

PENELOPE FITZGERALD

The Mooi

The Mooi sit in the sun. He forget he own a bicycle. It quite as simple as that. That the story long and short. There really nothing more to say, that is nothing of undisputed value. Yet somehow we feel the whole thing lack substance just left there, and of course inevitable questions ensue. Not only those aesthetic; some will be validational of purpose. And yes it will be wondered how we know this. For instance have we crystal ball or have we inside information? Have we spies? How research? And source of information will be of interest. Indeed are we the Mooi? And if not how know everything that we do? How know the Mooi's inside trouser? And if we not the Mooi, who the hell the Mooi? Yeah who the hell the Mooi anyway? And what the hell he? And questions like that and of that order. And questions of the nature of: if we not the Mooi, but boast of the Mooi's acquaintance like it some big deal, how know anyone the Mooi tell true when he say what he say? And when he tell what he tell? And how know we say true, when we tell what we tell? Even if the Mooi have told true. For we may alter it. And no-one know. For all anyone know the Mooi lie like a liar born. Mendax Mooi. And we too. We make it doubly wrong by untruths. Or we make it right by the same. Two negatives making positive. And all else failing and say we say we psychic, how the hell everyone else know that, man? How know and prove that? Your honour, it will be said, with all due respect, the thing don't stand up in court.

OK, OK. First things first. Then all else in time's fullness. No way we the Mooi, man. Too much self-respect. The Mooi, *Moi*? The Mooi the Man Orlways Out of It. Grasp it? Man. Orlways. Out of. It. Man. That him. Orlways. That mean never not. Never known not to be so. Out of. That mean outside and away from. It. That mean his head. He used to live there but now he an infrequent visitor and it fallen into disrepair. He not at home and

out of town. It also mean the world of you and me. That's we. The world of how. The world of do. Science world. Art world. Commerce world. The world that rise with the sun all verve. Do work. Then party under the moon with gusto. Then sleep the restful sleep and wake recharged. The world that's made of braincells enough and living. The Mooi a fugitive from this world. He swim in a booze and a glue and a chemical sea. He have an inhaler but no asthma. He a margin man. He a skulking shadow man. Then second things second. Shut you all up and hear what we say. We know cos we know. It so obvious and anyway we telling the story, man. Third things third, und so weiter ad infinitum.

It get worse. Not only the Mooi forget he have a bicycle. Not only that. He forget he ever have one. He forget he buy it. Or get give it. And he forget the many happy times he have with his scrawny buttocks cradled by it cushy seat. He forget the feeling good of bony hand on rubber handgrip. Good feeling. But he forget it. The functionary design. The control empowerment feeling. Speeding or trundling, windy hair. Country lane or city avenue. Ring ring the bell. He forget it all. And not only he forget he lose it. It ramify. So he forget when he lose it. He forget where and how. And having all these memory erased, he of course not report it. And he forget description, model, serial number and the rest, so necessary for police paperwork procedure. So all in all he very unlikely to get it back.

Quite frankly the predicament of the unmnemonic Mooi vis-à-vis the boneshaker terrify us. But he so out of it sitting in the sun with a can of molasses thick brainshrinker a head full of bees, he ignorant bliss. He know nothing about it. And this scare us all the more, man. It make us fret for cleanliness of linen. That he in such bad way but he don't know. And he don't know that he don't know. That spookiest of all. And he don't care that he don't know. Cos he don't know. And he don't know that he don't care. Cos he don't know. So what the fuck point in caring, knowing, worrying, and the rest? The Mooi don't. He sit with a smile on his face. No. That he don't know that he don't know that he don't know. That spookiest. No. That he don't know that he don't know that he don't know that he don't know that he don't know . . . etc. All in all it set new standards in terror. It exponential and endless. And yet he ignorant bliss. But he near destroy us mind.

Now he forget for sure. But there forget and *forget*. There times

when come drifting up feelings like bubbles in the soup of his brain. Feelings hard to pin down, hard to picture, they just are. They not thoughts per se, not memories as such, but close. They like almost memories of the muscle and the flesh. Kind of instinct. How else to account for instance, *exempli gratia*: that urge to clench the hands, hands held out in front and horizontal? And when he have to a certain special degree partaken of the sump oil booze, whence come that feeling that he have once been supported by something other than his own legs? And other than another human being of course. In similar circumstances of volitional renouncement of sensory awareness and physical coordination and the power of understanding through bibulousness, man. For it instinctive, it feel so, for him when in that state to reach out for something. A prop, a crutch, a guide. Something dark, perhaps. Dark in the darkness. And visible through being darker than the darkness. Inanimate and yet it seem to have a soul and a true identity and a sympathy. Something like a horse but not a horse. The Mooi, by the way, quite fond of horses. Or he feel so fond when it occur to him to feel so fond. This follow on from apprehending their nature, shape, form. Perhaps this latter in the sense of Plato. So it might be that he see one. This rare in the scum neighbourhood where he live but not unknown: raggy bone man, police football match patrol. Or maybe he hear tell of one or see a representation. This representation may be a TV broadcast of the Saturday racing. Or it may be a photo, or a painting sentimental and slick in a charity shop. Or it might be a description of the literary sort, though this less likely as the Mooi not so inclined to read now as formerly. Or otherwise just the thought come into his mind for no reason at all. Or for a reason. Such reason may be for example betting on a horse. The urge to do it. Or the sudden remembrance of having done so. And then the tearing up of the betting slip in disgust at the inevitable result of the race. No way tipster Mooi. Or the studying the form. This latter in the *Sporting Life* sense. The better to judge which horse to back. Which a joke truly. Or the urge to study the form for this purpose. Also a joke. But at other times when horses never occur to him he no way can be said to be fond of horses.

