every spring, summer, autumn and winter, when not working, she spent short periods in Romania, ostensibly for her interest in theatre. In reality, to be close to Ștefan.

Unbeknown to the Romanian authorities Glynis's research was put on hold. She took advantage of the fact that researching a book in a foreign country can take a long time, and everyone expected the whole process to take years. Anyway, after the revolution no-one appeared to take much interest in her visits. She simply metamorphosed into a tourist.

\* \* \*

During 1992, Ștefan went from Chicago to Ottawa. This time, as Glynis was in the process of taking early retirement, she was only able to accompany him to Chicago, but they spent a memorable evening dining and dancing on 'The Spirit of Chicago' as

it sailed on Lake Michigan, and as always, making love. When she left, he sent her another postcard.

It was the last of such communications, because afterwards, if he ever went abroad, she was with him:

*Dear Glynis,  
If I don't count the three days  
I spent in London, this is my longest journey:  
32 days in US and 8 days in Canada. I am  
glad it is over. My only moral support was you.  
I thank you. God speed in all you are doing.  
I admire you for your tenacity and the passion  
you put into everything.  
All my love,  
Ștefan*

After the passing of so many years the order of visits was hard for Glynis to recall them all. Sometimes they nudged into consciousness triggered by seemingly everyday things such as the long, white trail of an aeroplane, a startled flock, sounds, smells, – an advert. Such events remained embedded: their Pizza café in Rue d'Etoile they often visited when in Paris, and the occasion when he told a Romanian woman who had entered to sell roses that he had a twenty-one year old son called Mihai who was studying literature at University; the longed-for son that was never to be.

Then there was the Renaissance Church of Santa Maria de Popolo, in Piazza del Popolo, with Caravaggio's magnificent paintings of 'The Martyrdom of Saint Peter' and 'The Conversion of Saint Paul'; the rainbow that arched both sides of the Black Forest Pass; and the small pond full of white swans they discovered when rounding a corner of the New Forest having lost their way to Southampton . . .

**The man reaches forward and retrieves the glass swan from its depths. 'White, the purity of a white swan'. These words from his play echo back across the years as his fingers trace the fine slope of the wings. Leda – 'the great wings**

**beating still<sup>36</sup>, Florence – Michelangelo – Lebădă. He reads on sensing the smoothness of skin, the long neck, arched back, the cry. After a pause, he replaces the tundra swan carefully in the T-shirt.**

Wherever they went Ștefan introduced Glynis to the treasures of art and history he had once seen or read about only in books. Glynis took him into the modern materialistic, digital world. Both revelled in their discoveries and the wonders of nature, such as the flock of birds that darkened the sky as they stood on the bridge near Bern Cathedral. Then there was time when they came unexpectedly upon a rehearsal of Mozart's horn concerto at Notre Dame Basilica in Montreal.

They did exciting things too, like climbing up into the Madonna at Le Puy en Velay where he drew a heart with 'Ștefan loves Glynis' written over it in biro, before driving on to the English Church where she collected wild flowers to press and later frame. They explored Hemingway's house in Cuba with its boat-house and wild garden, and there was the time in Alsace when they couldn't find where they had parked the car in the circular ancient town of Colmar after they had visited the cathedral with its strange steeple, and later admired the statues, colourful flowers and the Quai de Poissonnerie on the canal. It was there that a grey-haired man had leant over his windowsill, to call out, 'What a nice couple', as they walked past hand in hand.

– And then, in 1993, there was the conference in India – Ah! Making love in India! During those ten days in Delhi they took a ride in a cycle-rickshaw avoiding the sacred cows that roamed the streets or else headed into oncoming motorway traffic. They visited a friend's house and shared the evening meal, sitting on the floor around a large tablecloth decked with vegetarian dishes, fruit and sweets; the ladies in colourful saris, their teenage daughter in a spotless school uniform. Outside the half-naked roamed among the dirt. One became used to the sharp, stark contrasts: those who earned a good living, dressed well, and those who slept by the roadside. Glynis was horrified to see a sullen child of nine waiting on the family. Her Indian friend, Raj, explained that the mother was working and living next door with another, smaller child and but for him giving the nine year-old work, board and lodging, the girl

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<sup>36</sup> W.B. Yeats. 'Leda and the Swan.'

would have starved. All members of the family accepted Glynis and Ștefan as lovers and they all spent the evening in chat and laughter, ending with a poetry reading in English, Hindi and Romanian.

Delhi meant riding elephants, wading barefoot after a sudden shower, sheltering in an alcove of the Taj Mahal when they had rid themselves of the gold-toothed guide, and the only thing that spoiled such enjoyment was the extreme poverty: maimed beggars and the fact that the country failed to maintain beautiful buildings like the Red Fort, once the seventeenth century Royal Palace built by Emperor Shah Jahan. They had often discussed how time seemed to elongate when they travelled. Ștefan had reminded her that the French ethnologist, George Louis Condominas, in his *'L'exotique est quotidien'* had stated:

*' . . . When a day spent in travelling is transported to memory it takes up a far greater "space" than a day spent at home. Above all if the journey takes one into an entirely unknown country . . . The hours spent in perpetually drinking in and absorbing this new world go beyond the natural and measurable intervals of time. The facts beat so powerfully upon the memory that the images come back in rather the same way as a film in slow motion. The playing-back time is magnification of the real time.'*<sup>37</sup>

If on their travels Glynis ever stayed in another hotel nearby they would always manipulate things so Ștefan could sleep with her and perhaps even stay for breakfast if she was in a double room. Then he would return to his own hotel to have breakfast as usual with colleagues. Once, in 1994 when they were in Germany at Konstanz near Lake Bodensee, they managed to escape detection by leaping onto a boat as it was about to set sail. There was a 'dinner and dance' on board and on that occasion there were even fireworks to celebrate their escape from his colleagues. In 1992, there had also been fireworks enhancing the magic in Florence, and two years later, Venice over the Rialto Bridge. Then there was always the music; their music, 'Tonight I celebrate my love for you,' 'Only Love' or 'Don't Go!', and those moments they experienced together were not all brief hotel visits.

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<sup>37</sup> 'The Exotic of Everyday', written in 1965 about his work in Vietnam, but never translated to be published in English. Quoted in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Coming of Age*.

Once when he was invited to the UK, they managed to be alone for nearly a week tucked away in a country cottage at Coombe, in the county he called Gloochester. They lived as man and wife, shopped together, cooked together. Ştefan helped wash up, tended the garden, and fed the chickens. Playing house was bliss and Ştefan often commented years later how well it had worked out. Both had wondered if they would be compatible in this way and soon concluded they were. Even if they had little money, or were ill, they would manage. They would help each other and remain devoted until the inevitable end. Childish romanticism? No, something much deeper they could not explain.

\* \* \*

Ştefan's 'friends', whether real or imaginary, were always in evidence when he told Glynis lies: or perhaps one should say, *felt* he had to tell her lies. He never wanted to give away the fact that he spent money on anything other than essentials. He never asked her for money nor would he ever take any.

In one of his letters he wrote:

*You know we have an account in each other's souls. We can withdraw whatever we will, whenever we want, for endless is our treasure trove. . .*

Glynis enjoyed sharing quality experiences, but Ştefan insisted simple things satisfied him. After all, she could afford it and he could not, or so she believed. Lying was a way of life in Romania. It had been a form of survival in communist times, and many of the older generation never lost the habit.

A generous source of income in their lives was Megara's elder sister who had emigrated to Switzerland. Glynis was told that she and her husband had retired, lived in a lovely new house and had two daughters in well-paid jobs. This sister was always lending them money for this or that, and paying for airfares or New Year's Eve party gatherings. Over the years this generous 'purse' was bottomless: truly a 'pot of gold'. Although, when Glynis was shown video coverage of the Anghelache's visit to their home in Geneva, the house was not very special. Just plain and simple. Nothing extravagant.

The only thing the Anghelaches never seemed to be short of were cigarettes! It entered her mind that perhaps he was involved in smuggling or some other fraudulent activity.

Or perhaps he was a spy and had been paid to keep close to her!

The thought made a quick exit as another took its place. Once when they were discussing money and Glynis was thinking of changing banks, she asked Ștefan which one he used.

‘I have accounts in different banks.’

Yet another enigma.

**The man’s back stiffens. He reaches forward to switch on the desk lamp, but the bulb has gone. In a gesture of utter frustration and anger he beats his forehead against his fisted hand. He rises stiffly, paces the room, massaging the back of his neck fiercely, glances again at his watch and then returns to the desk to see how many pages are left. He mouths unheard words towards the photograph. Slaps it face downwards onto the desk top, then pushes back the chair and wanders round the room as if to exercise his legs. After pausing he returns to his desk, wipes his glasses, re-angles the desk to catch more light from the window and shifting uneasily in his chair, begins to read the next chapter.**

*(Death often strides where least expected bringing sorrow in its wake. Sounds of mourning fill the air masking new beginnings; a newly fledged freedom. It is 1995 and Edward dies. He was sixty-five.)*

## Act II Scene II

‘Give sorrow words: the grief that does not speak  
Whispers the o’er- fraught heart, and bids it break.’<sup>38</sup>

They say never make rapid decisions after a funeral, and months passed before Glynis, now sixty-one, surfaced from sadness, the trauma of sickness, and finally the death. Eventually, alone in a large house with children scattered in their own nests, she decided to leave. No moulding into old age for her! Having taken early retirement, she was in a position to sell up, buy an apartment in Bucharest and recede gracefully onto another stage without segregation of young from old, where family units remained intact and elders were respected. Over eleven years she had many friends in Romania. No itinerant society during communism – they worked where they were placed and little had changed. In London it was a different scene. Most of her true friends were spread over a wide distance or in other countries. She would buy a new computer with the latest software and take it with her. Glynis concentrated on other props required for her new role in voluntary exile and began to sing again.

*In the dark times, will there also be singing?*  
*Yes, there will be singing.*  
*About the dark times.*<sup>39</sup>

The apartment was central and for six idyllic months she shed all layers of domesticity collected over the years. She learned to cope with small, red cockroaches, finding essentials and the frustrations of living in a third world country. She had a space of her own for the first time in her life. Gone the hand-me-down furniture. Gone all her trinkets and personal effects of no interest to others; binned to the charity shop in black plastic bags. Furniture left to the fledglings to share; the aftermath of a death. In Romania she found wonderful antiques that cost little, bought curtains abroad, and scoured the town for just the right aesthetic objects to furnish ‘the set’. She commissioned beautiful paintings, bought a piano. Friends would always say: ‘It is so English, so aesthetic, the way you have arranged everything reflects you. Joyous,

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<sup>38</sup> *Macbeth*. 4.3.1.209

<sup>39</sup> Lines from “The Motto” in the “Svendborg Cycle. Poems of Political Exile.” See Brecht.



yet peaceful!’ Shopping in Bucharest in the early nineties was fun. Shopkeepers in their new found freedom stocked anything they could lay their hands on.

So in the four hundred year-old area of Lipscani, Walker’s whiskey, Chinese vases, and costume jewellery were displayed alongside food, hammers, perfume, wash basins, toilet fittings, bulbs or wooden ladders. Glynis learned the history of the area first from Aura, then from Dan.

‘Long before Bucharest became known as ‘Little Paris’ Lafayette had a store in Lipscani. And at Christmas, they had a live Santa Claus sitting in one of the large windows with a telephone linked to a receiver on the outside of the building so children could talk to him! I used to take my son there.’

‘It was an area that supported numerous guilds such as goldsmiths or shoe and saddle-makers; the political and economic heart of the community well before 1459 when the foundations of Bucharest were laid. Vlad Tepeş, you call Vlad the Impaler, once set up court there and you can still see the ruins. There is also a very small Church in the area that dates from 1724. It was once attached to a monastery and an inn, but both demolished at the end of the nineteenth century.’

Glynis often ventured into that particular church to hear a few young people preparing neo-Byzantine music or Romanian Orthodox hymns for worship; their voices soaring into the small dome once partly destroyed in an earthquake. Glynis had experienced both small and large tremors, but to her surprise, worried more about the art works on her walls falling than saving herself.

Her friends often spoke of the tragedy in 1977, when the ‘big one’ had damaged thirty-five thousand buildings and over one thousand, five hundred people had died, yet she was not afraid. While living in Romania, Glynis folded thoughts of earthquakes back into the history books and concentrated on the long summer evenings. As new restaurants with terraces appeared like toadstools over night, she enjoyed traditional foods and wines shared with her many friends, including Megara and Ştefan. Live gypsy or classical music by talented musicians made the long, harsh winters seem far off in some distant land. She loved the old restaurant, ‘Carul cu Bere’ with its Gothic interior reminiscent of a church, complete with pulpit and confessional box; or the old inn, Hanul lui Manuc with the gypsy caravan in its inner courtyard where she took summer visitors for a cool beer. Many of the treasures in her new flat had come from a gated passageway of art and antique shops in what had

once been an inn-yard known as ‘Hanul cu Tei’.<sup>40</sup> The scent of lime blossom still lingered in early summer as far away as Calea Victoriei, near the old Savings’ Bank with its domes and elegant façade. Glynis would look up at the crumbling architecture of the old town and imagine a bustling, thriving trading centre with its smells and sounds, where now stray dogs roamed, coffins for sale were propped up outside shops and the poor struggled to exist in Lipscani’s overcrowded conditions.

Many theatres were in this part of Bucharest, as well as a Music Hall, and as the actors and productions were very good, Glynis would often visit, especially if plays of Shakespeare or Chekov were performed. It was in Lipscani that she discovered a building that had once been the first Music School. After the Revolution, when for a brief period it was turned into a shopping precinct, she was able to enter to gaze at the magnificent stained-glass dome in the great hallway; an ideal space for a performance by a string quartet. Later it became a heavily guarded bank. And there were shops called ‘Consignatie’ where people took goods to sell, no doubt in order to have spare money to buy products now imported from the West. Glynis spent many a happy hour there discovering rare finds for her apartment, such as a 1914 hand-painted metal clock engraved with the name of Bucharest’s first newspaper, ‘Ziarul Minerva’.

No one spoke of age. Her friends and neighbours varied from students to pensioners. Romanians never considered going into a care-home, for there were none at that time, and anyway people looked after each other and helped those who couldn’t look after themselves.

It was in the summer after she had moved that Glynis’s closest neighbour, Doamna Dora Stănescu, aged seventy-eight, shut herself out of her flat and sought Glynis’s help. The only access was by climbing from one balcony to the other. As she was unafraid of heights and the balconies were adjacent, Glynis mounted a chair, clutched the rail surrounding the glass partition and swung round in a flash intending to enter Dora’s balcony door, only to find it locked. Dora then decided to follow Glynis, but in doing so lost one of her shoes which fell to an applauding, cheering crowd of gypsies gathered six floors below. Between the two of them they solved the situation by breaking the glass portion of the door.

The following summer, Glynis was asked to play the Good Samaritan when a lady came to her door to ask if she could use the phone. She had been waiting outside the

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<sup>40</sup> Lime Tree Inn

block for about four hours trying to get someone to help her contact her uncle of ninety-two who lived on the second floor. She feared he had died as there was no response to her knocking. Her key wouldn't work as the door appeared to be blocked. She said that even at his age her uncle did yoga and had erected a bar above the bathroom door so he could swing and do exercises. Glynis tried to help and they could hear he was alive, but appeared to have fallen and was unable to rise. Glynis suggested the obvious. 'Use my phone and call the Police!' She did and the answer came without hesitation: 'Get someone to break down the door!'

As the months passed, and Ștefan visited once or twice a week, Glynis rejoiced at the changes since the revolution: there was the old flower shop in Piața Romană that was first to place a Christmas tree in its window and sell decorations, something unheard of in communist times; the dingy subway at University Square with escalators, long since left in need of repair, suddenly transformed into a modern, thriving shopping area; shop windows displaying bright, colourful modern fashion from abroad, and the fact that people could meet in groups in coffee houses or bars and discuss politics or other aspects of life without any real fear of retribution.

However, there were some who resisted change or tried to cover up the past.

Immediately after the revolution, the public had been allowed into Ceaușescu's palace of a thousand rooms<sup>41</sup> and Glynis had seen for herself its chandeliers, erected at a time when light bulbs were nowhere to be found, and desperate families 'borrowed' them from lifts or other shared spaces. Now, tourists and Romanians alike were quick to forget the old scenery and props – grandparents on small stools, queuing overnight for scarce food. Glynis would never forget.

Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena, would have been proud to see how the building was now utilised for Parliament and cultural events. How quickly tragedies are forgotten! In the summer of 1997, when Glynis was showing Judy around Bucharest, they joined a group of tourists on a palace tour. She was horrified to hear the young guide praise the construction and materials used, without ever mentioning how this communist ruler destroyed, not only homes, but lives, in order to give himself a capacious vista. Glynis interrupted and gave the guide and the tourists present a true account of what had taken place. The guide replied, 'Well, we don't want to dwell too

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<sup>41</sup> Ceaușescu named it 'Casa Republicii', but after his death the people named it 'Casa Poporului'. Later, when used as a parliamentary building, it was renamed 'Palatul Parlamentului'.

much on the past!’ Glynis then realised that the next generations were already distancing themselves from their own history and looking forward to Western materialism, and a life they had always believed could be found in ‘pastures green’. Glynis knew deep down that after so much deprivation such eagerness was only natural, yet, it was hard for her to accept. No wonder the people had eventually rebelled.

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Glynis told everyone she had retired, but when they discovered her talents, and perhaps due to the fact that resident Westerners were in short supply, they begged her to help out . . . just for a day or two . . . and this often led to almost full-time work in various roles. Although she was deeply in love with Ștefan, the sadness of losing Edward was always just below the surface of consciousness, and from time to time, memory or photograph would release tears, but eventually she found her own creativity re-emerging. She discovered a Romanian music teacher from the Conservatoire who helped her compose; a fabulous computer technician who helped her to keep up to date and eventually she learned to speak the language fluently. Yet all this took time. Glynis and Ștefan secretly hoped that one day they might end up looking after each other in their old age. They accepted that they were growing old and death was inevitable, yet they were amazed age had no affect on their need for each others’ company, nor quelled their physical desire, the magic of touch, the excitement of making love. They never seemed to notice the gradual changes time brought about to their bodies, the wear and tear lines, Glynis’s stiffness in her fingers, the raised veins on her hands or Ștefan’s receding hairline and slight paunch; and rarely did they speak of such things. They suffered the effects of asthma, high blood pressure, chesty coughs, high temperature, influenza, yet nothing age-related; genetic perhaps, but never geriatric.

Nothing to earn the title ‘elderly’.

He once joked about a quotation he had read in Emile Faguet’s *De la Vieillesse*: “A book lover says to a thinker: If you don’t love rare editions; the beautiful first copies, the beautiful binding, you don’t love books or what is inside them!”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Page 18. Un bibliophile disait à un penseur: ‘Vous n’aimez pas les éditions rares, les beaux imprimés, les belles reliures. Vous n’aimez des livres, que ce qu’il y a dedan.’

They knew of the variety of practised sexual techniques but needed little to stimulate one another. They never called it ‘having sex’. They ‘made love’. They matched physically and were rarely ill – except when apart. Ştefan came to the apartment when he could, and if it was around mid-day Glynis would prepare a light lunch and serve it in her small kitchen. He knew she didn’t like people smoking in the apartment, so he refrained, although most Romanians smoked a great deal. They would usually share a bottle of Murfatlar Pinot Noir if he wasn’t driving, and then make love until the last moment before he had to leave. He kissed her passionately when he arrived – and passionately when he left. It was all she needed; her desire mirrored in his. They would talk over the meal and plan their next meeting. He had a mobile phone Glynis had given him and kept it hidden in the boot of his car. It was their lifeline, for when he left the library they were no longer able to send each other the usual daily email. She would leave him loving voice messages each day and he would phone when he was on his own, usually from the market or when teaching at the University. They took a great interest in any new technology that came on the market. Glynis would investigate and if it could be found in Romania, would purchase the latest new mobile or software. Ştefan ensured the new library would be up to date.

For years it worked perfectly. They were in a state of grace and totally at peace, creative and happy. They seemed to stay young. If ever something went wrong, Ştefan would always say, ‘Never, ever doubt me!’ They were words Glynis kept in her head if he failed to ring when he should have done, or something else happened to thwart their plans. Most times when seeds of doubt began to germinate in Glynis’s mind, there was always an explanation, not only credible, but provable.

Any journey they embarked on together left wonderful memories. Balconies and thunderstorms held particular significance. In Venice they had made love in a thunderstorm while the rain pounded hard against the windows and lightning illuminated their nakedness. In Stuttgart, they always regretted not going out on the balcony during the storm to let the sharp drops whip their skin and the beads of rain settle into the crevices of their bodies, and they often recalled the old colonial-style Meridian Hotel in Senegal where they made love on the balcony with Glynis pressed against the railings; their cries alerting night birds and mingling with the breakers moaning as they mounted the shore.

**The man relaxes a little as he too enters the memories on the page. He wishes he had more light and searches in vain for a spare bulb he was sure he once kept in the cupboard by the door. Reluctantly, for the harshness hurts his eyes, the man switches on the main light. Shadows recoil from its fluorescent glow. He rubs his back and stretches, but curiosity leads him back to the chair.**

He never fulfilled his promise to show Glynis the rest of his Romania, but many friends did so. They revealed a country divided by the past, united in hope for the future; a past that left gifts from the Romans and a trade route that once united East with West. They pointed out the difference between the neat Presbyterian gardens of the Saxons and the rough and ready, ‘do it yourself’ gardens of the Romanians. She learned from her Romanian friends in Transylvania, whose native language was Hungarian, of their present-day fight for equality among other national minorities. She saw from the water colours of Preziosi, the Bohemian life-style of 1869 when women bathed alongside men in the Dâmbovița River while during the same period, in the north-west, near Oradea, life according to Ioan Slavici’s novel, *Mara*,<sup>43</sup> was extremely puritanical.

Travelling in Romania by car in the nineties was very different from going by train in the eighties. To enter Bucharest’s North Station before the Revolution was Kafkaesque; the light pale and dim. An expectant hush throughout. There were few people and no facilities, apart from a small covered stall selling a communist newspaper or cheap cigarettes, and one small dirty looking bar at the far end. On the platforms the odd city person or peasants waited, some sitting on sacks, no doubt filled with vegetables or goods unsold at market. Others stood alone or with a small obedient child, waiting: waiting and watching in silence.

Everyone seemed to be watching. Watching each other; faces expressionless.

Glynis had such images fixed in her memory but alongside another image: that of the surprise she had upon returning to find the crew had worked hard to change the set. Now the station was well-lit, had cheerful cafés and shops. What surprised her

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<sup>43</sup> First published in complete form, 1906 (see Slavici).

most were the sound effects: those of a normal station. Travellers were noisy, busy, arguing and smiling.

On her journeys by car Glynis saw a peasant playing the buciun horn, an instrument first introduced by the Dacians, and whose deep tone carried over mountains or valleys. She met nuns and monks, heard the wooden, orgiastic, percussive beats of the țoacă calling the faithful to prayer, and was entertained in grand style at monasteries, never too far from a town. In the north east of the country startlingly clear images of hell's fire and the rewards of heaven were painted on the outer walls of old churches. The Romanian Orthodox believe that after the Final Judgment, hell, although often portrayed as God's punishment, is in fact the soul's rejection of God's infinite and abundant love given freely to all.

Glynis noted the village still needed its well, children guided geese, herded goats and at dusk the head-scarfed woman led the cow home; ring through its nose for the long day's tether. Neighbours of mixed ages sat by the fence gossiping as modern tourists hurtled past.

Glynis had been one of those tourists, off to the Carpathians' snow-covered peaks, or to the tall, dark 'Hansel and Gretel' forests. Once she had visited the bird haven of the Danube Delta near the Black Sea with a group of ex-pats and slept in a fisherman's cottage, where on the wall behind the bed, two silky cream scarves hung framing a Holy icon. In front of the traditional red, white and black hand-embroidered curtains, on a small table, a sanctuary lamp was kept alight. On their way to the high mountain passes or narrow gorges that lead to lakes or one of the layered reservoirs that carry the water safely to large towns, they would often pass wooden houses decorated ornately with twisting flowers.

Glynis, like any tourist, was captured by the simplicity of stalls selling pots of honey, cheese wrapped in pine bark, or traditional arts and crafts near famous castles like Peleş, Bran, or the citadel at Sighișoara. Like Ștefan, she loved places steeped in history and enjoyed reading a new volume in English about the Black Church in Brașov, and the mystery of its collection of Turkish prayer mats and rugs.<sup>44</sup> Ignoring the fast pushy coaches, carts called 'căruțe' would amble along at a lively trot with their decorated horses pulling families to market – pig and all. Raggie-taggle gypsies in flowing rainbow skirts and their men displaying suntanned chests and wide

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<sup>44</sup> *Antique Ottoman Rugs in Transylvania*. See Ionescu.

brimmed, black leather hats fitted well into the countryside, whereas in towns they were viewed with suspicion – and any misdeed gave them prominence in newspapers or on television.

Once through the Prislop Pass that led into Maramureş, time stood still. Glynis watched a church being built, the outcrop of fresh wood rising around a king-pin shining cream against the blue sky. The workmen wore ‘opinci’ on their feet, and traditional garments that most peasants wore only for church.<sup>45</sup> The peaceful tree-lined valleys bred poets, myths and legends, and in Moldova even the old bank notes told of ‘The Little Ewe’ of folklore in the ballad, Mioriţa.<sup>46</sup>

Ştefan had explained that acceptance of all that was happening around them was a trait of the Romanian character. Before the Revolution, if a foreigner asked why they put up with the dreadful state of affairs, they responded meekly, ‘It’s our destiny! We’re Romanians!’ This acceptance was often blamed on the legend that was even included in the school curriculum:

*‘Master, Master dear,  
Call a large hound near  
A fierce one and fearless,  
A loyal one and peerless,  
The Transylvanian and the Vrâncean  
When the daylight’s through mean to murder you.’*

And the Moldavian says simply that if true, ‘his bones should be buried by the sheepfold with one small pipe of beech or elder amid the beautiful countryside, and that people be told he left to marry a princess among the stars.’

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During an early spring in 1997, while there was still snow, Glynis invited Ştefan and his wife to spend a weekend in a hotel at Poiana Braşov to share the beauty of the

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<sup>45</sup> Oldest type of Romanian peasant footwear worn with felt foot wraps or woollen socks.

<sup>46</sup> “Mioriţa” A Romanian pastoral ballad (see Snodgrass).



mountains and give him a chance to drive Glynis's automatic car. The food was excellent and they had a suite of rooms so that Megara could still enjoy watching TV until late and sleep alone, as she requested, so as not to be disturbed by Ştefan's snoring. Although tempted, the lovers resisted creeping into each others' rooms. Too risky! It was when they decided to go with friends to the summit in the chair lift that Megara's usual display of panic began. She hung back, speaking loudly to ensure she was heard.

'What if it hasn't been checked? What if we fall out? What if it stops midway and we can't get down?'

Ştefan calmed her and persuaded her to try. It was not as if she had never been on one before. They clambered into one of the ski-lifts and she had no problem until they reached the summit. Then she panicked again; this time about the weather.

'What if a storm starts?' And later . . .

'What if it starts snowing and there's a white-out?'

She didn't seem to appreciate what others were appreciating: the sheer, wild beauty, the carpet of wild flowers, the closeness of clouds, and the chance to climb with the wind in your hair. Her excuse? She had not brought the right shoes.

'Megara's always been like that, her and her sisters, frightened of their own shadows!' Ştefan said later when he got Glynis on his own. 'Inside the house, she's fine. You've seen that at our dinner parties!'

Glynis listened without comment, but wondered how he could control his temper with such a temperamental woman for he had been as patient as if talking to a small child.

**The man has brought his hands up to his mouth; the left hand clenching the right. His teeth nibble the knuckle of his right forefinger. Then, with eyes closed, head bent, he rubs his fingers into the sides of his scalp as the expression on his face darkens. Dandruff snows onto the front of his grey jacket. He notices; dusts it off. Remembers 'Les cheveux blancs, cette neige du Coeur . . .'<sup>47</sup>**

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<sup>47</sup> The words of Louise L'Hermitte quoted by Emile Faguet in *De la Vieillesse*.p.22

## Act III Scene I

‘Condemn the fault and not the actor of it.’<sup>48</sup>

As time passed Ștefan received fewer invitations to go abroad. Then, in the summer of 1998, at Glynis’s sixty-fourth birthday party, he asked her if she would like to join them on holiday in Turkey. It was a surprise and she accepted gladly. She paid for herself in advance, and after a period of excited anticipation, set off for two weeks in Antalya at the five-star Dumlupinar Hotel near the sea. During the direct flight Ștefan sat between the two women. It was the first time Glynis had spent longer than a weekend with the two of them and she was interested in watching how they interacted with each other or other people. In the small mini-bus that took them from the airport to the hotel, they met three other Romanian women who had met Megara and Ștefan at a hotel in Mamaia the previous year.

