

## THE BONE GARDEN

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An old man is sitting by his fireside, candlelight illuminating a halo of wisps around his bald head. He puts aside his *Guardian Weekly* and stares into the fire, toothless jaws working rhythmically.

His pre-dinner ration, self-imposed, is five pieces of chocolate. Why five pieces, when the block is six pieces wide? A personal challenge, no doubt. This is a man who considers the possibilities.

'What are you thinking?'

'Just contemplating life.' He smiles his gummy smile.

His eyes have become bigger in this last year. The blue has faded, but he is wide-eyed in the way of babies who expect marvels. It is a lovely thing to witness.

In the mornings I put my head around his bedroom door and see him lying as he will later lie in death. Each time I am suddenly afraid.

'Duncan?' I call softly.

His eyes spring open. 'Hello?' he croaks. Nothing else moves, but his eyes are alive.

Duncan knew that his long life was coming to an end. He was a realist: a zoologist, a palaeontologist, a farmer. He knew that he was an animal like any other and that death would come to him. Incontinence and immobility were approaching. A number of times he blacked-out and fell between chairs, table and fire, then regained consciousness unscathed. But he knew that his luck might not hold. Another blackout might cripple him. Or worse, impair his mental capacity. Though he was not at all afraid of dying he was very much afraid of the loss of independence and dignity.

He had little interest in seeking medical help and none in submitting his body for tests and diagnoses. For sixty years he had been lucky enough, or canny enough, to keep himself free from major medical intervention. He was sceptical about the lengths to which modern medicine will go to prolong life. He was a long-time supporter of voluntary euthanasia.

Suicide is no longer a crime in this country but, paradoxically, it is still a crime to assist a suicide. In Western Australia the penalty is life imprisonment. You have the right to organise your own death but no-one may help you. At the time in your life when you most

need help and companionship the former is illegal and the latter involves great risk for your companions.

Duncan accepted that the rule of law is the best arrangement so far devised by humans for peaceful coexistence. But it only works if we all go along with it. So how should a citizen respond if he or she disagrees with a law? Could a man like Duncan organise his death to be a fitting end to his life?

Conversely, could he live his life in such a way as to make his death easy and straightforward?

In the nineteen-seventies, aged 55, Duncan retired from the WA Museum. He and his wife Elizabeth left their three acres near Perth and moved to a farm in the South-West. Much later I asked whether it was hard to turn his back on a career which was satisfying and in which he was well respected.

‘But ever since I was a boy,’ he said, ‘I wanted to be a farmer.’

His professional interests did not end with his retirement. They simply broadened. And in any case his work activities had never been confined to office hours. He once collected chewed bones from the lion enclosure at the zoo and buried them in the garden so that he could study the tooth marks when the soft tissue was cleaned away. There were other bones too. Belatedly my sister and I discovered that he was in the habit of robbing the graves of our pets, a latter day resurrectionist.

At the farm Duncan worked from sunup to sundown seven days a week. He drew plans for a house that incorporated the best thinking of the time about energy conservation. It would use solar electricity exclusively, and solar hot water boosted by the wood stove. Duncan dug the foundations and the cellar and worked alongside the builders. Once the house was finished he and my mother turned their attention to the yard and Duncan constructed a vegetable garden with raised beds.

Years passed and the overhanging trees grew bigger. Elizabeth left and Duncan moved his few vegetables to pots on the verandah where there was more sun. The garden beds became a cemetery for animals, often road kill, which Duncan found or was given. Once the flesh had rotted, he retrieved the skeletons. Sometimes he allowed visitors, especially children, to work on minor specimens, brushing away the soil with small paintbrushes so that none of the bones was lost.

Duncan’s specialty was marsupials but he was interested in all bones. A question arose about the vertebrae of snakes and lizards. Is the spinal cord carried to the end of the tail

through a bony tunnel or an open channel? He needed a skeleton for study. During that summer three dead snakes were forthcoming, though only two were intact: a dugite and a tiger snake. The ceremonial burial of the dugite, by then stinking, was Duncan's Christmas treat. He believed neither in God nor in consumerism, so he was happy to spend the day alone burying his snake.

His interment method was a layer of fly wire followed by a layer of sand, followed by a careful arrangement of the carcass, more sand, and another layer of mesh to deter scavengers. In the case of summer burials, including the Christmas snake, he watered the garden beds carefully. Moisture was necessary for the flesh to decay and be consumed by parasites.

