

# **KIP FENN - REFLECTIONS**

## **EXTRACTS FROM THE AUTHOR'S DIARIES (2001)**

I have kept a diary for most of my life, although I only started writing a proper journal in the mid-1970s when I went travelling. They are personal journals, and have never been written in anticipation of being read by anyone other than myself. Except in my very earliest journals, all the entries carry the date on which they were written (not the day they are about necessarily)

The idea of making available my diary entries concerning Kip Fenn did not occur to me until I was preparing the book for publication. There is not as much about the thought processes and research that went into writing the book as I would have liked, especially in the period when I was working on it full-time (2003). Nevertheless, I felt there was enough to make the exercise worthwhile. (These collated entries, however, represent less than 10% of my diaries for each of the three years.)

I have collated nearly all the entries about Kip Fenn from the day I had the idea for such a novel (in March 2001) to the day that I felt it was finished and in a reasonable condition to try and sell to agents and publishers (August 2003). On those specific dates where a Kip Fenn entry exists, I have sometimes included a few extra paragraphs from the same date even though they may not relate directly to the writing of the novel, sometimes because I feel they might give a sense of my daily life while writing the book, or because they give an idea of my political/cultural preferences, or just because I wanted to.

I usually write my diary on the computer (I stopped hand writing my diaries in the late 1980s) quickly without wasting any time on grammar or spelling. However, I do collate the entries once every six months or so and then I subject them to a spellcheck. Usually I find upwards of 500 unrecognised words - mis-spellings, names, and many made-up words. I rarely rewrite/edit any entries. However, for this exercise I have tidied the grammar/spelling a little (but not with much care, it has to be said) and done some slight editing so as to avoid repetition or make the writing less convoluted.

NB: The fact that a particular publication is mentioned in these diary extracts does not, necessarily, mean that I found it any more or less useful than any of the other hundreds of books and internet sites I consulted during the course of my research for this book and which are not mentioned in the diary. If I had found one or more publication or internet site of invaluable assistance, or if such a source had provided specific information unobtainable anywhere else, I would have mentioned it or them in the book itself (as is the case, for example, in my unpublished factual book about a walk across London - London Cross).

Paul K Lyons

# JOURNAL EXTRACTS (KIP FENN) - 2001

## 17 March

More rain, more puddles in my garden. Moss is taking over the lawn. The concrete in my drive is falling to bits, and the fence is falling down.

I've typed up another old diary this weekend, from October 1978. In a truly spooky moment, I was listening to something on the radio when the place Berkeley Square was mentioned, at that very moment, that exact moment, I was turning a page in the diary, and the first line of the new page was entitled Berkeley Square!

On Thursday, I took B to see a folk singer called June Tabor. The following night, I went back to the same place on my own to see a harmonica player called Lee Sankey. I only bought the tickets with Adam in mind, but I'd forgotten he'd be in France.

Because of my newsletter schedule [I wrote, edited and published two monthly newsletters on EU energy and transport affairs which gave me 1-2 free weeks each 4-5 week cycle] I am faced with very little to do in the forthcoming week, so I decided to try and give some thought to a new novel. I've come up with a name, Thomas aka Kip Fenn, and I've written an opening two paragraphs, only another 2,000 to go.

## 21 March

I have not been able to work on Kip Fenn for more than a couple of hours. Somehow, I managed to wile away almost all of my free two-week period, mostly by going on a nostalgic voyage into my past. It's a serious undertaking to take an old diary and type it up. I did a fair number some years ago, and maybe one or two more recently, but there are still many which have not been typed into the computer. Last week, I picked out two thin ones from 1978, and this week, I have continued with a third, and sequential one, from 1979. These diaries are from the period in which I lived in the Fordwych Road flat, which was probably one of the most exciting in my life. Mayco is in the background, Harold and Roser and Mu are in the foreground, Mitzi too was part of my life then. Others come and go. Unfortunately, I was stricken with a poetical style. In parallel to typing up the (overly pretentious) diaries, however, I have also been sorting through my old letters. Now this I haven't done in a very long time, and there were some surprises that seemed to shed more light on who and what I was then, than my own journals. Perhaps I've dipped into the diaries too often and I know the material more or less, but not the letters. And what people say to me is more moving than what I say to myself. I found letters from lovers, with so many sweet things said, and from many people who were simply friends, some of whom were enchanted by their visits to Fordwych Road. One such was an American girl called Anne Mason. There are a dozen or so letters from her, all beautifully written, and all inviting me to visit in the US. Then there was Tacye, a siamese cat of a girl, if I remember right. I was surprised to find so many enticing and well-written letters from her too. And there are many others, from Harvey, Jim Kalnin, Peter and Lizzie, Sooz the potter, Sylvie, Joseph the clown, and even Michael my old sales manager boss from NZ. These people come alive in their letters so much better than in my diary.

