Gordon McLauchlan

TURDY KNOWS THE SCORE

"Chirpy, chirpy, off we go," said Colin Caulson, leaning over between Tony and Cheryl. He moved to the next table, his watery blue eyes set like poached sparrow eggs in his pink chubby face. "Chirpy, chirpy, off we go," he said again, and moved on to the next table.

"You heard him, Cher, chirpy, chirpy, off we go," said Tony, without a trace of irony, pushing back his chair.

And so they moved out, living by rote through some tribal memory.

. Once outside, replete with sausages, eggs and chips and sweet brown beer, and wrapped against the lowering grey of the afternoon, half an hour before the game was to start, they walked to the Rec, straggling along the frayed edge of the road. A drain ran along between the walkers and the high corrugated fence around the ground. Cars were parked in the school grounds opposite the gate to the Rec, at three dollars a time, and also along the other side of the road in a line broken only by the entrances to driveways into standard 1960s three-bedroom houses.

Cheryl rebuked herself for her impractical brown, calf-leather shoes as she picked her way among the clumps of rank grass that had taken root in the clay and which hid the stones and chips of tarseal broken from the road. The bottom of the drain was covered with stagnant water and rubbish waiting to be borne away after the next rain. She pulled back from an impulse to snuggle alongside Turdy and put her arm in his, taking their intimacy outside his bedroom. It was the sheer unlikeliness of them as a couple in everyone's mind that had helped preserve their secret in so small a town. She knew it would all end badly, probably sooner than later. What she would do when it all broke open, she didn't know.

Turdy never thought about that. You dealt with the world as you came to it. He was striding out ahead now, all seriousness of purpose, heading for the iron ladder that would take him up to the scoreboard where he'd have to unlock the box of a room behind it and get the numbers ready to drop in the slots as the tries were scored and the kicks were made.

Cheryl thought of herself as a spy plane, an eagle without talons, hovering away above the little party as it straggled towards the ground. Suddenly Turdy was beside her again, and then back beside Shankland, asking if there were any tickets left for the dinner. And then he was off to the front again. He had the ubiquity of a fantail, alighting here for a moment, there for a moment, a wonderfully distracting presence to Cheryl, a figure of mesmeric uncertainty. When he sat down a foot jiggled intermittently, wanting to be somewhere more interesting, or at least somewhere more lively. Whereas Tony Shankland had his feet so firmly planted on the ground it took an act of anatomical engineering to move them, a bracing of the hips, a shifting of the shoulders and then a heaving of legs, all accompanied by the hint that any such movement of feet so substantial and splayed was unnecessarily radical. Not for him a buffeting by the winds or whims of change. She imagined that if she came back in thirty years he would be standing in the home paddock, Ozymandias-like, a large ruin in the lone and level grass, a testament not to the vanity of power but to the immutability of country man. You could trust a man like that with your life and your money but not with your heart or your mind. Her life was weightless, she mused, left no discernible trace; whereas Turdy left a myriad of scratch marks wherever he went; and Tony left deep footprints where he stood.

All this was growing in her head, a small cluster of bacteria infecting her spirit. She watched couples, seemingly content, and wanted desperately to be like that. She wanted to ask Betty Currie was it enough for her, getting by from day to copycat day. She would want Betty to give a hint at a prescription for fitting in for the long haul if she built her life around this and that, some code; but she knew Betty would look bewildered, alarmed, cowed, offended, by such a renegade notion as discontent.

OoOOoo

Barry William Turdon had been called Turdy since the time at primary school when his fellow pupils had grown through the giggling, naughty innocence in about year four and found him small enough to wreak on him their new found tribal malice. "Turdon's a turd! Turdon's a turd!" they had chanted, encircling him in the playground. He was an outsider bused in from Littledene to the Marist Brothers School in Salisbury. The teaching brothers smilingly reflected that boys would be boys. He needed to sort it out himself. And he did. He was caught in the lasso of kids, the rope of them snaking in and out again as he tried to grab someone until the inflammation of his hurt and anger cooled enough for him to set his mind on one knot of it. He pursued this kid with undistracted fury and pumped at his head with his fists, not noticing at first how the other kids fell away with their taunts and their bodies until all he could hear were the deep cringing sobs of the kid he had caught. No one ever directly challenged him again. But the nickname stayed, hushed at first but then accepted. He'd long ago gotten used to it, hardly noticed it when newcomers, on first hearing it, looked at him with smiling surprise; but a psychiatrist poking around may have found a simmering resentment of that and other singularities that made Turdy a local character.

OoOOoo

Today Turdy would play a role in the big game of the year, the club rugby final at the Littledene Rec between Littledene High School Old Boys and Marist Old Boys from Salisbury thirty -odd kilometres down the road. For the eight years since he retired as halfback for Marist, he had manned the scoreboard at the Littledene Rec. Turdy had gone to both schools, bused each day to primary school at Marist, and then to Littledene High because Marist had no secondary department. Being an obstreperous man, he loved to talk up Marist to the enemy he lived among in Littledene.

By noon, the dining room at the Littledene Central Hotel was abuzz with locals stoking up for an afternoon in the old wooden grandstand or striding the sidelines, stridently barracking for their team -- Littledene fans on the grandstand side of the ground and the Marist hordes on the other. Nobody minded the weather – calm, cold and overcast this day -- because at the back of Canterbury, up near the foothills, you felt cosy, warmly dressed in a swanni, or encased in a trusty oilskin, cocooned the way you never were up north and near the sea. As the afternoon grew older and colder, the breath of the fans would send little puffs of steam out with every imprecation at their opponents and every loud hurrah for their team. They gloried in their climate, felt it made them especially tough.

Warmed by food, clothing and anticipation Turdy, hands deep in his coat pockets, shouldered his way through the swinging door into the dining room and strode up to Tony Shankland at the bar. Turdy was a plumber and Shankland, although a farmer in a small way on the edge of town, was also the local builder who sub-contracted him most of his work. Shankland's hierarchical status would have entitled him to rag Turdy as much as everyone else did – carefully they didn't overstep the mark because of his fiercely retaliatory nature -- but he

kept aloof from that kind of thing as president of the Littledene Old Boys Rugby Football Club, past president of the Lions, district councillor and aspiring mayor. Fifteen years ago he'd locked the scrum for Canterbury for a few games, a grafter whose big time career ended when it became obvious he was nothing more than that.

Shankland was a man the locals of Littledene respected. They all agreed that he was generous and dignified, a natural leader, strong and silent. Turdy was five-foot-two, easily angered and so aggressively talkative everyone thought him stupider than he was; whereas Shankland, exactly a foot taller, was a slow burner, quiet and methodical, so everyone thought him smarter than he was. Turdy considered "Shanksy" as maybe his best friend but Shankland didn't have a best friend and didn't much want one.

"Gidday, Turdy. The Marist boys could win this again today," said Shankland, above mere partisanship. "O'Reilly, this new captain of theirs, is a smart bugger."

"Of course they'll win like they should've last year and the year before that. There's not another team in the competition that's even close."

"Maybe," nodded Shankland. "Maybe."

"Any room at your table for lunch?" asked Turdy.

A flop of wavy brown hair emerged from behind Shankland and said: "We certainly do. You can sit by me."

"Thanks, Cher." Everyone else except Tony called her Cheryl.

"And now, my pet," said Shankland, "you must get something warm inside you."

"Aha."

"I'll have sausages and bacon, Eddy. And Cheryl will have the steak and kidney pie with mashed potato." And turning to her, "That'll keep your gorgeous little body warm."

OoOOoo

"The only time you have anything much to say is when you talk dirty to me," said Turdy.

"That's not talk that's musical accompaniment."

"Or in the time we lie here afterwards. And not always then." They were together on the bed on the regular Thursday at Turdy's place. He was smoking, lying on his back with one hand behind his head.

She smiled.

"You see, you've clammed up again. One sentence and that's that. I've never heard you hold a real conversation outside this room since we left school."

"I seemed to run out of things to say."

"But aren't you interested in things?"

"Lots of things but talking about them seems to wear them out."

"Wear them out?"

She smiled at him.

"There you go again. A sentence and then a smile." He pulled hard in his cigarette and puffed out the smoke, shaking his head gently as he looked at her silken body. "Well, I'm not complaining. Your deeds are better than any words you could say in here."

