



'Children in the Trees', by Gustav Vigeland



'Wheel of Life', by Gustav Vigeland

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Our great good fortune is that the Somerset countryside is a higgledy-piggledy garden of farmland that has not changed for hundreds of years. One of the lanes where we like to walk has the splendid name of *Corkscrew*. On the way we pass a 3000 year old Oak tree in a field named *Slipperstone*, that we delight in taking our Australian guests to touch and then tell them that they are sleeping in a house that was already 200 years old when the acorn germinated!



The 300-year-old oak near Agecroft

They stand under the tree in awe, looking up in wonderment. I read somewhere that Bismarck suffered from backache and to relieve the pain he would press his spine against the trunk of an ancient oak. If you do this to our oak it really does feel as though the tree's energy flows into your spine!

Beside the oak is a stream called the *Cam* that runs to Queen Camel, a village once owned by Henry VIII's mother, and where he banished Queen Catherine for a time. The ford at Queen Camel is guarded by the Bronze-Age fort of *Camelot*. This fort was first occupied 5,000 years ago and remained so until medieval times. From the fort you can see the Isle of Avalon, home of Glastonbury Abbey, where a thorn tree growing from Joseph of Arimathea's staff, flowers on Christmas Day! King Arthur was supposedly buried in the Abbey, but wasn't allowed to *rest in peace*, as he was dug up by Henry II in 1189, moved in 1278 by Edward I, and in 1539 Henry VIII scattered his bones!



May, Snowball and Laburnum flowering at our front gate

The trees we have planted in our old orchard have become a wood. The crab-apple and the copper beech add colour to the greens of oak and chestnut while the balsam poplars fill the evening air with intoxicating scent.



Crab apple and Copper beech in the garden

We can see King Arthur's *Camelot* from the end of the orchard. Our village must have existed for thousands of years as it is built a few hundred yards south of the *Hard Way*, a road that runs from London to Devon and predates the Roman settlement of Britain in AD 40.



On frosty mornings the spiders decorate the orchard

Spider thread is one of the great wonders of Nature. Not only is its construction and strength a miracle, but also the symmetry of the net. Some autumn mornings the whole orchard is carpeted with webs.

Cobwebs make me think of another miracle, that of *silk*. The Chinese silk industry that started at least 4,000 years ago had a greater influence on the development of China than any other single factor, so I am told. Long before paper was invented scrolls of silk cloth were used to write on, a use far more significant than clothing.

The flightless Chinese silk moth spins an average 900 foot of thread during a typical pupate. After mating, the female lays 500 white, pinhead-size eggs that can take between 6 and 52 weeks to hatch. The newly-hatched caterpillar only feeds on the leaves of the white mulberry tree, increasing its body weight 10,000 fold during its 28-day life. Every week the caterpillar sleeps for a day, and on waking, wriggles free of its outgrown skin.

After 28 days it ejects a single thread to anchor itself down and, tossing its head in a figure-of-eight motion, wraps itself in a liquid thread that flows out at a rate of 12 inches a minute! The thread hardens on contact with air to become the cocoon from which the moth emerges 14 days later, mates and dies three or four days later after laying her eggs. Nature doesn't take holidays!



'Silkworms', detail from Robert A. Hefner III's Chinese collection

Several natural threads are used to make one commercial thread. Around 110 cocoons of pure silk are needed to make a man's tie! It takes 3,000 worms that consume 135 lbs of mulberry leaves to make a woman's kimono! No wonder peasants were not allowed to wear silk and had to make do with coarsely-woven grass!

Naturally I am very much in favour of sculpture in gardens believing it adds a focal point to Nature's beauty, and one of my great joys is to visit my Patrons' homes and see where they have placed my work.

Regretfully I have not seen the Ryoan-ji dry-landscape gardens in Kyoto. The gardeners' use of natural rocks, moss and raked gravel must be one of the most masterful combinations that have ever been achieved. Well, it is too late now and anyway I am very content to occasionally look at a video I have of the gardens taken with not a single person visible! Sometimes on our walks in the England's Lake District we have come across perfect Japanese gardens created by nature, so I don't feel that we have completely missed out on the temple gardens, as pure nature is surely more pleasing than imitated nature.



