A Survivor's Story:

a memoir of a life lived in the shadow of a youthful brush with psychiatry

by Gerry Roche

And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

TS Eliot: *Four Quartets*

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I wish to dedicate this memoir to my sons Philip and Peter and to their mother (and my-ex-wife) Mette, with love and thanks.

I wish to give a special word of thanks to Ms. Maureen Cronin, Mr. Brian McDonnell, Mr. Charles O'Brien and Ms. Jill Breivik who assisted me in editing this memoir.

Introduction

> *A cure is not overcoming anything, a cure is learning to live with what your are, and with what the past has made you, with what you've made of yourself with your own past.*[1]

The story that I tell is of a journey, or perhaps more of an enforced wandering or a detour occasioned by what, at the time, seemed as inconsequential as the taking of a short break. In fact it necessitated a forty year search to regain the foundations on which I had once stood but of whose fragility I had then been utterly unaware: that sense of sureness and self-worth which is the birthright of every person but which I had unknowingly put in jeopardy.

The event that caused this detour was a brush with psychiatry. It was caused by a bout of bad depression, exacerbated by excessive drinking resulting in psychiatric advice to enter St. John of God's psychiatric hospital in Dublin as a voluntary patient for a few weeks rest and treatment for depression. In retrospect, this was advice which I should not have taken.

The detour was the struggle to escape from the label of being viewed – even, and perhaps especially, by myself – as an '*ex-psychiatric patient*'. Many psychiatrists dispute the existence of such stigma but lest anyone believe that it is imagined, he need only listen to news reports about someone wanted by the Gardai and to see how a phrase such as "*the suspect is known to have a psychiatric history"* is pregnant with implications; in fact that 'history' might well relate to little more than an episode of depression.

Though the initial events were indeed negative, the ensuing detour brought me to strange lands (Tibet, Iran, Syria, Japan, Ethiopia to name but a few); to intellectual landscapes (Law, Philosophy, Zen Buddhism) and to uncovering talents (academic research, woodturning, sculpture, log-cabin and house-building) which I might never have even suspected that I possessed.

It would not have been possible to write this memoir without spending close to ten years doing academic research on some of psychiatry's more problematic aspects. This work, in addition to my academic qualifications in Law, my training as a barrister and my previous research work in the Philosophy of Medicine allowed me to challenge the intellectual foundations of psychiatry especially in relation to its coercive aspects. Though I myself was a voluntary patient and never subjected to coercion, it is the implicit, and sometimes explicit, background to all staff/patient interactions in hospital psychiatry. It is for example, a little known provision of Irish Mental Health legislation,

that if a patient though categorised as 'voluntary', wants to leave a mental hospital without permission, he may be detained involuntarily.[2]

The fruit of these studies was being conferred in 2012, with a PhD by the University of Limerick for a dissertation entitled '*A philosophical investigation into coercive psychiatric practices*.'[3] This award has given me the standing especially in my own eyes, to enable me to write this story; its absence would I believe, have ensured that any criticisms of psychiatry that I might make, would have been dismissed, by the generality of psychiatrists, as not only unwarranted but presumptuous in that I was assuming an authority to comment on matters which lay solely within the competence and expertise of the psychiatric profession.[4]

That the thesis has had some small measure of success[5] has emboldened me but the very fact that I needed such validation to write this memoir is testimony to the depth and persistence of the stigma of having once been a psychiatric patient even though my last brush with clinical psychiatry was very minor and over 33 years ago.

Only now do I feel that the torment of psychiatric stigma has been sufficiently trammelled at least in my own mind, to enable me to tell this story. I do so in the hope that it may assist others who wish to escape psychiatry's entanglements, but find it difficult to do so. I hope that it will show that it is indeed possible to cut the Gordian knot and regain one's sense of wholeness and self-respect; or, in more philosophical language, one's 'personhood'.

This is not to be taken as a blanket criticism of psychiatrists. Although some psychiatrists consider those who seek their assistance as being akin to "*the detritus of a broken brain*" [6] whose main or indeed sole need is a medication to 'fix' this defective brain, others (whom I believe to be, sadly, much in the minority) engage with those seeking their help, with deep empathy and manifest an acknowledgment that the troubled individual before them is an autonomous, responsible person entitled to respect – a person who, for the time being is unable to find a path through the maze within which they are ensnarled but who desperately seek such a path. What such people need more than anything else are words of wisdom, understanding and help with how best to find a path.

At crucial junctures I was fortunate to be helped on my journey of re-discovery by two such empathetic psychiatrists.

The first occurred in 1981 when having been on various psychoactive medications continuously since my student days in 1966, I came to the conclusion that the unwanted effects of these medications posed a far greater problem for me than anything that they were supposed to cure. I attempted to go 'cold turkey'[7] on my own but the side effects of these efforts were so frightening that I stopped, fearing possibly life-threatening

consequences if I continued. Before repeating the attempt, I decided to place myself in what I considered to be a safe environment where at least my physical health might be safeguarded and I signed myself into St. Patrick's Hospital as a voluntary patient. The medical and nursing staff were – with one notable exception – not supportive; one nurse asked me why I was in hospital at all if I was not taking medication. From the day I entered the hospital I stopped taking all psychoactive medications; I stayed in bed for the first five days and kept a diary of my various reactions. One morning a doctor (whose name I unfortunately have forgotten but who was I believe a Professor of Psychiatry from Trinity College) put his head around the door of my room and asked how I was. I replied that I was trying to withdraw from all psychiatric drugs as I believed that to me, they were of more harm than good; he said that perhaps I was right and wished me luck. He was the exception and his words of encouragement – succinct and guarded though they were – sustained me over the following weeks. I have never taken any psychoactive medication since.

The second was fortuitous: having heard a radio interview with Professor Ivor Browne[8] in which he described his psychotherapeutic technique of Holotropic Breathwork, I made contact with him and attended a number of his workshops. It is only in retrospect that I can fully appreciate how much I owe to Professor Browne firstly for his deep understanding and empathy and then for putting me back in control of my life's trajectory. A short passage from his book *Music and Madness* both encapsulates his personal attitude to psychiatric practice and contrasts it with the all too dominant attitude of many other psychiatrists:

> *In dealing with a psychiatric illness there is no treatment that you can apply to a person that will bring about real change in him. The person has to undertake the work himself, and this involves pain and suffering. … Many psychiatrists seem to have missed this point entirely. They think that, by giving tranquilisers and temporarily relieving symptoms, something has been achieved, whereas in fact no real change has taken place and sooner or later the person will slip back …*[9]

Chapter 1: Ground Zero

1971: Lecturing, Depression, Drinking, John of Gods, …

"The real meaning of enlightenment is
to gaze with undimmed eyes on all darkness."[1]

Since completing my studies in UCD in 1968 I had occasionally seen Dr. Peter Fahy, the psychiatrist who had been attached to the University's student medical services. (The circumstances that first led me to seek his assistance are discussed in the following Chapter).

In 1971, I had been lecturing in Mathematics at the Regional College in Sligo for over a year and, being dissatisfied, I decided to resign and accept an offer of a place to study Philosophy at Trinity College in the autumn. However, caught between money worries and the recent break-up of a relationship, I procrastinated and ended up remaining in Sligo. I was living in spartan bed and breakfast accommodation – a choice which had originally been intended as a short stop-gap measure. I was drinking excessively and became quite depressed. Shortly before Christmas I made an appointment to see Dr. Fahy but on my arrival, and to my surprise, I was met by Dr. Tubridy, his *locum*. Having told him of my difficulties, he suggested that I should enter St. John of God's psychiatric hospital (to which he was attached) as a voluntary patient 'for a few weeks' rest and treatment for depression once the Christmas holidays were over.

Meeting Dr. Fahy some six months later, I got the impression – though nothing was explicitly stated – that he would not have agreed with Dr. Tubridy's suggestion. Over many meetings with Dr. Fahy, I found him to be a compassionate man who was widely read and was not the type of psychiatrist who believed that psychiatry (or its cornucopia of medications) held the key to life's tribulations. Though he prescribed antidepressant medication for me, I understood this to a temporary 'fix' to enable me to achieve some ease of mind whilst I found a way through the difficulties then facing me. My abiding memory is of him recommending philosophy and literature as a more reliable way of enabling a personal reorientation and reassessment; Kierkegaard appeared to be a personal favourite.

I spent Christmas 1971 with my parents and in early January, I entered the hospital as a voluntary patient. I spent the first days in bed in a locked six-bedded ward which was standard procedure for all new admissions.

One of my first encounters was with the hospital social worker. I asked that my parents not be told of my being a patient as I had not mentioned it to them and I felt that it would cause them needlessly worry since I expected to be able to return to work within a

few weeks. The following day my parents visited me in the ward having been contacted by the hospital authorities – a circumstance that made it very clear to me that I had left a world where my views in such matters took precedence, to enter a world where I might (irrespective of my wishes) be subjected to what in the view of others was in my 'best interests'.

This experience provided the original motivation which led me many years later to begin academic research on the ethics of non-consensual medical decision-making, firstly in my MPhil which examined the withdrawal of life sustaining treatment on the grounds of a patient's 'best interests' and secondly, in my PhD which examined the philosophical justification for psychiatric treatment against the wishes of a subject but adjudged to be in their 'best interests.' (A brief summary of the analysis underlying both dissertations is given in the Appendix.)

On that first day in hospital I was also interviewed by a psychiatrist not much older than myself who was, perhaps, in his internship. At that time my emotional difficulties revolved, in the main, around a lack of sexual assuredness[2] – whether a worry about size, premature ejaculation or a fear (arising from some teenage experiments / experiences) that I might have homosexual leanings.

Many of these difficulties flowed from a difficult childhood and adolescence. In retrospect, such problems would not have been uncommon amongst many of my peers but were at the time never spoken about amongst ourselves – to do so risked ridicule; thus to me I was an 'oddity' or, at the very least, peculiar and different from my fellows – a feeling accentuated by my general bookishness and love of mathematics and even my enjoyment of poetry!

My basic degree was in Pure Mathematics and Theoretical Physics and I was utterly committed to what I then saw as 'scientific' views of society and its problems. During my days in UCD, the student medical services had just been established and had included a psychiatrist/counsellor. I had some academic difficulties in my years in UCD due to my transferring between faculties and had sought the advice of the psychiatrist. At that time I saw psychiatry as an example of a truly 'scientific' way of dealing with one's personal problems.

It was such an attitude that led me to unburden myself in such a complete, open and transparent manner to the psychiatrist in St. John of Gods that early January. Having done so I remember returning to the ward with a feeling of optimism and an expectation that having laid out all my problems they would quickly be resolved. What optimism! What innocence!

Shortly after returning to my bed another young psychiatrist strolled casually into the ward and, glancing around somewhat sheepishly, looked at me with an expression that I

– with a sudden shock – realised was akin to a smirk. I suspected that he had just been retold my tale of woe by his fellow psychiatrist.

I had spent many of my student nights in Dublin amongst medical students. Hartigan's pub in Leeson Street was a favourite haunt and I still remember the cheer that went up late at night as an ambulance went down the side lane to the A&E of Vincent's Hospital which was then on St. Stephen's Green. Medical students were well known for their scatological sense of humour; their patients – outside their hearing of course – often being if not the butt of their jokes, the source of their amusement. Bearing in mind the difficulties of their work, such attitudes are understandable and it was in that light that I believed that my tale of sexual difficulties had been retold.

In telling my consultant psychiatrist some weeks later of this intuition, he – because I had no 'evidence' for my belief but simply a gut feeling – interpreted it as an indication of my being paranoid. This was a diagnosis that I found difficult to accept especially as had I been in the position of that young intern psychiatrist, I can quite easily imagine how I too, at that age, might – with a smile – have chatted about a patient's sexual difficulties.

As I mention in an addendum to this chapter, the implications of this diagnosis and the consequences of my 'denial' only became fully clear to me many years after these events.

I remained in St. John of Gods, not the two or three weeks I expected, but eight weeks, before returning to my teaching position in Sligo. Of the 'treatments' that I received over those weeks, the ability to take time out in a place different from where I usually lived provided an invaluable respite and allowed me time to reflect and to gain a degree of perspective on my difficulties and, more importantly, on how to change tack and escape the narrow view of life and its possibilities within which I had become entrapped. The meaning of the term 'asylum' – shorn of all the stigma now associated with it – is, according to the Oxford Dictionary, "*A sanctuary, a place of refuge and safety …* " and the ability to find such a place of shelter on those rare occasions when one risks being overwhelmed by life's difficulties, is priceless.

It was this granting of space to heal or renew myself, rather than any psychiatric intervention that I found to be of lasting benefit. It was a stratagem that I used many times over the following years when whatever academic, building or craft projects that I had been working on had either been completed or come to an impasse and I was once again without a point of focus and in danger of becoming again 'rudderless', then a month or two travelling solo in a foreign land with only my rucksack, gave me fresh eyes and allowed time for new ideas and alternative solutions to gestate.

The standard treatments in St. John of Gods were psychiatric medications, psychiatric consultations, occupational therapy, group therapy and a psychological interview. With

the hindsight of forty years none were of any long term benefit and some were extremely detrimental.

The medications were pervasive. Tablets were dispensed at meal times and, as best as I could judge, all 'inmates' were medicated; the names of my particular concoctions (some then, some later) read like a litany of torpor: Mellaril, Orap, Valium, Librium, Mogadon, Mandrax and, most hated of all, Largactil which left one apathetic and listless and with an unpleasantly dry mouth.

The nursing staff were uniformly helpful and considerate and, in one's day to day dealings with them, they were pleasant and informal and never, as far as I was could see, showed stigmatising attitudes towards patients – attitudes not always shared by some of the psychiatrists. Two episodes in particular come to mind. The first occurred during a group therapy session where some patients outlined their plans for the future. One of the participants – a young man in his early twenties who had suffered from depression – mentioned that he hoped to become a Garda. This produced such an expression of surprise and disbelief from the psychiatrist who was leading the group, that an embarrassed silence ensued. The implication was clear: that having a 'psychiatric history' rendered any such ambition unattainable. The implication for those others of us who witnessed this was equally clear: we were now indelibly marked; irretrievably defective, bearers of stigma.

The second was much more personal and occurred when, one afternoon, a nurse told me that an interview had been arranged for me with the hospital psychologist a Dr. O'Doherty. On meeting Dr. O'Doherty, he asked the nurse who had accompanied me, to get him a copy of the Evening Press. Getting and reading the paper appeared to me to be the main focus of his attention during the 40 minutes or so that I spent with him. I had anticipated an informal interview much as occurred with a psychiatrist but more broadly structured and without the emphasis on medication. In the event I was given a number of abstract drawings and asked for my interpretations; such cards were used in a psychological test –The Rorschach Test – which was then in vogue. Given that many of my mental preoccupations at that time revolved around sexual matters, this coloured the interpretation that I gave to the cards as did the fact that the patterns were all symmetric. Dr. O'Doherty from the depths of his profound boredom decided that I "*was in a complete mess*" and summarily ended the interview. This encounter stayed with me for many years as did his dismissive comment which – in its hint of contempt – was searing.

Many years later, on reading Primo Levi's account of his incarceration in Auschwitz, I came across a passage which immediately brought to mind the encounter with Dr. O'Doherty some thirty years earlier.

Levi had written:

> *Because that look was not one between two men; and if I had known how completely to explain the nature of that look, which came as if across the glass window of an aquarium between two beings who live in different worlds, I would also have explained the essence of the great insanity of the third Germany.*[3]

Later again did I discover that the, as I presumed, lay psychologist Dr. O'Doherty from whom I had had such a caustic rebuff had in fact been Fr. Fechin O'Doherty, then Professor of Psychology and Philosophy at UCD.

The phenomenon of psychiatric stigma has much exercised the profession of psychiatry. The Royal College of Psychiatrists, for example, has conducted an anti-stigma campaign entitled '*Changing Minds*'[4] urging the broader community to desist from stigmatising those who have, or have had, a mental health problem. The chairman of the Public Education Committee of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Ireland has gone so far as to advocate the coining of a new diagnostic category for those who manifest a prejudice against mental patients:

> *… there is no word for prejudice against mental illness. One possible remedy to this would be the introduction of the term "*psychophobic*" to describe any individual who continues to hold prejudicial attitudes about mental illness regardless of rational contrary evidence. … The challenge … is to confront the stigmatiser with his or her irrational beliefs, in addition to enabling direct contact with "one of them".*[5]

The irony of this proposal is made manifest when viewed against the background of research findings[6] which show that psychiatrists themselves show as great, if not greater, stigmatising attitudes towards those with mental health problems than do the general population – findings corroborated by an editorial[7] in the *British Medical Journal* which is headed *"[Psychiatric stigma] begins with behaviour and attitudes of medical professionals, especially psychiatrists*."

After the initial days in the observation ward, I was given a single room, small but more than adequate. The day-to-day routine in the hospital was not disagreeable. I was awoken each morning at about eight and given my medication, then I went down to breakfast which was held in the main dining room. Here we sat in groups of four, usually the same four, which enabled conversation and comradeship to develop. Although a few of the other patients were particularly reticent, most were outgoing and friendly and to all appearances, utterly sane. On those few occasions when others spoke of the problems that had led them to their present situation, these seemed to be of no greater seriousness than one might meet amongst one's acquaintances – but that is, I suppose, one of life's lessons: that another's burdens seem light until one has to carry them oneself! The other patients that I remember were pleasant, engaging people some of whom became friends. One in particular – an old man in his fifties who did not wish to be discharged because he found hospital more agreeable than home – would on occasion hold his paper upside down when walking along the corridor, simply to see the reaction

on the faces of those he passed – a wonderful example of finding fun out of others preconceptions!

After breakfast we could walk in the gardens or sit in the lounge until occupational therapy began. After that it was lunch and then classes in relaxation therapy or perhaps a lecture from a psychiatrist on some aspect of mental illness or treatment. Then the evening meal after which there might be a talk on music appreciation or some recordings of classical music might be played.

The occupational therapy was mindnumbingly bleak *e.g*. basket making and other repetitive tasks, but one was given a degree of freedom and I occupied myself by learning to touch type. I also made some leather bookmarks which over the years served as a personal memento of those troubled times.

The relaxation therapy was useful and some time later I had some sessions of biofeedback which is a mechanism whereby one's brain activity is monitored for the occurrence of brain waves associated with relaxation. When these occur the monitoring machine emits a sound and, repeated on a number of occasions, one subconsciously learns to be quite adept at getting into a relaxed state. This experience led me many years later to become interested in Zen Buddhism and the practice of meditation – a practice that was to have a profoundly helpful effect on my life in later years. Another experience from the hospital which directed me along that same path was the finding by chance, of a book by Kenneth Rexroth '*Poems from the Japanese'* which was a collection of haiku; these are short pithy poems that startle the spirit much like when, sitting by an open window, a cool breeze suddenly brushes one's cheek.[8]

The lectures on psychiatry invariably stressed the 'dogma' that mental illness was due to a chemical imbalance in the brain implying that a medication to redress this imbalance, was the obvious solution. At that time such an approach was not universally accepted even within psychiatry: for example, a past president of the American Psychiatric Association has decried the overemphasis on biological models of mental illness: " *… the biopsychosocial model become the bio-bio-bio model."*[9] The popularisation of such a model was of great benefit to the pharmaceutical industry but also to psychiatry where it helped differentiate that profession from clinical psychology whose practitioners, unlike psychiatrists, were not medical doctors and thus usually lacked the qualification to prescribe medications.

One of the most damaging consequences of this model is that it is destructive of personal responsibility. As expressed by Professor Ivor Browne, it is not the giving of psychoactive medications as such that is damaging (they can be extremely useful in the short term) but the message that accompanies them:

> *Typically, if a person is clinically depressed he is told that whenever he feels depression descending on him he must contact his psychiatrist and commence the appropriate medication. … this is a lethal message. … to deprive a person of the*

very quality of being in control of himself is the worst thing that could be done to him.[10]

That however was a message that took me many years to appreciate.

Consultations with psychiatrists took place perhaps once a week and inevitably revolved around medication: whether to change it or to increase the dosage. After the first few weeks, life in the hospital found a rhythm and became relaxed: one could go out to the local shops to meet a friend for a coffee or perhaps go home for a weekend. However, it was easy to become institutionalised and – as occurred with some patients – wish to prolong one's stay in the hospital and not be forced to confront the outside world with all its attendant problems.

My own discharge happened fairly suddenly: meeting Dr. Tubridy one day in the corridor he asked how I was feeling. When he heard that I was still somewhat depressed he suggested that he would have to consider giving me ECT ['Shock Treatment']. I was acutely aware that I was not being asked for permission but was being told what was being planned on my behalf. I immediately resolved not to be subjected to ECT and the next time I was asked about my depression I replied that it was lifting and that I felt much better. However, some days before leaving the hospital, what transpired to be a very unpleasant surprise was in store for me: I was required to attend an interview by a panel of psychiatrists, nurses and some others, about seven or eight in total, only two of whom I had met previously.

The interview itself took place around a large table and the questioning and discussion was informal and relaxed. Dr. Tubridy was present as was a second psychiatrist whom I had not met before, and a nurse from the ward; the others present may well have been psychiatric interns or students. As far as I can remember, no difficulties or problems arose at the interview and when it was over I was asked to wait outside for the second psychiatrist to have a few words with me.

This second psychiatrist was a Dr. S_. I had been in the same class at Belvedere College as his younger brother Peter, and he himself had been in a class two years ahead of us. I had a vague recollection of seeing him in school but had not seen him since and did not know that he was a psychiatrist.

Dr. S_ gave no sign that he recognised me or indeed that we had anything in common. The meeting lasted but a matter of minutes and his manner was abrupt. He told me "*You have schizophrenia, it is a serious illness and you will be on powerful medications for the rest of your life*".[11] With that the interview ended!

I was dumbfounded, shocked, stunned. The term 'schizophrenia' had never been used in relation to me by Dr. Tubridy nor by Dr. Fahy, – both of whom had spoken of my depression and anxiety – nor by anyone else and it filled me with fear and foreboding.

Living in a pre-internet age, information about schizophrenia was hard to find; I gleaned whatever little I could in various bookshops and libraries. The consensus as far as I

could determine it, appeared to be that a schizophrenic was one who 'heard voices' and had lost touch with reality: examples given were the those who believed that they were Jesus Christ: who believed that the TV was speaking to them and urging them to commit heinous acts.

Though I was a shy bookish person who enjoyed my own company – and on those grounds could be described as a bit of a loner who was sometimes oversensitive and – when entering a room full of people, sometimes imagined them talking about or being critical of me ['Ideas of Reference'],[12] I had never 'heard voices', never had hallucinations or delusions. On those occasions when I imagined people being critical of me, I fully accepted that this may have been an over-interpretation or mistake on my part so the diagnosis of schizophrenia that had suddenly been visited upon me, left me shattered. The degree of confidence and self-assuredness that I had been able to regain during my stay in the hospital, was – in those few words – stolen from me.

I left the hospital carrying a greater burden than when I entered but with a determination not to be overwhelmed. Many of those who suffer mental health difficulties embrace a diagnosis because it gives a certainty to what might have been up till then a chaos without boundaries; unfortunately when allied with the message that the 'illness' is caused by a chemical imbalance, it can rob the person of the will to take charge of their own lives and to reduce them to a state of passivity awaiting the supposed imbalance, to be restored.

I did not embrace this diagnosis. Over the following ten years until I eventually succeeded in jettisoning all psychiatric medications, I consulted a number of different psychiatrists none of whom agreed with the diagnosis of schizophrenia; instead they treated me for depression and anxiety.

When I left the hospital the VHI, as my health insurer, sent me copies of the various bills that had been paid to the hospital on my behalf. On glancing through these I noticed that one item had been charged for twice. I phoned the VHI to inform them of this but, whilst I was listened to with courtesy, I was told not to worry about such matters and that they would take care of it – an attitude such as one might have towards a child. Doubtlessly the clerk's response was kindly meant however it was clear to me that it was because of my having been a patient at St. John of God's and that had I been in an ordinary medical hospital the response would have been different. Thus it dawned on me that the stigma of being an ex-psychiatric patient would accompany me for, possibly, the remainder of my life's journey; worse was the realisation that I had been complicit in putting this strait jacket on myself. The ghost of this diagnosis would take many years to dispel.

The cavalier manner in which Dr. S_ had made his diagnosis based on what was an extremely short period of observation, compounded by the fact that his diagnosis was not subsequently accepted by his peers, fuelled my doubts about the standing of

psychiatry as a discipline and especially its claim to scientific status. I began reading the extensive academic literature which was critical of aspects of psychiatric clinical practice. The most famous of such critics was Thomas Szasz, himself a psychiatrist; amongst his many books[13], his *Myth of Mental Illness,* has been a source of discussion and controversy since it was first published in 1961. Shortly before he died in 2013, I received an email from him – which I treasure deeply – complimenting me on my doctoral dissertation.

Much of the academic criticism of psychiatry revolves around schizophrenia: about its validity as a psychiatric illness and about the criteria used in, and the reliability of, its diagnosis.

The first such criticism that I encountered was by the psychiatrist Professor Anthony Clare who commenting on the gross disparity between the diagnostic rates for schizophrenia in the US and the UK, suggested that that the easiest way to cure an American diagnosed with schizophrenia was to send him to England.[14]

The most damning criticism flowed from an experiment by Rosenhan (which had an especial relevance to my own experience in that it was published in 1973 and thus contemporaneous with my own 'diagnosis').[15] This study was designed by an academic psychologist who sought to determine whether psychiatrists could reliably distinguish 'the sane' from 'the insane' or whether psychiatric diagnoses flowed more from the context in which psychiatrists encountered their subjects, rather than from any intrinsic characteristic of the subjects themselves. He sought to get 'normal' people admitted to psychiatric hospitals to see if, and how, their sanity was detected.

Rosenhan and a number of pseudopatients (the majority being psychologists) sought admission to a variety of mental hospitals by arriving at the admissions office complaining that they had heard voices which were unclear "*… but as far as he could tell they said "empty," "hollow," and "thud". … It is as if the hallucinating person were saying, "My life is empty and hollow.""*

Immediately on admission the pseudopatients ceased displaying any sign of abnormality; they were told that they would be discharged when they convinced the staff that they were sane.

Seeking early discharge, they became model patients but, despite this, their deception remained undetected by the staff. Of the twelve admissions, eleven were diagnosed as schizophrenic and one, "*with identical symptomatology*"[16] as having manic depressive psychosis.

Rosenhan noted the severity of the stigma associated with schizophrenia and of the "*massive role of labeling"*:

> *Having once been labeled schizophrenic, there is nothing the pseudopatient can do to overcome the tag. The tag profoundly colors others' perceptions of him and his behavior. … Once the impression has been formed that the patient is schizophrenic,*

> *the expectation is that he will continue to be schizophrenic. … Eventually, the patient himself accepts the diagnosis, with all of its surplus meanings and expectations, and behaves accordingly. … … But psychiatric diagnoses are rarely found to be in error. The label sticks, a mark of inadequacy forever.*

The results of the Rosenhan experiment seriously undermined psychiatry's claim to being a scientific enterprise.

The response of the psychiatric profession was to begin a rigid formalisation of its diagnostic criteria into a compendium entitled '*The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*' [DSM] which is now in its fifth edition; this provides sets of necessary and sufficient conditions[17] for the diagnosis of various psychiatric disorders. The hope was that such a formulation would ensure that scandals caused by disparities of diagnosis (such as occurred in the Rosenhan experiment) would no longer occur. Though such formulations of diagnostic criteria are reported in the psychiatric literature as permitting high levels of reliability, this is misleading in that the term 'reliability' is being used as a synonym for 'consistency'; the crucial concept of validity often receiving scant attention. The 'validity' of a diagnostic category focuses on the question of whether – though well defined – it reflects an actual pathology; 'chronic fatigue syndrome' or the 'Gulf War syndrome' provides modern example from general medicine.

In the history of psychiatry there are many examples of psychiatric diagnostic categories that are now regarded as little more than curiosities: '*drapetomania'*, (a slave's excessive wish for freedom), '*fugue'* (an inordinate desire to travel) are two such; these categories could be described as no longer having validity in that their diagnostic criteria – though perhaps well-defined and hence capable of being diagnosed reliably – are no longer considered to be an illness; the removal of homosexuality from the list of psychiatric diagnoses provides a more recent example.

Szasz is one of many other psychiatrists who have argued[18] that, as a diagnostic category, schizophrenia also lacks validity. Ivor Browne believes that the cause of much that is labelled schizophrenia may lie in the psychiatric intervention itself[19] and, notwithstanding the development of the DSM, the reliability of the diagnosis of schizophrenia has also been questioned.

A 1999 study[20] sought to determine whether the disparity in the rate of diagnosis of schizophrenia between white and non-white communities in the UK might be due to racist attitudes amongst psychiatrists. To that end, the study compared diagnoses made by a black Jamaican psychiatrist with those made by white British psychiatrists and concluded:

> *Despite diagnosing schizophrenia in similar proportions of patients, the Jamaican psychiatrist and British psychiatrists showed low levels of agreement on <u>which</u> patients had this illness. … There was agreement on the diagnosis for 16 (55%) of these patients, and disagreement on the diagnosis for the other 13 (45%). … Of the seven patients from the 'disagreement' group diagnosed as having schizophrenia by the British psychiatrists, three were diagnosed with mania, two with depression, and two were given no diagnosis by the Jamaican psychiatrist.*

Though the study was inconclusive in relation to whether misdiagnosis was occasioned by racial factors, it was unequivocal as to the existence of high rates of misdiagnosis of schizophrenia.

The existence of racial prejudice in relation to diagnosis was subsequently confirmed from an unexpected source – a 2004 survey of UK psychiatrists[21] which found that they believed that *other* psychiatrists *often* misdiagnose schizophrenia amongst the non-white population; a finding which not only casts doubt on the psychiatrists own reliability but bespeaks a level of professional denial.

As I slowly became aware of such results, I realised that my sense of grievance at my own experience of the vicissitudes of clinical psychiatric diagnosis, might best be expressed through writing, from a critical perspective, an academic study of psychiatry; such a project would, I believed, not only be of benefit to myself but might also help others who had been bruised by their experience of psychiatry and might assist them to acquire the knowledge and critical skills to enable their sense of self-worth to be restored. Thus the genesis of my PhD project.

On leaving the hospital, I resolved to make radical changes to how I lived my life: I decided to resign my job and take tentative steps to embark on a new life path.

I had been a Lecturer in what is now the College of Technology in Sligo. It was a permanent job and most of my friends urged me not to relinquish such a highly paid and not especially onerous position. One colleague however who had become a very good friend but is now sadly deceased, was Phonsy Pettit; he was a barrister and Law Lecturer at the College. We shared an office and over many interesting discussions – and not a few pints – I became fascinated with law, rights and civil liberties (this was a time when the troubles in the North were much in the news). I decided to apply to the Law Faculty at UCD with a view to beginning legal studies. I was accepted on the BCL course for that following autumn. The BCL is an academic qualification in Law and does not entitle one to practice as either a barrister or a solicitor so because I hoped to become a barrister, I also applied to the King's Inns and was accepted.

On returning to Sligo, I finished the final draft of my MSc thesis[22] and submitted it to TCD some months later. Rather than seeking an extended leave of absence, I formally resigned my position and the 'burning of my bridges' gave me a wonderful sense of exhilaration, freedom and possibility.

To mark the beginning of a new life I bought a new rucksack and planned to make what was to me a challenging journey: to travel to St. Petersburg in Russia and then on to Finland, the North Cape, then Norway, Sweden and Denmark before finally returning home in time to begin my legal studies. In the event visa difficulties precluded me travelling to Russia but early in the summer of 1972 I took a flight to Helsinki. But

before describing these travels I want to first talk about my early life leading up to the events described in this chapter. This will be the subject of the following chapter.

Addendum

In 2002, many years after the events discussed earlier in this chapter, I attended an international postgraduate conference on the Philosophy of Psychiatry where Professor Fulford[23] – one of the leading experts in that area – spoke on the topic of 'delusions' with particular emphasis on 'delusions of infidelity.'

During the course of his lecture, the clinical justifications for the diagnosis which I had been given in 1972, became clear to me; in particular, my earlier unwillingness to accept the label of paranoia constituted – to a clinical psychiatrist – a 'denial' which (as asserted in the psychiatric literature[24]) constitutes new and independent evidence not only of mental illness but of schizophrenia.

Professor Fulford gave as an example of delusion, a man who believed that his wife was unfaithful but who was unable to justify this belief; and – elaborating on this example – he asserted that even if the psychiatrist interviewing the man knew that the wife had been unfaithful (she having earlier confessed this to the psychiatrist) this would not change the diagnosis of delusion.[25]

That a true belief might be classed as a delusion appears to be a contradiction in terms yet most psychiatrists appear untroubled by this seeming paradox, although some isolated dissenting voices are occasionally raised. I found this assertion galling especially as my studies in Mathematics and Law had made clear to me that logical rigour can have only the most limited application to the problems of daily life and that even the most cherished of our beliefs rests on tenuous foundations with but the slimmest possibility of adequate justification.[26]

In my dissertation I quoted from a novel[27] of family life to show how far the psychiatric requirement that a belief (if not to be delusional) be justified, diverges from our everyday life experience. The excerpt describes how Elisa (who is married to Gilles) suddenly becomes aware of a sexual tension between Gilles and Elisa's younger sister, Victorine:

> *"Victorine, in gloves and hat, was all ready to go, leaning on the table with both hands. He was very close to her. Turning her back on the room, Elisa stood by the wardrobe and rummaged in her handbag. … Precisely at that moment Elisa knew that behind her back there was another world, a world that was complicated, threatening, unknown. She felt it to be so and she was certain she was not mistaken; she was also certain that it was absolutely essential not to turn round suddenly and confront it. Disturbed by this mysterious insight, which seemed suddenly to have seized her by the throat, she waited a moment before slowly turning, at first only halfway, looking straight in front of her with faraway eyes, then three-quarters, then at last full face. She looked at them both. They seemed not to have moved: they were in exactly the same position they had been in a few minutes earlier, before she had had her insight.*

… She thought: 'For several weeks something has been going on between Gilles and Victorine. It may even be too late to prevent the worst.'"

Elisa suspects, rightly, that her husband is beginning an affair with Victorine. If asked to justify her belief, she would be unable; she would be forced into silence or, at best, a mumbling inarticulacy about the meaning of glances: furtive and sexual.

Is it meaningful to suggest that because Elisa cannot justify her belief that she is delusional? That no such possibility is adverted to in the novel and the fact that the reader can empathise with Elisa and may remember, or imagine, similar situations where the attraction between people is obvious to those perceptive enough to notice, is sufficient to dispel any such suggestion.

It may seem pedantic to quibble over such matters but the context in which these issues are discussed in my dissertation, is that of coercive psychiatry where – as in criminal law – the liberty of an individual is in jeopardy.

The ways by which we come to hold beliefs are myriad and I would hazard a guess that it is extremely rare to arrive at a belief as a necessary consequence of a process of logical analysis and syllogistic reasoning. Thus it is of the profoundest importance that beliefs that one cannot justify are not, by that very fact alone, classified as delusions[28]. To assert otherwise would indeed leave many clinical psychiatrists – in their espousal of some treatments which not only lack an adequate evidence base but run counter to the available evidence – open to that very charge.[29]

These comments are not intended as a criticism of the concept of delusion, to its importance to clinical psychiatry or to the criminal law. A brief reflection on the havoc that may be unleashed by an armed man who, for example, believes that he hears voices instructing him to kill demonstrates this. My plea is that psychiatrists – and especially philosophers of psychiatry – clearly distinguish between such beliefs (rightly classified as delusions) and cases where for example a man believes his wife is being unfaithful but is unable to justify this belief and most especially in cases where his psychiatrist knows that the wife was, in fact, unfaithful. One point of difference between such beliefs – which may be of assistance in drawing the required distinction – is whether the husband *insists* that all others accept his belief as being true even though he is unable to justify this belief to their satisfaction.

A last point concerns the classification of a subject's unwillingness to accept a psychiatric diagnosis as 'denial'. Such a stance bespeaks – on the part of psychiatrists – a troubling lack of modesty or acceptance that they too are fallible and prone to mistakes and misdiagnoses. Psychiatric misdiagnosis is not such an isolated phenomenon as to permit it being dismissed as of little consequence; on the contrary, such misdiagnoses have

been estimated as being about 25% – that is one in every four such diagnoses are erroneous.[30]

Chapter 2: Zero minus one

1945-71: Childhood, School, University …

So we beat on, boats against the current,
borne back ceaselessly into the past.[1]

I was born in Dublin in 1945 to parents Eva and Frank.

My father was a commercial traveller and at one stage held Irish agencies for various UK companies but the imposition of Irish import duties in the 1950's grievously damaged his business. Some of these companies were manufacturers of china and a profusion of ornamental Toby jugs throughout the house provided a later reminder of those days; the kitchen also contained a plentiful supply of china plates each with a small ¼" round hole in its centre (oddments from pastry-displays); eating a gravy stew from such plates required some dexterity but was also a reminder of our straightened circumstances.

He later acquired agencies for some Irish confectionary products and eventually become a wholesaler of these products. He also bought a small confectionary shop in Drumcondra which was run by my mother.

My father was a very affable and generous man and utterly without guile. Occasionally his business acumen let him down resulting in financial difficulties and at one stage he lost a factory to a business partner. As evidence of his trustiness, he had the misfortune to choose as his accountant perhaps the only accountant in Ireland ever to spend time in Mountjoy Prison though this had no connection with my father.

My father lacked a secondary education and this was a matter of some shame to him. He often told of how, at the age of twelve, the Christian Brothers had taken his schoolbooks back from him because he couldn't pay and that this marked the end of his schooling.

His family were from Kilkenny and his own father, who had been a gardener at Jenkinstown House, died before I was born. It was a large family and my father was the youngest but I have little knowledge or memory of his siblings other than two aunts who lived in Dublin but who were not close and an uncle who occasionally arrived from England in an expensive car and was reputedly very wealthy. Of my father's family the only one that I was close to was his mother and she lived toward the end of her life in a flat in Mount St. in Dublin. She was a warm happy and loving grandmother and her death when I was eight was a deep shock to me and was my first awareness of mortality. Her death caused something of a family rift because my mother who was a nurse, had undertaken to give some daily injections to my grandmother and an aunt believing that my mother had been late in giving one injection, blamed my mother for the death.

Years later when I was at university and still living at home one of my fondest memories is of my father coming to my room one evening when I had been studying non-stop for my finals, and giving me a ten shilling note (enough in those days for four pints of Guinness and still some change!) and telling me to go up to our local public house, to relax and get away from my books for a while. It was a gesture of simple kindness; in contrast, my mother's acts of generosity often had an ulterior motive. She could be quite calculating – not cold; however I have no memories of, as a child, ever being hugged by her.

My mother, Eva, was born near Ballaghaderreen in Roscommon and educated at the Ursuline convent in Sligo. She had trained as a nurse and had worked for some time as a nurse/companion to a wealthy elderly woman before meeting and marrying my father. She had two younger sisters Florrie and Molly. Their mother had been the headmistress in the local National School in Lisacul. Though my grandmother presented quite a severe face to the world, I remember nothing but kindness from her and evenings spent in the dim light of a paraffin lamp, looking into a turf fire to see what patterns might spring forth.

Their father, Tom King, was a farmer though this more in name than in fact. I remember him as a kindly man given to few words. It was a house, however, where there was an unrelenting silence between my grandparents. As I was to find to my cost during my adolescent years, silence can be a very effective weapon and it was a tactic often employed by my mother whenever her will was thwarted; a tactic that she had doubtlessly learned at her own mother's knee and on that account alone merits a degree of forgiveness.

Later I heard that as a young man, Tom King had begun third-level studies but was obliged to return to take charge of the family farm when his elder brother emigrated. On marrying my grandmother, her desire for a new and larger house necessitated his selling some land which further lessened his interest in farming. Seemingly outside the house he was a gregarious man with a fondness for drink and it was said that he had an uncanny ability to sniff out a funeral even at considerable distance and then to head off on his bicycle perhaps to disappear for a few days. My enduring memory of him was, as a ten-year-old, of spending a sunny summer day accompanying him to one of his fields overlooking a lake; the day was spent lazing, looking at the clouds, the lake and the sky, in blissful contentment; little work was done that day.

The house itself – though large and imposing compared to its neighbours – had not been well built; it was cold and so damp that the timber floors in the sitting room had begun to give way and, when entering the room, a large heavy carpet seemed to be one's main support. Books were in abundance and even a wind-up record player echoed happier times. My grandparents had separate bedrooms and the other bedroom – which had been their daughters' – was, to my young eyes, huge with a high ceiling, its walls

dominated by three large religious paintings. As a young boy, climbing the stairs at night with a solitary candle to confront these biblical ghosts was a chilling experience; perhaps in this lies the root of my antipathy to organised religion!

My aunt Florrie was a formative influence on my youth. After completing secondary school she had been sent as a companion to her maternal grandmother from whom, according to family lore, Florrie acquired her fierce independent – and sometimes combative – spirit and a deep love of books and especially poetry.

She had worked as a secretary in Dublin; had never married and lived in a small flat opposite the Jesuit Church in Gardiner Street. She visited our home at least once a week. She was very religious but unusual for those times, was very tolerant of other differing views. As a teenager I was highly critical of the Catholic Church and inclining more and more towards atheism and whereas others met these views with hostility, she extended a benevolent tolerance, taking some pride I believe, in that I was at least learning to forge my own path – crooked though it might be. She was an avid theatre goer and maintained a correspondence with, amongst others, Michael MacLiammor. She brought me to the Abbey and introduced me to the paintings of Jack Yeats in the National Gallery. She spoke to me about the Irish architect and designer Eileen Gray who, at that time was practically unknown in her home country. Most memorably was her ability to give a present or memento which was so uncannily appropriate to the moment as to indicate a mind utterly attuned to the needs of others.

Our family lived in Church Avenue in Drumcondra until moving close by to Clonturk Park when my sister Mary was born; at that time I was eight. As children – much like other competing siblings – we had a somewhat fractious relationship, but as teenagers and especially later when she was at university, we became very close. She studied English at Trinity College and loved it so much that she changed her forename name to 'Trin' in later life in a gesture of allegiance to her alma mater. She was in thrall to Brendan Kennelly and much admired David Norris who were her professors. She married and went to Australia but sadly, was killed in a car crash in Perth in 2012. She was vivacious and mischievous and I miss her deeply.

At one end of Church avenue there was a pub – the Cat and Cage[2] – and a 17th century Protestant church and graveyard at the other. Dominating all was a Catholic seminary (All Hallows College); an adjoining street contained a Protestant orphanage. Close by was High Park Convent which at the time was spoken of in whispers but later achieved notoriety for its being a Magdalene Laundry. Religion pervaded the environment and it was a sectarian religion; I remember mothers' of adolescent friends wondering whether as Catholics they risked excommunication simply by attending a funeral in the Protestant Church or even supporting the annual Protestant orphanage garden party.

My image of Catholic priests of that time was of dour, unsmiling men strongly attached to power and money. On my later travels the only religious that I encountered that were

comparable to Irish priests in this regard were Ethiopians clergy who appeared to have '$' signs in their eyes in place of pupils.

Years later when travelling in Tibet, I became fascinated with the demeanour of the Buddhist monks that I encountered – always a ready smile and eyes ablaze with spirit and mischievousness. Prior to visiting Tibet, I had neither knowledge of, nor interest in Buddhism but the startling contrast between the presence of the Buddhist monks and that of the Catholic priests made me wonder what 'food' sustained them – my later interest in Zen grew from the very posing of that question; but that awareness of an inner 'light' that carried them, had been sparked already by a seemingly inconsequential encounter when I was eight.

Occasionally whilst playing on the road outside my home, I noticed an elderly man walking home with the aid of a stick and over time we started to talk. He was a retired sailor and talked of his travels. Of these encounters, what lodged in my memory many years later were two things: the brightness of his smiling eyes and his advice to I know not what childish question of mine, to always breathe deeply as if from the pit of one's stomach. Looking back sixty years later this advice seems in a strange way to presage what was to become a sustaining part of my life: my Zen meditation practice; what is even stranger is that at the time it must have made such an impression on me that it often came to mind over the intervening years

I attended St. Patrick's National school until I was about twelve and was then sent to the Junior school at Belvedere College.

St. Patrick's was attached to a teacher training college and was an excellent school. Corporal punishment was, if not absent, rare. The one occasion when I remember being beaten with a leather strap, was for not knowing my nine-times tables specifically 9x7; ever after, 9x7=63 was etched in my mind and became a lodestar when I was asked to do calculations such as 7x8 or 9x6.

Home, during those pre-teenage years, was not the happiest of places. My parents quarrelled over money and particularly over my mother's wish to have financial independence and this she tried to achieve by taking in bed & breakfast guests. My father's drinking was also a source of endless quarrels and I remember nights sitting with my sister at the top of the stairs overhearing the arguments between them and fearful that my father might leave. Around this time I began to steal money and toys from the shop; each evening the till would be balanced but it was possible to then remove some money from the day's takings because though they would be aggregated and lodged each week at the bank, these weekly figures were never checked. With this stolen money a friend and I would buy comics or go to the cinema or the zoo or treat ourselves to a meal in Cafollas in Dublin. I stole toys – especially Dinky cars – and hid these in my room. When finished reading the comics, I would slip them down into a gap behind the bath so that they were unseen and would not be discovered. Once, unexpectedly, a

plumber called to do some work in the bathroom and all the comics came tumbling out onto the floor; the stolen cars were discovered not long after. All hell broke loose: I was confined to my room; a nurse colleague of my mother who was married to a detective and was a formidable woman in her own right was summoned to speak to me; having recently joined the scouts, I was frogmarched by my mother to my local club where I was reprimanded for my misdemeanours in front of the scout leader and my fellow boy scouts. Presumably my mother believed that this public humiliation might deter me from committing any further misdemeanours. Why I stole so much I do not know but being unduly kind to myself I can guess that it was an expression of my unhappiness at that time.

My mother had great, but unspecified, ambitions for me. Unlike her sister Florrie, she had no love of books; no appreciation that they enabled a wider understanding of the world and on that account alone should be appreciated. To her, education was purely utilitarian; the goal being a 'good' job, social standing and, with luck, wealth. To that end, from the age of seven I had to sit with her each afternoon after school, for an hour or so and be examined on such as the rivers and mountains of Europe or notable battles in Irish History. On Saturdays I had to attend elocution classes (Miss Bourke's Academy in Kildare Street).

Though the elocution classes lasted only a year, the extra tuitions continued at various points throughout my secondary education, given by various retired teachers of very mixed ability. Though sometimes these 'grinds' gave rise to unexpected pleasures: one evening at a maths grind which was held in a room in a house in Parnell Square, I was the last student and the teacher asked me to lock up and leave the keys downstairs; later going down the stairs I, as a 14 year old, encountered a girl of my own age in ballet dress coming out of the ballet school which was on the floor below. By some bizarre coincidence she was the last pupil and like me had been left to lock up. One thing lead to another and, ever after, on passing Parnell Square I would smile and fondly reminisce!

Unlike my father, my mother was highly attuned to the differing gradations of social standing in our local community; the priest and the doctor would have been at the top followed by teachers, civil servants and office workers; those who did not own their own houses – especially those living in 'Corporation' houses – fell towards the bottom. The family of a girl that I had fantasised about throughout my secondary schooling was unfortunately amongst those corporation tenants. On those rare occasions when she phoned to speak to me, my mother's antipathy to her and annoyance at me because of the phone call became so extreme that, on occasion, I resorted to disconnecting the phone lines on evenings when I thought the girl might phone. Clearly I was not the most courageous of boys!

My father resented my mother's efforts towards financial independence in that he felt it undercut his traditional role of breadwinner and, as the years progressed these quarrels

deepened especially when other neighbouring wives began offering bed and breakfast accommodation. In retrospect it was an incipient women's liberation movement! At one stage my father became so aggrieved against one neighbouring woman – whom he suspected of being a prime instigator – that he attempted, unsuccessfully, to ban her from the house.

My mother was assiduous in her bed & breakfast business and my father grew more and more resentful. Occasionally these guests became so intrusive that it was difficult to find a private space in the house and both my sister and I complained often and occasionally with some justification: on a night before one of my university final exams, my mother let my room and I had to sleep on a camp bed in the garage. That said, the money that was earned enabled both my sister and myself to go to college.

For many years I harboured – and indeed nurtured – very negative feelings towards my mother but over the years I came to realise that she herself was the product of a difficult upbringing and that it is a precondition of one generation being forgiven by its own children that it forgives the preceding generation – it is necessary to forgive in order to be forgiven! I remember my mother now with more balanced emotions.

Her single-minded grim determination to overcome all obstacles was admirable, provided that you yourself were not considered the primary obstacle. One memory of her determination was when as an eighty year old, she decided to go to Australia to see my sister's children. An air ticket had been booked for early November and in the weeks before her flight she had a bad asthma attack – an illness she had struggled with throughout her life. I had to bring her to the Mater Hospital to get the medication she needed for her time in Australia and, as we battled to cross the North Circular Road on a wet stormy winter's morning, I held her arm tightly fearing this slight woman would be blown over by the wind. But she battled on, and then battled on to Perth and then battled home again.

This obstinate determination was also a 'gift' that she bequeathed to me and – though it has made life difficult for those who shared their lives with me – it has stood me in good stead in a myriad different ways. Once when I was completing the renovation of an old stone barn which I had intended to use as a craft workshop (and which was being grant aided by the IDA) I was unable to raise the final monies to complete the roof. The bank had title deeds to the property which was considerably more valuable that my borrowings and I approached them for the necessary finance but was refused. I argued that their interests would be much better protected if the roof was in place but to no avail. I appealed to the bank's area manager but still to no avail. Coincidentally a letter arrived from the bank's head office mentioning that they had seen some of my craft work in a Dublin gallery and wished to put examples of it in one of their offices in Germany. Furious at the incongruity between what my local branch was doing to thwart my plans (even against their own self-interest) and the assistance being offered by their head

office, I phoned the bank's head office and asked to speak to the general manager. I didn't get to him but I did get to speak to his PA and having explained my case, the decision was reversed some days later. That temerity of mine was an inheritance from my mother – a gift that also helped me bring my PhD to completion in the face of some opposition that – bizarre as it may seem – was based on religious grounds.[3]

In coming to terms with my mother's memory, her use of silence against us as children is what I still find most difficult to forgive; it was an unrelenting silence sometimes lasting for days, and was used against myself or my sister to bend us to her will. 'Silence' is perhaps not the best term as it was more a refusal to acknowledge or to respond to us; to look over and beyond us as if we didn't exist. It is, I imagine, akin to how under apartheid, a poor black South African would be regarded by his white 'master'. In words that I would later employ in my PhD when analysing coercive psychiatry, it is a refusal to regard the one standing before you as a person and as such, it constitutes a 'denial of personhood'.

Lest all this sound too bleak, my mother was also capable of fun and laughter and of acts of great generosity; when in later life a log cabin building project of mine was in danger of going on the rocks she came to my rescue and gave me a gift of the £2,000 required to make it watertight; she also helped when costs were awarded against me in a High Court case which I took in 1983 in an attempt to stop the so-called 'Pro-Life Amendment'; this case is discussed in a later chapter.

In later life she became increasingly unable to manage on her own but her combative, independent spirit remained undaunted. For example, when using the gas cooker she would occasionally turn on one of the rings but forget to light it. Neighbours became alarmed not least for their own safety and I managed to locate an alarm which on sensing gas, turned it off at the mains and sounded an audible alarm. Before the gas could be switched on again it was necessary to open both the front and back doors of the house to ventilate it which unfortunately resulted in all the heat in the kitchen being lost. My mother hated this alarm but she had no way around it and I think that on occasion she cursed me for installing it. Arriving once on a visit, I saw her standing outside the house with both the front and back doors open. Thinking that the alarm had gone off yet again, her first reaction on seeing me was fury for installing it; in fact the noise that she was hearing was being emitted from her hearing aid which she had set incorrectly!

Eventually she conceded that she was unable to continue to live independently and fortunately, a nursing home place became available in Ballaghaderreen close to where she had grown up and, as an added benefit, near also to where her sister Molly's children lived. I tackled this move with a degree of trepidation and suggested that to start, she would stay in the nursing home during the week and that each weekend I would bring her back to her house in Dublin to see her friends and to catch up on the local gossip. This we did for a number of weeks until she herself decided that she was happy to

remain continuously in the nursing home. Her nieces and their families were a huge support to her when she was there as were the staff of the nursing home. One evening I called to the nursing home unexpectedly and on entering her room, I found a nurse sitting on my mother's bed and giving her a night time spoon of whiskey both for the pleasure and as a way of cleaning her mouth. This simple act of kindness had such a profound effect on me that I asked my sons that when my time came, not to subject me to any extreme levels of 'healthcare'; most important to me would be to sit at a window and feel the breeze (a sea breeze if possible) on my cheek and slowly sip a glass of Paddy!

When my mother died, my sister who had visited her shortly before did not come back from Australia for the funeral. As a result, I was alone in wheeling my mother's coffin out of the church. At the time this seemed to me to be an unusually appropriate gesture: she had brought me into the world and now eighty years later I was escorting her out of it!

Her death happened in 1998 and my father had died some twenty years earlier. One of my mother's last requests was that she not be buried next to my father in Sutton graveyard but next to her parents and her sister Florrie in Lisacul close to where she had grown up. Part of the reason for this reluctance might well have to do with the events surrounding my father's last illness. He had died of lung cancer and had been in and out of hospital many times during this illness. Despite being a nurse, my mother did not cope well with him being at home, she insisted, for example, that he use his own cup and eating utensils. He was in hospital when it became clear that his life was draining away and he expressed a wish to return home but despite his doctors also recommending this, my mother would not agree and, shamefully in retrospect, I agreed with my mother and my father died in hospital.

My father had been given morphine to ease his pain but this resulted in his having hallucinations and in consequence bars were put around his bed to stop him falling out and injuring himself. But in his drugged state he began to imagine that he was in prison and became even more distressed. In the end the morphine was discontinued. Other than the difficulties with morphine, he was very calm and accepting of his pain, of death being close and of his family's reluctance to take him home to die. He had a great dignity in his dying and I believe that this is a wonderful gift which he has given to me: that death can be gathered in to oneself and be approached without fear and with composure. It is a gift that I hope that I will have the ability and the courage to pass on to my own sons when my time comes.

My father's manner of dying was much in my mind when I was writing my MPhil in which the concept of 'a good death' played a fundamental role.

To return to my schooling, I remained at Drumcondra National School until at the age of twelve, I transferred to the Junior school at Belvedere College and then to the senior school the following year where I remained until I sat my Leaving Certificate in 1963.

Though I was placed in the top stream during my years at Belvedere, with the exception of mathematics, I did not have an impressive academic record. I was usually placed in the lower half of the class my reports inevitably stating that "*he could do better*". I excelled in mathematics and after fourth year, was placed with two others in what was called the scholarship class which prepared us for the university entrance scholarship in mathematics. Unlike the harsh regime of beatings that were reported to occur at Christian Brothers schools, the use of corporal punishment in Belvedere was rare and I enjoyed my time there and made some good lifelong friends.

I had no great interest in sport but never felt disadvantaged on that account. Belvedere has been considered by some to be 'posh' and its students as snobbish but – coming as I did from a lower middle class family in Drumcondra – these were qualities that I never experienced whilst there. In retrospect, the attribute that most comes to mind when describing the atmosphere at Belvedere was the level of respect that existed for students and their opinions from both lay and clerical staff. This was a quality which in the Ireland of the early 60's, was extremely rare.

One example from my final year comes to mind which well illustrates this: Fr. Jack Leonard who was Prefect of Studies and who had just returned from an extended period of work in France bringing with him an air of cosmopolitan sophistication, visited our religious knowledge class. Examining me, he asked: "*Does a dog have a soul?*" to which I answered "*No*" he then asked me "*What would you say to a man who said that a dog had a soul?"*; I responded, without any intent to be insolent, that it would then be a matter of opinion. The rest of the class tittered, but Fr. Leonard just acknowledged my answer with a hint of surprise but no reprimand. I know from friends who attended the nearby Christian Brothers school that to give such a reply there would have resulted in a severe beating.

As I later learned, the orthodox Catholic view was that a dog had no soul and the 'proof' of this was that if you placed two identical bowls either side of a hungry dog, he would starve to death being unable to exercise the freewill ('soul') which is characteristic of us humans[4] This was a 'proof' whose existence required more faith than did the original proposition!

I believe that the attitude of listening to students with some modicum of respect – and thereby giving the students the confidence to form their own opinions – was a gift of inestimable value to a young man setting out on his journey into the wider world.

Lest this willingness to tolerate a less than wholehearted acceptance of Catholic teaching be overestimated, a counterexample occurred some weeks later: as 6th year students we

were required to sit an external examination in religious knowledge which was called the '*Bishop's Exam'.* Unlike my classmates who appeared to write pages on each question, my answer were short and as I thought, to the point and – in the spirit of my newly found intellectual independence – not deferential or unafraid to express an opinion that was not fully orthodox.

The following week I was summoned to the Rector's office where I learned that the College authorities had read the answer papers before sending them for external marking. I was told that because my answers had shown not only a lack of knowledge of, but disrespect for, Church teaching I would be refused a reference from the College. In the event this did not matter to me as I planned to go to university but had I wanted to take a job then the lack of a school reference would have placed me at a severe disadvantage.

Ironically when some weeks later, the results of the Bishop's Exam were released I had not failed, as I might have expected, but got an honours mark and was placed high on the list. Needless to say I did not ask, and the Rector did not offer, to reverse his ruling, but the episode still rankles!

In retrospect this should not have come as a surprise: the College maintained a collection of books written by eminent past pupils and James Joyce who was possibly the most distinguished of them all, was unrepresented in the collection. A penalty presumably for his unwillingness to bend the knee!

Because mathematics was by far my best subject, the conventional understanding was that I should aim for a degree in Engineering. I sat my Leaving certificate in 1963 without any great distinction but with the requisite honours in mathematics to register in the School of Engineering at UCD that autumn. Some school friends from Belvedere made the same choice and I very much enjoyed that year in UCD. There were about 120 in that First Engineering class (including one very courageous girl) and there was a lot of fun and camaraderie and weekend parties and not a few pints.

There had been no career guidance in Belvedere and – in choosing to study Engineering – I had been unaware that it was possible to study Pure Mathematics to degree level. Mathematics was my first love and I decided to transfer to a degree in Pure Mathematics and Theoretical Physics.

Meanwhile I had been reading the UCD Arts Faculty regulations and came across an obscure clause that stated that if a student did particularly well in First Engineering maths he could transfer directly to second year Pure Mathematics. Because of my high marks in the Engineering maths exam I fell within this regulation and I wrote to Professor Gormley (who was Professor of Mathematics) seeking permission to join second year and citing the regulation.

He advised me against attempting to transfer without completing first year but I being headstrong and proud of having discovered the legal loophole, felt it was too good an opportunity to miss especially as it meant that I would be exempted from sitting the first year exams. These exams had a fearsome reputation as close to fifty might start in first year honours mathematics but this was whittled down to perhaps eight by the start of second year.[5]

Professor Gormley reluctantly gave me permission and I, recognising that the syllabus for first year Pure Mathematics was much broader and more rigorous than anything I had encountered in first year Engineering, decided to take what was then called an occasional year (permission to attend lectures, but no exams and minimal fees) to at least prepare myself for second year. I spent the year reading first year mathematics texts but at a leisurely pace and also neglected to study the corresponding theoretical physics texts.

In the autumn of 1965 full of optimism and high expectations, I registered for my second year and began attending lectures. My optimism was soon dashed: the standard expected in first Engineering mathematics was as a paddling pool compared to being dropped in the deep ocean of Pure Mathematics. Studying Pure Mathematics is like entering an esoteric priesthood where students seem to eat, live and even dream mathematics. We had eighteen hours of lectures a week but 'lecture' is to genial a word; these were 50 minute onslaughts where one left the lecture room with five or six foolscap pages of proofs and if one didn't keep up to date, one risked drowning. Professor Gormley who was a brilliant mathematician and had the ability to translate instantly from Russian textbooks (Russians being superb mathematicians) to English, seldom spoke to the class directly. His method was to begin the 'lecture' by going to the furthest of three blackboards, filling it with the start of whatever theorem he wished to prove, then quickly filing the second and then the third and – all within the space of perhaps five minutes – returning to the first blackboard to wipe it clean and continue. A story went the rounds in UCD that he once lectured general degree level maths students and attempted to follow his usual procedure. Such classes might contain over a hundred students and were not used to being lectured in such a style. Having filled blackboards one, two and three a student who was perhaps bamboozled by the speed of what was happening, jumped up and opened the lecture theatre door with the implication that Professor Gormley might continue filling up the walls out into the corridor; it was said that he never lectured general maths students again!

I believed that I could manage to just about keep my head above water with my maths lectures but all started to fall apart with my first lecture in theoretical physics which was given by Professor Sheila Tinney. My only preparation for this had been the applied maths classes in first Engineering and I had neglected to study the first year course books on theoretical physics. Professor Tinney breezed in, listed the textbooks for the year and gave us five problems as an exercise to be completed by early the following

week. The nature of the problems – never mind their solution – was like an utterly foreign land to me never having been aware of, much less studied, the topics in question. I battled on as best I could but the book on which the problems had been based was difficult to master over a year let alone over a long weekend.

The following week Professor Tinney called me aside and told me that there was little point in my continuing in her class. Try as I might to explain the particular circumstances that lead to this situation, she was not in 'listening mode'.

Having left the Engineering Faculty I was loath to swallow my pride and ask to be readmitted; I believed that if I had time, I would have been able to master the first year theoretical physics syllabus but my occasional year had been too unstructured and I had been too easy on myself; worse – I had only myself to blame for not heeding Professor Gormley's advice to attend all first year lectures and to sit the exams. I was distraught!

In such a state of turmoil, I heard somehow of the Student Medical Services and was given an appointment to see Dr. Peter Fahy the psychiatrist. Thus began my entanglement with psychiatry!

Dr. Fahy was helpful and understanding; he prescribed an anti-anxiety medication – Librium, if I remember correctly – which was to be the first of a long line of such medications that I was to be prescribed over the next ten years, each with its own bundle of slowly unfolding, side-effects. He also recommended that I return to first year Mathematics for the year and pay particular attention to the Theoretical Physics module. He also wrote a letter to Professor Tinney outlining his recommendations which she had little option but to accept.

His advice was excellent, I did as he recommended, continued taking the prescribed medication and called to see him every six weeks for some very informal and interesting talks.

The following year went well and I passed the second year exams in maths and theoretical physics without difficulty. I worked hard in my final year and enjoyed the various modules which included such esoteric topics as General Relativity and Quantum Mechanics.

One episode from final year remains in my memory: during one lecture Professor Gormley, giving an 'indirect proof' of a particular theorem, said that he believed a 'direct proof'[6] was not possible. In my arrogance I took this as a challenge and worked solely on this, for perhaps twelve hours a day, for well over a week until finally I believed that I had found the elusive 'direct proof'. I could barely wait for Professor Gormley's next lecture before presenting it to him. He receive it with grace, barely mumbling a few words but then, in over four years of his lectures, I do not ever remember him uttering a sentence that was not strictly about mathematics; he was inordinately shy but one felt that behind this reserve he was a deeply kind man.

As the following weeks stretched into months and I still had no reaction to my 'proof', I began to believe that perhaps I had been mistaken and that it contained some hidden flaw. Some months later, after the results of my finals were announced in which I was awarded a second class honours,[7] Professor Gormley approached me and said that he was very disappointed that I did not do better. So perhaps my direct proof was valid after all and Professor Gormley's somewhat backhanded compliment did contain a note of praise – but I never did find out whether or not the 'proof' was valid!

At the time of my graduation, job opportunities for pure mathematicians were extremely limited; this would soon be transformed with the advent of the internet, software development and the financial services sector but in 1968 – with the exception of mathematical economists and meteorologists (who were funded during their student years by government departments) and actuarial work (an occupation which held no attractions for me) – the choices were stark: a postgraduate degree or teaching. My limited finances dictated the choice and I applied for a teaching position in Monaghan VEC (Vocational Education Committee).

I remember travelling to Monaghan and being interviewed by a Dr. Hill who was the Chief Educational Officer of Monaghan VEC. He was a very welcoming and charming man whom I later learned was a Papal Knight. Luckily I was ignorant of this at the time and regaled him with my vision of a liberal education including the necessity of giving pupils a wider view of Irish history such as, for example, the anti-Semitic Limerick pogrom and the Limerick Soviet. (I do not know why I had placed such emphasis on Limerick as I believe that I had never set foot in the city up to then). I, in my innocence, also recited for him a poem '*Telling Lies to the young is wrong*'[8] written by the Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko.

Surprisingly he offered me the job reckoning no doubt that since I was teaching only mathematics, I would not be in a position to pass on any such 'nonsense' to his pupils.

The year that I spent in Monaghan was the very antithesis of the previous year which was lived in near monastic seclusion preparing for my finals. Perhaps because it was a border town at the beginning of the 'troubles', there was an interesting edginess and a slightly anarchic feel about it in contrast to Sligo which – at least to me – reeked of middleclass complacency. My fellow teachers were a welcoming bunch and there was quite a drinking 'culture' in the town. One incident which caused much amusement at the time concerned a recently promoted Garda Inspector who was staying at the same guest house as I was. One of his favourite questions to newcomers was to explain the difference between a book's Preface and Introduction which was a question that he had been asked at his interview for promotion and which, presumably, he had been able to answer.

At that time there was much after hours drinking in the main hotel in the town and one night the Inspector decided to raid the hotel and he stationed his men to the front and to

the rear thus – as he thought – blocking all exits. One of his 'foot soldiers' – who was a regular drinking companion of ours – entered through a side entrance to warn us of the impending raid and we all made good our escape. At breakfast the following morning I (with an expression of innocence) so much enjoyed asking the Inspector if he had had a restful night's sleep.

As a marker of the cultural bleakness of those times, the film of Joyce's *'Ulysses'* had just been released but, because it had been banned in the Republic, it was necessary to travel to Belfast to see it.

I enjoyed teaching at the VEC, the pupils were engaging, creative and often funny. A dark side of those days was the role played by religion in what was supposedly a non-denominational school: at the time set for religious knowledge classes the local priest would appear and all the Protestant children would have to leave the classroom and wait patiently in the corridor until the end of class. Being so segregated was humiliating for them but showed how the Catholic Church in those times attempted to lord it over those over whom it might. Thus, for example, when the Bishop came to visit the school he proffered his ringed hand to all and sundry that they might kiss it and kneel before him!

Having an honours degree in mathematics was, at that time, something of a rarity amongst second level teachers and because the maths curriculum was about to be changed (the introduction of the 'New Maths') the Department of Education asked me to give some summer courses for teachers in Cork and Dublin. It was an honour and also provided some badly needed money. I remember staying in a bed-and-breakfast in Cork but deciding that since I was getting well paid, I would treat myself to dinner in what was then the most prestigious hotel in Cork. At the close of the meal I asked for the cheese board and amongst the cheddars lay one of those Galtee Variety Packs containing six triangles of spreadable cheese. I often thought of the simplicities of those days when tales of the Celtic Tiger excess percolated down to the west coast of Clare.

I decided not to continue teaching at second level for a further year but to pursue my studies in mathematics. To better enable me to see what options were available I decided to apply for some part-time third level teaching in the College of Technology in Kevin Street. I was given work teaching maths and applied maths to the first engineering students who, since they were following a UK degree course, sat A-level maths and applied maths as their end of year exams. The course standard for A-level exams was considerably higher than the corresponding honours standard for the Leaving Certificate but against this it must be noted that UK second level students normally took two to three subjects to A level whereas Irish students took in excess of five for their Leaving Certificate. As I have watched the seemingly ever-changing nature of the English education syllabi over the years since then, it has seemed a shame to me to see the extent of the 'dumbing-down' that has occurred in English educational standards.

My work in Kevin Street did not begin until December so I decided to return to Monaghan to seek some teaching work until then and I managed to get some hours in the Collegiate school which was a private Protestant school. It was a small school and the atmosphere was somewhat smug and self-satisfied and quite different from the VEC but it was nonetheless an interesting experience.

Returning to Dublin to begin teaching in Kevin Street, I had the great good fortune to get a flat in a large house in Killiney which overlooked the Sugar Loaf. This was at a time just before the large housing estates had been built in Ballybrack and the area was unspoilt. On leaving Dalkey station, the evening train from Dublin entered a short tunnel and suddenly emerged into the miraculous spectacle of Killiney Bay. It was as if one had left Dublin and teaching and money and other worries behind and emerged refreshed into a bright new world.

One of my neighbours – if it isn't too presumptuous to use that term – was John Charles McQuaid Archbishop of Dublin whose Bishop's Palace was close by. This was one of two as he also had a 'Bishop's Palace' in Drumcondra where his offices were situated; the Killiney palace being his residence. Adjacent to his palace was a convent and girl's school run by the Holy Child Sisters. Local lore had it that the Bishop had an astronomical telescope installed in his residence and that, in his evening stargazing exploits, he became distracted by a clothesline of girls' underwear fluttering in the breeze and requested that it be moved.

In summer, the sisters would sometimes bathe in the sea but their preparations for this – requiring as they did the use of a tent-like burqa structure – were no less laborious than might now be required by the most traditional of Afghan women.

One of my most enjoyable experiences of teaching occurred with a class of third year Engineering students in Kevin St. These students who had originally joined the ESB as apprentice electricians, had qualified at the top of their class and had then been offered the opportunity to continue their studies and take a degree in Electrical Engineering. On arriving for class they would be awaiting me anxious to get down to work; at the end of class they would crowd around with further questions – always enthusiastic and thirsty for knowledge. These students were then in their early 20's and ambitious; appreciative of the chance that they had been offered and determined to make full use of it. To teach such students was an honour and I was meticulous in my class preparations. In contrast to teaching maths to trainee accountants in Sligo and Rathmines to or Leaving Cert students in Blackrock College (during the year I was doing my final Bar exams), these Kevin street students had a thirst to learn and a desire to understand and not simply to rote-learn in order to pass an exam.

Remembering the experience of teaching these Electrical Engineering students in later years, it struck me as embodying an ideal where there should be no pretence that a teacher's job is to persuade and cajole his students into taking his subject seriously but

that it should be to inform those students who have no interest in the subject, to leave and to do something else until such time as they felt a deep urgency to learn that which the teacher has to teach.

There is a Zen story which has a flavour of this: a young monk seeking admission to a monastery is first told to go away; if he still persists in waiting and seeking to gain admission, he is again told to go away but if on the third day he is still at the monastery gate, he is allowed in but even then, only on a trial basis.

Whilst in Kevin St., the Head of Department offered me a permanent job as Lecturer if I would undertake a postgraduate degree in Statistics in London, and then come back and teach in the College. Statistics not being an interest of mine, I declined but his offer was a vote of confidence in me which was worth recalling in the times which were not too far in the future when my self-confidence would take a severe battering.

During that time in Dublin I had met a beautiful nurse, Leah, and we began a relationship that sustained me over the next four years (with some short intermissions) until I, unwilling to give a full commitment, messed it up. I often reminisce of the simplicities of those days: her meeting me in Sinnotts for a few pints after I finished my classes, she having bought some good bread and some beautiful French cheeses in Magills (one of the few shops in Dublin where such could be bought) and then heading back to my flat.

Whilst in Dublin I decided to pursue a postgraduate research degree in maths and wrote to Professor Trevor West in Trinity College. In what was to be indicative of the informal style of our relationship, he suggested that we meet in Mulligan's Pub in Poolbeg St. and talk over some research ideas. He had been doing some work in Convexity Theory, an area in Topology concerned with metric spaces that had the property of being convex (*i.e.* given any two points in such a space, their midpoint also lay in that space). I suggested that it might be an interesting problem to see whether if a space was 'locally convex' (*i.e*. all sufficiently small 'parts' of the space were convex), the space itself was convex.

The idea was sketched out on the back of a beer mat and that became my research project for my M.Sc. thesis.

