

Unlike your husband

right, and your relationship with him until death do you part. Which is more than you can say for husbands (whatever they may have promised to the contrary during the marriage ceremony), lovers, children and even friends. Faced with this list of virtues, cat people tend to counter with the admirable independence of cats, their fastidiousness, tact, and the capacity for affection which (they claim) lies just beneath the surface of the feline nature. Here comes a confession: I have been a cat

you're a dog owner you know them already; if not, you really don't want to). Rather like parents who think their offspring can do no wrong, and look on fondly as they race around a park assaulting other children and stealing their sandwiches, Hanson is convinced that anyone who doesn't share her passion is at best unnatural, at worst a brute. (Mind you, in the case of the cyclist who ran over her dog and refused to apologise

— he turned out, unsurprisingly, to be a lawyer — she has a point.) In her introduction, she admits that the world of dog ownership is one of 'charm and conviviality, but also vibrant with tensions and hatreds', but that doesn't quite prepare you for the seething emotion that she brings to

finishes Michele off). Appropriately, there is something quite dog-like about this book: it is chaotic, enthusiastic, affectionate and sloppy. And it has the attention span of a particularly dizzy setter — for ever chasing off in pursuit of one thing, then getting distracted and ending up somewhere else. If you're a dog person, you will find this completely adorable.

No skeletons in a purple Versa

MANY exotic specimens burst into bloom in the Sixties, but few did so with quite the flamboyance of Sir Roy Strong.

Towards the beginning of this memoir, there's a photo of him taken in 1953. He looks like a particularly gloomy bank clerk, his mouth turned down, his hair neatly parted, his eyes magnified by a pair of unwieldy National Health specs.

But 15 years later, something extraordinary has happened. His hair has got longer — much longer — he has a silk scarf round his neck, a moustache like an enormous droopy caterpillar and his old National Health specs have been replaced by trendy granny glasses.

As Strong puts it, the first photograph was taken 'in the years before I discovered that I was photogenic and became the subject of every photographer from Cecil Beaton to Bill Brandt'.

You might reasonably assume from this last sentence that Strong is not a man laid low by false modesty — or indeed any modesty — and to some extent you'd be right. But he's also a much more contradictory character than this might suggest.

On the one hand, he suffers from an irresistible compulsion to bang on about his achievements — there are three references in the first eight pages to the fact that he became Director of the National Portrait Gallery aged just 31 — but, on the other, it's plain that this apparent bumptiousness hides deep wells of insecurity.

As long-time Strong watchers will know, he has already documented quite a lot of his life in his rivetingly bitchy Roy Strong Diaries.

This book covers his early years and is aimed at anyone who, as

MEMOIR
SELF-PORTRAIT
AS A YOUNG MAN
by Roy Strong
(Bodleian Library £25 ~~£20~~)
JOHN PRESTON

Strong puts it, has been wondering: 'Who is this young lion and whence did he spring?'

He actually sprang from the far-from-exotic locale of Enfield in North London, where his father (whom he loathed) sold hats and his mother (whom he adored) struggled to keep the family together.

Strong had two brothers. One, Derek, was decent and hard-working, while the other, Brian, was a colossal handful — 'a running sore in my life'.

Violent as a child, Brian became a sponger, a bankrupt and a drug-smuggler before, Strong notes with an almost audible sigh of relief, 'he at last died in 1967'.

Although life at the Strong's may not have been unbroken misery, it wasn't far off. His father was a bully, there was next to no money — and then there was the decor to which Strong, even as a boy, was particularly sensitive. He writes, shudderingly, of a 'three-piece suite in uncut moquette in an unutterable shade of red'.

He was, however, a very clever child and it soon became clear that Enfield couldn't hold him for long. At grammar school, by his own account, Strong excelled — 'I was a star', he says simply.

He then went on to the University of London to read history, specialising in the Renaissance.

But while the young lion was starting to wag his tail, he was also coming to terms with his sexual ambiguity. If he'd been born ten years later, Strong suspects, he would have lived the life of an openly gay man.

As it was, he kept himself tightly bottled up, appalled by the few glimpses he'd had of the gay world — 'it was not a world I wished to enter', he said.

At the same time, 'I was also hugely attracted to women' and he yearned for 'the stability of an old-fashioned Christian marriage'.

When Strong joined the National Portrait Gallery as an Assistant Keeper in 1959, he was entering a place that still had both feet firmly planted in the 19th century.

The secretaries were recruited from The Lady, with the thickness of the writing paper on which their applications were written being carefully scrutinised to make sure they were posh enough to work for the tiny salaries on offer.

At 11 o'clock each morning, they were all required to drink a glass of warm milk as the Director thought they looked 'peaky'.

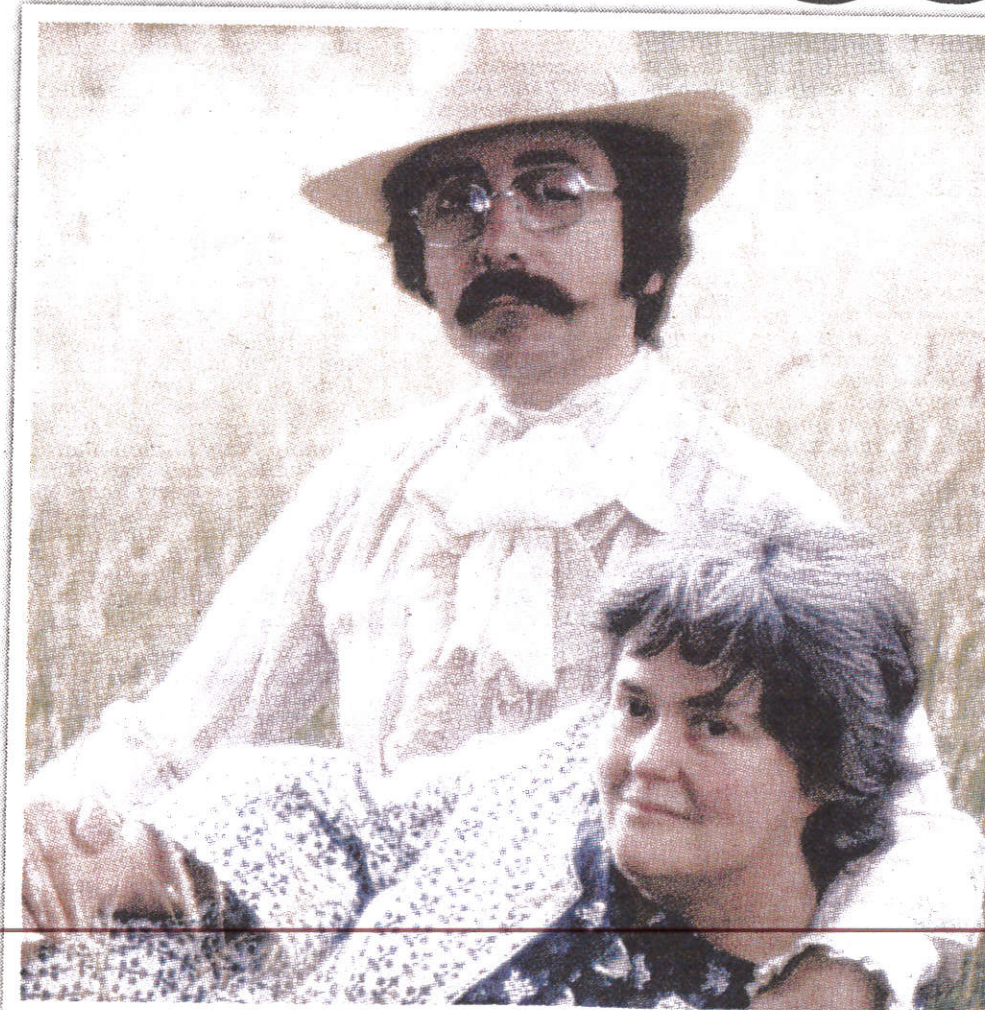
From the start, Strong was determined to stir things up — especially the way in which exhibitions were presented. This, not surprisingly, ensured that he made plenty of enemies.

