

ON POETRY



ON POETRY:
Jonathan Davidson

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For my mum, who gave me poetry.

INTRODUCTION

These essays and pieces of memoir are about my relationship with poetry. I've written about what I heard or read when I was young and some of the poems I've carried with me over the years. My interest in poetry has taken me outside the UK and I'm interested in poetry in translation. I've written about this. I'm interested in what might happen when poetry presents itself to the world – through performance or broadcast – and I've written about this too.

My background – working class and not good at exams – meant that I came to poetry by chance. I was hardly ever forced to read poetry and despite – or because – of this some poems have stayed with me. I've written about how it is to live with certain poems for many years. Poetry is an art-form that carries with it its own means of delivery, its own theatre, concert hall or back room. To speak or even to hear speech in our heads is talent and facility enough to experience poetry. In some pieces I write about this.

I've tried to make up my own mind about what is worth paying attention to and what isn't. Attention is important. There is *some* money in poetry but attention is the currency in which poets are paid. Like any trade it has its coiners and clippers. Reputations are built or launched and stand or fall to earth. I'm interested in what remains when the fuss has died down – the quiet voices. I've written about some of these.

Poetry is simple and complex. It has little *public* worth and gathers very little value in the world. But privately poems take

our concentration and consideration and turn this into energy. Poems find themselves in the firmament. They glow when they are of beautiful use, when they are heard and shared, when they are part of the Poetry Commonwealth. And as we've always understood of stars, they are worth gazing at, and sometimes worth following.

—Jonathan Davidson, 2018

CHAPTER 1

The poet Catherine Byron – Ivan V. Lalić in Leicester – Did you know Michael Farley? – A Fawn Overcoat – The Poetry Commonwealth – Changing Trains at Kanfanar – A Russian Poet encourages Glasnost – A non-person from Czechoslovakia opens a door in Scunthorpe – Manon des Sources begins at the end – Giving a shout – A good man.

In the mid-1980s the Yugoslavian poet Ivan V. Lalić came to the city of Leicester to give a poetry reading.¹ It was arranged by the poet Catherine Byron and by her then partner, the poet Michael Farley.² Ivan V. Lalić died in 1996. I haven't heard of Catherine for a while and I long ago lost contact with Michael.³ Wherever they are, this little event that they engineered still resonates with me. It was unusual. It was typical. Poets and others gathering in a city in the English Midlands to listen to poetry in its original Serbian and in English translation was unusual. That there were only about a dozen of us there to listen was typical. I was in my early twenties and it was my first experience of poetry in translation and the first time I had met a poet from an *alien* poetic culture. Had I known more about poetry I would have known that there are no alien poetic cultures but my diet had up until then been exclusively the poetry of the English language, and mostly the poetry of English poets. And mostly dead English poets.

Lalić was a poet working beyond the range of my experience. Despite this, I remember watching him take off his belted fawn overcoat at the start of the reading and turning to look at us as if we were already part of his world, as if we were citizens and contributors to a Poetry Commonwealth. And we were. Both.

Lalić was a gentle, quietly spoken man. He was the object of our intense attention but he presented himself modestly, aware that he was a dignified curiosity. If he was concerned about whether his poetry would mean much to us in English translation he didn't let on. Carefully he read the translations and carefully we listened. Each poem was let loose into the room as if at its moment of creation. And for those of us who hardly knew this poet existed, it was as good as hearing the poems at their making. The translations may have been particularly fine, his introduction to each poem may have given us just what we needed, or the background hum of the Leicester inner ring road may have been the perfect incongruous detail. Or perhaps it was that Lalić's poems had something that carried them easily across the disputed kilometres and through the dangerous century. They went from the past into the future. None of us knew then what a broken future it was to be.

I have come across his poems now and then over the decades that followed, most recently 'The Spaces of Hope' translated from the Serbian by Francis R Jones.⁴ This was published in the UK a few years after Lalić's reading in Leicester, but he may have read it in manuscript form. It is a deceptively direct and simple poem. It does not, in translation anyway, rely on poetic sleights of hand or obtuse references – although the details are not entirely universal. It is not a work of imagination so much as a work of reflection. The title, despite being rather abstract, echoes through the poem and gathers meaning. There are some agile phrases. 'A starless night lit only / By a book on the table' is a lovely idea and a lovely image. The poem is a perfect meshing of the facts of the matter with precise analysis of their potential implications.