Contrary to the expectations of non-mathematicians, mathematics is a discipline wherein aesthetics plays a considerable role: the goal is to produce – not *any* proof of a proposition – but an elegant proof which would be characterised by brevity, elegance and surprise. In this it is like an esoteric form of poetry. My proof unfortunately extended to about 160 pages and in the words of Beckett's Molloy was "*a solution, inelegant assuredly, but sound, sound.*"[9] I had thought of inscribing that quotation on the title page but fearing that my external examiner might not have appreciated the humour, I chickened out.

Trevor West most certainly would have appreciated it; a friend of his – Alec Reid – to whom he introduced me, was a noted Beckett scholar.[10] Professor West had wide sporting and cultural interests and stood for, and was elected to, the Seanad. He was a superb thesis supervisor, always ready to listen and, if asked, offer a suggestion. He was a highly intuitive mathematician internationally respected in the field. Of all the teachers and academics that I have encountered whether in Law, Mathematics or Philosophy he remains the one for whom I have the greatest admiration.

Coming from UCD, the Mathematics department in Trinity was a revelation: each morning postgraduate students and staff met for coffee which greatly facilitated the creative process because explaining one's research interests to fellow mathematicians working in a different field often led to highly fruitful and unexpected suggestions as to directions that might be worth exploring. During one such encounter I was offered a lecturing job in Maynooth University but – in a mixture of arrogance and anti-clericalism (because at that time two lecturers in Maynooth had been disciplined for expressing unorthodox Catholic views) – I turned it down.

Returning to UCD some years later to study Law, I got some part time work in the Mathematics department giving tutorials to first year Arts students. In recent years such students had been highly critical of their maths lectures and of the high failure rates in that subject and the tutorials had been instituted simply as a 'sop' to such criticism; I use the term 'sop' because my first 'tutorial class' was to about 300 students. These had been given maths problems and I was *strictly* prohibited from deviating from the printed solution sheets that they had also already been given. I was not allowed to take other examples or take questions from previous exam papers as Professor Kennedy – who was then in charge – believed that this would make an exam which he believed to be too easy, easier still. These 'tutorials' were from the students' perspective, an utterly pointless exercise; to me, they were illustrative of the attitudes adopted by UCD towards its students – attitudes which were utterly different from those that I had experienced in Trinity.

Meeting Trevor West some fifteen or more years later having returned from travelling in China and looking for some teaching work he met me initially with a look of disapproval. It transpired that he had believed that I was the 'Gerry Roche' who had been charged along with other Republicans in connection with the Sallins Train Robbery. As a member of the Seanad, Professor West had been deeply committed to the peace process and the thought that one of his ex-students had been involved with the IRSP (which lay at the more extreme end of the Republican movement) filled him with disquiet. Happily I was able to inform him that, not only was I not he but that just before I left the Law Library (being broke[11]) to return to teaching I had been briefed to defend that other Gerry Roche in the Special Criminal Court. Gerry Roche defending Gerry Roche (and not for the first or last time)!

At the end of my year teaching in Kevin St. and still living in my flat in Killiney, I applied for a lectureship in Mathematics in Sligo which had one of the five new Regional Colleges which were about to open; these were to provide third level education to diploma or degree level but in areas which were more closely allied to the needs of local industry than were universities. Much to my surprise I was offered the job even without interview and was to start the following September. That left the gap between May to September to be filled.

By chance a new housing development was beginning in Ballybrack close to where I lived and I got work there as a labourer on a building site for the three months until I moved to Sligo.

Working with a pick and shovel whilst digging foundations was a chastening experience not least because of the blisters on hands which were more used to pen and pencil, but – aside from providing me with some money – it was a good experience. Physical work has its own rewards: the joy at the end of the day in being able to see something that one had actually accomplished in contrast to intellectual work (especially in pure maths) where the problem that one was grappling with often appeared even more intractable at the end of the day than it had been at the beginning. There was a sense of camaraderie on the site often heightened by a few pints in the Rambler's Rest after work. (Having been drinking in the Lounge there on and off over the previous year it was ironic – being as I now was in a labourer's garb with dusty boots – to be directed into the Public Bar!)

When in first Engineering I had taken classes in surveying and because of this I was promoted out of the trenches to take charge of the theodolite. My first task was to mark out the foundations for each of the fifteen or so split level houses to be constructed on our site. The first surprise was that according to the architect's plans, house no. 15 ended up on someone else's land; this problem was resolved by simply squeezing all the other houses closer together. Some time later, whist the foreman was absent from the site, I was left in charge of directing the JCB on the depths of excavation required for each foundation. I started full of optimism but the hole kept getting deeper and deeper; I kept rechecking my levels but still it appeared that we needed to go yet deeper. Standing now in front of a hole about five meters square and nearly two meters deep and still according to the plans not yet deep enough, I called a halt until the foreman returned.

The architect's plans had yet again been faulty and as the foreman told me, such mistakes were not particularly rare. The solution was to empty twenty tons of stones into the hole and raise the elevations of all the houses – this was to be the first of many encounters with the problems of building in Ireland!

The driver of the JCB was something of a joker and on his trip each morning to the shops to collect milk and a newspaper for the foreman, he drove his JCB down the main street of Ballybrack village and with the engine running and the JCB inching its way driverless down the main street, he would jump down, run to the newsagent and grab the milk and paper and then back to take charge of his JCB which would have travelled some meters down the road. Those were indeed simpler and more innocent times!

In September 1970 I headed west to take up my new job in Sligo. I got a nice flat and Leah, who continued to work in Dublin, joined me on many weekends and on others I went to Dublin. On those weekends when I went to Dublin I continued to socialise with engineering friends – unlike fellow mathematicians, engineers were renowned not only for their conviviality but also their seemingly limitless thirst. We used to drink after hours in the Engineer's Club in Clyde Road and one night it was raided by the guards. On being asked our names I remember replying "*Hadji Bey and his mot"* – Hadji Bey being Cork's famous maker of Turkish Delight. The guard just smiled and the raid fizzled out; these were my lucky times; but my luck was about to change!

That first year in Sligo was full of endless meetings – meetings about the curriculum; meetings with the Department of Education; meetings with colleagues from other Colleges; union meetings (I became the union representative) and with the meetings came the drinking. Lecturing staff at the College were very highly paid at that time (nearly twice that of secondary teachers) and this occasioned a degree of envy and resentment, so we tended to socialize amongst ourselves. We dined well usually having a long lunch at the Sligo Great Southern Hotel inevitably preceded by a gin and tonic or two.

Because student numbers were low, teaching duties were not onerous extending to at most eight hours a week. Because of this I was given other responsibilities – setting up the library; assessing fire safety – a task for which I had absolutely no qualifications and which I was given, I believe, to occupy me so that I might not get involved in more projects similar to the one project for which, in retrospect, I feel some pride. This was instituting a 'Liberal Studies' option for all students in the College; to do this I chose about thirty different options ranging from photography to music and art appreciation, then I designed a ballot paper to be completed by every student in the College to enable each of them to choose three options from the thirty offered. Having collated the results I then went in search of the fifteen or so part-time teachers that were required and asked them to participate. The following day I had the CEO of Sligo VEC on the phone fuming as to who had given me permission to employ all these part-time teachers; I made whatever excuses/apologies that were required but the Liberal Studies programme went ahead with the fifteen teachers.

I spent the summer of 1971 in a flat in Trinity's postgraduate building in Westland Row and with Leah visiting regularly and Kennedy's pub nearby (Guinness on the cooler was

launched that year!) I finally managed to complete my MSc dissertation. I decided to apply to Trinity for a place as a philosophy undergraduate the following October. I was accepted and headed back to Sligo in early September planning to work for another six weeks before taking up my place in Trinity. Rather than renting a flat for such a short space of time, I decided to stay in a Bed and Breakfast. My room was small and claustrophobic with little more than enough space to walk around the bed. The atmosphere there was dingy: cats aplenty so that on occasion, I found a cat hair under my fried egg. To escape this I spent time in the pub and my relationship with Leah started to go awry. Things drifted. I let my plans for a philosophy degree slide.

Then things got worse and I realised that I could not continue as I was, I contacted Dr. Fahy in the hope of some helpful advice.

And then unfolded the events as described in Chapter 1.

Chapter 3: Zero's aftermath: destination 'cold turkey'

1971-81: MSc., Lecturing, Sculpting, Medication-free, Building Restoration, ……

"Am I not a man?
And is a man not stupid?
I'm a man, so I married.
Wife, children, house, everything.
The full catastrophe."
Alexis Zorba[1]

Chapter 1 concluded with my leaving St. John of God's Psychiatric Hospital in March 1972 after an eight week stay. When I left, I was told that it would be necessary for me to continue taking psychoactive medication for the foreseeable future.

As months turned into years it became more and more evident to me that these drugs – far from being helpful – were in all likelihood the cause of many of my difficulties. This chapter tells the story of my ten year battle to wean myself off all such medications.

I returned to my lecturing position in Sligo that April and completed the term. Meanwhile I finished the final drafting of my MSc thesis and, in June, submitted it to Trinity College Dublin. My relationship with Leah was back on track and the future looked a lot less bleak than it had just a few short months before.

I realised that I was now being given the opportunity to make some far-reaching decisions and – rather than continuing with my position in Sligo – I decided to try and forge a more fulfilling life-path. I resigned my job and decided to pursue a career in Law with the intention of qualifying as a barrister. As a celebration of this change of direction, I planned to travel for some weeks and to return in time to begin my legal studies in September.

Whilst studying for my Mathematics finals, I had often daydreamed of trips that I might make once I had completed my degree; one such – which had actually got as far as the planning stage – began with the boat from Holyhead; across England to Harwich and then by boat to the Hook of Holland; trains to Berlin, Warsaw, Odessa, Kiev, Moscow; St. Petersburg (then called Leningrad); a ferry trip to Helsinki and then North to cross the Arctic Circle; continuing into Norway and Hammerfest (then the most Northerly town in the world); then South to Oslo … Stockholm ... Copenhagen … and back home. Over forty years later whilst writing this memoir, I came across the original plan hidden between the pages of an old atlas with each day's destination meticulously identified. It

extended from July 10th 1969 to September 21st a total of over 12 weeks. Clearly I was nothing if not ambitious!

In the event travelling through the USSR in those times would not only have been prohibitively expensive but visa restrictions would have precluded travelling alone. In 1972, however, I was still able to preserve something of the original dream even if it had to be abridged.

I decided to begin my trip in Finland and booked a flight to Helsinki knowing nothing at all of its language or culture and having little money but hoping that I might be able to earn some along the way. I trusted that my luck was changing and that – failing all else – it would sustain me. I had only travelled outside Ireland once before and that was when, as a student and with a school friend, we took a three week break from our summer job in a Bachelors canning factory in England and hitchhiked across Germany, Italy and Austria. Travelling in Scandinavia would be my first venture on my own.

Luckily I had booked into a youth hostel in Helsinki before arriving so accommodation was not a problem but getting a meal turned out to be something of an adventure. I had arrogantly assumed that whilst English might not be widely spoken in Finland, some basic phrases would surely be understood; entering a restaurant to order dinner I suddenly found how wrong I had been. The waitress spoke no English nor did any of the diners and the menu was incomprehensible to me the words bearing no relation to what the corresponding words in English might be.

As I subsequently found out, Finnish bears little relation to other European languages with the possible exception of Hungarian and needless to say, I was as ignorant of Hungarian as any other reasonably educated Irish youth. As an indication of the strangeness of Finnish here are the basic numerals: *yksi* (one); *kaksi* (two); *kolme* (three); *neljä* (four) and *viisi* (five).

The problem of ordering my meal was solved by me going around the restaurant with the menu and with the waitress in tow, and gesturing to each of the other diners to point on the menu to the meal that they were then eating! … Inelegant it might be but a solution nonetheless!

My next task was to explore Helsinki. My idea of heaven is to wake up in a foreign city knowing nothing of my environs; to breakfast leisurely; then to spend the next four or five hours strolling and going I know not where; then to repeat this the following day but initially heading in a different direction and then again on a third and perhaps even a forth! After such an 'apprenticeship', suddenly you realize suddenly that you actually know the city quite well – its skeletal bone structure has emerged out of the unconscious.

The word *'flâneur'* best encapsulates my ideal of slowly appropriating a strange city; Baudelaire has a superb explanation of the term:

> *For the perfect flâneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement … To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world ….*[2]

This method of wandering – if indeed it can be called a 'method' – brings riches far in excess of the actual journey;[3] it fosters openness and a faith that all will work out well but it also teaches you to see out of the corner's of your eyes and to place trust in your intuitions especially as regards danger. It may, to some, have the downside that many of the sights that the guide books term 'unmissable' have indeed been missed but then riches that the guide books are oblivious to, have inevitably been found.

This balance of alertness and trust has allowed me to travel on my own in cities as diverse as Nairobi, Lhasa, Tehran and Lahore without ever experiencing serious difficulty. Travelling with even one other is a radically different experience in that you are no longer fully immersed in the country and the helpfulness and generosity that local people extend to the lone traveller is lost.

In more recent years technology has come to my aid. Travelling to Japan some ten years ago and having neither the language nor the alphabet, I thought to bring an old GPS that I had used on a boat off the coast of Clare. This GPS was without any maps but it enabled me to 'mark' a position and then, having travelled for some time, determine the orientation of a new position from the marked one. On leaving my hotel in Tokyo the morning after my arrival I switched on the GPS and waited … and waited … . Eventually it told me that my boat mooring in Clare was over 9,500 km. away and gave me the bearings to find it!

I marked my position outside the hotel then turned off the GPS and went meandering as usual. Turning the GPS on some five hours later it showed me the distance and direction to my hotel but since this was as the crow flies I had to zigzag and occasionally retrace my steps when encountering a river. Suddenly I was within 20 meters of the hotel. The experience was as if it had materialized miraculously out of a mist because I had been approaching it from an unfamiliar direction and had not recognised any of its neighbouring buildings.

Back to Helsinki! As I walked around the city in the following days, I was surprised to see so many drunks so early in the morning. I later discovered the Finnish psyche is akin to the Russian and not unlike the Irish in being a bit crazy with too much fondness for the booze. Though they also share a streak of depressiveness with other Scandinavians, the 'craziness' of the latter (Swedes, especially) is quite different having something of the Germanic worship of rules and an urge to conformity or, in other words, to being '*abnormally normal*'[4].

Alcohol was readily available in Finland in 1972 unlike Norway where it could only be bought in state alco shops which had limited opening hours. But Norway was where I first saw teenagers drinking spirits to get 'out of their minds' as quickly as possible; a sad

spectacle and eloquent testimony to what could be termed the spiritual poverty – in contrast to the material affluence – of much of Scandinavia. In Ireland, such binge drinking by teenagers is unfortunately now quite common but then for students three or four pints of Guinness on a Saturday night was a not uncommon ideal.

Finland had also a high suicide rate which I had assumed to be due to the long sunless winters; later I discovered that most suicides occurred not in winter as one might expect but with the advent of spring when the melting snow would reveal – not the hoped for rebirth – but that things were as they had always been.

Leaving such depressing topics to one side, Helsinki was an intriguing city with many old timber houses still intact and some superb example of modern Finnish architecture. The countryside of Finland can be boring to travel through: without mountains and with endless pine forests and with just the occasional lake providing a break from the monotony. Even the Baltic sea appears characterless and – in its lack of tides – is more like a lake. Perhaps in a reaction to such a landscape, Finnish architecture is superb as is their craft design whether in furniture, pottery or glass. One of their most renowned architects was Alvar Aalto and some years after my trip, an exhibition of his work was held in the Guinness Hop Store in Dublin. Visiting it, I became entranced by his use of timber laminates in furniture design; such a method permitted an elegance, a simplicity of design and a strength of material that one might have imagined to be only possible in metal. He became an inspiration to me in my later craft work especially in the design of some of my more contemporary laminated lamps.

I spent perhaps a week in Helsinki before heading east to Savonlinna – a very beautiful town surrounded by lakes and now famous for its annual Opera Festival. One of my reasons for going to that area was that I wanted to get a glimpse of the Iron Curtain – the Russian border being close by. Approaching the border, I encountered large signs prohibiting all photography. At that time Finland occupied a somewhat precarious position between Cold War warriors. Its proximity to the USSR obliged it to take no action that might displease its powerful neighbour yet its tentative friendship with the West guaranteed it a measure of protection.

I travelled by hitchhiking but before leaving Helsinki, I decided that having a large Irish Tricolour on my rucksack would be an advantage as indeed it turned out to be but for reasons that I had not anticipated: drivers stopped to ask what country this unknown flag might represent! Getting the flag was also something of an adventure: clearly it was not available to buy and I had not had the foresight to bring one so I went to a shop selling clothing material and purchased half meter lengths of one meter wide green, white and orange fabric. The problem of sowing these together was solved when in walking down the street, I noticed a shop selling sewing machines; the girl in the shop did not speak English but from my gestures she understood what I wanted and not only did not charge for my flag but even presented it to me with a smile!

Having glimpsed the Russian Bear I headed West to see the Baltic shore, my route was dictated by the position of the youth hostels where I planned to stay. Much as the eastern part of Finland was influenced by Russia, its western part had a Swedish flavour. Sweden had once ruled not only Finland but also Norway, the latter not achieving its independence until 1905. Much like Britain's attitude to Ireland, Sweden's imperialist past goes some way to explaining the arrogance of its citizens towards it neighbours – Norwegians were then regarded by Swedes as being country bumpkins. The Norwegian discovery of oil is reputed to have caused Swedes severe psychological trauma leaving them wondering how God could have had such poor taste as to give such wealth to such people! Now in 2014 it is Swedes travelling to Norway – rather than Norwegians travelling to Sweden – that go in search of employment: retributive justice?

The Arctic Circle had been one of the goals of this journey and crossing it was exciting; it was still high summer which meant that, at that latitude, it never got dark. It was only many years later when visiting Norway again that I experienced the full spectacle of the midnight sun: whilst fly-fishing on a small lake boat a silence descended just before midnight then shortly after the birds began singing again as a new day dawned; throughout all this time there was sufficient light to even read! It was on a later trip whilst staying on one of the Arctic islands that I saw the midnight sun in all its majesty: the sun slowly descended to the horizon, touched the sea and then began its climb again. It was a sight that no matter how often experienced, left one awestruck to the core.

At those latitudes, winter is dark and the sun vanishes completely and for longer and longer periods of darkness the further north you go. But winter has its own awesome spectacle: the Aurora Borealis or Northern Lights. Encountering these unexpectedly on a dark winter night is as if the Viking Gods were once again alive and bedecked in their purple, blue and green silken finery, were heading out to some cosmic dance! Dark winter days have other unexpected surprises: houses are ablaze with light and visiting a graveyard in Norway at Christmas, there are candles flickering in the shelter of headstones.

Travelling south in winter one's eyes are captured by the southern horizon in order to get the first glimpse of the reborn sun; I was told that in schools in earlier times, a holiday was announced the moment the first child called out that they had seen a flicker of the sun.

Years later when living in Clare on the northern flank of a mountain the sun also vanished completely for three or four weeks around midwinter. The first winter was depressing but over the years I found the more than compensating joy of anticipating and then experiencing the sun's return: first on a moored boat and then on the rocks and then the warmth on one's face. In later years as my sons got older we built a cairn of stones atop a ridge of the mountain which marked where – when standing at our door – the sun set at the equinoxes; this became our very own panoramic mountain calendar of

the seasons extending from the hills of the east to the west where the sun set on midsummer having 'rolled' down a headland to come to rest between the gap of two mountains.

Crossing the Arctic Circle and heading north, Finland became even more sparsely populated and hitching a lift from a passing car or truck, even more difficult. I still remember an isolated bridge somewhere near the Norwegian border where cars might pass perhaps every hour or two and my kicking of a stone up and down the road in an effort to pass the time during the long hours that I waited.

Finally I crossed the Norwegian border but my travelling in Finland had been more expensive than I had expected and I was running out of money. I had heard that there was a Findus fish factory in Hammerfest and I headed there in the hope of some work.

Hammerfest is a small fishing town on the far northern coast of Norway; it had been burned to the ground by the Germans during World War Two and it is said that only a single building was left standing. Norwegians still had bitter, raw, memories of that war. What is now the main coastal road in Norway – the E6 which, in 1972, extended as far as Rome – was in part built by the Germans using Yugoslav prisoners of war and was known as the 'blood road' because so many died in its construction.

Before the building of this road, traffic between the northern Norwegian coastal towns was by steamer. Hurtigruten are a modern reincarnation of these steamers though they are now used mainly by tourists. One of these ships leaves Bergen each day and, having stopped at many of the coastal towns on its voyage north, reaches Kirkenes on the Russian border some ten days later and then begins its return journey south.

Hammerfest is also the centre of Sámi culture. Sámi people (known in English as Lapps) are nomadic hunters and reindeer herders with a very rich culture and are noted especially for their distinctive music and song. Being non-Christian and nomadic they had been the subject of severe discrimination from their Lutheran, settled, neighbours.

Arriving in Hammerfest, I headed for the fish factory. Being a foreigner, a work permit was required which was unavailable at short notice but because of a shortage of workers, my lack of a permit was ignored (the ignoring of rules is a very rare occurrence in Scandinavia) and I was offered not only a job but accommodation in a company hostel which also had a sauna. My luck was holding!

Starting work the next day was something of a culture shock – a scheduled four minute morning coffee break meant precisely four minutes! I spent the next weeks gutting fish under the watchful eye of a foreman who spotted the slightest sign of my slacking.

Going to the laundry to be kitted out that first morning, I met a friendly Norwegian girl, Mette, who had excellent English; it turned out that she was studying in England for a degree in Social Work and had taken a summer job in Findus. Though I had no inkling of it at the time she was to become my wife some four years later.

During my stay in Hammerfest she and I became very friendly, often going for a beer after work. The difficulty in getting a drink is one memory of those days. The law at the time in northern Norway was that alcohol could only be served with food. We eventually found a friendly café where the food requirement was deemed satisfied if we bought a rock bun with each beer. I remember at the end of an evening attempting – unsuccessfully – to resell the plate of untouched buns back to the café owner!

The following week Mette had to head back to her family home in Bodø which she invited me to visit on my way south. Some weeks later having saved some money, I boarded the Hurtigruten and although my offer to work my passage as far as Bodø didn't succeed, it at least got me a discount on my ticket!

At that time, Norway was embroiled in a referendum campaign to join the EU and an equally vociferous campaign not to; "*Stem Nei*" (vote no) placards and stickers abounded especially amongst the young. Like Ireland many years later, Norway did indeed vote 'No' but unlike Ireland when presented with the question a second time, it wisely held its nerve and in the course of doing so it – unlike Ireland – managed to preserve not only its fishing industry but its independence.

Arriving in Bodø (a town just north of the Arctic Circle) Mette introduced me to her family: her father Eilif, her mother Hjordis and her brother Svein who was a dentist and politically active – a self-proclaimed Maoist then and who, in 2014, still is!

Mette's father worked as an electrician in the Bodø shipyard and his trade union owned a mountain cabin near Lønsdal a trainstop in the midst of the Saltdal mountains just north of the Arctic Circle. Mette had managed to borrow this for a week.

The cabin was small and cosy consisting of little other than a small kitchen/living area, a stove and a small bedroom. The toilet was outside; getting water necessitated bringing buckets to a tap some 400 meters distant. (The ground consists mainly of rock and the winters so severe that connecting the cabin was not feasible.) The nearest shop was perhaps a twenty minute drive away and the bread was bought frozen which I, in my innocence, had never seen before, but – as if by some miracle – the shop actually sold bottles of Guinness! Nearby was a Sámi settlement where in summer craft items made from reindeer antler and skin were sold to passing tourists on their way to North Cape.

Staying in that cabin amongst the Norwegian mountains – which at the time, were ablaze with the autumn colours of the aspen, birch and mountain ash – was my first true experience of the beauty and majesty of mountains. It was a marvellous experience to wake in the morning; light the fire in the old cast iron stove, cook breakfast and then head out to explore the mountains. Heading from the cabin towards the Swedish border (which was very close) meant crossing, by a suspended rope bridge, a river that in spring was a raging torrent. It was also where I made my first acquaintance with one of Norway's most fearsome creatures – the *mygg*. These are small mosquito like insects

that, especially at twilight, swarm in profusion and leave a painful bite on any piece of exposed flesh; luckily for me smoke repels them and (but perhaps unluckily in the longer term) I smoked not only roll-up cigarettes – a skill also learned in Norway – but a pipe and so I was reasonably safe from their predations.

That was my first of many visits to that cabin where sometimes, years later, I stayed alone and spent the days walking or fishing for trout and the evenings sitting by the stove, reading or listening to the BBC on my short wave radio. The rich experiences of those times was the genesis of an idea some ten years later, to build a log cabin in Clare from native Irish timber – but that is a story for later.

On leaving the cabin Mette insisted that it be left if possible even cleaner than it had been when we arrived when – to my unskilled eye – it had been pristine. That was to be the first of many lessons on the differences between Irish and Norwegian perceptions of the meaning of 'clean'!

Mette had to get back to college in Scotland and I headed south towards Oslo and the Swedish border. We promised to keep in touch but – both going back to our previous lives – it was to be some years before we were to meet again.

I learned a lot from my weeks in Norway: the beauty of nature; the joy of fishing; the pleasure to be garnered from days spent walking in the mountains. Perhaps because of the long winter nights, craft skills are common in Norway and it was there that my fascination with wood began; there that I first saw the wonders that could be produced even from the commonest firelog, by carving and turning – skills that in later years I was to learn, enjoy and master. Though woodcarving is difficult and time consuming it becomes in time, quite meditative; woodturning, by contrast, can produce beautiful work as if by magic and often within the space of an hour.

But the experience that most influenced me was watching how Mette's father, Eilif, spent his days. He worked at the shipyard from 7am until about 3pm when he came home to his family for dinner; meal over, all adjourned to our rooms for a half-hour snooze then coffee and cakes and a whole new day began of fishing, walking or pottering in his workshop. He managed to structure his time so that he created two separate days out of each 24 hour period; after his nap his shipyard job was finished, out of mind and didn't intrude until the morrow. This was a way of life that I had never seen before and it struck me as being profoundly civilised: work had its due place but it was confined to that and wasn't allowed to dominate the whole day .

It was these experiences – unexpected gifts – that, on my return to Ireland, prompted me to at least begin to forsake the pub (and its often convivial company) for other, more fulfilling, pursuits.

In Norway, as in many other European countries, there is a marked divide between the North and the South; this is perhaps exacerbated by its geography and by its terrain. At

its narrowest, Norway is just six kilometres wide and because its coastline is so deeply indented with fjords, its length is, surprisingly, just less than the coastline of Australia.[5] It is said that if the country were to be swivelled about Oslo, Hammerfest would coincide with Rome.

The coastal landscape of North Norway is not unlike the Burren in Ireland whereas the interior is, if not mountainous, often marshy and, in summer, difficult to navigate and inhabited only by *mygg*. The land is of such poor quality that farming is marginal, fishing having been the main industry before the discovery of oil. The development of the oil resources has brought wealth in its wake and reinvigorated the shipbuilding and ancillary industries.

Norway's South, in comparison, is wealthy; at least that is the impression I gleaned from seeing its rich farmland, its large houses, churches and experiencing a general air of prosperity. Its people are less friendly than northerners and it is perhaps for these reasons that I found it somewhat boring and no place more so than Oslo where – at least in 1972 – the city appeared to close down on weekdays at 6pm; on Saturdays at 3pm and on Sunday it became a ghost town.

Though Norway's capital was a disappointment, the country itself fascinated me; its majestic mountains; its islands, glaciers and seascapes; its awe inspiring fjords and its people especially those of the North. I left with a sense of sadness and headed for Stockholm and Copenhagen.

Copenhagen, in contrast to Oslo, was a city full of vitality and light. Stockholm, judging from my initial impression, was more akin to Oslo than to Copenhagen but whereas there might be a redeeming hint of craziness or anarchy to be discovered in some Norwegians, such traits seemed utterly absent from the Swedes.

Perhaps having once ruled Finland and Norway, Swedes take themselves very seriously and appear to have an unquestioning belief in the myths of Sweden being a peaceloving[6], neutral state[7]. They are a highly conformist nation with little tolerance for social difference or eccentricity. They can be arrogant and condescending to others – a trait exacerbated by their seeming lack of humour. Being asked to explain a joke to a Swede is not uncommon but is a painful experience.

Such negative comments aside, Stockholm was a beautiful and interesting city and the affluence displayed in its shops was something of an eye-opener; supermarket counters that had seemingly hundreds of different varieties of cheese were to a young Irish cheese lover in 1972, more of a mirage than of reality. Stockholm's social facilities were equally marvellous to one more used to Dublin's austerities: its main library housed not only books, journals and magazines but a superb collection of music LPs and tapes any one of which might be requested and listened to in exquisite comfort.

I spent four or five days exploring Stockholm before heading for Denmark. The Øresund Bridge (star of the TV drama '*The Bridge'*) now connects Sweden and Denmark but before its opening in 2000, travel between Sweden and Denmark was by boat – the Danish run Bornholm ferry.[8] As an illustration of the different social mores then existing between Sweden and Denmark particularly in relation to the availability of alcohol and gambling (Sweden being much the stricter) it is said that many Swedes took this ferry for the drinking and gambling, repeating the journey over and back without disembarking.

My first impression of Copenhagen was that it was marvellously, sparklingly alive. I booked into a hostel in the city centre which was a favourite base for visiting foreign students. It was an extremely fun, friendly place and of many days and nights of adventures and revelling, one is particularly memorable to me.

A group of us spent an evening drinking beer and as night turned towards morning and as the pubs began to close we went in search of alternatives. We found a café/bar near the docks where an early morning sing-song was taking place; that came to a close with a group of Russian sailors singing and dancing to the folk song *Kalinka.* As dawn approached that too was coming to an end. I was with an American girl and we were getting hungry but the night's drinking had been expensive so we had very little money left. I got the crazy idea of just going to a hotel and ordering breakfast and then when we had finished, pleading inability to pay. Clearly such a scheme would not work in most hotels as either the police would have been called or we would have been beaten up. The genius of this immoral scheme was to decide to go to what was then the best hotel in Copenhagen – The Grand Hotel – reckoning that they would be most unlikely to either assault us or call the police as such a response would greatly embarrass their other, more moneyed, guests. All unfolded as I had planned; a superb breakfast, beautifully served in exquisite surroundings which ended with the Head Waiter severely admonishing us and insisting that we bring either the money or our passports to him the following day. When related in print in the cold light of day, this episode might well seem tawdry but what lingers in my mind is the awareness, whilst eating each mouthful of food, of the furies that were about to descend on our shoulders; each morsel was savoured with the attentiveness of a man awaiting the final descent of a guillotine's blade. I doubt if I would have had the courage – or stupidity – to embark on such a scheme had I not spent the previous hours drinking but I never did put it to a test!

Arriving back in Dublin to begin my law studies I was extremely lucky to get a small self-contained flat close to UCD in Belfield and to re-established my relationship with Leah who had been working as a nurse in Dublin whilst I was gallivanting around Scandinavia.

On enrolling in UCD, I was apprehensive as to whether being considerably older (at twenty-seven) than my fellow students would have made new friendships difficult to establish; I had been teaching people even older than them some few months earlier, but I need not have worried on that score. Financial worries were to be a much more pressing problem.

I found some tutorial work in the Maths department in UCD but, though it did bring in some money, it was a very unsatisfactory experience; some private maths tuitions also helped but I discovered that I was also eligible for a small research grant to pursue further postgraduate studies.

I had been interested in mathematical logic for a number of years but facilities for its study were, in the early 70's, extremely limited. In Ireland computing (to which the study of logic would become hugely important in the years to come) was in its infancy. At that time the little of computing science that was taught was found not in the Maths, but in the Engineering department. Although there was no one in the Maths department in Trinity specialising in logic, I found a lecturer in the Philosophy department who was and I was accepted as a PhD candidate. Although I realised that undertaking research for a PhD at the same time as my law studies would be a heavy burden, I hoped that I might be able to rise to the challenge.

I undertook an arduous reading/research programme on current problems in logic and, in meetings with my supervisor every two weeks to review my progress, all appeared to be progressing satisfactorily. But this was something of a fool's paradise: eighteen months into my studies a visiting US academic gave a lecture on a recently published, ground breaking result in mathematical logic.[9] Both my supervisor and I emerged from the lecture shell-shocked and greatly demoralised. He, because he realised that the technical requirements for understanding such developments were not to be found in philosophy but lay wholly within mathematics; me, because I realised that my logic studies up to now were utterly inadequate to undertake research into areas such as had just been outlined and that a much more intense commitment would be needed. As this would be incompatible with my continuing to study law, both my supervisor and I drew a line under our research engagement and I refocused my full attention on my legal studies.

The academic study of law in a university setting is much broader than is required for professional qualification as a barrister or solicitor where the emphasis is on the practicalities of law and, in UCD, I was introduced to a diversity of subjects far greater than I had expected. In my first year, the most notable were some intellectually stimulating lectures on English constitutional history given by the Dean and lectures on criminology which touched on such gems of comparative sociology as the cultures of the Trobriand Islanders. I was being given access to perspectives of which I had hitherto been blissfully unaware.

I had excellent results in my first year exams and made plans with Leah for us both to spend the summer working in the US on student visas. During the previous year Leah had wanted me to make a greater commitment to our relationship and I – in a juvenile gesture of resistance – decided that we should travel to the US, work independently and then meet up for the final few weeks of travelling together. I headed to Denver and she headed to New York where she had some family friends. Luckily I quickly found work in a steel mill and having worked there for six weeks, and wishing to continue for a further two, ran headlong into the intransigence of a trade union – a battle that I could never have envisaged as my sympathies have always been with the political left. The union had a closed shop agreement with the mill and insisted that to work beyond a six week period, I must become a member of the union. Though I had no objection in principle to this, the membership fee would have taken a very large portion of my wages for the extra two weeks. The matter was resolved by my prolonging negotiations with the union until the two weeks had actually passed!

Many of the workers in the mill were Mexican and were subjected to considerable prejudice from the other, mainly white, workers but I found them to be a delightful people to work and socialise, with. One such evening over a few beers, a sing-song started and the Mexicans, a very musical people, gave impressive renditions of some of their traditional songs; I was eventually called upon to contribute. All I could think of was Behan's '*The Old Triangle'* and – standing atop a stool – began. The look of shock on the faces of my melodious companions when I began my raucous rendition was something to behold.

Denver which is known as '*the mile high city'* is surrounded by beautiful scenery amidst the Rocky Mountains. One very interesting trip was to see the adobe settlements in New Mexico. This whetted my appetite for further travel and I bought a 30-day Greyhound bus pass which gave me unlimited travel within the US. My first destination was Salt Lake City in Utah. To Mormons, this city might be heaven on earth (and San Francisco its nemesis), I came to the opposite conclusion. Not only was Utah a bleak place but it was difficult to buy a beer there. In contrast, San Francisco was where, in 1972, one had to "*Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair*". With its Bay, its cable cars and a sense of openness to the future, it seemed to me to be the very embodiment of optimism. I then headed to Las Vegas and the optimism beat a hasty retreat.

On my first crossing of the Nevada border, the bus stopped close to a gambling emporium full of one-arm bandits. Wandering in, I saw row upon row of middle aged patrons gazing at their machines as if mesmerised and awaiting their vision of heaven to be made flesh; they would not leave 'their' machine for change or for food – which were brought to them – for fear that if they did, some passing stranger might, for a single dollar, rob them of the fruits of their costly investment. Such a doleful sight inured me for ever against the lure of gambling. (Many other lures lay in wait!)

Las Vegas after a few days, left me longing for clean mountain air and sea breezes; its gaudiness was so extreme that one hoped to find some sign that it was capable of poking fun at itself; but no this was serious entertainment. One unexpected surprise from this the greediest of cities, was that – in an attempt to lure people into their casinos – free breakfast and lunch vouchers were readily available and I was thus able to survive on free food for most of my stay.

After Las Vegas came Phoenix and Tucson in Arizona and then El Paso in Texas where I took the opportunity to cross the US border to Ciudad Juarez in Mexico. This was my first taste of a non-western society and I found it mesmerising. It was teeming with life in what, to western eyes, was chaos, but which had its own hidden order. This was an experience which, many years later, I was to encounter even more powerfully in my travels to Indian and China.

Now, after a gap of over forty years, the rest of my US travels – Houston, New Orleans, Atlanta and back up the East coast to New York – were with the exception of Atlanta uneventful.

In Atlanta as in most cities then, the bus station was in the oldest, most deprived part of town. Arriving late I checked into the nearest hotel. It looked bleak and there were some unsavoury characters gathered around the desk but I paid little attention and reckoned that I would find a better hotel the following day. Entering my room I saw that the bed was disordered and the sheets looked grubby and stained. I realised that attempting to reclaim my money would be impossible; tired but somewhat apprehensive I locked the door and lay on the bed fully clothed. I dozed but after an hour or so I was awoken by the sound of someone trying to push down the door. I was out of the door with my rucksack faster than I might have ever imagined possible and found safety in a much more expensive hotel some blocks away. The fear that I felt that night remains with me and the hard won lesson which I have ever after honoured, especially when travelling alone, was to place complete trust in my instincts – they are my very own 'guardian angels'!

My overall impression of the trip was the astounding variety of lands and peoples encompassed in what is often thought of as a unitary phenomenon – the United States. On that journey I met some of the best people – but also some of the worst – that I have ever encountered; it was indeed a land of extremes.

My gesture of independence from Leah got me more than I had bargained for; she met someone else in New York whom she later married and I returned to Ireland feeling bereft but realising that I had only myself to blame.

I returned to Dublin and my flat which was now unwelcoming. I resumed my legal studies without the enthusiasm with which I had begun just a year earlier but managed

to get through the year and passed my exams. I then faced the unpleasant truth that my hopes of completing a PhD in Logic were unrealisable.

Being even more impecunious than usual and emboldened by my stolen breakfast in a Copenhagen, I hit upon a scheme for occasionally getting some free electricity.[10] There was a coin box to prepay the electricity and every month the landlady would remove the box and bring it to the ESB offices to be counted. Whilst the box was absent it was possible to put a coin into the slot, turn the key and watch the coin drop into one's hand. Repeating this one could notch up some credit. Not only did I not yet appreciate the hypocrisy of a law student being involved in such a discreditable scheme but I also planned a mark 2 version (which was never implemented). This involved taking a mould of a 10p piece, filling it with water then freezing it and having released the ice-coin, dropping it into the slot. The beauty of this was that unlike using washers or other metal counterfeits, it was likely to remain undiscovered. The heat in the room (for which it had just paid) ensuring that the water would evaporate!

During those years my father would often call and treat me to a welcome lunch; my sister's wedding was close and the fact that he would be obliged to give a speech filled him with trepidation. The solution that we arrived at was that I helped him to prepare his speech and then he would recite it into my tape recorder to which we would then listen and make whatever revisions were appropriate. We must have repeated this exercise some half dozen times but he delivered his speech with great aplomb and under strict instructions from my sister that he not drink even a drop on that day (much to his annoyance she used occasionally refer to him affectionately as Fluther Good after O'Casey's character in '*The Plough and the Stars*'!)

In my final year at UCD, Roman Law featured on the syllabus. One might reasonably expect lectures on such a subject to be dry and boring but they were one of the most fascinating. They were given by Professor John Kelly who was at the time a member of the Fine Gael government. Because of his governmental obligations what had been timetabled as two separate one-hour lectures per week were amalgamated into one two hour lecture. Professor Kelly spoke from the briefest of notes and yet the logical structure of his exposition was something of a *tour de force* and he managed to hold one's attention for close to two hours – something far in excess of anything achieved by even the most eminent of his colleagues. He was a man of considerable charisma: a story went the rounds that he had published a novel based on his student days at Heidelberg University which had subsequently been banned by the Censorship Board. I also remember a journalist writing that Professor Kelly's appearing in the Dail wearing his white linen jacket, was the first indication that summer had arrived.

I must confess that like many of my fellow students I occasionally indulged in smoking a few joints; a perpetual worry was where to stash these safely. My solution was place it between the spine and cover of Professor Kelly's *Fundamental Rights in the Irish*

Constitution reckoning that such a book would be anathema to any Garda intent on searching my flat!

I was awarded my BCL degree in 1975 and also passed my exams for the King's Inns which permitted me to sit my finals the following year. The King's Inns – or to give it its full title '*The Honorable Society of King's Inns'* – is Ireland's oldest legal institution (founded in 1541) and is the body responsible for the training of barristers. Aside from the more conventional requirements of attending lectures and passing the examinations, before being called to the bar one is also required to attend, each term, for Commons. These dinners are quite formal and commence at 6.30 pm and – perhaps to get some Dutch courage – many students would meet for a pint or two in a nearby pub. Dinner was a lively convivial affair where one sat at tables of four with fellow students and perhaps a senior barrister, often discussing legal matters, often not. It was both an entertaining and an educational experience. During dinner we were served with a pint of beer and then later – if it was a 'grand night' – a bottle of wine to oneself after which a small box of snuff was passed around. The down side of all this drinking was that by 7.30 one was quite merry. I remember one night, having booked seats for a performance of a Brecht play in the Abbey, attempting to watch the performance with a hand over one eye in an attempt to ward off double vision! One fellow student was of the opinion that the purpose of the dinners was to teach one to hold one's drink so that later, when on circuit and dining with colleagues and perhaps a judge, one didn't disgrace oneself by getting too gloriously drunk!

During this final year at the King's Inns, I also taught maths at Blackrock College. This was part-time work and consisted of teaching two classes a morning but it was a financial lifeline. Blackrock College had some excellent teachers but some of the students exemplified that which many years later, was to be so hilariously lampooned as Ross O'Carroll-Kelly: boys with very rich daddies and a feeling of utter entitlement. These were attitudes which I had never encountered in Belvedere but then that was a different era before the Celtic Tiger had even been a glimpse in an estate agent's eye. It might also have been because of the north/south split that had led to Dublin being socially partitioned to an extent that a southsider might enquire (only half in jest) whether a passport and an interpreter was needed when crossing the Liffey. But it could also have been due to my own political sensitivities as I had recently joined Official Sinn Féin which at that stage was militantly socialist – an ideology it was to divest itself of later when it became the Workers Party before finally merging with the Labour Party. My first memory of any such political leanings is of, as a fourteen year old, going surreptitiously to the communist bookshop in Pearse Street to buy a copy of the Communist Manifesto. This was shortly after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the airwaves were full of vindictive against the Communists; in Ireland, this became something of Catholic crusade with the campaign for the release of Archbishop Mindszenty, who had sought refuge in

the US embassy, becoming a cause célèbre. My nascent anti-clerical feelings must have suggested to me that anything which merited such virulent Catholic denunciations must be of some interest. I went with a school friend to Pearse Street but he was so afraid of being seen near the communist bookshop that he waited at the fire station some 200 meters distant. Having bought and read the manifesto I carefully hid it at home fearful of what might happen if it was discovered. Its message seemed to my young eyes to be quite compatible with Catholic social teaching and, many years later, on encountering Liberation theology with its conception of Christ as a political revolutionary, my initial impressions of the Communist Manifesto had not been unduly wide of the mark.

My involvement with Official Sinn Féin resulted in the Special Branch calling to my flat in what seemed to be an attempt at intimidation. As well as this I was sometimes stopped and questioned by them, the most memorable was one evening on Charlemont Bridge on the Grand Canal. Being a law student and because at that time the Special Branch regularly stopped and questioned members of the party, I was given the job of summarising the law governing the power of the police to stop and question. These were the Dublin Metropolitan Police Acts and in the course of my reading, I discovered that they only applied to the Dublin Metropolitan Police Area which comprised the area between the Grand and Royal Canals.

Our local cumainn was adjacent to The Barge to which we usually adjourned after our meetings. Once on leaving the pub as I was crossing the nearby Charlemont Bridge, I was stopped by two Special Branch detectives. With the arrogance of a nearly qualified barrister, I asked as to their authority and when they cited the Police Acts I replied that as we were now standing in the middle of the bridge, these Acts did not apply. I was told with much '*ffing and blinding*' that if I wanted to be such a smartarse, I could spend the night in custody cooling off. I had touched on the limits of law and legality and not wishing to spend a night in the cells I gave my name and address which, in any case, they already had!

During the previous months Mette and I had got back into contact. She was completing a postgraduate degree in social work in Scotland. I visited and stayed in a caravan that she was sharing with some friends and was whizzed around the Black Isle on the back of her moped. She was planning a trip to Greece but promised to make a detour to visit me in Dublin on her way. When she arrived, remembering the beauties of the Norwegian coastline, I wanted to show her the west coast of Ireland. We headed west and spent some enjoyable days in Galway and Connemara. Heading north towards Achill I got what I thought was a marvellous idea to tape the sound of the sea on my newly acquired cassette recorder. Leaving it well away from the shoreline we walked on up the beach but on coming back found that the sea had outwitted me. *"Après moi, le déluge"* indeed!.

Though the recorder was destroyed, the tape cassette itself survived and when played one heard the sea getting steadily closer and louder and louder still until suddenly armageddon … and then utter silence … impressive!

Mette went on her travels and then came back to Dublin and we managed to get a large, beautiful apartment in Dun Laoire which not only had a walled garden but a gardener who called each week to keep it in trim. His work was 'assisted', if only symbolically, by our friendly neighbour, a retired bank manager whose love of whiskey was matched only by his hatred of daises; on occasion he might be seen on his knees, in the early afternoon, with scissors in hand wreaking vengeance on the daisies which – as he probably well knew – were bound to vanquish him in the end.

The DunLaoire College of Art was nearby and Mette enrolled in a pottery class and– motivated by the wood sculpture that I had seen in Norway and encouraged by Mette – I began to learn how to carve wood.

Like many Norwegians of the generations before the advent of television, Mette had many craft skills so using these and scouring for second-hand furniture, the apartment was transformed from bare rooms into a home. Settling in well together we decided to get married. The facts that Mette (being Norwegian and thus not in the EEC) was not entitled to reside in Ireland and that I was still at times under the watchful gaze of the Special Branch, added a degree of urgency to our decision. That summer I passed my final King's Inns exams, was called to the bar and then headed off to Norway to get married.

During that last year studying law, a group of like minded student barristers and solicitors, set up a socialist lawyers group called '*The Irish Association of Democratic Lawyers.*' We established legal advice centres in deprived areas of inner Dublin and published a 'Bill of Rights'. Traditionally barristers worked from the Law Library which is in the Four Courts buildings and solicitors either worked on their own or set up in practice with fellow solicitors. The professions were rigidly separated with barristers precluded from dealing with a client unless the client had first instructed a solicitor who in turn, briefed a barrister. We were idealistic and our hope was that we could practice as a type of commune sharing both work and fees.

The group managed to survive for some years before fragmenting into the traditional separation of solicitors and barristers. Of the ten or so of the most active original members, one is now a High Court judge, two others are judges of the Circuit Court, another a judge of the District Court, another an eminent Senior Counsel, others are successful barristers and solicitors and … yours truly who walked a different path.

My finding this other path was in many ways due to how my travels in Norway and meeting Mette had opened my eyes to a different way of life. In the years since, I have often mused that had I not met Mette, I would probably have been a very successful

barrister though now long dead from an overindulgence in alcohol to which I was unduly partial and which is also something of an occupational hazard for lawyers.

Though I had some interesting cases and a few successes, it was extremely difficult to get paid by solicitors; this was exacerbated by the knowledge that complaining too vociferously, lessened the chances of further work.

All came to a head for me one hot July day when, sitting in a stuffy courtroom in my full regalia of wig and gown, waiting for my case to be called and contemplating the freedom of the swans on the near-by Liffey, and badly short of money, I decided that I had had enough. I approached the College of Commerce in Rathmines and was offered a position as Lecturer in Law and Mathematics. Earlier I had been instructed to act on the Sallins train robbery defence team but in autumn 1977, I had to relinquish that case to begin my lecturing work.

Around this time Mette and I bought a house in County Meath in a new estate rather grandly called Ashbourne Garden City. These houses, though interestingly designed, were very poorly built. My knowledge of construction and building standards was to come much later and was, in part, fuelled by this early mistake. Nonetheless the house was at the edge of the estate and open countryside lay no more than a few steps away. This was my first step from being a city boy into one who revelled in mountains, islands and open spaces – gifts which my experience in Norway had taught me to appreciate. Another gift from Norway was an appreciation of wood and woodcraft and whilst I continued to learn to carve, I had become fascinated by woodturning – this was a skill which enabled a beautiful piece of work to be completed in as little as an hour which, when contrasted with the long hours required to finish a piece of carving, was like magic.

I bought a small garden shed and pride of place in it was a small lathe attachment for a Black & Decker drill. With this, some books on woodturning and especially a wonderful American magazine called *Fine Woodworking* (to be distinguished from much inferior UK counterparts) I learned not only the craft of woodturning but also joinery. I learned it so well that some few years later I won first prize in the Irish Woodturners Guild's annual exhibition. Later again my work was exhibited and very favourably reviewed not only by the Crafts critic of *The Irish Times*[11] but also by their Art critic.[12]. It was sold in the Kilkenny Design shops and exhibited by the Crafts Council[13], the Design Center and other galleries. A sculptural work of mine which had been completed on a lathe was I believe, the first such piece ever exhibited at a Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts Annual show.[14]

In acquiring my woodturning, and later my cabinet making and design skills, I was essentially self-taught. Though this is much more time-consuming than the traditional method of instruction by a recognised master such a method of self-directed exploration and learning has unexpected and valuable benefits.

Firstly, rather than following a path laid down by others, one has to find one's own way and that means journeys down byways and cul-de-sacs; I believe that it is through such detours than a true understanding is acquired. To make such a journey – much like when travelling alone – requires that one keeps one's eyes wide open and that one be conscious of apparent trivialities; a problem can only be overcome if one has been aware of what caused it. When one can recreate the problem at will,[15] only then can one claim to have understood and solved it.

Secondly, I remember remarks on carving made by a London Art College lecturer in which he stated that a truly excellent piece could only be created if it had been a 'work of risk' – by which he meant that one had to leave the safety zone and, in an attempt at perfection, go to the step just before the piece would be destroyed. An analogy might be how, when sailing a boat, one can seek the sweet spot just short of capsizing the boat; that level of absorption and intuition is a delight when one can rest in it! Being self-taught gives a level of confidence which enables such an exploration of the edge zone.

In researching both my MPhil and PhD philosophy degrees I had the great benefit of not having completed an undergraduate degree in philosophy. I say 'benefit' because I believe that the main goal of a standard undergraduate course is to instil in students the techniques, methodologies and habits of mind which in the opinion of its most eminent practitioners, are a prerequisite for success and moreover to accomplish this so efficiently that they become as a second nature or persona – the bedrock on which the discipline is built. Thomas Kuhn[16] in his writings on how science progresses, argues that this does not occur by slow accretions of knowledge but when the discordance between accepted theory and observed fact become so great as to engender something akin to a palace revolution. In support, he cites the physicist Max Plank:

> *"A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it."*[17]

But whereas science can institutionalise a form of regicide, philosophy does not and tends to manifest a form of ancestor worship: an extreme obsequiousness to received wisdom and to 'common sense' and a requirement that one place one's contribution between interstices of received dogma: glosses on its history, not revolutions are generally the order of the day.

Such a statement might sound unduly extreme but that was my experience in beginning my MPhil and my PhD studies.[18] In both UCC and UL the prevailing orthodoxies were taken as a given and one's obligation was to accommodate oneself to and, if possible build on them.

To a lawyer, orthodoxies (at least those of other disciplines) are open to scrutiny and challenge no matter how sacrosanct. Luckily for me I shared this training and furthermore was aware that the two modern philosophers whom I most admired –

Foucault and Wittgenstein – had embarked on their groundbreaking work without the 'benefit' of an undergraduate training in philosophy. Their coming to problems with fresh eyes permitted levels of creativity and originality to blossom which would, I believe, have been stifled and corralled by a formal training that focussed on paths that their predecessors had walked.

The College of Commerce in Rathmines which had been a traditional business college specialising in teaching general management and accountancy courses, was, at the time that I joined, expanding not only in student numbers but also in subjects taught and levels of specialisation. Computer and media studies departments were being established as were courses for non-law graduates who wished to take the solicitors entrance exams.

To facilitate the restructuring, a new Principle, Jim Hickey, had been appointed; he had been a colleague of mine earlier in Sligo and I liked and respected him. He had taken over from Joe Christle who had been acting Principal; Christle was a somewhat charismatic ex-IRA figure who was rumoured to have been involved not only in the 1956 IRA border campaigns but the blowing up of Nelson Pillar in 1966.[19] As might be imagined he was quite a domineering man whom Jim Hickey was loath to cross; and as events were to unfold in a somewhat bizarre fashion (as will be related in the following chapter), these circumstances led to my decision to resign from Rathmines some four years later.

My teaching duties in Rathmines were mainly to teach mathematics to Business Diploma students. Accommodation in the College was severely overstretched which resulted in no lecture theatre being sufficiently large to accommodate the first year class, which had to be divided resulting in my first year mathematics lectures being repeated three times (sometimes on the same morning). From my perspective this was less than satisfactory and as the years progressed I began to believe that teaching the standard first year calculus course to prospective business managers served little purpose and I began to plan alternatives, the most radical of which led to strenuous objections from Joe Christle and – on the very eve of its planned implementation – it being vetoed.

During my first year teaching in Rathmines, Mette gave birth to our first son Philip; a joy that helped redress the sorrow caused by the death of my father. With the new addition to our family, the limitations of our small house in Ashbourne became even more apparent and we decided to move. We were hoping to find a small labourers cottage with a decent-sized garden and pleasant rural location. Having little money, we sought one which, over time, we could renovate.

We would often spend weekends exploring the byways of North County Dublin which because it is a relic of what was the Pale, is an area richly veined with small narrow roads full of the unexpected. We eventually discovered less than twelve miles from the city centre, an old thatched cottage on an acre of ground, set well back from the road and surrounded by over a hundred acres of corn fields. It also had a separate outbuilding with a wood-panelled ceiling (perhaps the dwelling of a farm worker) which contained a set of outsized stations of the cross (antiques from some old church) and, wonder of wonders, the cottage had a full sized sauna!

The house was owned by a Dublin artist who had used it as a retreat from city life and despite much well-meaning advice that we were buying nothing but trouble and that the price was exorbitant, we decided to jump where more sensible souls would have hesitated.

Attempting to complete the purchase was fraught with difficulties as none of the usual financial institutions would give us a mortgage on such a property. In the end and after countless legal complications, we agreed with the seller that she would act as mortgagee and that we would pay to her each month an amount equivalent to the average of what we would have been charged by three of the largest building societies had we been able to get mortgage facilities. Despite its complications, the arrangement worked well.

Because it was a thatched house, getting insurance was also problematic. None of the Irish house insurance companies that I approached would consider it; on complaining to one such and speaking to one of their senior underwriters, he eventually agreed to insure the house but only for fire and not for contents. Had it been for contents and not for fire I could have readily understood but he was of the belief that it would be easy to break into a thatched house by removing the straw. Had he but the slightest experience of thatch he would have known that breaking through a tile or slate roof would be vastly easier than seeking to burrow through perhaps eighteen inches of thatch but his belief was unshakeable and in the end we had to get insurance through Lloyds of London.

Contracts signed and finance and insurance agreed, we moved in late on a very wet November weekend. Getting up the next morning and sitting on the toilet, I reached across for some toilet paper – the whole toilet moved as it had not been fixed to the floor and when I flushed it, the waste remained as the sewers were all blocked. This was to be the first of very many surprises: rats had nibbled at all the electric cables in the attic (with the exception of the oversized sauna cable); the timber bedroom floor had been laid directly on earth; the well was contaminated; the chimney had no flue pipes and many more such seeming disasters.

Over the following years, I made new hardwood doors and windows and with the help of some labour, we essentially rebuilt the house and converted the outbuilding into a workshop.

Others who were interested in the original property might have levelled it for its superb site location and built a modern house in its place. To have done so would have been considerably cheaper than the path that we had chosen but we got great satisfaction from bringing such an old house back to life. It exemplifies a lesson that I have also learned from other work: that the pleasure to be gained from a task is proportional to both the immensity of the effort expended and also to the risk of it completely unravelling!

In 1979, I had been on various psychoactive medications for over seven years and I had begun to suspect that the anxiety and depression that I sometimes suffered from, might well be being exacerbated by these tablets; furthermore their side effects – such as a sometimes overwhelming tiredness – were becoming even more problematic. I had been dealing with my GP over the years and I decided to consult a psychiatrist and was referred to a Dr. Cooney. He prescribed a different medication and on a later visit suggested an altered dosage and then later again an alternative medication; each change invariably accompanied by optimism that this 'newer' tablet was far more efficacious than its predecessors and had fewer side effects. To a psychiatrist who was utterly committed to the "*bio-bio-bio*"[20] model of psychiatry in that the formulary for psychiatric medicine is – in comparison to general medicine – quite limited this had an air of '*ringing the changes*' and reminded me of a short story by Hemingway where a doctor who lacked a filing system but who relied on prescribing an extremely limited number of medications, asked his patients what medication he had originally prescribed and thus could deduce their original complaint. I persevered with Dr. Cooney's suggestions for over a year but finally decided – and much against his advice – to go 'cold turkey' and stop taking all psychoactive medications. Mette who had been very supportive throughout agreed with my decision.

One day I simply decided to stop taking all such medications and whilst a wiser course of action might be to slowly reduce the dosage over a period of weeks if not months, I was afraid that my resolution would falter. The consequences were frightening: extreme anxiety, sweating, palpitations and disturbed sleep but most worrying of all, I started to lose my sense of balance. I was very afraid that if I persisted and if some serious health emergency occurred, I could be putting my life in danger living as I was in the countryside. I was left with little choice but to resume taking the medications and reconsider my plans.

I decided that if I was to come off all medications at one fell swoop, then I should put myself somewhere safe with help close by. I decided to enter St. Patrick's Psychiatric hospital solely to be in a place of safety and to delay going 'cold turkey' until I was admitted. Dr. Cooney was very much against my decision to cease taking medications as were (with one exception) all the medical staff in the hospital. The exception (whom I

mentioned in the Introduction) was a Professor of Psychiatry from Trinity College who wished me well and said that I might well be correct in my belief that the various medications were causing me more harm than good.

Once admitted, I stopped all medications; stayed in my hospital bed for some days and kept a diary detailing the occurrence of reactions such as I had previously encountered. The diary entry for day seven was "*Week up: no more side effects*". I was sleeping much better, not as tired as I had been and far less anxious.

Such positive responses did not dissuade the hospital psychiatrist a Dr. Eustace, from recommending that I try another, just released, 'wonder drug'. Again I was assured that it did not have the side-effects which I had been experiencing but I was not to be dissuaded from my decision. At that time he was mentoring some junior psychiatrists and asked me if I would participate in a video interview with one of them to facilitate their training. In response to my concerns about confidentiality, he assured me that the video recording would be destroyed once he had had an opportunity to review it with his student. Later he admitted that because it was a good example of a well conducted interview he had not destroyed it. I was very much aware that I had not the standing to insist that he honour his undertaking; that realisation made me painfully aware that by virtue of me being a psychiatric patient, my personhood – in the sense of my ability to assert my rights – was diminished.

Whilst in the hospital I attended some relaxation classes and had some sessions of bio-feedback[21]; both of these had long lasting benefits and doubtlessly sparked my later interest in Zen Buddhism.

The hospital itself provided a very pleasant environment with its own walled gardens and there was no problem in having a friend call and head across the Liffey to Ryan's pub for a pint. Although I was taking no medication – a circumstance that often raised the question as to why I was in hospital at all if I was not taking medication and having no psychiatric treatment – my stay in the hospital provided me with a safe, caring space within which I could cross the bridge from being an ex-psychiatric patient still under psychiatric care to being medication (and psychiatrist!) free and for that I am extremely grateful; it provided exactly that which was encompassed in the original meaning of the term 'asylum': *"A sanctuary, a place of refuge and safety."*

A month after I had entered the hospital I was back teaching in Rathmines now drug-free and have remained so[22] in the over thirty years since then – an accomplishment of which I am inordinately proud. Some months later a diary entry of mine, recorded simply: "*Really feeling now for first time in ages that life is worth living.*"

Coming off the medication entirely was not without its downside. Psychoactive medication suppresses or sometimes smothers emotional feelings such as anger and I had to begin a late apprenticeship in acquiring some emotional intelligence – a

circumstance which created some difficulties in my relationship with Mette who had been so supportive throughout these events.

This is perhaps a good point to review my experience with psychiatry. Even now at a remove of over thirty years, I deeply regret becoming involved with – or, more appropriately, entrapped by – psychiatry. Certainly there were psychiatrists that I met who were extremely helpful but they were rare and I believe that it was aspects of their own character – their compassion, empathy and a wisdom flowing from the breath of their own life-experiences – rather than from (I would even suggest 'despite') the discipline of psychiatry, that made them so. Ivor Browne was one such; Peter Fahy another. My initial meeting with Dr. Fahy at a time when I got myself into what seemed an insoluble impasse in my attempt to change faculties was extremely helpful and the short term use of an anti-anxiety medication was greatly beneficial. Unfortunately psychoactive medications once given, carry their own momentum caused not least by the addictive qualities of these medications and the resultant problems of withdrawal. Had that initial period of medication been for weeks or even months all would have been fine but it continued for considerably longer; in fact, for over eight years. In a 2014 article, Professor Browne spoke on the overuse of drugs to treat mental health problems:

> *While they have a role in treatment, he says, they are being overused. "There's far too much focus on biochemistry, rather than examining what's going wrong – or has gone wrong – in a person's life," he says. "I spend most of my time taking people off drugs, but it can be a slow, painful process, combined with dealing with life problems."*[23]

Would that his psychiatric colleagues had shared a similar perspective. But it was not alone the extended period on which I was on medication that was problematic but the range of medications and their sometimes severe and debilitating side effects as well as the seemingly cavalier manner with which some psychiatric diagnoses were made.

The most deleterious consequence of my encounter with psychiatry was occasioned by Dr. Tubridy's initial advice to enter St. John of God's Psychiatric Hospital. This opened the door to a diagnosis of schizophrenia which – though deemed a misdiagnosis by all other psychiatrists whom I subsequently consulted – resulted, to my mind at least, in a life-long stigma and sense of diminishment.[24]

Having ceased all psychoactive medication, the depression from which I had often suffered in the past (and which had provided the continuing justification for taking the medication) presented new challenges when it inevitably recurred.

Since my visits to Norway, I had begun to value nature and the outdoor life. I had joined a walking club and began to explore the Dublin mountains; as I gained confidence, I bought a good tent and begun to explore the mountains on my own. Later I headed to the islands with my tent: Tory, Inishboffin, the Blaskets and Clare Island amongst others.

Sometimes I went with Mette and Philip; sometimes just with Philip and two such trips stay in my mind. The first was to Ireland's Eye where the boatman promised to collect us next morning. It was a very strange sensation that night to experience all the sounds and lights of the city any yet be on our own on the island. The next morning the island was completely covered in mist and we had to wait till late afternoon for our boatman. The second arose from my attempts to give up smoking; Philip and I climbed to the top of Djouce Mountain to be met by a group of sixty year olds coming from the other direction. They were hugely proud of their mountaineering accomplishment until their eyes fell on Philip who as a four year old had not only done the same but carried his own rucksack. I had my last cigarette on the summit of Djouce and buried all my smoking paraphernalia under a stone; this was a stratagem to ensure that I kept to my promise to stop smoking as Philip would be the witness to any lack of willpower. Philip similarly buried some *tiggigummi* (Norwegian chewing gum) and he – being still of an age when he believed his father's stories – believed that a tiggigummi tree would be growing proud on the summit next time we climbed the mountain. We put our tent atop the mountain and I awoke to see the sunrise over the coast of Wales – something Philip had not the slightest interest in seeing at five in the morning!

I also developed an interest in sea fishing and the more demanding skill of fly-fishing which I found to be highly therapeutic. A remark in a wonderful book[25] on fly-fishing helped explain this; in it, the author suggests that fishing is so relaxing because it requires *just sufficient* concentration to stop one thinking of anything else. In this it is not unlike Zen 'sitting'[26] which – by virtue of concentrating solely on watching the breath – precludes all other thought.

I often travelled alone with my tent to more remote locations. I have come to believe that solitude or rather the ability to be alone with oneself – and thereby getting to know, and like, oneself – is one prerequisite for coming to terms with depression.

Another is the jettisoning of any direct attempts to achieve 'happiness'.[27] The popular media's obsession with it, and fuelling a preoccupation with its pursuit, is a folly in that happiness – or better 'contentment' – is a fleeting gift of the moment, like a bird alighting unexpectedly on one's shoulder when one is absorbed in a task that one loves. If any direct intention is of use it is that which will enable one's particular talents or gifts to be uncovered; one's task then is to bring these to as great a fruition as one can. 'Happiness' if it arrives will be the unexpected and unsought reward.

I have also come to believe that – contrary to the conventional wisdom, depression is not an evil to be dispelled at all costs. Rather it is a wake-up call to examine how one is currently living one's life and – much as a farmer might allow a field to lie fallow – to spend time in (rather than attempting to push away) one's depression. This gives an opportunity to the unconscious to generate ideas on alternative lifestyles. In short, the

quickest way to overcome depression is – rather than seeking to dispel it – to go through it, painful though that might be, to see what new perspectives emerge.

An example of such a strategy occurred to me once whilst attending a Zen *sesshin*[28] in London. At the time I had been sitting in *zazen* for many years and had learned to sit in the full Lotus position;[29] but this was usually at home and my cushion height was slightly different from those provided at the sesshin. Very few of the other participants sought to sit in such a position most being content to sit in less stressful positions on either a cushion or even the edge of a chair. The unspoken agreement was that whatever sitting position one chose to adopt, one remained in it unmoving until the gong sounded which was normally after about thirty minutes. Being proud of my ability to sit in full Lotus (and wanting to show-off) I began sitting but after about ten minutes the pain became so intense that tears were running down my face. I slowly realised that my whole body was extremely tense and as if I was physically trying to push away the pain. I relaxed and just began to observe – in a disinterested way – how the pain moved from one thigh to the other and then to a knee and how its intensity rose and fell like waves in a sea. I had begun to accept the pain rather than seek to push it away and suddenly it was no longer the problem that it had been. Looking back on that experience many years later, I regard it as a great gift which showed me how to accommodate myself to the occasional unpleasantness that life inevitable throws our way.[30]

In 1981, following a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights, the Dail enacted a law[31] which made provision for the review of involuntary psychiatric detentions by an independent panel. This enactment raised the ire of the psychiatric profession principally because it sought to place some limitations on what had hitherto been their essentially unfettered powers in relation to compulsory detention. Mary Raftery, the journalist who was instrumental in bringing to light the abuse of children in Irish Industrial schools, has described the circumstances which ensured that the Act never had the force of law because it awaited a ministerial signature which was never made:

> *That Act had been voted through in the teeth of opposition from psychiatrists, who regarded the establishment of independent tribunals (with non-medical members) to review their diagnoses and committal orders as an unwarranted interference in their professional expertise.*[32]

This controversy prompted me to take pen to paper and begin what turned out to be a quite extensive[33] debate within the letters page of *The Irish Times*, on the necessity for such protection. In response, I received an invitation to speak to the UCG Law Society on my criticisms of psychiatry and a letter from a UK based consultant psychiatrist congratulating me on the points made in my letters. Thus began my efforts at putting some shape on what had hitherto been tentative criticisms of psychiatry. It would be eighteen years before I would take up this challenge again and a further twelve before I

would bring it to fruition in my PhD dissertation. By that stage my attitude towards psychiatry had, if anything, hardened.

During the period of my research, one great disappointment was discovering the subservient role played by philosophy in the discipline of Philosophy of Psychiatry. The latter sees itself as being a sympathetic handmaiden to psychiatry rather than being, as it should be, its sternest critic, rigorously holding it to account. Flowing in no small measure from this and from and the adoption of a similar deferential stance by the Irish Courts, are a host of problems (all of which have been fully documented in my dissertation):

- The poverty of evidence base for many psychiatric treatments;
- the unwillingness of many psychiatrists to abide by the evidence when it does exist;
- the influence of the pharmaceutical industry on psychiatry;
- the suppression of negative studies on the efficacy of psychoactive medications;
- the confusion between the concepts of normality and psychiatric illness;
- the arbitrariness of some psychiatric diagnostic categories;
- the psychiatric intervention itself as one of the primary causes of stigma.

The extent of psychiatric misdiagnosis deserves a special mention in that not only is research on the phenomenon well-nigh non-existent but there appears to be a denial amongst many psychiatrists as to even the existence of such a phenomenon; this is evidenced by the fact that a subject who challenges his psychiatric diagnosis is deemed to be 'in denial' which is not only considered to be a psychiatric illness in itself but is also a diagnostic criterion for the diagnosis of schizophrenia; such a stance exhibits a level of hubris which is unacceptable. Both the existence, the prevalence and estimates of the extent of psychiatric misdiagnosis played a central role in my PhD dissertation.

Chapter 4: After 'cold turkey': the cake …

1981-92: Tibet, India, Log Cabin Building, …

"A man needs a little madness, … Or else? …
He never dares cut the rope and be free." [1]

In February 1981, I left St. Patrick's Hospital after a three week stay and, buoyed by my success in coming off all psychoactive medication, I returned to teaching in the College of Commerce with a new-found energy, enthusiasm and self-confidence.

As mentioned earlier, my primary duties related to teaching mathematics to accountancy and business studies students. The first year mathematics syllabus was similar to a standard university undergraduate course for arts and commerce students and focused primarily on basic calculus. I had long been of the view that such a course was of extremely limited value to such students who would have scant use for the techniques of differential calculus in their subsequent careers.

The study of mathematics – particularly the rigorous study of the subject as found at honours degree level – inculcates skills other than the manipulation of techniques which to non-mathematicians, appear to comprise the entirety of the subject. The serious study of mathematics – as undertaken, for example, by those who aspire to becoming mathematicians – instils a deep awareness of aesthetics. To a mathematician, a proof is – aside from its basic functionality – judged primarily on its elegance and, in this, it bears a resemblance to some recondite school of esoteric poetry; the relationship between mathematics and classical music bears witness to this link to aesthetics.

However the most important skill that a mathematician learns from his discipline is that of logical proof. A mathematical proof is, after all, nothing other than an admittedly abstruse, logical argument which has survived all attempts to undermine it. I believed that it would be possible to teach such skills directly and outside of any mathematical context. I envisaged that to a business person, such skills would be an inestimable advantage when assessing a business proposal. He would have the ability to get to the heart of the matter speedily; to spot logical flaws; to note unwarranted assumptions smuggled into an argument by subterfuges such as appeals to 'common-sense', or to 'what everybody agrees' or to emotion. In short, he would be critically aware and extremely alert to ramifications to which others, less skilled, might be oblivious.

In an attempt to impart some of these skills I had developed a Liberal Studies option whilst teaching in Sligo and had attempted a similar course in Rathmines but concluded that it was unsatisfactory as it lacked adequate focus. I decided that a more explicit definition of the goals was required and in the end settled on the theme '*Methods of argument and of persuasion*.'

The principle, Jim Hickey, agreed to the development of such a course and to my proposal that other staff members would teach separate modules addressing the shared theme but using techniques and insights from within their own specialities. This course was to replace part of the traditional first year maths syllabus. Five of my fellow lecturers – in such disciplines as Psychology, Sociology, Politics and Media Studies – were enthusiastic and we developed detailed syllabi for each of the modules. I was to teach the module on basic logic and logical fallacies.

A basic course in logic would usually be taught in a somewhat abstract manner by, for example, listing the various forms of syllogistic reasoning[2] but I believed that this would result in little more than a technical exercise and that it was necessary to find a teaching method which would more fully engage the students.

The method that I chose was to take controversial social and political topics and try to lay out the differing arguments with the aim – *not* of coming to any conclusion on the merits of any particular side – but to see the structure of the arguments that each side was proposing; to determine their weaknesses and the nature and type of evidence that they would each require in order to establish their particular viewpoint.

I believed that it was important to take controversial topics which would fully engage the passions of the students as logic is usually the first casualty when passions are aroused and – though it was a strategy that was perhaps fraught with difficulty – the students should emerge from such a course armed with a critical scepticism towards those who sought to sway their views by the use of rhetorical blandishments.