The snake disinterments were ceremonial occasions. Neighbours were invited to watch but only Duncan himself was allowed to do the paintbrush work. A snake skeleton, consisting mainly of dozens of vertebrae and tiny detached ribs, is not an easy thing to keep track of. Duncan wanted the vertebrae in order, threaded onto cotton.

Once he had labelled and annotated the results he displayed the bones with great seriousness to anyone who visited, young or old. Part of Duncan's charm was that he spoke to everyone in exactly the same way, regardless of age, gender or background, and simply assumed that they would be interested in the subjects that fascinated him. It never seemed to occur to him that people might be daunted by his fierce intelligence and encyclopaedic knowledge.

Improvisation and ingenuity in the pursuit of science were not new to Duncan. In his day the Museum was not well endowed and Duncan had used old fridges, stored in the basement of the courthouse next door, as de-fleshing baths. So he was unfazed in retirement by the lack of specialist equipment or the occasional failure. Birds and bats buried in pots produced nothing. The bones were so fine that they disintegrated. So he tried keeping them in water, using whatever old crockery was to hand. This could be disconcerting for visitors. Duncan would serve them a cup of tea and a biscuit, pushing aside a saucepan full of liquid bones and feathers. For years a dessert bowl held the remains of a mummified rat, only the skull visible beside a pelt of fur. A saucer in the living room still holds a collection of fine bones held together with feathers and threads of dry flesh.

The cup containing the visitor's tea, however, would be spotlessly clean. Duncan's washing up was of a high order. The dust balls might be ankle deep but the sink was spotless. He only ever washed up with soap and boiling water. The water came not from the tap but from kettles on the wood stove or billies hanging on hooks over the fires. No greasy

lukewarm water, no food scraps in the sink.

Duncan did not see this small instance of domestic perfectionism as inconsistent. You are unlikely to get sick from not washing your body or your floors, he reasoned, but very likely to get sick from not washing your dishes. The same logic led him to boil his tank water before drinking and to discard crockery the moment it was chipped or cracked and might harbour germs. Once it was demoted he could use it for storing specimens.

When my sister and I were growing up in our tiny nuclear family, with our nearest close relatives on the other side of the continent, there were three secrets. Like all family secrets, these were complicated burdens.

The first was that both our parents were members of the Communist Party. The secrecy probably arose from the oppressive conservatism of the 1950s when left-wing books were hidden and children were trained to keep quiet about unpopular political affiliations.

Eventually Duncan faded out of the CPA because he no longer believed that the Party was a grass roots movement. But he never lost his interest in Communism (indeed it was impossible to stop receiving *China Reconstructs* - once a subscriber always a subscriber). For the rest of his life he collected thick folders of press clippings. He thought and wrote. His ideas evolved and developed and circled back and around. He was generally sceptical about Western condemnation of the Soviet and Chinese systems. But in a different mood he wrote: *like most people growing up with Abyssinia, the Spanish civil war, and the obviously growing power of Nazism, we thrashed about for counterweights, and like many of the best of our generation, we saw it in Russia – may we be forgiven for our panicky blindness.*

What Duncan retained was the basic socialist principle that the common good should come before private gain. When he was fired by the social revolution of the sixties and decided to retire to the land, he envisaged a cooperative enterprise. He spent his last thirty years on land owned by one of the Clubs he had helped set up.

By the end of his life Duncan had achieved freedom from ownership, more or less. He had plenty of books, tools, art and music supplies, the use of a lovely (if shabby) house and a little cash saved from his pension. He had no real estate and no investments.

The second secret was that Duncan had tuberculosis in the 1940s. As with Communism it is hard now to recreate the stigma attached to TB. Duncan's case was mild and his stay in a sanatorium relatively short but it must have reminded him of a six-week

incarceration for diphtheria in his childhood. Elizabeth's assessment was that the effect of being institutionalised was worse than the illness. She took him home against the advice of the doctors and went out to work while his mother nursed him.

Duncan had been teaching high-school science but as a TB sufferer he was no longer welcome in the public education system. After a series of short-term jobs and two interstate moves, he got a position at the University of Western Australia. With uncharacteristic dishonesty, he did not admit a history of TB.

The third secret was the most inexplicable. It concerned the death, indeed the very existence, of Jock, Duncan and Elizabeth's first baby, who died of asthma at the age of nine months. I imagine that this became a secret when my sister started to ask questions. My parents probably showed pain and were short in their answers. She deduced that Jock should never be mentioned. Jock was a secret.