The Spaces of Hope

by Ivan V. Lalić

I have experienced the spaces of hope,
The spaces of a moderate mercy. Experienced
The places which suddenly set
Into a random form: a lilac garden,
A street in Florence, a morning room,
A sea smeared with silver before the storm,
Or a starless night lit only
By a book on the table. The spaces of hope
Are in time, not linked into
A system of miracles, nor into a unity;
They merely exist. As in Kanfanar,
At the station; wind in a wild vine
A quarter-century ago: one space of hope.
Another, set somewhere in the future,
Is already destroying the void around it,
Unclear but real. Probable.

In the spaces of hope light grows,
Free of charge, and voices are clearer,
Death has a beautiful shadow, the lilac blooms later,
But for that it looks like its first-ever flower.

Lalić was never a familiar name, despite his reading in Leicester, and since his death it is all too easy to assume that his poetry has stopped emitting light. This poem proves this is not the case, it is so powerful still. Sometimes, it is important to read the poems that are furthest from us – in age or geography or cultural background – because what manages to be transmitted across time and space and from language to language, that will be *the poetry*. This is what I want as a reader and listener: from out of the static and white noise, to suddenly receive poetry.

However distant the galaxy – a poem can take hundreds of years for its light to reach us – reach us it may. It demands some work. It can be terribly inconvenient to have to have our satellite dishes constantly turning day and night and to pick out the verse from the interference.

It's an exaggeration to say that as a reader I have preferred to travel on foot and across open country with nothing but the stars for guidance, but I do like to take the back roads. Which is in itself somehow fitting as poetry can be at its most powerful when, having offered us the ambiguity of metaphor and simile, and the formlessness of abstraction, and the beguiling clatter of consonance, and all the many other doors and chambers through which a poem passes, the road rises and the mist suddenly clears and we find ourselves on a hilltop staring at a star we didn't know existed.⁵ Re-reading 'The Spaces of Hope' I imagine how Lalić must have set out to discover what this almost gauche abstraction might mean for one who had lived through the Second World War, who had grown up in a country within a country, who knew the bloody uncertainty of history. He might have written a memoir or a history book, but he chose to write poems. And in this instance, he focussed on a street in Florence and the railway station at Kanfanar.⁶ And, most tellingly, on little lilac flowers.⁷ Things both particular and universal. The poem, created so many years ago, is received. Still. Like light.

Although it was Anvil Press Poetry in the 1980s who were making the work of Lalić available to readers in the UK, it was Bloodaxe Books who did most in my 20s to introduce me to poetry in translation. I was slightly too young to register the impact of the Penguin *Modern Poets in Translation Series* but Bloodaxe continued the work of this series by intercepting and making public the poetry of poets from a politically volatile Eastern Europe. They published, for instance, the Czechoslovakian poet Miroslav Holub and the Romanian

poet Marin Sorescu, both of whom wrote from within political systems that seemed to simultaneously celebrate and frustrate poets and poetry. While at Leicester Polytechnic I helped make a performance of the poetry of Russian dissident poet Irina Ratushinskaya, drawn from the collection *No, I'm not afraid*, published by Bloodaxe in 1986. Her story, we reasoned, would be more powerful if her poems were performed. The audience, the performers, the poems and the poet, would all have made a connection. Even if she were imprisoned – as she had been – her poetry could be released. Poetry can make its own moments. It can at least help to change the world.⁸

In the early 1990s I was in the position to invite poets to give readings.⁹ The details are hazy, but somehow I arranged for Miroslav Holub to visit the steel making town of Scunthorpe in North Lincolnshire. He read the English translations of his poems and they seemed at the time to be perceptive and wise. Perhaps he wrote with the knowledge that for his work to have an audience beyond that of his small country he would have to be translated, and there is a sense in his best work that nothing has been lost in translation. Here is his poem ‘The Door’, translated by Ian Milner:¹⁰

The Door

by Miroslav Holub

Go and open the door.
 Maybe outside there's
 a tree, or a wood,
 a garden,
 or a magic city.

Go and open the door.
 Maybe a dog's rummaging.

Maybe you'll see a face,
or an eye,
or the picture
of a picture.

Go and open the door.
If there's a fog
it will clear.

Go and open the door.
Even if there's only
the darkness ticking,
even if there's only
the hollow wind,
even if
nothing
is there,
go and open the door.

At least
there'll be
a draught.