When he was made Director of the NPG in 1967 — aged just 31, remember — Sir Harold Nicolson peered disdainfully at him, said, 'We never appointed you', then turned promptly on his heel.

Although this memoir concentrates on Strong's early years, there are several digressions along the way, one of which takes in his friendship with the fashion designer Gianni Versace. As well

£10
The cost of a ticket to tour Roy Strong's garden, The Laskett

Roy's closet (just once dressing gown)



Strong marriage: Roy and his wife Julia relaxing in their beloved Herefordshire garden.

as being close friends, Versace took a keen interest in Strong's wardrobe, regularly sending him items of clothing.

'He always saw me in purple for some reason, his last present being a floor-length dressing gown in thick purple silk,'

Strong writes. 'Often when I am on my own I have my bath and descend wearing it for the evening, remembering him.'

Versace confided in Strong that he was 'trying to educate Elton John' — clearly implying he found it an uphill struggle.

At the start of the book, Strong writes that if an autobiography is to be any good, it must involve 'quite painful and honest disclosure'. Yet while there are certainly moments of frankness here, there are others when the veil of discretion drops down

IF YOU LIKE THIS WHY NOT TRY...

PATRICK LEIGH FERMOR: AN ADVENTURE
by Artemis Cooper
(John Murray £25)
AS A BOY, Paddy

failed every exam and was expelled from every school. Yet his charm and good looks made him friends worldwide and he achieved fame: as an war hero and a brilliant travel writer. As this fascinating biography reveals, he was also a champion sponger, constantly borrowing money and forgetting to pay it back.

rather more sharply than you might expect.

He writes that his mother and his wife, Julia Trevelyan Oman, fell out — but doesn't say why.

He also writes warmly of two lesbian friends, then notes baldly: 'Unfortunately, Julia found them repulsive, so that friendship went more or less into abeyance when we married.'

Despite this, there is much to enjoy here — some sharp self-analysis, some even sharper analysis of others and plenty of good stories.

His wife, whom he clearly loved deeply, died in 2003.

But while Strong was devastated by her death, characteristically he did not plunge into self-pity.

Aged 77, he's still as exotic as ever, still obsessed by fashion, still 'descending' after his evening bath in his purple Versace dressing gown.

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BBC Radio 2 Audience Award.
oliverawards.com

Strong stuff to delight

Christopher Gray on a gripping account of Roy Strong's rise from weird beginnings

Is he gay or isn't he? The endearingly camp manner adopted by Sir Roy Strong during the many years of his great fame have naturally led a curious public to question his sexual identity. Midway through this hugely enjoyable book, he finally outs himself — well almost.

"If I had been born in 1945 and not in 1935 I should probably have lived the life of a gay man," he writes, "in a society which by 1980 accepted such orientation." Then comes the 'but' you suspect might be on the way: "I was also hugely attracted to women and I knew that, if I found the right person, I would like the stability of an old-fashioned Christian marriage."

Of course, he *did* find the right person in the stage designer Julia Trevelyan Oman. Their 32 years of happiness together (she died of cancer in 2003) supplied a running theme in *The Roy Strong Diaries* (1997). He regards these as having provided a satisfactory, if

REVIEW

Self-Portrait as a Young Man

■ By Roy Strong
■ Bodleian, £25

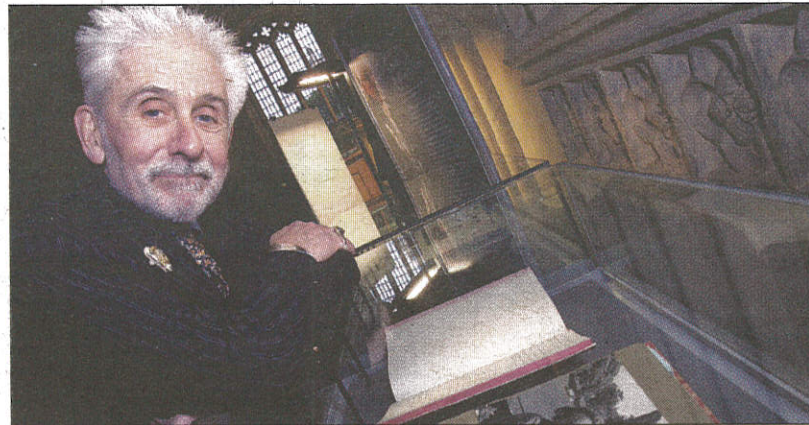
Art historian looks back on his odd upbringing with candour and wit



incomplete, account of his later life, with the volume under review giving a picture of his formative years. He considered it necessary to offer such a record to place into context his lifetime archive of papers that will pass on his death to the Bodleian Library.

Thank heavens for the bequest! one must think, for what a really marvellous book we have in consequence — gripping, painfully honest and often hugely funny, despite the seriousness of its theme.

Essentially, it is an escape story, showing how a brilliant youngster broke free from a seriously weird family (only through death, in the cases of both his clingy, emotionally needy mum and criminal elder brother) to make his way as an art



Life story: Roy Strong, who has given his papers to the Bodleian Library

historian, gallery curator and, among much else, arbiter of fashion. His was a rise, he says, peculiarly of its time, exploiting a window of educational opportunity to lower-middle-class lads such as himself that was closed by the switch to comprehensive schooling. In a revealing detail concerning the snobbery of those days he tells how the occupation of his mean commercial traveller father ("never a penny of pocket money, ever") was changed to 'businessman' on

the advice of a mentor when he applied (successfully) for a job at the National Portrait Gallery.

The book's level of wit can be judged from the priceless account of exhibition organiser Dicky Buckle seeking Lord Harewood's help over items for display: "And you can tell your cousin from me — I want those jewels!" The cousin was the Queen.