'Immortality', Peter Rymill's garden, South Australia

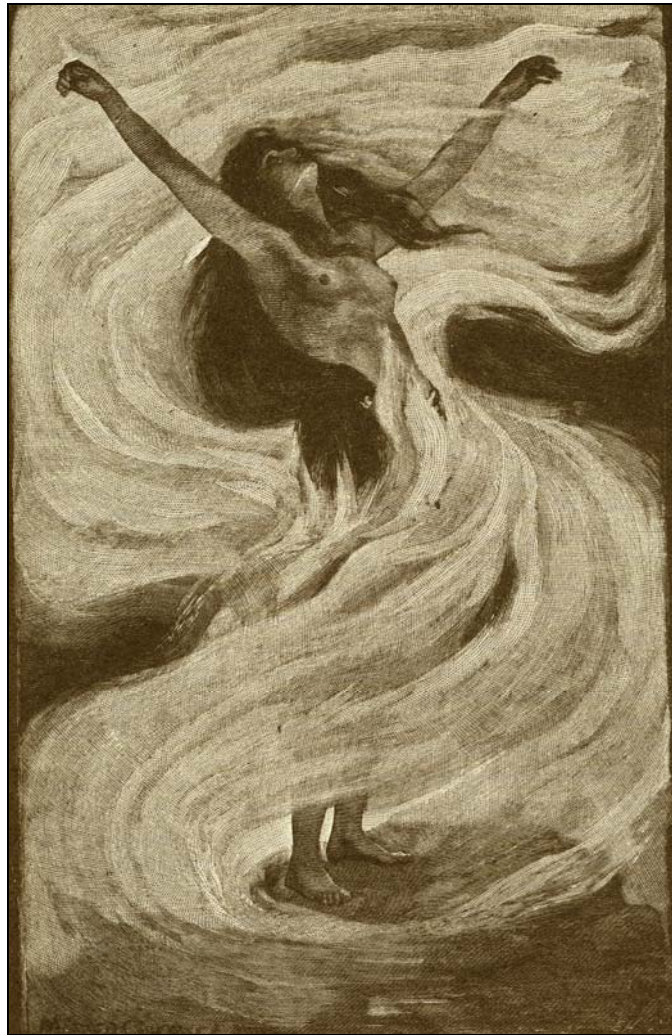
I like to think my Symbolic Sculptures sit as comfortably with Nature as the rocks do in the Ryoan-ji Temple.

The first book that I remember really enjoying because it made me laugh was called *Mr Wilbur*. It was about a police horse in New York City that talked to Mr Wilbur when he gave it a peppermint cream. I then grew into my Romantic Teenage period of nerve tingling adventure mixed with saving maidens in distress. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* fascinated me as an adventure on a desert island, but as his only friend was *Man Friday* I found the story definitely lacked romance! Scott's *Ivanhoe* was much better having the right mixture of knights and princesses, but I didn't get really excited until I read Wren's *Beau Geste*. What a wonderful book for boys! It is also a great movie.

Aged of 15 I found *SHE* by Rider Haggard to be even more fulfilling and it has remained in my memory as the best adventure story of darkest Africa that has ever been written. I bought a second-hand copy for grandson Sam so I could read the story again. The writing is stunningly descriptive. *The next thing I recollect is a feeling of the most dreadful stiffness, and a sort of vague idea passing through my half-awakened brain that I was a carpet that had just been beaten!*

When I read it a second time I discovered that I had skipped great chunks in my hurry to find out what happened next in the adventure. The story is used as a vehicle for some very profound philosophy captured in conversations between the 6,000-year-old Ayesha – *She-who-must-be-obeyed* – and Holly, the guardian stepfather of Leo, the golden-haired hero.

I mustn't ruin the story that is still being printed as a paperback, although I recommend trying to find an old copy from Abebooks.com with the original etched illustrations as it is a masterpiece.