## 16 May

Here I am, half way through the first of two free weeks in my newsletter schedule. After two days of admin, and gardening, and tidying up, I was going to have another look at Kip Fenn (who I've not thought about since I came up with the name), but I haven't got round to it yet. Instead, I've been having another look at my future. But I have not got very far. I keep making lists, and more lists, and writing down apparently useful questions, and summary answers, and not making any headway. So I thought I might just ramble a bit in the diary, and see where that leads me - sometimes I have ideas inside me which I don't know are there, and they only come out when I am writing. I suppose this is a bit like when writers claim a character takes on a life of its own - only in this case it's the I in me which seems to take on a life of its own. There's a thought, for a start, I didn't know I owned.

## 18 May

Why do I find creative writing so very difficult? It is now 10:40am, and I haven't yet started to think about Kip Fenn. Admittedly, I went to bed late (about 1:30 after watching a recorded edition of *West Wing*), and therefore I lazed around in bed until 8:30 or so this morning listening to the radio, then I listened to the radio a bit more until 9:00, then I read a novel for 45 minutes or so, then I played a bridge computer game for another 40 minutes, then I took a walk around the garden which I do several times a day, then I made another cup of tea, and now I'm writing up my diary. It's a deep feeling in me, that I recognise, but which I don't understand or control. It may well be linked to another feeling I get which obliges me to stop when I've actually done some creative writing for a couple of hours. I have never been able to work long hours uninterrupted on writing, in the way that I can on accounts, for example, or production, or resolving a computer problem. There is a kind of energy or mental or physical cut out which stops me simply getting on with it. I've wondered if these feelings are connected to a fear of not being able to do the job, not being able to come up with anything, of not being able to produce the goods, or, if I've produced some goods, a fear of drying up and not being able to produce any more.

Perhaps I am being too harsh on myself. I mean it is difficult, very difficult, in the early stages of a new project, especially one which starts from absolutely nothing - as does Kip Fenn. I don't really know how to start, where to start, I don't even know how to begin to start, or to begin to begin to start, or to begin to start the beginning of the planning. I have tried three or four very broad chapter headings to provide a framework for my thinking, but each one is just a few lines of notes. Because I may have decided to tell Fenn's story roughly chronologically, I spent some time yesterday starting to work on his background. I now have another page of scrawled notes but this bears little relation to my other notes. When I mention this to Adam - how wise he is already - he tells me, without hesitation, that's it's not wasted time, because I need to build up a picture of the character. Of course, I know this but what underlies my grumbling is the fear that I can't do it. This is a very ambitious novel, and I should not be undertaking it in the odd week here and there around my main job. This is preposterous, and yet I've spent most of this week coming to the decision to use my free time over the next 18 months to work on Kip Fenn. I should really be choosing a less demanding project for these spare weeks, and leave Fenn until I've closed my newsletter business down.

Oh isn't easier to have these circular arguments with myself than to get on with it. And this is the fun part, the creative imagining part, wait until I have to sit down and start writing - then my ability to prevaricate will multiply xfold.