Amongst the topics that I chose were abortion, racism and nationalism.

In view of what subsequently transpired, it is of interest to note that over thirty years later, proposals to teach philosophy in schools with the goal of fostering critical thinking skills have been accepted by the Minister of Education who stated her belief that it would make:

> *"… a significant contribution to giving students the tools to critically engage in an informed manner with the world around them"*[3]

The need for such skills in the commercial sector was made abundantly clear in the Nyberg Report in 2011 into the failure of the Irish banking system.[4]

Meanwhile back in Rathmines in 1981, my colleagues and I having spent a considerable time in preparing the various modules; resolving the timetabling problems; explaining the aims of the course to students and printing hand-outs, were ready to begin teaching early the following week. What happened next was truly bizarre.

That Friday I – as I sometimes did after work – headed up the Dublin Mountains for a few hours hillwalking. I parked on the Featherbed opposite a turf-cutters track which leads to the summit of Kippure. As I was putting on my boots I noticed a figure jogging

towards me along the Military Road. As the figure approached, I recognised Joe Christle the Deputy Principal in Rathmines. Very surprised, I greeted him but though we were within meters of each other with no others in sight, he did not return my greeting but continued on his way, jogging towards the horizon.

My bafflement continued until, on returning to work the following week, I was told that the Critical Thinking course had been vetoed by Joe Christle. There were no further details, no explanations, and although Jim Hickey was the Principal and had been extremely supportive of the project throughout its planning, he had acceded to Joe Christle.

Because Joe Christle had a very dominating – indeed, domineering – personality I could understand Jim Hickey's deference to an older and more experienced colleague but the reasons for Joe Christle's hostility long remained puzzling especially in that he had long been involved in the republican movement and had been a member of the IRA. It was only many years later when reading of the correspondence[5] between Seán MacBride and the Archbishop of Dublin (MacBride had also been prominent in the IRA) where MacBride showed a deference that was truly surprising, that some glimmers of understanding began to emerge. My mistake had been to assume that one who espoused a radical republicanism would not object to what might conceivably have been seen as an attack on Catholic teaching[6]; my inclusion of 'abortion' as a topic worthy of logical scrutiny might well have been seen in that light.

In planning this course, I had been riding on a surge of idealism; once the course disappeared so did my enthusiasm and I no longer wished to revert to teaching the traditional mathematics course as it no longer held any value for me. Over the previous years I had pursued my woodturning and woodcarving work and had some modest success in small exhibitions and craft fairs and it was work that I hugely enjoyed. By this time Mette had got a fulltime job as a Probation Officer and was relatively well paid. I decided to resign my teaching job and work full time in the crafts area and she encouraged me in this decision. I sent in my letter of resignation at the end of that academic year.

Around that time I had read an article by Michael Viney in *The Irish Times*. Viney who had resigned his full-time position in the paper, had bought a small cottage by the sea under Mweelrea in Mayo. His colleagues had tried to dissuade him from leaving the security of a well-paid job and though he was anxious, he decided to take the plunge. Subsequently writing about this experience in his weekend column, he mentioned how that first year he had come across a book by a young couple who had made a similar decision and had forsaken the bright lights of London for a mountain cottage in Wales. They told how it often happened that a looming electricity, veterinary bill or bank

payment presaged ruin and yet, at the final moment, disaster was averted: an offer of work or money arrived from some utterly unexpected source. They elevated this into a principle and gave it a name which I soon forgot but which I rechristened as the '*Trim'* – why that name I can no longer remember[7] but in the years to follow, its invoking gave me courage. In that it was not unlike the Biblical parable of the lilies.[8]

A few weeks after I had sent in my letter of resignation I had a phone call from the Personnel Department suggesting that if I reworded my letter to mention 'health grounds', I might be eligible for a small pension; this I did though I did not conceive of myself as resigning on such grounds. To me the phone call seemed like the first manifestation of my '*Principle of Trim'*.

Having made the decision to focus on craft work, my first task was to transform what had been an old mud-walled outbuilding adjoining our thatched house, into a viable workshop. The outbuilding had two sections; one had been a cowshed and the other had a timber panelled ceiling which might have been the creamery or a farm labourers living quarters. I knocked the separating wall; built a chimney, put on a new galvanised roof, installed two second hand windows and an old scrapped Stanley stove. Wired the building for electricity and connected it to the mains. Suddenly I had a superb, spacious and warm workshop. A Dublin machine supplier was winding up it's agency for Kity woodworking machines and I bought a saw, planer and spindle moulder for a fraction of their normal cost. The IDA had seen some of my woodturnings at various craft fairs and been impressed so it helped me to buy a new lathe. Suddenly things were falling into place.

The thatched house was also in need of substantial rebuilding. Learning my joinery skills from books and magazines, I made new hardwood doors and windows and with the help of a labourer built a new chimney. We found rats in the attic which in their scuttling across the ceiling at night sounded like elephants and – with a young infant in the house – these were a particular worry. As the house was in the middle of a hundred acre wheat field, rats were always going to be a problem especially in autumn after the burning of the stubble. One gable wall was like an Emmental cheese so riddled was it with holes (some of these subsequently proved useful as a means of getting mains cables through eighteen inch thick mud walls!). Later we found that the rats had nibbled at all of the electric cables in the attic sometimes leaving two bare cables adjacent to each other; the only one untouched along its length was a heavy duty cable for the sauna which must not have been a comfortable fit for a rat's jaws! The first electrician that we contacted was so uncomfortable in the attic that he left, suggesting that we didn't need any work done as the rats would simply electrocute themselves (which they might well have done but in doing so, it is likely they would have set the fire to the thatch!)

The cottage needed to be completely rewired with attic cables enclosed in rat-proof conduit; the plumbing had to be replaced; the gable wall rebuilt and new concrete floors poured. The roof also needed to be re-thatched but that was left for later when funds might permit. The cottage had no mains water and on testing the well water, we found that it was contaminated by cross flow from the septic tank. That summer I drained the well and went down a ladder to its bottom to clean it. The septic tank had been incorrectly built so that flow between its two compartments was not possible. Having had this drained, and utterly ignorant of the danger, I went down into it with chisel and lump hammer to make a hole in the dividing wall. Later when I became aware not only of the explosive nature of methane (which might easily have been ignited by a spark from the chisel) but of its toxic properties, I shuddered.

We had in fact rebuilt the house and at a cost probably exceeding what it would have cost to level it and build a standard bungalow but despite all, we had gained a wonderful sense of satisfaction from restoring to life what others might have condemned.

The other boon was the satisfaction that I gained from physical work itself and also the pleasure when, tired at evening-time, I could relax and see the fruits of a day's labour. The contrast with intellectual work was marked where often at a day's end, one realised that not only had no progress been made but the possible solution that one glimpsed in the optimism of a new morning had turned into an impenetrable cul-de-sac by evening. This was especially so in mathematics where sometimes a difficult problem seemed so intractable as to take on the aspect of a vertical cliff face with not even a hint of a possible foothold. One skill I learned from my mathematical studies is the virtue of leaving a problem to one side for awhile – perhaps even to 'sleep on it' until the following morning – and the surprise is that often when one returns to it refreshed, the solution is obvious. This has led me to think of the conscious mind as a kind of muscle which enables the wider consciousness to achieve a focus; the downside is that tunnel vision can result. Having a nap or a break allows the muscle to relax and permits the wider consciousness (what is often called the unconscious) to generate alternative strategies. I have come to believe that the unconscious is the true seat of creativity and that we can have no 'ownership' of our best ideas – they are, in a literal sense, given to us.[9]

Such a perspective led me to believe that an ideal way of working would be to alternate between periods of physical and intellectual work; ideally to work with one's hands until lunch and after, to work with one's head. Though I never managed to fully achieve such a balance, it was by making manual or craft work an integral part of my daily life that I was able to complete the close to ten years of my PhD studies. I was surprised recently to find that such a luminary as Tolstoy advocated that striking a balance between physical and mental work was an essential part of his creative process.[10]

1983 saw the intensification of the campaign for a constitutional prohibition on abortion. Mette was pregnant and expecting a baby that autumn. Thus we had an especial interest in many of the issues discussed in the campaign especially those concerned with medical complications, such as ectopic pregnancy, which may arise in pregnancy and which might put the life of the mother at risk.

Although I didn't take any active part in the anti-amendment campaign, the *Irish Times* published many of my letters. One in particular comes to mind which was a response to Dr. Ryan, the then Archbishop of Dublin, who termed the claim that traditional Catholic teaching sometimes favoured the life of the mother over that of the foetus, "*a calumny*".[11] Suspecting that Dr. Ryan's statement was a distortion of traditional Catholic teaching, I discovered a pastoral letter written in 1980, by the Archbishops of Great Britain which addressed the ethics of abortion at a time when there were renewed calls for its restriction (abortion having been legalised in the UK in 1967); this pastoral confirmed my suspicions that traditional Catholic doctrine did indeed maintain that the life of the mother must, on occasion, be sacrificed to save the life of the foetus.[12] The spectacle of what, in view of his theological eminence, must be taken as a conscious misrepresentation of church teaching for political ends was deeply unedifying and removed the last vestiges of respect that I might have harboured for the Catholic Church in Ireland; it brought to mind a quotation by a German bishop (cited by Arthur Koestler in his *Darkness at Noon*) to the effect that when the Church is threatened, the breaching of all moral rules is permitted in its defence.[13] The Catholic Church adopted a not dissimilar stance towards the victims of paedophile priests.

The country became obsessed – indeed convulsed – with the so-called '*Pro-Life'* debate on the proposed amendment. The main political parties agreed on the final wording – which now spoke of the *equal* rights of mother and 'the unborn'[14] – but in their refusal to engage with the substantive issue of whose rights should take precedence in case of conflict, they showed a complete lack of courage.

I, like so many others, had conflicted views on abortion; in particular, I did not believe that a woman has an unfettered 'right to abortion'. I had read of a New York hospital where doctors were carrying out late *(c.* 20 week plus) abortions whilst some floors below their colleagues were attempting to save the lives of babies of the same gestational age; such conflicted obligations must surely put a great strain on the emotional wellbeing of doctors obliged to carry out such procedures. These late abortion cases are hugely problematic from an ethical perspective as are the possible rights of the father of the foetus. The resolution is, I suspect, best judged from an assessment of the burden that being obliged to carry the pregnancy to full term, would place on the woman; thus a teenager who is pregnant from rape or incest; a woman who very late in pregnancy, finds that the baby she carries is most unlikely to survive birth would, to my mind, clearly have a right to an abortion.

I believed the proposed wording of the constitutional amendment was silent on all such complexities and I believe that its silence was a dishonest, hypocritical compromise dictated by purely political considerations; as such I believed it to be deeply unethical. I also formed the view that in asking citizens to vote 'yes' or 'no' to what was an intrinsically ambiguous question and without providing guidelines as to how the possible conflict between these rights might be resolved, it displayed a contempt for the rationality of voters; it was akin to being asked to choose between black and red boxes without being told what is in either.

I believed that for these reasons, it could be argued that the holding of the proposed referendum was in itself an unconstitutional exercise of power. I spoke with a friend in the Law Library who thought that the argument was worth pursuing and he offered to speak to Mary Robinson[15] who as a Senior Counsel and academic, specialised in Constitutional Law. Mette by virtue of not being an Irish citizen was not entitled to vote but she was also opposed to the proposed wording and agreed that we should see if there was any legal merit in my argument and a meeting with Mary Robinson was arranged.

I summarised my argument to Mrs. Robinson by stating that on one possible interpretation (that if a woman's life was endangered by a pregnancy her life would take precedence over that of the unborn) I would unequivocally vote 'Yes' but on another possible interpretation (that a woman would have a right to an abortion – even a late abortion – if the unborn was likely to have a disability such as Down syndrome) I would unhesitatingly vote 'No'. Presented with the wording as it then stood, I could neither vote 'Yes' nor 'No': voting 'Yes' might leave open the Down Syndrome scenario; voting 'No' might leave Mette open to her life being in danger if complications should arise in her pregnancy especially as the law as it then currently stood, gave no guarantee that her life would have priority. I was not arguing that the Government should enumerate how *all* conflicts between these rights be resolved but rather that they should set forth the principles which would guide the courts in resolving conflicts in any particular case.

Mary Robinson thought that we had an excellent case and agreed to get the papers prepared and to begin proceedings. My only worry at that time was as to what might happen if we lost and costs were awarded against us. Mrs. Robinson assured us that in that unlikely eventuality she and her supporters in the anti-Amendment groups would rally round and organise some concert or other fundraising event to help defray the costs.

On the 7th June 1983, an application was made to the High Court on my behalf by Mary Robinson for an injunction to block the proposed referendum. Although I had decided not to speak to the media, the case attracted considerable media attention; the Irish Independent, for example, devoted the greater part of its front page to a report on the

case. The Government had planned to hold the referendum in early summer but because of the court case, postponed it to the autumn.

The case was adjourned until the 16th June when before Miss Justice Mella Carroll, arguments were heard from both Mrs. Robinson and the State. Judgment was reserved and was given the following day; my application failed, the judge stating that if I was not certain which interpretation would ultimately be placed on the wording then I could vote against it. Cost were awarded against me and I decided not to appeal to the Supreme Court lest I be held liable for additional costs.

It is ironic that as I write this (January 2015), the High Court was again presented with the problem of interpreting the provision concerning the equality between the life of the mother and that of the unborn. This tragic case concerned a pregnant woman who had been pronounced brain dead and the question before the court was whether artificial support should be continued to enable the infant to be born alive; the court decided that the support could be discontinued though unfortunately the decision was grounded solely on the facts of the particular case and thus does little to prevent similar – and even more harrowing – cases from arising in the future.

A more satisfactory (and more courageous) solution would have been for the Court to resolve the ambiguity inherent in the Amendment by deciding that, in cases of conflict and except in the most exceptional of circumstances, the basic rights of the mother should take precedence over those of the foetus. It could be argued that one such basic right is the ability to die with dignity and the artificial prolongation of life for the purposes of safeguarding the rights of another would conflict with such a basic right and thus the right of the mother to die with dignity would take precedence over any rights of the foetus.

Some months after the hearing of my case I received a statement of costs from the Chief State Solicitor. He sought payment of IR£7,280 [equivalent to over €22,100 at 2014 prices].[16] This was an astounding figure as the State's actual costs comprised the fees for two Senior counsel for one day and the cost of the State's solicitors who – being employees of the Chief State Solicitor – were on their standard salaries. On researching the law relating to costs I found that the State was entitled to charge not their actual cost, but the costs a private party might have charged. I contacted some firms of Legal Cost Accountants but though extremely helpful, offered little hope that I might achieve a substantial reduction in these costs. I phoned Mary Robinson at her office who suggested that I speak to my solicitor; I was surprised at her dismissive attitude in not being willing to help as she had earlier indicated she would.

The *Irish Times* though they had been supportive of the court case refused to permit me to appeal to their readers for assistance. I spent days phoning politicians especially

those who had spoken against the amendment. A surprising lesson from that experience was that on phoning a Government Department, provided that one aimed sufficiently high and directly asked to speak to the Minister or his private secretary, one usually succeeded.

Eventually the Chief State Solicitor yielded to political pressure and the cost were settled for, if I remember correctly, about IR£3,000. My mother helped me defray some of this which was an act of considerable generosity on her part particularly as her views on the amendment differed greatly from mine.

Though at the time of the court case we had messages of support, we also had a not inconsiderable amount of, usually anonymous, 'hate mail'. Many years later I was shocked and surprised to discover that the vehemence and unpleasant tactics that characterised many of the supporters of the 1983 referendum are still to be found, though now with a different focus: on leaving a Dublin meeting in 2013 in support of assisted suicide, I was confronted by a member of Youth Defence (a group strongly opposed to abortion) who aggressively insisted on videoing all those who had attended the meeting: a deeply offensive attempt at intimidation. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*!

Mette was due to have a baby that autumn and as we had planned to have the house rethatched during the summer, she decided to go to Norway whilst this work was being completed. Some weeks before she was due to travel, she attended her gynaecologist for a routine check-up. She returned home distraught and in tears saying that the gynaecologist had told her that she would lose the baby and that there was nothing that could be done but that she should continue work as usual until the inevitable miscarriage. I was dumfounded believing, somewhat arrogantly, that perhaps Mette in her deep upset, had misinterpreted what had been said. We made an appointment to see the gynaecologist the following morning.

Not only was he a very senior consultant but he was Master of The National Maternity Hospital in Holles Street whom Mette, as a private patient, had engaged. Some two months earlier, in the preparation for my court challenge to the constitutional referendum, I had asked him to appear as a witness on my behalf and he had refused. The medical profession in Ireland – and especially gynaecologists – were deeply divided on the referendum, a division which appeared to mirror the religious group to which individual hospitals were affiliated; Holles Street was a Catholic hospital and I had understood this to be the reason that the gynaecologist did not wish to appear as a witness in my case.

At our meeting that morning, I realised that there had been no misinterpretation by Mette; all was exactly as she had reported: there was no chance that her pregnancy

could be saved; there was no advantage to be gained in prolonged rest and that all that she could do was to continue her work until she miscarried. I argued that it was inhuman that this might be expected of her and that if he was so certain that the pregnancy was doomed, why would he not terminate it. His response that that would be an abortion and could not be permitted. Perhaps unfairly, but I got the impression that the coldness of his response was due in no small measure to my High Court challenge to the referendum.

In view of Mette's travel plans, I asked the gynaecologist whether, in his view, there was any reason why Mette should not travel to Norway. He said that there was not and she boarded her flight to Norway some days later.

When she arrived in Norway, the gynaecologists there could not understand how she had been permitted to travel and immediately confined her to bed. They succeeded in preserving Mette's pregnancy for a further three weeks and then she miscarried; an additional two weeks and an early delivery would have been possible. We called the infant boy Martin and he was buried in Bodø in Norway. Mette and I and my other sons visit his grave on each trip to Bodø.

But our difficulties and troubles were by no means over. Because Mette had not been living or working in Norway before her pregnancy, she was not entitled to free health care and the hospital bill was substantial – about €6,000 if I remember correctly. However, she had travel insurance and when I contacted them, they were extremely helpful and agreed to cover the hospital costs provided I submitted a letter saying that Mette had not travelled contrary to medical advice. I anticipated no difficulty in obtaining such a letter and contacted the gynaecologist's secretary. The letter arrived within days but was so bizarrely worded that I felt the secretary must have misunderstood my request.

I arranged a meeting with the gynaecologist for the following day and though he agreed that he had said that there was no reason why Mette could not travel, he said that he could not write a letter to that effect as his professional colleagues would regard it as inappropriate. I was dumbfounded at what I perceived to be his duplicity and his utter disregard for the additional burden that the hospital costs would place on Mette. Sitting opposite him across his desk, I remember wishing to strike him but, wisely, I held my peace and left, feeling nothing but contempt for him. My memory of that interview is of a very self-satisfied man sitting in his pastel jacket in his expensive suite of private offices, smug, and oblivious to all other interests than his own; my regret is that I did not have the foresight to bring a small recorder to tape his admission.

I explained the situation to the insurance company who were very understanding and were (miraculously) willing to cover the hospital costs.

I sought to make a formal complaint about the behaviour of the gynaecologist to the Board of The National Maternity Hospital, to the Minister for Health, to the Medical Council and to The Institute of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists; predictably no one was willing to take him to task.

The way these events had unfolded made me deeply ashamed in being Irish. The grotesque pride that Ireland takes in preserving its self-image as a Christian and caring society; the callousness and unwillingness of the Catholic hospital to take every measure to preserve a pregnancy in contrast to Norway where abortion is freely available; the compassion shown by the English insurance company (again a country where abortion is freely available) who paid for that which they were not legally obliged to pay in contrast to the behaviour of the Irish gynaecologist who disregarded his ethical obligations in favour of the preservation of his self-image. In Ireland, with the passing of the referendum, voters could now relax in the smug hypocrisy of a state newly ordained as being a beacon of righteousness to the world.

One other memory of these events is how the supposed 'certainties' and simplicities as portrayed by both sides of the abortion debate had hardened or even coarsened some of those who had taken an active part; some of Mette's feminist acquaintances, for example, made light of her miscarriage (it was '*only a ..*') which was deeply hurtful. In recent years such attitudes have changed and nowadays the traumatic effect of a miscarriage is more readily acknowledged and compassion more readily extended.

I had travelled to Norway to comfort Mette on our loss. On coming back to Ireland and the re-thatching having been completed, the cottage was again liveable. Mette returned to work and I focused again on my woodturning.

I had started to design a range of lighting which had begun to achieve some measure of success. I had been exhibiting at the Mansion House Christmas Craft Fair which in those years (1983-4) attracted a considerable amount of media attention. Kilkenny Design placed orders for my work as did many other craft outlets and it was exhibited by the Craft Council. I exhibited at the Annual Industrial Development Association Showcase Fair and I was shortlisted for the main IDA award. I was later told that the only reason I did not get the award was that it was a condition that the exhibitor have a proven track record at the fair and since this was my first year exhibiting, I was ineligible. Nonetheless being shortlisted for such a prestigious award was a considerable boost to my self-confidence and it opened many doors to selling and exhibiting my work.

At that stage I needed a larger workshop and an exhibition area and by chance an old roofless stone building lay adjacent to our cottage. Unbeknownst to me the owner – who was then one of the largest landowners in Meath – had sought planning permission for a house just in front of our cottage but had been refused. This was an era when the public

notice requirements for planning permission could be discharged by placing the notice in an obscure newspaper which was not commonly available in the area and thus likely to escape attention. Knowing nothing of this I phoned him and he, thinking that the only planning permission that would be available would be as a workshop, sold me the stone building and the site on which it stood for the bargain sum of IR£2,000.

Then and in subsequent years I garnered many positive media reviews: *the Irish Times* (*"A personal favourite is the beautiful woodturning being done by Gerry Roche…."*[17]); the Aer Lingus in-flight magazine *Cara* twice featured photos of my lamps[18] and at one stage planned to include me in a feature article on '*The six leading crafts makers in Ireland'* (a clash of dates – on their side the death of a friend of their photographer; on mine a planned month long stay in a Zen monastery in England – meant that my place in the article was forfeited to another); photos in a German design magazine[19] and for the *Woodworkers* magazine. Of the various reviews, a personal highlight occurred when after one exhibition I decided to take a break and I headed off with my tent to spend some days alone on the Blaskets. Before getting the boat across I dropped in to see some of Louis Mulcahy's work at his shop nearby; chatting to him, he quipped about all the publicity that I had been getting but not knowing what he was referring to, I let his remark pass. Later that evening, on the island with tent assembled and cooking my dinner on my stove, I glanced casually at a copy of the Irish Times which I had bought earlier that day. In it was not only one but two reviews of my exhibition; one from the Art critic and one from the Craft critic and both highly complimentary;[20] my day was made! Sadly the downing to the west of the Blaskets, of an Air India 747 with the loss of 329 lives occurred during my stay on the island and was a harsh reminder of the troubles that were besetting a world outside my island idyll.

I also had many commissions from architects and advertising agencies (*e.g*. to make artefacts for a *Ronseal* billboard campaign); to make a cross to be presented to the Pope; to make a presentation casket for the Mayor of Cork; to make trophies and sculptural pieces. One trophy that was being commissioned by an advertising agency for presentation to one of their favourite clients was for a cricket trophy. The advertising executives arrived at my workshop in a large Mercedes and money appeared to be no object provided the trophy was exactly as they required; namely a perfect scale model of a cricket ball and stumps mounted on a green baize base. The base and stumps presented no problem but they also required that the ball be a perfect scale replica *c.* 40mm diameter and with all stitch marks clearly showing. The stitch marks on a cricket ball are elliptical in shape, regularly spaced and stand proud of the surface of the ball. Carving the stitch marks was well nigh impossible as no matter how dense a piece of hardwood was used and however great care was taken, the raised wood remaining was extremely fragile and tended to break away – I was stumped!

A solution eventually dawned on me when I remembered an old cabinetmakers' trick for removing a compression dent from a surface such as a dining table: they would place a wet cloth over the dent and a hot domestic iron atop the cloth. This had the effect of forcing steam into the dent which in turn would make the timber expand and the dent disappear. I used a similar process in reverse: I took a hard piece of Bubinga which is a dense hardwood coloured a deep red and thus a perfect match for a cricket ball; I turned this down to a 44mm perfect sphere; I then ground the tip off a small flat nail leaving me with a 3mm punch. Then where all the stitch marks should be I punched 2mm deep elliptical holes; I then sanded to ball till it was perfectly uniform with none of the dents visible and then covered all with a damp cloth and used my steam iron. *Voila,* I had my perfect stitch marks. Needless to say the bill presented to the advertising executives reflected all the thought and ingenuity expended!

The renovation of our cottage was by now, substantially complete and the *Sunday Independent* ran a generous article[21] complimenting our restoration project and my craftwork. Our second son, Peter, was born in 1985 but it had been a very difficult pregnancy for Mette who had been confined to bed for most of its duration. My struggle to come off psychiatric medication had been successful but I had been taking them for over eight years and jettisoning these drugs caused my emotions to bubble again to the surface. It was only then that I fully realised how deadening and stultifying these medications had been. Later when researching my PhD, it did not surprise me to discover that others who had successfully weaned themselves off such drugs, described their previous state as being like a "*zombie*"[22] (though possibly they had been on higher dosages than I had). For me, these rediscovered emotions opened a door to a new energy, vitality and creativity and seemed, at least to me, like a rebirth. But I had to learn to 'house-train' these new emotions and much like a teenager I displayed at times an emotional volatility which was undoubtedly difficult for Mette.

Against such a background, relationship difficulties inevitably arose but we had the great good fortune to encounter a counsellor/psychologist whose wisdom helped us steer a path through these. Mette's mother was in the final stages of a terminal illness and Mette decided to return to Norway to care for her. We worked out a temporary separation agreement to last for one year; Philip was to stay in Ireland with me and Peter was to go to Norway with Mette and they would both return after the year. We both had considerable financial difficulties but I was surprised to receive a letter from Mette midway through the year saying that she was applying for a divorce, not because she wanted a divorce or wished to end our relationship but her financial situation in Norway would be much easier as a divorcee. She maintained that it was akin to a paper exercise and of no consequence to our relationship but nonetheless I was completely taken aback; more so than had she sought a divorce in order to pursue another

relationship. I however, was not blameless in all this as I had begun a dalliance with a friend which breached the temporary separation agreement that had been made in which both Mette and I had agreed not to get involved in other relationships.

Mette and Peter returned to Ireland the following year but trust had been breached for both of us; we drifted apart emotionally and finally decided to separate. In my court work I had often seen how the involvement of a solicitor for each party can, when attempting to come to an equitable agreement concerning a legal separation, have extremely damaging effect on the subsequent relationships between the parties and their children. Mette had seen the same results in her work and as we had already agreed between ourselves on the main points of a draft agreement, we resolved to get a single solicitor to act for us both and to highlight any ambiguities in the draft and to put it into a standard legal form. The surprise for me was when contacting many solicitors whom I had known and had considered to be left-leaning or radical, though all were wiling to act for one of us, how few were willing to act for us both; the conservatism and deference to tradition – even amongst seemingly radical solicitors – was deeply ingrained. Eventually we did succeed in finding a solicitor to act for us both and draft our agreement and I remember how on the morning that we finalised it, we both adjourned to the nearby Wynne's Hotel for an Irish Coffee and startled the bartender when we told him of that which we were celebrating!

It is a tribute to Mette that we remained friends in the over thirty years since we drank that toast and that we often went on holiday together to Norway (most years) and, on occasions, to Morocco, Seville and Budapest. It was of inestimable benefit to our sons that they grew to maturity with parents who – though divorced – were in the main, friends to each other.

As far as this memoir goes a final word on Mette and our marriage: at many times it was rocky; I was moody and Mette had her silences but her Norwegian spiritedness – even spikiness – prompted me to get up off my ass and head in directions and take on tasks and projects that a more traditionally Irish partner would not only have discouraged but who, faced with such schemes, would have thrown up their hands in horror and left. For that I am grateful.

I had already begun the restoration of the stone building that I had purchased earlier and which as part of our separation agreement remained my property. It was essentially a ruin comprising four stone walls some of which tilted precariously and topped by the remains of a roof, the timbers of which had rotted. It was about sixty foot long by fourteen foot wide and two stories high.

I managed to get a loan from the bank to cover its reconstruction but it was less than I had budgeted for. In the end it was insufficient and I had to wage a prolonged (but finally successful) battle with the bank to get sufficient funds to complete the roof.

At any event, in beginning this reconstructing my finances were tight and to help get the best estimate for re-construction, I contacted about twenty contractors operating in the area. Of those that were willing to quote, the highest quote was, to my considerable surprise, approximately twice the lowest. Opting to explore the lowest quote, I found that the builder not only had an excellent local reputation but was easy to deal with and we quickly came to an amicable agreement. Having worked with many builders since those days, I can truthfully say that the standard to which he worked was exemplary and I learned the very useful lesson that price is seldom an indication of quality. Another useful lesson that I learned was how readily architects/engineers resort to blaming the builder for errors in drawings or for problems that the architects had not foreseen. In this case the architect had erred in measuring the height of the gable wall with the result that in standing on the top step of the stairs, one's head would hit the velux window above. The error was over two foot and we had to raise the walls by a corresponding height to compensate for the error. When the architect came to inspect the building work, I by coincidence and unknown to him, was close by and overheard his swearing at the builders for what he claimed to be *their* error. Often the builder in such circumstances cannot respond, as he may well be dependant on that architect either for future work or to sign the necessary completion certificate. Many years later and immersed in another project which involved constructing a short 15' tunnel between an existing building and an extension, the engineer was so badly out in his calculations that I remember making the quip that had he been in charge of designing the Dublin Port tunnel, it would have ended up in Liverpool!

The builder in his quotation to renovate the stone building, had provided a full list of costing and one item was a cost for the safe removal of the rotted roof timbers which was not the simplest of problems. Although a cause of destruction and pain to others in the area, fortunately for me *'Hurricane Charley'* arrived over Ireland the day before the builders were due to start. It removed the remains of the roof speedily and safely – and reduced my builder's quotation accordingly – I took this to be a good omen and that my luck was holding!

The renovation of the stone ruin presented many problems because it had been built directly on the ground and without any foundations. It was necessary to build a house within the existing stone walls and to incorporate into this new structure the necessary damp proofing and insulation. This necessitated digging new foundations by hand; building a new block inner leaf and then casting a reinforced concrete beam to tie the new block walls to the existing stone ones and, finally, to face the exterior of the beam with stone so that its presence was not evident from outside. I remember the first day

that the upper floor timbers were installed and clambering over them with glass and whiskey bottle in hand, to sit on what had been the top of the old gable wall and to gaze at what appeared to be an unfolding miracle: a beautiful building rising from what had been debris.

The rebuilding took over a year to complete. In the interim I had made all the hardwood doors and windows required and my craft business was progressing well. Because of my marital separation, I had sought planning permission to change the use of the upper part of the renovated building to an apartment and this had been granted. The lower part was a superb workshop and display area. Later, in seeking a mortgage to enable me to escape bridging finance,[23] the building society's inspector was full of praise for what had been accomplished with the reconstruction. It was then I realised that I had been bitten by the 'building bug'.

I lived very happily in that apartment for about four years and to have my sons and Mette living close by, worked well for all of us. With the various exhibitions and craft fairs that I attended, my craft work was flourishing and it offered a reasonably stable way forward but the next project was already gestating in my unconscious.

Whist travelling in Norway I had often stayed in log cabins and had become fascinated by the special character or atmosphere that they seemed to embody – it is not simply the wood panelling on the inside; I have never felt standard block built houses with a panelled interior to convey anything of the same ambience; neither is it simply the wood because I have found a timber framed house to be equally deficient in atmosphere – it is the fact that log cabins are built of *logs*! They seem to embody something primeval: the idea of heading into the wilderness equipped with only an axe to build one's own house; perhaps I saw too many westerns as a child! This was to become my next building project. But the first question was where could I build it, though I was sure of one thing: it must be beside the sea!

It had been a pastime of mine over many years to walk in the Dublin mountains sometimes for just a day. Other times I would take a small tent and embark on a more ambitious trek along the ridges. One Christmas I headed out on St. Stephen's day from Marley Park in the hope of getting as far as Glenmalure; I had not fully appreciated not only how early it got dark (which necessitated looking for a site to place my tent at about 2.30 and, once pitched, spending the next sixteen hours with only my radio for company) but the severity of the weather at that time of year. I eventually managed to get as far as Glendalough some three days later, sore and exhausted. I did the same trip in later years with Philip though we had the good sense this time to do it in summer. One episode on that trip marked a special time for me: we had been walking on the ridge past Mullaghcleevaun and towards Tonelagee where the ground was very wet and peaty; I

had been carrying the heavy pack with the tent and was finding the going difficult. Philip seeing my difficulty, returned and gave me a hand over a particularly marshy patch of ground – a small gesture perhaps but to me, it was symbolic of the handing over of a baton from one generation to the next.

Some years before that trek when Philip was about ten years old, I had begun to plan my log cabin. I had decided to take Philip on a camping trip to the Blaskets. The weather forecast for the next days was very bad but I had a good mountain tent and felt sure that once safely on the Blaskets we would have no difficulties. We arrived at Dunquin but could not find a boatman to take us across to the island; eventually some youths offered to do so in their rib. I agreed and as they began to reinflate their rib, Philip started to cry and refused to go. That was that; we changed our plans and decided to work our way back north along the coast staying in campsites as we went. I phoned local auctioneers as we travelled, enquiring whether they had any coastal sites for sale. Eventually we got to Clare and I struck gold: a one and a half acre site near Ballyvaughan, on the seashore and beside a pier. After some complicated negotiations, a deal was struck and the site was mine. I had anticipated problems in getting planning permission for a log cabin but no, my luck was still holding. The next problem was the construction of the cabin. There were a number of log cabins in Ireland at that time but all had been imported as kits from either Finland or Norway, I wanted to build one from Irish timber and in my innocence I thought that using native timber would present no particular problems.

On my many walks in the Dublin mountains I had often noticed the number of what seemed to be electricity or telephone poles just harvested from the mountain forests and that indicated a good place to start my enquiries. After a number of phone calls I made contact with Caoilte (The Irish Forestry Board) and the manager of their Tipperary sawmill at Dundrum. He had for many years urged his head office management to expand into timber house building which would have constituted a much more profitable use of timber than its being exported, as it then was, as raw material for paper pulp. My log cabin proposal fired him with enthusiasm; I showed him the site and we adjourned to a local pub and agreed the main points: pricing, quality, moisture content and other necessary details. I had brought along a friend as a witness and the manager had also been accompanied by a Caoilte engineer. I had made a note of all the points of our agreement – a wise move as the Caoilte Head Office refused to allow the manager to issue any written record; an attitude that should have forewarned me of the difficulties that lay ahead. I should also have been forewarned by their lack of experience in construction as the only 'prototypes' that they could show me were of the size of a small garden shed and constructed of 2" timber; not only would my cabin be well over ten times that size but it would be constructed in 4" timber which required special kiln-drying techniques. Despite all these problems I decided to press ahead; I bought a small

caravan in Dublin and towed it down to my site to use as my accommodation whilst I built my cabin.

To celebrate all these decisions I decided that, before I began the build, I would do some travelling. I chose Tibet; for what reason I do not know but perhaps it was its reputed difficulty and inaccessibility but more likely it was because I had just turned forty and wanted to prove something if only to myself!

This was 1988 and travelling to China and Tibet was much more problematic than it was later to become. Visas for independent travelling to Tibet were not available and I am not sure that even if they had been, that I – with, at that time, so little experience of independent travelling – would have had the courage to go. So, I travelled with a UK tour operator that specialised in small tours to exotic destinations. The tour was to begin in Kathmandu and ten of us met there and stayed a couple of days getting to know each other and completing visa formalities. I was paired to share a hotel room with the English manager of a tool company who explained to me on our first meeting that although his mother was Irish he had never denied it. He said this with the attitude of one who expected gratitude in return and sought to copper-fasten his remove from his Irish ancestry by then telling me that he had a deep love of opera and listened to Radio 3 each Saturday for its live broadcasts from the New York Met. An inauspicious beginning but all turned out well and – ignoring attitudes reminiscent of the British Empire, attitudes which during my later years I often encountered amongst the British when abroad – I refrained from informing him that like Shelley's *Ozymandias*[24], the British Empire was now little but a fleeting memory!

I remember the occasion of my first glimpse of the Himalayas: I had been marvelling at the high mountains on the horizon surmounted by clouds until I realised that high above the clouds and, in their snow-covered whiteness, camouflaged by them were the mighty Himalayas; mountains truly worthy of veneration.

Kathmandu was exotic to eyes more accustomed to European cities but, amongst all the bustle and poverty, it was safe and friendly and the Nepalese were very hospitable. Travellers to such countries often comment on the poverty and on how distressing it is to witness but, with some exceptions, I have come to believe that the lives of many people in such cites whilst undoubtedly not having access to the material wealth of many in western countries, is incomparably richer when viewed from a social and spiritual perspective; and that the 'concern' expressed by so many westerners serves as an unconscious affirmation of the worth of their lives back home where money is the measure of all. This came home to me forcibly once when on returning to London from a trip to India, I was struck by the 'dead' eyes of so many of the children that I saw on

London streets when compared with the vitality, ingenuity and 'spunk' of so many of the kids that I had seen on the streets of Indian cities.

Leaving Kathmandu, we headed in a small minibus towards the Nepal/Chinese border which was marked by a river flowing along a deep gorge and spanned by the Friendship Bridge. We stayed overnight in a small village inn on the Nepalese side and crossed to the Chinese side the following morning to complete formalities.

Returning to this village some fifteen years later (in 2003) with a close Swedish friend, Anna, it presented a different prospect. On that occasion the rain was incessant and during the night stones and then rocks were being dislodged from the mountain slope above us and hitting the galvanised roof above our heads. I got dressed and lay on the bed, boots and all, ready to run but without anywhere safer to run to! That night I was unsure whether I would survive till morning; I did and daylight showed the full extent of the rockfall. The largest was about a meter in diameter and lay on the road just in front of where we had been sleeping. I whistled slowly through my teeth and thought that someone must surely have been praying for me. This was on a trip to Mount Kailash which is in the far west of Tibet and difficult of access and again I was obliged, for visa reasons, to travel with a small group. Anna (who had also joined the group) had, unwisely, not drunk the quantities of water that are recommended to prevent altitude sickness and as we travelled westwards she became more and more nauseous. Eventually on about the eight day of travelling we reached the base of Mount Kailash and set up camp. Mount Kailash is a sacred place to Buddhists, Hindus and adherents of Bön (a religion which predates Buddhism in Tibet) and the source of four of the major rivers of Asia lie in its foothills. Being a sacred mountain none would even attempt to climb it.[25] Reverence toward the mountain is shown by making the difficult circumambulation on foot though sometimes the more devout pilgrims, complete this by making full, body length, prostrations. That night my friend Anna became euphoric and incoherent with her mind wandering incessantly. Luckily I remembered a passage from one of Dervla Murphy's books on her travels in Ethiopia[26] where she described a similar occurrence and I realised that Anna had extreme altitude sickness and that it was crucial to get her to a lower altitude as quickly as possible. The guides that accompanied us did not have the pressure masks or the oxygen that they should have carried but we headed off at night in a Jeep in search of a Chinese military outpost. There she was given oxygen and after three or four days, recovered from what had been a very close brush with death.

Before this digression I was describing my earlier trip to Tibet in 1988. Crossing the Friendship Bridge on the Nepalese/Chinese border we found that the road on the Chinese side had been washed away by floods and was being repaired by Chinese soldiers. With porters who helped carry our rucksacks (and who put us to shame by their ability to effortlessly carry large loads) we climbed to where the road was undamaged and where a minibus was awaiting us. The plan was to overnight in various monasteries and military

barracks during the four days that it would take to get to Lhasa. Of that journey, amongst my most enduring memories were the huge blue skies framed by the snow-capped Himalayas, all bathed in a luminosity such as I have never experienced elsewhere and which may be occasioned by the thinness of the air at that altitude (*c*. 3,500 m.); the unrelenting glare of the sun which burned with an especial ferocity and which the local Tibetans made good use of with their solar cookers (parabolic mirrors, the kettle being at the focal point); the beauty and colour of the monasteries (often marred by ever-present packs of dogs which were believed to be the reincarnation of monks who had misbehaved in an earlier life but who were on that account protected even though they were aggressive and possibly contaminated with rabies); the demeanour of the monks and the hypnotic effect of their chanting.

Perhaps the most memorable moment of those days was when we spent the night in an army barracks close to Everest base camp; early the next morning I went out alone to gaze awestruck at the mountain. There was a small stream at my feet with the water on one bank still frozen solid; on the other it flowed freely under the warmth of the sun; the lord of all mountains, bathing in sunlight, reigned over all.

Heading towards Lhasa, the road was sometimes little more than a dry riverbed which, in the spring, would be a raging torrent and impassable; the difficulty of the journey and the risk of altitude sickness somehow heightened the experience.

In Lhasa we stayed in a small hotel which was the occasion of one of my most embarrassing memories of that journey: as a celebration of our safe arrival we had some beers … and then some more beers and after some time I went in search of the toilet. In those times very few tourists came to Lhasa and the signs in the hotel were in Chinese and Tibetan but not in English and I could find not even an indication of which of many rooms was a toilet much less a male toilet. The situation became urgent and I spotted one of those large floor-standing ashtrays with a push button, propeller-type, mechanism. Being unobserved, I pressed the button, pissed into this receptacle before beating a hasty retreat. The next morning was one of those where, on waking, one pulls the blanket over one's eyes and says no, I did not do that; my humiliation was absolute. Luckily there were no consequences but I often wondered whether if the police had been called, the Irish embassy would have leapt to my defence: I suspect that I would still be languishing in a Tibetan goal.

To me, the most impressive buildings in Lhasa were the Jokhang Temple and the Potala Palace. The Jokhang Temple is in the very centre of Lhasa and is regarded by Tibetans as especially sacred: one to which they will make pilgrimage and, on arrival, pay obeisance. Much like at Mount Kailash, pilgrims circumambulate the temple (somewhat reminiscent of Catholics making a Stations of the Cross but more arduous) and manifest their devotion by making full length prostrations towards it.

The Potala Place – at least to a foreigner – expresses a very different aspect. It is built atop a step hill and its façade is not vertical but tilted backwards so that the aspect that it presents to the onlooker below is one not only of dominance but of a dominance so absolute that it does not even deign to see you but looks over and beyond – an attitude not unlike one who, believing himself superior to others, looks 'down his nose' not even at, but beyond them. This is a face of Tibetan Buddhism that is ignored by many of its western devotees who prefer to gloss over the feudal nature of the monasteries and their extreme wealth and power prior to the events of 1959 and the Dalai Lama's flight to India. Western media often adopt a simplistic and condescending attitude in their editorialising on Tibet and China; it is worth bearing in mind that had the *China Daily* or the *Lhasa Times* (if such exists) sought to instruct us Irish on how at the height of the 'troubles', our problems should be resolved, we should have regarded it not only as the height of presumption but as indicating an even more astounding level of ignorance. Neither should it be forgotten that Western nations have vested interests in seeking to weaken or dismember China (interests which have their reflection in the Chinese fear of 'splittists').

One image of Tibet that stayed with me for many years occurred at a meal that our group shared in an eatery on the outskirts of Lhasa. This was not in any sense a restaurant but a roadside stall where we all sat at the one long table as our food was cooked in front of us. During the meal and unseen by the owner, a man approached the table on his knees; he was dishevelled and holding out his cap for us to place food in despite the fact that the food that we were eating was of the consistency of a curry. Not only was he a beggar but it seemed that – whether by reason of lacking a residence permit or being a fugitive from the law – he was also an outcast. Never since have I seen such a wretched, pitiable sight but there was nothing to be done; any attempt to highlight his plight would have brought nothing but further misery down upon his shoulders.

Leaving Lhasa we journeyed back to Kathmandu following the road we had come, digressing only to see some monasteries that we had not visited on our outward journey. Descending towards the Nepalese border was akin to experiencing the four seasons in one day. Lhasa lies at an altitude of about 3,490 metres whereas Kathmandu has an elevation of 1,400 metres and thus the drop from the barren plains of Tibet to the Kathmandu valley is over 2,000 meters. As we departed, Tibet had the feel of winter not being far distant; autumn arrived with the loss of altitude, the trees became plentiful and all still had their covering of leaves; next came summer and the luxurious abundance of plants especially the rhododendrons in all their magnificent splendour; lastly came spring and the farmers out planting in the fields and tending to their crops.

Having gained some confidence in my ability to navigate my way through the hurdles of travelling in an unknown land I decided to travel in India for a further month or so on my

own and booked a flight from Kathmandu to Varanasi (Benares) and a further flight some days later, onwards to Leh the capital of Ladakh which was once a Himalayan kingdom and is now the most northerly part of India. I parted company from what over our fifteen days of travel had become a close knit friendly group; we pledged our intention to keep in touch and I headed to the airport and my flight to India.

Varanasi in a phrase that I would seldom otherwise use, 'blew my mind'. I had booked into a small Government run tourist bungalow where I turned out to be the only guest and, leaving my rucksacks, I headed out to explore. First I headed for the river – the great Ganges – where I encountered the ghats; these are the steps where devotees can descend to bathe in the sacred river and alongside of which are the 'burning ghats' where bodies are cremated. In Hinduism cremation is one of the rites of passage and its performance on the banks of the Ganges is considered to be especially auspicious. The body is laid out in full view and whilst the relatives of the deceased stand alongside, it is covered with timbers and incense and set alight; the fire is tended to until nothing but ashes remain which are then placed in the river.

Overawed by this I made my way back to the centre of the city. Varanasi, like many other Eastern cities, took on a much more welcoming aspect as the sun went down and the oppressive heat of the day diminished. At such times families come out to promenade, to shop and to eat from the multiplicities of stalls selling delicious, freshly cooked, street food. I stood in a doorway and watched; mesmerised as rivers of people paraded past yet, strangely, I felt utterly relaxed. I was gazing with such intensity at all that was unfolding that eventually someone approached and asked whether I was a writer or artist. Though on an objective level all before me was strange and foreign yet bizarrely I felt that, in some sense, I had come home.

Some days later I took a plane to Leh. Because Leh is at an altitude of 3,500 meters and surrounded by high mountains and difficult terrain, the difficulties of landing a plane are considerable. In fact the airport features on a pilots' web site devoted to 'Which Is The Hardest Landing Airport?'[27] Luckily I was unaware of this at the time, only becoming apprehensive at what seemed the extreme steepness of our descent. I had been travelling alongside a Swiss-French woman who had become quite scared during the landing and perhaps because she mistook my petrified expression for *sang froid*, we began to talk and subsequently we became travelling companions for the next month. It transpired that she had worked for the Red Cross and had travelled extensively in Asia usually on her own. Her name was Catherine, she was very beautiful and in her late twenties.

Ladakh is on the Tibetan Plateau and is known as 'Little Tibet'. It had been the site of a border dispute with China in 1962. The area was still heavily militarised with some areas

out of bounds; it was not until 1996 that the dispute was finally resolved. Leh itself is much smaller than Lhasa and is dominated by a ruined palace built in a style similar to the Potala Palace. Had I not recently visited Tibet, I would have been overwhelmed but the memories of Lhasa and the magic even associated with its name meant that – as one might say to a child who had been given too many gifts – I had been spoilt. One memory that does linger is a visit to a monastery where I had my first sighting of lammergeyers (bearded vultures) who were riding the thermal currents above the steep cliffs sheltering the monastery. Their flight was as graceful and effortless as that of a surfer riding the waves. We stayed in Leh for three or four days and then planned to travel to Srinagar in Kashmir and whereas the town of Leh might have failed to impress the road from Leh to Srinagar more than compensated for any disappointment.

Being late in the year, winter was rapidly approaching. At around the same time the previous year a bus to Srinagar had got stuck in snowdrifts and many passengers had died before rescuers could reach them. When I went to buy tickets I found that the bus had been cancelled until the following spring. Having heard of the wonders of the Leh to Srinagar road I was reluctant to fly and luckily we managed to hitch a ride on that year's last military convoy heading to Srinagar.

Because of the recent confrontation with China having a road from Srinagar to Leh was of great strategic importance to India. The road was indeed spectacular and because of the difficulty of the terrain (towering mountains on one side and a river flowing far below and being continually subjected to the ravages of ice, snow and rockslides).[28] It was little more than a dirt track often barely wide enough for the lorry on which we were travelling. A lorry travelling in the opposite direction made for a hair raising encounter! The highest point on the road is the Fotu-La pass at 4,108 metres (13,477 feet); at this height the air is very thin which puts additional strain not only on the drivers but also on their engines. It was one of those strange circles of fate that the river far below me was the mighty Indus which, some four years later, was to be again far below me but in a different land (Pakistan) as I made a trip across the Karakoram; its source (at Lake Mansarovar, under Mount Kailash) I was to see again some fifteen years later on a trip to Tibet.

The spectacular nature of the road was made even more poignant by a story that I was told by one of the army drivers. The convoy had come to a stop beside a memorial stone and the soldiers dismounted, stood to attention and saluted. The memorial (and the salute), I was told, was in honour of the army engineer who had overseen the construction of the road and who had wished to name the road in memory of his daughter. When this had not been permitted by his army superiors, he, feeling dishonoured, committed suicide at the very spot where the memorial now stands.

The convoy made an overnight stop at Kargil which is very close to the border with Pakistan and which, some ten years later, was the site of a border incursion by Pakistani troops who captured the town thus precipitating a clash with the Indian army.

Leaving Kargil, the road begins its descent into the Vale of Kashmir which after the rigors of Kargil appeared as a kind of Shangri-la made even more so by the wondrous Dal Lake – the jewel in the centre of Srinagar.

Srinagar had been the traditional summer retreat for India's rulers. There they could find solace from the oppressive heat of the plains. Kashmir had maintained its independence during the British Raj and though the Maharaja had not permitted the British to build houses in Kashmir, they had circumvented this by building ornate houseboats on the lake which are still available for rent. Wakening up on such a boat with a mist still covering the lake; the Himalayas far above and glistening in the sun, having breakfast – which had just been served by the proprietor from his shikara (a traditional small boat) – was akin to heaven; indeed in the 12th century '*Chronicle of Kings'* it is believed to surpass it:

> *… the saffron, iced water and grapes, which are rare even in heaven, are common here. Kailasa [Kailash] is the best place in the three worlds, Himalaya the best part of Kailasa, and Kashmir the best place in Himalaya*.[29]

Although beautiful, Srinagar at that time of year was cold; even the local men sat crouched in their long coats with a brazier[30] hidden deep within its folds.

Catherine, driven by a longing for some European food (more specifically. a hamburger) and me by a desire to escape the cold, we headed south to Delhi. Sadly she was to be disappointed: cows being sacred in India, the only burgers to be had were yakburgers – a very different experience!

The bus drive south was an experience not to be repeated: the driver was high on hash as he probably needed to be to manage the twenty hour, 800 mile journey to Delhi; a journey accompanied by non-stop Indian film music at full volume; nonetheless we reached Delhi safely, and deprived of the anticipated joys of a hamburger we headed west to Rajasthan and its deserts and palaces and fabled cities.

Our first stop was Jaipur and to reach it we had travelled on a local bus and amongst our fellow travellers, all Indian, were a group of soldiers in uniform. The bus, as was often the case, pulled in to a roadside teahouse for a short break. I sat at a table outside and ordered tea whilst Catherine went in search of a toilet, something often difficult to find in India. Suddenly she appeared, distraught. Some of the Indian soldiers had followed her to the back of the teahouse and when she entered the toilet, attempted to push down the door. I, in my fury, remonstrated with them and demanded their details but they, in a display or arrogance and impunity, did not even try to apologise and, if anything, were on the verge of assaulting me. The fact that they desisted was probably because I was European – not because they had any particular respect for Europeans (quite the

contrary) but because an assault on a European, in contrast to a local, would inevitably have attracted the attention of the police with likely repercussions on them. That episode is something that I have often remembered especially with the continuing news reports from India of rapists escaping unpunished, sometimes even with the connivance of the police.

Jaipur is deeply etched in my memory not so much for the city itself – which was beautiful – or for its observatory or palace which are impressive but because it was where on my return journey, I got malaria. More of that anon.

When there with Catherine, it was a stopping point on our journey to Pushkar which was the goal of our journey west. Pushkar is a small village at the edge of the desert with a beautiful lake which is a sacred to Hindus but its main fame arises from its camel fair which is held every year in late autumn. Much like the Ballinasloe Horse Fair, Pushkar is renowned not only for the buying and selling of camels but also for camel races and all the other entertainments and bazaars that accompany such fairs. One unexpected and unplanned 'entertainment' occurred one evening when an elephant, feeling somewhat peckish, and close to a stall selling chapattis, decided to serve himself; chaos ensued with people, in fear, running amok which, in turn, frightened the elephant so that it was only with great difficulty that the animal was calmed and injury was averted. In the midst of all this Catherine met a group of French travellers and decided to travel back to Delhi with them. I who had hoped to celebrate my birthday with her in Jodhpur, headed west on my own.

Jodhpur has one of the largest forts in India which, sitting high above the city, dominates all; a truly impressive sight made even more so by the 'Sati Handprints' still visible on the walls at one of its fortified gates. These fifteen pairs of small gilded handprints were imprinted on the wall in 1843, by the wives of the then recently deceased Maharaja as they went out to commit ritual suicide by throwing themselves upon his funeral pyre. My birthday was made even more poignant by being celebrated alone sitting watching the sunset atop the walls of the fort; now, at forty-three, a further step into middle age but what a place to be.

Leaving Jodhpur, I continued to head west; my goal was Jaisalmer a town set in the desert close to the Pakistan border. Deserts have always had a fascination for me and perhaps that is why I ended up living in the Burren in Clare which has often been described as a 'stone desert'. Over my years travelling I have been in deserts in China, Africa, Iran and Syria but I do not think that I have the courage to travel in a jungle. Even though deserts are harsh environments, there is something about the sparseness, clarity and beauty that still touches the mathematician in me; in contrast, a jungle, to me embodies an unpleasant confusion and chaos.

Jaisalmer did not disappoint; beautiful stone buildings, Jain temples, a relaxed and relaxing town. In pursuit of my 'desert experience', I with three or four others booked a

camel safari where we spent four days each of us atop a camel (a sore experience) and sleeping at night on the desert floor and gazing at the biggest night skies that I have ever seen. Camels being double-jointed, are difficult to mount and dismount as they tend to throw one forward and when one does get seated, the ground seems quite a long way down.

In the desert, we encountered many stone ruins which were extraordinarily well built but now deserted perhaps because of drought or, more recently, the wars with Pakistan. At any event they were spectacular and they reinforced a belief that had been lurking in my subconscious since I began travelling in India namely that they were of a civilization much older and richer than my own and compared to which Europeans were as barbarians.

At night we were given a thick rope to be placed on the ground surrounding our sleeping bags; this, we were told, was to ward off snakes; the idea being that a snake thinking the rope to be another snake, wouldn't cross it. The greatest danger occurred to me not from snakes, but atop my camel when we encountered another camel train. It was a very discomforting experience for me when one of their male camels took a fancy to the female upon which I was precariously perched!

Back at my hotel in Jaisalmer and in an effort to dispel the taste of the endless chapattis that we existed on when on our safari, I went to a restaurant and enjoyed a spectacular meal but, being greedy and wishing to guild the lily, I ordered an ice-cream. Ice is one thing to be avoided when travelling. I remember once in India, seeing a boy on his bicycle dragging behind him by a rope, a large block of ice which in all probability was to be delivered to an expensive hotel and then broken into pieces to grace the drinks of the monied tourists. I ended up getting very sick and spent three days journeying between my hotel room and the toilet.

The owner of that hotel was an upper-caste Hindu and one evening as we sat on the roof sipping tea and eating delicacies, I noticed that he served the food in such a manner as indicated that he considered any food that we, Europeans, had touched to be unclean and as if we belonged to a lower caste. Thinking about it afterwards, I thought it a good lesson to learn as we Europeans, when travelling in Asia, often act as if we believe ourselves to be more important than locals so that if a choice must be made between saving a European or a local, the answer to us is self evident. The lesson was how deep-seated is the unconscious racist attitudes that we all harbour but which seldom see the light of day.

Recovering from my diarrhoea and forswearing all further ice-cream, I headed back to Jaipur on the train. The memory of this train journey still remains with me: I was able to sit at the open door of the train (perhaps the doors were sliding and the draught was a welcome ventilation) cross legged, gazing out as the country unfolded before me. It brought to mind the wonderfully romantic American stories from my teenage years of a

life lived in utter freedom 'riding freight trains' and going wherever my fancy took me. Teenage dreams that were quickly brought down to earth.

Arriving in Jaipur, I booked into an especially cheap hotel because my money was running out and I ended up sleeping in a rooftop room with no mosquito nets or no air-conditioning. Even though I was being badly bitten by mosquitoes I believed that my anti-malarial medication (one weekly tablet plus a daily tablet of a different medication) would fully protect me and I just suffered through the bites planning to head onward to Delhi and then home.

But I have two happier memories of Jaipur: one was when walking in the market in an area not usually frequented by tourists I noticed a young girl on the opposite side of the street watching me. Suddenly she had crossed the street and was in front of me and proffering a single flower. Surprised, I thanked her and reached for some coins to give her. Embarrassed, she refused the coins and I, realising the extent of my gaucheness, could murmur nothing but to thank her again. I do not believe that such a spontaneous gesture could occur in a European city and that is one of the reasons why I believe India to be the superior culture.

The second memory flowed from an experience in a similar marketplace. As often happens in such places a seller might have just one or two items which he wishes to sell and might display these on a cloth placed on the pavement beside which he will patiently await any show of interest. I once saw such a seller display a single bicycle pedal, however on this occasion it was a child's toy: a small metal speedboat. On examining it, I saw that it had been meticulously constructed out of waste food cans and bottle tops and, moreover, that it contained the most ingenious 'jet' engine. The boat was about 4" in length and the mechanism consisted of two bottle tops welded together (a 'boiler') from the back of which extended two small tubes and under which was room for a small ladle (again a bottle top) with a long handle. First one filled the boiler with water and having placed the boat in a tub of water, a small wax candle was lit and placed on the ladle and then pushed under the boiler. After a few moments when the water had heated, steam was emitted from the tubes at the back of the boat and it was off and away propelled by its jet engine. I still have this boat on my workbench and often marvel both at the ingenuity of its maker and also how the creativity of the Indian mind could conjure up such a wonder from what to Western eyes, were the meagrest pieces of rubbish.

Feeling as if I had a slight flu and utterly unsuspecting that the various malarial medication might not have given me complete protection, I headed to Delhi. Having little money by this stage, I headed to the airport by motor rickshaw not realising that Delhi airport was a considerable distance from the city and that the rickshaw, being open sided, would be so cold. In the darkness, cold and miserable and feeling ill I began to wonder whether we were in fact heading to the airport or whether the driver had more

nefarious objectives but in my situation there was nothing that I could do but trust – trust which was eventually rewarded when the airport lights began to materialise out of the darkness.

I boarded my flight to London, for that is where I began this journey, and returned to the bed and breakfast where, on my outward journey, I had left some of my belongings. The following morning I was feeling even more ill and seemed to be losing my balance. I had booked a ticket on the boat from Holyhead to Dublin and was to get my connecting bus that evening from London. I asked the owner if – because I was feeling ill – she would mind if I remained in my room until late afternoon when I could get a taxi to the bus station. She refused. I realised that I was back in Europe with its more mercantile concept of 'hospitality'. Worse, she was Irish, affluent, and from what she had told me earlier, politically well-connected: clearly a presaging of the Celtic Tiger to come.

The bus and boat journey happened as if in a haze. Landing in Dublin, I was met by Mette, Philip and Peter and, as I was told subsequently, I looked as if at death's door. I was put to bed and I sweated so much that night that the sheets had to be changed more than once, but although I was sweating profusely I felt very cold and kept calling for more and more blankets.

At that time in Ireland, malaria was practically unheard of and my GP thought I had a bad case of flu. The next night I slept more soundly and I assumed that I was recovering but the profuse sweating and the feeling of bitter cold returned the following night. The GP recommended that I be brought to hospital. It was only later I discovered that the combination of sweating and the feeling of extreme cold is a symptom of malaria as is the reoccurrence of the symptoms every other – rather than every – day.

By a stroke of luck I was brought to Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda. I say 'luck' because the hospital was run by the Medical Missionaries of Mary – an order of nuns who, as their title suggests, were experienced in tropical diseases. One of the nuns who was also a doctor, immediately diagnosed me as suffering from malaria and began treatment. On the fourth day I began to recover, I was brought a plate of toast and some tea; I was so weak that it took all my strength and concentration to butter the toast. That was the first time in my adult life that I was made aware that my – as is everybody's – grasp on life is frail and tenuous and could be sundered by something as seemingly innocuous as a mosquito. The doctor that took such good care of me was Sister Patricia Kelly and I remain deeply in her debt.

Slowly my strength returned and I turned my attention to the building of the log cabin. The site purchase was completed, planning approval was granted and I employed a builder to do the site works such as laying a driveway, provision for services and, most

importantly, a number of meter cube plinths upon which the cabin would be placed and to which it would be fixed by stainless steel bolts.

Log cabin building is common not only in Scandinavia but in Germany, Austria, Canada and the US where even a monthly magazine exists devoted solely to the techniques and materials required in their building; I had become busy with research. Timber, provided the correct species is chosen, is extremely durable: the Hopperstad Stave Church in Norway, for example, is 900 years old.[31] It is crucial, however, that some basic principles be respected.

Of these basic principles, one of the most important is that timbers must never be allowed to become waterlogged and thus the lowest timbers must have no direct contact with the ground; ventilation is crucial and this was the reason for installing the plinths which would not only allow the underfloor to be well ventilated but would also provide a sheltered storage space and also permit easy access for the installation of services; thus ducting for fans could vent downwards into this space and need not go through walls. A second principle is that the roof should overhang and give shelter to the walls.

Since the cabin was to be built of solid log timbers – rather than as a timber frame which could subsequently be clad both inside and out with panelling – the settling of the timbers needed to be allowed for in the design. This necessitated the construction of a 'U' shaped framing around the doors and windows within which the settlement in the walls could take place. Had this not been done then since the settling turned out to be about 2" overall, the doors and windows, if not crushed, would be wedged solid. This settling process also necessitate the use of a double flashing around the masonry chimney to allow the roof to 'slide' down the chimney without letting water penetrate.

One of the greatest problem in log construction is to ensure that the logs fit snugly together. I opted for a 6"x4" profile log with a double tongue and groove and foam gaskets to be affixed atop each tongue. But even with such a design unless the timber was kiln dried down to approx 12% moisture, gaps would inevitably open between the logs and knowing how unliveable a room can become in winter with a strong draught from under one meter wide door, I – if the logs were incorrectly dried or machined – could have the prospect of living with a 700 meter draught and, even worse, perched on the seashore! Even further precautions were added in the design: 12" long 1" diameter hardwood dowels running vertically between every log and the one beneath it and spaced at one metre centres (to prevent torsion of the cabin under the force of the wind); 8, 1" diameter, 10 foot galvanised vertical bolts that could be periodically tightened from underneath (to ensure that the logs could be pulled tightly together); the correct profile of the logs before machining so that the pith of the timber was high in the log and central (to ensure that any cracks that opened up would not go through the log but would slope upwards towards the pith and would thus shed water). This is especially important when using native timbers as they grow much faster than Scandinavian timber (5 years to the

inch as judged on endgrain rings, as against 25 years or more on Scandinavian timber) and thus softer and more susceptible to moisture uptake.

Other than the base framing which was of 8”x10” timbers and which were affixed to the plinths and extended a meter out past the exterior walls thus permitting the construction of a walkway around the cabin, pressure treating the logs themselves with preservatives was not possible because, in time, the toxic chemicals used in such a process would be released into the interior (of that, more anon).

Lastly, the roof was to comprise a waterproof membrane covered with a grass sod (in Norway one sometimes saw photos of goats put on a cabin roof to trim the grass!). Such a construction requires a shallow roof slope (12 to 15 degrees) otherwise the roof drains too quickly and the grass will wither.

The use of a sod roof was not only for aesthetic reasons but because the weight of the sod would help compress the logs and stop gaps emerging; having lived through some gales during the course of construction the plan to use sods was later abandoned (a dry sod might well disappear in a gale and with it the roofing membrane which required ballasting) and I finally settled on 2” round limestone (which surprisingly – in that the Burren is all limestone – had to be ‘imported’ from Galway).

All this research was given to Caoilte, a schedule for cutting, drying and delivering the timber was agreed and the costings were confirmed with the sawmill manager. My original plan was to begin construction in May and to have it completed by September. To finance this project I had hoped that, once successfully built, it could serve as a prototype and that a business proposition could then be put together for the building of six or so of such cabins as holiday homes, the construction of which I could supervise. But I was due for a rude awakening: so much for the best laid plans of mice and men!

The caravan was now on site and on my first night sleeping there, it snowed; snow being very rare so close to the sea I feared this might be a bad omen but I was overjoyed to awake to the sound of the sea and the beauty of my surroundings. Having supervised the completion of the site work I headed to the Caoilte sawmill in Dundrum in Tipperary where all the timber was to be kiln-dried and machined.

My first visit to the sawmills was inauspicious: the main saw table was clearly off-square; timbers which had been just machined as skirting boards still had traces of bark on them which indicated that quality control was extremely lax. Most of the timbers that I required were long lengths (*c.* 5 meters) and whilst their lengthwise machining was satisfactory the machining of the end joints (which required that the timbers be supported on a sliding table as they passed over the cutter head) was not only poor but dangerous.

I had a small moisture meter which I carried with me to randomly test the dryness of the timbers. On perhaps the second week of machining, I was told that if I persisted in using

this I would no longer be permitted entry to the sawmill because some of the supervisors found it to be 'unsettling'.

The first serious problem arose when the first batch of timber had been machined and the kiln drying process began. Caoilte had no experience in kiln-drying timber of this thickness (4"), their experience related to drying timbers of at most, two inch thickness which can normally be dried within days or at most a week. Four inch timber presented far greater problems because if it is dried too fast, casehardening (a very dry outer skin and a wet inner core) occurs which renders the timber useless for building a log cabin. The kiln had been loaded and samples were taken every few days to test the moisture content but the process was slow but though it had already taken close to a month, it was progressing satisfactorily. The local manager had promised to continue as we had been going but a senior manager visiting from head office, instructed that the kiln be speeded up as the process was becoming too costly. This resulted in the complete kiln load of timbers being rendered unsuitable. Eventually we used these timbers to construct a small shed on my site in Clare but the machining of timbers for the cabin had to begin all over again.

In the midst of my coming and going to the sawmill in Tipperary, I had a letter from Catherine. She had been recollecting the incident in India where some soldiers had followed her to a toilet and attempted to push down the door. My response at the time must to her, have seemed more courageous than it really was and, viewed in retrospect, took on a greater value for her than it merited. The upshot of all this was that she decided to come to Clare and help in the building of my log house. She came and we became lovers and lived in the confines of the caravan for many months. Life with Catherine in the caravan was good. Amongst other gifts she introduced me to the literature and food of France (she had been a bookseller and had learnt her culinary skills in her father's hotel). One day she decided to teach me to swim: as I struggled to keep afloat alongside her, she encouraged me to head for the pier steps. Even though I was out of my depth, all was going well but then she became aware of jellyfish between us and the pier, panicked and headed back towards the shore. My 'insurance' was gone and it suddenly became sink or swim time; I succeeded, the barrier of fear was broken and afterwards, though not a strong swimmer, I swim without difficulty.

Another amusing incident occurred early one summer's morning when a cow, presumably in order to scratch an itch on its back, began rubbing against the caravan. My angry shouts had no effect and I grabbed the nearest implement to chase the cow away. Afterwards I often imagined some poor German tourist rubbing his eyes in disbelief at the spectacle of a naked man with a fishing rod chasing a cow around a field at sunrise – the bizarre angling practices of the mad Irish!

Amidst these pleasure however, the problems with Caoilte were now such that the first load of timbers was being delivered as autumn encroached rather than at the beginning

of summer as originally agreed and as winter approached and the difficulties with Caoilte mounted, so did the building problems.

As it became evident that there was no chance of getting the building up and watertight before winter, I insisted that the building be fully assembled at the sawmill with each piece numbered. I also decided to paint all faces of each log with their finished varnishes before moving them to the site. This necessitated often staying over in a hotel near the sawmill and at considerable unplanned expense.

When the first load of logs was finally delivered, there were further problems in assemblage because the weather had deteriorated. I remember some mornings with Catherine trying to dry the frost off the logs with the only implement to hand - a hairdryer; it was necessary that they be dry as otherwise the sealant mastic would not adhere. Meanwhile living in the caravan in winter was becoming difficult; the only heat was by a gas fire and one morning, on seeing the condensation on a packet of cornflakes, we decided to rent a small house nearby. But even then with the shortening of the days and the worsening of the weather, it became apparent that the building work could not continue; covering all the timber against the weather, I decided to call a halt until spring. I went to Dublin until winter was over and Catherine returned to Geneva. She was extremely fond of my sons and would have stayed but I needed some solitude and I also felt the stirrings of a longing to travel again but on my own. In later years, I often remember her reading to me in the car as we journeyed and I try to recapture some of the magic of her accent by switching the language settings of the GPS to French: a poor substitute.

She visited again many years later with her young son and once when we went walking on the rocks at Fanore, he – being used to the more genteel environment of Lake Geneva – was utterly enchanted to see a dolphin come close enough for him to reach out his hand and touch it.

Before Catherine had left we had made a start on building the shed using the timbers from that first kiln load that had been badly dried and when I returned to Clare after Christmas I completed it and made it habitable.

I lived in that shed for the next few months during which I experienced a storm more ferocious than any other over my twenty five years living on the coast. The double-glazed window began to visibly distort so that I had to brace it from within; heavy 6 foot long, eight inch square, gateposts which I had used as ballast on the roof were dislodged; the shed (which had not yet been bolted to its foundations) trembled and audibly complained in the wind. This storm which lasted for two or three days, eventually impinged on the consciousness of those at RTE in Dublin 4 who broadcast a programme on the great storm of 1839 – '*The Night of the Big Wind'* – which related the story of the first man to fly in Ireland. He was the gatekeeper at the vice regal lodge in the Phoenix Park when he and his cabin were lifted into the air and he was dashed to his

death. Listening ruefully to this I began to envy him in that at least he had a dry place to end his days unlike me who might well end up in the tumultuous, cold waters of Galway Bay. Those few days forced a radical review of my philosophy of life. Till then I had the outlook of a smart Dublin lawyer: if something went wrong there was someone to blame and who was obliged to fix it and – if he failed – to threaten to sue. Feeling the strength of the wind and watching the huge singular waves progressing up the Bay like ranks of Roman cavalry, I was forced to confront a different reality: one where in the face of the power and majesty of the sea and wind before me, the only appropriate gesture was to bow; and compared to which I was of as little consequence – as I expressed it, somewhat crudely, at the time – "*as a fart on the wind*". Though I doubtless still carry some of those Dublin, smart-assed, lawyerly attitudes, I hope that my steps though the world are now at least a little more gentle and reverential.

Having survived the gales, two of Caoilte's carpenters helped me to finish the building of the cabin that summer. Next came the problem of trying to extricate myself from the financial problems caused by the original schedule not having been adhered to. This required interacting with the Caoilte head office management rather than with the local sawmill manager.

I had and still have, the greatest respect for the sawmill manager who was an open and honest man with the foresight to see that if the sawmill was to have a viable future, it would have to develop higher value products than those it had hitherto been producing. Caoilte management were a different proposition. I should have been forewarned by their unwillingness to commit our original agreement to paper and by their unthinking behaviour in rendering a kiln load of timber unfit for purpose. In retrospect I believe that they sat like vultures on the shoulders of local management ready to take the credit if the project succeeded but ready to pounce and levy blame if it failed. They appeared to lack all expertise in managing such a project and worse, refused to acknowledge that they lacked such skills. I have never discovered the total cost of the project to Caoilte but I would hazard an educated guess at a figure of at least €200,000 and perhaps considerably more.