Megara questioned them in machine gun bursts – her voice harsh, metallic. It was a tone Glynis had never heard her use before and the whole incident again made her think that Megara had once enjoyed the power of interrogation on behalf of some communist committee.

The Dumlupinar Hotel was set in beautiful grounds with pink bougainvillea and oleander bushes. It had indoor and outdoor swimming pools, tennis courts, a Jacuzzi and access to a private beach. Apart from the hotel’s open terraces, restaurants and bars, there was a children’s playground, and an open-air disco. Meals were served either inside or out, and their choice depended on the wind’s foray on Megara’s hair. Ștefan and Glynis loved to sit outside, but Megara always got her way as they appeased her every whim to keep her happy. She would always pile her plate high, and at breakfast got in the habit of secreting large amounts of fruit and other things into her bag so they could eat them for lunch, but on one occasion the Restaurant Manager politely asked her not to do it again. She was naturally very embarrassed, but then became angry and indignant while making some feeble excuse.

If Glynis and Ștefan were ever left alone they tried to plan their next meeting. The sea seemed the best solution, as Megara preferred the pool. So they found moments to say ‘I love you’, moments to touch, to smile, to hold a glance. Ștefan was

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<sup>48</sup> *Measure for Measure*. 2.2.37

adventurous and slid down the water chute, but when Glynis decided to join him, Megara admonished them both.

‘It is dangerous!’

They were all in their mid-sixties, but Glynis took no notice and joyfully climbed the steps to slide into Ştefan’s waiting arms. When they did get a chance to go alone to the sea and were sure Megara would not follow, they wandered far up the beach to a deserted spot. There were small dunes and sparse vegetation, but the sand was searing hot on their soles, so they entered the water, hidden from preying eyes. Ştefan found a large stone to raise Glynis up to the right height. It was like a small platform and he held her close. The cool water on bare skin was exciting and they longed to strip off completely, but other swimmers were too near. The taste of the salt was on their tongues and Glynis felt the coolness of the sea enter her. They were sea creatures oblivious to anything on land. It was the first time that holiday they had made love.

Days later they found the stone again, but Megara, having always refused to join them, now decided to come to the beach and continued to complain about everything.

‘There are too many țânțari’ in the garden at night.’<sup>49</sup>

‘I am too tired.’

‘My nails will be broken, and I haven’t made my machiaj!’<sup>50</sup>

‘The safe in the bedroom was blocked and no one came for thirty minutes. We could not leave for our things might be stolen!’

‘The children are too noisy. They splash too much in the water and wet my hair.’

Hair was still her major problem. Having had so much dye on it over the years, always self-applied, as well as a great deal of hair lacquer, it had a strange texture and looked good only when she had first washed and blow-dried it – a procedure that took up a great deal of time. She preferred to wear it long in an old-fashioned bouffant style back-combed into place, or in a plait wound round her head, held by a large clip. Actually, the one time she did look really attractive was when she had it cut to wave naturally round her high forehead and ears, but she didn’t like the new image and soon grew it again. Her figure was still attractive, although a little fuller and swimwear looked good on her. In this ‘summer role’, she usually wore a bathing cap

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<sup>49</sup> ‘mosquitoes’

<sup>50</sup> ‘make-up’

or sun hat and insisted that Ștefan wore her old white cap or his peaked one – at all times. She continually dominated and bossed him about. Glynis couldn't understand why he didn't rebel.

When alone on their journeys, Glynis and Ștefan were equals, adventurous partners who rarely disagreed. The best time on this holiday was when they took a coach trip along the bay to a galleon-style boat that took them round the coast into a quiet inlet near Bodrum where Ștefan and Glynis were able to climb down a ladder and swim in the warm turquoise sea, out of sight, to the alarm of Megara, still on board, who forecast sharks lurking to grab unsuspecting limbs. They also visited the Aspendos ruins where there was a fine Roman amphitheatre, the cool arches of the aqueduct and a bridge. Ștefan was also eager to see the remains of Lycian, a city built in the second century BC but abandoned in the fifteenth. Megara was more at ease on these trips, and all three relaxed into a pleasant companionship, their senses lulled by the mystique of history.

After the Millennium, Ștefan began to take his wife with him on trips abroad – first to Brussels, then to New York and Washington. His excuse was that it was only fair to give her a turn as she had never had the opportunity to go before the revolution. Although she admitted to herself that having lived through a revolution, Megara did deserve to have a chance to go abroad with Ștefan, it still hurt to know he was perhaps revisiting places without her that held such special significance for them both. However, Glynis and Ștefan still managed to meet on occasions when he had to travel alone to various parts of Romania.

As to how Megara and Ștefan were able to afford such trips . . . 'They helped us out with the money,' or 'We were invited by this kind Professor . . .' he would say. Glynis knew better than to query these explanations.

**The man shakes his head slowly from side to side, his face set in a thoughtful, puzzled expression as if desperately searching his memory for an event long past. He bites his bottom lip and bows his head as he turns it to one side. The hands rest on the desk top, helpless. He stays like this for some time, staring into space. Then the fingers of his left hand comb back the few strands of hair that have fallen forward. He turns the next page – slowly.**

## Act III Scene II

‘The tempter or the tempted, who sins most.’<sup>51</sup>

In 2002, Glynis planned a holiday and invited the Anghelaches. She also invited Alexandru Gheorghiu, a retired professor of natural history who once worked at the Bucharest Museum. She had known him some time as a translator and as he was a widower, she thought he might like to accompany the three of them to the Greek island of Lesbos. Megara would no doubt be happier if there was another male around, and Ștefan knew enough about Alexandru to realise that Glynis held no romantic feelings for him. She respected him as a friend, but nothing more. He was very fond of *her*, but accepted the fact that she was secretly in love with Ștefan.

Alexandru was sixty-six, spoke excellent English and had a passion for keeping healthy. Since his wife died in a car accident in the early nineties, his life was so strictly organised that he resented anyone or anything disturbing his routine. He appeared a solitary figure, although often immersed in projects for his daughter who lived abroad. As he was religious, he had a fascination for monasteries. He was also interested in ornithology and, armed with an old but lovingly-preserved pair of binoculars, would often take the train north to the Danube Delta to stay with a relative who owned a small fisherman’s cottage. Glynis thought he would fit in well as his needs were not great. He would be quite happy sitting somewhere peaceful, relaxing with a book, a herb tea or a glass of good whiskey. Alexandru Constantin Gheorghiu was meticulous in all he did and took great pride in trying to help Glynis plan the holiday to perfection. Glynis was as eager as Ștefan to see Lesbos, the third largest island of the Greek archipelago, steeped in history and mythology. Megara listened attentively while Ștefan ‘taught’ her the facts:

‘The arts and literature flourished there over the ages and outstanding among the island's many intellectual figures were Sappho and Alkalis, while the twentieth century produced the Nobel Prize winner, Odysseus Elytis who described the shape of the island as a leaf of a plane tree.’

Interest was aroused and she seemed very eager to accept the invitation.

As some English friends had told her it was very reasonably priced and provided a full English breakfast, Glynis booked three rooms at ‘The Olive Press’, a fairly large

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<sup>51</sup> *Measure for Measure*. 2.2.62

family hotel in the small fishing village of Molyvos and offered to pay for everyone. Somewhat reluctantly, Ștefan agreed to accept this offer of a free holiday saying that otherwise they would not have been able to afford it that year. Alexandru insisted not only on paying for his own airfare, but also on surreptitiously giving Glynis money towards meals, hoping his daughter would send him some money when he got home.

Alexandru had met Megara and Ștefan before and always seemed to get on well with them. On previous occasions he had thought Megara full of fun, but this time the holiday started with him taking a distinct dislike to her. Glynis imagined that with Alexandru joining them on holiday she would not feel so lonely if Megara suddenly decided they would stay in their rooms all afternoon. What she had not considered was Alexandru's obsession with early morning bird-watching, meals at set times, his desire for occasional wolf-like solitude and his inability to suffer Megara's stupid questions.

The holiday had started in fine form, and jollity prevailed until Megara started her usual panicky statements. She was afraid of the aeroplane. 'What if it crashed? What if there was a . . . ?' Ștefan reassured her. They took their seats and then the other questions started. She had already flown many times in an aeroplane without problems, so why be afraid this time? The air-conditioning started up and Glynis relaxed, but Alexandru's face revealed disbelief and slight anger at what he was hearing in Romanian. Later he confided to Glynis in private, 'At first, I thought you were just being bitchy but now I understand! She keeps making stupid remarks and Ștefan says nothing. That woman is so stupid, yet she tells me she studied French at Bucharest University! How can he put up with her, when he could have you?'

Glynis said nothing. She could not always follow Romanian when it was spoken fast or at the same time as extraneous noise, and apparently she had been missing a great deal. Indeed, how could Megara be stupid when she had worked for the Inspectorate? When they were going to board the second plane in Athens, security officials discovered Megara had a nail file in her handbag and the airport police refused to let her keep it. She became peevish and insisted Ștefan go back to the earlier security desk to demand they pack it in their main luggage, so she could retrieve it later. Alexandru and Glynis knew it would be a wasted journey, yet Ștefan obeyed meekly and without much comment. Nails, skin, eyebrows and eyelashes were all extremely important to Megara. On holiday she often wore a lot of makeup at breakfast so that she was ready to sit by the pool or the sea. Having now lost her

precious nail file, as soon as they arrived at the Molyvos hotel, she pestered Ștefan until he took her to buy another from the nearby chemist. Alexandru could not understand his behaviour.

‘Making him go all that way back just for a bloody nail file that cost peanuts! I’d have told her to shut up and think before she packs things next time!’

The hotel was on the edge of crystal-clear waters, but the beach was small and pebbled. Ștefan had read about the legends of Orpheus and Arian and was delighting in sharing his knowledge with Glynis. There was a large pool with tables and umbrellas, in a courtyard splashed with the colour of exotic flowers, and behind the hotel they could see an old castle on the northern tip of the hill, which according to the guide book would be floodlit at night. It was a picturesque harbour with red-tiled stone houses, but the town seemed no more than a village. Eventually, everyone settled into their rooms and relaxed into holiday mode.

One day before the holiday, when alone, Ștefan had suggested to Glynis they hire a car in order to see more of the island. Glynis agreed and reminded him to bring his driving license. Megara had never complained about the twists and turns of the road from the airport as the taxi driver took them across the island, but it was quite a different matter when they actually did hire a car for three days and set out to explore. She made the first day of driving in the hired car most stressful by complaining loudly most of the time. Yet the others were determined to enjoy the sights.

They journeyed to the south-western end of Lesbos where, on the slopes of Ordymnos near the village of Sigri, they found the extraordinary Petrified Forest. Twenty million years before there had been a tropical forest of massive trees. Then the volcano had erupted burying everything under tons of lava and tephra. Now all that was left were barren rocks, sparse olive bushes and stumps of stone trunks that looked like oddly shaped coloured marble columns. It was of great historical and geological significance and Alexandru and Glynis walked ahead leaving Ștefan trying to explain to Megara how it had come about. The walk was long, as the tree samples were far apart and the whole geopark covered many acres, but because of Megara’s complaints about the heat or her shoes, they were forced to cut the walk short. Next they made a detour driving up a narrow mountainous winding road to the monastery of Ypsilon. When they got there, only the chirp of the well-hidden cicadas chipped away at the peace – time’s hidden army with its insistent war-cry laying siege to a small elevated building of simple construction. The Monks ignored the few tourists

and went about their daily routine in silence. Ştefan, Alexandru and Glynis just wanted to absorb that peace; hold it in like drawing a deep breath, but Megara gashed it with jarring, jagged chatter about inconsequential things.

At the end of that day she declared she was too afraid of the car going off the road to venture out again, and that she would prefer to stay on the beach in the sun. She appeared to have forgotten her doctor's advice which years ago, was often used to confine Ştefan indoors. Glynis and Alexandru were relieved at the news and Ştefan simply excused her with, 'She never feels well in a car.'

The next morning at breakfast Megara wore the mask that stated 'I don't fully understand or even care what's going on.' This was a facial expression she had used for years. It was a mask that also made her look slightly arrogant, as if the rest of the human race were underlings. She would sit erect and put on an inane smile. Glynis had often noticed her elevation to sovereignty at the Opera or Concert Hall, where she always made a point of over-dressing 'fashionably' in the hope of meeting important people. Unfortunately, her idea of 'fashion' consisted of a fox-fur, and gloves worn at inappropriate times.

Ştefan tried his hardest to persuade her to join them, saying the roads were perfectly safe and if she preferred, he would drive. Megara was adamant. She would stay by the pool. Glynis said that if that's what she preferred, it was alright by her. It *was* a holiday and no one was obliged to do something they disliked. So they left her, but when the three of them started out in the car on this second day's sight-seeing, Ştefan declared that they must be back by two o'clock at the latest so they could eat with her, for although Glynis had arranged for Megara to select what she wanted and put it on the bill, Megara had told Ştefan in private that in no way was she going to eat alone.

This meant that the planned route the men had prepared so enthusiastically the evening before had to be curtailed. Glynis said nothing at the time, happy to have a complaint free day, and besides, she thought Megara was sincere in what she had said and really *did* want to stay behind to read or swim. Alexandru made sure he had his binoculars with him, and they set off with Glynis at the wheel.

Their first stop was the castle at Molyvos.

It was a site that gave them tremendous views over the bay towards the coast of Turkey. Then they went on round the bay until they came to a small fishing harbour called Skala Sykaminiyas where they decided to have a drink at the quayside. The men



chatted amiably about the waders Alexandru had spotted, while Glynis conversed with a talkative parrot chained by the foot to its wooden perch. Turning south they followed signs to Kalloni and headed round the Gulf towards Mount Olympus.

Pine, holm oak and olive trees lined the roads. Once olives had produced a thriving economy and they caught glimpses through the trees of old footpaths, abandoned villages and derelict oil-presses. It was a barren, sad beauty laden with the heavy scent of old pines. On the way they also stopped at a small town called Agiassos, surrounded by stands of deciduous trees with the occasional clump of sweet chestnut. In the 10th or 11th century, a monk was said to have left an icon there supposed to have been painted by Saint Luke. The story was written on a board outside a small church, and as Alexandru knew Greek, he decided to make a transcription for his grandson.

While he painstakingly copied the Greek, Ştefan and Glynis explored the tiny Church. It was deserted, and among the glitter of golden icons and scent of burning incense, they faced one another; held hands. He pulled her towards him – slowly, gently and in this holy atmosphere again swore his love, sanctifying it with a prolonged kiss.

When they were all ready to leave, Glynis continued to drive and as they approached Olympus aials were seen, seeming to grow out of grey stone buildings perched on a wide steeple of bare grey rock as if held by a mythical hand hidden in the greenness below.

The car wound round and round and round and round, slowly climbing the steep gradient. The guide book had stated it was nine hundred and seventy metres to the summit and Glynis found it hard to believe a road existed up there.

They continued in low gear, eventually ascending the rock itself on what looked like a track; a rough one hewn out of stone with no barriers at the edges, just a sheer drop. No one spoke as she concentrated on corner after corner, until the final turn that steepened sharply.

‘Please don’t let the car stall now!’ went through Glynis’s mind, as small stones spat and scuffled scurrilously from grating wheels. Suddenly it levelled out and they found themselves at the side of an outcrop of buildings. She brought the car to a slow halt, sat back and breathed a sigh of relief. Alexandru must have suffered most because later he asked Ştefan if he would like to drive back. To Glynis’s relief Ştefan

agreed, for she was not looking forward to the descent, although in fact it turned out much easier than the upward climb.

It was very hot and to their surprise, in a room of the tower-shaped building, they spotted a man. Alexandru went over to chat and discovered he was a Relay Keeper who watched over the powerful receivers and transmitters in radio frequency that kept the island, so far from its motherland, in telecommunication with the continent. His duty was also to warn people in case of fires, for the summit was the master server for the island's fire-fighting network. Apparently during the last world war, the site had been an outpost for the Germans. Afterwards, the Greeks converted it for its current purpose. However, they had also built a small commemorative chapel which all three of them entered. Alexandru didn't stay long, but with binoculars in hand went off on his own to explore, no doubt deliberately, as he stayed away some twenty minutes. Glynis and Ştefan were unaware of time passing on its slow onward march to whatever fate held in store. There they were on top of a mountain, in a holy place with their love as sacred as the artefacts around them: out of reach of all harm. The sanctuary lamp was their lamp. They could have remained immersed in this quiescence until destiny liberated their souls.

On the way back, Alexandru eulogised over his sighting of a small, brown Rufous-tailed scrub robin known as a Rufous Bush Chat whose tail, wings and eyes were tipped with white. He had never seen a *Cercotrichas galactotes* so close before and hadn't dared to move as it alighted for an insect, fanned tail splayed upwards to reveal white under plumage. Such twitching for Alexandru was sheer Heaven! The men decided to reach Molyvos through the historic small town of Petri, high up on the mountainside that overlooked nearby villages. Once there, they parked the car and began to climb the winding steps.

They were surprised to find a tiny restaurant overlooking the bay and as it was half-past one and they were all hungry and thirsty, Glynis suggested they stay a while to have lunch, or at least a drink. Ştefan insisted that they return at once for it would take half an hour to drive back and he had promised Megara to be there by two. Inside, Glynis's fury bubbled, babbled and eventually burst. She was not often jealous, normally squashing such thoughts, but today, on such a beautiful day; that day, which had been so special for the two of them, when it had been like a wedding twice over . . . she could not contain her anger.

'It's not nice to eat alone,' he had said condescendingly.

‘I eat alone every day of the week!’ Venom struck. ‘All right I’ll take you back to your wife!’ As she slithered swiftly down stone steps using every muscle in her body, Glynis surprised herself at what adrenaline could do as it flows into the system. As she undulated down more steep steps, jaw set in grim determination, Alexandru followed closely with soft, sympathetic clucking, but at that moment Glynis hated everything and everyone. She didn’t often slip out of character, but now she was a spoilt child, a hurt lover, an aggressive bitch and the feeling lasted until they reached Molyvos and brought the car to a screeching halt.

It was exactly two o’clock.

When they arrived at the hotel, Megara was in their room. Ştefan joined her and eventually they came into the dining room. He fidgeted with the cutlery and she sulked like a spoilt child, and continued to do so throughout the meal. Glynis could not believe it. Ştefan had been right. He was always right when he predicted what his wife might do. Megara was annoyed that they had taken so long. Alexandru pretended not to notice and tried to keep the conversation jolly by telling her about all the places they had seen, enthusing over his Rufous Bush Chat and pointing out what she had missed.

Later that afternoon, when they were alone, to Glynis’s great surprise, Alexandru suddenly announced he had no intention of going in that ‘fucking car’ again to spend all day looking at olive trees. Half of her cursed him, the other half rejoiced, for if Megara refused to come, it meant she would have Ştefan to herself. Glynis was sure that Alexandru had done this deliberately so as to give them this one opportunity, although he never confessed to it. On the other hand she felt she should try to persuade Megara to come too.

That evening she told the others of Alexandru’s decision and begged Megara to change her mind and come with them. Glynis avoided mentioning how dangerous the drive up the mountainside had been, but tried to reassure her that all would be well. Megara was adamant. She would sit by the sea and read.

Glynis had no wish to go alone and as the car had been hired for three days it was a pity to waste the opportunity of seeing more of the island, so she ventured to ask Megara what she felt about Ştefan coming on his own with her.

‘Would you mind?’

‘Why should I mind?’ A shrug.

As she seemed pleasant, even sincere, Glynis took her at her word. At breakfast the next day Ştefan again begged Megara to join them, but she continued to refuse. She would stay with Alexandru on the beach. They promised to be back in time for lunch and then Glynis and Ştefan, in a turmoil of inner excitement, set off. They left on the road that led south-west, past Petra, until they came to Anaxos, not far from the small island that could be seen from the hotel. It was where the cyclorama revealed the angry red sunset, piercing the water with its reflection until the cross fade. They had both conceived the same idea – hire a room. There were many apartments just off the beach with no trouble over availability and they were soon engulfed in a tongue-tossing sea of expectation.

No hesitation now or furtive procession to a waiting bed. With curtains half-closed to eclipse the day, Glynis sensed him ready to plunge the hidden depths, desire rippled at the slightest touch and they were soon drowning in a consuming wave of passion. They were not silent in the wreck of their success and afterwards there was no flotsam of flies and tights, just nakedness and peace. His aftershave lingered on the hand towel and her thighs yearned for him again throughout the day. This had been their only chance to make love on that holiday, and they made the most of it. The small straggling village of Anaxos became Ştefan's talking point over the next few months, so much so that Glynis warned him not to mention it again or else Megara would realise it held special significance.

After Anaxos, they drove back and up the mountainside to another ancient village called Stypsi. From here they walked from the car park up the hillside to try to find the ancient site of a church. The air buzzed with life and tall hedgerows hid the couple from view. They climbed hand-in-hand ascending with unending energy. They were tireless; a sun-tanned god and goddess created in man's image from the marble of petrified trees.

On the church's site was a small squat building. It had a tiny window and the door was unlocked. On entering they discovered a simple improvised chapel with some wild flowers stuck in a cheap vase and a Coca-Cola bottle on the windowsill holding Holy oil. Ştefan held Glynis against him and she felt autumn return to spring. However, they could not spend much time there for the strange atmosphere was thieved by another couple who entered shortly afterwards.

They returned to the car and made their way back to Molyvos – well in time for lunch. This time Megara was *obviously* angry. She had expected Ştefan on both days

to say that he would not go without her, but would stay and sit on the beach while she read her book. Later, when Glynis heard this, she couldn't believe such selfishness. Edward would never have let *her* get away with such comments. Later she said to Ştefan 'I hope you told her she was selfish.' He assured her he had. After this hiatus the days passed peacefully enough. Alexandru did his own thing, and sometimes ate breakfast at a different time. Glynis would go to a nearby bar alone and sit surveying the other tourists trying to imagine their life-dramas, or else would sit in the hotel lounge chatting to other guests. Yet they did manage to do some pleasant things as a group. They went to Petra and climbed to the church on the rock, floodlit at night, and everyone enjoyed wandering round the many shops. It surprised Glynis that Ştefan and Megara often bought fruit and biscuits for themselves to supplement meals though there was no need, for choice at the hotel was good and the portions large. They ate so much she could never understand why they needed more, or that they kept their secret hoard to themselves. They were also secretive about presents they'd obviously bought for friends back home. At the airport Megara, although struggling, refused to let Glynis help her and turned on her warning blast: 'No, I can manage. Thank you!' Perhaps she thought Glynis might guess what was wrapped inside. In fact Glynis was unconcerned for it was normal to buy small gifts for friends and relations. What hurt was the deception. Why did Ştefan always have to try and hide the fact they had money? But then he always kept his purse strings tight. He would say: 'We only manage because I am very careful. I have to be. There is father to provide for. He needs an inside toilet, and I will have very little after August when I can no longer teach. Imagine, Glynis, ninety-one and no bathroom in the house! I must help him.'

**Someone taps on the door and informs the man that the Library will be closing in twenty minutes. The man acknowledges he has heard and quickly thumbs through the pages to see how many are left. He re-reads the last paragraph while massaging his chin or idly picking a small scar where he cut himself shaving. Unheard, he appears to mutter to himself and reads on.**

Alexandru had not come out well as a holiday group member. Whenever he took off to go birding or twitching, or decided to breakfast early on his own, Megara and

Ştefan would label his actions childish and inhospitable. Alexandru thought Megara ignorant, and Ştefan mean – for not offering to pay or share the fruit they bought.

Glynis, trapped in the middle of this triangle of attitudes, decided not to invite Alexandru on the next holiday.

\* \* \*

Whenever doubts entered her mind Ştefan surprised her. Two months after this holiday, he received an unexpected invitation to visit London. This enabled them to have a brief weekend together and while there, he suggested they took a taxi drive just to pass by all the places still resonating so clearly in their memories. Holding hands in the back, they kissed and relived past moments.

*(The planets continue their orbit and years pass uneventfully. Then the wheel of fortune falters; starts spinning out of control.)*

## Act III Scene III

‘This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune – often the surfeit of our own behaviour – we make guilty of our own disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars; as if we were villains by necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves, and treachers by spherical predominance, drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence.’<sup>52</sup>

Glynis and Ștefan were happier than ever. He commented how their love had grown much deeper over time and their lovemaking more relaxed as they had grown older. He reckoned they would still be making love when they were ninety, and one day confided that once when alone with some male acquaintances, he had boasted that he intended to keep young, virile and healthy well into his eighties.

Many of the older Romanian generation also spoke French, and one day he came to the apartment with a copy of Emile Faguet’s *De La Vieillesse*. It was a small grubby first edition which he treasured, and sitting with her arm round her, read:

‘Mais l’amour d’un vieillard pour une femme qui est à peu près de son âge et qu’il a aimée jadis, est une chose, non seulement respectable, mais toute pleine de plaisirs délicats, charmants et profonds. L’ardeur violente des passions de la jeunesse n’approché pas des tendresses calmes, sûres et intimes. Dans tout le sens du mot, des passions séniles.’<sup>53</sup>

‘How true is that of us, my love!’

Once, having visited the Louvre at Pyramide, Glynis and Ștefan had entered the church of St. Germain-l’Auxerrois where they sat in the stillness of the nave; something they often did when visiting churches. He spoke of how when they were eighty and no one cared any more, he would go on the radio and tell the world about their love, for no one would bother then about who he was or what he was doing.

‘I have to go to Berlin next month and I will be alone. Can you come too? It’s twenty-one years!’

April 2003! Twenty-one years exactly since they had first met.

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<sup>52</sup> *King Lear*. 1.2.32-35

<sup>53</sup> *De la Vieillesse: Les dix Commandements*. Chapter X111, p. 78

‘The love of an old man for a woman who is more or less the same age and whom he has loved for some time is something not only respectable but full of delicate charming and profound pleasures. The violent ardour of the passions of youth do not come close to the tendernesses of the passions of old age that it calm, assured and intimate in every sense of the word.’

‘Of course I can. That will be wonderful! I’ll change my timetable if I have to!’

She still worked from time to time, but hours were flexible if she planned ahead. Ştefan had always said that she was his ‘real’ wife as he had stopped making love to Megara long ago.

‘Think how hard it was for me to lie to her and say that I was no longer capable as a man.’

‘What will Megara do while you’re away?’

‘Perhaps, a face-lift?’ he joked. ‘She’s saving her pension for it. Did I tell you? She’s always been coy about her age and tries to avoid telling people. Well, soon we will all be seventy!’

‘Next year for me! But I’m not worried as long as I have you near!’

‘Me neither! Let’s hope we go on keeping in good health, my darling.’

‘Well, I’m sure making love helps!’

Laughter, a pause . . . ‘Have we time?’ A quick glance at the watch. ‘Shall we?’ and back to the bedroom. That night, Glynis curled herself up in the nest she usually made with pillows and planned for the trip to Berlin. She also thought about Megara’s strange attitude to life.

She was not a popular woman even with neighbours. Ştefan said she had no personal friends, and only telephoned her sisters and older brother, who lived far away in Oradea, on special occasions. They always told Glynis that it was her sister in Switzerland who rang them as they couldn’t afford long-distance calls.

Glynis found it strange that Megara never travelled alone to visit anyone, unless it was locally to the annual College Class Reunion. Because Ştefan was careful with money, theatre or concert visits often depended on free seats offered by someone in the show. The only restaurant visits made by the Anghelaches were by invitation to some special occasion such as a wedding or anniversary, so Glynis’s friendship provided them with many opportunities they would otherwise have had to forego.

Berlin proved to be a very special trip. They relaxed into a long weekend of passionate love-making, new sights and famous clocks; the Brandenburg Gate and the White market where Glynis bought a top hat just for fun. It was a weekend of memories, old and new.

\* \* \*



Ștefan's father had been getting steadily worse. His hearing had deteriorated even more and he also had bladder cancer, so it was necessary for his daughters to spend a lot of time at Șerbănești. Ștefan felt very guilty not sharing this burden. Glynis had offered to help, but Ștefan felt he would sense the relationship between them. In the early summer of 2004, the doctor gave his father three to six months, and this meant the planned trip to Cyprus in late August hung in the balance. Now it was Ștefan's turn to say 'What if?' Glynis checked and found out that a seat in the plane could always be found in an emergency.