"I make myself someone I'm not when I chat with people. I'm what they want me to be, or at least what they expect me to be. I listen to myself and don't much like what I hear. You know, solitary people have much more intense internal lives than gregarious people who regurgitate their emotions as soon as they arrive. Then their emotional receptacle is immediately empty again. And anyway, what you never seem to have noticed is that I talk a lot more when I'm here with you, and you, a mile-a-minute talker, say hardly anything at all."

"What gets me is you talk so deep to me. Bit of a waste, really."

"Well, I'm talking to myself to hear what I'm thinking. I've always been a shadow of someone else. My mother decided who I'd be when I was a kid and that got worse when dad left. Then I became my aunt's shadow, and now I get all my identity from Tony. He said the other day, as excited as he ever gets, that I'd probably be mayoress of Littledene some day soon. His mayoress. Not my mayoress. I'm his appendage in this town."

"Well, fight back, for God's sake."

"I can't. I've never done that. I don't make things happen. Things happen to me. I want to fit in. Why can't I just be content like Betty Currie and the other wives? "

Turdy was bewildered. He felt for her deeply but he was helpless in situations like this. He just couldn't understand the passivity of her nature. "You should be grateful to people like me. What would happen if everyone waited until they had something to say. It would be all heavy silences and short heavy speeches. Jeezuz. I do people like you a favour, filling the spaces."

OoOOoo

They ate amid humdrum talk about the game, the weather and the state of the wool market. Two big television screens high in corners of the bar, on mute, flickered out unwatched images of some foreign rugby league match while the space between pointless and desultory conversation and a silence against which, embossed, the words may have had some coherence, was filled by the lamentations of Country and Western singers pumped in through speakers in the other corners, heard but unlistened to. Communication was rife but unconsummated.

Tom Currie's belly fell over his belt, a sump for his dead and calcified dreams. It was known, but studiously never said any more, that at one time he was a lithe and loose-legged dancer and won an audition for a part in a company touring with *West Side Story.* He didn't tour because he wanted to finish his studies; and then he stopped dancing. This Saturday, thin wisps of hair, damp with gel, were scratched around his pate to look like more than they were. Tom and Betty were heavy in their chairs. Her haunches had swelled out at the back and the sides. Her once pretty, wide, white face was flabby, underslung by a plump, fine-lined dewlap. They leaned into one another as they sat, their pride and energy victims of a tacit pact that food and drink were an end in themselves, pleasures that would transcend all the others; but they were too remote, too unsophisticated yet to have enlisted into a cultural cause the delusive urban vocabulary that transformed gourmands into gourmets, voracity into high culture, and the palate, poetically, into some sort of fine-tuned instrument that played music to the soul.

Cheryl noticed Betty's trumped-up interest in the talk and watched Tom fidgeting the remnants of his food around his plate. Disappointment was endemic here, a disease, like HIV. It lurked in your blood and made up its own mind on when it would begin seriously eating up your innards. She wondered if this occluded way of life was how the village tradition started in Europe thousands of years ago with people settled, or rather rooted, in one place, always fearful of the encircling unknown; a tradition looked back on now nostalgically because it must have been free of the diurnal nag of time, languid, steady-rhythmed. But it can't have been, was probably like this, life stultified by isolation. Or was it just *her* disappointment, so keen, so constant, that she wanted it to be more virulent in others than it really was?

"Should be okay up on the scoreboard today, Turdy, not much wind about," said Tom.

"Yeh, never worries me much when there is. You can always find shelter on one side of the box or the other. It's the best place on the ground to see the game from."

“And there’s not much of you to blow away, is there?” said Betty Currie, with a friendly smile.

“You know, Turdy’s a stickler for getting the score right,” said Shankland. “I can remember a few years ago when the kids from Littledene High got thrashed by a team from Burnside High in Christchurch. Big kids they were. You could tell just by looking at them they were way above the weight limit. Anyway, they won by a hundred and nine to eleven, and for the last few minutes of the game Turdy held the plate with “1”on it in front of the Burnside score because there’s only two score slots to put the plates in.”

“Those kids were scandalously big,” said Tom, a teacher at Littledene High.

“And the Littledene kids were scandalously gutless,” said Turdy with his usual cheerful truculence.

“They were intimidated,” said Betty Currie.

“That’s what always happens to gutless people. They get intimidated.” Turdy placed a thin, rolled cigarette, one of his famous ‘racehorses’ on the table, which everyone knew was like a cowboy gambler putting his gun down beside his cards. Their grins all thinned, except Cheryl’s, because she loved Turdy, in every sense of the word, despite his famous foibles, in fact because of some of them.

OoOOoo

The manager, Steady Eddy Carlyon, was pleased to see Turdy sit down with solid people like Tony and Cheryl Shankland, Tom and Betty Currie and Freddie Francis, the local reporter for *The Press.* Turdy could be fun – but also a bloody nuisance.

He smoked and was taunted for it. Almost everyone he knew had at some time said, “Hey, stunts your growth” while pointing at the roll-you-own fag that drooped from his mouth most of the time except when he was eating. What deeply pissed him off was they all thought it the first time anyone had thought of that. In all the places where smoking wasn’t allowed any more he kept what he called his “ciggy” in his mouth, either extinguished or unlit and, when the nazi came out in restaurateurs or the doctor’s nurse as he sat waiting, and he was told the no-smoking rule, he sneered and said “I’m not smoking.” He hoped then they’d say something like, “What’s that then?”, so he could say, “I’ve got a cigarette in my mouth but I’m not smoking. It’s not lit. I’ve got my shoes on but I’m not walking”, or “I’ve got a sweatshirt on but I’m not sweating”, or some other of the range of confusing rejoinders he had assembled; and he watched them challenge themselves intellectually to come up with an answer. “I’m the negro of this town,” he’d say, “I like a fag in my mouth and I’m eternally damned for it.”

Harry Barber, at Sweethearts Café, once called the police and an argument ensued until Constable Fred Jackson, thinking of the paperwork on the long road to a test case, persuaded Harry it wouldn’t be worth the hassle. Would a court rule that having a cigarette in your mouth was smoking? Or not? Even after the locals had learnt to ignore the game, visitors would ask restaurant managers to tell the man smoking to quit, and the managers would have to go through the explanation that the man wasn’t really smoking to perplexed and sometimes irritable clients, hoping some evangelical non-smoker among them wouldn’t get up and insist on leaving.

OoOOoo

Cheryl Shankland was beautifully turned out as always in tailored woollen slacks and woollen sweater, her long, brown leather coat hanging over the back of her chair. In counterpoint to the weather-beaten carapace of her husband’s personality, she exuded a

yielding softness that powerfully attracted men -- but not too close. She seemed a class apart since she came back to Littledene; and anyway she was Tony's wife. He doted on her and her smiling, relaxed, decorative manners. A close observer would have seen the way her eyes moved lazily to catch what was happening around her. She missed nothing. When she looked at Turdy, for example, it was with a different smile, a caress, a deep fondness that her husband, not being very quick on emotions, mistook for the pity he thought Turdy deserved.

The other wives who slopped around in tracksuits and joggers didn't resent her elegance. She seemed apart from them but ever-so-nice. And, anyway, no vulgarity, no anger, no dislike seemed to disturb her beyond the slightest, surprised furrow on her brow, and the barely discernible contraction of her easy-set smile. It was a smile inasmuch as it curved her lips and gave glimpses of her lovely teeth but not inasmuch as it revealed anything. It was a balcony rather than a window into the interior. In fact, behind her eyes Cheryl often seemed to be somewhere else, in another dimension, meticulously but airily polite and genial but disengaged with the present. It wasn't until one of the infrequent occasions that she spoke that the reality of her presence in Littledene was apparent. She could have come from nowhere else but rural South Island with that drawl, dragging her vowels and then doubling up on consonants, like someone pulling a reluctant poodle on a tight leash.

"Do you think Littledene will win?" Tom Currie asked her.

"Yeeyeesh. I sure ho-hope so."

"So you'll be pissed off when Marist wins," said Turdy, grinning.

"No-o." And she retreated, smiling, and such was her gentleness that everyone else smiled too.

"Ah, you're lovely, my pet," said Shankland, putting his arm around her shoulder, and then, looking up, "but she's got her head in a book all day and half the night."

"Which half?" said Turdy.

"Not the loving time, that's for sure," lied Shankland with a manly grin. And Cheryl smiled wider than ever, blushed, lowered her eyes and tenderly patted his hand.