'I saw the fire run up her form'

Ayesha translates for Holly an inscription carved on the wall of a tomb:

I, Junis, a priest of the great temple of Kôr, write this upon the rock of the burying place in the year four thousand eight hundred and three from the founding of Kôr. Kôr is fallen! No more shall the mighty feast in her halls, no more shall she rule the world, and her navies go out to commerce with the world. Kôr is fallen! And her mighty works and all the cities of Kôr, and all the harbours that she built and the canals that she made, are for the wolf and the owl and the wild swan, and the barbarian who comes after. Twenty and five moons ago did a cloud settle upon Kôr, and the hundred cities of Kôr, and out of the cloud came a pestilence that slew her people, old and young, one with another, and spared not. One with another they turned black and died – young and the old, the rich and the poor, the man and the woman, the prince and the slave. The pestilence slew and slew, and ceased not by day or by night, and those that escaped the pestilence were slain of the famine. No longer could the children of Kôr be preserved according to the ancient rites, because of the number of the dead, therefore they were hurled into the great pit beneath the cave... This do I write in the misery of heart before I die... all have passed off the face of the earth.

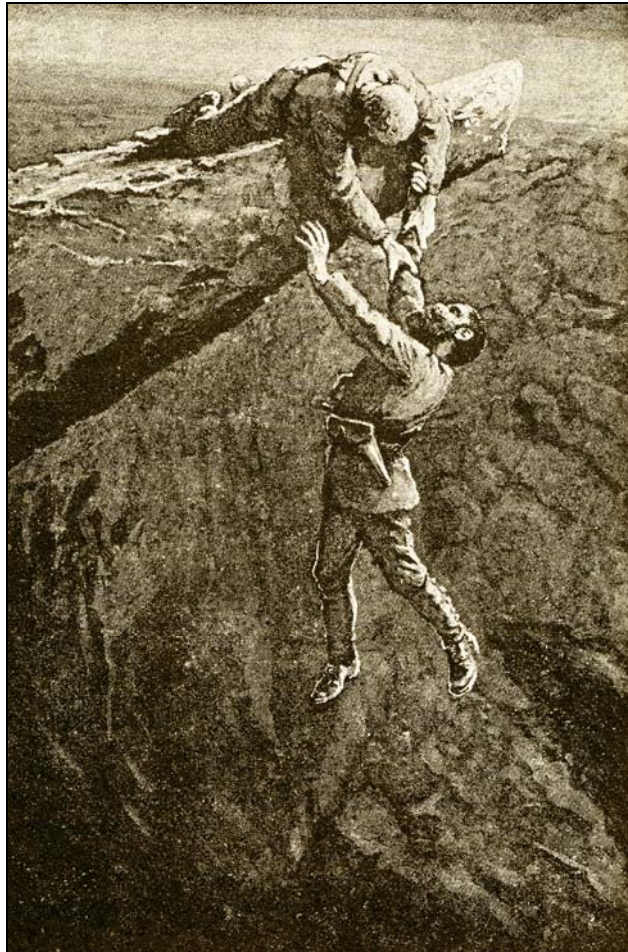
Ayesha then takes Holly to see the vast burial pit which Junis described in his inscription. Holly reports: *So far as I could judge, this pit was about the size of the space beneath the dome of St Paul's in London, being full of literally thousands of skeletons, which lay in an enormous gleaming pyramid, some with the skin still on them.*

Holly thinks aloud: *What proportion of fact, past, present, and to come, may lie in the imagination? What is imagination? Perhaps it is the shadow of the intangible truth, perhaps it is the soul's thought.*

Ayesha says in a discussion with Holly: *Mankind asks ever of the skies to vision out what is behind them. It is terror for the end, and but a subtler form of selfishness – this is what breeds religions. Religions come and pass and naught endures but the world and human nature. Ah! If man could but see that hope is from within and not from without – and he himself must work out his own salvation!*

Then again on Sin: *Men are faithful as long only as temptation pass them by. If temptation be but strong enough, then will the man yield, for every man, like every rope, has his breaking strain, and passion is to men what gold and power are to women – the weight upon their weakness. For man can be bought with woman's beauty, and woman's beauty can be bought with gold. The world is a great mart where all things are for sale to him who bids the highest in the currency of our desires.*

