

Prologue

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

TS Elliot, Four Quartets, Little Gidding 1942

I believe in a Creator, but not in some great figure sitting astride the Universe with all its galaxies determining everything, not in someone I can personally talk to. So I can live with ritual; but prayer is more difficult. I am envious of Emma Kirk, the music teacher in the play, who has that facility. When she finally meets her Maker, she will do so with equanimity. I hope you will warm to her as I do.

My route to my Creator is through my relationship with man, and with an awesome awareness of the incredible wonders of the Universe, of which man is but a tiny part. For me God does not replicate the attributes of Man. That would deny us our freewill. And we would all be puppets on his string. Whether we are believers or non-believers we must surely not be puppets.

There is a price to be paid for that. For good or for ill, we have a choice. We can be saints or sinners. Starting way back in the Garden of Eden - or just in the distant past - we were given personal choice in our lives as our birthright. It is one of the things this book is about. How we exercise it, and just how much of it we are actually allowed to exercise in the 21st Century. Maybe you don't worry about this. Maybe you see personal choice as a bourgeois fad. Then know that you cancel out personal responsibility too, and you herald authoritarianism. Is that what you want?

Despite all that I think that some things have to happen. Providence takes a hand. This Prologue was the result.

Consider the following. I am in Manhattan for a number of reasons. One is to see old friends, not least to see a beautiful lady, now in her nineties. I met her almost fifty years ago when she along with her wonderful husband, now sadly passed away, welcomed me to her home as a guest of her somewhat eccentric son. He must have been more than a bit eccentric. He wrote from New York offering his services to the British Liberal Party. I was also a bit eccentric at the time. I was working in Victoria Street, and I replied to his letter, asking him to

call in. This was the start of many treasured trans-Atlantic friendships that I have come to enjoy.

The other reason I am in New York is a holiday, to look at art works. Many of these were spirited out of Europe while British Art dealers were asleep. At the end of just one more day of this, very fortuitously, if not providentially, I have just seized a rare opportunity to look in wonder at Gustav Klimt's *Adele Block-Bauer I* at the Neu Galerie, and I am in a café enjoying a cafe latte. I notice at the next table a short, stocky, bespectacled, well dressed but somewhat crumpled very senior citizen. What took my eye was that he was tucking in to a large piece of chocolate cake, a huge mound of cream, and an ice cream sundae. He was also sporting four colourful badges on his dark professional suit as well as a very lively tie and something else - I never quite worked out what - dangling round his neck and down his chest. This was not an everyday occurrence, even in New York.

We got into conversation. He was a retired doctor and a wise, interesting and probably lonely old bird. He had a very dry sense of humour that I warmed to. As he drew upon his reservoir of quip and anecdote, his serious face melted into a smile that was at one and the same time both benign and mischievous. A true raconteur. He was also a flirt with the ladies. We invited him to join us that evening for a meal at the *Café des Artistes*, and to our great pleasure he did so. I thought it would be lovely to introduce this great character to my American hostess of yesteryear. It was an idea that appeared to die a death.

Quite a few days later I was walking through Central Park on my way to see my ninety year old lady friend. As I walked down Park Avenue, who should I see but the same crumpled up character clutching a paper parcel in one hand and a broken down walking stick in the other emerging from an apartment. A moment earlier, a moment later, I would have missed him. You've got it. I invited him to come with me. And so we walked at something less than a snail's pace to our destination, stopping only to enable him to talk to every doorman en route, reminding them of his former patients in that particular apartment block, and to catch his breath.

As we walked we discussed many things. There was plenty of time to. His father had been one of the founders of the American Liberal Party. I didn't know that one existed. I shared with him my view as to the Achilles heel of the Liberal - naiveté. An endearing quality if you recognise it, a very dangerous one if you don't. "Insanity," he said. And he reminded me of King Lear. We were on the same wavelength.

When ultimately we reached my friend's apartment, we discussed the play and the background to it, and I read out a few extracts. She had already read most of it. She said that

she liked it, but that from time to time it had lost its way. At this point my newly found friend and admirer urged me to consider the methodology of George Bernard Shaw to write a Prologue, and to put into it the generalities of the thoughts provoked in me by my writing. I could then miss them out of the play almost altogether. This actually tied in with some other helpful advice from another quarter. This friend had identified parts of my writing as "rant". She had liked the rest. A Prologue suddenly made sense to help you on your way.

If you want to understand the writing, you need to have some understanding of the writer, and where the writing comes from. I am interested in the microcosm, and I am interested in the whole of which the microcosm is just a tiny, tiny part.