Sir Roy's appearance at the Oxford Literary Festival with old friend Brian Sewell is already sold out. But this book isn't. Buy it.

BOOK-IN

Events for bookv

Today

Talk and signing
■ 7pm, Blackwell's, Street, Oxford
■ 01865 333623
Richard Watson on *The Future: 50 Ideas You Need to Know*. Tickets from customer service

■ 1pm, Oxford Hub, Street, Oxford
■ 07900 227 200

Armenian author Arman Ohanian reads from his novel *The Apple Tree Blossoms in the Fall*. Oxford International Women's Festival.

Saturday

Comics day

■ Noon, Waterstone Broad Street, Oxford
■ 01865 790212
Phoenix Comic team celebrate World Book

Tuesday

Poetry reading

■ 7pm, Woodstock Bookshop
■ 01993 812760
Fiona Sampson reads her new collection, *C*. Tickets, £5, must be booked. info@woodsbookshop.co.uk

LOCAL AUTHOR

Charles Kingsley was a Cambridge man, and not a local author. But this edition of *The Water-Babies* (Oxford, £12.99)

about a boy chimney sweep



He's famous the world over as the flamboyant director of the V&A. But in his painfully honest memoir, Roy Strong reveals his humble beginnings – blighted by a cruel father he hated... and the violently deranged brother who took a knife to him

How I fled the curse of my AWFUL family

By **SIR ROY STRONG**

I wrote these words on the death of my brother, Brian, part of a private obituary to reconcile myself with a terrible story: 'Why is it that everything to do with the Strong family always had to be so unutterably awful, so humiliating, so haunting?

'Why aren't there those normal relationships of love and joy? My last memory of him was of virtually drawing a knife on me in the kitchen. He persecuted me. I have the letters, ones from someone mentally unbalanced, deranged.

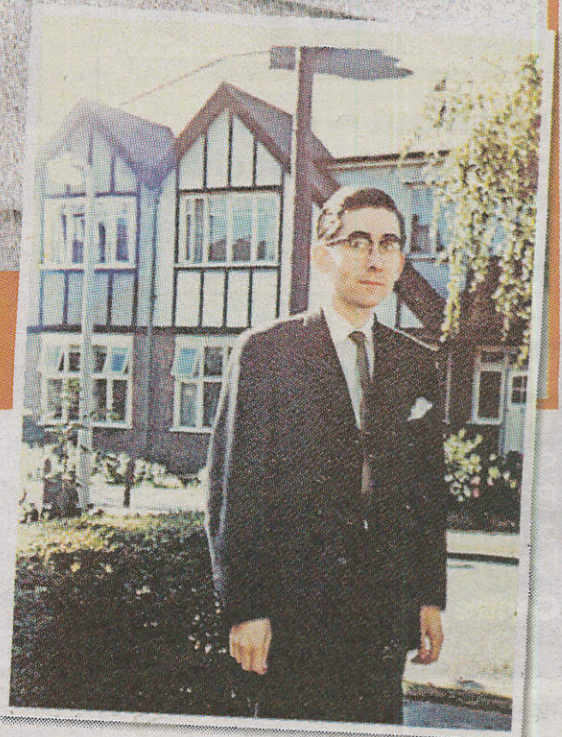
'And then he started to ring me up, threatening – ring and ring and ring – it was

terrible. We changed the telephone number. Even at my apogee there was always this dark figure hovering, waiting to pounce, grinding, relentless, bent. Looking back, the whole of my life has been fleeing that family, struggling to detach myself, get as far away as possible and make a life and home full of the old-fashioned virtues I was never surrounded with as a child.'

There is a studio photograph of me aged 18 months. I do not look happy. This was me in 1937, the year of the coronation of George

VI, a troubled infant staring out at what was already a troubled world heading fast towards cataclysm. This is the infant who was to be Director of the National Portrait Gallery at 31 and of the Victoria and Albert Museum at 38.

The beginnings were not, however, propitious. My father George Strong was the son of a composer. His job after the First World War was to travel the South Coast selling men's and ladies' hats for Ayres & Smith, situated in Lexington Street, Soho.



'YOUNG FOGGY': Roy Strong outside his family home in 1955 and, main picture, in the early Seventies

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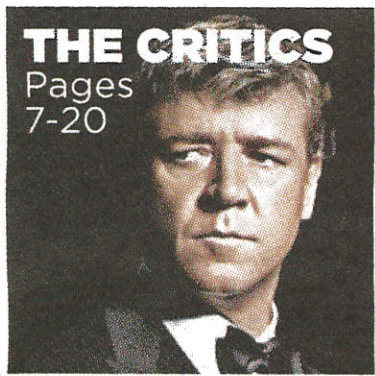
REVIEW

The Mail

ON SUNDAY

THE CRITICS

Pages
7-20



Broken beyond repair
Russell Crowe's thriller *Broken City* is a mind-boggling mess
Pages 12-13

HEALTH

Pages
21-27



The mole hunters...

All you need to know about those often-annoying blemishes - and how to get rid of them
Page 25

PROPERTY

Pages 28-31



Splash out - on a converted Baptist church

Fascinating home about to star on TV could be yours for £425k
Page 29

BRAIN WORKOUT

Sudokus, *Bare Bones* and all your other favourite brain teasers
Centre pages

Plus PUB QUIZ
Page 6

My brother was a running sore in my life - until the day that he died

» From Page 1

Every man and woman wore a hat at this period. At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, his world collapsed. His employer's firm was turned over to making military headgear and his income was reduced to £5 a week, out of which he was expected to keep a family of five, besides paying the household bills and the mortgage. Something must have snapped, for in effect he nose-dived into poverty.

I was never to know the successful younger man, only someone who had shrunk back into himself. And when peace came, the old days never returned.

In those years and into the decades after 1945, the pattern of my father's life never changed. Each morning he would leave our Twenties terraced house in Winchmore Hill, North London, at 8am on the dot, carrying a cardboard box containing his Ayres & Smith samples. His return to Winchmore Hill, North London, always signalled the descent of a pall over the house.

Having hung up his hat and coat he would go upstairs and put on slippers and a pink woollen dressing gown, which he wore until it was in rags. A bottle of whisky was secreted under the stairs, more often than not his first port of call.

Then he would take up a commanding position in the sitting room on an upright armchair. In the bay was his bureau, with the flap down; on this sat the radio, over which he had control. There, he would sit, sipping, smoking and progressively nodding off.

He became a hypochondriac. Year after year, he would inform us that he would never survive the winter, lamenting: 'I'll never make old bones.' Needless to say, he died in his 90th year. Whenever it took his fancy, he would go to bed, announcing he was ill. Up and down the stairs my mother toiled, in response to his every whim.

My mother Mabel always



FAMILY AT WAR: George Strong in the Twenties and Roy, far right, with his brothers Derek and Brian in 1938

referred to him as 'your father'; when addressing her, he invariably referred to 'your children', as though he had had nothing to do with the creative process.