Now . . . now it time to say 'now' and pause for thought with a dot dot dot . . . now . . . it get complicated. We say he forget and no way we lie or involve mendacious tendencies. He still sitting in the sun as we speak and as we live and breathe and a head full of

bees and ignorant bliss. But we have a problem. The problem this. We not totally sure that when he sober he not remember, albeit dimly so, something of his Fahrrad or bicyclette. But we absolutely certain it not a strong memory. And we know he no way remember much because he drunk when he get it and dead drunk when he lose it. And mostly stoned when he ride it. So he not remember the appearance overmuch. Mostly he drunk anyway. Just once or twice he hungover and bide his time for a hair of the dog. Yes, going back a little while, he get the bike when one crapulent Mooi and so next time he briefly sober it just seem to appear in his life. And as he fretting for a little drink to relax himself, he just accept this new presence. Yet at the same time he never totally comfortable with it. It like something grafted on to his life. Now here a philosophical vexer. If he broadly speaking unaware of his possession of this object, videlicet: the bicycle, how deep and true his ownership? Sure he have the potential for unobstructed legal use without the need for permission, he have access to access. He have the right to use. But as he unaware, what good that? And if possession nine tenths of the law, what dispossession? Nine tenths also? Or one tenth?

When it went he was not surprised. Mostly it never occur to him to be surprised. And if he did remember the be-bicycled time, which we doubt sincerely that he did much, it seem to him much as a dream. And really it so short a duration as not to figure much in his thought if it did. But we swear right here and now that we certain that as he sit in sun he truly forgetful and all amnesiac dipsoblivion. We swear before God, Blessed Virgin, all the saints. Something similar happen with his teeth.

The Mooi on his own today and solitary. Meditating we would say but you need a brain for that. The Mooi spend a lot of time alone but not exclusively. Once we think he solitary and see him like he look raving. Finger pointing arms outstretched head nodding. But the worry thing he seem to be ranting at a tree. Cos that all there are nearby. He sit on the green grass and gesticulate and rant and rave like the tree disagree with him about some life or death matter. Or the tree insult his mother memory. He look like one crazy guy, man. And the tree crazy too, if it joining in. One crazy drunk tree. But then we move our position and there inevitable parallax effect with regard to the tree. It move and reveal a someone else. Another drunk pal. So the Mooi not alone.

Sometimes he entertain. Sometimes he have company at his bench in the park. Once the Mooi try to show off speaking Spanish Español to some drunk acquaintances. But all he end up speaking is the lingua franca of the drunk fraternity. Slurred mumble. And no real Spaniard ever understand him. But it get worse. He try speak Spanish Español and at same time cut a dash. He walk backwards with an arm in the air declamatory style. He lifting up his heels. Flamenco Mooi. Pah! Mooi a drunken ham is all. But his big mistake rest in reversing. Big big mistake. Cos he fall over and near break his head. Swear some bees fly out his ears and out his mouth.

We just thought. Maybe the Mooi no way stand for what we said. Or partly no way. Come think of it it might be: Most Often Out of It with a small O for of. Or it could be: Most Out Of It. Or: Mostly Out Of It. Both with a big O for of. And truly orlways not spelt that way at all. The way we spell it earlier. It spelt with a A. We knew it all the time but kept up the pretence because no way it fit otherwise. So therefore he could be called the Mooi Man and no redundance of verbiage. Indeed it true oft we hear it sung on the wind: Hey here come the Mooi Man. But to this day, cos no way we want appear pedantic or irrelevant to us cronies and thus never ask, we not sure if it mean: Hey here come the Mooi Man or Hey here come the Mooi, man. The comma and the capital letter vital. But they hard to be distinguish in speech, especially the lilt of drunk speech.