So here are the thoughts behind the play. The bee - or bees - in my bonnet that refuse to fly away. The assumptions, I suggest, that shouldn't always be assumed, that at the very least I invite you to question. The rant. A play focussing on a School for children with Special Educational Needs provides me with a vehicle in which to travel the world. Come with me.

The play is set in a special school. So, firstly, here are my thoughts about Special Educational Needs, about the policy of Inclusion in Education¹ and about the right to it. Just why, despite all the paper plans, despite all the talk of human rights, why do they continue to get it wrong? Why do they fail to give so many children the one chance they have? And they do.

Rights! My mind goes back to a lecture by Herbert Hart, the eminent Professor of Jurisprudence at Oxford.⁸ He explained that there was not one single meaning for the word "right". There could be five or more different meanings depending on how it was used. Also "rights" are not always complementary to each other and are rarely, if ever, absolute.

Sometimes one person's "right," say a UK citizen's right to live in safety and not to be blown up by a propane gas bomb loaded with nails - or have a fear of it - may conflict with the rights of migrants seeking to enter this country. You have to be very careful how you use the word "right", and you need fine judgment and a sense of fair play in deciding when and how to assert it. It is as well to remember that while human rights may enable lawyers pronouncing on them to enjoy the fruits of Utopia, they afford the rest of us only a partial glimpse of it. In Professor Hart's own words human rights are "the prime philosophical inspiration of political and social reform"⁸. Not more than that. Understand that; understand everything.

So, when you talk about the "right" to Inclusive Education you should recognise that some will want to assert it and may succeed and thrive, some may assert it but be disappointed and wish they hadn't, some may want to assert it but be denied it, some may not want to assert it at all but be forced to accept it with no other realistic choice available, and some may want

to assert a different right altogether, the right to go to a special school. You also need to remember that children without special needs have their rights too

Social reformers have not always grasped this. I suspect that many have looked at this simplistically, projecting what they *felt in their gut* they would want for *themselves* for everyone else. Even disability organisations that have done so much to help the disabled, may have fallen into the same trap. That is why they may not always have seen the quite different and totally varying needs that some children and their parents actually have, and the not always pleasant reality they have to deal with every single day. *Very simply, some do not want an open door. What they want is a helping hand and the comfort zone of their own company. For them change is a worry and a threat.*

Inclusion is a concept that is absolutely wonderful in the libraries of the mind;. It is not always quite so wonderful in the classrooms of the real world, especially if children are excluded when they are supposed to be included.

Today classrooms are populated by far too many bully boys and bully girls.⁵ Teachers may have too little time and sometimes too little training as well. Supply teachers are here today and gone tomorrow. Classroom assistants don't always know how to stretch children in the way that trained teachers do, and those teachers are not always trained to relate to them. A hundred thousand more classroom assistants have come on stream since 1997, quite a number of them supporting children with special needs. Did anyone anticipate this - and calculate the cost.? In addition, there are too few therapists and money is still short. But then the policy of Inclusion was never properly costed by anyone in the first place.⁴

It is far too simplistic, far too naïve, to say that the failure of the plans can be attributed to the shortage of money. If that is the case, then in the nature of things they will be destined always to fail. Fortunately there is more hope than that if people did but realise it. This is not just about money. It is about *the way* that it is spent, *who* spends it, and *where* it is spent And you don't solve problems simply by throwing money at them. That is totally naïve thinking. The very first thing you have to do is to try to understand the problems.

What I sense children with special needs and their parents all want is not sympathy but understanding, and along with that understanding there needs to be compassion. You express sympathy. You feel compassion. A very important distinction.

This is another reason why well intentioned plans have failed. Compassion can never be part of the job description of civil servants. Even empathy may be too much to ask Central

government is too remote, and local government is too parsimonious, and not best structured to deal with something that would better be handled regionally as, for example, airports.

In essence, education should be about preparing children to be included in society as adults. To do that, one form of education does not fit all children, and it is very unwise to believe that it does.

Hence *Death of a Nightingale*. In the play the headteacher, Margaret Williamson, comments "Your social engineer has put square pegs into round holes .. with Araldite." Why? Because he focuses on outcomes and not on needs. When? Whenever he goes against the grain of man's natural instincts.

I have thoughts about teachers - many highly committed to their job, but with too many things asked of them which get in the way, and with not enough time and energy to do it all. Thoughts about all those working in the public service, feeling obliged to do some things they know they shouldn't be doing, or not do things that they should. Thoughts about school governors, and people like them, who are doing valuable voluntary work within the community, but who are deliberately denied the tools to do it properly by those who prefer to do it themselves, but want to make it look otherwise. The con in consultation. The charade of partnership. The make-believe. And as a result, the mess of much of it.