As with so many poems by Holub, it speaks with a clarity which makes the ambiguity of his intent more powerful. We can assume that for much of his writing life Holub was having to say one thing and mean another.¹¹ And perhaps his career as a scientist ensured that he wrote with a certain detachment, the better able to present his observations. Certainly this poem is a long way from the personal introspection that marked so much poetry written in the same period in Western Europe. His personality is absent. With good reason. The poet, perhaps, had been asked to step into a side room to have a word with some gentlemen from the Ministry. So we are alone with the poem. Just us and

the words. We hear footsteps in the corridor outside and doors opening and closing, but there is just enough time to appreciate the suggestion that the poem offers, that other ways of living are possible and that a country – that individuals – should have the nerve to find out what they might be.

Not long after that reading by Miroslav Holub I went to see the film *Manon des Sources*, screened at the Scunthorpe Film Theatre, then run by my friend Tony Whitehead.¹² This was still the days of films arriving from wherever they had been last shown in a series of shallow tins, each numbered so that the projectionist knew in which order to screen them. Shortly after the opening credits and a bit of Gallic action, we witnessed one of the lead characters, Ugolin, committing suicide by hanging himself from a tree.¹³ But that can't be right, we thought, surely that's part of the grim denouement? And then what must have been the next reel was screened and we were somewhere in the middle of the story. We did our best but couldn't make head nor tail of it. Then the screen went dark. Tony came on the address system to say that the reels had been mixed up by the clots at the Grimsby Film Theatre so he was just going to have to screen them one by one and could we give him a shout when it all made sense. It took four hours but it was an oddly profound experience. Which is what writing poetry may be about, just giving a shout if we think, even momentarily, that it all makes sense. Which was what Ivan V. Lalić was doing, that evening in Leicester. And what I still listen out for.

¹ This was before the Yugoslavian wars of succession in the 1990s.

² Catherine Byron was the first published poet I met, at the age of 21. She was also the first person to refer to me as 'the poet...' Michael Farley was the second published poet I met. They ran a poetry workshop for the Workers Educational Association in Leicester. I went when I was a student at Leicester Polytechnic. I told none of my friends. Poetry begins in secret.

- 3 When I last spoke to Catherine, a few years ago, she had given up writing poetry and left England. She sent me a book, *Salmon: A Journey in Poetry, 1981-2007* as part of a dispersment of her library. So poetry is passed around. Michael Farley I lost track of many years ago – this was before social media – but occasionally I meet people who knew him. He was beautifully serious.
- 4 From *The Passionate Measure*, Ivan V Lalić, translated by Francis R Jones, Anvil Press Poetry, 1989, and included in *Centres of Cataclysm*, edited by Sasha Dugdale, David Constantine & Helen Constantine, Modern Poetry in Translation/Bloodaxe Books, 2016.
- 5 Or, 'Silent, upon a peak in Darien', as Keats suggested in his poem 'On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer'.
- 6 Kanfanar is a small village in Croatia and lies at the interchange of the Istrian Y expressway/motorway B8 and A9, as well as on the Divača to Pula railway, and was formerly the junction of a branch-line to Rovinj, so I believe.
- 7 Oh, and odd that 'lilac' should be an anagram (minus the accent on the 'c') of Lalić. Odd, irrelevant, but apt.
- 8 Irina Ratushinskaya was released from a Soviet labour camp in late 1986 and the poetry she had written while in prison added to the mounting pressure on Mikhail Gorbachev to introduce Glasnost which led eventually to the end of the Soviet system.
- 9 I was Literature Development Worker for South Humberside based in Scunthorpe, with Grimsby as the other jewel in my crown. I had a small budget and a telephone on a desk in Scunthorpe Central Library opposite Brigid, the Dance Development Worker, and with the Music Development Worker, Dan, always off somewhere banging cans and singing, and the Film Theatre just downstairs run by my dear, late friend Tony Whitehead, who loved *Carry On* films and Avant Garde French Cinema, and could tell the difference between the two.
- 10 *Poems Before & After: Collected English Translations*, Bloodaxe Books, 2006.
- 11 Although he was not overtly political, after the Prague Spring of 1968 Holub became a *non-person* in Czechoslovakia.
- 12 A film released in 1986, directed by Claude Berri and adapted from the novel by Marcel Pagnol.
- 13 And so apparently ending the long line of the Soubeyran family.