## 22 May

The Tuesday of my second free week. Things are going slowly, very slowly. I potter around the house, not doing too much. It is nearly 11am now, and all I've done is a little reading: a chapter of Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, a chapter of Martin Amis' *Experience* (in which, oddly, *Underworld* is briefly referred to), and the last chapter in Michael Heseltine's autobiography. I was only reading the latter because I decided to tidy up my reading table in the lounge. There must have been 20 books on it, some I'd finished, some I'd got bored with, some reference books, some waiting to be read, and some I'm still reading. I thought I had finished Heseltine's long book, but there was a bookmark in the last chapter which is about his role as Deputy Prime Minister and the run-up to the last election. It is difficult to see the Conservative Party ever nurturing the likes of a Heseltine again - it is doing nothing and saying nothing in this current campaign to prove itself worthy of the people's trust, and nothing to attract bright clever people who will, one day, appeal to the centreground of British politics, something which the Labour Party is doing so well at the moment. But I didn't mean to get sidetracked on to politics. I have Jan Garberek's *Rites* playing in the background. Outside, there is glorious sunshine, and the sweet smell of the Japanese azaleas fills the garden. I walk out, and around the garden several times during the day, to check on my pot plants, and my vegetables, and to enjoy the trees, now in full spring growth mode. I counted the number of trees in my garden the other day, and it gave me great pleasure to realise I had so many typically British trees: apple, hawthorn, holly, oak, rowan, yew, amalanchier, silver birch, Scot's pine, and goat willow. I noticed this morning that my rowans were flowering - not that their creamy flowers are particularly noteworthy.

I had thought to go away walking this week but I decided there would still be too many foot-and-mouth restrictions in place and I would only find it frustrating and difficult not to be able to access any of the wilder moors. So I've stayed at home, pottering around. But, bit by bit, I am trying to think about Kip Fenn.

## 24 May

I continue to struggle with my imagination over Kip Fenn. I've sketched out, very roughly, the main themes for about half the book. Tomorrow, I shall try and type it all up into some sensible notes (rather than rough hand-written notes, covered in squiggles, boxes, arrows) so that, when I eventually get round to returning to it (one month, one year, two years . . .), I'll be able to re-engage, so to speak, with my ideas. I talked to Adam last evening about some of them. He said he thought I was trying to squeeze too much into one book, but I explained about 'Reflections' being a term coined, in the late 2080s, for autobiographical books which skim on the detail, and how any real autobiography would have to be full of endless detail, with names and places, which, when not real, would be boring to invent, and even more boring to read.

## 26 June

The last Eurostar train to Brussels on a Tuesday night is usually such a peaceful journey, but this evening it is like Trafalgar Square on the move. In front of me, I have a Chinese family eating a full meal, dished out from a dozen foil containers, and chatting about it non-stop; behind me I have three giggly Mexican girls, and behind them a group of Dutch lads trying to chat them up. Everyone is talking at the same time, mobile phones ring every few minutes, usually between the annoying announcements on the tannoy.

There were a couple of small things I thought of that I wanted to put down in my Kip Fenn note book, but I keep forgetting so I'm putting them down here in my diary instead: a fad for businessmen, perhaps only Africans but maybe not, to dye their beards with fancy colours and patterns; one of Kip Fenn's teachers to tell a joke in every lesson.

### 15 July

Jan Garbarek streaming his saxophone chords throughout the house. Unusually, I am sitting in my reading position at the back of the lounge with a view to my left across the garden, a line of cacti on my right, and the portable on my lap. I don't like typing like this for long, but I wanted to sit here, where the sun reaches in the morning, and I didn't want to go into the office. It is Sunday morning, and my summer break is now stretching out before me. I have about five free weeks, and I'd like to put them to some constructive use - although, apart from Kip Fenn, it'll be mostly practical bits and pieces.

This weekend is blackcurrant weekend. Yesterday A, B and I stripped the two blackcurrant bushes of a healthy crop of berries; last night I spent about two hours preparing a third of them, and this morning I've made some jam. Well, it's probably not jam, I think it's more like syrup. I may have put too much water with the currants (I should have allowed for the fact that they were wet and not dry and put less water in), or I may not have boiled them long enough after the sugar went in. I have five jars of syrup. I would have had one big jar more, but for my clumsiness. When I was trying to close the lid on the preserving jar, it slid out of my hands, and fell on the floor tipping and spraying its brilliant purple contents over half the kitchen, not to mention my shoes and socks, and nearly scalding my feet in the process. What a lively mess. My immediate reaction was to lift my foot (complete with slipper and sock) and plunge it into the washing up bowl of water. Whether this saved me from any burns, I don't know, but it added to the chaos of the scene. It took a good half an hour to clear up the mess.

### 2 August

Ah, the weather has broken, it's cooler and rainy now. I was going to do some outdoor maintenance, some sanding and painting, but it'll have to wait. England are being thrashed in the third test against the Aussies. I have finally - last night - put my business work to one side, and I hope to move on to Kip Fenn when I've come to an end of pottering around the house.