This time Glynis asked another friend to accompany her. Lavinia Naum was a psychiatrist who worked at a Bucharest clinic. A lively person, around forty-six and full of fun; the age Ștefan had been when Glynis first met him. She married at an early age and divorced two years later, like so many Romanians who bound themselves into wedlock to avoid living longer than necessary in the small cramped apartments of their parents. Many male friends had ventured across her path, but never the right one to settle with.

She had distinguished ancestors. Once when visiting Santorini together Glynis learned that some of her relatives could be traced back to the Knights Templar and the Boyars. She was intelligent, spoke four languages and was well liked. People enjoyed talking or eating out with her. She always smiled, was energetic, and interested in many things besides psychiatry. Her greatest wish was to be really well qualified in her field. She took many courses abroad and always passed with good marks. As she knew the Anghelaches, having met them at social events, Glynis felt Lavinia would be an ideal choice for a holiday companion as she was also keen to see Cyprus. Besides Santorini, she and Glynis had visited Vienna together and spent a New Year's Eve in Rome, so she knew sharing a room would be no problem. Also Lavinia was well aware of Glynis's romance with Ștefan, and had never been judgemental, or critical because of their age.

Glynis was sure that Ștefan's father would hang on until after the holiday and so booked early. Fate as usual was on the side of the lovers! The hotel offered an excellent deal for the four of them. As in Lesbos, Glynis said she would pay for the Anghelaches, but Lavinia insisted on paying for herself. Ștefan asked Glynis what he should do because in Lesbos Alexandru had embarrassed him by offering to contribute towards meals out, whereas *they* had not ('because they could not afford to do so!'). Glynis agreed that she would give Ștefan cash in advance, and then they

would appear to be contributing. He could not use the Visa card Glynis had given him for emergencies, because Megara was unaware he possessed one. In fact, he had never used it and insisted he would never do so. Ştefan always told Glynis how embarrassed he was at her having to pay for them and this time Glynis really had to push him into accepting, saying again that years were passing and with little time left to be together they should enjoy themselves. Why not see the world if she could afford to pay so they could discuss the wonderful things they had shared? Glynis was naturally generous not only to members of her own family, but to anyone in need. She lavished gifts on her friends, expecting nothing in return, although they often repaid with some kind deed, no doubt out of unsought gratitude. With Ştefan it was different. She wanted to be with him, and the opportunity had to be created no matter what the cost.

The day for departure came. His father's health had grown no worse and so they travelled. At the airport Megara was eager for Ştefan to buy her a few magazines but he refused. As it turned out she had no money in her handbag. She told Lavinia Ştefan kept it all. She preferred it that way because she always spent it on silly things.

'This way we save.'

Lavinia was horrified at this statement and so was Glynis. When alone, she tackled him on the subject.

'You're silly not to let Megara handle money or pay bills. What will happen if you die first and she's left alone and doesn't know how to cope?'

To Glynis's amazement he answered,

'If I die, I have no interest in what Megara does.'

The Hotel at Paphos was very different from what they had expected. There were quite a number of families but luckily lots of space, and fortunately for Megara most of the older children had left to return to school. The furniture was of Nordic design and sparse, but the staff were charming. They arrived at the hotel after one o'clock so the rooms should have been ready, but there had been some delay with the outgoing guests. Glynis went up to inspect the rooms alone, leaving the others sitting in the entrance hall. She found the communicating doors open, and thinking that it would be useful while they were all settling in, asked the maid to leave them unlocked. By the time Ştefan and Megara's room was prepared, everyone was busy and she forgot to mention it. They never did try the doors and so, quite intentionally, Glynis placed a chair in front of the door on her side.

The rooms were deluxe with balconies overlooking the pool and if you leaned over and looked eastwards you could see the old fort, and in the far distance, fishing boats bobbing up and down, casting seal-black shadows on the pleated sea. Glynis longed to go down to the beach and swim. They developed a pattern. Breakfast at nine although Megara wanted it at ten! Lavinia planned to get up early and go for a pre-breakfast swim, and she and Glynis did so until the mornings grew cooler. The breakfast hall was like a canteen swarming with hungry eager 'Brits' or Germans, with very young children of every size and shape. Glynis and Lavinia would have liked to sit outside to eat by the pool, but Megara decided otherwise, making some incoherent excuse which Ştefan accepted. How different he was when she was around. In fact even his voice changed when he was with his wife, and it wasn't just because he sounded different speaking English. This time he *was* 'different' as if he had taken on another 'role' that he was forced to play when with this particular woman. He spoke in a deeper, coarser tone and would laugh raucously. The food was good and Glynis had never seen either of them devour so much. When alone with Glynis, Ştefan ate quite frugally at mealtimes. He was always against over-eating, considering it unnecessary and bad for one's health. On this holiday, the four of them usually had a drink before lunch either of ouzo, whisky or wine, but after the first day or two Lavinia opted out.

In the evenings they chose to go down around eight to eat at the outdoor arena where there was a dance floor, and they sat at one of the tables round its edge so they could enjoy the small children at their mini disco.

Cyprus gave them a tremendous feeling of history and Megara was keen to pose for a photograph at every place of interest. Paphos was a bright, cheery seaside town with a small port and marina, and Ştefan was excited about seeing the site where in the twelfth century the Mycenaeans had built a temple to Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love. They swam near Aphrodite's rock and took a tour to Neo Paphos to see St. Paul's pillar and the house of George Eliades built in 1894, where they saw a fine archaeological collection and many folk-lore objects. There was something for everyone. Megara enjoyed the furnishings on display and Lavinia the rock tombs in the grounds. They all agreed the visit had been well worth while.

The first few days went smoothly, but Lavinia had already started to get angry, first with Megara and then with Ştefan. She too couldn't stand what appeared to be Megara's stupidity. Lavinia, with her experience as a psychiatrist realised that in no

way was Megara really stupid. After all she had held a good position at work and was well versed in Romanian art.

‘They are playing a game,’ she announced, ‘and you, Glynis, are the loser.’

Glynis didn’t understand what Lavinia meant. She had heard Megara on the plane ask if its engines were inside, and like Lavinia couldn’t understand how Ştefan, even though he laughed at such a question, could be so patient, explaining, as if to a five-year old, exactly where the engines were and why.

‘They go on like this all the time,’ Lavinia said.

‘What do you mean? I haven’t heard them!’

‘You can’t understand everything and so you miss out!’

Glynis didn’t want to know or think about it. She was happy in Ştefan’s company and he in hers. They ate well, drank well, swam well and although there were few opportunities to be alone together, Glynis and Ştefan sent silent scripts when no one else was looking, and during the whole holiday he mouthed the words, ‘I love you’ whenever it was safe to do so. Lavinia wanted to hire a car. Remembering the experience in Lesbos, Glynis’s support was hesitant, yet she did raise the subject when Lavinia was in the sea.

Ştefan now took control of the situation. Yes, that would be all right and he would be the one to drive. Glynis said that Lavinia was a doctor and a very good driver. If she was going to hire the car, then she should drive. Ştefan objected.

‘She’s too young!’

‘What at forty-six? That’s about the age you were when we first met! She’s a safe driver and very experienced!’ Glynis retorted, and at that moment decided to try to steer Lavinia away from the idea. Yet, she wanted to see Coral Bay, just seven miles north-west of Paphos, and then Polis and the Baths of Aphrodite. Later, she discussed the problem with Lavinia who said, and Glynis felt she did so reluctantly, that if Ştefan really wanted to drive it was OK with her. The atmosphere between Ştefan and Lavinia darkened. Lavinia began to withdraw from conversations, sit silent at meals, and found some excuse to sit apart or retreat to the sea. Glynis couldn’t believe the change in her. Glynis grew more anxious, Ştefan more and more angry. He started to denounce Lavinia. Megara’s only comment was, ‘She’s just young!’

Realisation dawned on Glynis that she had made a great mistake bringing the three of them together. She also realised that she was in danger of drowning in this strengthening undercurrent. When Ştefan complained to her about Lavinia, Glynis

asked him not to make such comments as she was her friend and found it hurtful. Later when Glynis made a derogatory remark about Megara, Ștefan referred to Glynis's earlier comments and said he felt the same when she spoke that way of his wife. Without smiling they agreed to respect each other's wishes.

A few days later Lavinia hired a car for the day at a good rate and they set out together, attempting to be positive. The trip in the car was successful as they also visited the Monastery of Ayios Neophyos on a peaceful wooded hillside. Then, on the way back, they discovered a quiet beach with a calm sea and fine golden sand. They ate a hearty meal at a small restaurant nearby and everyone managed to be pleasant. Inside the car was different. Glynis had tried to sit at the back, but Megara insisted she go to the front. Like many Romanians they didn't like air-conditioning or open windows because of the dreaded 'draught' they are sure will either kill or maim you for life. Megara and Lavinia, in particular suffered from the excessive heat of the day, and this, combined with the fact that Ștefan was cautious over money and Megara was playing at being the ignorant child, annoyed Lavinia so much that she told Glynis being with them gave her a terrible headache and she was thinking of returning to Bucharest early. She said she felt bombarded with sound and stupidity. She had had enough.

'It makes me feel really ill!'

The climax of events came one day in Glynis's absence, when Lavinia and Ștefan were holding a discussion. He made the mistake of saying that in some ways communism actually helped Romanian culture.

When Glynis heard about the argument, she excused him to Lavinia by saying he probably meant that artists were given space and time, musicians their instruments etc., which was true. But members of Lavinia's family were intellectuals who had suffered under communism, and for her the subject was dynamite as one of her uncles had been imprisoned for openly discussing his views on the subject. She considered Ștefan and Megara from peasant stock, which they were, but Glynis saw things differently. The Anghelaches had managed to build on their humble background and Ștefan in particular had done extremely well in his career.

The wounds were too deep to heal.

Lavinia reiterated that seventeen days were too long for her holiday.

She used the excuse that she had never spent so much time away from her job, and made arrangements to change her ticket. It was exactly a week before the planned end of the holiday.

She left the next day.

Now alone in her room, Glynis attempted to analyse Ştefan and Megara's relationship. It was as if Megara played the helpless child, while from time to time, Ştefan appeared to enact the role of Megara's son or else the stern father of a dear daughter whom he needed to protect from harmful comments. She would ask stupid questions. He answered and explained patiently. Both Lavinia and Alexandru had commented on this, and now Glynis had noticed it for herself, first at Lesbos and now in Paphos.

With Lavinia out of the scene, the three of them tried to relax, but Ştefan was still tense. However, they did manage to seize a few moments alone to touch and embrace. He planned to come to Glynis's room to make love the next time Megara was engaged in the major operation of dyeing and setting her hair. Glynis thought this a dangerous ploy and tried to dissuade him, but he reassured her that all would be well.

When he did knock gently and unexpectedly on her door, Glynis was alarmed, yet pleased. She warned him he had better not cough or make a sound as the last thing she wanted was for Megara to find out!

They coupled in haste, soundlessly, joylessly.

There was little romance.

'Now we must wait a week,' he whispered. 'We've been lucky so far and can wait – we've done so before.'

She nodded, wondering just how long luck would last.

**The pain on his face digs deeper furrows. The man shifts uneasily in his chair, chained between conflicting memories:**

**his desire to be with Glynis;**

**his dying father, alone and needing constant care;**

**his wife's ever-watchful eyes.**

**Her anger, her sorrow – all peck fiercely at his despair.**

**He sighs as his guilt shifts uneasily from one shoulder to the other. He eases both shoulders backwards; head bent as in prayer.**

**He is back with Megara in the hotel bedroom; a young boy, eager to please or pacify.**

**Then pride ripples, washes away fear of the anima, to create once more – the man; the stern animus.**

*(The cyclorama lights up. The Man and the Woman are in their hotel room. The Woman sits on one of the single beds. The Man is pacing the room. The woman is obviously agitated and there is an air of conspiracy as they whisper to each other in Romanian. The translations are revealed in surtitles above the proscenium arch.)*

'You must end this friendship before it's too late.'

'You enjoy her money and the trips.'

'Yes, but you said next year we'll have the interest.'

'Leave me in peace. That's enough! The subject's closed.'

\* \* \*

Glynis had booked and paid the hotel's concierge for the three of them to go to see the Troodos Mountains which they had heard were very beautiful and not too far from

Paphos. There would be many monasteries which Ştefan was eager to visit. Glynis thought they might even be able to walk up to the Caledonian Falls if they wore sturdy footwear, but a lot would depend on the weather. Yet if it rained they could always wander round the old part of the town and there were bound to be some small shops or stalls if Megara wanted souvenirs.

The day before this trip, September 9<sup>th</sup> started off as usual, except that after breakfast, Megara greeted Glynis outside their door with a sharp burst of word-fire: ‘Ştefan will stay in the room!’

\* \* \*

*(Glynis stops writing. The rest is too painful to relive. She feels as if the end is near; her life’s end. She considers the Epilogue. She remembers his words ‘I love you! Never, ever doubt me.’ She sleeps. Sleep, the great healer in whose depths the needle of life’s compass falters – changes course.)*

I woke early, but with a warmer feeling in my heart; rested from having written so much of the story, but frustrated that I couldn’t end it. Decided not to give up hope on Ştefan. If he rang, he rang. Anyway, it wouldn’t be until the following day for I had heard the strike might be over. I would be loving and kind as I’d always been until that moment when shock diverted me off course. I’d wait for him forever if necessary. I don’t ‘believe’ but I do have ‘faith’. I’ve faith in Love and if there is a God he’s the love in every man’s heart.

Don’t they say, ‘God is Love’?

Although my husband was brought up Catholic, our children were allowed to make up their own minds. I sometimes went to church with him, and would listen to his views on life and religion. However, having listened and analysed, I came to the conclusion that I needed to keep my options open. There is so much we don’t know in this world. Who is to say who is right? One shouldn’t be blinkered like a horse. I refuse to follow doctrines, seeing only hypocrisy in the established Church and much of society. I read and keep an open mind eager to explore all avenues of thought, even New Age philosophy, but personally, the Quaker belief, that ‘the love of God is in every man’ stays with me. Love is within. I believed in our love and I wasn’t going to allow anyone to destroy it.



## Light-images

7.

*(Giant tarot cards hang from the flies. Spirit-raising light-images, vague at first, cross fade with those of Istanbul, Venice, Dubai. Sounds of rivers and music from ancient chateaux, while gods and devils engage in battle. It is late November.)*

Three months have passed like years.

My friend, Kirsten Johannessen arrived from Denmark and rang to invite me to her apartment. When I told her of my woes, she suggested Tarot cards might help. Tarot cards! Well, when you're drowning one clings to anything! Even Numerology! After all, Pythagoras thought reality could be expressed numerically and the Tarot pack also has numerological associations. So I decided to go along with the idea.

She said it was a period of reassessing situations. Mercury was apparently going retrograde, which was normal three times a year, and it would last for about three weeks. It began on November 14<sup>th</sup> and would go on until December 3<sup>rd</sup>. During this period people tended to lose things, have bad news if they went to a doctor, computers got viruses, and people had misunderstandings. Then around Dec 1<sup>st</sup> it started to clear, like a mist. Ștefan's birthday was on February 10<sup>th</sup> and so with the year, the calculations came to twenty-three. His temporary vibration was as follows:

Powerful protective forces are around to guide him into safe ports.

Marriage (or a relationship) reacts favourably to this situation. If others oppose his ideas he should not allow himself to get into quarrels or he could alienate friends. He should be truthful and helpful: as such an attitude would be rewarded through material gain, peace of mind and contentment.

My birthday is on April 12<sup>th</sup> and the number calculated for me was twenty-seven. Things would grow, blossom and be fruitful. Relationships would bloom. There would be a deeper understanding, and possibly marriage or a close partnership. Creative enterprises would go well, although there could be a negative reaction and generally unhappy feelings.

I didn't like the sound of either. I didn't feel in a creative mood to consider *any* enterprise, and as to my 'blossoming', I thought it most unlikely that there could ever be a 'deeper understanding or marriage' in the future. I thought the negative reaction was more likely to prevail for both of us!

I began to choose the cards that would indicate how Ştefan and I were feeling now. ŞTEFAN: For him I chose the 8th of Ones, and then the Sun card, but they lay upside down suggesting that he can do nothing however hard he tries and there is no sunshine in his life. There is only the dark wall behind . . . just blackness.

Had I brought him to this?

ME: I chose the Knight of Wands that indicates travel, and card number 1V suggesting freedom, love, creativity and a celebration of love.

How could all this be possible? My life was over!

BOTH: Between us is chaos but the accent is on him. His card was the King of Swords upside down and mine, Pentacles 1V that indicates I am unstable.

Kirsten said Ştefan was in a mood to kill . . . probably both Megara and me! My mind distances itself. Focuses . . .

1997, Columbia, South Carolina. Humidity saturating the lungs and the spore-spawned Spanish moss hanging from great ‘resurrected’ evergreen oaks like Indian hair, floating in the breeze to remind ‘y-all’ of the decimation of tribes by Western bacteria. A small café. A great deal of wine. Ştefan speaking of a young woman with whom he’d had an affair when he worked at the Pedagogical Library.

‘She was so beautiful, but then she divorced her husband and expected me to marry her. When she realized I wasn’t interested, she threatened to tell Meg! I could have killed her with my bare hands! Her mother came to the library, and demanded jewellery as compensation.’

The conversation highlighted quite a different aspect of his character: one I’d not seen before, and I’d made a mental note never to pressurise him into divorcing Megara.

OUTCOME SUMMARY: This was revealed in the card Queen of Swords. Everyone stays alone and there is an enormous emptiness.

So their emptiness was as great as mine!

Was he considering death too?

ANOTHER PREDICTION:

ŞTEFAN: Not happy with anything. Not able to work on anything. Loves nothing and no one.

ME: About to give up but will travel and put it all at the back of my mind.

How could I do that? Put it all at the back of my mind!

BOTH OF US: Both see and hold the good parts held in memory.

So there was no hope?

How they were reacting to each other at the moment.

ŞTEFAN: I chose the 9th of Ones and the 111 card with a heart in it divided by three Swords (called Spades). In short, both cards indicated that he had stopped fighting.

So he did fight?

MEGARA: I chose the sun XV11 that apparently means she feels OK most of the time, but the next card was the Wheel of Fortune upside down which suggested she feels a great deal has changed for the worst. Things are not the same.

I imagined the atmosphere inside their home – tense, silent, each trapped inside their own anger.

BOTH MEGARA AND ŞTEFAN: I chose the X111 card that apparently means they are turning their backs on the situation. Thoughts of separation are present. The second card was the Temperance card X1V, but upside down. This suggested no inner happiness, quarrelling over stupid things.

I could imagine them! No peace! Was there hope in the fact they were quarrelling and considering separation? Yet the thought of him suffering at her hands pained me.

OUTCOME SUMMARY: This was revealed in the King of Swords card, which Kirsten said meant abuse . . . violence in words if not deeds.

Constant quarrels? Conquest – defeat? Defeat – conquest?

In dealing the cards to ask direct questions, I accidentally dropped one – the Devil.

‘Both of you need to turn to God for help!’

That statement took me aback! As far as I was concerned religion had no place in this! I chose cards to ask the outcome of all this for *me*. In short the cards pointed towards travel which could also be interpreted as travelling psychologically towards my innermost dreams.

Again ‘positive’ *or* ‘negative’.

How everything would eventually turn out was still an enigma. It appeared he was in a dangerous, desperate state of depression where he could do absolutely nothing. He had no love for anyone and could only rely on memories.

The outcome for him or for me could go one way or the other, but in general, unhappiness would prevail.

Then I was right.

There really was no hope.

I still didn't want to listen to all this, although deep in my heart I knew that if she'd 'killed' him in more ways than one, all the hoping in the world was not going to bring him back to me. Yet I was determined to go on keeping love in my heart . . . and go to Fujairah. After all this 'fortune telling' which uncannily pointed towards exactly how Ştefan and Megara were probably feeling and reacting, I realised it would be better if I didn't email him at the library again or make any contact whatsoever. From the start, jokey Sorkey had said I shouldn't run after him.

'Let him come to you, Glynissima. Don't make it easy for him!'

Yet how would Ştefan know I'd always love him if I didn't tell him; or that I'd wait, however long it took, while he was going through the 'angry period of grief', I'd passed through earlier? I'd have to think about it. Whatever happened I knew I mustn't react hastily. I'd already made three great mistakes. The first, not letting him come to me that first Monday after the holiday to return the new phone. The second, getting angry and not allowing him to explain why I must wait until after November 26<sup>th</sup>, and the third, ringing to say I'd seen him alone in the car.

It was good I'd planned to go away and people were keeping me busy. He'd only got his courses and a situation from which he couldn't escape. Soon it would get worse, for after next July he'd be at home the whole time! At home, and unable to escape the unrelenting accusations.

I decided to 'bank' all my jobs before leaving:

took four jackets to the tailor's shop down the road to have the shoulders lifted. (I'd lost so much weight they were hanging off me.);

took my high-heeled boots to be re-heeled at the shoe repairers;

paid a year in advance for the TV and Internet connection;

paid an advance for December/January for the two telephone lines;

had a pedicure and my fingernails trimmed and had my roots dyed.

Now all I had to do was look forward to seeing my daughter in Dubai and book a taxi for the morning. I felt a sense of achievement at having done all this – but the weather had turned much colder and it felt as though it would snow . . .

. . . And it did snow, all the way to the airport. The taxi followed a navy Renault saloon, but my initials were not on the number plate.

The plane to Istanbul was leaving from Gate 9; the Gate we'd used in the summer to go to Cyprus. On the plane to Dubai via Istanbul I looked at the In-flight magazine. The first page I opened showed a picture of the Taj Mahal. My body energized.

. . . Warm rain. Time eclipses. Expands. We wander bare-foot across grass lawns. Nothing else exists . . .

I shifted gear to reality and asked the stewardess for a Romanian newspaper. The strike was legal and likely to continue for another week. Until after Nov 26<sup>th</sup>? Was that what he was trying to tell me? How hard it must have been for him. No salary for four weeks! And still not much more than the old rate of a hundred dollars a month. I felt sorry for him. How could he possibly create a bathroom for his father on such a small income?

Three hours later I landed in Dubai.

The office driver met me and drove through the 'Son e Luminaire' of Downtown's art gallery of building designs towards my daughter's villa near Safa Park. Delia and her husband were welcoming as usual. My fourteen-year old grandson, James, often asked me to help him with his homework. A fast-growing, affectionate monster who devoured books. This time he was interested in an historical novel set in Venice, and the book's cover showed the Bridge of Sighs. Domes, spires and gondolas emerged from the text.

Everything reminded me of Ștefan.

Delia was enthusiastic over a course she had just attended on Regression Hypnosis and a film they had been shown called 'What the bleep do we know?'<sup>54</sup> It was about quantum physics and in particular centred on how the quality of thought can affect water. Apparently research had shown that molecules of water are shaken up considerably when someone is thinking angrily or anxiously. In contrast molecules remain calm when thoughts are calm. The participants were asked to imagine what damage such a disturbance could be done to bodily functions and organs considering we are made up of ninety percent water! Delia asked me to imagine it.

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<sup>54</sup> Arntz. William et al. Film dates from 2004.

I began, but the image of jumpy molecules having a nervous breakdown inside our bodies, amused me so much, that despite being distressed, I couldn't help corpsing.

My daughter's enthusiasm for hypnosis and past-life regression made me wonder if it might provide me with some answers. Was it all a coincidence that he'd left me after twenty-three happy years when he swore I was the one he considered his true wife, and that he loved me far more than I loved him? Or had it all been planned by fate, or 'the *bleep* past lives we don't know?' Delia said there was a Scottish lady who practised in Dubai and wondered if I'd like to go. Well, why not? But *after* my visit to Fujairah.

Leaving the sterile beauty of Dubai, I again set off with a driver. This time the journey took only an hour and a half, passing through desert and the almost bare Hajar mountains wimpled with waddies and a few wandering camels, while the glistening turquoise ocean suckled the sky over the Gulf of Oman, but I had no reason to eulogise. I arrived early and she came late. However, Diwata *was* expecting me and we had an hour and a half together before her first customer arrived. She was more dark-skinned than most Filipinos with black, straight hair that would have been a better advertisement for the salon if she'd bothered to style it a little. She wore an open pink nylon, short-sleeved overall over a white T-shirt and flounced down on the stool – no bra! – fanning out her cotton, navy, flared skirt while her natural, well-trimmed finger nails took one of my feet in her lap.

I was very surprised to find she was a Catholic, and that despite this, she practised certain gifts possessed also by her sister back in the Philippines; although she did confess her sister was much better at it than she was. I wondered if these 'gifts' could possibly be linked to the 'black arts'. Anyway I was only listening, and didn't have to carry out her advice! As I said, the photographs had taken one month to reach Dubai from Bucharest. So, ironically, when Ștefan had rung weekly for four weeks, and I had fondly imagined the 'voodoo' was working, the photos and money were still in the post!

How crazy was I getting?

I fought back the feeling that this visit to Fujairah was a complete waste of time and energy. Normally I would have laughed at my own stupidity in believing all this in the first place, but such was my desperation that I clung onto every word she said. Her friends who ran the church in the Philippines had received one photo and she'd kept the rest. She told me the money had gone to the poor of the church to buy food,

and at the start of the services everyone had been asked to pray for Ştefan and Glynis to be together again. Had they been told we were lovers and not a married couple? And in a *Catholic* Church?

I sat in one of the soft leather chairs in that pink windowless beauty-parlour gazing at the framed posters of attractive women with conservative hairstyles. Diwata sat on a stool at a small table close to me as she manicured my toenails.

In a low voice, she spoke of certain practices and how I should set about them.

As I listened in amused silence, I was aware of her scarlet-painted toe nails peering up at me from well-worn, open-toed sandals. She pushed back the wicks, while reassuringly explaining what she had done to win back her husband after she found he'd been with another woman. While she was applying the colour, I thought her last comments equivocal. Surely it was Megara who should be trying such things to win back her Ştefan!

However, having none of Ştefan's sweaty clothing in my apartment (apart from the precious T-shirt), nor any possibility of menstruation . . . and at the moment, no opportunity of seeing him either, it was impossible to carry out her advice. And although she swore me to secrecy, I can safely say, that if I *had* carried out those unhygienic instructions, he'd have probably been quite ill. I was secretly sceptical of her recipe for reunion, and quite relieved that she hadn't asked me to stick pins into an ageing, tall, slender, well-shaped doll, with a sharp nose, a painted mask for a face, and black, bouffant spun-sugar hair with auburn tints and white roots. Diwata said that her sister would have been able to say immediately whether Ştefan would ever come back to me, but was afraid I might harm myself if the answer was 'no'.

Was my mood so obvious?

I was curious, but feared the worst. I told her to ask, but not tell me . . . at least just now. Suddenly she said, 'You know I feel his father's dead or will be very soon, very soon.'

That was on November 23<sup>rd</sup>.

I didn't take much notice of this prediction, but remembered it!

Looking back, it was interesting that she never asked our ages. No doubt the same thing happened in the Philippines.

\* \* \*

It was a few days after this that I went to see the Scottish lady. I reckoned Delia would appreciate me taking up her offer.

She had a beautiful modern home with cats and crystals, Asian tapestries and low cushions, green plants in strategic places and four gardeners replanting the flower beds. I told her the tale, and surprisingly, wept. She was understanding, and eventually led me into a bedroom where I lay back on comfortable pillows under a covering of many shades of brown. She said that afterwards I would remember everything and there was nothing to be afraid of. She might also use crystals: small coloured stones that could be placed on different parts of the body. All I removed were my shoes.

It was a strange experience. Logic tried very hard not to be pushed out. It was as if I had split into two. I followed her instructions to close my eyes and relax. The very soft Scottish dialect and the rhythm of her sentences compelled me to listen. She asked me to find a safe place where I went to be calm and protected so that I could always go back there. I thought of the duck-pond I used to visit near my Wandsworth home, when life with three small children became difficult. I thought of a garden with flowers and peace. Tears began to stream down my face and my bottom lip started to quiver uncontrollably. I thought I must look as a young child does before the howls set in, but I ignored it and tried to concentrate.

‘What can you see?’

I struggled hard with eyes closed.

Logic stated bluntly, ‘What you always see with your eyes closed – some reflections of light through the eyelids. Trick of the retina!’ I peered hard and said I could only see clouds.