OoOOOo

Cheryl and Turdy had been at Littledene High together. She had been attracted to the spunkiness he showed when the local third formers couldn't resist bullying him. He could take a hiding because, as he said, he'd had plenty of practice, and he'd learnt to fight back like a guerrilla, creeping up on bullies, belting them when they least expected it, if necessary taking another hiding, and then striking again, until the big kids became confused and nervous and eventually gave him a wide, respectful berth.

She was an only child, as he was, and lonely, although you'd never have guessed it because she was pretty and clever and the boys hung around, flexing their manliness to attract her. She tried sitting in the back row at the pictures with Arnie McLeod, and with captain of the first fifteen Gary Cropp but they pawed her insensitively and slobbered over her. It was down on the riverbank with Turdy that she learnt how wonderful mutual touching was in those secret places. Their shameless secret had bonded them until Cheryl went to Auckland and a school for beauticians. She had wanted to stay on at Littledene High and maybe go to university but her mother's sister had a chain of hairdressing salons in the north and they decided that with her looks and feminine style she'd do brilliantly as a hairdresser. "She'll have to learn the art of smalltalk, though," said her aunt.

Well, she never did. After six years, her life and her loves faded away to nothing. She went back to Littledene to become receptionist in her uncle's accountancy office. Anthony Shankland, as he tried for a while to "rebrand" himself, relentlessly courted her, and her mother

steered her into the marriage. Cheryl guessed it would be a comfortable life with no material worries; and by and large it was; but that wasn't enough now.

She took up with Turdy again – recovered her sexual innocence. She loved his exuberance and it was exciting to flail around in his bed each week, away from the stagnant lake of boredom her life had become. He was working on the new kitchen Tony had persuaded her she needed, a year after they were married, and she asked him why he hadn't gone to Christchurch to do engineering as he had wanted. "I missed School Certificate," he said. "Twice. I'm dumb so I plumb."

"The depths?" she said. He looked up quickly. They both understood.

OoOOoo

By the time kick-off came, Cheryl and Betty Currie were in the middle of the stand flanked by Councillors Anthony and Thomas, placed there authoritatively by Shankland. They were surrounded by a hearty bunch of footie mates. Betty seemed geed-up by the occasion but Cheryl, in her practised way, kept her smile fluctuating from warm interest to amused distraction.

It was hard-slog rugby on a heavy ground with Marist's big Teddy O'Reilly taking the ball in the lineouts and plunging forward, body position low and legs pumping. Cheryl was thinking how quickly men in the country seemed to get through their youth and become thick in the body, their faces, necks and hands corrugated by sun and wind. The field was full of them, all shapes and sizes and yet all the same. An exception was Alan Trump, a slender boy at first five-eighth for Marist, around whom the game seemed to swirl without much touching him. He kicked or ran and passed, adroitly moving the other players around. Turdy had told her to watch Trump, saying the sign of class in a first five-eighth was he seemed to have more time available than others. She saw what he meant.

Littledene started well and scored two unconverted tries while Marist's classy goal-kicker, Steve Bishop, narrowly, surprisingly, missed two penalties. Then Marist came back and scored two tries – and Bishop again missed the kicks, and then another penalty by the slenderest of margins, making the score ten-all at half-time. When the break came, Shankland, peering at the scoreboard, said: "What the hell's Turdy playing at?"

"He's lost count," said Jack Towle, leaning over from the row behind. "He was standing there with a couple of numbers in his hand and then made it thirteen-ten after that last Marist penalty missed."

As soon as the whistle went for half-time, Shankland strode from the stand and shouted up to the Turdy on the platform: "You've got the score wrong."

"No I haven't."

Shankland climbed a few rungs up the iron ladder. "It's ten-all."

"Nope, that last penalty was over. Thirteen-ten."

Shankland climbed grimly further up the iron ladder. "For God's sake, Turdy, can't you count? Listen to me carefully, the score's ten-all."

"No it's not. It's thirteen-ten Marist. That kick was over."

"What?"

"It was bloody over. How many times do I have to tell you."

"The line umpires didn't put their flags up and the ref didn't blow his whistle; so make it ten-all."

"No, I'm the scorer."

"Jesus, Turdy, you're just the little shit that puts the numbers up. I'm club president; do what I tell you."

"I don't care if you're the president of the NZRbloodyU, the kick was over."

Shankland put his hand on the top rung to haul himself on to the platform and Turdy's boot thumped down on his fingers.

"You little bastard," he said, flicking his hand at the pain. "I'll bloody kill you when I get hold of you. You're making us a laughing stock..."

"You listen to me, I've got the best view on the park of those goalposts, straight behind and above and I can tell you the kick curled but was still well inside the upright when it crossed the bar." He stabbed a pointing finger at the posts as he shouted at Shankland. "Colin McIntyre, that no-hoping bastard of a Littledene line umpire, started to put his arm up and then pulled it down when he knew bloody well it was over."

"Turdy, if the ref says it missed, it missed."

"So there's no truth, eh? What bloody fish-face Phil Barnacle from Christchurch says goes no matter what? Well not with this joker."

Shankland put his hand back on the platform. But tentatively. Turdy raised his size sixes with steel studs and prepared to chomp down on it. Shankland made a grab at his ankle but missed and Turdy's boot grazed the back of his hand again just before it landed on the top rail. Shankland snatched his hand away and nearly fell the five metres to the concrete pad below. "You might be prepared to do what these cheating bastards want but not me. Piss off and leave me to do the scoring." He hadn't meant to stomp so hard on his hand.

Shankland retreated.

Turdy stood defiantly on the platform, his sou-wester jammed down on his head, its brim curled up. His hands were in his pockets and his oilskin came down to the top of his boots. From where she sat, Cheryl thought he looked like a miniature pagoda.

Back in his seat, Shankland muttered to whoever could hear him that Turdy'd been out of control since someone told him Napoleon was only four feet eleven and Hitler five feet two. Cheryl laughed aloud because she could see Shankland simply didn't know what to do. "It's not funny, Cher. He's out of control, that little bugger."

OoOOoo

She wondered what she and Turdy had, as she watched him climb up the ladder to the scoring box. God knows it wasn't romantic love. It was an inexorable coming together as though in the grip of powerful pheromones, like insects locked in a final reason for existence. Something she loved about him, though, was that desire didn't ebb away afterwards as with so many men. She was fascinated the way fucking changed them. Her smile, usually becalmed on her placid face, was swollen into something else altogether and her eyes narrowed and her focus went all hazy. Turdy's features, usually in turmoil, were fixed in rigid concentration on their pleasure.

Turdy didn't notice or care about all this. All he knew was it was the only time he was entirely at peace.

When she first went to bed with him again she told him with affection that it was so nice he was short because she was too and she could kiss him while they were making love and talk to him in his ear. With Tony all she saw, she said, was his stiff-bristled chest heaving up and down, back and forth, like a hillside of dry gorse trembling in an earthquake. Most men thought of women as one-size-fits-all but she thought that with sex once you found the perfect fit no one else was worth wearing. She luxuriated in the secret that no one would ever remotely guess how energetic, gentle and attentive to her needs this stroppy little man was, or how funny he could be in his sexual exuberance.

"Do you ever feel guilty about us?" he asked one afternoon.

"Never when I'm with you but sometimes when I'm with Tony. He's ambitious. He married me as a kind of ornament. He's got a gift for friendship and he works hard at that, but he has no talent for love. Intimacy frightens him. I only feel guilty when I realise that other people would think I should. All he needs is friendship so I give him that."

"And betrayal."

"I'm trying to square that off with myself, you dumb plumber."

OoOOoo

The referee came from under the stand, looked up and said: "The scoreboard's wrong."

"I know," said Shankland.

"It should be ten-all."

"I know."

"Well get it fixed. The Littledene team's pissed off."

"And so am I."

"Well for God's sake, fix it."

"Why don't you go and tell him. He'll believe you."

Phil Barnacle shrugged self-importantly, trotted over to the scoreboard, cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted: "It's ten-all, not thirteen-ten."

"That penalty was over."

"No it wasn't. It may have been close but it missed. Anyway I decide that"

"So you can make it miss even if it didn't?"

"Both the line umpires and me ruled it missed."

"So even if three of you are wrong it makes it right, eh?"

"Jesus, you're a weird bugger."

Barnacle trotted back, shouted up to Shankland: "Jesus, he's a weird bugger."

Shankland closed his eyes, livid with anger born of frustration, and bitter at the pain in his hand.

Barnacle ran under the stand, and then appeared again. "Arnie McLeod says he won't bring the team out unless the scoreboard's fixed."