### 10 August

Friday. After a day of storms, rain and cold air, the sun has returned today. I may get on with some household chores. So far, I've managed to fritter away all my summer holiday spare time. Yes, of course, I am completing those jobs that need doing, my accounts, the paintwork maintenance. But I thought I would have two clear weeks to tackle Kip Fenn - well that was my vague objective. Somehow Monday and Tuesday faded from me, I was overtired having not been able to sleep properly, either because of the sun/exercise excess on Sunday or because of the malaria pills I'm taking. I did open up the file once or twice, but the task seemed so daunting, I slipped back to playing bridge on the computer, or watching a film on telly (*Odd Man Out* with James Mason by Carol Reed). By Wednesday it was becoming more difficult to avoid the task, and so I started by reading through a bit of what I had already written. By Thursday, I was finally writing a few new words. But they came so hard. Although I have a structure and some characters, I don't have a clear idea of how the writing will be, how the

style will work. I mean will it work if I just start writing at the beginning and keep writing and writing and writing. What I've written so far appears to be nothing more than an introduction - so I may make it just that, which means this morning I should be trying to get going on the first chapter. But what can I possibly do in a week - and surely I can't write this book in the work gaps over the next year and a half. Shouldn't I be trying to write something simpler in the meantime, some short stories? I'm not committed to Kip Fenn yet, which is why I'm dilly dallying a bit, and why I can't decide to focus clearly and exclusively on it during these days.

### 16 August

So my two weeks on Kip Fenn have gone up in smoke. I failed miserably to do anything constructive during the summer apart from house maintenance. It's as though our forthcoming trip to Kenya has put a blight on the summer - it's such a big journey (the biggest I've ever undertaken with Adam, and the longest I've done in more than 15 years) that it's removed the real need, any real determination to achieve anything else this summer. And it's not even as if I'm having to plan or do anything, unlike all other holidays.

But, I must say, it is very very difficult to get going on Kip Fenn. I have made a start on chapter one, but only out of desperation to get something done. I don't really believe I can do this novel, I think it'll turn out to be another *Rats* [my first attempt at a novel], an exciting idea, but beyond both my ability to write, and the detailed knowledge of many different kinds of facts I would need to make the story work. I started writing what I thought was chapter one, but it soon transpired that it was too general, too reflective, and so I've assumed it could be a kind of prologue. I then took a while to come up with a more specific scenario for chapter one, which I have started writing. But I don't have much confidence in myself, and I've taken every opportunity I can, not to write it. Now my time is up, my summer spare time is over.

### 15 September

It's Saturday now, and so far I haven't written about the events last Tuesday which have so shocked the Western world. The crashing of the planes into the buildings, and the loss of life was bad enough, but the subsequent crumbling and total destruction of the two World Trade Centre towers in New York made the terrible and horrific attack ten times worse - not least because so many more people (including hundreds of firefighters) were killed by the falling buildings. But also, in a way, because of the symbol created by the changed Manhattan skyline, and the great loss of physical property. During the first two days, no-one paid any attention to the fact that the hijackers, teams of three-six, had not only been prepared to die, but knew they would definitely die, and that these teams must necessarily have included highly trained (pilots) and intelligent people. This is quite extraordinary in itself. President Bush used the word 'cowards' to describe the terrorists. What a stupid thing to say. They may be detestable, evil, murderous, corrosive, poisoned, loathsome (I've resorted to the thesaurus) but they are not, were not, cowards. What can lead people to act in such selflessly destructive ways: only a passionate belief in something, usually religion or nationality.