Father never read a book. Indeed, there were no books in the house apart from some kind of medical dictionary, which only convinced him that he had everything in it, and a multi-volume series on how to be successful in life, which he patently had not been.

He had no concept of being a parent, no interest in what happened to me or my elder brothers, Derek and Brian. I recall the devastating effect on me when, with a good school report, I pressed it open proudly into his hands so that he could read it. It was immediately slammed shut

and pushed back into my face. Father died in 1984 and, at the time, I wrote: 'For a time, I hated him. I use that word deliberately. As I grew up, I suddenly saw him for what he was, and for what he had done to my mother and to all of us. I hated him for that.'

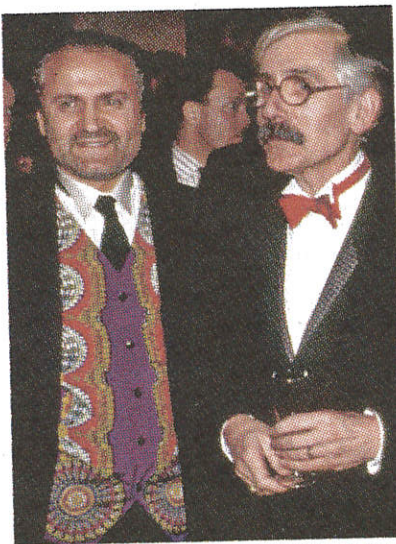
By the early Forties, my parents were two people yoked together in unending unhappiness. Every evening, my mother's role was to see that his supper was ready on the dot. Father ate at the kitchen table as my mother ministered to him. Once he was settled, she returned to the communal living room.

From time to time, the air would be rent with a shout of 'Mabel! Mabel!' as though he had been struck by lightning. Out she would rush to find that she had

failed to put the mustard on the table. He was never kind to her. Life for her must at times have resembled a life sentence and one of my most vivid memories was of her sitting alone in the kitchen, weeping.

Money was unbelievably tight. My mother scraped by thanks to a succession of piteously paid jobs. The first was assisting in a postal lending library; after the war for a time she collected money from those who bought on long-term credit.

I still have the toy theatres I treasured during those years, the Adelphi and the Britannia, together with boxes of scenery and cut-out figures of several plays. Through them, I was able to relive the Regency and Victorian theatre with its spectacle



Strolling arm-in-arm

A shelf on my bookcase is reserved for the great Italian couturier Gianni Versace, pictured with me left. The books are filled with such electrifying juxtapositions as a Jacobean portrait of a lady in a ruff opposite a muscular hunk in Gianni's Milan home.

They establish at once that this was a complex human being, a man of contradictions who adored neoclassicism as much as what he called il mondo del pop. We were drawn to each other by a

mutual sympathy, quiet and unspoken. When he was murdered by a gay serial killer outside his Miami mansion on July 15, 1997, I lost a precious and private friend.

On my first visit to his villa on Lake Como, Gianni took me to his shop on the Via Spiga. My eye fell on a crumpled brown silk suit, the acme of style. I tried it on and, for a moment, hesitated before asking Gianni whether or not I could carry it off. In that beguiling Italian English,



ROY STRONG / CAMERA PRESS

BRIGHT LAD: A self-portrait by Roy aged 11

HISTORY MAN: Sir Roy dressed as an Elizabethan gent for a photoshoot in 2010

and melodrama. Looking back, I bless the bliss of those hours spent with 'penny plain, tuppence coloured' printed sheets.

They were an escape to a world away from the unutterable greyness of the era. It was a world of

heroes and villains, of sunlit, dreamy landscapes, Italianate palaces, glittering grottoes and amazing fairytale epiphanies. Inevitably it led to a fascination with the history of the theatre.

Derek, my eldest brother, gained

entry to a grammar school, Latymer, in Edmonton, North London.

Most of his life was swallowed up by the Army Cadet Force and then National Service. My father arranged a job for him at Barclays Bank.

He was to marry happily, have children and grandchildren and indeed create a family life of the type which had been missing from his parents' home.

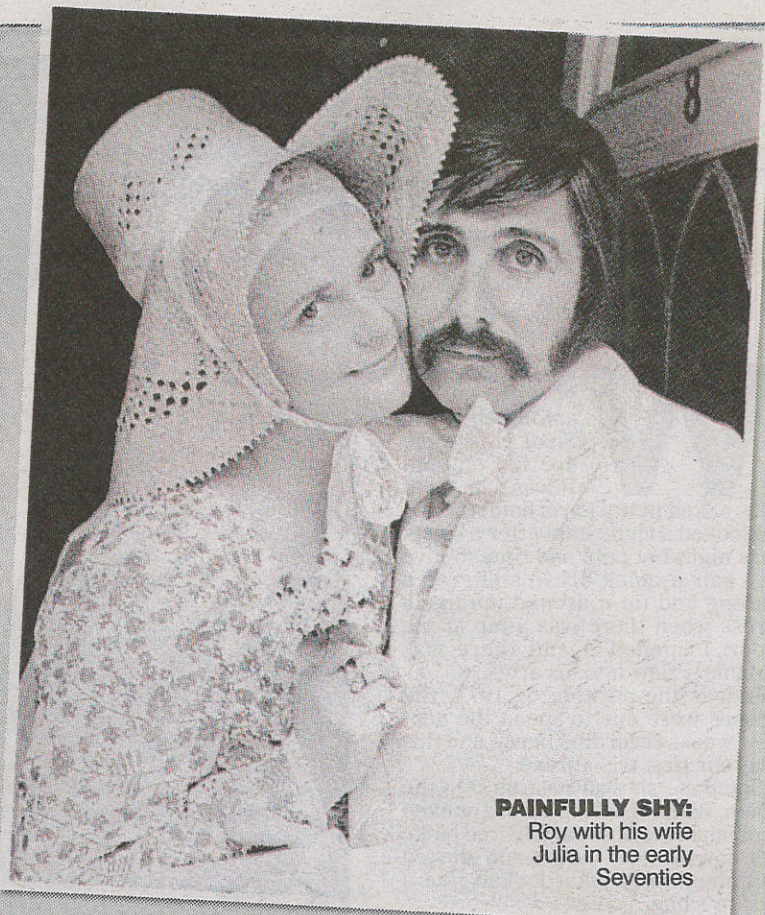
Brian's life was to be a very different one. Barely a couple of years my senior, he was to fail the 11-Plus and proceed from secondary school to technical college. My mother wanted him to resist the examination but he physically prevented her from going to see the head teacher. He was later bitterly to regret that action, which prefaced a life of deceit and brought misery on the family.

Brian was to be a running sore in my life until in August 1997 he at last died. I once again put pen to paper: 'It was like a weight, a curse, a threat taken away from me. There was nothing I could do and I felt nothing, just that a chapter was finally closed.'