Really the Mooi a figure despised. He despised by the civilised such is we. Or if not so overriding an aversion obtain then looked down upon. Not unknown at all we laugh at him. For he definitely low order man. Not always so but so now. Yes it cruel that we so unsympathetic but that life. And it terrible platitude that life but sad to say that life also. Once he higher order man but he come to be lowered by a collusion of immanence and circumstance. But somewhere where he steal a march on us and take the lead is death. And it strange to one to have a march stolen on one by one such as the Mooi. Especially galling as the Mooi a kind of anti-role-model in most areas and sure guide to living as long as you do the opposite that he does. So it feel not right. But there it is. The Mooi not fear death. Whereas we so scared of the last full stop we just keep on wording in a frenzy. The Mooi past caring. He say he no way fear it. Least that what we take it he say. It hard to make out what he say some time. Once it

sound like he say: A dime Toby Bourne. A dime today. That just nonsensical Mooi phooey. Who hell Toby Bourne when he at home? No way we acknowledge that appellation. But the Mooi fearless in the face of extinction we sure. Though this partly to do with the need of awareness to fear. And to do with being halfway there already. Once someone describe the Mooi as a crazy hermit. Like he a kind of prophet figure. Well he sure crazy. Head full a bees. But a prophet need to prophesy. And he don't do nothing but mumble. And that good cause for mockery from the likes of us. We see him sometime walking down the street. Maybe to the park if it sunny. Maybe to the park if it rain. For then he stand and sway under a tree. And lean against the trunk. And refresh his system with a little something from a bottle or a can. And drops of rainwater fall around him but he sheltered by the big leaves of the chestnut. The big leaves keep a circle dry around him. And it like his own private world. So say it rainy and he walking to the park. We see him from the window of the bar where we sit. We sociably drink in civilised wise. And we scoff not a little no doubt to see the loony fellow. He will be dragged by the rain. His ratty hair. His thin jacket drenched and stretched on his skinny shoulders. And he striding unsteady and mumbling all the while. Other street passers look at him like he a moon man. But he a Mooi. And we steal a march on the Mooi then cos we can drink in a bar but the Mooi got to drink in the wild places cos he an outcast. Margin man. See his face haunting the shadows beyond the flickering firelight of the human feast. Throw him a bone. He probably take it for a holy thing.

Shameful admission is what we have now to make. No way we feel good about it. Truth is we could get the Mooi's bike back if we wanted. Truth is we know the location where is located the bicycle of the Mooi. If it please us so to do it quite in our power to walk up to the Mooi, take off our hat if we ever have one, and say excuse us Monsieur Mooi, Herr Mooi, Señor Mooio, most esteemed Mooi, sir, if you would care to follow us we will lead you to your hitherto accustomed means of transportation A to B, two-wheeler, needing a certain trick of balance which you have obtained formerly in childhood and once you learn you never unlearn. And don't forget the parrot bell. Yes, sad to say we could do this but choosing not to don't. We believe it pointless. We truly think the Mooi's cycling days over. And the Mooi biggest danger

to himself on two wheels. Best leave it where it is. Behind the church. It behind the church for ages now, against the wall and rusting in the shrubs. Rusting from Christmas to Easter. And Easter to Corpus Christi. The chain right off, the cables snapped. But that how it was the day the Mooi left it there. Because he couldn't ride it so he leave it. In truth the chain off and the cables snapped some time before he deposit it. And the Mooi reduced to pushing the thing around. He no bike repair man that for sure. Till at last even the Mooi realise with his impaired thought that pushing a broken bike about a fruitless task and a labour of Sisyphus. It have all the disadvantage of bicycle ownership and none of the advantage. Such as being able to ride. Which the whole point of investing in this machine. And so really, once this function of the apparatus removed, a bicycle become an albatross. And it senseless to take it out with one. But habit a habit after all and a hard thing to lose. And the Mooi a man who feel loyalty and unease at parting with what in effect his closest friend his bikey buddy. And also of course it never occur to him that anything not in order and in need of alteration. And add to that his personality have developed through adversity a stoical dimension. This make him tolerant of inconvenience. Still at last even the Mooi capable of strictly occasional insights and revelations. And it dawn on him one afternoon that the bike a burden. So he relinquish it at some point in his diurnal itinerancy. Time in which necessity dwells have made him peripatetic and restless. But what the hell the Mooi doing near a church you say. Quite right to say. Not know is all. Not know. Except to piss. Piss a pottle into the dank earth behind the church. Or maybe he have a mind to drink communion wine.

So that it. That about everything. The long and the short. And the tall, you say. But no way it a tall story. And there you wrong. And never mind how we know what we know. Just that we know it is to be accepted or trouble ensue. And so this is the end. Which like the beginning. It come full circle. Really and no way intend a pun it a cycle. The sun shine as heretofore. The Mooi still where we left him and not a jot the wiser. Still he sit. Hear him? If you strain you can. He sit eyes closed and face up to the sun the heliotrope. And he hum and mumble low. And it sound like the sound far off of humming bees all about their fruitful summer work.