Sadly, my parents turned this into a secret from each other and did not share their feelings. My mother never got over the death of her baby and, worse still, she believed that Duncan had forgotten him.

When Duncan and Elizabeth separated in 1985, Duncan wrote about her departure on the bus to Perth.

*The most devastating and yet most precious memory of my life is seeing Jock for the last time through the hospital window as I was leaving, and waving to him. He was propped up in a cot, fighting for breath, but he saw me wave and smiled back. This was early one night, and we were woken up in the small hours of the following morning by a hospital messenger, to tell us he was dead.*

*... waving goodbye to Elizabeth as the bus pulled out this morning and seeing her turn and smile and wave back – again through a window – reminded me poignantly of what she used to be.*

In later years Duncan down-played these episodes. He blamed himself for leaving Jock in the hospital that night and he ruminated about possible reasons for Elizabeth's departure. But on the whole he was philosophical. I am reminded of the White Knight in *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, which Duncan read to us when we were little, chortling contagiously. After the knight's umpteenth fall from his horse, this time into a ditch, Alice rushes to rescue him.

*'How can you go on talking so quietly, head downwards?' Alice asked, as she dragged*

*him out by the feet, and laid him in a heap on the bank.*

*The Knight looked surprised at the question. 'What does it matter where my body happens to be?' he said. 'My mind goes on working all the same.'*<sup>i</sup>

One unsettling and exhilarating aspect of conversation with Duncan was that his sense of time was of an unusual order, measured in millennia rather than decades, centuries rather than years. He accepted without difficulty the mind-boggling truism that the whole of human history is a small blip in geological and evolutionary time. As a boy his passion was chemistry. Then an imaginative teacher took the class out to gather raw material and Duncan discovered geology. Later he added a second degree in zoology and a PhD in palaeontology, but his timeframe was always geological.

Duncan's ideas about time were underscored by his appearance. He was tall and skinny and balding and grew a beard long before it was fashionable. He was then about forty, but his beard was silvery and he looked decades older. He seemed already to have done his aging, so that from then on he simply faded and grew more stooped. A newspaper cutting from 1978 shows him behind his desk in a white coat, jawbone in one hand, magnifying glass in the other, under the ambiguous caption: 'Shedding New Light on Ancient Man'.<sup>ii</sup>

Duncan wrote many scholarly papers in his time and popular articles too, since he was always interested in making science accessible to non-scientists. After his retirement he continued to read and discuss everything under the sun with anyone available. An exchange of letters with a local Jehovah's Witness led him into two extended meditations.

Firstly, how do you prove the theory of evolution? He corresponded with various colleagues, but found that there is a dearth of straightforward evidence, for example a single layered deposit that would show unequivocally the changes in one species over time.

Secondly, how do you prove the immense age of the Earth? For this he turned to the Margaret River caves in which he had done a lot of his work. His writing brings to life the beauty of the caves, enhanced by a detailed understanding of how they are formed and an estimate of how long each process might have taken. *At present, the answers can only be guesses. Ten thousand years is only 100 centuries, and my guess is that 100 centuries are not nearly enough.*<sup>iii</sup>

Mostly Duncan's retirement interests revolved around human politics, the activities of a single species with a short history and a limited future but fascinating nonetheless. The 'great work' of his last decade was a discursive but disciplined treatise entitled 'Democracy' which pulled together all his readings and musings on social organisation from prehistory

onwards.

In other writing Duncan allowed himself more latitude. In a 2002 essay he compared the medieval Catholic Church, the USSR and the present-day USA: *three giant experiments in social engineering* ... The essay ends unexpectedly with a summary of the findings of Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson concerning bonobo and chimpanzee behaviour <sup>iv</sup>. Unfortunately, they suggest, humans are more like violent chimpanzees than peaceable bonobos. Duncan's plan was that we should unlearn the former behaviour and replace it with the latter.

*I believe we should move purposefully towards a society in which woman-to-woman bonding is the social cement, that is, towards matriarchy. Domestic cattle and wild African elephants did so long ago; Homo sapiens is slow.*

Some of Duncan's pursuits were more arcane than others. In his last few years he studied the relative densities of margarine and Vegemite. The Vegemite is harder, he decided, and should be applied first to the bread. The margarine is softer and easier to spread on top of the Vegemite. Of course there is a certain degree of subjectivity in this finding. It depends on whether the bread is fresh or stale. The result may be open to challenge.