'Brian was sporty with hair tinged red. But he was violent even as a child. He was never disciplined or controlled. He exerted brute force. He was secretive and, worse, a compulsive liar. But he was bright. He needed a man to control him but my father opted out. Mother always caved in.'

'Over the years, everything went from the house to bail him out until it was virtually emptied - even her engagement ring and a second mortgage. Everything for Brian was a quick fix, car dealing and God knows what else. There were at least two jail sentences and he was extradited from the US for attempting to smuggle drugs. His marriage was a disaster.'

'He even induced me to obtaining a bank loan to bail him out. Eventually I found out that the allowance I made to my mother was taken by him and so I redirected it via Derek ... He returned to our house



PAINFULLY SHY: Roy with his wife Julia in the early Seventies

If I'd been born 10 years later I might have lived my life as a gay man...

I was not only cripplingly shy but aware that sexually I was ambiguous. Prosecution of homosexuals as criminals reached a peak with the famous cases of Sir John Gielgud in 1953 and Lord Montagu of Beaulieu the following year.

It is difficult to communicate to a generation where everything can be - and is - said and done what it was like to come to sexual maturity in the middle of the Fifties.

If I had been born in 1945 and not in 1935, I should probably have lived the life of a gay man in a society which by 1980 accepted such orientation.

An old friend of mine, Brian Sewell, took a very different path in life from the one I chose.

For that I respect him, for he too could, he admits, have married. In the Fifties, any mention of such a tendency was then unthinkable and even if I had faced up to it, I would not have known what to do about it. At 20 I was bottled up and inhibited.

There was a homosexual side to me, that much I knew; but whenever, later, I had glimpses into that world I knew that I did not wish to enter it.

There was another side to me: emotionally and intellectually I was also hugely attracted to women and I knew that, if I found the right person, I would like the stability of an old-fashioned Christian marriage. I

was 24 when I entered the National Portrait Gallery, an age by which many men are not only married, but fathers.

Twice I seriously considered asking two very different women to marry me, but I fell back on contemplating the social gulf between their families and my own.

But in the long run I was to be a very lucky man when, in 1971, I eloped with the designer Julia Trevelyan Oman - an elopement arranged by my friend and confessor, Father Gerard Irvine.

Our marriage that same year precipitated the break with my mother who, rejecting Julia, created a slow death in our relationship.

By then, Julia had soared to stardom as the designer of Jonathan Miller's famous television production of *Alice In Wonderland* which won her the Designer Of The Year award, and she had gone on from there to work with Tony Richardson, Alan Bennett and Patrick Garland.

The attraction between us was instant but totally divorced from what one thinks of as London of that time, the world of David Bailey and Blow-Up. Both of us, beneath it all, were shy people born out of context and there followed a gentle, old-fashioned courtship until, at last, I plucked up courage and proposed to her in St James's Park.

She died, to my anguish, in 2003.

with Gianni Versace

he said: 'You can wear anything. In this you look like an old colonial planter.'

Not long after that I appeared in a film on the great Victorian photographer Henry Fox Talbot. I needed that iconic 007 garment, a white suit. Gianni promptly obliged and it was flown in from Italy overnight.

The Miami phase of Gianni's life always puzzled me. More than once he castigated Americans as ignorant, uneducated peasants, but then he suddenly fell in love with

Miami. By then Elton John had entered his life: 'I am trying to educate him,' Gianni would say.

I could not bring myself to go either to the funeral or to the requiem Mass in Milan Cathedral, which had all the pizzazz of Princess Diana, Elton and Sting.

That was the side of Gianni with which I didn't particularly empathise. I had known the private man, the man who had once told me that he hated being touched but who put his arm through mine as we once strolled by Lake Como.

Turn to Page 6 >>

Everyone will want to take part in our mind-stretching Pub Quiz, so settle down with the family and test your knowledge - just for fun! Answers are below.

1 MOVIES Road To Singapore was the first in a series with which two leading men?

2 MUSIC American inventor Robert Moog was associated with which instrument?

3 TV Who hosted Wheel Of Fortune from 1988-96?

4 SPORT Which darts-based TV programme featured Jim Bowen in the Eighties and early Nineties?

5 HISTORY Which Sudan city was redesigned by Kitchener in 1899 to look like the Union Jack?

6 SCIENCE Which element has the same name as Superman's home planet?

7 LITERATURE Which novel by David Mitchell was adapted into a film starring Halle Berry?

PUB QUIZ

8 CELEBRITIES Zoëy Deschanel played Trillian in which British sci-fi comedy?

9 WORDS Uncinate describes which characteristic? a) Bluish, b) Hairy, c) A hooked shape.

10 POT LUCK What is the name by which singer/songwriter Robert Zimmerman, born in 1941, is better known?

ANSWERS 1 Bing Crosby and Bob Hope, 2 Synthesiser, 3 Nicky Campbell, 4 Bulseye, 5 Khartoum, 6 Krypton, 7 Cloud Atlas, 8 The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy, 9 C, 10 Bob Dylan.

Snubbed - and thought 'a bore'

» From Page 3

at 23 Colne Road, and as long as he was there, I never went again. It was so terrible that I never did see my mother for the last seven years of her life. That too haunts my inner recesses but even she, in the end, was corrupted by him ...'

As my star rose, Brian's plummeted of his own making, and in 1977 proceedings were brought against him for bankruptcy. This was followed by a warrant for his arrest for contempt of court. It was then that his pursuance of me entered its darkest and unbalanced phase with a stream of letters claiming that I owed him money for everything from arranging for me to go on to sixth-form to coping with my mother on the day I told her that I had married my wife.

Much, I know, was concealed from me, including a civil court action in 1985 involving a woman with whom he lived - which he lost.

Derek telephoned me in March 1990 to say my mother had been taken into Enfield Hospital and that I should come quickly. I dropped everything. The phone rang again and I was told that it was too late.

My mother's will was quite specific: That the house was to be sold and the proceeds split equally between her three sons. I had made it clear that I did not want a penny.

By then Derek and I had already gone through two mortgages to bail out Brian. It was clear that he would not move out of the house and that if we made any attempt to send in the bailiffs he would go to the papers claiming that I had thrown him on to the streets.

It was my saintly brother Derek who dealt with all of this, resulting in an accommodation that Brian should stay in the house until his demise. He died intestate and, once again, Derek cleared up the mess.

Having passed my A-levels in the summer of 1953, I took up my place to read history at Queen Mary College, University of London. It was only upon arrival that I was to realise the yawning gap between those who had been born into an educated family and those who had not.

One of my earliest encounters on reaching the university was with a girl who cross-examined me as to which public school I had attended and to which London club my father belonged. My negative replies meant that I was immediately cut.

The years of my degree and post-graduate studies were years of unremitting slog. I knew that any failure would bring to an abrupt end what I aimed to achieve.