‘What sort of clouds?’

‘Cumulous,’ I heard myself saying. ‘That’s all. Behind is a deep blue but only edges of it. Now I’m coming down.’

‘What can you see?’

‘Woods. Tops of trees. Large woods.’

‘And what are in the woods?’

I paused, my head turned to the right to follow the downward progress, ‘I’m not down yet. It’s a long way.’

I wished she would give me time. I needed more time. Logic came back to insist it was the light from the window on the left that created this illusion.



‘Now I’m in the wood. It’s a clearing.’ She prompted me with more questions. Suddenly I was aware of being in a place I concluded must be a sort of castle. First I’d seen the low pyramid-shaped turrets. I waited.

Then I was aware of old kitchens, hooks high up, a fire burning in an enormous fireplace. Logic again . . . Probably Mediaeval! Then that vanished and there were outer stone walls – close up. Old walls. And where I thought there’d been a window was just a hole in the wall as if a canon had blasted it. I told her.

Another question: ‘Can you see yourself?’

Long pause . . .

‘No.’

‘What sex are you?’

‘Female.’

‘Can you see your feet or what you are wearing?’

‘No.’

But then I saw the square windows, two of them high up, and another, rectangular-shaped with patterned glass, so clear I could have drawn them.

I was aware of someone standing at a stone bridge not far from what I presumed was the entrance to a courtyard.

He stood still and light shone from him.

‘Can you see his face?’

‘No, he’s in armour. I think he’s guarding me.’

I was now conscious of my fingers and hands being very stiff, as if afraid.

‘What’s happening now?’

I paused a long time.

‘It’s the woods again. I’m running. I think I’m running from the castle. I’ve escaped. I’m running in and out of the trees, alongside a river, and then back into the trees again, and then there’s a . . . I hesitate for I cannot describe anything except to say ‘It’s some kind of barn, there’s hay and there are ducks, geese . . . I hide in the hay. I can’t see myself as me, but I can see what the girl’s wearing. It’s a long brown skirt with a whitish apron and some kind of white headgear that hides her hair.’

Logic puts bars on the image. It’s just your imagination. You’re making up this story and you will say Ştefan comes to you because that is what you want to happen. How do you know you’re not just making this up? This makes me hesitate a long time. I become unsure of what’s happening, but then continue: ‘A man comes. I’m

afraid at first, but he's protective and loving. He's handsome, I'm attracted to him. I tell him something urgently. He pushes me back into the hay. His hands explore my body. Gently, but urgently. I don't resist. We make love there. I like it. No, I don't know his name.'

'Well, if you did know what would it be?'

Long pause where logic attempts to creep in again.

'Thomas,' I say, but feel it's not correct.

'What is *your* name?'

Again, 'I don't know. He calls me something like Tina'

'If you did know what would it be?'

Long pause.

'Bettina'. Logic laughed, but it was distant. 'That's the name of a child play-mate of yours still in your memory-banks!' I took no notice but with questions and answers went on to describe their life together.

'They lived together. She had a child, a girl. He often went away. Something to do with music. Then there were battles. I think he was forced to go to fight. He could ride a horse. I had to fend for myself. I worked in the fields.

'What happened after that?'

'Someone told me he'd died. Drowned when he fell. There was shouting.

He was chased and tried to ford a river that was too deep. Swept away in the dark.' Suddenly the words were coming out without meditation.

'What happened to you after this?'

'I died in labour. Raped. No, I'm no longer there. I'm looking down from a distance.

'Can you see your body?'

'It's buried.'

Suddenly the cats started to fight loudly in the hall and shortly after the gardeners outside started banging with something. I moved into consciousness secretly cursing the bloody cats and the men; for I was fascinated by what was happening. The soft voice ignored these sounds and said that she would rest her hand on certain parts of my body very lightly and that I should tell her what I feel or see.

The vaginal area: 'A waterfall.'

'Beautiful,' the soft voice uttered.

The lower part of the womb: ‘Narrow streams of illuminated water across the body.’

Again came, ‘How beautiful.’

The heart: I paused, ‘A heavy dark weight in a dim light.’

My forehead: ‘Head pains.’

A real headache seemed to have suddenly started.

I then considered that the light was probably the light-bulb that must be on above me. She told me that she would place the crystals on various parts while I tried to go back as far as I could over time and space. Now the sky was a light creamy yellow. The colour seen after a storm. I waited, again turning my head to the right – to ‘see’ better – to follow the movement. Then I began to smile, a broad smile of pleasure and disbelief for I had seen curled fringes above my eye level dismissing logic’s explanation that they were eyelashes, for they curled the wrong way.

‘I think I’m in a nest. In a nest on top of a mountain!’

‘Are you flying?’

‘No, I must wait.’

‘Why?’

Why must she always interrupt just when I am entering this amazing scene? I struggled to get the words out.

‘Grow. I have to grow!’ I heard myself saying very slowly. The words now coming from my mouth as if from a great distance, still with difficulty. One word answers not sentences. Then . . . ‘Flying . . . wind.’

Suddenly I felt cold and said so.

‘Cold.’ I felt the cold rush of air on my face. Logic leaped back.

‘She’s put the air conditioner on. That’s what you’re feeling.’

‘What do you think is the relevance of what you have experienced for you and Ștefan?’

I thought, eyes still closed . . . ‘Don’t know.’

Again, the reversal: ‘If you did know, what would it be? Just say what comes into your mind. You’re doing very well, Glynis.’

‘I must wait . . . be loving.’

‘And the significance of the twenty three years?’

‘I really don’t know. Can’t say.’

‘What does your heart look like now?’

I focused on imaging my heart. To my surprise there was no heavy weight just a slight shadow to the left of it with a stronger coloured black dot within the shaded part. The rest was growing lighter.

She finished at that point. I opened my eyes. She removed all the small stones that were scattered over me. The headache had gone. I looked up. There was no light bulb, just a round woven paper ball of a lampshade that would have shielded any bulb had it been lit.

‘Tell me did you turn on the air conditioning during the session?’

‘No, it hasn’t been on all day.’ The room had been the same temperature throughout – quite warm.

‘But I actually felt the cold air on me and I was cold all over.’

‘Yes, that sometimes happens,’ she assured me.

‘And the tears and my bottom lip . . . was that normal?’

‘Yes. Sometimes people scream or cry out.’

‘What about me finding myself in a nest?’

‘That was the start of your Great Nest of Being. You have travelled through different time periods on your spiritual journey. Have you heard of the Ken Wilber’s work?’<sup>55</sup>

‘He’s New Age isn’t he? I’ve heard my daughter mention him, but I’ve not read any of his books.’

‘He is a philosopher and transpersonal psychologist, but his theory’s complicated, so I won’t share it just now. If you’re interested his first book was ‘The Theory of Everything’, but his collected works came out in 2000.’

I thanked her and went back to Delia’s in a taxi.

It was as though something had been lifted from my heart, but not destroyed. A steady warmth, a growing patience – and the urge to kill myself had definitely faded.

As to finding Ştefan in my past lives, I didn’t think that had been successful. Perhaps I needed more sessions when I could push reality further into the background.

I borrowed Delia’s laptop and amused myself by looking up the origins of the names ‘Thomas’ and ‘Bettina’.

‘Bettina’ was a diminutive of ‘Elizabeth’, but was also Italian and its original meaning was ‘The oath of God’. The name ‘Thomas’ had its origins in Aramaic and

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<sup>55</sup> Ken Wilber et al. *The Integral Vision*.

was then pronounced ‘Ta-mas’ – just as it is in France. It had links with Judas in the Bible, and meant ‘twin’. Interesting! Then I began to think of the ‘castle’ I had seen. It hadn’t seemed like an English castle. There were no crenulations or narrow slits of windows. Perhaps it was in Europe.

I dismissed it all and concentrated on enjoying the few days I had left of my short break with my daughter. Then I flew back to Romania with Emirate Airlines. Their planes have a camera just to the right of the cockpit, so as to film ‘take off’ and ‘landing’ and give their passengers the feeling of actually flying. I smiled to myself. The baby eagle had grown!

## A Parallel Universe

8.

*(At the moment the emotional umbilical cord is finally severed, the searching child in Glynis is caught in a maelstrom whose uproar crashes against her ears. Eventually, she seeks sanctuary within the dance of wounded souls until she escapes into a parallel universe.)*

After that, my Irish friend invited me to go away with him for two days. I declined. Judy had to postpone her visit until the end of February, and I still had a teaching commitment, organised by the British Council. I'd planned to use some lectures on Brecht I'd prepared at Queen Mary's, create some challenging handouts, get them to work in groups and hope for the best.

The strike was over.

Ştefan's university classes had started again. Would he ring? I made sure I left my class on time so as to be alone – just in case. If only he too had Skype, how easy it might be to get over this hurdle.

\* \* \*

Two weeks snailed by. I didn't bother to visit Cişmigiu to watch the children ice-skating, or enjoy a plum brandy from one of the kiosks set up for Christmas. I wrapped the grandchildren's presents, packed, and was all ready to set off for London trying hard to regurgitate the jollity of past festivities. My son and his family were soon to move from near the Round House in London to live in Warwick, and as their home would no doubt be chaotic with packing, I planned to stay in a small hotel nearby.

All went well with the flight to Stanstead, and I was met, kissed, hugged and chatted to as we headed westwards towards Camden. On the third day of the holiday we were all in a jolly mood rejoicing at my grand-daughter's success in the school concert. Children's laughter and happiness are always infectious, so while they were out of the room I decided to ring Ştefan's mobile. It would be his last day of teaching before the holiday and he would have finished by half-past five. It was around that time in Romania, so I rang.

To my surprise another man's voice answered. I was tentative. 'Ştefan?' I ventured. 'Ştefan, I was worried about you . . .'

The man explained in Romanian, 'A Ştefan is not here. Wrong number!'

I checked the number with him and he said it was correct.

'A Ştefan Anghelache was not at that number.'

Immediately I rang Aura in Bucharest asking her to check it out and question this strange man a little further. She did so and rang me straight back. The man had received the number from the telephone firm CONNEX.

There was only one explanation. Ştefan had changed his number so that I could never contact him again. I was stunned. It was the final blow and his action made very clear statements:

'You're not going to catch me out in any more lies and make me feel even guiltier than I do already.'

'You know the hours I work and so I feel very vulnerable. In your desperation you might phone when someone is with me.'

'Keep away. I no longer want you anywhere in my life.'

'I want to forget you.'

'I don't want you ringing on my name day or my birthday and reminding Megara of the whole incident all over again.'

'I can't bear to hear your voice for it tears at my heart when I want you but can't have you. I have to be cruel to be kind.'

'Now go and find another man and forget me.'

I burst into tears.

My son John came into the room and I told him what had happened. He and his wife had never questioned my relationship, rejoicing in the fact that at my age I was still enjoying all aspects of life. He pulled me close and held me tight.

**The man's mobile phone rings. He rises to hunt for it in his overcoat pockets. Answers it. Whoever is at the other end gets a short, sharp response. He glances at his watch, speaks a few more words and then stuffs it angrily into his jacket pocket. He shivers slightly, goes over to feel the small radiator that is no longer warm. He rubs his veined, stiff hands together, then sits again to read. As he does so, from time to time he places alternate hands under his armpits.**

Back in Bucharest.

I woke startled with a sudden realisation. Ştefan had blamed me! He'd said it was all my fault – said that I had flirted with him, chased him, kept telephoning, pursued him! Could he really have done that? It would certainly account for the hushed whispers in their Paphos Hotel room, the sudden departure, Megara insisting that neither of them see me again, the email that Ştefan sent on their behalf: *In the last days we were in Cyprus you know very well what happened.* Then finally changing the number of his mobile phone! Had he wriggled out of his dilemma by accusing me? It all became logical, but could he really have been driven to go that far out of fear? After all he had always said he'd never told anyone of our affair. As far as he was concerned there was absolutely no evidence that he was to blame! Megara would certainly have warmed to this suggestion seeing that I lavished so much money on them. Why else would I have done it? She wasn't to know generosity was in my nature. 'A born philanthropist to the point of foolishness!' the family joked. Ştefan probably said: 'She did it just so she could be with me. I took no part in it, but agreed, as you seemed to enjoy the perks, which we can't afford, but personally I am innocent and saw no harm in it as long as I didn't respond! But if it upsets you, we can stop it simply by not seeing her anymore. It doesn't bother me, but you will miss out! I can't afford to take you to restaurants or on expensive holidays like we've just had!'

And later: 'She tried to ring me so I am going to change my mobile phone number!' It all made sense – tragic sense. Eventually Megara would have acquiesced and the final move of changing the phone number would have proved his innocence beyond all doubt! I desperately needed some sign that this wasn't the reality. I'd just have to wait and see. I'd heard his father had died and desperately wanted to console him knowing how devastated he would feel. I told Aura I'd give him a year.

In the hairdressers I picked up an English magazine and flicked it open at HOROSCOPES.

*AQUARIUS, the Water Bearer – As the Sun and Mercury are in Aquarius all plans and decisions should be very carefully made and well calculated. However as Venus is retrograde all love life will be on hold until the summer.*

*ARIES, The Ram – Venus has gone backwards and this will affect love. There will be a period of frustration and waiting.*



I'd give him a year.

'And then what?' Aura enquired anxiously.

'Then I'll have to give him up for good.'

'Oh, dearest, I am so relieved. I had in mind you might kill yourself, and he's not worth it. That man! It hurts me to see how much he has pained you. Look, how you are losing weight! But you won't leave us, will you my dear?'

Kill myself? At that stage . . . I didn't know? Leave Romania for good? That thought hadn't crossed my mind – until then.

One night I took Lavinia out to dinner. It was the first time I'd seen her since I'd returned from Cyprus. Conversation turned to the holiday and I asked her what she meant by Ştefan and Megara 'playing games' while unaware they were doing so. She explained they were exhibiting 'Passive – Aggressive' behaviour. I didn't fully understand so she explained:

'You see a dysfunctional relationship is when a power struggle develops between a couple as to who is right and who is wrong. It's very common in couples who have no children. You see there are no winners, and when one of them is dominant the other pulls away and vice versa. If the first person doesn't react, the other backs down and pleads to be let in again. Like a tug of war really.'<sup>56</sup>

'Why should they do that?'

'It's about a self that's been wounded and remains unhealed. Difficult to explain and understand, I know! He especially will have been taught either by education or religion that if something bad happens, it's because they have done something wrong. Another reason is they feel life is a test where they are seen as failures if they don't live life according to others' expectations.'

'Well, that certainly makes sense!'

'Such people usually live in fear and have a great feeling of shame. It affects their personality and a strict orthodox background would certainly emphasise such feelings.'

'That explains a lot... his shame, guilt, pride.'

'I think it does. Oh, by the way, I heard his father died a few days ago. That's going to have an effect on him too.'

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<sup>56</sup> Based on Robert Burney's *The Dance of Wounded Souls* (see Burney).

Poor Ștefan. He had a great bond with his father. All this gave me food for thought for many days. Ștefan and Megara appeared perfectly normal when entertaining guests at home. Perhaps they only behaved in this strange way when I was around. Lavinia's reference to religion and guilt when applied to their lives certainly did give some foundation for the behaviour we had witnessed.

In the meantime, I thought I may as well telephone Diwata in Fujairah to see if she has spoken to her sister yet. Her first words as she answered were, 'His father's dead, isn't he? I told you it had happened or probably would do so while you were here. Simply wait,' she said, 'he'll come to you eventually. Just wait and we'll go on trying to help you! Keep in touch!'

\* \* \*

How traumatic it must have been for Ștefan to go to his village for his father's funeral. When the last parent dies one senses life's road shorten. Suddenly, you see yourself near the front of Death's queue. Until that moment '*it's they who are old, not us . . .*' as the Romanian poet, Marin Sorescu said in one of his poems.<sup>57</sup> Now Ștefan would be depressed at the thought of advancing age. Megara's family would now consider *him* the eldest and therefore, old. With me, he never considered himself 'old'. We rescued one another from the edge of that slippery-edged precipice. Our life-scape was never every-day time. We were the 'young old' and it was star-time; even though we both knew death could only be postponed, not cancelled. Now he would have many decisions to make about the family home, the land, how to make it safe from thieves and vandals, whether or not to sell. There were no relatives left, and who would buy a house with no bathroom, built at the edge of a farming village, nestled on poor soil, surrounded by an uninteresting flat plain miles from any real modern civilisation or large town? He'd often considered living there himself when he retired but Megara had no intention of going, and at the last discussion, he'd given up the idea. Now it might be different! The old village of Șerbănești struggled to survive along with straggled hollyhocks that scaled fences in summer; fences erected to support pale roses. In winter, the snow would be guarding doors to keep souls

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<sup>57</sup> Marin Sorescu. "Everyone."

under house-arrest. Only when it thawed would the snow's snail-trail flee into the flat distance carrying hardship on its back. The iced ruts would be empty as no one could afford to plant or reap. I imagined the meagre wisps of smoke from chimneys straining to reach heaven before the occupants of the dilapidated houses.

The women usually wore black, as if to be ready.

Only Death seemed to reap at regular intervals, but had had to wait for Daniel Anghelache – ninety-three years.

I had always fondly imagined Ștefan would want to be buried in his village cemetery with his parents, and that one of my friends would manage to scatter some of my ashes on the same spot: half with him and the other half in England with Edward.

Megara had doused such romanticism informing me cheerfully that they'd bought a plot for the two of them in the main Bucharest cemetery. She'd insisted it had been done now in case Ștefan predeceased her – and after all 'they were getting old!' I'd wanted to yell at her that 'Yes, age is inevitable but we are all healthier now and are likely to live much longer as long as we keep active. We should think positively and enjoy the years we have left. Stop telling Ștefan he's old!' But I kept quiet, while my head nodded automatically like a toy-dog in the back of a car. She never considered *herself* old so why did she try to brain-wash him?

That year winter came and went in the city, and the average temperature was zero. Snow made a half-hearted effort to return. It no longer clung to my boots and there were no drifts to hug the fields like two lovers hating to part; not even an east wind to scourge the flakes into a Hora.<sup>58</sup>

This snow lay thin, lifeless over shiny rooftops and pot-holed pavements. It settled and seemed united, yet by morning it had gone, unlike our memories.

More friends emailed me with advice –

'You have to accept that he has decided in the last years of his life to do the decent thing and stay faithful to his wife.'

I should have remembered how this particular lady's husband had led *her* a 'merry dance', flirting with others while in her company. It was so blatant, and he was so horrid in public, that everyone felt sorry for her. But it wasn't like that with Ștefan.

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<sup>58</sup> A Romanian 'round' dance, progressive in speed..

‘From the sound of it he’s trying to be true to the situation, but if I were in your place, I don’t know what I’d do!’

She was likening it to her own experience. Yet each person’s love is unique. It’s hard to draw conclusions by comparison. I’d begun to wonder whether people viewed *me* negatively. My friend Alexandru seemed to do so. Now he was aware of recent events, he’d changed his tune completely and declared that when we’d all been on holiday together in Lesbos it was really Ștefan who had annoyed him not Megara. He said he’d blamed her at the time only because he knew how much I was in love! In retrospect he now viewed her as the deceived wife who acted naturally ‘according to her mind’, and Ștefan and I as the wicked pair who should ‘go to church and seek forgiveness’.

Was love then really a ‘demon in one’s heart’?<sup>59</sup>

I entered the 18th week from our parting.

It was the first week I’d really been alone and two weeks of emptiness loomed ahead.

An Irish friend rang to say he’d be in Bucharest at the beginning of April and would take me to see *Chicago* at the National Theatre. It was a friendly gesture and very welcome. We were to go for a meal afterwards at ‘The Bistro’ where there was always live music: usually two excellent violin students from the Conservatoire playing, ‘Eine Kleine Nachtmusik’. Once, he and a few other ex-pat business men, of all ages and nationalities, had started reciting poetry there. Poems they had learnt by heart as children. Romania was full of such cultural surprises.

I moved the piano into the sitting room so I’d be tempted to play again. Music breeds music. Poetry breeds poetry. Does love then breed love? Can one just be in love with love and nothing more? Years ago, when I told my old school friend, Carol, about my love for Ștefan, she’d said, ‘Oh Glynis, you don’t really love him. You just love being in love and playing the part.’ Who was it suggested that ‘falling in love involves telling ourselves stories about falling in love’? Barthes? Lacan? Or was it Freud?

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<sup>59</sup> Jacques Derrida. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. “Che cos’è la poesia?” *Points ... Interviews 1974-1994*. See Derrida.

I then made a special effort to fulfil all the chores of cleaning up, waiting for hours in long queues to pay household bills, watering the plants, and with even more effort forced myself to go swimming again. Why did memories or concerns about Ștefan and Megara keep snagging my mind? I came back to the idea that he'd blamed me for everything. He could always invent excuses on the spur of the moment – or so he'd told me. Although the email had stated: '*She is thinking still we are guilty, both*', the statement is clearly ambiguous and could read: '*She is still convinced we are both guilty, but I have told her it was all your doing. You were chasing me!*'

Was it so? Had I chased him? All those years, had I been the guilty one? Many would probably think so, but it never felt that way. It was a communion. We had our own reality. Our own second parallel universe. Now it was really parallel. Two lines that would meet only in infinity. Two lights never able to blow each other out. Two lovers unable to reach each other. Parallel lives? No, parallel losers. Just two romantics who once found ourselves admiring the same view, although it now seems Ștefan always saw a sunset and I a dawn. For twenty-three years we revelled in our own imaginations swearing we were realists as nightingales sang in crimson trees. Then that summer he'd carelessly pushed our world aside and left me sitting there staring into space still believing I could see the dawn.

I once thought that waiting was relative; that one could contract time so that it seemed only a day had passed, only a day. After all, distance has no meaning when things can't be seen. He was probably wishing he could get rid of *me* to somewhere, or else he was hoping to make me so miserable and angry that I would pack up and return to England. Well . . . perhaps I would.

\* \* \*

A few weeks later, a Romanian friend and translator from English into Romanian rang to tell me that an extract of a love scene from one of Ștefan's plays, together with his photograph, had appeared in 'Romania Literara' and she was sure the part that began with '*Only you*', was meant for me. The seesaw suddenly banged me down hard on its opposite end and I rushed out to buy a copy. I easily sifted out the metaphysically expressed references to the past few months, but to be quite sure, I asked Aura to help me translate them. Ștefan and I had corresponded in the old days

like this and so perhaps we could again. I needed to write something, get it translated, and then ask my friend to present it to the same newspaper for possible publication.

With her influence it might just be possible.

Mine would also need to be metaphysically expressed, hidden behind other possible interpretations, typical of Romanian writing before the Revolution when, as there was no samizdat literature and all typewriters were registered, censorship was rife and threatening. I had checked the titles with the indices in his published plays. None had been published previously. *'Only You'* in translation read:

(An imprisoned soldier speaks to his lover as he awaits execution):

*Only you and two or three clouds full of illusions fly towards my water meadows from the city of signs where most of the gates are locked. Happy are those who defeat fear to breathe together in this rounded sphere, this immensity which, like you, is always near. Happy are those whose bodies defy age when seen through one another's eyes. Death shall never part us, nor fear destroy our souls.*

*Here our thoughts meet only at the crossroads of our imaginings, to blend with rocks, those poor trees and rain-grey skies, above that old man's head. When splashed with colour, the world, with its icy fronds seems to wait for us in expectation, with its images solid as ancient stone. You know our gold is stored deep within it like a pain that avenges happiness or like a hot iron that heals the skin. Those days haunt us. Even the sunset has no desire to set and seems settled on the cross of forgetting; the cross in the silence of a small chapel with its chimera enticing, malicious in colour.*

*Hours have set my feet in stone. Only ugliness rises in this serene sphere. Why? Why? What a question! Nothing for nothing! What could be fairer? Yet, how molten you are in every cell. You're the one who could always bring a glint of tomorrow that now fades from our night. You're the only one to help me into the boat for the last crossing. Everything that's waiting becomes unpassable. Everything that falls becomes polluted. Even the spirit is created from image and willpower, an image turned inside out, a body of flesh that disappears. I can no longer absorb the empty face. No warm cloaks of moments without action, nor suffering without moments and no love without you. Remember me! (He is led away.)*

References to recent events in Cyprus and to my feelings were obvious.

Every line contained something that could be interpreted as a message: his desperation and torment over recent events, tossed and turned in the titanic waves of

his personal metaphysical ocean. I recognised his images and references to inaction for we always used similar poetic prose.

I sat down at the laptop and typed a short extract in response.

Unaware of time, words flew from my fingers.

Eventually, I went to Aura who planned to translate it while I was away and then present it for publication.

Extract from the play, *HADRIAN'S WALL*

*And in time we too will be ruins, bones stretched out across a lifetime – All things are relative and perhaps one day someone might find we're useful after all! Here's an eye – they'll say – we can patch up someone's face, and piece by piece they'll loot; creating Picasso out of night. And as people gather to stare will they ever marvel at the love once there? Or when a gate opens in a glance will you enter my estate? Will you still preserve me in your bed of peace 'unmourned, and unknown, covered by the long night'<sup>60</sup> with the forgotten people of another age whose indifference cast you out? You are like the shadow of a prispa,<sup>61</sup> I, the shade of the dwelling we shared, as the winds works loose the soil from our bones.*

\* \* \*

I'd been trying to acquire the latest National Geographic magazine,<sup>62</sup> as apparently there was an article there about the chemistry of love. Then unexpectedly on the television they referred to this particular research in a programme on the growth of adolescence and adolescent behaviour.

Apparently, when one falls madly in love, the brain registers in both lobes at a particular place. These markers are quite different from those illuminated by the computer when lust is involved, highlighting the difference between Love and Lust.

So is love chemistry? Or does this intense feeling produce the chemical response?

Ștefan was a great admirer of the Romanian philosopher, Constantin Noica,<sup>63</sup> and often spoke of him over the years. However, it was my friend, Sorela, who reminded me of Noica's comments: *'I feel I can sever myself from you. I love you so much, that*

<sup>60</sup> Taken from Horace *Odes*, bk. IV.

<sup>61</sup> 'roofed veranda'

<sup>62</sup> Lauren Slater. "True Love." See Slater.

<sup>63</sup> Constantin Noica. "Fragmente." *Jurnal filozofic*. See Noica.

*something inside me has been fulfilled – and now I can sever myself from you*'. He was speaking of an occasion when events may become so bad, that it would be better for the couple to separate. We talked for a long time and considered many possibilities including the fact that Ștefan may have fallen in love with someone else – I didn't think so. That he may have felt he could no longer make love? – No, that definitely wasn't the reason. That Megara had known all the time and before the revolution saw it as an advantage to be in communication with someone from England, but when she saw the relationship getting too serious, decided to act? – There was no evidence of this. That they both knew and used me for what they could get out of it until she decided enough was enough? – Definitely not! That I threatened his safe world of 'lies within lies': a world that he and Megara, like many other communists, had inhabited all their lives? Now that *was* possible!

Suddenly, the image was clear: a safe room in which they'd locked themselves. The walls of respectability were secure as long as no one tried to enter or penetrate them surreptitiously. The space within, that had expanded over the years, was now suddenly on the verge of being broken into. I was the threat. The walls had to be protected at all cost, at any cost, and by them both.

I understood. Although in a way, I'd always understood.

It was such an old fashioned attitude and one I'd lived through as a child. One that can still be experienced today if the society or community is remote, small, religious, or very traditional. In the past to sin in any way was condemned, but the sin of sex before marriage, adultery or homosexuality was the most serious. Such sinners were ostracised from the rest of the community and many believed they would end up in hell.

In general this was the case in the UK as late as 1970, yet nowadays couples in Western countries, even at our age, live together out of wedlock, many men and women, given the chance, have extramarital relationships, divorce is commonplace and couples of whatever sexual orientation marry or form a civil partnership with the blessing of the state.

As we are living longer, are healthier, such relationships are now normal.

In Romania, many of the older generation still found such things difficult to accept, while others revelled in their individual tastes. Sometimes, it was simply a matter of not having the opportunity to meet someone new. However, the influence of



the internet was playing a large part in changing attitudes of the young towards such things and no doubt in the future those over sixty would benefit too.

Sorela was a psychologist and agreed with Lavinia's diagnosis that it was in the Anghelaches' interest psychologically to move from one role to the other. As she offered to explain in more depth, I invited her over for a drink. Appropriately, she brought a bottle of 'Lacrima lui Ovidiu'.<sup>64</sup> I asked if she thought their problem originated from the fact that they had no children.