But that was not the case with the peppermints. Duncan discovered that if you strike two extra strong peppermints together in the dark they produce a green spark. Subsequently he issued overnight guests with peppermints and instructions as they were going to bed. <sup>v</sup>

It is hard to imagine any subject that Duncan would not find interesting (though he was impatient with psychology). He was a genuine sceptic, never afraid to question.

*The Calves and the Hen – A True Fable by Duncan Merrilees (1998)*

*There is just one chook in the yard here. She is about five years old; I am about seventy five. We are growing old together. At her advanced age she does not lay an egg very often, but when she does her glad triumphant cackling quite matches that of her exuberant youth.*

*So, when I went out the other day to collect the offering she was announcing, I was not surprised to see that a dozen or so half-grown calves and one or two cows were standing in a line along the chookyard fence gazing in awed surprise at what was to them a startling new phenomenon. They had only recently been let into the small paddock next to the chookyard, and had never before seen a chook, let alone an exhilarated one.*

*For a few minutes she paraded back and forth in front of this line of spectators,*

*cackling mightily, while heads turned first one way and then the other to follow her progress. But soon other calves and cows began to join the line. There was some pushing and pulling to fit them in, and one of the cows began to take exception to this noisy black specimen, with bright red trim, strutting around just in front of her nose.*

*The spectators began to move about. The bull began to exercise his protective and supervisory functions. The cows' hostile gestures became more obviously menacing. The chook began to be alarmed. Her cackling changed to distressed squawking. She began to run back and forth in her yard, as far away from the fence holding back the spectators as she could get. And, in response, the spectators themselves became more agitated. Tension mounted until, with one last despairing raucous shriek, the chook spread her wings, becoming twice her original size, and fled, half-running, half-flying with flapping black wings, into the chookhouse, where she sat cowering in the darkest corner.*

*That was altogether too much for the cattle. They too turned and fled in alarm, and their alarm spread instantaneously through the herd warning system to the cows who, until then, had been grazing unconcernedly while their offspring watched the chook show. All at once that paddock and others nearby became a confusion of galloping snorting cattle, and calm did not return for some minutes.*

*The chook lay concealed for half an hour before emerging very quietly.*

*MORAL: Some of the things which alarm us prove to be nothing but terrified chooks.*<sup>vi</sup>

Duncan had an explosive temper which he vented mainly on inanimate objects: trailer knobs, combustion engines, mechanical devices of all sorts. Eventually he did away with everything except hand tools, cutting his firewood with an axe and a bow saw.

In earlier years Elizabeth did her best to defuse rows and provide a broader, softer perspective. Duncan knew this. Writing to me about their separation he kept any anger or pain rigidly in check. It was the trained scientific mind turned to the subject of his own marriage. He listed his disappointments, but also described Elizabeth's strengths, such as her gift with people. *It has been she who has kept me in touch with the people round about; without her I'll hear nothing and know nothing unless I can change my ways pretty radically. All told, I'll have to make some changes in my life, an unwelcome need. You said a while ago that you don't like 'Encounter'. Neither do I, partly because it is dishonest in its bias, but partly because it forces me to review cherished ideas. Cherished practices might be even more*

*distasteful*

So he subscribed to *Encounter*, a reactionary English journal widely believed to be subsidised by the CIA, simply to challenge his own preconceptions. Perhaps he was not so ill-equipped, once Elizabeth left, to change his ways.

He set about the task with his customary thoroughness. He remembered names and asked after children. He wrote down the dates of birthdays and remembered to send a greeting. He got to know neighbours and people in shops. He learned enough Italian to welcome his grandson's new partner. He got the phone connected, learned the violin and formed a strings group. He was active in organisations ranging from the local Arts Council to the Bush Fire Brigade. He handed out how-to-vote cards for the Greens in his conservative timber-milling town. He was open about what he believed but always prepared to listen to another point of view. He made a place for himself and the community accepted him. He might have come with the hippies in the 1970s but, as one friend and neighbour put it, he looked after his fences and he stayed.

Duncan travelled interstate rarely and overseas only once, much earlier in his life. His one trip to Perth in his last decade was for Elizabeth's funeral. By the end, his life was a round of small chores and observations: firewood, the weather, the rain gauge, visits from animals. The rest of his day consisted of reading, writing, painting and, increasingly, gazing at the fire or dozing. At night he lit the stove (an hour-long ritual requiring nine different grades of kindling), cooked his dinner and gave the wind-up torch fifty slow turns.