Much of this waste was attributable to purchasing inappropriate machinery and a lack of management technical skills in relation to drying and machining timbers such as were required for the cabin. The sad fact is that had they had the vision to employ a sawmill manager from Scandinavia (on perhaps a 1-year contract) who was experienced in the sawmilling industry and the standards required for log-cabin construction, a viable industry could have been established in Ireland and at far less cost than had been expended.

Aside from the waste due to inappropriate machinery and technical skills there was a considerable level of timber waste – not least from the failed kiln-load – and when the

bills were presented and matters resolved, this became a considerable bone of contention.

I had originally agreed to pay at an agreed rate per cubic meter calculated on timber quantities delivered to the site which met the agreed specifications. I had insisted on such a condition because it gave me a measure of control over my final costings.

Caoilte realising the huge expense and wastage that the project had incurred sought to bill me for timber quantities as delivered to the sawmill thus attempting to load these costs onto me.

My attempts to deal on a personal basis with Caoilte's management were fruitless and matters quickly moved into the hands of solicitors. I got the impression that their intransigence was occasioned by their unwillingness to accept any of the responsibility for the catalogue of errors which they were attempting to offload onto me and, I presume, the shoulders of the sawmill manager. Furthermore they were fully aware of my limited financial resources and they – as a State funded body – were not digging deep into their own pockets to fund legal proceedings but believed, I presume, that in the event that I won my original case they had the resources to appeal any decision that might be in my favour until I would have to admit defeat for want of resources to continue.

At this stage matters became more complex because I was claiming not only for my additional expenses (hotel, travelling *etc*.) but also asserting my right to my intellectual property in the design and construction methods used in building the cabin. Despite not having been aware of these prior to me giving them the fruits of my research, they argued that they were common knowledge and thus not subject to intellectual ownership. The sums of money claimed at this stage were considerable.

I had consulted a solicitor friend from my early days in law who showed much greater wisdom than me. I had been insisting on going to court; he negotiated a final settlement whereby I paid – if I remember correctly – €2,000 for timber and I relinquished any further claims against Caoilte.

Litigants generally are blind to the defects in their own case and unfairly biased against their opponents. To help mitigate some such fears, I will briefly mention two examples concerning Caoilte's technical competencies that I discovered some years after the events just described.

The first was a golf clubhouse that I came across by chance. I noticed that the logs from which it had been constructed, had the same profile as the ones that I had designed for my cabin in Clare. Curiosity getting the better of me, I called in and met one of the young couple whose project this had been and who were now living in its upper story and who told me that it had been constructed by Caoilte. They invited me to look around and I noticed that not only had the building been constructed directly on the ground with no provision for underfloor ventilation, but that there was considerable evidence of water

penetration at its corners. I was loath to point out to them defects of which they weren't yet aware especially as they had other problems the most pressing of which was according to them, a continuing problem with storage heaters which though replaced, continued to emit an unpleasant smell. I suspected that the problem might have originated not with the storage heater, but with the timber wall alongside which if it had been pressure treated with preservative, would release toxic chemicals when heated. I did not mention my suspicions as I, at that stage, lacked evidence.

The second came from a conversation with some of Caoilte's recently retired sawmill workers. They told me that the logs for all cabins that had been manufactured by Caoilte subsequent to mine had been pressure treated despite them having been given by me regulatory guidelines and research papers from Scandinavia and Canada emphasising the toxicity of such practices. Worse, I was told that the logs were pressure treated with preservatives *prior* to machining. This defeated in large measure the preservative effect of the chemical which, in the main, penetrates only some millimetres into the wood but ensures that the machinists breathe in these toxins because the heat generated by the cutters is effective in vaporising them. Thus it seems that it was not the storage heaters but the treated logs that were the source of the problems at the golf clubhouse. Not only had Caoilte built the clubhouse using such methods but also a group of lakeside chalets which were being rented as holiday homes.

Some years later one of Caoilte's higher management called to my house on other matters and I remonstrated with him about the health risk to the occupants of houses such as I had seen. He did not seem unduly troubled and though I threatened to write a letter of complaint to some politician, I never did.

I believe that the problems with Caoilte were not necessarily caused by its being a semi-state agency but arose because the decision makers were 'management types' rather than individuals with the requisite knowledge and technical skills to be involved in a timber industry. The OPW (Office of Public Works) which was also a State funded agency undertook a research project in the building of timber frame (as distinct from log) houses[32] in the late 1970's. A group of houses were built at Killykeen in Cavan and a video and booklet were produced detailing the construction methods and research finding. This was a model of research and development and one of their research findings[33] has been of great use to me in the various projects that I have subsequently undertaken. It was indeed a great shame that an organisation such as the OPW were not given charge of all timber construction projects since they – unlike Caoilte – had a demonstrable track record of competence; but that is the history of so much of modern Ireland.

I emerged from this project so financially bruised that I was obliged to sell the stone building that I had rebuilt in Meath and after some convincing that it could be converted into a beautiful house, Mette decided to buy it and to sell the thatched cottage that we had both restored earlier. I helped design and supervise the conversion and it did indeed turn out to be a very beautiful house.

I resolved to move to Clare and to live in my log cabin and to build a new workshop alongside it. I decided that before embarking on another building project, I would make another long journey but a final hiccup lay in wait for me.

Because of my recent divorce and my move to Clare, I applied for a government housing grant and all appeared to be progressing satisfactorily until I had a letter from the Department of the Environment's Chief Building Inspector. I was surprised that a man of his importance should be getting involved in my affairs but it seemed that the log construction had raised alarm bells. The inspector insisted that, for fire protection reasons, I cover all the internal walls with plasterboard. This would have completely destroyed the 'feel' of it being a log cabin. I argued strongly against his decision citing Scandinavian and Canadian building regulations and pointing out that the fire risk in using solid timber[34] is considerably less than timber panelling which is widely permitted. My arguments were to no avail.

Subsequently I heard rumours to the effect that the regulation had been introduced at the behest of the Irish construction industry (whose 'expertise' lay with construction in concrete) and who, some years earlier, had wished to prevent Canadian timber houses from gaining a foothold in the Irish market.

I decided to appeal the Inspector's decision to the Ombudsman because the regulations governing the building grant made no reference to special standards for log construction. This was a long shot and I also decided to try and boost my chances by contacting some politicians in the hope that they might bring some influence to bear. Initial contacts provided little room for optimism so I decided to try and visit the Minister of the Environment's constituency clinic; the Minister at that time was Padraig Flynn. Phoning his constituency office to ascertain the opening times of his clinic, I was dumbfounded when he answered the phone himself. Not having any of the letters in front of me I explained the problem as best I could; his reply was brief and succinct "*I know that bucko*". The Inspector's decision was reversed the following week with him stipulating that I paint all internal timber walls with fire retardant; this I did but I suspect that the fumes from these paints caused me considerably greater health damage than was ever likely to be caused by the bare logs; but a solution had been achieved and the relevant egos had been preserved.

I felt that I needed to make a long journey if only to clear my mind of all the recent turmoil, so that I could return to the building of my new workshop with a mind clear, refreshed and ready to undertake a new challenge.

I decided to fly to Moscow and onwards to Beijing and then to cross China to Kashgar and, if my luck held, to try and cross to Pakistan by the legendry Karakoram Highway (the highest paved international road in the world) and then, finally, to India and home.

Because I had contracted malaria some years earlier, I was worried about the possibility of its recurrence once I reached Pakistan or India (both malarial areas) and having explained my difficulties to Aeroflot when booking my ticket, I was given two return tickets: one from Lahore (which I could use if I became ill in Pakistan) and one from Delhi. To receive such a generous gesture from a European airline would be, I believe, unimaginable.

So, finally, I was on my way and one wet autumn morning I boarded a Moscow bound flight at Shannon. The flight had begun in Rio and stopped over in Havana; entering the plane I found a party already in full swing; Caoilte and the cold and wet of an Irish autumn quickly became a distant memory!

Chapter 5 : And then the icing on the cake!

1992-96: China, Karakoram, more Building, Ethiopia, …

> *"Life is trouble. Only death is not. To be alive is to undo your belt and look for trouble."*[1]

I had booked a room in a Moscow hotel before arriving and, though not in the city centre, it was easily accessible. I spent the next week just walking, looking and absorbing. I saw, of course, the well known sights: Red Square, the Kremlin; the changing of the guard at Lenin's Tomb and the Bolshoi Theatre. Of such sights, St. Basil's Cathedral lodges in my memory: its startling originality, its beauty and its asymmetry.

Lack of symmetry or balance is sometimes considered to be a breach of the canons of aesthetics but I have come to believe that symmetry is one of the most deadening of qualities when found in art; it connotes order, stability and conservatism (think of the mirror-image ornaments on a mantelpiece). Contrast it with asymmetry which bespeaks not only instability, motion and change but possibility; asymmetry refuses to permit the gaze to easily come to rest. St. Basil's Cathedral had that quality, in that a single glance could not comprehend all that it presents to the eye; one is obliged to see it again and again and from different vantage points.[2] Ivan the Terrible (who commissioned it in the 1600's) is reputed to have ordered that the architect be blinded lest he ever build anything that might surpass the beauty of St. Basil's – a compliment but doubtlessly not one graciously received.

It was not these sights, however, that most impressed but rather those unexpected happenings that one chances upon when strolling through a city: the wedding parties on their way to a particular statue of Lenin to have their photos taken (this, seemingly, a good-luck tradition); encountering statues of dignitaries of an earlier era now toppled, broken and left lying on the grass – these, in their broken state, spoke eloquently of the vicissitudes of political fashion and the presumptuousness of rulers.[3]

But this was the autumn of 1992 and barely a year after the failed coup against Gorbachev. His policies of glasnost and perestroika[4] had heralded the break-up of the USSR. It was a time of extreme economic deprivation with rampant inflation. Even in the centre of the city, I encountered queues for food with the shelves of many of the shops, lying bare. Old women ('*babushkas*') stood silently on the steps of the Metro stations holding out perhaps a single valued possession in the hope that it might catch the eye of some passer-by and thus provide food for her table. A woman, recognising

that I was a Western tourist, approached me requesting help in contacting western human rights groups.

Such poverty had also increased the risk of crime as I was soon to experience: I had taken my father's walking stick with me on these travels (he had died some years previously and had never travelled beyond Ireland and the UK, so his 'spirit' was symbolically accompanying me to see these strange lands). On going down the steps of an underpass, I was suddenly surrounded by a half-dozen or more young boys of an age that I thought would be easily dispersed by a loud shout; but no, suddenly hands were everywhere and what appeared as a slightly comical situation became very serious as I risked losing my passport and money. Flailing wildly about me with the walking stick, they quickly scarpered. That night I had an additional glass of whiskey to my father's memory.

At the time, some humanitarian aid was being sent to Russia by western countries but later reports[5] have suggested that some of this food had been 'tainted' and that even some of the Irish beef that had been sent to Russia was "*unfit for human consumption*". It is unsettling to realise that at a time of Gorbachev's openness to change and to the West, that it – rather than seeking to put the Cold War behind and to forge a new common partnership – instead sought to build political advantage out of Russia's weakness.

The fruits of such policies are still with us. As I write (2015), the civil war unfolding in Ukraine is a consequence of Western duplicity in not honouring the promises it made to Russia at the break-up of the USSR and, in particular, that it would not seek to encroach upon nor militarise, the former territories of the USSR. NATO, under the guise of the EU, sought to do precisely that in 2014. But perhaps a more philosophical attitude is required which recognises that Russia has often been duplicitous in its foreign policy but, even accepting that, Russia seldom adopts the attitudes of moral superiority so characteristic of Western nations.

Over the next few years I was in Russia on three occasions two of which were transits through Moscow and the last a week spent in St. Petersburg.

The first of those transit visits saw me spending five days sleeping on the floors of Moscow Airport. This was in 1995 and I had been on my way to Nairobi when my flight to Moscow was late and missed the onward connection. Because I had booked a through flight with Aeroflot, they took responsibility for the missed connection. However because I was without a visa, I was not permitted to leave the confines of the airport transit lounge and had to sleep wherever I could find space but the airport authorities helpfully provided meal vouchers. It was a very useful lesson in learning patience and I have had many occasions over the years to refresh my knowledge of that lesson. Sometimes

when I hear people complaining about having to spend five or six hours in an airport I – with, I confess, a sense of smugness – enjoy retelling the story of my five day saga! At some stage during my stay I had been running short of cash. Aer Rianta, at that time, ran both the duty free section of Moscow Airport and its bars. Approaching one of the barmen I asked if he could cash an Irish bank cheque; it transpired that he lived in Ratoath in Meath, close to where I had restored the thatched cottage and he cashed the cheque without a problem. The luck of the Irish!

The second time that I transited through Moscow was in 2000 when I was returning from a trip to Iran. Not wishing to relive my previous experience, when booking my flight I booked a night in a transit hotel. This was a hotel some distance from the airport and from which one is not allowed to leave except in the sealed bus in which one arrived. It was winter, cold and snowing and at breakfast the following morning there was one other fellow traveller. The breakfast – which had been expensive – was, when it eventually arrived, meagre beyond belief; I went to the kitchens looking for answers. The kitchen was excellently equipped with perhaps five kitchen staff and when I began complaining about the frugality of my breakfast, slowly some eggs were produced, then some cheese, and then finally some fresh bread. The staff, it seems, were pocketing the food that had been provided for our breakfasts; I remember thinking at the time that the kitchen and its practices functioned as a microcosm of the wider society. However that proved to be an extremely overhasty judgement as I was to be soon to discover. Arriving at the airport, my baggage had been checked through to Riga, in Latvia, from where I was to take a boat to Sweden and then finally a train to Norway. Arriving at the main airport I encountered a sign requesting me to choose between 'International' and 'Internal' destinations. Because Latvia had recently (1991) become independent I chose the 'International' gate. As my destination time approached, I noticed that that 'Riga' failed to appear on the departures list. On my enquiring, I was told that I was at the wrong terminal and should have chosen 'Internal'. What happened next was a tribute to helpfulness and generosity that I could not imagine happening at any other airport: the check-in clerk immediately brought me to her side of the counter and through the staff exit and on to a trolley bus and we travelled some considerable distance to the international baggage section so that I could identify and retrieve my rucksack. Then she brought me back to the baggage area for my departing flight to Riga and all this with a graciousness, a friendliness and a delightful smile!

St. Petersburg in 2004 was a much more enjoyable experience than Moscow had been. Again it was winter and I was on my way to spend Christmas in Norway and I had been able to add a stopover in St. Petersburg to my air ticket for a small extra charge. Russia, in 2004, was a country transformed from what I had seen twelve years earlier. St. Petersburg is an extraordinarily beautiful city sometimes called the Venice of the North because of its many canals. It is especially beautiful in winter with its river, the Neva,

frozen over and with the Winter Palace in the background. The Winter Palace – once the residence of the Tsars – is now the home to the Hermitage Museum which is one of the world's great art museums. One can quickly become dizzy from the wealth of all that is on display especially some of the iconic works of art such as those of Rembrandt, Matisse and Picasso. It was also possible to glean something of the wealth and opulent lives of the Russian nobility; the 'Amber Room' especially comes to mind, this is a chamber with walls and ceilings entirely covered with gold and amber ornamentation.

Outside the museum there were some paintings for sale including copies, by local artists, of famous paintings in the museum. Bargaining over the price of a marvellous portrait of a Russian mystic or wanderer (the artist wanted $100, I had offered $50), we couldn't agree and I went to walk away when a sudden gust of wind coming from the Neva beside us, blew the painting to the ground; the seller called me back and said that it was clearly intended for me and we agreed a price of $50. I still have and admire it. I should mention that in the midst of this bargaining, a bear lolled nearby, chained to a tree and ready to dance if a few roubles were given to its master.

It being close to Christmas, it was a joy to browse through the market stalls in search of presents and, being interested in computing, I chanced to stop at a shop selling software. Because Russia did not consider itself bound by western copyright law, software which was expensive in the west such as Microsoft Office and Windows operating systems, was available for as little as $5 as were copies *Matematica* and *AutoCAD* for a similar amount though the latter cost over £1,000 in the UK at that time.

I had been in thrall to the novels of Dostoyevsky since my student days and whilst in St. Petersburg, I was able to retrace the path of Raskolnikov, the protagonist of *Crime and Punishment*. I was also able to visit Nabokov's family residence; he was the novelist famous (or perhaps infamous) for his novel *Lolita* amongst his many other writings.

I also took the opportunity to attend the Mariinsky Theatre and watched a performance of *Le Corsaire*; though not a ballet fan before attending, the athleticism and beauty quickly won me over. On collecting my coat from the cloakroom after the performance, I made the mistake of proffering a tip to the attendant which was firmly, but politely rejected and in a manner that I thought reminiscent of older communist values of equality and disdain for any semblance of servility; at the time, I had not appreciated the condescension that may be implicit in the act of tipping.

In more recent times political groups such as Pussy Riot, have staged distinctly anti-communist protests in St. Petersburg. One of the most famous occurred when a group of students painted a huge penis (fully adorned with testacles) on one of the bridges over the Neva. This bridge was directly opposite the Security Police headquarters and that night, as the bridge was lifted to enable shipping to pass, the spectacle of a huge erect penis appeared out of the darkness and pointing directly at the main symbol of State power in St. Petersburg – an eloquent political gesture.

Before leaving St. Petersburg, I visited the museum commemorating the 700,000 who had died during the 900 day siege by the Nazi army of the city which was then called Leningrad. As a young student, I had seen a play about the siege and had been shocked by how the magnitude of the sacrifices and the depth of suffering of the Russian people appeared to be absent from popular Western accounts of the Second World War. Two memories of my visit to the museum remain with me: the plight of the citizens who were forced to eat dogs and rats in order to survive (the pitiful daily bread ration for a man and his family was four ounces); the courage and dedication of Shostakovich whose seventh symphony had been written during the siege and was performed by the city's remaining musicians and broadcast live to the besieged inhabitants.

Arriving in Beijing late at night and without a hotel booking, I had to rely on a taxi cab driver to find me a hotel, a considerable portion of the cost of which he then received as commission. However the following morning and being well rested, I was able to negotiate a much better price. This was a pre-internet era and booking a hotel room in somewhere such as Beijing, would have required the use of a travel agent which would have added considerably to the cost and been prohibitively expensive but I vowed never again to arrive in a foreign city after midnight, exhausted and without having organised accommodation if only for that crucial first night.

The smallness of Beijing airport had surprised me as it seemed of a size comparable to the old Collinstown Airport in Dublin. Now, nearly twenty–five years later, photographs of modern Beijing bear scant resemblance to the city that I walked around in 1992 and I realise how incredibly lucky I was to experience something of old, traditional China before 'development' levelled all before it. At that time the bicycle was king and cars were not plentiful. The environs of the Forbidden City was a warren of narrow alleyways and traditional dwellings. Smog, skyscrapers, motorways and flyovers and the wonderful exuberance of much of modern China's architecture lay far in the future. Then it was a place where on leaving my hotel, I could stroll down in the evening to a factory entrance where, at factory closing time, an enterprising stall owner arrived with his folding chairs and tables perched atop his pedal trolley and then proceeded to set up shop. The trolley contained an icebox within which were the cool bottles of beer to be sold that evening.

Later as I sat and enjoyed a beer, a hawker passed by with a mound of small wicker baskets balanced precariously across the handlebars of his bicycle. Each basket contained a cricket and having purchased one of these, I placed it on my table and fed it with some leaves plucked from nearby trees; the cricket serenaded me as I sipped my cool beer – serendipitous, is the word that comes most readily to mind. Later I was to see how older men would often gather in the mornings at a park to talk or play board games, each having brought his own pet bird in its cage, all these would be placed close

together so while the men chatted between themselves, the birds – in what seemed a not dissimilar ritual – sang to each other.

Those experiences exemplified much of the five or six days that I stayed in Beijing where full of curiosity, I wandered the city. Once, I came across a government bookshop close to Tiananmen Square and browsing within, I was surprised to find a commentary on Taoism by a famous modern Chinese philosopher and, amazingly, it was in English. That book[6] was to become my main companion on my trip across China and was a treasure to be dipped into for many years after.

The goal of my journey in China was Kashgar which is where one begins the journey over the Himalayas into Pakistan along the so-called 'Karakoram highway', though highway it is not. To get there I planned to take the train from Beijing to Urumchi but to disembark at the small station of Liuyuan which is close to the oasis of Dunhuang. Dunhuang is famous for its Buddha caves and lies in the midst of the Taklamakan desert (literally: "*He who enters, never leaves*"). Then after some days, to reboard the train as far as Turpan (another oasis also famous for its Buddhist statues) and which is close to Urumchi. From Turpan I planned to take a local bus across the Taklamakan desert as far as Kashgar.

Urumchi is the site of where some 4,000 year-old, well-preserved mummified remains were discovered which because of their Caucasian features (very tall with long noses and red or blond hair) indicate that they were racially different from the ethnic Chinese. The surrounding area extending to Kashgar, is inhabited by the Uyghur people who are Muslim and have been leading a violent separatist movement against the Chinese; thus the discovery of these non-Chinese mummified remains has become politically controversial.

I had bought my train ticket from the international ticket office some days prior to departure but when I arrived to board my train I could not find anyone who could speak English. I had my train number and could decipher it amongst a wealth of Chinese characters on one train but was unsure as to whether it was the correct one. My train was due to depart at 12.57 (I still have the ticket) and this one did precisely that which was some confirmation; twenty two hours later I saw station signs for Xian which I knew to be a stopping point for Urumchi trains, and I finally relaxed having some objective evidence that I was heading in the right direction.

The journey to Liuyuan was about sixty hours and I had booked a 'hard sleeper' in a six berth compartment. During the day the top two bunks on either side were folded upwards thus allowing the bottom bunk to become seating; there was also a small table/seat in the corridor opposite which I was able to commandeer and which provided me with at least a semblance of privacy.

My fellow travellers were all Chinese and were extremely friendly and generous in offering to share their food with me. There was a dining car on the train and, as was common then in Chinese trains, there was a large boiler at the end of each carriage where travellers could fill their flasks with hot water and cook their noodles and other foodstuffs but with all this cooking activity in the compartment, the ability to escape to my own window seat was a blessing.

Having settled in, I very much enjoyed the journey and the desert and mountain landscape that unfolded before my eyes; at one stage I saw, what transpired to be, the last outpost of the Great Wall standing forlornly in the desert. The colours and shapes of some of the mountains were astounding; one in particular lodges in my mind because of its strange pastel colours of green and pink but also because of its deep vertical gullies which gave rise to it being called '*The Flaming Mountains*'.

I slept well and was woken each morning by loud martial music – an experience common in China where, in small towns, martial music would blare from the loudspeakers and which was a relic of China's more militarised past. Another vestige of this military past was when – at those small stations when the train was not stopping but hurtling past – the stationmaster, in full uniform, would stand to attention and salute the train.

I left the train at Liuyuan, a small forlorn town and from where I was to get a bus to Dunhuang, some ninety miles south. I had been forewarned of the bleakness of Liuyuan in reading a travel memoir[7] by Vikram Seth, an Indian novelist and poet who had described it as: "*A dusty, treeless, godforsaken depot, its main street merging with the road to Lhasa now 1,800 kilometres away*." It did not look like an auspicious place to begin a journey to Lhasa which had been his destination. Luckily my destination was more modest and I boarded a bus to Dunhuang.

To a medieval Silk Road traveller on his journey across the Taklamakan desert, the oasis of Dunhuang must have seemed like one of those desert djiins – demons arising out of his own mind to further torture him in his exhaustion and thirst. To me it was as a mirage; an oasis of green arising out of the sun-bleached desert: suspended above many of the streets were trellises from which grapes hung in profusion; to such as the medieval traveller, it must have been a true Garden of Eden. As the day grew to a close the vastness of the night sky was unveiled. In the half-light away from the full glare of the sun, the immensity of the nearby sand dunes could be appreciated. The following morning these same sand dunes provided a marvellous slide – like a ski-slope – but I made a mental note that if ever this way again, to bring a strong plastic bag upon which to sit and avoid the burns.

Dunhuang is most famous for its Buddhist caves and grottoes and for the giant Buddha figures carved into the sandstone cliffs; similar sculptures were to be found in Afghanistan but were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001. Many of the Buddhist relics and manuscripts were looted from Dunhuang by British and German archaeologists in the

early nineteenth century and some are now to be found in the British Museum and, like the Elgin Marbles, have led for calls for their repatriation.

Leaving Dunhuang, I headed back to Liuyuan to board the train for Turpan. In contrast to Dunhuang which was a popular destination for Chinese tourists, Turpan was more relaxed. It also had a profusion of Buddhist caves and carvings and I remember seeing saw marks on the walls from where an artefact had earlier been pillaged. But Turpan remains in my memory mainly for two things: its oppressive heat and its marvellous irrigation system which takes melt water from the mountains some thirty kilometres distant and by a system of channels (which, to prevent evaporation, are mainly underground) enabled Turpan to thrive. That some of these channels and tunnels were constructed two thousand years ago and by hand is reason for additional wonder.

The Turpan Basin lies 154 meters below sea level and is the second lowest depression in the world[8] and the lowest in China; it is also the hottest with temperatures reaching 49.6° Celsius. Even with appropriate covering, walking in such heat is akin being struck on the head with a mallet; a thudding, oppressive assault by the sun. But in a small village nearby, a man stood by his cartload of watermelons selling slices of this elixir. On guzzling one of these, my joy was immense as was my surprise at unexpectedly finding such a perfect cure for my thirst – an example of how, in nature, the poison and its remedy are often to be found close by.

The bus trip to Kashgar crossed the Taklamakan desert along little more than a dirt road. When the storms blew up, sand penetrated every crevice – even within the bus – so that it was necessary to cover one's mouth in order to breath. I found it astounding to see fibre-optic cables being placed alongside this road in a region where telephone contact had barely been possible before. That was my first inking that it would not be long before China surpassed the West in its technological development.

Reaching Kashgar, I stayed in what had once been the Russian Legation but was now little more than a crumbling ruin masquerading as an hotel. It was a survivor from the late nineteenth century when the rivalry between Britain and Russia had been intense and Kashgar was the centre of the political machinations known as '*The Great Game'.* Britain feared that Russia might gain access to the Indian subcontinent, then part of the British Empire. One relic of those times is the Wakhan Corridor in Afghanistan – this long, narrow 'panhandle' of territory was created with the intention of hindering Russian access to India.

My memories of Kashgar itself are not the most pleasant. The atmosphere in the town was redolent of trouble; this may have been attributable to the fact that the population are Uyghurs who harbour considerable resentment against the Han Chinese. It was an atmosphere not unlike that in a nationalist area in Northern Ireland at the height of the troubles when one was conscious of the intrusiveness of the British military presence.

Walking thorough the old bazaar, I was 'quartered': in a crowded area, two youths pushed tightly against me from either side and another who was walking in front, slowed down so that I was hemmed in and then a forth, behind me, attempted to rifle through my backpack. My backpack was cut through with a knife but luckily, this only gave the would-be thief access to an inner pocket which contained nothing of value.

Earlier, wishing to purchase two silver ornamental hunting knifes for my sons as souvenirs, I had stopped at a market stall and began to bargain. Having haggled over the price, I changed my mind and began to walk away; in response, the seller said that he would accept my original offer but as I demurred, he became aggressive and I feared being assaulted; I beat a hasty retreat.

The weather was also changing. Listening to the BBC World Service on my shortwave radio, I heard dire reports of heavy rain in Pakistan causing severe flooding and landslides. The buses going to Pakistan were cancelled and no lorries could travel. I began to fear that I might have to wait in Kashgar until the weather improved which might be a considerable time. I took some consolation in the fact that, whilst in Dunhuang, I had got an extension on my visa for a further month.

One evening, I met two American doctors who were returning from a trip to explore the Taklamakan Desert. They were in a hurry to get to Pakistan from where their flights were to depart in some few days time and, being affluent, had decided to hire their own land cruiser and driver to bring them across the frontier. They were willing to take two other travellers in an attempt to defray their costs. I agreed as did another and we agreed to meet early the following morning to begin our journey. Unsettled by the severity of the weather reports from Pakistan which spoke of landslides and roads being closed, I went in search of a climbing helmet but none were available in Kashgar. Luckily I spotted a builders' merchant and there purchased a hard hat and a thirty meter length of rope – all this, I believed, was more for my psychological security than any likelihood that it would actually be of use.

Next morning, my other travelling companion decided to wait a few days until the bus to Pakistan was able to depart. Meeting him a week or so later as the bus arrived in Pakistan, he told how worried he had been when, at one stage, the bus had been stopped by a rockslide and the passengers had feared that they might freeze to death if obliged to remain overnight on the mountain. One of his travelling companions on the bus was a Pakistani who carried a small attaché case which contained – as the travelling companion proudly showed me now that he was safely across the border – half a dozen hawks with their beaks taped lest they make a sound and their bodies tightly trussed and all packed cheek by jowl so that they were incapable of movement. They were destined to be sold as falcons to rich gulf Arabs.

The land cruiser with the Americans arrived on time and we headed for the Pakistan border post at the Khunjerab Pass at an altitude of 15,397 feet. At the pass we

encountered a motorcyclist – or rather one who had had such hopes. He had been travelling from Europe and having crossed the Pamir mountains, arrived at the Chinese custom post in Urumchi. There he was told that he would not be permitted to drive his motorbike in China but must put in a crate and ship it to Beijing which he reluctantly did. Wishing to travel to Pakistan, he then shipped the crated bike to where he now stood and where he had just been informed that his paperwork was not in order and that he would have to return with his bike to Beijing to have matters rectified; a distance of 4,000 km. I admired the stoicism and forbearance with which he accepted the decision; however any attempt at bribing the Chinese border guards might have had even worse consequences.

The landscape, as we had climbed towards the border crossing, had been unrelentingly bleak and enlivened only by the sight of the extraordinarily beautiful Pamir Mountains lording over all.

Descending the pass we went through the Pakistani customs without a problem. I had been apprehensive because deep in my rucksack and tightly wrapped in a towel, was a bottle of Chinese whiskey which – knowing the great difficulty of buying alcohol in Pakistan – contained my night-caps and thus was a necessary component of my 'medicine cabinet'.

As we descended into Pakistan we were confronted with a landslide which completely blocked the road. The Himalayas are among the youngest mountain ranges on the planet and were formed in the ice age by the Indian landmass moving northwards and colliding with the Eurasian land mass and pushing the latter upwards. The resulting line of collision became the Himalayas. The movement is still ongoing[9] with the result that the Himalayas rise by about five millimetres per year. One consequence is that the slopes of these mountains are highly unstable and landslides are not uncommon.

Such landslides may take many days to clear and, as often happens, lorry drivers – whilst waiting for the road to open – offer to act, for a small fee, as porters to take goods or travellers across the landslide to the other side. One such offered to help me across. The ground was loose scree and steep; it sloped precipitously down to the fast moving, ice cold Hunza river – a tributary to the mighty Indus. I donned my hard hat and strapped the coil of rope to my daybag.

My porter carried my main rucksack and I followed closely behind but the term 'closely' is an understatement: I watched where he placed each step and with an intensity of concentration that I have never since experienced – in Beckett's words "*so as not to make a balls of it*"[10] – I placed my foot in precisely the spot vacated by my guide's foot some moments before. Thus step by slow step we crossed the landslip but were then faced by an even more hazardous task: to cross the river by way of a narrow tree trunk which spanned the five or six meter river. I was conscious that one slip meant that I would plunge into the freezing waters and would be most unlikely to survive. Again all

thought went from my mind other than the necessity to slide one foot a few inches forward and then the other and so on. In a gesture of profound thanks I tipped my guide generously and also gave him my hard hat and rope thinking optimistically that they would be of no further use to me.

A jeep which had been stuck on the southern side of the landslide offered to act as a taxi and to take me to Sust which was the first village on the Pakistani side. There I found a cheap hotel and headed for the shower.

Feeling human again, I emerged from the shower and grabbing the towel from my rucksack, there was a sudden crash as the bottle of whiskey broke into smithereens on the concrete floor. The loss of the whiskey was serious but of infinitely greater seriousness was the fact that I had smuggled whiskey into Pakistan where its possession was a crime and risked embroiling me in difficulties with the police. I called the houseboy to help clear up the debris; he smiling and recognising the smell, sought to drink the remnants from the broken bottle. Grabbing it from him because it was full of glass shards, I emptied it outside but whilst it might have been easy to get rid of the evidence, the overpowering smell of whiskey lingered and – the floor being of porous concrete – it was likely to linger for many a year to come. It was only later as I headed towards Hunza and Gilgit that I realised how lucky I had been that the Muslims in Sust were Ismailis (who give allegiance to the Aga Khan as the hereditary Imam) and not the Sunnis or Shias from further down the valley. The Ismailis were peaceable, open and friendly in contrast to the Sunni and Shia villages further down where, because of religious or tribal clashes, a night time curfew was in place. Later, in one of these villages, I got a lift in a share taxi which stopped to enable a woman and her son to enter. The boy was escorting his mother who was heavily veiled; the mother got in the front seat as did the son, but I was acutely conscious throughout the journey that for me to even raise my eyes and make eye-contact with the woman could have had unpleasant consequences for me. It was a deeply traditional area where no woman would venture out unless accompanied by a male relative. But before encountering these difficulties, a true treasure awaited me: the Hunza valley.

On leaving Sust the road descended rapidly and the bleak wastelands of the Khunjerab Pass yielded to a lush landscape of poplar trees, small stone houses with enclosed fields and orchards of apricots and other fruit; all this lying in the shelter of high, snow-capped, mountains. It was as if the idyllic valleys of Switzerland or Austria had been transposed to what had hitherto appeared to be a bleak inhospitable terrain. The valley is fabled for the extraordinary longevity and health of its inhabitants and as being the lost kingdom of Shangri-La.

Booking into a small hotel at Baltit, breakfast the next morning was a bowl of porridge and apricots. It was delicious. Surprisingly Hunza apricots are available in the health food shops in Galway; cut into small pieces, steeped in water overnight with oats, and

then cooked the following morning, was a dish that I often served to my sons when they were young in an attempt to convey to them something of the magic of Hunza.

I spent some days in that town still not quite believing my eyes; stalls by the roadside sold a profusion of precious stones which were often to be found amongst the debris of the landslips. But it seemed a paradise that was destined soon to end: one evening, I chanced upon a shack in which many of the local children had gathered to watch American soap operas on satellite TV; seeing images of such opulence and lacking any awareness of the hard underbelly and poverty of much of American life, the seeds of future social and political disharmony were being securely planted.

Heading lower down the valley towards Gilgit, I passed through the Sunni and Shia villages which were under a night curfew and was happy for the relaxed, pleasant days that I had spent in Baltit.

About one hundred kilometres east of Gilgit lay Srinagar but it might as well have been thousands because, in order to cross from Pakistani Kashmir to Indian Kashmir necessitates a journey of at least 700 km south to Lahore which is beside the only permitted crossing point between Pakistan and India. Seeing the cleavage between communities that has been caused by this border and by India's subsequent refusal to honour its promise to permit a plebiscite in Indian Kashmir, makes the India-Pakistan border disputes more understandable.

Gilgit shelters under the towering mass of Nanga Parbat which at 8,126 metres, is the ninth highest mountain in the world. Between them lies the Indus which at this point is contained in a narrow, deep gorge; downstream lie the plains of Pakistan. Some years before, this gorge had become blocked by trees which had been swept down the valley and behind which, as in a dam, the waters of the Indus backed up. The danger was so great that if this build up of water were permitted to continue then when the dam eventually burst, it would release such a torrent of water as might drown hundreds of thousands in the cities in plains below. The Pakistani Air Force was obliged to bomb the blockage to prevent such a catastrophe.

Arriving at Gilgit, I met some other travellers who planned to hire a Jeep and head westwards to the Swat valley and I decided to join them. The mountain road upon which we travelled the next day, was not unlike the Khunjerab Pass and we soon came to the seemingly inevitable, landslide. This time the road was not completely blocked but stones, rocks and occasional boulders were tumbling down the mountainside in a steady stream and the driver was not willing to proceed. The only way forward for us was to run, carrying our rucksacks, the hundred or so meters until we had passed this dangerous stretch and then to hope to get a lift on the far side. The driver promised to stand watch for the falling boulders and then to call to each of us travellers in turn, to run. I was second in line and my hard-hat was now many miles away. The first succeeded in crossing without difficulty. My shout came and I ran but midway – whether

out of curiosity or simply blind stupidity – I looked up and saw a boulder bouncing over and back like a giant ping pong ball as it hurtled down the mountain. I froze like a rabbit caught in headlights. Suddenly I was snapped out of my stupor by a heavy thump on the back from the last runner. I had been extremely lucky!

Swat Valley is famous for its Buddhist monasteries, for its tradition of learning and for Alexander the Great having spent time here in 326BC before sailing down the Indus to the sea. It is said that some of Alexander's soldiers remained and intermarried and that this accounts for the European features of some of the local peoples; features such as pale skin, blue eyes were especially notable in the Kalash valleys which lie in the far North West along the Afghan border and which I was later to visit.

Taxila (the ruins of which lie close to Islamabad) was a centre of learning and of Buddhist worship. As a centre of learning, Taxila by the late fifth century BC:

> *"..had become the site of the best-known university in the subcontinent, which offered courses in mathematics, law, history, medicine, …, astronomy and military tactics."*[11]

In contrast, the University of Oxford dates from 1096CE; the University of Cambridge, from 1209CE and the University of Dublin, from 1592CE.

As a centre of Buddhism, Taxila came into prominence under Emperor Ashoka in 272BC who built a giant stupa containing ashes of the Buddha. Buddhism spread from here to China sometime in the first century CE and thence to Korea and Japan in the fourth century CE.

I visited Taxila and though it had been overrun by the White Huns in the fifth century CE, the ruins that remain – the sculptures, the stupas, the excavated streets houses and courtyards – display such a level of order and sophistication that, in contrast to the ruins to be found in Europe from even 1,500 years later, Europe was the land of barbarians in contrast to the civilization that had existed in Asia.

Whilst visiting Taxila I had stayed in Rawalpindi in a hotel that I remember for the bleakness of my room and the lizards that, literally, climbed the walls during the night. As an impecunious traveller I often stayed in very cheap hotels but with the money that I had saved, had my evening meal in more expensive hotels where the food was usually excellent and, in contrast to the room price, inexpensive. I dined out in such an hotel in Rawalpindi. To get there I had taken a taxi and, as whenever I am in a foreign city, I attempted to agree a fixed price with the driver rather than accept the metered price. Reluctantly he agreed, but when we got to the hotel he took great enjoyment in showing me the price on the meter (which he had left running) and which was considerably less than our earlier, bargained, price. I was hoisted by my own petard!

The dinner at the hotel was one of the best meals that I have ever enjoyed. It was a most sumptuous buffet and a feast for the eyes – a stunning display of food and fruits with some of the sweets decorated with edible gold foil.[12] Such a display was not the

usual fare but had been prepared in honour of a group of visiting American academics who were, presumably, there to study the ruins at Taxila and who were staying at the hotel.

The American surveyed the food with expressions akin to mild disdain, they picked and prodded and manifested a fastidiousness that suggested that they had just arrived on the Indian subcontinent and that they would have much preferred to explore it from the safe confines of an American university library. Perhaps I was spurred on by this but I sampled and tasted and enjoyed and my appetite and enjoyment were gargantuan. To celebrate such a feast and because it was such a beautiful starry night I decided, like a lord, to take a rickshaw back to my hotel – lizard sanctuary though it might be.

The following day I headed west to Peshawar from where I hoped to travel to the Khyber Pass; going there – as for the Kalash valleys which I was to visit later – required a special police permit not only because they are so close to the politically sensitive, Afghan border but also because they are in the North-West Frontier Province. This province is governed differently from the rest of Pakistan being as they are part of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. I wished to visit the Khyber Pass both because it has played such an important role in the history of the area but also for more personal reasons in that the valley next to where I live in Co. Clare in Ireland shares the same name. This is possibly a relic of the nineteenth century custom, common amongst Anglo-Irish landowners, of the second son joining the British Army (the eldest son would inherit the land) and being sent to the furthest outpost of the British Empire amongst which were the North-West Territories. Later, on seeing the Khyber Pass, I was indeed struck by the physical similarity between it and its namesake in Clare: at first sight it was unimposing having nothing of the grandeur of, for example, the Khunjerab Pass but its fearsome reputation was due to its terrain being such that any army travelling along it would be extremely vulnerable to ambush.

Peshawar was one of the most beautiful and friendly cities of my travels thus far. The air was clear, the streets wide and the sun shone but without the intensity that I had experienced in the deserts of China. Having found a good hotel, I spent a week in Peshawar, walking most days to the offices of the British Council which had an excellent library which contained many English books on Islam and on the history and culture of Pakistan. It also had copies of the main English newspapers and magazines which, in a pre-internet age, was a great boon because other than what I gleaned on listening to my treasured short-wave radio, I had been starved of news. So my days often began with a visit to the British Council library, then a leisurely coffee and an afternoon spent in strolling through the streets and markets; it was a heavenly time and now many years later I look back with great sadness as I read of the destruction, the killings and suicide bombings that have been unleashed on that city.

Having received my travel permit and boarding the bus to make the short (16km) journey to the Khyber Pass, I was surprised to see that we had an armed soldier as escort. But that was barely a foretaste of what awaited me when the bus finally drew to a halt at what was a large village but which, as a consequence of US support for the Taliban in their war in Afghanistan against the occupying USSR forces, had been transformed into something of an arms factory. There were scores of small machine shops busily producing small arms such as Kalashnikovs which, I was told, had been established as part of the US efforts to arm the Taliban; the *quid pro quo* being that the authorities in Pakistan would turn a blind eye to the smuggling of heroin from Afghanistan to Pakistan. Later consequences of these US machinations would be a much increased heroin trade with devastating consequences for Europe and the turning of the arms so readily given to the Taliban, back against invading western forces in their wars in Afghanistan. After the 9/11 attacks and as a further bitter irony in the war against the Taliban, the US sought to make allies of the drug lords that their misguided policies of an earlier era had helped create.[13]

Drugs were well-nigh openly for sale as were guns; one such was a small 'pen-gun' which was shaped like a fountain pen and could fire a single bullet. Visitors who were tempted to buy any such souvenirs, were in for a nasty surprise as the bus was searched by the police on its return journey. It was said that anyone found with either drugs or weapons on that return journey would be threatened with prosecution; this could only be averted by the payment of a substantial bribe to the police; any guns or drugs seized would then be sent (with apologies to Mr. Joyce) "*by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to the Khyber Pass and Environs*"[14] and at considerable benefit to the local economy the wealth of which was evident in the opulent, heavily defended, mansions of the drug lords liberally scattered along the road back to Peshawar.

Whilst at the British Council Library, I had read about the strange tribes that lived in the Kalash valley and, having received the requisite police permit, I decided to visit the area. It was first necessary to travel to Chitral which is a long deep isolated valley in the north-western corner of Pakistan lying on the borders of Afghanistan and separated from it by the Hindu Kush mountains which here are dominated by the massif of Tirich Mir. The valley is separated from the rest of Pakistan by another range of mountains, the Hindu Raj, lying to the east and south. The land route to Chitral is blocked by snow for nearly five months of the year and travelling to it requires that one hire a four-wheel drive which was prohibitively expensive. The alternative was to travel by small plane which, depending on the weather, flew twice weekly between Peshawar and Chitral and which was relatively inexpensive; I chose to fly. Whilst waiting at the airport, I met the Governor of Chitral who was also travelling to Chitral to see a polo match; he invited me to accompany him. Thinking that polo was a peculiarly English sport, I was surprised to find out not only that it originated in Asia, but that it had deep associations with the

princely states of the Indian Subcontinent and especially that of Chitral; the Governor was to preside over an especially important match. As a child I had often watched polo matches in the Phoenix Park in Dublin, but polo *à la* Chitral was played with considerably more fervour and passion than the gentlemanly jousts that I had seen in Dublin; the match in Chitral was reminiscent of the passion and partisanship that one sees at a hurling final in Croke Park.

Leaving Chitral, I headed to Bumburet the largest of the three isolated valleys wherein the Kalash peoples live. They are non-Muslim and follow their own traditional religion which has aspects of shamanism, animism and sun worship; one commentary describes an archaeological structure in a manner reminiscent of Newgrange, in Ireland:

> *… [its function] must have been to serve as a sun observatory in which the first beam of the rising sun on the winter solstice was to hit a statue of the god inside the temple..″*[15]

The midwinter festival in Bumburet, is marked by a throwing over of the normal bounds of propriety:

> *"The girls, especially, were bordering on hysteria as they used language that would normally have embarrassed them … As for the married women, they roared with laughter, delighted in these refinements of vulgarity which demanded efforts of the imagination. … The 'shameless divinity' takes advantage … to descend, and his presence gives free rein to invectives …″*[16]

Music and dance play a central role in their culture and there is a sense of openness and friendliness – especially from the women who are unveiled – that would be unimaginable elsewhere in Pakistan; a woman, for example, can leave her husband for another man on condition that the new partner pays twice the original dowry to the first husband. One of their more unusual customs is that their dead are not buried but placed on trestles above ground.

I rented a small timber cabin and stayed for a week. I had bought a copy of the Upanishads in Peshawar and occupied myself between reading it and walking the mountain paths. It was an idyllic setting: small mountain streams tumbling down from the high mountains; the days were cool and sunny and the night, star filled. It was like a pastoral setting in Ireland until, as a shepherd came into view with a Kalashnikov slung over his shoulder, one suddenly remembered that the Afghan border was at the head of the valley.

Reluctantly I left the Kalash and headed back to Chitral to catch a plane back to Peshawar. Arriving at the airport I found that all planes had been cancelled due to low hanging cloud with no clue as to when flights might resume. Speaking to some others, I met a father and his adult daughter who were anxious to get back to Islamabad and who were planning to hire a four-wheel drive to make the journey and they agreed to let me accompany them. It transpired that the Lowari Pass – which is a relatively low pass over the Hindu Raj mountains into central Pakistan – was closed and that it would be necessary to take not only a much more difficult, and higher route but one that looped

across the Afghan border. The father, as it turned out, was a wealthy Pakistani businessman who was married to a German diplomat and their daughter, who was travelling with us, also had German nationality; she expressed the opinion that, being Europeans, the Pakistani border guards would not permit us to attempt a mountain crossing if our lives would be in any danger. Teasing her, I asked why should the authorities take more care of us than of Pakistanis; she replied that there were much more of them, the implication being that it was the relative scarcity of Europeans rather than any hint of racism that underlay her belief. Going further than I should, I suggested that that line of reasoning would suggest that Germans, being more numerous, would have less value than the Irish. Silence ensued and I was lucky not to suffer the loss of my lift! She was being racist, but then I have noticed in travelling how often such attitudes well up in myself; I believe that such attitudes are well-nigh universal and the obligation we have to others is to be conscious of our racism but to then challenge it intellectually and not to act on it. (I have elaborated further on these thoughts in a postscript).

As we ascended from the valley, the father stopped the jeep and, facing the Tirich Mir Massif, he bowed deeply towards it in a mark of deep reverence – a gesture that first surprised, and then resonated deeply within me.

The border post was a bleak snow-bound hut with a glacier on one side and a precipitous fall on the other; one could not but have pity on the forlorn-looking soldiers who had been stationed there. We were allowed to proceed and, despite our earlier misgivings, the rest of the journey proceeded without difficulty.

My travelling companions owned a house in Islamabad and they offered to put me up for the night before I travelled onwards to Lahore and India. The 'house' was more palace than house and was one of a number of others that they owned. It had recently been renovated and was replete with lavish furnishings and marble floors. It had so many rooms that neither father nor daughter were confident of what was where and was indicative of the extreme wealth of some in Pakistan's elite. Such extreme wealth coexists with extreme poverty; this, in conjunction with the intertwining of wealth and political power; a conservative religious establishment; a poorly educated populace and a powerful military caste, indicates that Pakistan is not the modern democratic state that it purports to be but is still, essentially, feudal.

Lahore was the very antithesis of Peshawar; it was noisy, crowded and polluted and my only memory is of getting a motor rickshaw to a hotel for the one night I stayed in the city before heading to the Indian border. I had balanced my rucksacks on that rickshaw but as the driver weaved his way through the crowds I suddenly noticed that my large rucksack was missing. I shouted for him to stop as I ran back along the road but could see nothing until I glimpsed my rucksack atop someone's bicycle as he headed away from me up a side street. He surrendered the rucksack without objecting and, on

returning to my rickshaw, I found that the driver had waited patiently for me and had guarded my other rucksack until I returned. Had a similar situation unfolded in some western city, I have doubts that it would have been resolved so easily and so amicably.

In retrospect, my reaction to Lahore was extremely negative and doubtlessly unfair but this may well have been because I had been relaxing in the hills and bubbling streams of Chitral up to the previous day and the contrast was simply too sudden and too extreme.

Amritsar on the Indian side of the border, is but a short journey from Lahore but first one must cross the border and that border post is the location of one of the great theatrical displays of the Indian subcontinent. This occurs in the evening when the border is being closed for the day; on one side Pakistani soldiers, in full dress uniform, goose-step up to the very edge of the border, with an expression of ferocity directed at the equally ferocious, equally high-stepping Indian soldiers on the other side, both sides being cheered on by their respective compatriots. Such displays would be comical were the situation between India and Pakistan not so tragic with the ever-present threat of war, but perhaps – like cricket between these nations – they offer a welcome alternative to more deadly pursuits.

My baggage was checked at the border and I was questioned as to whether it contained any alcohol, which in so far as alcohol was unavailable in Pakistan and I was leaving, seemed bizarre but then as I headed for Amritsar and a cold beer (the first since China), I mused that perhaps the border guard was having his own little private joke!

Arriving in Amritsar I found that a celebration of Diwali was in full swing; Diwali is an ancient Hindu "festival of lights" celebrated at autumn and – much like the pagan origins of Christmas – signifies midwinter and the overcoming of darkness and the return of the light. A celebration was in order and heading to a restaurant, I ordered a favourite Tandoori meal and – to mark the escape from my enforced abstinence – a cold beer. The waiter apologised but said that a beer would not be possible because alcohol was prohibited during a time of religious festivities. The magnitude of my thirst and the depth of my disappointment must have been obvious because when I went on to explain that I had just arrived from Pakistan, he disappeared but moments later reappeared with a large glass which had been completely shrouded in newspaper so that its contents were not visible, but it contained my longed-for beer. It is the occurrence of moments like those that, in recollection, become the jewels of any journey.

Amritsar is the city sacred to the Sikhs and contains their most sacred shrine, the Golden Temple. The temple buildings seen from a purely aesthetic perspective, are astounding: the holy of holies is the Harmandir Sahib whose upper stories are covered in pure gold. It contains the books written by their gurus which are most sacred to Sikhs. It is set in a large lake which is itself surrounded by the main temple buildings and is accessible by a long causeway.

The Golden Temple is most impressive when seen from its religious aspect: the devotion of the Sikhs; the tradition of openness and acceptance to all regardless of religion, caste, or gender; the provision of free food and accommodation to all comers – it houses the largest free kitchens in the world, serving up to 100,000 meals daily.

But Amritsar has also had a troubled past. It was the site of the infamous Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919 where (as described on the memorial):

> *''This place is saturated with the blood of about 2,000 Hindu, Sikh and Muslim patriots who were martyred in a nonviolent struggle to free India from British domination.''*

Antagonism between Indian and the British was rekindled in 1997, when Prince Philip, who was accompanying the Queen on a state visit to India and (having spoken to the son of the officer accused of ordering the massacre) suggested, with characteristic diplomacy, that the memorial *''vastly exaggerated''* the death toll.[17] A response which brings to mind the British response to the Bloody Sunday killings in Derry as originally formulated by Lord Widgery in 1972.

Leaving Amritsar I headed to Dharamshala which was where the Dalai Lama sought refuge on his flight from Tibet in 1959 and where he still resides. Seen in retrospect, this was a sign of my deepening – but, at the time, unconscious – interest in Buddhism. During my stay I was in a group audience with the Dalai Lama and it was his presence rather than any words that he had to offer, that was most impressive; in using the term 'presence' I mean his presence to himself rather than concern with the impression that he created in others: a sense of personal, un-serious, self-assuredness that one could glean simply from his demeanour.

Many years later I saw him again on his visit to Trinity College in Dublin where some Buddhist monks had constructed a beautiful multi-coloured sand mandala. The completion of the ceremony was marked by a procession to the river Liffey into which the mandala was tipped, thus destroying it. The curator of the gallery remarked to me at the time that it was such a shame to destroy such a beautiful object but in making this comment, she showed that she had missed the whole point, namely that it was a lesson in impermanence: it was to show that in life, all is subject to change and that it is as pointless to try to cling to ephemeral islands of beauty as it would be to insist in the midst of a beautiful dawn, that the sun be still.

Dharamshala during the British Raj – and like Simla further east – was a hill-station whose cool climate provided a summer respite from the oppressive heat of the Indian plains. Relics of these times are still to be seen in the presence of an Anglican Chapel and with its adjoining graveyard – a "*corner of a foreign field that is for ever England*."[18]

Dharamshala itself was awash with colourful prayer flags and whilst its religious aspect is ever-present, it has none of the oppressive seriousness or 'holiness' that often characterises religious shrines; on the contrary the maroon robed monks often display a

disarming, smiling levity which should not be taken as suggesting that their attitude to the life that they have undertaken is anything other than profoundly serious; a seriousness which is evident in their arduous spiritual and meditational exercises and the deep throated chanting of the monks which appears to originate from the very bowels of the earth.

It is sometimes said of some Zen practitioners that "*they stink of Zen*" meaning that they are officious, smug and overly conscious of their beliefs; it also characterises an attitude occasionally displayed by some western Buddhists, of unctuous 'loving-kindness' which one suspects is but skin deep and which – to me at least – raises the temptation to put it to the test by administering a sharp kick to shins.

I found no such attitudes amongst Tibetan Buddhists who often displayed the full range of emotions and eyes full of mischief. Once whilst visiting a monastery, I watched two young monks debate a point of Buddhist teaching whilst cheered on by their fellow monks. They displayed a passion and verve in their arguments and a physicality in making a point – especially if they believed it to be a killing blow – that must have been how Socratic philosophy was practiced amongst the Greeks during its heyday.

Years later, when reading some Taoist texts, I was astounded to discover the subtlety of argument and of distinctions that one sometimes encountered in these ancient texts; a subtlety which should put some modern philosophical commentators to shame. Consider this piece from the writings of Chuang-Tzu dating from 300BC:

> *Chuang-Tzu and Hui Shih were strolling on the bridge above the Hao river.* 'Out swim the minnows, so free and easy*.' said Chuang-Tzu.* 'That's how fish are happy'.
> *'*You are not a fish. Whence do you know that fish are happy*?'*
> 'You aren't me, whence do you know that I don't know that fish are happy?'
> 'We'll grant that not being you I don't know about you. You'll grant that you are not a fish, and that completes the case that you don't know the fish are happy.'
> 'Let's go back to where we started. When you said "*<u>Whence</u> do you know that the fish are happy*?" you asked me the question already knowing that I knew. I knew it from up above the Hao.[19]

Leaving Dharamshala, I headed to Delhi and my flight back to Ireland to begin the construction of my new workshop in Clare, but before leaving India a final vignette awaited me which encapsulated the stark difference in attitudes between the strident individualism and the overweening arrogance sometimes found in the West and the calm determination and strength of the East which are often mistaken as indicating a powerless resignation. At customs clearance, an American had been asked to open his camera and remove the battery. He demurred and then refused while loudly maintaining that in all his extensive travelling through many countries, he had never before been asked to perform such a task and that, to him, it could serve no useful purpose. The Indian customs official quietly but authoritatively repeated his request. To watch the

American climb his ladder of pride step by step and to know that he was going to have to descend that same ladder, ignominiously, step by painful step, was a lesson worth remembering.

Arriving back in Clare I was forcefully struck by its beauty and by my good fortune to live in such a place which now – having sold my share of our home in Meath to my ex-wife – was to be my permanent home.

In Clare, in contrast to the deserts of China and the mountains of Pakistan, I had the immanence of the sea and its ever-present soundscape ranging from barely audible gracenotes to a thunderous intensity far surpassing the most impressive of orchestral symphonies. In its rhythms of tide, it also imposed a pattern to the day which brooked no dissent.

Also I had the light: the ever changing cloudscape of the Burren fractures the light into a dance between light and shade and, in those moments when the sun newly emerges from rain clouds, the mountains become a kaleidoscope of mirrors.

I have come to believe that the landscape within which one lives has a profound effect on the moulding of character and temperament; in Rajasthan, for example, in the heat of a hot summer's day one knows that tomorrow will bring few surprises and that the sun will beat down with the same unrelenting ferocity as it does today. Living on the west coast of Ireland could not be more different, the weather far from being predictable, is the very embodiment of fickleness. I remember when fishing for mackerel on the rocks, a local fisherman once warned me to never turn my back on the sea for fear of the unexpected 'rogue wave' than can suddenly materialise from the calmest of seas and sweep an inattentive fisherman to his doom. For me, that image came to symbolise the attitude that living close to the sea instils: an attentive watchfulness always conscious of what may suddenly appear from where one least expects it.

The landscape of the Burren also differs profoundly from that of Meath where I had lived earlier. Standing at the corner of a field set amidst the flat plains of Meath, one feels than, by virtue of its uniformity and flatness, it is possible to comprehend it in its entirety. The Burren, in contrast, has the extra dimensions of depth and surprise: walking across a landscape, suddenly one stands over a fissure in the rock within which, like a jewel, stands a single flower – a Gentian, perhaps – magnificent in its beauty and singularity.

True the Burren was not only isolated but an isolating landscape of which Yeats has written:

> *Somewhere among great rocks on the scarce grass*
> *Birds cry, they cry their loneliness.*
> *Even the sunlight can be lonely here,*
> *Even hot noon is lonely.*[20]

It is especially so in winter but that too can have its own blessings: I remember once describing the effects of such isolation to someone who was considering a move to such a location, in the words: "*Your choices are stark: either you get to like yourself or you kill yourself*" I was lucky and was able to find the former.

In finding this point of personal equilibrium and self-acceptance, I owe a great debt to my attending some sessions of Holotropic Breathwork (a psychotherapeutic technique that had been pioneered in Ireland by Professor Ivor Browne) and subsequently to a psychotherapist whom he had recommended and who gave me invaluable assistance in beginning my journey of self-exploration. These psychotherapeutic encounters enabled me to regain something of my natural self-confidence and self-esteem which had been so grievously damaged by my interactions with psychiatry and its profusion of lethargy-inducing, mind-deadening medications.

One consequence of such insights was a rising anger in me against the psychiatric system and a longing to find some gesture of retribution or, more realistically, some form of 'closure' so that I could relegate those events to an episode in the dim, distant past. This anger was directed at the hubris of psychiatry considered as a discipline and not – with one possible exception – against individual psychiatrists who were generally well-meaning and who sometimes appeared to be as entrapped within the confines of a narrow intellectual straitjacket (which decreed human distress to be a manifestation of an imbalance in brain chemistry) as their subjects were in their asylums.

What was I to do?

I had been assured by Professor Browne (who as Professor of Psychiatry in UCD and Chief Psychiatrist of the Eastern Health Board, was particularly authoritative) that the diagnosis of schizophrenia that I had been given by Dr. S_ over twenty years earlier, was not only mistaken and unjustified but ill-considered; this was also the verdict of my GP with whom I had many conversations over perhaps thirty years.

These assurances did little to salve my feeling of having been grievously wronged but, in my search for redress, my options were very limited:

Firstly, I could discuss my concerns with Dr. S_ who had made the original diagnosis but this had been made after a very brief encounter and when he had been an assistant to Dr. Tubridy who had since retired. It seemed to me that in the unlikely circumstance that Dr. S_ saw that his original diagnosis was mistaken, he would be most unlikely to acknowledge that to me if only because of possible legal consequences.

Alternatively, I could seek to have my files reviewed by an independent psychiatrist but such a course of action would be effectively placing my newly acquired, hard won sense of self-worth, back into the hands of the very groups that I believed, bore responsibility for many of my difficulties. Furthermore, such a course of action could only take place

within the context of a legal action alleging wrongful diagnosis because only such a scenario would enable an examination of my original case notes which I had already requested but to which I had not been given access.

Some twenty years later, in 2005, such a case was taken by a John Manweiler[21] who by virtue of the *Freedom of Information Act* (1997) was enabled to gain access to his original case notes.[22] I did subsequently speak to the solicitor who had acted for Mr. Manweiler but he advised me against taking any such action stating that he had been shocked and appalled by the methods employed[23] by the psychiatric profession in its defence to Manweiler's legal challenge and that I would find it a personally bruising and traumatic experience which was highly unlikely to be rewarding either on a personal or financial level. I decided to forgo any attempt at legal redress.

Many years later, on reading a transcript of the cross-examination of Manweiler's psychiatrist (Dr. Burke) by John Rogers SC, I was struck by the sheer informality, and the brusque almost casual manner, with which his diagnosis of schizophrenia had been made. These events occurred in 1984 some twelve years after the publication of the Rosenhan Experiment[24] and at a time when standards might have reasonably been expected to be considerably more stringent. Rosenhan's study – which was published in 1973, a year after my own 'diagnosis' – had been designed to determine whether psychiatrists could reliably distinguish the mentally ill from those who were not; it found not only that they could not but that their 'error rate' was extremely high. This result was catastrophic for psychiatry's pretensions to scientific status.

The experiment involved eight pseudopatients (including three psychologists, a paediatrician, and a psychiatrist) who, stating that they heard a voice saying "*thud*", attempted to gain admission to 12 different psychiatric hospitals across the United States. After admission, the pseudopatients acted normally and told staff that they felt fine and had no longer heard any such sounds. Of the 12, 11 were diagnosed as schizophrenic and one, with the identical symptomatology, as manic-depressive psychosis (a less stigmatising diagnosis and given in the one private hospital in the sample). Before release, all were forced to admit to having a mental illness and to agree to take antipsychotic drugs as a condition of their release.

A not dissimilar unfolding of events occurred in relation to John Manweiler, but this time it was no academic exercise but a coercive intervention with life changing consequences for him as may be gleaned from the following brief excerpt from the cross-examination in the Manweiler case:

> *[Manweiler had had a verbal dispute with his mother who had dementia and with whom he had been living. His sister (with whom he did not get on due to a family dispute about his father's will) told Manweiler that unless he went voluntarily to a psychiatric hospital, he would be "committed"; this he did but was subsequently certified as involuntary by Burke who prescribed anti-psychotic medication though Manweiler had never been psychotic. This medication was forcibly administered for a period of over ten years.*

Shortly before Burke's diagnosis, a psychologist's report on Manweiler – which made no mention of his being mentally ill – saw poor family communication as being the root of the problem and recommended the holding a family conference. This recommendation was ignored by Burke who had not spoken to Manweiler before diagnosing him as schizophrenic.
*The admitting psychiatrist's diagnosis had stated: "*Chronic mild depression. Schizoid personality. Short stay only. Then day care*." – a note which was crucial to Manweiler's success in his civil action.]*

Rogers:
You decided this man was a schizophrenic just because he was silent?
Burke:
I didn't decide then, I saw it as a possibility.
Rogers:
So what was the mental illness he had [then]?
Burke:
It was the same as he has now. He has a simple schizophrenia but it is very difficult to diagnose. …
Rogers:
So you must have diagnosed it even though he didn't speak to you?...
Burke:
I admitted him for safety's sake and to investigate and prove he had a schizophrenic illness.

Rogers then asked Burke why, knowing of the existence of family problems, he had not discussed these with Manweiler's family.

Burke:
Well I didn't think it appropriate for me to interfere in a family matter like that. …
Rogers:
Why not?
Burke:
Because it has nothing to do with me and could be devised [sic] as being difficult, it is not something that I would do lightly. … I wouldn't dream of doing that.

Manweiler had been medicated with anti-psychotics which (according to independent expert witnesses) would produce side-effects which "*actually mimic chronic forms of schizophrenia*".

Having decided not to pursue a legal course of action, I felt that the only course open to me to voice my criticisms of psychiatry was by such means as the letters columns of *The Irish Times*. I had hoped that my legal qualifications might add some weight to my criticism.

I eventually came to believe that they had slight, if any, effect and were always open to the ultimate put-down that these were but the complaints of an ex-psychiatric patient. Such responses are eloquent testimony to the severity of psychiatric stigma and how it serves to render null the voices of those who have found themselves enmeshed in the psychiatric system. It is especially galling when such objections are made by members of psychiatric profession without any personal knowledge of the objectors and yet this self-same profession refuses to acknowledge the reality of psychiatric stigma.

One aspect of my character which assisted me in holding on to my recently acquired sense of self-worth and self-acceptance, was the realisation that I am an 'inner directed' person rather than 'outer directed' meaning that intellectual pursuits rather than social interaction are the wellsprings from which I draw most sustenance though this is not to lessen the importance to me of close friendship.

I believe that this 'inner directed' aspect to my character is one shared by many if not most mathematicians who aside from their love of mathematics, are often noted for their love of classical music and whilst not necessarily solitaries, are seldom gregarious party-goers. Cédric Villani, the 2014 winner of the Fields medal (the mathematician's equivalent of the Nobel Prize), speaking of the life and character of mathematicians, has said

> *And for a mathematician … You have to have an intense interior life and reflection to spend time thinking – really thinking – and then find the solution.*
> *… People think it's about numbers. It starts with numbers, for sure, but in a mathematical proof or in a mathematician's life, there are hardly any numbers. It's all about concepts and logical reasoning.*
> *… And when the breakthrough finally comes, there is no mistaking it. … "everything seemed to fit together as if by magic" and quotes André Weil on it, who calls it "lucid exaltation", a climax that "unlike sexual pleasure" may last "for hours at a time, even days".*[25]

Though I have often had great intellectual pleasure from mathematics it never reached such heights but then I had only ever wandered its foothills whereas Villani had scaled its summits.

I prefer the terms 'inner/outer directed' to the more common 'extrovert/introvert' as I believe that the latter import, however unintentionally, the connotation that being an extrovert is something to be aspired to – is, in short, 'normal'[26] – whereas being an introvert is 'abnormal' and, especially when seen in a child, is to be guarded against as it partakes of the pathological or autistic (at least in the variant known as Asperger's).

One influential proponent of such views is Professor Michael Fitzgerald, a psychiatrist and professor of psychiatry at Trinity College who has argued that philosophers such as Spinoza, Wittgenstein and Kant; writers such as Swift, Orwell and Yeats, and scientists such as Newton and Einstein, 'suffered' from Asperger's which is a form of autism. Professor Fitzgerald seeks to lessen the insult that he casts on such luminaries when he suggests that this 'psychiatric disorder' is also key to their creativity; he notes:

> *"These produce people who are highly focused, don't fit into the school system, and who often have poor social relationships and eye contact. They can be quite paranoid and oppositional, and usually highly moral and ethical. They can persist with a topic for 20-30 years without being distracted by what other people think. And they can produce in one lifetime the work of three or four other people."*[27]

What Professor Fitzgerald seems oblivious to is the stigma caused by his assertion that those he cites, had a 'psychiatric disorder'. This raises the important question as to what

constitutes such a 'disorder'? Is it simply that which psychiatrists say it is? But the long list of what were once considered to be psychiatric disorders[28] would militate against any such simplistic approach? More accurately, what is at issue is the ownership of the term 'psychiatric disorder' namely, who decides? Is it the psychiatric profession or an informed public? This question was central to my PhD dissertation but I would suggest that in the court of public opinion, the examples cited by Professor Fitzgerald would be regarded as ideals to be emulated rather than bearers of pathology or 'sufferers' of psychiatric disorders.

Allen Frances who is one of the most influential psychiatrists in the United States, was the architect and lead editor of the fourth edition of '*The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*' [DSM-IV] which had been developed in 1988 in the aftermath of the Rosenhan study and in an attempt to re-establish confidence in psychiatric diagnostic practices. In recent years he has been a relentless critic of the pharmaceutical industry and its influence on psychiatry leading to an almost promiscuous use of psychosis diagnoses especially in relation to Autism, Attention Deficit Disorder, and childhood Bipolar Disorder. In a lecture given to the International Society for Ethical Psychology and Psychiatry in 2014, he stated:

> *The combination of an overly inclusive DSM and misleading Pharma marketing has resulted in a massive mislabelling as mental disorders what are instead the expectable everyday aches and pains of everyday life and of childhood development.* [29]

But as recently uncovered, Allen Frances has had his own dark history of collusion with the pharmaceutical industry not only in the marketing of anti-psychotics but in establishing the diagnostic criteria for which these anti-psychotics were to be prescribed. A case taken in 2012 by the Texas Attorney General against Janssen Pharmaceuticals which alleged that they "*masked, withheld, or failed to disclose negative information contained in scientific studies concerning the safety and efficacy of Risperdal*" was settled on payment of a fine of $181million. The court had commissioned an independent expert report into the adequacy, or otherwise, of the scientific information that the pharmaceutical company had submitted in its original licensing application; it found that:

> *… in 1995, the very year after DSM-IV appeared, Johnson & Johnson had paid more than half a million dollars (USD) to Frances and two of his psychiatrist colleagues to create an official-seeming document as the basis for promotion of one of their drugs. The following year, the drug company paid them almost another half million dollars to continue and expand the marketing campaign.*[30]

This campaign was for the marketing of Risperdal and lead to the promulgation of the "*Schizophrenia Practice Guidelines*" drawn up by Allen Frances in collusion with Janssen. These guidelines – which purported to be based on the most reliable scientific evidence at the time and, as such, the 'gold standard' of evidence-based treatment – specified Risperdal as the drug of choice in the treatment of schizophrenia at a time when the drug had not yet been approved by the FDA.

The finding of such levels of corruption at the very heart of a supposed reform of the psychiatric diagnostic system whose deficiencies had been so ruthlessly exposed by Rosenhan and others, suggest that psychiatry itself has been fatally compromised. Such an assessment has received support from an unexpected source - Thomas Insel, Director of the US National Institute of Mental Health who, in 2013, questioned how his fellow psychiatrists:

> *" … actually believe [that the diseases they diagnose using the DSM] are real. But there's no reality. These are just constructs. There is no reality to schizophrenia or depression…we might have to stop using terms like depression and schizophrenia, because they are getting in our way, confusing things."*[31].

Before heading to China, I had drawn up plans for my new workshop and had obtained planning permission. I had also found a local builder to construct the workshop; he did an excellent job and unlike the building of the log cabin where Caoilte had been responsible for most of the construction problems, this time I was the one to blame for the mistakes.

The workshop, which was close to my log cabin and also overlooked the sea, was in the style of a traditional cottage. It was built of block and faced with 5" thick Liscannor stone and merged well in the landscape. It was 30ft. by 15ft. in size and with a slate roof in which were six roof windows so that it was flooded with light.

I had based the design of the workshop on that of the stone building that I had renovated in Meath which, because the original stonework was structurally unstable, had incorporated a reinforced concrete ring beam (at wall-plate height) tying the old and new together into a structural unity. Foolishly, I decided to use the same system in Clare where there had been no need for any such reinforcing. The problem that occurred – and which I should have foreseen – was that the damp-proof membrane on top of the ring beam and spanning the gable walls would get damaged in construction which, needless to say, it did. The result was that after days of heavy driving rain, water penetrated the outer wall and the membrane being damaged, then penetrated the inner wall so that droplets formed and ran down its inside surface. The solution was one of the most awkward building jobs that I have ever had to undertake and harshly taught me the lesson of how something which at construction stage, is easily done correctly but which, if not, can become a nightmare to rectify. To solve the problem, I with the help of a friend, had to drill out every second block above the ring beam on the inner gable wall and to then dry the 4" cavity with the only means available – a hair drier – before installing a new membrane on a bed of bitumen mastic … but it worked!

With all my tools, benches and machines installed, my new workshop was a joy to work in. The ever-changing sea just outside my windows and the rocks and driftwood on the

shore providing a veritable encyclopaedia of interesting shapes. I knew that here I couldn't want for inspiration.

