

# For Hugh Falkus an absolute nightmare

*When, in the late 1980s, Jo Rippier sent his friend, Hugh Falkus, a copy of his play 'Fine & Far Off' he merely hoped to provide Hugh with some light entertainment. But a few days later he received the following letter:*

*Further comments on the play 'Fine and Far Off':*

*The art of putting-in by leaving out. – K. S.*

*Amusing, sharp, and quite near the knuckle. – G. S.*

*Highly entertaining, very funny and extremely thought-provoking. – J. C.*

*The text is full of gnomic little truisms which have wider implications. Phrases like 'I'll take you down to the end of the lake' make an audience suspect Jamie is more than just a boatman.*

*A Celtic figure of fate. A blind spinner. A Norn.*

*My wife thought he was like Charon and expected him to row them across a Styx-like stretch of the lake at the end, so the comic conclusion came as a surprise to her. Which is like life itself. ...*

*Is the fishing real or is the real world real? The answer, I suppose, is both.*

*But fishing reflects life. ... Fishing is a kind of sub-plot to life. – N. F.*

I resolved to stop writing dreary egotistical letters, in fact to stop writing letters at all, and then your new play arrived ...

The play is not playable. And even if it were, not 1 % of your audience would understand it. I am not sure that I understand it myself. As for being what you so blithely call an 'upcheerer' ...

I found its intimations of mortality inexpressibly sad. Those silly little men sitting like ghosts in their silly little boat, twisting and writhing and wriggling to change their silly little lives, and emphasizing only that they will retain for ever their ghastly sameness ... Is that 'upcheering'?

The threat of eternal darkness; the lap of water on that everlasting loch ... Is that 'upcheering'? The chill of loneliness; the terrors of the dark; the dreadful mixture of tears and laughter; the laughter so desperate; the tears flooding the furrows of age like rain on a sodden landscape ploughed by centuries of hands now brittle-boned and thrust back into the soil of a thousand years; ten thousand years; ten times ten thousand ... Is that 'upcheering'?

Or have I misread the thing? I skimmed through it again quickly – and hastily pushed it into a drawer.

Just now, at four in the morning after I sat in bed drinking coffee and whisky – and read it again. The bedstead is of iron

and very old, with ten brass knobs on railings fore-and-aft. And on every knob sat a raven.

Once at four in the morning there would be only one raven. It sat on my shoulder, and I would shoo it away. After a time shoo-ing wouldn't shift it, so I killed it. But it came back from the dead with one of its mates ... Then with two; then three; then four. And now there are ten of them and they huddle, preening, all along the bed rails, one on every knob. And they croak.

And this morning, just now, not an hour since, as I read your manuscript for the last time, they reminded me that on the Spey a fortnight ago I sensed suddenly that I was making my final cast; that I no longer cared whether I rose a fish; that there was no more pleasure in it for me.

And as my fly swung round on its last journey and I slowly wound in the forty yards of white Number 11, DTF, the clacking Hardy Marquis Salmon Number 2 seemed to echo the awful clacking emptiness of my own mind.

And now the ravens cackled in chorus and croaked: 'Silence will come soon enough!'

Yours ever –



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