It goes beyond that, and I am only saying here what more and more people are saying. Lying has become endemic from the top downwards. But when proven, lying is a heinous crime in our society, so the denial and the cover-up necessarily have to follow, compounding the problem. And the checks and balances that I always thought were an integral part of a democratic society have been disabled.. Heads should just occasionally roll. They do in the private sector.

In 2006 The Institute for Public Policy Research issued a publication entitled *Whitehall's Black Box: Accountability and performance in the senior civil service* Here is one quotation from it. "What, then, is precisely wrong with the way Whitehall is governed? This is best put by saying that lines of accountability are weak and confused. There is a 'governance vacuum' at the heart of Whitehall." Public accountability should not be seen as an outrageous suggestion.

The recent *Power Report*¹⁰ pointed to "the weakening of effective dialogue between governed and governors" and "the rise of quiet authoritarianism within government." If I can remove the wrapping paper, it is saying that our democracy is often just a sham, that the problem is not so much spin as twist. It is a serious criticism of those who wield power - the subtle and not so subtle pressures they exercise - the patronage they use to get their way. It should be no

surprise that lawyers, accountants, academics and others, from time to time, compromise strict standards of professional behaviour. I have seen it happen.

I pose the question in the context of education for special needs. Is our system of government providing an educational system that enables children to rise to the challenges of the 21st Century? It needs to look itself in the mirror. Read Rudi Giuliani's book entitled *Leadership*.¹⁰ This is what he says about education in New York City: "What the system *should* have been about was educating its million children as well as possible. Instead, it existed to provide jobs for the people who worked in it, and to preserve those jobs regardless of performance. " Could that be an element of truth in it if the same criticism was levelled here in the UK?

I have been a witness to events. Like everyone else I have been an observer. What I have seen in one small part of Britain is, I suspect, a microcosm of the whole. What I have seen could happen anywhere, any time. All of that is now for me ancient history. What I write here is fiction from first to last, but it is born of the experiences and of the paranoia of what I have seen. And I write it as a tragedy, which I believe it is. I hope that I do not give too much away if I say that there are no individual heroes or heroines in the play, no individual villains either. All the characters are, one way or another, victims or casualties of a system that has somehow lost its way. They're all human. If there is a hero, it is Brighthouse School itself.

I have had some positive thoughts too. All is not bad. There are opportunities as never before for those who can seize them, and pleasures abound for those who can afford them, or have been shown where to look for them. The world is a big and exciting place for those who can find their way around it. And as I have thought myself into the characters of Emma Kirk and Joan Errington, the Music and English teachers that I have created, both with a real sense of vocation, I have felt things about Music and English that I was not aware of before. And I have thought more about God.

Music is good for the soul. Whether playing or just listening, it is something you should learn at school and once learnt there, it will last a lifetime. With great Music like great Art you can touch eternity. These are moments that will last for ever.

English, well English we take for granted, but we shouldn't. It is England's enormous gift to the world, enabling it to talk to itself. It offers its rich vocabulary and its strange punctuation, that I can never seem to get absolutely right because I was never properly taught it in the first place, and its great literature. But then I am sure that the Romans didn't appreciate what a wonderful gift Latin of all languages was going to be to the world either.

What a legacy England has bequeathed with Shakespeare and Milton, with Wordsworth and Rupert Brooke, and all the wonderful writers of today and yesterday. We do have to make sure that their legacy is not lost along the way. Our schools also have to make sure that the children of those who have recently arrived at our shores are given every opportunity to see, hear, use it and enjoy it to the full. That is a major task in its own right, one of many they have, apart from meeting special educational needs.

And where does the inspiration come from for Art, Music and Literature? Can it simply be explained by the laws of evolution? I'm not so sure. I shall return to this.

I have also had some new thoughts about politics too. For many years I went along with the idea, as I guess most people do, that 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' was, and is, worth going to the barricades for. But is it?

'Liberty', too often today confused with License, is in today's complex world constrained by rules and regulations; we are moving towards an Orwellian State with cameras everywhere, computers that can read your every movement and filter your email, and DNA profiling. Are you really free when you are intimidated, bullied or cajoled into doing things you shouldn't do or into not doing things you know you should? The play shows how easily this can happen today, and the consequences. But if Liberty is simply an absence of slavery or torture, is that really enough? It certainly was around the year 1800, but today?