Now that I was based in Clare I decided to trade in my father's old car which I had inherited, for a brand new Kadette van. Buying a van rather than a car, was a symbolic shedding of the remaining vestiges of my barrister persona: it is difficult to imagine someone emerging from a Kadette Van bewigged and begowned! But it was liberating and I welcomed it. That van also taught me another lesson: before buying it I had spent a morning phoning all the Opel dealers in the Dublin area and the prices that I had been quoted barely differed, all falling between IR£7,000 to IR£7,100; a little dispirited I decided to phone Opel dealers outside Dublin and eventually succeeded in buying it for a thousand pounds cheaper than I had been quoted in Dublin. It transpired that the dealer from whom I had purchased the van was one sale short of the monthly target required to get a bonus from Opel; he had less than a hundred pounds profit on the sale to me but received his bonus! The very useful lesson that I learned was that a morning spent ringing around for quotations could be extremely profitable.

Despite selling my old workshop, I ended up heavily in debt and sometimes money was so tight that in going to Dublin to see my sons Philip and Peter, I was unsure as to whether I would have enough money for the diesel. Luckily I found one garage just outside Ballinasloe that still had the old slide system for debiting a credit card and this ensured that I had at least a full tank of fuel. Though living in Clare was much less expensive than Dublin, eventually I had no choice but to take out a mortgage and got one from the Irish Nationwide Building Society (of Fingelton fame!). Because the building was a workshop, I was charged a commercial rate but was given to understand that this would be no more than one percent above the domestic rate. The financial situation in Ireland at the time worsened rapidly and soon I found that not only was I being charged 18% interest on my mortgage (at a time when the domestic rate had been kept at about 12%) but any missed payment attracted not only a fixed penalty but additional interest.

Believing this to be deeply unfair I formally requested that the building society show me precisely where on my mortgage deed that I had explicitly agreed to any such missed payment penalty charges and they being unable to do this, I was refunded the penalties. Emboldened by my success, I sought to enforce the undertaking that my interest rate would not exceed the domestic rate by more than one percent. I lodged a complaint with the financial regulator and also with the building society. Within days I had a senior manager from the building society phone me and offer to reduce my mortgage rate and eventually agreeing to a one percent excess over the domestic rate on condition that I withdrew my complaint to the regulator. They had yielded not because of any particular skill or argument of mine but because the building society reckoned that on the slight chance that the regulator would rule in my favour, they would have to reduce the rate for

other commercial mortgages which would have had considerable financial repercussions on them. It was good to realise that my legal qualifications could still be put to some good use!

Philip and Peter regularly came to Clare and indeed cycled from Dublin with me, Philip when he was about fourteen but Peter the week he reached his tenth birthday in 1995. I remember that trip especially because it was just before Easter and the days were still short and the mornings, frosty. We left Dublin on a Thursday and stayed overnight at a bed and breakfast outside Moate and intended to stay the following night in Ballinasloe but, it being good Friday, we could not get a bed and breakfast when we arrived and cycled on into the dark as far as Loughrea; that day we cycled fifty miles and was something of which Peter was rightly proud. But that was not the only reason that I remembered that trip: reaching Abbey Hill just past Kinvara, Peter effortlessly cycled up the very steep incline whilst I was tasting blood before even reaching midway. I could make the excuse that I was carrying our baggage but I simply had to acknowledge that I – at close to fifty – was getting old! On arriving in Clare I hung up my bike and it was to be many months before I had the courage to take it down again.

I settled well into my new workshop and my work was more creative and innovative than it had been before. Prior to my move, most of the work that I did on the lathe was not noticeably different from that of other wood turners in that it comprised lamps and bowls made sometimes from exotic timbers, other times from native woods; indeed once at a craft fair in the Mansion House, my display included pieces made from thirty five different timbers from trees which had been grown in Ireland.

Coming to Clare with its barren landscape, my work became pared down – more sculptural with a concentration on abstract form. I had seen laminated[32] timber used in furniture making and had been especially impressed by the work of the Finnish architect and designer Alvar Aalto which I had seen at an exhibition in Dublin. It is a technique which not only permits small sectioned timbers to have a deceptive strength but because individual thin pieces of timber are easily bent, laminated timbers can be formed into interesting, unusual sculptural shapes.

The work that first suggested to me the use of lamination were some pieces for an eggcup design competition organised by Kilkenny Design; of the thirty or so pieces that were finally exhibited I had made four which was a boost to my self-confidence but I had used a steam bending technique for one which was a narrow ring connected to base by a slender curved arm. The arm, unfortunately, tended to function as a moisture meter and to curve or straighten with the changing weather; lamination resolved that problem.

But laminating thin pieces of veneer had its own problems because of the inevitable imperfections and inconsistencies in the grain of veneer. Luckily I came across a veneering method whereby thin vertical slices were taken from a stack of horizontal veneers and which produced a uniform grain pattern of thin parallel lines. This veneer

was about 2mm thick and using two of these 30mm strips glued together and which had been slightly hollowed to permit the placing of a lighting flex between them, I was able (by using new low heat, mini-fluorescent bulbs) to create some unusual lamps. The first and most successful of these I had christened the 'Heron Lamp' in that its shape had been suggested to me by a heron who would sit on the steps of the pier in front of my workshop awaiting the delicacies that might be brought his way on the incoming tide.

The Heron Lamp and the variants that followed were successful and were the reason why I had been shortlisted for the main IDA award at the Annual IDA Showcase Export Fair. They were also featured twice in the AerLingus in-flight magazine which had intended to run a feature entitled '*The six leading crafts makers in Ireland'* of which I was to be one. There was a clash of dates for the proposed photo shoot as I had already organised a month's stay in a Zen monastery and another got my place in the article.

By this time, Zen already had an important place in my life and I had begun a weekday practice of at least one hour of meditation; I had also done some weeklong Zen retreats ('sesshins') in England. These were conducted in silence and each day involved perhaps seven hours of intensive sitting meditation interspersed with periods of walking meditation and lectures.

A meditation practice fitted easily into the environment of sea and mountains around my house in Clare and that environment was also rich in suggestions for creative work; I have mentioned the lamp whose shape had been suggested by a Heron but one of my own favourite pieces was a candleholder suggested by watching a briar move in the wind. This was a thin laminated curved piece of ash which – like the briar – looked as if it were suspended in space; at its end I had placed a thin piece of horizontal glass onto which was placed a small timber holder for a nightlight. The idea was that coming into a room one saw – as if frozen in mid-air – a small candle which, in shock (like a blow to the solar plexus), elicited the response '*That cannot be!*'. I believe that the eliciting of such a response is the test of a good piece of design. Some of the shapes that one encounters in nature are masterpieces not only of design but of engineering: think of a blade of grass perhaps a meter high and to which, in comparison, the Dublin Spire appears positively clumsy; if the Spire managed to incorporate the same structural strength as the grass, it would be perhaps a half meter in diameter at its base instead of the many meters that it actually is.

I was also working on the lathe but it no longer played the prominent role that it once had as I had come to regard the work produced on a lathe as being somewhat boring in that the final shapes were always the trace of a line revolved around a fixed axis howsoever one might attempt to camouflage this fact: the circle always dominated though sometimes not obviously so. The banality of such shapes were often masked by the wonderful varieties of grain and colour to be found in different timbers but in remembering a test of good design proposed by a London Art College lecturer, they had

lost their magic for me. The test that she had proposed was that lathe work (and pottery produced on a wheel) should be imagined as having been painted completely white and that if afterwards they were still of interest, then they were craft pieces of worth. Much as one would not seek to exhibit a piece smoothed by a hand plane and justify it by the exotic provenance of the wood or the intriguing patterns of grain or colour, I had come to believe that the lathe should be used simply as a tool much like any other: sometimes useful, sometimes not.

The two sculptural pieces that I am most proud of and in the making of which the lathe had been useful, were a piece called '*Inner Chaos*' that had won first prize at the Annual Woodturner's Guild exhibition in 1990 and a piece entitled '*Ushas'* that had been exhibited at a Royal Hibernian Academy of Arts Annual show in 1995.

The piece '*Inner Chaos*' was constructed by using sixteen, 12" long, 3" square pieces of pine; I had used pinewood because when splintered, it produces long sharp slivers of wood. I took twelve of the pieces; then laying each piece lengthwise and hitting it sharply at its midpoint with a sledge hammer, broke it in two whilst keeping a careful note of each matched pair thus produced. I then glued all sixteen pieces together in the form of a cube with the four unbroken pieces at its centre; the splintered paired pieces (slightly separated) matching perfectly on the perimeter.

I then put the resulting cube on the lathe which at that stage was so wildly out of balance that, even though it weighed over a half-ton, started to dance across the workshop floor. I had to persuade Mette to sit on the other end of the lathe before I could eventually manage to turn the cube into the shape of a sphere. I then painted all the unsplintered surfaces a matt black to help conceal the fact that it was composed of individual pieces of timber. The final work when exhibited was powerful but somewhat unsettling; it embodied, as I had hoped, an immense tension but with no sign of damage or brokenness in the timber but rather a pulsating energy; not explosive but fully contained. It was afterwards that it occurred to me that it portrayed the deep energy localised in the '*hara'* or '*tanden'* (solar plexus) that one becomes aware of as one's seat of power when sitting Zen meditation.

The piece '*Ushas'* was less startling. I had taken 144 pieces of 6" long, 1" square ramin, each painted matt black. I had chosen ramin because it is a timber with little or no grain and of a uniform whitish colour. I placed these pieces on end and packed them tightly into a 12" square box which was 6" high and which was itself affixed to a faceplate and mounted on the lathe. I then turned this box (and the pieces constrained within it) into the shape of a dish. Removing all from the lathe and taking away the retaining framework, I was left with a black 12" square, 6" high piece into which a whitish dish had been carved. Taking every second piece and moving it 8" diagonally, I then glued this finished array onto a black base. When viewed from a distance, the finished piece

appeared to be composed of two interlaced, shimmering disks. It was, I believe the first piece to be exhibited at the RHA which had been made on the lathe.

In 1995, with my fiftieth birthday rapidly approaching, I felt the need to take my rucksack and go travelling again. Somewhat emboldened by my trip to China and though aware of my fear of travelling solo in Africa, I decided to travel north from Kenya to Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan and, hopefully, to follow the Nile as far as Cairo.

I booked a flight with Aeroflot via Moscow, arriving in Nairobi on the 5th October with my return flight from Cairo to Moscow scheduled for 4th December some two months later. Having been given all my travel inoculations[33], I headed off on my journey with a considerable degree of trepidation.

Chatting to an Irish fellow traveller whilst queuing for immigration at Nairobi, she told me that she was being met by her Kenyan-based father and that they could drop me at my hotel whilst on their way to his home. This her father offered to do when he arrived and we set off for Nairobi in his landrover.

As we sped on our way he suggested that I not leave my arm out the open window as it had been reported that when stopped at lights, some people had had their arms grabbed by waiting thieves and their watches then pulled from their wrists. Being already somewhat fearful, this exacerbated my fear but more was to come.

I had booked into a small budget hotel – the Hotel Africana – in Nairobi city centre and mentioned this to our driver who assured me that I would most likely be robbed if not in the hotel then in its immediate vicinity which was in a rough part of town.

Arriving at the hotel and tired after my journey, I decided to have an early night but mindful of all the warnings that I had been given, I placed a chair against the hotel room door thus barricaded it closed. As I write this some twenty years later and, wondering whether the warnings that I had been given were unduly alarmist, I searched online for reports on the hotel and this was the most recent:

> *We spent a night there at the end of February [2012]. Our room was burgled but the door was not forced. The thieves had the key. The hotel is doubtless involved. We lost for more $5,000 of material and cash. Neither the owner nor the manager deigned to pay off us even a part.*[34]

I had no problems in the hotel nor as I walked around Nairobi but I had again taken along my father's walking stick (which had earlier saved me from being robbed in a Moscow underpass) and although I was aware that I had brought it with me as a form of protection, I had hoped that this would go unnoticed. It didn't; one day whilst strolling in the vicinity of the hotel, a bystander who must have seen me pass some days before, joked at me about the incongruity of me and my stick; to him, I must have looked like some latter-day Daniel ready to ward off the lions! Not just any Daniel but a white European Daniel hidebound in the images, fables and prejudices bequeathed to him by

his fellow European white imperialist forbearers. I was after all in that '*Heart of Darkness*' which is Africa.

These words may appear to be unduly explicit, to be redolent of prejudice or to be even racist but they were the thoughts that were going through my mind at the time. As I have elaborated in the postscript to this memoir – but in a somewhat different context – I have come to believe that prejudice, whether racial or otherwise, is so widespread that I believe it to be intrinsic to how we think conceptually. Recognising this, I believe that our obligation is, not to deny our prejudices, but to drag them out into the clear light of day; to see them for what they are; to subject them to critical scrutiny and if they are found wanting, not to seek to deny their existence but to resolve not to act on them.

I was surprised to see that I had such deep seated prejudices in relation to Africa whereas I had not been aware of any similar prejudices when travelling in Asia. I am unclear as to how I came to posses such racial stereotypes but I, like many of the schoolchildren of my generation, had been recipients of missionary tales of primitive, cannibalistic Africans and of the need to convert and rescue the 'black babies' from their heathen families.

But experience is the great destroyer of stereotypes because it forces simplicities to yield to complexities and precipitates a more nuanced thinking – and the reason that I was in Africa was for the experience!

I also remember words of my Zen teacher in London, the Venerable Myokyo-ni, on how when one is in a strange city and being fearful or apprehensive of danger, one often attracts it. This is, I believe, because being fearful, one's focus is narrowed so that one is conscious of only that which one anticipates whereas when fully alert and unfocussed one can see 'out of the corner of one's eyes' and one is ready to respond appropriately and spontaneously to any eventuality no matter how unanticipated.

At any event, I stayed four or five uneventful days in Nairobi and as I strolled around and slowly relaxed I became captivated by how life in an African city was so much more full of bubbling excitement, colour and music that the drab, but affluent, European cites with which I was more familiar. The African art that I had seen had been so much more vital and spoke to a much deeper dimension, than the often purely decorative, art of Europe. Slowly the complexities were replacing the simplicities.

After Nairobi I took a local bus north to the town of Isiolo which my Lonely Planet guidebook had assured me is "…*where the tarmac ends, is the frontier town for north-eastern Kenya*". I assumed this to be a piece of travel writers hyperbole (but I was soon to find out that it wasn't) and booked into a cheap hotel with a view from my balcony of the colossus that is Mount Kenya.

Sipping my evening whiskey (plus an additional 'medicinal' glass to kill any stomach bugs!) and gazing at the majesty of the snow covered mountain I remembered reading

of how in 1849, the Geographical Society of London had decreed that snow could not possibly occur, let alone persist, in such latitudes and that one such report was "*the hallucination of a malaria-stricken missionary;*"[35] I mused on the transience of such academic 'certainties'.

Isiolo was a pleasant town and as there were no buses going north I stayed there for four or five days before attempting to arrange a lift to Moyale (a town straddling the Kenyan-Ethiopian border) which was my next destination. In the course of my search I had met an Irish priest in the town who had been helpful and, seeking to return the favour, I offered him a book on Buddhist meditation which I had just finished and thought excellent and which I had thought might interest him; it was received with as much enthusiasm as if it had been an anti-papist tract.

Because the road to Moyale ran close to the Somali border and the presence of bandits or guerrillas, it was considered dangerous by the Kenyan authorities and travel on it was only permitted if in convoy and accompanied by an armed guard. The tactic of the Somali bandits was to block the road and to then rob the occupants of any vehicles. A convoy of lorries had been arranged as had my lift and I was told sit in the driver's cab with the driver on my right and two others on the seat to my right. On being told this I noticed a smile being exchanged between my companions in the cab, the reason for which quickly became apparent once we began our journey. I was sitting on the gearbox and – as the travel guide had predicted – the paved road disappeared and we travelled along a badly corrugated dirt road. I was not only being shaken but juddered and pummelled. I remembered that I had a self inflating camping mat in my rucksack and – calling on the driver to halt for a moment – I retrieved and party inflated the mat; then, happily enthroned, I could afford to return the smile.

The terrain through which we travelled was unlike anything I had ever previously seen; it was a flat desert with occasional, isolated, mountains arising from it as if they were islands in a vast sea: a Skelligs of the desert. It seemed to be an aged, prehistoric landscape which indeed it is, fossil records evidencing a line of human development going back at least 7 million years.[36]

The journey north was without incident but I was enthralled by the landscape, the herds of giraffes that ran alongside us (and presented the danger of a collision if they became frightened) and the occasional snakes that I glimpsed from the safety of the driver's cab.

Luckily the autumn monsoon season was late that year because not only would the dirt road have become impassable but along with the rains would come the mosquitoes and the risk of malaria which was one of my greatest fears in travelling to Africa. I had contracted malaria in India some years before but the malarial strains in Africa are much more virulent especially as they may cause cerebral malaria. I was taking two forms of anti-malarial medications but as I had learned to my cost in India, these are far from dependable.

Arriving in Moyale, I found a small hotel and relaxed and congratulated myself that all had gone well so far. Later that evening as I was having a meal, I was joined at my table by a young English couple – he an Anglican missionary and she his somewhat prim wife – who were based in Ethiopia but were taking a short vacation in Kenya. They were dressed in a style reminiscent of the 1950's and we all ordered the one meal – spaghetti – that we could decipher on the menu. When the meal was served, the young wife meticulously chopped it and ate it with her knife and fork in a gesture of misplaced etiquette or modesty that reminded me of the wife of a teaching colleague in Sligo who – being equally fastidious – insisted on eating bananas sidewise!

The following morning as I headed for the border post I was surprised to see a Swedish Protestant Evangelical church which, judging by its size, possessed a large congregation; the Anglicans clearly had competition in their race for the soul of Africa!

As I arrived at the border the following morning, the Kenyan border guard warned me that the situation in Ethiopia was dangerous and that in travelling there, I risked being robbed. Taking his warning to heart I strapped my smaller rucksack across my chest and with walking stick in hand walked resolutely up the long straight, but steep, road that lay before me and towards what I presumed would be the Ethiopian border post at its top. Barely half way up the incline, I was surrounded by young Ethiopian boys and – in full proof of the effects of fear – I saw only the possibilities which had been put in my mind by that well-meaning Kenyan border guard and assumed that the boys were attempting to steal my rucksack. Much as had happened in the Moscow underpass, I swung my stick widely and the boys scattered. Like Don Quixote having survived the attack from windmills, I strode manfully and purposefully (as I thought) on up the centre of the road looking for the border post only to be stopped suddenly by a jeep out of which four armed, but ununiformed men jumped out and, without saying anything that I could understand, pushed me roughly into the jeep and drove off. As later transpired, the Ethiopian border post lay not at the top of the hill but much nearer the border and on a small road off to the side. Fixated as I was on the possibility of being robbed, I had not only missed the border post but had mistaken for robbers, the boys who were attempting to show me my error. All eventually resolved and I arrived at my hotel somewhat shaken not only by my mistake but by the surliness of the armed police and the fact that they were not uniformed. Later as I travelled in Ethiopia and Eritrea, I learned that the civil war between these countries had ended but a few short years earlier and with the victory of Eritrea and that this had had a profound effect on the psychology of both nations: Ethiopia, after its defeat, appeared to be in the midst of a profound depression and a national loss of self-confidence whereas the atmosphere in Eritrea was of vigour, celebration and optimistic plans for the future.

I decided to travel as soon as I could to what I hoped to be the comfort and safety of a large city and asked the hotel clerk to arrange a ticket for me on the next bus to Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa where I had planned to spend four or five days. The following morning as I awaited the bus outside the hotel I was joined by two west Africans who had arrived across the border the previous evening and who had also stayed in the hotel. We chatted awhile and when the bus arrived, they were seated on the front two seats and I directly behind. The bus moved off but then stopped at a police checkpoint at the edge of town whereupon an armed but ununiformed policeman or soldier entered the bus to inspect travel documents. He questioned the two west Africans and asked one of them to open a small briefcase which he had on his lap; he initially refused but the policeman insisted and when opened, it was full of tightly packed banknotes. The two west Africans were taken off the bus and as the bus moved off I saw them being escorted to a small tin shack. I had been in conversation with them the previous evening and was grateful that I also had not been taken off the bus but over the next few days, I wondered often as to their fate in that tin shack under the burning heat of the sun!

I had assumed that the bus travelled directly to Addis but it stopped midway for the night at a town of whose name I am still not sure; Dila perhaps. Night had fallen by the time we arrived and the town was in darkness except for some hurricane lanterns. A fellow passenger on the bus pointed to where I might sleep for the night; it turned out to be a brothel and I – having spurned the goods on offer – was shown to an outside room whose floor was covered in water (the rains having just begun). I feared that I might be robbed but much greater was my fear of malaria and I rigged up my mosquito net with especial care. I awoke in the middle of the night in a panic: the buzzing of a lone mosquito pervaded the room but armed only with my small torch, all that I could do was to inspect the net for gaps. Daylight slowly arrived and I headed for my bus to continue my journey to Addis.

Some street hawkers boarded the bus as it commenced its journey and began selling khat, a plant whose leaves are a mild narcotic; the drug is widely used in Ethiopia particularly for its energy giving properties as it allows farmers to work in the fields in the heat of the midday sun. As the passengers began chewing the leaves, the mood in the bus was enlivened but as the day progressed and the heat became more unbearable, the effects of the narcotic wore off and the mood changed and tempers became short. Some days later after I had arrived in Addis, I saw that a talk on khat was advertised in one of the expensive tourist hotels and, being curious, I attended and was surprised to see that the audience was composed mainly of the wives of diplomats anxious to experiment and to find an escape from their boredom.

I had found a good budget hotel in Addis and spent some pleasant days wandering the city and seeing its sights. One such morning as I was walking down one of its busiest

streets, I was suddenly 'quartered' in a manner similar to what had occurred some years earlier in Kashgar. Four youths – one each side, one behind and one in front – suddenly began to hem me in. Realising what was about to happen I jumped between the youth in front and the one on my street side and I began walking directly into the oncoming traffic; my pursuers quickly gave up in the face of the cacophony of car-horns that ensued; shocked but relieved at my escape, I retreated to my hotel. Talking afterwards with some others travellers, I heard that some of them had had their wallets and passports robbed by a similar ruse. Unsettling as this experience was, I realised, on reflection, that whilst in some African cities one ran the risk of being robbed, a similar experience might well happen in any European cities but there (and an experience that I had witnessed in Dublin's Temple Bar came to mind) one also ran the risk of being knifed and badly injured.

After Addis, I reckoned that my Ethiopian journey could only but improve and improve it did. I headed to see the ancient towns of Lalibela , Gondar and Axum; of these Lalibela and Axum were the most interesting but the Blue Nile Falls close to Gondar were magnificent and awe-inspiring especially in that I saw them framed by a rainbow; seeing the water then thundering over the falls, I wondered which of us – I or those drops of failing water – would be the first to reach Cairo and taste the salt waters of the Mediterranean.

Lalibela is noted especially for its churches dating from the 12th century which are hewn out of bare rock and cut vertically down into the bedrock and not horizontally as in, for example, Cappadocia. Ethiopia is one of the oldest Christian states in the world and the majority of the population adheres to the Orthodox Coptic tradition; Islam is the religion of about a third and there was also a small group of Ethiopian Jews who were accepted as Jews by the Israeli government and airlifted to Israel in the 1980's.[37]

To view the churches it was usually necessary to give a donation to the priest in charge and I found these to be such a mixture of unsmiling greed and persistence that I began to imagine that their eyes contained – rather than pupils – flashing $ signs. Part of this might well be due to the superiority displayed by Ethiopians towards other races arising I believe from the fact that Ethiopia – unlike other African countries – had never[38] fallen under the dominion of another nation but that display of superiority sometimes verged on a contempt towards foreigners especially when in the more remote areas, children's shouts of "*Ferengi, Ferengi* ['foreigner']" are accompanied by stones.

I am not alone in this view of Ethiopian priests, no less a renowned and experienced traveller as Dervla Murphy has described[39] her experience of being physically threatened and then robbed by a priest. Although Dervla Murphy enjoyed the rural people amongst whom she travelled, she was dismissive of the priests and contemptuous of the towns especially Addis Ababa – " *this malformed infant capital so atrophied my sense of humour … my permanent impression was of a calamitous unreal city.*" I shared her

views on the priests and on Addis Ababa but I believe her conclusion that the country lacked any spiritual vitality to be unduly harsh and my experience in Lalibela is the reason for my disagreement. It was not the churches that I visited nor the art that they contained that had deeply impressed me but the unfolding of an all-night religious vigil where the full majesty of the religious ceremonials – the robes, the incense, the deep-throated chanting of the men, the ululations of the women – all happening within the flickering light cast by hundreds of candles which illuminated the expressions of deep spiritual intensity etched into the faces of the congregation. Somewhat chastened by this experience – for which my earlier encounters in Ethiopia had left me unprepared – I headed for Axum.

Axum is over 2,000 years old and was then the capital of Ethiopia at a time when there were strong trade links between Ethiopia and Arabia. It was founded by Menelik I who is said to have been the son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba and is reputed to have brought the Ark of the Covenant back to Ethiopia, following a visit to Jerusalem to meet his father. The Ark of the Covenant is now kept in the church of St. Mary of Zion in Axum but, not unexpectedly, is kept hidden from all except a "*a succession of virgin monks who, once anointed, are forbidden to set foot outside the chapel grounds until they die*." [40]

Axum's other historical artefacts of note are the massive stele or Obelisks, one of which was thirty metes in length. One such Obelisk (which had earlier been broken into five pieces perhaps by an earthquake) had been taken by Italian Fascist soldiers during their invasion of Ethiopia in 1937 and moved to Rome to mark what was hoped to be the beginning of the Second Roman empire. It was repatriated in 2008.

I stayed in Axum for some days whilst I attempted to arrange a lift across the Eritrean border to Asmara; eventually I met an American academic who was willing to hire a car and two English girls and myself who would help defray his expenses.

As I left Ethiopia I noticed with some surprise that I did so with some regret; unaccountably it seems, it had managed to find a place in my affections. Years later I read an essay on the French poet Rimbaud who had spent the last years of his life in Ethiopia but who because of a cancerous wound, had been hospitalised to France. He died whilst dictating a note to his employer requesting that he "*Let me know what time I shall be carried on board*" determined to return to that one place, Ethiopia, where he had found peace.[41] Perhaps it was in Lalibela that I glimpsed something of that.

The American was unaccountably nervous as we crossed the border but all went well and we headed towards Asmara. As we travelled, one of the English girls mentioned that she was planning to get married on her return to Tanzania and that her future husband was building a log cabin as their future home but that unfortunately it would only have an outside toilet. I mentioned my own experience in log cabin building and also suggested that she name her toilet after the Wicklow mountain, '*Tonelagee'* [from the Irish '*Tóin le*

Ghaoth' meaning 'arse to the wind']; I sometimes imagine that as she sits in Tonelagee somewhere in the north of Tanzania, she can, through the open door, watch the moon rise over the majestic Kilimanjaro crowned with its halo of snow.

If on this trip Addis Abba was my purgatory then Asmara was my heaven but over my stay there, I also saw hints of a dark underside.

As to the heaven: Asmara had patisseries and coffee shops with real espresso (unlike Nairobi where in a misplaced gesture of generosity or honour, one was offered Nescafe); it also had a cinema which on my visit was showing an old Hollywood western but as its second feature, it screened a documentary of Mussolini's march on Rome which was shown not as an historical documentary, but as if it were current news and something worthy of celebration. The patisseries, the good coffee, the cinema and its documentaries; the Art Deco architecture were all legacies of the Italian occupation of Eritrea which had originally been permitted by the Ethiopians in 1890 but which had subsequently been used by the Italians as a springboard in their war against Ethiopia in 1935.

The city provided a wonderful respite from the travails that I had sometimes encountered in Ethiopia. The atmosphere was celebratory in that Eritrea had won its recent civil war with Ethiopia; those who had served in the army were honoured and the presence of wounded veterans (many of whom were amputees) provided a powerful reminder of the sacrifices that had been made to obtain that victory. However the army was ever present and at night, as I looked from my hotel balcony, I noticed that the streets were deserted with only lone army jeeps patrolling what was all but in name, a curfew. In hindsight, the stage seemed to being set for the Army playing a central – and perhaps ominous – role in Eritrea's future.

I had originally intended to travel north from Asmara and to cross the Eritrean-Sudanese border as I headed towards Egypt but border clashes between Eritrean and Sudanese soldiers had closed the border; my options were to fly to Cairo (which was prohibitively expensive) or to go to the Red Sea port of Massawa and to then take a boat to Jeddah in Saudi Arabia from where I might take another boat to Port Sudan and I could resume then my planned overland trip to Egypt. The trip to Jeddah necessitated a Saudi visa and whilst I awaited this, my two English friends departed but not before giving me a bottle of whiskey as a fiftieth birthday present – a gift that was nearly to cause my demise!

Applying for my Saudi visa was a lesson in racial contempt; the Saudi officials showed an egalitarian disdain towards all non-Saudis whether European or African. Being a white European, this was a lesson that I had only once before experienced and then from a Hindu Brahmin but even that had been relatively innocuous. The racial superiority

exhibited by the Saudis was of a different order of magnitude and to be the recipient of it was a salutary lesson for any white European. I got my visa and headed to Massawa.

The road from Asmara to the coast descends by over 2,300 metes and so steeply that its beginning and end are marked by religious shrines where the bus stopped and the driver gave thanks (and alms) for a safe journey. The Italians had built a steam driven narrow-gauge rail line linking Asmara and the coast; it was destroyed in the civil war but has since been restored.

It was only on reaching the coast that one could fully appreciate the pleasantness of the climate on the Eritrean plateau; in contrast to Asmara, Massawa was unbearably hot and humid. I booked my boat ticket to Jeddah for the morrow and quickly found a cheap hotel to find a refuge from the relentless glare of the sun. Later as the sun went down, I walked on the beach and was shocked to see rigid inflatable boats which had been fitted with extremely powerful 200 HP engines to the stern but which had machine-guns mounted at the bow. These were relics of the recent civil war and had been used to strafe enemy soldiers further down the coast. The presence of such armaments on what had at first glance, appeared to be a pleasure boat, was disconcerting.

That evening after my meal, I had a couple of beers and repaired to my room to get an early night's sleep in preparation for my trip. As I was getting into bed, I heard the strains of some music and looking forlornly at my bottle of whiskey – which would have to be ritually sacrificed before I would be allowed to board a boat to Jeddah – I decided to head down to the hotel bar to investigate.

A group of Russian sailors had arrived and amidst much singing and dancing, I decided to join in with my bottle of whiskey as my contribution. The following morning all that I remembered was my whiskey-fuelled jibes about the Russians loosing their war in Chechnya; I deserved to have been trounced but wasn't and somehow had made my way back to my room. In my condition the following morning any thoughts of boarding my ship were quickly dismissed as I pulled the blankets even more tightly over my head. Some days later having recovered sufficiently, I retreated ignominiously back to Asmara to catch a flight to Cairo. I managed to get a plane ticket at barely a fraction of the original price (which was comparable to that of a flight to London) by a method of which I am still not fully sure but which involved someone from my hotel first bringing me by taxi to a money exchange and then to ex-serviceman's travel service.

The security on boarding the plane was severe; the soles of my shoes were scrutinised and some small round stones, such as I often carry as talismans or keepsakes, aroused particular concern; eventually my being a white European (or perhaps being Irish?) sufficed as an adequate explanation for such bizarre possessions.

Arriving in Cairo some weeks earlier than I had planned I decided to take the train to Alexandria before returning to Cairo for my flight home.

As a town, Alexandria is one of the loves of my life. I have returned to it a number of times since and once (in 2002) I decided to head out along the coast to El Alamein and was shocked to see that the minefields placed there during World War II had not only not been removed, but their presence still caused injuries to children. My goal then was the desert oasis of Siwa which lies close to the Libyan border and about 200 miles inland. The oasis has a fabled history, it was the site of an oracle whose presence drew Alexander the Great to visit it in 331BC to seek confirmation that he was indeed the son of the gods - not only the son of Zeus but, being the new Pharaoh of Egypt, also the son of Amun.

Even in 1995, the road to Siwa was formidable, my memory is of only one isolated tea-stop amongst the barren, burnt rock of the desert and the exquisite beauty of the oasis is heightened by the bleakness of the desert approaches. The one film that I know that gives an inkling of such desert bleakness is Bertolucci's '*The Sheltering Sky*'[42] based on Paul Bowles' novel of the same name.

I found a small hotel and that evening came across the most enchanting restaurant, my table was atop a platform which was built to surround a palm and for dessert one simply reached up and plucked the freshest of fresh dates from the tree.

Returning to my hotel in Alexandria, thankful to escape the burning heat of the desert, I sat on the balcony and, as I watched the sun set over the Mediterranean, a draught of cool air wafted in from the sea and I thought that if I – a professed atheist since my schooldays – was ever to believe in a god then it would be incarnate in the caress of a cool sea breeze at the close of day.

Until the 1950's Alexandria was the most cosmopolitan of cities with a large population of Jews, Greeks, and British (an Anglican Church still stands in one of the city's main squares); a flavour of those days can be found in the *Alexandria Quartet* which is a series of four novels by Lawrence Durrell and set in Alexandria in the years leading up to World War II.

The atmosphere of the Alexandria of an earlier era has been captured in the writings of E. M. Forster whose 1922 guide to the city is still highly regarded, and in the poetry of the Greek poet Constantine Cavafy who was born and lived in the city and whose house – above a brothel – is now a museum. Of this neighbourhood he said: "*Where could I live better? Below, the brothel caters for the flesh. And there is the church which forgives sin. And there is the hospital where we die*."[43]

Alexandria is replete with echoes of its ancient history ranging from the tomb of Alexander and the Lighthouse of Alexandria (once ranked amongst the seven wonders of the ancient world) to Egyptian and Roman ruins and antiquities still being recovered from the sea (the city has sunk over 20 feet since the time of Alexander).

The ancient city was also famous for being a seat of learning and scholarship and for its library which was the largest and most important library of the ancient world. Ships entering the port were obliged to take any books in their possession to the library to enable copies to be made. The library is reputed to have been burned by Christians in 391CE because of the presence of pagan books in its collection (the then Roman Emperor having made Paganism illegal on his conversion to Christianity).

The modern city holds the sea in a tight embrace by a crescent shaped promenade (The Corniche) which runs for over ten miles from the Citadel of Qaitbay (built over the ruins of the old lighthouse) to the Montaza Palace and gardens. The hotel – which I found on my first visit and to which I have always returned on my subsequent visits – is a simple hotel long past its days of splendour but still having the inestimable blessing that its rooms have balconies overlooking the Cornice and the sea.

At the east end of the Corniche is the *Bibliotheca Alexandrina* which was completed in 2001. Architecturally it is a marvel being of a tilting circular form so that when seen from the far end of the Cornice, looks like the rising sun. Though eleven stories high, its size is masked by its elegant design. Inside, one's impression is of an airy spaciousness with none of the oppressive 'heaviness' often found in libraries. It is flooded with light which insofar as it was designed by Norwegian architects, is not a surprise – light, doubtlessly because of Norway's long winter darkness, is something of a national obsession. Though the library's book collection is still somewhat meagre, it does contain on its servers, a mirror copy of the Californian-based universal archive of all internet web content; the pieces of art and the sculpture so liberally scatted throughout the library, add greatly to its atmosphere. It was with great sadness that I forsook Alexandria and the sea and its rejuvenating breezes, and headed back to the noise, traffic and crowds that is the chaos that is called Cairo but it too also has its own magic.

The Nile is to Cairo as the sea is to Alexandria and, on my return to Cairo in 1995, I celebrated my fiftieth birthday by taking a small sailing boat for a trip on the river which was slightly marred when the boatman attempted, unsuccessfully, to renegotiate the price before bringing me back, somewhat ungraciously, to land. Determined to celebrate my birthday in style I headed to a concert given by the Gothenburg symphony orchestra which was then visiting. Not having packed the requisite tie in my rucksack, I had to borrow one from the manager of my hotel. As I walked back to the hotel that night I mused on how safe Cairo was in comparison to cities like Dublin. Aside from the many other virtues in visiting an Islamic city –the hospitality, the courtesy, the religious art and architecture – is the absence of drunks on the streets. Thus, in those days, it was quite safe to stroll the streets of Cairo without fear even when alone and after midnight. This was not because alcohol was not readily available, it was; for example, the small restaurant opposite my hotel served half-litres of iced beer in what I had never seen until then: double-glazed glasses filled with a coolant which had been kept in a freezer and

which when filled with beer, steamed and were so cold that – as in an artic winter – one risked one's lips being burned which for one brought up as an Irish Catholic, was just the correct mixture of pleasure and pain!

I had found a small hotel in the centre of the old part of Cairo and stayed there each time that I returned to the city. It was but a short distance to the Nile and convenient to the Egyptian Museum and to the American University which not only had some hamburger outlets (which provided a welcome contrast to Egyptian food) but also an excellent bookshop where the assistants were very understanding and who once – as a staff birthday celebration was in progress – allowed me to read undisturbed the whole of Jasper's *Way to Wisdom;* it was only on seeing the party trinkets being tidied away, that I realised how long I had spent in reading what had been a thoroughly engrossing book.

Once whilst staying in that hotel, I was awoken by a feeling that all about me was shaking. Being a cheap hotel, it occupied the fifth and sixth stories above an office block. Access to the street below was normally by a lift, but knowing that this would be unsafe in what I reckoned to be earthquake, I thought of descending the stairs but realised that in the event of debris falling from buildings, the most dangerous place to be was probably the street. Earlier I had seen how the roofs of the buildings surrounding the hotel, had had steel reinforcing rods projecting so that further stories might be added, indicating that building standards (if such existed) were extremely lax and that the safest place to stay was in my hotel room. Amongst the steel rods, goats and chickens wandered and vegetables were being grown; the occupiers of these building having in many cases, recently fled the poverty of the countryside for the city which at least offered them the possibility of hope. I had been in an earthquake once before when travelling in Nepal but that occurred in open countryside and what had astounded me about that experience was the eerie quiet that had preceded it and then, once it happened, the raucous screaming of the monkeys; it was as if the monkeys had sensed what was about to happen. As things turned out, the earthquake in Cairo had not been severe and caused little structural damage and all quickly returned to normal.

Cairo always seemed to have a profusion of festivals and events on offer; for example on that first visit in 1995, the Goethe Institute hosted a festival devoted to the films of Rainer Fassbinder, in which they screened perhaps a half-dozen of his films interspersed with lectures and receptions. And, importantly, all were free. The Egyptian Museum necessitated repeated visits if only because the abundance of its exhibits which could not otherwise even begin to be appreciated.[44] The mosques were always welcoming and provided a calm, cool refuge from the heat, the noise and the crowds and which – in contrast to Christian churches and at other than prayer times – permitted a very informal atmosphere where adults might relax, chat or even snooze and children might run and play.

Of all cities, Cairo repays repeated wanderings – in the manner of the *flâneur,* as I described it earlier – and only slowly and reluctantly does it yield up its hidden surprises. On one such wandering, I chanced upon Cairo's City of the Dead which is a huge cemetery on the city's outskirts and I was astonished to see so many people living amongst the tombstones. Other such journeys brought me to the Coptic Museum and to the pyramids at Giza.

The Coptic museum was fascinating especially because of its exhibit of original papyrus pages from the Nag Hammadi Library showing the apocryphon ["*secret teachings*"] of John and the beginning of the gospel of Thomas. The Nag Hammadi Library consists of books of papyrus which had been sealed in a large terracotta jar until 1945, when they were discovered by a farmer near the town of Nag Hammadi. They were sometimes spoken of as the "*secret gospels*" and are written in Coptic and serve as the primary source of information on Gnosticism, a religious movement in the early years of Christianity whose writings had been suppressed by the official church as being heretical in that they advocated a direct experience of the divine unmediated by any reliance on Christ or clergy. Whilst browsing in the museum bookshop, a second surprise lay in wait for me: references to Ireland and its "*well known*" links to Coptic Christianity. Some years earlier I had encountered and enjoyed Bob Quinn's book '*Atlantean: Ireland's North African and Maritime Heritage*'[45] which sought to trace many of the traditions of those living on Ireland's Atlantic coast to the Berber people of North Africa. The traditions that interested Quinn were sean-nós singing, the tau cross, the crios, the rigging of the Galway hookers and – what I found most fascinating and which linked Ireland to the Coptic traditions – the tradition of desert hermit monks found in Syria and Egypt which found a reflection in the Ireland's monastic traditions such as found on the Skelligs. The other – to me, obvious – link was between what are now called the traditions of Islamic calligraphy and the style of illustration found in manuscripts such as the Book of Kells.

I approached Giza from the city and at walking pace which – if it is possible – accentuated the breathtaking monumentality of a first encounter with the pyramids and sphinx. Even Napoleon's soldiers are said to have paused awestruck and saluted the endeavour of those who forty centuries earlier, had succeeded in such constructions. Napoleon himself had written:

> *"... my mind was full of emotion on contemplating these vast scenes, and I regretted the approach of darkness, which spread a veil over so striking a picture to the imagination, … At the first dawn of day my eyes were again saluted with a view of the pyramids, of which I made sketches; …"*[46]

Later as I sat and contemplated these monuments a camel owner who had been selling camel trips around the pyramids, eventually gave up on me as a possible customer and sat down alongside me as we attempted a conversation in very broken English, about our histories and families. I remember our mutual surprise at how we each lived and his amazement at my telling him of Norway and its bitter winters and bleak darkness when

the sun vanished beyond the horizon. Eventually as we ran out of English, we sat in silence and I mused on how a companionable silence can often be so much more rewarding than words; in later years, I often recollect those moments of calm relaxedness amongst the turmoil that is Cairo.

Before leaving Clare and being short of money for my trip, I had sold some timber to a fellow craftsman who had promised to lodge the money to my Visa account within days of my departure. Now in Cairo and out of money, I headed to the local Visa office. It still relied on the old slide mechanism and I was given the two hundred pounds that I had requested and that I needed to travel to Norway where I had planned to spend Christmas with Mette and my sons, but to get there I had to travel by a circuitous and expensive route via Moscow, Estonia and Stockholm to Bodø. On my return to Clare, my friend apologised for not having lodged the money 'explaining' that his dog had chewed the paper on which my account details had been written; had I known this in Cairo I would not have reached Moscow let alone Bodø. I gave profound thanks that Visa's technology upgrades had not yet reached Cairo.

On one of my last days in Cairo, I was browsing in one of the old English-language university bookshops and – in a gesture of loyalty to my old discipline – was examining the contents of the shelves on mathematics and logic. By chance I picked up a book entitled *Rationality*[47] which was an edited collection of writings on the subject. It suddenly dawned on me that the concept of rationality was fundamental to a philosophical exploration of psychiatry and that it provided the key to challenging its intellectual underpinnings, 'irrationality' being one of its most central concepts. But 'rationality' was also a concept with which I had considerable familiarity from my many years of postgraduate studies in both mathematics and logic.

This was my *eureka* moment and although I suddenly had the key I was unsure as to how best to utilise it; the interests and research projects that this sparked were to occupy me for the next 15 years and were resolved only in the successful completion of my PhD degree.

Chapter 6 : And then the cognac … (and the bitter lemon)

1996-2012: MPhil, Iran, Japan, PhD, more Building, Syria … (and prostate cancer) …

> *"As I watched the seagulls, I thought: That's the road to take; find the absolute rhythm and follow it with absolute trust."*[1]

I returned to Clare in early 1996 and, having read the academic text on rationality which I had found in Cairo, I began a deeper exploration of the topic and its connection to psychiatry. I quickly realised that for any attempt at formulating a critique of the intellectual underpinning of psychiatry to carry weight, it must not only be rigorously formulated but any such formulation must take place within an academic environment and that the most appropriate way for me to achieve that would be by undertaking academic research leading, hopefully, to a PhD.

When judged from either a legal or ethical perspective, the most problematic area of psychiatry concerns coercive[2] psychiatric interventions and since I had both academic and professional qualifications in Law, it seemed the most appropriate place to begin. I applied to the UCG Law School to be permitted to begin research as a PhD student and was accepted.

My supervisor at the time was an excellent lawyer but I quickly realised that he was not fully sympathetic to the questions that I wished to ask, nor to the direction that I wished to take in my research. A previous student of his had just completed an excellent survey of the historical development of Irish Mental Health Law but I had no wish to get involved in any such project; I wished to ask more fundamental questions. The conflicting viewpoints may best be explained by means of an analogy between lawyers and chessplayers. Whereas chess players specialise in how best to analyse the possible moves in a given game and, in doing so, they can draw on a wealth of experience: their own personal experience; the writings of eminent chess masters and a vast library of past games but they will not be drawn into a debate on why *that* game and not another or why *those* particular rules are used. Similarly with lawyers: they have great skill in discerning and distinguishing the rules that they may use to their advantage in any particular court case and – as academics – they may involve themselves in more abstract considerations and classifications of particular types of cases; they may even look at how similar court cases are resolved in other jurisdictions but they are assuredly not interested in asking why have we *any* involvement with cases of this type. They are excellent in manipulating the rules of a game but uninterested in asking why that particular game is being played or perhaps why an alternative set of rules would not be

'better'. Moreover I realised that I was not able to articulate the concerns that I had within the vocabulary available to a lawyer: I lacked an adequate conceptual framework and thus had not even the words that I needed to enable me to pose my questions.

Whilst attempting to chart a way through these difficulties, I realised that whatever path my research was to take, it must take a different direction from those commonly taken by those who sought to make a critical assessment of psychiatry – I was unlikely to find any jewels on well trodden paths! The internet was just then coming into common use and I realised that it might provide a fruitful source not only of information but also of analogous problems and alternative perspectives which might benefit my research. I bought a computer and taught myself the skills necessary for word-processing and similar tasks. I also learned how to use a database programme (Microsoft Access) which – though time consuming to learn – was probably one of the best decisions that I made at that time, because it permitted me to specify a multiplicity of topics of interest and to then enter under these topic-headings, notes culled from journals, textbooks, newspaper articles and other miscellany and ideas that I thought might be of even remote interest to my project; most importantly it also enabled me to speedily retrieve any note if I could remember but one word that was peculiarly associated with it.

I have come to believe that ideas are like gifts from heaven (or, more prosaically, one's unconscious mind) and that one's obligation is at very least, to take note of them; it continually amazes me how ideas that, at the time, seemed of no particular use, later bear fruit; it is also infuriating to try to remember what once seemed an excellent idea but which one has now forgotten.

The skill in designing and using the databases was invaluable especially in completing my PhD, because it allowed me to explore areas of peripheral interest under whose weight I would otherwise have drowned.

In the midst of such concerns, by chance I heard a radio interview in which Dr. Dolores Dooley, a lecturer in Philosophy and Medical Ethics in UCC, was discussing her involvement in an EC funded research project to examine how best to make decisions concerning the withdrawal of artificial feeding from patients who had been diagnosed as being in a Persistent Vegetative State [PVS]. These questions were topical in that cases dealing with such matters had recently come before both the Irish courts (The Ward Case)[3] and the English courts (The Tony Bland Case)[4].

The Ward Case concerned a young woman who, in 1972, attended a Dublin hospital for a minor gynaecological operation during which she suffered a cardiac arrest which caused severe brain damage. She was unable to speak, her mouth was permanently clenched and she was unable to swallow and she was fed artificially by a gastrostomy tube. Her eyes were open and often followed people moving in her vicinity. The judgement of her doctors was that such behaviour was 'reflex' in nature and not evidence of any underlying consciousness. In 1995, her family, believing that the patient's continued

tube feeding was causing her considerable distress, sought an order from the courts that medical treatment be discontinued. This order was granted and she was permitted to die.

I have sketched the philosophical issues surrounding this case in an Appendix. Suffice to point out at this stage that what fascinated me in Dr. Dooley's discussion of the case was that it revolved around the taking of medical decisions on the grounds of the 'best interests' of a patient and these were precisely the grounds on which decisions in relation to coercive psychiatric intervention were being made. I suddenly realised that in her discussion of the PVS case, she was using a vocabulary of whose lack I had been so painfully aware whilst in the Law department of UCG. I applied to transfer to the Philosophy department at UCC.

My meeting with Dr. Dooley went well and she agreed to allow me to begin research but for an MPhil degree (the regulations not then permitting enrolment for a PhD without having gained a masters degree in philosophy). I chose to study the topic that was then her specialism [end-of-life decisions in cases of PVS] believing that that would be the most efficient way for me to learn the skills necessary to undertake a PhD on the link between rationality and psychiatry – a task that I planned to begin on successful completion of my MPhil.

To enrol in UCC I needed two academic references and had nominated the Maths department in TCD and the Law department of UCD. Both references were given without difficulty but in seeking the second I had phoned a lecturer in UCD with whom I, as a student, had been very friendly who had then appeared to be the epitome of a radical young lawyer. Our phone conversation was informal and lasted quite some time with the inevitable questions to each other of '*what have you being doing … '*. In the course of this conversation I mentioned my earlier difficulties with depression, thinking nothing of doing so as they had occurred over twenty three years earlier (and I had been medication-free for over fifteen years) and before I had even begun to study Law. My mention of a 'psychiatric history' appeared to set off alarm bells in his mind and he insisted on the necessity of mentioning this 'history' in my application to UCC. It was a reaction that might have been appropriate had I just confessed to him that I had been convicted of multiple murders and had just been released from prison.

I was shocked for two reasons: firstly, because that 'history' had in my own mind, been relegated to the far distant past and this was my first experience of the persistence and longevity of psychiatric stigma; secondly, because he – as a supposed liberal lawyer – would have been the last person that I could have imagined to hold such prejudicial views. But as I was to find out twenty years after this episode (as related in the Postscript) the recounting of a youthful brush with psychiatry can, in the minds of the most unexpected of people, cast an indelible, inerasable stain on the bearer of the label:

'ex-psychiatric patient'.

Needless to say I made no mention of any such history to the authorities in UCC.

Having begun my research under Dr. Dooley, I found her to be an excellent supervisor who was always ready to offer constructive criticism and suggestions; the one slight difficulty lay in her deference to medical authority. This was a predisposition that I had noticed at our first meeting when – in speaking of the Ward Case – she expressed surprise that the courts should seek to second-guess, if not overrule, the views of the doctors involved. A lawyer's attitude (which having trained as one, I shared) would, unsurprisingly, be in marked contrast. Born of the obligation to subject expert witnesses (including medical experts) to, sometimes, severe cross-examination, lawyers show little deference towards received wisdom.

Were philosophers to cultivate a little disdain for received wisdom[5] it would transform the discipline especially in areas such as medical ethics. Sometimes one gets the impression that philosophy has – in its own eyes – become something of an irrelevance and seeks to justify its existence in relation to other disciplines by adopting a craven subservience towards them and thus risks becoming little more that a public relations exercise by putting 'correct' formal shape on their conceptual structures – making itself 'useful' but seldom challenging these structures themselves. This is, I believe, the road that philosophy has unfortunately assumed in the discipline 'Philosophy of Psychiatry.'

My MPhil dissertation[6] focused on how the certainty often exhibited in medical determinations that a PVS patient lacked consciousness and the ability to feel pain, was illusory. In fact, PVS patients do manifest brain activity and there is no specific brain activity which is unambiguously linked to the possession of consciousness and which is absent in PVS patients; the position is similar in relation to pain. The problem originated with the original definition[7] of PVS by Jennett and Plum in 1972 which aimed at identifying an *irrecoverable* condition and which thus confused questions of diagnosis and prognosis and thus rendered problematic the categorisation of patients who either recovered or who were subsequently shown to have some level of consciousness (*c.* 45%). Categorising such patients as misdiagnosed without specifying what their correct diagnosis should have been, served only to mask the problem in that it permitted the proposition that PVS patients lacked consciousness to be still asserted (*i.e*. had it been acknowledged that – using objective diagnostic criteria – such patients had been correctly diagnosed as being in a PVS, then the proposition "*PVS patients lack consciousness*" would have been demonstrably false.)

The problem was compounded by medical ethicists who unreservedly accepted these medical 'certainties' which then became the presumptions on which they constructed their ethical analysis which thus rendered the exercise, in itself, a deeply unethical undertaking. My conclusion was that 'doubt' and the presence of uncertainties needed to play a central role in ethical analyses of end-of–life decisions in relation to such patients.

The concept of personhood and, in particular, the use of necessary and sufficient conditions in its definition, was crucial to my argument and to teasing out how the concept of 'best interests' – whose very words appears to preclude harm – served to mask the damage (and sometimes destruction) of an individuals personhood. Dr. Dooley actively encouraged me to use the concept of personhood in the formulation of my MPhil thesis. Later, these concepts were to be central to my PhD argument but then my use of the concept of personhood met with considerable opposition on supposedly academic (but which I believed to be religious) grounds; but more of that later.

In constructing my dissertation argument, I received considerable assistance from an unexpected source – a book entitled '*The Diving-Bell and the Butterfly*'[8] by Jean-Dominique Bauby. Bauby, who had been editor of the French magazine *'Elle'*, suffered a massive stroke which left him paralysed and speechless but with his consciousness unimpaired. Those surrounding him considered him to be a 'vegetable' but a very perceptive friend and nurse noticed that he had the ability to blink one eye. Using a system whereby she would hold up a card on which a letter of the alphabet had been written and he, in response, would blink if it was correct, the book was dictated letter by laborious letter. The title reflects his perception that even if his body was trapped in the diving suit of the book's title, his mind could still take flight like a butterfly. Bauby, speaking of his attitude to withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment, had said: "*When the neurologist asked did I regret that I had been resuscitated, tell him that I don't think like that anymore but that I'm glad that he asked the question*."

Bauby's attitude flatly contradicted the presumption inherent in most medical, legal and ethical discussions of PVS that even – and, perhaps, especially – if such patients were conscious, their quality of life was so poor that to 'permit' them to continue living would be to condemn them to horrendous torture; this presumption spoke more eloquently of the unacknowledged or unconscious fears of the observers as they contemplated themselves being such a patient, rather than of a concern with the interests of the actual individual before them who had been diagnosed with PVS.

Bauby's perceptions of his life were extremely useful in the formulation of my argument and were proof of the value of going *off–piste* even (or, perhaps, especially) in philosophy. They also served to illustrate how the interests and perceptions of the carers often differed profoundly from those of the cared; an observation that proved to be useful in researching coercive psychiatric interventions where those subjected to such interventions often spoke of being treated as objects rather than as persons and – because of the enormity of the violation to their sense of integrity and personhood – to the coercive intervention being akin to a rape.

Researching and writing the thesis took over three years and doubtlessly it was overlong at 486 pages but I was proud to have successfully completed my MPhil; to be awarded a first class honours was the icing on the cake!

It was now Autumn 2000, my rucksack again beckoned and my destination this time was Iran.

I was tempted to visit Iran for two reasons; firstly, because in my travels in India and Pakistan, I had been fascinated by how these cultures differed from European culture and customs though they clearly shared many similarities. I had hoped, if I journeyed to the Iran-Pakistan border and then travelled overland back to Europe, that I would see how the cultures slowly transformed one into the other, by what I assumed to be, continuous, small gradations. In fact, as I found out, most of the change happened at the Pakistan-Iran border; the change that I most noticed was the attitude to hygiene and most notably food hygiene – especially in the selling of meat and street food. In relation to general customs and attitudes, Iran was generally closer to Europe than to Pakistan and India; the exception being courtesy: I experienced such high levels of graciousness and concern in Iran, India and Pakistan, that I have but seldom witnessed in Europe.

The second reason that I wished to travel to Iran was that then (in 2000) Iran was being reported in the Western media in the same manner as North Korea is 'enjoying' in 2015. The full extent of Iran's then pariah status was brought home to me when, soon after my return home from Iran in 2001, I saw the Irish media coverage of an upcoming World Cup match between Ireland and Iran. Some days later, as I sipped a leisurely pint in the Gravedigger Kavanagh's pub in Dublin and casually chatted to a fellow drinker, he told me that he was an avid soccer supporter and had wanted to go to Tehran to see the match, but was extremely fearful for his safety. Grateful for my reassurances, he still regarded me much as if I had somehow survived the most hazardous of missions.

In applying for my visa at the Iranian Embassy in Dublin, the consular officials were extremely helpful, one official giving me a gift of an Iranian guidebook and expressing the hope that, on my return, I would tell others about the beauties of Iran and the friendliness of its people. Clearly the embassy staff were also deeply conscious of the Western media's negative perception of their county.

There were three strands to the then negative media coverage of Iran: the prominent role of Islam in its governance, the oppression of its women and its virulent anti-American rhetoric. Before considering these strands, it is first necessary to see them in their historical context.

Prior to 1951, Iran had been governed by a Shah; the then holder of that office, Reza Pahlavi who had succeeded his own father, had appointed Prime Ministers. In 1951, Mosaddegh was elected as Prime Minister in the first democratic elections in Iran which was, at that time, a secular state.

In 1953, Mosaddegh was overthrown in a *coup d'état* orchestrated by the CIA and the British Secret Intelligence Service primarily because he had sought to nationalise the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (later to become BP).

In the years between 1953 and his overthrow in 1979 by followers of Ayatollah Khomeini, the Shah sought to align Iran to a greater and greater degree with US political and financial interests and to remould its culture so as to be more consonant with Western values. The resulting clashes with the more traditional sections of Iranian society – its women, its clergy, its political dissidents – were suppressed by Iran's notoriously cruel intelligence agency (the SAVAK) acting, at times, in collusion with the CIA.

The event which more than any other symbolised the deep divide that had opened between the Shah and his people in the years before his overthrow, was the celebration in 1971, of the 2,500th anniversary of the Persian Empire. The six hundred guests who attended the banquet included in their ranks, a glittering array of the world's rich and famous: Royalty, Presidents, Prime Ministers and film stars. It was, according to the Guinness Book of Records, the most lavish official banquet in modern history. Catering services were provided by Maxim's which closed its Paris restaurant for two weeks to cater for the glittering celebrations; 250 red Mercedes-Benz limousines were used to chauffeur guests from the airport.

Such open displays of opulence and extravagance caused outrage amongst Iran's poor and offended the religious sensibilities of many Iranians. Remnants of this tent city still survive in Persepolis and were still visible when I visited; they provided an eloquent testament to the hubris of the Shah, his regime and his Western allies.

The criticism of the excessive influence of Islam in Iranian governance, require a degree of moderation especially when the extent of clerical domination of Irish political, social and cultural life is remembered. The spectacle of an Irish Government Minister pledging fealty to the Catholic primate with the words that he would be "*entirely at your Grace's disposal"* was mentioned in Chapter 4 and would not seem out of place in modern Tehran but with the recognition that it took Ireland ninety years to begin shedding some of this subservience; the Iranian revolution is but thirty years old.

It is ironic to note that when Western media raise their hands in horror at reports of today's 'sharia police' enforcing the wearing of the veil in modern Tehran, a comparable policy of enforcement of a female dress-code occurred under the Shah's rule, but then his police – in their urgency to enforce his policies of westernisation – forcibly removed the veil from any woman found to be wearing one in public.[9] It is also worth remembering that Ireland had also its own mechanism for trammelling female sexuality, it very own 'sharia' enforcers' namely the Magdalene Laundries and the Mental Hospitals.

In assessing Iranian anti-American rhetoric it needs to be remembered that, in Iranian eyes, the 1979 hostage crisis (where fifty-two American diplomats and citizens were held

hostage in the US embassy for over a year) was a response to US attempts to destabilise the new government of Iran and to its refusal to extradite the Shah back to Iran from the US (where he had taken refuge). Subsequently, the US armed and supported[10] Saddam Hussein between 1980 and 1988, in Iraq's war against Iran; a war which cost Iran dearly both in casualties (over 250,000 killed and 400,00 wounded) and economic damage (in excess of $500 billion). I saw maimed survivors of that war – often wheelchair bound or with missing limbs – in every town that I visited during my journey.

Many Iranian villages and towns were attacked with poison gas, resulting in heavy civilian casualties. In July 1988 Iraqi planes dropped cyanide bombs on an Iranian Kurdish village (as they had done four months earlier on their own Kurdish village of Halabja). About the same time, the *USS Vincennes* shot down an Iranian civilian airliner[11] which was on a scheduled flight resulting in the death of 290 passengers. Not only did the US refuse to acknowledge its error but the captain of the *USS Vincennes* was subsequently decorated. Shortly after the downing of the aircraft, George H. W. Bush who was then US Vice-President, said: "*I will never apologize for the United States – I don't care what the facts are ... I'm not an apologize-for-America kind of guy."*[12]

I have included this excursus into US-Iranian history firstly, to help show that Iran's sense of grievance against the West has some justification and secondly, that Western media reporting of Iran is often not only unbalanced, but deeply biased[13] – a bias which helps fuel the severe sanctions under which Iran currently labours. My hope is that Iran might be judged from a less harsh perspective when that bias is acknowledged.

I flew with AirFrance to Tehran and before my arrival, had booked a room in a small hotel close to the city centre and to the University.

Tehran is huge with a population of over eight million and is more cosmopolitan than its counterparts in India or Pakistan. With the towering snow-covered mountains to its north, it is also more beautiful but because these mountains shelter the city from northerly winds, it is subject occasionally to severe air-pollution caused by a thermal inversion. Alongside each street lie deep gullies into which the rains and melting snows from the mountains are channelled, adding to the city a sense of refreshing cleanliness.

I spent about a week in the city strolling through its streets and markets meeting nothing but smiles and friendliness. Though some of the older and poorer women dressed in an all encompassing black, the younger women dressed as colourfully and as elegantly as any to be seen in the streets of Paris and though headscarves were ever-present, these were often worn casually and more as a gesture towards propriety than as a head covering. Even the wearing of a full veil serves to accentuate the eyes which are surely a most beautiful feature of a face. I was reminded of this when as a first year maths student in UCD, one of my fellow pupils was a nun who dressed in traditional fashion and

I – when sitting in the row behind her – could suddenly see her hitherto hidden ankles and with that, the realisation of how erotic that which is normally covered, can become when glimpsed.

One day as I was walking past the British Embassy (now on a street which the Iranians have ironically renamed 'Bobby Sands Street'), I stopped at a street bookseller and, browsing through his stock, I saw one whose cover was wrapped in plain paper. I began to remove the cover but was stopped by a hand gently placed on mine; I still have that book (still adorned in its camouflage). It was a Penguin novel entitled 'Hers' by the English poet and critic Al Alvarez. What offended Iranian sensibilities was the cover photo of a young woman who was clearly naked but was posed so that her arms covered her breasts; the only part of her anatomy that could be clearly seen was her unclothed arm but despite this an attempt had been made to entirely obliterate the image with a heavy black marker.

I remembered this episode when some years later whilst travelling in Syria and having arrived in Aleppo, I went again in search of some English books; browsing the shelves of the sole bookshop recommended by the guide book and aside from the English-language school texts, the majority of the remaining English novels were lesbian romps. I pondered on the indirect ways by which one gleans something of the culture of a nation.

Having bought the Alvarez book in Tehran and retracing my steps later that day, I was met by the bookseller who, smiling, gave me a gift of some cakes and wished me well as I went on my travels – a gesture of thanks which I doubt would ever be encountered in a European city.

Another day as I strolled through the city, I chanced upon a gathering who were celebrating the opening of a film festival; recognising me as a foreigner, I was invited to watch a screening of a film which I later found was entitled '*A Time for Drunken Horses*'[14] (it had lacked English subtitles). There was a huge air of excitement in the cinema which was not only full, but overflowing; even the aisles were crammed with people sitting on the steps. It was only later when I found out that the film was the first in the Kurdish language to be shown in Iran that I understood the reason for the sense of exhilaration and celebration; in Iran – as in Turkey – the speaking of Kurdish had previously been outlawed in an attempt to quell separatist sentiments.

The film itself dealt with the lives of a fatherless family of Kurds on the Iran/Iraq border whose only means of subsistence was by way of smuggling. Horses were needed to transport the smuggled goods over the high snow-covered mountains and the only way to enable the horses to overcome the rigors of altitude and cold was by giving them alcohol; hence the film's title. Later, on returning to Clare I bought a copy with English subtitles and enjoyed it anew.

During my stay in Tehran I often visited the University which was close to my hotel; often on such occasions students would engage me in conversation – some wishing to improve their English, some wishing to engage in political or religious discussion and some simply curious. Often they would speak with regret about how unjustly they believed Iran was being treated by the West and how Western sanctions made their lives and that of their families, so much more difficult even to the extent of rendering some medications difficult to access. I was deeply impressed by their idealism – both political and religious – and their hunger for learning and understanding and by the standard of education of both the young women and the men.

Before leaving Tehran, I attended the sermon given after Friday prayers in the main university hall. The gathering was huge and those attending were highly attentive but as the rhetoric of the Imam increased in intensity and took a decidedly political slant – the vehemence of the anti-American chants could not be misunderstood – I, feeling decidedly uncomfortable and realising that discretion might be in order, unobtrusively took my leave.

Distances in Iran are large and although the roads are extremely good (one consequence of the Iraq-Iran war) air travel is extremely inexpensive; leaving Tehran and heading East, my first stop was Mashad and as the airfare was little more than $10, I flew.

Iran has been deeply affected by the wars in Afghanistan and, at times, has had close to a million Afghan refugees;[15] it has also been plagued by opium flooding in from Afghanistan. Mashad is subject to both these problems, being little more than 100 km from the Afghan border. The city is also exceptionally sacred to Shi'ites, being the place where the grandson of the Prophet was believed to have been poisoned; the literal meaning of 'Mashad' is 'Place of Martyrdom'. Needless to say, the city was not exactly a bundle of joy. I found the atmosphere somewhat oppressive and after a couple of days, decided to head south to the ancient city of Bam which lies close to the Pakistani border. Needing a haircut before leaving Mashad, I went to a barber shop which was reasonably full with a number of other customers awaiting their turn. Eventually as my hair was being trimmed, I chanced to glance in the mirror and saw a middle-aged man seated beside a teenage boy amongst the other customers. The man was sexually groping the boy in open view of the other customers and of anyone passing by on the street and all this within in a hundred meters of the main mosque. Knowing of Islam's intolerance of homosexuality I was somewhat perplexed. It was only many years later on seeing a BBC documentary entitled '*Afghanistan's Dancing Boys*'[16] that I began to understand that the prohibition on male homosexuality does not appear to extend to pederasty.

After Mashad, Bam was a breath of fresh air. The modern town of Bam is about 3km. from the ancient citadel of Arg-é Bam which was the world's largest adobe structure and which dated from 500 BC. I stayed in a small hotel in the modern town and amongst the fellow travellers was a German woman who had travelled on her BMW motorbike and

planned to continue on to India through Pakistan. I very much admired her courage in undertaking such a journey as a lone woman but when she told me that her greatest fear was that if her bike fell over, she had not the strength to right it again, my admiration turned into wonderment.

That evening as I went to wash, I was brought very quickly down to earth again when I saw a large scorpion lurking at the bottom of the wash hand basin in my room. It had got in through a crack in the wall. It is said that they are most dangerous if they can't escape as can occur when they get into an empty shoe which one then, unknowingly, attempts to put on. The owner's son removed the scorpion and whether as a gesture of recompense or not, offered to get me some cans of bootleg Russian vodka. That evening having had too much vodka and being in that mood when one feels benevolent towards all of humankind, I began drinking toasts to the various Ayatollahs – not the wisest of gestures!

The owner of the hotel who was a teacher, told me of how during the reign of the Shah, local district police offices were staffed not only by police but also by CIA operatives. One such CIA member sexually assaulted the daughter of a local notable but because of the CIA's immunity, the family could get no redress.

Visiting the citadel the following day, I was astounded at its size (6 sq. km.) and its excellent state of preservation (it was a World Heritage Site). It was completely deserted but that even added to the sense of awe and mystery. Unfortunately the citadel was nearly completely destroyed in an earthquake in 2003 but my seeing it, remains one of the highlights of my trip to Iran.

Years later when on a visit to Berlin, I saw a German film entitled '*Windspiel'*. It tells the story of a young man who, prompted by a dream, sought the assistance of an old poet in retracing a journey to his father's homeland. The goal of the journey turned out to be Bam and his search for his father was portrayed by the image of a white horse running wildly through its deserted streets. I was extremely sad at seeing images of Bam and knowing of its destruction; I was also struck by how the image of a white horse – as also used in the paintings of Jack Yeats – seems a universal image for spirit and spiritual search.

At the airport the following morning, I met two young Norwegian brothers who were in their late twenties and also waiting to board the flight to Yazd. The younger appeared to have a drug problem and had brought some drugs with him onto the plane which seemed a particularly foolhardy thing to do in Iran. Later they told me that their mother had been related to the Shah and that their family had owned large estates to the north of Tehran. I thought, perhaps unfairly, that I could discern an attitude of coming to visit and inspect that which was rightfully theirs and that the bringing of the drugs through airport security was a gesture of *lèse-majesté* towards 'the usurpers' who constituted the current regime.

Yazd, which is one of the oldest towns in the world, has a community of Zoroastrians who follow their ancient practices of fire-worship and sky-burial. I visited one of the fire-temples and watched unobtrusively one of their religious ceremonies where an eternal flame became the focus of attention much like a tabernacle on a Christian altar. The eternal flame was said to have been burning for over 1,500 years. The worshippers were gracious and friendly – one couple even offering to drive me back the many kilometres to my hotel.

The following day I climbed to the top of one of the hills where the sky-burials take place; such places are called 'Tower of Silence'. I had seen a similar practice in Ladakh where I had guessed that it might have originated in the difficulty in digging graves in frozen ground but the practice in Yazd clearly had other origins. What occurs is that the body of the deceased is brought to one of the Towers of Silence and after the religious ceremonials, the body and bones are broken up and all is the left to the hovering vultures. Later, I read that in order to determine whether a person was dead or just unconscious, Zoroastrians would put some bread on their chest and if a dog went to eat it, then this showed that the person was indeed dead.

I next wished to visit Persepolis and Esfahan but this required that I go by way of Shiraz. I remember my stay in Shiraz most especially for a dinner that I had the day of my arrival. Staying as I usually did in a cheap hotel, I went for dinner to one of Shiraz's most exclusive hotels. Such hotels usually make their money on their very expensive room price and not on the meals which can be relatively inexpensive and yet of superb quality. I had one such excellent meal during which the wine waiter proffered the wine list and – bearing in mind that Shiraz was once famous for its wines of the same name – I was astounded to see that the wine list ranged from bottled water to fizzy orange. Ordering one, it was served with all the aplomb of a true sommelier and without even a trace of irony; I cannot remember whether he offered me the opportunity to first taste but I doubt that he did. I had thought of complaining that the water was a little corked but wisely desisted – play can only be taken so far!

The bus to Esfahan turned out to be reminiscent of the stock car races that had enthralled me as a teenager. Four or five bus companies competed on that route and having bought my ticket and seated myself, all progressed normally until a gasp of excitement rippled through the other passengers and I saw that another bus had drawn alongside, its driver having an expression of grim determination. Our bus driver reacted with fury at this usurper who had crept up on him unawares and, with foot firmly to the floor, we hurtled up this road neck-and-neck like racehorses at the finish post. The road had no other traffic and extended straight in front to us to the brow of a hill. With a mounting sense of panic I realised that if a lorry came towards us over that brow, we were all finished: I, the other passengers and the two would-be charioteers who had

been in charge of our buses. It became a question of nerve and I breathed a sigh of relief as the other bus pulled back.

I remember as a law student, reading of the accidents that had occurred on the bus route between Dublin and Dun Laoire at a time when many independent bus companies competed on that route and when from sheer commercial necessity, each would race to be first at the next stop. It was a similar Darwinian struggle that played out on the road between Shiraz and Esfahan.

The road approaching Esfahan was lined with flowering rose bushes; later I discovered that a famous rose – *'Rose d'Ispahan'* – takes its name from the city; it is a pink Damask rose brought back to Europe at the time of the Crusades.

The approach to Esfahan did not mislead, it is truly a beautiful city and, to me, Iran's most beautiful. My memory is of the city and especially its mosques and bridges (for both of which it is rightly famous) but also for a small madrassa which I came across by chance when – curiosity getting the better of me – I pushed open an ornate but otherwise ordinary, door on a city back-street and saw the most marvellous jewel within.