And again: *Day by day we destroy that we may live, since in this world none save the strongest can endure. Those that are weak must perish; the earth is to the strong, and the fruits thereof. The cruel rage of the tyrant may prove a blessing to thousands who come after him, and the sweet heartedness of a holy man may make a nation slaves.*



'I swung to and fro'

Occasionally Ayesha allows Holly his say: *And what oh Queen, are those things dear to man? Is not ambition but an endless ladder by which no height is ever climbed till the last unreachable rung is mounted? Doth not wealth satiate and become nauseous, and no longer serve to satisfy, or to buy an hour's peace of mind? And is there an end to wisdom that we may hope to reach it? Rather, the more we learn shall we not thereby be able only to better compass out our ignorance? Did we live 10,000 years could we hope to solve the secrets of the suns, and the space beyond the suns, and the Hand that hung them in the heavens? Would not our wisdom be but a gnawing hunger calling our consciousness day by day to a knowledge of the empty craving of our souls?*

But he can't win: Holly, *there is love – love that makes all things beautiful, and does breathe divinity into the dust that we tread. With love shall life roll gloriously on from year to year, like the voice of some great music that hath power to hold the hearer's heart poised on eagle's wings above the sordid shame and folly of the earth.*

Of course all the above was skipped when read as a teenager so gaily passed me by. Reading those passages today, in my seventieth year, they strike me as being the utterances of a prophet! *SHE* is a Classic. I discovered that Carl Jung also thought it was a great book that recognised man's *anima*.

To end my romantic period I read *The Prisoner of Zenda* by Anthony Hope. It is the ultimate romantic adventure set in a time of 'pomp and circumstance'.

Several books have made a lasting impression. *Frontiers of Astronomy* by Fred Hoyle changed my life as it opened my eyes to the universe. The first factual book that had to be re-read at once on finishing was by van der Post, *Jung and the Story of Our Time*. I have now read it at least four times and it is dog-eared and scribbled over. *Wonderful Life* by Stephen Jay Gould taught me more about evolution and 'Extinctions' than any other book and introduced me to the creatures captured in the 'Burgess Shale' high in the Rockies. Those interested in evolution should read Flannery's *Future Eaters*, especially white Australians! Van Osterzee's *Where Worlds Collide*, a biography of Alfred Wallace, Darwin's collaborator, is an amazing story. Dugard's biography of the courageous Captain James Cook, *Farther than any Man*, left me exhausted with admiration; what a remarkably gifted sailor and navigator he was!

Anything Vincent Cronin has written is worth reading, especially *Catherine, Empress of all Russia*. His two volumes on the *Renaissance* are exceptionally informative books about that unbelievable period of creativity. Amelia Edwards's *A Thousand miles up the Nile*, a true 19th-century adventure that reads like a novel. Lesley Blanch's *The Sabres of Paradise*, and Christine Sutherland's *The Princess of Siberia*, and so on and so on...

Carleton Coon's book, *The Hunting Peoples*, published in 1972, is without doubt one of the most informative and education books on our Hunter Gather Ancestors that has ever been written. In 1972 he warned the world of the problems we face today. At the close of the book he writes, *someday, far out in the desert, a few families of hunters may meet, and ask one another: "Where have all the whitefella gone?"*

Joseph Bronowski's *Ascent of Man* videos are the most informative viewing programmes ever made, closely followed by Kenneth Clarke's *Civilisation* videos. In my reckoning both are 'musts' and get a *Ten Star* rating!

Francoise Gilot's *My Life with Picasso* provided the inspiration for my first life-sized sculpture so is treasured. An essential book to read for anyone who wants to be a sculptor is Cellini's *Autobiography*, as it tells a quite extraordinary

story. Hopefully my grandchildren will read the books and watch the films listed here and find them as enjoyable and enlightening as I have.