Shankland stomped down the steps into the Littledene dressing-room, pushed his enraged face into McLeod's and snarled: "Just get on with the bloody game, Arnie. Don't make things worse than they are."

McLeod was standing with the ball in his hand, the rest of the team behind him, stamping their boots on the concrete to keep warm. He looked anxious and guilty. "Well, the boys are pissed off. What the hell's wrong with Turdy?" he said.

The Marist players were jumping up and down to keep warm in the other dressing-room and through the open door, Shankland could see their wide grins. Teddy O'Reilly shouted: "I told him that kick was over. But let's get on with it. We're ready to go."

McLeod showed no sign of budging. "You're enjoying this for some mad bloody reason," said Shankland. His hand shot out and bunched the front of McLeod's jersey in his fist. "If you don't go out there I'll tell Barnacle to call the game off and your name'll be muddy as a cow's arse around here."

The teams took to the field again. Shankland walked, jerky with anger, like a mechanical crane, down the sideline to the scoreboard ladder and shouted up: "You'll never work for me again you little shit, if you don't fix that scoreboard." He walked back to the front of the stand and stood there, then stiltedly strode up and down. Cheryl joined him, linking her arm in is. "It doesn't matter that much, Tony. You know, Turdy, he's having one of his stubborn fits."

“He’ll have a real fit when I get hold of the little shit.”

“Look, you’re way over the top about this. The referee will announce the score and this’ll be seen as a bit of a joke in a day or two.”

“He’s made a complete fool of me.”

“Well, careful you don’t make an even bigger fool of yourself.”

“What? Whose side are you on?” He pulled his arm away from hers and stared at her. She smiled to mollify him but it must have spread too wide as the impotence of his anger seemed increasingly absurd. She had watched Turdy standing with his head high and she thought delightedly that he probably did think he looked like Napoleon. And maybe he did.

OoOOoo

Littledene started strongly in the second half with an early try, but gradually Marist gained control. Bishop missed another penalty but in the last minute they scored a try to draw level at 15-all. Everything depended on the kick. Ted O’Reilly grabbed the ball from Bishop and to everyone’s astonishment goaled from wide out. Marist had won 17-15. Shankland calmed down. It didn’t matter what the scoreboard said now. But he had another flash of anger when looked up as Turdy slotted his final figures: Marist 20, Littledene 15. That penalty still went over as far as he was concerned.

OoOOoo

“I think I’ve had just about enough of Turdy,” Tony said, stirring his after-breakfast cup of tea. It was the Tuesday following the game, a cold fine morning. He’d just come in from feeding out, a double-knit woollen jersey hanging on his big frame; stolidly leaning over the table, the tea mug flimsy in his hand, the sweet-shit smell of silage still about him coming through the scent of soap.

Cheryl nodded.

She was powerless, absolutely powerless, to impinge on the life of Shankland, to make it more compatible with her own, not because of an excessive stubbornness in him but because he was impermeable to shifts of mood or desire, to fancies or dreams, open only to cudgeling words and even these made no impression if the ideas they carried didn’t fit a preordained immutable, God-stamped landscape of the world. And she was no word-cudgeller.

“That scoreboard thing mightn’t have been much in itself,” he said, “but like Colin Cheeps said on Saturday night, he never gives the town a damn thing except noise and disruption. Take that smoking thing …”

“So what are you going to do, run him out of town?”

He’d never seen such a hard look in her eyes. “Well, no, of course not. I give him most of his work though and Colin’s got a plumber mate in Salisbury who’d be happy to open up a depot here.”

“Would that put Barry out of business?’

“Barry? Why Barry all of a sudden?”

“That’s his real name.”

“Yeh, I know that but Turdy suits him better,” he said, looking up at Cheryl and sensing, for the very first time, animosity. “Why are you going soft on him?”

“It wouldn’t matter who it was. You ruin his business because he gets uppity at the football, because he’s not one of the boring, flat people in this town.”

“Hang on a sec, I don’t owe him any special favours.”

"But you owe him a bad turn that's got nothing to do with his work. I thought you said he's a pretty good plumber."

"Well, he can be, but business isn't just about getting the work done. He annoys a lot of people and if Colin's mate sets up here he could lose a lot of other work, anyway."

"Why don't you let nature take its course then?"

He looked, bewildered, at the hardness in her eyes and straightness of her mouth. "Yeh, maybe that's the best thing to do." He leant forward to touch her hand but she pulled away, stood up and went to the bench to clear the breakfast things away.

"And I'm going to call him Barry from now on," she said over her shoulder.

ooOOOo

That Thursday she asked Turdy how dependent he was on Tony's contracts.

"I'd be pushed to get by without them. But I thought we had a pact not to talk about these people on Thursdays."

"I heard that the plumber from Salisbury's thinking of opening a depot here."

"Tony told me that yesterday. He'd find it tough without Tony's work."

"Would you have enough work apart from Tony's."

"Dunno. Probably not." He put out his cigarette, leaned on his elbow, licked her ear, and said: "What's wrong with you today?"

"Nothing."

"Nu-u-thing," he parodied.

"I'm going." She got up and dressed in silence while Turdy lay there watching, his face puckered.

"I suppose even you're entitled to bad moods. I've never seen you in one before."

"I don't normally share them." She slid from the room, checked from the window and walked down the paved shortcut track that led from the street above, where she and Tony lived, to an alleyway into the main street.

OoOOoo

When Tony came in from feeding out the following morning, he found his breakfast prepared and ready on the table. Cheryl was sitting at her place, crying. He'd never seen her cry before and it frightened him. She was crying because this was it. Everything had become so… so… small.

"What's the trouble, pet?" His right hand hovered over her shoulder not knowing where, if anywhere, to alight.

She sobbed on and then looked up and said: "I think I'll have to go away for a while."

"Away? For a while? Where to? Your place is here, pet."

She wiped her eyes and smiled bleakly. "Have your breakfast and go to work. I'll be okay."

"I'm sure, pet. I'm sure."

He went to work.

OoOOoo

He never saw Cheryl again.

She wrote a letter. He was a good man, she told him, and it was in no way his fault. All hers, and she was sorry. She would send him the name of a lawyer when she got to Melbourne. She was sorry, she said, again.

She left a note for Turdy too. Very brief. She hoped he'd stay in Littledene to keep them honest and that he'd find a Miss or Mrs Right for Thursday afternoons.

Tony read his standing up, frozen, uncomprehending, as he knew the town would be; and then he folded it, over and over and over again, very evenly, very tightly, his long fussy fingers pressing in the folds, and then he put it in a bureau drawer.

Turdy read his in his armchair in front of teevee. He had found it under the door, and slashed it open as he turned on the news. He wiped some tears away, mumbled, "Good luck, Cher", and after a few minutes looked up at the news. It was another of life's knockbacks he would take in his small, perky stride.

Chapter one: The Origins of the Maori

Egypt is at the height of its cultural brilliance and imperial power under the 18th dynasty of Pharaohs.

The Babylonian Empire is in decline.

The Greeks are moving from the Caspian Sea into the eastern Mediterranean, the new home in which they will flourish as one of history s most enlightened civilisations.

The Phoenicians have reached Malta to become the predominant traders in the Mediterranean.

Stonehenge is till the centre of religious worship for the people of southern England.

This was more than 3000 years ago in a corner of the world where long-settled agricultural people have had the leisure to invent a primitive form of writing; so we have records.

At that same time, on the other side of the Earth, a group of vigorous sailors known in history as the Lapita People, best identified by archaeologists from their ornamented pottery, are settling on Vanua Levu, in the Fiji group, an island speck in the immensity of the Pacific Ocean. They have already completed sea journeys beyond the imagination of the Egyptians, the Greeks or the sailing-trading Phoenicians.

Their life has never been settled or sedentary, so they have no writing. A range of modern scholars of language, archaeology, anthropology, biology and physics has constructed what we know of them.

Over 40,000 years, since the beginning of human voyaging, the ancestors of these people gradually developed their matchless maritime skills in the safe waters that washed around the long peninsulas and dense archipelagos of South East Asia. Then, quite suddenly, carrying way-back genes from Asia and Africa, they sprang out into the Pacific across the top of Papua New Guinea, and swooped along the Bismarck Archipelago.

These migrant groups travelled in outrigger canoes built to carry themselves, their livestock and their chattels at speeds of around four knots, probing 5000 kilometres to the east, island by island, through seas pacific only in name.