I have often found some of the art and architecture of some European Churches – especially those ornate, overwrought Italian and Spanish churches – to verge on the grotesque. I greatly admire Zen temples but their extreme simplicity and sparseness sometime verges on the austere. Islamic mosques are, to me, the very pinnacle of religious art and architecture. Islamic teaching in its modern manifestation, prohibits any figurative representations of the divine. None of the images of tortured human suffering which proliferate and indeed dominate, European Church Art are to be found; instead the experience of the divine is sought to be intimated by the almost mathematical symmetries and orders hidden within hierarchies which – provided sufficient attention is accorded them – can be discerned even in some of the smallest details of these mosques. This aesthetic experience is often heightened by examples of the most exquisite calligraphy whose flowing lines serve as a counterpoint of the regularity of the tiles. But even the tile work is full of unexpected surprises: thus in the most famous of the mosques – the Masjed-e Jāmé – the wonderful blue colour of the tiles changes with the time of day. On entering the mosque, the apparent simplicity of the exterior yields to a wonder of domes and vaults and sudden bursts of light. A magical place.

The enclosed square outside the mosque is one of the largest in the world and is where Friday prayers are held in the open air. As originally designed, a game of polo could be played within its confines. Shops surround the square and horse drawn carriages await the tourists.

Of the bridges, the Khaju Bridge is the most memorable. Built in 1650, it is a two-storied structure consisting of over twenty arches which also functions as a dam. The top story is a wide passageway permitting the passage of carts; the lower is a covered walkway

and at its centre is a pavilion designed to allow the then ruler of Iran – Shāh Abbās I – to sit and contemplate the beauty of the river. A ruler given to contemplation calls to mind the Platonic ideal of philosopher-king and if, in addition, the exquisite proportions of the bridge are reflective of his aesthetic sensibility, then he is rightly honoured in the title 'Shāh Abbās the Great'.

On entering that madrassa that I had chanced upon, I saw perhaps a dozens scholar's cells, each opening onto a walkway which surrounded a large rectangular pool and all adorned with intricate blue tilework. Above was a tiled dome with a small central opening to the sky. At one corner the pool was fed by a small streamlet. It would be difficult to imagine an environment more conducive to meditation and study; the tinkling of running water was just sufficient to dispel a silence which might otherwise have been oppressive; the endless play of sunlight and shadows from the aperture in the dome onto the water of the pool were sufficient to dispel any temptation to daydream yet not to enough to cause distraction. The design of the madrassa provided eloquent testimony to the importance of intellectual activities to the Islam of those times when the obligations to learn, to inquire and to study were considered the most sacred duty of every Muslim.

In travelling to Persepolis, it turned out that the easiest way was to take a private taxi. The driver was a very pleasant young man who had but limited English but who persisted in asking me why I wouldn't convert to Islam. I would be saved, he promised, if I would but only say three times "*La ilaha ill Allah …*" ("*There is no god but God and Muhammad is his messenger*"). He spoke to me in a manner such as one might adopt towards a recalcitrant child who despite being cold, stupidly and stubbornly refused to put on his coat. He had a truth which, to him, was blindly self-evident and he simply could not understand my obduracy. All of this verbal jousting took place with humour and with not the slightest aggressiveness and it did help to enliven the journey!

Never before or after have I seen historical remains that were as impressive as Persepolis and it would be beyond presumptuous of me to attempt to convey anything of its grandeur. The buildings were begun by Cyrus the Great and completed during the reign of Xerxes the Great (519–465 BC). Details that lodge in my mind were the carvings of emissaries from the great diversity of tribes and nationalities that came to pay tribute; they were of such a multiplicity and in such a variety of dress, that gave an indication of the vastness of the empire under his control. Another was an inscription of some words of Xerxes: "*I am not hot-tempered. When things develop in my anger, I hold firmly under control by my thinking power. I am firm, ruling over my own impulses*." – though the world turns much, the preoccupations of the personal change but little!

For the first four years of my secondary schooling in Belvedere, I had been obliged to study classical Greek. One of the standard texts was Xenophon's *Anabasis,* sections of which had been translation exercises. The *Anabasis* is the story of Greek mercenaries who fought with Cyrus the Younger in an attempt to oust his brother from the Persian

throne; having failed, and Cyrus having been killed, the *Anabasis* relates the long years of wandering of these Greek soldiers – "*the Ten Thousand*" – before they finally glimpsed the Black Sea shore at Trabzon. Though now in modern Turkey, Trabzon was then a Greek city state and the soldiers realizing they were saved, raced down the mountain to the sea shouting "*Thalassa!, Thalassa!"* (meaning *The Sea!, The Sea!*). The schoolboy shouts in imitation of the soldiers, are etched in my memory and I had the words carved in stone facing the sea, at my house in Clare; unfortunately they are some of the very few words still remaining to me from my four years of learning Greek.

Back in Tehran, I planned to head north to the Caspian Sea. My kindly hotel manager tried to dissuade me asking why would I want to go to such a bleak place at that time of year. It was late November and I – coming from the warmth of the South – thought that he was being a little over-cautious and took a bus to Ramsar. He was indeed correct; the Caspian coast at that time of year – much like any seaside resort – was cold, wet and bleak.

The Caspian has been variously classified as the world's biggest lake or, because it is salty, a sea or even an ocean. In contrast to the Black Sea, it is without outlets and I suspect that is perhaps why, subconsciously, it has none of the beauty of the Atlantic. I believe that part of what makes a sea so attractive – in contrast to a lake – is that when one stands on its shores, one has the feeling that given a boat, a little luck and some ingenuity, one can escape to the wildest shores of Africa or America; indeed the whole world is within one's purview.

I booked into a small hotel in Ramsar and after a brief exploratory trip to the unattractive beach I went to see one of the ex-Shah's now shuttered palaces, which was nearby. Seeing the palace in its present state had the same eloquence as had the toppled statues of Stalin that I had seen earlier in Moscow; an eloquence that bespoke the fleetingness of power and the hubris of rulers.

Later, as I was talking with the young couple that managed the hotel, they told me of their career hopes and of their plans to emigrate to America. They were very well educated with excellent English but in an idiom of a long gone era; their conversation was peppered with Jeevesian sayings direct from the novels of P.G. Wodehouse which appeared to be their touchstone on spoken English. If they succeeded in their plans to emigrate, I wondered how a phrase such as "*putting the fox in charge of the chicken coop*" would be received when dropped into a casual conversation on the streets of New York. In an attempt to assist, I suggested that by listening regularly to such as the BBC World Service, they might become more familiar with colloquial English but I'm not sure whether I helped or simply undermined their confidence.

The next day I headed further up the coast to Rasht. The beach was again deserted save for a young boy who was fishing sitting astride the inner tube of a lorry wheel. I

marvelled at his ingenuity especially when landing his boat, he simply put it over his shoulder and headed for home.

There was little to detain me in Rasht and I headed for Tabriz from where I hoped to reach the Turkish border.

The journey from Rasht to Tabriz necessitated crossing some high mountains and the bus being old, was slow. Like much else in Iran, western sanctions had ensured that rather than being replaced, such buses were endlessly repaired. We left Rasht in late evening and didn't arrive in Tabriz until early the following morning. Being ill-prepared and the bus lacking heat, I shivered in the bitter cold but there was little that I could do. I remember how as I arrived in Tabriz just before sunrise, I was by then well beyond shivering, I shook. As soon as I could I got off the bus and walked around in an attempt to gain some heat. It was about twenty minutes before my body began to calm and at the first glimpse of the early morning sun, I gave thanks. I had been in serious danger.

Deciding to head directly to the border, I got a taxi which dropped me at the end of a long line of trucks snaking up the hill towards the Turkish frontier. All were parked and awaiting customs clearance and I feared that I might have a long wait. Pushing myself to the front of the queue with typical Western arrogance, I was in luck, was quickly through immigration and got a taxi to Doğubeyazıt the first town on the Turkish side of the border.

The main street of Doğubeyazıt was covered in mud and slush, winter was on its way. It being a Kurdish area, the military presence was obtrusive. Again a cheap hotel and as I had a shower that evening, the bathroom flooded – all looked bleak.

I awoke the following morning to sunshine and – it being the 24th November – it was my birthday; not any but my fifty-fifth and something of a milestone. To celebrate I took a taxi out to see the ruins of a famous Ottoman fort: the Ishak Pasha Palace. It was imposing for many reasons: it stood alone on a ridge commanding the wide plain below; it was exquisitely built and in an excellent state of preservation; entering a north facing room, I saw the magnificent sight of Mt. Ararat framed in a window. I had read of the mountain but not seen it the previous evening as it had been covered in cloud. Now it stood in all its majesty and crowned in snow. To Christians, it is where Noah's ark came to rest and where archaeologists (of US Evangelical traditions) still come in search of its remains. To Armenians, most poignantly of all, it is their sacred mountain but to which they are denied access because of the closure of the Turkish-Armenian border. Memories of the Armenian genocide where one million Armenians were either killed or expelled from Turkey have continued to sour relations between the two countries.

Memory of that glimpse of Mt. Ararat stayed with me for many years and was the reason for my return many years later to the region, but this time to Armenia from where I could see the mountain from a different perspective. Mountains have always had a

fascination for me and I remember once being asked by my Zen teacher in London as to what first attracted me to a spiritual path such as Zen Buddhism. I had replied that it was the experience of going walking in the mountains, alone. This reply gave much amusement of those others who had overheard my reply but not to my teacher who understood that the gesture of leaving aside one's concern with the views and opinions of others, is the beginning of a spiritual search which most importantly is a journey on one's own, confronting one's own self.

At other times, images of other mountains have also had a profound effect on me: years later when travelling in Japan and wishing to see Mount Fuji, I took the fast train heading south from Tokyo but the mountain was covered in cloud. A helpful elderly gentleman suggested that I get off at the next stop and take a slow train back to a small station at the foot of Mount Fuji. Alighting at this station the clouds lifted and to top it all it was my sixtieth birthday – what a birthday present.

Years earlier when camping on my own on Inishboffin in autumn, I came back from an early morning swim and saw Croagh Patrick glint in the first rays of the rising sun. I got the crazy idea to pack, hurry to the boat, drive to the mountain and climb it before dark and this I just managed to do.

Peaks such Kailash in Tibet, or Mount Fuji, or Ararat or indeed Croagh Patrick seem to have a magnetic attraction; a presence all of their own which incessantly captures one's gaze and draws it back to pay homage to these magnificences.

The following day I took a bus to Erzerum from where I hoped to travel to Trabzon which was where those wandering Greek soldiers had found sanctuary; reaching Trabzon had become, for me, something of a pilgrimage undertaken in memory of my schooldays.

Whereas Doğubeyazıt wore the aura of a wild-west border town, Erzerum was a modern cosmopolitan city though political tension between Turks and Kurds was evident (a trader had angrily remonstrated with me for not distinguishing between 'Turkish' and 'Kurdish'). I found a hotel, had a good dinner and retired happily to bed.

Going down for breakfast the next morning, I was met by an empty dining room. On enquiring, I was told that as this was the first day of Ramadan, breakfast had finished before dawn; I had miscalculated my dates and had thought it began some days later. Undeterred, I headed downtown to buy some bread and cheese but however much I searched, I found that all the food shops were closed. Ramadan is taken much more strictly in the eastern and rural areas of Turkey than in Istanbul where restaurants are open throughout the day.

I decided to head for Trabzon. I took a taxi because the bus station was on the outskirts of town – as is often the case in such cities. As we navigated a roundabout I saw out of the corner of my eye, a fruitseller and shouted for my driver to stop. He decided to reverse back around the roundabout much to the anger of the other oncoming drivers

but I managed to buy some bananas and apples to tide me over till evening. I should have been forewarned about the driving abilities of my taxidriver because when getting into the taxi he had insisted, lest we be stooped by the police, that I put the seatbelt across my chest even though it lacked a clip to lock it in place.

The journey to Trabzon took about five hours and – in contrast to Iran, but like all other buses that I used in Turkey – the bus was not only modern but spotlessly clean and with an attendant who dispensed refreshing face wipes and later, tea and biscuits; on such buses, the use of mobile phones is prohibited, all of which makes travelling by bus in Turkey a cheap, efficient and pleasant way to travel.

Travelling towards Trabzon the countryside was bare mountainous desert but as we crossed the final ridge before our descent suddenly all changed and we were travelling through an abundance of trees and bushes all growing luxuriously on slopes facing the Black Sea. This was the spot where the 'Ten Thousand' wandering Greeks first saw the sea and knew that they were saved.

The sudden change from bleak desert to exuberant growth was caused by the moisture-laden winds blowing south from the Black Sea and which, because of the height of the ridge, shed their moisture on the mountain's north facing slopes. It reminded me of an agricultural experiment[17] about which I had read, which had taken place on the once barren Pacific coast of Chile. Netting was placed close to the shore and bushes had been planted alongside it. The moisture laden sea-fog being blown in from the ocean condensed on the netting thereby watering the plants beneath. Once these bushes were well established, condensation took place on the bushes and the netting was then moved further inland.

Trabzon, being situated on the Black Sea coast, is a beautiful city. As in Erzerum, the restaurants were closed throughout the day but Ramadan was also the cause of one of my most memorable meals in Turkey. As evening approached crowds began to gather outside the restaurants and, peering inside, I could see the tables all set with bowls of bread fresh from the oven, jugs of cool water on the tables and the staff waiting expectantly for the signal that the sun had set, that the fast was over and that the Iftar meal could begin. I was welcomed as a guest and waited expectantly. Suddenly the twilight was rent with the explosive sound of a cannon being fired – the signal that the sun had set and that the feast could begin. The meal was magnificent and the atmosphere exuberant.

I marvelled at the discipline of my fellow diners who had fasted since dawn (unlike myself, having nibbled some chocolate rations). But this Ramadan was close to winter when days were cool and short; how much more onerous when Ramadan falls during the summer months when every day, for a month, from sunrise to sundown, neither food nor water are permitted. Such discipline is awe-inspiring especially when contrasted with the minor privations that I, as a child, was obliged to observe during Lent. It is easy to

understand how such a display of self-discipline is appealing to young idealistic Muslims in Europe especially when their more secular peers are often lost in a crazed, hedonistic search for pleasure and/or oblivion.

The building that I found most intriguing in Trabzon was Hagia Sophia; it is now a church, had been a mosque and later a museum. It was positioned on an elevated plateau overlooking the Black Sea. It had been built on the site of a pagan temple and as I stood there knowing that history, it seemed that all these other eras – even that of the 'Ten Thousand' Greek soldiers – were in some sense, still present.

I had planned to travel from Trabzon to Istanbul by boat thinking that to enter Istanbul from the sea would be the best way to appreciate its grandeur but, on inquiry, I found that these had ceased for the winter. Wondering where next to head on my way to Istanbul, I chanced upon a report of a forthcoming celebration in Konya in honour of Rumi – the 12th century poet and mystic; as a poet, he is to the East as Shakespeare is to the West. He was the founder of Sufism – a mystical from of Islam – which has often been regarded as heretical by other Muslims especially as many of Rumi's poems appear to glorify wine and drunkenness. Much like a similar usage amongst Christian mystics, his use of such terms is not literal but metaphorical and indicates a state of religious absorption. The religious practice for which the Sufis are most widely known, is their ritual dance (*semâ*) whose performers are known as "*Whirling Dervishes"* – a ritual which can best be understood as a mechanism to help still the mind – much like the telling of prayer beads or the reciting of the Catholic Rosary.

The Mevlevi Order (the name by which Sufism is known in Turkey) was outlawed in 1925 because they were believed to have excessive political influence. Their ritual dance is banned throughout Turkey except when performed as a tourist attraction; the one occasion when it is permitted as a religious ceremony is at Rumi's tomb in Konya on his saint's day. That anniversary was some ten days hence so I decided to spend some days exploring Cappadocia before going to Konya.

I had also planned to stop at Sinop a town on the Black Sea coast west of Trabzon, which had been the birthplace in 412BC of Diogenes the Cynic [or Diogenes of Sinope] a controversial Greek philosopher whose writings I had admired for their iconoclasm. I had used a quotation of his in my MPhil thesis, which he is said to have uttered whilst masturbating in public: "*If only heaven let us rub our bellies too, and that be enough to stave off hunger!"*[18]. I had used this in an attempt to undermine the apparent consensus amongst philosophers that death is an evil – a proposition that implied that there was an ethical imperative to prevent it if at all possible. My argument was that death – being as it is, an intrinsic part of life – cannot be considered to be an evil; no more than the inability to stave off hunger by rubbing one's belly could be considered to be an evil. I argued that such a thing as *'a good death'* is possible and that sometimes the ethical imperative is to assist in the occurrence of such a death.

Before leaving Trabzon, I changed some money at a currency exchange. I had proffered a $50 note but the young man – whether by reason of tiredness during Ramadan or simple inexperience – gave me Turkish Lira to the equivalent of $500. Though such an unexpected bounty might have seemed heaven sent, I – whether from the realisation that he would probably have the money docked from his meagre wages, or whether the wonderful Iftar meal of the previous evening had imbued me with some measure of idealism – brought the error to his attention and went on my way.

The journey to Cappadocia crossed Anatolia whose sheer scale I found astounding. Wide, unfenced steppes; occasional settlements guarded by ferocious dogs; magnificent caravanserai (walled enclosures where travelling merchants could find shelter and protection for themselves, their goods and their animals) all bespoke a rich heritage stretching into the far distant past. Indeed Anatolia is rich in archaeological heritage and is believed be the location where humans first domesticated plants and animals. My explorations were minimal, just impressions gleaned from glimpses as I travelled towards Cappadocia where, luckily, I had some days to stroll and marvel.

'Marvel' is indeed the word appropriate to Cappadocia and I stayed in the small village of Göreme. The landscape has often been described as a moonscape and at first sight, it does appear to be a barren desert of rock but, on a closer inspection, it turns out to hide a buried warren of churches and houses, all set amongst a landscape that seems to have floated free from one of Salvador Dali's more surrealistic imaginings. Large Christian communities had once lived underground in these houses which were hewn from the soft volcanic rock; it reminded me – but on a much larger scale – of that aspect of the Burren landscape that I most enjoy: that sense of sudden surprise at finding at one's feet an exquisite flower hidden in a crevice of whose presence one could have had no inkling.

The weather in Cappadocia was dry but cold; sunny with big blue skies. Konya was but a three hour bus journey from Göreme but it was as a journey from heaven to if not quite hell, then purgatory. Though both Göreme and Konya are at an altitude of over 1,000 meters, Konya – at least during my stay – appeared to lie in a deep valley covered in fog. It was cold and wet with the rain sometimes turning to ice on the pavements. I booked into a hotel and seeking the solace of a warming glass of whiskey, I asked the porter as to where was best to buy some alcohol. Immediately the words had escaped my mouth I realised that I had committed a grievous *faux pas*; his expression was akin to what I imagine would be that of a Vatican Swiss Guard if asked to recommend his favourite brothel. Abstention was to be the order of the day. I should have known better; my Lonely Planet guidebook had said of Konya, that it: "*… is conservative, devoutly Muslim, self-satisfied and proud of it. … Sometimes you may get the distinct feeling that you are being regarded as a gavur (infidel)*." – I seemed to have passed that test with honours!

I attended the ceremonies in honour of Rumi but despite being asked not to take photographs of the whirling dervishes, intermittent camera flashes by others destroyed the religious atmosphere and turned it simply into a spectacle.

The city itself was very wealthy as was evident from the large underground gold markets. It seems that in Turkey – as in many Eastern countries – people prefer to keep their wealth in gold and jewellery rather than trusting to paper currencies. Wishing to purchase a small silk carpet to bring home, I was bargaining with a young carpet seller who, as we began to talk, told me that he was a mathematics student in the city's university. Hoping to strike a better bargain I mentioned my own mathematics background, whereupon he produced a problem that he had been working on when I entered the shop. I solved the problem for him but when I went to pay for my carpet, my mathematical skills went unrewarded and I mused that he had a much better future as a businessman than as a mathematician.

One enjoyable memory from Konya was of a morning spent at Rumi's tomb witnessing the devoutness of his followers and studying the exhibits at the adjoining Mevlana Museum. Of these, by far the most interesting were the illustrated Korans in many different styles of elegant, flowing, sinuous calligraphy. Some of these were embellished in gold leaf and – considered purely as art objects – were exquisite. Others were miniscule so that in the need for precision, the skill and craftsmanship required would have far exceeded even that of a watchmaker. Like the monastic books of Ireland, they were lifelong labours of love and devotion.

After Konya, Istanbul was a very relaxed city where despite Ramadan, the restaurants were open during the day and I could even purchase a small bottle of whiskey. I had booked into what in reality was a carpetseller's shop but whose upper stories had four hotel rooms. It was situated in Sultanahmet which is the older part of Istanbul on the European side and close to Aya Sofya, the Blue Mosque and Topkapi Palace. Breakfast was served on the roof terrace overlooking the Bosphorus and the many ships lying at anchor waiting to proceed to the Black Sea ports. At night, as I sat at my balcony sipping my whiskey and watched the beam from the lighthouse play on the waters below, I became homesick for Clare. Istanbul is such a cornucopia of treasures that I resolved to visit it again and to spend more time and to look with more care and attention; but now I was heading to Norway to be with my sons for Christmas and that necessitated a long journey: a flight to Moscow; then a flight to Tallinn; then a boat to Stockholm and finally a train to Bodø.

Returning to my home in Clare in early 2001, I was faced with two problems: how to earn some money (my woodcraft business having lain dormant during the years of my

MPhil research); and how best to proceed with my academic goal of researching the philosophical link between irrationality and psychiatry.

In an attempt to sort out my finances, I thought of converting my workshop into a self-contained holiday home that I could let out on a weekly basis during the holiday season. Such a plan appeared to have potential especially because such a holiday home would be in a beautiful setting overlooking Galway Bay and close to the seashore. This would necessitate the building of a new, smaller, workshop because although I had plans to begin academic research, my first love was carving wood. I had plans drawn up both for a change of use of the old workshop and for a new workshop/garage. I submitted these to the planning authorities and was given permission to build.

I began building the new workshop first so that I had a place to house my woodworking machines which I would also need to use in the reconstruction of the old workshop. Although I had the help of a blocklayer, I did much of the other work myself and what I had originally thought could be completed in a manner of months, took over a year.

Whilst in the midst of building the new workshop, I realised that my log cabin was becoming too small. It had been originally built as a prototype simply to show that building a log cabin out of Irish-grown timber was feasible. At little over 50 sq.m. it was more than enough for myself but became a little cramped when my sons came to visit especially as Philip was then 23 and Peter was 17 years old.

I thought of building an extension to the log cabin and tentatively approached the bank to seek finance offering the planned rental income from the workshop conversion as security. Finance was agreed, I had plans drawn up and secured planning approval.

The planned extension to the log cabin was two-story but constructed in the fashion of an 'upside down' house with the bedrooms downstairs and the living room on the upper story to take full advantage of the view over Galway Bay. The extension was to be built in block and then clad with cedar to blend more easily with the original log cabin.

The plans necessitated considerable excavation for which I employed a local contractor who also poured the new concrete slab foundations for the planned extension. With the foundations complete and the earthmoving equipment on site, I decided to tackle the landscaping. I had already purchased over 500 shrubs – a mixture of fuchsia, gorse and others – to function as a groundcover so that the resulting garden would be maintenance free.

The thatched cottage in Meath where I had lived with Mette many years before, had had a large one-acre garden. 'Lawn' is certainly too grand a term, but aside from the name, it still required mowing; to me, this was my weekly penance which I hated from the depths of my being and I had vowed, if I ever moved house, that – like a born-again junkie – never ever, ever have anything to do with the devil grass. Now when I

occasionally hear the sound of a lawnmower in the depths of the countryside, I believe it to be the first steps of encroaching suburbia: a militant bourgeoisie on the move!

In the course of the landscape work and while the digger was realigning some large boulders, I had my damascene moment (if it isn't blasphemous to use such a word in such a mundane setting). I suddenly saw a possibility utterly different than what I had envisaged, namely to sell the log cabin and that I would live in the converted workshop. The repositioning of the large boulders had naturally partitioned the site into two separate self-contained, properties. Had I thought of this earlier I could have saved myself the trouble (and the considerable expense) of pouring the foundations for the extension.

I placed the log cabin with a local auctioneer; the actor Brendan Gleeson came to see the cabin and purchased it. He built an extension to his own design and has proved to be an excellent, friendly neighbour.

With the sale of the log cabin, my financial difficulties were for the moment resolved but the conversion of my old workshop had barely begun; nonetheless I had little choice but to move in.

The following two years were difficult because, for various reasons, the new kitchen had to be installed last and this meant that washing (my own personal ablutions and the cleaning of the kitchen utensils) had to take place at an outside sink. I remember how on some winter mornings, I had to break the frozen ice before I could begin.

Throughout the reconstruction, the inside was covered in dust and woodshavings to such an extent that during the day, I had to cover my bedding with plastic sheeting. Showering became a hard choice between living with an acceptance of my sweat and dirt or standing under a freezing tap.

It was close to four years before the reconverted workshop was fully habitable but it turned out to be a beautiful living space; warm, comfortable and full of light.

I had done some craftwork during those years, prompted by being asked to mentor a young lighting designer. Subsequently we exhibited our work jointly at a Crafts Council exhibition in the RDS and, in retrospect, I regard that work as including some of my most original designs. Some German and American lighting designers showed considerable interest in my designs but I was reluctant to get involved in the necessary ramifications of contract and copyright law especially as it is often extremely difficult to ensure that one's designs are not simply stolen and reproduced by a retailer with enough commercial and financial muscle to ensure that they can face down any legal challenge.

But by this stage my interest and attention was being focusing elsewhere and I decided to begin research on a PhD in the Philosophy of Psychiatry.

Whilst involved in the various building projects, I had also been immersed in preparatory background reading on the philosophy of rationality and academic critiques of psychiatry such as Thomas Szasz[19] and Richard Bentall[20]. I had read various textbooks on both Philosophy and Philosophy of Psychiatry and had not only subscribed to the quarterly journal *Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology* but had read all the back issues since its first publication in 1994. This gave me an excellent insight into the state of current research in Philosophy of Psychiatry. That journal was particularly important as it was the official journal of the *Association for the Advancement of Philosophy and Psychiatry* and its editor was Professor Bill Fulford who is Professor of Philosophy attached to both the University of Warwick and the University of Oxford; he is also the author of *The Oxford Textbook of Philosophy of Psychiatry*.

I attended a number of postgraduate conferences on the Philosophy of Psychiatry in the UK and at one of these I met Professor Fulford having corresponded with him earlier. Over lunch, we discussed my planned research project. He thought it an interesting topic and offered to take me on as one of his PhD students and to act as my supervisor. In the event the postgraduate fees in the UK were prohibitively expensive (*c.* £10.000 pa) with little prospect of getting a bursary, so I had little choice but to decline his offer.

Professor Fulford's contribution to that postgraduate conference was impressive and I found it intriguing especially because it opened up some fruitful lines of enquiry which were later to become important for me in elucidating my PhD dissertation argument. 'Delusion' is a central concept in psychiatry[21] and he had taken the example[22] of a man who believed his wife to be having an affair but who, when questioned by his psychiatrist was unable to justify his belief. A complicating factor was that the psychiatrist knew (having been previously informed by the wife) that she had, in fact, been unfaithful.

Professor Fulford classified this belief as a 'delusion' by virtue of the fact that the subject was unable to justify his belief in his wife's infidelity and went on to suggest that having such delusions – termed 'delusions of infidelity' – is a known indicator of dangerousness.

One of the first surprises that I discovered whilst undertaking my PhD research, was that the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* defines a 'delusion' as "*A false belief … "*[23]; in Fulford's example, the psychiatrist knew the belief to be true. Secondly, the extent of unjustifiable beliefs amongst 'normal' individuals is considerable: for example, in a survey of 'normal' UK university students, 81% had the occasional thought that "*My actions and thoughts might be controlled by others*"; 8% had this thought weekly.[24] Worse, psychiatry is replete with examples of psychiatrists themselves holding tenaciously to beliefs that not only could not be justified but which had been discredited.[25]

The question may seem academic but the psychiatric diagnosis of delusion of infidelity can have devastating consequences and result in involuntary committal to a mental

hospital often for considerable periods of time; the Irish case of Mr. Louis Blehein is a noteworthy example which occurred in the late 1990s.[26]

In my thesis, I proposed the imaginary scenario of a teacher who believed that a colleague was sexually abusing a pupil. The teacher had no evidence that this was so only a deep unshakeable conviction forged from observing furtive glances and similar 'evidence'. Is it possible to imagine that if the teacher approached her headmaster with her suspicions, that the headmaster might deem her delusional? That she might be coercively detained for voicing her belief? That if the headmaster already knew the colleague to be having an affair with pupil, that he could still insist the teacher was delusional and might, on those grounds, be coercively detained? I suggested that a more likely response from the headmaster would be a recognition that the teacher had been unusually observant.

In 2007, a series of articles[27] in *Philosophy, Psychiatry & Psychology* which focused on the reliability that should be accorded to allegation of sexual abuse, raised even more troubling questions. Beliefs by adults that they had been sexually abused as children are analogous to beliefs by husbands in the sexual infidelity of their spouses, in that – in circumstances where the beliefs are not capable of justification – their reliability is open to question. By analogy with delusions of infidelity, one might expect that the unshakeable belief that one had been sexually abused as a child, whilst being unable to defend that belief, could also be capable of being classified as a 'delusion'. Some of the philosophers who contributed to the discussion – not only did not advert to the possibility of delusion – but argued that the beliefs should be accepted as being true. I argued that such a stance by philosophers of psychiatry, indicated a philosophical double standard indicative of a lack of impartiality manifesting in an *a priori,* willingness to come to the defence of current psychiatric practice.

Fulford had also asserted that delusions of infidelity are known indicators of dangerousness and cites a single reference in his textbook.[28] Examination of that source – and the references that it itself cites and those of other academics asserting the same claim – showed that the studies being relied on had sought to determine the proportion of those convicted of murdering their partners, who had exhibited signs of jealousy. But this confuses two problems *'the likelihood of a jealous person, committing murder'* and the '*the likelihood of a convicted murderer, being jealous*.' The confusion of these is a serious probabilistic error[29] and is akin to confusing *'the likelihood of an Irish person speaking English'* with *'the likelihood of an English speaker being Irish'.*

Had I been able to take up Professor Fulford's offer to supervise my PhD, I believe that such criticisms would have been unthinkable in such an environment and that what had at the time appeared to have been a setback was, in retrospect, extremely propitious.

Other contributors at the first conference were by no means as impressive as Fulford; one in particular spoke on the psychiatric phenomenon of 'thought insertion' whereby a

subject believed that their thoughts are not their own. I posed the question of how to distinguish between it and 'inspiration' – the phenomenon often spoken of by poets and artist who believe that their creative ideas were given to them from some outside agency and not the product of their own conscious minds. No answer was forthcoming and I got the impression that many of the contributors were attempting to shoehorn the richness of reality and experience into their ready made schema; they lacked an insight into what the poet Louis MacNeice perceived, namely that the "*world is crazier and more of it than we think, incorrigibly plural*".[30]

A second postgraduate conference in Southampton was dispiriting. One speaker who was a professor of philosophy, when challenged to define the concepts of 'madness' and 'mental illness' responded by saying that his usual reply to students was to ask them to imagine themselves as actors playing such roles; this unquestioned reinforcing of conventional stereotypes seemed a response unworthy of a philosopher. A second contributor was a consultant psychiatrist who advocated the importance of religion and of a religious practice to those who had psychiatric difficulties. As he developed his theme it became clear that he was speaking of Christianity wearing its Anglican garb and, when I suggested that other religious such as Islam, might be equally beneficial he became somewhat indignant.

At this stage I was becoming very unsure as to how best to proceed but I chanced upon, read and was deeply impressed by a book of essays by an Irish psychiatrist who had been a pupil and friend of Wittgenstein. The book was entitled '*The Danger of Words*'[31]and had been edited by Professor John Hayes who was himself a philosopher and Head of what was then, the Arts Department of the University of Limerick.

I contacted Professor Hayes, we met and he found my research proposal interesting. He offered to act as my PhD supervisor and he also referred my proposal to the Head of Philosophy, Dr. Stephen Thornton for his comments. Dr. Thornton replied that "… *I would simply say that it strikes me as one of the more impressive, well-researched and promising research proposals that I have seen*."

With my confidence bolstered by this response and having been awarded a generous Doctoral Scholarship (which covered not only fees but maintenance), I began my PhD studies under the supervision of Professor Hayes in 2004. The provisional title for my research project was "*The use of the term 'irrationality' in psychiatry*".

I have outlined my dissertation argument in an appendix to this memoir. Suffice here to say that the concept of 'personhood' – which I had used earlier in my MPhil thesis – played a central role because firstly, of the rights accorded to being a 'person', the right "*to say no*" to any proposed offer of assistance is pre-eminent; secondly, because the concept can be defined by a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, of which the most important from the perspective of psychiatry, is rationality. A coercive psychiatric intervention is by its nature, one which damages, if not destroys, an individual's

personhood in so far as it overrides his expressed unwillingness to accept the proffered psychiatric intervention.[32] To justify this overriding, it would be necessary to show that the subject's level of rationality, at least temporarily, failed to meet the minimum standard required for him to be accorded the full rights of personhood. My goal was to determine whether there was a correlation between being subjected to a coercive psychiatric intervention and some deficiency in the subject's level of rationality prior to the intervention.

As a first step I sought to see how psychiatrists used the term 'irrationality': did they use it with precision and accurately distinguish, not only between different levels and meanings of the term, but whether the level of irrationality exhibited by a particular subject was such as to put their personhood in jeopardy?

I spent my first year scouring the psychiatric journals, textbooks and diagnostic manuals to determine how psychiatrists used the term but concluded that its usage was so informal and so lacking in precision that no particular meaning emerged which corresponded to those cases which are deemed eligible for coercive intervention.

Such a conclusion required that, though the goal of my thesis might remain, its achievement necessitated a radical revision of methodology. My sixtieth birthday was approaching and I decided to celebrate it by heading off for a long journey alone with my rucksack. I hoped that the change of scene might give space for some new ideas to emerge on the direction my research project should now take.

My thirst for things Japanese had been building for many years. I had long enjoyed its films and novels; the fact that it was the country most closely associated with Zen Buddhism was an added attraction. I had also heard a chance remark on a poetry programme of how the Japanese and the Irish shared an admiration for the 'half-said' thing: the thing just hinted at, its mystery still left intact and not spelled out with all the laboriously destructive explicitness of the Germans and the Scandinavians.

I had also read of Lafcadio Hearn and how this man who was half-Greek and half-Irish, was revered in Japan. His stories of Japanese myth and legend achieved international recognition. One story, in particular, made a deep impression on me.[33] It told of how an aged grandfather too weak to go with his family to the seashore to harvest seaweed, remained at his mountain-hut, but becoming aware of a sudden stillness and seeing the sea rapidly withdraw from the shore, glimpsed a tsunami developing on the horizon. Realising that his family were in great danger he shouted in an attempt to attract their attention but to no avail. Suddenly he had the idea of setting fire to the thatch on his house, the flames of which he knew would be seen by his family. The flames were seen and his family came running to his aid and in doing so saved themselves; the sacrifice of his house and only wealth had saved his family.

I had once seen an inspirational television documentary on a young English traveller[34] who sought to retrace the steps of Basho – one of Japan's most revered poets – in his famous *Narrow Road to the Deep North.* So my destination was to be Japan and I hoped to explore its Far North; I began my month long journey in early November 2005.

Arriving in Tokyo some nineteen hours after I had departed Dublin, though exhausted from the journey, I was pleasantly surprised by the calm, spacious hassle-free atmosphere at Narita Airport. I got the metro into central Tokyo where I had already arranged a booking in a small hotel. To make my journey easier, I had a copy of the name of the hotel written in Japanese characters but the taxi driver could understand neither this nor the attached map, so with me as navigator and, knowing that we were at least in the right neighbourhood, we circled and backtracked until I eventually recognised the hotel from a photo. It occurred to me later that the taxidriver might not have been able to read but like all Japanese that I encountered on my trip, he was extremely courteous even though we were communicating across a chasm of misunderstanding; arrayed as he was in his uniform and white gloves, this was a taxi-experience quite unlike late-night Dublin.

Arriving at the hotel, I attempted to check-in but was told that as it was now only 11am this was not possible until 2pm and that if I wished to use the room before then, I must pay for it by the hour. It seems that many young Japanese – living as many in Tokyo do with their extended family – often book into an hotel for a few hours privacy.

Tired and with three hours to pass, I strolled around and found that the harbour was but a few hundred meters away where boat trips of Tokyo Bay were on offer. Reckoning that a couple of hours touring the bay would not only be more interesting, but cheaper than an early check-in at my hotel, I opted for the cruise. Sitting at the stern of the boat, I soon fell asleep. Suddenly I awoke with a start as if in a nightmare before reality slowly reasserted itself in the memory of my journey.

Safely back in the hotel, I slept until the following morning. The bathroom like in many budget hotels in Japan, was a self-contained capsule; alongside the toilet was an array of buttons and dials but all labelled in Japanese. Prodding one of these, a small metal tube slid out horizontally from under the toilet seat and as I stared at it, a jet of water suddenly hit me between my eyes. Now fully awake and thinking that there were pleasanter ways to begin the day, I headed down for breakfast.

Breakfast was first an artistic experience like encountering a painting by Mondrian: a tray was elegantly presented with an array of different coloured delicacies, of what they were composed, I had no idea as none of the staff spoke English. It being eat or starve time, I ate, some were delicious, some not so. Eating out in Tokyo was not dissimilar in that many restaurants had a window display of coloured, plaster mock-ups of each of the

dishes on offer so that even if one was none the wiser as to the ingredients, at least one was not taken visually, by surprise. The restaurants were generally excellent value and the service was very attentive: once having ordered a salad, the waiter brought me a range of oils to sample before dressing my salad. In travelling in Japan, perhaps the best value food is to be found in the large food halls often located alongside, or more generally, under the main train stations; there one can purchase a lunch box (a '*bento'*) containing the most exquisite assortment of fishes or meats; some of these bentos are very elaborate and expensive with the box itself often being a work of craftsmanship.

As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, I had brought my GPS with me and whilst it lacked maps, it allowed me to mark a position, then to wander freely and later to determine the directions to my original position. Leaving the hotel I just wandered and drank in all that I saw; that first morning whilst strolling through an outdoor market, I chanced upon a ceremonial procession which, from the elaborate costumes and demeanour of the participants and the attentiveness and respect shown by the onlookers, was clearly of importance, but I left being none the wiser as to what was being commemorated. Though young students usually had excellent English, older people did not, and whilst the lack of ability to communicate was at times inconvenient, it never became seriously problematic.

Though it was late autumn, the weather was still mild and it was a joy to stroll in the parks and to note how carefully the trees were tended. The tree surgeons worked with an attentive eye as to how best to shape each tree so that it would be seen in its fully glory in the spring. Many of the older trees had, like aged warriors, been given an added support; later when visiting a temple in Kyoto, I found this verse carved on a stone:

… and quiet artist-priest, carver of Noh masks
fashioning a bamboo crutch for the ancient peach tree
symbol of strength, symbol of concern.

Later as I travelled around the country, I occasionally saw isolated trees or rocks bedecked with ribbons and flags. These were trees which – perhaps because of their great age or unusual shape – were regarded by the traditional Shinto religion, as being particularly sacred. Such trees or rocks were often surrounded by a thick rope which served to demarcate the sacred from the non-sacred.

Years later when visiting Korea, I noticed that certain trees in the Royal Gardens were officially awarded the status of being 'National Monuments' and were especially revered. The poet Robert Graves in his book *The White Goddess,* spoke of the great reverence that the old Irish accorded to trees – sadly that is an age of which little remains, though at a recent Royal Hibernian Academy Exhibition, a short film recounted how in Clare, the path of a planned motorway had been diverted so as not to interfere with an ancient hawthorn.

I remember an incident from the time I spent in a Zen monastery in London, where the teacher, Myokyo-ni, had asked another student to prune one of the trees in the garden. Quite a struggle ensued as the student professed ignorance of what to do and wanted to know 'the rules', only to be told in reply, to go out and open her eyes – the student could not shoulder that level of freedom and trust in her own judgement and, having learned little, left in frustration.

Since my visit to Japan was in November, the cherry blossom season was unfortunately well gone; it is a season which is greatly anticipated, as it marks the departure of winter. Its arrival is a time of great excitement and its progression across the country is announced each evening much as in a weather forecast, and families will often have a tradition of gathering under a particular tree to celebrate with food and drink and to sit and appreciate the beauty of the blossom – its evanescence also hinting at the fleetingness of life.

Exploring Tokyo was relatively easy, especially as it has an excellent metro system. One line of which – the Yamanote – is a circular line which provides an excellent mechanism for getting an overview of the city with a guarantee that you won't get lost and, at worst, will arrive back where you started.

Part of the Yamanote line is elevated; travelling on it one evening, I was astounded to see the number of first–floor level, cram schools and the students hard at study even at 10pm. The pressures on Japanese students to succeed are extreme and result in a suicide rate which is twice that of the United States.[35] These pressures are exacerbated by a high demographic imbalance with the number of those over 65 outnumbering those aged 14 or younger by a factor of two.[36] As I walked around the outskirts of Japanese cites I was struck by the comparative rarity of not only children, but even the sound of children at play and I was surprised to later discover that in Tokyo, a noise pollution regulation existed which, in the suburbs, prohibited noise in excess of 45 decibels, which is about the volume of a bird whistle though there are proposals to exempt the sound of children's voices from these regulations.[37] The situation is even more extreme in the rural areas of the North where the fear of depopulation is such that there are government schemes designed to lure young couples back to live in these areas.

One of my first journeys on the Yamanote line was to explore Akihabara which is a techie's dream; I had never before even been aware of the stupendous variety of laptops and cameras on display many of which are produced for the Japanese market and never reach the European or US shops. Needless to say, I succumbed to the purchase of a small Sony laptop which was a triumph of miniaturist design; though now over ten years old I treat it with a reverence and care that is accorded to none of my other computers. More generally, I found the elegance of Japanese design intriguing and I was surprised to note that it far surpassed Scandinavian design though the latter was the one held up in Ireland by such as Kilkenny Design as the exemplar worthy of emulation. What was

fascinating was that this commitment to design not only extended to but reached its apogee in the design of the simplest of objects such as a spoon or a pen or a cup.

The commitment to style extended to even the act of purchasing an item where a plate was proffered onto which you placed the money and bowed, the shop assistant replaced the money with your change and again bowed; it all had the feel of a religious ritual rather than a simple commercial transaction and embodied a level of formal courtesy which I had never before experienced.

I had spent a week in Tokyo and before leaving Ireland I had purchased a Rail Pass which allowed me to travel for a fortnight throughout Japan on all but the very fastest trains. I headed North up the east coast stopping at many of the small towns for a night or two before moving on. In Japan there exists a class of journeymen who appear to travel the country on behalf of their companies; an earlier generation in Ireland would have called such men 'commercial travellers'. They travel by rail and stay in the myriad of small budget hotels to be found close by the train stations. Though such hotels were often a little dismal and the rooms small, they were usually clean and inexpensive. One surprise in such hotels was the near universal prevalence of slot machines on each floor selling tokens which would give access to porn films on the TV; a further surprise was that most of these films would have been classified as child pornography in Western countries as they usually involved young teenagers dressed as schoolgirls.

One experience of the journeyman phenomenon still remains vividly in my mind. I had taken my seat on the train when a group of four men entered my carriage, the older took his seat and the three younger men having safely stowed the elder's bags, bowed to him and took their leave. He not only did not return their bow but did not even acknowledge their presence. Leaving the train, the three younger men stood stiffly and facing the window alongside which the elder sat. They remained motionless until the train began to move whereupon they bowed deeply; yet again the elder disdained to even acknowledge their presence with even the least flicker. I wondered whether this was the enactment of a religious or a commercial or a militaristic hierarchy; it was unsettling to watch.

The trains in Japan are works of magnificence and the boarding of passengers is orchestrated with remarkable precision. Having purchased a ticket with an allotted seat number, one must wait on the platform at the spot designated for that number. The train will arrive precisely on time and, as it may wait for perhaps only three or four minutes before departure, dawdling is not an option. The trains themselves are not only marvels of engineering, but in their aerodynamic shapes, are works of sculpture. On the trains, the attendants will bow to the passengers on entering or leaving the carriage and to say that all this is accomplished with clockwork precision, would risk being an understatement.

My journey became especially interesting on leaving the town of Morioko – a beautiful town where I had stayed for a couple of days – I headed to Aomori which is the town

furthest north on Japan's main island of Honshu. From there I took the train through the Seikan tunnel which links Honshu with Japan's most northerly island, Hokkaido. The tunnel is about 54km long of which 24km lies under the sea. My goal was the city of Sapporo the capital of Hokkaido and famous for once being the site of the Winter Olympics.

I found Hokkaido exhilarating. The sparseness of it population, the cool air, the spaciousness and the mountains all reminded me of Norway – but an even more extreme version in that wild bears still wander in the mountainous areas (though, supposedly, with a bell slung around their necks to warn of their approach). The depth of snow in winter was such that a photo that I had seen of a snowplough clearing a mountain road, showed snowbanks on either side of a height greater than a double-decker bus. Much like Northern Norway has its indigenous Sámi population, Hokkaido has its native Ainu who – like the Sámi in Norway – have been subject to racist discrimination. Having stayed some days in Sapporo, I visited the two most northerly towns on Hokkaido; Wakkanai on its North Western tip and Abashiri on its North East. Russian islands are but 20 km from both of these towns and the towns seemed to share a culture more similar to Russia than what I had experienced in Tokyo.

The train to Abashiri had but a distant relationship to the high speed trains of the mainland; it was small and with few passengers; on reaching the terminus the seats had to be manually rotated for the return journey. Abashiri itself was well-nigh deserted (though it did possess an Irish Pub which was closed) and I was obliged to buy some cooked food in a supermarket as I couldn't find a restaurant. As I ate my chicken in my hotel room, looking out the window I saw some dead birds floating down the adjacent river; this was when the panic about 'bird flu' dominated the popular media and I wondered soulfully what was about to descend on me.

The following morning the town looked less bleak and I made my way to the harbour. It was cold and the fishermen were dressed in ski suits; they were fishing with spinners as we would in Ireland when fishing for mackerel, but here they were catching salmon. Each had their iceboxes alongside and the magnitude of their catches suggested it was a commercial operation. The seas in this area, freeze in deepest winter and icebreakers are required to enable the waters to remain navigable so it seemed a blessing that the fishermen could have such success from the safety of the shore.

Though my stay in Hokkaido had been at times a little bleak, the island itself was enchanting and I left with regret and took the train back to back to Morioka and onwards down the west coast of Honshu before crossing its mountainous spine back to Kyoto on its Eastern side. The evidence of recent earthquakes was clear as I crossed those mountains and I marvelled at the resilience of such people who lived such rich lives whilst making their beds on the back of a sleeping dragon.

Though I made three more side-trips before heading to Osaka to catch my flight back to Ireland I spent the week remaining to me in Kyoto. One of the side-trips was to see Mt. Fuji and I have recounted earlier how on arriving at a small station at its foothills, the clouds miraculously cleared and I beheld it in all its majesty – it being the occasion of my 60th birthday was an added blessing; the second was to Hiroshima of which to say anything would be to diminish the horrors that were visited on that city. The third side trip was to the sacred island of Miyajima.

Arriving by boat one is met with a large torii; a *'torii'* being a structure in the shape of the Greek letter pi ('∏') which marks the entrance to a traditional Shinto shrine. This torii was unusual in that it was built on land covered by the incoming tide and on that account was known as a *'floating torii'.* Traditionally, visitors were obliged on approaching the island by boat, to enter through the torii. The island is a sanctuary where herds of wild deer wander freely undisturbed by the tourists, some of whom come to have their wedding celebrations on the island. It was a marvellous opportunity just to sit and watch the Japanese at their relaxed best.

Rather than staying in the typical journeyman hotel of my earlier travels, I had booked into a traditional Japanese ryokan. Such ryokan are quite formal in that you leave your shoes at the door and don a pair of slippers and are brought to your room which is bare except for perhaps some prints or screens and a tatami, or reed, mat which is put away during the day but rolled down for you in the evening. Regulations are strict – a 10pm curfew and a general air of quietude much as one might find in a monastery. Some Americans were also staying there and the following morning at breakfast (which was at a large shared table), they spoke loudly and garrulously amongst themselves. It was in my awareness and annoyance at their boorishness that I realised how much I had come to appreciate and enjoy the quiet courtesy of the Japanese.

Kyoto was a joy to stroll through: a tree-lined path alongside a little stream which was called 'The Philosopher's Path' and which I felt under a professional obligation to stroll along many times; at evening it was a joy to watch the colourful procession of geisha dressed in their kimonos, going off to their work (I, touched with a little sadness, remained behind). One morning and needing to do some laundry, I found an automat close to my ryokan; it was deserted and – yielding to the temptation to emulate a much younger and fitter guy who featured in some TV soap advertisement – I stripped off to my vest and underpants and hoped that I would have it washed and dry before having to explain my complete absence of decorum to some unsympathetic policeman.

I spent many of my days in Kyoto in visiting its Zen temples which included some of Japan's most famous. Aside altogether from their spiritual significance, the architecture of their design; their relationship to their surroundings of trees, rocks and water; and their method of construction were of a subtlety such as I had never seen before. Even though I was well-skilled in working with wood, there were timber joints and tools of

which I had not been aware. For example, one saw for cutting fine joints such as dovetails, was made from very thin steel which required that it be used in a 'pull' stroke rather than in a 'push-pull' stroke as in the West. Their chisels were constructed from laminated steel which permitted a very hard steel – which would take an excellent edge but which is very brittle – to be laminated to a much softer steel which provided strength and flexibility.

Of the temples, Daitoku-ji was a particular favourite because my Zen teacher, Venerable Myokyo-ni, had studied there under Sōkō Morinaga Rōshi; many years later he had come to England to establish *Shobo-an,* which is the Zen centre in London. Whilst wandering in the gardens there I came across a carved stone basin on which were inscribed Japanese characters which when translated, mean "*I learn only to be contented*" – which struck me as a wonderful, if often unattainable goal for living one's life.

That same temple also contained the world-renowned rock garden which contains fifteen rocks placed in groups of two or three on a bed of fine raked gravel – it was a garden within which I felt utterly as at home as in the Burren. Later I read an interesting interpretation:

> *… in one Zen gloss, the garden's meaning emerges from contemplating the contradictions implicit in trying to see the whole at any one moment: to take in all the rocks, a viewer must move, but doing so means relinquish one perspective in order to gain another.*[38]

Some days later as I waited in Osaka Airport, I happened to glance through the local newspaper – the *Kansai Scene* – and saw the following amongst their classified ads:

> *Shallow and handsome white male from America with blond hair and blue eyes looking for tall, big breasted, shallow Japanese woman for serious love making. Must wear brand names, not be smart and not lay on her back when making love. No pidgeon toed ladies please or have bad teeth.*

A little different to the fare normally advertised in *The Irish Times* – Japan had given me many different perspectives and a most interesting journey!

During my travels in Japan, thoughts of how best to reorient the direction of my PhD research had never been far from my mind and I immediately set to work on it on my return to Ireland.

My goal was to determine if, given a psychiatric assessment of a subject as warranting a coercive intervention, it could be reliably concluded that the subject's level of rationality was so compromised as to put their personhood in jeopardy.

My original plan in scrutinising the psychiatric usage of the term irrationality was to determine whether their use of the term 'irrationality' was precise; if so, that would have opened up the possibility of attempting to correlate their level of irrationality deemed

sufficient to render a subject a suitable case for coercive treatment, with the level which would be sufficient to undermine personhood. The finding that the psychiatric usage – at least in their academic publications – was little better than colloquial, was a set-back but, at best, even this would have been a very indirect way of assessment. A better way would be to see if I could find more direct evidence of where a psychiatric assessment of irrationality had been objectively observed by some third party. I found an account of just such an assessment in the work of Branca Telles Ribeiro who was an academic sociolinguist. She had been a non-participating observer to a set of interviews between a psychiatrist and his subject and using sociolinguistic techniques, she had analysed the interviews and published a book on her study.[39]

The subject had been deemed by the psychiatrist to be incoherent yet Ribeiro's analysis showed that the 'incoherence' was more apparent than real and that the term was being used to describe a refusal by the subject to participate in the interview on the terms decreed by the psychiatrist – *i.e*. the subject did not follow turn-taking rules and did not alternate speaker and hearer roles. Ribeiro concluded that by the subject insisting on talking about what she wished to discuss rather than what the psychiatrist wished to discuss, she was deemed crazy or deviant.

Because Ribeiro's study was of a single subject, it did not enable conclusions to be drawn; furthermore its very complexity meant that it was unlikely to be repeated and certainly not on a large scale or on one sufficient to allow the drawing of more general conclusions.

At issue above was the reliability of psychiatric assessment in the area of assessing irrationality; however psychiatrists also claim expertise and make assessments in other areas such as diagnosis and treatment and assessments of dangerousness. A proven reliability in these areas might tentatively indicate that psychiatric assessments of rationality should also be taken to be reliable; conversely, if on evaluation, psychiatric diagnostic practices, treatment decisions or assessments of dangerousness were found to be seriously problematic then that would reflect on the degree of credence that should be afforded a psychiatric assessment of rationality. This would most especially be the case if the existence of these problematic areas was denied or minimised or otherwise not adequately addressed.

One obvious difficulty was that whereas I had a good academic background in logic – which accorded me some academic standing in discussions concerning rationality and irrationality – I had no such academic background in assessing the appropriateness or otherwise of psychiatric diagnostic practices or psychiatric treatment decisions. Because of my background in mathematics (which includes a study of probability) I was on surer ground in relation to evaluating psychiatric assessments of dangerousness.

I proposed to Professor Hayes that I widen my research programme to cover these areas and I argued that having trained as a lawyer, such scrutiny of the claimed expertise of

members of another profession, is the bread and butter of a barrister's practice; they might often be required to subject a medical witness to sometimes severe cross-examination in an attempt to undermine their testimony or otherwise discredit their supposed expertise. In such a procedure the barrister is not interposing his own views of the matter under discussion – for they are of no interest – but rather he is using a technique of immanent criticism whereby the statements of the supposed expert medical witness are shown to be inconsistent with the consensus of other eminent medical experts as evidenced by their published academic writings.

I have grave doubts whether Professor Fulford – had he been my supervisor – would have permitted me to widen my field of research to the degree that I had planned if for no other reason than the danger that I might well lose my bearings and drown under the mass of relevant academic literature; however Professor Hayes did and I am extremely grateful for that trust that he placed in me. The time that I spent in learning Access database management during my MPhil, was invaluable in ensuring that I was able to keep track of the huge number of sources, quotations *etc*. necessitated by such a broad research programme.

I believe that this breaching of the 'disciplinary boundaries' – *i.e.* using the skills and techniques of one discipline to investigate another – is profoundly liberating and opens up the possibility of creative leaps of the imagination. When one's research programme is restricted to confining one's reading and speculations to strictly within the confines of a given discipline, one is put on the discipline's traditional intellectual 'tramlines' [*i.e*. its traditional way of tackling problems of that sort] and inevitably one is drawn down the routes on which one's predecessors have trod; one is most unlikely to find any hitherto undiscovered gems on such well-worn pathways. One eminent exponent of the necessity of such a breaching of disciplinary boundaries was the radical French philosopher Michel Foucault; another was Hannah Arendt who believed that the traditional academic specialisation can actually function as a barrier to thought. In her own life and work she insisted on the need to think outside – and between – the traditional academic categories: "*thinking without banisters*", as she called it.[40] It is an injunction to think against received opinion and provides a mechanism for avoiding the easy comforts of 'group think'.

This new research direction proved fruitful with many of the findings on psychiatric diagnosis, treatment and assessments of dangerousness, reinforcing each other. The levels of psychiatric misdiagnosis were found to be not inconsiderable as was the extent of psychiatric treatment decisions that were unsupported by an adequate evidential base. The problems associated with psychiatric assessment of dangerousness were even more serious; an indication of some of these was given earlier in discussing Professor's Fulford assertion that having delusions on infidelity was a reliable indicator of dangerousness.

Furthermore, there was evidence of denial amongst the psychiatric profession, in relation to all three problems.

In the midst of this onerous research programme, I had – against the advice of many – begun another building project; this time much more ambitious than anything that I had hitherto undertaken and which, on occasion, tethered on the edge of becoming a calamitous failure but which – though it swallowed every penny that I could lay my hands on and much beside – turned out to be spectacularly beautiful (even if I say so myself).

The idea for this project was prompted by the experience of a neighbouring farmer who had been refused planning permission to build a house on his land which was close to where I live. His site was on the sea side of the road and about 200 meters back from a cliff but its elevation was unusual in that the first 50 meters from the road were level with the road but then the ground dropped about 7 meters and then continued level as far as the cliff. He had wished to build a conventionally pitched house close to the road; I suggested that if he undertook some excavation, that he could then build the house into the bank and roof it with either grass sod or stone and that as it would then be invisible from the road he might well get his planning permission. The beauty of such a design aside from the insulation properties of constructing such an earthbound building, is that the seaward side (not visible from the road) could be fully glazed and would provide spectacular views over Galway Bay. He was not taken by my idea but later I realised that the land to the front of my converted workshop was of a not dissimilar orientation in that it sloped down at an angle of about 30 degrees towards the sea which was about 100 meters away. One complication in my case, would be the necessity of constructing a tunnel to connect the new extension to the old workshop.

The more I thought of this idea, the more I liked it and it became like a worm in my brain until eventually I asked an architect to draw up some plans. The new extension would be of a simple elongated shape, under a low pitched roof covered in stones and built into the bank in front of the old workshop. We arranged to meet the planners and, amazingly, they raised no objection.

The two main problems in construction were the excavation and the building of the tunnel and because of these, I engaged the services of a civil engineer in addition to the architect.

Although we had to excavate to a depth of over 7 meters, we did not encounter any bedrock which is unusual for such a rocky environment as the Burren. The presence of bedrock would have necessitated rock-blasting and this would have added considerably to the cost.

However all was not to run so smoothly with the tunnel construction. I first became aware of a problem when I saw the digger driver standing in the rain, attempting to scale

measurement off the engineer's drawings; it transpired that the drawings did not give the tunnel position in relation to the existing building but only the tunnel's interior dimensions. When I phoned the engineer's assistant, she admitted that the reason for this was to exclude legal liability for errors (the drawings themselves had contained a 'no liability' note and an injunction against scaling from them or using them as construction drawings). I was furious because it seemed to me that these were the very reasons that one commissioned engineering drawings. The architect and engineer spent an evening attempting to produce accurate working drawings but, despite this, problems remained.

The construction of the tunnel required a 6 meter deep excavation, one side of which was parallel to the gable wall of the old workshop and less than half a meter from it. As this was a relatively massive wall (6 meters high and constructed of double concrete block plus 125mm stone outer facing), I was worried that it might be undermined by the excavation, especially as it was now November and the ground was very wet; I quipped that, fearing a collapse, I now slept at the far end of the house.

The excavation completed, the next problem was to erect the shuttering to contain the concrete for the tunnel walls. It turned out that there was insufficient space at the side of the tunnel excavation to place the shuttering bolts in place; the engineer suggested that we remove some of the remaining bank adjoining the gable wall. I was beginning to have less and less confidence in his advice especially as these problem could easily have been avoided had the tunnel orientation been slightly different. At one stage I got so annoyed at both the architect and engineer that I suggested that had they been in charge of constructing the Dublin Port Tunnel it would have ended up in Liverpool!

The builder had seen a novel method of construction whereby insulated foam boxes with the steel reinforcing already in place, are assembled in a Lego-like system and then, when all are in place and braced, the concrete infill is poured from the top. I opted for that system although it added considerably to the expense. In using such a system one first places a special barrier at the base and provided the concrete is poured on this within 48 hours, it forms a waterproof seal and functions as an effective damp course.

With that barrier and all the insulated formwork in place we were ready to pour the walls and the concrete was ordered for early the following morning which was a Friday. By lunchtime there was still no sign of the concrete and on phoning the supplier, the builder was told that it would not be possible till the following Monday. Pulling out all the legal stops, I told the supplier that if the concrete was not delivered that day that the waterproof barrier would have to be replaced and that would require removing and then reconstructing all the formwork and that he could rest assured that he would bear the complete cost of that. Somewhat chastened, he promised that it would be delivered that day. True to his word, the concrete pump arrived and the lorries containing the concrete but it was now after 5pm, dark and wet, and the builders (having expected to be well finished before dark) lacked arc-lighting. The great danger in using such a system is that

if under the weight of the wet concrete, the lightweight foam insulated shuttering was to give way at its base, then the concrete would run free over the site and could not be contained or cleaned up under such weather conditions. Mercifully the formwork held and working with only simple head torches, the builder completed the pour successfully. That night I slept even better than a lord – like a king!

With all the heavy concrete work completed, the remaining construction was relatively unproblematic. The one difficulty arose because of the use of 300mm x 150mm Glulam timber beams to support the roof; these were each over 6 meter long and a crane was required to put them in place. I wished to use such beams because they would be the only timber visible on the inside and also because such a span would enable as open an interior space as possible. Before he headed to Australia, my son Peter helped me in installing the beams and then he and Philip installed the plywood roof decking – a family topping out ceremony!

On his return from Australia some two years later, Peter – who is an excellent carpenter – did all the finishing touches: laying the hardwood floor, hanging doors and installing interior fittings. Despite all the difficulties and expense, I am proud of and enjoy the building now that it is finally completed.

During the three years (2006 – 2009) that I was overseeing the construction of the extension and tunnel, I also worked every day on my PhD dissertation. Mette (my ex-wife) once remarked that each project provided an escape from the other when the difficulties of one appeared insurmountable and that having both kept me sane!

The revised dissertation structure that had been agreed earlier, was working well and as each chapter was completed I discussed it fully with Professor Hayes; he offered his comments and suggestions and was highly complimentary on my progress. Over the course of the writing two problems surfaced in our discussions; firstly, the length of the dissertation and secondly, my reliance on the concept of 'personhood' in formulating my argument.

Because the focus of the dissertation had widened considerably beyond its original scope to included matters of diagnosis, treatment and assessment of dangerousness, the body of the thesis inevitably expanded. Professor Hayes had mentioned a number of times that the university imposed a maximum word count of 100,000 on all PhD dissertations; the relevant regulation as I found by an online search, whilst it mentioned the 100,000 word limit continued on to state that these limits were not mandatory but advisory.[41] Having read this, my view was that Professor Hayes was being unnecessarily cautious and the matter was left in abeyance. However in an attempt to reduce the size of the dissertation, I had created Appendices from what had earlier been chapter sections and

this opened the possibility that these appendices might be placed online and not included in the word count for the dissertation.

The second area of contention was to prove much more serious. Between the years 2006 and 2008, Professor Hayes had voiced his dissatisfaction with the reliance my dissertation placed on the concept of personhood. The concept was contentious because to those Roman Catholics who opposed abortion, the status of a foetus as being 'a person,' became a linchpin of their arguments: the killing of a person being murder. I had used the concept in my MPhil and it was absolutely crucial to the PhD argument that I wished to make and I refused to recast my argument in any (to me, futile) attempt at its removal.

Once to Professor Hayes's argument that all humans are persons, I countered with the example of an anencephalic infant who lacked a brain; "*Is such an infant a person?"* I asked to which he replied that such an infant would have a very short life; a reply which to my mind, simply evaded the question. To equate '*humanhood'* with '*personhood'* achieved nothing other than to break the link between 'personhood' and the possession of a full component of rights. It seemed to me that the position Professor Hayes was adopting was more in the nature of a religious positions than a philosophical one and I protested strongly. The argument became heated and when tempers cooled he asked as to where I had gone to school; to my reply of "*the Jesuits*", he countered that "*That explained everything*" – by which I understood that to him, it explained my independence of mind or (as I'm sure he would have described it) my arrogance and stubbornness. The next time that Professor Hayes raised this objection, I formally asked for a change of supervisor; a request which I withdrew only when he undertook not to raise again an objection to my basing my argument on 'personhood'.

I had hoped to complete my dissertation by 2009 when Professor Hayes had been due to retire, but the widening of my research to include problematic aspects of psychiatric diagnosis, treatment and assessments of dangerousness had pushed back this deadline to the Spring of 2010. Professor Hayes agreed to continue to act as my supervisor till then.

During a routine health check-up with my GP in early in 2010, he did a PSA (Prostate-specific antigen) blood test and on being informed of the results suggested that I have a prostate biopsy and the arrangements were made for such a test in the Bon Secours in Galway.

Arriving in the early morning, the test took less than 30 minutes and, lest the test had caused an infection, I was given some antibiotic tablets to be taken later that evening. I had lunch and spent the day happily strolling around Galway. That evening I felt fine as I did on waking the following morning, but as the morning progressed I became dizzy

and weak. Having gone to lie down for a short rest, I began to feel very cold and to shiver violently. Thinking that this was a recurrence of my malaria, I piled on some extra duvets and hope the fever would pass. By lunchtime my fever was getting worse and I attempted to phone my GP who was at lunch; I then called the consultant who had done my biopsy in the Bon Secours who suggested that I go to the Accident and Emergency Department in University College Hospital in Galway. Despite feeling very ill, I refused to go there as news reports regularly suggested queues of up to 24 hours and, despite which they would have not have had my medical records. I said that I was going to the Bon Secours come what may as that was where the procedure had been done and I felt that responsibility lay with them. Around this time a neighbour called and he was shaken by my appearance: I was losing my balance and my eyes had taken on a yellow hue. He phoned the GP who arrived and backed me in my decision to go to the Bon Secours and said he would bring me there as he was on his way to Galway. On arrival I was admitted and was told that I had had a temperature of 104° and was suffering from septicaemia. Later I realised that I was lucky to have survived. Once admitted, the care was excellent and I remained in the hospital for about a week. I had suggested to the senior nurse that those taking the prostate biopsy should be warned of the (perhaps, slight) possibility of serious infection and to ensure that they were in contact with family or friends over the following 48 hours. She said that she had reported the incident as serious and thought that my suggestion was excellent; she arranged that I speak to the Hospital Director before leaving.

The Director saw nothing amiss in how the events subsequent to my biopsy had unfolded and I got the distinct impression that whereas the charge nurse's main focus was preventing patient harm, his was directed to more commercial considerations. Somewhat annoyed at what I interpreted to be his cavalier attitude, I suggested that the consultant's attitude was akin to that of a plumber who being told that problems had arisen with work he had done some days earlier, blithely replied that he didn't do problems and to try elsewhere. I got the impression that a warning note lies beside my name on the hospital records suggesting that next time I be sent directly to the morgue!

Some days later my GP phoned with the results of the biopsy and told me that the test was positive and that I had prostate cancer. He arranged for me to see a specialist the following day who told me that the cancer was serious (Gleeson score 7, if I remember correctly) and that he would recommend surgery as being the 'gold standard' of treatments but that because of the position of the cancer this might well leave me impotent and incontinent. As an alternative, he suggested the use of radiation by means of an implanted radioactive pellet.

A college friend of mine, John Walsh, who had been a medical doctor in the US, had been diagnosed with prostate cancer some four years earlier and I had met him a number of times since on his visits back to Ireland. He had died shortly before my diagnosis. He

had had surgery which left him incontinent; he had also been on hormone treatment which completely sapped his energy and I remember him saying that he was coming to believe that the treatment was more injurious to him than the disease.

The research which I had undertaken for my MPhil and PhD, though having no relevance to the treatment of prostate cancer, left me somewhat sceptical of supposed 'medical certainties' and 'gold standards'; a scepticism which was to be greatly reinforced on reading reports of a just-completed study of the efficacy of prostate cancer surgery.

I first saw reports in the media[42] and subsequently read the original study[43]. It was the largest randomised trial of the standard surgical treatment for prostate cancer and found that the treatment was ineffective. The trial which had begun in 1994 with 731 men who were followed up for 12 years, showed that those who underwent the operation had less than a 3% survival benefit compared with those who had no treatment and furthermore, that this 3% was not statistically significant and might be attributable solely to chance. It seems that the only certainty in relation to prostate cancer surgery, were the side effects! However the term 'side effects' does not do justice to the seriousness of such consequences which may include incontinence, impotence and – as in any surgery – death.

The paragraph of the original article that I found not only very disturbing but most persuasive was:

> *When the findings were presented at a meeting of the European Association of Urology in Paris in February, attended by 11,000 specialists from around the world, they were greeted with a stunned silence.*

My initial reaction to the study was that if the 'gold standard' was so deficient then a degree of scepticism was warranted towards other standard recommendations such as continuous three-monthly monitoring of PSA levels. I had a number of these tests but decided against continuing with them as, having decided not to have surgery, they served little purpose other than to make me continuously aware of the presence of the cancer. I also took some comfort from the fact that most prostate cancers are so slow-growing that the patient dies from some other cause.

One consequence of my cancer diagnosis was that it provided the impetus – if not the energy – to complete this memoir.

Turning my attention back to my PhD dissertation: as each of the final chapters was completed, I sent them to Professor Hayes and we then met the following week and went through that chapter line by line with me noting his observations or recommendations (all of which were acted on). It was agreed that I should have the final copy of the dissertation with him by early June aiming to have external examiner's *Viva* examination

in late Summer or early Autumn. I lodged a copy of the final draft with the College on 10th June 2010 and paid the appropriate college fees of €1,200.

Many years earlier, I had decided to celebrate the completion of my PhD with another solo trip with just my rucksack and had decided to travel around Syria. It was to be a complicated trip: first a flight to Budapest; then a train to Istanbul and a further train to Aleppo in Syria. I planned to spend a month travelling around Syria and to then take a ferry from Tartous in Syria to Alexandria. Then, having spent a week in Alexandria, to take a ferry from there to Venice and after a week there, to take a flight back to Ireland – it was indeed a fitting 'carrot' to motivate me during the many months and years of what appeared to be endless reading, writing … and the inevitable rewriting.

My travel reveries were abruptly shattered by an email which I received from Professor Hayes some days later stating that the word-count on my dissertation was 221,679 and far exceeded the 100,000 which he considered to be mandatory and not advisory. In subsequent exchange of emails, Professor Hayes also raised objection to the working assumptions on which I had based my thesis; I understood this to be a reference to his dissatisfaction with my use of the concept of personhood. I began to suspect that his objections concerning word-count were a cover for his real objections which were to do with my use of 'personhood' – a conclusion which was reinforced when I was told by a third party that another doctoral dissertation in philosophy had far exceeded the supposed 100,000 word limit and had been accepted without objection whilst Professor Hayes was Head of Department.

Suddenly all became clear: on 30th June I had an email from Professor Hayes followed within moments by a second email recalling the first and stating that the first email had been sent in error: it had stated:

> *"As for morality I admit to a deep antipathy to views that seek to specify who is and who is not a person, and so who has and who has not a claim to be subject of human rights, … "*

It was also clear from this retracted email that an extern examiner had not yet been appointed.

At his stage a meeting was arranged with the Head of the Arts Department who had been kept informed of the unfolding difficulties. He graciously offered his apologies for the manner in which I had been treated and offered to put a new supervisor in charge who would be more sympathetic – or rather would not raise moral objections – to the argument that I sought to make. Having examined the dissertation he believed that little more than a polishing exercise was required and he did not anticipate any further problems over the word-count.

Subsequently I met the College Principal who agreed to waive any further fees and who again apologised for the manner in which matters had been allowed to unfold.

I also met Dr. Niall Keane who was to be my new doctoral supervisor and even though we shared radically different philosophical tastes – his favourite philosopher was Heidegger, whom I disliked and mine was Wittgenstein, whom he disliked – our meeting went very well. We planned to get down to whatever revision was required the following January after I had returned from my Syrian trip.