'Joy of Living', Ramiilaj, Aspen

I love dogs, which is natural because there was always a dog in the house when I was growing up. When I returned to England aged eight a beautiful golden Labrador named *Chance* ruled the roost. When young he was my brother Pat's gundog and on retirement became my mother's walking companion. Presumably he was the reason for my giving Margie a golden Labrador puppy as an engagement present! We called her puppy *Lady* because of our seeing the

film *Lady and the Tramp* together, although that was soon changed to *Heidie*. Her nose was put out of joint by son Tim's arrival but luckily Margie's father had fallen in love with the puppy during our engagement so she immediately found a new home where she could be pampered.

On the farm my Border-Collie sheepdog was called *Lassie*. When we came to England son Peter asked for a puppy and so we found a Springer Spaniel/Border Collie cross who grew into the most brilliant dog. She was also called *Lassie*, which supposedly was very unimaginative, but it seemed to suit her and she reminded me of my sheep-farming days. *Lassie* came on all our camping adventures with the boys and was quite happy to sleep in a tent. She was not very keen on sailing in the *Surry*, but preferred to brave it rather than be left behind. She looked very chic in her own navy-blue lifejacket! She could open the kitchen door and let herself out and then close it again when she came in, which is pretty remarkable for a dog that only cost one pound, and even more so when you consider that pedigree pups now cost £600.

Lassie was still going strong when we owned Freeland Gallery and would come to London and illegally camp upstairs with us, none of us being allowed to do so by rights. Berkeley Square was her favourite place to patrol before the city woke up and after dark when everyone had gone home. She lived for sixteen years and died in her sleep one night. What a way to go!



Lassie

Soon after *Lassie* died we became involved in our sculpture travelling adventures to Italy, America and Australia, so for some years it was not practical to have another dog. When this period of our lives eased I happened to meet a beautiful Springer Spaniel puppy and was bewitched by her. When Margie heard about the infatuation she was delighted at my having an affair with a Springer, so we found out the name of the kennels.

Life takes many strange twists but one of the most extraordinary was to discover that the puppy had been born at the village of Holcombe, just north of Castle Cary. Holcombe came into my life when we found out that my

Australian great-grandfather, Anthony Bennett Robinson, had been christened in the Holcombe Church in 1832.

The village of Holcombe had been ravaged by the Black Death which led to all the houses being burnt, although the church was left standing in a field on its own. It is a beautiful small building and it seems quite amazing that my great-grandfather was christened there, although his parents had moved to Ashcott, a village five miles away. It amazes me to think that my ancestors had come from these parts and that after four generations abroad both my brother Pat and I had come back to live only a few miles away and that 19 of Anthony Bennett's descendants are now living in the vicinity once again!



My Australian cousin, Michael Bennett Robinson, at Holcombe Church

The Spaniel breeder lived in the new village of Holcombe that had been built a mile away from the old church. When we went to inspect the litter one puppy crawled out of the cage and got stuck between Margie's shoes so she was chosen. When the mother got tired of feeding her brood we went to collect our bundle of trouble, Holly of Holcombe. Training Holly was not an easy task as Margie is all too ready to tell. She was one of the most spirited puppies we have ever come across, silky soft, utterly adorable and incredibly naughty. Life was a game to be played from morning to night, in fact, whenever awake for the first four years of her life!

Holly's day now starts by joining me for a walk before breakfast in the lanes. Her favourite occupations are eating, sleeping, walking, barking at dogs as they pass the front gate and playing with our grandchildren, mainly because

they sometimes have a chocolate biscuit in their hand. She decided that she was human about two years ago and demanded to sleep at the foot of my bed!



Holly of Holcombe



Holly's favourite position

Would we ever own another Springer Spaniel? Well, she is very strong-willed and when she can catch them, eats baby rabbits! If the fire isn't lit she retires into her cave under an armchair and growls if disturbed. She is getting fat, which is my fault because I feed her titbits when we are having our meals. The kennel owner took one look at her the other day and announced she was a 'tad portly'. However, she has one of the most endearing personalities that we have ever come across and often makes us burst out laughing. The grandchildren love her and we wouldn't part with her for all the tea in China.