Most of the other thrusting meritocrats seemed to be Left-wing ideologists, thrilled by John Osborne's Look Back In Anger, marching in favour of nuclear disarmament. In sharp contrast, I was a committed Royalist; an Oxford Movement Christian; a lover of Old England, its great houses, churches and landscape; in short, a prototype of the later Young Fogey, conservative by instinct and not at all an Angry Young Man.

And so, I was to join that most conservative and old-fashioned of all the national collections, the National Portrait Gallery, in September 1959, as an Assistant Keeper on a salary of just over £700 per annum [£12,900 today].

Shortly after I arrived, I was exhumed from the basement to be presented to the trustees, like some exotic specimen. As I was steered

towards Sir Harold Nicolson, diplomat, politician and writer, as well as husband of Vita Sackville-West, he just looked at me and said: 'We never appointed you,' and turned his back on me.

That incident still rattles around in my mind: a sense of social rejection.

It somehow came back to me that I was considered a humourless bore. It came as quite a shock. I therefore deliberately set out to transform myself, if not into a delight at least into an amusing companion at table.

By 1964, I was in demand as an exhibition organiser and then, in 1966, came the news that this relatively unknown, bespectacled young man had become the National Portrait Gallery's new Director.

Ahead of me lay more than 20 years directing and changing two of the nation's greatest institutions, for the V&A came my way in 1974, when I was 38. In the case of the National Portrait Gallery, my challenge involved re-presenting the public galleries, giving status to photography, establishing an education programme and persuading the trustees to agree to collect portraits of living sitters.

In the case of the V&A, it was to be a bloodier saga involving getting the museum out of Government hands by Act of Parliament. And beyond stretched yet more, a life as a writer, diarist and gardener.

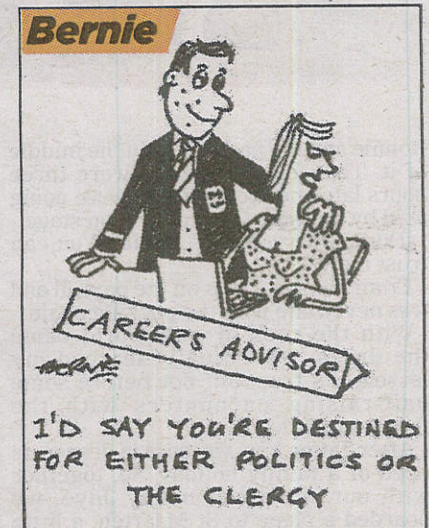
Without the 1944 Education Act, which put in place what was in fact a social revolution, none of this would have happened. Luck also came into being the right person in the right place at the right time.

Although I was to have powerful allies, all of it was achieved by someone who was devoid of any connection that brought advantage through either wealth or family. Aspiration, determination and relentless application were there in abundance.

Several of the virtues we were brought up on - duty, patriotic pride, obedience, service to others, living within one's means and competitiveness - have vanished.

But when friends of my generation start bemoaning the new generation - O tempora! O mores! - [Oh the times! Oh the customs] I always reply: 'No, it wasn't better then; it was just different.'

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Roy Strong: Self-Portrait As A Young Man, by Roy Strong, is published by The Bodleian Library, priced £25. To order your copy at £20 with free p&p, call the Mail Book Shop on 0844 472 4157 or visit mailbookshop.co.uk



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Books

Preview of the literary year

Melissa Katsoulis surveys another busy year ahead in the world of books

JANUARY A New Year's resolution to read more books should be a pleasure to keep, but what if you found yourself promising to do one good deed every day for 365 days? Find out how the memoirist Judith O'Reilly managed it in *A Year of Doing Good* (Viking). Even more inspiring is *Bend, Not Break* by Ping Fu (Portfolio), the story of a Chinese girl who began life in a labour camp and ended up the only ethnic minority female CEO of a Fortune 500 company.

Allen Lane presents a new approach to war history in the shape of *Engineers of Victory: The Problem Solvers who Turned the Tide in the Second World War* by Paul Kennedy, full of detailed insights into the work of the strategists, engineers and even businessmen who led us to victory with such silly sounding but deadly inventions as "the hedgehog" – a particularly nasty grenade launcher.

This year marks the 200th birthday of *Pride and Prejudice*, a book that age may never wither. Of the several publications brought out in honour of this anniversary, the one not to miss is *The Real Jane Austen* by acclaimed biographer Paula Byrne (HarperPress). A less happy anniversary, too, this year: it's half a century since Sylvia Plath committed suicide. Andrew Wilson's biography *Mad Girl's Love Song* (Simon & Schuster) focuses, unusually for studies of Mrs Ted Hughes, on her childhood and teenage years.

Then there's the massive underground hit *Wool* by Hugh Howey (Century) which has gone from self-published cult success to a massive US bestseller, and soon to be the next Ridley Scott film project. Just don't read it in the dark...

FEBRUARY Delving deeper into the secrets and illusions of consciousness is a new publication by the great John Gray, *The Silence of Animals: On Progress and Other Modern Myths* (Allen Lane), which promises to be a chilling sequel to his bestselling *Straw Dogs*, looking at the ways storytelling and art both obscure and reveal our animal selves. There's always room for a new history of the First Afghan War, especially from a writer as able as William Dalrymple, whose *Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan* is to be published by Bloomsbury. Music lovers will relish two new biographies of *Benjamin Britten*, by Paul Kildea (Allen Lane) and Neil Powell (Hutchinson), brought out to coincide with the centenary of Britten's birth.

It's a strong month for fiction, too, with fans of literary Americana well served. Dave Eggers presents *A Hologram for the King* (Hamish Hamilton), the story of an unravelling businessman in the Middle East against a backdrop of global recession. And 4th Estate has a remarkable trick up its sleeve with the publication of a recently discovered novel by the folk singer Woody Guthrie: *House of Earth* promises dustbowl drama told in a unique voice.

MARCH This month brings Eric Hobsbawm's final book, *Fractured Times: Culture and Society in the 20th Century* (Little, Brown), a sweeping summation of the last century and its artists, singers, politicians, philosophers and even cowboys. There's history of a more personal nature in *Self Portrait as a Young Man* by Roy Strong (Bodleian Library Publications) in which the author's recollections are handsomely supplemented by photographs and other documentary material from his early life. The long-awaited memoir of her mother's life by Maya Angelou, *Mom and Me and*

New novels by Dave Eggers and JM Coetzee sit alongside the fiction debut of singer Woody Guthrie



Illustration by Aude Van Ryn

Mom, comes from Virago and promises to be as moving and insightful as her earlier volumes of memoir. Look out for Mary Beard's *Classical Traditions* (Profile) in which the question of Why The Classics Matter is ably answered by the queen of ancient history, and there are literary lionesses by the dozen in *Fifty Shades of Feminism*, edited by Lisa Appignanesi, Susie Orbach and Rachel Holmes (Virago), a state of the feminist union address by the likes of Jeanette Winterson and Siri Hustvedt.