'Certainly, this plays a part, but the dysfunctional relationship of demand/withdraw behaviour could have originated from their upbringing. You say Megara enjoys playing the helpless woman? Well this is because she gains from it, while he gains from being on the receiving end.'

'I wonder where my needs fit in?'

'This first life of his obviously fulfils the stronger need. His second life with you fulfils a very different one.'

'What would happen if Megara died before me? How would he fulfil his first need then? Do you think he would transfer it to me? I'm by no means helpless and he knows this. In fact it seems to attract him.'

'He might expect you to play the helpless role so he can keep his chauvinism, imprinted from upbringing and peer group pressure. We women know from experience that chauvinism in Romania is alive and kicking!'

What were *my* needs?

To prove that lasting romantic love and beauty could exist in reality as well as in literature? If so, I think it was Ștefan's too. To find a soul mate that would link with past and future lives? Ștefan was very wary about believing in life after death. He tended to think that when death came there would be only blackness and that the only 'afterlife' was in our DNA. As neither of his sisters had produced offspring, he felt very hesitant about anything that suggested otherwise. Neither of us planned to live if we became so ill that we became a burden to others, and hoped we'd be able to die with dignity. To me, 'death' was just peace and a bright light.

'In this relationship with Ștefan I've enjoyed having a courteous, strong man by my side; enjoyed feeling protected . . .'

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<sup>64</sup> 'Tears of Ovidiu'. A sweet white wine.

Memories cut into the conversation as we paused to sip the sweetness of Ovid's tears . . . when he thwarted an attempt to snatch my handbag in Barcelona, when he held an umbrella over me when it poured in Strasbourg. The welcoming arm across my shoulder when strolling or observing a fine view; and how I longed to feel his chest resting against my back in a crowded lift . . .

Sorela's voice broke in . . . 'I know some things are easier for a man to do, but here the male does tend to dominate unless the partnership is dysfunctional.'

' . . . and so let me do it!' Ştefan would plead. I never minded this – as long as he understood I could do the job if warranted.

After Sorela had left, I considered what she had said. All this analysis did not change my determination to stay loving and patient throughout the coming months.

\* \* \*

At half-past five each afternoon I noticed it growing lighter. We were nearing the end of February. I listened to Euro News and learned the Pope had been making his Vatican address again.

Pope Benedict XVI had stated that these days human love has a tendency to be nothing more than lust unless it is on a higher plain – a spiritual one.<sup>65</sup> The love that Ştefan and I possessed for each other had always been on a spiritual plain. Poets talk romantically of the elements, cold stars, the moon, the Milky Way, when actually asteroids, comets and, the worst monsters of all, black holes, are moving nearer to destroy earth and everything on it. At the moment Jupiter is earth's shield; its whipping boy, receiving blows from asteroids that were on a collision course for earth. However, were that planet to be destroyed by a 'feeding' black hole, the sun would be next, and finally us. Scientists have discovered that the centre of our galaxy is actually a black hole, whose gravitational pull is stronger than that of anything else in the universe, and that it is slowly pulling everything towards it.<sup>66</sup> There are many others that astronomers just cannot see, but know they are there. They unravel matter and suck it into their vortex until the whole planet disappears. Asteroids and comets

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<sup>65</sup> Pope Benedict, XVI. First encyclical "Deus Caritas Est . . ."

<sup>66</sup> K.E. Sage. "What Happens to Quantum Information When Ingested by a Black Hole?" See Sage.

have reached earth before and are likely to do so again. It is only a matter of time: a million years, a thousand, a hundred, less? So how can writers use such deceptive terms?

How can a creator be worshipped who has planned such an intricate and powerful force of destruction? Or has virtual reality progressed so far that we are live characters performing in a new technology? Are there Child Gods who play the game of 'build a planet', the rules being that each sets traps to see who can be first to destroy their planet by sucking everything out of it until the core collapses? Winner takes all? Do the laws of physics apply to human nature as well? Do we attract only to destroy? Does the one with the strongest gravitational/emotional pull lure the other into a black hole or are we manipulated by a powerful outside force so that we collapse together into a hell on earth?

So many questions. I grew tired. Another week of being addicted to love.

Do drug addicts, when being rehabilitated, dream of cocaine, of touching it, of longing just to see it? I had my doubts until I discovered the research in the December 2001 edition of *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*. Sorela had passed it on to me as she thought I'd be interested. Apparently, eighty-one percent of forty-one crack cocaine abusers had related drug dreams during the first month of rehabilitation and sixty point nine percent at the sixth month follow up: dreams mainly of using or refusing the drug.<sup>67</sup> However, a better treatment outcome was associated with dream frequency. Conclusion: more research needed to explore the progression of dreams during treatment as a predictive tool. Now what someone needs to do is explore the relationship between a Love rehabilitation programme and one for Cocaine! What a great subject for a doctoral thesis! One might also look at what registers in the brain when a very religious person views a picture of Christ or the Madonna, for there is surely a connection.

\* \* \*

Lavinia and I had a long talk in a restaurant about the hold Megara appears to have over Ştefan. Lavinia was convinced that Ştefan had done something really bad in the past and Megara had threatened to reveal it unless he agreed never to see me again. I

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<sup>67</sup> Sandra D. Ried and Donald T. See Ried.

wasn't so sure, although I did remember him once saying to me that he was not the good person I thought he was and that he'd done things of which he was ashamed. The subject also came round as to why Megara pretended to be stupid when she was not. It was certainly an enigma. I suggested that Megara might do this to seek attention when I was around because I had never seen them reveal such behaviour in their own home or when I was there among the guests. Yet it did happen if we were on a trip somewhere. Perhaps it was linked to her insecurity. Then this didn't tie up with the fact that Megara had held a position of authority.

Also, she was probably a Party member.

I managed to get hold of Helen Fisher's book, *Why We Love*,<sup>68</sup> to discover more about love and obsessive-compulsive disorder having a similar chemical profile. The book was fascinating. Fisher writes that love and mental illness may be difficult to tell apart and suggested it is foolish to indulge in great passion. Far better to keep one's distance. She questions why passionate love doesn't last. Don't twenty-three years reveal that in some cases this is just not true? According to biochemists this feverish stage burns out 'perhaps because the brain cannot maintain the intense neural activity of infatuation'. According to this anthropologist, 'pair bonding is ultimately driven by the mating instinct wired into the most primitive part of our brains that seeks to pass on our DNA'. Romantic love is drenched in dopamine while the quieter calmer stages are said to be induced by a hormone called Oxytocin. Dopamine has been shown to be triggered by novelty that leads to attraction. So much for myths and the Romantics! Well, Ştefan and I certainly had 'novelty' but also steady calm periods like a man and wife meeting after two or three weeks away from each other, only to find their passion unflinched.

\* \* \*

April. My seventy-first birthday came and went. As I had nothing to celebrate, I decided to stay at home all day on my own and do absolutely nothing apart from work

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<sup>68</sup> Helen Fisher. *Why We Love. The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love*.

on my laptop, and drink wine. People kept ringing, flowers kept arriving, but Ștefan didn't call.

Once I rejoiced in living through a key moment in history, joining the crowds on the street to see Bush and Clinton; rejoiced at the magical changes that appeared like hidden presents on a treasure hunt; attended open-air concerts in the square in front of the Parliament where I heard Pavarotti with Plácido Domingo and José Carreras and in 1995, during the Enescu International Festival in the Atheneum Concert Hall watched Yehudi Menuhin conduct the visiting London Philharmonic, – but now all I noticed were things unkempt and felt myself growing more and more irritated with the Romanian attitude to maintenance and care. The library building was just another edifice and no one bothered to remove the graffiti from the newly painted exterior. My eyes no longer scanned the streets for Ștefan, and no doubt the only reason *he'd* be scanning them would be to *avoid* me.

To me, Megara was one of the Furies.<sup>69</sup> She really *had* killed something in him; all warmth and love. She was no Pearl! All sympathetic thoughts put aside, I envisaged her castrating him with cruel words, whenever she wanted to get her way, knowing what he must be going through and enjoying every moment. 'Only bad things,' he'd said. I should have only pity for him, but he was obviously blaming me for his unquiet soul. My fighting spirit circled within me, but a maternal instinct to protect and heal kept it well-caged.

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<sup>69</sup> 'Megara' in Roman mythology was one of the Furies and the personification of jealousy and vengeance. It is still given as a first name to children in Europe as the name also means 'Pearl'.

## Past Shadows Invade the Present

## 9.

*(Scenes change in quick succession. Schools, air-raids, hospice, graveyard. Shadows invade past innocence).*

In May 2005, an invitation arrived from the UK for an Old Girls' School Reunion in my home town. I thought it would be interesting to go. I would hire a car and might even drive across to Wales to see Edward's memorial that my daughters had chosen to erect over his ashes. I hoped I could grieve properly there, for over the years I'd never allowed grief free-fall.

Alone, I dared to let my thoughts re-enter the room of the hospice the night Edward died.

Although all our married life had been happy with the usual 'ups and downs', the last five of our forty years together had been the most honest and caring. I never lied to him, but as I told you, he always said he'd rather share me than lose me. He knew I loved him too. I've discovered love in so many of its forms and embraced them all. Later, when he did die in the early hours of October 23<sup>rd</sup> 1995, I was devastated. I'd sat by his side all night with his right hand on my feet as they rested on the edge of the bed.

I woke at four in the morning. Suddenly, as if summoned. He'd died while I was asleep. I still can't forgive myself for not being awake when it happened. The sudden onset of death took even the nursing staff by surprise and I was unprepared and desperately in need of that comfort the Macmillan nurse offered. 'They often wait you know, until the right moment, so as not to upset those left behind.'

He was sixty-five and had fought cancer for many years. He too had followed a career he thought would please his parents, when actually he would have been happier working in gene research. As a youth he created his own experiments with rats in the attics of his parents' large house and kept lizards in a terrarium. Both of us wanted a large family. When married we split responsibilities so that he did the gardening and I arranged the house, but Edward's main hobby was sailing and golf. He hated travelling long distances to work, and was not terribly interested in the theatre. He was a great family man though, always putting the needs of his children first. We both shared our hobbies with them, and as we also loved animals, from time to time the

house was full of puppies, kittens, hamsters, gerbils, mice and fish – although, no matter how hard we tried, the fish never lasted long.

As the family home would be too expensive for me to run, my son suggested I look at a ‘Granny Flat’. A ‘Granny flat’! At sixty-one I didn’t consider myself old and was certainly not ready to settle down into comfortable, slowing-down, respectable ‘granny-hood’, and never would be. I was still young at heart, healthy, energetic, and wanted to continue travelling. Nowadays people might say I was in denial, but I didn’t wear a mask of youth and I refused to wear the mask of age. I grieved, yet I was myself again; free to wear whatever mask I chose.

Having rented an apartment in the centre of Bucharest, not far from the library and University, at first I used to return to Wandsworth where we still lived at that time, but eventually decided to sell the family house. As we were turning out the attic and discovering odd objects or photographs, memories had flooded back. Memories of those happy years in the lovely old house, with a garden overlooking a park. Memories of our earlier home; of his wonderfully kind parents and jolly sisters, now in Australia and of my home town in Lancashire. There had been difficult times as in all families, but the base was solid, mainly due to Edward.

My daughter, Joanna kept pressurising me to make a decision over Edward’s ashes, but I prevaricated. As long as I didn’t do anything he was still there. They probably thought I didn’t care, but it was like the stain on the back of the armchair left by the grease of his hair. I wanted it left there. It took a long time, even after the three-piece suite had been brought to Bucharest, before I had the strength to send the covers to the cleaners. I took his after-shave lotion and a few other things to Bucharest and kept them on the edge of the bath, while two of his ties, his electric shaver and cuff links spent years on the top shelf of my wardrobe.

Pushed by the director of the crematorium, my two girls planned to bury the ashes in Anglesey at a cemetery where his mother, father, and other relatives were buried. They had ordered a small white marble headstone to be engraved and that was it – the end. They held a small ceremony of which I knew nothing, as they avoided telling me until months later. I felt numb. They had robbed me of . . . what? Difficult to put into words . . . something which, until that moment had still been part of me and my life.

It was raining when I entered the cemetery.

I parked the hired car near the gate on a yellow line not caring who found it or what fine I might have to pay. I remembered they'd said it was up on the hill set near a hedge and overlooking the bay. The rain and gusts grew fiercer, but I struggled up the path, stepping over neglected grassy graves and wind-strewn plastic flowers, until eventually I came across it. The stone was still in good condition, shining in the wetness with clear black lettering: 'Lord make me an instrument of Thy peace. A family man, dearly loved, pure in heart and sadly missed.' I rested my hand on the low white marble top as my howl upbraided the wind. There was no one to hear or care. Just me, with tears tempering the raindrops as they flowed down my cheeks. A little grief escaping. But not all, I could never let it all go, for then I'd have lost him completely.

So I cried for the dead and for the living 'dead' back in Romania.

\* \* \*

I drove on up north to Merseyside. I wasn't sure of the exact route into Southport so just followed my nose. To my surprise I came upon the Crown Hotel at Hillside where I used to wait for the bus to take me to town or school. I'd driven along busy country lanes where once I'd cycled without the noise of traffic or fear of assault. So I drove on a little further to look again at the old home. I discovered it under scaffolding.

Having my camera with me, I ventured in to ask the workman if I could take a photograph. While talking he said that the lady who had bought the house from my mother all those years ago had just died at the age of ninety-eight. His son was now the new owner and he was renovating it for him. He suggested I might like to walk round the house and garden, and take whatever photos I liked.

I entered my childscape; a fragment of stair carpet was enough to take me back to any age I wanted. My life was all there, safe and intact. I had lost nothing. A scarf of grief garrotted me as I wandered from room to room hardly able to see through welling tears.

I was – in the airing cupboard hiding from my mother's blows . . . on the swing, legs out, knees bent, as I aimed to reach the height of the apple trees . . . teasing my father with a bird's feather as he sat in the garden reading the Sunday newspaper . . .



lying in the grass watching insects in their own world manoeuvring stems and tiny stones, while wondering if we were someone's experiment or if creatures from another world were out there peering down at *us*? Sitting on the stairs with my book, crying at the death of next door's dog.

I was on the toilet discovering the first signs of womanhood – late at sixteen. I was on the landing with my first boy friend; undressing each other like dolls, in adolescent exploration. This is where the 'essence' of me had begun. I say essence because I realised I had become many characters and played many scenes in my life: personal theatrical projects where I'd always played the leading role.

After this interlude, I drove on to the old girls' reunion, held in Norbury Hall, now a private co-ed, but once linked with our old school, Norbury Downs. Over the chatter I was aware of:

'Where is \_\_\_\_\_?'

'Ah, she died you know!'

'And \_\_\_\_\_?'

'Oh, haven't you heard. She's just got married again! Yes, marvellous!'

'Oh, she didn't come as she's very ill with cancer.'

'She's not here because she's visiting her older sister in hospital . . .'

And so on, and so on . . .

Then the chorus of the young ones whispering about us; us they called the 'oldies'.

'God, some of them are on their last legs!'

'Did you hear one of them is remarrying?'

'No! At her age? She was in the 1945-50 group wasn't she? Must be nearly seventy! Can't imagine them doing it!'

'He's the same age!'

'Disgusting! Anyway, I thought men were past it by then!' Titters. Raised eyebrows. Knowing looks. Jokes.

'Hi, Jean. Your cousin's looking good for her age!'

'Yes, but she keeps having her 'senior moments'.

I overheard. Until now 'age' hadn't reached me. The odd blood test, broken wrist, an operation for 'water on the knee', a bout of pneumonia via Legionella I got in Cuba, aching hands with notched knuckles, but nothing connected to what they called 'the fourth age'. But here they spoke of age as illness, death, dying . . . The mask of

age that covers the adolescent feelings we still possess; things that come naturally to us all, but at different rates. I began to realise that when people start segregating into labelled groups such as ‘pensioners’ or ‘the elderly’, ‘senior citizens’ or even ‘baby boomers’, they automatically feel we should join them. Birthday cards, internet jokes all conspire to segregate us, downgrade us.

In Romania I was immune from all this; accepted by all ages as if ageless. No one grouped me into a category, nor did I group myself into one. Our friends were of all ages. At this gathering, where the clock reversed in quick-time, we shed tears for happy times and fond memories. We never remembered a wet day at that school of our early years. Despite my love/hate relationship with my mother, she’d chosen well and no doubt sacrificed a great deal personally to pay school fees. I’d be ever grateful for that. I wish now I had tried to understand her needs, but things were different in those days. One didn’t discuss such matters.

A few of my past acquaintances were grey, grey, lonely people living out their lives in memories, the occasional game of golf or bridge; waiting, just waiting; the new culture of ageing seeming to have passed them by. Or was it that they just hadn’t the opportunity or courage to set about meeting someone new. I couldn’t tell such people or the younger generations present about my emotional life experiences over the last twenty three years, for I doubted they’d understand! In Romania the old were respected and mingled with youth. Here in the UK, so many of the under forties seemed unaware that we never change inside; that feelings no longer ride tandem with our bodies. Many other friends though *had* risen above conservative expectations of a dignified bowing out and had travelled, had a ‘special friend’ who shared an active social life, entertained, or still took a lively part in the world I once knew. I thought to myself that I would probably return . . . for good.

**He rises to get his coat and scarf from behind the door, then places the fur hat firmly in place. He looks at his watch and snatches up the ‘book’ unfinished, when suddenly the next heading captures his eye. He changes his mind and sits, huddled in his coat, to read the rest.**

## Seven Years Later: The Epilogue

## 10.

*(The Epilogue is short. A candle is lit and a window opened. What seems a new beginning is the end – the final scene.)*

Seven years it's taken! Seven years to bring our story to an end.

I returned to England for good in the fifth year of the third millennium on the day Craig Venter was reported to have sequenced his own genetic code and the Java earthquake dominated newsprint. At thirty-thousand feet I slipped more easily beneath the surface of singed love, while still clinging to the poppy petals of plastic money. Up there – how I wished I could have stayed up there in that surrealistic world above the clouds, where you catch up with the moon, or retreat into night; be a sun-drenched eagle setting itself apart from a fun-loving, suffering, work-alcoholic, money-grabbing, selfish human world below. Bound to earth as we are to war, to each other, to passion, to power, we're forced back, emptied out, lined up, thrown into a chaos of movement and sound, so as to obliterate all memory of freedom, still watched by eyes everywhere, now electronic eyes. Perhaps it was only in preparation for death that I attempted to distance myself.

I bought a flat in my home town. Alpha males have crept out of past friendships to propose affairs, partnerships or even marriage. I have allowed my body to be caressed, probed, possessed. I have turned off my mind when someone swore their love for me, yet enjoyed their company for I needed human contact. Still need – the soft touch of skin against skin.

Now seventy-seven, I have been invaded by hidden forces: ingredients lying in wait, camouflaged by small print. I buy organic, but nothing stops the onward surge of alpha fats exerting their dominance around my waist. I avoid mirrors: round ones, full-length ones, the one in the bathroom, the one in the bedroom; the new image.

Ştefan had been my mirror – and I his, fulfilling each other's expectations – shared identities of an inner 'soulhood' and late-life, seeing myself as he saw me. Here, my 'self' roams lost, inviting age to surface when I am unaware.

Age, once rooted only in distant imaginings.

It is now merely a matter of nurture by a young amateur society chorus to ensure I am fully aware of nature taking its course.

Clocks tick faster.

Alpha males have ordered my body to be X-rayed, probed, manipulated. I have turned on my mind and, helpless, have been guided and ordered. I have listened patiently to description, prescription and heard myself discussed by others dispassionately.

A diagnosis? A case history? One more life – yet another death? Perhaps Hamlet was right. ‘. . . *The readiness is all*’.<sup>70</sup>

Over the years I have discarded, destroyed, but never forgotten the contents of the shoe-box. Only his T-shirt and the swan remain. I have made-do patiently by listening passionately to those who still discuss Ștefan with others.

*Was* it an obsession?

A hopeless case?

I miss Judy who moved to live in the south of France.

I miss London with its theatres and vibrant rhythms.

I miss Romania and all my dear friends.

I miss Ștefan.

For seven years the Anghelaches observed complete silence. Ștefan disappeared from the literary scene; went to ground like an old dog scenting his own death. The grapevine grew silent. I was told he’d written nothing – published nothing, and then, towards the end of February, a letter came from Aura saying her beloved Doru had died, but she also enclosed a torn-out page of seven fragments from Ștefan’s plays, published in ‘Romania Literara’ on the occasion of his birthday. Again, published with his photograph. This time it was a copy of the one I took in 1984 and had kept by my bedside for twenty three years.

In her letter Aura said the fragments were about love, written in such an abstract style she could spot no reference to times Ștefan and I shared.

Love fragments? And his wife still alive?

I presumed she was alive. For each of those seven years I’d thought of him on his birthday: grieved again for his passing. Did this mean he’d been doing the same for me? I searched for my glasses. Scanned for signs. Poem by poem. Seven roads, parallel, but inaccessible. Then seven symbols leaped to my glance. From poem six to one and four, then five to two and three to seven.

---

<sup>70</sup> *Hamlet*. 5.2.21.

No, two to seven. ...? Those seven words were all there.

'I love you, never ever doubt me,' hidden among images only I would recognise. Love tucked in among syllables. Love once hidden from the eyes of the Securitate.

Bare bones of meaning after seven years.

Seven years ago I lit a candle for the dead, opened the window for his soul to fly to heaven. Now the bones are out on display. They should be white and clean to show he has entered into eternal rest, but the heart has obviously not decayed! The 'Strigoi', that predatory creature of Romanian legend, must have trapped his soul on earth. According to tradition there should be a ritual to set the soul free: a ritual with garlic, a cross, holy water or basil. The body should be decapitated, burned or the heart removed and impaled, but then only peasants in remote villages do such things. But who is this Strigoi? Megara, his own guilt, the one unborn, or me? Ștefan must have known those poems would find their way here, for hadn't he comforted me so many times in the past, by saying: 'Don't worry Glynis, I'll always find you!'

In the year they found the so-called 'God particle', he *had* found me, but too late.

*Dearest Ștefan,*

*You found me too late!*

*At our age, seven years is too long. Things have changed, my darling. Love feeds on memories, and people we once knew are merely characters in our own dramas. We found true happiness in true love. In our own Eden we moved through our life-course in harmony and accepted the natural order of change. If only we had been free of the actions of others! Free of the materialistic order of this world. I have no ritual to perform, no garlic or basil, and lies raised have risen like oil to pollute the surface of our story: our Holy water. But perhaps by sharing the burden of my cross, my truth, the Strigoi's hold on you will lessen, guilt will vanish and you'll rest in peace.*

*I have bought a return ticket with TAROM<sup>71</sup> to fly to Bucharest next Friday, but I shall not seek you out or stay long. Our memories and the moments of our great love that we have left on this earth are too precious to shatter. Time is something we can ignore, yet it's always there, hiding somewhere. Just how long can one elongate this thread of life that Fate handed out? One thing remains a certainty. The reality of death will come and grief will again unfurl to enshroud those left behind.*

*Goodbye my love, I kiss you.*

*Glynis*

---

<sup>71</sup> Romanian Airlines

He sits very still. Deep wells glisten in his eyes and slowly, very slowly, he closes the 'book', wraps it gently in the T-shirt with the swan and places them carefully back in the shoe-box. He looks once more at the photograph and lowers it gently inside. Afterwards, he replaces the lid, bends low resting his forehead against it and sighs. In the cold air the mist of his breath wreaths it.

*(Memory's jaws open. Text tumbles from the email he sent two months before news of her death. Ștefan's voice is heard.)*

Glynis,

*The director of the National Theatre wrote me about your intention to produce one of my plays. I have not any recent writing. Years ago we agreed to cut any connection between us. Please follow it. Ștefan*

*(Shock. That name suddenly appearing in her INBOX. Eager anticipation transmuted to disbelief, to a tsunami of temper against herself, against the world, against him; transmuted at last to closure. Glynis's voice is heard.)*

Reply

*I certainly did NOT request permission to use one of YOUR plays. I asked for a short recording of ANY Romanian play for a lecture I was giving, as I thought he still had connections with UNITER. I have NO desire to re-establish communications so you needn't worry. Do NOT contact me again.*

Send

*(Shock. That name appearing in his INBOX. Pride stunned by the sudden transubstantiation of power. Love imagined? Love lost? Love regained in seven years? Memory's jaws suddenly clench.*

*Was the text in the shoe-box the only copy?)*

Having re-sealed the box as best as he can, he puts the brown wrapping paper and string into a drawer, takes the car key from his jacket pocket, buttons up his overcoat, puts on his gloves, and places the shoe-box under his arm. As he turns out the light, all the shadows race towards him. He locks the door behind them,

and as he winds his way back down the long corridors, the shadows become one; the man's shadow. Then, slowly, very slowly – this eases away, dissipates. Alone, he walks bowed, as if carrying a heavy burden on his shoulders.

From the top of the steps, the door man, muffled in many clothes, has already cleared the Professor's car of loose snow, and now watches Domnul Professor, Doctor Anghelache as he places the shoe-box in the boot alongside the shovel for clearing ice and warns him to take care on the short journey home.

The snow still falls – heavily.

'La mulți ani!' <sup>72</sup> shouts the doorman as an afterthought, for it is the night before New Year's Eve, but his voice fades into the noise of the blizzard. The man drives off at speed – not to his home, but towards the bridge over the Dâmbavița – towards the fields of Șerbănești –

*(A collage of voices echo words, then lines<sup>73</sup>, skidding, jingoing, accelerating shards of verse rolling into a crashing, clamouring . . .)*

I sometimes hold it half a sin, SIN to put in words WORDS the grief I feel  
 GRIEF I FEEL; for WORDS, words like Nature, HALF REVEAL  
 half reveal, HALF CONCEAL, half conceal the SOUL  
 WITHIN, SOUL WITHIN, soul within SOUL, SOUL,  
**SOUL WITHIN . . .**

*( . . . CLIMAX – as it merges with the sound of ice breaking, and water gurgling over a dark shadow; a shadow of slowly submerging metal.*

*Cue: Blackout .      Cue: Curtain Call*

*Silence. The characters step forward into the small spot that lights their faces on the apron stage in this order:*

*Ștefan*

*Megara*

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<sup>72</sup> 'Happy New year!'

<sup>73</sup> From Tennyson's "In Memoriam A.H.H."

*As in the beginning, as each character appears, a light kindles a moment, and is gone.*

*Cue: Curtain, House-lights, Music*

*Ladies and Gentlemen, our voyage has now come to an end.)*

\* \* \*

**The Director:**

The little box has sung its song.

There is no applause. No wake. No doors offstage. Glance upwards. Eros and Thanatos no longer guard the proscenium arch, nor do gods in pleasant meadows weave shadows over interacting masks:

‘Young old  
Age.’

Members of the audience, readers; characters from your own dramas: the Lovers sought significance in the afternoon of their time, speared by romanticism, bandaged in myth. Do not blame their sorrow on ‘old’ age, for that existed only in your words, your phrases, your imaginings – as they swept past – and already the understudies are preparing – before they too will sweep past this surrealistic, over-reaching world where successive waves of passion, power, grief and greed – continue to sing.



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Appendix 1. Web site details online Jan. 2011- Jan. 2013

<http://www.writersofloveover65.com>

[Go to the questionnaire](#)



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- [Questionnaire](#)

[Blog](#)

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### **Exeunt – part 1**

29 January 2011

V.S. Prichett, in *The Living Novel*, stated that great novelists live beyond their time because they embodied as new material that period ‘between two worlds’ when values and conflicts, specific to that time are in transition. Thus, the living novelist is always ‘on the tip of the wave’, not

reflecting his age, but adding something to the discovery of the age itself.

[Read more »](#)

[Read more blog entries](#)

### **Writers of love and relationships of older people**

**Current research has shown that with improved health many older people are remarrying or entering into new relationships after bereavement or divorce.**

Joan Walker is 76 and a PhD student in Creative Writing at Loughborough University. Her research element is to investigate why British publishers and writers of contemporary fiction are not reflecting the changing social dynamics of ageing in relation to amorous relationships and intimacy over the age of 65.

By taking the questionnaire you'll help to investigate how and why this happens and how attitudes are changing towards the depiction of love and relationships between older people.

The results of the study will be written up as part of Joan Walker's doctoral thesis. If you have any questions or comments please [contact her](#).