By 1200BC, they had colonised the Fijian and Tongan groups, the Samoas, Uvea, Futuna, the western fringe of the northern Cook Islands, Niue, the Tokelaus and other islands, all previously uninhabited. They had become an isolated, mid-Pacific maritime community. During that last surge from the eastern periphery of Asia to central Pacific, their numbers were so small and they moved so swiftly over such great distances, they outran the pandemic diseases.

Their cultural origins are obscure except they were heirs to a Lapita tradition, which means they were noted for their pottery, tattooing chisels, and distinctive adzes and fishhooks, and they traded in obsidian. Although much of their pottery was plain and utilitarian, some carried characteristic Lapita decorations, executed with great artistry, carved and stamped with simple parallel lines, teeth-like shapes, curves and concentrically arranged motifs, some representing the human form. This pottery was also widespread in Melanesia, including Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and New Caledonia, and the style echoes back through South East Asia, particularly to Taiwan and the Philippines, possibly earlier homelands.

In their isolation over several hundred years in the Central Pacific, they adapted to their changed environment, discarded the pottery tradition and evolved into a new people with a distinctive body shape, language and way of living.

They became the Polynesians.

At no time before the spread of Europeans through the Pacific in the 18th century were there more than 800,000 of them -- and yet they spread over an area greater than that covered by any other racially homogenous people in the history of the world.

During their regular, seasonal voyages among the islands of the Tonga, Fiji and Samoa groups, they developed two skills to an astonishing degree that enabled them to dare to explore the world s largest ocean: the manufacture of sturdy double-hulled, highly manoeuvrable sailing canoes, and navigational techniques to read the sky, the sea, the wind and seabird migrations -- knowing how they changed and recurred during the various seasons of the year. And because the seabirds had the islands to themselves, virtually free of predators, they proliferated to a degree unmatched anywhere else in the world. Great strings of the migratory varieties must have given directional aid to observant explorers.

These navigators became so familiar with their natural environment they could journey around their islands with confidence. Thus the name the region was given, aptly, by

anthropologists, from the Greek: *poly* meaning many, and *nesoi* islands. By the time they found an island, they had memorised the winds, currents and astral charts that had taken them there to prepare for two-way travel, bedding the instructions into folklore for the benefit of succeeding expeditions.

Before the birth of Jesus Christ, small groups had stepping-stoned their way across the atolls and small rocky islands of the eastern Pacific to the Marquesas, the Societies and the long string of the Tuamotu Archipelago. As they moved eastwards, they needed their most highly refined navigational skills because the islands were now more scattered and smaller -- in many cases, atolls, with just whispers of cloud above them, or slight shifts of current to indicate their presence where they crouched so low on the horizon.

The explorers almost certainly probed further east and found South and Central America, an already inhabited land, uncongenial to islanders. Some must have returned with the sweet potato and other plants. Some may have stayed and been absorbed. They also discovered and populated Hawaii to the north and Rapanui (Easter Island) to the south, and then explored the south-west and, possibly stepping through the Southern Cooks and the Kermadecs, found Aotearoa. It was the last substantial land mass discovered by man. What is still under debate among scholars is when that discovery was made. Opinions range from the ninth to the 12th century, with some few outside that range. In coming years, archaeology and carbon-dating may refine opinion.

That s a sketch of the Polynesian story as it is understood today but a long journey through myth and misapprehension has been followed to construct it.

OoOOoo

After Stephenson Percy Smith died at his home in New Plymouth in April 1922, the *Taranaki Daily News* published an obituary which said that when the biographies of the truly great men of New Zealand came to be written, his name would be close to the summit of the scroll of fame. That may seem hyperbolic now but for a long time Smith was the most famous and respected of the many New Zealanders investigating what was then a pervasive and enduring mystery: the origins of the Maori.

James Cook and those aboard the *Endeavour* in the second half of the 18th century were the first outsiders to comprehend the extent of the long-distance voyaging of the Polynesians. A Tahitian aboard the *Endeavour*, Tupaia, made it obvious that not only did these Islanders look similar but they spoke closely related languages as far apart as Tonga, New Zealand, Tahiti, Hawaii and Easter Island. Cook, the greatest seaman/navigator of his time, belonged to the first generation able to calculate longitude accurately through the use of accurate shipboard chronometers, and thus he could pinpoint his position anywhere on the globe. He and his companions realised that when Polynesians were voyaging around the Pacific in large but relatively fragile double canoes, the most expert sailors in countries that had the technology to build large ships were still nervous about losing sight of land. Although regional sailing was still common among Polynesians in the 18th century, long-haul voyaging had stopped; so Cook and others were even then wrestling with the question of whether the islands had been settled by calculated voyages of exploration, or by accidental voyages — canoes attempting regional journeys, getting lost and blundering into previously undiscovered islands; or expeditions having to sail blindly into the ocean because of exile for political or religious reasons.

The movement of peoples around the great landmasses in other parts of the globe had ready explanations. Forced by population pressures, wars or by the restless spirit of adventure that is so characteristically human, migrations across Africa, Asia and Europe, could be made on foot. Asians had moved into the Americas across Bering Strait; and Australia s Aborigines had arrived as early as forty thousand years ago, either on foot when the island continent was not quite an island, or in small canoes across the relatively short distances to land in the north; or both. The Vikings made daring and controlled voyages from Scandinavia to the British Isles during the first millennium, and then to Iceland, Greenland and perhaps North America. But these journeys were to extended coastlines. Compared with discovering Hawaii from Tahiti and probably sailing back, finding the coastline of America would have been a doddle for any vessel well built and well provisioned enough to keep sailing westward across the North Atlantic. Columbus conquered the Atlantic about a thousand years after the Polynesians reached all the way across the Pacific.

OoOOoo

The fact of Polynesian voyaging seemed stranger than fiction a century ago and, as usual with human beings, the want of details led the mystified to scramble around to make some up. They conjectured wildly with varying degrees of improbability. Professional and amateur historians of all sorts -- sailors, meteorologists, linguists, botanists, archaeologists, anthropologists as well as ethnologists analysing the religions, the cultural practices, the songs and the stories of these widely dispersed groups — slugged it out for years over theories to explain where the Polynesians came from and how they explored the Pacific. The answers ranged from the fairly plausible to the absurd. The Polynesians were one of the tribes of Israel, travelled here from Ancient Egypt, came from Arabia, from Madagascar, from southern China, from India, from North, Central and South America and even arrived in eastern Polynesia as a group of migrating Caucasians via what is now British Colombia. Early missionary leader Samuel Marsden, and Oxford graduate and eminent academic at the university of Canterbury John Macmillan Brown are just two examples of intelligent, educated men who groped around and came up with explanations of gross improbability.

Marsden decided New Zealand Maori had sprung from some dispersed Jews at some period or other because of similarity between selected religious customs, and what he considered cultural similarities, such as: They have like the Jews a great natural turn for traffic; they will buy and sell anything they have got . It was Brown who declared that Caucasians had reached the Pacific coast of Asia and British Colombia long before the Mongoloids and the only non-Caucasian influence on the Polynesians was Negroid, brought in by the last immigrants and conquerors .

Another theory that had its brief day until emphatically denounced by geologists was that Polynesians had spread around a huge Pacific land mass, or along chains of large islands, which had then sunk beneath the ocean, except for mountain tops. Belief in the idea of a huge southern continent had long been held by many northern hemisphere geographers who considered it would be needed to balance the weight of Asia and Europe in the north. Abel Janszoon Tasman s main task during his 1642 voyage was to find the western limits of Staten Landt , the name an earlier navigator had given to South America. Tasman and his navigator, Frans Visscher, thought they had done that when they found the west coast of New Zealand. More than a century later,

Cook sailed to the edge of the Antarctic circle in the south and a long way west of New Zealand to seek such a continent.

OoOOoo

While anthropologists and other intellectuals turned aside from their other work to conjecture glibly on the marvellous mystery, Percy Smith spent a lifetime assiduously studying the genealogies, folklore and traditions of Polynesians. As a young surveyor, he travelled throughout New Zealand, learning Maori and listening to the song and story of iwi. He traced the origin of the Polynesians back to Caucasians migrating down through India and constructed a detailed history of their voyaging around the Pacific, complete with names and dates, almost all of it based on the traditions of New Zealand Maori and Cook Islanders with some input from other East Polynesian groups. His work may be outmoded and most of it discredited now but it was once powerfully influential in this country. The four editions of his major work, *Hawaiki: The Original Home of the Maori,* dominated popular thinking and New Zealand school curricula for at least the first half of the 20th century. That s why the *Taranaki Daily News* presumed history would enshrine him as a truly great man of New Zealand.