CHAPTER 2

Ted Hughes on vinyl – Windgather Cottage Youth Hostel – Slogging uphill – William Dunlop, leading poet – Shuttling darts – The Communist Party of Great Britain – The New Golden Treasury of English Verse – The Jam – Shelley, Keats, Spenser & me – Dad finds Crow – The possibility of Myxomatosis – Under cover of fading light.

In 1978 I heard a record of Ted Hughes reading some of his poems. I hadn't heard a poet reading their own work before and I had no idea who Ted Hughes was.¹⁴ I was thirteen when the needle dropped onto the vinyl and his soft northern cadences filled the room. It was the voice I heard, not the words. There was a quiet certainty. The accent was unforced. The silences were precise. This was poetry as spoken art, not to be explained or understood. The record wasn't mine and I heard it at someone else's house – a thoughtful grown-up thinking I might be interested. I didn't ask to borrow it and it didn't cross my mind to try to buy a copy for myself.¹⁵ I think eventually I got hold of a copy of Hughes' collection *The Hawk in the Rain*, but the book and the recording didn't connect in my mind, although I can still remember his reading of 'Six Young Men' and I think I read the poem once or twice myself.¹⁶ Hearing him reading was an end in itself. Curious. Unsettling.

I also remember Hughes reading his poem 'Wind',

particularly for the lines:

This house has been far out at sea all night,
The woods crashing through darkness, the booming hills.

The poem is full of the concrete made abstract. It had a nerve, a poet saying simply that this is how it is. It introduced to me the idea that the landscape we inhabited was something more than simply the place in which we happened to find ourselves. For a boy who had spent most weekends and holidays walking and cycling around the British Isles this was an important understanding.¹⁷ It began to explain to me why slogging up all those hills in bottom gear with a gale blowing was more than just madness. The poem finishes by driving home the idea that even the underlying rock was alive:

We watch the fire blazing,
And feel the roots of the house move, but sit on,
Seeing the window tremble to come in,
Hearing the stones cry out under the horizons.

Here was an experience of the natural world that I had shared with Hughes. I had stayed at Windgather Cottage Youth Hostel¹⁸ in the Peak District while on a cycling tour with my dad when I was thirteen. The name was apt. A storm had pulled at the slates that night as we few hostellers huddled round a fire and played Monopoly. I can't remember if I had heard the poem before that night or if I played it back in my memory later, but suddenly I was living – had already lived – the life of the poet. Next morning we set off south, the country fresh and windswept. For nearly forty years I've carried, entwined, that stormy night at Windgather Cottage and Hughes' reading of his poem 'Wind'.

Then another thing happened. While I don't remember Hughes' own poetry at school I do remember the anthology

he'd edited, *Here Today*,¹⁹ but only for the poem 'Landscape as Werewolf' by William Dunlop. Not many people remember William Dunlop (1936 – 2005), but he had two poems in *Here Today* and in the 1950s and 60s he was considered one of the UK's leading poets. He managed to miss out on publishing a collection early on in his career, although Oxford University Press and Victor Gollancz Limited were interested. He may have forgotten about 'Landscape with Werewolf' when he moved to the United States in the early 1960s as it wasn't included in his first collection, *Caruso for the Children and Other Poems*, which was finally published in the late 90s.²⁰ And when, two years after his death, the publication of a *Selected Poems* was made possible by private subscription from friends and admirers, 'Landscape with Werewolf' wasn't included.²¹ Dunlop had given up writing poetry in the late 1960s. Then, from the 1990s until his death, there was a burst of late creativity. He was probably completely unaware of how his short poem for young people was making its own way in the world through various dog-eared copies of *Here Today*.

Landscape as Werewolf

by William Dunlop

Near here, the last grey wolf
In England was clubbed down. Still,
After two hundred years, the same pinched wind
Rakes through his cairn of bones

As he squats quiet, watching daylight seep
Away from the scarred granite, and its going drain
The hills' bare faces. Far below,
A tiny bus twists on its stringy path
And scuttles home around a darkening bend.

The fells contract, regroup in starker form;
Dusk tightens on them, as the wind gets up
And stretches hungrily: tensed at the nape,
The coarse heath bristles like a living pelt.

The sheep are all penned in. Down at the pub
They sing, and shuttle darts: the hostellers
Dubbin their heavy boots. Above the crags
The first stars prick their eyes and bide their time.