Appendix 2. Other contemporary novels read featuring aspects of ageing:

Doris Lessing (*Memoirs of a Survivor*, 1974)

Margaret Lawrence (*The Stone Angel*, 1987)

May Sarton (*Mrs. Stevens Hears the Mermaids Singing*, first published in America in 1975 but in the UK, 1993)

Doris Lessing (*The Diaries of Jane Somers*, 2002)

Marilynne Roberston (*Gilead*, 2004)

Patrick Corcoran (*Cecil & Noreen*, 2005)

Anna Jacobs (*In Focus*, 2009)

Fay Weldon (*Chalcot Crescent*, 2009)

Leslie Larson (*Breaking Out of Bedlam*, 2010)

Christine Dwyer Hickey (*The Cold Eye of Heaven*, 2011)

Corcoran's novel was not included in this research as the narrative of *Cecil & Noreen* tells of a long, happy marriage, without any reference to personal feelings about intimacy.

Similarly, although Jacobs refers to the new dynamics of ageing when the character, Renée tells Beth that she does not look anything like her age and should go out and 'find a sexy guy' because '45 is now the new 35', only the secondary characters in *In Focus*, Linda (Beth's mother) and her old friend Nat, are over sixty-four and set up house together.

Many of the above titles have been among books quoted by critics of feminist literature as revealing important aspects of ageing womanhood. Other volumes also mentioned, but written earlier, include Muriel Spark's *Memento Mori* (1959), Barbara Pym's *Quartet in Autumn* (1980), Elizabeth Taylor's *Mrs. Palfrey at the Claremont* (1982), and Vita Sackville West's *All Passion Spent* (1983).

Non-fiction writers interested in how fiction portrays ageing also quote the above with the addition of male writers such as;

Kingsley Amis (*Ending Up*, 1974)

Kingsley Amis (*The Old Devils*, 1986)

William Boyd (*Any Human Heart*, 2002)

John Updike (*Villages*, 2004)

John Latham (*Ditch Crawl*, 2004)

David Lodge (*Deaf Sentence*, 2008)

Paul Auster (*The Invisible*, 2009)

Stanley Middleton (*A Cautious Approach*, 2010)

Adam Thirwell (*The Escape*, 2010)

Philip Roth (*Exit Ghost*, 2010)

Philip Roth (*The Humbling*, 2010)

Julian Barnes (*Nothing to be Frightened of*, 2008)

Julian Barnes (*The Sense of an Ending*, 2011)

Howard Jacobson (*The Finkler Question*, 2011)

*The Cold Eye of Heaven* by the Irish novelist, Christine Dwyer Hickey is a late 2011 publication that tells the story of a seventy year-old man's life envisaged during his last moments before death, when he relives the loves, losses and betrayals that have informed his life.

Appendix 3. Results of ‘British Novel Characters Survey’

Page 1

**British Novel Characters Survey**  
**ONLINE Fieldwork : 6th - 8th May 2011**


Absolute/cod percents

Table 1  
Q1. Do you think it is acceptable or not acceptable for older main characters, aged 60 and above, to be portrayed in British novels as having sexual needs and desires?  
Base: All respondents

	Gender		Age							Social Class					Region				
			18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	AB	C1	C2	DE	South East	Mid-lands	North	Wales & West	South land	Scot-land	
	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	
Unweighted base	495	54.1	117	168	210	179	158	20.4	331	280	156	269	261	274	261	149	91		
Weighted base	508	52.8	124*	166	197	176	155	21.8	280	300	218	238	263	273	260	149	90*		
It is acceptable	339	36.8	76	90	125	129	115	17.1	204	202	148	153	181	184	187	97	59		
	68%	70%	61%	54%	64%	74%	74%	7.9%	73%	67%	68%	64%	69%	67%	72%	65%	65%		
It is not acceptable	34	3.8	11	16	12	11	10	1.1	25	13	17	17	23	20	15	7	7		
	7%	7%	9%	10%	6%	6%	7%	5%	9%	4%	8%	7%	9%	7%	6%	5%	7%		
Prefer not to say	12	1.9	4	5	10	7	4	2	9	5	7	10	4	12	5	9	2		
	3%	4%	3%	3%	5%	4%	2%	1%	3%	2%	3%	4%	1%	4%	2%	6%	2%		
Don't know	122	10.4	33	55	49	29	28	3.4	41	80	46	58	55	58	53	37	23		
	22%	20%	26%	33%	25%	16%	17%	15%	15%	27%	21%	24%	21%	21%	20%	25%	25%		

Proportions/Mean: Columns Tested (5% risk level) - a/b - c/d/e/f/g/h - i/j/k/l - m/n/o/p/q/r - A/B/C/D/E/F/G/H/I/J/K/L - M/N/O  
\* small base; \*\* very small base (under 30) Ineligible for sig testing

Prepared for Dynamic Markets by ICM Research





**British Novel Characters Survey**  
**ONLINE Fieldwork : 6th - 8th May 2011**

Absolute %/col percents

Table 1  
 Q1. Do you think it is acceptable or not acceptable for older main characters, aged 60 and above, to be portrayed in British novels as having sexual needs and desires?  
 Base: All respondents

	Region										Marital Status			
	Scotland (A)	North East (B)	North West (C)	Yorkshire & Humber (D)	West Midlands (E)	Wales (F)	East-ern (G)	London (H)	South East (I)	South West (J)	East Mids (K)	Single (M)	Married (N)	Wid-owed/separ-ated/div-orced (O)
Unweighted base	91	47	124	90	98	54	96	119	142	95	80	260	635	131
Weighted base	90*	47*	122	91*	96*	55*	97*	130	133	94*	81*	269	636	124
It is acceptable	59	32	91	64	69	35	63	87	94	61	52	169	443	92
	65%	68%	75%	70%	72%	64%	65%	67%	71%	65%	65%	63%	70%	74%AM
It is not acceptable	7	4	8	3	10	5	4	16	7	3	6	15	46	10
	7%	9%	7%	3%	11%	8%	4%	12%DJG	5%	3%	8%	6%	7%	8%
Prefer not to say	2	1	2	3	2	2	6	2	2	7	4	12	12	5
	2%	1%	1%	3%	2%	3%	6%	1%	2%	8%CH	6%	4%N	2%	4%
Don't know	23	10	21	22	15	13	25	26	29	23	18	72	135	17
	25%	22%	17%	24%	16%	25%	26%	20%	22%	25%	22%	27%O	21%	14%

Proportions/Mean: Columns Tested (5% risk level) - a/b - c/d/e/f/g/h - i/j/k/l - m/n/o/p/q/r - A/B/C/D/E/F/G/H/I/J/K/L - M/N/O  
 \* small base; \*\* very small base (under 30) ineligible for sig testing



## Appendix 4. Portrayal Vs. Betrayal? Extracts from research of the Film Council April 2011

Complete research can be accessed at: [www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/audiences](http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/audiences)

### Foreword

Watching films is one of the UK's favourite pastimes. We know that the UK is becoming an increasingly diverse society and it is absolutely vital that the film industry reflects that by serving the broadest possible audiences, reflecting their lives and age, gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation and physical ability.

However, despite the rapidly changing demographics of modern Britain, a recent consultation across all sectors of the film industry revealed that there is little knowledge, insight or understanding of the definitive drivers and barriers for diverse film audiences in the UK. The conversations also revealed that the film sector recognised the importance and commercial value of understanding and delivering what diverse audiences want but that there is very little comprehensive and freely accessible research into diverse audiences and how best to reach them.

This new study, **Portrayal Vs. Betrayal?** aims to provide the answers by focusing on a number of groups including older women, working class, lesbian, gay and bisexual audiences; minority ethnic audiences including more recent immigrants, Eastern European.

The findings are intended to be a valuable tool for film makers who want to think more about the audience's perspective and make films that are relevant, connected and authentic to the broadest and most diverse film goers. In the future this could lead to greater economic returns across the entire sector.

Mary FitzPatrick  
**Head of Diversity, UK Film Council**  
April 2011

### What people think of the portrayal of diverse audiences:

Older women portrayal 97

#### Genre preferences

### The perceived power of film Key insight

*The great majority recognise the **awesome power** of film to tell stories, to influence, to educate and to inspire. Our country's diverse audiences are even more aware of this power, especially for film's ability to generate role models and to influence the public mindset.*

**69% of the general public say that films have the power to educate about real life issues – and our diverse audiences even more readily**

agree with this (75% for the older female audience, 74% for the Asian audience)

❑ More than merely inform, 1 in 2 of the general public also go further to say that film has the power to challenge stereotypes – and again our diverse audiences are ahead of the national opinion on film’s power to change the mindset (80% of the LGB audience, 75% of the Black audience)

❑ The detailed report also investigates the power of film to create stories and scenes about diverse communities that make people want to talk to each other about issues and how film can play a role in learning about people unfamiliar to us – all of these findings all point towards an extraordinary power that film has to shape and mould public opinion

### The conclusion

*That film has such a power to influence mindsets means filmmakers should spend time to reflect on how all parts of our society are portrayed.*

### Qualitative Insights - Older Women 50-75yrs

- This group is more **traditional** in their consumption – they do not visit the cinema as regularly as younger people, but they make outings if they read **good reviews** in the national press. Many are often going to the cinema with grandchildren to enjoy family films.
- The majority are watching films at home, often **renting them on DVD**, with a large number also **recording films** from television. There is a greater reliance on the TV as a source of film.
- They are influenced highly by **trailers and posters** in the main. Personal recommendation is very strong and powerful in influencing film watching, although the repertoire of films is fairly narrow – this audience knows what it likes.
- The **younger members of this older audience** in London that we spoke to were **more in tune with technology**, many have iPhones and one had a Kindle. Two of the youngest and sociable are on social media and were having lively social lives, although this was rarely cited as influencing their film choices in any way.

### What people think of the portrayal of diverse audiences

#### Comparing perceptions of Older women portrayal between the general public and Older women

When comparing the general public view with that of older women we see only a little uplift in opinion, meaning everyone tends to feel the **same** way. With other diverse audiences, we saw very substantial uplifts in the level of agreement compared to the general public. The small increases here may be telling us something about the **lowered expectations** of older females compared to other diverse audiences.

That they feel not that much more strongly about these specific and relevant issues does not mean there is no **spur to action** because it remains the case that the majority of people and older women alike are telling us that older

females are underrepresented and too often marginalised in roles. While older females do consume fewer films and attend the cinema less frequently compared to younger demographics, they are still a **significant** part of the total market, so taking their views into account is something filmmakers should take on board.

**% that agree with each statement**

Base: representative sample of GB 16+ population into film happy to answer sensitive questions (1,705) and Older women (358)

**General public - Older women**

Older characters, especially women, are too often **marginalised** and tend only to feature as background characters. Older characters, especially women, tend not to be portrayed as having **sexual** needs and desires. Older women are comfortable seeing themselves as being **attractive** to younger men. Films feature and glamorise the young; older characters, especially women, are significantly **under represented**.

Appendix 5. Informed Consent and Participant Information Sheets



**Research Proposal**

**SEVENTY IS THE NEW FIFTY, BUT IS THIS REFLECTED IN  
CONTEMPORARY BRITISH FICTION?**

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further scientific knowledge and that all procedures have been approved by the Loughborough University Ethical Advisory Committee.

I have read and understood the above information sheet and this consent form.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my participation.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and that I will not be required to explain my reasons for withdrawing

I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence and will be kept anonymous and confidential to the researchers unless (under the statutory obligations of the agencies which the researchers are working with), it is judged that confidentiality will have to be breached for the safety of the participants or others.

I agree to participate in this study.

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

Your signature \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of investigator \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



### Research Project Title

## SEVENTY IS THE NEW FIFTY, BUT IS THIS REFLECTED IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH FICTION?

### Participant Information Sheet

Joan Walker. **Main Investigator** (Doctoral student in Creative Writing)  
Loughborough University, Loughborough, Leicestershire, LE11 3TU email  
[j.b.walker@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:j.b.walker@lboro.ac.uk) Tel +44 (0)1332 853 966

Kerry Featherstone. **Supervisor** (English and Drama Department) Loughborough  
University, Leicestershire, LE11 3TU email [K.Featherstone@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:K.Featherstone@lboro.ac.uk). Tel.  
+44 (0) 1509 222928

The **purpose of this study** is to investigate how writers and members of the publishing industry have responded to the recent demographic changes in society regarding amorous relationships between partners of similar age, starting or continuing over the age of sixty five.

The **reason for this research** is that Joan Walker's novel, *EXEUNT*, written as part of her research, depicts protagonists whose passionate or compassionate love continues sexually well into their old age. **Joan is in her late seventies**, and curious to know why she has not found any contemporary British full-length novels reflecting what medical journals or non-fiction books have been stating for some time – that the definition of old age is changing as society enters a longevity revolution.

The results of the study will be written up as part of Joan Walker's doctoral thesis. If you have any questions please contact her.

If for some reason you are not happy with how the research has been conducted, the University has a policy relating to Research Misconduct and Whistle Blowing which is available online at:

[http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees/ethical/Whistleblowing\(2\).htm](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees/ethical/Whistleblowing(2).htm).

The Questionnaires (one will be sent to publishers, the other to writers) are brief and should not take up too much time to complete.

**\*Please return the questionnaire together with the attached Information Consent Form\***

**Participants are asked to complete the relevant questionnaire and Informed Consent Form, and to note that they are able to withdraw from the study at any time by contacting the main investigator.**

Appendix 6. Questionnaires for Publishers and Writers



**Research Proposal**

**SEVENTY IS THE NEW FIFTY, BUT IS THIS REFLECTED IN  
CONTEMPORARY BRITISH FICTION?**

**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PUBLISHERS**

**Thank you for your willingness to participate!**

**Please complete and return to the Investigator by post or email together with the Information page and the completed Informed Consent Form.**

1. Do you give prospective authors a top age limit for main characters that are in love and actively engaged in a sexually intimate relationship?
  
2. If not, has your publishing house had such romance or mainstream fiction in its lists where the main characters are 65 plus and in an intimate relationship?
  
3. In the light of demographic changes in society, do you envisage encouraging more authors to include older main characters involved in romance?
  
4. Any other comments?





**Research Proposal**

**SEVENTY IS THE NEW FIFTY, BUT IS THIS REFLECTED IN  
CONTEMPORARY BRITISH FICTION?**

**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR WRITERS**

**Thank you for your willingness to participate!**

**Please complete and return to the investigator by post or email together with the Information page and the completed Informed Consent Form.**

1. How would you feel if a publisher gave you a top age limit for the main characters in your novel that are in love and actively engaged in a sexually intimate relationship, and has this ever happened to you?
2. Have you ever written about such a relationship? If not how would you feel about doing so?
3. In the light of demographic changes in society, do you think writers will move towards including such older main characters in romance or mainstream fiction, and if so how do you think readers will react?
4. Any other comments?

Appendix 7. Three request letters and list of contacts for approaching authors.

REQUEST 1 for Society of Authors:

My name is Joan Brenda Walker and I am in my second year as a full-time PhD student of Creative writing at Loughborough University. My long career has been divided equally between the arts and education, and I have travelled the world, often giving papers on a variety of subjects including, ‘Difficult Literature and Commercial Publishing’ at the Nobel Jubilee Symposium in 1991. Some of you might remember my publishing house, Forest Books, which specialized in literature in translation.

In my seventy-fifth year, I became aware that there are very few contemporary British novels written in English that depict sexual attraction and loving relationships after 65 as perfectly normal. Gerontologists and sociologists accept that we are healthier, living longer and that the social cultures of ageing are changing, so my question is: ‘If 70 is the new 50, why doesn’t contemporary British fiction, whether in romance or mainstream, reflect this when it comes to love and relationships over 65?’

Writers (young or old) . . . can you help? If so please open my web site and complete the questionnaire online.

[www.writersofloveafter65.com](http://www.writersofloveafter65.com)

REQUEST 2 for contacts approached online:

WRITING OLD AGE RESEARCH Joan Brenda Walker

I am 77 and in my second year as a PhD student in Creative Writing at Loughborough University and am involved in qualitative research. My question is ‘If 70 is the new 50 then why doesn’t British fiction reflect this when it comes to love and relationships?’

I hope that Writers can help me answer this. All is explained on my web site:

[www.writersofloveafter65.com](http://www.writersofloveafter65.com)

All comments valuable!

REQUEST 3 for Academics:



COULD YOU HELP WITH MY RESEARCH?

IF SO, PLEASE READ ON AND THEN EMAIL ME.

Many thanks. Joan Walker

### **Research Project Title**

#### **SEVENTY IS THE NEW FIFTY, BUT IS THIS REFLECTED IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH FICTION?**

Joan Walker. **Main Investigator** (Doctoral student in Creative Writing)  
Loughborough University, Loughborough, Leicestershire, LE11 3TU email  
[eajbw@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:eajbw@lboro.ac.uk) Tel +44 (0)1332 853 966

Kerry Featherstone. **Supervisor** (English and Drama Department) Loughborough  
University, Leicestershire, LE11 3TU email [K.Featherstone@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:K.Featherstone@lboro.ac.uk). Tel +44  
(0) 1509 222928

The **purpose of this study** is to investigate how writers and members of the publishing industry have responded to the recent demographic changes in society regarding amorous relationships between partners of similar age, starting or continuing over the age of sixty five.

The **reason for this research** is that Joan Walker's novel, *EXEUNT*, written as part of her research, depicts protagonists whose passionate or compassionate love continues sexually well into their old age. **Joan is in her late seventies**, and curious to know why she has not found any contemporary British full-length novels reflecting what medical journals or non-fiction books have been stating for some time – that the definition of old age is changing as society enters a longevity revolution.

The results of the study will be written up as part of Joan Walker's doctoral thesis. If you have any questions please contact her.

The **Questionnaires** (one will be sent to publishers, the other to writers) are brief and should not take up too much time to complete.

Your participation would be most appreciated.

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#### LIST OF CONTACTS WITH THEIR RESPONSES

1. 'National Association of Writers' Guilds' YES, and passed my information on to webmaster.
2. 'Writers' Guild of Great Britain' YES
3. 'Nottingham Writers' YES
4. 'Boomer Writers' (Linked In) YES
5. 'Writers' Forum' Site temporally dismantled
6. [www.blogspot.com](http://www.blogspot.com) (Created blog to give my professional link)
7. 'Writers East Midlands' YES
8. 'Swanwick Writers' School' YES
9. Personal approach to writers at conferences YES
10. [www.writersroom.com](http://www.writersroom.com) (User name 'Joan'. Discussion Group)
11. 'Writers' Café' (User name 'Joan Brenda'. Display name 'Loughborough')  
Last chapter of *EXEUNT* shown as sample. Welcome email received.
12. 'Real Writers' (Now only an appraisal site)
13. 'Grassroots Writers' Guild' Blog. Posted comments
14. 'Writers' Guild' Blog and Twitter YES
15. 'Romantic Novelists' Association' (Romance Matters) YES. Sent my information to all members.
17. 'UKwriters' (a collaborative Blog)
18. 'Society of Authors' (London) YES and they placed information re the Research in their monthly online newsletter and sent contact list of authors.
19. 'New Eastbourne Writers' Group'. NO REPLY

20. Bangor University (Via Nia at [cos606@bangor.ac.uk](mailto:cos606@bangor.ac.uk)) YES
21. Ex-pats Writers' group in southern France YES
22. Online Forum at (Glam.ac.uk.) YES
23. All university departments with lecturers specializing in Creative Writing Courses. YES
24. 'Authonomy Writing'
25. 'You Write'  
<http://www.youwriteon.com/forum/70-is-the-new-50-Topic-25323-1.aspx>
26. Dundee International Book Prize winners YES
27. Thirty-three individual authors contacted via the Society of Authors
28. Via own web site [www.writersofloveover65.com](http://www.writersofloveover65.com)

## Appendix 8. Methods for Approaching Publishers

Between March and June 2010, ninety-six publishers of contemporary fiction were identified. Eighty-nine were found to be relevant and contacted first by telephone, to ensure the correct name of the director, senior director or chief-editor. Once I had explained who I was and the nature of the research subject, one of the following took place:

The person who answered the phone – refused to put me through; said they would pass on the message; suggested I emailed the firm using ‘info@’; said the firm no longer published fiction; requested I send a letter; said they did not respond to questionnaires; put me through to the editor’s secretary or the person requested.

A director or fiction editor would listen while I explained. Some were very interested and agreed to me sending them a questionnaire. Others stated they were too busy to spend time on a questionnaire, but would be willing to discuss the points with me over the phone. Some became involved in discussing the issues, while others asked me to send a questionnaire and gave me their official email address. Occasionally, if the secretary asked me to write to the firm, the questionnaire and relevant paperwork would be sent together with a more personal letter. Sometimes this would elicit a reply by email or a telephone call. If they agreed to sign the respondent consent form, I asked for their direct email address at the firm and sent it immediately with the questionnaire and a personal message.

89 PUBLISHERS OF FICTION WERE APPROACHED 28 replied

## Appendix 9. Qualitative Insights of 28 Publisher Respondents

Comments colour key: **Blue** = YOUTH; **Brown** = MARKET FORCES; **Orange** = READERS; **Dark blue** = POSSIBLE AGEIST ATTITUDES. **Pink** = AGENTS ; **BOLD PRINT** = Other interesting comments, including those on censorship and awaiting good writing.

**1. Publishers were asked if they gave prospective authors a top age limit for main characters that are in love and actively engage in a sexually intimate relationship.**

We would only interfere if we felt that any relationship depicted in the novel was unrealistic or underplayed. (But that would apply to any novel whose significance or reality had been poorly utilized).

**We do publish books that involve relationships, but they are usually secondary characters to the protagonist's main story. The protagonist could be any age, but as we are somewhat known for finding new young authors, they do tend to write from a younger point of view. YOUTH**

**While we want our fiction to reflect contemporary society, influencing, through editorial advice, such major factors, will only ever depend on a particular book and its needs. We take on a book and help the author to improve it – we don't tend to decide that the market needs a certain book and then commission a writer to create that book for us. MARKET. We would not shy away from a book that came to us which included such a love story – as long as it was relevant and appropriate to the book's and our criteria in that the writing was interesting and of a very high standard.**

**We don't actually set a specific age limit, but it has long been a convention of the genre that our heroes are aged between 28-40 and our heroines 21-41. That's not to say that occasionally we have gone outside these ranges. YOUTH. But until recently feedback from our readers consistently confirmed that they find these ranges the most accessible and supportive in order to enjoy our romances. Of**

**course we are in the business of supplying fantasy and it would seem that readers like to project themselves into an ideal stage of life. READERS**

**Mainstream novels give writers and readers a much larger canvas to deal with and often aim to give a slice of life which might explore life-stage issues. Whereas romantic series fiction sets out to deliver a higher level of fantasy and a quick emotional hit, so here the issues and challenges of later and middle and old age are less conducive. AGEISM**

**There is evidence that our readers, though predominantly they still look for and enjoy stories set around characters that are in that 'golden' life stage, are beginning to look for fiction that is relevant to and reflective of themselves. We feel this partly because of the demographic shift in the population towards 45+, READERS, but also because media has become much more 'ordinary-people-centred (e.g. reality TV and real-life story women's magazines). Also, although previously readers between the ages of 18-80 seemed content to share a specific genre, now women's fiction has moved towards becoming segmented by age, for example, chick-lit. Again, this follows the media pattern. POSSIBLE AGEISM.**

**We foresee a market where there is still a strong demand for 'golden-age' characters, but more opportunity to produce niche fiction that caters for older or much younger readers.' MARKET**

**Books we have published about older people are: *The Humbling*, Philip Roth, 2009; *Sabbath's Theatre*, Philip Roth, Nov 2007; *The Escape*, Adam Thirlwell, Aug 2000**

*The Old Devils.* **We are interested in encouraging great books which encourage all area of human behaviour.**

Books not published to a particular formula and we do not provide guidelines of the sort you describe. **I suggest you contact \* \* \* since they do publish very specific 'rules' for their authors.**



**... several of our most successful authors have been in the 50s and 60s by the time their first novel was published.**

Not actively encouraging but we won't be discouraging any particular focus on youth either. **We want literary quality whatever the age in the story. In our list the age of author or protagonists would not be a reason for rejection as long as the story and the writing worked well enough for us to want to publish it.**

Our latest book is by a 64-year-old, Gaynor Arnold. Our spring highlight is by 62-year-old Penny Feeny. And Candi Miller and Paul Wilson are both in their 50s. Age rules, OK

**I don't think this has ever been an issue for us and will continue not to be an issue.**

We publish very little fiction

**No, but I publish literary fiction – it may be that publishers of popular and genre fiction are more prescriptive.**

Middle-age love affairs (e.g. novels and short stories of William Trevor) but I can't think of anything involving older characters.

**I prefer to approach it from the other end: I think more writers will write about such events/characters.**

To give guidance would be a form of censorship.

**Not that I recall, but neither have I been offered a novel with this kind of relationship in it. There is certainly no agenda or censorship from within \*\*\*\* editorially when it comes to these matters and how the elderly are represented in fiction.**

There are not many areas of life and of experience represented amongst the relatively small number of books we publish.

**We do not habitually** encourage writers of fiction in any particular direction, either to include or exclude specific material or concerns.

**2. Publishers were asked if they did publish such love stories in their lists?**

**Yes – *Kath Trevelyan* by Jeremy Cooper (older woman 70ish, younger man 40/50ish).**

We don't ask authors to include anything in particular – **they must write what they want to.**

It may be that romance publishers approach writing in the way suggested above – i.e. looking for particular subjects or demographics, to please a certain market, but it isn't how we work. However, that may mean that younger characters have all the fun – Indeed a book like *Any Human Heart* or *Gilead* demonstrates how books about older characters tend to focus **on looking back at life rather than tracing a story as it happens.**

**No, not something that has ever occurred to us. We have novels with romantic episodes involving characters in their forties and older.**

**We have had titles with romantic relationships between older couples in our catalogue of titles in print. But not necessarily categorised at 'love stories' per se.**

**Don't know that we'd actively 'encourage' the inclusion of older characters in such relationships, but we certainly wouldn't outlaw or discourage them – we tend not to dictate one way or another as to the ages of characters within fiction.** Given that our authors range in age from their twenties to their eighties we get as broad a range of characters and ages within those author's fictions.

**Not right to force a writer or preclude them from age/sexual activity etc in a work of fiction as all should arise from plot and characterisation if the novel is to convince in a satisfactory manner. What happens in life tends to be reflected in fiction, so if it's happening in the real world we'll see it soon enough within the books on our bookshelves.**

Can't offer much. **Authors are free to write what they like.**

**We published one notable novel about love in old age some years ago *Cecil and Noreen* by Patrick Corcoran but I don't recall it including much on the physical side of the relationship. Perhaps this is a generational thing and still to happen as the children of the sixties become the aged of the early twenty-first century.**  
**YOUTH**

**I suggest you contact \* \* \* as they are prescriptive; also AGENTS as they are the ones who tell authors what the market wants.**

**We judge submissions purely on the quality of the writing.**

**Generally agree that it was up to the writers to present such change in the dynamics. *The Misogynist* by Piers Paul Read shows an older couple, but good writing will always be accepted whatever the age of the protagonists. Also mentioned *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson and *Any Human Heart* by William Boyd.**

**'... smaller market for these books. (Which in itself is perhaps a symptom of there not being enough of them published in the right way) we naturally think carefully before committing. It's perhaps worth mentioning that it's rather rare for us to receive books of this kind of submission – so that's a factor too.'**  
**MARKETS**

Have older characters remarried or widowed but no love stories where the main focus is on characters of 65 plus. *The White Woman on the Green Bicycle* by Monique Roffey is an example of two people in their 70s. **A marriage of 50 yrs looking back**

**to newly weds and child rearing years. Explores the marriage well into middle-age and beyond.**

- 3. Publishers were asked if in the light of demographic changes in society, they envisaged encouraging more authors to include older main characters involved in romance.**

**Contemporary fiction should certainly reflect society, so in that sense, yes and if there is an obvious demand in that area of the MARKET then we publishers should of course take it.** I don't know that I would encourage an author to include older main characters involved in romance for its own sake, but **I certainly would if this fitted with the author's own interests and demands of the plot.**

**The older reader is the core customer. MARKET/ READERS** .We publish crime rather than romance but no barrier had they been appropriate to context. In one of the series a 30 something woman has a relationship with a man approaching retirement age.

**It seems to me that not enough fiction of any genre deals with relationships between older main characters. In the right circumstances I would certainly encourage authors to address this.**

Crime fiction offers little opportunity to develop romantic relationships but where they do occur I see no reason at all to confine them to younger characters.