Flowers came into my life in our garden in Wiltshire when I was ten years old. Our garden had a large herbaceous border, but the bed of blue *forget-me-nots* and one of red *snap dragons* stick firmly in my mind. Our farm woods were carpeted with *bluebells* and the lanes were banked with *primroses*, which in those days we were allowed to dig up. My mother used to take them up to London and fill a large copper basin in the sitting room of our London flat. When the flowers were over she would bring them back and replant them in the woods. The fields around our house were thick with *conslips*, but they have nearly disappeared over the last 50 years because of the use of chemical fertilisers.

When I was holidaying in Madeira, aged 15, the *agapanthus*, growing wild along the roadsides in the mountains, stunned me with their beauty. The blue petals and the waxy green leaves made a lasting impression on my mind.



Agapanthus in Madeira

Now it is the roses that Margie grows at Agecroft that give me the most pleasure. The red *Etoile de Hollande* has an intoxicating scent, while *Peace* and its *Kronenberg* cousin are a wonder to see, although of course, *yellow roses* remain our favourite for sentimental reasons. The story of Pierre-Joseph Redouté's career as a painter of roses is astonishing and well worth reading. He was a genius who lived through very troubled times, teaching flower painting to Marie Antoinette and Josephine Bonaparte! He was one of the few people who were allowed to visit the unfortunate Queen in the Bastille so she could see a rare cactus from Mexico flowering for the first time!

The joy of living in England lies in the gardens; *snowdrops*, followed by *crocuses*, *primroses* and all the wild flowers in the orchard give us a never-ending display of colour throughout the spring and summer. The miracle of the first fresh leaves when the different trees sprout a thousand shades of green never ceases to thrill us. The arrival of the leaves heralds nest-building time and the beginning of the bird chorus at dawn and then again in the evening when the *song thrush* serenades us as we sit by the pond and enjoy the end of the day.

Margie's wedding dowry included her knowledge of birds, as she knows so many of them by name and recognises their calls. Until our marriage I was unaware of the different bird songs. Australian bird plumage is often dazzling. Blues, reds, greens, whites and yellows. The *blue wren* has a plumage that is beyond compare, almost unbelievable in intensity.



Australian Blue Wren

Parrots and *rosellas*, although extremely raucous, are an explosion of colour and the *sulphur crested cockatoos* are simply stunning.



Sulphur Crested Cockatoos

Occasionally at Agecroft a *bullfinch* appears and that means all work stops while we watch hidden behind the curtains. They are extremely shy so we are lucky if we see him once or twice a year.



Mr Bullfinch



Blue Tits

Our garden walls are home to several families of *tits* and *wrens* who hop about like tiny mice. Why aren't *blue tits* called *yellow tits*? Wrens weigh less than a champagne cork and yet, as this photograph shows, they are able to feed a baby *cuckoo*, something that leads me back to the staggering mysteries that make up the life that surrounds us. We often hear cuckoos in the spring when out walking and for me they represent one of the great wonders of Nature.



Cuckoo being fed by its surrogate mother Wren

Just how does a cuckoo know to lay its egg in a nest of another bird? How does the newly-hatched cuckoo know to literally boot the other eggs out of the nest so it is left alone to be fed by its adopted parent? Just how does the cuckoo know to fly off to Africa without a parent to follow? How does it know the way back to the same spot where it was hatched? I presume the answer must be *instinct*, but how did that *instinct* evolve? Is the instinct there in the egg that is lying in a wren's nest waiting to hatch? It certainly makes one think!

The song of the cuckoo is well known, but most people don't realise they are only listening to the male as the female call is a 'soft burble'. Both male and female ferociously defend their territory and are very promiscuous, each sex having numerous mates. The female uses 20 to 25 separate nests, taking about five seconds to lay an egg. If the nest has a side entrance *she can forcibly project an egg into the aperture while hovering*, which is quite a feat if you think about it! To cap it all off, hairy caterpillars are their favourite food – a form of nourishment no other bird will touch!



Spotted Flycatcher

One of our favourite birds is the *Spotted Flycatcher*. Every year the male arrives from Central Africa on May 4th for my birthday (give or take a day!) and the female joins him within a week. They build a nest on the east wall of the house for the first brood and on the west side for the second. They are an delight to watch as they swoop back and forth catching flies.