You can see why Hughes selected it. While it doesn't have the daring leaps of imagination of so many of Hughes' poems, every word and phrase is darkly perfect. To anthropomorphise the fells is not original but it is well done. The language is functional and sharp. I like the description 'and shuttle darts': insignificant but accurate and somehow more revealing than the more obvious 'playing' or 'throwing'. And the line, 'The first stars prick their eyes and bide their time', focuses the hope and menace underlying the poem. Here is poetry that achieves its purpose so well that beyond the obvious there is really nothing to say about it. Good poetry sometimes shuts us up.

Although the house I grew up in was full of books,²² very few seemed to have been bought new and our small town certainly didn't have a bookshop.²³ It had a library but I don't ever remember borrowing poetry. Somehow or other we did have a few poetry books in the house. Most of these my mum had gathered as a young woman working in a bakery but with an ambition to write poetry.²⁴ There was some Wordsworth and Blake and the *Collected Poems* of Dylan Thomas. I read a few poems but didn't find much in these collections – too difficult or too boring for a fifteen year old. In 1980 I bought, presumably from our town's WH Smiths, a paperback of the *New Golden Treasury of English Verse*, edited by Edward Leeson but based on Palgrave's original selection. While I didn't read

it from cover to cover, it was mine and I thought at the time that in compact form here was all I needed to read in order to become some kind of poet. The poems were in chronological order, beginning with Anonymous and ending with Ted Hughes.

In the summer of the same year The Jam, a style-conscious but independently-minded post-punk band from the suburban south, released an album called *Sound Affects*. They were a smart band (they wore suits but not city suits), this was a smart album (the cover was a pastiche of the BBC sound effects records of the previous two decades) and the title was clever. The sleeve of the album had this on it:

From *Mask of Anarchy*

by Percy Bysshe Shelley

Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you –
Ye are many – they are few.

Let a vast assembly be,
and with great solemnity
Declare with measured words that ye
Are, as God made ye, free –

The old laws of England – they
Whose reverend heads with age are grey,
Children of a wiser day;
And whose solemn voice must be
Thine own echo – Liberty!

I asked my mum, when she was next off to Oxford to spend a day asking people which brand of cigarettes they preferred,²⁵ if she could get me more poetry by this poet called Shelley. For my 17th birthday in 1981 I was given *The Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. I was slightly embarrassed by it being bound in fancy imitation tooled leather – I didn't want a book that drew attention to itself or was pretending to be more than it was, I just wanted the words. Over the years I read only a handful of Shelley's poems. 'Ode to a Skylark' and, at least once, the full 'Mask of Anarchy', but not the verse dramas 'Prometheus Unbound' or 'The Cenci'. His long elegy for John Keats, 'Adonais', I think I did read because I then took myself off to Oxford and bought *Keats Poetical Works* from Blackwell's Bookshop.

I knew a bit about Shelley and about Wordsworth and Coleridge and Byron, and I had had to read a bit of Chaucer and Pope for O-Level and A-Level English Literature respectively, and I didn't doubt the importance of any of them, but I read John Keats because I wanted to. For a while I thought I was Keats.²⁶ Here was a man often out of his depth – socially, academically, physically – but trusting everything to poetry. And while there are currents of complexity and subtlety awash in his work, even as a seventeen year old destined to possess only one A-Level I felt I was as capable of being affected by his poetry as any scholar. I hoped I was reading Keats, every line and every word, with the same appetite that Keats read Shakespeare or read Chapman's translations of Homer. The Jam had given me Shelley and Shelley had given me Keats and now Keats was my band. And because Keats admired Edmund Spenser I took the train to Oxford again and bought *Spenser's Poetical Works*, and in the summer of 1982, after failing my A-Levels and in theory looking for a job, I read 'The Faerie Queen'. While I didn't appreciate much of Spenser, there was hardly a poem of Keats that didn't in some way catch in my mind. Privately I made him my study.

The autumn after my summer with Spenser and Keats my dad found a pile of what looked like discarded English Literature textbooks and set-texts on the roadside as he was cycling home from work, including Hughes' collection *Crow*. We were used to Dad coming in with a saddle bag full of things he had hunted and gathered – blackberries, apples, sloes, rabbits, pigeons, even pheasants – the former being liberated from trees on both sides of the fence and the latter being roadkill. Waste not want not. Books we had not expected, but in they came and I was suddenly the owner of a battered, rain-stained, abandoned copy of *Crow*.²⁷ It seemed fitting that it came to me as a found book scavenged from the roadside. I read it, largely without understanding but aware that this was a different kind of poetry, certainly not Keats or even Hughes' early work. It was demanding stuff but not because of arcane language or syntax. It was precise in its opaqueness, seemingly rough and unpolished while carefully constructed and with a voice that was neither man nor beast. It stuck in my mind.