**In my experience it is the mature writers who are breaking through.** There are many out there. I think the problem you seem to have identified is not so much to do with demographics **but rather the decline of fiction as a genre that sells. MARKETS. It is unfortunate, but like TV, the books that sell in vast numbers are increasingly celebrity focused.**

**4. Publishers were asked if they had any other comments.**

**A book that is aimed at (for the sake of arguments) over 50's immediately limits my audience by 50%. MARKETS. The more mature are more likely to read books about younger loves and relationships than the reverse. READERS**

**I agree it's true that publishing generally (and bookselling too) tends to be a young person's industry so maybe there is little inherent interest/sympathy. But I still think a really good novel would be taken up. YOUTH**

## Appendix 10. Qualitative Insights of Writer Respondents

Total number of respondents 54

Comments highlighted with colour key: **Blue** = YOUTH; **Brown** = MARKETS; **Orange** = READERS; **Pink** = AGENTS; **Dark blue** = AGEISM; **Red** = GATEKEEPERS; **Purple** = SELF PUBLISHED; **Green** = NATURE; **Dark Red** = LACK OF TRUST; **Bold Black** = Other interesting comments

- 1. Writers were asked if any publisher had given them a top age limit for the main characters in their novel that are in love and actively engaged in a sexual intimate relationship and if so to give details.**

No, but I consider there should be no upper age limit

I have never been given a top age limit, but the oldest that I have made of my heroines was in the first book I wrote for Harper Collins 'Walking Back to happiness' when my heroine Hannah Delaney was in her mid-twenties when the book opened and in her early forties when it finished. **It is more usual for me to have the main character in their early twenties and sometimes in their late teens when the book begins, but the very nature of a saga is that it follows the heroine for a number of years.**

No, but an **AGENT** suggested that publishers were really looking for heroines under 40 – she suggested I write a book from two points of view –

**One younger and one older character** – that is what I am doing at the moment. I'm not good at writing graphic sex for any age but I would certainly want readers to think that anyone could have sex at any age.

**No, though I do not think \* \* \* would expect me to have a heroine over 65 (LACK OF TRUST)** in my historical romances. It might be different for the sagas I write. The question had not yet arisen.

No, my publisher leaves the characters to me.

My previous **AGENT**, (an older man) suggested keeping women main characters in their late 40s, rather than fifties, even.

I'm aware that the **MARKETING DEPTS** at my main publisher prefer a not too old heroine e.g. 40s, even 50s is OK, but not 60s or 70s for the main character.

**It's more a question of understanding the MARKETS (and their GATE-KEEPERS) which you have to do as a writer if you want to stay published, than getting explicit instructions. Novelists galore have been dropped in the past two or three years because their sales went down and publishers were trimming their lists. I don't wish to be one of them. It's hard getting published in the first place; it's even harder saying published. LACK OF TRUST**

No, never.

**Not specifically, although there is an implication in the types of romance book I write that the top age limit should be about 40. There would be no top age limit for a romance between secondary characters. LACK OF TRUST**

No, but I tend to write for young adults. I do write short fiction for adults and interestingly I have two middle-aged people in love in the first part of the trilogy.

No

**No, but then I mostly self-publish so can make my own decisions. SELF PUBLISHED**

If they had I would feel it was to satisfy the general public.

**I would think the publisher or AGENT was blindly responding to stereo-types of what was 'normal' or acceptable and lacked the courage to publish fiction that took on important social issues.** It hasn't happened to me, but if it did I would want to seek another agent or publisher (and probably would have to do so).

I personally have never ever received any instruction or suggestion from my publishers regarding the age of my protagonists or their emotional/sexual lives/. I write what I want, concerning what interests me, and always have done.

I'd feel outraged and would laugh at them. This has never happened to me however.

This has never occurred during my experience with four novels for adults (not counting one novel for teenagers) I suppose it *could* happen if a publisher found a certain relationship implausible – or not very pleasant to read about! – on age grounds, but it would surprise me if it did. **Nothing I have written ran this risk. it could be that publishers implicitly expect characters to be below a certain age. LACK OF TRUST**

I would object strongly. But I feel it would be unlikely.

This has never happened to me. If it had I would feel offended.

**I would feel it inappropriate and outmoded for a publisher or AGENT to stipulate a top age limit for lovers, although I suspect that it's not uncommon, due to ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT MARKETING. LACK OF TRUST. I haven't had restrictions put on me about age, but I have about disability and sexual orientation.**

**It has never happened to me, only because I did not get interest from a publisher yet. However, if this does happen I would feel upset and torn between wanting to be published and wanting to be true to the story I want to write. LACK OF TRUST**

I'd give him a piece of my mind! Love and sexual relationships have no top age limit. No, no publisher has refused my novel because of age of the age of my characters.

I am not a novelist but a medical practitioner aware that love can develop at any age and in any form. I would have thought that any reasonably educated and mature



publisher would be aware of this and accept a well written account. If it were not accepted on ageist grounds I would attribute the decision to ignorance.

I would be insulted. My characters are MY creation and if I want them to be 86 and still be at it like rabbits, then so be it!

This has never happened to me, and I would be very against this. It would be both offensive and unrealistic.

I would be bemused.

I would understand where he/she was coming from IF they were targeting a certain demographic.

Creatively, I would be annoyed, personally, I would be wildly offended. **This hasn't happened to date but in all honesty, all romantic/sexual relationships have been between twenty/thirty somethings in my books.**

No, it's never happened and if it did I would be gobsmacked and refuse to comply. People fall in love. People have sex as long as the flesh is willing. End of.

Not happened to me, but I would feel that if characters or any other aspect of a novel were being capped, then it might affect the novel's potential to be the best it could.

I'd be cross and no – it's never happened to me.

I think that there is a huge difference in what you are asking here. **My personal view is that the age of the author has a lot to do with what they are willing to write about. Young writers may feel that the topic of older people having an intimate relationship is somewhat TABOO**, or simply too difficult for them to write about or imagine. Perhaps because they think of their parents or grandparents, or because it is easier to write about what they know with regard to contemporary sexual relationships.

I would be offended to be restricted to an age limit since it does not reflect the contemporary reality I wish to portray in my writing. It has not happened to me.

**I would probably be surprised that a publisher would demand such a requirement, but if he or she could justify it on commercial grounds I would be happy to go along with it. No it has never happened to me as I have never written a novel. MARKET**

I like to think I would refuse to abide by their constraints. **They take too many liberties with my characters as it is. LACK OF TRUST** I am not bothered that much about whether or not I get a book published (at least, not in theory). Has this ever happened to me? **I presume you mean, has an AGENT or publishers requested I alter the age of my characters – no, they haven't.**

It has never happened to me and I would not object if it was a one off request rather than an ageist policy.

This has never happened to me, but I think I would find it discriminatory.

This has never happened to me but I would refuse to change the age of my characters.

Outraged. I'd look for a new publisher. **This has never happened to me, though I am SELF PUBLISHED.**

It would be absurd – and I would be surprised if it really happened. It hasn't happened to me. (I guess from the nature of this study that it might have happened to the main investigator).

Has not happened but I would refuse to comply.

I would not agree with this. Love and sexual intimacy are unique to each and every person no matter what their age.

This has never happened to me. **As an artist, which is what I do in my off time, I would feel very discontent and possibly look into other publishing options if possible. As a market researcher, which is my day job, I would probably be more apt to understand if the request genuinely reflects the target audience.**

It hasn't happened to me. **However I think an age limit could be restrictive to the story unless it is being aimed at a specific age group then this could be understood because a younger person may not engage with the story. READERS**

If they were offering a fee to write the novel, then I wouldn't mind at all how old the characters are or whether they are male/female.

I would be appalled at such intrusion; it would be like being told not to write about any non-white characters. It has never happened to me, **publishers seem to have concentrated instead on the liberalisation of sexual mores i.e. same sex relationships and bed before marriage now seem OK to write about.**

Extremely annoyed. No.

## **2. Writers were asked had they ever written a novel where such a relationship with older characters was portrayed.**

No for several reasons: **There's A SCHOOL OF THOUGHT that says sexual intimacy is not something a writer should necessarily be describing in detail. There's a school of thought that says amorous exchanges should end at the bedroom door – leave the reader to use their imagination to fill the gap.** However, I have written a couple of love/sex scenes: one in a novel that was abandoned/postponed; between a thirtysomething woman and a man she meets in a night club while on a hen party – it's very much intended to be a comedy sex scene. The second was in a short story where a fiftysomething banker meets a woman in her twenties – again **the approach is COMEDY.**

**At my CREATIVE WRITING CLASS we have never thought of describing older people.**

No I have not written about sexually intimate relationships of any characters. **My one novel is focused on the SPIRITUAL lives of my characters.**

**I have not written about such a relationship but would have no problem doing so. I do feel however that not having this type of relationship would make my views based on stereotypes.**

I write about older people a lot. 'Rhode Island Blues' is about an elderly love affair, Chalcot Crescent starred an 81 year old with a gentleman caller and so on, if only because older women are more interesting than the younger ones, **but I take care to introduce a young nubile person before they come onto the scene. LACK OF TRUST/AGEISM I think prejudice has a lot to do with the fact that NATURE itself is interested only in women during their procreative years. sex drive lingers but is unproductive. If seventy was the new forty we'd have a hope – over forty and women are still having babies, but 50 is pushing it. READERS take a look at the PHOTO ON THE BACK COVER and if they see someone of middle-age they think they're going to be writing about themselves, and not inventing and it's all going to be documentary not fiction, all too often alas, it's true!**

Sort of.

I don't write creative fiction.

**Not consciously, simply because it didn't suggest itself as part of what I was doing at the time. Also it might have introduced a controversial element that would have distracted from the main theme.** A parallel example would be in my novel Gorsaga where I had to decide the sex of a human hybrid. If I had made her female I would have had to tackle problems of menstruation and female sexuality which would have distracted from the main thrust.

To be honest my stories haven't led me down that path so far. I have not deliberately focused on younger people, but as we write about what we **know I find that my characters are contemporaneous with my age and experience. YOUTH**

**Not yet, mostly because I AM ONLY IN MY 40s and so tend to write about a younger age group.** However I do have a manuscript whose protagonists are in their 70s and I will complete it one day. Has incomplete manuscript with characters in their 70s.

I've written an 'older woman' romance, 'Maddy's Magic', as yet unpublished where the heroine is 45 and the hero 48, so it's not chicklit, but they're still young to me. This was in response to Transita's requirements but they were no longer publishing by the time I finished it. \*\*\*\* **Books are no longer in business but were a 'how to' firm and recommended 45 for Females AND 48 for Males as protagonists. AGEISM**

**I think older READERS like to escape the shackles of age and identify with healthy young bodies and beautiful unlined faces. All my older friends are young in mind but all have age-related health problems. We can forget these when caught up in a fictional world.**

**I've written main characters in their 50s, but lesser characters in their 60, 70s and over. However, some of the lesser characters were quite telling portrayals and won very positive comments from READERS, to my delight. I've not gone any further so far, because as I said I want to stay published. LACK OF TRUST. It's not readers but booksellers and big store Buyers who hesitate to stock books with older protagonists. The publisher responds to these GATEKEEPERS and therefore the writer must be wary as well. These Buyers are younger and must be living with their heads in the sand, given the demographical changes in society.** I gather that older women are the book Buyers who spend most. It might be different for **library books** – you know some publishers produce only hardbacks for the library system don't you? E.g. Robert Hale. There might be a bit more latitude there.

I write modern novels for one mainly library publisher and feel that I have much more latitude in what I write, but that may be just company policy. I'm currently writing a story with a 50ish heroine. **I haven't even needed to OK it with them as a specific plot, because my book sales are still increasing and I know what they like. Actually I think I write better books for them, given this extra bit of freedom.**

Too many other projects for this specifically.

I have not written a novel which depended entirely on the sexual relations of any one couple – neither old nor young. **Older couples do appear in my novels, just as they do in real life, and I hope their continuing love, affection and companionship is apparent. I write family sagas usually in a series of three or four, following a family through the generations. The couple may be young in the first book – as in the ‘Laird of Lochandee, but they are grandparents by the fourth book, and still turn to each other for love and support and express their emotions, but from the letters and emails I receive. I think my readers are older than forty. I doubt if my books would appeal to younger readers who enjoy more explicit sexual encounters.**

Although Romance, my novels are not sexually explicit. It would not stop older characters from falling in love though.

No I don't think I would ever do that. **Just because people are getting older does not necessarily mean that they like to read books about people their age. There is surely a measure of escapism in reading. Many of my READERS are in the older age group and they say that they like reliving memories of the time during the war, or just after it, when life was so different and they were young and their heads full of romance. They like reliving that time.**

Possibly.

Many of my stories are about ageing. I haven't yet written directly about sex in old age, but won't shy away from it when the time comes. YOUTH

Yes. ‘Lovers and Neighbours’

Yes, several times, because sexuality and our contrary views of it have always interested me. I started to write young. **With age ( I am now 49) my confidence in writing from the viewpoint of older characters has grown. I've no doubt that at**

**75, I'll be writing about 75 yr olds in a different way to how I'd approach them at the moment. Experience of age helps.**

No, I haven't I haven't any current thoughts about incorporating in a plot a love affair between older persons, but **I would resent it if a publisher tried to ever cut such an idea. I think I would try to make the love scene more important than the age of the lovers, i.e. keep the age part as incidental, as if it were completely natural (which it is!)**

**I have written about such a relationship but they are not the main characters. The main ones are over 40 though. LACK OF TRUST**

I did once write a short story about a couple in their sixties. I never set out to write a particular age group. I come up with a story idea and then create characters that would most fit it. Story first and then find the characters.

I haven't, but I would do so if it benefits the plot. **There is no age limit for love.**

I have not written about such a relationship. **I feel I should break the TABOO around sex and age. AGEISM.** I would want to nuance relationships and connections. **I would want to overcome barriers in the construction of 'proper' as I do in my own life.**

Some of my main characters are certainly older (and some even wiser!) But no, I have not written about love/sexual relationships among older people but I certainly have no problem in doing so.

No, that would not be my role.

No but it is an area I am interested in.

I have and had no issue doing so.

I am fascinated by sexual psychology and am currently studying a PhD in Creative Writing. My novel is about extreme sexual perversion and I would be happy to explore sexual relationships of all ages and preferences.

**I wouldn't be opposed to it, but I don't feel I would be able to write about such a relationship because I AM NOT OF THAT AGE, nor have I been exposed to much literature that does so.**

**Personally, I think it would be most challenging DUE TO MY AGE.** Obviously, this doesn't prevent me from writing it – I write male characters and same sex relationships and I don't particularly have experience of those either.

About an intimate relationship or an intimate relationship above a certain acceptable age limit? If the former, yes. If the latter, no. But it wouldn't trouble me in the slightest. **One of the things I am keen to write about is love across many decades. A couple in a forbidden relationship at 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70...how does it change and how does it change them?**

I have not written about such a relationship. However, I would not have anything against doing so. **AS A TWENTY-ONE-YEAR-OLD, I have not been exposed to a romantic or sexually intimate relationship. I believe there may be a lot of potential to explore this, and I would attempt to.**

No. And I'd have no difficulties doing so, **but AS I'M YOUNG I might struggle to get it 'right' experientially as maturity changes attitudes and feelings that I might not portray correctly in a novel.**

I am currently writing a creative fiction piece for my university degree about a 78 year-old lady. She does have a sexual relationship with her husband, but as a memory. After reading your web site, I am now considering changing this and setting the scene in contemporary day.



I have not written about such. **I would be open to writing about this area but would probably feel that AS A YOUNG WRITER (34) I do not have the experience to do it justice.**

No I have not. It would pose no problems so long as identities of those involved were well disguised.

I have written a very short story about a relationship between two older people, not with a view to trying to get it published though. I am writing a book at the moment which includes a relationship between a couple, starting when they are in their early 50s. Whether this book ever gets as far as my AGENT is debateable.

I have never written about characters who are over 65 specifically.

Only in a short story, not a novel. Usually, I prefer to write about characters in the 16-21 age groups, as I am interested in coming of age. **In a full-length novel, I think I would feel unqualified to do so as I AM ONLY 37.**

No, but I see no reason why not to.

I haven't yet but I would think it would be interesting to do so. I think one of the biggest losses we have to endure in life is that of our life partner in older age, I still miss the romance too.

I have not – I would like to do so but feel one would have to experience sexual intimacy at that age to get it right and I have 30 years to go.

Not yet, but if that is where a character wants to go, so be it.

I have not written about such a relationship but would not mind doing so. I believe that love and sexual intimacy in the older years, as with the younger years, must be good for the mind, body and soul.

**I have not. I would feel pretty out of my element, BEING IN MY MID-TWENTIES and not knowing many 65+ couples..**

I have written about characters in love that are in their 20-30's however have not gone into sexual information in a lot of detail. I guess I worry about how close you want to write about it.

No, only because I don't write romantic fiction, although if I did I think I would write about young-ish characters, and again, only because **I hadn't thought of using older characters.**

**I've not been age conscious but recently having turned 70 myself, I am aware of blossoming romances acquaintances in their 70s. However this seems often a cause for merriment by other contemporaries. Yet children of these couples seem to take it in their stride.**

Only in a poem. Fine.

**3. Writers were asked if in the light of demographic changes in society, they envisaged including older main characters involved in romance in their future work.**

I hope writers will move with the changing demographics but retain a balance with younger age groups too. **I imagine that, as now, READERS will pick out what looks interesting to them and as there are more older readers this will be reflected in readership patterns.**

I wasn't planning to, but anything's possible

Yes.

I believe that **there has already been a move towards this in a few films lately.** The public reacted well to these types of movies even though certain scenes were met with unease

Already do.

Yes

I don't write creative fiction

No. I'm a romantic novelist and would never include a character 'involved in romance' in any novel I write. I am currently writing a novel set in England between 1674 and 1682. **While two of the characters do fall in love, their ages are a matter of historical record and it would be quite unjustifiable to make them older than they were.**

Well I guess some time I might stop writing for young adults –

**I am 58 now and I might write for own age group. People fall in love? Why not?**

**Now that you have drawn my attention to this issue, I might give it some consideration in my work.** However I find my stories moving away from the personal to the wider issues of politics and sociology. I do think it ridiculous that publishers presume to judge a writer or a story on the age of the characters or the author. Interesting and engaging narratives come out of so many different situations and can be told by so many different voices. **Gender and age should not be relevant if the writer has managed to catch something of the 'real stuff' of life and weave it into a tale.**

**Usually I don't specify age of the protagonists leaving readers free to impose their own vision.** So for example in 'Illuminations' we don't know exactly how old the lovers are, only that there is a considerable difference in their ages. **I would be chary of specifying and setting of an ooh aah response of either 'How disgusting' or 'Bravo' with the added danger of drifting into polemic. I am certainly not going to reject older sexuality if it rises naturally and indeed have handled it to**

some extent in my poetry and a recent play, 'Sappho Singing', where she is not only old, but dead!

**I do envisage including older main characters at some point (see above) but more because it interests me than in response to demographic changes in society.**

**In a multi-generational saga I'd be happy to include older protagonists but the bedroom door would be firmly closed.**

Oh, yes. **I'm treading carefully, though, as I said. But I've got some excellent older characters in the sub-plots already – LACK OF TRUST**

And have given them romances. I write complex stories with several quite important sub-plots usually, **so as long as my central heroine isn't ancient. AGEISM.** I can include a feisty much older woman in a sub-plot and I sometimes do. I also include younger women, mind. Books with characters in only one age group would bore me, both as a writer and a reader. After all society isn't made up of older people only or younger people only. I enjoy writing books where we have two or three female characters of differing ages. Have just completed one on spec.

**I have older characters in my novel 'Suddenly You Know' but sexual scenes are not written in detail. This is because these characters are NOT THE MAIN PROTAGONISTS.**

Only in so far as I do at present. I know over sixties are young at heart and many embark on a second or third or fourth romance **but I doubt if the attitude of publishers or the buying public have caught up with this yet. I suspect the MARKET for books depending entirely on sexual encounters of older characters would be limited. At the end of the day publishing is a business so demand is important and money matters – a case of supply and demand.**

Possibly.

Don't envisage doing anything else – older people are more interesting and there are many humorous aspects of growing old.

Not really and for the reasons already stated.

Possibly

**Well, if they have any sense they will. But one gets the impression that the mainstream MARKET is obsessed with NICHE MARKETING and there is as yet no such niche for this. Publishers of good fiction on the fringes may look more kindly upon it.**

**In my experience READERS are far more broadminded than publisher's marketing departments. When I wanted an older (80) character illustration on a BOOKJACKET ; my publishers first tried to fob me off with a very well preserved 50 something and changed tack entirely saying the 'older women wasn't working for them'... AGEISM**

Undoubtedly novelists will continue to reflect the social shifts in the world about them. I write about relationships, so hope I would do so too. At some point, however, I'll probably also write about the new pressure being brought to bear on older people to continue to have sex lives when I suspect many would turn their back on sex and its attendant pressures with something like relief.

I would imagine it could be going to happen, as it's possible that **YOUNGER READERS (say under 40) would take time to adjust to 'elderly persons' relationships as natural**, but I think they eventually would, as long as the love relationships are sympathetically portrayed and are intrinsically believable. Just as some publishers, particularly those with a 'youth' obsession would try to keep older people from falling in love with each other in fictions.

It might be likely but I don't know. **If a relationship is properly portrayed I don't think READERS will ever have a problem with it per se**, or indeed with a 65yr old going out with a 22 year old.

When I was a teenager, chick lit was usually about a heroine who was aged between 18-24. The last romance novel I read was about a woman in her 50s. I don't read

many romance novels, but I believe that older ages are available. Take sex and the city as an example. It started off with the ladies in their 30s and now they are in their 50s and their fans have grown up with them and younger fans admire them as well. **However I do think that READERS like to relate to the heroine and a teenaged reader may not be able to relate to a character who is 65 +**, however there is a large readership, I believe, who would enjoy reading romance novels about older people.

**I am not convinced that writers will move towards involving older people as quickly as the older population is increasing, mainly due to publishers and AGENTS' perception of desirable fiction and who they see as desirable.**

**It is getting tougher to include main characters as they are constantly made irrelevant in the realm of image and consumption. In our capitalist world, young sells and old sells only to old people. Old people are supposed to be asexual and distant. Being old is as distant as death to people. AGEISM**

**I think it is the business/responsibility of writers to move towards including older main characters in their work (and many have): it's only by doing so that the READING public/the man in the street will begin to see that older people are not prehistoric monsters who should be confined to a home and wait for death to come along. I think readers will always have mixed responses: some will take the newness of it all in their stride, while others will react negatively.** But that doesn't matter. **The 'older age' issue should be addressed whether or not the readers accept the fact that society will always be changing and will continue to change.** We've come a long way since writers/the public have seen women as fragile creatures who needed their smelling salts at every turn.

Yes, I anticipate this will happen; but the fact that I cannot quote any precedents I put down my preoccupation with other matters. I am sure a truly literary person would be able to quote many examples.

Yes, the silver pound?

**I think READERS would welcome this as it would show the reality of life and connect with a wider reader demographic.**

**Unfortunately, I don't think it will become mainstream fiction. I think there is a target older audience for such work! An ageing society won't change the opinion of the masses that sexual relationships are only 'attractive' in younger people. For example, Page 3 girls will always be 19, not 69... it's a sad fact that older people are simply not regarded as being sexual beings (unless of course, you are an older person with a healthy sex life). AGEISM**

**I feel that society will always elevate the idea of youth, and literature/other types of narrative will still for the most part be geared towards that. AGEISM**

**There may be a slight increase in writings including these characters, but I don't think it will be a drastic one. I do believe however READERS would be fine with the premise.**

**I think there is definitely a larger audience out there for smart, sexy romantic fiction aimed at an older demographic that doesn't just fall into the generic Mills and Boon mould.**

**Yes. And they will be older READERS too, obviously. It begs the question: who is the readership?**

**I don't think that there will be a surge of older characters entering mainstream fiction, simply because there are certain trends that fluctuate and revolve constantly, which may or may not be influenced by societal demographics. On the other hand, I may just be showing my ignorance here; are there currently a lot of novels dealing with credit crunches, a subject that has been in the forefront of mainstream media for several years now?**

**There may be, however, the chance for writers to explore elderly characters in romantic fiction, because it is a way of taking a familiar story in an unfamiliar direction.**

**Yes, mainly because the READING population is ageing. Younger generations don't seem to read as much as older ones, so the demographics of key characters might alter too.**

**I think that writers would be open to using older characters in a romantic novel, however I think that it would take longer for people to come round to the idea of writing about older sexual relationships. AGEISM**

I would imagine that as writers have longer careers and readers live longer that there would be older main characters – from what I recall Mary Wesley did this to some degree. **I would anticipate it beginning with literary fiction where it is more acceptable to push boundaries, before it becomes adopted in wider fiction and romance. I would imagine READERS are more likely to accept it in books of realism rather than escapism – at least to begin with.**

**I doubt it in bodice strippers, may be in more serious fiction. I'm not sure if the majority of READERS would not continue to prefer reading of sexual encounters with younger age groups.**

**I hope writers will move towards this but publishers and AGENTS have such control that I have doubts about it happening.**

**I think older READERS may welcome it but that younger ones will still see intimate relationships as stopping after the age of about 45-50 and may laugh at descriptions of older couples' attempts at intimacy. AGEISM. Having said that, my own 3 daughters would be quite receptive to the idea. They certainly have not given adverse comments about my own 'older' relationship.**

**I think fiction with older characters would be read by those of that age in the same way that I (aged 80) rarely read 'Hello' magazine aimed at the younger person. However with the change in demographics and people being aware that reading will help them stay alert it may change. I have noticed that thrillers often have a person nearing retirement age in their characters.**

**I think they might, simply because there will be more older writers.**



**I think READERS' reaction would depend on the reader: some would be very happy, some would feel embarrassed.**

Perhaps, I think most writers write from experience and so it's only likely to happen if older writers lead the movement. **However, as you get older, you have more experience to draw from – consequently, the movement would have to be a conscious decision, rather than some sort of accidental, slow shift.**

I think the changing demographics will eventually allow the older person to be the main character, more people will be able to identify with such characters, as an older person. **I can say we don't always want to wallow in nostalgia; we want to imagine being part of something now at an older age, as you read would be exciting. READERS**

If it becomes more common in fiction, that is because it is more common in life (at least among writers – and therefore there will be an audience for it.

Mary Wesley successfully included older, sexually active characters in many of her books and they were considered 'mainstream'. **I think there is certainly room for more. It is about the quality of writing and the believability of character.**

**Many women are marrying later, having children later, and looking 35 when they are 50. With respect to this, I feel that writers will naturally move towards writing about older characters in romance or mainstream. As this would reflect the changing demographics in society, I do not feel that the READER would have a problem with this.**

**Depends entirely on the target audience. 'Mainstream' is a pretty meaningless word when it comes to the entertainment industry, fiction writing included. However assuming that the 65 + market continues to grow steadily and offers a decently sized audience, I have no doubt that many writers will try to cater to the new MARKET. More power to them.**

**I don't think there should be a prejudice about the age you write about. AGEISM Again I think READERS will react dependant on their age group and maturity.**

**I think older people will like it, but young won't. It's a bit like your kids not believing that you ever could have 'done it' TABOO. I guess it all depends on what the publisher wants. LACK OF TRUST**

**It is possibly easier for older writers like myself to write about older characters in love.** The ploy of not revealing their age at the start should work – as explored in EXEUNT.

Yes. Hopefully there will be a positive reaction as the young will one day, with luck, grow old.

#### **4. Writers were asked if they had any other comments**

**I wouldn't want to read explicit sex involving wrinklies, despite my being 77. If I thought it would sell, I'd consider writing something. READERS**

**I haven't really anything further to say except that to reiterate what I have already said, professional writers are led by MARKET forces just like everyone else.**

**Why don't publishers believe that women of fifty plus might be happy to read about people of their own age rather than yet another thirty-something. READERS**

**It is the story itself which dictates the age of the protagonists. If it calls for the hero and heroine to fall in love, then that's OK.**

**I don't think many YOUNG PEOPLE understand how their elders think and feel so they don't want to READ about them. My own tastes in reading have changed over the years and I suspect that happens with each generation. Writers**

**and publishers have to cater for the age group with the money to buy books and the time and desire to read them, MARKETS** whether light fiction or literary. **I do believe there could be a place for one or two really good novels with older characters, but they would have to be special and different.**

**In my works of erotica, no character is older than 42 years and this is because of specific details e.g. smooth skin, taut breasts and staying power!**

I would probably 'write around' the ages if focusing on older protagonists in a romance. i.e. sex scenes in detail. **This is because I prefer my READERS to gain their own 'picture' of my characters through my descriptions and through dialogue, rather than via their birthdates.**

Fellow members of the Romantic Novelists' Association seem to agree that falling in love has no age barriers.