English-born, Smith moved to New Plymouth with his family when he was nine, became a surveyor, and in 1889 was appointed the Colony s surveyor general and secretary for lands and mines. In 1892, he helped found the Polynesian Society, and was co-editor or editor of the society s journal until his death. He was essentially a Victorian who wore the fustian three-piece suits of the time, complete with watch-chain and pocket-tucked white handkerchief. He beavered away at Maori history at a time when it was impossible to view the race with an objective historical eye. His work intensified during the 1890s and especially following his retirement in 1900. Maori had fought the British Army and colonial forces with skill, conspicuous bravery and a kind of Arthurian code of honour during the wars of the 1860s and 1870s, but the effects of the fighting, the cultural alienation from a growing influx of foreign immigrants and European diseases saw their population fall off dramatically. By the closing years of the 19th century, some anthropologists were talking of Maori in the past tense, convinced they would take the same road to extinction as the Moriori. Thus -- as Pakeha reflected with affection and guilt on Maori virtues -- Maori took on the aura of Rousseau s Noble Savage.

Meanwhile, in the wider New Zealand community, Maori history was of peripheral interest only. Educationists taught Colonial children the glories of the British Empire. What little curriculum time that was given to New Zealand s own history depended mainly on amateurs like Smith.

OoOOoo

Smith used Maori and Polynesian traditions for *what* happened and whakapapa for *when*, estimating historical time by counting back the generations. He actually got quite a lot right but took little account of mythology s imaginative poetry and of the corruption of traditions that occurred almost immediately Maori came into contact with Europeans. Missionaries had brought the new mythology of the Bible, some of which was imported into the traditions; and Maori, being a curious and adventurous people, were quickly travelling around the Pacific on European ships, living with European sailors and Polynesians of other communities. In an oral culture, stories are living organisms. It quickly became impossible to judge clearly what was original pre-

European material and what was new or adapted. It has been claimed that Smith was too subjective in his approach to traditions and easily confused because he wasn t a professional scholar. There s no doubt he was both of those things — but then so were some of the professional scholars, especially those working outside their professional disciplines.

In *Hawaiki,* Smith claimed Polynesians were able to navigate the Pacific Ocean in all directions with relative ease. About 925, he wrote, an explorer from Raiatea in the Society Group named Kupe, during a visit to Rarotonga, discovered what he named Aotearoa after noticing land birds flying in from the south-west to winter in the central Pacific. He found New Zealand, circumnavigated both islands and took the news back to Tahiti. It was, however, more than two hundred years before the next canoe arrived with settlers. The immigrants were led by Toi-te-huatahi. They found a group of people here who had Melanesian blood but spoke Polynesian. These were the Moriori who were driven to the Chathams by the more vigorous Toi and his companions. In 1350, the Great Fleet arrived from Rarotonga, a flotilla of the canoes to which Maori traditionally traced back their Aotearoa arrival. The Great Fleet theory was lodged into history for more than half a century. Some school textbooks carried a reproduction of the painting by Charles F Goldie and L J Steele called *The Arrival of the Maoris in New Zealand,* depicting an emaciated, bulge-eyed complement of Polynesians packed into a double-canoe with one man near the prow pointing to land ahead. This melodramatic symbol of the Great Fleet, painted in 1898, accurately represented the beliefs of the time, awash as they were with sentimentality.

OoOOoo

As the 20th century progressed linguists, ethnologists, archaeologists and anthropologists continued the steady accumulation of information that began to give scholarly substance to the Polynesian story. Among them were another New Plymouth surveyor, H D Skinner, younger than Smith but a foundation member of the Polynesian Society, and his son W H, who graduated as a lawyer but professionally followed his interest as an ethnologist; Roger Duff an archaeologist who discovered the moa-hunter site on Wairau Bar; and Maori anthropologist Sir Peter Buck, who became director of the Bishop Museum in Hawaii. Before his career as an ethnologist, Buck had been a politician and a medical doctor who worked in the area of public health. But the gradual progress of the new professionals was overshadowed after the Second World War by two revisionists whose theories were given wide publicity.

The first was a Norwegian anthropologist, Thor Heyerdahl, who built a balsa raft he named *Kon-Tiki*, and sailed it from Callao in Peru to Puka-Puka in the Tuamoto Archipelago. Heyerdahl had spent time in the Marquesas where he had learnt of a tradition that led him to believe the Polynesians came from South America. He backed it up with claims about the origins of Polynesian art and of plants; and he had as an ally the undisputed fact that the sweet potato, forefather of New Zealand s kumara, originated there. What served Heyerdahl well was that his account of the journey on the balsa raft, *The Kon-Tiki Expedition,* was a gripping read and became a bestseller. But after its period of worldwide popularity his theory gradually evaporated in the heat of superior scholarship supported by growing archaeological and linguistic evidence.

Then, in 1956, *Ancient Voyagers in the Pacific* by New Zealander Andrew Sharp was published and insisted the Pacific was settled by what he called accidental voyages (a term he later modified to one-way voyages), and that none of the early mariners could navigate accurately enough to sail over long distances with any hope of return. Sharp, who refined his

theory in *Ancient Voyagers in Ancient Polynesia* (1963), accepted that surprisingly ambitious regional voyages were common because he knew that when Cook reached the Pacific, Tahitians were still sailing within the Society Group and the Tuamotos, and Tongans, Fijians and Samoans within Central Pacific. He pooh-poohed, however, that there had ever been the long-haul expeditions to seek and find destinations such as Hawaii, Easter Island and New Zealand. He questioned claims by early European explorers that various Polynesian communities knew of the existence and direction of faraway islands. His book had none of the affable, high readability of Heyerdahl s. It had the thunder of a polemic about it; but it did raise a stir and encourage affronted contemporary Polynesians and also Pakeha scholars to confirm with more evidence their claims that long-distance exploration had been possible.

OoOOoo

No one can explain with any confidence why planned distant voyaging had ended by the 18th century, except perhaps that the explorers had for a long time been unable to find any more habitable uninhabited islands. Modern navigators replicating as far as is possible the traditional sailing instructions collected by such as Smith and one of his prot g s, Elsdon Best, have shown that calculated long-range voyages were possible. Influential in the research was a traditional Micronesian navigator Mau Piailug using methods different from but similar to those of Polynesians. During the sixties yachtsman David Lewis in his catamaran and, in the seventies and eighties, Hawaiian Nainoa Thompson in a double canoe, made journeys around the Pacific using these traditional methods with sufficient accuracy; although, of course, they had access to meteorological and oceanic records that Polynesians navigators would have had to carry in their heads over the generations. No doubt now exists that Polynesian communities had their navigators, men trained in the traditional lore of the profession. As in all human activities, some of these navigators would have been more skilled and more brilliantly intuitive than others.

One long-lasting conundrum was how could exploration have gone from west to east when steady and, for long periods of the year, unremitting trade winds blow from the east and thus into the teeth of voyagers from Central Pacific to the Marquesas and Tahiti. Modern researchers, backed by Micronesian experience, say that was an advantage because expeditions could set out eastwards during the relatively brief periods when wind came from the west, confident that if they found nothing they could sail back when the reliable easterlies returned.

Always working against the accidental drift theory was the need for canoes that carried substantial settlement populations in places like the Marquesas and Tahiti and from that region to Easter Island, Hawaii and New Zealand, complete with plants and livestock. Also, modern research strongly suggests drift voyages from eastern Polynesia to the new islands would not have occurred under anything like normal conditions.

Contemporary opinion among the experts still diverges on the matter of the timing of the migratory voyages around the Pacific, on the order in which the various island groups were settled, and on how many migrating parties there were from which departure points. Was Hawaii settled first from the Marquesas or Tahiti? Archaeology suggests settlers came from both sources. Did the first Maori come directly from Tahiti or via Rarotonga, when did they come and how many canoes arrived over the years? But despite these questions the amount of agreement is striking. Linguistics and archaeology have established a broad pattern — Polynesians didn t sail into the Central Pacific from the west as a formed cultural group, they evolved there from the Lapita people; they did develop the canoe technology and the navigational skills to make long

expeditions that searched for new homelands and in many cases returned; and those expeditions did move from Central Polynesia to Eastern Polynesia and from there to Easter Island, Hawaii and New Zealand.