That my dad gave this haul of literary driftwood to me and not to my sister was because by our mid-teens it had been noted that I was the one reading poetry. At about this time Dad also gave me the slip-cased faux red leather-bound²⁸ collected works of Shakespeare that he had bought at some point in his early twenties. My mum was certainly a reader, had taken an A-level later on in life and had read poetry from being a young woman, but for my dad it was part of the discipline required by those who wanted the world to change. One of the things his membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain gave him was a faith in the value of reading for improvement and enlightenment. At the factory he read in whatever breaks there were and all through his dinner time. And he read when he got up for his breakfast alone at 5am every morning. The books came mostly from the library. I don't think he read for pleasure. Reading was part of the struggle and so reading should be a

bit of a struggle. I know what he means.

Along with a house full of books we had plenty of records of classical music and some folk music and a recording of the Red Army Ensemble singing ‘Songs from the Urals’. Classical music was like literature, it was ours to claim and claim it we should. Folk music was where dancing met the radical tradition, and male Davidsons love to dance.²⁹ It was from Russia because anything Russian was considered to have a melancholy grandeur as befitted the then leaders of the world’s workers. I was the next in a line of working class people trying to hunt and gather what we hoped was high, improving culture, just as my Dad, as he cycled his twenty miles to the factory and back through the Oxfordshire countryside, would keep his eye out for late blackberries or a rabbit clipped by a car.³⁰ We knew there was good stuff out there and we believed it belonged to us, but we took it – including poetry – under the cover of fading light.

¹⁴ I didn’t know that Ted Hughes had founded the magazine *Modern Poetry in Translation* with Daniel Weissbort in 1965 or that he had, in the process, published poems by Ivan V. Lalić.

¹⁵ At that age I owned precisely zero records.

¹⁶ *The Hawk in the Rain* by Ted Hughes, Faber, 1957.

¹⁷ Every year, from when I was eight, our holidays consisted of walking or cycling and staying at youth hostels, with the exception of the one year we took a package holiday courtesy of Progressive Tours, to spend a week on the Black Sea in Bulgaria. Keats would have enjoyed the trip to the collective farm: eat what you like from the trees and fruit bushes, they told us.

¹⁸ Which operated as a Youth Hostel from 1939 to 1983; it couldn’t have been better named.

¹⁹ Hutchinson, 1963, with an introduction by Ted Hughes.

²⁰ Rose Alley Press, Seattle, USA, 1997.

²¹ Classic Day Publishing, USA, 2007.

²² So many books, from the works of Marx & Engels to a book on Scottish tartans and one about sex called, *You’ve Got to Have Love*.

²³ Didcot, since you ask. It had a railway junction, power station, canning factory, but no bookshop. The final instalment of a three volume history of Didcot by the town librarian, Brian Lingham, was called *Dreams and Delusions*. Not without reason do

- we Didcotians excel in limited ambition.
- 24 In her early twenties, she had a poem published in *The Liverpool Echo*.
- 25 My mum had left the bakery and didn't like the succession of cleaning jobs she'd picked up, but it turned out she liked stopping people in the streets and asking them questions. A couple of years later a bloke she interviewed told her he ran the Oxford Playhouse. She asked if her son could come and ask him some questions about what arts administration might be. I did and it sounded better than being a wages clerk. So my life changed direction because the Chief Executive of the Oxford Playhouse smoked Benson & Hedges Silk Cut.
- 26 I also thought I was Jude Fawley from Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, partly because I had been up on the Downs south of Didcot and looked north to the dreaming spires of Oxford (Hardy's Christchurch) and felt that I was an outsider looking in, as I was, and as I still am.
- 27 He'd found them on the roadside somewhere between Nuneham Courteney and Clifton Hampden on the little road that heads south and slightly downhill towards the bridge over the River Thames, which, as Spenser noted, runs 'softly till I end my song.'
- 28 Or it may be real leather but such fine leather that it looked faux.
- 29 The latest generation of Davidsons, male and female, all know how to cut a rug too.
- 30 That these rabbits may have been hit by cars because they had myxomatosis never crossed our minds. It was free food and no one died, until much later.