I strongly supported the UK action in the Falklands and the West's response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (against much popular opposition), but I am not convinced that the apparent worldwide response - at least that collected and reported by our media - to this tragedy is the right one (involving some kind of military action in Afghanistan, and, possibly, Iraq). First, it

is really important to try and bring perspective to the issue. It seems that around 5,000 may have been killed; and, yes, it is the most terrible terrorist attack, with more victims than any single event of its kind in the modern world, only outdone, so to speak, by natural disasters and actual and ongoing wars. (Ah, but, as I write this, I recall the Bhopal tragedy in India, which may well have been bigger in terms of deaths and injuries and generational birth defects - I would need to check - but not of course in terms of financial loss or the loss of such famous buildings.) But, as one commentator pointed out, one quarter of Afghanis (i.e. millions of people) are currently in danger of starvation; and another one asked where was all this outpouring of anguish when 20,000 people died in India earlier this year as a result of floods. And, I wonder, how many people die on the US's roads, or are murdered by guns, in any given day. Most of those are senseless, selfish, greedy murders, but Tuesday's murders were in fact driven by people with passion and self-less objectives. I believe the world should not be considering revenge or vengeance, or not only, but should be looking deeper for the reasons why this terrorism exists. Parts of the world have, after all, accepted that some terrorists - the Palestinians and the IRA for example - have had legitimate arguments that needed listening to, or dealing with. Just because the terrorism is on a global scale, does not mean we should be trying to patch up the problems, we should be searching in a global way for the underlying causes, in the same way that the UK is now trying to solve the Northern Ireland problem.

I believe (and this is one of the themes I've already identified for Kip Fenn) that the underlying causes must be traceable back to the extraordinary divide that still exists between the rich and the poor in this world, more specifically between the rich nations and the poor nations. And, it so happens, that the Muslim/Arab nations are the ones most likely to be able to rally fanatics and armies to assault the rich West. The fact that, despite huge divides within the Muslim/Arab nations, one part of the Muslim world has managed to shake-up the west should not be taken as a call to arms, but a call to peace, a call to a greater understanding of what divides the world. The US has reportedly decided to devote an extra \$20bn to fighting terrorism - if there are five million afghanis hungry, that \$20bn could be used to give each one \$4,000 each - that would surely defuse Osama Bin Laden's power.

### **18 September**

Martin Amis, writing in the *Guardian*, has similar ideas to mine, and suggests the US should attack Afghanistan with food parcels not bombs. As I write it is one week to the minute that the first aeroplane hit the World Trade Centre. Is the western world now making too much of it? By chance, I noticed an unrelated article in the paper yesterday about Bhopal and the fact that many of the victims have still not been compensated 17 years later, and that the death toll, although officially around 5,000, may be nearer 20,000!

This is the free week in my monthly work cycle. Already it is Tuesday, and I have been prevaricating badly over what to do with it. Yesterday, I moped and shopped; and today I've messed around reinstalling the software on this portable computer, and now I'm writing my journal. Unless I were to sit down and use the week to prepare some new marketing exercise for my newsletters, which I haven't done for 18 months, the only project on my plate at the moment is Kip Fenn. But this is such a big project, I have not been able to psyche myself up enough to make the decision to get going on it properly. Even in the summer when I had loads of time, I only finally got down to doing a bit when it was already too late.

We are eating the very last of this year's garden produce, and there isn't much after the daily deer visitations. I've had a few good sweetcorn, and there have been a few beans at the top of the canes which the deer couldn't reach. They've also left the spring onions, although all the lettuce and spinach on either side of the onions have been gobbled to nothing.

I've finished *Air and Fire* by Rupert Thomson. This book, set in Mexico, is very unlike other works of his, and reminded me (deliberately I'm sure) of the magical realism novels by authors such as Llosa, Amado and Marquez.

### 21 September

I've been so unproductive this week, I might just have well slept through five days. Here I am on Friday afternoon, and I've managed less than one day on Kip Fenn, and I've nothing else to show for the week, not even some gardening. Maybe I'll do some later.

It has become apparent today that some kind of invasion of Afghanistan is likely to take place in the next few days, led by the US and the UK with the connivance of other countries including some Arab ones. But invading Afghanistan and deposing the Taliban, will not get rid of Muslim fundamentalists and terrorists.

### 3 October

Vladimir Putin was in Brussels today (and yesterday) for a Russia-EU summit. I watched him (on a screen video link) answer questions from the press. He looks so young to be in charge of such a huge country with so many problems. Early on his microphone wasn't working, and somebody leaned over to press a button. Putin stretched out an arm to pat the person on the back. 'Prodi's in charge of who talks,' he joked, only it was Javier Solana next to him on the podium not Prodi.