If only it were as simple as writing stories readers want! **I suspect it's BUYERS FOR SHOPS /BIG STORES AND MARKETING DEPARTMENTS AT PUBLISHERS who are the tails wagging the dog in this. GATEKEEPERS. I'm sure you've seen how gender stereotyped adverts are in general.** I yell at TV regularly because of this eg buy Mummy a nice new iron for Mother's Day. Buy daddy a drill for Christmas. Shudder!

**It has saddened me that chick lit has been written and pushed (ad nauseum!) focusing on younger women. AGEISM.** Have a look at the cheapie remainders. There's a lot of spare, unsuccessful stuff.

**There isn't even a decent name for fiction with older heroines and heroes. Talk about a sexist putdown. They try to call it 'geezer lit' or matron lit' but none of those names have stuck. We need someone to figure out a catchy name for novels with older central protagonists. AGEISM**

Some people online are calling it 'Boomer lit' but I don't like that either.

**With the MARKET being so picky and in such a state of flux I wouldn't attempt anything experimental. It would be a waste of time. Publishers seem to want more of the same 'with a new voice' LACK OF TRUST.** E-publishers seem to publish mainly erotic fiction, which isn't my bag either. I tried a partial for Black Lace when they started but they said there was too little story to keep the sex together.

As a post-menopausal woman, I resent pressure to continue to be sexual when I no longer have sexual feelings. This seems to me to be an unattractive aspect of the demographic shift in our population. As a writer therefore, I have no desire to make other women feel inadequate or wrong. **As an academic I am far more concerned about AGEISM at work than in literature.**

**I think it is a great pity and reflects the AGEIST attitudes of western society that more fiction does not focus on relationships between older people, especially women.** In fact American writer May Sarton, publishing in the 1970s and 1980s, did focus on older female characters. However this feminist trend now appears to have disappeared on the whole from fiction.

**I feel that whenever there is a subject that is not being written about that this should be an initiative for writers to begin writing about it.**

While people these days are in better physical health than previous generations and are sexually active much longer in life, **I think more important aspect of living together is our SPIRITUAL LIFE which offers much more interesting story lines for people who have experienced sexual relations for many years but in many cases are just beginning to appreciate their spiritual lives.**

As a male writer, romance is of limited interest – although I do feel that it's good to throw some in now and again. Perhaps as a result of taking part in this study, I'll consider it much more. It depends what you write about.

**Due to socio-political factors I feel there is more energy in YOUNG PEOPLE and perhaps that's what makes literature dynamic.** I appreciate that's a stereotype, but it's true – and we've all been younger than we are – so we can tap into

that energy. **There's a danger that choosing to write about older people could be seen as sentimental. READERS. I'm just throwing ideas in now, just thinking about one or two films and TV dramas written about older people that came over as a bit twee.**

**Age and sexuality/sex/lack of/changes in attitudes is an area of concern\_AGEISM** as people end up in care homes. This has been highlighted by the Alzheimer's society.

This is a subject I feel strongly about, and **I am working towards creating a small organisation that will act as a platform for older writers and creative artists generally. See my website \* \* \* for more information.** I'd love to talk more about this. It is a good thing you are doing. Good luck.

**I do believe however that really good books will always find a market – and that market follows its own enthusiasms, with the publishing industry forever at its wake. If publishers tried to dictate what the public should read, I think they'd find it a short route to ruin! READERS**

**Some publishers, particularly those with a 'youth' obsession would try to keep older people from falling in love with each other in fictions. No, they would find other reasons for doing that. But older relationships ought to become accepted, just as much as gay relationships now are. AGEISM**

It's an interesting area. **I asked my READERS on Twitter and none of them made any negative kind of comment. In fact, they were very positive.**

**Yes. Writers need persuading that there is a market for fiction about older characters involved in loving/sexual relationships – as do publishers and AGENTS. Perhaps one way would be for an independent publisher explicitly stating that manuscripts involving these relationships are amongst those they are looking for, or perhaps a literary competition and/or event with this theme.**

**I think though, that THE MARKET does need developing via reader cultivation and this needs careful planning to avoid it backfiring.**

I think there should be more romance novels for over 60s because love is for everyone, regardless of their age, race gender etc.

Thank you for including me in this questionnaire.

I shall be interested to hear about the progress of this project.

This is an interesting study and I wish you all the best in your research.

Very excited to see the final result.

**It was really interesting to think about this. My books are so carefully targeted at a very, very young audience, it really made my brain tick over. If anything, I've always been pushed to write younger and sexier – I'm pretty sure my publishers and audience would be horrified it all went a bit Harold and Maude... LACK OF TRUST / READERS**

As I get older I feel more 'tooled up' as a writer (life experience, work experience, people experience) but less equipped as a vigorous member of everyday society (depleted energy, physiological decay, an inevitable sense of having seen it all before, new fucking technologies coming out every day!) but I would never plead a special place for mature lovers. Bollocks to it. We are lovers full stop until the die we die.

**I'm not sure if I believe elderly characters are 'prejudiced' against; I agree that as the population starts having a higher life expectancy, then there will be plenty of opportunities to incorporate this fact into contemporary fiction.**

**Best of luck with the study, it's a very interesting topic.**

**I do not just think that it is a problem that writers have. There is no point in an author writing and publishing a book which includes older characters engaging in an intimate relationship if no-one will read it. Maybe your research should not only ask writers if they would write it, but also ask the public if anyone would READ this. If it makes them feel uncomfortable then this could be part of the**

**reason why writers do not include it: the is just not the audience market for the subject/characters.**

**A news item in the Guardian on March 30<sup>th</sup> about the return from a record 21<sup>st</sup> migration of an osprey to Scotland. Apparently at 26 yrs, the bird is 3 times older than most breeding females. Sadly having built her nest and having waited for a mate, males who all came near, flew away. Maybe a moral there somewhere.**

Although I have never had a refusal on age grounds, **I feel uncomfortable when asked for my age from certain magazines. AGEISM**

I think there are more younger characters in love because more people have direct experience of being that age – either they are that age or they can look back on a time when they were. Less people have personal experience of being in their 70s. **(Therefore, those with experience of being in love at a younger age will always outnumber those who have directly known love in their 70s, even in a changing society).**

I think it is marvellous that someone who is investigating this subject. I would love to read it when finished. I hope it will be available to the general public. However I think there have been older main characters in fiction but not in a romantic way. e.g. Miss Marple?

**If I were an AGENT or a publisher I would be on the lookout for excellent writing that made any unfamiliar or untreated subject interesting and moving – I don't see why sex among older people would be excluded.**

**Writing about sex is always problematic, whatever age-group is being written about...**

**With the high divorce rate more people are experiencing new relationships at later stages of life. I believe this offers new opportunities for love and sexual intimacy in the older years and can be contrasted to long term relationships and**

marriages where the passion and love declines over time. **Also death of spouse is no longer seen in\_society as a reason not to begin another relationship, even if the person is past 65. I believe that this is now accepted and encouraged.**

Pru Leith (cookey fame) has turned her hand to fiction and uses more mature characters very well.

**Thinking about the children of older couples and seeing their responses gives a degree of hope for future ACCEPTABILITY.**

**The young should feel pleased to know that the doors to love, sex and romance do not necessarily close when we are old. My best years with regard to those three have been since the age of fifty-nine to my present age of seventy three. My partner is aged eighty-one.**

I would expect that as people's sexual lives grow longer, **this will be reflected in fiction like other trends in society, and it already is reflected to some extent.**

I congratulate you on raising the topic and **for evidently embodying the principle that over-60s are no different from any other segment of the population in many or most aspects.**

**We need to watch publishers all the time for entrenched bigotries or for that matter, new obsessions which establish unfair rules e.g. looking for youthful faces on dust-jackets. A dislike of the idea of older people's relationships may continue as long as ageism continues, as ageism is after all a very natural thing, even if some progress has been made to expose it as matter of urgency, i.e. health treatment, etc. AGEISM exists because youth rebels against older people and simply can't believe that certain abilities and energies still exist in those older people, the age of their grandparents.**



Appendix 11. Conferences attended to present a paper in 2011

Brunel University 8-9 April 2011

**New Cultures of Ageing:**

**Narratives, Fictions, Methods and Researching the Future**

Keynote speakers: Will Self and Fay Weldon

York University 18 June 2011

**Centre for Modern Studies Postgraduate Forum in Augural Symposium**

**'Watched and Being Watched'**. Plenary Speaker.

Plymouth University 5-7 July 2011

**British Society of Gerontologists 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference**

Maastricht University 5-9 October 2011

**European Network of Aging Studies**

**Crossing the Disciplines**

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## END NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> 'Sexually retired' is a term used by Gott and Hinchliffe 64-65.
- <sup>2</sup> 'The third-age' is a term coined by Peter Laslett 77-95.
- <sup>3</sup> Saturation point would have meant including all other agencies mentioned, such as readers, publishers' finance directors, bookshop-chain Buyers, agents and creative writing tutors.
- <sup>4</sup> Fictodrama is defined here as fiction using the analogy and terminology of theatre and is not the same as 'Fiction Drama', a term used by bookshops to label shelving for books as diverse as *The Life of Pi*; *Romeo and Juliet*; and *Catcher in the Rye*.
- <sup>5</sup> Gott 45-61.
- <sup>6</sup> Intimate relationships over the age of sixty-five is the selected aspect of the new dynamics of ageing for research connected with this thesis..
- <sup>7</sup> The Sheffield project was an 'eight year multidisciplinary research initiative with the ultimate aim of improving quality of life for older people. The programme is a unique collaboration between five UK research councils: ESRC, (Economic and Social); EPSRC, (Engineering and Physical Sciences); BBSRC, (Biotechnology and Biological Sciences); MRC, (Medical) and AHRC, (Art and Humanities) . This project is the largest, most ambitious research programme on ageing ever mounted in the UK. At present the Economic and Social Research Council funds multidisciplinary training days for the NDA, particularly with regard to the Media. There are two levels of training and these are held around the country in London, Manchester, Exeter and Glasgow. Such initiatives are already gaining ground with positive results as they nurture emerging researchers in many related fields. If their work is then reflected in policy making, changes to existing practice are possible.
- <http://newdynamics.group.shef.ac.uk/about-the-programme.html>
- <sup>8</sup> For example, Professor Emeritus Malcom Johnson is a visiting lecturer on Gerontology and end of life care at Bath and Bristol universities in their departments of Health and Social Policy.
- <sup>9</sup> A most comprehensive account of the New Dynamics of Ageing can be read in an article by Alan Walker in the annual magazine of The New Dynamics of Ageing Council, 2011 or online <http://www.newdynamics.group.shef.ac.uk/living-longer-still-seen-as-a-problem-alan-walker.html>.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ageing Europe*. Alan Walker and Tony Maltby, Open University, Buckingham, 2000. Rethinking Ageing Series. This series, whose editor is Brian Gearing from the School of Health and Social Welfare, has produced many volumes on Health and Ageing with regard to homes, housing, community care, residential care, the psychology of growing old, politics and power and dementia, abuse, race and ethnicity. Also in this field, Miriam Bernard and Moyra Sidell have published on health and its promotion in old age.
- <sup>11</sup> Bill Bytheway discusses the metaphors and representations of old age in Chapter 4 of *Unmasking Age*. The Polity Press, Bristol, 2011. Also Mike Hepworth's essay 'Images of Old Age' in *Handbook of Communication and Ageing Research*. Eds. J..Nussbaum and J. Coupland published by Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ, pp. 3-30.

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<sup>12</sup> Wesley K Thompson et al “Association between Higher Levels of Sexual Function, Activity and Satisfaction, and Self-rated Successful Aging in Older Postmenopausal Women” *The Journal of the American Geriatrics’ Society* (see Thompson).

<sup>13</sup> National Surveys of Sexual behaviour and Lifestyles organised by (NATSAL) began in 1990. The 2<sup>nd</sup> study was in 2000 and the 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010-2012 is ongoing. 15,000 men and women are being interviewed between the ages 16-75.

<sup>14</sup> The UK Office for National Statistics confirms the longevity figures stated by biologists and geneticists.

<sup>15</sup> <<http://www.radionz.co.nz/audio/remote-player?id=2099124>>

<sup>16</sup> Web. 14 Nov. 2011. <http://www.medicalpress.com>

<sup>17</sup> See Eric Klinenberg, Professor of Sociology at New York University, in *Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Surprising Appeal of Living Alone*, Penguin Press, 2012. Also in this volume Klinenberg recalls the American political consultant and commentator, Paul Begala stating that Baby Boomers are ‘the most self-centered, self-seeking, self-interested, self-absorbed, self-indulgent...’ group at the present time.

A similar but more positive aspect can be found on page three of the introduction to *Gerontology in the Era of the Third Age*, (2011) edited by Dawn C. Carr and Katherine Komp where they suggest there is growing evidence that: ‘baby boomers, especially are resisting traditional images of old age that depict later life as a period of frailty, loneliness and withdrawal, the language associated with the Third Age has come to represent a more positive, uplifting perception of later life whereby aging is being reassigned qualities such as personal growth and meaningful engagement.’

<sup>18</sup> Mike Featherstone and Andrew Wernick edited *Images of Ageing* in 1995 with contributors who have since extended and published their own research.. Featherstone and Mike Hepworth provide a case study of the magazine called ‘Retirement Choice’ and the emergence of positive ageing. They also highlight the dual imagery of retirement/ageing where the old imagery of later life links with the new consumer-orientated positive imagery which they say ‘raises the question of relevance of the new imagery for the majority of the population in a society characterized by enormous inequalities in income and opportunity.’

Another relevant researcher, revealing sociology’s impact on gerontology, is Professor Chris Phillipson at Keele University. He is one of three Pro-Vice Chancellors and has taught Applied Social Studies and Social Gerontology since 1988. His publications include: *Reconstructing Old Age*. Sage, 1998; *Social Theory and Social Ageing*, (co-authored) McGraw Hill, 2003; *Social Networks and Social Exclusion* (co-edited), Ashgate Publishing, 2004; *Ageing, Globalisation and Inequality*, (co-edited) Baywood, 2006 and *Futures of Old Age*, (co-edited) Sage 2006.

Another aspect of constructing age and age identities was depicted in research carried out at the Health Science Centre at University College, Dublin by Gerard Fealy, Martin McNamara, Margaret Pearl Treacy and Imogen Lyons and published in the January, 2011 edition of the journal ‘Ageing and Society’. This School of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Systems examined ‘discursive formations and age identities in print in Ireland’ resulting in the claim that ‘the outcomes made available subject positions that collectively produced identities of implied

dependency and otherness, thereby placing older people outside the mainstream of Irish society. The proposition that older people might be healthy, self-reliant and capable of autonomous living was largely absent in the discourses. Newspaper discourses betray taken-for-granted assumptions and reveal dominant social constructions of ageing and age identity that have consequences for older people's behaviour and for the way that society behaves towards them.'

<sup>19</sup> In April 2010, the charities 'Age Concern' and 'Help the Aged' amalgamated to form a national charity, 'Age UK' that established brand partners over the country. Age Concern, was first created after the Second World War, and until recently was the main UK charity. Many branches of Age Concern did switch to Age UK, but others decided to remain independent.

<sup>20</sup> Bretschneider, J.G. and N.L. McCoy, "Sexual Interest and Behaviour in healthy 80-102 year-olds". *Archives of Sexual Behaviour* (see Bretschneider).

<sup>21</sup> R.C. Lewontin and R. Sennett in "Sex, Lies and Social Science" (NYR of Books, April 20, 1995) openly criticised an article by Bretschneider and McCoy in the 1988 NORC Survey on the Social Organisation of Sexuality entitled "Sexual Interest and Behaviour in Healthy 80-102 year-olds," and there was another exchange of views on May 25. This was followed by a letter in the August edition of the NYR from Professor Christine .K. Cassell, supporting the initial research and quoting many articles on the subject matter. Further argument ensued between the social scientist Lewontin and the medical profession.

<sup>22</sup> Townsend, Peter. "The Structured Dependency of the Elderly: the Creation of Social Policy in the Twentieth-century (see Townsend).

<sup>23</sup> The term 'ageism' was defined by Butler as 'a combination of three connected elements. Among them were prejudicial attitudes towards older people, old age, and the aging process; discriminatory practices against older people; and institutional practices and policies that perpetuate stereotypes about older people.'

<sup>24</sup> MASSOBS: <http://www.massobs.org.uk/downloads/MOA%20Annual%20Report%2009-10.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Barnes, Julian. *Nothing to Be Frightened of*.

<sup>26</sup> Comment by Philip Tew, Professor of English and Director at the Brunel Centre for Contemporary Writing. Along with Dr. Nick Hubble and Dr. Jago Morrison, he is one of the principal investigators responsible for the 'Fiction and the Cultural Mediation of Ageing Project' which forms part of the 'New Dynamics of Ageing' initiative. A follow-up programme 'New Narratives of Everyday Ageing' will use a selection from ordinary people's diary entries gathered by the Mass Observation Project (2009-2012) in order to disseminate the findings of the original FCMAP project.

<sup>27</sup> 'Narrative gerontology is based on the postmodern idea that personal stories contain "a set of larger stories or 'macro' narratives that reflect shared history, values, beliefs, expectations, and myths" (Webster, 2002, p.143), thereby giving a broader context to reminiscing.' Roberta R Greene and Harriet Cohen. "Social Work with Older Adults and their Families." [www.familiesinsociety.org](http://www.familiesinsociety.org).

<sup>28</sup> The Institute of Narrative Therapy was established in the UK in 2000 by social scientists. It now has accredited courses in various parts of the UK and offers the award of a Diploma in Narrative Therapy. There are a number of places like the Dulwich Centre whose courses are linked to international bodies such as those in Australia.

<sup>29</sup> Bruner's list of universal structures: Structure of committed or unique time; generic particularity; individual's actions possess reasons; empirical or rational evidence for actions; authenticated within a



given context; narrative references tend to ambiguity; centrality of trouble; contestability of stories' meaning and relevance; stories possess temporal order (see Bruner).

<sup>30</sup> Bohlmeijer, E., Kenyon, G and Randall, W. Eds. *Storytelling Later Life: Issues, Investigations and Interventions in Narrative Gerontology* (see Bohlmeijer; and also Freeman, M.; Randall, W.).

<sup>31</sup> Ageing studies on later life are of interest internationally, so most conferences invite speakers from other countries. For example, at the ENAS conference held at Maastricht University, keynote speakers were: Jan Baars, Professor of Interpretive Gerontology in Utrecht who writes on the concepts of time and temporality; Thomas Cole, Chair in Medical Humanities at Houston; Anne Basting, Director of the Centre on Age and Community who is also Associate Professor in the Department of Theatre at the Peck School of Arts, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; Roberta Maierhofer, Professor at the Department of American Studies at the University of Graz, Austria, who writes about ageing and has published a volume entitled *Salty Old Women: Gender and Aging in American Culture*; Margaret Morganroth Gullette, a scholar at the Women's Studies Research Center at Brandeis University, whose latest volume is *Agewise: Fighting the New Ageism in America* and Kathleen Woodward, Director of the Simpson Center for the Humanities and Professor of English at the University of Washington, Seattle. Woodward has published essays in the cross-disciplinary 'domains of emotions, women and ageing'.

As this particular conference was held in Europe, the final keynote speaker who came from the UK can also be mentioned. Philip Tew, Professor of English at Brunel University has various research interests which include deploying narrative for sociological research. Together with a team of academics, including Dr. Nick Hubble and Dr. Jago Morrison, he was the principal investigator responsible for the 'Fiction and the Cultural mediation of Ageing' project, which forms part of the New Dynamics of Ageing.

(Taken from the ENAS Home Page: <http://www.agingstudies.eu/page/Keynote>).

<sup>32</sup> Following the recent conference of the European Network of Ageing Studies (ENAS) Leni Marshall, Professor of English at the University of South Florida, now sends regularly by email to all groups connected with age research: a list of future conferences and courses; awards and funding opportunities; together with a list of publications and posts available in relevant fields. This helps provide a much needed forum for mapping the flux and planning future-directed inflections across many disciplines. See 'Ageing Studies and Age Studies eNews.' [enews@agingstudies.org](mailto:enews@agingstudies.org)

<sup>33</sup> Bruner, Jerome. "Life as Narrative". *Social Research*. 54.1 (1987) (11-32).

<sup>34</sup> [www.vibrantnation.com/...sex.../free-fall-a-late-in-life-love-affair-an-erotic-memoir/](http://www.vibrantnation.com/...sex.../free-fall-a-late-in-life-love-affair-an-erotic-memoir/)

<sup>35</sup> Barra, A. C. "Romance Novels in Contemporary Culture" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, Hilton, Atlanta, GA (see Barra).

<sup>36</sup> Ménard, Dana A; Cabrera, Cristine. "Sexuality and Culture". The sample consisted of books that had won the Romance Writers of America award for best contemporary single-title romance from 1989 to 2009. 'A quantitative content analysis revealed that hypotheses were supported with respect to characterization of the male and female protagonists, characterization and context of the romantic relationships, and order and nature of sexual behaviours.' The implications of these results suggested further research is needed on depictions of sex and sexuality in the media (see Barra).

<sup>37</sup> *Gerontology in the Era of the Third Age: Implications and Next Steps*, (Springer, NY, 2011) edited by Dawn C. Carr and Katherine Komp is a very important volume as it highlights the current paradigm shift in Gerontology. Part 111, Chapter 10, pp.189-206, entitled 'Challenges and Opportunities for Relationships in the Third Age', was contributed by Jenny de Jong Gierveld, Professor Emeritus of Social Sciences at VU University, Amsterdam and Honorary Fellow of the Netherlands Interdisciplinary

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Demographic Institute (NIDI) at The Hague, The Netherlands and Denise Brothers, Research Fellow at Scripps Sociology and Gerontology Center, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, USA. The introduction states ‘how demographic factors associated with the emergence of the Third Age have changed the ways people cultivate relationships with others in later life and the extent to which these changes have positive and negative consequences.’ Such international research confirms the normality of intimacy in the Third Age which is only now being observed (7).

<sup>38</sup> Doris Lessing Studies. Vol.28. No.2. (2009), pp. 4-9.

<sup>39</sup> David Robson’s review in *The Telegraph*. Feb 2004. “The old age pensioners go East”. *These Foolish Things* by Deborah Moggach. Web.19 Feb 2012.

<sup>40</sup> A contemporary feminist author. Previous publications: *Aged by Culture; Declining to Decline; Safe at last in the Middle Years*. The latter now leads a series entitled Age Studies.

<sup>41</sup> Marius-Adrian Hazaparu. “Being Old and Getting Old in Romania: Ageing Frames in Romanian Newspapers”. *Acculturating Age: Approaches to Cultural Gerontology* (see Worsfield).

<sup>42</sup> 37.4.(2009): 373-385.

<sup>43</sup> Research was published in June 26, 2012 in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* entitled ‘Dementia, Sexuality and Consent in Residential Aged Care Facilities’. The research was conducted in Victoria, Australia at the Centre for Evidence-Based Age Care by Laura Tarzia, Deidre Fetherstonehaugh and Michael Bauer. The study commented: ‘Sexual self-determination is considered a fundamental human right by most of us living in Western societies. While we must abide by laws regarding consent and coercion, in general we expect to be able to engage in sexual behaviour whenever, and with whomever, we choose.’ The paper argued that while every effort should be made to ensure that no resident came to harm the residential aged care facility director and staff must respect the rights of residents with dementia to make decisions about their sexuality, intimacy and physical relationships. The authors added that policies should be considered and then implemented or else appropriately employed staff be trained to deal with the issue.

<sup>44</sup> In 2006, the Swedish theatre director, Suzanne Osten’s play *Wellkamm to Verona* was made into a film following Shakespeare’s tale of Romeo and Juliet but also set in a care home and acted by the residents.

<sup>45</sup> A new production of this play by Marion McMullen took place at The Swan, Stratford-upon-Avon in October 2012.

<sup>46</sup> A theatre project ‘Ages and Stages’ involving the University of Keele and the New Vic theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme, is currently exploring the role that the Vic has played in the lives of people in the Potteries during the last forty years. The focus is on social documentaries, archival research and individual or group interviews.

<sup>47</sup> From ongoing research by Professor Michael Mangan at Loughborough University.

<sup>48</sup> Although not everyone owns a computer, examples of new relationships late in the life-course are available on television and daily newspapers or popular magazines offer Dateline pages.

<sup>49</sup> Joan Bakewell and Ray Connolly. “Love in a Cold Climate.” *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 Jan. 2011: 22.

<sup>50</sup> New Dynamics of Ageing Programme. In the introduction to the section on Fiction and Cultural aspects of ageing, Philip Tew states: ‘Since 1945, the field of fiction has been notable for the scale of its resistance to reductive, one-dimensional narratives and images of ageing which have dominated other forms of mass media. Older writers, older readers and the subject of ageing continue to retain important and privileged positions within the fiction industry. Building on the cultural turn in social gerontology, ‘Fiction and the Cultural Mediation of Ageing’ will systematically research how older people, both as authors and readers, engage with representations of ageing. By focusing on the role this interaction plays in the shaping of self-image and social attitudes, the project team will produce an integrated analysis which will feed into direct public policy recommendations. The primary aims of ‘Fiction and the Cultural Mediation of Ageing’ are to

understand both how representations of ageing circulate in culture and society (impacting in complex ways upon social agency and policy) and how elective readership facilitates purposeful symbolic interaction with these representations, producing qualitative data through analysis of reader group diaries.’

<sup>51</sup> Guildford Press, New York. 1993: 5

<sup>52</sup> See Sartre’s play *Huis Clos* and the volume, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, published in 1943 by Washington Square Press.

<sup>53</sup> Featherstone, M. and Andrew Wernick. *Images of Ageing*. London: Routledge, 1995.

<sup>54</sup> ‘In British Culture, the complexity of the interplay between the literal and figuratively old and young finds expression in everyday verbal imagery: old heads sit on young shoulders, little old ladies remain young at heart but old in body. Selective use is made of the body as a referential source through establishing metonymic relationships. Thus, the adjective ‘wrinkly’ can become a noun used to refer to elderly people, as in the following headline to a story about a bank-raider in his late 60s: ‘Wrinkly in an old-up’ (*The Sun*, July 4 1990).

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.coffeexpress.com/geezershop>

<sup>56</sup> The actual story entitled ‘Old Love’ can be found in his later volume *Passions*, first published by Fawcett Crest-CBS, New York, 1970.

<sup>57</sup> Isaac Bashevis Singer *Old Love*. Author’s note, p.1. First published in America in Yiddish in 1979, by Cape in 1980, and later reprinted by Vintage.

<sup>58</sup> Hennessy, Catherine Hagan and Alan Walker. *Ageing and Society* (see Hannessy).

<sup>59</sup> A term coined in 1968 by Bernice L. Neugarten

<sup>60</sup> *The Times*, Jan.30 2010: 42-3

<sup>61</sup> Times2Life, *The Times*, Mar.15 2010: 37

<sup>62</sup> Times2Life, *The Times*, Mar.15.2010: 47

<sup>63</sup> *The Times*, Mar.15 2010: 52

<sup>64</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, Mar.15 2010: 15 C3

<sup>65</sup> *The Sunday Telegraph Magazine*, ‘Stella’, Feb. 13 2011: 39

<sup>66</sup> *The Times* ‘Modern’, Oct.14 2011: 4-5

<sup>67</sup> Forest Books. Specialists of literature in translation. 1983-1995

<sup>68</sup> Bizcommunity. Web. 23 Feb. 2012. <<http://www.bizcommuntiy.com>>

<sup>69</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, Feb. 25. 2012: 25

<sup>70</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, July:11 2012: 2 ‘Hollywood studios ignore the over-60s, says author’

<sup>71</sup> *The Daily Telegraph*, July 11 2012: 11

<sup>72</sup> ICM Group is a full-service research and insights consultancy working globally across sectors and markets. The group is formed of ICM Research, ICM Direct and Fieldwork UK.

<sup>73</sup> Fiction and the Cultural Mediation of Ageing

<sup>74</sup> Defined here as ‘Critical reflection on art, culture and nature’ (See Kelly, 1998. Vol 1. p.xi)

<sup>75</sup> Emile Faguet. Original French, (1900): 34 “La vieillesse est une comédie continuelle que joue un homme pour faire illusion aux autres et à lui-même et qui est comique par cela surtout, qu’il la joue mal.”