Why would expeditions embark on such enterprises? Perhaps because that s what they had always done — just as some nomadic tribes continue to roam long after they see settled farming communities. They may have been encouraged by population pressures that were exacerbated by drought or cyclonic devastation. They may have been expelled or have decided to emigrate because of political ambitions or religious conflicts at home, much as European groups faced the dangers and deprivation of emigration to America in the 17th century.

Polynesian expeditions would have had major economic ramifications on their communities. The construction of an ocean-going canoe and the provisioning for a long voyage required massive capital input. No one would deny an attrition rate from expeditions lost forever because of unseasonal weather conditions which so seriously disrupted sailing traditions that re-establishing their position would have been impossible for sailors without modern navigational equipment. But the fact is they sailed where no one had sailed before and the evidence is increasing if not conclusive that they could find an island and return to alert others of its existence.

OoOOoo

About a thousand years ago, around the time the Danes were invading England, the *Vikings of the Pacific* as Sir Peter Buck called the Polynesians, landed on the shores of Aotearoa. It was their last major discovery and in many ways their most difficult. For the first time, the canoes had purposely slipped into the blustery region below the tropics in which New Zealand resides. The winds, currents and seasons were more erratic and thus less predictable than they were used to and the temperatures lower. They would have needed higher levels of courage, skill and patience to keep going and, on arrival, they would soon have realised that the North and South Islands were each far larger than any in their previous experience.

The strong likelihood is that on at least two or three occasions over a century or two, canoes carrying enough men and women with plants and livestock to set up a viable community arrived in Aotearoa. The brought with them the plants they had farmed in their tropical homelands but found a cooler climate in which these plants didn t thrive (breadfruit, taro, paper mulberry, yam and kumara) or didn t survive (coconut). They brought the rat and the dog but possibly not the pig or the fowl. But they found an abundance of game birds, including moa, and rapidly developed the moa-hunter culture. Did they bring the pig and fowl and slaughter them on arrival when they saw the forest was thick with game? Certainly the fowl would have seemed almost irrelevant compared with the local variety; but it is more difficult to imagine them being so profligate with the pig for which they undoubtedly had a special liking. A mystery, that.

The odds seem to favour a route from the Cook Islands via the Kermadecs, but the culture was so closely related to eastern Polynesia that they could have come direct from Tahiti. Perhaps Percy Smith was right that what lured them here was that settlers in the north-east noticed long, regular strings of the petrels that proliferated in this region moving to the south-west in certain months of the year. But was he right about the fleet? Seems improbable given the resources needed to set up an exploratory or migrant group, and staying together and within sight of one another impossible. But it s hard to imagine the estimated 100,000-plus people here in the mid-eighteenth century having sprung from one canoe stacked with enough people, plants

and livestock to establish a viable base — enough people to have wiped out the moa within four centuries (although helped, perhaps, by egg-raiding rats and dogs). More probably, a few canoes arrived over a number of decades. And yet, navigating in this part of the world is as tough as anywhere, so maybe once a small number of parties arrived and some went home for reinforcements the urge to take the risk dissipated.

They found a huge country rich in game — moa and other birds, seals by the million, whales, sea lions and dolphins — as well as fish and the creatures of the coast waters — shellfish and crayfish. But, given the climate, farming the food plants they had brought with them was difficult and no local plant yielded easy supplies of carbohydrate. The best they could find was the fern root that they stripped and ground into a form of flour but which was severe on their teeth. The fern was so common they could move from plot to plot without cultivating it, but preparation into food was relatively arduous. Flax made up for the struggling paper mulberry. They found a variety of huge trees that were alien to them but which provided a readily available source of building materials that would test their tools but would alter their houses and their art forms.

It was an environment very different from what they were accustomed to. Although the resources were rich, the newcomers faced a fundamental adaptation to the way they lived their daily lives.

These are the first two of 25 chapters I've written of a personal and professional memoir – about me and about my writing life – and its working title is "A Writing Life." I've been back through it to revise only once.

WRITING

Chapter one

In the beginning was the Word.

And then along came another word.

And another, and another, and another, until each day billions of them wash over us in torrents from the air waves, march across endless pages in serried ranks of type, flicker back at us from ever-mutating images on computer screens, and tennis-volley to and fro in conversation, face to face or by telephone.

Silence is hard to find.

And just as inflation from the velocity and profligacy of a currency diminishes its unit value, so with words. The more swiftly and glibly we use them, the less they mean. When I worked for the New Zealand Press Association a few decades ago, the teleprinters, as we called them, brought news from both national and world news sources, chattering away at so many words per minute. Because the conduit was limited in capacity, a process of selection, both of words and full messages, was exercised at various stages before it reached a newspaper. Time and craftsmen discriminated, selected what would go forward in what order, and they leavened the prose.

Nowadays, news and opinion come with a rush and quickly disappear, replaced almost immediately. The faster the words come the less crafted they are and the more ephemeral their existence. In some ways words have become tyrannical, clouting the mind incessantly but discordantly. In e-mail and telephone text messages the speed of the medium has led to condensed sentences and shortcut words.

For half of my fifty-year career as a writer I acted as a public relations consultant with my left hand while my right got on with my real life. As the years went by, my advice to individuals and organisations aggrieved by some media slight – sometimes actual, mostly perceived – was more and more often to wait for the issue to evaporate. And it almost always does within hours or, at most, a few days. Even insults and innuendos are quickly crowded out by new ones.

OoOOoo

The Word with a capital W was a synecdoche for the Bible, the Word of God; and, whether you believe in God or not, words may truly have been the beginning for human beings, the evolutionary biological development that triggered our emergence as a species. Language was the genesis of the mind.

Word with a capital W is now more than anything else a brand representing the most common word-processing software in the world. Microsoft has, in effect, achieved copyright on written language. Imagine if Chaucer had gained ownership and thus copyright on his newly evolving English.

Darwin acknowledged that humans have an instinctive tendency to speak and, more recently, cognitive scientists have claimed it is an instinct similar to, but even more marvellous than, that of migratory birds which navigate thousands of miles by calibrating the positions of the constellations against the time of day and year. Though language is innate, if it is to be used as a supple and subtle instrument to communicate nuances of thought and emotion it must be refined by the hard work of reading and writing.

It's not fashionable to suggest the digital world that delivers most of this modern verbal bonanza is anything but good, so I won't demur except to risk the opinion that more persistently than ever, how we cope with those words, how we discriminate -- both in understanding them and using them to express ourselves -- has much to do with how efficiently and comfortably we live in the world; and has much to do with the level of freedom and independence we achieve. Democratic politicians use language to deceive, and despots to enslave. As cognitive scientist Steven Pinker put it: "In our social relations, the race is not to the swift but to the verbal."

But technology, in my lifetime, has never delivered as much as it promised. I've been using computers for nearly 20 years and still marvel at what they can do for me; but every time I get a smaller and faster machine than the last, I hope it will make thinking easier. It never does, of course. I used to joke that if Shakespeare had had a word processor he would have written more and better plays. The truth is the word-processor has an upside and a downside.

The huge advantage so many of us take for granted is that writers can revise and revise again as they go, searching and finding, cutting and suturing words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs in search of language precision. Frederick Forsyth told me that before word-processors his method of keeping track of the characters in a developing novel was to write the name and last whereabouts of a character on a piece of paper and pin it on the wall of his office for rapid reference.

It has never been easier to go back to your work, to read it and revise it. Only the dreamiest romantic could still believe that under the influence of some muse good or great writers dash off works of art pristine in their truth and beauty with no need for the hard work of revision. But some critics claim we write more glibly, dig less deeply into our minds working on computers than we used to on typewriters or by pen because using those primitive tools we had to put everything back through our heads to produce clean copy. You can sometimes sense this in the excessive narrative tidiness of some mass-market novels; but for writers serious about their work the word-processor is also unquestionably a boon.

Writing and reading will survive in book form -- although print will be delivered electronically rather than on paper -- because it can be kept, mulled over, infused into the mind. And because writing demands cool consideration, the filtering of thought and emotion.

Before books, people had to rely on their memory -- a faculty now atrophying -- to store religious and cultural lore in the form of stories to pass on to the next generation. Their memories developed prodigious reservoirs of knowledge but they did have to be selective. And the mnemonics they developed to carry these oral stories down the generations were deeply rooted in rhyme, in assonance, in alliteration, in rhythm, in metre, which are found in their most refined state in poetry. These devices have an atavistic attraction, capturing our ear every day as in *orchestrated litany of lies, hard yards*, *Delhi belly* and thousands more. Sometimes, as in *holy moly*, the rhyme is the sole reason for the existence of a phrase that is an exclamation expressing surprise.