Duncan enjoyed visitors when they came, but didn't greatly mind when they went away. He lived his round with great contentment. When asked, he said that he had done everything he had ever wanted to do. He had sent his snake skeletons to the Museum. His achievements were complete.

'Except,' he said, 'for sorting the *Musica Magica* scores for the library.'

Given the piles of paper of every description in every direction, this was a considerable understatement. Later he added, in a burst of candour, 'and I probably won't get around to that.'

What, in later years, became of Duncan's explosive temper? When they moved into full time farming, Elizabeth was concerned that he did not have the temperament to cope with cattle and sheep. But perhaps it was the animals that taught him patience. Thirty years later he would write: *for many years I had the privilege of caring for a small herd of cattle ... The privilege.*

The cattle were his day to day companions, along with chooks and sheep. He knew their idiosyncrasies. He spoke to them, always quietly, so that they would come when he called and let him move them from paddock to paddock. He toasted stale bread in the oven as a treat for the sheep. He had only to stand in the paddock and shake the paper bag for them to come running.

Towards the end of his life Duncan wrote about an earlier incident, the death of one of twin wethers, the last two sheep on the farm.

*... as soon as I began to drag the dead sheep on to the carry-all platform, even more as I began to drive away, the survivor erupted into what is best described as a frenzy. He set up a continuous bawling, and ran around the tractor and up and down. When, with difficulty, I had got through the gate and begun to drive away, he ran about inside the gate, looking through it, and bawling. I could still hear him long after I was out of sight.*

Another person might have left the dead sheep in the paddock. Duncan did not, but nor did he forget the experience.

Because he had no pets there was nothing to deter the native animals (not to mention the rats) from moving in closely with him. A family of Splendid Wrens took crumbs and hopped on to his hand. Geckoes hunted on the outside of the kitchen window at night. He knew them individually and observed them as keenly as he observed everything. When one dropped its tail, Duncan kept a log as the new tail grew and sent his observations off to a gecko expert. He spoke every day to four resident kangaroos so that they would come up to the fence with their joeys.

During his last summer a snake moved in. In the logbook he first noted its presence on 26 February. The following day it was sunning itself from 3 to 6pm, and the next day it had moved into the ferns at the northern end of the verandah. On 4 March he wrote: *Mainly sunny ... Snake seems definitely to have a neck. Now holed up under ramp.* The neck identified the visitor as a tiger snake rather than a dugite.

On 6 March he recorded: *Snake holed up under ramp again or still. He's very secretive, slides under cover as soon as aware of having been seen.*

Over the next few days Duncan noted the snake's basking habits and size (*girth now c.4cm diam*), but then did not see it again. On 13 March he concluded that it had gone, since its former basking places were sunlit but unoccupied. *So: snake Feb 26 – Mar 10, then moved camp.*

Would it have come when he called? I don't doubt that he spoke to it.

Suppose that Duncan, having reached the age of 87, did not wish to push his luck any further? Suppose that he organised a peaceful and painless way to end his life? Imagine that it happened like this ...

*For months, for more than a year, he and his daughter, when she is staying with him, talk about every aspect of death, from the metaphysical to the pragmatic. How might it be achieved? There are endless logistical complications. What if someone drops in? And what about the standing order for fresh bread every Thursday? The baker has been kind, and wraps the bread in tissue rather than plastic. It won't do to leave the bakery with two unpaid-for loaves at the end of the day. But if you cancel the order in advance won't it arouse suspicion?*

*Most worryingly of all, how will your companion fare after you have gone? You will be placing her in jeopardy. How can you protect her from prosecution? Clearly it will be safest to pass the death off as natural. Indeed a natural death will not be a surprise to the doctor.*

*But, despite all this thought, Duncan and his daughter fail to see that to conceal the manner of his death will be to create yet another secret or, rather, a reverberating chain of secrets. The daughter will have to lie, and so will her partner and sister, even to the people nearest to them, loved and respected friends, family and neighbours. Such lies and secrets make holes in the social fabric.*

*The anxious talking goes on and on. Has he considered every eventuality? Has he rehearsed every step? One day, exhausted by logistics and emotion, the daughter protests: 'I don't know! I don't know who I'll ring up once you're dead.' And in desperation: 'I've never done this before.'*