I am reading a novel, my first ever, by Margaret Atwood - *The Blind Assassin*. I don't have much to say about it for the moment, except that there was a moment when I was suddenly, but strongly, reminded by the writing style (not the content) of Robertson Davies (and I haven't been reminded of any other writers as I read the book) which is interesting because both Atwood and Davies are Canadian.

However I do want to note one interesting coincidence. On Monday, before I had started to read the book, I checked into the Trace website. I have been dipping into the Trace chatroom for a year or two, especially to look at the fun weekly exercise set by a creative writing teacher. I've never bothered to post anything on the site before but, recently, I decided to monitor the exercises with a view to writing and posting one thing. On Monday evening, I found the week's task was based on an idea stemming from Margaret Atwood's short stories (which I've never read). I mulled it over, pinched a paragraph or two from my past diary, and posted a very short sketch a couple of hours later. Then, once I started reading the *Blind Assassin*, I realised the style of my little story could have been taken from Atwood herself, especially in the way I had used an old family photograph as a catalyst for remembrance!

I went with Lucy to see a Brazilian film called '*Me You Them*'. It was beautifully photographed, and seeped in gorgeous Gilberto Gil music. The performances were simply perfect, and the slow careful direction made every scene count.

I have just listened to a debate on globalisation on Radio 4. I've also recently read a number of articles in the *Economist* on the same subject. I'm interested because this is going to be a theme that I must tackle in Kip Fenn. George Monbiot, a writer in the *Guardian*, was one of the people on the programme. His main aim was to promote the idea of a world parliament. I think that is naive. Interestingly, there does not seem to be much evidence about whether the inequality in the world is growing or not, and what impact globalisation might be having on whether it is or not. If I remember right, I have already planned in Kip Fenn that a report will be published in the 2020s or 2030s which demonstrates how much of the world's wealth has been sucked into the first world in the previous 50 years, and that this, extraordinarily, starts off a chain of events which eventually leads to the formation of the ICCO [this ended up in the novel as the IFSD]. I haven't given much thought to it, but I know already that ICCO is not a world government - I haven't considered such a thing in the whole of the 21st century. One speaker in the debate argued that it would be impossible for a central worldwide organisation to be able to divide up how money should be distributed between a village in Chile, for example, or a town in Africa. He said there needs to be much more local (and in his view voluntary) involvement in deciding how development monies should be shared out.

Sometimes, a couple of times a week maybe, I get such an urge, such an itch to sink into Kip Fenn, and get going, but I simply can't go in and out of it on a daily or even a weekly basis. I will try now, through until Christmas, to use my spare weeks.

### **20 October**

I've been working on Kip Fenn all week. I wrote about 9,000 words, more than doubling it's length. But this is the first week, I suppose, in which I have really got to grips with writing it. I wrote every day, not as much as I would have liked - but still every day. I am in sight of the end of the first draft of the first chapter. This part of the book is probably the easiest to write, because it's set in the small world of Kip's childhood, which is in the very near future. For later chapters, I am going to have to invent and predict much more than in this first one. I have already begun to realise there are some severe limitations to the novel's structure. There can be no plot as such, which may severely undermine its publishability. And there are limited ways in which one voice can keep linking ideas and anecdotes to sustain a narrative.

*The Blind Assassin* is beautifully written, full of insight, and intriguing. I do, though, find some of the links between the present and past over-contrived, and find the description - especially of upper class society - over-wrought, and I am remain relatively uninterested in the plot.

### **23 October**

Kip Fenn keeps crossing my mind - which is good - but I expect he'll vanish over the next couple of days as my business journalism takes over mental space. I thought today, for example, (and I need to note this here or else I'll forget it) that I should intersperse email dialogues throughout the book in order to help break up Kip's voice, and to allow me, the author, a wider scope. In chapter one, for example, it occurred to me that I could use an email correspondence between Kip's mother and her brother to allow more comment on his mother's teaching methods, and on how she brought Kip up. Kip could explain that he 'inherited' the correspondence from his uncle. There could be at least one email correspondence in every chapter, perhaps.

Also today in the *Economist* I read about the new portable video phones that correspondents have been using to send TV reports from Afghanistan. I think it is fairly clear that within 20 years or so we'll be using video phones as standard, in our houses, and on the move. And then, yesterday or even the day before yesterday, I saw Billy Connolly on the Parkinson show. He had dyed his goatee beard purple. I can't ever recall seeing someone with a dyed beard - that's straight out of my plans for chapter four or chapter five of Kip Fenn.