Verse is where literature cross-dresses with music. All of us have a pleasurable response when we hear or read simple iambic lines ending in rhyme because they are echoes from our past. The iambus -- one short or unstressed syllable followed by a long or stressed syllable – is a basic rhythm which carries a narrative along, but if it goes too long unbroken it can be monotonous. If you get that nice uncluttered movement in your sentences, and you vary their length, I guess you're halfway to the sort of rhythm that will help hold a reader's interest.

Remember that in our subconscious somewhere we carry the code for a full range of rhythms and cadences. Think of a drum and the rhythms it can express. A way of enhancing your sense of dramatic rhythm is to read the King James Bible. Not so much now but in past years many of the fine British prose stylists echoed its enchanting rhythms. Nothing to do with divine intervention, although it is so beautifully written that one English academic, Arthur Quiller-Couch, has called it a miracle.

The Jews and Christians were once know by the Muslims as The People of the Book and, for the English-speaking people particularly, the Bible was a literary

masterpiece full of myths and morality tales that glued societies together. Society has become secularised as science has freed people from the more restrictive beliefs that kept them in many ways emotionally constrained. People have gained the knowledge to become humanist but discarded most of the literature and art that would bind them in a unified morality. The Bible as literature has been diminished by two forces: the tedious rendering of favourite passages by clergy, and by prosaic translations of the text itself, designed to bring people back to church. When I reviewed the *Reader's Digest Bible* in 1983, I wrote: "This company's editors move through literature like giant weevils masticating the beautiful agonised music of the soul and crapping behind a kind of Weetbix of the mind".

Not only has nothing replaced the central position the Bible had in our culture, the other critical texts from ancient times to the 20th century have fallen from use because schools have moved from education of the mind to education of the brain, from education for life to education for vocation. These beautiful texts have gradually been replaced by the scatology of television in a culture which tells us we cannot have artistic quality, must take what we get financially supported by commercials in all their childish awfulness.

Yes, the *King James Bible* is packed with great stories beautifully told, with rhythms and a special assonance that seduce the ear; but it seems to me a problem that those who go to church may too often hear the same old passages droned out by that kind of wheedling, tone-deaf voice that clerics graduate with. So my advice is read the *Bible*, Shakespeare and perhaps Edward Gibbon aloud and absorb the rhythms. Gibbon's sentences have such extraordinary resonance. They remind me of long waves rolling in from away out at sea, building up and up, and then breaking on the beach. And by the way, the modern jibe that only morons need to move their lips when reading is simply silly. Reading aloud to oneself is a history-honoured pastime. According to Alberto Manguel in *A History of Reading* it was normal until the Middle Ages.

Writing may have dimmed the melodic resonance performers gave to stories in oral cultures; but it has preserved for all of us the artistry of the towering geniuses whose work remains so beautiful, so dramatic, so wise, so intensely human, so eternally fresh that generation after generation they renew us. I'm thinking of Homer, Dante, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats and many, many others. Writing is the butter of thought. Talk is the whey.

Chapter two

As long as I can remember, words have been my touchstone with identity and sanity. But I've never been able to confirm in my own mind whether it is the imaginative consequence of words or the concrete things they represent that have the greater hold on me. I can remember less about what *Alice* does in *Wonderland* than the magic lunacy of the words and the conundrums they create.

I relished *La Belle Dame Sans Merci, Ode to a Grecian Urn, Ozymandias* and the speeches from *Julius Caesar* long before I had any firm grasp on their meaning. I can remember when (1949) and where (on the train to a Dunedin holiday) I read my first P G Wodehouse story (from *Thank You Jeeves)* and I was captivated by the glorious absurdity of the words rather than by Jeeves or Bertie. I still have the calf bound *Complete Works of William Shakespeare* I bought in 1948. Luckily I first read *Julius Caesar,* the most accessible of the plays, but it was the rhythms that captured me. I keep that book for sentimental reasons because the truth is the particular Oxford University Press edition is

in type so small and in columns so narrow it's almost unreadable. My eyes must then have matched my enthusiasm.

My father was an intelligent, enthusiastic reader of newspapers, magazines and books, with eclectic taste. My mother was a literary gourmand who devoured magazines and, once a week, would borrow five or six books, mostly light fiction, from a lending library and read for long hours of the night, lying against a hill of pillows, dozing, reading, dozing, while my father learned to sleep with the light on. I never did fathom my mother because of a range of eccentricities. She had learned the piano as a schoolgirl and could play accurately to sheet music, methodically and without style. I remember how she was inveigled into playing for singing and dancing at parties. It was always a chore, until one day when she was in her late thirties, she closed the piano and never opened one again.

My father had wodges of verse in his head, mainly from Robbie Burns, Walter Scott (all of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*) and Shakespeare, but also from Thomas Bracken (all of *Not Understood* and *Dunedin from the Bay).* He belonged to that generation of New Zealanders who had great hope in the future of the country, a shining belief in a future of free education, communal goodwill and shared wealth. We were a close family because my father was peripatetic.

Almost every American carries a hometown image in his mind, as much a dream as a record of where he came from. Even if he grew up in the heart of the great Metropolis, he holds on to this mirage of the East Side in the fifties or sixties, or Brooklyn, or Queens. But mostly it's a town in the Mid-West, New England or the real West. Janitors and Presidents are equally susceptible and, because the weakness of American culture is sentimentality, they all play nostalgia liked a stringed instrument. It's not so common in New Zealand, or not spoken about anyway, but it's something I understand deeply because my father left Dunedin the month the Second World War started when he was in his late thirties, and he carried the place of his childhood and youth in his head until he died. He became rootless, shifting around the North Island to a variety of jobs in a kind of geographical funk. He never went back because as the years went by, I'm sure, he knew a visit would destroy his illusions both of place and people.

Dunedin was my hometown, too, in the sense that I was born there and, because my father was a good storyteller, his nostalgia became, second-hand, mine. After we left, my sister and I went to eight primary schools in just over three years as we moved from town to town, so I had no substitute hometown to lap over the imposed nostalgia. We seemed always to be among strangers. So I developed two skills – reading to overcome loneliness and fighting and a sharp tongue to overcome the inevitable bullying of a very small new boy – and a sense that I belonged to the whole country.

Later I moved around again, this time on my own, working on small-town and provincial newspapers and then, for several years as a roving writer for the late lamented *NZ Weekly News* and the *Journal of Agriculture*. But I also worked in Wellington in the Parliamentary Press Gallery and I've now lived almost half of my life in Auckland.

In 1975, six years after I came to Auckland, I wrote *The Passionless People,* a social commentary that sold around 25,000 copies in a few months and spawned two television discussion programmes. It's often forgotten now that New Zealand had then been for about 40 years one of the world's most successful countries if the wealth and well-being of its citizens are the measure. But what I had seen clearly in my travels were two serious symptoms of decline: an ineffable and deadening smugness that had grown from widespread admiration at our social orderliness, and a sclerosis clogging up our institutions. Controlling organisations designed to make our economy even more orderly

had begotten more controlling organisations until we reached the extraordinary extreme of the Egg Entitlement Board. The board controlled the production of eggs to ensure that supply and demand were always in equilibrium and, of course, actually ensured they never were.

Things had been so good for so long that during the decade after *The Passionless People* New Zealanders were bewildered to find they had not achieved nirvana. British membership of the European economic union and the oil shock of the early 1970s had sent us into a very noticeable economic decline. The self-satisfaction evaporated and in the confusion, we plumped for the “strong leadership” of Rob Muldoon and then, after we discovered that it’s weak people who need strong leaders, we were conned into discarding the Great Truth of the welfare state for the Great Truth of economic rationalism.

A number publishers have asked me over the years whether I would write another *The Passionless People* but I’ve always resisted the temptation because I’ve never taken it as seriously as most other people seem to, and because New Zealanders are not smug any more, just confused. But what intrigues me is that -- while the squabbling indecision has been going on over the years since *The Passionless People* was written -- some extraordinary changes have occurred in the texture of our society. They run parallel to similar changes in other countries but have been more marked here than elsewhere, for good or for bad, but mostly for good. They concern the transformation of the lives of Maori, of women and of small towns.