In fiction, witness a new, macabre direction for Joyce Carol Oates, whose novel *The Accursed* (4th Estate) is a fantastical and gory story set in Princeton; there's an extraordinary-sounding new novel from JM Coetzee about a boy exiled from his home and parents, *The Childhood of Jesus* (Harvill Secker); and don't miss the latest from Spain's finest living writer: *The Infatuations* by Javier Marías (Hamish Hamilton), an enticing tale of obsession, love and murder.

APRIL A fresh slice of world literature for spring, starting with Iran's bestselling novel of all time, *The Book of Fate* by Parimoush Saniee (Little, Brown): a tale of forbidden love set amid the upheavals of the sociologist author's native country. *Americanah* by the 2007 Orange Prize winner Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (4th Estate) is a very modern love story set between Nigeria and the US, while Taiye Selasi's much talked-about debut *Ghana Must Go* (Viking) also spans the Atlantic to West Africa, dealing with an eminent Ghanaian surgeon and the family he took to America.

On the home front, you can't get much more British than *Kate's Farm Diary* by the darling of *Springwatch*, Kate Humble (Headline), and for cricket fans there's *80 Not Out* by Dickie Bird (Hodder), sure to please lovers of the green grass of home. Political animals won't want to miss *The British Dream: Success and Failure in Immigration Policy Since the War* by David Goodhart (Atlantic) or *Disraeli or The Two Lives* by Douglas Hurd and Edward Young (Weidenfeld & Nicolson), not to mention the new historical study by Michael Burleigh, *Small Wars, Faraway Places: The Genesis of the Modern World* (Macmillan). *Falling Upwards* by Richard Holmes (HarperPress) is a beguiling history of hot air ballooning, while *The Undivided Past* by David Cannadine (Allen Lane) takes a lofty approach to his-

tory, making a plea for us to stop seeing the past in terms of conflict rather than communality. *The Last Train to Zona Verde* by Paul Theroux (Hamish Hamilton) is the travel writer's account of his final big African rail journey, taking him from Cape Town to Angola.

MAY Last year saw the loss of the brilliant novelist Siân Busby, whose uniquely gripping historical fiction brought her great acclaim in her too-short life. Her final work, *A Commonplace Killing*, is published posthumously by Short Books. Intrigue of a decidedly more modern hue is at the heart of *Mr Loverman* by Bernadine Evaristo (Hamish Hamilton), in which the London poet and author tells a ribald tale of gay love in the capital. But the most hyped release in fiction this spring has got to be *The Hive* by Gill Hornby (Little, Brown). It's a spicy comedy-drama set in the bitchy milieu of competitive school-gate mums by the author also known as Mrs Robert Harris. The bidding war for it was furious, so critics wait with bated breath... And there's a new John le Carré to get your teeth into as well: *A Delicate Truth* is on its way from Viking.

It's a strong month for non-fiction also, with a timely assessment of the limits of genetics from the ever-popular Steve Jones: *The Serpent's Promise* (Little, Brown) links bible stories and science, while Lewis Wolpert's *Why Can't a Woman be More Like a Man* (Faber) takes an evolutionary-biological look at gender. A big history title to look out for is *Perilous Question: The Drama of the Great Reform Bill, 1832* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson) by Antonia Fraser, while a quirkier offering comes from the always intriguing catalogue of Portobello Books: *Deep Sea and Foreign Going: The Uncharted World of Freight* by Rose George goes behind the scenes of those mammoth vessels that ply the oceans bringing us all our lovely stuff. And Martin Sandler for Bloomsbury has collected the most revealing of *The Letters of John F Kennedy* from the two million on file, in time for the 50th anniversary of the president's assassination.

The Trip to Echo Spring: Why Writers Drink by Olivia Laing (Canongate) promises literary gossip and serious analysis, as does a special memoir by Geordie Greig, one of Lucian Freud's confidants whose *Breakfast with Lucian* (Jonathan Cape) is a must for lovers of that extraordinary

artist. Finally, *A Place in the Country* (Hamish Hamilton) is the long-awaited translation of the late WG Sebald's work on the six cultural figures who most inspired him.

JUNE In summer our thoughts turn to visiting faraway places, and the armchair voyager will be well served by a fine crop of travel books. The editor of the *TLS*, Peter Stothard, found inspiration in *Alexandria* (Granta) and writes of its place in his heart and his obsession with Cleopatra. Edward Rutherford, the bestselling author of *Sarum*, travels in time as well as space for his 2,000-year history of *Paris* (Hodder); and Ronald Blythe, whose *Akenfield* is still the ultimate classic about rural England, stays in Suffolk for *The Time by the Sea: Aldeburgh 1956-58* (Faber), a memoir encompassing Britten and the famous music festival.

Other non-fiction treats to look forward to are an examination of our relationship with the sea, *The Sea Inside* by Philip Hoare (4th Estate) and *Here and Now*, a collection of revealing letters between the Nobel laureate JM Coetzee and his friend Paul Auster (Faber). *The Autobiography of Ann Widdecombe* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson) is sure to be a gutsy and compelling read while, from the same house, Daisy Waugh brings her spiky attitude to the pitfalls of motherhood and the shortcuts you can take to avoid them in *I Don't Know Why She Bothers*.

JULY - AUGUST High summer brings some highbrow history this year, with two more books from Weidenfeld and Nicolson, who have a particularly strong list in 2013. *Empire of the Deep: The Rise and Fall of the British Navy* by Ben Wilson is a landmark history of our power at sea from King Alfred to the present day, highlighting the extent to which our command of the oceans has driven Britain's success in the world more than any other factor. *Churchill and Empire* by Lawrence James focuses on the effects of the great man's campaigns in India and Africa on his political development. And there are two rich slices of US history from Mainstream: *Who Killed Kennedy? The 50-Year Quest* by Matthew Smith, who has been involved in the world's favourite murder mystery since the beginning, and *Time Out of Mind: The Lives of Bob Dylan* by Ian Bell, a crucial piece of biography that reads between the lines of Dylan's writings and reveals much about his life and work.

SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER The best books of the year are always saved for autumn, and this year they should be well worth the wait. From Allen Lane comes the new Malcolm Gladwell, *David and Goliath*, in which the bestselling author develops the thesis of *Outliers* to prescribe some winning strategies that the weak might successfully use against the powerful; also *Think Like a Freak* by Steven D Levitt and Stephen J Dubner, in which the controversial creators of *Freakonomics* show us how to think bigger, faster and better. Not for them, perhaps, Simon Garfield's mellow *Lost Art of Letter Writing* or *The Novel Cure: An A-Z of Literary Remedies* by Susan Elderkin and Ella Berthoud (both from Canongate), but fans of these gentler offerings might also relish a wander through Vita Sackville-West's *Sissinghurst: The Making of a Garden*, edited by Sarah Raven (Virago) and, from the same publisher, *Ten Fascinating Women of the Fifties* by Rachel Cooke. In fiction, the always brilliant Margaret Atwood's new novel *Maddaddam* (Bloomsbury) is the third instalment in the fantastical trilogy that began with *Oryx and Crake*, and sure to top many people's Christmas lists this year is the debut novel from everyone's favourite shaggy-haired Venetian aristocrat, Francesco da Mosto. Based on his own family's history and centred on artefacts found in their *palazzo*, *The Black King* (Little, Brown) promises literary intrigue and beautiful buildings across 16th-century Italy and England. And after 365 days of righteous behaviour, what better tonic could there be?