*At that they laugh. The whole idea is absurd. Too big. Too forbidden. Too everything. But shouldn't it be too ordinary to warrant all this angst? We are animals. We die.*

*Duncan's family gathers for a bonfire under a cloudy full moon and he totters down the paddock to supervise and to deliver an incantation. He drew this composition, he explains airily, from here and there: his time with the Sea Scouts, his memory of Latin orations ...*

*As the flames leap upward, so let our aims ...*

*As their light dispels the darkness, so let our understanding ...*

*As the flames die down, so let our peaceful old age.*

*After the visitors leave, Duncan is uncharacteristically withdrawn for a day, but then emerges in the evening most cheerfully to eat dinner and play Scrabble.*

*This bedtime is his chosen hour.*

*But his first attempt at ending his life does not work. His old body is propped up in bed, still alive. Physically he is unharmed, but how must he feel? His daughter wants to cry, but he depends on her to be matter-of-fact. She tucks him in with a hotty. They will talk about it again in the morning.*

*Duncan is not defeated. He and his daughter talk it all through again. The next day, a wild September afternoon with lashing rain and gale force winds, Duncan decides to try again. He has been reading in his armchair beside the fire, but abandons his book on the Bayeux tapestry ('interesting but light-weight, not worth finishing') Since it is Thursday, his daughter's partner drives heroically into town to get the bread, risking trees across the road and a farm track flowing like a creek. But then, rattled, she leaves the bread on the counter after all, and doesn't realise till she is nearly home. Duncan smiles benignly and says that bacon and eggs, cooked exactly so, will do instead of fresh bread and vegemite. He follows that with chocolate biscuits and brandy.*

*As night falls, he and his daughter light the candles. They wish each other loving but nervous farewells, not at all sure that this will work, not quite believing ...*

*'Good luck.'*

*'And you.'*

*And then, propped in his armchair with his daughter holding his hand, he ends his life.*

*Suppose that he dies with his eyes open, in every meaning of the phrase? As those eyes lose their focus he turns his head slightly to one side, towards the blurry light of the candles. Lastly he turns again to the fading glow of the fire, his companion of thirty years.*

It couldn't have happened like that. The daughter and even her partner would have been liable to prosecution.

But Duncan did die peacefully in front of the fire. We buried him the next week in the local cemetery, alongside many good neighbours. It wasn't the vegetable garden, Duncan's preference, but it was better than cremation. This way he can be dug up in time and his bones given to the Museum.

I wanted to run up and down bawling like the old wether and sometimes I did. But meanwhile, in the restrained way of our culture, we had a celebration, secular of course. We made a memento: a photo of Duncan with his sheep and an extract from the *Rubaiyat*, which

we found, handwritten, clipped to his will:

*While the rose blows along the river brink  
With old Khayyam the ruby vintage drink  
And when the Angel with his darker draught  
Draws up to thee – take that, and do not shrink.*<sup>vii</sup>

The wind has been with me all day, whispering and gurgling. A deeper background sound is the branches moving in the tall trees, interrupted occasionally by the impossibly sweet trill of a bird.

There is nothing else to hear in Duncan's house, no traffic, no humming appliances, no television. The last voice I heard was at midday when I wound up the radio and listened to the news and the four-day forecast. Tonight, besides the wind, and the scratching of the pencil on the paper, I can hear the crackle of the kitchen stove, an occasional explosion of sap or damp wood, the murmur of the kettles. I can hear all this, and so vividly, because I am wearing my father's hearing aids.

I have inherited other riches. I know how to light a fire. At present I don't use more than two or three grades of kindling, but I expect to expand that number in time. And I see that there is no need to be afraid. In particular, there is no need to be afraid of ideas, not even the biggest and wildest ones.

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<sup>i</sup> Lewis Carroll *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, Puffin 1946 (1865)

<sup>ii</sup> *The West Australian*, 29 June 1978.

<sup>iii</sup> *How Old is Old?*, Highly Commended, Eric Rolls Prize for Natural History Writing 2010

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<sup>iv</sup> Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence*, Bloomsbury 1996.

<sup>v</sup> In an extraordinary instance of synchronicity this experiment was written up, I think in *The New Scientist*, shortly afterwards. Someone in England had made the same discovery. We knew, however, who should really have the credit.

<sup>vi</sup> *The Calves and the Hen – A True Fable* 1998

<sup>vii</sup> Edward Fitzgerald (trans) *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, Collins 1973 (1859)