I'm reading *Atonement* by Ian McEwan. Everyone has praised this book as his best ever. I am a third of the way through, but already am close to pronouncing it a load of pretentious twaddle. So far the book is about the lives of two sisters and a brother in a privileged pre-war household. Some of the writing is good, brilliant even, but he goes too far, and imposes on his young characters complex calculated mental worlds that are simply unbelievable. Also why do we have to have so much intricate petty detail about their lives, a quarter as much would be more than enough to set the scene, the atmosphere - the rest is just padding, baggage, showing off. In addition, some key events appear manufactured and imposed on the characters even though we have so much character/scene formation. The scene where Cecilia and Robbie break the antique vase would never have happened because Cecilia would have grown up knowing its worth; it would have been second nature to her not to use it any way that might lead to an accident. If she had such a cavalier attitude to it then it would have been damaged earlier in her childhood. It didn't ring true. It is noticeable that McEwan made an effort to explain why such an antique vase is on display at all. Even worse, though, is Robbie. There are so many things wrong with him. 1) I don't believe a young man of 21 would think in any way that would lead him to write the first of these two sentences: 'In my dreams I kiss your cunt, your sweet wet cunt. In my thoughts, I make love to you all day long.' The second yes, but not the first which, to my mind, is the kind of thinking and language that emerges from either considerable experience of sex, or the influence of pornography in the post-war period. 2) He could not and would not have mistaken the two letters: one was hand-written and the other was type-written, and, besides, the language of his pornographic postscript would be so strongly etched in his momentary thoughts, he wouldn't be able not to check he had got the right letter. There are other things wrong too which I find really galling - no it's not that they are wrong that is galling, it is that the book and its author are so feted that I find galling.

## 10 November

A hard frost last night. There was even some snow in London the day before; and yet the trees are still furnished fully with leaves. Autumn is very late this year, or so it seems.

I wonder if Kip Fenn is keen on 19th century photography.

An interesting insight? I have a two week free period now, and not much else to do with it but work on Kip Fenn. Last month, when I'd put my newsletters to bed on the Thursday, I found it helpful to start reading over some of the KF material straightaway on the Friday so that my head was already thinking about KF over the weekend, which would then make it easier to get writing on the Monday. So, I thought I would do the same this time - but I resisted. And when I examined the reason why I resisted, I found it was because I was afraid to find it wanting, afraid to find the material not very good, afraid of not being able to produce any more.

I took a trip to London. On the train I read Stephen Jay Gould's *The Lying Stones of Marrakech*. I visited the Photographer's Gallery where there was an exhibition of Atget's photos of turn-of-the-century Paris. There was also a display of photographs of London by someone called Wentworth which had been set up to provide a modern day comparison to Atget. But, whereas Atget's photographs are of a documentary nature, with some mild implied commentary (perhaps exaggerated by the choice of photographs displayed) about the state of the city and its people, Wentworth's photographs are all commentary, he is too busy demonstrating his ability to spot irony or ugliness in London's streets. Just because Atget's photos now look interesting to us, many of them would have been very ordinary pictures at the time, only made extraordinary by the fact that photography was still in its artistic infancy. Wentworth eschews the ordinary, simple photos of buildings for example, or entrances, or streetscapes; most of his photos are closer taken, of litter or stray objects in the street; people are there because Wentworth has found something odd or unusual about them, not because they represent London here and now and today.

### 15 November

I am typing up my early Brazil diaries. I've completed the first one, and now I'm on the second, and I've just got to the story about how I bought the picture that now hangs in my lounge. I spotted the painting on the wall of an auction room when I arrived before the start of the sale, and it was the only picture visible that I liked. None of the paintings were identified by lot number and this one had no name. When I looked through the catalogue, there was only one painting that I liked the sound of, lot 44, *Igreja a Sabara* (Church at Sabara), and this was only because I had recently spent a marvellous day in the historic town of Sabara. Although I actively disliked every single other painting on show and being sold, and although I was bored, I decided to wait for lot 44. Astonishingly, *Igreja a Sabara* was the very same painting that I had picked out visually on the wall. And then, to cap it all, no-one else bid for this particular painting and so I got it at the base price of 200,000 cruzeiros (I'm not sure how much that was), even though other paintings were going for up to 5m.