'Equality'.¹³ Who really does want Equality? Only those painfully less equal, or those who do not always practice what they preach. Not an argument for not wanting a fairer society, a fairer world and equality of opportunity. But 'Equality'? Is that the right word? Is it the right word in education? Deep down in Britain fairness and fair play are the words that really resonate, and make the country a good place to live in and a tolerant society.

And 'Fraternity'. Some hope if you think about all the tragic conflicts between different groups over the years and to this day, right around the globe.

In short, today Liberty is absolutely impossible to define. Equality is absolutely impossible to achieve, and Fraternity is simply impossible. And what about Integrity, Diversity, Harmony, Accountability, and common decency. What about old fashioned Trust. None of these were ever listed. A bit of competence would help too, and a bit of wonder. We are driving blind. No wonder there are errors of judgment.

And here is another blind spot. Personal satisfaction sits alongside financial reward as a basic human need. That is why self-fulfilment and self esteem make a major contribution to

personal happiness irrespective of income. Are they rated as important in the corridors of power? They should be. Life is not just about money and an opportunity to spend it. With today's excesses of drugs, drink, gambling and promiscuity, all increasingly off limit, happiness, especially in the young is increasingly elusive. This should surprise no-one. It is what happens when you confuse liberty and licence, imagining that you are providing the one, when all you are doing is encouraging the other.

In our troubled world we need an altogether new and simpler banner to say it all..

It should simply read 'Humanity'. In our newly discovered *global* world, this should now be the focal point of our aspirations, the spark to our idealism, the Litmus test for all human behaviour. Some people are there already - *Médecins Sans Frontières* for instance. And the thousands and thousands of people, millions worldwide, who do unsung, voluntary work quietly. There is also the army of those who care for their patients, or for their family, neighbours and friends. But still not nearly enough people rally behind the banner of 'Humanity' not least those best positioned to assert it in government or on a pulpit. There its value is understated and at times undervalued in the pursuit of other things. Shame on them!

We should be defining what is humane and promoting it, and defining what is inhumane and outlawing it. We should identify what respects human life on this planet and what threatens it. And we should not be afraid to look within ourselves for compassion for those less fortunate than ourselves - children with special educational needs for example, and their parents. It is of the essence, yet so often I felt it missing.

This does not divide people by race or by religion, by political persuasion or by gender. Yes, men and women are wired up differently, and one shouldn't assume otherwise, but they derive their energy from the same power source.

Asserting our common humanity distinguishes between fundamentalists who can be alright and fanatics who aren't, between those guided by dogma which can also be alright, or by devilry which is not. It distinguishes between those who care about future generations on this planet and those who do not, and are motivated simply by avarice for money or for power or both. Very simply it divides between people who are basically humane and those who are basically inhumane. It's as simple as that. Sadly, not everyone that is human is humane.

And even in war - especially in war - when the guns are firing, and when bombs and rockets are exploding, those who think that it then has no relevance make a big mistake. Then it is just more difficult to define, and harder to achieve. The imperative however remains to help create the peace afterwards.

And we should stop thinking that when you are confronted by evil you have only a two-way choice, between appeasing it and confronting it. Appeasing it is an act of weakness that accepts it. Confronting it militarily can sometimes be an ultimate necessity, but sometimes is an act of lunacy, that feeds evil, by giving it the oxygen of publicity.

The third option is containment, an act of quiet strength. Quarantine the monster until it self destructs. We have seen this work with the rulers in the Kremlin and with Mao Tse Tung. Bad notions can no longer compete for long in our global world. Let them try, and then eventually fail. They will implode. Let people realise that just as Communism does not work, so other dogmas and ideologies have their fault lines too. That is how we should be dealing with religious fanaticism.

There is not much further to go now, as I share my thoughts with you. Stay with this just a little while longer! If I think about 'Humanity' I have also been thinking too about God.¹¹ Religion and faith both come into the Play. The music teacher, Emma Kirk, is a Pentecostal Christian. She lives her faith, and she makes it her own. She breaks the rules and talks about it in the classroom. Terry, a pupil, expresses the doubts of his father, an atheist. Another parent, Anwar Fawzi, a taxi driver is a Sikh. The English teacher, Joan Errington, is probably agnostic.

I should tell you where I stand. I am a member of one of the smaller Jewish communities in the UK. I have an approach to my religion that is my own, but I am not alone in this.

Along with about half of the world's population, I believe that there is a Creator. I sense that many people feel the need of a faith because it explains the beginning and the end of existence. It helps them to live with themselves, and to seek forgiveness when they need it. It provides a sense of community. It is the source of solace and strength in the face of adversity, and it gives a set of values to live by. It is about birth and death, pain and guilt, and about loyalty to the tribe.