From across the pond come JFK's letters, a close reading of Bob Dylan and the latest Malcolm Gladwell

HOT TYPE

New crime and thrillers

The key to a successful crime series is the ability to produce the same (only different) novel time and time again. There is no better exemplar of this than Donna Leon. **The Golden Egg** (Heinemann, £17.99), Commissario Brunetti's 21st case, concerns the apparent suicide of a deaf mute. Egged on by his indomitable wife, Paola, Brunetti uncovers a nasty secret. The familiar characters and Venetian locations are described with remarkable freshness and, as always, the edifying result is both amusing and thought-provoking.

Fred Vargas's series of Commissaire Adamsberg mysteries continues with **The Ghost Riders of Ordebec** (Harvill Secker, £12.99). Soon after a woman prophesies that people will die in Normandy a notorious sadist disappears. What follows



is a glorious mix of myth, quirky observation and Gallic humour.

The Ranger (Corgi, £12.99) by Ace Atkins introduces us to Quinn Colson, an Afghanistan veteran who now works as a US Army ranger. When his uncle, a county sheriff, is reported to have committed suicide a sceptical Colson starts to investigate and opens up a whole can of worms. This exciting thriller leaves you looking forward to the ranger's return.

Detective Inspector Jack Caffrey made his debut in *Birdman* in 2001. His latest case, **Poppet** (Bantam, £14.99), involves disturbing goings-on at a psychiatric unit. Mo Hayder's blend of grisly Gothic and warped sexuality is not to everyone's taste but there's no denying it makes for compulsive reading.

Outsiders (MacLehose Press, £12) is a fine collection of short stories by such writers as Roberto Saviano, Carlo Lucarelli and the Wu Ming collective about those on the margins of Italian society.

MARK SANDERSON

THE SPORTING LIFE

A fearless writer's homage to the sport of kings impresses Jane Shilling

BLOOD HORSES: Notes of a Sportswriter's Son | JOHN JEREMIAH SULLIVAN | *Yellow Jersey*, £12.99, 272pp



A horse, John Jeremiah Sullivan observes in his bracingly eccentric memoir, is essentially a kind of enormous hare. Although the modern equine is an imposing figure, essentially it remains the prey animal it was at the start of its evolution, with powerful hindquarters built for flight from the terrors its near 360-degree vision allows it to perceive.

These attributes, combined with a size that enables them to bear a man, and a temperament responsive to domestication, have led horses into a strange relationship with humans – part toy, part servant and part totem. And it is in blood horses – the rarefied class of thoroughbreds, with their matchless speed, ballerina temperaments and

ancestry traceable across centuries to one of three Arabian stallions – that those qualities are most intensely concentrated.

Sullivan's father Mike was a sportswriter in an era when that was shorthand for a certain kind of American masculinity. In perverse contrast to the athletes he wrote about, he subjected his own body to a regime of alcohol, cigarettes and junk food. His self-neglect dismayed his family, who were convinced that he would die young (as he did, aged 54).

The last time John Jeremiah saw his father alive, Mike was in hospital after a heart bypass. He recalled the Kentucky Derby of 1973, which was won, in a magical display of pure speed, by a horse called Secretariat.

After Mike's death, Sullivan looked up his articles about the Secretariat Derby. One was a colour piece in which he described meeting a boy he calls "The Kid", who had driven through the night to get a jockey's autograph. "If The Kid

failed in his mission," ran the final sentence, "this story will end here." Something about this pay-off sent Sullivan on a quest to discover more about Secretariat, the Derby, thoroughbreds, and the mysterious connection between men and horses.

Sullivan is a remarkable writer, with a powerful addiction to footnotes and a fearless attitude to pretentiousness. Of a moment in the film of Secretariat's winning run when the horse gallops out of the frame, he writes, "In the history of profound absences – the gaps in Sappho's fragments, Christ's tomb, the black panels of Rothko's chapel – this is among the most beautiful."

It is preposterous, but he knows what he is doing, so you forgive – even admire – the trope, just as you admire the sweetly mannered device of ending his book with his father's elegiac phrase: "If he failed in his mission, this story will end here." Sullivan *files*, I think we can say, has not failed in his mission.

MEMOIR

Giles Waterfield applauds the meteoric rise of a museum revolutionary

SELF-PORTRAIT AS A YOUNG MAN | ROY STRONG | *Bodleian Library*, £25, 296pp



Roy Strong's hugely entertaining diaries raised a storm on publication in 1997. Having bequeathed all his papers to the Bodleian Library, he is supplementing this donation with the present book, which tells his story from his birth in 1935 until his appointment as director of the National Portrait Gallery at 31.

The memoir is shot through with issues of class. Strong evokes an unpromising background, born and raised as he was in a modest suburban house, "a clone of millions of others built between the wars", to a commercial traveller and an overprotective mother. Strong escaped not only through his personal abilities but through the new accessibility of grammar school education, offering high academic standards and dedicated teachers to anyone of

sufficient ability. One of the book's strengths is its study of this system, the new worlds it opened to people with limited horizons (Strong was under pressure to leave school to earn a wage). With his (later) friends Peter Hall, AS Byatt and Alan Bennett, "we all belonged to the brief swathe of time that produced a short-lived meritocracy."

Strong tells us all. We learn about his school (and a little too much about his teachers), his conversion to Anglicanism, his sexual hesitations (much less spicy than the adventures of his friend Brian Sewell), his abandonment of the dreariness of an academic career for the glamour of museums. Especially vivid (and much less vindictive than Sewell's memoirs) is his account of his early years at the National Portrait Gallery. In 1959, when Strong joined the staff, the Gallery was astonishingly conservative, hardly recovered from the "deadly hold" of its former Director, Sir Henry Hake, and its snobbish trustees.

Confined initially to a basement room and required to compile the Annual Report, Strong was not kept down for long. Inexhaustibly energetic and curious, he played an important role in reassessing Elizabethan portraiture on which he published seminal works. Within a few years he became one of the English-speaking world's most sought-after curators, introducing a sense of theatricality to exhibition installations.

In the history of British 20th-century culture, Roy Strong is an important phenomenon. As an early example of the museum director as celebrity, champion of Sixties elegance and style, and innovator in the field of design, he helped to transform museums and galleries into places that seek to attract and delight. His curiosity about the world is unbounded. This is an enjoyable and valuable record of the brilliant early career of (in Strong's words) "a young man from nowhere who went somewhere."