My original plan in contemplating a trip to Syria, had been simply to get a flight to Damascus and then to spend a month exploring the country before returning home. The events of the previous months – especially my diagnosis of prostate cancer and the difficulties with Professor Hayes concerning my draft dissertation – had left me a little 'shell-shocked'. Lest the cancer might progress more aggressively than anticipated and this be my last backpacking journey, I decided on something more elaborate than I had originally planned. As I explored my options on the internet, I discovered a roll-on/roll-off cargo ferry that plied a triangular route from Venice to Tartous in Syria, then to Alexandria and then back to Venice and which it repeated on a fortnightly basis; the ferry also took foot passengers and it became an integral part of my trip.

Whilst browsing online, I had also found a website[44] devoted to rail travel which was a treasure trove of other useful travel information, aside from routes, timetables and prices. The site was called '*The Man in Seat Sixty-One';* its creator had been an employee of British Rail and thus entitled to free rail travel throughout Europe; he had always booked seat no. 61 on his continental journeys because, in the rail carriages then in vogue, it alone provided him with a forward facing seat with an unobstructed view. It became my bible for planning all my train journeys.

My itinerary as finalised: I took a flight to Budapest where I stayed for some four days, then a train to Bucharest for a couple of days and then by rail to Istanbul where I stayed for a week. From Istanbul I took a train to the Syrian border which I crossed by share-taxi to Aleppo. I spent just over a month in Syria before joining the ferry at Tartous for Alexandria where I stayed for five days before catching the ferry again to Venice before flying back to Ireland.

Budapest is a beautiful city made especially so by the majesty of the Danube but, seeing it in late Autumn, it presents a different face to that seen in winter when – as was evidenced from the markers along the banks – severe flooding may result in many thousands being rendered homeless. Seen from such a winter perspective, one begins to understand why rivers were, at least in myth, regarded as gods who sometimes became angry and vengeful.

One of the simplest, yet most evocative, sculptures that I have ever encountered lies on the banks of the Danube close to the Parliament building. It consists of bronze replicas of perhaps twenty pairs of shoes and is located at the edge of the quayside. The

sculpture is a memorial to the Jews who were killed by the Hungarian Fascists during the second World War; having been ordered to remove their shoes, they were then shot so that their bodies fell into, and were carried away by, the river.

Leaving Budapest for Bucharest by train and wishing to be well prepared on my arrival, I changed some money but in an unforgivable ignorance of geography, I had asked for Bulgarian currency instead of Romanian, so rather than being well organised, I arrived in Bucharest with an additional problem. It reminded me of a similar situation when in 2002, having spent Christmas in Norway (which never joined the EU), I planned to travel to Sweden in early January; again wishing to be well prepared and having scoured the banks in Bodø for Euro, I arrived in Sweden very pleased with myself but, on proffering my Euros, I was met with an expression of blank amazement. Though in the EU, Sweden had not adopted the Euro.

Bucharest has a poor reputation amongst backpackers, but my stay was uneventful though there was evidence of considerable poverty and drug use. Once, just outside the main station, a man lay dead on the pavement and although some police were standing nearby, the body had not been covered and the scene had the air of being, if not a regular occurrence, then of not being particularly noteworthy. Some years later I saw a TV documentary on the high number of drug-users in Bucharest many of whom were orphan children, who lived in the tunnels and sewers under the town centre; I was shocked and surprised to learn that:

> *"Deep under the streets of Bucharest there is a network of tunnels and sewers that is home to hundreds of men, women and children stricken by drug abuse HIV and TB. The entrance to this underworld is a hole in the pavement on a traffic island in front of the station. By late afternoon they start to wake up, clambering up out of the ground like the undead …"*[45]

The station of which they spoke was the same one outside of which I had seen a corpse lying on the pavement; perhaps this offers some explanation for the seeming indifference of the police? But even using the term 'explanation' in such a context is profoundly unsettling.

Arriving in Istanbul, the train line hugs the seashore and whilst it might not have matched the hope that I once had of arriving by boat and watching the city rise up out of the sea, it was a good second best. Having visited the city before, I was more relaxed in my wanderings and my best memories of my visit were walking at eventide along the promenade beyond Kennedy Caddesi, to slowly sip green tea while watching the sunset. Another was watching the many fishermen along the Galata Bridge and their occasional successes. Later, I could enjoy some of the freshly cooked fish for sale at the quay below.

In leaving Istanbul I took a short ferry ride to the Haydarpaşa rail station on Istanbul's Asian side from where I would take my train to Adana close to the Syrian border. My train was not to leave till close to midnight but not having been on the Asian side before

and wary of any travel mishaps, I arrived many hours too early. The Haydarpaşa terminal is a beautiful building standing directly on the shore and commanding a wonderful view over the Bosphorus and the Sea of Marmara, so passing the few hours as I awaited my train departure, was more an enjoyment than a burden. The station itself had been built in 1909 with the assistance of the Germans and the rail line had then run to Adana and onward to Aleppo and Damascus. From Damascus a narrow gauge railway continued to Medina in what was later to become Saudi Arabia; the film 'Lawrence of Arabia' told the story of the sabotaging of this rail link.

In booking my rail ticket to Adana I had opted for a single-berth sleeper which was relatively inexpensive, costing little more than a room at a mid-price hotel; it was the most luxurious and enjoyable rail journey that I have ever taken. On entering the train my berth was already made up with white crisp linen sheets; the cabin contained a wash-hand basin with a fold up reading table and a fridge with various juices and fruit – and best of all, I had it all to myself! I slept soundly and on waking I showered, breakfasted and my bed was tidied away and I spent the day watching the countryside in all its varieties unfolding beside me. Before heading out into the plains of Anatolia, the train passed Konya where I had spent a few days some ten years earlier; I find it a strange experience to revisit a place one has been many years before but to see it anew and from a different direction.

The train usually continued past Adana onward to Aleppo in Syria but that section of the track was then being repaired, so my rail journey terminated at Adana; it had taken twenty hours since leaving Istanbul. I spent a night in Adana and then took a share-taxi to the Syrian border and onwards to Aleppo.

I travelled around Syria for over a month, first to Aleppo then Latakia, Damascus, Hama, Tartous from where I took the ferry to Alexandria; and I saw many sights: the Citadel in Aleppo; the many and beautiful mosques; the old crusader Krak des Chevaliers; the waterwheels in Hama; the old bazaar in Damascus and even the chapel[46] of St. Paul.

But now as I write, the situation in Syria is so despairing; the country is past mourning, nearly dead; the lives of the Syrian people are so awful with so many in exile, that to write of my many enjoyable experiences, seems distasteful. In the face of present horrors, it would be to speak of trivialities.

But there is one exception that I would like to mention because it has a bearing on psychiatry and the care of the mentally troubled, these are the bīmaristans that I saw in both Aleppo and Damascus.[47] Bīmaristans were charitable hospitals or refuges for the insane that were established in the 8th century; some of which continued in use until the end of the 19th. Being a westerner, it is very easy to misunderstand – to simplify, to extol or to denigrate – what one encounters in a culture very different from one's own; the fact that these refuges catered for the insane is an added complication in that one tends to see them through the lens of a modern sensibility but they had features which,

at least to me, even surpassed that modern sensibility. The buildings were beautifully constructed in stone with a courtyard, a large water-filled pool and a fountain at its centre; a number of cells opened onto this courtyard and around which there was a covered colonnade to create a cool, shaded, space; some of the cubicles had barred windows, presumably for the more violent inmates. This provision of a cool, quiet, refuge shaded from the heat of the sun functioned as a refuge within which a healing might take place; of the therapies provided, music played a central role. Quietude, music, the tinkling of running water, companionship, a cool escape from the relentless sun all seem excellent therapies to help calm a troubled mind.

The little else that I can speak of is my impression of the political situation as I encountered it during my month's travelling and talking to those I met on the way. First, to place this in context: in the face of continued EU reluctance in progressing EU membership, Turkey had turned its attention eastwards and was forging very strong diplomatic and commercial links with Syria and both economies appeared to be thriving. The United States was restoring its diplomatic relations with Syria. The war now engulfing Syria began with some apparently minor incidents of civil unrest in the southern city of Daraa, where some students who had been arrested for writing anti-government slogans, were subsequently tortured by the police. A protest march was confronted by armed police and suddenly some protesters were shot as were some of the security personnel. This functioned as a match to light a fuse from which began the conflagration.

In the events that unfolded, President Al-Assad was ham-fisted in his response and served to exacerbate the situation; Russia proposed negotiations but western nations insisted that President Al-Assad must resign before any negotiation could take place. As might well have been anticipated, he refused and then the situation further spiralled out of control with arms being supplied by many, far from disinterested, foreign states.

In travelling through Syria I saw little evidence of police brutality. This was in contrast to the week that I subsequently spent in Alexandria where I saw men plucked from the street by plain clothes police; an extremely oppressive atmosphere in a local court which I attended, where the many accused were confined in a cage. The black marias with their prisoners being brought to prison were a regular evening occurrence. I myself had an encounter with the political police when strolling along the promenade in Alexandria. I had noticed a particularly fine old house which happened to be the Swedish Cultural Center. I stopped to take a quick photo and suddenly a hand covered the camera lens and I was aggressively ordered to desist. I did, but only then did I notice that at each of my shoulders, stood a black uniformed member of the political police. I suddenly realised that this could quite easily have unfolded in a much more serious manner.

What I did see in Syria was evidence of corruption especially at the border crossing where my companions in the taxi were 'shaken-down' before being allowed to import

some domestic items. On the train to Latakia, I was surprised when some children threw stones at the train as their father stood by. In Latakia, I saw a huge political commissariat under construction which, when I enquired, brought silence but wry smiles of amusement, in reply. Later, when I needed a visa extension, I sought directions to the local police office and responses from some locals to my enquiries, was to say the least, hesitant; on finding the police office, I was very surprised to see so many going from office to office, seeking to obtain various permissions and when I was obliged to go to the chief's office, the atmosphere amongst those already there, was oppressive.

These are small innuendoes and easily over interpreted, but I did meet a dissident who had been exiled under President Basher al-Assad's father (Hafez al-Assad) and who had just returned to Syria and who spoke of how the political situation was much improved from when he had left.

I had read about Hafez al-Assad's campaign of killing against members of the Muslim Brotherhood who had become prominent in Hama. I visited the city and saw the remaining evidence of the destruction. But there was also evidence of Western meddling: in Damascus, I had seen the bullet holes in the galvanised roofs of the bazaars from when French planes strafed the city in 1945 in an attempt to keep Syria under its control.

All this is to argue that whilst Syria clearly had problems of dissent and possessed an oppressive, harsh security service, these paled in comparison with the situation in Egypt at that time.

On first reading of the fatalities at those first protests at Daraa, I wondered whether a lone sniper might have precipitated the conflict by first firing at and killing a protester, then firing at and killing a soldier and then departing, knowing what might ensue. A not dissimilar scenario has been reported to have occurred during the Maidan uprising in Kiev in Ukraine in 2014. It might also be argued that some of Syria's neighbours had had an interest in stopping Syria being welcomed back into the international community. I am most certainly not suggesting that the unbridled chaos that eventually occurred in Syria might have been intended, but rather that just the 'little bit of chaos' that had been intended as a warning, suddenly turned into an unintended conflagration likely to burn all in its vicinity. This might be wild speculation, yet what unfolded in Benghazi barely a year later, was not dissimilar and resulted in the destruction of the state of Libya.

The ferry journey to Alexandria took under two days. Entering the city through its magnificent port, I became aware of a dimension of the city of which I had previously been ignorant; namely, its importance to the imperial ambitions of many European powers.

Having forgotten the name of the hotel that I had stayed in on an earlier visit, I had been unable to book my stay but with the help of a friendly taxi driver and after many wrong-turnings, I finally recognised it. It often amazes me how such sympathy, empathy and helpfulness can not only arise but sometimes even flourish, despite the absence of a common language. Luckily the hotel had vacancies and I checked into a room much like the one I had enjoyed before; a balcony open to the cooling sea breezes, on the Cornice and overlooking the sea.

I spent that week strolling and re-experiencing the city; though one incident occurred which remained with me for some considerable time.

I had been sitting on the sea-wall along the promenade and listening to some music on headphones; my rucksack was on the wall to my side and beneath me was a drop of about 3 meters to the rocks below. Someone approached me on my left side and began speaking to me; I removed my headphones to reply but the ensuing talk seemed forced and a little bizarre. Suddenly I suspected that something was happening behind my back; turning, I saw a man attempting to slowly unzip the front pocket of my rucksack. We were face to face with barely inches between us; I shouted at him but I didn't move and neither did he but he slowly stood up and walked away. I then saw that there were not only two but a third man who had been observing – or more likely – orchestrating all that had occurred. All three slowly walked away whilst I remained, shocked; the slightest push and I would have fallen on the rocks below, if not dead, then seriously injured and my distress unlikely to be observed. I had never before looked so closely into the eyes of someone who could have killed me with barely a flick of his hand; I was shaken – it was like being faced with one's own open grave.

On leaving Alexandria, I needed a taxi to get back to port. Again the taxi driver had no English so in an attempt to explain my destination, I took pen and paper and drew a sketch of a boat. Feeling very pleased with myself, I was shocked out of my complacency by my taxi driver who – doubtless equally pleased with himself – had drawn up alongside a beach with children swimming in the sea and playing in the sand!

Eventually arriving at the port, I found that I would be obliged to wait for many hours before being allowed enter and board. Also sitting outside was an old American who told me that he been in the US military and knew the Middle-East well; he was on a cruise which had been a present from his children. He was a very knowledgeable man interesting to converse with. As we sat and reminisced, we watched the other cruise passengers some very few of whom braved the port gates to venture on their own into the city; but even they ventured but a short distance, most were brought on escorted bus tours of Alexandria. It was disappointing to see how few were open to getting any direct experience of the countries that they visited; they gained little more than had they stayed at home watching travel documentaries on TV.

The shipping line being Italian, the restaurant food was superb; often the first course at dinner could, in itself, have been a full meal. The weather was superb and I spent the days on deck watching the coasts of Crete, then Greece, Italy and Albania slowly glide by. But suddenly the furies of the Adriatic were unleashed upon us and the beauties of Italian food were far from my mind as I succumbed to seasickness but not as severely as many of my fellow passengers.

I had booked my Venice accommodation in the Santa Croce district in what had been a convent but was now a small hotel. It proved to be an excellent choice as it was far from the main tourist areas yet on the Grand Canal. As the ship neared Venice, I enquired of the ship's bursar as to where precisely we would dock. I had come armed with all my maps and he, having perused them, assured me that we would go directly up the Grand Canal to the centre of Venice. He had been very helpful to me earlier and, not wishing to offend him I remained silent but – in that the bridges over the Grand Canal had a clearance of at most five meters and our ship was perhaps fifty meters tall – I hoped that the ship's navigator had achieved his qualifications at a marine college different to that of the bursar.

We eventually docked in Venice's commercial port which was many miles distant from Venice itself but the purser, perhaps having realised his earlier error, kindly arranged a lift to bring me into the centre of Venice.

My last visit to Venice had been over forty years earlier so my first days were spent in repossessing old memories. But quickly tiring of the main tourist sites, I discovered Sacca Di S'Girolamo which was a wonderful, quiet area north of the Jewish Quarter and from where it was possible to see the snow covered Dolomites in the distance – my love affair with mountains seems to be incurable!

Walking in such areas I found some excellent, reasonably priced, local restaurants and in the week that I spent in Venice, quickly found myself at home. I also ventured out onto some of the more remote islands – San't Erasmo was a particular favourite. Strolling around the island it was difficult to conceive that the crowds of Venice were but a short distance away. Sitting on the grass having a picnic, I was suddenly surprised to see a snake creeping under my rucksack; doubtlessly it was not dangerous – possibly just a grass snake – but I gained a new respect for St. Patrick.

Torcello was another wonderful island, with a magnificent basilica which is one of the oldest in Venice but in its simplicity and lightness, it far outshines any other church that I had seen whilst in Venice. As I was sitting outside enjoying the sun, two boats drew alongside, each containing family members and both families were clearly good friends; each had brought their picnic baskets and delicacies which they continued to share between the boats; amidst the sheer ebullience of their conversations – of which I understood nothing – I mused to myself '*What a beautifully civilised way to live*.'

I also spent a day strolling around the Lido which was full of echoes of a different, older world replete with relics of a past grandeur; I visited the Grand Hotel des Bains – which featured in Visconti's film '*Death in Venice'* – and which still, like von Aschenbach in the film, seeks to present an elegant face to the world despite death knocking at its door.

Chapter 7 : A Coda …

2012-15: award of PhD, Armenia, Korea, …

> *"Two equally steep and bold paths may lead to the same peak. To act as if death did not exist, or to act thinking every minute of death, is perhaps the same thing."*[1]

On returning to Ireland after my trip to Syria I was anxious to resolve the situation in relation to my PhD dissertation, as rapidly as possible. I met Dr. Keane in early January 2011 and he made a number of suggestions concerning stylistic changes which, though accepted by me at first with some reluctance, helped considerably in the readability of the dissertation. Perhaps drawing on my mathematics background, my original draft had been liberally sprinkled with numbered 'Thesis Conclusions' and 'Sub-Conclusions'; jettisoning these made the dissertation much more accessible.

Over the following weeks and months we worked our way through the earlier draft chapter by chapter. Dr. Keane made some excellent suggestions as to other philosophical sources which I could draw on to further buttress my argument and I found the cut and thrust of our discussion not only intellectually invigorating but very fruitful. By June 2011, the revision was essentially completed and the revised draft was submitted to the College in the hope that a *Viva* examination by the external examiner might be arranged for September. The College had appointed Professor Joris Vandenberghe (who was Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Louvain in Belgium) as external examiner. I was very happy to have someone of such international standing appointed not least because my dissertation contained some strong criticism not only of the psychiatric profession but of Irish psychiatry. Hence, I believed that it might be difficult to get a fair hearing from someone drawn from within the narrow confines of the Irish academic psychiatric establishment.

No questions were raised by the College authorities concerning the word-count. In view of the earlier dispute with Professor Hayes, it might be of interest to note that the word-

count of the dissertation as presented to the extern examiner in June 2011 was 221,192 – a reduction of 487 words. The word count of the dissertation as finally accepted after the amendments and additions required by Examination Board subsequent to my *Viva*, totalled 229,481 – an increase of 7,802 words!

My *Viva* was scheduled for 13th September which I had hoped would not be inauspicious. The Examination Board consisted of Professor Vandenberghe, Dr. Thornton, Head of Philosophy and Professor Breen both of MIC, University of Limerick.

The standard procedure during a *Viva* is, I believe, for the candidate to first give a short video or oral outline of his work but I decided that it might be more beneficial to my case to try to tackle the objection that I believe would be most strongly made against my thesis namely, that I had been overcritical of psychiatry and that whilst my criticisms might once have had validity, that era was now passed. I took an indirect approach[2] based on an observation by the late Professor Gillian Rose, a philosopher who was Jewish and deeply involved in Holocaust Studies. She had argued that the Holocaust was being narrated in such a way as to protect the present generation from the thought that they too might have something in common with the perpetrators. For Rose, the story of the Holocaust is typically told so as to place the audience alongside the victim: for example, in discussing the film *Schindler's List* she used the term 'Holocaust Piety' to describe the responses to the film which she states "… *seeks to mystify something we dare not understand because we fear that it may be all too understandable, … all too human*"; the film, she states, degenerates into myth and sentimentality and "… *it leaves us … piously joining the survivors putting stones on Schindler's grave in Israel. It should leave us unsafe …"*. She contrasted it with Tadeusz Borowski's book '*This way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen'*, of which she said:

> *"… he makes you witness the brutality in the most disturbing way for it is not clear from what position, … as whom … you are reading. You emerge shaking in horror at yourself, with yourself in question"*

The lesson that I sought to draw was that the admitted horrors of past psychiatric practice – the lobotomies, insulin treatment, incarceration of political dissidents and so much else – should not be comfortably regarded as belonging to a distant past with no connection to current psychiatric practice, but rather as injunctions to dispassionately scrutinise contemporary psychiatric practices to see if aspects of them are capable of being regarded by later generations with the same incomprehension and abhorrence as we now regard psychiatric 'treatments' such as lobotomies.

Professor Vandenberghe led the questioning and I was surprised at how thoroughly he had studied my dissertation. He took me to task on a number of my assertions: in relation to neurotoxic effects of antipsychotics; the lack of an adequate evidence base for the use of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT); and an objection – first raised by Drury in his '*The Danger of Words and writings on Wittgenstein'* – to randomised clinical trials which I had sought to use. I had the sources at hand to defend the first two but had to concede

that I was in error in relation to the third. His strongest objection however, was to my interpretation of the Hippocratic maxim '*primum non nocere*' ["*Help, or at least do no harm*"] which I had argued implied that the obligation not to harm took primacy over the obligation to help. He argued that because (some) harm was often an inevitable consequence of medical treatment, my interpretation would result in "*…the end of medicine (and not just psychiatry) as we know it*." I responded that under the doctrine of informed consent, the patient in giving their consent, took on their own shoulders the responsibility for any harm that might ensue but that such could not occur in the context of a coercive intervention. I had sought to clarify the syntactical structure of the maxim by the following example: imagine a parent when advising a teenager who is going to visit their grandmother, saying: "*Bring a gift but at least do not steal anything*".

I asked does such an injunction mean:

- [preclusive]: "*Above all else do not steal and, if you can, bring a gift*"? or
- [permissive]: "*Make sure that that the extent of your gifts exceeds that which you steal*"?

I suggested that the first is the only meaning permitted by the syntax but Professor Vandenberghe took exception to my example and I was obliged to remove it from the final text. At the end of close to an hour's rigorous questioning, I was told that I had passed subject to me making some minor corrections and to my adding a section discussing some research studies that I had not been aware of in writing my dissertation. These studies related to ex-patients who had once been subjected to a coercive psychiatric treatment and had been questioned as to their, then current, perception of whether the coercive intervention was beneficial. I subsequently studied these and some similar studies and found that their methodology was such that there was a built-in propensity towards classifying responses as 'positive'; Professor Vandenberghe raised no objection to my criticism of these studies and my dissertation was formally accepted. I was conferred with a PhD in Philosophy on the 25th October 2012 by the University Of Limerick. My doctoral thesis was entitled *'A philosophical investigation into coercive psychiatric practices'*; it is in two volumes and is available online.[3]

I sent a copy of my dissertation Abstract to Professor Thomas Szasz who – though a psychiatrist himself – has over a period of fifty years, been one of psychiatry's most vociferous and trenchant critics, in the vague hope that it might be if not of use, at least be of interest to him. He replied and asked me to send him a copy of the full dissertation. I was surprised and deeply honoured that he troubled to reply as he was then ninety-two years old and – in that he died some months later – doubtlessly ill and frail. His reply was short and thanked me for letting him see my thesis, congratulating me and concluded by saying that: "*It is clearly the product of much serious work*."

Professor Vandenberghe suggested that I should publish my dissertation as a book and offered to write the publicity material if I did. I felt however, that if a book were to be published, it would require much editorial input from me and I simply lacked the energy for this; I also believed that putting the dissertation online would make it freely accessible to anyone who was interested and at no cost to them. Furthermore having studied and researched the topic of coercive psychiatry for close to ten years, I believed that I now had little further to add.

I put the dissertation online and on the academic sites *Academia.edu* and *criticalpsychiatry.co.uk.* The former is a repository for general theses and research papers and the latter is a repository for academic psychiatrists wherein research papers written from a non-traditional psychiatric perspective, can achieve an audience. Over the years since publication the dissertation has reached an audience of approximately 10–15 hits per month on *Academia* and much to my surprise, it has ranked in the top 5% on *criticalpsychiatry* which – in that most of the other contributors are academic psychiatrists – was a matter of considerable pride.

I have had very slight involvements with academic philosophy or psychiatry since my conferring: Amnesty asked me to review submissions that they were making in relation to proposed changes to the *Irish Mental Health Act* (2001), which I did. I also sent a submission to *The Health Information and Quality Authority* (HIQA) giving details to some research that I had encountered which detailed the high incidence of inappropriate prescribing of antipsychotics in Irish nursing homes and the extremely deleterious effects of such practices on the residents in such homes.

Israel and its treatment of the Palestinian population under its occupation has been a concern of mine for many years, and has resulted in many letters to newspaper editors – some published, many unpublished. A particular concern was the attempt by some of Israel's sympathisers to equate criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism. A particularly egregious instance of this was to be found in what had been sometimes been portrayed as the official EU definition of anti-Semitism; it had included examples such as the claim that "*Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis*" – a statement with which even many Jewish critics of Israel would have agreed.[4] It transpired that this definition was not an official definition but had been drafted by Israeli sympathisers and placed on the EU website as a working definition; it has since been removed after many protests including my own. But having completed my PhD, I planned to do some academic research on the definition of anti-Semitism and when in 2013, the University of Göttingen in Germany, offered 5 post-doctoral studentships on religious toleration I decided to take a chance and apply. Though I recognised that my chances were slim not least because the studentships had been widely advertised in

international journals and because my proposal was not directly relevant to the specified research area, I submitted a research proposal.[5] This proposed a study of the asymmetries in the criteria used in defining anti-Semitism and Islamophobia with a view to achieving a measure of concordance between them. The proposal was unsuccessful but at least it had the virtue of allowing me to clarify my own thoughts on these matters.

In the course of drafting that proposal and writing this Memoir, I had asked a friend with whom I had previously had had a relationship but who knew nothing of my earlier involvement with psychiatry, to review the draft of a letter that I had intended to send to a newspaper critical of the 2014 Israeli bombing of Gaza. She response by asking whether I was becoming obsessive and risked damaging my health by having such preoccupations – an observation that flowed directly from her reading of my experience with psychiatry some fifty years earlier and which she neither could, nor would, have made without learning of that 'history'. I was deeply shocked to find that I was still being stigmatised for what had happened so long ago, a shock which was exacerbated by her refusal to acknowledge that she harboured any such stigma. I have attempted to address some of the issues concerning psychiatric stigma, in a Postscript.

Since completing my PhD I have made two interesting journeys, the first was in 2013 to Georgia and Armenia and the second, a month travelling with my rucksack around South Korea in 2014.

My trip to Georgia and Armenia was motivated principally by my desire to see Mt. Ararat again. I had seen it from Turkey on my return journey from Iran some ten years earlier. The aspect it then presented and the lore associated with the mountain continued to intrigue me; now I wished to see it from another perspective, that of Yerevan, the capital of Armenia. I travelled to Tbilisi in Georgia because it was far cheaper to fly to Tbilisi and travel by overnight train to Yerevan, than to fly directly to Yerevan.

Though Georgia had not been my main interest when planning my journey, it turned out to be the most memorable part of my journey. I would have loved to have had the energy and means to have travelled north to the Caucuses or to the Black Sea resorts but my trip was for little over a fortnight and other than a trip to Davit Gareja which is one of the oldest Christian monasteries in Georgia, and my journey to Yerevan, I spent my time in Tbilisi.

Though charming pockets of the old town were still to be found, the centre of Tbilisi has been the victim of redevelopment highlighted by some grotesque modernist 'trophy' architecture credited to Georgia's recent President Mikheil Saakashvili. Close by the new glass domed palace, I came across a small intimate orthodox church of a size comparable to the Gallarus Oratory on the Dingle Peninsula but its architectural beauty was thrown

into high relief by its more garish new neighbour and for that alone the brashness of the latter might be excused.

Saakashvili who had been something of a US protégé who wished to take Georgia into NATO, is now exiled. In 2015, he was appointed by the new President of Ukraine, as Head of the International Advisory Council on Reforms although at the time he was wanted by the Georgian government on charges of corruption – a glimpse of the hidden wheels within wheels of international politics … and capitalism, as is evidenced by the plenitude of gambling casinos liberally scattered across Tbilisi!

Georgia's political gyrations were beautifully portrayed in a wonderful piece of sculpture in central Tbilisi which was of a 5 meter high bicycle but with an additional set of reverse-facing handlebars in place of the saddle; to me, it symbolised the great efforts expended by the different political factions, but to little effect - much ado about nothing!

Aside from the architectural glitz, wandering the side streets and markets was a pleasure. Even buying grapes from a street fruit-seller became something of a wonder as he offered me samples to taste of the different varieties that he had on sale whilst explaining that Georgia grows more varieties of grapes than any other country in the world and has a long wine-making tradition and an international reputation for the excellence of its wines.

Georgian independence from the USSR dates from just 2003 when President Shevardnadze was driven from power and though my taxidriver was deeply contemptuous of recent US influence (loudly berating the naming of the road to the airport the 'George Bush Avenue') the Museum of Soviet Occupation provides eloquent testimony to the baleful nature of the Soviet influence and the sometimes extreme cruelty of its rule; a particular irony in that Stalin was Georgian. One of the most memorable exhibits in that museum was the original carriage in which, in 1921 at the end of Georgia's short lived independence, its most influential leaders were imprisoned and shot. The carriage now stands in the museum, lit from within, the bullet holes starkly visible in the gloom.

The Georgian National Museum nearby provided a welcome contrast. It contained gold antiquities of such exquisite craftsmanship that – at least in my own memory – they served to dull the treasures of our own Irish museums. It was whilst there that I recalled the Greek story of Jason's search for the Golden Fleece and realised that it may not have been simply a fable: Georgia was long famous for its gold, flecks of which were often washed down the mountain streams flowing from the Caucuses. The method of gathering the gold was to place a sheep's fleece in the stream to catch the particles of gold – hence the 'golden fleece'; it was with some surprise that recently, when watching a Canadian programme on panning for gold, I saw that they used a not dissimilar method though with a more modern material in place of the fleece.

Of Davit Gareja, both the monastery itself and the journey to it were equally memorable. The monastery – which is Georgian Orthodox Christian – is hewn out of the rock and situated on a mountain ridge on the Georgian-Azerbaijan border; it had the appearance of a fortress capable of being defended; unsurprising in that it lies on the fault line between Orthodox Christianity and Islam. It was founded in the 6th century by its namesake who was an ascetic Syrian monk on a mission to spread Christianity. In drawing its origins from the Syrian traditions of hermit monks, it seemed to me to share at least a spiritual kinship with the monks who first established their monastic settlements on the Skelligs – an even more dauntingly isolated outpost at the very opposite extremity of Europe which also possessed an austere, but very different, beauty.

My journey to the monastery was by the only means available to me – a taxi. The journey had been preceded by hours of 'negotiations' the previous day as the taxi driver spoke no English and I, no Georgian or Russian. The negotiations had to encompass: how many were going? (just me); how long he had to wait for me at the monastery? (3 hours) and how much money?; the slip of paper which I still possess includes stick figures, drawings of clocks, two columns of figures (his slowly decreasing and mine, slowly increasing) with multiple crossings out until a final concordance emerged (the bargaining was so protracted that the term 'concordance' is merited!).

The following day, the journey from Tbilisi to the monastery took perhaps four hours of which the first three hours were uneventful but for the last hour we left the main road and headed off across semi-desert steppes on what were at best dirt-roads. There was little evidence of human habitation: a couple of settlements and a deserted army barracks and sightings of herds of cattle and sheep with the herdsman mounted on his horse and alongside his pack animal carrying his tent and cooking utensils. The herdsman following his herd across the fenceless steppes was like a re-enactment of the cowboy westerns of my childhood. Though the landscape was starkly beautiful in summer, I had seen photographs of the snow-bound monastery in winter when the landscape appeared deeply inhospitable.

The rail journey to Yerevan was overnight and took over ten hours. The rail line crosses an elevated plain before dropping down to Yerevan and despite the temperature in Tbilisi being about 25° Celsius (Yerevan was similar) patches of snow were visible alongside the track. Dawn broke on the bleakest of bleak lands and as the altitude dropped and small farmsteads appeared alongside the track, the extreme poverty of the inhabitants became visible. It all looked like the detritus following a war but with a poverty so unlike the poverty to be seen in Asia where for perhaps cultural or religious reasons, the bright

smiling eyes of children were always to be found. Here the poverty looked simply oppressive and bleak without even a glimmer of hope on the horizon.

Later I was to read that the bleakness and agedness had a long historical lineage extending over million years: on that border plateau, in Dmanisi, archeologists had unearthed the skulls and other remains of human ancestors that were over 1.8 million years old. The remains are thought to be early forms of *Homo erectus*, the first to have body proportions like a modern human. Previously early humanoid fossils found in Africa were assumed to be distinct species but the find in Dmanisi showed that they were normal variants of *Homo erectus* who migrated as far as Asia soon after appearing in Africa.[6]

Arriving in Yerevan, tired and not a little dispirited, I soon found my hotel. Later, having asked the hotel receptionist for directions to the city centre, and mishearing her, I headed to the top of the street and turned left (as I was to be told later, I should have turned right). I found myself amongst extreme poverty and in a desolate neighbourhood where my presence seemed to generate suspicion from the black-jacketed men standing around. Over my many years travelling I have often been in neighbourhoods deeply scarred by poverty and unemployment but here it had a much more threatening aspect; I kept my eyes straight ahead, looking neither to the left or right and retraced my steps. The following day and having discovered my error, I headed for the city centre which, like most cities and provided one remained alert, held out no particular dangers for a saunterer such as I. I began to wonder whether my experience of the previous day was a product of earlier preconceptions drawn from what I had seen from the train; I fear that they may have been – such prejudices deeply colour and diminish one's experiences.

Heading into the centre, I had two places that I had planned to visit: a woodcarving museum and the Sergei Parajanov Museum. A third was the Armenian Genocide Museum which lay some distance from the centre and which I planned to visit some days later.

Woodcarving has been a love of mine for many years. Working to the slow rhythm of a mallet; the sensuousness in the feel and smell of the wood; the awareness that (unlike working in clay) a loss of attention may make the work irrecoverable; all these make it a much more personally rewarding experience than, for example wood-turning, where the wood dust and the noise of the machine, means that one works not to one's own rhythm, but to that of the machine. An actual museum to woodcarving is such a rarity that I felt obliged to pay homage; I did and it was a richly rewarding experience not least for the beautiful young girl who served as my guide and not only enlightened me on Armenian wood traditions and sculpture but also on its most eminent writers and classical musicians.

Close by was the Sergei Parajanov Museum; he was a filmmaker and I had seen his '*The Color of Pomegranates'* many years earlier but – though the sometimes surrealistic

images it contained were fascinating – I found the film itself, impenetrable. The museum was housed in his old house and was a cornucopia of Parajanov's sculpture, costumes and film memorabilia; one could only marvel at his creativity and capacity for inventiveness in so many disparate fields, especially in the realisation that all this had been accomplished whilst suffering periods of incarceration because of his political activity.

Leaving the museum and attracted by wedding celebrations in a nearby church, I rounded a corner and suddenly beheld Mt. Ararat in all its majesty. I had seen it earlier from my hotel but here it struck me by surprise and because I was gazing across a deep valley and the mountain was unobstructed, its true magnificence was undeniable. Its lower slopes were seen through a haze so that the mountain looked as if suspended above the earth and with its snow covered summit clearly visible, it had an ethereal presence which was accentuated by fact that the mountain is sacred to Armenians and yet is situated in Turkey to which they are normally[7] denied access. At that spot, the city of Yerevan seemed oriented, as if in supplication, towards the mountain whose snow-capped enormity dominates the city's skyline.

The Armenian Genocide Museum is built on an elevated site commanding a panoramic view with Mt Ararat its only competitor; it is as if both are in a dialogue with each other – Ararat being the locus from which the exile took place and the museum being the memorial to that very exile. Architecturally it is a beautiful building and in its basement, it houses a wealth of records, contemporaneous photographs and newspaper articles detailing the horrors that were visited upon the Armenians in the midst of the first World War.

The responsibility for the massacres is often laid wholly at the door of the Turks but it should be remembered that Germany also had a role to play in its planning, if not in its implementation. Germany and Turkey were allies in that war and the Armenians were suspected of being sympathetic to their joint enemy, Russia. I became aware of the extent of that collaboration between Germany and Turkey when travelling to Syria. The rail line between Istanbul and Aleppo and onwards to Jordan, was constructed with the help of German engineers and it was this same railway that Lawrence of Arabia sought to destroy. Indeed the hotel that I stayed in when in Aleppo had been originally called Baron's Hotel and had been built to accommodate these same German engineers. Lawrence had stayed at that hotel in more peaceable times and his (still) unpaid bar bill is framed for all to see – but unlikely to shame him any longer.

The Armenian Massacres have often been regarded as the precursors – or even the inspiration – for Hitler's Holocaust against the Jews; his statement "*Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?"* being often cited in support, but it is worth quoting the passage in full:

> *It's a matter of indifference to me what a weak western European civilization will say about me. I have issued the command — and I'll have anybody who utters but one word of criticism executed by a firing squad — that our war aim does not consist in reaching certain lines, but in the physical destruction of the enemy. Accordingly, I have placed my death-head formations in readiness — for the present only in the East — with orders to them to send to death mercilessly and without compassion, men, women, and children of Polish derivation and language. Only thus shall we gain the living space (Lebensraum) which we need. Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?*[8]

In view of the world's readiness to condemn any who deny the Holocaust it is indeed ironic that Israel – for what appears to be commercial considerations – refuses to use the term 'genocide' in relation to the Armenians and to extend to them, the same honour and respect for memory, that they claim for themselves.[9]

Leaving Yerevan, I took the overnight train back to Tbilisi and to my flight home well-supplied with Armenian apricot brandy – a treasure that alone merited such a journey!

I headed to South Korea in September 2014 for a month's backpacking; my flight from Dublin was first to Dubai where after a four hour stop-over, I boarded a flight to Seoul. I had a window seat on this flight and the sky was cloudless, so the terrain was clearly visible beneath. We first crossed southern Iran close to Bam – a beautiful citadel with a history dating back to 220 BCE which I had visited in 2000 but which had been utterly destroyed in 2003 by an earthquake. We then crossed the Pamir mountains on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan and I fondly remembered a week that I had spent there in 1992 amongst the Kalash; the flight path continued over Kashgar and then along the ridge of the Tian Shan Mountain range where I had also been on that journey. Images of these mountains – which are also called the 'The Flaming Mountains' – had long lodged in my memory and I had often wondered whether I had imagined the strange colours and shapes: the deep gullies and ravines adorned in pastel shades of red and green which gave them something of the appearance of a giant ice-cream; but no – the image beneath me surpassed in brilliance and sheer extravaganza, anything that I had remembered. This flight over Iran, Pakistan and China was like seeing part of my last twenty years in revue – a sobering experience.

I had arranged hotel accommodation in Seoul for my first week's stay but on enquiring as to travel arrangements from Incheon Airport, I was told that as a taxi would be prohibitively expensive, I should take the express train to central Seoul and then a metro to a suburban station from where I was given directions to the hotel. All sounded so simple as I left Dublin but the flight to Dubai had been over eight hours and then the stop-over in Dubai followed by another eight hour flight to Seoul meant that even as I arrived at Incheon, some twenty hours after departing Dublin, I was exhausted. Nonetheless I had little choice but to press on; the staff at the airport were very helpful

and getting the express train to Seoul went without a hitch but I then had to descent to the Metro where my problems began.

Knowing nothing of the Metro or of its ticketing procedure and lacking any knowledge of Korean, I began to flounder until two young Korean girls – who had no English – helped me use the ticketing machine and pointed me in the direction of the correct platform. Keeping my wits about me, I managed to decipher the station closest to my hotel. On exiting the metro and whilst still carrying my large rucksack and my day-bag, I was faced with what the summit of Everest must have seemed like to Hillary, tier upon tier of steps to be climbed. I began to realise that, at 68, this might well be my last backpacking trip. Eventually I arrived at the hotel and slept … and slept.

Waking the next morning, breakfasting and strolling around downtown Seoul, I realised that if this was to be my last trip, I had made an excellent choice.

I had first thought of visiting Korea on seeing the film '*Spring, Summer, Winter, Autumn … and Spring*'[10] – a Buddhist-inspired fable set on a small temple in the middle of a lake, amidst beautiful mountain scenery and it was that scenery that first attracted me.

Over the years I had also become aware of something of the troubled history between Japan and Korea and when visiting Hiroshima, I had read of the refusal of the Japanese to permit the erection of a memorial there to the many Koreans who, whilst being forced to work in Hiroshima by the Japanese, had been killed in the dropping of the atomic bomb. The Japanese to this day do not fully acknowledge the horrors that they unleashed on their Asian neighbours; their use of Chinese prisoners for experimentation; the hundreds of thousands that were massacred in Nanking; the kidnapping of Korean women (so-called 'comfort women') who were subsequently used as prostitutes by the Japanese military. This last in an ongoing source of friction between Korea and Japan.[11]

Whilst in Japan – though I very much enjoyed my travels – I was aware that behind the formal rituals of greeting and hospitality, lay a deep arrogance and a racism bolstered by a militarism which though now sleeping, appears ready to waken. My wondering how the Korean character differed from the Japanese and whether the relationship between Japan and Korea might in some ways, mirror that between England and Ireland, was another reason for my visit Korea.

Seoul was in many ways not dissimilar from Tokyo though the commitment to high tech internet and phone devices seemed even greater. The near universal use of camera-sticks and whole streets devoted to cosmetic surgery evidences a high level of narcissistic self-absorption amongst the young; doubtlessly this is becoming a world-wide phenomenon but Korea seems to be in its vanguard – but these are probably little more than the musings of a man in his 70th year and steadily becoming more cantankerous!

Seoul is a beautiful city with some superb architecture but one of the greatest surprises was a project that had been created out of the removal of a raised highway and underpasses from the centre of Seoul. The removal of these roads had uncovered a small river which was now centrepiece to a narrow 6 km. riverside park perhaps only 20 meters wide, but sunken 7 meters below the road level. It had become a beautiful, landscaped oasis in the very centre of Seoul – an escape from the busyness, noise and traffic of the city. Alongside the stream, one saw occasional escape ladders and notices which warned of the dangers of sudden flooding; seemingly the stream also functioned as a flood relief in times of torrential downpours.

An excellent educational system in addition to a continuing US military presence, possibly accounts for the high levels of proficiency in spoken English amongst the young; but amongst the older people and especially outside Seoul, it is sometimes difficult to be understood. Despite that, the Koreans that I encountered were unfailingly helpful, hospitable and generous.

From Seoul I travelled south to Busan which had once been Korea's hippy, artistic capital but is now as bustling and busy as was Seoul. Travelling westwards I found my place of quiet tranquillity in the beautiful seaside town of Yeosu where I spent a very pleasant week watching the fishing and the bird life whose variety astounded me especially in the profusion of cranes and divers.

I travelled north to Jeonju which in its Hanok Maeul district, had preserved the traditional log-built houses and temples of many generations ago. Booking hotels online, one was sometimes met with some surprises such as what one had thought to be a centre-city hotel turns out to be a love-motel. Though centre-city, these are drive-in and screened from the street; the corridors are dimly lit and the rooms are often adorned with floor to ceiling mirrors – a not altogether relaxing experience as one sits there alone sipping a late night whiskey! Although the décor in such places left a lot to be desired, the food was usually not only good but excellent value. It was an experience that I encountered throughout my travels in Korea that in ordering a meal, one was usually given three or more sides dishes which were included in the price so one rose from the table well–satisfied.

On my travels I noticed a great profusion of Christian churches; though Buddhism was once the dominant religion it has recently been overtaken by Christian, mainly Protestant, sects who now constitute close to 30% of the population whereas Buddhists accounted for 23%. What was somewhat unnerving was the militancy of some of the Christian sects especially their younger adherents whom I saw engaged in picketing meetings of some other congregations. In remembering how, in 2007, Koreans had gone to Afghanistan and began distributing copies of the Bible in an attempt to proselytize, such militancy was not a surprise but it was disconcerting to see it in an Asian setting where tolerance and acceptance is usually the order of the day.

My journey back to Ireland was even more exhausting than that to Korea; my flight left Seoul at five minutes to midnight and arrived back in Dublin some twenty-two hours later followed by a further four hours back to the coast of Clare. But if as I guessed on my arrival in Seoul, this was indeed to be my last venture with my rucksack, Korea was an appropriate place to take my leave.

In writing this memoir I am conscious that I have given a far from unbiased account of the various episodes and encounters with others who would, doubtlessly, relate matters differently. I suppose everyone wants to be the hero of their own story and my need was perhaps greater than many. In trying to escape the trammels of my early encounter with psychiatry and its medications, I was driven by something akin to the urge of a drowning man to survive; a Humpty-Dumpty who felt fractured by his encounter with psychiatry and strove to put himself together again.

And what now are my views on psychiatry?

Looking back over the nearly fifty years since I, as a young graduate, had my first brush with psychiatry and the thirty five years since I stopped all psychoactive medications, my primary feeling is one of regret in the realisation that – with some very few exceptions (Professor Ivor Browne being pre-eminent amongst these) – my interaction with psychiatry has, on a personal level, been unhelpful.

The lesson that I take from the years of study for my PhD, is to regard psychiatry's supposed certainties with scepticism; its assertions on the efficacy of its medications as often little more than blandishments and its claim to being a science as deeply misplaced.

The label that I was given by Dr. S_ blighted my life and most especially my self-image and by virtue of that, the image that others had of me (an example of which I have recounted in a postscript to this memoir). It has undoubtedly made my life's journey more difficult but against that, I recognise that in my attempt to regain my self-respect and sense of assuredness, I have taken paths – interesting and self-fulfilling paths – that I doubt would have been taken in its absence. I believe that life's difficulties, like clouds, sometimes have a silver lining in that they force one to find strengths within oneself that otherwise would have lain undiscovered; wonderful gifts never opened much less explored.

To those whose toes I have tread on or have offended in some way, all I can plead is that I might be excused if only on the grounds that to my mind, my situation was so precarious and fraught.

To finish; a poem:[12]

As you set out for Ithaka
hope the voyage is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
angry Poseidon – don't be afraid of them:
you'll never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
as long as a rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
wild Poseidon – you won't encounter them
unless you bring them along inside your soul,
unless your soul sets them up in front of you.

Hope the voyage is a long one.
May there be many a summer morning when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you come into harbors seen for the first time;
may you stop at Phoenician trading stations
to buy fine things,
mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
sensual perfume of every kind –
as many sensual perfumes as you can;
and may you visit many Egyptian cities
to gather stores of knowledge from their scholars.

Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you are destined for.
But do not hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,
so you are old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you have gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.

Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you would not have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you will have understood by then what these Ithakas mean.

That poem was written by Cavafy.

He, on his 70th birthday and suffering from throat cancer, wrote a full stop; drew a circle around it; died, and that afternoon, was buried.

Now, some months short of my 70th birthday and unclear of how my cancer is progressing[13] (it is akin to sitting astride a snoozing dragon) I regard Cavafy's example as being a little extreme and – whilst it may suit a dramatic, Latin character – as not suited to me. Cavafy's symbol has too much finality about it, I'd prefer to finish on a note that allows for some unexpected joys and surprises:

Ȯ

As to hopes? – an open window with a gentle sea breeze on my face; a glimpse of a distant mountain that I had once climbed; a glass of Paddy in my hand … strains of Schubert … bliss!

Postscript: Stigma – an inerasable, indelible stain.

"Tell them I've had a wonderful life."[1]

When I began to write this memoir I planned to end with a postscript which I envisaged as being a somewhat valedictory account of how, 40 years after my brush with psychiatry, I had finally shed the last vestige of being an '*ex-psychiatric patient*' and how the ghost that had haunted me all these years had finally been laid to rest – what presumption!

As events were to forcefully show, psychiatric stigma was more tenacious and unforgiving than I had ever realised. Before explaining how this reversal happened, it is necessary to outline the context in which it occurred which – bizarrely – had to do with the 2014 Israeli war on Gaza.

In the 1960s, Israel had wide support in its attempt to defend itself in the face of what then seemed to be Arab intransigence; the secular and communitarian ideology of its *kibbutz* movement was an added attraction especially to western students and these were views with which I was in deep sympathy. Over the years as I learned more about the history of the establishment of the state of Israel and its dispossession of Palestinians of their land, my views slowly changed. The aftermath of the 1967 war and the resulting Occupation led me to become deeply critical of Israel and the behaviour of its armed forces. These attitudes have only hardened over the years and I have written many letters of protest to various newspapers, TDs, Ministers and even – in my innocence – to the Israeli Embassy. The attempts by Israelis to paint their critics as anti-Semites, has infuriated me and, shortly after finishing my PhD, I had considered doing some postdoctoral work on the definition of anti-Semitism. All this discussion on Israel is by way of showing that it has been a pre-occupation of mine for many years.

Next to turn to the reason for its relevance in this present context: I had asked a friend whom I had known for many years and with whom I had had a relationship – but who knew nothing of my previous involvements with psychiatry – to help in editing the first chapters of this memoir. Her suggestions were extremely helpful. Knowing that she had been interested in human rights issues I had – in the midst of the Gaza war – sent her, over a period of two weeks, links to perhaps a half-dozen articles on the war which I had found to be particularly insightful. Phoning her some days later she casually asked as to whether I was becoming obsessive about this Israeli war and wasn't it likely to damage my health.

I was dumfounded at what seemed to me a bizarre comment and couldn't understand her reference to my health.

Slowly over the next hours it dawned on me that having read the first chapters of this memoir, the events related there had now coloured her attitudes towards me: her raising of the 'obsession/health issue' resurrected something that happened 40 years ago and used it as a means of interpreting my current beliefs and behaviour and this is precisely what constitutes 'psychiatric stigma': the reinterpreting of innocuous current events in the light of some distant psychiatric history and thus rendering them in some way pathological.[2]

The grotesque horrors inflicted on a captive population by the Israeli onslaught were so disproportionate to the acts that were cited by the Israelis in justification that I do not believe it unfair to suggest that anyone who wasn't outraged would be not only lacking compassion, but also a moral compass; I state this to call attention to the fact that without my friend's knowledge of my 'psychiatric history', the word 'obsessive' - along with all that it connotes - would never have occurred to her.

On my suggesting that she was prejudiced against those who had a 'psychiatric history', she was outraged declaring that she was not that type of person and that, over the years, she had had many friends who had had such a history and that she was only attempting to be kind and considerate and what she had said had been said with the best intentions. To my suggestion that whilst I fully accepted that she was not being malicious, her prejudice may well have been unconscious, she responded that "*You have no idea how deeply offended I am by your assumption that you know my mind*."

On a personal level we quickly resolved our difficulties. I now wish to leave these to one side and to discuss from a more impersonal perspective, some of the themes that arose – for example*, 'prejudice'* and '*doing good'* – because they have a relevance far beyond the 'misunderstanding' that I had with my friend. In particular, the wish to '*do good'* – or to act in another's '*best interests'* – is the ostensible motivation for many paternalistic interventions many of which can be extremely damaging.[3] Within such a context, Pascal's epigraph may have a particular resonance: "*We never do evil so fully and cheerfully as when we do it out of conscience*."[4]

It is a commonplace to note that prejudice – whether based on colour, religion or psychiatric history – is pervasive. It is also a commonplace to note that prejudice is widely reviled – the belief being, apparently, that it is indicative, if not simply of mental laziness, then of an education that was deficient or of an individual who is parochial, smug and lacking in empathy. Indeed to acknowledge one's prejudices is akin to flaunting one's hostility to normal standards of social behaviour.

The willingness to accommodate incompatible beliefs [so-called '*cognitive dissonance'*] such as for example, exhibiting prejudice whilst simultaneously denying that one is prejudiced is also pervasive and even to be found within the hallowed walls of

psychiatry.[5] I believe that such dissonances are facilitated by the binary oppositions which are such a characteristic feature of the intellectual structure underpinning the Western mind and are, perhaps, a by-product of a common Christian heritage with its reliance on the 'Word' – or conceptual thought – as the sole means of appropriating the world.

One of the most important binary oppositions is that between 'good' and 'evil'. Once this dichotomy is accepted, then a deep chasm is opened between what is 'good' and what is 'evil' with little room for grey areas; people cleave to the 'good' even if this is simply a pretence or an unconscious strategy to burnish their own (moral) self-image.[6]

Over the years I have read many books on Eastern philosophy, but two in particular made a deep, indeed life-changing, impression on me.[7] In neither case was this because of a narrative that they related or a sustained argument that they expounded but rather because of some of their – at least to me at the time – singular, idiosyncratic ideas. The first was a Chinese text which was written over 2,500 years ago: the *Tao Te Ching* ascribed to Lao Tzu.[8] The second was a Buddhist text from the 9th century: *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po on the Transmission of Mind.*[9]

Tao Te Ching

The maxim of the *Tao Te Ching* that I found so startling on first encountering it, was:

"When all the world recognises good as good, this in itself is evil."

Having been educated within a Catholic tradition, I had been taught that 'good' was a goal to be aspired to and strived for; 'evil', on the contrary, was to be condemned, fought against and, if possible, conquered. The Taoist maxim seemed to be the very antithesis of what I then understood to be an ethical stance and it took me many years to begin to appreciate its meaning.

Lao Tzu's Taoism was in many respects a reaction to the philosophy of Confucius which was then dominant in China. Confucianism was a set of precepts which strictly decreed one's duties to family and society; the Roman Catholic Catechism might provide a modern analogy. Lao Tzu was not advocating his philosophy as a replacement for Confucianism but rather as an addition to it. Confucianism was to be taught to the young in order to awaken in them an awareness of ethical perspectives and to inculcate a knowledge of norms and social obligations but Taoism was to be the philosophy of their maturity when age and experience should have given them both an ability to discard the ethical rules-of-thumb[10] of their youth and also sufficient wisdom to respond to circumstances appropriately though such a response might run completely counter to that ordained by Confucian principles.

The 'virtues' of most importance to a Taoist are compassion and humility; true compassion requires that we stand in the shoes of the other and help if we can and, if we can't, desist. Immersed in a situation which might at first glance have called for a

response, the Taoist perspective would be to sit in the midst of one's own ethical discomfort until the appropriate response, if any, becomes abundantly clear; if such a clear unambiguous response does not emerge, then one must accept one's impotence in the face of life's problems with a humility that recognises that one doesn't have all the answers.

Thomas Merton who was a noted Cistercian monk, has written a commentary on the Tao[11] in which he notes how '*good'* can become '*evil'*:

> "*When a limited and conditioned view of "good" is erected to the level of an absolute, it immediately becomes an evil, because it excludes certain complementary elements which are required if it is to be fully good. To cling to one partial view, one limited and conditioned opinion, and to treat this as the ultimate answer to all questions is simply to "obscure the Tao" and make oneself obdurate in error."*[12]

And on seeking an appropriate ethical response:

> *If one is in harmony with Tao … the answer will make itself clear when the time comes to act, for then one will act not according to the human and self-conscious mode of deliberation, but according to the divine and spontaneous mode of … the Tao itself, and is therefore the source of all good.*
> *The other way, the way of conscious striving, even though it may claim to be a way of virtue, is fundamentally a way of self-aggrandizement,*[13] *… that mere virtuousness is without meaning and without deep effect either in the life of the individual or in society.*[14]

The lesson that I take from this excursus into Taoism is that one should be extremely cautious of one's own motives in interfering in the lives of others and that one should recognise that despite the protestations of one's good intentions (*i.e.* that one is motivated solely by 'best interests' of another) this is unlikely to be the case and consequently there is a moral obligation for introspection in order to excavate and lay bare any hitherto hidden, self-serving motivations; disinterested action should be the goal. Furthermore there is an obligation to ensure that any intervention that may be undertaken does not occasion harm.

Lest this discussion appear recondite or obscure, the underlying issues are of considerable ethical importance and were the main points of contention during the *Viva*[15] examination for my PhD.

In the original draft, I had urged that the Hippocratic Oath ['*Help but do no harm*'] which is generally regarded as the fundamental principle of Medical Ethics, comprised two principles: an injunction to help and an injunction to do no harm. I had posed the question as to which had priority: *i.e.* must the doctor be sure that his intervention will do no harm before he attempts to intervene or is the primary obligation to help: *i.e.* to act.[16]

I had suggested that in order to better understand the syntactical structure of the maxim [*'Do X, or at least do not do Y'*], to imagine a parent advising a teenager who is going to visit their grandmother: "*Bring a gift but at least do not steal anything*"; I then asked whether the meaning was:

- [preclusive]: "*Above all else do not steal and, if you can, bring a gift*"; or

- [permissive]: "*Make sure that that the extent of your gifts exceeds that which you steal*."

I suggested that the first is the only meaning permitted by the syntax and that accordingly the preclusive meaning must be given to the injunction "*Help, or at least do no harm*"; where 'harm' was to be interpreted not as transient harm but a serious impairment. Such an interpretation would imply that (in the absence of other factors) if impairment is in prospect, then the intervention must not proceed.

Professor Vandenberghe disagreed with my interpretation arguing that it would eviscerate not only clinical psychiatry, but all of clinical medicine.

I argued in response, that the problem of priority does not arise in consensual medical interventions because, in order to obtain informed consent, the possibilities of harm must have been explained to the patient who must, in turn, have given his consent not only to the intervention but to the possibility of harm[17]; it is however, of importance in relation to coercive interventions where consent is necessarily absent.

However, in the end I was obliged to remove the teenager/grandmother example in its entirety and also to recast my analysis of the maxim [*i.e.* as preclusive] as being an interpretation that I was advocating and not as being its actual meaning [*i.e.* as permissive].

The Zen Teaching of Huang Po on the Transmission of Mind

Though written well over a thousand years ago, this text had a clarity and an iconoclastic directness which – in contrast to the dry stiltedness of many Buddhist writings – was as exhilarating to my mind as an ice-cold shower; lest my descriptions seem over exuberant here are two excerpts:

> *If you can only rid yourselves of conceptual thought, you will have accomplished everything …*
>
> *… Let there be a silent understanding and no more. Away with all thinking and explaining.*

To me, maxims such as these appeared to attack the very foundation of any intellectual endeavour; it was as if the very ground upon which I had always stood was being pulled from under my feet – without such concepts how could I find my bearings in the world? Without them I would be utterly at sea – rudderless! The very bedrock of my mind and being seemed to be founded on conceptual thought; Descartes' argument "*I think, therefore I am*" would, like mist in the early morning sun, simply evaporate into nothingness!

The first hint of an understanding came to me in a memory of when, as a youth, I visited the Botanic Gardens with a friend; she – being knowledgeable about botany – identified

the various species of all that we passed; I, perhaps discourteously, pointed out that in the midst of all this classifying, she could no longer even see the garden.

Thomas Merton has described how Zen seeks to get back to the freshness and richness of experience unmediated by words:

> *The taste for Zen in the West is in part a healthy reaction of people exasperated with the heritage of four centuries of Cartesianism: the reification of concepts, idolization of the reflexive consciousness, flight from being into verbalism, mathematics, and rationalizations. Descartes made a fetish out of the mirror in which the self finds itself. Zen shatters it.*[18]

The goal of an artist in their practice is not dissimilar. It has often been noted how as a child grows older their artistic ability changes and is often lost. At the age of about seven, if asked to draw the face the child will no longer draw that which is before her but will reify this through her recently acquired 'conceptual spectacles': thus rather than drawing that odd shaped protuberance she will recognise that it is a nose and will draw a caricature of a nose. The adult artist is one who still in his gaze, has eyes of a child and sees that, in the words of the poet Louis MacNeice:

> *World is crazier and more of it than we think,*
> *Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion*
> *A tangerine and spit the pips and feel*
> *The drunkenness of things being various.*

MacNeice's words capture something of the Zen maxims quoted earlier. To one who practices Zen, the goal is to live life in the present; to throw away all categorising and to see the world in which one now stands in all it particularity and richness. It is in a way to see again the world as if through the eyes of a child: not to revert to a childishness but to achieve a sense of wonder, a childlikeness.[19]

The Zen maxims of Huang Po are but a special instance of the Taoist maxim quoted in the previous section: that one should seek to interact with the world not through concepts of 'good' and 'evil' which are a pair of conceptual spectacles that licence blindness to circumstances that are, from an abstract perspective, not considered relevant; the goal should be to throw away such concepts and to open one's eyes to the full particularity and complexity of the circumstances that appear to call for a response … and then to pause awhile before rushing in![20]

Prejudices – whether based on race, colour or psychiatric history – also arise because of the use of conceptual spectacles which permit the wearer to see not the person standing before them in all their individual richness, but through the limiting and distorting prism of race or colour.

The normal response to prejudice is to assert that all prejudices should be abjured and to be seen to assent to such an assertion becomes 'proof' that one is prejudice free. Such a response is extremely simplistic and simply permits the denial of prejudice to continue unchallenged – and even unchallengeable – and at an even deeper and more subterranean level.

This normal response is exemplified in one who – on being challenged that they are racially prejudiced – asserts that that could not be so because "*I have many black friends*"; thus, they believe, fully rebutting the challenge.

The Macpherson Report[21] on the UK's Metropolitan Police handling of the murder of the black student Stephen Lawrence in 1993 provides a devastating critique of such reasoning. Despite the original police inquiry finding "… *no evidence to support the allegation of racist conduct by any MPS officer*" and widespread denials by individual police officers that they were racist, the Macpherson Inquiry concluded not only that many of the individual police officers had manifested racial prejudice but that that 'institutional racism'[22] "*exists both in the Metropolitan Police Service … and other institutions countrywide*." Furthermore Macpherson took the definition of a 'racist incident' out of the hands of the police and decreed that:

> "*A racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person*."[23]

A stance such as this suggest that an individual's belief that he has been subjected to prejudice should, at least initially, be accepted as being true. But how would this help resolve common instances of where individuals believe that they have been subjected to prejudice by another who, in turn, denies not only exhibiting prejudice in the circumstances in question but also that they harbour *any* prejudice?

It is at this point that a more philosophical approach is required. Building on the Zen quotations earlier which indicate that individuals primarily interact with the world through concepts, I suggest that our everyday implicit reliance on conceptual thought *necessarily* creates prejudice in that it eschews the particularities and individualities of the unique individuals and circumstances that are in front of us in favour of abstractions and labels.

Prejudices are in the nature of intellectual shortcuts and the inevitable consequence of abstract or conceptual thought; by this I mean that such reasoning necessarily negotiates the world through categories and such categories are important to us because they indicate difference of value.

The solution is not to attempt to rid ourselves of such prejudices for such would be a truly Sisyphean task but to acknowledge that they exist and to give them 'house room' – even at the cost of damage to our self image! The crucial point to note is that the recognition that one is prejudiced does not imply that one should *act* on these prejudices; quite the contrary, the recognition that we harbour prejudices is the very precondition for *not* acting on them.

Prejudices which are acknowledged can be discussed, criticised and evidence assessed; thus, for example, the belief that those who have a psychiatric history are more prone to violence, can be subjected to critical scrutiny.[24] Surely one implication of the Socratic

injunction against living an unexamined life is that one should seek to bring one's prejudices – one's daemons and devils – into the clear light of day.

The mechanisms whereby one might become aware of one's prejudice are many; psychoanalysis or psychotherapy are a common mechanism; Zen meditation is another though the term 'meditation' is misleading in that it connotes a meditating *on something*. Zen practitioners prefer the terms *'zazen'* or 'sitting' which simply involves the taking of a traditional meditation position for a predetermined length of time and then just watching one's breath. Inevitably the mind and its images intrude but since no distractions (*e.g*. radio, music, or phone) are permissible, one is forced to see the habitual mental noise and chatter that, in everyday life, is censored out. It forces one to make friends with oneself and to acknowledge one's 'dark side'.

Such suggestions might seem far fetched but it is interesting to see that such luminaries of our modern world as Google and Yahoo are adopting similar strategies to help expose the "*hidden, reflexive preferences that shape most people's worldviews, …*" Google's Human Resources Division believed that the existences of such prejudices resulted in sexist and racially discriminatory employment practices and, in response, instituted a series of staff workshops and lectures:

> *The lecture begins with a dismal fact: Everyone is a little bit racist or sexist. If you think you're immune, take the Implicit Association Test, which empirically measures people's biases. Dr. Welle goes on to explain that some of the most damaging bias is unconscious; people do the worst stuff without meaning to, or even recognizing that they're being influenced by their preferences.*
> *… Finally, Dr. Welle points to research showing that we aren't slaves to our hidden biases. The more we make ourselves aware of the role our unconscious plays in our decision-making, and the more we try to force others to confront their biases, the greater the chance we have of overcoming our hidden preferences.*[25]

This Postscript was planned in the belief that as far as I was concerned, psychiatric stigma was a dim and distant memory which I had managed to successfully overcome but it was written in the knowledge that this is not the case but that such stigma is at best a ghost which can – without any agency on my part – be reincarnated simply by someone finding out that I had spent some weeks in a Mental Hospital some 40 years ago.

What are the consequences for me now of this new awareness?

In that I am rapidly approaching my eight decade with its attendant burdens of hospitalization or nursing home care possibly in prospect, two issues have long preoccupied me:

– the possibility that if, at some stage, I refuse a proffered 'life-saving treatment', my wishes will be disregarded;

– the possibility that if towards the end of my life, I end up in a nursing home, I will be medicated with psychoactive medications.

Irish law is unequivocal in asserting the right of an individual to refuse to consent to any medical intervention.[26] Whilst this is the theoretical position, it should be noted that in practice the situation is far less clear. Where cases have come before the Courts on the application of medical professionals who urge that life-saving treatment is necessitated, the courts have in all the cases of which I am aware, overridden the patient's refusal and permitted the treatment.

Two cases are extensively discussed in my PhD dissertation; the first is that of Amy which is sketched below; the second is that of Catherine an asthmatic who was forcibly intubated, and which has also been discussed in an Appendix to this memoir.

The Amy case concerned a 77-year-old woman who was diagnosed as having lymphoma and who had refused medical treatment. Having put her affairs in order, she attempted to kill herself by drowning. She failed, was hospitalised, but later (on release from hospital) she was successful in her attempts. The case is of particular interest because of the divergence of views between her hospital medical consultants and two psychiatrists who had interviewed her whilst she was in hospital. The hospital consultants had believed that Amy was not irrational – and thus not in need of psychiatric intervention – in her refusal of treatment and of her choosing to die. Her psychiatrists [Drs. Gervais and Watler] argued that her actions indicated a need for coercive psychiatric intervention:

> *"There is no evidence that patients with serious medical illnesses "rationally" choose to die."* [Dr. Watler]
>
> *"In psychiatric terms, this woman was showing signs of grandiosity she would be the one who decided when to live and when to die, and in a way she would act like God. This, to me, is manic denial."* [Dr. Gervais]

A defence put forward by the psychiatrist Gervais is worthy of special note. He had argued to the effect that even though Amy stated that she did not want treatment, she 'really' did and this would have been obvious had she been listened to with the "*third ear".*[27] To imagine this argument being made by one accused of, for example, rape, is sufficient to demonstrate its folly. To imagine it being made by one charged with determining the rationality of another, is unsettling.

Even more unsettling is the realisation that decisions of such seriousness may be based on such flawed reasoning.

Until beginning research for my PhD I had little awareness of the full extent of the practice of medicating the elderly for considerable periods of time with psychoactive drugs for reasons other than their health.

Many international studies[28] have described the widespread use of anti-psychotic medications in the care of the elderly in order to reduce the need for higher staffing levels and to make patients more easily governable. Such uses as 'chemical restraints' have been described as being akin to a chemical 'cosh' because of their deadening effect on the mental life of such patients effectively turning them into – what has been described by one such patient as – '*zombies'*.[29]

Schweizer (2003) examined the usage of psychoactive drugs in nursing homes in Northern Ireland. He found a prescribing rates for psychoactive medication of 72.8% of which "… *only 21% had a suitable diagnosis … recorded in their medical notes*."; 28% had been prescribed antipsychotics of which only 21% had an appropriate diagnosis.

A Canadian study found even more disturbing results:

> *… an average of 31.3% of all residents were receiving antipsychotics. … Only 8.1% of prescriptions had accompanying documentation on the behavioural indication for the use of antipsychotics.*

Antipsychotic use in the care of the elderly has not only sedative effects but may have extremely damaging consequence for a patient's health: Ballard (who is Professor of Old Age Psychiatry at the University of Newcastle) has stated:

> *As clinicians we talk about "the best interests of our patients". How can a treatment which doubles the rate of cognitive decline, triples the rate of stroke, doubles mortality, substantially increases falls and fractures and reduces quality of life be beneficial, especially, as in real life, once neuroleptics are started they are rarely discontinued with cumulative adverse effects? … Doctors, especially specialists feel they need to do something, and prescribing a familiar drug is the easiest option.*

Meaney & Cooney (2003) examined the prescribing of antipsychotics by psychiatrists to elderly subjects in the Republic of Ireland and concluded that though Irish psychiatric practice was, in this regard, similar to that of other countries: "*… on occasion, extraordinarily high doses of antipsychotics are being prescribed*."

The irony is that in a country which trumpets its supposedly Christian values and where a campaign to legalise assisted suicide is likely to be even more virulent that the Anti-Abortion Campaigns of the 1980's, the elderly may well be subjected to a zombified 'life' even worse than death without scarcely raising a murmur of protest from their supposedly Christian 'defenders'.

A final conclusion:

Having a 'psychiatric history' makes it possible for others to 'intervene' in one's life in ways that they would have found considerably more difficult if not impossible in its absence and I can only conclude now with the realisation that my chances of suffering either or both of these indignities that I have just described, have been increased.

The only precaution that I can take against such eventualities is the making of a living will; this I have done but the question of its effectiveness is for the future and all I can do now is hope and trust … which I do!

Appendix: Medical interventions on the grounds of another's 'best interests'

On admitting myself to St. John of God's psychiatric hospital in early 1972 (as mentioned earlier) my requests to the hospital social worker that my parents not be informed, were ignored. To my surprise and shame, both my mother and father appeared at the hospital the following day. Had I anticipated that the hospital might act in such a manner, I could have explained the circumstances to my parents and the experience would have been much less traumatic both for them and for me but the offhand way that my views had been disregarded in a matter so apparently unimportant as this and without even the courtesy of my being informed, was deeply shocking not so much because of the actual event but because of what it symbolised: that I had unknowingly crossed a Rubicon into a territory where my views were subservient to what others might consider to be my 'best interests' and this realisation immediately prompted concern as to how far this 'liberty' to overrule my wishes, extended.

This trespass – slight though it may be in comparison to reports of what others have been subjected to – prompted me many years later to begin academic research on the ethics of such 'best interests' interventions, firstly in my MPhil[1] which examined the ethical basis for the withdrawal of a patient's life sustaining treatments on the grounds that it was in their 'best interests' and secondly, in my PhD[2] which examined the ethical basis for a psychiatric intervention undertaken against the explicit wishes of an individual subject.

At first glance the decision to give medical treatment to another on the grounds of their 'best interests' would appear to be not only unproblematic but to be the very embodiment ethical action: surely an action undertaken in someone's 'best interests' could not be criticised on ethical grounds, its very name appears to proclaim its virtue? An example[3] from general non-psychiatric medicine will help dispel that view: Catherine, a 29 year old English woman suffered a severe asthma attack whilst staying with her sister, Anna, in the United States. Catherine had suffered from asthma most of her life and was well informed as to its management. Anna suggested that Catherine go to the Massachusetts General Hospital and Catherine agreed, but only if her treatment would be limited to the administration of oxygen. Anna called the hospital and was assured that Catherine would only be treated with oxygen. They went to the emergency department where Catherine was given oxygen and medication through a nebulizer. Catherine soon removed the nebulizer, reporting that the medication gave her a headache, and said she wanted to leave the hospital but this the attending physician who believed that intubation was necessary, would not permit. Catherine attempted to leave the hospital but was

forcibly placed in a four-point restraint for an hour before intubation and for eight hours afterwards although her competence to consent to treatment (and accordingly her competence to refuse treatment) had never been called into question.

Catherine was severely traumatized by her mistreatment at the hospital. She suffered from nightmares, cried constantly, was unable to return to work for several months, became obsessed about her medication, and swore repeatedly that she would never go to a hospital again. Some two years after the original incident she again had a severe asthma attack; she refused to go to hospital and subsequently died.

After her death her father who was a GP, took legal proceedings against the hospital and won on appeal. The case was reported in a leading medical journal and elicited a number of replies from medical practitioners who unanimously expressed the opinion – despite the decision of Massachusetts Supreme Court – that the decision of the original physician to use coercion, was correct.

The belief that a medical intervention, even against the wishes of a subject, may not only be excused but be justified by the belief that it is in their 'best interests' is widespread in medical circles though in recent years such paternalistic attitudes have been somewhat constrained by the recognition by the courts of the right of a competent adult to refuse treatment.[4] But because of the general unwillingness of the Irish courts to intervene in matters relating to psychiatry, exacerbated by the hubris exhibited by many psychiatrists[5], questions as to the need for consent to psychiatric treatment are seldom accorded the respect they deserve.