The purpose of all life is to raise a family and females are very good at the job, although of course there are a few exceptions, such as the *sea horse*. The female sea horse lays her eggs in the specially-adapted pouch of the male for fertilisation and the young stay there until they are fully developed and are ready to fend for themselves. There are some wonderful examples of unbelievable motherly devotion. One is the female octopus that lays hundreds of eggs and then guards the young with her body until they are old enough to look after themselves. She does this with such devotion that she doesn't ever

leave her nest. When she dies from starvation the young are weaned of their protector and set off to fend for themselves. Another example of cell sacrifice!



Margie

To have a fulfilled life both sexes need a *loving companion*. A woman requires a *provider and protector* whom she can trust to help raise her children. I can't think of a better career for any girl than to be a mother and raise a family and am sure the vast majority of women agree. I have based my own opinions on the *female of the species* on a brilliant book called *Mother Nature – Natural Selection and the Female of the Species* by Sarah Blaffer Hrdy. (No 'a' in Hrdy. See Google))

Inside the cover it states: *Here is a provocative, wide-ranging history of the female of the species – in the natural world, in primitive societies and in hi-tech nations on the brink of the twenty-first century, Hrdy looks afresh at the concepts of maternity, explaining what it means in biological and genetic terms, to talk about maternal instinct, how Natural Selection works, and how it shapes a woman's 'choice'. It delves into the ancient tensions between men and women, who needs to care for babies, and explains just what infants actually need from mothers, and why. Carl Jung was very honest about Love and wrote: In my medical experience as well as in my own life I have again and again been faced with the mystery of love, and have never been able to explain what it is. Laurens van der Post reported that Jung said: Love, in the last analysis, is a feminine mystery.*

Everyone comments on the bloom on the face of a mother-to-be and we all delight in seeing the transformation. Women glory in maternity. An extension of this is when they become grandmothers, because when that happens, another transformation takes place that is also a delight to watch. Margie's life has been enhanced beyond measure by the arrival of our seven grandchildren and she adores them all. Her mail between *Granny Friends* around the world is full of news and photographs of their respective grandchildren.



Mother and Child

Margie's letters are written in a corner of the kitchen that has been taken over as her desk and *for no reason* must be touched by anyone. From her perch on a stool she is able to reach the kettle to refresh her teapot while at the same time write letters and watch the bird feeder strategically placed outside the window. Each day the feeder is replenished with a continuous supply of bread and nuts for a vast array of birds, the odd squirrel, and the occasional field mouse that has the biggest ears you have ever seen and a white waistcoat.

The *song thrush* likes to sing from the top of the ash tree that overhangs our courtyard and its repertoire is quite astonishing, almost as good as the Australian *lyre bird*. Gardeners worship them as they relish eating snails! They pick them up and bash them against a rock to break them open. It is a brilliant summer sound and quite often we are woken at dawn by the ratatat-tat of the thrushes clubbing a shell to pieces for their snail breakfast.

When Margie takes breadcrumbs out, a call of "Robie Robie" brings the *cock robin* hopping to a branch beside her. When she is weeding the rose garden she often has to shoo him away with her hand as he gets in the way! Cock robins are very good protectors and providers, having sometimes up to three wives nesting at the same time! The robin is a protected species in Britain and the shooting of three this year raised a 'Question in Parliament'. It is a somewhat different story in France where 20,000 robins are eaten every year! If you ate one in England you would be put in the stocks and have rotten apples thrown at you! In the winter on frosty mornings *Robie* puffs himself up to the size of a tennis ball to keep warm. What a character! He will even feed from Margie's hand!



"Robie Robie"

The *mistle thrush* is another dedicated mother and returns from the Mediterranean every year to raise her young in our garden. One year she decided to show off and nest in the fork of the common pink cherry tree in the middle of our courtyard. Although a very pretty home it was rather too exposed for comfort and caused a lot of anxiety for all concerned.



Municipal Cherry, Lassie and Margie's Marvellous Mini