And here's some more synchronicity (it's a rather weak example but then my life doesn't exactly provide much opportunity for synchronous happenings at present). When I was raiding my diaries from the early-mid 1990s for Kip Fenn, I found a reference to the singer I used to go and see at the Black Lion on Monday nights in the Kilburn High Road - she inspired one of my *Love Uncovered* short stories. I could never understand what such a talented singer was doing in an empty Kilburn pub on Monday nights. In my diary I found her name, which I'd forgotten, Holly Penfield. I immediately went to Google and found she had a personal website. She's come a long way since Kilburn. But here's the synchronous bit: the one forthcoming gig mentioned on the site is at the Pizza on the Park venue on 4 December. And, at the very same venue on 5 December, Mike Westbrook is playing [I've been a Westbrook band groupie for over 20 years].

The weather has turned very cold again, and quite bitter, although this afternoon, there was glorious sunshine. I went for a long walk on the Common. Having finished a first draft of the Kip Fenn chapter one in the morning, I knew I couldn't even consider starting the next chapter without some serious thinking. So I took a notebook and a pen, and sat down here and there in the sun to make notes. I did decide on some important elements for the chapter. I'm starting to think seriously, for example, about the character of Harriet (Kip's first wife), and about Kip's time in Brussels. Am I pleased with the first chapter? Not too displeased. But I haven't yet faced any real factual difficulties, but I will in chapter two.

## 25 November

Autumn has come suddenly, and the trees are full of beautiful colour. My two weeks on Kip Fenn have come to an end. I spent the first week finishing chapter one and thinking about chapter two, and the second week writing the first half of chapter two. I've now written over 30,000 words, which is a third as long as *BLR* [*Begetting - Loss - Recovery* an earlier novel of mine]. I expect Kip Fenn to be twice as long as *BLR*, with around 20,000 words for each of 10 chapters - although I may be deluding myself about what I'll be able to write for the later chapters.

In terms of my writing schedule, I managed around 2,000 words a day, although I feel sure that if I were to push myself (if I had a real deadline for example) I could do 3,000 words. In general, though, I think I need the best part of three clear weeks to write a 20,000 word chapter, including two or three days of thinking and preparation, and the odd half days here and there for research. If I used all my spare time over the next year, I would only have four-six chapters written by the time my business finally closes at the end of 2002. This would, though, give me something to get my teeth into during the first half of 2003.

## 26 November

I have been reading a book about the history of the internet, *The History of the Future*, by John Naughton. I bought it because I thought it might give me some insight into what I should give Kip Fenn to do. Although a huge chunk of the book is about the early origins of the various aspects that underpinned the internet development, there are a few pointers towards the future and a short discussion of regulatory issues - which is where Kip will get involved. Naughton also discusses, fairly briefly, the issue of pornography and provides an interesting lead to a psychology academic, R M Young, who publishes on the web and has written interestingly about society (including sex) and the internet. I am starting to develop my ideas on this for Kip, but I've yet to write about the issues proper. There may be a danger that I touch on a long list of subjects without ever really going into any of them at all deeply. I notice, for example, that, when it came to volleyball, I opted out of giving Kip a role to play at the top level of the sport - it didn't seem to fit in with his story very well - and so I've not communicated anything exciting about the sport at all.

While waiting in the Eurostar lounge, I opened a new Rankin thriller - on page two, I found him introducing a character called Phillipa, universally known as Flip! And I thought I had invented the name.

## 1 December

I have registered Kip Fenn as an email address on Yahoo. I was very pleased to find no-one else registered under that name. The ideas (more than the characters) in Kip Fenn are starting to embed in my brain, and I find myself thinking about it quite a lot. More often than not, it is something missing or an inconsistency that suddenly comes to mind. Yesterday, for example, I realised that William Caxton would probably not have called himself that until after he left the government. In chapter one, Kip meets Caxton briefly when, as a junior minister, he comes to the school to give a talk. But, I don't think he would have been called Caxton yet, I think he would change his name later. And, for another example, Kip claims Jacques Delors is the most influential politician of the 20th century (I may change this later), but he wouldn't do this unless he had just finished learning about the EU or written an essay on him, something which I have not yet written in. And so on.