The violation suffered by Catherine was traumatic but without minimising the seriousness of the violation, it was tightly circumscribed. Had it occurred in the setting of a psychiatric hospital, such a violation would be of a higher order of magnitude both because it would be more all-encompassing and because of the increased likelihood of its recurrence compounded by the inadequacy of mechanisms of legal redress.

Coercive medical interventions such as were visited upon Catherine are – in comparison to those occurring in psychiatry – relatively rare but the trauma involved is clearly considerable. Though critical perspectives towards such interventions are sometimes adopted within academic legal discussion they are rare within Psychiatry and so rare as to be well-nigh non-existent[6] within the Philosophy of Psychiatry. Furthermore such ethical or philosophical analysis of medical interventions as are undertaken, invariably proceed on the basis of an exemplar which is (from the medical perspective), ideal.

Thus when discussing, for example, the withdrawal of life sustaining treatment from a patient in a Persistent Vegetative State, the ethical analysis will take it as a given that the patient actually is in such a state (*i.e.* that a misdiagnosis is not possible) and – because from the medical perspective a patient so diagnosed lacks consciousness and the

ability to experience pain – that the patient also lacks consciousness and the ability to experience pain.

This division of labour has an echo of a traditional union demarcation dispute where different trades will not trespass onto each other's 'territory' thus the ethicist will not question the medical 'certainty' as to correct diagnosis nor the medical determination that a vegetative state patient lacks consciousness.

In view of the fact that the misdiagnosis rate for such patients has been estimated to be of the order of 30%[7] and that the status of assertions that they lack consciousness or the ability to experience pain are equally problematic, then it is clear that any such proposed ethical analysis – if it assumes a certainty which does not exist in an actual clinical environment – will be highly inappropriate to the environment in which the analysis will be applied.

Attempts to apply such simplistic analysis to decision-making in an actual clinical case (*i.e.* assuming that a patient diagnosed as being in a vegetative state cannot experience pain) may result in consequences which – had a wider perspective been embraced which sought to incorporate the complexities and uncertainties that arise in actual clinical situations – would be clearly unethical.

One of the conclusions of my MPhil dissertation was that:

> *A reading of the medical literature on PVS suggests that assertions that PVS patients lack consciousness and the ability to experience pain are securely based in scientific fact and open to independent verification. They are not. … All PVS patients should be treated as if they are conscious and can experience pain.*[8]

A similar division of labour occurs between Philosophy (including Philosophy of Psychiatry) and Psychiatry and thus ethical analysis of coercive psychiatric interventions will, on the rare cases when such occur, assume that the psychiatric diagnosis – or any psychiatric assessment of dangerousness – on which the coercive intervention was based is not open to doubt.[9] The assumption that any psychiatric treatments to be administered will be unequivocally of benefit and securely grounded in evidence-based studies will be regarded as so obvious that to even assert it would be regarded as otiose. There is however a considerable body of research findings which radically undermine such assumptions, thus, for example:[10]

Psychiatric assessments of dangerousness

Although there is a widespread belief amongst the general public, that the presence of mental disorder greatly heightens the risk of violence, the preponderance of research indicates that – in the absence of substance abuse – the risk of violence is no greater than that occurring in the general population and, furthermore, that substance abuse itself is the best predictor of violent behaviour.[11]

The reliability of psychiatric clinical assessments of dangerousness is comparable to determinations made by the tossing of a coin.[12]

Psychiatric misdiagnosis

Kingdon (2004) which was a survey of the beliefs and attitudes of UK psychiatrists, found that psychiatrists considered the misdiagnosis of schizophrenia by other psychiatrists to be "*common*".[13] My PhD dissertation concluded that the best available estimate for the rate of misdiagnosis of schizophrenia was of the order of 25%.[14] Shorter (2010) states:

> *[Reading the DSM–V] … is to see the discipline's floundering writ large. Psychiatry seems to have lost its way in a forest of poorly verified diagnoses and ineffectual medications. Patients who seek psychiatric help today for mood disorders stand a good chance of being diagnosed with a disease that doesn't exist and treated with a medication little more effective than a placebo.*[15]

Psychiatric treatments

Parikh (2009):

> *Even psychiatrists can sing the blues. Not just because of the current economic depression, but because of recent research findings. A series of pivotal effectiveness studies, in psychiatry – STAR*D, CATIE, and STEP.BD – have compared real-world performance of various treatments in depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder. STAR*D showed that virtually all antidepressant strategies had low and similar efficacy in major depression. CATIE showed low effectiveness and similar comparability of antipsychotics. And STEP.BD showed that antidepressants are not effective for bipolar depression.*[16]

Bick (2007):

> *The most stunning finding was that psychiatrists tend to ignore life-threatening, treatable medical conditions in patients presenting for treatment with schizophrenia. … [the study] did expose a woeful standard in the medical management of schizophrenia offered by psychiatrists.*[17]

In view of these and many similar studies I believed that in order to delineate the framework within which a philosophical exploration of the justification for coercive psychiatry could be meaningfully undertaken, it was necessary to cross the disciplinary threshold and incorporate academic findings such as outlined above, into the discourse. To argue otherwise would necessitate accepting at face value the account of coercive psychiatry as told by the generality of psychiatrists and would mean implicitly accepting psychiatric diagnostic practices, treatments and assessments of dangerousness as being essentially unproblematic.[18]

Once the universe of discourse was established the next question to be determined was how to conduct the philosophical analysis. This essentially resolved into finding a conceptual structure that would enable those circumstances where a coercive intervention (undertaken on the grounds of the 'best interests') might be ethically justified, to be distinguished from those where it would not.

The English philosopher Philippa Foot [1920 – 2010] has had a deep influence on the study of Ethics. She is noted for establishing '*virtue ethics'* as an approach to the study of moral problems and, in particular, for posing the '*Trolley Problem'*: the ethical dilemma faced by the driver of a runaway rail trolley hurtling toward five track workers, but who, by diverting the trolley to a spur where just one worker is on the track, can save five lives. It was however her analysis of euthanasia[19] that, for my purposes, was most useful; this problem when posed in the abstract, asks the question: "*Is it ever permissible to kill another 'for his benefit'?*".

Foot took as a setting for her argument, the situation of a grievously wounded soldier who was unable to retreat and had to be abandoned in the face of a rapidly advancing enemy; his comrades knowing that on capture he would face torture and a gruesome death. Foot posed the problem as to whether the custom whereby his comrades would "*accord a merciful bullet to men in such desperate straits"* should yield to the wishes of the soldier that he be left alive. Foot based her analysis on the distinction between the virtues of Justice and Charity; Justice, she states: *"… has to do with what men owe each other in the way of noninterference and positive service*." Charity, on the other hand: *"… is the virtue which attaches us to the good of others."* These virtues may sometimes conflict and, in such circumstances, the demands of Justice (which entails the right of non-interference) must take precedence over the demands of Charity and *"… the action we would dearly like to take for his sake*."

Charity must yield to those obligations flowing from Justice because the latter are a subject's by right:

> *Justice as such is not directly linked to the good of another, and may require that something be rendered to him even where it will do him harm, as Hume pointed out when he remarked that a debt must be paid even to a profligate debauchee who "would rather receive harm than benefit from large possessions"*[20]*.*

Foot concluded that the "… *right to be let free from unwanted interferenc*e" is one of the most fundamental and distinctive rights of persons.

This has as a corollary that the abrogation of such a right is incompatible with being a person or, more technically, with possessing '*personhood*.'

Philosophical analysis of the concept of personhood has resulted in considerable controversy because in distinguishing between the concept 'human' and that of 'person', it implied that not all humans are persons. This risked the opprobrium of those – particularly in the Roman Catholic Church – who argued that all humans are persons by which they meant entitled to legal protection; this controversy became particularly acute in relation to abortion and the withdrawal of life sustaining treatment from severely disabled infants who had no hope of survival in its absence.

A consideration of conditions such as anencephaly (literally 'having no brain') suggest that the distinction is valid; in any event it was of considerable assistance in formulating

the dissertation arguments because it enabled the assertion to be made that some coercive psychiatric interventions were of a gravity that could severely damage or even destroy[21] the personhood of a subject.[22] Furthermore it permitted the analysis to support reports by some self-styled 'survivors' of coercive psychiatry who described their experience of being treated as an object or a 'non-person', rather than as a person. The Irish case concerning John Manweiler[23] – who was forcibly and inappropriately[24] medicated with antipsychotics for over ten years and to the extent that he described his situation whilst being so medicated as being like a 'zombie' – is one where had his situation not been redressed (which happened due to a fortuitous series of events) one might say that his personhood had been permanently destroyed.

Much of the philosophical literature on personhood concerns its definition: the specifying of sets of necessary and sufficient conditions for personhood such that an individual will be a 'person' if, and only if, each of the set of conditions is satisfied.

For the purposes of the dissertation argument I assumed that personhood can be defined by such a set of conditions and that from these sets of conditions, a set can be chosen such that the only conditions relevant to formulating a justification for a coercive psychiatric intervention, are 'rationality' and 'ability to communicate'.[25]

Thus, if a subject failed to meet the required minimal levels of rationality or ability to communicate then the conditions for personhood would not have been met. Adopting Foot's analysis: the obligations flowing from Justice would no longer have precedence over those flowing from Charity. In such circumstances a coercive psychiatric intervention which overrode the subject's 'right to be let alone' could be undertaken provided it was in the subjects best interests.

The question then reduces to determining whether in those cases where a coercive psychiatric intervention had been undertaken, the minimal levels of rationality and ability to communicate had not been met.

More precisely, the questions to be determined were:

1. Can coercive psychiatric interventions be of such a level of intrusiveness as to destroy or grievously damage, personhood?
2. How irrational must a subject be before their personhood is put in jeopardy?
3. How irrational must a subject be before a coercive psychiatric intervention is warranted?
4. Does the latter level of irrationality exceed the former?

The first question was answered with an unequivocal '*yes'*. The remaining questions necessitated an examination of how the term 'irrational' was used by psychiatrists both in their clinical practice and academically.

The conclusion reached[26] was that not only did the psychiatric usage lack precision but, on the contrary, was (generally speaking) vague and informal; that levels of irrationality

were seldom identified and, in particular, that the level that precipitates a coercive intervention could not be identified.

Furthermore a direct assessment of the reliability of psychiatric assessments of irrationality (by comparisons with independent assessments) was not possible due to the lack of data.

The argument then sought to determine the reliability of psychiatric assessments of irrationality by more indirect means: namely to see whether psychiatric determinations in other areas of their claimed professional expertise – *e.g.* psychiatric diagnosis, a assessments of the evidence base for psychiatric treatments and psychiatric assessments of dangerousness – manifested a reliability and accuracy that was such as to inspire confidence in their professional assessment that a subject was manifestly irrational.

An examination of psychiatric diagnostic practices found a poor level of reliability, and that many of the diagnostic categories were of questionable validity. Moreover, the rate of radical misdiagnosis (*i.e.* a misdiagnosis which precipitated a coercive intervention which would not have occurred in the absence of such a diagnosis) was estimated to be of the order of 25% of all such coercive interventions.

An examination of psychiatric treatment practices showed that many supposedly evidence-based studies supporting the psychiatric use of, for example, antipsychotics, were deeply flawed and that psychiatrists manifested a reluctance to changing their prescribing habits in the face of authoritative disconfirming evidence relating to the safety and efficacy of the drugs in question.

These results[27] – and similar results in relation to psychiatric assessments of dangerousness – suggests that psychiatric determinations of irrationality are unreliable and that, consequently, a psychiatric assertion that a subject manifested a level of irrationality sufficient to put his personhood in jeopardy, is also unreliable. It also follows that justifications for coercive psychiatric interventions which are based on psychiatric assessments of the level of irrationality manifested by the subject, are of doubtful validity.

Notes: Introduction

[1] A comment by the novelist Jennifer Johnston in discussing her book '*The Invisible Worm'.*

[2] S.23 of the *Mental Health Act*, 2001.

[3] Online at *gerryroche.com*; *http://academia.edu/* or *http://www.criticalpsychiatry.co.uk*.

[4] Much as occurred in response to criticisms of psychiatry that I and some others had voiced in the *Letters* page of the *Irish Times* in 1980.

It may be of interest to recall the liberties extended by *The Irish Times* to its 'Letters' contributors in the 1980s: I was permitted 26 column inches to make my case; a psychiatrist (Dr. Dermot Ward) was given equal space and I was permitted 22 column inches to respond; such latitude would be unthinkable today.

[5] In that Professor Thomas Szasz, (though a psychiatrist himself, he is perhaps the most eminent and most severe academic critic of psychiatry) offered me his congratulations on my PhD describing it as "*an impressive piece of work* ..."; also its online publication by the *Critical Psychiatry Network* (which is an academic forum for psychiatrists) where it achieved a ranking in the top 4% of papers within 12 months of being placed online.

[6] Luhrmann, T. (2001). *Of Two Minds: An anthropologist looks at American psychiatry*. New York: Vintage, at p.292. Tanya Luhrmann is Professor of Anthropology at Stanford University.

[7] Rather than adopt the wiser course of action of reducing the medications gradually, I stopped taking all medication outright.

[8] Ivor Browne was Professor of Psychiatry at University College, Dublin and Chief Psychiatrist to the Eastern Health Board.

[9] Browne, I. (2008). *Music and Madness*. Cork: Atrium, at p.261.

Notes: Chapter 1

[1] A quotation often attributed to the Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis (I have been unable to locate its original source).

[2] It was many years later that I realised that some of these sexual difficulties may well have been compounded by the side effects of antidepressants that I had been prescribed. By that stage I had successfully completed my mathematics and law finals unaware of the negative effects that such drugs might also have had on my academic capabilities.

[3] Primo Levi. *If This is a Man*. Abacus; p.112.

[4] See: http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/about/campaigns.aspx. [accessed: 1st July 2014].

[5] Byrne, P. 'Stigma of mental illness and ways of diminishing it'. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* (2000) 6: 65-72 at p.67. [online]: http://apt.rcpsych.org/content/6/1/65.full [accessed:01/07/2014].

[6] Nordt, C. *et al* (2006). 'Attitudes of Mental Health Professionals Toward People With Schizophrenia and Major Depression.' *Schizophrenia Bulletin*. 32(4):709–714.

[7] Sartorius, N. (2002). 'Iatrogenic stigma of mental illness.' *British Medical Journal*. 324:1470–1.

[8] Ezra Pound's poem '*In a Station of the Metro*' embodies the spirit, if not the pure form, of a Japanese haiku:

> *The apparition of these faces in the crowd;*
> *Petals on a wet, black bough.*

[9] See Roche (2012), p. 17.

[10] See Roche (2012), p. 322.

[11] Five years after this encounter with Dr. S_, his brother who was a very successful barrister, agreed to accept me as his 'devil' (apprentice) when I was called to the Bar.

[12] '*Ideas of reference'* describe the phenomenon where an individual believes that events or coincidences which, to others, are innocuous, have a particular relevance – or in some way *refer* – to themselves.

[13] Amazon.co.uk currently lists 105 of his books [accessed:9th July 2014].

[14] Rates in the US for most age groups were about five times those in the UK, and for some age groups as much as twenty times. [Roche (2012), p.132]

[15] Rosenhan, D. (1973). 'On Being Sane in Insane Places'. *Science*. 179:250-8; see Roche (2012), p.127.

[16] This occurred in the only private hospital in the sample; it was a less stigmatising diagnosis than schizophrenia.

[17] Thus the diagnostic criteria for schizophrenia as specified by the DSM-IV-TR (2000) include:

> *A. Characteristic symptoms: Two (or more) of the following, each present for a significant portion of time during a 1-month period (or less if successfully treated):*
> *1. delusions,*
> *2. hallucinations,*
> *3. disorganized speech (e.g., frequent derailment or incoherence),*
> *4. grossly disorganized or catatonic behavior,*
> *5. negative symptoms, i.e., affective flattening, alogia, or avolition.*

[18] See his '*Schizophrenia: The Sacred Symbol of Psychiatry'*.

[19] Browne (2008), pp.258-9:

> *It is my belief that the full picture of schizophrenia is, to a considerable degree, iatrogenic; that is, it is partially created by the psychiatric intervention itself, establishing a pathway of illness behaviour extending over weeks or months, with heavy medication and institutionalisation. Thus, the young person loses connection with ordinary living at a critical time and finds it difficult to reintegrate back into society. It is only then that the full picture of the illness we call schizophrenia supervenes.*

[20] The study was conducted by Professor Frederick Hickling who was Professor of Psychiatry at The University of the West Indies, Jamaica. See Roche (2012), p.182.

[21] See Roche (2012), p.169.

[22] The thesis for which I was awarded the MSc degree in 1972, was entitled *'A Local Type Convexity for Metric Spaces'.* It was written under the supervision of Professor Trevor West who aside from being a brilliant mathematician, was a most inspirational teacher.

[23] Professor KWM Fulford is Professor of Philosophy and Mental Health at the University of Warwick. He has written many textbooks on the Philosophy of Psychiatry including Fulford (2006) which is entitled *'Oxford Textbook of Philosophy and Psychiatry'.*

[24] Roche (2012) p.350 quoting Amador & Strauss (1993):

> *"In work with patients with schizophrenia, denial of illness is so common … that it has become integral to our concept of this disorder."*

Also Fulford (2006), p.45:

> *"The difference between non-psychotic and psychotic symptoms is well illustrated by the difference between obsessions and delusions. As described above, with an obsessional symptom, the patient, although sometimes equivocal about the need for their obsessive-compulsive rituals, ultimately regards them as something wrong with them, and hence as needing therapy.*
> *… With psychotic symptoms, then, the patient is well aware that something is wrong, but fails to recognize that what is wrong is that he or she is mentally ill. Conditions in which symptoms of this kind typically occur are called psychotic conditions."*

[25] Fulford (2006) gives a similar example (at p.43):

> *"Mr O.S. … Attended general practitioner's surgery with his wife who was suffering from depression. On questioning, delivered an angry diatribe about his wife being 'a tart'. Unable to talk about anything else. Offered unlikely evidence (e.g. pattern of cars parked in road). Psychiatric referral confirmed diagnosis even though the doctors concerned knew that Mrs. O. was depressed following the break up of an affair."*

Kingham & Gordon (2004) state:

> *"It is noteworthy that individuals may suffer from morbid jealousy even when their partner is being unfaithful, provided that the evidence that they cite for unfaithfulness is incorrect and the response to such evidence on the part of the accuser is excessive or irrational."*
> [See Roche (2012), p.85]

[26] In regard to '*Common Sense'* Papineau (2006) has written:

> *"The trouble is that everyday intuitions are often nothing more than bad old theories in disguise. Any amount of nonsense was once part of common sense, and much nonsense no doubt still is. It was once absolutely obvious that the heavens revolve around the earth*

each day, that the heart is the seat of the soul, that without religion there can be no morality, …" [see Roche (2012) p.107]

[27] Madeleine Bourdouxhe '*La Femme de Gilles'*; see Roche (2012), p.105.

[28] The psychiatric diagnostic manuals specifically exempt religious belief from the definition of delusion.

[29] See Roche (2012), p.230 in relation to psychiatry's dismissive response (as evidenced in its refusal to change clinical practice) to those studies which challenged the safety and efficacy of atypical antipsychotics. Of these drugs a *Lancet* Editorial of 2009 commented:

…[this] is now, and only now, seen as a chimera that has passed spectacularly before our eyes before disappearing and leaving puzzlement and many questions in its wake.

[30] See Roche (2012), p.360.

Notes: Chapter 2

[1] The closing lines of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby.*

[2] The 'Cat and Cage' is one of Dublin's oldest pubs dating as it does from the 17th century.

There is a story about an exchange between the owner and a sign writer who had been engaged to repaint the pub's name. The owner having been asked by the sign writer to inspect his newly completed handiwork, mused and pronounced: "*The distances between 'Cat' and 'and' and 'and' and 'Cage' are not the same".* Thus producing a sentence containing five consecutive '*and*'s yet making complete sense!

[3] My thesis argument dependent in part on using a stipulative definition of 'personhood' (*i.e*. specifying sets of necessary and sufficient conditions for personhood); the use of such definitions was bitterly opposed by some Catholic anti-abortion groups.

[4] Many years later, I found that one of the commonest Zen Buddhist 'koans' was the question "*Has a dog Buddha nature?"* Like all such koans this was a question whose insolubility was meant to shock one out of the habit of endless conceptual analysis and into an awareness of the living life that one is presently in the midst of.

[5] Searching on the internet recently for references to Professor Gormley I came across the following [http://www.philipmcshane.ca/Field%20Nocturne-13.pdf]:

*"… my first marvelous experience of teaching mathematical physics of an advance form to a first year university class. Chatting with the professor of the area, Professor Philip Gormley, in the first week, I told him that I had a good crowd in the class. His advice was magnificent: '*lecture above their head for a few weeks: then you'll clear out the crowd, and you'll have a great year*.'*
That was a pragmatic way of waking up the school girls and school boys in my class to the problem of serious understanding, which many of them had not encountered before. One may do well in grade 12 simply with a good memory, especially when combined with hard work. But doing mathphysics properly is a different ballpark, …"

[6] An 'indirect proof' of a proposition 'X' is accomplished by showing that a contradiction results from assuming its contrary [*i.e.* 'not-X']. A 'direct proof' of 'X', in contrast, proves 'X' without reference to the status of 'not-X'.

[7] Grades in that department at that time were First, Second and Third Class Honours and Pass. It was only many years later when finally free of all psychiatric medication, that I fully realised the dulling effects that these drugs can have on the intellect.

[8] Yevgeny Yevtushenko: '*Telling Lies to the young is wrong'*

Telling lies to the young is wrong.
Proving to them that lies are true is wrong.
Telling them that God's in his heaven
and all's well with the world is wrong.
The young know what you mean. The young are people.
Tell them the difficulties can't be counted
and let them see not only what will be
but see with clarity these present times.
Say obstacles exist they must encounter,
sorrow happens, hardship happens.
The hell with it. Who never knew
the price of happiness will not be happy.

Forgive no error you recognize,
it will repeat itself, increase,
and afterwards our pupils
will not forgive in us what we forgave.

[9] Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* ['the stones sequence']:

And it was on the basis of this interpretation, whether right or wrong, that I finally reached a solution, inelegant assuredly, but sound, sound. Now I am willing to believe, indeed I firmly believe, that other solutions to this problem might have been found and indeed may still be found, no less sound, but much more elegant than the one I shall now describe, if I can ...

[10] He had been a producer for the BBC and his book '*All I can manage, more than I could'* the discussed the plays of Samuel Beckett.

[11] See Chapter 3: "*Wife, children, house, everything. The full catastrophe. … "*

Notes: Chapter 3

[1] Kazantzakis, N. *Zorba the Greek*. London: Faber & Faber (1946).

[2] See Baudelaire. *The Painter of Modern Life*. [Online]: *http://www.columbia.edu/itc/architecture/ockman/pdfs/dossier_4/Baudelaire.pdf* [accessed:31st October 2014].

[3] Similar sentiments are to be found in Cavafy's poem *Ithaka*:

… Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you would not have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.
And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
you will have understood by then what these Ithakas mean

[4] See Roche (2012) quoting Bollas: "*A normotic person is someone who is abnormally normal. He is too stable, secure, comfortable, and socially extraverted*."

[5] Australia's coastline is 25,760km whereas Norway's is 25,148km – over seventeen times that of Ireland. [online]: http://world.bymap.org/Coastlines.html [accessed:13th November 2014].

[6] The Swedish armaments industry was, in 2012, ranked 11th in the world just behind Israel and just ahead of Canada. Assessed on a *per capita* basis, it is third (after Israel and Russia) with some suggesting that the armaments industry is " *… one of the most essential parts of the Swedish economy."*

[Online]: *http://www.thelocal.se/20140520/sweden-arms-dictators-as-defence-exports-soar* and *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arms_industry* [accessed: 17th November 2014].

[7] Though nominally neutral in the second World War, Sweden permitted its railways to be used by the Nazis for transhipments of arms and raw materials. [Online]: *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sweden_during_World_War_II* [accessed: 17th November 2014].

[8] The Irish writer Aidan Higgins has entitled one of his novels *'Bornholm Night Ferry'.*

[9] The topic of the lecture was a recently published book by Paul Cohen entitled '*Set Theory and the Continuum Hypothesis'* which outlined his proof of the independence of the Continuum Hypothesis from the other axioms of Set Theory. In its importance for mathematical logic, this result ranked with Gödel's theorem of some forty years earlier. Cohen, in honour of his achievement, was awarded the Fields Medal in mathematics in 1966 and the National Medal of Science in 1967.

[10] This brings to mind a scheme which had been employed by engineering students in UCD for obtaining free phone calls in the era when pennies were required to make a local call. Four such coins were left adjacent to the phone for general use with a small triangle filed out of each. On ending the call the pennies were retrieved by pressing button B. A more sophisticated scheme involved the 'tapping' of the phone which also had the benefit of permitting long distance calls.

[11] Una Lehane. 'A Way with Wood'. *The Irish Times.* 26th June 1985.

[12] Harriet Cooke. 'Gerry Roche at Kelly Green Gallery'. *The Irish Times.* 21st June 1985.

[13] Crafts Council Newsletter July/Aug 1985: "*Gerry Roche one of Ireland's foremost innovators in the crafts of both wood carving and wood turning …."*

[14] A piece entitled '*Ushas'* exhibited at the RHA's 165th exhibition in 1995.

[15] Beginners to woodturning are often fearful of a skew chisel or bowl turning gouge 'digging-in'; this is caused by a non-cutting edge suddenly coming into contact with the wood. In teaching such

students I often began by instructing them to cause a dig-in; afterwards they knew how to avoid the problem and could then relax and shed the muscular tension which fear creates.

A similar strategy is often adopted when teaching sailing and the pupil is told to keep trying to capsize the dingy until they manage to succeed.

[16] Thomas Kuhn. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.* University of Chicago Press. (1962).

[17] Max Plank. *Scientific Autobiography and Other Papers*. New York. (1949). pp. 33–34.

[18] The subject and the methodologies adopted in both these dissertations are outlined in the Appendix.

[19] See for example, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nelson%27s_Pillar [accessed:08 December 2014].

[20] This was the phrase used by an ex-President of the American Psychiatric Association in criticising the overreliance on psychoactive medications by his fellow psychiatrists; Professor Ivor Browne has made similar criticisms [see Introduction *supra*].

[21] This is a mechanism like a skull cap which enables the brain wave forms which are associated with being in a relaxed state, to be monitored; when they occur the attached machine emits a sound and, by repeated practice, one learns to become proficient at generating these brain waves until, after four or five sessions, one can dispense with the mechanism and generate the relaxed state by oneself.

[22] As mentioned in the Introduction, I attended some of Professor Ivor Browne's workshops on Holotropic Breathwork in 1990. These were designed to enable subjects to recover memories of childhood trauma which had been repressed at the time but which, in later life, resulted in emotional 'blockages'. The technique required the subject to be in a state of deep relaxation and this was achieved using various techniques – rapid breathing, loud rhythmic music, and, on occasions, use of the drug Ketamine – whereby the vigilance of the conscious mind was relaxed and hitherto unconscious memories were experienced as if for the first time and could then be integrated into the subject's consciousness.

Over the course of four or five sessions, I was given Ketamine and these were the only occasions since going 'cold turkey' in 1981, that I have taken psychoactive drugs. I found these workshops to be extremely beneficial and I am deeply grateful to Professor Browne for permitting me to attend.

[23] Carl O'Brien. 'Ireland's mental hospitals: the last gap in our history of 'coercive confinement'?' *The Irish Times*. 16th June 2014.

[24] A research article detailing the deleterious effects of a diagnosis – or indeed misdiagnosis – of schizophrenia found that:

> *People found the diagnosis harmful, and the harm associated with the use of the diagnosis was a greater problem in personal terms than the experiences of distress that led it: The humiliation of being labelled schizophrenic threatened to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. … Some respondents described the diagnosis as a life sentence from which there was no recovery. One said that any attempt to disagree with or challenge the diagnosis was interpreted by psychiatrists as a symptom of the illness.*

Thomas, Philip *et al*. 'Personal consequences of the diagnosis of schizophrenia: a preliminary report from the inquiry into the schizophrenia label'. *Mental Health and Social Inclusion.* 17(3). [Online],: http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/MHSI-05-2013-0013 [accessed: 29th December 2014].

[25] T. C. Kingsmill Moore; *A Man May Fish*. The author was a judge of the Irish Supreme Court.

[26] In Zen, '*zazen'* is the term used for period of seated 'meditation' – though 'meditation' is not the most apt word as it connotes meditating *on* something; in *zazen* one simply watches or follows one's breath.

[27] A friend now living in Canada, noted that whilst the United States Declaration of Independence purports to grant citizens the right to "*Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness*" Canada aspires to a more modest "*Peace, Order and Good Government*" and that these find reflection in the different cultures and lifestyles of the two nations: the US with its aggressive individualism exemplified in its gun laws; Canada in its socialised medicine.

[28] A *sesshin* is an intensive period of meditation undertaken during a period of retreat with others in a Zen monastery.

[29] Sitting cross-legged with the feet placed on the opposing thighs.

[30] Many years later, I came across an article in a medical journal which spoke of the necessity of distinguishing between 'pain' and 'suffering' and in which it was stated that:

> *"… being present to the pain was a way to suffer less from it. Suffering and pain were not the same."*

Stonington, S. (2015). 'On the (f)utility of pain.' *The Lancet*. 385(9976):p1388.

[31] The Health (Mental Services) Act, 1981.

[32] Raftery continues:

> *Which brings us neatly to the Mental Health Act, 2001, trumpeted as the solution to all problems around involuntary committal. But, lo and behold, almost four years later, the critical sections of this Act dealing with patient rights and safeguards have not yet been enacted … And the reason? Yes, you guessed it – opposition from the psychiatric profession. Twenty-five years after they successfully stymied the 1981 Act, they're at it again. They are refusing to participate in the threeperson tribunal system, designed to review each involuntary committal*.

Raftery, M. 'Psychiatric profession at it again'. *The Irish Times*. 26th May 2005.

[33] Judging from the generous space provided (my original letter exceeded twenty six column inches!) the Irish Times clearly considered the debate to be of importance.

Notes: Chapter 4

[1] The quotation is from the soundtrack of the film *Zorba the Greek* based on Kazantzakis' novel of the same name.

[2] *E.g.* the syllogism known as *Barbara*:

> *All men are mortal.*
> *All Greeks are men.*
> *All Greeks are mortal.*

[3] 'O'Sullivan signals philosophy to be taught in schools.' *The Irish Times*. 30th December 2014.

[4] The Report commented on how "*groupthink*" was prevalent throughout the Irish Banking industry:

> *A minority of people indicated that contrarian views were both difficult to maintain during the long boom and unhealthy to present to boards or superiors. A number of people stated that had they implemented or consistently supported contrarian policies they may ultimately have lost their jobs, positions, or reputations. Other signs were also noted pointing to sanctioning of diverging or contrarian opinions as well as self-censorship because of this.*

[online]: http://www.bankinginquiry.gov.ie/Documents/Misjuding%20Risk%20-%20Causes%20of%20the%20Systemic%20Banking%20Crisis%20in%20Ireland.pdf [accessed:02 January 2015].

[5] Diarmaid Ferriter. 'Can Irish political anger convert into effective governance?' *The Irish Times.* 30th November 2014:

> *Some of the most striking correspondence from that period includes the craven letters he sent to senior Catholic leaders. At the behest of MacBride, the first cabinet meeting of that government informed pope Pius XII of MacBride and his colleagues' desire "to repose at the feet of Your Holiness the assurance of our filial loyalty and devotion as well as our firm resolve to be guided in all our work by the teaching of Christ".*
> *Similarly, MacBride told archbishop D'Alton, the Catholic primate, he would, in government, "be entirely at your Grace's disposal". He also signed himself as an "obedient and sincere" servant of John Charles McQuaid, the Catholic archbishop of Dublin, with whom he regularly liaised on government business.*

[6] The comedian Dave Allen who was noted in the 1970's for his satirical sketches on the Roman Catholic Church, was on that account subjected to IRA death threats.
See Martin Chilton. 'Dave Allen – God's Own Comedian'. *The Telegraph*. 28th December 2014. [online]: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/tv-and-radio-reviews/10026098/Dave-Allen-Gods-Own-Comedian-BBC2-review.html [accessed:2nd January 2015].

[7] Whilst writing this memoir it dawned on me that '*Trim'* was the name used by Beckett in his 'Sucking Stones' sequence in *Molloy*:

> *One day suddenly it dawned on me, dimly, that I might perhaps achieve*
> *my purpose without increasing the number of my pockets, or reducing the*
> *number of my stones, but simply by sacrificing the principle of trim.*

As a student, I had owned an LP of Jack McGowran reading Beckett to which I would often listen. The '*Principle of Trim'* clearly had made a deep impression and lodged in my unconscious.

Whilst helping me proofread this memoir, Mr. Charles O'Brien told me that he also remembered the original Viney article and that the principle involved had been called *'The Flow'* rather than '*Trim'*.

[8] Matthew 6:28: *"And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin."*

[9] Mahler: "*One does not compose, one is composed*." As quoted in Johnson. *Mahler's Voices*, at p.47.

[10] BBC News. '*The secret to a happy life – courtesy of Tolstoy*.'

> *He not only regularly put down his pen to guide a horse-drawn plough across the fields, but kept a scythe and saw leaning up against the wall next to his writing desk. In his last years, when writers and journalists came to pay homage to the bearded sage, they were always surprised to find one of the world's most famous authors huddled over his cobbling tools making a pair of boots.*

[online]: http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30536963 [accessed:5th January 2015].

[11] Archbishop of Dublin, Pastoral Letter 1983:

> "*.. The suggestion that the Catholic Church is so concerned with the life of the unborn child that the life of the mother somehow becomes secondary is a calumny …*"

[12] The Archbishops of Great Britain '*Abortion and the Right to Life'*:

> *"If there remain any cases, which in contemporary medicine are exceedingly rare or perhaps even non-existent, in which the life of the mother could not be saved without a direct abortion, a sensitive and upright conscience must in these cases be guided by the fundamental principles which govern all these matters: innocent life is not to be directly attacked; the unborn child has an intrinsic right to life … in such a situation, the law of God, which is also the rule of reason, makes exceptionally high demands."*

[online]: Abortion And The Right To Life - from the Tablet Archive.htm [accessed:15th January 2015].

[13] Arthur Koestler. 'Darkness at Noon', p.81:

> *When the existence of the Church is threatened, she is released from the commandments of morality. With unity as the end, the use of every means is sanctified, even deceit, treachery, violence, usury, prison, and death. Because order serves the good of the community, the individual must be sacrificed for the common good*.
>
> Dietrich of Nieheim, Bishop of Verden.

[14] The Amendment inserted a new sub-section 40.3.3 to the Constitution:

> *The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right.*

[15] Mary Robinson was elected President of Ireland in 1990.

[16] IR£7280 = €9244. The cumulative inflation rate between 1983 and 2014 was 139% giving a total of €9,244 + €12,864 = €22,107.

[17] Maura Buckley, 'Shopfront'. *The Irish Times.* 28th January 1988.

[18] *Cara* May/June 1985 and Nov/Dec 1994.

[19] *Internationale Fachzeitschrift fur Geschenkartikel;* February 1995.

[20] As mentioned in Chapter 3.

[21] Carolyn Kerr. 'When Love is Blind'. *Sunday Independent*. 13th Oct 1985.

[22] See, for example, Roche (2012), p.327.

[23] Mette's mother, Hjordis, had lent me £2,000 to help me complete the restoration and when I went to repay it some years later, she would only accept £1,000 which she then passed on to one of her nieces then a student. Her generosity to me was all the more remarkable because by that time Mette and I had been divorced.

[24] Percy Bysshe Shelley. *Ozymandias*:

> *And on the pedestal these words appear:*
>
> "My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
>
> Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!'
>
> Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
>
> Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
>
> The lone and level sands stretch far away*".*

[25] An attitude reminiscent of the story told of the ascent of Everest by Hillary and Norgay when Norgay declined to emulate Hillary in his 'conquest' of the mountain by not taking the final step.

[26] Dervla Murphy. *In Ethiopia with a Mule*.

[27] http://www.airliners.net/aviation-forums/general_aviation/print.main?id=1866963

[28] The winter temperatures go down to - 50°C making Drass, a village close to Kargil, the second coldest inhabited place on earth. The Zoji La pass on the road reportedly received some 18 meters of snowfall in 2008. [online]: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Highway_1D_%28India%29%28old_numbering%29 [accessed: 29th Jan 2015].

[29] [Online]:http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kashmir_Valley [accessed:29th Jan. 2015].

[30] A firepot containing burning charcoal.

[31] See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hopperstad_Stave_Church.

[32] See: '*Killykeen Holiday Complex by the OPW'* [online]: http://www.paddi.net/?func=display_document&document_id=18318 [accessed: 7th February 2015].

[33] One of the main problems in timber construction is the cracking that occurs at the ends of long lengths of timber. The OPW study found that by coating the end grains of such timbers with aluminium oxide paint, the rates of water uptake (and correspondingly, of shrinkage) between end and side grain were equalised thus inhibiting cracking.

[34] Thick timber beams are actually safer than steel which, in fire situations, will buckle unlike timber while will char but not burn and thus retain its structural integrity.

Notes: Chapter 5

[1] From the soundtrack of the film of Kazantzakis' novel 'Zorba the Greek'. The rendering in the English translation of the novel is somewhat more prosaic [p.110]: *"Life is trouble. Zorba continued. Death, no. To live – do you know what that means? To undo your belt and look for trouble!"*

[2] Some days after writing this paragraph I was listening to a CD recording of a cello recital by Yo-Yo Ma entitled *Solo*. The sleeve notes began:

> In early 1999, during a trip to Japan, Yo-Yo Ma visited the Zen garden of Ryoan-ji Temple in Kyoto. The garden is thought to have been designed at the end of the fifteenth century, and consists of fifteen rocks placed amid white sand in several groups of two and three. No single vantage point provides a complete view of all the rocks, and in one Zen gloss, the garden's meaning emerges from contemplating the contradictions implicit in trying to see the whole at any one moment: to take in all the rocks, a viewer must move, but doing so means relinquish one perspective in order to gain another.

[3] The Turner Prize winning artist, Duncan Campbell entitled one of his works "*Statues also die*".

[Online]: http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/art-and-design/visual-art/irish-turner-prize-winner-comes-home-to-imma-1.2099564 [accessed:13th February 2015].

[4] Transparency and reconstruction.

[5] Belton, Catherine. 'Tainted U.S. Meat on Russian Shelves.' *The Moscow Times*. 15th April 1999. [online]: http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/tainted-us-meat-on-russian-shelves/278281.html [accessed:11th February 2015].

[6] Fung Yu-Lan. '*A Taoist Classic: Chuang-Tzu*.' Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1991.

[7] Vikram Seth. '*From Heaven Lake : Travels Through Sinkiang and Tibet*.' This is a fascinating and informative book about his travels in the region.

[8] The lowest is Dead Sea at 423 meters.

[9] At a rate of 67 millimetres per year.

[10] Samuel Beckett, *Molloy* ['the stones sequence']

[11] Shaw, Isobel. (1989). *Pakistan Handbook*. Hong Kong: The Guidebook Company; at p. 257.

[12] This is called *varakh* and is actual gold hammered into a very thin layer of leaf.

[13] See, for example, the Wikipedia entry on Haji Ayub Afridi; [online]: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haji_Ayub_Afridi [accessed:24th February 2015].

[14] James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* begins:

> *riverrun, past Eve and Adam's, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs*

[15] Loude, J-Y. & Lievre, V. (Negre, H. trans.) *Kalash Solstice*. Islamabad: Lok Virsa.p.254.

[16] *Op.cit* p. 201-204.

[17] Burns, J. 'India and England Beg to Differ'. *The New York Times,* 19th October 1997. [online]: http://www.nytimes.com/1997/10/19/weekinreview/india-and-england-beg-to-differ-tiptoeing-through-the-time-of-the-raj.html [accessed: 27 February 2015].

[18] Rupert Brooke. *'The Soldier'*:

> *If I should die, think only this of me;*
> *That there's some corner of a foreign field*
> *That is for ever England. …*

[19] Graham, A.C. *Chuang-Tzu: Inner Chapters.* London: Mandala, 1991; at p.123.

[20] Lines from Yeats' play *'The Dreaming Of The Bones'*.

[21] This case is discussed in detail in my PhD dissertation where references are given. [See Roche (2012), Vol. 2. '*Appendix H: The Manweiler case*.' p.422 *et seq*.]

[22] Such a course of action would not have been available to me not only because freedom of information laws had not then been introduced but also because, when introduced, they did not cover private hospitals such as St. John of God's.

[23] The use of such tactics was reflected in the award of exemplary damages against the psychiatrists and hospital authorities. Manweiler was awarded a total of €3 million which was the highest award of general damages in Irish legal history; these were subsequently reduced to €500,000 in an out-of-court settlement.

[24] Rosenhan, D. (1973). 'On Being Sane in Insane Places'. *Science*. 179:250-8. The Rosenhan experiment is described more fully in my PhD dissertation. [See Roche (2012), p.127 *et seq*.]

[25] Cadwalladr. C. 'Cédric Villani: 'Mathematics is about progress and adventure and emotion.' *The Guardian*. 1st March 2015. [online]: http://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/mar/01/cedric-villani-mathematics-progress-adventure-emotion [accessed:9th March 2015].

[26] The term 'normal' is highly ambiguous in that at one level it suggests an objective, statistically determined, measure whilst on another, it is evaluative and aspirational; the philosophy of psychiatry seldom adequately distinguishes between these and the resulting confusion severely undermines psychiatry's attempts to portray itself as being an intellectually rigorous discipline. See Roche (2012) especially Chapter 3, Section D: '*Problematic aspects of the psychiatric concept of normalcy*.' P.104 *et seq.*

[27] Fleming, N. 'Albert Einstein 'found genius through autism.' *The Telegraph*. 21st February 2008. [online]: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/science-news/3326317/Albert-Einstein-found-genius-through-autism.html [accessed: 3rd March 2015].

[28] For example, homosexuality and (as mentioned in Chapter 1) 'drapetomania' (a slave's excessive wish for freedom), 'fugue' (an inordinate desire to travel).

[29] Caplan, P. 'Conflict of Interest at the Top of the Psychiatric Apparatus'. *Aporia*; vol.7(1): pp.30-41. [online]: http://www.oa.uottawa.ca/journals/aporia/articles/2015_01/commentary.pdf [accessed: 9th March 2015].

[30] *Ibid*.

[31] Scull, A. 'Madness in civilisation.*' The Lancet*. 385(9973); p1067, 21st March 2015.

[32] Lamination is a technique whereby very thin pieces of wood when correctly glued together can have unexpected strength; a traditional use is in the making of laminated yacht masts. The theory behind lamination can best be understood by imagining a standard length of 3" by 2" softwood as used, for example, in making stud walls. The strength of such a piece of wood would usually be poor because of the presence of defects such as knots and cracking, however if it was sawn lengthwise into six pieces of 2" by ½" and then these glued back together in a different order so that defects did not overlap, then the resulting laminated length of 3" by 2" would be immeasurably stronger than the original.

[33] Attending at the Steven's Hospital Travel Clinic for my vaccinations and enquiring about the possible side effects of the anti-malarial medication *Lariam* (of which I had heard frightening tales of it inducing psychosis) I mentioned to the doctor that I had once been prescribed antipsychotics but had been medication free for close to fifteen years, she commented: *"Oh you're one of those, why didn't you say so before!".*
Research has shown medics to be amongst the worst stigmatisers. [See Roche (2012), p.300]

[34] https://www.lonelyplanet.com/thorntree/forums/africa/topics/one-night-nairobi-hotel-africana

[35] Speaking of reports of snow on Mount Kilimanjaro; see Russel, J.& Cohn, R. *Johannes Rebmann*. [Online]: http://www.abebooks.com/book-search/title/johannes-rebmann/ [accessed: 16th March 2015].

[36] See '*Kenya: Truly The Cradle Of Mankind*.' [Online]: http://www.museums.or.ke/cradleofmankind.html [accessed:16th March 2015].

[37] But where they have been subjected to discrimination: a 2005 survey, for example, reported that 43% of Israelis were unwilling to marry, or have their children marry, Ethiopians. Jassen, J. 'Racism alive and well in Israeli society'. *Jerusalem Post*, 22nd March 2005.

[38] With the exception of its occupation by Mussolini's troops subsequent to the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935.

[39] Dervla Murphy. *In Ethiopia with a Mule*. London: Arrow (1991); p.155.

Another excellent book on travelling in Ethiopia is Philip Marsden-Smedley's, *A Far Country: travels in Ethiopia*. London: Arrow (1991)

[40] According to the Smithsonian Institute:

> *"It arrived nearly 3,000 years ago, they say, and has been guarded by a succession of virgin monks who, once anointed, are forbidden to set foot outside the chapel grounds until they die."*

[Online]: http://www.smithsonianmag.com/people-places/keepers-of-the-lost-ark-179998820/?no-ist [accessed:19th March 2015].

[41] 'Where Rimbaud Found Peace in Ethiopia'. *The New York Times*. 27th February 2015. [online]: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/01/travel/where-rimbaud-found-peace-in-ethiopia.html?hpw&rref=travel&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=well-region&region=bottom-well&WT.nav=bottom-well&_r=0 [accessed:19th March 2015].

[42] The 'sheltering' of the title is the illusion of solidity that is provided by a blue sky which masks the black, boundless, emptiness of space.

[43] Sprott, D. 'The naked civil servant' *The Guardian*. 14th August 2004. [online]: http://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/aug/14/featuresreviews.guardianreview15 [accessed: 23rd March 2015].

[44] On one such visit after I had begun my PhD research, I saw a sculpture representing the coronation of Ramses III by the god Horus (personifying order) and the god Seth (personifying anarchy). I had thought of using a photo of this sculpture as a frontispiece in my dissertation as representing the ideal of *'being equally blessed by the gods of order and disorder'* much like the Kazantzakis excerpt that I have used elsewhere (*"A man needs a little madness, … Or else? …He never dares cut the rope and be free*").

In the event I used the photo of a landscape which had been painted on the inside of a once locked, but now derelict, asylum door.

[45] Published in a new expanded edition by the Lilliput Press in 2004 and retitled '*The Atlantean Irish: Ireland's Oriental and Maritime Heritage'.*

[46] Ireland, W. *The life of Napoleon Bonaparte*. p.430. [online]: https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=gOtBAAAAcAAJ&pg=PA430 [accessed:24th March 2015].

[47] Manktelow & Over (eds.) *Rationality; Psychological And Philosophical Perspectives*. London: Routledge; 1993.

Notes: Chapter 6

[1] Kazantzakis, N. *Zorba the Greek*. London: Faber & Faber (1946), p.251.

[2] The term 'coercive' (rather than 'non-consensual') is used to indicate an intervention carried out against the subject's explicit and contemporaneous objections.

[3] In the Matter of a Ward of Court [1995] 2 ILRM 401.

[4] Airedale N.H.S. Trust v Bland, [1993] AC 789.

[5] David Papineau, Professor of Philosophy of Science at King's College, London has written an exhilarating essay entitled '*The Tyranny Of Common Sense'* in which he states:

> *Sometimes I despair of my philosophical colleagues. … When it comes to philosophical ideas, they are congenitally suspicious of intellectual innovation. In their eyes, a good philosophical theory is one that agrees with the views found on the Clapham omnibus. Few philosophers, in the English-speaking world at least, think of philosophy as a source of radical new ideas. Rather they view it as way of systematising the everyday reactions of ordinary people*.

[online]: www.davidpapineau.co.uk/.../1/8/.../the_tyranny_of_common_sense.doc [accessed: 26th March 2015].

[6] Entitled '*An alternative conceptual structure for the resolution of 'end-of-life' problems involving PVS patients*' and is available online at https://www.academia.edu/.

[7] See Roche (2000), p. 414.

[8] A film of the same name, was made by Julian Schnabel and released on DVD in 2008.

[9] Shilandari, F. (2010). *Iranian Woman: Veil and Identity:*

> *In 1936, Reza Shah abolished the wearing of the veil; and consequently, as Hay asserts, "under Reza Shah, class attitudes to the veil reversed, with the upper class embracing Western reforms including Western dress, while the working poor saw the veil as a sign of propriety" (Hay 2007). A large part of women choose to stay at home rather than confront police who pulled the veils from their heads.*

[Online]: http://www.gozaar.org/english/articles-en/Iranian-Woman-Veil-and-Identity.html [accessed: 1st April 2015].

[10] Craig-Jones, T.:

> *While the United States claimed to have been caught off guard by Iraq's invasion of Iran, many U.S. policy makers came to see a continuation of the war as a useful way to bog down two of the region's most highly militarized regimes and to stave off short-term threats to the regional order and the political economy of oil. To this end, the United States supplied weapons, funding, and intelligence to both sides in the conflict, and acknowledged and condoned Iraq's use of chemical weapons on the battlefield and against its own citizens.*

Craig-Jones, T. 'America, Oil, and War in the Middle East.' *Journal of American History*. 99 (1):208-218. [online]: http://jah.oxfordjournals.org/content/99/1/208.full [accessed: 2nd April 2015].

[11] Air Flight 655.

[12] See Chomsky, N. '*Outrage'* [online]: http://www.chomsky.info/articles/20140814.htm [accessed: 2nd April 2015].

[13] Though the Channel 4 reporter, Jon Snow, offers a refreshingly positive perspective:

> Snow's greatest love, though, has always been Iran. Naturally, he was there when the Shah was overthrown*:*
>
> > *"Everybody on the streets, a complete swirl of humanity. It felt like liberation. I am an unapologetic Iranophile, it's one of the most beautiful places on Earth. Persepolis is possibly the oldest city on Earth – I mean, God help us – the thought that they were writing alphabets and maths when we were crawling on our bellies in caves."*

Heawood, S. "Jon Snow: *'In the establishment, I'm the most anti-establishment person I know'*". *The Guardian*. 12th April 2015.

[14] Bahman Ghobadi was the director of the film *'A Time For Drunken Horses'*.

[15] See, for example, *Medecins Sans Frontieres* report on Iran. [Online]: http://www.msf.ie/iran?gclid=CMaiy5S32sQCFaSWtAodXSUAfg [accessed:3rd April 2015].

[16] BBC. '*Afghanistan's Dancing Boys*.' [Online]: http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00ff0hh [accessed: 3rd April 2015].
See also: Abdul-Ahad, G. 'The dancing boys of Afghanistan'. *The Guardian*. 12th September 2009. [online]: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/sep/12/dancing-boys-afghanistan [accessed: 3rd April 2015].

[17] See, for example, United Nations Environment Programme *'Fog Harvesting'* [online]: http://www.oas.org/dsd/publications/unit/oea59e/ch12.htm [accessed: 9th April 2015].

[18] As quoted in E. M. Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*; at p.63.

[19] Thomas Szasz though himself a psychiatrist and a professor of psychiatry at the State University of New York, was a noted critic of modern psychiatry; his most influential books were *The Myth of Mental illness* (first published in 1961) and *Schizophrenia: The Sacred Symbol of Psychiatry* (first published in 1988).

[20] Richard Bentall is Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Liverpool and is a Fellow of the British Academy; amongst his books are *Doctoring the Mind: Why psychiatric treatments fail* (2010) and *Madness Explained: Psychosis and Human Nature* (2003).

[21] Karl Jaspers, for example, in his *General Psychopathology* held (at p.93) that delusion is the "*basic characteristic of madness*".

[22] See also Fulford, KWM. *The Oxford Textbook of Philosophy of Psychiatry* at p. 43:

> *Mr O.S. … Attended general practitioner's surgery with his wife who was suffering from depression. On questioning, delivered an angry diatribe about his wife being 'a tart'. Unable to talk about anything else. Offered unlikely evidence (e.g. pattern of cars parked*

in road). Psychiatric referral confirmed diagnosis even though the doctors concerned knew that Mrs. O. was depressed following the break up of an affair.

[23] *DSM-IV-TR* (2000), p.821.

[24] Bentall, R. (2003). *Madness Explained* at p.429; see also Roche (2012) p.331.

[25] For example, psychiatry's dismissive response (as evidenced in its refusal to change clinical practice) to those studies which challenged the safety and efficacy of atypical antipsychotics; see Roche (2012), p.230.

[26] Roche (2012), p.85 *et seq*.

[27] Freedman (2007a); Nissim-Sabat (2007); Potter (2007); Lieberman (2007) and Freedman (2007b) [more complete references can be found in Roche(2012)]

[28] Fulford, KWM. (1989). *Moral Theory and Medical Practice.* Cambridge University Press, at p.204.

[29] Known as '*base rate errors*' in the theory of probability.

[30] Louis MacNeice, '*Snow*.'

[31] Drury, O'C. (1996). (Berman, D. Fitzgerald, M. and Hayes, J. (eds.)). *The Danger of Words and writings on Wittgenstein*. Bristol: Thoemmes.

[32] The psychiatric interventions under discussion are '*coercive'* rather than '*non-consensual' i.e.* the subject has explicitly and emphatically rejected the proffered intervention.

[33] The story is based on an old Japanese legend and is entitled '*A Living God*' and was included in Lafcadio Hearn's *Gleanings in Buddha-Fields.*

[34] The documentary had been accompanied by a book: Downer, L. *On the Narrow Road to the Deep North: Journey into Lost Japan*. London: Jonathon Cape. (1989).

[35] Peaslee, E. [Thesis_ Carnegie Mellon University] '*Adolescent Suicide in Japan'* [online]: http://repository.cmu.edu/hsshonors/128/ [accessed: 2nd May 2015].

[36] *The Guardian*. 'Japanese population falls to 15-year low'. 18th April 2015 [online]: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/18/japanese-population-falls-to-15-year-low [accessed: 2nd May 2015].

[37] Boren, Z. 'Tokyo may allow children to make noise for the first time in fifteen years.' *The Independent* 7th March 2015 [online]: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/tokyo-may-allow-children-to-make-noise-for-the-first-time-in-fifteen-years-10092927.html [accessed: 2nd May 2015].

[38] From the sleeve notes to a CD recording of a cello recital by Yo-Yo Ma entitled '*Solo'*.

[39] Ribeiro, B. (1994). *Coherence in Psychotic Discourse*. Oxford: OUP.

[40] Nixon, J. 'Hannah Arendt: thinking versus evil.' *Times Higher Education*. 12th March 2015.

[41] Accessed in 2008, online at http://www.ul.ie/ppa/Politics/PostgradHandbook08.pdf

> "These limits are advisory. It is unlikely - but possible - that your thesis would not be accepted for examination simply because you exceeded your department's limits. On the other hand you should not disregard them entirely: they are guides to give you an indication of the scale on which you should be working."

[42] Laurance, J. 'Study raises doubts over treatment for prostate cancer' *The Independent*. 28th April 2012.

[43] Wilt, T. *et al* 'Radical Prostatectomy versus Observation for Localized Prostate Cancer' *N Engl J Med.* 2012; 367:203-213.

[44] *www.seat61.com*

[45] 'O'Brien, Paraic. 'Beneath the streets of Romania's capital, a living hell.' *Channel 4 Documentary.* [Online]: http://www.channel4.com/news/romania-tunnels-bucharest-orphans-photo [accessed: 4th May 3015].

[46] This is a modern chapel whose structure incorporates stone from the ancient city gate of Bab Kisan through which – as told in the Acts of the Apostles – Paul was lowered out of a window.

[47] Naqvi, N. '*Four Medieval Hospitals in Syria'*:

> *A close look at the architecture of this hospital validates the reliability of historical data as regard to treating mentally disturbed patients and a rational compassionate approach towards mental illness. The patients were provided free accommodation, medicines, medical care, food and even entertainment.*

[online]: http://www.muslimheritage.com/article/four-medieval-hospitals-syria [accessed:5th May 2015].

Notes: Chapter 7

[1] Kazantzakis, N. *Zorba the Greek*. London: Faber & Faber (1946), p.251.

[2] There is a copy of my presentation on my website at *gerryroche.com.*

[3] It is available on a number of websites: *www.academia.edu*; *www.criticalpsychiatry.co.uk*; UL website[*dspace.mic.ul.ie/handle/10395/1544*] and *www.gerryroche.com*.

[4] The Guardian (2009). 'Letters: UK has led efforts for Gaza ceasefire'. *The Guardian*, 10th January. [online]:

http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jan/10/letters-gaza-uk [accessed 5th February 2013]

[5] The research proposal is available online at *www.gerryroche.com* and at *https://www.academia.edu/.*

[6] See, for example, Sample, I. 'Skull of Homo erectus throws story of human evolution into disarray.' *The Guardian.* 17th October 2013. [online]: http://www.theguardian.com/science/2013/oct/17/skull-homo-erectus-human-evolution [accessed: 29th April 2015].

[7] Though the border between Turkey and Armenia is closed, many Armenians enter Turkey through Georgia and Turkey has a substantial population of Armenians who have travelled there in search of work. See, for example, [online]: http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/04/armenian-immigrants-life-turkey-150420070803126.html [accessed: 29th April 2015].

[8] The so-called Obersalzberg Speech was given by Hitler to his commanders at his Obersalzberg home on 22nd August 1939, a week before the German invasion of Poland. The wording of the translation is taken from an inscription at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.

[9] As I later found out, Theodor Herzl (one of the founders of the Zionist movement) supported the Ottoman Sultan against the Armenians believing that by this, he would get the Sultan to sell Palestine to the Jews. Elboim-Dror, R. 'How Herzl sold out the Armenians. *Haaretz*. 1st May 2015. [online]: http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.654393 [accessed:1st May 2015].

[10] A film directed by Ki-duk Kim and released in 2003.

[11] McCurry, J. 'Japan dismisses South Korean protest over 'provocative' textbooks.' *The Guardian*. 7th April 2015, [online]: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/07/japan-south-korea-china-protest-textbooks [accessed: 7th May 2015].

[12] *Ithaka* by CP Cavafy translated by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard.

[13] Having decided not to pursue aggressive treatment after my prostate cancer was diagnosed in 2011, I saw little point in attempting to monitor its progress. Its symptoms, thankfully, don't yet impinge greatly on my everyday life.

Notes: Postscript

[1] Wittgenstein's last words, to his doctor's wife (28th April 1951); see: Malcolm, N. *Ludwig Wittgenstein : A Memoir* (1966) at p.100.

[2] See Roche (2012) p.307 where Bentall's example is given of a patient whose politeness had prompted a nurse to comment: *"He's excessively polite*," the nurse explained darkly. … "*… we're trying to work out whether his politeness is part of his normal personality or his illness.*"

The incident is reminiscent of how in the Rosenhan (1973) experiment, psychiatric staff – looking myopically through the distorting lens of the psychiatric diagnosis – considered note writing to have pathological overtones and described it as "*writing behaviour*."

See also Reich's observation [Roche (2012) p.364]:

> *Perhaps the most remarkable property of diagnosis, and sometimes the most enraging for the diagnosed patient, is its capacity for inevitable self-confirmation. That property is used in everyday life by persons who call others 'crazy' or 'weird': once they do so, everything that the receivers of such lay diagnoses do can be attributed to, and dismissed as a result of, those or similar psychopatholizing epithets. In fact, everything they do subsequently can become a proof that the original assessment was correct. This 'catch-22' quality of the pathological naming therefore functions with even greater efficiency and inevitability within psychiatry itself*.

[3] Thus, for example, many imperialist ventures were justified on the grounds that they were beneficial to the 'natives'.

See also Roche (2012) where the argument is made that many coercive psychiatric interventions though ostensibly justified on the grounds of an individual's 'best interests' can damage, or even destroy, that individual's personhood.

[4] Pascal. *Pensées*. Penguin Classics; p.245.
The original ["*Jamais on ne fait le mal si pleinement et si gaiement que quand on le fait par conscience.*"] is sometimes incorrectly translated as "*Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction*".

[5] Kingdon (2004), which was a study of psychiatrists' attitudes towards their patients, found that psychiatrists believed that the misdiagnosis of schizophrenia (by, presumably, *other* psychiatrists) was common. [See Roche (2012), p. 22]

[6] *Cf.* a reviewer's comment on the novels of Muriel Spark:

> *… the stories that wring pathos from the plight of victims, Spark says, let the reader 'go to bed feeling less guilty … He has undergone the experience of pity for the underdog. Salt tears have gone bowling down his cheeks.' But in the morning 'he rises refreshed, more determined than ever to be the overdog.'*
>
> [http://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n18/christopher-tayler/uncuddly; accessed 21st October 2014]

[7] The only book other book on philosophy that has such a galvanising effect on me on a personal level, was Derrida's '*The Gift of Death'*. So much of Western philosophy is imbued with the idea of death as an 'evil' (again a vestige of a Christian heritage) that to read Derrida was liberating. Death is one of the bounds within which life is necessarily lived but to consider it an 'evil' requires that it be regarded as contingent. Recognising the inevitability of one's own death gives 'salt' to life – without this recognition then the urgency to complete those undertakings which we feel to be our life's task would be lacking.
The recognition of the inappropriateness of speaking of death as 'evil', was of considerable help in formulating my MPhil dissertation argument which placed considerable reliance on the concept of 'a good death.

[8] Lao Tzu. *Tao Te Ching*. (trans. John C.H. Wu). Shambhala; pp. 33-34.

[9] John Blofeld (trans.). *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po on the Transmission of Mind*. London: The Buddhist Society. 1958.

[10] Akin to an ethical 'check-box' mentality which perceives a situation in terms of abstract categories rather than seeking to experience it in its singular particularity.

[11] Thomas Merton. *The Way of Chuang Tzu*. Shambhala.

[12] *Ibid*. p.24. George Bush's promise to "*rid the world of evil*" provides a contemporary example.

[13] This brings to mind the story of a beggar who would seldom thank his almsgivers because he did not wish to collude in the deception that their giving was a disinterested act of generosity.

[14] *Ibid*. p.15.

I suggest that to the Taoist, the ideal ethical action might be akin to a man who in carrying a heavy bucket with his right arm and becoming conscious of an excessive strain, simply transfers it to his left arm without reliance on any ideas of fairness or goodness; similarly an ethical response to another person should flow naturally from an empathetic response without the need for any intervening intellectualisation.

[15] This is the oral interview/examination by a panel of academics, where one is required to defend one's dissertation. The panel includes an external examiner who in my case was Professor Joris Vandenberghe of the University of Louvain. I would like to thank Professor Vandenberghe for the sympathetic understanding which he evinced towards what was a contentious subject matter.

[16] See Roche (2012), p. 58 quoting ter Meulen:

> "*However, in clinical practice there is a duty to act. Physicians have an obligation to do good to their patients …* "

And [at p. 219] quoting Ballard:

> *"… that does not legitimize widespread use of dangerous treatments. … we prescribe because of fear of therapeutic impotence and not because of the best interests of the patient. … Given the often catastrophic effects of treatment, in the context of dementia, it is difficult to see how neuroleptic treatment can be in the best interests of anyone other than the harassed doctor making the prescription."*

[17] Thus removing that portion of the Hippocratic obligation from the shoulders of the medical practitioner.

[18] Thomas Merton. *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. Bantam Doubleday Dell (1994); p.287.

[19] It is of interest to compare such a stance with the biblical injunction:

"*Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven*." [Matthew 18:3]

To the Zen practitioner, heaven is of course here on earth and is precisely where he now stands if only he can open his eyes to the richness of it.

[20] See also the 13th century Persian poet Rumi:

> *Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,*
> *there is a field. I'll meet you there.*
> *When the soul lies down in that grass,*
> *the world is too full to talk about.*
> *Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other" doesn't make any sense.*

[21] [online]: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/277111/4262.pdf [accessed: 23rd October 2014].

[22] *Ibid*. 'Institutional racism' includes " *… attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness …"*

[23] *Ibid*. S. 45.17; Recommendation (12).

[24] See Roche (2012), Chapter 6 which contains an extended discussion of these issues.

There is a deep mismatch between assessments of the link between mental illness and dangerousness as perceived by the popular media, and as determined by research studies which indicate that – in the absence of substance abuse – the risk of violence is no greater amongst ex-psychiatric patients than that occurring in the general population and, furthermore, that substance abuse itself is the best predictor of violent behaviour.

[25] Manjoo, F. 'Exposing Hidden Bias at Google.' *The New York Times.* 24th September 2014, [online]: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/25/technology/exposing-hidden-biases-at-google-to-improve-diversity.html?emc=edit_ct_20140925&nl=technology&nlid=21643801&_r=1 [accessed:23rd October 2014].

See also Neyfakh, L. 'Psychologists are testing ways to reduce unconscious racial prejudice.' *The Boston Globe*. 20th September 2014. [online]: http://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2014/09/20/the-bias-fighters/lTZh1WyzG2sG5CmXoh8dRP/story.html [accessed: 23rd October 2014].

[26] The Irish Supreme Court, for example, has declared:

> *The consent ... is not necessarily a decision based on medical considerations ... Such reasons may not be viewed as good medical reasons, or reasons most citizens would regard as rational …*

[*Per* Denham J., *In the Matter of a Ward of Court* (1995), p.454]

[27] Gervais (1997):

> *She was an intelligent, articulate person who talked in an apparently logical way and was listened to in a similar logical way, but she was certainly not listened to with the "third ear."*

[28] See Roche (2012): Section C.2: *Non therapeutic use of antipsychotics in the elderly*, where full sources are given.

[29] *Ibid*. Appendix H: The Manweiler Case.

Notes: Appendix

[1] In 2000 I was awarded by UCC an MPhil with first class honours, for a thesis entitled "*An alternative conceptual structure for the resolution of 'end-of-life' problems involving PVS patients*" [Roche (2000)]. This thesis is available online at *gerryroche.com.*

[2] In 2012 I was awarded PhD by the University of Limerick, for a thesis entitled "*A philosophical investigation into coercive psychiatric practices*" [Roche (2012)].

The term 'coercive' is used to distinguish interventions which take place against the express wishes of a subject, from 'non-consensual' psychiatric interventions which may occur when, for example, a subject is unconscious.

[3] The case was reported in Annas, G. (1999). 'The Last Resort — The Use of Physical Restraints in Medical Emergencies.' *New England Journal of Medicine*. 341(18): 1408-1412; see Roche (2012), p.288.

[4] See, for example, the judgement of Denham J., in the Irish Supreme Court:

"*Medical treatment may not be given to an adult person of full capacity without his or her consent. ... The consent ... is not necessarily a decision based on medical considerations ... Such reasons may not be viewed as good medical reasons, or reasons most citizens would regard as rational*."

[*In the Matter of a Ward of Court* [1995] 2 ILRM 401 at p.454]

[5] See, for example, Roche (2012), p. 427: In a civil action by John Manweiler, his psychiatrist Dr. Burke gave Manweiler's "*unwillingness*" and reluctance to consent as a reason for changing Manweiler's status to involuntary. Dr. Kennedy (Director, The Central Mental Hospital), speaking in 2005, gave similar reasons:

> "*… the other [reason why involuntary committal procedures would be invoked] is expressing your general unhappiness or unwillingness to remain in hospital. I tend to listen to my patients and if they tell me that they are unhappy, I take it that they are not consenting*."

Such an interpretation eviscerates the doctrine of consent and renders it operative only in circumstances where the subject agrees with a proposed treatment.

[6] Criticisms of psychiatry such as made by Professor Thomas Szasz (himself a psychiatrist), have been - if not vilified - generally ignored by mainstream psychiatry though see: Schaler, J. (ed.) (2004). *Szasz Under Fire: The Psychiatric Abolitionist Faces His Critics*. Chicago: Open Court.

Some recent studies – such as those by Priebe (2009) – have sought to deflect or pre-empt criticisms of coercive psychiatry by conducting surveys of retrospective opinions of those who had been subjected to a coercive psychiatric intervention; the methodologies adopted by some of such studies have serious flaws [see Roche (2012), p.337].

Priebe, S. *et al* (2009). 'Patients' views and readmissions 1 year after involuntary hospitalisation.' *British Journal of Psychiatry*. 194: 49-54.

[7] References to research studies are given in Roche (2000), p.136.

[8] Roche (2000), p.416. It is somewhat ironic that fourteen years later the *Washington Post*, in an article entitled "*Is a patient 'vegetative?' The crucial answer may be quite wrong*", reported on a recent study which was the first to compare brain-imaging techniques with standard clinical practice:

> "*…the PET scan revealed that a third of the 36 patients diagnosed as "behaviorally unresponsive" using the standard hospital test "showed brain activity consistent with the presence of some consciousness*."
>
> … [The study author had commented]*: "We can't make ethical or medical or legal decisions which are right if we we're not having good diagnoses, …We need to reduce" the interpretive element as much as possible."* [*Washington Post* 16th April 2014].

[9] Worse; a subject's protests against his diagnosis may well will be interpreted as being a denial of his illness; this 'denial' may become new and independent evidence of the supposed correctness of the original diagnosis. [Roche(2012), p.356 citing Amador & Strauss (1993): "*In work with patients with schizophrenia, denial of illness is so common … that it has become integral to our concept of this disorder*."]

[10] Full details of any sources cited are given at the pages referred to in Roche (2012).

[11] See Roche (2012), p.255; also Mullen (2001): "*The best established mental health variable in predicting future offending behaviour is the presence of substance abuse*." [Roche (2012), p.272]

[12] For example:

> Swanson (2008): "*Using clinical judgment alone, mental health professionals cannot predict individual patient violence much more accurately than chance*."
>
> Szmukler (2001b): "*This means that if violence occurs in say 5% of a patient population, the predictive test will be wrong 92 times out of 100*." [In relation to serious acts of violence.] See Roche (2012), p.267-8.

[13] Roche (2012), p.23; p.169.

[14] Roche (2012), p.360.

[15] Roche (2012), p.145. Edward Shorter is Professor of the History of Medicine and Psychiatry at the University of Toronto. DSM–V (*The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th Edition) is the current and most authoritative psychiatric diagnostic manual.

[16] See Roche (2012), p.207. In contrast to many research studies funded by the pharmaceutical industry which "*are four times as likely to have outcomes favouring the sponsor than are studies funded by other sources*". (A *BMJ* editorial [see Roche p.458]). *STAR*D, CATIE*, and *STEP.BD* were publicly funded by the NIMH (National Institute for Mental Health) which is the lead US Federal agency for research on mental disorders and thus the studies are particularly authoritative.

[17] See Roche (2012), p.177.

[18] A similar problem arose in writing my MPhil; there the decision was made to incorporate the uncertainties involved in establishing the absence of consciousness and the ability to experience pain into the ethical analysis.

[19] Foot, P. (1977). 'Euthanasia'. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. 6(2): 85-112.
Foot, P. (1978). *Virtues and Vices*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

[20] Foot (1977), p.108.

[21] When one says that a house has been 'destroyed' by a storm or fire one does not mean that every trace of the original house is gone or that no brick is left standing, rather one means that, although vestiges of the house may remain and hints of its original structure may still be glimpsed, it is so severely damaged that, realistically, no remedial work could restore it to its original condition; it is damaged beyond repair, destroyed. [Roche (2012), p.34]

[22]Not all infringements of the right to be let alone are sufficiently grave as to place personhood in jeopardy; consider for example, a fireman restraining a father from entering a burning house to save his child and or that of a climber who is suffering from altitude sickness, being forcibly brought down the mountain. I termed such interventions '*quasi-coercive interventions'*. [Roche (2012), p.33]

[23] Roche (2012), Appendix H.

[24] The Manweiler case came before the Irish courts in 2005 and concerned the wrongful psychiatric confinement and treatment of a John Manweiler. It resulted in an award of Euro 3 million damages – the highest award of general damages in Irish legal history.

[25] These conditions were chosen because psychiatrists often regard 'irrationality' as synonymous with 'mental illness' and secondly, 'ability to communicate' covers cases (*e.g.* catatonic schizophrenia) where the subject lacks the ability to communicate thus rendering it difficult to justify a finding of irrationality.

[26] Roche (2012), p.79.

[27] Roche (2012), p.350.