But one of my closest friends is an atheist, and he asserts that his values, and those of the many people like him, are at the very least as worthy as those founded upon a religious belief, and he reminds me of the blood that has been shed over the centuries, and to this day, with all the frenzy that comes only from religious fervour. As he is a retired senior officer from within the Fire Services with the dedication of that Service, he must have a point.

So, I pose the question. With arrival on our shores of many representatives of the world's faiths in what is a largely secular society, how are we all to live peaceably together on our small and crowded island?

As one teacher put it to me when I asked her how she dealt with very many faiths represented in her school in Leeds, she said "We celebrate everything" That must be much better than celebrating nothing, and much more likely to lead to social cohesion.

A number of years ago I heard the following proposition which I endorse here. If there is one God, it shouldn't be outrageous to suggest that for the billions of people on this planet there are many paths to him or to her, just different routes up the same mountain, and that each one is equally and totally valid. The strength of individual belief underpins the validity of one - it does *not* undermine the validity of another. No single way is exclusive, although Judaism, Christianity and Islam all find words to suggest that theirs is. If they have that belief, isn't it time for them to shed it? A compassionate God in his wisdom must have some continuing discretion as to whom he admits to his presence.

I just cannot believe that God has favourites. There has been, still is, too much suffering caused by those who have believed this. We are dealing here with the Infinite. There is no edge to the universe. The concept of God should reflect that, and religion should reflect it too. I am happy to echo here sentiments that others, much more learned than me, have expressed, most recently Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks in his book, *The Dignity of Difference*.⁴

God is not One, but One to the power of n. That is the simple logo for badges and T Shirts, uniting all those who believe in a supreme deity. In the name of humanity they should sport it.

Monotheism stems from tribes in the desert that couldn't live in harmony then any more than they would appear to be able to do so today. The Holy Land is an unholy mess. Jerusalem is not a city of peace. But those tribes produced holy texts, the Torah, the Bible and the Koran. Beautiful documents. There is an exhibition of them in the British Library as I write. Incredible wisdom in their day. But both contain militant passages right for their day, but out of synch in our global world. They were written when the sun went round the earth. Not the other way round. They predate Copernicus, never mind the Hubble telescope and all the scientific discoveries of our times. Further there are some things we are not given to know for sure - or at all, and so many things scientists do not know even now.⁵

So give Holy texts the respect they deserve, but not now an unquestioning literal obedience if that denies to God's presence compassion, and to people of other faiths or no faith their

common humanity. We will need all the help holy texts can give us, if we are to contain HIV Aids and confront the effects of climate change on our psyche, never mind on our landscape and on our financial resources.

So I say where I stand. We should see ourselves as partners on Planet Earth, not rivals, as bringing forth the blessing of tranquillity, not the curse of violence, the gift of sacred beauty, not the ugly face of conflict. How can you educate a multi-ethnic society in any other way? People should not just come together in prayer only when they mourn their dead in war.

If writing this seems all a bit naïve, I still have, you must understand, not Liberal idealism - I never had that - but a basic conviction in the worth of liberal values. That is something quite different, and has nothing whatsoever to do with party politics. These values can be found sometimes, but sadly not always in most political parties. I hope that I am not too naïve asserting them here.

The Play you are about to read is about losing them. Feel the loss. Now think for a moment about what were five quite different killing grounds - the Somme, Auschwitz, Hiroshima, the Gulag and Ground Zero - think what man can do to man, what man has done to man. Feel the loss there too. We all now lead our lives under the threat of much greater loss still. "Care, and take care" is the underlying message within the play. I am not sure that everyone does.

We do need to take very great care of our heritage - all of it. Older civilisations than ours, from the East and from the West, respected their ancestors and the earth they came from. We should do the same. And we need to reassert some of our own core values, and resurrect some time hallowed norms. It is not critical whether they are based upon religious precept or simply upon rational judgment. And they are as much about our legacy to the generations to come, as to things we seek for ourselves, often in our own selfish interest.

How many natural or human disasters must take place, how many temples have to be destroyed, before we start to do this? See the final moments of the Play in this context.

I toss this tiny pebble into a very large pond. I hope it may cause just a few ripples before it sinks to the bottom.

To close, a little story. Two seriously ill patients go to see a doctor. He examines the first. "Oh dear" he says, "I am most terribly sorry. I *cannot* do anything here. " He then sees the second. "Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. I *must* do something here." Hence this Play within a book. Please read it with that in mind. See the whole as one picture - but see it as a fragment of a very large canvas.